

NEWSLETTER

"Rehabilitation and reintegration services within the social welfare system in the Republic of Albania for women survivors of violence"

June 2, 2021

On June 2, 2021, the [Gender Alliance for Development Center \(GADC\)](#) and the [Albanian Women's Empowerment Network \(AWEN\)](#) organized a roundtable discussion on: **"Rehabilitation and reintegration services within the social welfare system in the Republic of Albania for women survivors of violence"**. This activity has been organized in the framework of the regional project *"Institutionalizing Quality Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs for Violence Survivors."* The project is implemented in cooperation with the organizations network, who work against gender-based violence in the Western Balkans, led by the ["Autonomous Women's Center"](#), Serbia, and it is supported by the [Austrian Development Agency](#).

The purpose of this activity was the presentation of the Report: *"Rehabilitation and reintegration services within the social welfare system in the Republic of Albania for women survivors of violence"*. This report aims to improve the secondary legislation/programs and the institutionalization of the qualitative services for women surviving Gender Based Violence (GBV). The outcome of the project as well as the discussions of this roundtable aim to improve the quality of rehabilitation and integration services for GBV survivors in all Western Balkan countries, including Albania.

About 60 other representatives of various institutions of the country, representatives of civil society, local institutions, media, donors, etc. attended the discussion online through the ZOOM platform.

Present at the roundtable were: Mr. Albert Nikolla, vice. Minister of Health and Social Protection ([MHSP](#)), Dr. Christian Steiner, [Austrian Ambassador to Tirana](#); Mrs. Merita Xhafaj, General Director of Policies and Health Development and Social Protection, Mrs. Blerta Gazheli - Coordinator at the Lilium Center, Mrs. Brikena Puka, Executive Director of [Vatra Center](#), Mrs. Ines Leskaj, Executive Director of AWEN. In this activity participated also Mrs. Alexandra Nestorov from the Autonomous Women's Center, Serbia and Mrs. Adelina Berisha from the [Kosovo Women's Network](#), who shared experiences of their countries.



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Mr. Albert Nikolla, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection, among other things, highlighted the importance of such discussions meetings regarding reintegration and rehabilitation services for women survivors of violence, by saying: *“Women and girls’ violence is a drama which is directly related to the violation of the dignity of woman as a human being. The dignity of women is equal to that of men and consequently, if violence is not seen in this dimension as well as a violation of dignity, then something is missing from our struggle against violence. Only when women will be deeply aware to protect their dignity, then they will be freer and less violated, and also the laws will be more effective. Therefore, I emphasize that in addition to legal work, hospitality in the rehabilitation centers, detention of the perpetrators, a strong cultural work is needed to open the minds of women across the country, so they can understand that they are the patroness of their destiny. In the Holy Book "Torah", it is written: "Beware! Do not make a woman weep, because God counts any of her tears”!*



The Austrian Ambassador in Tirana, **Dr. Christian Steiner** also participated in the activity. Dr. Steiner said he was happy that the Gender Alliance for Development Center and the Albanian Women's Empowerment Network organized this roundtable discussion which includes not only the representatives in the hall but also the participants who attended the online meeting. Although sad, that the current issue of cases of extreme violence is quite high in both countries, in Albania and in Austria.



Among others, Dr. Steiner added: *“Gender-based violence is a global problem. In Austria, there have already been 14 Femicides this year, which is a very high number. It also remains widespread in the Western Balkans. The lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation. Without appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration systems, many women are often forced to return to the perpetrators or are left on the street without support. Institutions in Albania lack a holistic, victim-centred, sensitized approach to ensuring safety and security for survivors of violence. Therefore, Austrian Development Cooperation supports the Albanian Women's Empowerment Network and the Gender Alliance for Development Centre to institutionalize quality rehabilitation and reintegration programs for violence survivors in Albania.*

Albania has ratified the Istanbul Convention and drafted a new National Strategy on Gender Equality and a Plan of Action, aiming towards zero-tolerance against gender-based violence and domestic violence. Survivors need to be adequately protected. Therefore, it is critical that the different institutions and organizations in Albania working in this area closely collaborate to offer protection: social services, the police, the courts, women's organizations and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. I thank the representatives for being here today and their commitment to this cause.”

The meeting continued with an in-depth analysis of **Mrs. Merita Xhafaj**, who made a broad overview of the legal framework but also of the work done so far for the protection and support of victims of domestic violence in an institutionalized manner, emphasizing the improvements made to the law "On measures against domestic violence", as well as the amendments adopted in the DCM "On the mechanism of coordination of work between the authorities responsible for referring cases of domestic violence and its proceedings for the support and rehabilitation of victims of violence." Among other things, Mrs. Xhafaj stressed that the legislation on social care services has been continuously improved, supplemented by important bylaws, which have set criteria and standards for services for women victims of domestic violence.



Following Mrs. Xhafaj said: *"From the 4-year evaluation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020, resulted that by the end of 2020, the number of specialized support services has increased by 53.8%, from 13 specialized services in 2015 in 20 specialized support services at the end of 2020 and currently we already have 22 different typologies. Although it is estimated that there are positive developments and the objective has been achieved according to the NSGE 2016-2020, these services have to be long-term and sustainable. For these reasons, through measures and actions set out in the new Strategy 2021-2030, the aim is to expand the range of specialized support services for the treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of the gender-based violence and domestic violence survivors, as well as offering the missing services for all groups of women, young women and girls, aiming at tripling these new services across the country. Parallely with the work done for the domestic violence survivors, it is important to work even with the perpetrators, being also an obligation deriving from the DV Law, as amended. So far this service is being offered as counseling by the Counseling Line for Men and Boys in 4 municipalities (Tirana Shkodra, Elbasan, Vlora) and is offered online throughout the country."*



Mrs. Mirela Arqimandriti presented the Report and its main findings which will serve as a basis and bring information in three aspects

1. Women and girls' survivors of GBV experience with women support centres in Albania;
2. Women and girls' survivors of GBV experience with NGOs service centres;
3. A map of support services for women victims of Domestic Violence in line with Istanbul Convention.

The project itself, which is being developed by GADC and AWEN, aims to:

- a). Support for women in leaving violent perpetrators and becoming more autonomous;
- b). Quality evidence-based proposals for secondary legislation and programs for assisting survivors put forth;
- c). Improv skills of service providers towards increased safety/security of survivors;
- d). Strengthen regional network for addressing violence against women in line with EU standards.

Based on the goals and expected result, this report is a basis which brings in detail the situation of rehabilitation and reintegration services of survivors of violence. After the presentation of the report, some conclusions were presented such as:

- Based on demographic data, it is clear that the survivors of domestic violence, experience a very difficult social-economic situation;
- Many of them have underage children and haven't yet resolved all the problems with the perpetrator;
- Most of violence survivors have serious problems with accommodation and employment;
- Most of the women go back to their families, as the government does not provide accommodation for domestic violence survivors and neither a help for their economic empowerment or employment;
- The analysis of the answers shows that the service provided by the centers is not in line with international standards;
- The centers do not meet all of women's necessities, such as psychological and social support, secured environment, job opportunities, temporary care for their children, etc.;
- In most of the cases the service centers, readdress the survivors to NGOs, for various types of assistance free of charge, being so, the NGOs offer to them the most socio-psychological support.

Mrs. Arqimandriti asked the representatives of MHSP that the findings on rehabilitation and integration services for abused women must have the proper attention and be properly addressed by the Ministry.



Mrs. Ines Leskaj from AWEN in her speech said: *"We have to thank ADA for the cooperation and the support given, which is in full synergy with the long-time work of women's organizations and other international organizations. As deputy Minister mentioned during his speech, the dignity of the women and girls we aim to support must be increased. To have dignity, these women and girls need to be independent and empowered enough, and to achieve this there is a long way toward. As we all know from experience the process of rehabilitation and reintegration requires sufficient and sustainable resources and take time. On this purpose, we need professionals of service offerings who, fortunately, are part of the staff of network organizations. Their experience and expertise, is an added value in terms of the contribution given over the years offering the services such as: protocols, standards, ethics and the rehabilitation/integration processes. For us is very important the cooperation with governmental institutions and in this occasion, I want to thank Mrs. Xhafaj who has recognized and appreciated the work of service providers organizations."*

Some statistics from the project development:

Support services provided through this project for **193 service users**

Legal support:

180 women, survivors of violence - service users

14 girls, survivors of violence - service users

8 boys, service users

11 men, service users

Psychological support:

85 women and girls, survivors of violence - service users

30 children, survivors of violence - service users

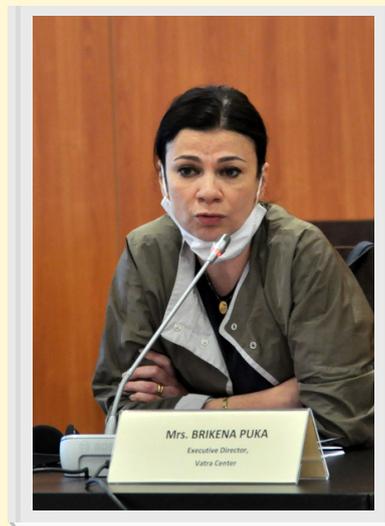
Present at the meeting was also **Mrs. Blerta Gazheli**, Coordinator of "Lilium" Center, which is opened in 2019 by MHSP, for the victims of sexual abuse, with a multidisciplinary service group. The opening of the center was done in the framework of the implementation of the NSGE 2016-2020, for the establishment of a center dealing with sexual assault crises. Among other things, in her speech Mrs. Gazheli said: *"The cases treated in the center have reached the number of 80, already. In addition to emergency care, the center also aims to raise awareness of the population through schools, as it is necessary to obtain information on sexual abuse and violence, also through cooperation with police and psychologists in schools, to raise awareness of referring cases of sexual abuse. The problem that arose from all the work is the fact of the minors abusing, which is growing, while this year has started with 16 cases of minors abuse. "Lilium" Center is a bridge that works with the hosting, support, rehabilitation and integration of women victims of domestic violence and their children.*



The "Lilium" Center is the first center for managing cases of sexual violence not only for women and girls, but also for children, boys and men, as well as members of the LGBTQI community. But so far, of all the cases, almost 80% are sexual violence against women and girls. "

Meanwhile, within this year, "Lilium" will not be the only one center, but two other same centers will operate in Shkodra and Vlora.

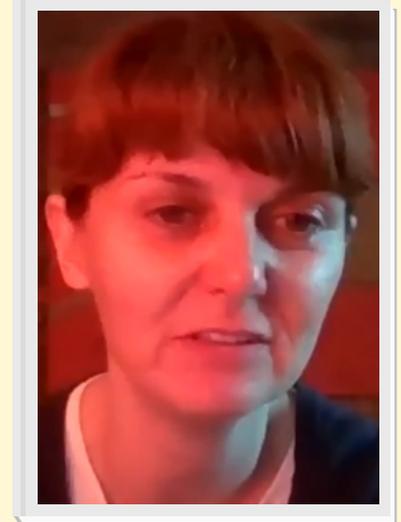
Subsequently, Mrs. Arqimandriti said: *"The opening of this center has been an achievement and it is necessary to open new centers as soon as possible. Also, is needed a proper organization with the schools, in order to minimize to zero the victims. This, should be done in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Legal education should also be provided for perpetrators and potential victims, but also even for creating the possibility of immediate and safe reporting."*



In her speech **Mrs. Brikena Puka**, Executive Director of the Center "Vatra", among other things informed that in addition to the shelter, "Vatra" has set up a legal clinic, where lawyers in addition to assisting victims of trafficking also assist victims of violence.

There are already 2 lawyers employed by "Vatra", 1 psychologist for women, girls and children, a counselor for abusive men and a social worker for evaluating the cases. *"There are many services offered by the shelter such as accommodation (covering basic needs); security and protection; medical assistance, psychological assistance, legal assistance and education possibilities. Life skills development activities are also offered; creative activities; support in establishing contacts with families; vocational training courses; employment counseling; on-the-job training / internship; employment mediation; apartments for rent and support."*- added Mrs. Puka. There are currently 18 cases in the shelter, 14 monitoring and 4 follow-up cases. While during 2020 there were 82 women with 31 children. *"The family is the basis, highlighted Mrs. "Puka - and we are working hard to re-establish contact with the families of the victims, and from our statistics we have noticed that most of the cases that have been successfully reintegrated are those for which the families have been supportive."*

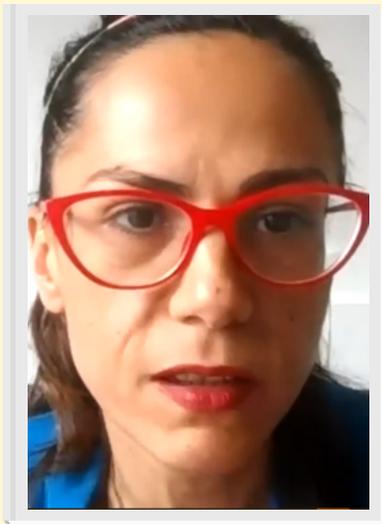
Via online platform, the discussion was joined also by **Mrs. Alexandra Nestorov**, representing the Autonomous Women Center, Serbia, which is also the project's lead organization. She thanked the organizers but also all civil society organizations that with their work are trying to create a better world for all. In the following, Mrs. Nestorov had a presentation of the organization she represents, showing the experience of rehabilitation services in the social welfare system for women survivors of violence. Mrs. Nestorov presented the legal basis created and used during their work, legal changes and those that would need to be changed and improved in the Republic of Serbia. During the speech was also reflected an analysis of the mapping of social welfare services, for women survivors of violence as well as services for the population in local government and throughout the country.



Mrs. Nestorov emphasized, among other things, the basic services of the existing regulations such as: day service, support for independent living; counseling therapy and social-educational services; accommodation services; financial assistance.

To conclude with conclusions and recommendations such as:

- Improving services and developing specialized social protection for survivors of violence, based on the Istanbul Convention;
- In cases of increasing services, it should be taken into account that women can be part of several marginalized groups at the same time;
- Make legal changes, unify social protection services throughout the country. etc.



Mrs. Adelina Berisha, Coordinator of the "Kosovo Women's Network", joined the discussion also via online platform. She made a presentation of the situation regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration of gender-based violence survivors in the Republic of Kosovo. She presented the legal basis for these issues in Kosovo, with standard procedures and their strategy and action plan. Meanwhile, work is already underway to change the legal basis for being in line with the Istanbul Convention, thus seeking to make the full package possible to carry out the full rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, given that so far there have been major shortcomings in budget support.

Mrs. Berisha said: *“Vocational training centers are also a problem in Kosovo, which do not have priority, as stated in the law for the victims of violence. As in Albania and in Serbia, so in Kosovo, social work centers fail to perform their function.”* Mrs. Berisha made a presentation of centers and shelters for victims of violence, while emphasizing that there is still no shelter for violated men.

While the recommendations continue to be almost the same with Albania and the region: The change of the law; need for trainings; compiling guidelines; setting and increasing the budget; creating policies and standards regarding the protection, treatment and services for victims of violence, those with disabilities, LGBTQI persons, minorities, etc.

At the end of the activity, we discussed the possibilities for further continuation of the project, based on the findings and conclusions of the roundtable discussion, where in addition to the focus on rehabilitation and reintegration of abused women and their children, other issues emerged such the necessary steps to be taken next, to improve rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women and girls in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and the region.

"With the cooperation of all actors, we hope that after two years, when we re-analyze the services of reintegration and rehabilitation for women survivors of violence, to have a report with higher and encouraging results." - concluded the meeting Mrs. Arqimandriti

To read the full report please [click here!](#)



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