

ESCAPING VIOLENCE

Eight Untold Stories



Ending
Violence
Against
Women



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Eight Untold Stories

UNDP Albania
“Ending Violence against Women in Albania”

Joint Programme of the UN Funded by
the Government of Sweden



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE 2020

A word from Limya Eltayeb

UNDP Albania Resident Representative

Dear partners,

Women and girls all around the globe experience domestic, sexual and dating violence, stalking and sexual harassment. Violence against women and girls in all its forms remains a grave violation of human rights.

The latest “Population-based national survey on violence against women and girls in Albania” reaffirmed that violence against women and girls is widespread and asks for immediate multi-faceted action, even more so, given the new unprecedented circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. It calls on all actors and society to put an end to it now.

In the context of the UN Joint Programme “Ending Violence Against Women in Albania”, UNDP is supporting service providers to effectively implement legislation and normative standards on elimination of violence against women and other forms of discrimination.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads, UNDP continues to provide support to strengthen institutional response

mechanisms to gender-based violence and assist state and other service providers from civil society to strengthen the provision of specialized integrated support to domestic and sexual violence victims.

Today, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we are happy to bring to you eight stories from eight brave women who fight with this often-hidden pandemic, day in, day out. These stories are powerful, heartbreaking but inspiring too.

Join us in the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign to stand up for women's rights and for a society free of violence. I want to use this opportunity to hail our partnership with the Government of Sweden that has continuously supported our work and for upholding women's empowerment, gender equality principles, non-discrimination and elimination of violence against women everywhere in the country.

Let us all join the fight for a society with equal rights for everyone where women feel empowered. If they do, society will prosper.

Sincerely,
Limya

The corrosion of women's human rights is a litmus test for the human rights standards of the whole society."

— United Nations Human Rights Council

OUR TANGIBLE RESULTS IN A GLANCE:

The first state-run National Shelter for Domestic Violence Survivors accommodated **217 women and (their) 334 children**

Laws and policies are constantly improved to ensure protection of women's rights in compliance with international gender commitments and standards such as The Criminal Code, Criminal Procedural Code, Free Legal Aid, the Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations



36 municipalities are supported to establish and make operational Coordinated Referral Mechanisms at local level to handle Domestic Violence cases

The first ever state-run, one-stop, multi-sectorial, emergency 'LILIUM' Centre for sexual violence victims provided, over a year, integrated emergency support to **62 survivors of sexual violence**

The first online state-run recording and tracking system Domestic Violence cases REVALB has so far registered and tracked **5785 DV cases**



A 13-YEAR-OLD BOY AND HIS MOTHER ESCAPED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

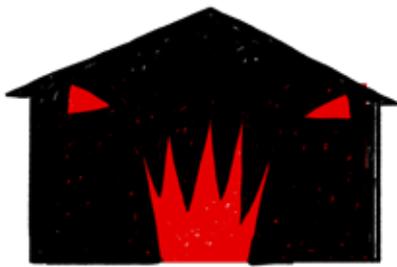
M.R is a 13-year-old boy, on the verge of adolescence – an age when role models that inspire self-confidence are much needed. Unfortunately, his family situation did not help him much in this regard. Until a few months ago, he lived with his mother L.R. and his father Sh.R. in a house in Patos. Scenes of psychological violence against his 46-year-old mother were a common sight in this household, occurring often times in his presence. This violence lingered on for months, until his mother decided to report her husband to the police. The Patos Police reacted quite quickly, reporting the case to the municipal domestic violence local coordinator in time. Upon reviewing the case, it was concluded that the situation presented a medium risk and a lawsuit was promptly prepared, followed by an immediate protection order issued by the Fier District Court.

The 13-year-old boy and his mother moved to his grandparents' in the Municipality of Ura Vajgurore

for the time being, while awaiting the approval of the lawsuit by the Fier District Court. Free transport was provided from Patos to Ura Vajgurore by the Patos Coordinated Referral Mechanism. In this case, the boy and his mother were supported with specialized support services in every step of their escape from domestic violence by the local public and non-public institutions, which were very well coordinated and reacted in a timely manner. Both mother and son underwent a medical check-up by the Patos Health Center, as well as the host family, as a necessary measure prompted by the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thereafter, in close cooperation with the police of Patos, mother and son were first accompanied to their apartment to pick up their personal belongings and then to the grandparents' house.

Following the decision of the Fier District Court ordering the removal of the perpetrator from the household, the execution of this decision was made possible in cooperation with the Bailiff's Office in Fier, and both mother and son returned to their home in the "Mustafa Matohiti" neighborhood in Patos.



Promptly upon their return, the mother was offered a job by the Employment Office in one of the local shoe factories. During the pandemic, she benefitted support from the Municipality through free psychological and legal assistance, as well as food aids.

Meanwhile, the case of the 13-year-old boy was referred to the Office of Pre-University Education and the boy obtained online support from his school's psycho-social services.

This support was essential to help the 13-year-old overcome the psychological distress caused by exposure to domestic violence. According to the National Population-Based Survey on "Violence against women in Albania", children raised in such environments are at risk of developing a shy or avoidant personality or show aggressive behavior towards their mother or other children, if they are not offered the necessary psychological support.



11 INSTITUTIONS WELL-COORDINATED TO END VIOLENCE FOR MOTHER AND CHILDREN

M.L., a mother with children, was systematically abused by her husband in their presence. This history of abuse went on until she ended up in the hospital, and her husband in prison. In general, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the situation of domestic violence, especially during the lockdown, when perpetrators and victims had to spend more time together.

Fortunately, the case of M.L. turned into a success story thanks to the mother's courage to report the violence and the timely and adequate institutional response provided by the Coordinated Referral Mechanism at local level and other public and non-public service providers – in total, 11 institutions coordinated efforts and successfully managed to rescue the victims of domestic violence.

The Local Domestic Violence Coordinator in Has was among the first to learn about the case and assist

in its management. Initially, the Has Police Station where the violence was reported performed a risk assessment and assisted the mother in filing a claim with the Tirana Judicial District Court for the issuance of an Immediate Protection Order for safety reasons. The mother was sent to Has hospital for an examination and treatment of injuries caused by violence.

This case was not easy. Several institutions came together to provide support. The police coordinated the officers of the Kukës Police Station, the General Directorate of State Police and Police Station no. 5 in Tirana to accompany the mother and her children to a safe location, where they could get support without being in danger. The Municipality, the Centre for Civic Legal Initiative and the National Shelter for the Treatment of Domestic Violence Victims came together to offer assistance to the mother and her children.

The local domestic violence coordinator and child protection specialist, together with the domestic violence expert at the police directorate, were committed to helping the family escape its history of violence. They accompanied the mother to the National Shelter for the Treatment of Domestic Violence Victims. Thereafter, with the help of the police officers at Police Station no. 5, they escorted her to court, where the mother

requested an Immediate Protection Order for her and her children. The order was issued immediately. With the support of the Civic Legal Initiative lawyer, the family obtained a Protection Order while being sheltered at the National state-run Shelter for the Treatment of Domestic Violence Victims.

Once things started to improve for the mother, who started work and enrolled her children in kindergarten and school, she filed for divorce from her husband. He was sentenced with indefinite imprisonment awaiting trial for domestic abuse charges.

M.L. is merely one of the many women and girls suffering “a human rights pandemic within a health pandemic,” as the United Nations have referred to the worsened situation of violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic - a time when addressing domestic violence seems to be considered a “luxury” in the current state of survival from the health crisis.

Considering that isolation measures add to the difficulties of those responsible for protecting victims of gender-based violence, it is vital to find ways to inform these women and girls that local and central institutions such as those involved in the case of M.L. are there to provide services in their support.



THE STORY OF A DIFFICULT REPORTING

V.D. is a mother of 4 children. Living with the head of the family was a challenge for them. The five of them have been through a lot, In addition to physical injuries, this violence also caused serious psychological consequences on everyone. The children, who often witnessed their mother's abuse, had trouble paying attention at school.

The domestic violence victim tried to react more than once. She reached out to the Local Domestic Violence Coordinator in the Municipality of Klos and the latter informed V.D of possible ways to escape this situation, advising her to report the case to the police. However, this was not that easy, as her husband would keep her locked up at home, threatening her that even the police would not support her since he was friends with all employees.

Given the circumstances, the Local Domestic Violence Coordinator urged the woman to build up enough courage to report the violence not in Klos, but in Police Station no. 5 in Tira-

na. The mother and her children were provided with an Immediate Protection Order, while the abuser was forced to leave the household.

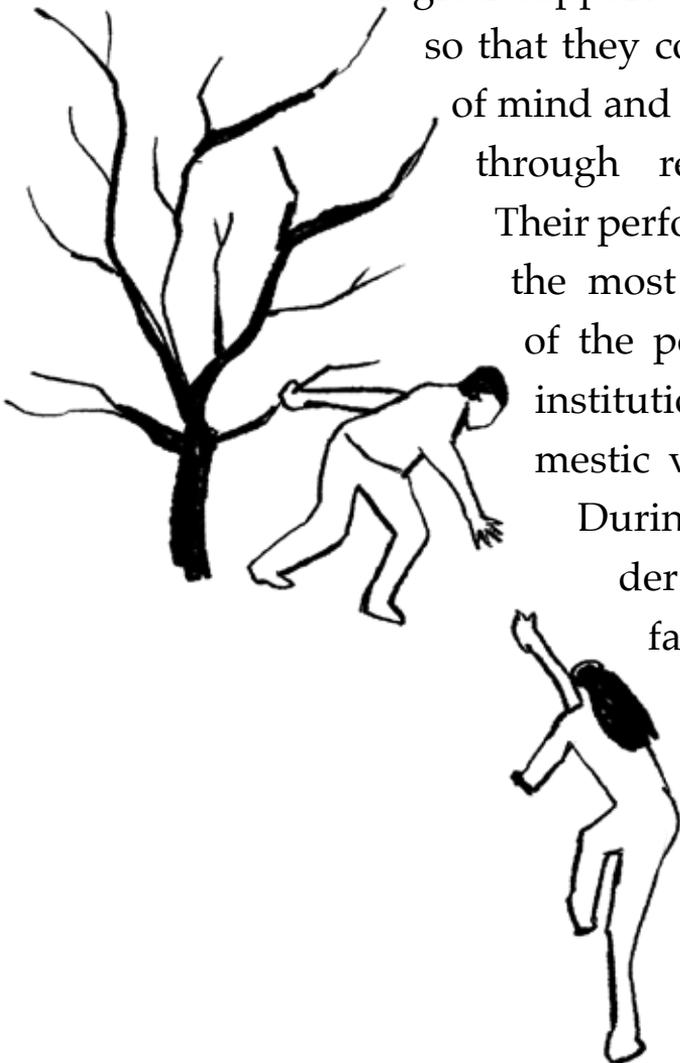
It was the police of Klos and the Bailiff's Office in Mat who forced the perpetrator to leave their rental home, while the mother obtained a 3-month protection order. The children were provided with psycho-

logical support during these months, so that they could find some peace of mind and enjoy their childhood through returning to school.

Their performance at school was the most significant indicator of the positive impact of the institutional response to domestic violence intervention.

During the protection order's 3month-period, the

family was kept under supervision, making sure that the perpetrator respected the restrictive measures. V. D was continuously instructed



on the steps she would have to follow if her husband tried to hurt them again.

The rent bonus provided to the family by the Municipality of Klos helped them return to their normal lives. Having a safe environment encouraged the mother to report the violence.



BREAKING FREE FROM VIOLENCE: A JUVENILE'S STORY

S.Th. was only 15 years old when she was sexually abused by the school guard. The abuse by the 60-year-old man, who could have well been her father given his age, continued for one year. The abuser had long attempted to rape the minor by threatening, harassing and blackmailing her constantly and in various ways. Found under this pressure, afraid to tell anyone from the family circle or society, the girl surrendered to the abuse and remained silent.

Sadly, the abuse did not end here. S.Th was also sexually abused by unknown persons, who recorded her rape. With this “evidence” in hand, they unleashed a new series of threats against the minor. The video risked being shared among other people or on social networks...

Amidst this vicious circle of abuse, threats and blackmailing, the girl decided to break her silence. She reported the case to the police, telling them about her abusers and the methods they used to blackmail

her. That was enough for the police to inform the child protection unit in the area where the girl lived with her family.

The specialists noted that there was no time to lose. The girl and her family had to immediately get the necessary psychological and social support.

The employee referred the case to the LILIUM Centre, so that the girl could benefit the emergency services provided by this centre. The girl was accompanied to the Centre by the child protection officer and representatives of the CRCA organization.

The 15-year-old had suffered serious abuse, so immediate intervention was necessary. The girl obtained the specialized psychological support needed in cases of sexual abuse. She underwent a psychiatric evaluation aiming to assess the effects of the abuse, as well as several medical examinations. The 15-year-old was accommodated at the LILIUM Centre during the first 48 hours, under the continued support of their staff consisting of therapists, doctors and nurses.



Intervention chain

Such cases of abuse require a complex and long-term intervention. This ensures a quick return to normal life for the victims of sexual violence and their families. The same was applied in the case of S. TH. In order to ensure the coordination of the support and its multi-faceted service provision, a good cooperation was achieved between several public and non-public service providers.

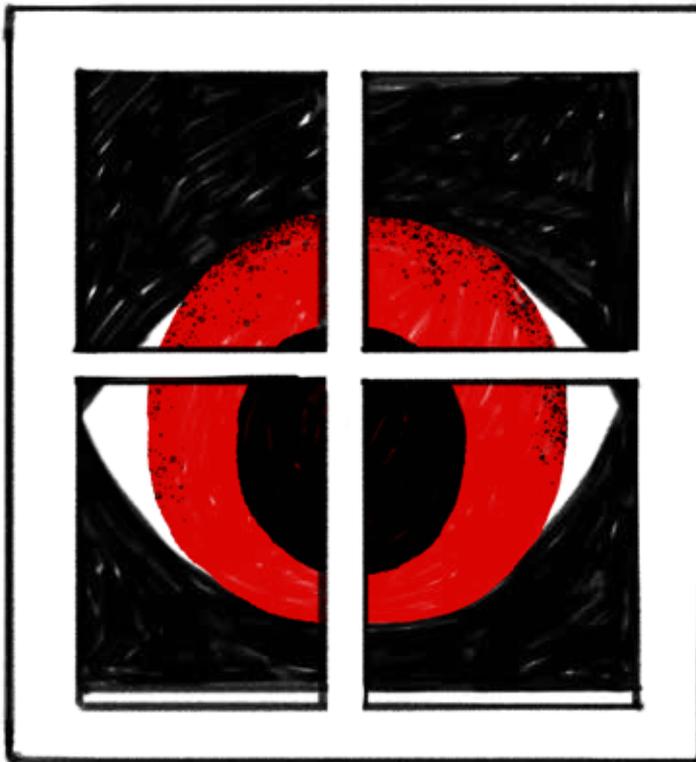
The work began with a detailed case assessment and provision of emergency services. The key person serving as a liaison between the girl and the Inter-Sectorial Technical Team, as well as one of the most important actors in the management of this case, was the child protection officer.

A part of the support was also offered by the non-governmental organizations, which provided the materials to facilitate entertainment activities within the centre. S.Th was also referred to the Local Domestic Violence Coordinator of Tirana, with the aim of ensuring a proper coordination of interventions for the long-term management of the case.



She managed to escape violence. What now?!

An effective management of sexual abuse cases does not end with the provision of emergency support. The real success lies in helping sexual violence survivors integrate into society. Thus, in the present case of the 15-year-old girl, the support chain was extended even further. She was assured a safe shelter, and in cooperation with the Social Services in the Municipality of Tirana, a suitable apartment was provided for her whole family. The payment of their apartment rent



was covered through cooperation with several civil society organizations.

The staff of LILIUM centre, which sheltered the girl during the first few days, remained in touch with her even after she left.

Today, the girl seems to be in stable condition, and she and her family are striving to move forward and leave this sad story of abuse behind.



THE 24 HOURS THAT CHANGED THE LIFE OF A JUVENILE GIRL

On August 11 2020, a 15-year-old girl arrived at the Maternity Hospital of Shkodra, accompanied by two men. The girl was suffering from severe bleeding and pain. The doctor immediately realized that she had been sexually abused. The incident had taken place on that same day and was promptly reported to the Malësia e Madhe Police, upon taking the young girl's statement. She initially denied the abuse out of shame and fear. The two men accompanying her were her father and uncle, the latter being in fact her abuser. Unaware of this fact, the girl's father had asked his brother to accompany them to the hospital, since he had a car.

From the hospital, the girl and her family members went to the police station for further evaluation of the case.

Faced with the girl's confession and the results of the medical check-ups , the uncle confessed his crime

and was immediately detained by the police.

The abuser was arrested...what about now?

The damage was done. In just a few hours, the girl found herself going from her house to the hospital and then to the police station and that was it! In order to avoid sending the girl back home without any specialized support, the police immediately informed the Local Coordinator Against Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Malësia e Madhe, who, in turn,



coordinated with all the institutions of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism of domestic violence cases. Its members took a series of prompt measures, accompanying the girl throughout all stages of evaluation, counselling and safe sheltering.

Initially, a safe sheltering was provided for the girl. She was accommodated at the “Woman to Woman” emergency shelter in Shkodër, which is also a member of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism of Domestic Violence cases in the Municipality of Malësia e Madhe and the Municipality of Shkodra.

The psychologist the Coordinated Referral Mechanism in this municipality drafted a support plan con-

sisting in long therapy through psychological sessions, not only for the survivor of the abuse, but also for her parents. Separate sessions were held for each of them.

Consequences of the abuse

The sexual abuse left its mark on the girl not only physically, but also psychologically. She suffered injuries and experienced eating and sleeping disorders, low self-esteem, symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In order to avoid the girl's immediate return to her family home, where the incident had taken place, the girl and her mother were accommodated in Shkodër. They were granted two months of paid rent and benefited food aids from the Municipality of Shkodër, as part of an initiative supported by UNDP.

The Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Malesia e Madhe is following up and continuously monitoring the case in order to provide specialized support according to the needs of the survivor and ensure her prompt return to normal life.





A SERIES OF SEXUAL ABUSES SINCE CHILDHOOD AND THE SPECIALIZED SUPPORT PROVIDED BY FRONT-LINE PROFESSIONALS

A.B. is a 26-year-old girl who has been sexually abused since childhood. She has suffered many cases of sexual abuse in her life and her file proves this. She has been sexually exploited and subjected to forced labor.

Every page of her file has left deep marks on her life.

One day, while she was living alone in her apartment, without any friends, family or relatives, she was sexually assaulted by two strangers.

The 26-year-old reported the incident to the Tirana Police Station. Following the assessment of this complex case, due to her long history of abuse, the young girl was considered a “victim of trafficking”. The case was referred to the National Reception Centre for Vic-

tims of Trafficking in Linzë, before conducting the formal interview, and the girl was accompanied to the premises of this centre due to the risk status and level upon assessment.

She told the police that she feels at risk and is afraid to go back to her apartment. Therefore, she was referred to the Liliium Centre to be provided with the emergency services provided to victims of sexual abuse through a specialized multi-disciplinary team.

Emergency support for the survivor of sexual abuse

Once she was admitted to LILIUM Centre, the multi-disciplinary team drafted a working plan. The young girl underwent a general medical and forensic check-up. She was evaluated by a psychiatrist and was provided with psychological services by the staff of the centre.

For four days, she was accommodated at LILIUM Center and supported by therapists and nurses, while also being provided with food and clothing.

The centre's staff remained in close contact with the young girl for 2 weeks after she left their premises, in order to make sure that the 26-year-old was safe and

in good health. She kept receiving the necessary psychiatric services by LILIUM centre.

The girl is a recurring victim, who has been previously supported by the organization “Different & Equal”, which offered to assist with medications even in in this next episode of sexual violence.

The Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Tirana has also played a key role in the intervention plan, coordinating all work in order to detail the plan. The State Social Service has also been involved in the support through meetings held with the young girl to decide on a long-term treatment.





A NEW LIFE FOR A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR, MOTHER OF 4, AND HER CHILDREN

For V.D. 45 years old, January 2020 will be remembered as the day when she put an end to her marriage in Fushë Arrëz, where she was systematically abused by her husband. If he wasn't home, he would be out drinking for hours and hours. As soon as he'd be back, he would start abusing her physically and psychologically. This violence went on for 22 years continuously. Their four children –aged 19, 15, 12 and 10 – were born and raised in a home where they witnessed continuous violence. The first who managed to distance herself from home was the eldest daughter, who is following her studies in Tirana. She too has suffered abuse and threats from her drunken father. V.D. had attempted several times to run away from home, but she always came back hoping that things would change, but no, the violence would start again, and each time would be worse than the last. When her husband started threatening their eldest daughter, the mother finally found

the courage to take a final step and leave her abuser.

At first, the mother and children went to the police station in Fushë Arrëz, but they refused to take their statement. Then, the family asked for help in Tirana. They were sheltered at the home of a friend of the eldest daughter. The Court of Tirana issued a protection order for them and the case was referred to the Shelter for Women and Girls by the Counselling Line for Women and Girls. From the first days of 2020, the mother and two of her children, 12 and 10, benefited full services from the Shelter. The three of them obtained psychological and emotional support aimed to improve and stabilize their emotional state. The children were enrolled in school with the help of the Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Tirana. They were supported with continuous psychological services throughout their learning process and were provided with educational means of entertainment throughout their stay at the shelter. Meanwhile, the mother managed to find a job with the mediation of the social worker of the Shelter.

Taking all appropriate measures to prevent any potential problems, the National Counselling Line for Women and Girls, in cooperation with the Coordinated Referral Mechanism for Cases of Domestic Violence

in the Municipality of Fushë Arrëz and the police, assisted the mother in obtaining a 1-year protection order while she initiated the divorce proceedings. By the end of June 2020, the mother managed to finalize her divorce and take custody of her three minor children.

After leaving the Shelter, the family was assisted in finding a rental apartment and the children were enrolled in school. Given that their registered residence address was still in Pukë, this process was carried out with the mediation of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism for Domestic Violence Cases in the Municipality of Tirana.

The family was granted financial assistance to cover their rent for two months and was provided with emergency food aids for three months, school supplies for the children and continuous therapy sessions from the Shelter and all public and non-public local institutions, with the support of UNDP.

Currently, the mother and her children are living in Tirana, working, studying and being supported in every step of their way by the relevant structures for an appropriate reintegration in life.

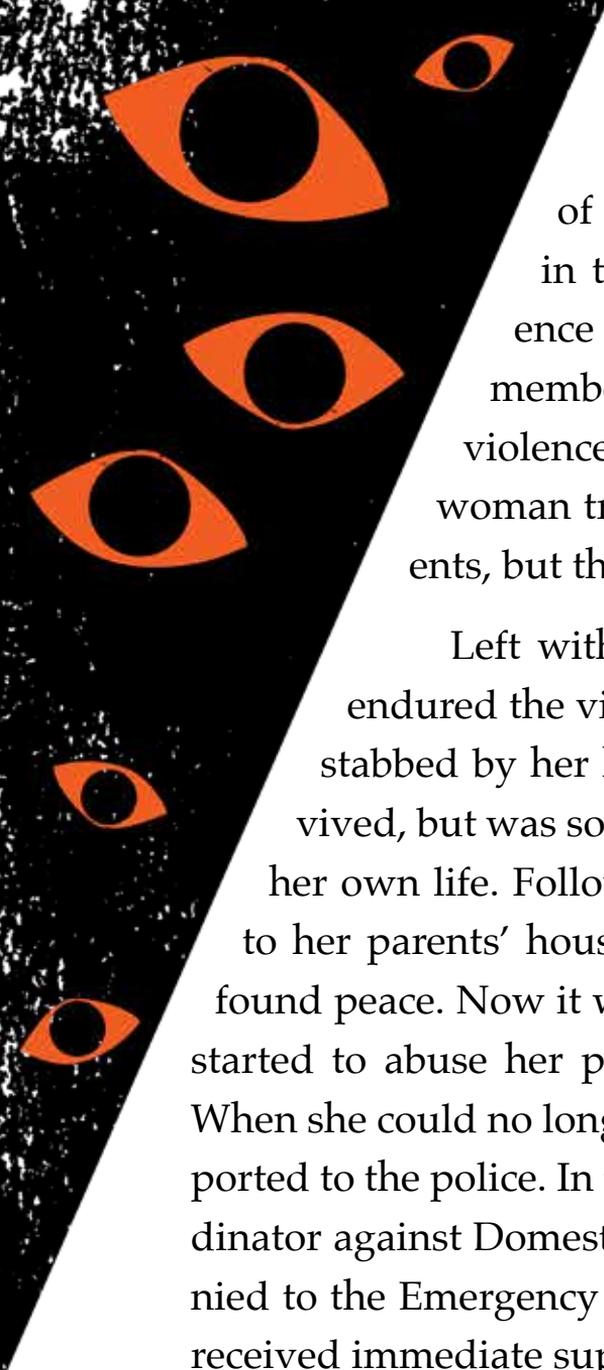


ABUSE AFTER ABUSE, UNTIL SALVATION FINALLY CAME

When the Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence and the “Woman to Woman” Emergency Centre in Shkodër referred the case of 30-year-old L.L. to the Shelter for Women and Girls, it was clear to everyone that immediate action was needed, and a long-term solution was required.

In 2011, the 30-year-old woman with secondary education, from a village of Puka, was married in arrangement to J.L., living in Rrëshen, with whom she has two children, 8 and 6 years old. She has never been employed and being a housewife has always been her only occupation. She lived in Rrëshen with her husband, their two children and her parents in law. She started having problems with her husband’s family since the very first days of her marriage. She was disrespected, disregarded, neglected and mistreated not only by her husband, but also by his mother.

Her husband was an immigrant in Greece, and whenever he came back to his family home he abused her physically, psychologically and financially. Scenes



of violence were a common sight in their home and even the presence of the children or other family members would not stop the acts of violence. Given the circumstances, the woman tried to seek help from her parents, but they turned their backs on her.

Left without any support, the woman endured the violence until one night she was stabbed by her husband. Fortunately, she survived, but was so desperate that she tried to end her own life. Following this incident, she moved to her parents' house, but even there she did not find peace. Now it was her father and brother that started to abuse her physically and psychologically. When she could no longer endure the violence, L.L reported to the police. In the presence of the Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence, she was accompanied to the Emergency Shelter in Shkodra, where she received immediate support.

The 30-year-old found shelter and psycho-social support at the Shelter for Women and Girls. The Coordinated Referral Mechanism and the Local Coordinator against Domestic Violence in the Municipality of Lezha helped the mother obtain a 1-year protection order.

TLAS organization is providing free legal support for the divorce and child custody proceedings. The 30-year-old is now registered in Tirana Employment Office, expecting to find a job and start over. When all professionals come together, there is hope for the survivors of domestic violence to start a life free of violence.

2020 FACTS

1 Support Services to Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence Victims at Local Level

372

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES benefited from **multiple services** provided from

18

COORDINATED REFERRAL MECHANISMS

of cases of domestic violence at local level

301

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES are provided with **psychosocial services**



2 Capacities of Members of Coordinated Referral Mechanisms of Cases of Domestic Violence are Strengthened

479

MEMBERS of Coordinated Referral Mechanisms and Social Service Providers **trained on domestic violence law enforcement**



3 Information and Awareness Campaigns

73,079

PEOPLE reached through social media

1,475

PEOPLE BENEFITED directly from **awareness campaigns** related to domestic violence



4 Updated Records in On-line Tracking System for Domestic Violence Cases - REVALB

135

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES and **3079 updates** are recorded in **REVALB system** from 18 UNDP supported municipalities



851

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES and **10,390 updates** are recorded in **REVALB system** from all municipalities across the country

LILIUM Center

22

CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE supported with **specialized integrated emergency services**

3

WOMEN



18

GIRLS



1

BOY



FACTS ON THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1 Support Services to Gender-Based Violence & Domestic Violence Victims at Local Level

318 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES benefited from multiple services provided from



18 Coordinated Referral Mechanisms of cases of Domestic Violence at local level

245 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES are provided with psychosocial services

2 A Protocol Developed on Treatment of Domestic Violence Cases During COVID-19 Pandemic

456 MEMBERS of Coordinated Referral Mechanisms and Social Service Providers trained on the use of the protocol



3 Information and Awareness Campaigns

1307 PEOPLE BENEFITED directly from awareness campaigns related to domestic violence

63695 PEOPLE reached through social media



4 Updated Records in On-line Tracking System for Domestic Violence Cases - REVALB

120 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES and 2323 updates are recorded in the REVALB system from the 18 UNDP supported municipalities



729 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES and 8981 updates are recorded in the REVALB system from all the municipalities across the country

LILIUM Center

15 CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE supported with specialized integrated emergency services

14 WOMEN AND GIRLS



* An internal regulation is developed to manage emergency sexual violence cases in COVID-19 situation

This booklet is prepared by UNDP Albania in partnership with Ministry of Health and Social Protection as part of the UN Joint Programme “Ending Violence against Women in Albania” with Government of Sweden funds.

