

**Alternative Report**

**of the Republic of Latvia on the implementation**

**of the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

**1 January 2005 – 31 December 2017**

**Contacts:**

MARTA Centre

**e-mail:** [centrs@marta.lv](mailto:centrs@marta.lv)

**Telephone:** +371 67378539

**Introduction**

MARTA Centre is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that unites associations of rural women, women in business and education and has worked in the field of women’s rights protection for 18 years, supporting women in Latvia – non-citizens and migrants, women with low income and unemployed women, female victims of human trafficking and of domestic violence. MARTA Centre is the only women’s rights NGO in Latvia that, in addition to practical (psychological, legal and social) support to victims of violence and human trafficking actively works with advocacy issues. Additional field of MARTA Centre’s work is violence prevention, achieved by working with youth to challenge the prevalent gender norms and behaviours that make young people susceptible to becoming victims and/or perpetrators of violence. MARTA Centre routinely cooperates with other NGOs and the respective public authorities at local, national and international level to safeguard the human rights of women and to raise awareness of the significance of the issue.

Recognizing the importance and value of the Latvian Sate’s Combined fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh periodic report on the implementation of the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination against Women for the period of 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2017, MARTA Centre’s experts shall use this opportunity to submit an Alternative Report on the same topic to highlight how the aspects discussed in the State Report work on a practical level. MARTA Centre has chosen to structure this Report in a manner similar to that of the State Report, namely, by commenting on both the Committee’s recommendations and information provided by the State. Due to expert capacity limitations, MARTA Centre will comment exclusively on those aspects of Committee’s recommendations and State Report that are particularly urgent in MARTA Centre’s view or most closely aligned with the Centre’s expertise.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 46 – definition of discrimination against women**

**And**

**Paragraph 6 in State Report**

The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia still has no special provisions regarding gender equality because it is still considered that the article 91 guarantees gender equality. The other laws mentioned in the State Report indeed do cover the prohibition to discriminate in general and to discriminate women or men in particular; however, MARTA Centre feels that this prohibition is still understood rather vaguely by the general public and the law enforcement. As a result, not many people realize if and how they can secure their rights.

For example, the Ombud’s Office (an entity that is tasked with educating and safeguarding the population with regards to their human rights) has dealt with the following number of cases of gender-based discrimination in the period of 01.01.2007. to 20.09.20112:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2007** | **2008** | **2009** | **2010** | **2011** |
| 12 | 13 | 19 | 8 | 2 |

On the website of the Supreme Court, one can find only 2 cases of gender discrimination in the workplace tried in the reporting period: one in 2007 for unequal pay; another in 2012 for laying off work based on recent maternity[[1]](#footnote-1).

There is still no unified Anti-Discrimination Law. As stated in a report by Latvian Centre for Human Rights (which is now the Ombud’s Office) in 2011[[2]](#footnote-2), the anti-discrimination norms are included in multiple separate laws, making it difficult for a lay person to understand their rights. There are also multiple institutions that deal with discrimination cases – each in a separate field (e.g., Labour Inspection in the field of employment, Consumer Rights Protection Centre - in advertising, etc.).

The most problematic aspect is that there is no unified information system that would render it possible to look into the statistics on discrimination cases in the courts. Most information on such cases is coming from the mass media or by directly contacting the courts or searching their webpages.

According to the Labour Law (Art. 29, parts 4 and 7) harassment is also considered a form of discrimination. However, despite the European Union’s (EU) statistics showing workplace (sexual) harassment being of grandiose proportions[[3]](#footnote-3) and despite the Latvian internet news outlets and forums being full of articles/ questions regarding what to do if being harassed at the workplace, there is no official research on the topic in Latvia and there seem to be no court cases regarding the issue.

MARTA Centre therefore recommends updating law enforcement statistical systems to better represent statistics on discrimination cases in the workplace, including those on (sexual) harassment, as well as to research the topic thoroughly.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 50 – gender equality mechanism**

**And**

**Paragraphs 15 to 19 in State Report**

MARTA Centre agrees that a lot has been done to mainstream and institutionalize gender equality work. However, one aspect of Committee’s recommendations still has not been fulfilled, namely, allocation of sufficient budget and human resources to efficiently carry out gender equality policies. Ministry of Welfare has worked relentlessly on the issue, and many victories have been achieved; however, presently only 2 employees work full time with gender equality issues within this institution[[4]](#footnote-4). Moreover, presently no extra resources are attributed to the gender equality issues and all the public institutions are expected to carry out gender equality promotion tasks assigned to them within their existing resources. Needless to say, gender equality is not the priority of most public institutions, and it will so remain unless extra resources are found.

As stated in the State Report, “Since 2005, all ministries have nominated a high-level official, who is responsible for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies”. MARTA Centre wants to elaborate on this statement. First, it is not at all clear who exactly this official is. For example, by looking at the Ministry of Economics’ web page, it is hard to find a mention of such an official, and the same is true with other ministries. Second, it is very likely that this is merely an additional work assignment to that official’s main obligations, and thus – not a priority. MARTA Centre expresses concern that this nomination of officials in each ministry is just for appearance and actual work is not being done due to ongoing resource limitations.

MARTA Centre therefore recommends that resources are sought to enlarge the financial and human resource capacity of public institutions to work on gender equality issues.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 54 – the role of women in the family and in society**

**And**

**Paragraphs 29 to 34 in State Report**

In addition to the activities mentioned in the State Report MARTA Centre wants to inform the Committee that multiple NGOs are working systematically and over long term to diminish the stereotypes prevailing in the society in order to promote, among other things, more equal role distributions in family and social life.

MARTA Centre has been running workshops continuously for youth since 2010. In these workshops, by using tools of informal education, a safe space is provided for youth to critically evaluate societal and their own assumptions about relationships, gender roles, power relations, self-worth, and other topics that are relevant for them. They are also encouraged to think critically and challenge societal norms that they feel are harmful and limiting. MARTA Centre’s youth experts note that young people have been lacking safe spaces to talk about such issues both at schools and at home. These workshops, depending on possibilities, are provided either over multiple months or over shorter period of time, preferring, of course, the longer duration. In 2017, 150 young people took part in these workshops in 8 different Latvian cities.

Foundation “Fathers”, also an NGO, has been working since 2015 to change the harmful stereotypes associated with masculinity and father’s role in the family, to promote healthier attitudes and involvement of fathers with their children, more equal labour division at home and in society, as well as to discuss the practical aspects of fathers’ involvement with their children, the emotional needs of parents and children, etc. Workshops are organized for fathers on emotional and practical aspects of fatherhood.

MARTA Centre has repeatedly advocated for more accountability from the media industry regarding the qualitative and quantitative representation of women and men in the media in Latvia. Acknowledging that media campaigns can be effective in changing social attitudes, MARTA Centre maintains that the day-to-day media messages are equally, if not even more, important. For this reason, MARTA Centre regrets that the existing legislation covering the media industry is not demanding enough and there is no unified, clear mechanism to demand accountability from companies that disregard equality principles in the media. As for now there is no Media Ombud but there have been discussions on creating such an institution in the future.

During the reporting period MARTA Centre has approached Consumer Rights Protection Centre (PTAC) multiple times with complaints about blatantly discriminatory/ sexist advertisements, but little or no action has followed from the Centre as a result. This shows that yet another institution that supposedly works to diminish discrimination can do little in practice due to vague legislation, no established practice in the field and little understanding of the issue[[5]](#footnote-5).

Regarding the policy measures to harmonize the parents’ involvement in childcare and household duties, there have been improvements regarding the increased popularity of paternity leave. However, this leave can still be legally transferred to the other parent, and this chance is often used. MARTA Centre believes that situation of father involvement could be improved by following the Nordic approach – namely, the leave cannot be transferred to the mother, and unused leave is lost (different leave mechanisms should be applied to single parent households so that these families are not discriminated). This would send a clear signal that fathers should be equally involved as parents and it would help strengthen the emotional bond between the father and the child from the child’s early days. This has been discussed amid attempts to harmonize work/life balance, however, this suggestion has not been widely supported on the political level.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 56 – elimination of domestic violence**

**And**

**Paragraphs 35 to 68 in State Report**

Although marital rape is still not recognized as a separate crime, there have been other major legal improvements in the area of domestic abuse legislation: since 2014 a mechanism for temporary protection against violence is in place, allowing perpetrators to be removed from the proximity of the victim, including the perpetrator’s own dwelling, and there have been various positive amendments to the *Criminal Law* that have already been discussed in the State Report. However, despite these amazing legal improvements, there are still multiple practical shortcomings to the victim protection and their possibility to seek redress via law enforcement system.

Issues with the Police: Even though MARTA Centre has previously collaborated with the Ministry of Welfare and the State Police in order to systematically educate police officers on issues regarding domestic abuse, still more work needs to be done. The police officer is often the first responder in cases of emergency and has immense responsibility (and potential) to save the victim’s life with a timely, appropriate action, therefore it is not permissible that many officers still tend to ignore victim’s calls, downplay the seriousness of their experiences, ignore the patterned, long-term nature of the violence they have suffered, blame them for provoking the perpetrator, do not inspect the dwelling or the victim’s body unless the blood is obviously visible, are intolerant or condescending towards the victim, try to console the victim with the perpetrator, share jokes with the perpetrator, try to convince the victim not to file a complaint because the perpetrator is himself a police officer and would therefore get into trouble if the victim filed the complaint, etc.[[6]](#footnote-6) Often the officers do not inform the victims of their right that the perpetrator be removed from the dwelling, and this action is only performed when asked specifically by those victims who are aware of this regulation. Moreover, the police tend to detain the perpetrator only for a few hours; afterwards, when the perpetrator returns to the victim, the victim is in even more severe danger than without this kind of police intervention. Many of the victims have stated that after such encounters with the police, they avoid calling the police unless in grave danger.

It is still very hard for victims to be taken seriously when they report stalking which is now also criminalized. Generally, the victims recognize that it depends on the police officer’s personal attitudes and knowledge regarding domestic abuse if the situation is be managed effectively, and also positive experiences have been reported to MARTA Centre.

For this reason, a project “One Step Closer: Coordinated Community Response to Violence against Women” has been carried out with the support of the EU funding, uniting Ministry of Welfare, State Police and MARTA Centre to design a multisectoral cooperation model that puts victim’s needs first. The aim is to educate first responders so that they can act quickly and efficiently, and to educate the society on the topic. As a result, risk evaluation questionnaires and easy to use action guidelines have been designed for use in domestic violence calls by the police. These materials have thus far been piloted in one municipality (Tukums) and introduced in other municipalities. An important aspect of these materials is that they also include provision that police officers establish the sex of both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as the status of their relationship to ensure better data gathering practice in the future. The project ends in January 31, 2019.

Issues with the Judiciary: MARTA Centre has been involved as experts in multiple educational seminars aimed at Judiciary workers on the topic of domestic abuse and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Similar problems as with the Police have been noted within the Judiciary: lack of belief in the victim’s experiences and lack of understanding that domestic abuse is not an isolated violent fight among two adults. In 2014 a widely covered controversy emerged as the Attorney General's Office proclaimed that there are certain rape cases in which victims are at least partially to blame for their rape – an incident which sheds some light on the general understanding of gender-based violence within Latvian Judiciary. Still, in courts and other institutions rape and domestic abuse victims often are forced to tell and retell multiple times the details of their abuse, which is a practice MARTA Centre has worked to end to insure victims are not re-traumatized and are treated with dignity.

An issue that MARTA Centre learns about from its clients is that courts tend to easily grant temporary protection to the woman who has been victim to domestic abuse, which is good, but not to the children she may share with the perpetrator. In this case children remain a way for the perpetrator to contact and meet, intimidate, influence, and emotionally abuse the victim. This issue is also present in cases of divorce wherein courts or Orphan Courts, due to lack of understanding of the dynamics and danger of domestic violence, grant the right to meet the children also to the perpetrator. In non-violent situations MARTA Centre agrees that the ruling that both parents have an equal right to meet the children is supportable.

It is mentioned in the State Report that “Since 2015, the State-funded social rehabilitation services are available to persons who have committed violence. … The services are voluntary.” MARTA Centre has advocated that changes are made to render these services mandatory to those perpetrators who are subject to police temporary protection decision or court ruling. This is particularly important since most of the people enrolled in the abovementioned service are women who have been violent to their children. MARTA Centre admits the importance of reducing the violence towards children by adults, either men or women; however, the fact that voluntary service for violence reduction hosts mainly women as perpetrators of violence amidst the statistics of men being primary violence perpetrators in family settings signals that this service may not attain its ultimate goal if managed in the present manner.

Regarding the statistics of domestic abuse, MARTA Centre alone helps more than 300 people a year, mostly women who have suffered from domestic violence or human trafficking[[7]](#footnote-7). Often women seek help in their municipality’s social service. However, according to the 2012 study of the EU Agency on Fundamental Rights (FRA), more than 1 in 3 women in Latvia admit that they have suffered physical and/or sexual violence by a partner on a non-partner since the age of 15[[8]](#footnote-8). Being aware of the widespread violence acceptance among the general public in Latvia, and seeing the trend in this specific FRA study that the Nordic countries, known for their successful work on illuminating gender-based violence, score higher, whereas Poland and Croatia, known for not exactly preferring open discussions on such topics, score lower, it can be suspected that the actual number of women who have been victims of violence in Latvia might be even greater. Namely, with the present-day awareness of the topic, some forms of violence are not yet seen as a type of violence even by victims themselves, e.g., some forms of sexual harassment.

Regarding the rehabilitation of the victims of domestic violence MARTA Centre would like to point out that the state funded programme offers to the victims very limited help that is not customised to the needs of individual victim unlike in the cases of human trafficking where state funded programme can be customised according to the needs of victim and if needed can cover such expenses as dentist. In cases where victim of domestic violence would like to stay anonymous (for example, is a well known person in public or works in social services or police) right now it is not possible for them to be included in state funded programme since the name of victim has to be revealed and no other solutions to this, like assigning person to a code, have been accepted or offered from the state. In these cases, MARTA Centre has to find other funds to provide rehabilitation for the victims.

In 2016 Latvia signed The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and many of its provisions have been included in the Latvian legislation since then. In July of 2017 the Ministry of Welfare had prepared a draft law for ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and the procedure for the law’s adoption was begun. It was planned that the Convention would be ratified in 2018. However, consequently the progress has been halted, the Convention has experienced negative coverage in the media and has been used as a populist tool, as a result of which its ratification has been delayed with no clear date set for its ratification.

An overarching Gender Equality Law also has not been drafted, and there are no present discussions that this could happen in the nearest future.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 58 – fight against trafficking in human beings**

**And**

**Paragraphs 69 to 100 in State Report**

MARTA Centre agrees that important progress has been made in legislation regarding human trafficking, particularly with the introduction of the term “vulnerability” in the Criminal Law; however, there seems to be insufficient understanding among the Police, Judiciary and the general population of what this term actually means, as shown by the following extract from the State Report: “The criminal offence provided for in Article 165¹ (“Sending a Person for Sexual Exploitation with the Person’s Consent”) is separated from Article 1541 “Trafficking in Human Beings” of the *Criminal Law* because the person is subjected to sexual exploitation with the person’s consent which is considered a less dangerous criminal offence, consequently, less serious punishments are applicable.” MARTA Centre maintains that there should be no distinction made between prostitution with “consent” versus “forced prostitution”, first, because state of vulnerability means exactly that – that “consent” of anyone can be acquired, just that the correct influence has to be used, and it is easier with a person who is vulnerable in a particular way, thus this “consent” is actually meaningless; second, in both “types” of prostitution an advantage of a person’s vulnerability is being taken, meaning that it has to be considered human trafficking either way; third, the psychological, emotional, social and physical consequences for the victims exploited with their “consent” or without are equally grave, therefore there should be no difference in the punishment applicable to the perpetrators in these cases.

As a direct result of this, human traffickers routinely are convicted on Article 165¹, not Article 1541, resulting in smaller penalties for essentially the same crime. As shown in the State Report: “In 2016, the convicting judgments for crimes according to Article 1541 of the *Criminal Law* entered into force in 3 cases (4 persons were convicted) and 9 convicting judgments for crimes according to Article 1651 of the *Criminal Law* entered into force (12 persons were convicted).”

While MARTA Centre acknowledges the efforts taken by Latvian state to support the victims, it has to be pointed out that, unfortunately, the support is insufficient and the mechanism for victim to acquire the official victim’s status often tends to be sloppy and traumatizing. MARTA Centre regards as positive the fact that the state offers free to victim rehabilitation service that covers the basic necessities (food, shelter, medical appointments) and consultations by social worker and psychologist. This is a long welcome situation; however, MARTA Centre’s experts also recognize that maximum 180 days of rehabilitation is not enough due to multiple reasons: for a person as traumatized as a human trafficking victim often is, it takes most of the devoted rehabilitation time to actually establish mutual trust between the specialist and the person in question; after the trust is establish to a reasonable degree, the time left is not enough to help a person who, in many cases, has been abused for multiple years or for most of that person’s life. In this case, MARTA Centre hopes the State can secure enough funds to prolong the rehabilitation services available.

Regarding the procedure during which the victim is allowed to receive that rehabilitation, there are problematic aspects as well. If the police grants the person the status of witness or victim in a criminal case, the person automatically is entitled to the rehabilitation. However, those who for some reason are not granted the status, have to go through a meeting with a panel of experts who, by asking questions and examining the facts, establish if the person qualifies as a victim. Unfortunately, not all members assigned on the panel are equally qualified to make the best decision in cases that are not textbook examples of human trafficking. Moreover, the style of questioning the victim by some members of the expert committee rather resembles questioning a suspect in a criminal case than questioning a victim and a witness, so secondary victimization is often the result. Together this may result in some actual trafficking victims being denied the status, protection and the needed state-funded rehabilitation; in other cases, victims have to wait for multiple meetings to take place (multiple months) before they get the help they need. In such extreme cases, MARTA Centre has worked hard to secure funding from other sources to enrol a person who was not granted the status by expert committee in the rehabilitation program nonetheless; MARTA Centre has also witnessed a case where a person was hospitalized after a suicide attempt because the expert meeting failed to grant the needed help to the victim as soon as possible. The present mechanism has to be improved.

Even though there have been attempts to educate the Border Guard on the issues of human trafficking, MARTA Centre has come across a new situation in the last years – namely, citizens of a third country, trafficked through Latvia presumably to other EU states, are detained on the border and, without any investigation on their situation, declared illegal immigrants and sent back to their country of origin. These people are usually sent back to their countries before MARTA Centre has a chance to meet them for inquiry. MARTA Centre suspects that these are not cases of illegal immigration but cases of human trafficking. The collaboration has to be extended and sufficient resources allocated to the Border Guard to better manage this situation.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 60 – reduction of prostitution**

**And**

**Paragraphs 101 to 114 in State Report**

As stated in the State Report, prostitution up until present has been regulated by Cabinet of Ministers’ Regulation. Few years ago a working group including NGOs, Police, ministry representatives and other actors was set up to draft a *“Law on Prostitution Restrictions”* which will become the main legislative norm to regulate the issue*.* MARTA Centre experts were also members of the law drafting group, and the process has taken up until the present.

Regarding the content of the new law: MARTA Centre has expressed repeatedly that according to data and our understanding of the sexual exploitation victims’ situation, the present Regulation does not reach its aim due to unfounded assumptions being included therein (e.g., that prostituted persons have a lot of choice regarding when and where they are bought for sex, and therefore fining them will change their behaviour). Unfortunately, despite our repeated objections, this provision (fining the prostituted persons) not only has not been rejected, it has been included in the new law. This means that prostituted persons will still be fined if they are bought for sex in places prohibited by this new law.

Another measure included in the new law that MARTA Centre has called out multiple times is the prohibition to be involved in prostitution below the age of 25, and to use the prostitution of a person who is under 25. MARTA Centre’s knowledge shows that most prostituted persons have been involved as minors, and that sex buyers either do not bother with getting to know the age of the person they buy or they buy very-young-looking or even underage girls purposefully. Taking into account the context and grave circumstances of persons involved in prostitution, this norm does not protect them, but rather makes them more vulnerable to abuse, including from the police.

The same goes for the prohibition to use the prostitution of a human trafficking victim. France had a similar provision before adopting the new law, and it became clear eventually that the distinction between “consented” and “forced” prostitution is meaningless as almost no person is involved in prostitution out of personal preference.

Theoretically the new Latvian law includes a provision to fine both, the prostituted person and the sex buyer, in case this provision is breached; however, multiple instances in Latvian and Lithuanian experiences show that sex buyers are not generally targeted for fining. Another problem with including the fining in the new law is that victims remain seen as criminals and thus the police is not perceived as an ally, but a threat. Fining also allows for abuse of the so-called “control purchases”. MARTA Centre has knowledge of situations wherein the police carry out the “control purchases” to establish if there has been a breach of the prostitution Regulations. Dressed in civil clothing the police routinely use the prostituted women, in the end presenting their badge and stating that the prostituted person now has to pay the fine. Another objection to fines is – how exactly are prostituted persons going to get the money to pay the fine?

For these reasons MARTA Centre has called for the introduction of the so-called Nordic model in Latvia, namely, offering sex should be neither a criminal, nor administrative offence while the buying of sex should be criminalized. This idea has been rejected repeatedly citing political reasons, no support from the public, as well as by citing numerous unfounded myths (e.g., if men do not have access to prostituted women, they will rape “normal” women; note that this exact wording is routinely used by representatives of the public authorities). Another myth used widely is that of “consented prostitution” as an objection against the Nordic model. The police often cite the idea that, first, prostitution will become latent once the Nordic model is introduced, and, second, that it will be impossible to find and punish sex buyers. Therefore MARTA Centre has organized exchange of good practices and lectures, inviting Nordic, French and Canadian experts to Latvia to explain not only the ideological but also practical aspects of the Nordic model, e.g. how it affects the police work practically.

Positive aspect of the new law is that rehabilitation for both the prostituted persons and the sex buyers is included; however, it is not yet clear exactly how this will work in practice. MARTA Centre objects to the proposal to offer rehabilitation to the prostituted persons as a means to escape the fine as this sends the message that the person is a criminal either way and merely has to choose between two different punishments.

MARTA Centre maintains that the cited aims of the new law, namely “to restrict and reduce the prostitution, reduce the risks of trafficking in human beings, prevent involvement of children and young people in prostitution, reduce risks of violence against persons engaged in prostitution, and promote the termination of engagement in the prostitution and use of prostitution” will not be achieved with the draft law as it now stands; however, it could be achieved by introducing the Nordic model.

It is mentioned in The State Report that “Latvia informs that draft law *“Law on Prostitution Restrictions”* has been drafted and supported in the Cabinet of Ministers, envisaging its entry into force on 1 January 2019”. MARTA Centre, being one of the partners involved in the process of drafting the new law, is not aware of the fact that it had been discussed or supported in the Cabinet of Ministers; in that case such information would be available on the Cabinet of Ministers’ web page, and it is not. Moreover, for a law to enter into force, it has to be reviewed by the Parliament, and MARTA Centre has no knowledge that this has happened. Moreover, in 2018 there was a halt in the drafting process because certain agreements could not be reached among the involved parties, and since then there has been no moving forward. Therefore MARTA Centre shares its confusion regarding this information as it is presented in the State Report regarding the progress of the draft law.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 70 – effective access to health-care information and services**

**And**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 72 – HIV/AIDS**

**And**

**Paragraphs 171 to 197 in State Report**

MARTA Centre informs the Committee that in 2015 the Parliament voted on amendments in Latvian Law on Education which state that schools have to provide “virtuous/ value-based education” especially promoting the values established in the Latvian Constitution such as marriage and family (family in this context means almost exclusively a married father and a mother, and children)[[9]](#footnote-9).

This amendment also implies that schools’ pupils have to be protected from such information that goes against the abovementioned “virtuous” values (this might imply a wide range of issues from homosexuality specifically to sexuality at large, reproductive health and rights, and other issues). Initially the author of these amendments, a Parliament deputy, also suggested that those methods and informative materials not in line with the state’s idea of “virtue” have to be prohibited (thankfully, this suggestion was not supported by the Parliament even though some politicians and priests of some confessions openly supported them[[10]](#footnote-10)).

Many school teachers have objected to these amendments stating that they not only limit the quality of education on important topics, they also amount to censorship of certain topics, and admit that this move seems to be a result of deputies’ wish to limit the rights of same-sex couples rather than improve the quality of education.[[11]](#footnote-11) Many experts have condoned these amendments as counterproductive to managing such public health issues as teenage pregnancies, abortions, spread of HIV/AIDS, and other. The NGO that is also mentioned in the State Report, “Papardes zieds”, has worked particularly hard to protest against these amendments. These amendments are still in force.

**Comments on**

**Committee recommendation in paragraph 74 – situation of minority women and older women**

**And**

**Paragraphs 215 to 220 in State Report**

MARTA Centre informs that together with partners from Austria, Estonia, Finland, Greece and the United Kingdom in 2017 and 2018 a WHOSEFVA (Working with Healthcare Organizations to Support Elderly Female Victims of Abuse[[12]](#footnote-12)) project was carried out. The main findings were that healthcare providers are critical to help elderly victims of domestic abuse and that the situation of elderly victims of domestic abuse is often extreme, uniting intersecting types of inequality and abuse. These domestic violence victims in particular lack the means and knowledge on ways to get help when needed and on their human rights. There is no official statistical data on the prevalence of violence against the elderly in Latvia.

As mentioned in the State Report: “In accordance with Article 561 of the *Medical Treatment Law*, if a medical treatment institution provides assistance to a patient and there are grounds for considering that the patient has suffered from violence, the medical treatment institution must notify the State Police thereof without delay but not later than within 12 hours”. MARTA Centre generally approves this provision; however, focus groups with healthcare providers carried out within the project showed an issue that is rather common to domestic violence victims, but is especially true for elderly domestic abuse victims – namely, these victims often request that medical providers do not notify the police about suspected violence, threatening to commit suicide or never again approach medical professionals for treatment if their request is not respected. Elderly domestic violence victims often tend to call the medical providers instead of calling the police after an incidence of violence. Partially this is due to the fact that the elderly are especially dependent on their abusers.

In the light of these results, MARTA Centre has suggested that medical professionals take note of the physical signs of abuse nonetheless (e.g., in the form of X-Ray and written notes) so that when/ if the individual is ever ready to settle the matters via the police and court, there would be enough documentation to support the case. Workshops have been carried out intended for healthcare professionals to be able to better respond to violence cases in the elderly population.

1. http://www.at.gov.lv/lv/judikatura/judikaturas-nolemumu-arhivs/civillietu-departaments/klasifikators-pec-lietu-kategorijam/darba-tiesibas/darba-likums/a-dala-visparigie-noteikumi-1-16pants?lawfilter=1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/site/attachments/29/01/2012/Diskriminacijas\_noversana\_Latvija\_II\_Screen.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EU-OSHA-infographic-Sexual-Harassment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/dzimumu\_lidztiesiba/dokumenti\_un\_tiesibu\_akti/lmpl\_29052018.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://marta.lv/docs/1283/2016/2\_2\_217Par\_seks\_reklPTAC21102016.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://marta.lv/marta-runa/soli-tuvak--ko-sievietes-stasta-par-to-ka-institucijas-sniedz-palidzibu-vardarbibas-gadijumos?gads=2017&pp= [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://marta.lv/about-marta/annual-reports [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-violence-against-women-survey [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/saeima-atbalsta-pretrunigi-vertetas-normas-par-tikumisko-audzinasanu-skolas.a134457/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/saeima-vienojas-neaizliegt-materialus-kas-var-negativi-ietekmet-tikumisko-audzinasanu.a126708/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://papardeszieds.lv/seksuala-izglitiba-skolas-nepieciesama/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://whosefva-gbv.eu/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)