***The European Union Programme “Rights, Equality and Citizenship” grant project:***

**ONE STEP CLOSER: A Coordinated Community Response to Violence Against Women (No.JUST/2015/RDAP/AG/MULT/9830)** was implemented in Latvia from 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019 headed by the Ministry of Welfare and its partners - the State Police of Latvia and the Resouce Centre for Women “Marta” .

The project developed, tested and implemented **Latvia’s first multisectoral victim centred standardised institutional cooperation model for cases of violence against women** (coordinated community response) with the ultimate aim of ensuring that women are empowered to report and thus reduce the risk of repeated violence.

The standardised cooperation model was piloted in Tukums municipality in 2017, then replicated in 2018 in Balvi, Cesis, Dobele, Saldus and Valmiera. A total of 23 surrounding municipalities serviced by the core local governments’ State Police participated in some of the project activities. The stakeholders, both in the pilot and replication stages, elaborated proposals for developing and institutionalising the model.

A total of 321 professionals from municipal social services, the State Police, municipal police, the Orphans’ Court, the Prosecutor's Office, Court Probation Services, crisis centres, as well as doctors – serving a total of 11,8% of the Latvian population - were directly engaged in the multisectoral teamwork, coordinated by the head of municipal social services. Training events for improving skills in working with victims, using the risk assessment instruments as well as monitoring activities and joint conferences bonded the teams. Job shadowing was considered a particularly useful team building activity by the participants.

The entry point to the coordinated community response is call to the police about a domestic violence incident. A total of 75 cases were registered by police during the project period and forwarded to Social Services, which then monitored for progress.

Three tools were developed by the project to launch the system:

1. **A police risk assessment questionnaire** to be completed by municipal or State Police and sent to social services was elaborated, piloted, improved and its use was replicated. Guidelines were also produced, and users were trained in their use.
2. **A standardised cooperation model monitoring instrument** was designed to track individual cases, including interventions provided for the victim and perpetrator by different stakeholders as well as information on repeated offenses and their consequences.
3. The **MARAC** risk assessment questionnaire was adapted for local use by Tukums Municipality social services, as it attempted to deal with the increased caseload resulting from the police information. This was not foreseen in the project proposal, but has been welcomed by the municipalities replicating the model because it saves time and engages the victim in designing a plan to avoid repeated violence.

In the course of the project, two leaflets were developed for distribution by police and social workers at first encounter with a domestic violence case. 300,000 booklets are now available to victims and 170,000 booklets to bystanders outlining steps to take.

Awareness on domestic violence was raised at seminars for regional media during seminars conducted in 2017. As a result, regional media began to write more on domestic violence, highlighting the victims’ viewpoint. In 2018, public awareness was multiplied through a complementary project campaign about zero tolerance towards violence against women “Violence likes silence” (No.JUST/2016/RGEN/AG/VAWA/9944).

As a result of the project, professionals have standardized information on the situation from police who are trained to use the risk assessment instruments, social services receive this information within 24 hours. Each case is monitored. This has revealed new clients that otherwise would not have been “under the radar”, even though increased Social Services caseloads . Social Services have a new risk assessment instrument that motivates the victims to seek solutions. Social services have been identified as the coordinating entity for the multi-sectoral teams. Eventually coordinators will be able to analyse the effectiveness of the multi-sectoral interventions. The victims and perpetrators are now sensitised to the coordinated response.

During the replication phase, municipalities modified the cooperation model to fit their conditions (for example, by including hospital social workers into the team). The results are best practice to be shared with other municipalities at future trainings if the Latvian Government decides to implement a country wide standardized institutional cooperation model for cases of violence against women.