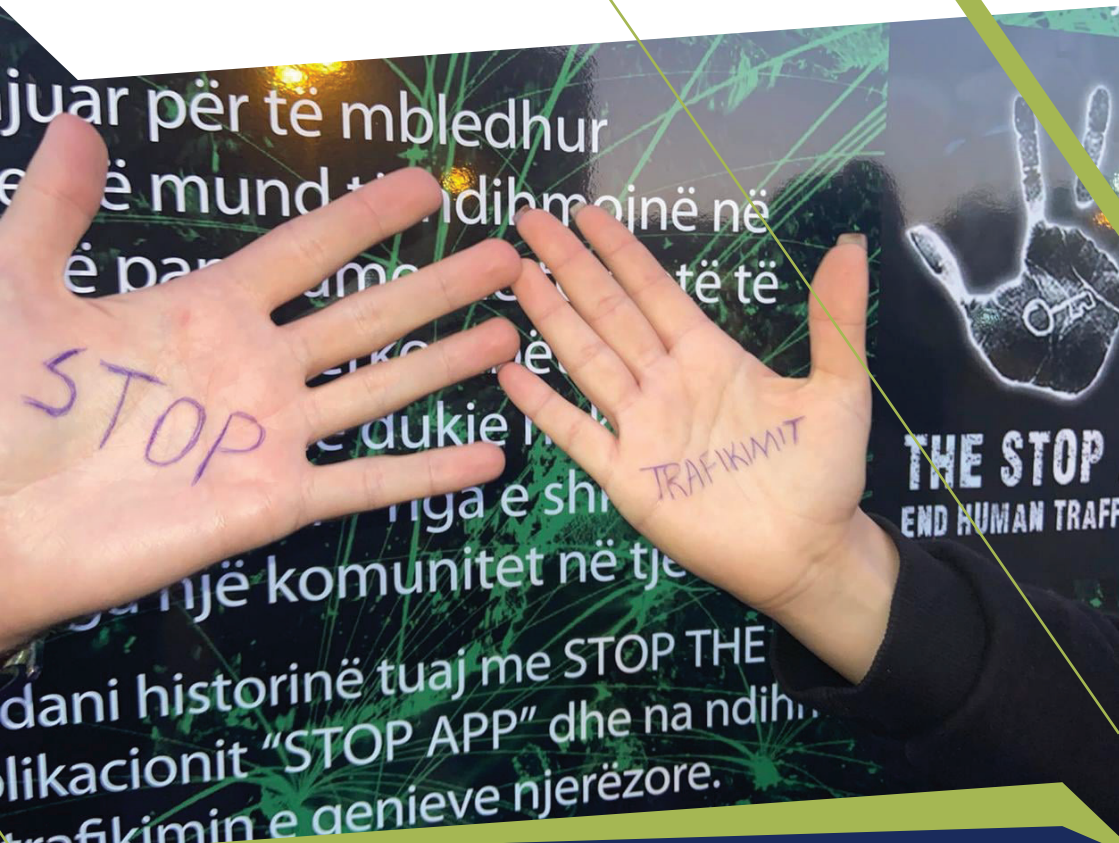




Albanian Mission Against Human Trafficking



Annual Report

January 2021 – December 2021

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► IMELDA POOLE IBVM, MWL PRESIDENT

This is a remarkable summary of a year in which MWL has reshaped an evolving Foundation, whilst simultaneously listening and responding to the call to mission against human trafficking, in an ever increasing and profoundly deeper dimension. The emphasis on collaboration with so many other partners comes from the wisdom of knowing that tackling systemic change, awakening others to the dangers of this crime at grassroots and increasingly supporting the victim and survivors of this terrible abuse and exploitation, can only be achieved together and in collaboration.

Barack Obama has said:

"It ought to concern every person, because it is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name - - modern slavery."- (President Barack Obama)

True advocacy, which tackles the causes of Human Trafficking, aims at systemic change and at transforming the hearts of all those in leadership towards a desire to implement justice for all and especially those on the margins of society. This mission of transformation is aimed at leaders in every sphere of life in a country and in every continent where Global and local laws can work together to either support or hinder the realisation of human rights for all. Without this form of justice, trauma impacted people, suffering from abuse and exploitation are not seen by leaders and consequently law turns a

blind eye to the implementation of human rights trauma informed law. The impact of Part 4 of the Nationality and Borders bill, on victims and survivors of Human Trafficking in England & Wales, which is being presented in the UK Parliament at present, is a classic case of the kind of fall out which MWL is coping with a cross border between the UK and Albania, as they work tirelessly to relieve the suffering of Albanian trafficked, trauma impacted people. In this bill, if it goes through parliament, the trafficked person is hidden and unnamed as a victim of crime. Mary Ward Loreto is inviting the good will of law makers to bring about real justice for trafficked people and to implement these laws when realised.

On behalf of the governing board of Mary Ward Loreto in Albania I would like to congratulate the MWL Team of staff for their incredible courage and passion in implementing this mission through these most difficult of times. They are a truly remarkable group of people, who respond at the highest professional level, to the needs of those who are exploited and suffering from a form of abandonment in our society today. They really See the impact of such injustice and their empathy leads them to respond with care and compassion. We thank them for this dedication and inspiration.

Mary Ward Loreto would also like to thank all of the partners and collaborators in every field of the work and to the Mary Ward Loreto donors from so many corners of society. The foundation knows that without all of this support the implementation of the mission would be impossible.

► INTRODUCTION

Even during the most difficult of circumstances there is always hope and faith to be found in ourselves and others. The transformative power of hope and faith lies in its ability to change our perspective and guide us to the understanding that challenges are an opportunity for growth. As we remain mobilized to help lessen the hardships of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we do so with an ever-stronger belief in our mission to be there where our programmes are needed most.



In this report we highlight achievements, challenges and lessons learned throughout a period marked by continued disruptions to our work by the pandemic. It includes reflections on the effectiveness and impact of our interventions, as well as a general description of specific projects implemented by MWL. We are proud to highlight our efforts in the promotion and protection of human rights through coordinated action with our network partners. Only by working together with others can we bring about lasting change.

Opportunities arise while priorities and focus change. Projects come into being while others are phased out. Partnerships are forged and pursued with different levels of intensity over time. We embrace change as an inherent aspect of our work. By doing so we are better able to meet the needs of the communities we serve. Yet despite the various changes, our work continues to follow a single overarching purpose: to combat human trafficking by empowering our beneficiaries to overcome their vulnerabilities.

To achieve this, the entire spectrum of services provided by the MWL Foundation is administered through one of three main programmes: Advice and Service Centres (ASCs), Economic Empowerment and Civic Education. Currently operating in Tropoja, Rreshen, Lezha, Tirana, Lushnja and Saranda, we directly supported 803 beneficiaries, handled 1,629 cases across our ASCs and engaged 1,110 individuals through training opportunities and activities in this reporting period.



We look with a deep sense of satisfaction upon the many accomplishments achieved despite the operational challenges posed by the pandemic. Now, however, is not the time to become complacent. Concerted effort and focus are needed now more than ever. We are grateful that you stand with us and for your continued support and engagement in the fight against human trafficking.

► MWL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Prevention and support through advice and service centres

MWL Advice and Service Centres (ASCs), first piloted in Tirana, now operate in 6 regions throughout the country: Tirana, Tropoja, Rreshen, Lezha, Lushnja and Saranda. These centres constitute the one-stop-shop for individuals and communities to access the entire spectrum of services provided by MWL. Each centre plays a vital role in effectively combating trafficking in human beings by utilizing a three-fold approach: prevention, support and advocacy. Grounded in the holistic approach, each centre offers services addressing the unique circumstances of the communities they serve while offering a core set of services available at all ASCs.



At the heart of everything the foundation does is the conviction that rooting out the underlining causes of human trafficking and exploitation is the single most effective method at our disposal to confront this ill. With challenging social, psychosocial and economic conditions now only exacerbated by the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our support of 803 individuals in advancing their quality of life takes on increased meaning.

Table 1 Number of beneficiaries by group

Total number of beneficiaries	Men	Women	Minors
803	118	527	158

MWL intentionally has a wide range of target groups, which include divorced women, single parents, women and girls of all ages who face domestic and patriarchal violence, individuals unable to access social services and housing programs, individuals and families residing in remote regions and those who lack stable employment and general economic stability. Particular attention is always given to those vulnerable for trafficking: P/VoTs, victims of GBV and DV, people in extreme poverty, immigrants and returned Albanian migrants.

ASCs continue to play a central role in the identification of P/VoTs. Victims often do not report trafficking or violence for a variety of reasons, including considerations for their safety, stigma and/or their inability to escape trafficking circles. The trust necessary to report their situation is built slowly over time through contact with the outreach work and services offered at our ASCs. As a result, 13 P/VoTs were identified at an ASCs this year and provided immediate protection and support for their reintegration and empowerment.

In close cooperation with partners and shelters, 54 survivors of human trafficking received support through the ASC, economic empowerment and/or sheltering and accommodation programmes. Moreover, domestic and gender-based violence victims, and their children, were brought to safety and received support services through our partnerships with local branches of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism (CRRM) for cases of domestic violence.

Support is not limited to emergency care only. As a case in point, a group of 10 individuals established the Survivors' Business Club under MWL guidance and received social, personal, analytical, and leadership skills training necessary to reintegrate socially and economically into society.

Table 2 Number of cases handled per target population

Nr.	Target Population	Number of cases handled
1.	Human trafficking P/VoT	54
2.	People at high risk of trafficking	176
3.	Victims of domestic violence	183
4.	Victims of sexual crimes	43
5.	Women family heads	134
6.	Women in divorce proceedings/post-divorce	152
7.	Returned Albanian migrants	33
8.	Foreign asylum seekers in Albania	6
9.	Albanian survivors of THB, asylum seekers in UK	9
10.	People affected by extreme poverty	748
11.	Victims of persecution	8
12.	Minors in need of social services	83
		Total 803

Beneficiaries and their family members seeking assistance at a MWL ASC often require multiple forms of support. Access to a wide range of complementary services beyond the scope of those provided at ASCs is made possible through our active partnership with local, national, and international institutions. In total, 2,088 service cases were handled in 2021.

Table 3 Number of cases per services offered or referred

Nr.	Services offered or referred	Number of cases handled
1.	Healthcare and medication	191
2.	Psychological and therapy services	104
3.	Online counselling offered by MWL psychologists for Albanian P/VoTs in England	9
4.	Legal aid offered by MWL and referral to partners	121
5.	Advice in accessing public and private sources of support	1,212
6.	Employment advice	363
7.	Public housing programme advice	26
8.	Sheltering and safe accommodation	55
9.	Emergency accommodation	7
		Total 2,088

In its role as a vocal advocate for the rights of victims of trafficking, MWL presented a platform of policy recommendations to law makers at both the local and national level during 2021. This extensive list of legislative proposals is directly informed by the real-world challenges identified through our work with victims at the grassroots level.

During this reporting period MWL continued to explore different approaches to improve the effectiveness of our prevention work and reintegration assistance for P/VoTs. A research project has been launched to evaluate the effectiveness of these family-focused approaches in the prevention work of human trafficking and illegal youth migration. Results of this study are forthcoming and will be shared with stakeholders.

► PREVENTION AND SUPPORT THROUGH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

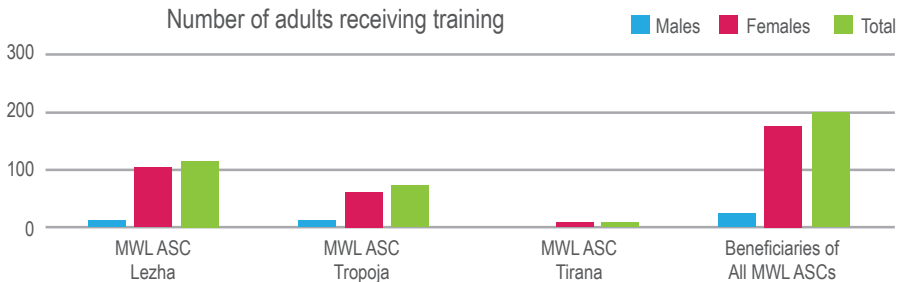
This MWL programme forms the nexus point of our efforts towards systemic change. The programmatic work is firmly rooted in two strongly held convictions of our organization. First, sustainable change can only be achieved through empowering our beneficiaries to be their own agents of change. Secondly, MWL can, and should, contribute to the further democratization of Albanian public institutions through direct outreach and training opportunities for public servants.

Raising public awareness continues to be a central focus of MWL's community development work. Within this overarching context, human trafficking, domestic violence, gender-based violence and children's rights are understood as a set of issues affecting everyone in a community. However, as a prerequisite for action, consensus needs to be established that these are issues in need of being addressed collectively.



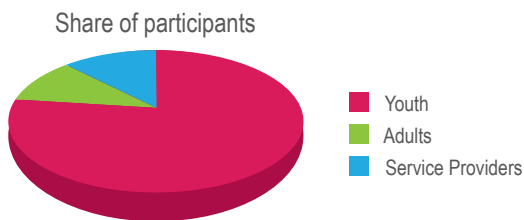
During this past year we were able to:

- ▶ Mobilize local governments, members of civil society and members of the public in every region we operate to jointly call for the active prevention and elimination of human trafficking, gender-based violence and domestic violence. Youth designed and led awareness raising campaigns played a pivotable role in achieving high levels of community engagement. In total, these actions reached 2,145 people in 6 communities.
- ▶ Increase the level of cooperation between public and private service providers at the local level. Improvements in the level of concerted action was achieved through robust training, the sharing of resources and know-how and improved channels of communication. As an example, every service offering to a DV, GBV and/or P/VoT was provided through collaboration with local CRMs and/or the Coalition of Shelters during 2021.

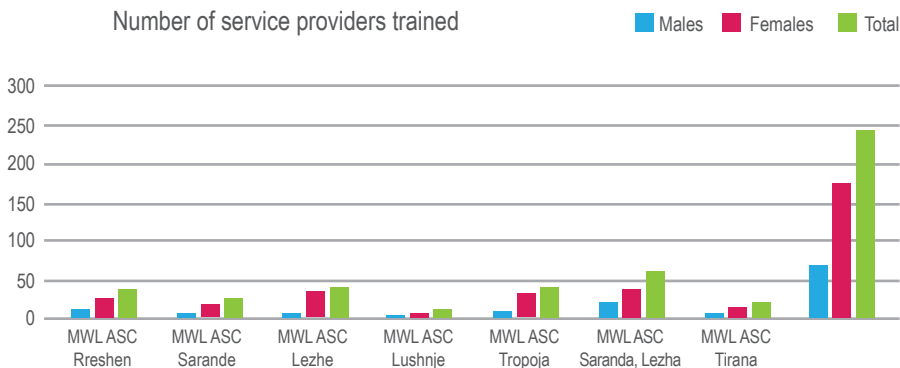


- ▶ Increase the active participation of youth in clubs and training opportunities. For example, 4 social clubs, comprised of 44 youth in Saranda, Delvina and Lezha, maintained a regular meeting schedule, along with two other groups of 20 motivated youth in Rreshen and Lushnja. A further youth group in Tropoja, receiving training from MWL, is preparing to undertake community initiatives. A total of 37 youth-targeted trainings were conducted during this reporting period.

Of the 1,946 total individuals participating in community development activities in 2021, an impressive 77% of them were youth.



- Offer 16 trainings to teachers, nurses, doctors, social workers, and other members of public and private service providers.



► PREVENTION AND SUPPORT THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This programme includes the entire spectrum of our initiatives and efforts to assist our beneficiaries in achieving financial and economic stability. Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe. Through our grassroots level work we witness first-hand how economic insecurity and poverty are directly linked to an increased risk of human trafficking. Similarly, we witness how economic stress and a lack of basic financial resources can act as a trigger for violence against family members.



The Albanian job market is dominated by unskilled labour positions in the construction sector, shoe and clothing production industry and seasonal summer employment in the tourism industry. For this reason, MWL invests heavily in vocational training opportunities for youth, women and men as a way to achieve permanent employment and a steady income. In addition to providing training in CV writing, ASC members routinely facilitate employment opportunities for beneficiaries with local businesses and other NGOs, such as Dev-Aid.

Additionally, women's economic livelihoods continue to be supported by two social business initiatives launched by MWL. The transfer of

the day-to-day running of a touristic workshop in Tropoja to one of the female employees marks an important moment in the economic empowerment of our beneficiaries in the area. Utilizing business skills acquired through MWL training, the manager now independently coordinates the activities of the workshop. By doing so, she supports the livelihood of 20 women through the production and sales of their handicrafts. The handover represents the achievement of our highest hopes and aspirations for this initiative. Although the second business is not yet in a position to run independently, the Kallmet Workshop continues to provide 5 women with a regular source of income.

Table 4 Number of individuals benefiting from Economic Empowerment programme by initiative

46

Employed through MWL ASC referral

41

Assisted in registering for and completing vocational training

230

Received assistance in applying for job vacancies

179

Trained in CV writing and job-hunting skills

119

Referred to and assisted by public employment services

26

Benefited economically through involvement in MWL's social businesses

191

Received one-on-one career orientation and job search consultations

► PREVENTION AND SUPPORT THROUGH CIVIC EDUCATION

This programme advances our work in achieving systemic change through service learning. We strongly believe that long-term change can only be brought about when community members themselves become agents of change. Likewise, the process of further democratization of public institutions can only be achieved through the commitment and active participation of public servants in the process.

In both arenas MWL actively works to empower individuals to become positive forces for change by providing civic, leadership and service-learning trainings. Conducting 15 training sessions for public servants, MWL was able to engage teachers, health workers, social workers, nurses, doctors and public administrators of benefit programmes. Additionally, MWL organized 36 training sessions designed to support youth civic engagement.

Trainings for Public Service Providers

Trainings for administrators of public services were conducted across the country during this reporting period and are captured in brief below.

Tirana:



- Two capacity building trainings were developed for both public and private service providers.
- An online training in human anti-trafficking work was held for 7 post-graduate students at Marin Barleti University.

- A two-session training on social animation took place in collaboration with the municipal government of Tirana for 15 volunteers attached to the city’s newest community centre.
- Online training sessions entitled “Trauma Informed Care Model for Survivors of Human Trafficking” and “Survivors and Economic Re-integration” were held for international professionals during the UN Commission Status of Women NGOCSW65/NY Virtual Forum.
- The online training “Holistic Approach to Re-integration” was offered to RENATE members.

Tropoja:



- The social worker at MWL ASC Tropoja continues to mentor the local child protection officer in the identification of children in need of social protection, the management of domestic violence abuse cases, P/VoT identification and case management as well as cooperating with NRMs.
- A training addressing stress management, selfcare and work-life balance was held for 14 medical staff members of the Isa Zllami Hospital.
- A training was held with 12 public servants in Tropoja on P/VoTs identification and case management.

Saranda:



- A series of trainings were developed within the framework of the Youth Education for Sustainability (YES) Project with the purpose of bringing together 40 youth and local government administrators of public services to support dialogue and the active participation of youth in community actions.

- A training programme for 61 public service providers was conducted by NISMA Arsis, our partner organization for the YES Project, in Delvina, Saranda and Lezha. Public servants in attendance ranged from those in charge of child protection services to school psychologists, members of the state prosecution office and police officers.

Lezha:



- Forty-one administrators of public services attached to the municipal government took part in an onsite visit of the NGO Different and Equal to learn directly from the NGO's staff how services are effectively provided to victims of human trafficking.
- Despite legal obligations to do so, cases of P/VoTs are rarely, if ever, reported by primary healthcare staff. A training in the identification and referral of P/VoTs was provided to 25 healthcare professionals to raise awareness and increase reporting.

Service-Learning Initiatives

Service-learning is an approach which equips young individuals with essential interpersonal and civic skills through participation in trainings and real-world application. The following 7 service-learning informed initiatives were designed and implemented by the youth clubs of Saranda, Delvina, Lezha, Mirdita and Tropoja during the course of 2021.



► A Library for Delvina

This mini-project was successfully implemented by students of the Sulejman Delvina school and brought together students, the school

administration and a local business under the framework of the YES project. Students were tasked with identifying a realistic project they deemed a high priority. The process furthermore allowed students to apply critical thinking in finding practical solutions to overcome the lack of books in their school library. In the end, students were able to successfully engaged partners, a business and their fellow students in addressing a problem affecting the entire student body.

► **Our School Environment in Saranda**

Students of Adem SHEME School in Saranda organized a mini-project to modernize the school's sport and recreation facilities by acquiring sport equipment, stationary, paint and flowerpots. While students engaged in the planting and decoration of the school premises, the local government assisted by leading the painting project. The success of this initiative helped build trust among students in their ability to bring about positive change in their school and community.

► **Carrier Education in Lezha**

Spreading the message about the importance of career education and vocational training formed the basis of a project led by 12 students of the Hydajet School in Lezha. The trainings they developed provided instruction to their fellow students on the topics of career education opportunities, leadership skills, problem solving and in-person visits of vocational schools. In total, 85 students attended these trainings. This project promoted empathy and care for others among participants and improved their public speaking skills through peer-to-peer education.

► **Environmental Protection Project in Lezha**

A group of 12 students at the Rogationists High School in Lezha implemented an environmental project designed to promote adoption of the Four Recycling Principles and reduce the consumption and irresponsible disposal of plastic products. Run in collaboration with community partners, this project strengthened awareness among students that problems affecting the entire community are best dealt with through communal action. A regularly meeting environmental

club has resulted from this project and allows interested students to continue to be active in addressing local environmental issues.



► **Together Let's Give Colours to the Future in Rreshen**

A service-learning project entitled "Together let's give colours to the future" was run by a class in the social and health services branch of St. Joseph the Worker School in Rreshen. After receiving instruction in service-learning, students were able to identify and address the needs of local hospitalized children. This project helped to promote empathy among the students and their active engagement in the care of others.

► **Say NO to Violence, Say YES to Sport in Lezha**

This sport-focused project brought together MWL, the local Education Office of Lezha, the Directory of Education and Youth at the Municipality of Lezha, 10 local high schools and 1,800 students to address the issue of violence in schools and classrooms. The goals of the project included assisting schools in obtaining sports equipment and promoting physical safety in schools through sports. Utilizing sporting events as a positive form of engagement at their schools, students were sensitized to the fact that they themselves play a key role in creating and maintaining a school environment free from violence. A total of 10 volleyball teams from 10 high schools competed in a tournament, which culminated in an awards ceremony attended by students and local authorities to distribute certificates and trophies.

► **Parenting Festival in Tropoja**

This service-learning initiative was implemented with 28 students at the Ali Podrimja School in Bajram Curri and brought MWL staff, students, teachers, parents and community members together for the promotion of positive

parenting techniques. The project started with a school visit by 12 students from Bajram Curri to Beselidhja School in Lezha to see first-hand the benefits and positive effects the service-learning approach can have on the quality of school education. Cultural exchange activities with their peers allowed for further interaction and dialogue. Based on their experiences in Lezha, the students decided to organize a Parenting Festival in Bajram Curri. The goal of inviting parents to the school was to help foster a better educational environment through strengthening communication and ties between school officials, teachers, parents and children.

Breakdown of service-learning activities in numbers:

Name of Project or Activity	Number of activities	Number of participating youth	Number of participating partners from state structures	Total number of participants
Service-Learning training & SL project steps	15	236	45	281
Library - Delvina	1	50	8	58
Our School Environment-Saranda	1 (campaign)	56	8	64
SL-linked training and study visits targeting career education	7	108	11	119
Leadership and youth training	6	87	10 teachers	97
Community activism and voluntarism training, including an in-person visit at the NGO Civic Resistance	5	201	20 teachers	221
Together Let's Give Colours to the Future - Rreshen	1	38	7	45
Say NO to Violence, Say YES to Sport - Lezha	12 (volleyball matches)	120	27	147
Violence awareness and youth protection structures	3	560	40	600
School fundraising - sport equipment	10	2000	40	2040
School fundraising-fire extinguishers	10	2000	300	2300
Parenting Festival-Tropoja	1	20	23	43
Study visit exchange on SL experiences	1	20	6	26
Positive Discipline and Inclusion of Parents in Schools	2	20	15	35
Celebration Events	7	700	70	770

► EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT OF OUR APPROACH

MWL specialises in accessing regions where public and private services and engagement are limited. The effectiveness of our work is shown by the quality of the services provided to those in need. Of the 803 individuals receiving support through an ASC this year, the majority reported they either did not have access to or were denied services before seeking mediation at an ASC.

The provision of services through an ASC does not result in an enhanced quality of life for the immediate beneficiaries only. By setting a positive example, those receiving assistance directly encourage others to seek similar assistance at an ASC. We routinely see how community members gain confidence in seeking out social services on the basis of witnessing the success of others.

ASCs also play a vital role in the identification of P/VOTs, DV and GBV victims. Receiving support in accessing various services helps build the necessary trust to disclose potential or real cases of THB, DV and GBV. Immediate protection for survivors of THB, DV, and GBV has been provided in 62 cases. Our expertise in case management, guided by a victim-centred approach, has allowed for coordination of efforts among multiple parties engaged in victim support.

MWL applies a family approach in the prevention of human trafficking and the re-integration of survivors.

This approach aims to empower the entire family as a strategy to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. In this way, vulnerability to THB, DV, and GBV is reduced through support, empowerment of survivors and their families, increased awareness, improved institutional practices and coordinated response between local and national networks.

Awareness of the fight against THB and human rights violations has increased among communities and local stakeholders through campaigns and training. This is particularly the case when youth are empowered to design and lead their own initiatives. Young adults involved in service-learning initiatives develop and practice skills necessary for civic involvement, turning them into engines for positive change.

Mary Ward Loreto continues to be a central figure in the Service-Learning Regional Network for Central and Eastern Europe by presenting the country of Albania. Leaders of the MWL Civic Engagement programme regularly contribute to meetings and were involved in the Regional SL Conference and SL award ceremony in Prizren, Kosovo on 10 December 2021.

This year's Regional SL Award competition was marked by high levels of engagement on the part of Albanian schools. Nine projects from Albania were submitted and five were selected as finalists. While three received honourable mention, one Albanian school convinced an international jury and took first place, beating out 67 other submitted projects from across Central and Eastern Europe. This year's successes were a special testament to our work and commitment despite the many challenges posed by the pandemic.

► PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

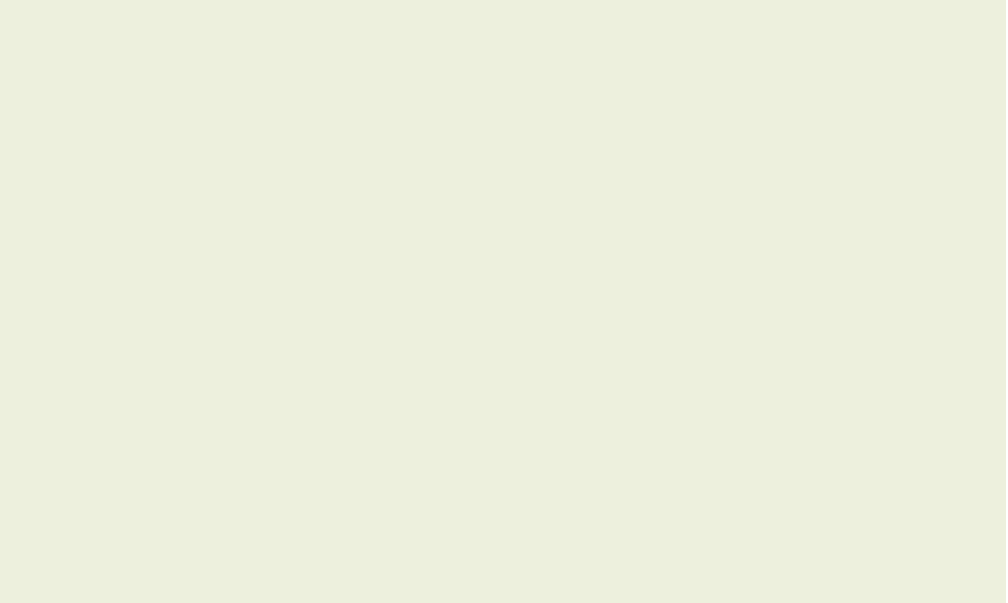


Our active role in strong networks of partner organizations allows us to leverage our work in promoting and protecting human rights. Regular roundtable discussions and meetings with local partner NGOs allow for the invaluable exchange of information, best practice and lessons learned.

Through our ASCs we are able to promote human rights by supporting individuals in seeking services and rights they are entitled to but often do not benefit from. For example, 19

round table discussions and 8 emergency sessions were convened with the purpose of coordinating emergency support and integration services.

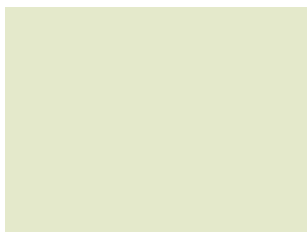
We are encouraged to see a trend among ASC beneficiaries towards more self-advocacy and whistleblowing involving cases of unjust treatment. Understanding their rights and actively seeking the social benefits they are entitled to often marks the first steps down a path of advocacy for themselves and others.



The promotion of human rights is also accomplished through public demonstrations and protests. As an example, 3 public awareness-raising campaigns against gender-based domestic violence and human trafficking were organized in Saranda, Delvina and Finiq. During marches from local government headquarters to town centres, local community members were informed about issues through leaflets and chanted slogans.

Further examples of concrete action include awareness raising activities in Lushnja, Rreshen and Saranda during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence under the UN slogan “Orange the World, Stop Violence against Women Now”. In recognition of the UN Anti-Trafficking Day on October 18, MWL jointly organized the UN Gift Box Campaign in Rreshen with the URAT network. Young community members played a leading role in each of the events.

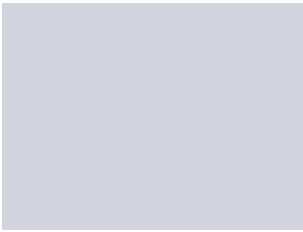
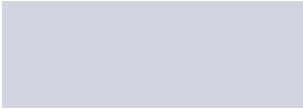
► COORDINATED ACTIONS IN NETWORK



During this reporting period MWL continued to work in close cooperation with existing partners, while also seeking to cultivate new partnerships. Implementing the TEAL leadership model has not only assisted us in reaching new target groups of beneficiaries. It has also aided us in forging new partnerships for coordinated service delivery. By dividing responsibilities, we can focus on providing those services we are best equipped to deliver while allowing other organizations to do what they do best.

Our cooperation with six regional municipalities continues to be actively pursued and has resulted in a sustained degree of close coordination among the ASCs, service providers and municipalities to serve the needs of vulnerable communities. Child Protection Units remain our main associate partner within the municipalities. In Lezha, Tropoja and Saranda, we are also members of the local Coordinated Referral Mechanism for DV and GBV.

Cooperation with municipality structures extends to other activities as well. For example, 2 awareness raising campaigns and an awareness raising activity were conducted in Rreshen, Lushnja and Saranda on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism



against Gender-Based Violence initiative. Under the slogan "Orange the World: Stop Violence Against Women NOW!" 72 youth were directly involved in the campaigns, of which 44 were young women and girls. The success of these campaigns highlights the value of close cooperation between municipality administration, schools, and local partners.

During the second half of 2021 MWL was also able to partner with municipal government structures in Lezha to improve access to legal services and advice. The opening of the Free Legal Advice Office of the local Ministry of Justice of Lezha has greatly improved MWL's ability to assist beneficiaries in accessing legal support and advice in matters of divorce, property ownership disputes, etc. With a strong partnership between ASC Lezha staff and the advice office now established, every referred case has benefited from free legal services.

The MWL team is always open to new methods of improving the quality of services we provide. This is another important reason why the foundation actively partners with various organizations. One such example is our partnership with the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tirana University, which has supported us in optimizing the delivery of our services and improving the depth of our cooperation with network partners.

Another example is our close cooperation with religious organizations and institutions. During this reporting period, religious groups became the main source of new referrals to ASC Centres.

MWL continues to be an active member of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and is represented in the group by the ASC coordinator. On the basis of this membership, MWL joined the Regional Expert Group Meeting, initiated by the UNODC in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France. Participation allowed MWL to share its expertise in prevention work and assistance to VoTs of sexual exploitation.

Moreover, MWL is now a member of six regional anti-trafficking committees in Albania after joining the Rreshen committee this past year. MWL also continues its membership in the Gender-Based Violence Monitoring Network. This network tracks the Albanian government's implementation of the CEDAW and Istanbul Convention. An ASC social worker represents MWL at this network, and ASC staff regularly attend workshops and trainings developed by the network.

MWL continues to play a central role in the United Response Against Trafficking (URAT), a network originally founded by MWL. The ASC programme coordinator represents MWL in this network. In cooperation with other URAT members, MWL organized a UN Gift Box Campaign in Rreshen on October 18, the UN International Day Against Human Trafficking. Gathering in the main square, representatives from public and non-public institutions jointly declared their commitment to join the fight against human trafficking. Young community members also disseminated flyers and worked to raise awareness among the general public for two consecutive days.

MWL staff members are likewise members of the Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation (RENATE). Their participation contributes to MWL's capacity building endeavours and allows employees to remain up-to-date on national and international

issues and developments in the field of human trafficking. Their participation also facilitates the coordinated support for victims of human trafficking internationally. In cooperation with the RENATE Albania Network, activities for the commemoration of Saint Bakhita Day, the International Prayer and Reflection Day Against Human Trafficking, are planned for February 8 of this year.

MWL also continues its collaboration with the UK Medaille Trust by providing online counselling services for Albanian survivors of human trafficking sheltered in England. In addition to receiving assistance in working through their trauma, survivors are provided with written documentation for their asylum request cases with the UK Home Office.

MWL ASCs works in close cooperation with a variety of NGOs that provide direct services to P/VoTs. Common services include re-integration programs for victims of trafficking, sexual crime and domestic violence, sheltering and protection services, legal assistance, employment assistance, vocational training and support in accessing healthcare.

Both MWL ASCs in Lezha and Rreshen have organized protest actions surrounding sexual abuse cases involving minors in Lezha and Mirdita. Three cases of abuse have recently come to light in Lezha alone. In general, school principals and teachers are hesitant to report suspected cases of abuse. Similarly, MWL staff have noticed a general reluctance among governmental institutions and NGOs to publicly engage and confront such crimes.

In Saranda, local government officials have become involved in the management of DV, GBV, and THB cases. Our main NGO partner, Nisma ARSIS, with whom we implemented the YES project, has contributed the services of a youth psychologist and offered general organizational support for various ground-breaking activities. Further support has been offered by other partner organizations, such as D&E and Civic Resistance, which have hosted two in-person visits

of our beneficiaries. Projects are co-financed by Arise Foundation and Do Terra Healing Hands Foundation.

In Rreshen and Lushnja, MWL works closely with local services in managing sensitive cases of sexual crimes and GBV. The foundation does this by offering both referral and direct services to individuals and their families. The involvement of religious communities in aspects of case management has also proved highly beneficial.

Finally, MWL works in close collaboration with public employment offices to identify vulnerable youth who can benefit from vocational training and employment mediation. The vocational training centres Drejtoria e Formimit Profesional Numer 4 – Tirana and Professional School Shen Jozefi Punetor have provided invaluable support through their cooperation and offers of vocational training.



► IN THEIR OWN VOICE

My name is M. Sh. I am 25 years old and live in the city of Rreshen, where I was born and completed my high school education. After finishing high school, I would get various short-term seasonal jobs in Rreshen and at touristic sites. Returning to my hometown after every stint, I would have to restart the difficult task of finding a new job. In the fall of 2020, I heard "by chance" about the MWL run youth project in Rreshen. Initially driven by curiosity, I participated in a few informational meetings designed to help youth like me get vocational training. With the support of MWL, I decided to attend a training course in electrical installations for civil and industrial plants at the "Shën Jozefi Punëtor" vocational school in Rreshen. During those months I also participated in other trainings offered by MWL. Today, I can say, without a doubt, that my many engagements with the MWL have positively contributed to my personal and professional growth. After successfully completing the course in February 2021, I managed to secure a job as an assistant to an electrician in Rreshen. I continue to work part-time but hope to transition to a full-time employment very soon. I am very grateful to the members of the Mary Ward Loreto Foundation for providing me with direction throughout the whole process. Now, after almost two years, I replace the phrase "by chance" with the word "opportunity". Thank you, Mary Ward Loreto, for the opportunity you have given me and continue to give many of my peers. Thank you for believing in us young people!

My name is Ardi and I am 20 years old. I live in the village of Bardhaj in Mirdita. When I finished middle school, I had no choice but to remain at home because my family's circumstances didn't allow me to attend high school. It was a tremendously difficult period for me because of the social isolation and complete lack of prospects I faced. Through some friends of mine I came to know about the activities of the Mary Ward Loreto Foundation in Rreshen. One thing led to another and my engagement with MWL resulted in them supporting me in finishing my vocational training as a mechanic. But my story doesn't end there. MWL staff never gave up on me and pushed me to finish school. Thus, on this day in July of 2021, I proudly graduate from high school. Unlike previously, I now have options of what to do next. I want to thank the MWL Foundation for all their support over the years. You have been with me throughout this journey, and for that I thank you!

B.G. is a 35-year-old mother of four who endured the abuse of her husband in silence for many years. Fearing she would not receive support and end up alone, she suffered in silence and did nothing to seek assistance from others. Only after the abuse of her husband became physically and emotionally unbearable did she go to the police. Luckily for B.G., the local police she sought help from were partners in the Coordinated Referral Mechanism. Their police report prompted a coordinated intervention. Through services provided by the local MWL ASC, B.G. is currently in divorce proceedings and has been relocated to a safe location where she has been able to secure employment.

▶ LESSONS LEARNED

It is when we embrace challenge that we learn the most about ourselves and others. COVID-19 induced work disruptions have provided us many opportunities, and indeed the necessity, to rethink how we operate. We have been reminded during 2021 that flexibility is crucial when it comes to meeting the shifting needs of our beneficiaries in a general operational environment of uncertainty and ever-changing circumstances.

Frequent and direct contact with individuals and communities is the unquestionable foundation upon which the effective delivery of services rests. We have relearned in 2021 that there is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Through our engagement with individuals at the local level, we are reminded that human anti-trafficking

work must continue because of, and not despite, the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic. Preventing trafficking through the promotion of higher living standards is now more essential than ever before.

A further recognition gained through our grassroots engagement harkens back to the wisdom behind the old saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. During meetings with youth and community members across the country, we often confronted a general lack of awareness about human trafficking, the dangers of unsafe migration, domestic and gender-based violence and local services available to communities. We are thus more convinced than



ever of the urgency of getting the message out to communities as a form of prevention.

A lack of awareness of issues surrounding human trafficking is not limited to just single individuals. Our engagement with public servants through the YES and Free from Violence projects made this point abundantly clear. Among the 122 participants, half admitted they were completely uninformed about the identification, evaluation and referral of P/VoTs, DV and GBV victims. The need for training among public servants and members of local referral agencies responsible for case management can be found throughout the country.

We again witnessed the power service-learning initiatives can have in building and strengthening social ties across community groups. In the specific case of Albania, this is often seen in improved communication between local governments and community members. Furthermore, service-learning provides a valuable qualitative learning program for youth. Two SL projects were carried out as part of the wider YES project, which allowed 30 youth to gain new skills and actively engage in solving and addressing community needs. These two groups continue to be civically active. Moreover, in-person visits conducted as part of the YES project have proven to be a very effective mechanism for learning and sharing. The real-world applicability of the connections, advice and knowledge gained through this type of instruction is invaluable, as frequently noted by the participants themselves.

Finally, we are but one organization. Working alone, we would fail our beneficiaries. By meeting only their immediate basic needs, we would be contributing to their dependency on social services. For this reason, we focus on building partnerships with other organizations to deliver effective responses and help empower individuals and communities. The value in cooperating and coordinating with public and non-public entities, businesses, and individuals who aspire to help the most vulnerable shows itself time and time again.

► CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION:

During this reporting period, 4 sets of overarching issues constituted significant challenges for us in achieving our mission. These four sets of issues include: 1) general budget constraints, 2) the lack of resources and capacity of public institutions, 3) insufficient levels of safety and protection services, and 4) worsening circumstances for those hit hardest by the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Budget Related Challenges

In Albania, emergency response to those in need and vulnerable to trafficking is limited by a general lack of available resources. Despite the existence of both public and non-public services, only a small minority of individuals actually benefit from assistance programs. Designed to meet only the most basic survival needs, these programs do not empower individuals to improve their own circumstances. Leveraging our extensive network of domestic and international partners, MWL is able to help mitigate challenges associated with limited funding and resources through collective action. A further strategy is jointly applying for funding with partner organizations.

Limited Capacity of Public Institutions

A lack of staff and knowhow at public institutions create significant obstacles. For example, in Saranda and Delvina, individual civil servants are often charged with executing numerous roles and responsibilities beyond their direct job description. Due to a lack of resources and staffing, one single individual acts as the public social worker for both municipalities, the head of the child protection unit and

the coordinator of the domestic violence and gender-based violence response unit. Thus, MWL supports the work of public institutions and NGOs by filling the gap and providing a full range of services on a case-by-case basis.

Insufficient Safety and Protection Services

Both adults and minors frequently remain in dangerous situations due to a lack of legal provisions and protection. Furthermore, overly bureaucratic procedures hinder the timely execution of police and court issued protection orders for victims of domestic and gender-based violence. Disruptions to the court system caused by the current judicial vetting process in Albania have led to fewer and fewer victims seeking legal support. Courts are typically avoided as a mechanism of arbitration.

The insufficient number of emergency shelters for victims of trafficking and domestic violence remains a serious challenge. The few shelters that do exist typically operate at full capacity and cannot meet the demand for safe accommodation. In response, some municipalities have begun establishing emergency shelters in several areas of Albania, but these buildings often lack the most basic level of furnishings to make them inhabitable.

Moreover, there is a general lack of coordination in service and programmatic offerings for victims. This is particularly noticeable in the minimal support services officially available for the children of human trafficking and domestic violence victims. In order to enhance their safety and protection, MWL ASCs work in close partnership with non-public service providers to ensure victims access adequate emergency accommodation, rent support and legal aid.

Ongoing Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Continued disruptions to livelihoods caused by the pandemic have increased economic and food insecurity among the most vulnerable individuals our ASCs serve. With borders closed for Albanian migrant workers, MWL began partnering with local businesses and public institutions to assist the unemployed in accessing available public services and support.

For those remaining employed, fear of losing their only source of income has increased the danger of workplace exploitation. Specifically, women employed in the textile and garment sector are at greater risk of abuse and ill treatment. Human trafficking in the supply chain system has increased significantly. With a lack of government oversight and enforcement, exploitation is becoming normalized. Such developments significantly complicate the identification of workplace exploitation. In response, those seeking services at ASCs are now routinely provided information on labour codes and workers' rights. To date, 5 individuals have received support in transitioning from exploitive work conditions to other employment.

The identification process of victims of human trafficking was negatively affected during the lockdown. Family visits, conducted as a routine component of case management, were initially halted due to restrictions in place to stop the spread of COVID-19. Thus, MWL transitioned its counselling and therapy services to an online format to protect the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve. In person visits are being slowly reintroduced in strict accordance with safety guidelines and protocols.

Our youth projects were equally affected by the lockdown and school closures. Despite initial scepticism and disinterest on the part of students, the transition to online meetings allowed for projects to continue. We are grateful to the Arise Foundation, and other partners, in granting extensions to allow projects to continue.

► ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND EFFECTIVENESS

Self-managing teams, comprised of ASC staff members at the regional level, continue to operate according to a TEAL organizational structure. This approach supports our efforts of decentralization by providing leadership opportunities and fostering a greater sense of ownership among staff members at all levels of the organization.

The continued professional development of our own MWL ASC staff members remains a key focus of our attention. In this reporting period, associates attended multiple trainings and workshops addressing topics ranging from changes to the legal code and regulations affecting our work to comprehensive reviews of best practices in our sector. As an example, MWL staff attended trainings developed by RENATE on the growing problem of online child exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participation in winter semester courses offered by ERSTE provided MWL staff with additional training opportunities. Subject areas included design thinking, the art of the pitch, organizational resiliency and the effects of the pandemic on European integration. Moreover, staff also received training in adapting to the new circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.





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