

**ASSOCIATION SOS HELP-LINE
FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN – VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**
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**INFORMATION ABOUT
ASSOCIATION SOS HELP-LINE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN – VICTIMS OF
VIOLENCE (LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA)**

Short introduction of Association SOS Help-line

Association SOS Help-line is a:

- *feminist women's non-governmental,*
- *volunteer,*
- *humanitarian,*
- *non-profit organization,*
- *working at national level,*
- *in the public interest,*
- *in the field of social welfare and*
- *in the field of equal opportunities of men and women.*

The Association provides help to relieve social distress, by carrying out different forms of psychosocial help, first of all for women and children – victims of violence in family and in other interpersonal relationships. In 1989 it was a first organization in Slovenia providing help to victims of violence. Its main programs are: SOS help-line, two shelters, psychosocial and psychological help. Its preventative activities are informing, educating and raising awareness of professional and general public on the problem of violence against women and children.

Programs and activities of the Association SOS Help-line are performed by employees and volunteers, who are all qualified and have special knowledge to work with women and children – victims of violence, acquired through extensive basic training and monthly additional trainings.

Mission of Association SOS Help-line

Association's mission is to alleviate and resolve emotional and psychosocial distress and problems of people with experience of violence and to implement various forms of psychosocial assistance in the frame of the programs, projects and activities of the Association, for:

- Women and children – victims of domestic violence, partner and violence in other relationships.
- Persons who are experiencing any type or form of interpersonal, institutional and/or structural violence.

Association is also designed to support, inform and search for solutions for/with:

- People who want to help victims of violence.
- Professionals and experts faced with the issue of violence against women and children in their work.
- General public and all interested in the issue of violence, particularly violence against women and violence against children.

The Association professionally deals with the following types and forms of violence:

- Violence against women.
- Violence against children.
- Domestic violence.
- Sexual abuse.
- Violence against the elderly.
- Violence at school.
- Violence at work.
- Sexual and other forms of harassment in the workplace.

<p>Basic goals of Association SOS Help-line</p>
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Basic goals of Association's programs and activities are:

- To provide personal counseling, intercession and advocacy to women – victims of violence.
- To provide (telephone and e-mail) counseling to victims and witnesses of violence.
- To provide basic information on the issue of violence and on existing forms of help nationwide and also abroad.
- To include victims of violence to different Association's programs.
- To direct to proper programs of other organizations.
- To report cases of violence to police, public prosecutor and to centers for social work.
- To qualify the executants of the program for counseling to victims of violence.
- To cooperate with other organizations on curative and preventative level to prevent violence.
- To carry out preventative activities for educating, informing and raising awareness on the issue of violence.

Professional background and criteria of the Association SOS Help-line

All the programs and activities of the Association SOS Help-line are carried out on the basis of certain guidelines and criteria:

- Violence against women is a social problem: although most of it occurs in the family or in private relationships, it is not a personal, but a social problem. It is rooted in the unequal distribution of social and private power between men and women. It is a significant obstacle to gender equality and one of the most common violations of human rights in the world. In more than 90 percent, victims of violence in intimate partner relationships are women and children, which is why our help is intended primarily for women and children – victims of violence.
- Victims of violence need support: firstly, in their decision to seek help, and secondly in their choosing appropriate forms of assistance. This support is offered through providing information on various forms of professional assistance and by raising awareness in the context of preventive action.
- Zero tolerance for violence. Violence is neither permitted nor approved.
- Individual experience of violence. Each person perceives violence she/he experiences in a different way.
- Do not minimize violence. Do not minimize the importance and seriousness of violence.
- Do not judge violence according to our own personal space. Do not derive from our own limits, own feelings and emotions, own experiences with violence.
- Do not grade violence. Do not classify violence into more and less bad.
- When determining a violent relationship, define power of both sides first. Distinguish who misuses his/her (superior) power in a relationship.
- Violent behavior is defined by the victim and not by the perpetrator. It is the victim who determines certain behavior as violent.
- Act! Respond to any violent behavior. Do not shift responsibility for taking action to others.
- Efficient, thorough and sensible dealing with violence is the best and the most important form of prevention.
- Demand responsibility for committed violence. Responsibility for violence belongs exclusively to the perpetrator. The perpetrator of violence has to assume all responsibility for his/her behavior.

About the Association SOS Help-line

Association SOS Help-line is the oldest non-governmental organization in Slovenia committed to help women and children with the experience of violence. It has been for more than 28 years since activists for women's rights in Slovenia in the frame of feminist Section Lilit at ŠKUC-Forum in Ljubljana identified the need for a counseling help-line for women and children experiencing violence. Assumptions about widespread violence and consequently the need for a

new organized form of support for women and children were confirmed by two questionnaire surveys with over 300 answers, carried out in 1988.

On October 11th 1989, the SOS Help-line telephone rang for the first time. It was a pioneer's and determined step towards the protection and help to women and children who experience violence in their relationships. With this act also the Association SOS Help-line, the first non-governmental organization working in the field of combating violence against women and children in Slovenia, was established.

In its first decade, Association SOS Help-line was a kind of nestling grounds for new associations/programs and new women's organizations recognizing additional needs in Slovenia in offering support for victims of violence. The selection of services to support victims of violence can only be improved with good and constructive cooperation we are developing with both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

At present, Association SOS Help-line is one of the most prominent and professionally highly developed organizations combating violence against women and violence against children. Because of that, we are committed to strengthening expertise and stability of professionally supported voluntary and professional work; running good quality training for general and professional public; developing new programs and according to needs supporting the existing ones; developing preventive programs that are the basis for development of society without violence; strengthening relations with other non-governmental organizations in Slovenia and abroad; participating in policy making in the field of preventing violence and removing its consequences, and striving to increase the quality of help offered to victims of violence.

Association SOS Help-line cooperates with different non-governmental and governmental organizations in Slovenia and other countries and with international organizations. Cooperation takes place on preventive and curative level, so it shows results when dealing with individual cases of violence as well as on the level of policy making and policy analysis.

In recent years, Association SOS Help-line has been cooperating intensively with other governmental and non-governmental organizations in order to actively influence decision makers and policy makers. For example, the Association SOS Help-line was intensively involved in the preparation of the Family violence prevention Act, the Resolution on the National program for Prevention of Domestic Violence 2009-2014, and Rules on Cooperation and Activity of Centers for Social Work, Multidisciplinary Teams and Regional Services when Dealing with Domestic Violence. Association SOS Help-line also cooperated actively in the process of discussing reports of the Republic of Slovenia in front of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Most recent achievement of Association SOS Help-line is a successful campaign for the ratification of Istanbul Convention in Slovenia. Istanbul Convention came into force on June 1th 2016 (<http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures>).

Association SOS Help-line cooperates with other organizations in organizing media campaigns and other activities for raising general public awareness and influencing public opinion.

Especially important and well received are the activities during international Days of Activism against Violence against Women, from 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10th December (International Human Rights Day). For example, campaign in 2016 (similar was in 2015) brought together more than 20 non-governmental and governmental organisations in Slovenia and was carried out in the shape of EU Project Coordinated efforts. More about campaign in 2016 can be found here: <http://www.potpisujem.org/eng/2270/16-days-of-activism-against-violence-against-women>.

Association SOS Help-line actively cooperates with other organizations in organizing joint professional meetings in the field of violence prevention: conferences, discussions, round tables etc. Joint professional meetings are organized with the initiative from either non-governmental or governmental organizations; coordinators for dealing with violence; Community of Centers for Social Work; Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Municipality of Ljubljana, etc. The meetings are held at a national and at a local level. In 2016 Association SOS Help-line (co-)organised three professional meeting. In 2016 we have prepared expert meeting *Multiinstitutional consultation: Court experts in cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse of children* at Ljubljana Law Faculty, together with Association for Non-violent communication, ISA Institute and the Human Rights Ombudsperson of the Republic of Slovenia. Various stakeholders presented their views on the issue. Consultation was attended by 220 professionals. In March we hosted guests from US on the topic of media representation of violence against women and family violence, they presented their work with media on the conference *How to correctly report on domestic violence and violence against women* (<http://www.potpisujem.org/eng/2055/how-to-correctly-report-on-domestic-violence-and-violence-against-women>) and in October together with the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities we organized international conference *Implementation of Measures to Fight Violence Against Women. From Words to Action!* Theme of the conference was monitoring and implementation of the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) (<http://www.potpisujem.org/eng/2260/international-conference-implementation-of-measures-to-fight-violence-against-women-from-words-to-action>).

Programs and activities of the Association SOS Help-line

Association's programs and activities differ from other programs in Slovenia which offer psychosocial support to people in need, in a way that they are specialized in working with women and children who are experiencing violence. All the providers are acquired to have special skills for psychosocial support and counseling to victims of violence.

Association SOS Help-line differs from other similar associations/programs also in large number of volunteers, which is also important for the success in eliminating the social taboos surrounding the issue of violence. Association has a strong emphasis on the integration of voluntary work and by that successfully participates in promoting and developing social

awareness and solidarity in general, especially in the area of violence against women and violence against children. In 2016 number of volunteers working in the Association was 59. Association's programs and activities complement the public service, since they provide counseling and preventive activities which are not carried out by public service. Association with its activities reduces social exclusion of inhabitants, increasing their mental and physical health and increasing opportunities for active rescue of their life situations. Consequently, this means raising the quality of life of inhabitants and reduction of the costs of the state and of local authorities, that are spent on curative action on the issue of violence against women and children and on reduction of the social and financial consequences of violence.

Basic programs and activities of the Association SOS Help-line:

- Program SOS Help-line for women and children – victims of violence.
- Program Shelter for women and children – victims of violence.
- Program Shelter for women and children – victims of violence II.
- Program Psychosocial and psychological help for women and children – victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual abuse.
- Preventive activities: awareness raising activities/campaigns, education and informing for professionals and the general public about the issue of violence against women and violence against children, publishing and active cooperation with media, writing articles. Association is organizing lectures, workshops, seminars, round tables, conferences and consultation sessions.

SOS help-line

Counseling and informative talk with a competent female counselor on a toll free SOS help-line for women and children - victims of violence 080 11 55 is available: Workdays: 12 noon – 10 p. m.; Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays: 6 p. m. – 10 p. m.

SOS Help-line is intended for all who experience domestic violence or violence from their partners, relatives, violence at a work place or in other relationships. It was established in 1989 and was the first program in Slovenia, specialized for help to victims of violence. Counselors at SOS Help-line are specifically trained for work with women, children and other people who have experienced violence. SOS Help-line is intended primarily for people experiencing violence, but people with other issues also call and are advised or directed to appropriate institutions or non-government organisations that can help them. SOS Help-line is still the only national telephone help-line in Slovenia, specialized in helping women and children – victims of violence. The program also offers the possibility of inclusion to other programs of the Association, in which we accept users from all over Slovenia. Preventive activities are carried out throughout Slovenia.

In 2016 we performed 3.090 counselling services:

- 2.166 telephone counselling.
- 290 mail and e-mail counselling.
- 1.088 other services (reporting to the police and centres for social work, attending multi-institutional teams for dealing with the situations of victims of violence, advocacy, testifying).

In 2016 we performed following trainings for experts, working with victims of violence:

- 1 basic training in Celje for experts, working on SOS Help-line in Celje: 48 hours of theoretical training for 14 candidates; 6 of them continued with practical training for counselling work.
- 30 team meetings for counsellors on SOS help-line in Ljubljana and Celje.
- 20 supervision meetings for counsellors on SOS help-line in Ljubljana and Celje.
- 12 additional trainings for work on SOS help-line in Ljubljana and Celje.
- 7 internal educational meetings.
- Cooperating in 23 preventative activities for educating and raising awareness of expert and other publics.

Shelters

Association SOS Help-line runs two shelters, located in Ljubljana, which house women and children from all parts of Slovenia and also abroad. Shelter is a safe (safeguarded) place at a secret location. It is available for women with or without children, in need of a safe space to avoid violence they had experienced from their partners, within family or from relatives. Shelters are available for women, victims of violence, aged 18 and over. Accommodation, counselling and advocacy (a companion to institutions) are all provided at our shelters. Women can stay at the shelters for up to 12 months.

The Association opened its first shelter in 1997 as first non-governmental shelter in Slovenia with the capacity of 23 beds for women and their children. It also has the possibility to prolong residence of women and their children to up to 2 years in 2 separate units outside of main unit. The second shelter was opened in 2009 as the first shelter that offers a bed to a handicapped woman, victim of violence or her child. Its capacity is 7 rooms for women with 10 children.

In 2016 we accommodated 16 women with 9 children in the first shelter and 19 women with 14 children in the second shelter.

Psychosocial and psychological help for women and children – victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual abuse

In recent years we are offering more psychosocial and psychological help for women and children – victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual abuse in form of personal counselings. Program Psychosocial and psychological help for women and children – victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual abuse is intended for adult women with experience of any form of violence in family and interpersonal relations and is also intended for children to be included with non-abusive parent, for relatives and persons close to victims of violence and/or sexual abuse.

Within the program following activities are available: individual counselling, advocacy, intervention/escort at/to institutions, psychological treatment, support group for women victims of violence, psychological support for children, legal counselling. The aim of the program is to offer comprehensive help and support.

The purpose of the program is to connect different professional workers to work in team to offer high quality and comprehensive help and support to victims of all form of violence in

family and interpersonal relations. The purpose is also eliminating of consequences of violence and to contribute to lower the possibility of re-experiencing of different forms of violence. Persons that want this kind of help can call SOS help-line or contact us through e-mail (drustvo-sos@drustvo-sos.si) or on +386 31 699 333.

In 2016 53 users were included to the program.

In following years, we want develop this program with more focus on offering support to victims of sexual violence and to offer free legal aid in larger scale.

Other projects

Association SOS Help-line has a rich history of carrying out different projects directed mainly in raising awareness on the topic of violence against women and children.

Association SOS Help-line was a partner organization in two EU co-funded projects in 2016:

- Coordinated efforts – toward new European standards in protection of women from gender based violence and
- First – Capacity building for First Points of Contact for Victims of Domestic and Gender-based Violence.

In 2016 Association also carried out two small projects that were granted by different cofounders (American Embassy in Ljubljana, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) and focused on raising awareness of media on how to report on the topics of violence against women and family violence. Together with Association of Slovene Journalist, General Police Directorate and Community of Centers for Social Work we conducted five workshops for different media companies throughout Slovenia, with about 60 journalist and editors attending. We also prepared pdf. handbook and an e-book *How to report on violence against women and family violence – Handbook for Media*. Handbook is available on Association's web page: <http://www.drustvo-sos.si/za-medije/kako-porocati-o-nasilju-nad-zenskami-in-nasilju-v-druzini>.

Recent honours for the Association SOS Help-line

In 2012, Director General of the Police, Janko Goršek, granted Association SOS Help-line “Bronze sign of the Police for co-operation in enhancing safety.”

In 2015, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, granted Association SOS Help-line the Order of the Republic of Slovenia “For twenty-five years of systematic, professional and committed support to women and children – victims of violence, Association SOS Help-line receives the Medal for Merit.”

Ona 365

President of the Association SOS Help-line was in 2016 selected among 50 women which in 2015 left their mark in society. The title Ona 365 was granted by OnaPlus magazine. "Maja Plaz has more than two decades working experience. With her personal dedication and commitment, vast experience and knowledge, she works for the protection of vulnerable and

fragile human life and returns lost humanity and life dignity to victims. Compassion, as a noble human characteristic, converts into the driving force of her own performance. She is not afraid to look where everything is black," Sabina Obolnar, the head editor of Magazine Ona and OnaPlus, has explained proclamation of Maja Plaz for Ona 365. More at: <http://goo.gl/2NI03c>.

20. March 2017