



Feminist *Figures*

MARIJANA SAVIĆ

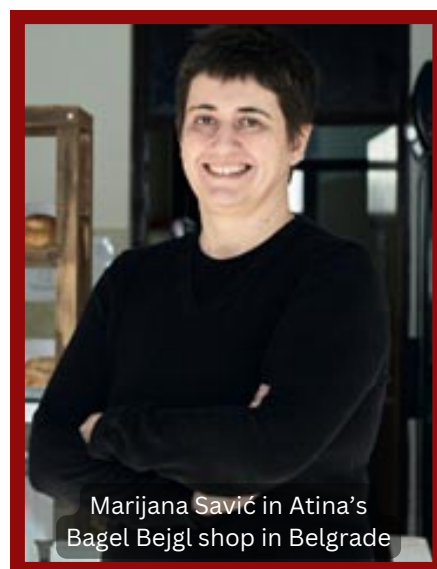
founder of NGO ATINA - human rights activist - policy reform advocate

Marijana Savić is a Serbian **human rights activist** and the founder of **NGO Atina** - *the citizen's association for combating trafficking in human beings and all forms of gender-based violence.*

Marijana has a law degree from the **University of Podgorica** and works on the development of the social and political environment in Serbia, focusing on advocating for victims of **human trafficking, sexual abuse, labor exploitation, discrimination and violence.**

NGO ATINA

Atina was founded in **2003** as a response to the lack of mechanisms and long-term support for victims of **gender-based violence** and **human trafficking**. Such an initiative was especially crucial after the two **refugee crises**, namely after the Yugoslav war and the 2015 refugee surge from Iran, Iraq, Afganistan and parts of North and West Africa.



Marijana Savić in Atina's Bagel Bejgl shop in Belgrade



Atina's event "Democracy Embraces Diversity: Celebrating and Empowering Migrant Women's Participation". Photo: Piroški

Atina's first safe house was established in **Belgrade, Serbia**. It was the first of its kind in the country, in the sense that it did not serve only as a shelter, but also a **rehabilitation center** where women **participated in their own liberation** and shared responsibility for their safety. This approach focusing on helping women **regain control of their own lives** is the basis of all Atina's operations.

THEIR WORK

Atina runs programs for **victim protection** and **reintegration** into society such as the **Transit House project** which provides survivors with accommodation and food as well as legal services, counseling, and support with finding jobs, healthcare, and education. A major aspect of this support network is the **Open Club Reintegration Center**, where all forms of support are available with direct assistance from Atina's former beneficiaries. This builds a strong **community** and **culture of trust** among survivors working together to rebuild their lives.

“ — Marijana Savić on the victims requiring help beyond safe houses:

*“The solution is the support of a **community** [...] It's important that she can **exercise all her rights**, that she has all necessary documents, that she has health insurance and her own doctor. **Everyone** in the system that matters to that woman needs to come together in order for her to recover.”*

TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS

Atina also arranges **training sessions** and **educational programs** for professionals across various sectors, including **police**, **social workers** and the **National Employment Service**. The goal is to enhance the capabilities of institutions and organizations in offering effective support to victims of violence and human trafficking.

In **2011**, a training initiative called, "**Social Welfare Centre in the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking**" was developed. It involved the active participation of representatives from Atina and the **Ministry of Labour and Social Policy**. The program aimed to empower **social welfare centers** in addressing issues related to human trafficking, focusing on enhancing the knowledge and skills of professionals crucial for the recognition of violence and for victim protection.

The training was comprehensive, reaching **72 Social Welfare Centers** across Serbia and training a total of **227 employees**. The program also aimed to have a **preventive** impact.



WOMEN AND CHILDREN REFUGEES

The Balkan region experienced a **refugee crisis** due to the **Yugoslav war (1991-2001)** and post **2015**, when the **Balkan route** played a major role in the movement of (since then) over **1.500.000 refugees** from **Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan** and parts of **North and West Africa**. In response, Atina allocated a significant part of its resources to address the struggles of **women and children refugees**.



Refugee girls on the Serbian border.
Photo: Marko Djurica/Reuters

Refugees are often at a higher risk of **violence**. Atina acknowledges that women refugees especially endure considerable violence and **sexual abuse**. They are often compelled into '**survival sex**' with smugglers, are subjected to theft and harassment, and become victims of **human trafficking**. Unfortunately, their experiences often go unspoken.

In one of their reports, Atina points out how despite the **high number** of yearly reported cases of possible **victims** between refugees and migrants, very few cases are actually addressed, let alone **investigated**. For example, in 2016 and 2017 respectively, only **5%** and **7%** of cases reported to the **Center for Human Trafficking Victims Protection** resulted in the **identification of victims**.*

*The report pertained to the migrant and refugee population in Serbia following the surge of refugees in 2015-2017. The report is accessible [HERE](#).



Young refugee family. Photo: Marko Djurica/Reuters

Victims also often have no access to useful information due to **language barriers** and **patriarchal family structures** which only allow for communication through men. Young girls are often denied the most **basic education** and with it the capacity to **advocate** for themselves. Between **2016-2018**, the organization provided direct assistance to over **6,000** refugees and survivors of human trafficking.

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN VICTIMS BEYOND MOTHERHOOD

A common regressive perspective often accompanies systems of support for **women refugees**, victims of **human trafficking** and other forms of **violence** - one which primarily focuses on **women as mothers**.

Successfully supporting women refugees and victims of gender-based violence requires a shift away from viewing them solely through the lens of **motherhood**. Currently, the system greatly addresses their needs as mothers, focusing on child-friendly spaces for young children. However, adolescents and women beyond the maternal role are **overlooked**.

The **patriarchal perspective** reinforces societal expectations, emphasizing gynecological care and reproductive health. While these aspects are crucial, over-all **mental** and **physical well-being** of women beyond their roles of motherhood is not addressed. Even in child care facilities, **assumptions** about **traditional roles hinder women**, especially those with older children. There is a lack of consideration for their personal time, basic amenities, and spaces for women to share experiences, relax, and **be acknowledged beyond their roles as mothers**.



RESEARCH & LEGISLATIVE REFORM

In the area of **gender-based violence** and **human trafficking**, Atina also works to **improve legislation** supporting victims and their families and carries out extensive research. They have published numerous studies on the topic such as:

- Children on the Move - status and programs of support and protection of children on the move in the Republic of Serbia
- National Referral Mechanism for the victims of human trafficking
- Social inclusion of victims of human trafficking
- Protection of victims and prevention of trafficking in human beings

All of Atina's publications are available [here](#).

only
0,002%
 out of
204 billion
 to fight
 gender-based
 violence

WHY ORGANIZATIONS LIKE ATINA REMAIN CRUCIAL

The most recent report by **UN Women** partners the **Equality Institute** and the **Accelerator for GBV Prevention** found that out of the **USD 204 billion** spent in overseas development assistance* in **2022**, only **one fifth of one per cent** was allocated to **reducing gender-based violence**.^[1]

A **third** of all women have experienced violence in their lifetimes, but the rates are even higher for **women refugees, First Nations women, Black women** and others who experience **intersecting discrimination**.^[2]

Combined with the lack of funding, this issue positions organizations such as NGO Atina as a crucial agent in finding **long-term solutions** against gender-based violence and **securing adequate resources**.

*Overseas development assistance: aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.

Would you like to help further Atina's cause? [DONATE HERE.](#)

SOURCES:

[1] The Equality Institute & The Accelerator for GBV Prevention (2023) [What Counts? The State of Funding for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence Against Women and Girls.](#)

[2] World Health Organization. (2021). [Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women.](#) World Health Organization.



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Helping victims of **gender-based violence**, involving **women** in **political decision-making** and **advocacy processes**, and **raising awareness** of the plight women may face during crises are among the main objectives of **Politics4Her**.

In addressing **systemic violence** against women and girls, we believe an **intersectional approach** is crucial to avoid neglecting cases where risk is heightened due to various and often **coexisting types of discrimination** based on **gender, race, ethnicity, economic status** and **migrant or refugee status**.

Aligning ourselves with Atina's approach to victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence, we believe **effective aid** and **long-term rehabilitation** require the provision of tools and support systems which work beyond providing **temporary safety** and build towards **long-term liberation of every woman**.

Who inspires you?

If you would like to nominate a young feminist changemaker to be highlighted in our monthly volume, **[fill out this form](#)**.

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