



Annual Narrative Report

Year 2022

Implemented by YWCA of Albania

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INTRODUCTION

Focus on support and awareness. Invest in capacity building and network creation. Involve all women, youth and children. Drawn from the YWCA's strategic plan, these calls echo the key messages the YWCA of Albania has used to frame the efforts illustrated in this annual report. YWCA of Albania brings together and empowers women and young girls voluntarily to participate in matters of vital importance and to ensure justice, peace, health, human dignity and rights, freedom and environmental care.

The situation caused by Covid-19 global pandemic has presented new challenges for all of us, especially with the vaccination process. During this crisis we have learned the importance of rapid mobilization and stronger collaboration. Related also to our objectives, YWCA of Albania has supported the community, especially women that are part of vulnerable groups, like women with low incomes, women with breast cancer, women with special needs or human trafficking survivors. Based in this framework we are more engaged to promote women's leadership and to provide specific services to support them, as an important strategy for further emergencies.

Mental health and psychological support were an important initiative of YWCA. During 2022 we continued to offer free online psychological counseling women diagnosed with breast cancer and their family members, to reduce fear and anxiety and to improve their quality of life. We paid special attention to youth mental health aiming to improve their psychological wellbeing and to have a better understanding of self and others.

YWCA of Albania has been and continues to be a great home for all ages and categories of people without distinction. Meetings between members and volunteers of YWCA, professional trainings, job placement, awareness raising related to mental health, support of families with low incomes, breast cancer campaign, awareness raising for gender equality, women empowerment as a key factor to prevent violent extremism, presentation of positive techniques of discipline; the focus on education through Day Care Centre created for the Afghan community based in Durrës and Lezha, distribution of packages with food and hygiene products for vulnerable groups, creation of anti-drugs coalitions and the psychological services offered for women with breast cancer have been the main activities YWCA

has developed. This annual report illustrates the impact YWCA's investment and involvement has had on women, children and youth. By building capacities and providing tools for good management, YWCA supported to effectively deliver services and programs to the community. The work of YWCA of Albania is based on specific values like integrity, tolerance, respect and inclusiveness. The achievements described in this reporting period would not have been possible without the dedicated support of board members, staff, volunteers, partners, and donors.

Donika Godaj

Executive Director

YWCA OF ALBANIA PROGRAMS

GOAL 1: CONTINUE TO INCREASE THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE ALBANIAN WOMEN THROUGH INFORMATION, EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING SERVICE PROGRAMS

Project 1.1: Strengthen Local Women's Networks capacities on P/CVE as a mechanism to build alerted and cohesive communities

During 2022, YWCA in collaboration with the Public Affairs Section in the U.S. Embassy, developed the project ``*Strengthen Local Women's Networks capacities on P/CVE as a mechanism to build alerted and cohesive communities*``. The initiative intends to *increase the awareness of the community* about violent extremism and to empower women as a key factor to prevent and report the phenomenon.

YWCA of Albania has decided to use a gender approach to prevent violent extremism because:

- Women are more often victims of the actions of violent extremist groups.
- Women, as a primary caregivers can notice the violent extremism signs of family members if they are informed and empowered
- Women can serve as positive models and promoters of peace, equality and democratic values
- Women's direct engagement in violent extremist acts has decreased over the past thirty years.
- Some, but not all, women follow husbands or other male family members into terrorist groups, sometimes feeling little choice in the matter
- Women are more likely than men to agree that people belonging to different religions should be treated equally

For this reason, YWCA of Albania has created ***four local women's networks*** in four different regions: Kavaja, Kukës, Berat and Lezha. These networks have a wide multiple player representation of women only, such as representatives of education institutions, representatives of local municipality offices,

NGOs, police officers, media and also most importantly active members of local communities. The main goal of this project is to start ***building safe and resilient communities to violent extremism*** in four different regions in Albania by forming trained, active and functional local women's network with a defined strategy, a specific plan and necessary tools how to achieve it.

Until now, YWCA has developed informal meetings in the municipalities of Kavaja, Lezha Berat and Kukes to discuss about the structure of the local women's network. The participants have evaluated the project's approach and the focus on women empowerment. They have emphasized that:

- in the selected municipalities the violent extremism is considered a dangerous phenomenon
- in these areas live a large number of families with low income, a factor risk related to the violent extremism
- the women aren't active participants in the society and are facing a lot of sensitive issues
- there is a lack of information about violent extremism

Links with photos from the activities

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid02ks8wao5MjZKiFZck7RS9hk4BZghv5P5YfPTYBRJL7YN63JBxyD3KPS3Yi2aN2z4Wl>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0SmjnFM62d9BHbyFfcD1pYt1oZ9RjbEgcbt1P6ejFKxJZaWVZ71G7qhbCBboy5qogl>

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<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0a7YmoYoJLXNFPYYGJk3Lfw2HxkEfiSqudbqA29bGV2jHxf4qoNn3XTGAt7Vd3vr2l>

2: CONTINUE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WOMEN AND YOUNG GIRLS, TO EMPOWER THEM CULTURALLY AND SOCIALLY

Project 2.1: Expand and improve the library services program

The Library Project is related to the main goals of YWCA for the emancipation of women and girls *by promoting the passion of reading*, as a form of training to empower them culturally and socially, but also to bring positive changes in their lives. Due to the difficult economic situation in Albania people read less, so our work intends to attract women and girls of all ages.

The library of YWCA contains books from various types: classics, books by Albanian authors, psychological, philosophical and sociological books; medical books; books in foreign languages, historical books, etc. An important focus in our library, have the books for children, with stories and fairy tales, but also with instructions for a healthy growth and education, for parents and teachers. In our library, readers have access to the best Albanian and foreign authors. Currently the library has **3500** books.

Reading has an *incredible influence on the empowerment of women and girls* because it helps them to grow mentally, emotionally and psychologically; it gives them an opportunity to learn new things and explore new ideas and it can also increase their knowledge. Through books women can discover themselves, because every good book opens up new dimensions of thoughts for the reader.

The Library Project intends to improve emotional health, because books are full of emotions. So, books are no doubt a huge source of motivation. Women can derive *great inspirations* from them and transform their lives positively. Women need access to books that engage their imagination and spark their interest so that they are inspired to start reading and keep reading throughout their lives. YWCA will continue to have a special focus on women and girls' education, as the main strategy to empower them.

Links with photos from the activities

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<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1506579286193209&set=a.138821939635624>

<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1505557669628704&set=a.138821939635624>

GOAL 3: BECOME ONE OF THE BEST PRACTICE ENTITIES IN PROVIDING QUALITATIVE EDUCATION SERVICES TO CHILDREN

Project 3.1: Early Childhood Centers as creative and safe spaces!

“Early Childhood Centers as creative and safe spaces!” is the project applied by YWCA of Albania with the support of UNICEF and USAID.

As of mid-October 2021, around 500 Afghans, including adults and children arrived in Albania. During 2022, the Afghani population was accommodated in two resorts in the coastal city of Durrës and one in Lezha. Around 40% of the evacuees are children, with approximately 640 children being accommodated in the two resorts. As a response to the situation, the main aim of the project is to create **two ECD centers in Lezha and Durres** that will serve as safe and educational places for Afghani young children and their parents.

So, YWCA of Albania has set up two Day Care Centers in Shengjin and Durres. To enable the participation of the children in the Centers, YWCA has followed these steps: announcement about the Centers; information about age and specific services; description of benefits from DCC; meetings with parents to sign the “Form of Registration” and informed consent about the photos and/or videos. Parents are well informed about the program, and welcomed as observers and contributors to the Day Care Centers.

All the philosophy of our Day Care Centers is based on the **non-formal approach of learning**. Non formal education focuses more upon the learners and is considered as the best form of learning, especially for preschool children. One of the important types of non-formal education is associated with child development and learning, early childhood care and education.

YWCA of Albania has a special focus on **Afghan parents` empowerment**. To address their needs, YWCA develops meetings with them to raise their awareness about the best strategies of parenting and to involve them actively at the Day Care Centers programs. During this time, with parents we have

introduced a lot of topics about mental health, positive discipline, the importance of play and have established a strong network of parents that advocate for new strategies of parentings.

Also, YWCA of Albania has developed training sessions with preschool **teachers and educators**. The themes of the sessions were as following: presentation of the initiative; introduction of non-formal approach; socio-emotional learning; educational goals; positive discipline; resilience of children; the development of preschool children; child-centered approaches; the principles of observation; the academic process with children affected by traumatic events; the ethical principles and brainstorming sessions.

The trainings have served to increase the capacities of educators and preschool teachers. They were considered very successfully.

YWCA of Albania has published **human stories** related to services offered by Day Care Centres in Durres and in Lezha. The stories, written based on the interviews and direct observations, presented the issues of Afghan children and parents. During the narration, the difficulties faced from this category were identified. Human stories will be used in this project to present people and their problems, concerns, or achievements in a way that brings out the interest, sympathy or motivation in the reader or viewer. Human stories are very powerful because they personalize project's impact results and reports by documenting the personal experience of individuals who were influenced by the project.

The stories have been shared on social media accounts and YWCA of Albania's website and have had a significant impact on the community.

Link with photos:

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid02ppv3ZyQ5BgjyY3ySe9wzvCx728oqb7KZbJCM9vLGCsyMv2UGLcfj2Nsqn6G6bPDSI>

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<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0jFmGkjgDQpmh7jgvTnWRYLuorUnWaHwB2igpmqm4WnX4mugfPytSfGSRHomrcxh7l>

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Project 3.2: A better world for children

The project "A better world for children" is being implemented by YWCA of Albania with the support of OSHEE in Shkodra municipality. The target group of this project are children part of vulnerable groups, such as children coming from families with low incomes, children of Roma and Egyptian ethnicities, children part of families with socio-economic problems, etc.

In total, about 60 children have benefited from the services provided. The **teaching process** is carried out by 4 teachers, where two teachers are responsible for the primary education and two teachers for the secondary one. All children are equipped with books, which they receive free of charge from the government, thus facilitating the teaching process based on the educational program approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Children part of the project, in most cases, live in rural areas with very difficult access to different services. Also, due to the low incomes, they are faced with the lack of technological tools and internet connection. For this reason, 20 children have been received online classes and counselling sessions.

During each month of project implementation, 40 families have been supported with **packages** with foods. Due to low income, isolation, inability to go to work, low access to services, etc., these families face extraordinary difficulties even to meet their basic food needs.

Psychological support has been one of the main activities carried out in the project. This service has been very necessary for the children, who faced a number of challenges, such as: lack of a safe environment, low income, deprivation of rights and freedom, high level of stress, inability to develop oneself, lack of social relationships and deprivation from education.

The psychological support is provided in several ways, such as:

- Individual counselling
- Art and play therapy
- Observation
- Counselling session with family members
- Discussion group


As part of the project, a **summer camp** was successfully organized. This camp was held in Voskopoja, with the participation of 20 children and the supervision of 5 teachers and YWCA. An informative and awareness-raising video was produced as part of the project's activities. The video contained the following elements:

- Description of blood feuds situation in Albania
- Blood feuds impact at children
- Presentation of project`s activities
- Introduction of target group`s needs

Regarding the visual aspect of the **video**, due to the high sensitivity of the phenomenon, animation was used. Also, animated videos are considered more visually appealing and used to share important messages to a wider audience.

GOAL 4: HEALTH EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PROGRAM - TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT HEALTH AND BREAST CANCER

Project 4.1: Breast cancer awareness campaign

 **Hug the Pink Ribbon!** This has been the opening slogan of the **YWCA of Albania's 14th campaign** against breast cancer; a long journey, full of challenges and hope at the same time.

YWCA of Albania and the ambassador of the Pink Ribbon, **Ermonela Jaho**, have expressed their gratitude at the opening of the campaign to the partners and close collaborators: the **US Embassy in Tirana, ROCHE, Top Channel, CREDINS Bank, UNFPA, Hausbrandt, ONE Telecommunications**, etc. YWCA has once again emphasized that its mission is dedicated to the pink warriors, who have taught us to never give up, because hope is much greater than fear. They serve as role models for many other ladies who have just started fighting this battle.

The activities developed by YWCA of Albania this year have been numerous and have focused on the importance of prevention, early detection and psychological support for women and girls.

Social media campaign

During the month of October, YWCA of Albania has developed an intensive campaign on all social media channels, with the aim of raising community awareness about breast cancer. The campaign on social media for 2022 was based on three main elements:

- promoting the **importance of medical check-ups**, aiming the early detection of breast cancer
- promoting the **importance of receiving online psychological counseling** offered for free by YWCA through the platform fjongoze.al
- building an **online community** that promotes hope, new opportunities and solidarity

Activity at the Oncology Hospital in Tirana

Throughout this year, YWCA's Pink Ribbon was close to the pink fighters/survivors who are battling the disease of breast cancer at the ***Oncology Hospital in Tirana***. In the 14th year of the awareness raising campaign, YWCA of Albania has continued to offer a series of services, with the aim of informing the community about the importance of early detection, but also encouraging and supporting women and girls who are diagnosed with breast cancer. With the support of the hospital's staff, we have developed one activity in January and one in December with different patients who were receiving the treatment. YWCA has prepared and shared ***gifts*** with them, which contained ***brochures*** with important information about breast cancer and its treatment, a ***book***, a ***head scarf*** and ***coupons*** with the amount of which they could buy food or other products at any Spar supermarket in Albania, to fulfill their needs.

Pink Ribbon Hug" Challenge

"Pink Ribbon Hug" has been one of the most special activities developed in the framework of this year's campaign. This challenge started with the video of the ambassador of the cause, Ermonela Jaho, and was followed by many people who showed their ***solidarity and support***.

Video of the challenge

YWCA of Albania has made a ***video*** of all the people who took part in the first phase of the "Pink Ribbon Hug" challenge. Through this video, YWCA has invited and encouraged new people to be part of the "Pink Ribbon reminds me..." campaign. Anyone can be a ***pink volunteer*** spreading the word, raising awareness and supporting our sensitive cause!

Lunch and learn

YWCA of Albania developed "***lunch & learn***" activities in Tirana and Shkodra municipalities. Designed in the form of a friendly lunch, this activity brought together women with breast cancer, their relatives and members of the community. Pink Ribbon reminded us during "lunch & learn" that ***pain decreases*** when shared with people who understand and support you during difficult times. The women shared their experiences and inspired all the participants with the ***strength and courage*** to overcome the challenges while facing breast cancer. Also, they served as ***positive models*** for the awareness of the whole community by addressing the problems of many women and girls who are diagnosed with breast cancer in our country.

Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Berat

This October, for the 14th year, YWCA of Albania in collaboration with our partners, such as the *Public Relations Office of the US Embassy in Tirana, Roche, Berat Municipality, Top Media, Credins Bank, UNFPA Albania, ONE Telecommunications, Eurofarma T & Q Tolica, Uji B, Fentimans Ltd, Hausbrandt Albania, AK-INVEST, Korriku Flowers Service*, etc. developed the symbolic walk to share information and raise awareness on the early detection of breast cancer. This year the walk took place in the city of **Berat**, under the motto "Pink ribbon reminds me..." on October 14, at 12.00 PM.

The walk was followed by the "Pink Ribbon Volunteer" award ceremony that were given by important guests, including our partners, representatives of local and central government and international organizations.

Before the start of the walk, the volunteers of YWCA of Albania distributed **informative and promotional materials**, such as leaflets, brochures, pink ribbons, umbrellas, t-shirts, etc. as a symbol of the fight against breast cancer.

Discussion forum

YWCA of Albania, as part of the 14th campaign against breast cancer, under the motto "Pink Ribbon reminds me...", held a **discussion forum** on October 27, 2022, with the participation of partners and supporters of the initiative, representatives from the **Ministry of Health, women MPs, civil society representatives, doctors, as well as women survivors of breast cancer**. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss **the challenges** faced by women with breast cancer, the **needs** they have and what **strategy** should be followed by all actors of society to improve their lives, providing the necessary services and with contemporary standards.

YWCA of Albania has also conducted a **study** about the situation of breast cancer in our country. As part of the study, the findings and recommendations of the discussion forum were also included. After the meeting, YWCA has officially sent the recommendations to the **Albanian Assembly**, with the aim of taking **legal steps** to improve the lives of women with breast cancer.

Healthy nutrition

YWCA of Albania has published the **brochure “Healthy nutrition during and after breast cancer treatment”** on the platform fjongoroze.al. This material is very important because it guides women with breast cancer towards **healthy eating routines** during and after the treatment.

Healthy nutrition helps to mitigate the side effects of treatment, manage the stress that accompanies the disease and improve the quality of life. In the brochure, girls and women can find information on the values and benefits of healthy eating, as well as advice on how to follow the right diet every day.

Free online psychological counselling for women diagnosed with breast cancer and their family members

During this year YWCA of Albania has continued to offer the service **of free online psychological counselling** for **breast cancer survivors** and their **family members**. This initiative has been successful and has helped them a lot during the challenging times of **treatment or post-treatment**. Since the diagnose of breast cancer affects the life of all the family members of the patient, they have expressed gratitude and described the service as very necessary for them to overcome the fear and challenges that the disease presents. Also, throughout the year, **YWCA’s database of breast cancer patients** has been updated with new patients and their personal and medical information.

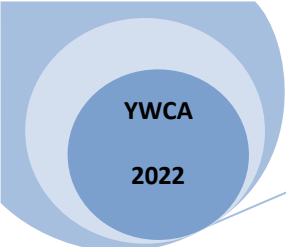
Video of physical exercises

Year after year, YWCA of Albania offers **innovative activities** of the campaign. In the 14th year of the Pink Ribbon cause, a video showing some **physical exercises** for women diagnosed with breast cancer was produced. Two personal trainers have demonstrated how physical exercises should be performed and how important it is to take care of the physical health. Physical exercises are considered a very effective strategy to improve the body’s condition after the diagnose, but also the psychological well-being.

Link with photos

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0P9FYzQWAFqKLEuzgUBrRVs8WQhk7JLo3tmym5SZj4nZ44VWSn9hqi2M5CSq5bzoAl>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid02V4AqXZUKuU1e47EnWRJCKNdN1VcDNzny7DKmGu2H94Xn6UDvyrFB6mb2khBw3ciLl>



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<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid028x8jKgAdhisep2BbNvpaGjGezHDNbLsUoodgr3TnZncmAjWSEJLMnM73qSiYfmC4l>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoBEyF9xDkY>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid026stpHmqSQYpb1xcsYfA2yc27XZYxJdPsZ4fFpGsxxVDPgKEqFefN2kUpnyty9q7Wl>

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<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/2123342051183593>

Project 4.2: Your story matters

YWCA of Albania with the support of National Youth Congress and in collaboration with Tirana municipality has applied "Your story matters!" project in 5 high schools. The initiative was focused on **youth mental health**, as one of the most vulnerable groups.

Adolescence is a unique and formative time. Physical, emotional and social changes, including exposure to poverty, abuse, or violence, can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems. Protecting adolescents from adversity, promoting socio-emotional learning and psychological well-being, and ensuring access to mental health care have been some of the main objectives of the project.

The activities developed to achieve the expected results were:

- Workshops with youth focusing on mental health, their needs and challenges
- Creation of "Emotions Clubs" in each school
- Writing of human stories
- Discussion forums focusing on media and mental health; impact of the project and the importance of psychological support
- Video production
- Development of psychological activities
- Peer to peer sessions
- Awareness raising campaigns about mental health

Through the project, the following results were achieved:

- Increased information and awareness of 1000 young people about mental health related issues through direct activities
- Increased the capacities of 2000 young people to respond to mental health challenges through informal activities

- Created Youth Groups that will continue to advocate for the importance of mental health among young people
- Engaged young people in voluntary initiatives related to mental health
- Increased mental health awareness for 6,000 young people through the use of a variety of creative methods on social media
- Improved the psychological well-being of young people through psychological techniques
- Promoted outdoor activities through intensive campaigns

Link with photos

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0rTiCkM3iHG65BgdJuddGznUC5j3G6EcEtKM8oghjFkUXyVyBRLd9o9UubJ3aRTI>

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Goal 5: STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITIES THROUGH STRUCTURES BUILDING, SUPPORT AND TRAINING, INFORMATION SESSIONS AND AWARENESS RAISING

Project 5.1: Poor families and children have access to social protection entitlements and services, including risk communication

“Poor families and children have access to services and information for protection from risks” is a programme implemented by YWCA of Albania in partnership with UNICEF Albania and USAID. Three municipalities, namely Lezha, Durrës and Berat have been supported with capacity and tools enabling them to support families and children under cash assistance to access services and other social protection entitlements.

YWCA pursued a two-tiered intervention approach. On the one hand, it worked to provide directly for the families in economic aid in each of the three selected municipalities, by providing. Thanks to a long-standing grassroots experience, YWCA could reach out to 700 families in economic aid in the three municipalities and 1800 children from these families. Furthermore, YWCA focused on capacity development of responsible municipal staff.

More concretely, project activities resulted into:

- **Profiling of participants** (through in-depth interviews with families living in economic aid and professional staff at the municipalities) was crucial to inform subsequent support to the vulnerable families and capacity building measures offered to local government unit staff.
- **Increased information** of families living with economic aid and consolidated the collaboration of different structures related with social services, through the organization of 54 Open Informative Days activities.
- **64 social administrators** and responsible municipal staff trained on the new approach of social care services provision through workshops that aimed at introducing the approach, challenges and needs of social administrators.
- **700 families and 1800 children** of economic aid scheme were empowered with opportunities, such as vocational training, as a bridge from passivity to active participation in the social and work life.

- 4500 informative brochures on **COVID-19 prevention and vaccination**
- 4500 informative brochures on **healthy nutrition**
- **620 food** and school supply packages distributed to families and children.
- Video (summary of the interventions results and impact) on the intervention from the perspective of beneficiaries
- Human stories

The project succeeded to support the delivery of combined cash and care services to families that are beneficiaries of economic aid, as well as to effectively respond to training needs of responsible institutions and staff to provide social services to these families. This intervention helped the implementing organization take away several valuable lessons and insights for future interventions.

One of the key lessons from this project was the insight in the reality of families that are beneficiaries of the economic aid. Economic aid, when considered only as a cash allowance, plays a non-essential role in reducing or supporting the beneficiaries grow out of poverty. It does not contribute to the social inclusion of children, young people, women, and all families. Besides direct cash support, vulnerable need support, guidance and hands-on information on issues that are relevant in their everyday life.

The main purpose of the project was to overcome the barriers between social services staff and families with economic aid and to increase their access to the social services basket. Open Informative Days are considered as a contemporary model of services' offering. OIDs were developed in each Administrative Unit of the 3 municipalities and have provided opportunities to coordinate the services.

The informal strategy was used during the Open Informative Days, as a manner for reducing barriers between social services staff and families with low income. The representatives from Durrës, Berat and Lezha municipality have expressed their willingness to integrate the Open Informative Days on their strategic plan.

Links with photos from the activities

Photos:

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/1904723406378793>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/1871206889730445>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/1862869940564140>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/videos/562923681574991>

Project 5.2: Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

In 2022 YWCA in collaboration with CADCA has implemented a *prevention strategy against alcohol and drugs use*. The work on this project reflects its domestic mission: to create safe, healthy and drug-free communities.

This year the initiative was applied in five regions: Tirana, Shkodra, Berat, Kukes and Lezha. The approach of the project was based in the creation of coalitions. YWCA and CADCA have worked to strengthen the capacity of community coalitions by providing technical assistance and training, public policy education and advocacy, coalition-specific media strategies and special events. According to the objectives of the initiative were held various activities to increase awareness of community in these sensitive issues.

Meetings in the selected municipalities

YWCA of Albania has developed discussions and meetings with various representatives from the municipality of Kukes, Tirana, Lezha and Kukes, with the aim of establishing the community-based coalition.

During the informal meetings, YWCA of Albania has identified the following issues:

- in the municipality of Kukes there are a *lot of socio-economic problems* and a high number of families with low incomes. This situation increases the vulnerability of the community members toward substance abuse
- the lack of local *non-governmental organizations*

- the lack of *capacities of the municipality* to address sensitive issues in the society, such as drug and alcohol abuse
- the lack of *friendly and safe spaces* and initiatives for young people. In the absence of positive and appropriate social alternatives, the youth have a higher predisposition to use drugs and alcohol

In the municipality of Tirana, YWCA has achieved:

- the involvement of the initiative in the *Work Plan of the Municipality*
- the identification of the *focal points* in each administrative unit

Also, community representatives who will be involved in the Tirana coalition have shared a lot of ideas and have identified the areas for intervention, such as:

- CADCA's approach has been evaluated as *very effective*, through the involvement of all community actors
- CADCA provides a *practical methodology* on how to prevent drug and alcohol abuse
- Representatives from the municipality of Tirana consider the initiative as very necessary, due to the increase of the numbers of drug and alcohol users.
- *Young people* will have the main role in the initiative and will be responsible for the development of informative sessions and social media campaigns

In the framework of the coalition's creation, in the municipality of Lezha, were developed meetings to identify the representatives who will be part of the future activities, and therefore will be the core structure of the coalition. During the meetings was decided that:

- The coalition will operate in the *local level*
- The identification of *hot points* is a necessity
- The *involvement of young people* should be one of the priorities of the approach's coalition

- Intensive work in *schools* will help the youth to receive appropriate information in the field of addiction
- Involvement of *parents* in the initiative is a necessity

In the municipality of Lezha, the initiative was considered very useful with the aim of preventing drug and alcohol abuse.

Also, the municipality of Berat is one of the municipalities selected for the creation of community-based coalitions. Different representatives of community sectors have shown interest in this initiative. They have reported:

- a *decrease of age* among drug users
- an *increase* of the prevalence of substance use disorder
- lack of structures* that provide *specialized services* related to drug issues for children or youth
- a *small number of qualified professionals* are engaged to work in the area of drugs and alcohol treatment or prevention
- a lot of substance users are *young people*
- lack of prevention* or awareness raising initiatives
- absence of services' integration* to prevent substance use

During this year, YWCA of Albania organized the ***first trainings*** on the creation of the coalitions in *Lezha, Kukes, Berat and Tirana*.

Both trainings have explored the following *topics*:

- Prevention and coalition building overview
- Community Assessment
- Summary of the approach of prevention
- Introduction of the Strategic Planning Framework
- Membership

- Questions and answers

Also, some representatives of the coalition DUA, MUND, ARRIJ (DMA) Shkoder joined both of the trainings to share their work and successful intervention to prevent drug and alcohol abuse on their community. Each of them made a detailed presentation of the work of the coalition and explained their role and their sector's role on the coalition. The participants from the 4 areas showed great interest on the discussion and asked a lot of questions about the best practices and strategies that they could also use on their work in the community.

Link with photos

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0XAR6wy8TakEJ984HFmRTfv99JEyKcYuVDf19wk6xWdvordhWcP1PD3xrPHTqqR4zl>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid02gageGVQyrWEphMNR7PL28owTSQTvbgqUkWjFaSYWhaKaVuMK9vrNXEopmYMfYeNAI>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid08XAWitSZwSCTk841j4LAWaLWoB6h3zLJB4iMUUejt5Ut5F1hte8pcYzWqbiUVFbFl>

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid026XwtPrJB5WyVjsSUvWbXC7e5rhe8Q9DGtemGVkM1sHMqvxfmDZFY7dgRVHwqtTRYI>

Project 5.3 Empowerment of vulnerable groups on risk communication

YWCA of Albania, in collaboration with UNICEF Albania and with the support of USAID, has implemented the second phase of the project “Empowerment of vulnerable groups on risk communication” in the municipalities of Tirana, Berat, Lezha, Kukes, Shkodra and Elbasan. This initiative focused on raising the awareness of families with economic aid with more than three children and persons with special needs on the issues of maintaining their hygiene, respecting the protective measures against Covid-19, as well as sharing accurate information about the vaccination process. The target group was selected based on their higher vulnerability during humanitarian crises, as well as due to the low vaccination rates among them.

The activities organized in the framework of the project have contributed to the improvement of the general health of people with low income and disabilities through awareness raising; have increased

the social inclusion and improved their quality of life. Also, the initiative has supported the local structures through trainings and supervision to increase their capacities and to effectively respond to the poorest and most vulnerable needs with a keen focus on families with low income and persons with disabilities.

The whole purpose was to assist these families with both hard and soft skills' development in order to contribute in theirs and their children's better social inclusion and Covid-19 protection. Thus, we have aimed to achieve the objective of transferring cash to knowledge, information and skills. YWCA has applied similar projects with focus on COVID-19 and the process of vaccination and during our work, we have identified the lack of information of the target group regarding to the Covid-19 and vaccination process. For this reason, the project "*Empowerment of vulnerable groups on risk communication*" implemented as an awareness raising campaign, is considered very helpful and has served to empower the families with low incomes and persons with disabilities with knowledge and information.

Open Informative Days have been one of the main activities carried out in the framework of the project. The main goals were related to the information and awareness raising of families with economic aid and persons with disabilities on the importance of vaccination and maintaining good hygiene. These activities have been very effective because they brought together representatives of different structures with the community members. Also, the participation of different doctors in the meetings has increased their confidence in the authentication of the information, as well as the safety for the entire process.

Representatives of Social Services are among the most affected professionals during the humanitarian crises. They have faced many difficulties during the pandemic, which changed the nature of providing services and increased their challenges in interacting with the community. During this initiative, the development of trainings was considered as a positive practice, based on:

- the need for social services staff to be supervised
- the need to increase the capacities of social services staff
- the necessity to ask for advice and support from professionals in the field of protection from Covid-19 and vaccination issues

- the need to exchange and share experiences among colleagues
- the necessity to address burnout, as one of the most common problems experienced by social services employees
- the emergency to address current issues related to families with economic aid and persons with special needs in the field of protection from Covid-19 and vaccination issues

Community leaders have had an important role in the implementation of the project. This practice can also be applied to other initiatives, where sensitive and current issues are affected.

Community leaders, as influential people in the society, are a source of support for other actors, such as NGOs or governmental institutions. They are known and respected in the community, and they are familiar with the community member's needs and problems, as well as their way of functioning. On the other hand, the community trusts them because they stay in contact.

Thus, the promotion of the role of community leaders, as well as their involvement in the implementation of the project is a model that leads to the achievement of results and the fulfillment of the objectives.

The project "*Empowerment of vulnerable groups on risk communication*" was applied as an informative and awareness raising campaign. This approach was evaluated as very positive and was considered an important practice, since the lack of information among families with economic aid and persons with disabilities is very large.

Link with photos:

<https://www.facebook.com/AYWCA/posts/pfbid0t22YtiaECmypLokKXJfscuMVHppd6V5EinFevwrJB6aQ2YdHEW1eH8UveKQuurJml>

5.4 Supporting community and social services to prevent human trafficking!

YWCA of Albania has implemented the project ``Supporting community and social services to prevent human trafficking`` with the support of UNICEF, in Shkodra, Peshkopia and Vau Dejes areas.

During the implementation period, YWCA reached several targets, especially, in terms of reaching out to the direct beneficiaries. In this regard, YWCA managed to support 850 families and 1200 children that are currently living in poverty and receiving cash assistance and are more prone to fall prey of human trafficking. They had direct access to important information on social protection entitlements, and they were supported to access social care services, health services, education, and psycho-social services.

More concretely, project activities resulted into:

- Specific needs of families were identified through the organization of focus-groups and 18 mobilization meetings.
- Focus groups and interviews for an In-depth assessment of the situation of families in economic with regard to risks of human trafficking, level of information and awareness on human trafficking driving factors, but also the assessment of their level of information and awareness with regard to available social services and efforts within the community to prevent trafficking, were decisive to inform the design and implementation of support measures.
- Level and accuracy of information and awareness among families in economic aid and their children in all three municipalities of Shkodër, Lezhë and Dibër improved significantly due to regular organization of 54 Open Information Day (OID) activities.
- 100 % of the municipal staff responsible to work with the families that are beneficiaries of economic aid trained on the intervention methodology, as well as how to work with the families and raise their awareness and protection mechanisms from the risks posed by human trafficking.
- Mobilization meetings, Open Information Days, dedicated trainings of responsible staff in the municipalities triggered an improvement in the coordination among different organisations and institutions at the local level and enhanced the understanding of the importance of integrated social services to address human trafficking.
- 850 families and 1200 children of economic aid scheme were empowered with opportunities, such as vocational training, as a bridge from passivity to active participation in the social and work life.

The project built on an intervention at two different levels. In the three municipalities engaged, the project worked at different levels, with families that are beneficiaries of economic aid, social administrators, and other municipal responsible staff. Jointly with the municipalities and local services providers barriers and obstacles were identified that families face and that affect especially the wellbeing of the children. After identifying barriers, several key measures were taken to directly tackle these vulnerabilities with information and direct supplies. In addition, a strong focus was put to empower the responsible staff with approaches and tools to improve the assessment of families' needs, especially from the perspective of the wellbeing of their children, as well as to improve the way they provide the services to these families.

The project succeeded to support the delivery of integrated services and information to families in economic aid and their children as a vulnerable target of human trafficking and its consequences. A crucial dimension of this intervention was the capacity development of social administrators and municipality staff responsible for social services.

The project created an active network of families and carried out information activities through mobilization meetings. What is more important, this was crucial for the empowerment of the families. Families were exposed to facts and deconstructed myths on human trafficking, which helped them question their beliefs or attitudes towards this phenomenon. Through its positive and inclusive approach, the project helped empower families and children, who were able to overcome barriers. This positive effect was reported by all representatives of the three municipalities.