



Annual Narrative Report

Year 2023

Implemented by YWCA of Albania

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INTRODUCTION

YWCA of Albania is deeply committed to fostering support, raising awareness, and investing in capacity building while establishing crucial networks. Our organization is dedicated to engaging women, youth, and children in our various initiatives, with a keen focus on promoting justice, peace, health, human dignity and rights, freedom, and environmental stewardship, all in alignment with the core messages delineated in our strategic plan.

In pursuit of our objectives, YWCA of Albania has extended crucial aid to vulnerable communities, particularly women grappling with multifaceted challenges such as financial hardship, breast cancer, disabilities, or survivors of human trafficking. Central to our approach is the promotion of women's leadership and the provision of tailored services to effectively address these issues. Notably, we prioritize mental health and psychological support, offering complimentary online counseling sessions for women diagnosed with breast cancer and their families.

Our organization serves as a nurturing sanctuary for individuals of all ages and backgrounds, facilitating a diverse array of activities including meetings, professional training, job placement assistance, mental health awareness campaigns, support for low-income families, breast cancer awareness initiatives, gender equality advocacy, and empowerment programs aimed at curbing violent extremism. Additionally, we've established Day Care Center for the Afghan community in Lezha, spearheaded anti-drug coalitions, and provided essential psychological services for women battling breast cancer.

This annual report underscores the profound positive impact of YWCA's investments and engagements on women, children, and youth alike. Through the cultivation of capacities and the provision of effective management tools, our organization has successfully delivered vital services and programs to the community, all while upholding core values of integrity, tolerance, respect, and inclusivity. None of these achievements would have been possible without the steadfast support of our board members, staff, volunteers, partners, and donors.

Sincerely,

Donika Godaj

Executive Director

YWCA OF ALBANIA PROGRAMS

Goal 1: CONTINUOUSLY ENHANCING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF ALBANIAN WOMEN THROUGH INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Project 1.1: Strengthening Local Women's Networks Capacities on P/CVE as a Mechanism to Build Alert and Cohesive Communities

YWCA of Albania has successfully implemented the project titled "*Strengthening Local Women's Networks Capacities on P/CVE as a Mechanism to Build Alert and Cohesive Communities*" in the municipalities of Kavaja, Kukes, Berat, and Lezha. This initiative, built upon YWCA's prior work on the issue, adopts a gender-sensitive approach to prevent violent extremism.

The decision to employ a gender-sensitive approach is rooted in several key factors:

- Women are disproportionately affected by the actions of violent extremist groups.
- As primary caregivers, women possess the potential to recognize signs of violent extremism within their families when equipped with information and empowerment.
- Women can serve as positive influencers, advocating for peace, equality, and democratic values.
- The direct involvement of women in violent extremist acts has decreased over the past three years.
- While some women may join terrorist groups under coercion or familial pressure, many advocate for equality across religious lines more fervently than men.

To advance these objectives, YWCA established four ***local women's networks*** across Kavaja, Kukes, Berat, and Lezha. These networks boasted diverse representation, including members from educational institutions, local municipal offices, NGOs, law enforcement, media, and active community members.

Various activities were undertaken as part of the project, encompassing meetings with women and youth, training sessions, community outreach events, engagements with economically disadvantaged women, and culminating in a final workshop aimed at sharing best practices and fostering a sustainable network among women and girls—a critical component in preventing and reporting extremism.

Collaboration with local women's networks, alongside local and central government bodies, NGOs, and other stakeholders, yielded several tangible outcomes:

- Establishment of ***four local women's networks***

- Design and distribution of *an informative document*, reaching 800 members of the women's networks
- Creation of *women's profiles* as a strategic tool for future initiatives
- Empowerment and training of *100 women* on violent extremism, positioning them as role models for others in the fight against CVE
- Active engagement of *100 women* within their communities, aligned with the objectives of the local women's networks
- Development of a *specific web menu* on violent extremism prevention and intervention on official websites of Social Services Directorates in each municipality
- Empowerment of approximately *1,000 women* through various communication channels (e.g., informal meetings, social media, videos, brochures)
- *4 Memoranda of Understanding* signed
- *Open Informative Days* delivered
- Enhanced *cooperation* and *consolidation* of community structures among diverse stakeholders
- Provision of comprehensive information to women, enabling them to recognize and prevent extremist *ideologies* and *actions*
- Promotion of *volunteerism* to advocate for peace, democracy, and equality
- Boosted *self-esteem* among vulnerable women involved in the initiative
- Identification of *best practices* in preventing violent extremism
- Increased *participation of women* in addressing sensitive societal issues through the *creation of networks*.



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

Project 2.1: Enhancing and Expanding Library Services Program

The Library Project aligns with the primary goals of YWCA, aiming to empower women and girls *by fostering a love for reading*. This initiative not only enriches their cultural and social understanding but also catalyzes positive transformations in their lives, especially in the face of decreased reading habits due to economic challenges in Albania.

YWCA's library boasts a diverse collection, spanning classics, works by Albanian authors, as well as psychological, philosophical, and sociological texts. Additionally, medical, historical, and foreign language books are available. Of particular importance are the children's books, featuring stories, fairy tales, and

guidance for healthy growth and education—valuable resources for both parents and educators. With access to the works of esteemed Albanian and international authors, our library currently houses **3,500** books.

Reading plays a pivotal role in the *empowerment of women and girls*, fostering mental, emotional, and psychological growth. It serves as a gateway to new knowledge and ideas, enabling individuals to explore diverse perspectives and discover themselves through literature's profound reflections.

The Library Project aims not only to enhance literacy but also to promote emotional well-being, as books are reservoirs of emotions and inspiration. Women can draw motivation and derive *inspiration* from literature, thereby effecting positive changes in their lives. By providing access to captivating books that ignite imagination and sustain interest, YWCA seeks to instill a lifelong passion for reading among women and girls.

Continuing to prioritize women and girls' education remains central to our strategy for empowerment. Through the Library Project, we are committed to nurturing minds, expanding horizons, and empowering individuals to realize their full potential.



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 a collaborative initiative spearheaded by YWCA of Albania with support from UNICEF. Against the backdrop of the arrival of around 500 Afghan individuals, including both adults and children, in Albania as of mid-October 2021, the project addresses the urgent need to provide a nurturing environment for Afghan young children and their families. With approximately 40% of evacuees being children, equating to around 640 children in total, the primary

objective was to establish **two Early Childhood Development (ECD)** centers in Lezha and Durrës, serving as havens of safety and education. Initially, YWCA set up two Day Care Centers—one in Durrës and the other in Shengjin. However, due to the higher concentration of Afghan refugees in Shengjin, the center there remained operational, offering an array of essential services. Central to our approach is the philosophy of **non-formal learning**, particularly beneficial for preschool-aged children. This approach prioritizes the learner's needs and is recognized as highly effective in early childhood care and education.



Empowering Afghan parents is a core focus of our efforts. Through targeted meetings, we raise awareness about effective parenting strategies and actively involve them in the Day Care Center programs. Discussions cover a range of topics, including mental health, positive discipline, and the significance of play, fostering a supportive network of parents advocating for progressive parenting approaches.

Moreover, training sessions conducted with preschool **teachers and educators** cover various themes, including the introduction of non-formal education approaches, socio-emotional learning, and child-centered methodologies. These sessions significantly enhance the capacities of educators, contributing to the success of the program.

Psychosocial activities are integral to the holistic development of preschool children, promoting emotional well-being and social skills. Through engaging games, storytelling, and collaborative play, children learn to express emotions, build relationships, and navigate social interactions effectively.

Expanding our reach, we've extended services to the local public kindergarten in Shëngjin, encompassing activities tailored for preschool children, informative sessions for parents, and discussions with teachers.

Joint activities involving Afghan and Albanian parents and children foster integration, cultural understanding, and coexistence based on principles of peace and diversity.

Human stories, derived from interviews and direct observations, have been instrumental in depicting the challenges faced by Afghan children and parents. These narratives personalize the project's impact, evoking empathy and motivation within the community, and have been widely shared through social media channels and YWCA of Albania's website. Additionally, we've launched a **podcast series** titled "*From Kabul to Kindergarten*," shedding light on the resilience of Afghan children and the compassionate response of the Albanian community. Through poignant narratives, the series aims to raise awareness about the critical importance of providing a nurturing environment for displaced children. To further disseminate knowledge, we've produced a **series of publications**, including manuals on positive parenting, children's rights, and brochures on child development, nutrition, and hygiene.

Through the concerted efforts of YWCA of Albania and its partners, "Early Childhood Centers as Creative and Safe Spaces!" strives to create an inclusive and supportive environment for Afghan children and families, fostering resilience, learning, and mutual understanding.



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

Project 4.1: Breast cancer awareness campaign

YWCA of Albania's 15th Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign: "Pink Ribbon Reminds Me..."

The 15th edition of our Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign, themed "*Pink Ribbon Reminds Me...*", represents a significant milestone in our ongoing mission to raise awareness, encourage early detection, and provide support to those impacted by breast cancer. Over the past decade and a half, we've witnessed remarkable progress in our endeavors to combat this disease. This campaign centers around the iconic pink ribbon symbol, serving as a *poignant reminder for individuals to remain vigilant about breast health* and take proactive steps in the fight against breast cancer. Our comprehensive report offers insights into the campaign's activities, impact, and the progress achieved over the years.

Supported by esteemed partners such as *Hoffmann – La Roche LTD, U.S. Embassy-Tirana, Tirana Municipality, Top Channel, OTP Bank Albania, Arté Boutique Hotel, Dominer, Credins Bank, NRG Radio, The Pilates LAB, UNFPA Albania, Hausbrandt, Albanian Design Academy, and others*, YWCA's Pink Ribbon has remained a steadfast presence, offering vital services to girls and women throughout the year.

Key Highlights of the Campaign:

- ***Free Online Psychological Counseling:*** Our ongoing commitment to providing free online psychological counseling for women diagnosed with breast cancer and their families has supported *70 women* and numerous family members. This service addresses the emotional and psychological aspects of the disease, enhancing well-being and fostering coping strategies.
- ***Social Media Campaign:*** Leveraging the power of social media, we've continued to educate, support, and inspire individuals and communities in the fight against breast cancer. Regularly sharing informative posts across all channels, we've reached a wide audience and *raised awareness* effectively.
- ***Activity at the Oncology Hospital in Tirana:*** YWCA's Pink Ribbon stood in solidarity with breast cancer fighters/survivors at the *Oncology Hospital in Tirana*, providing hope and encouragement. On International Women's Day, *March 8th*, we distributed informative materials, essential items, and introduced the *fjongoroze.al* platform for online psychological counseling.
- ***Letters from Breast Cancer Survivors:*** A *new addition* to this year's campaign, *letters* penned by breast cancer survivors shared personal stories that were adapted to *videos*, offering support and inspiration to others facing similar challenges. These narratives have had a profound impact on raising awareness and advocating for breast cancer awareness.

- **"The Summer of Pink Ribbon" Challenge:** From June to August 2023, we launched an online challenge encouraging solidarity and support, featuring the ambassador of our cause, Ermonela Jaho, and participants from across the community.
- **Youth Engagement:** Collaborating with *schools and youth groups*, we conducted educational activities focused on breast cancer awareness, including competitions and quizzes. Secondary and high school students gained valuable knowledge and became advocates for breast cancer prevention.
- **Outdoor Pilates:** Promoting the importance of a *healthy lifestyle*, we organized outdoor Pilates sessions, benefiting both physical and psychological well-being. This initiative fostered community engagement and contributed to breast cancer prevention efforts.
- **Stadium Activities:** Partnering with *Partizani Football Club, Tirana Football Club, and Albanian Basketball Federation* we integrated breast cancer awareness messages into sports events, emphasizing the collective responsibility in the fight against breast cancer.
- **Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Tirana:** Our symbolic walk, a hallmark event of the campaign, brought together partners, survivors, community members, and supporters to honor the journey and impact of the Pink Ribbon Cause. Held on *October 23, 2023*, the event united participants in solidarity and determination.

As we reflect on the achievements of our 15th Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign, we renew our commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those affected by breast cancer. With unwavering support from our partners and the community, we remain steadfast in our mission to raise awareness, promote early detection, and provide vital support services. Together, we continue to make strides in the fight against breast cancer.

<https://fjongoroze.al/>



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

Project 5.1: Municipalities support prevention of human trafficking through integrated social protection measures

Albania grapples with persistent unemployment rates, particularly affecting its youth and female populations. Historical and structural factors have not only shaped the country's socio-economic landscape but also influenced the prevalence of human trafficking, both domestically and internationally. Human trafficking not only harms its direct victims but also impacts the broader communities where it occurs. Effective social protection measures are crucial in combating human trafficking by reducing the vulnerabilities of potential victims and supporting the reintegration of survivors. By providing adequate support, impoverished households and vulnerable individuals can feel more secure and connected to essential services.

Despite strides in policy and legal frameworks surrounding human trafficking in Albania, the issue persists, posing a continuous threat to hundreds of individuals each year. Identifying trafficking victims within irregular migration flows, facilitating their reintegration, and empowering survivors remain significant challenges. Vulnerable families often lack access to social protection entitlements due to limited information and various barriers, such as communication challenges and unclear administrative procedures. Social administrators also face constraints in providing necessary support efficiently.

To address these challenges, YWCA of Albania is implementing the project *"Municipalities Support Prevention of Human Trafficking Through Integrated Social Protection Measures"* in the municipalities of Kukës, Kamëz, Pukë, and Bulqizë. This initiative focuses on empowering families with economic assistance to prevent trafficking.

In 2023, notable achievements include:

- Conducting face-to-face meetings involving **985** individuals.
- Organizing **24** Open Informative Days, attended by families receiving economic aid, along with representatives from various sectors including Social Services, Employment Offices, Vocational Education and Training, Healthcare, and Municipality Staff in selected areas.
- Training **93** social welfare personnel and municipal staff.

These achievements represent significant progress in the ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking and promote social protection measures in Albania. Through continued collaboration and dedication, we aim to further strengthen our impact and support vulnerable individuals and families across the country.



Project 5.2: Building healthy, safe, and drug-free communities in Albania

In collaboration with CADCA, YWCA continued its efforts in 2023 to implement a prevention strategy against alcohol and drug use, aiming to create safe, healthy, and drug-free communities across five regions: Tirana, Shkodra, Berat, Kukes, and Lezha. This initiative focused on data gathering, recruitment of new members, and increasing the visibility of the coalitions' work as a means of engaging the community and raising awareness.

Key Activities and Achievements:

- **Communities' Assessment:** Coalitions conducted thorough assessments of their communities through questionnaires, observations, and interviews with various stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and residents. The purpose was to identify the current situation regarding substance use, collect data, and design intervention strategies tailored to local conditions.
- **Vetting of Coalition Members:** Following CADCA's approach, YWCA of Albania engaged in vetting processes for all training participants, including law enforcement representatives and civilians from other sectors. This ensured the integrity and effectiveness of coalition members.
- **Internal Informal Meetings:** Coalitions organized informal meetings with participants from diverse backgrounds, including Community Centers, NGOs, local police, municipality staff, health care services, and schools. Discussions covered various topics such as the need for institutional support, group integrity, data analysis, and the inclusion of new members.
- **Review of Membership:** Emphasizing inclusivity, coalitions aimed to recruit representatives from all sectors of the community, particularly prioritizing sectors lacking representation. Youth involvement was a key objective, with many students joining coalitions and demonstrating enthusiasm for collaboration.
- **Distribution of Leaflets:** Coalition members distributed informational leaflets to community members and structures, introducing the coalition's mission and vision and raising awareness about the importance of prevention and intervention.
- **Trainings on Coalition Creation:** YWCA of Albania and CADCA organized second and third trainings on coalition creation in Kukes, Lezha, Berat, and Tirana. Topics included community assessment, logic models, comprehensive strategies, and essential elements of community assessment, ensuring participants were equipped to address substance abuse effectively.
- **Cooperation Agreements:** YWCA finalized cooperation agreements with four municipalities to establish coalitions, outlining plans, policies, and strategies to reduce drug consumption rates through empowerment, training, and support.
- **Awareness-Raising Activities:** Coalitions organized various awareness-raising activities, including events in Shkodra to promote a healthy, drug-free community through artistic expressions and the launch event of CAD Tirana coalition, targeting high school and secondary school students to raise awareness about the negative impacts of drugs and the coalition's existence.

These activities and achievements signify the commitment of YWCA of Albania and CADCA to combat substance abuse and create resilient, supportive communities across Albania. Through collaboration,

education, and community engagement, these coalitions strive to make a tangible difference in the lives of individuals and families affected by substance abuse.



This table provides a clear overview of the beneficiaries of each program, categorized by gender and program type.

<i>Programs</i>	<i>Women and girls</i>	<i>Men and Boys</i>
Violent Extremism (Empowerment and Capacity Building)	1000	200
Education Services (Information Sessions and Psychological Support)	800 Afghan parents	500 Afghan parents
Education Services (Non-formal education and psychological support)	80 Afghan children	100 Afghan children
Health (Online psychological counselling for women diagnosed with breast cancer and their family members)	100	
Health (Awareness raising activities related to breast cancer prevention)	1500 community members	500 community members
Human trafficking (Information and Empowerment)	744 beneficiaries of economic aid	241 beneficiaries of economic aid
Human Trafficking (Empowerment and Capacity building)	77 social welfare personnel and municipalities staff	16 social welfare personnel and municipalities staff
Community based Coalitions (Capacity building)	90 representatives of 12 community sectors	43 representatives of 12 community sectors
Community based Coalitions (Awareness raising and empowerment)	360 community members	140 community members