

Annual Narrative Report

Year 2025

Implemented by YWCA of Albania

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INTRODUCTION

YWCA of Albania remains committed to its mission of empowering women, girls, youth, and children, as well as strengthening communities through inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based interventions. Throughout 2025, YWCA continued to serve as a safe, supportive, and dynamic space for individuals from diverse backgrounds, addressing key social challenges related to gender equality, health, education, social inclusion, psycho-emotional well-being, and environmental responsibility.

Building on its strategic priorities, YWCA focused on supporting vulnerable groups, including women facing health and socio-economic challenges, at-risk children and youth, refugee communities, and families in need of protection and care. Throughout the year, YWCA's approach centered on leadership development, access to quality services, psychosocial support, community engagement, and advocacy, while simultaneously establishing new partnerships with national institutions, international organizations, local governments, and civil society actors.

A central pillar of YWCA's work in 2025 was also the promotion of human dignity, equality, and sustainability. Through educational programs, awareness campaigns, capacity-building initiatives, and the provision of direct services, the organization contributed to strengthening individual capacities and community structures, ensuring that no one is left behind.

This annual report presents an overview of the main programs and projects implemented by YWCA of Albania during 2025, highlighting achievements, impact, and lessons learned. These accomplishments reflect the dedication of the staff, volunteers, governing board, partners, and donors of YWCA, whose continued support made this work possible.

GOAL 1: CONTINUE TO PROMOTE THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF ALBANIAN WOMEN THROUGH INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Project 1.1: “Women and Youth as Guardians of the Land”

YWCA of Albania, with the support of *BOOST Balkans*, began implementing this project in October 2025, as an integrated intervention aimed at empowering women and young people in rural areas, particularly young girls, to take on active leadership roles in environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and local decision-making within their communities.

The project is being implemented in the municipalities of *Berat and Shkodër*, and its main goal is *to empower rural women and youth as community leaders and active protectors of the land*, by strengthening their capacities in climate action, sustainable natural resource management, and environmental advocacy at the local level.

The project combines gender equality, environmental awareness, and rural development, promoting new models of intergenerational collaboration and positioning the community as a key actor in solving environmental issues.

➤ *Description of activities and progress*

During the period October – December 2025, the primary focus was on forming local groups, mobilizing the community, and preparing for the training phase.

During this stage:

- Orientation and consultation meetings were held in rural communities in Berat and Shkodër;
- Key project beneficiaries were identified, ensuring gender and intergenerational representation;
- Local Eco-Action groups were created in each area, composed of women and youth who will work together throughout the project;
- A detailed training plan and intervention methodology were developed.

By the end of December 2025, 4 groups had been created, representing a deliberate combination of rural women and youth, fostering intergenerational collaboration and the sharing of traditional knowledge with the energy and perspective of the younger generation. In parallel, the training process for 80 women and 30 young people from both areas began, and it will continue throughout the next phases of the project.

➤ *Expected results*

- **110 trained local leaders** in climate action and environmental advocacy (80 women, 30 youth);
- **4 active Eco-Action & Advocacy groups** in Berat and Shkodër;
- At least **2 policy dialogues with municipalities**, with concrete proposals for climate change adaptation;
- Over **500 community members engaged** through awareness activities;
- A **final report** with best practices and success stories for replication.

Overall, “*Women and Youth as Guardians of the Land*” aims to create rural communities that are more sustainable, better organized, and more capable of protecting their land, natural resources, and their future.

Photos from the activities



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

Project 2.1: EmpowerHer – Young Women Leading Climate Action for a Sustainable Future

This project was implemented by YWCA of Albania with the support of *World YWCA*, during the period November 2024 – September 2025, in the cities of *Tirana, Berat, and Shkodër*. The project aimed to empower young women and girls aged 18–30 to take active leadership roles in climate

action, environmental responsibility, and community engagement, directly linking gender equality with the challenges of climate change and sustainable development.

The project engaged **90 girls and young women** from the three participating cities. They first took part in orientation sessions, followed by a structured cycle of trainings on leadership, climate action, community organizing, and advocacy. The trainings were based on the *RiseUp! Leadership Guide and the World YWCA Feminist Consultation Methodology*, using interactive methods such as practical workshops, group discussions, individual reflections, creative exercises, and simulations.

This approach contributed not only to increasing technical knowledge but also to developing participants' self-confidence, communication skills, and critical thinking.

After the capacity-building phase, the girls were organized into working groups and engaged in the process of co-creating environmental community initiatives. During this phase, they identified concrete environmental issues in their communities, such as waste pollution, lack of recycling, plastic pollution, and low awareness about climate change. As a result, they designed and implemented **six youth-led community initiatives**, including:

- Local campaigns for waste reduction and waste sorting;
- Recycling and awareness-raising activities in schools and communities;
- Greening activities and tree-planting in public spaces;
- Establishment of youth environmental clubs;
- Educational workshops on climate, sustainability, and responsible consumption;
- Informative activities and online campaigns to increase public awareness.

➤ **Results and impact**

- **90 young women and girls were trained** and empowered;
- **6 environmental community initiatives were successfully implemented** in Tirana, Berat, and Shkodër;
- **Over 2,000 community members directly benefited** from public activities, workshops, awareness campaigns, and community events;

- **A significant increase was observed in self-confidence** and participants' ability to speak publicly, lead processes, and collaborate with local actors;
- **New cooperation networks were created** among young women, schools, local authorities, and civil society organizations.

Overall, “EmpowerHer” contributed to the creation of a sustainable, youth-driven, and feminist model of climate action in Albania. The project demonstrated that investing in young women generates multidimensional impact – strengthening communities, advancing climate action, and building new leadership that is engaged and conscious of social and environmental justice.

Photos from the activities





Project 2.2: Eco-Girls+ – Building a Circular Economy with Equality Starting From School

This project was implemented by YWCA of Albania with the support of *EDEN Center* in Shkodër district, during the period September 2025 – January 2026, with the aim of empowering adolescent girls to act as leaders of environmental and social change within their school communities. The project was carried out in two educational institutions: the “*28 Nëntori*” High School in Shkodër and the “*Adem Haxhija*” High School in Postribë, combining environmental education with gender equality and active participation of girls in decision-making.

Specific objectives included:

- increasing girls’ knowledge and skills on circular economy, recycling, and re-use;
- developing leadership, organizational, and decision-making skills;
- creating sustainable environmental mechanisms in schools;
- encouraging creativity and innovation through art and material re-use;
- promoting the active involvement of the school community in sustainable practices.

In the initial phase, the girls participated in *educational and creative workshops* on circular economy, environmental responsibility, and gender equality. These sessions were designed as spaces for collaboration and reflection, where girls not only gained theoretical knowledge but were also encouraged to share experiences, identify concrete issues within their schools, and propose practical solutions. The methodology used was participatory and focused on girls as the main agents of change.

✓ Creation of “Eco Corner” kiosks

One of the most important and sustainable results of the project was the creation and operationalization of *two “Eco Corner” kiosks*, one in each school. These spaces were designed as material exchange points and educational hubs for circular economy. The girls were directly involved in:

- ✓ planning the physical space;
- ✓ dividing roles and responsibilities;

- ✓ drafting the kiosk’s operating regulations;
- ✓ managing and promoting the kiosk within the school.

The “Eco Corner” serves as a practical mechanism where students can bring items they no longer use and exchange them, promoting re use, solidarity, and waste reduction. Through this process, the girls applied concrete organizational, planning, and decision-making skills, becoming active managers of a functional structure within their school.

✓ **“Collect, Don’t Throw” campaign and creative activities**

As part of the project, the awareness campaign “Collect, Don’t Throw” was implemented, involving the collection of recyclable materials and their transformation into creative works. The girls created artistic and functional objects such as clothing, bags, accessories, decorative items, soaps and other handmade products, demonstrating the practical potential of re-use.

A key element of this component was the organization of the *“From Waste to Art”* exhibition in both schools. The exhibitions were conceived as interactive events where the girls showcased their creations, organized quizzes, educational games, creative activities, and presentations for other students. Dozens of students, teachers, and parents participated, turning the exhibitions into spaces of dialogue, inspiration, and reflection on responsible consumption.

✓ **Inter-school visits and experience sharing**

An important component of the project was the organization of inter-school visits, where girls from both schools had the opportunity to share experiences, learn from one another, and strengthen their sense of networking. These activities contributed to the creation of a community of engaged girls who see themselves as part of a broader movement for change.

➤ **Results and impact**

- **60 girls trained and empowered** in circular economy, leadership, and creativity.
- **2 functional “Eco Corner” kiosks**, managed entirely by the girls.

- **4 creative workshops, 2 school exhibitions, and several awareness campaigns** successfully implemented.
- Approximately **500 indirect beneficiaries** within the school communities.
- **A significant increase in girls' self-confidence, initiative, and leadership roles** within the schools.
- **Establishment of sustainable practices** that continue even after the project's completion.

In conclusion, “Eco-Girls+” demonstrated that when girls are provided with space, trust, and practical tools, they are fully capable of leading real processes of change. The project generated not only tangible environmental results but also social and cultural transformation, building a generation of more aware, engaged, and empowered girls ready to positively influence their communities.

Photos from the activities







Project 2.3: Expansion and Enhancement of the Library Service Program

The Library Project aligns with YWCA’s core objectives for the emancipation of women and girls by *promoting a passion for reading* as a form of learning that enables cultural and social growth, while also creating positive changes in their lives. The YWCA Library contains books from various categories: classical literature, works by Albanian authors, psychology, philosophy, and sociology books; medical books; foreign-language books; historical books, and more. A significant focus of our library is children’s literature—storybooks, fairy tales, and guidance materials for parents and teachers that support healthy growth and education. In our library, readers have access to some of the best Albanian and international authors. Currently, the library holds ***3,500 books***.

Books play *an essential role in empowering women and girls*, as they positively influence emotional and psychological well-being; they offer opportunities to learn new things, explore new ideas, and expand knowledge. The Library Project aims to improve the emotional well-being of readers, since books are rich in emotional experiences.

Women need access to books that stimulate their imagination and spark their interest, encouraging them to continue reading throughout their lives. YWCA will continue to place special emphasis on the *education of women and girls as the key pathway to their empowerment*.



GOAL 3: OPERATE AS ONE OF THE BEST ENTITIES IN PRACTICE FOR PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Project 3.1: “Early Childhood Centers as Creative and Safe Spaces!”

This project was implemented by YWCA during the period **2022–2025**, with the support of *UNICEF* and the *Government of the United States*. Throughout this multi-year cycle, the initiative represented a sustainable and structured intervention aimed at guaranteeing the right to quality education, protection, and well-being for children in early childhood, specifically for Afghan refugee children and their families temporarily sheltered in Shěngjin. The project was designed as a comprehensive response to the complex needs of children affected

by displacement, trauma, and insecurity, combining non-formal education, psychosocial support, parental empowerment, and the capacity-building of education professionals.

The core of the project was the Day Center in Shēngjīn, which for several years provided an integrated package of educational and psychosocial services. Educational activities were based on non-formal approaches, learning through play, and trauma-sensitive practices, supporting children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. The monthly thematic programs integrated storytelling, creative art, music and movement, sensory play, group activities, emotional intelligence development, and multilingual elements to encourage communication, self-expression, and inclusion.

Main services and activities provided

- *Non-formal, play-based educational activities* for preschool children.
- *Psychosocial support and counselling* for children and parents.
- *Art and play therapy* as tools for emotional expression and healing.
- *Informative and awareness-raising meetings* with parents about child development.
- *Creation and functioning of the Parents' Club* as a space for mutual support.
- *Thematic workshops for parents* on positive parenting, emotional well-being, behavior management, and gender equality.
- *Training, mentoring, and professional support* for Day Center staff.
- *Training and mentoring for local kindergarten teachers* on inclusive practices and trauma-sensitive teaching.

Psychosocial support was a fundamental component of the project throughout all its years of implementation. Trauma-sensitive practices were integrated into daily activities, helping children identify and express emotions, develop coping strategies, and build emotional resilience. At the same time, parents received support through weekly meetings and structured workshops, which contributed to strengthening parent-child relationships and creating more stable family environments.

➤ Results and impact

- Over **700 Afghan refugee children benefited** from the Day Center’s services throughout the implementation period, with an average of **40 children involved in each active cycle**.
- Around **3,100 parents and caregivers participated** in weekly meetings, thematic workshops, and awareness activities.
- **12 types of integrated educational and psychosocial services were offered** to children and their families.
- More than **100 preschool educators and kindergarten teachers were trained and mentored** in inclusive and trauma-sensitive practices.
- **Community art exhibitions were organized**, promoting children’s creativity and cultural exchange between the refugee and host communities.
- **Human-centered stories were documented**, reflecting the long-term impact of the project on the lives of children and beneficiary families.
- **A manual for non-formal early childhood education, a child rights manual, and a child protection and education manual were developed**, available in Albanian and Dari, serving as sustainable resources for parents and educators.

Overall, the project significantly improved access to quality education and psychosocial support for Afghan refugee children, strengthened parents, and increased the capacities of education professionals. Through an integrated and sustainable approach, the initiative directly addressed gaps in early childhood services in humanitarian contexts, offering a functional model that combines child protection, non-formal education, and emotional support. Additionally, the project contributed to raising awareness among local actors about the importance of early childhood education as a key element for social integration and long-term child development.

Photos from the activities





GOAL 4: HEALTH SERVICE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS – RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT HEALTH AND BREAST CANCER

Project 4.1: Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign

During 2025, YWCA implemented the *17th national Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign*, a comprehensive and multidimensional program that intertwined public awareness, institutional advocacy, art, sports, culture, and community mobilization across the country. The campaign aimed to increase public knowledge about the prevention and early detection of breast cancer, reduce the stigma that accompanies the disease, empower the voices of patients and survivors, and advocate for more accessible and higher-quality health and social services for women affected by breast cancer.

Building upon YWCA’s many years of experience in this field, the 2025 campaign was designed as an integrated intervention, addressing breast cancer not only as a health issue, but also as a social, emotional, and fundamental human rights issue. At the heart of the campaign were the real experiences of women, their concrete needs, and the urgency for more inclusive and patient-centered public policies.

🎀 Public communication and social media campaign

A key pillar of the campaign was public communication and engagement through social media. The online campaign “**I Am Strong**” brought together well-known public figures from various fields, who used their platforms to convey messages of solidarity, strength, and the importance of early diagnosis. Through coordinated actions across social networks, the campaign reached wide and diverse audiences, contributing to the normalization of public discourse on breast cancer and reinforcing positive narratives about survival, resilience, and collective responsibility.

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To further expand its reach through traditional media, the campaign included participation in the television program “**Big Brother VIP**”, one of the most-watched formats in Albania. In this context, symbolic vouchers for echography and mammography were gifted to the participants, using the show's visibility to normalize health check-ups and encourage women to prioritize their health.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DG00Fa6N5tn/>

Community engagement and the voice of patients

Community engagement was strengthened through **roundtable discussions with breast cancer patients, organized in Elbasan, Fier, Vlorë, and Berat**. These roundtables were designed as safe, inclusive, and supportive spaces where women living with or after breast cancer could openly share their personal experiences, challenges, and sources of strength. Placing the voices of patients at the center aimed to break the silence and stigma surrounding the disease and to foster greater solidarity among women.

Beyond their psychosocial value, these roundtables also served as mechanisms for advocacy and learning. Women discussed their experiences with diagnosis, treatment, post-treatment follow-up, and social support, highlighting gaps in local health, psychological, and institutional services.

The insights and reflections gathered contributed to strengthening YWCA’s advocacy efforts for more accessible, integrated, and patient-centered services.



🌸 Sports, well-being, and the inclusion of men as allies in the fight against breast cancer

Sports and physical activity played a central role in promoting health and raising awareness. YWCA organized the **“Pink Ride”** spinning session, as well as the **“Fit for Pink”** event at the Artificial Lake Park in Tirana, linking physical well-being with prevention and health care.

Awareness was further expanded through banners and pink-and-black jerseys worn by male and female players during basketball and football matches.

These activities carried a clear message of inclusivity, *engaging men and boys as allies*, and reinforcing the idea that breast cancer awareness is a shared social responsibility.



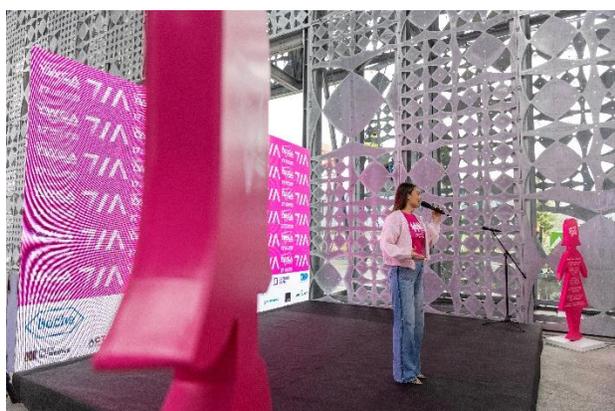


Symbolic walk for breast cancer awareness

A highlight of the campaign was the **annual march**, which this year was organized in a highly symbolic and widely frequented location: the **Tirana International Airport**. By holding the walk in one of the most visited public spaces in the country, the campaign aimed to amplify its message of prevention, early detection, and solidarity—reaching not only participants, but also travelers, airport staff, and the general public present at the venue. The walk brought together breast cancer survivors, patients, their family members, civil society representatives, institutional partners, and citizens, creating a powerful moment of collective presence and shared purpose. Walking together in this environment transformed the airport into a space of awareness and reflection, symbolizing movement, journeys, and hope—mirroring the personal journey of women affected by breast cancer.

Before the walk began, YWCA of Albania volunteers distributed informational materials and campaign symbols such as **pink ribbons, T-shirts, and brochures about self-examination and early detection**, aiming to increase awareness about the disease. The activity concluded with the **“Pink Ribbon Volunteer” awards ceremony**, recognizing individuals and institutions that have supported the cause with dedication and commitment over the years.

The event helped normalize conversations about this illness and reinforced the message that breast cancer awareness should be part of everyday public life, not limited to closed or specialized environments. Beyond its symbolic value, the march served as a public call to action, emphasizing the importance of regular check-ups, timely diagnosis, and ongoing social and institutional support for breast cancer patients.



Culture and art as tools for awareness

➤ “Listen to our voices”

This activity, held at the Parliament of Albania, represented one of the most powerful advocacy moments within the 17th Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign. For the first time, breast cancer patients had the opportunity to speak directly from the parliamentary seats, addressing decision-makers within the institution where laws and public policies are crafted. This symbolic reversal of

roles placed patients at the center of political attention and transformed the Parliament into a platform for lived experiences, truth, and accountability.

During the activity, women who have battled breast cancer *shared their personal testimonies*, highlighting the realities of diagnosis, treatment, follow-up care, and the emotional and financial burdens faced by patients and their families. Speaking in their own voices and from their seats in the Parliament chamber, they articulated concrete challenges related to access to early screenings, quality healthcare services, psychological support, and social protection.

A central component of the event was the *presentation of an open letter addressed to decision-makers*, clearly outlining the key services that need to be strengthened or created for breast cancer patients. The letter called for improved access to diagnostic services, better coverage of treatment costs, and the development of patient-centered integrated healthcare pathways. By formally submitting this letter in Parliament, the campaign translated the voices of patients into concrete advocacy demands, reinforcing the message that meaningful policy changes must be based on the real needs and experiences of those directly affected.





➤ **Stage Podcast "Tefta Tashko Koço - Kënga Ime Ndaj Nat' Here"**

As part of the cultural and awareness-raising dimension of the campaign, a concert dedicated to the life and legacy of Tefta Tashko Koço was organized, merging art, memory, and advocacy in a powerful and emotionally meaningful way. The concert honored Tefta Tashko Koço not only as *one of Albania's most renowned sopranos*, but also as *a woman who was diagnosed with breast cancer*—making her story deeply connected to the message of the campaign. Through classical music and artistic performance, the concert created a reflective space that highlighted the human dimension of breast cancer—the emotional depth, personal battles, and enduring strength. By linking cultural heritage with contemporary health advocacy, the event helped build a bridge between generations and reach audiences that might not typically engage with awareness campaigns.

At the same time, the concert had a direct social impact. All proceeds from ticket sales were dedicated to supporting YWCA's psychological counseling services for breast cancer patients and their families, helping address the often-overlooked emotional and mental health needs associated with this illness. By contributing to these services, the audience became active supporters of women and families facing the psychological challenges of diagnosis, treatment, and survival.

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➤ **"I Am More Beautiful Than My Battle"**

This activity, organized in collaboration with *Coin Tirana*, created a positive and supportive space where women had the opportunity to share their experiences, affirm their identity and beauty beyond the challenges of illness, and feel valued by the community. The event aimed to challenge the stereotypes and social perceptions that often associate cancer only with loss or weakness, emphasizing that women who go through this experience remain strong, beautiful, and full of life. The activity promoted body positivity and self-image, encouraging women to accept and celebrate their bodies even after the physical changes that treatment may bring.





➤ **“12 Stories of Courage” book**

The voices of patients were further amplified through the book *“12 Stories of Courage”*, created to bring their experiences to the forefront by offering an honest and intimate portrayal of the emotional, social, and medical realities of breast cancer, while highlighting resilience, dignity, and inner strength. Through personal narratives, the book sheds light on different stages of the breast cancer journey—from diagnosis and treatment to survival—capturing not only moments of fear and uncertainty, but also those of hope, solidarity, and transformation. By sharing these lived experiences, **“12 Stories of Courage”** contributes to breaking the stigma and silence surrounding breast cancer, encouraging open dialogue and fostering a broader public understanding of the challenges women face throughout this journey. The book’s promotion took place through events organized in several cities, creating safe and reflective spaces for dialogue between patients, family members, professionals, and the wider community.

These activities allowed the authors and contributors to share their stories directly with the public, fostering empathy and human connection, while reinforcing key messages about early detection, psychological support, and the importance of comprehensive care.



➤ **Installation: “The Sun of the Following Day”**

The campaign concluded with a powerful public art intervention titled **“The Sun of the Following Day”**, installed near the iconic mosaic **“Albania.”** This installation transformed a well-known

national symbol into a space for reflection, using art as a tool to confront, humanize, and raise awareness about the realities of breast cancer in a direct and uncompromising way. In the installation, the central female figure of the mosaic was reimagined as a woman without hair and with one breast removed, offering a striking visual representation of the physical impact of breast cancer and its treatments. The intervention invited passersby to pause, reflect, and emotionally connect with the lived experiences of women affected by breast cancer.

Through this installation, the campaign emphasized *the role of art in driving social change*, using visual expression to amplify patients' narratives and promote empathy. "The Sun of the Following Day" served as a lasting reminder of the courage of women facing breast cancer and reinforced the collective responsibility to support early detection, comprehensive care, and solidarity with all those impacted by the disease in Albanian society.

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Overall, the 2025 campaign succeeded in effectively combining media communication, community dialogue, sports and wellness activities, cultural expression, and institutional advocacy. Through this integrated approach, the campaign strengthened public awareness, encouraged early detection, amplified the voices of patients, and reinforced collective commitment to improving the quality of life and the services available to women affected by breast cancer across the country.