



QENDRA SHQIPTARE PER POPULLSINE DHE ZHVILLIMIN  
ALBANIAN CENTER FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2021





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# CONTENTS

<u>BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>ACPD STAFF IN 2021</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>KEY SUCCESSES AND MAJOR INITIATIVES IN 2021</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>ACPD PROJECTS IN 2021</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>ACPD 2021 PHOTO GALLERY</u>	<u>122</u>



## BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

The Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) has been very active in addressing issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), reproductive coercion, bullying and sexist attitudes. Sexist coercion, violence, and economic, social and reproductive exploitation cannot be understood in isolation from those social norms that govern gender relations and make such violations acceptable. Violence and marginalization are used to punish perceived transgressions of gender roles. These phenomena are not new to Albania. They are rooted in patriarchal traditions that have long shaped Albanian society, such as strict gender roles, patriarchal authority, and respect for the code of honour, shaming, poverty, and inequality in the area of employment or education.

While family planning services are provided free for insured women, often women and girls do not use this right for a variety of reasons including fear of possible bias by service providers; fear of negative attitudes by community members, etc. Unofficial sources indicate a higher number of abortions than those published.

In the frame of fundamental rights, the main issues include improvement of the Law “On Protection against Discrimination” in a number of aspects, such as terminology, specification of the categories of discrimination, and related procedures.

The first draft on Law of Reproductive Health was developed and disseminated for consultation and feedback to key stakeholders. After identifying other gaps in relation to developments in areas of health and technology, and human rights, the working group prepared a detailed report where it rationalized the need for developing an entire new law on RH in 2021. The law was revised in 2021 and it is expected to be passed by Albanian Parliament in 2022.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection Efforts has placed efforts to strengthen the legislation that addresses gender-biased sex selective abortion. The latter practice continues, nonetheless. Efforts should thus be stepped up to ensure monitoring of the practice. Improvements have been made in the availability and accessibility of contraception, for example, by introducing family planning services as part of the general health services package and by offering modern contraceptive methods free of charge.

Women from disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, LGBTI community, Roma and Egyptian women, are often unaware of their



rights and how to access services, including shelters. Effective implementation of the free legal aid system and the promotion of legal awareness and empowerment will be essential to ensure women's access to justice. The number of local referral mechanisms for reporting gender-based violence has increased to 52 municipalities out of 61. Efforts should, however, be stepped up to set up and make referral mechanisms functional in all municipalities. Emergency shelters have been set up in some municipalities of the country. These services remain mainly donor-funded. In this direction, ACPD has continued its efforts and has achieved considerable success in the municipalities of Elbasan and Shkodra, which will serve as good practices to be replicated to other municipalities across the country for supporting emergency shelters.

ACPD considers it crucial to continue to shape its narratives on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and to convey strong messages about what drives its work whose goal is to protect women, girls (families), and LGBTIs against sexist coercion, endangerment, and bullying.

Albania has ratified most international conventions relating to the protection of fundamental rights, but obstacles to the exercise of the right to health and to sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for vulnerable groups, persist across the country. While abortion care is guaranteed by law, women from vulnerable groups, especially Roma women, face barriers in accessing it.

On preventive measures, there is a national cancer control plan. Appropriate structures for cancer screening services have been put in place, especially in the main urban areas, but a cancer registry is yet to be set up. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection endorsed the national plan for cervical cancer screening, but a lack of integration in health care services limits its effectiveness.

On drug abuse prevention and harm reduction, prevention activities have taken place sporadically, mainly initiated by the Department of Health Promotion and the Institute of Public Health should be conducted in a more systematic way.

On health inequalities, the national community health care programme continues to provide residential health care mainly for marginalized Roma and Egyptian minorities. The number of Roma and Egyptians provided with free health cards increased substantially as did the number of people in informal settlements benefiting from health services delivered by mobile teams. However, Roma people and Egyptians continue to face barriers and no decision has yet been taken on appointing health mediators in public hospitals. HIV awareness activities have been conducted for those communities, but further efforts are needed to improve access to services for them and other vulnerable groups, including women, people with disabilities, and populations in rural or remote areas.

On the other hand, during emergency crises (Covid-19) SRH services are reportedly neglected, thus affecting the vulnerable and marginalized groups of population. Access to services for these groups is impeded by unprofessional, biased, and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour of healthcare staff. ACPD experience

indicates that factors such as lack of youth-friendly services, gender disparity and conservative socio-cultural practices and norms also create barriers to accessing adolescent SRHR. In addition, promotion, awareness raising, and community engagement are still deficient.

This situation highlights the importance of developing mechanisms and procedures in order to be better prepared to continue providing essential SRH services, to address issues of people being left behind during a crisis, especially those living in remote/rural areas, key populations, Roma, etc.

The importance of telehealth as a major vehicle for delivering timely care over distance has become increasingly relevant as the Albania's health care needs have become overwhelmed by a significant increase in level of chronic disease amid Covid-19 pandemic in the last two years.

The parliamentary elections of April 2021 in Albania resulted in the re-election of the ruling Socialist Party (SP) for the third time in succession. In terms of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, SP has supported and invested in improving the rights of women, youth, and minorities by committing to improve the legislation and policy framework and infrastructure of healthcare facilities.

Development of strategies on contraception and RH, and related protocols, improvement of the law on termination of pregnancy, law on reproductive health and law on domestic violence are some of the commendable actions the SP-led government has undertaken in this respect. To compliment the new primary health care package approved in 2014, which includes family planning and HIV preventions and testing procedures with follow-up for pregnant women, an action plan was adopted for LGBT and the National Cervical Cancer prevention programme was introduced that are widely recognized as major achievements of the left wing central government.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education introduced in pre-university level in 2015 constitutes a milestone for the health and wellbeing of young people also seen in the context of a conservative society such as Albania's.

In early 2015, UNFPA, MoES and AEQPUE launched the project to restore the institutionalization of health and sexuality education in Albanian at the pre-university education level. The concept of institutionalization extended to 2 levels: 1) writing health education curricula, 2) training teachers.

The program has provided teachers and students with school-cycle publications on curricular, didactic and informational packages.

Contextualizing the program with reference to the socio-cultural specifics of the school and community has eliminated the potential opportunities for the program to be applied in template forms. Every school, teacher, has had enough academic freedom to identify teaching topics, specific methodologies to develop substantive issues of health and sexuality education.



The program of how it has been delivered in schools and training has significantly “reduced” misinformation about these sensitive issues that until recently were considered taboo.

Up-to-date data show that during 2018-2019, teacher training and on-site piloting of didactic materials ‘Sexual Life Skills Teaching’ continued on a one-to-one basis where one TOT teacher trained around 10 teachers. A total of 648 teachers were certified as TOT teachers by the following breakdown:

- » 288 TOT teacher profile Primary Education; 105 TOT Physical Education teacher profile (AMU + Gymnasium); 130 TOT Biology Teacher Profile (AMU + Gymnasium); 125 TOT Citizenship teacher profile (AMU + Gymnasium)
- » During 2020 - 18 Local capacity building - training competence on comprehensive sexual education in each LEO (Local Education Office) 600 trained teachers; 72 trained principal’s school; 72 monitoring schools; 15000 students informed.
- » During 2021 – 14 Local capacity building - training competence on comprehensive sexual education in each LEO (Local Education Office)
- » - 460 trained teachers; 56 trained principal’s school; 56 monitoring schools; 12000 students informed .

Irrespective of commendable outcomes of the left-wing policies related to SRH, the Albania Demographic Health Survey 2017-2018 reveals poor figures in relation to access to SRH among women, youth and young couples. The SP-led government has supported universal health coverage funded by progressive taxation, but it has given priority to public-private partnerships in the health sector. This move has led to severe criticism for not treating the poor and the rich equally. The sector has constantly lacked budgets to implement strategic documents in place. The lack of funds for health systems is often borne by private households, whose out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure is high. More inclusive policies to protect the health of vulnerable groups and reduced inequalities are a must.



## ACPD STAFF IN 2021

ACPD management and staff structure has undergone internal changes, initially the change of the financial officer and later on with the resignation of the Executive Director. To some extent the managerial attitude created some frictions within the team, however with the intervention of the board, these issues were corrected and rectified and did not affect overall performance of ACPD.

ACPD management and staff structure has undergone internal changes, initially the change of the financial officer and later on with the resignation of the Executive Director. To some extent the managerial attitude created some frictions within the team, however with the intervention of the board, these issues were corrected and rectified and did not affect overall performance of ACPD.

ACPD members continued their hard work and all relevant decisions and steps were promptly taken and ACPD team is complete and working with full capacity.

On the other hand, ACPD emergency/backup plan developed as a result of Covid-19 situation facilitated the work and finalization of the projects implementation.

For 2021, ACPD expected to maintain the same level of funds. However, given the end of the five-year contract with UNFPA, the available funds dropped by about 40% compared to 2020, as the donor (UNFPA) planned to reserve these funds for the new five-year contract. ACPD has submitted the expression of interest in the first phase of the application to be an implementing partner of UNFPA for the 2022-2026. Also, we will submit our proposals as per their upcoming programme, which will be launched soon by UNFPA office. ACPD expects to sign new agreement with UNFPA by May/June. The new agreement will ensure the same level of funding that ACPD has received from UNFPA over the last few years.

In 2021, ACPD has undergone some changes in the governing body of the organization following the resignation of the executive director and the termination of ACPD president's term in office. Three meetings were carried out in September-October to discuss and fill the gap created in the management structure. The first meeting was held to approve the executive director's resignation and publication of the notice for this vacancy. In its second meeting, the Board decided on the selection criteria of the new executive director and published a vacancy notice. The notice was disseminated in various communication channels, including social media, partner organizations, and networks for two weeks. In its last meeting, the Board reviewed the applications and hired the new executive director. Also, an act-



ing president was appointed till the General Assembly meeting, which is planned to take place in July 2022.

An ACPD General Assembly meeting was planned to be held in June 2021 to elect new board members and to fill the vacancies. Under the Covid-19 restrictions that banned physical public meetings because of an increased number of infections in the first half of the year, the meeting was held virtually. The quorum in this meeting could only discuss and approve the IPPF core fund, the working plan for 2021, and the annual report for year 2020. Given the internal changes that occurred in September with the executive director and the Board, the Assembly decided to hold elections for two board members in its upcoming meeting, which will take place in July 2022.

In 2021, ACPD completed the 5-years of accreditation and was expected to undergo the fourth accreditation system. However, the fourth accreditation cycle did not take place as IPPF initiated a review of the Accreditation System to develop an improved, fit-for-purpose system for the Federation. A new system is being developed bearing in mind the recent global governance reforms, the new resource allocation model, and the unified secretariat. The review of the existing system will involve consultations with key stakeholders and will consider the suitability and effectiveness of the system to serve its purpose. In this frame, ACPD was invited to participate in the accreditation phase 3 (2016 – 2021) evaluation process by completing a short survey on the views and experience of the accreditation phase 3 process. ACPD carried out consultations with key staff and board members that were involved in the process. Based on IPPF instructions, ACPD will proceed with the fourth accreditation phase.

ACPD has continued to implement the gender assessment plan aiming to advance the gender equality component.

In 2021:

- » Due to new reform of IPPF and plans for a long process of development of the Strategy 2023-2028, the development of ACPD strategic plan, which expired in 2021, was postponed. However, the component of gender equality was discussed among staff and ACPD members as a key component that should be included in the new strategic plan.
- » In October 2021, ACPD and Board members carried out a staff retreat to discuss the working plan for 2022 and the inclusion of gender equality in the new strategic plan and association policies.
- » ACPD conducted a desk review to collect evidences on effective models in support of women and girls' victims/survivors of violence in Shkodra and Elbasan municipalities. The desk review includes a set of recommendations for integration of emergency shelters in public and NGO sector. This document served as an advocacy tool and facilitated the process of the engagement of the Municipality of Elbasan to provide financial support to the emergency shelters for

women/victims of violence.

- » ACPD submitted applications to a number of calls for proposals with a focus on SRH and gender equality aiming to set the balance of gender service providers.
- » In coordination and partnership with organizations that work with young key populations, ACPD has extended the number of young people from Men having Sex with Men, transgender as part of ACPD programs.
- » Strengthened partnership with local government in support of women and girls' victims or survivors of violence in targeted municipalities. This is documented under the signed order by the municipality of Elbasan.
- » ACPD has expanded the incomes for 2021 with new projects supported by Save the Children, Unicom's Switzerland GmbH – Sofia Branch. While, for some applications we are still waiting for their response.
- » In ACPD policies and procedures despite other target groups there is a specific focus given to key population with regards to respect of their rights, non-discrimination, inclusion etc. they are also integral part of ACPD working plan in facilitation, implementation and monitoring of the processes.
- » ACPD in 2020-2021 implemented an initiative with support of IPPF on the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for an inclusive and gender equal society. Research took place in a high school of Tirana aiming to provide evidences related to the benefits of CSE to young people lives with strong emphasis on prevention and response to harmful social norms and practices and sexual abuse. The research examined the perceptions, nature, extent, causes, and impact of violence in schools and evaluated how the situation has changed after the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education for the intervention group composed of 30 of students in comparison with the comparison group of 30 students who did not receive CSE until the end of the initiative. The overall post-intervention data analysis shows that there are changes in communication with parents and teachers before and after the intervention. The results show a positive effect that the intervention had in terms of helping participants to get acquainted with GBV, considering that for 43.3% of participants it helped them to a great extent while for 36.7% it helped them to a considerable extent (total 80%). When it comes to trust to respond to GBV, the results show that 27% of participants considered the intervention useful to a large extent, while 50% considered it useful to a considerable extent (total 77%). Again, this result confirms the change that the intervention has made in the participants' confidence levels regarding the response to GBV.
- » In the frame of the project “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for an inclusive and gender equal society”, a ‘Zero Tolerance’ policy was developed, signed by the high school director and it is publicly shared with students, teachers and parents. This policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the



Rights of the Child, 1989 and the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The purpose of this policy is to focus on preventing and responding to school violence to provide a guide for school management to be a safer space, providing the right structures, policies and enabling environment as well as for them to orient school management towards appropriate remedial and preventive interventions. The policy comprises definitions; a section on violence prevention; section on how to identify, intervene and refer cases of violence; orientation of actions to address evidence-based violence. A guideline Prot.176, date 01/06/2021 was issued by high school director on Zero Tolerance policy implementation.

In 18 – 20 October 2021, four ACPD staff attended the Safeguarding online training organized by IPPF, which provided information on how to mainstream the knowledge of safeguarding and the IPPF framework across our MA. The online course aimed to roll out the news IPPF safeguarding resource pack to ensure that our MA is equipped to fulfil our own responsibilities in safeguarding. ACPD focal point and the executive director, as a follow up of Safeguarding online training in October organized in the third and fourth week of January 2022 the two-day trainings with staff, board members and volunteers regarding the Safeguarding and its importance.

On 20-21 January 2022 a training with ACPD staff and Board members was held. Indeed, some ACPD key staff of Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra were previously trained by IPPF in November, so they had preliminary information and insight on the materials, while Board members were only introduced with translated and adapted policies and had general information on the process since 2020. The two-day training was very useful as it helped both ACPD staff and Board members perceive safeguarding and ACPD as a whole, and draft an action plan that serves ACPD and all actors engaged. Also, it made them more aware and responsible on acting in cases of such occurrences.

On 25-26 January a training with the ACPD core group of volunteers with moderation of safeguarding focal point and ACPD staff was held. The materials used in the training with staff and board members were also used for volunteers. However, the information was simplified and in line with the responsibilities and contribution the youth given in their engagement with ACPD.

The main recommendations that came up from the training include:

- » Capacity building of all actors engaged in the ACPD structures is very important to ensure a safe environment where the rights and dignity of everyone are respected and protected. In general, the training process went very well. The set of materials were very useful and comprehensive for each target group. However, what ACPD emphasizes is the importance to have sustainability in delivering such trainings, taking into considerations the involvement of new people in the organization.
- » Also, it would be highly effective and useful to create a sustainable mecha-

nism for delivering such training periodically to new members of ACPD (staff/ Board or volunteers) so they can be aware of the safeguarding and policies in place, reporting system etc.

- » A volunteer needs to be assigned in the safeguarding team who will serve as a focal point for their peers and work closely with ACPD safeguarding focal point, and they can deliver these trainings together to other volunteers.

ACPD staff and board members are in the process of developing the action plan which will include sustainable mechanism for the implementation of these policies and provision of such to other partners and actors engaged with ACPD. The action plan will consist on timeframe of data related to trainings of actors who will participate; new volunteers engaged with ACPD; and training of new members of ACPD. A volunteers will be voted by other volunteers as a focal point for the young group of volunteers. He/she will work closely with the ACPD safeguarding focal point.

ACPD level of funds were as projected in the beginning of the year with minor changes in case of UNFPA which reduced the fund by about 40%, as the donor (UNFPA) would continue to reserve these funds for the new five-year contract. On the other hand, ACPD was supported with small grants from two other donors: Unicom's Switzerland GmbH-Sofia Brunch and Save the Children. Save the Children supported ACPD to deliver trainings to key professional of child unit and municipality level on health promotion. In addition, Unicom's Switzerland GmbH-Sofia Brunch supported to promote the "Safe from SGBV" platform among young people in Albania developed under IPPF initiative.

Also, owing to ACPD successful performance in the previous years the project National Resource Center for Civil Society Project – implemented with Partner Albania for Change and Developments and funded by European Union– is extended to cover 2022-2024. Other projects were submitted during 2021.



# KEY SUCCESSES AND MAJOR INITIATIVES IN 2021

## Reproductive Health Law in Albania

In 2020, Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD) advocated for the revision of the actual Reproductive Health Law in Albania. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection established a working group in order to draft the new RH Law. Bearing in mind that the existing law lacks important components, the technical group concluded that an entire new Law should be developed to address additional gaps identified, linked to recent developments in health and technology and human rights. In 2021, the working group presented the new RH draft. The new Law drafted has taken into consideration similar experiences from EU countries. This draft law aims to regulate the organization, functioning, and supervision of all reproductive and sexual health activities in health institutions to protect the reproductive rights of the individual and the couple. In contrast to the Law currently in force (Law No. 8876, dated 4.4.2002, "On reproductive health"), the new draft introduces a new concept of "sexual health", which is defined as the state of physical, mental and social well-being related to sexuality. The novelty of the definition sexual health is that it goes beyond the absence of disease, dysfunction or disability. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationship and the possibility of pleasurable and safe sexual experiences without coercion, discrimination, and violence. Sexual health improves personal life and relationships, not just counselling and cares about reproduction and sexually transmitted infections. To achieve and maintain sexual health, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. Other definitions include: reproductive health, assisted reproductive medical techniques (ARMT), artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, infertility, surrogate adoption, informed consent. The draft was submitted to the National Committee on Reproductive Health, in which lively discussions took place to solicit their opinions. The new draft law is expected to be approved by the Parliament in 2022.

Policy dialogue workshops were organized with municipalities, civil society organizations, women and girls to ensure the engagement of all actors in support of development of emergency shelters and ensure institutional commitment through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU). Following ACPD and its partners' advocacy work, the Municipality of Elbasan issued Order No. 90, dated 20.09.2021, "On the Approval of Initiation of Procedures for Renting a Facility that Will Serve as an Emergency Shelter, to Be Administered by Local NGO "Forumi i Gruas Elbasan". Through this order, the Municipality of Elbasan committed funds



to pay the rent of the facility that will serve as an emergency centre. The centre will be administered by Forumi i Gruas Elbasan, which will provide support to local women victims/survivors of violence. On the other hand, the Municipality of Shkodra committed to sign an MoU in support of emergency shelters in 2022. The commitment of these two municipalities will serve as a good example for other municipalities to provide support for emergency shelters in the future.

An information system and a dedicated registry were set up for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test. The information model is needed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and facilitate the long-term follow-up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the healthcare system. The new information system will facilitate the assessment of essential indicators of the program; a) the proportion of women positive in primary screening HPV test, who have visited the gynecologist for diagnoses and follow-up treatment b) the number of pre-cancer diagnoses and their treatment. The system was created by the Institute of Public Health (IPH) technical team. In the frame of the meetings and discussions, the directors of 'Queen Geraldine' and 'Koço Gliozheni' Maternity Hospitals signed two bilateral memorandums of understanding in November 2021 to ensure system sustainability.

## Working with Religious Communities in Vlora during 16 Days of Activism

In the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, Aulona Center, the ACPD branch in Vlora, held a roundtable on 25th of November, with support of the UNFPA Albania, in the framework of the Joint Program of the United Nations, "End Violence against Women and Girls", financed by the Swedish Government and implemented by UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women in cooperation with Government of Albania. This roundtable brought together 20 representatives and leaders from all religious communities of Vlora (Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Church, the head of the Baptist, the representative of Bektashi community, the head of the Evangelical Church and the head of the Vlora Church of Christ) and members of the Referral Mechanism Against Gender-Based Violence aiming to discuss the role of the religious communities in preventing violence against women and in better helping the victims/survivors, and in putting an end to the silence regarding this phenomenon. This roundtable helped to launch the national campaign that seeks to promote the most active spiritual leader of the 2022 year in protecting families, gender equality and women's rights. This campaign aims to encourage religious community leaders to increase their presence in the media and social media and address issues of GBV prevention and fight.

## Establishment of "Youth Forum"

A "Youth Forum" was established in the frame of YEEP "Increasing Opportunities



for Labour Market Integration of Youth and Families at Risk” Project composed by the most active and eager youths who are engaged in social life of their city and who are willing to raise their voice about issues that concern them and their peers. The Youth Forum has been actively engaged in appealing to the local decisionmakers to improve services and policies in favour of disadvantaged youth.

A platform “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” was developed aiming to enable young people, teachers, parents and community members to access information and knowledge about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The platform is designed based on the updated manual on Safe from SGBV that the ACPD has adapted from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” platform consists of 6 modules with information about comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and gender-based violence. Each of the modules contains theoretical information combined with practical exercises, to be completed by young people, who are provided with a certificate of participation at the end of the training. This is the first online platform developed by ACPD and endorsed by MoEYS to be accessible for all teachers and young people and it is a supplement of the information and knowledge young people learn at school. Regardless of the fact that it is recently launched, the interest triggered among partners, stakeholders, and some of the young people themselves to use it and share widely is a good hint of the great results it will provide in the future.

ACPD in the frame of the project “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for an inclusive and gender equal society” in collaboration with “Myslym Keta” high school developed a ‘Zero Tolerance’ policy signed by the high school director. This policy is publicly shared with students, teachers and parents. This policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The purpose of this policy is to focus on preventing and responding to school violence to provide a guide for school management to be a safer space, providing the right structures, policies and enabling environment as well as for them to orient school management towards appropriate remedial and preventive interventions. The policy comprises definitions; a section on violence prevention; section on how to identify, intervene and refer cases of violence; orientation of actions to address evidence-based violence. A guideline Prot.176, date 01/06/2021 was issued by high school director on Zero Tolerance policy implementation. The work done with policy was presented to the participants of the concluding meetings as a comprehensive document that can guide the Myslym Keta school, towards a common approach to achieving a learning, safe, healthy and non-violent learning environment and should be used as a good practice to learn from and expand to other high schools.

The mobile ultrasound machine has been purchased under MISP restricted fund, supported by IPPF, and has been used by the medical staff of ACPD to provide SRH services in addition to Covid protection supplies for women and girls living in rural areas who cannot access such services in their health care centers.



Provision of SRHR counselling and consultation services through digital technologies such as Skype, WhatsApp, and information through SMS for counselling on GBV, abortion care, contraception care, HIV/STI preventions, and follow-up including for Covid-19 have empowered women and girls to take control of their health and fertility through enhancing self-care and health monitoring and improve their health seeking behaviours.

An ACPD expert prepared a document with the best practices of ACPD on provision of SRH services in crises and post-crisis including case studies, analyses, reports. This document has been shared with Ministry of Health and Social Protection, high level decision-makers, authorities and key stakeholders in advocacy activities, with NGO partners as well as on ACPD social media. This product is valuable also for other member associations who work on SRH services to provide support in crises and post crisis situation as an effective tool which eliminates barriers and reduces costs especially through digital technologies and telemedicine initiatives.

- » 21,934 SRH services have been provided during 2021 by ACPD clinics in Tirana and Vlora as well as through community-based delivery, which has shown a slight increase.
- » In total, 863 health care providers were trained on various topics related to SRHR:
- » 110 healthcare providers were trained online on family planning through the ViC platform: <http://www.vic.eerh.org/login/index.php>
- » 183 social care providers and 130 healthcare providers were trained online and offline regarding 3 standard operating procedures (SOPs) approved in Feb 2020 in Albania for preventing GBV including emergency
- » 200 healthcare providers participated in the online training on regional level on building cervical cancer screening registry.
- » 120 healthcare providers were trained online on MISP in light of Covid-19 to strengthen their capacities in emergency preparedness and response related to crises and post-crisis situations.
- » 60 medical health workers (family doctors, nurses, lab technicians, dentist and healthcare centres managers) trained how to provide free of stigma rights based and gender sensitive HIV services for KP.
- » 60 health care providers trained on value clarifications on Contraception Abortion Care.
- » 97 HCP and 103 social workers were trained on SOPs



## Internal and External Challenges

- » The Covid-19 crises continues to affect the work and provision of reproductive health services as state institutions prioritise and dedicate all resources to Covid-19 services and its impact to the society. On the other hand, the pandemic has also aggravated several issues, such as domestic and gender-based violence, access to abortion, etc., that have had a severe impact especially on marginalized and rural communities. In this situation, it is important to prioritize advocacy actions in accordance with the context such as advocating for provision of reproductive services through digital health, support of emergency shelters etc. ACPD combined service provision with advocacy, policy briefings, engagement of media. To this end, key stakeholders and online awareness campaigns were employed to convince policymakers on the importance of safe living SRH services especially for women and girls from vulnerable groups reaching out to approximately 60.000 people with positive messages through online and offline channels. In addition, to advocate at national level, evidence-based actions are crucial to engage stakeholders and drive changes.
- » For 2021 ACPD expected to maintain the same level of funding. However, given the end of the five-year contract with UNFPA, the funds available were lower than in 2020, as the donor (UNFPA) would continue to reserve unspent funds for the new five-year contract. ACPD has submitted an expression of interest in the first phase of the application to be an implementing partner of UNFPA for the 2022-2026. Also, we will submit our proposals as per their programme, which will be launched soon by UNFPA office. It ACPD expects to sign a new agreement with UNFPA by May/ June. The new agreement will ensure the same level of funds ACPD has received from UNFPA in the past years.

## Technical Assistance and Expectations

List each type of Technical Assistance from IPPF/EN	Select a category to be Assigned to each Technical Assistance	For each TA: did it meet expectations? Why/Why Not? Recommendations
	Advocacy Commodities – Logistics Communications Finance and Accounting Gender and Rights Governance M&E Marketing and Social Enterprise Quality of Care Service Delivery Systems-Medical Clinical Systems-Other	

List each type of Technical Assistance from IPPF/EN	Select a category to be Assigned to each Technical Assistance	For each TA: did it meet expectations? Why/Why Not? Recommendations
Refresher webinar on DHIS data entry and troubleshooting – 7 January '21	Systems-Medical Clinical Systems-Other	ACPD staff attended the refresher webinar organized by IPPF EN covering the most relevant aspects of DATA ENTRY such as the general logic & calendar of the reporting process; the ADVOCACY WINS & YOUTH/WOMEN GROUPS data; GLOBAL INDICATORS data; and SERVICE STATISTICS data
IPPF Safeguarding Online Training -18-20 October	Governance	Four ACPD staff attended the Safeguarding online training which provided information on how to mainstream the knowledge of safeguarding and the IPPF framework across our member associations (MA). The online course aimed to roll out the news IPPF safeguarding resource pack to ensure that our MA is equipped to fulfil our own responsibilities in safeguarding.
Regional and Youth Forum – 19-21 November	Governance	ACPD Executive Director and one youth member participated in the Regional and Youth Forum organized online by IPPF in November with participation of all member associations. This forum sought to explore key issues relevant to the IPPF Global Strategy 2023-2028 and ensure the perspectives of Europe and Central Asia are shared with the global strategy team.
CSE webinar on “A gender-transformative tool for advancing adolescent sexual health and rights and preventing child, early and forced marriage and unions”	Gender and Rights	Two ACPD staff has joined the webinar organized by IPPF gathering together participants from all IPPF MAs interested. The webinar provided ACPD staff with information on how CSE can be a tool for social norm change; The ways in which CSE supports young people to build healthy relationships, exercise agency and choice, and understand and respect consent and bodily autonomy; Embracing diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity and challenging restrictive binary beliefs and views; and Challenges and learnings from implementing CSE, and what funders can do to support organizations to implement sustainable programs, advocate for policy change and mitigate backlash.



List each type of Technical Assistance from IPPF/EN	Select a category to be Assigned to each Technical Assistance	For each TA: did it meet expectations? Why/Why Not? Recommendations
Youth Voice Youth Choice, Online Meetings	Advocacy Commodities – Logistics M&E	The ACPD Executive Director, the programme and financial staff participated in several meetings held by IPPF team regarding the inception, implementation and development of the products and achievements of the results in the framework of the “Youth Voice, Youth Choice” Project. The assistance will continue to be offered also in the next two years of the project implementation.
Flag System Training- Brussels, 3-5 November 2022	Advocacy Governance Gender and Rights	One ACPD staff participated in the Flag System training organized by IPPF EN and Sensoa in Brussels, 3-5 November 2022. The training enabled participants to apply the principles of the Flag System to actual cases. Also provided an insight into the possibilities for use in working with children and young people, such as education, youth work and leisure, youth welfare, residential care for children with disabilities, etc. The format of the training could be used by the participants to train professionals in their own networks and have insight into the available materials, the conditions of use and the possibilities for support.

## Outcome 1. Champion Rights

- » Strengthen strategic alliances and partnerships for SRHR advocacy with the SRH coalition, the monitoring of gender-based violence against women, groups of women and youth.
- » Participate (as an expert on SRHR) in the consultations for revision of the RH Law, ICPD +25 Follow-up Summit to influence SRH laws, public policies and governmental programs.
- » Joint advocacy with and/or support advocacy of eight women’s and youth groups on SRHR, gender and/or sustainable development (through public statements, positioning, campaigns and public actions).
- » Participating in the hearings of the various parliamentary committees and subcommittees such as the Parliamentary Committee for Labour, Social Affairs and Health, Subcommittee for Gender Equality and the Alliance for Par-

liamentary Women; Subcommittee for Human Rights, and raising the voice for the issues concerning SRH.

## ACPD and the Reproductive Health Law in Albania

In 2020, Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD) advocated for the revision of the actual Reproductive Health Law in Albania. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection established a working group in order to draft the new RH Law. Bearing in mind that the existing law lacks important components, the technical group concluded that an entire new Law should be developed to address additional gaps identified, linked to recent developments in health and technology and human rights. In 2021, the working group presented the new RH draft. The new Law drafted has taken into consideration similar experiences from EU countries. This draft law aims to regulate the organization, functioning, and supervision of all reproductive and sexual health activities in health institutions to protect the reproductive rights of the individual and the couple. In contrast to the Law currently in force (Law No. 8876, dated 4.4.2002, "On reproductive health"), the new draft introduces a new concept of "sexual health", which is defined as the state of physical, mental and social well-being related to sexuality. The novelty of the definition sexual health is that it goes beyond the absence of disease, dysfunction or disability. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationship and the possibility of pleasurable and safe sexual experiences without coercion, discrimination, and violence. Sexual health improves personal life and relationships, not just counselling and cares about reproduction and sexually transmitted infections. To achieve and maintain sexual health, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. Other definitions include: reproductive health, assisted reproductive medical techniques (ARMT), artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, infertility, surrogate adoption, informed consent. The draft was submitted to the National Committee on Reproductive Health, in which lively discussions took place to solicit their opinions. The new draft law is expected to be approved by the Parliament in 2022.

## Support of MIPPA Report- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

For the first time, ACPD, with support of UNFPA, collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) to prepare Albania's fourth report on Madrid Plan on Ageing. The report was drafted with the participation of different stakeholders as members of technical group, set up upon an Order of Minister of Health and Social Protection, No. 352, dated 27.07.2021, and using diverse sources of information. Besides, it used several reports, studies, and analyses on ageing produced and published from different sources. INSTAT updates data used in this report.



## International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Survey in Albania

Albania joined the second wave of the I-SHARE (International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health) Survey. I-SHARE is a global study with the overall goal to understand better sexual and reproductive health among adults during COVID-19 using an online convenience sample from selected countries, including Albania. Supported by UNFPA, ACPD was part of the process that engaged various resources such as NGO, Institute of Public Health, and the Faculty of Medicine, etc. Some 412 responses were collected to understand how different isolation measures implemented by governments worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have affected family structures, relationships, and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

## Follow-Up of the Nairobi Summit

In September 2021, representatives of informal all-party parliamentary group on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Members of Subcommittee for Gender Equality and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence continued their meetings with focus on Nairobi Samite Commitments, discussion on ICPD + 25 Agenda and explained the linkages between progress toward the agenda and advancement on reproductive health and rights and gender equality in Albania. Some of the key achievements were highlighted by the MPs including in relation to SRH and GE: New Law on Reproductive Health; Transition Global Fund which enables gender-sensitive and rights-based HIV services for key populations etc.; progress on Implementation of the National Cervical Cancer Program through screening; and, continuation of provision of SRH services in pandemic situation. The state ensured the provision of antiretroviral therapy supply through local health directorates. Major recommendations included: Guarantee access to all SRHR by recognizing them as essential, lifesaving, and often time-sensitive services; the government' requisite to adapt their policies, technical guidance and service-delivery models (e.g., tele-medicine); services and resources for survivors of SGBV are essential services.

## The MoUs signed by Queen Geraldine and Koco Gliozheni Maternity Hospitals in Tirana.

An information system and a dedicated registry for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test was set up to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and the long term follow up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the health system.

Three meetings carried out between a technical group of experts from the Institute of Public Health and clinical teams at University Hospitals for gynecology



and obstetrics ('Koco Gliozheni' and 'Queen Geraldine') and Oncologic Hospital at 'Mother Theresa' University Centre. On behalf of these meetings two MoUs were signed by both Maternity Hospitals in Tirana.

## Best Practices

ACPD has established a national expert group composed of 6 members: representatives of Health and Education institutions; experts and young people to work together to provide insight on the situation of sexual and reproductive health services access by young people.

In the anticipatory meetings, the case of a sexually-abused minor girl with mental health problems was discussed. The girl made a request to have an abortion in conformity with the legislation, but the healthcare committee did not comply with her request, because even though the law is in place, there is no regulation to guide the procedures of abortion in such cases. The legal Center for Civic Initiatives and Albanian Center for Population and Development entered into the discussions with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to take measures and address the issue. But Covid-19 pandemic was a barrier for pushing this process and act on time for issuing the abortion order and help the girl in a timely manner.

In the frame of implementation of the Merck project, ACPD intensified its efforts and collaboration with the MoHSP and the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives to address the existing gaps in the Law No. 8045, dated 7.12.1995, "On Termination of Pregnancy". Article 11 of this law specifies: "Termination of pregnancy for social reasons shall be performed within 22 weeks, in case a commission composed of three specialists, doctors, social workers, and lawyers deems, upon examination and consultation, that the pregnancy is the result of a rape or another sexual crime, as well as when other social reasons are established. The instruction for handling these cases and the composition of the commission are approved by the Minister of Health and Social Protection." But such instruction has never been developed to date.

To perform an abortion (pursuant to the decision of the girl, who has not been declared incapacitated), the Maternity Hospital requires a statement from a psychiatrist recommending the termination of pregnancy. But the psychiatrist declares that he cannot give such a recommendation. In conclusion, the girl carried on with her pregnancy due to lack of administrative acts on modalities for establishing a commission required by law.

Now both organizations are communicating regularly and are consulting with the Ministry of Health to develop and issue an administrative order that will regulate the provision of abortion for sexually-abused victims/survivors. This order is expected to be issued in 2022.

Policy dialogue workshops were organized with municipalities, civil society orga-



nizations, women and girls to ensure the engagement of all actors in supporting the development of emergency shelters and ensuring institutional commitment by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU).

Following ACPD and its partners' advocacy work, the Municipality of Elbasan issued Order No. 90, dated 20.09.2021, "On the Approval of Initiation of Procedures for Renting a Facility that Will Serve as an Emergency Shelter, to Be Administered by Local NGO "Forumi i Gruas Elbasan". Through this order, the Municipality of Elbasan committed funds to pay the rent of the facility that will serve as an emergency centre. The centre will be administered by Forumi i Gruas Elbasan, which will provide support to local women victims/survivors of violence. On the other hand, the Municipality of Shkodra committed to sign an MoU in support of emergency shelters in 2022. The commitment of these two municipalities will serve as a good example for other municipalities to provide support for emergency shelters in the future.

Women and young people groups of ACPD have been involved in advocacy events including planning, implementation, monitoring. ACPD volunteers designed several awareness-raising campaigns and were directly involved in the improvement of the young people's access to SRH services in times of Covid-19. Their contribution consisted of data collection, analysis and report generation from fieldwork with their peers in the frame of Youth Voice, Youth Choice initiative. Also, they were part of the working group for the development of the Safe from SGBV platform, part of ACPD website.

## Lessons Learned

The Covid-19 crises continues to affect the work and provision of reproductive health services as state institutions prioritise and dedicate all resources to Covid-19 services and its impact to the society. On the other hand, the pandemic has also aggravated several issues, such as domestic and gender-based violence, access to abortion, etc., that have had a severe impact especially on marginalized and rural communities. In this situation, it is important to prioritize advocacy actions in accordance with the context such as advocating for provision of reproductive services through digital health, support of emergency shelters etc. ACPD combined service provision with advocacy, policy briefings, engagement of media. To this end, key stakeholders and online awareness campaigns were employed to convince policymakers on the importance of safe living SRH services especially for women and girls from vulnerable groups. In addition, to advocate at national level, evidence-based actions are crucial to engage stakeholders and drive changes.



## Outcome 2. Empower Communities

- » Training of trainers, educators, volunteers, intermediaries and field workers to provide CSE.
- » Support the public sector to deliver CSE.
- » Provide CSE in school or out of school to young people.
- » Develop and implement innovative approaches for delivering non-formal CSE.
- » Use the media to promote health, choice and rights to individuals (through, events, campaigns, and development of adolescent blog.).
- » Use own communications materials and channels such as ACPD website, social media publications, etc. to promote health, choice and rights directly to individuals.
- » Build ACPD capacity on media & communications.
- » Organize online and offline campaigns/events to generate media coverage, highlight celebrity support and raise public awareness.
- » Working with Religious Communities in Vlora during 16 Days of Activism

### Working with Religious Communities in Vlora in 16 Days of Activism

In the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, Aulo-na Center, the ACPD branch in Vlora, held a roundtable on 25th of November, with support of the UNFPA Albania, in the framework of the Joint Program of the United Nations, “End Violence against Women and Girls”, financed by the Swedish Government and implemented by UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women in cooperation with Government of Albania. This roundtable gathered together 20 representatives and leaders from all religious communities of Vlora (Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Church, the head of the Baptist, the representative of Bektashi community, the head of the Evangelical Church and the head of the Vlora Church of Christ) and members of the Referral Mechanism Against Gender-Based Violence aiming to discuss the role of the religious communities in preventing violence against women and in better helping the victims/survivors, and in putting an end to the silence regarding this phenomenon. This roundtable helped to launch the national campaign that seeks to promote the most active spiritual leader of the 2022 year in protecting families, gender equality and women’s rights. This campaign aims to encourage religious community leaders to increase their presence in the media and social media and address issues of GBV prevention and fight.



## Establishment of “Youth Forum”

A “Youth Forum” was established in the frame of YEEP “Increasing Opportunities for Labour Market Integration of Youth and Families at Risk” Project composed by the most active and eager youths who are engaged in social life of their city and who are willing to raise their voice about issues that concern them and their peers. The Youth Forum has been actively engaged in appealing to the local decisionmakers to improve services and policies in favour of disadvantaged youth.

## Best Practices

In 2021, ACPD continued its efforts to enable the provision of education on sensitive topics of CSE by training teachers and students in Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra. Two hundred teachers built their skill and knowledge in CSE delivery and have the capacity to provide CSE to their students adequately. In addition, 200 adult educators were provided with comprehensive sexuality education; 120 out-of-school young people in rural areas and with MSM, LGBT and young people who sell sex in Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra were given information and education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS, modern contraception, sexual gender-based violence, sexual relationships, abortion etc. and some skills related to sexual and reproductive health services through online platforms. The information and education that young people gained from these workshops were shared with other 750 peers in informal settings through friendly sessions on online platforms.

ACPD has organized several online awareness campaigns with the involvement of key stakeholders, national and local media, and public figures (approximately 100 people) to promote health issues, gender equality, non-discrimination and SRH service provision. Dissemination of information on SRH guided safe care-seeking behaviours in the time of Covid-19 and beyond already prepared the public for changes in service delivery platforms, including outreach activities in their communities.

ACPD continued to promote the blog for adolescent sexuality education and made it popular among young people especially for young people at school trained by ACPD and partner organizations. The blog has been active with information prepared by young activists of the center regarding the importance of comprehensive sexuality education mainly on sexuality, sexual pleasure, sexual orientation and gender identities, gender roles, sexual risks and safety and sexual rights. Some 1500 people were reached out with accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education as well as with COVID-19 information as a result of blog posts linked to Facebook, allowing them to increase their awareness on CSE as well as COVID-19 pandemic and response.

A platform “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” was developed aiming to enable young people, teachers, parents and community members to access information and knowledge about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The platform is designed based on the updated manual on Safe from SGBV that the Albanian Center for Population and

Development has adapted from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” platform consists of 6 modules with information about comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and gender-based violence. Each of the modules contains theoretical information combined with practical exercises, to be completed by young people, who are finally provided with a certificate of participation. It is the first online platform which is developed by ACPD and endorsed by MoEYS to be accessible for all teachers and young people and it is a supplement of the information and knowledge young people learn at school and even though it is recently launched the interest received by partners; stakeholders and some of the young people themselves to use it and share widely is a good hint of the great results it will provide in the future. The platform was developed with the input gathered by all actors included young people and teachers and consulted with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

ACPD with the approval of MoEYS carried out research which took place in a high school of Tirana aiming to provide evidences-related to the benefits of CSE to young people lives with strong emphasis on prevention and response to harmful social norms and practises and sexual abuse. The research examined the perceptions, nature, extent, causes, and impact of violence in schools and evaluated how the situation has changed after the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education for young students. The research findings have shown that the intervention was successful and impacted the knowledge attitudes of young people and teachers.

ACPD held a concluding meeting to present the findings of the study “Evidence of the Impact of Comprehensive Sexual Education on the Ability of Young People to Protect Themselves from Gender-Based and Sexual Violence”, carried out with Mylsym Keta High School students. Attended by more than 30 representatives from MoEYS, United Nations Population Fund in Albania (UNFPA), high school director and teachers, representatives of partner organizations, experts, and gynecologists, this meeting presented the findings and launched the platform “Safe from Gender and Sexual Violence”, as major achievements of this project.

## Lessons Learned

### » Community Engagement through Preliminary and Preparatory Meetings

Approaching and engaging community through online platforms have been challenging because the invitation becomes more complex (engaging community leaders to invite them in our activities). ACPD staff have prepared community leaders, health care providers and managers, school directors who are the key persons that engage in community education and engagement through preliminary and preparatory meetings with them how to involve and engage community members. Staff have provided assistance prior to activity on the use of digital platforms on various activities. Social media was widely used to announce ACPD activities.

Gathering young people from KP to participate in the workshops remains chal-



lenging. ACPD staff managed it, however, by collaborating with Aksion + and Stop AIDS organizations that work with YKP in the area of SRH and HIV/AIDS through the provision of services, education and advocacy.

In 2021, ACPD placed efforts to put the agenda of enabling extracurricular CSE for young people. Despite the good will of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (they have been fully supportive towards CSE in Albania) the issue of budget allocation for this priority continues to be a challenge. To this end, under the Advocacy project, ACPD engaged in capacity building for the community center staff to advocate for the provision of CSE for out-of-school children/young people.

» Usage of Digital Platforms to Deliver and Enable CSE

ACPD worked to ensure access to CSE that provides youth with the basis to make well-informed decisions about their lives and bodies and develop healthy relationships, which need to be ensured in all phases of the pandemic. In order to maximize effectiveness, digital platforms and tools and other in and out-of-school CSE resources were used to promote sexual and reproductive health, including the provision of sexual and reproductive health services.

» Use Multiple Communication Approaches to Build Public Confidence and Encourage Continued Utilization of Essential Services During the Outbreak

It is important to use multiple communication approaches, including social media networks, to build public confidence and encourage continued utilization of essential services during the outbreak. Additionally, a strategic step is to engage with communities to inform the adaptation of services so they are more responsive to local needs.

### Outcome 3. Serve People

- » Strengthen and expand service delivery partnerships with the public and private sector including pharmaceutical companies, factories, manufactures etc. (providing commodities, support for IEC materials, etc.).
- » Strengthen and expand training of external service providers.
- » Deliver rights-based services including for safe abortion and HIV.
- » Enable services through public and private health providers.

An information system and a dedicated registry were set up for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test. The information model is needed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and facilitate the long-term follow-up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the health system. The new information system will facilitate the calculation of essential indicators of the program; a) the proportion of women positive in primary screening

HPV test, who have visited the gynecologist for follow up diagnoses and treatment b) the number of pre-cancer diagnoses and their treatment. The system was created by the Institute of Public Health (IPH) technical team and can be accessed in the link: [https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq\\_kc8kSGtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbl0Hg?e=QSpeUC](https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq_kc8kSGtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbl0Hg?e=QSpeUC).

Supported by IPPF EN and UNFPA and in close collaboration with technical group from the Institute of Public Health, ACPD held meetings with the directors of Institute of Public Health (Dr. Albana Fico) and two University Hospitals for gynecology and obstetrics; 'Koco Gliozheni' (Dr. Genc Hyska) and 'Queen Geraldine' (Dr. Eliona Demaliaj). In the frame of the meetings and discussions, the maternity hospital directors signed two bilateral memorandums of understanding in November to ensure the sustainability of the system.

ACPD has used mainly online channels and remote platforms to conduct awareness raising, promotional and informative campaigns about services and information ACPD provided in the conditions of Covid-19. Campaigns have delivered tailored messages in the framework of Cervical Cancer, Safe Abortion, HIV and SGBV for the audiences reaching out to an audience of 30,000 people with positive messages.

ACPD has continued to serve to vulnerable communities by expanding their choices and increasing access to health care through community-based delivery and its clinics. ACPD clinics and CBD have been a decent option for women and girls from rural areas to receive services they need.

## Best Practices

The mobile ultrasound machine has been purchased under MISP restricted fund, supported by IPPF, and has been used by the medical staff of ACPD to provide SRH services as well as Covid protection supplies for women and girls living in rural areas who cannot access such services in their health care centers.

Provision of SRHR counselling and consultation services through digital technologies such as Skype, WhatsApp, and information through SMS for counselling on GBV, abortion care, contraception care, HIV/STI preventions, and follow-up including for Covid-19 have empowered women and girls' beneficiaries to take control of their health and fertility through enhancing self-care and health monitoring and improve their health seeking behaviours.

A guideline on Sexual and Reproductive Health services have been prepared by an expert of the field aiming to guide the medical and programmatic staff for sustainable services in the context of the pandemic COVID-19 and after that. Topics elaborated in the document included: adapt management and coordination mechanisms in time to support COVID-19 response action, including the establishment of an event management team; prioritize essential health services and adapting to changing contexts and needs; enable service delivery points and service plat-



forms; quickly optimize the capacity of health personnel; ensure the availability of essential medicines, equipment and supplies; strengthen communication strategies to support the proper use of essential services; use digital platforms to support the delivery of essential health services; the elderly; sexual and reproductive health services; sexual transmitted infections; Anti COVID safeguard; vaccination and ACPD attitudes. The guideline has been shared with two ACPD clinics in Tirana and Vlora and their staff is using it in their everyday work with its clients. It has also been shared in ACPD website reaching out to over 1,500 people.

A document with the best practices of ACPD on provision of SRH services in crises and post crises including case studies, analyses, reports have been prepared by and expert and has been shared with Ministry of Health and Social Protection, high level decision-makers and authorities and key stakeholders during advocacy activities, NGO partners as well as on ACPD social media. This product is valuable also for other MAs who work on SRH services to provide support in crises and post crises situation as an effective tool which eliminates barriers and reduces costs especially through digital technologies and telemedicine initiatives.

- » 21,934 SRH services have been provided during 2021 by ACPD clinics in Tirana and Vlora as well as through community-based delivery, which has shown a slight increase.
- » A total of 863 health care providers were trained on various SRHR topics.
- » 110 healthcare providers were trained online on family planning through the ViC platform: <http://www.vic.eeirh.org/login/index.php>
- » 183 Social care providers; 130 healthcare providers were trained online and offline regarding 3 SOPs approved in Feb 2020 in Albania for preventing GBV including emergency
- » 200 health care providers participated in the online training on regional level on building cervical cancer screening registry.
- » 120 healthcare providers were trained online on MISP in light of Covid-19 to strengthen their capacities in emergency preparedness and response related to crises and post-crisis situations.
- » 60 medical health workers (family doctors, nurses, lab technicians, dentist and health care centres managers) trained how to provide free of stigma rights based and gender sensitive HIV services for KP.
- » 60 health care providers trained on value clarifications on Contraception Abortion Care.
- » 97 HCP and 103 social workers were trained on SOPs
- » Four training sessions were held in Tirana, Shkoder, Durres and Vlora with the participation of 65 health care providers on MISP with support of UNFPA.



## Lessons Learned

Despite the efforts of ACPD to advocate for endorsement of a policy paper on telemedicine and digital technologies by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, which offer huge potential to support women and girls to achieve positive SRHR outcomes, it was difficult to reach the finalization of this process by this year. Due to the high engagement of ACPD advocacy work through continuous consultation meetings and workshops, the representatives of MoHSP informed the ACPD that there is already an order issued which relates to the provision of telemedicine and digital health services only for chronic diseases in public hospitals. This is an indication of MoHSP awareness on the need for digital technology but due to the situation of COVID-19, progress achieved in this direction is limited vis-à-vis chronic diseases while SRH is in the future plans of MoHSP. Based on the recommendations from the workshops, MoHSP expressed optimism to expand this initiative to other health components including SRH. This paves the way for ACPD and its partners to continue its advocacy in the upcoming years to ensure this service is also provided to women and girls, especially those from rural areas.

## Outcome 4. Unite and Perform

- » Design and implement tailored resource mobilization strategies and action plans (incl. opportunity capture and donor mapping).
- » Resource mobilisation to diversify the funding base
- » Strengthen finance/budgeting/costing
- » Strengthen governance
- » Strengthen knowledge management
- » Strengthen ACPD capacity for resource mobilization
- » Strengthen managerial capacity
- » Identify and implement activities to engage activists
- » Strengthen the capacity of activists on SRHR issues success

ACPD management and staff structure has undergone internal changes, initially the change of the financial staff and later on with the resignation of the executive director. However, such changes have not affected our work and the results projected in the beginning of the year. ACPD members continued their hard work and the management role was essential in steering adaptation to the changes. On the other hand, ACPD emergency/backup plan developed as a result of Covid-19 situation facilitated the work and finalization of the projects implementation.



Based on the good work of the organization and the overall performance in the previous years, in 2021 ACPD entered into negotiations with donors and managed to extend an important project which will contribute to the sustainability and performance of the organization. This extension will also cover a part of the salaries for 2 ACPD staff members. The project is: [National Resource Center for Civil Society supported by Partner Albania for Change and Developed with funds from European Union covering 2022-2024.](#)

ACPD has finalized the purchase of the ultrasound machine following all the procurement procedures based on the Albanian Law on Procurements. ACPD board decided/approved the additional fund in order to enable an optimal purchase based on the quality of the equipment. ACPD has paid 50% of the total amount from the association funds as a guarantee required by the company for starting the procedure of ordering the equipment and has finalized the transfer to the company for the second payment once the device was installed and set to work in ACPD premises. The ultrasound machine helped to increase the number of clients and services through community-based delivery and static clinic service which were a significant service challenge before. The mobile ultrasound machine has been used by the medical staff of ACPD to provide SRH services. In addition, Covid-19 protection supplies have been donated to women and girls living in rural areas who cannot access such services in their health care centers. This type of service provision will continue beyond the project (MISP restricted) with the support of IPPF unrestricted fund and income generated by ACPD clinics.

## Best Practices

Amid reform efforts in 2021, the IPPF approached the application deadline for the “Business Plan 2022”. The application for the 2022 fund was made according to the new formula referring to the reform on the allocation of funds and governance. The application was submitted directly to the IPPF central office. An independent evaluation committee was engaged to evaluate the application. The process employed to draft the proposal followed a similar format used in the past years, albeit with some improvements and refinements. The application was prepared in a short notice following the instructions delivered to the executive directors of the organizations in their meetings with the central office in London (the company that assisted in the reforms) as well as with IPPF EN regarding the 2022 proposal.

Year 2022 will be a pilot year. Following that, applications will be for three-year projects 2023-2025. So, even though it is the “Unrestricted” fund, there are a series of factors that affect the approval: the country needs, organization’s performance, the services, governing bodies (board), the quality of application, the strategies proposed, the targets, etc. The new application reflects every aspect of the organization and was submitted in a new online platform introduced for the first time (JotForm). The Technical Review Team completed the review of the business plan and ACPD received maximum evaluation.



## Lessons Learned

For 2021, ACPD expected to maintain the same level of funds. However, given the end of the five-year contract with UNFPA, the available funds dropped by about 40% compared to 2020, as the donor (UNFPA) planned to reserve these funds for the new five-year contract. ACPD has submitted the expression of interest in the first phase of the application to be an implementing partner of UNFPA for the 2022-2026. Also, we will submit our proposals as per their upcoming programme, which will be launched soon by UNFPA office. ACPD expects to sign new agreement with UNFPA by May/June. The new agreement will ensure the same level of funding that ACPD has received from UNFPA over the last few years.

Covid-19 continues to have its negative impact on the management and coordination of the organization's activity. A few meetings and gatherings which required a considerable number of participations were done online or in hybrid form due to the fear of infection, especially in the first 6-months of 2021. A lesson learned from the Covid-19 pandemic is that it is crucial to have in place emergency plans for mobilization and delivery of programs and the need to adapt our working plans to the restrictions imposed the central government and match with its priorities.



# ACPD PROJECTS IN 2021

## Project Title: Ending the SGBV against women in Albania – IPPF EN

### Project summary:

There is a lack of emergency shelters to provide immediate services to women who have suffered violence and whose cases have been reported to the referral mechanism. In the absence of emergency shelters near their place of residence, victims are accommodated in long-term shelters or in emergency shelters set up in the nearest municipalities.

In the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, the Albanian Government imposed a number of restrictive measures. Social distancing and isolation have been a priority, but despite the necessity of the restrictions, isolation due to COVID-19 might trigger an increase of the incidence of violence.

To replicate the success of the Vloë emergency shelter for women victims/survivors of violence, and through the “Ending SGBV against Women in Albania” Project supported by IPPF, ACPD aimed to expand its work to the municipalities of Shkodra (ACPD local branch) and Elbasan, where ACPD had a branch in the past and has continuously implemented activities as part of its work. In both municipalities, emergency shelters integrated in the public sector are lacking.

ACPD held policy dialogues to engage them to dedicate funding for emergency shelters for women victims/survivors of SGBV through the involvement of municipalities, civil society organizations, private sector and Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The establishment and budgeting of this service would increase women and girls’ safety and improve access to SGBV services for victims/survivors with emergency needs.

The objectives of the project were:

1. Collect evidences on effective models in support of women and girls’ victims/survivors of violence in Shkodra and Elbasan municipalities while draw a set of recommendations for integration of shelter centres in public and NGO sector.

2. Enabling environment for the establishment of emergency shelters on SGBV in 2 municipalities in Albania – Shkodra and Elbasan – that support women victims/survivors of violence and their empowerment and integration in society.

Several activities were implemented in Elbasan and Shkodra to achieve the objectives and achievements were made to support women victims/survivors of violence and their empowerment and integration in society.

### Main achievements of the project

During January- March, ACPD carried out several meetings with key stakeholders from Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP); representatives from local municipalities of Elbasan and Shkodra; civil society organizations; health and education institutions etc. The aim of the meetings was to introduce the initiative, build partnerships and develop recommendations for the establishment and functionality of emergency shelters for women and girls - survivor of SGBV. Two representatives (one from each municipality) committed to support ACPD in this initiative. They were actively engaged in the desk review, policy dialogue workshops and other activities organized by ACPD.

One expert from Elbasan and one from Shkodra were contracted by ACPD to develop a desk review to identify successful models and recommendations for the establishment of emergency shelters for women and girls - victims/survivors of violence. The desk review consists of comprehensive information regarding the main concepts of Coordinated Referral Mechanism (CRM); functionality and structure of the CRM; data and information on case management during the Covid-19 pandemic; best practices of the Municipality of Elbasan. On the other hand, a questionnaire was administered with emergency shelters directors/staff and clients to have a mapping of the situation, to understand the models and concepts of emergency shelters.

The desk research showed similarity in the problems faced in both municipalities. However, the Municipality of Elbasan provides some good practices on the functionality of the programmes of social services where the collaboration with civil society organizations has enabled women to get acquainted with the law and provided support to all women to prepare the necessary documentation for the opportunities offered by the law. Also, the collaboration of the Municipality of Elbasan with civil society organizations that operate in the field is very good and sustainable compared to that of the Municipality of Shkodra.

Despite the good practices of the Municipality of Elbasan, the main recommendations resulting from the desk reviews are similar for both municipalities and consist of the following:

- » Capacity building and strengthening the role of administrative units (AUs) in identifying, referring and treating cases of domestic violence through the



deployment of domestic violence specialists. The placement of domestic violence specialists in each AU is an important factor in successfully identifying, treating and referring all cases of domestic violence, in case-by-case data collection, and in addressing the needs and concerns of survivors. of DV and in strengthening and functioning of coordinated referral mechanism (CRM); Raising awareness on domestic violence, gender-based violence and violence against women and girls, as well as CRM services are needed to improve knowledge among vulnerable communities, young boys and men, as well as professionals dealing with these forms of violence (police, health centers, schools, employment offices and the media, etc.) in order to prevent and address them. The advocacy work should be aimed at public institutions to increase the allocation of funds for the organization of awareness campaigns related to the prevention and combating of gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

- » Improvement and development of specialized services especially for victims of domestic violence as well as perpetrators who have been diagnosed with mental health problems.
- » Advocate for more funding for social services (social fund, social housing schemes) for vulnerable groups, including DV survivors, in cooperation with central government institutions, especially Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) and Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE).
- » Increase budgets to improve the range of services for DV survivors through the implementation of general gender budgeting (GGB), coordinating planned interventions in local development plans / social care plans / local plans for GB with budget allocation for the development of packages comprehensive for comprehensive services for DV survivors to respond to their short-term and long-term needs and ensure their social and economic rehabilitation and reintegration into society.
- » Determining in each protection order / immediate protection order decision the sanction for the perpetrator to attend a rehabilitation service as well as the strengthening and increase of rehabilitation programs for the perpetrators.
- » Create opportunities for employment of victims of domestic violence. Support for the integration and empowerment of women (victims of domestic violence), small loans, housing, start-ups for businesses, etc. Employment and Long-term Housing for survivors of domestic violence. Establishment of services for long-term rehabilitation of cases of domestic violence.
- » Establishment and operation of a rehabilitation center for victims of domestic violence with long-term residence.
- » Better field monitoring and more in-depth work in schools, where phenomena related to domestic violence can be more easily identified. The responsibility

of existing structures should be higher and this requires as much awareness as possible.

- » Within the identification structures, the school and the family doctor, as well as the social services that operate in the field, should have a greater role, so that the identification is on time and the prevention of the escalation of problems within the family is achieved. Awareness meetings as much as possible in the community.
- » ACPD with the facilitation of Elbasan and Shkodra focal points carried out one-day policy dialogue workshops with the participation of 30 participants/ each workshop from municipalities; civil society organizations; women and girls etc. The aim of the workshops was to ensure the engagement of all actors in support of development of emergency shelters and ensure institutional commitment through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU). At the end of the workshops, representatives from the municipalities of Elbasan and Shkodra agreed to support the initiative and make efforts to support emergency shelters.

Following ACPD and its partners' advocacy work, the Municipality of Elbasan issued Order No. 90, dated 20.09.2021, "On the Approval of Initiation of Procedures for Renting a Facility that Will Serve as an Emergency Shelter, to Be Administered by Local NGO "Forumi i Gruas Elbasan" The allocated funds are for the period of 10 months in 2022, however there are possibilities for extension. Through this order, the Municipality of Elbasan committed funds to pay the rent of the facility that will serve as an emergency centre. The centre will be administered by Forumi i Gruas Elbasan, which will provide support to local women victims/survivors of violence. On the other hand, the Municipality of Shkodra committed to sign an MoU in support of emergency shelters in 2022.

- » On 3rd of December, ACPD organized an advocacy roundtable in Elbasan with participation of 25 representatives from the municipalities of Elbasan municipality and Shkodra, civil society organizations, and media. The aim of the advocacy roundtable was to identify sources and create opportunities of funding in support of emergency shelters. Several recommendations were provided by participants regarding the type of support needed such as: Empowerment of multifunctional centres that are in place, as this centre works directly with children with special needs; Service improvement; Employment of a child protection worker given that the social worker is specialized for cases referral but not cases management: Staff sustainability etc. At the end of the roundtable, participants agreed to work to strengthen the partnership between private and public sector and local government representatives committed to prioritize the issue in order to identify the funding sources.
- » The project coordinator with a communication strategy expert designed a communication strategy in support of ACPD online advocacy campaigns with messages on emergency shelters. The aim was to raise awareness on the benefits of emergency shelters, the importance and socio-economic impact on



women - victims/survivors of violence. Through the communication strategy and advocacy campaigns, ACPD aimed to raise awareness of municipalities and boost their support. Posters and leaflets were designed with key messages and disseminated online in ACPD social media reaching out to about 2,000 people. The key messages developed as part of the strategy and used by ACPD in the online campaigns are:

- » We fight for a world where every woman and girl is safe, empowered and where her voice is heard!
- » Violence against women is a crime and is punishable! Report the violence!
- » “The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded existing gender inequalities and increased the risk of gender-based violence.”

“If we want to take the next step towards guaranteeing gender equality and maintaining the enjoyment of fundamental rights, now is the time to recognize the importance of reproductive and sexual health and rights. With the help of national gender equality bodies, Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights should be promoted as part of health care and as an obligation.”

- » Act now, but remember the future!

The state needs to monitor how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting women’s health and draw conclusions. Now more than ever we are looking at the dangerous effects that restricting access to Reproductive and Sexual Health and Women’s Rights has. The government should see the health crisis as a chance for a new approach to reproductive and sexual health and the protection of women. Additional barriers, created by the isolation of the country, should serve as an incentive to ensure proper access to Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights.

- » Young people have the right to a Reproductive and Sexual Health care that meets their needs!

Empower young people to protect their health through comprehensive sexuality education; Invest in high quality youth friendly health services; Fight stigma as a barrier to health care.

- » The health system can help women survivors of COVID - 19 violence!

Identify and share information on support services, including service schedules and address details; Create referral links; Find out what the needs of violence survivors are and how to meet them best and safely

- » The government can help protect women and their children from violence during COVID - 19.

In 2021, ACPD continued its work with the provision of services through its static

clinics and mobile clinics. ACPD psychosocial staff provided 2,895 GBV prevention services, with counselling provided to both clients and victims/survivors of violence. Local TV chronic on advocacy roundtable: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4JBfTcw\\_sc&list=UUdG779-A6umMh3NvRuobDQ&index=30&ab\\_channel=TelevizioniSKAMPA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4JBfTcw_sc&list=UUdG779-A6umMh3NvRuobDQ&index=30&ab_channel=TelevizioniSKAMPA); ACPD roundtable: <https://www.facebook.com/QSH-PZH/photos/pcb.4475422949240785/4475401899242890/>

Communication strategy: <file:///C:/Users/HP/Desktop/Strategjia%20e%20komunikimit%20p%C3%ABr%20dhun%C3%ABn%20me%20baç%C3%AB%20gjinore%20dhe%20seksuale.pdf>

## Challenges and Project Response

Overall, the project implementation went well and the municipalities we worked with welcomed our initiative and committed to collaborate with us. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need to provide more support on issues related to any type of violence, including domestic and gender-based violence, and this has facilitated the work ACPD has done to date. However, there have been some challenges confronting ACPD, including:

- » Irrespective of the insignificant differences between the Municipality of Elbasan and the Municipality of Shkodra, the latter would not sign an MoU in support of emergency shelters. However, owing to the persistence and good job was done and Shkodra committed to sign it in 2022.
- » The partnership public-private still remains a challenge itself. Despite the good will and commitment of the local government, there is still a lot of work to make sure real support is provided to emergency shelters. However, ensuring the commitment of local government representatives and their involvement in discussion in these roundtables on the prioritization of and support to the centers is an important step forward.





## Project Title: Deliver and Enable CSE – Young People in Albania Are Empowered to Realize Their Health, Wellbeing and Dignity-IPPF EN

### Project summary:

During this reporting period, the initiative continued to focus on reaching out to more out-of-school young people from rural areas of Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra -not covered previously- by delivering comprehensive sexuality education; creating a supportive environment through education and awareness raising activities; building capacities of teachers and other educational professionals to provide quality CSE especially on sensitive topics and development; and/or scaling up innovative communication strategies such as web-based CSE interventions and steady advocacy towards CSE for vulnerable groups.

ACPD continues to focus its work on the provision of CSE for vulnerable groups by advocating to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for establishing clear mechanisms in this regard. ACPD worked to ensure access to CSE that provides youth with the basis to make well-informed decisions about their lives and bodies and develop healthy relationships, which need to be ensured in all phases of the pandemic. In order to maximize effectiveness, digital platforms and tools and other in and out-of-school CSE resources were used to promote sexual and reproductive health, including the provision of sexual and reproductive health services.

### Main achievements of the project

120 teachers from public schools in rural areas of Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra participated in the three two-day online trainings organized by ACPD. The participants were selected from the schools that are not included in the Agency for Ensuring Quality Pre-University Education (AEQPUE) plans for trainings delivery in coordination with Regional Directorates of Education. During the interactive discussions encouraged by the moderator, some of the teachers stated it was difficult for them to speak openly with their students about sensitive components of CSE, while others stated that many young people refer to internet when they want information about sexuality. There were other teachers who stated that some students have more information and knowledge about these issues than us. Some of challenges identified were: lack of materials and resources among teachers, parental opposition, and the persistence of cultural taboos around sex which impede young people to receive accurate information and SRH services. ACPD staff shared with the participants evidence-based findings about the effectiveness of CSE in health-seeking behaviours and their wellbeing. Based on the evaluation forms, the participants have shown increased knowledge and skills on CSE component including sexuality,



sexual pleasure, sexual orientation and gender identities, gender roles, sexual risks and safety, and sexual rights and they felt confident and able to address various challenging situations during the delivery of sessions. Trained teachers shared their information and knowledge gained from the training with other 200 teachers in project areas through informal sessions.

Three of one-day peer education workshops on CSE, SGBV & SRH services were carried out through online platforms with 120 out-of-school young people in the rural areas and with MSM, LGBT and young people who sell sex in Tirana, Vlora and Shkodra. Participants were supplied with information and education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS, modern contraception, sexual gender-based violence, sexual relationships, abortion etc. and some skills related to sexual and reproductive health services. The information and education that young people gained from the workshop were shared with other 750 peers in informal settings through friendly sessions on online platforms.

ACPD continued to promote the blog for adolescent sexuality education and made it popular among young people especially for young people at school trained by ACPD and partner organizations. The blog has been active with information prepared by young activists of the center regarding the importance of comprehensive sexuality education mainly on sexuality, sexual pleasure, sexual orientation and gender identities, gender roles, sexual risks and safety and sexual rights. Some 1,500 people were reached out with accurate, age-appropriate sexuality education as well as with COVID-19 information as a result of blog posts linked to Facebook, allowing them to increase their awareness CSE and COVID-19 pandemic and response.

As a result of the collaboration with “Myslym Keta” High School, a ‘Zero Tolerance’ policy was developed, signed by the high school director and it is publicly shared with students, teachers and parents. The policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. The purpose of this policy was to focus on preventing and responding to school violence, to provide a guide for school management to be a safer space, providing the right structures, policies and enabling environment as well as for them to orient school management towards appropriate remedial and preventive interventions. The policy comprises of definitions; a section on violence prevention; section on how to identify, intervene and refer cases of violence; orientation of actions to address evidence-based violence. A guideline Prot. 176, dated 01/06/2021, was issued by the high school director on Zero Tolerance policy implementation. The work on policy was presented to the participants of the concluding meetings as a comprehensive document that can guide the Myslym Keta High School towards a common approach to achieving a safe, healthy and non-violent learning environment and should be used as a good practice to learn from and expand to other high schools.

An expert in the field of sexual education prepared a report on the current state of CSE in Albania focused on the recent achievements and current barriers. The



report has been shared on ACPD social media as well as with stakeholders and partners working with CSE. Over 1,000 viewers have been reached out through ACPD social media.

ACPD carried out three policy dialogue workshops with 60 participants from key stakeholders and Ministry of Education Sports and Youth aiming to produce a policy briefing regarding CSE and the urgent need for addressing CSE delivery among young people out of school in order to equip them with knowledge and life skills to prevent HIV, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, to decide on their own body based on rights based and gender sensitive CSE and improve their life and health. At the end of these workshops, it was ensured the commitment of MoHSP through the development of Zero tolerance policy against SGBV in school. Ministry of Education and Sports provided suggestions and recommendations of the development of the online platform which is part of the ACPD website. This activity was combined with advocacy efforts undertaken under the project Comprehensive Sexuality Education for an inclusive and gender equal society. Efforts have been done also to advocate on establishing mechanisms for funding opportunities and addressing CSE need among young people out of school identified. Despite all efforts and advocacy work of ACPD to reach a statement from the Ministry of Education and considering the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to reach the finalization of this process by this year. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/3648919665224455>.

## Challenges and Project Response

The trainings with teachers were planned to be organized face to face but the restriction set by the schools because of the pandemic of COVID-19 made the school settings inaccessible. ACPD staff managed to organize the trainings online by rearranging the days and schedule according to the availability of the participants.

Gathering young people from KP to participate in the workshops remains challenging. ACPD staff managed it, however, by collaborating with Aksion + and Stop AIDS organizations that work with YKP in the area of SRH and HIV/AIDS through the provision of services, education and advocacy.

During the policy dialogue workshops, efforts have been made to ensure commitment of the MoE toward improvement of implementation of the state CSE and improvement of its SGBV component through mechanisms for funding opportunities and addressing CSE need among out-of-school youth identified. Despite all efforts and advocacy work of ACPD to reach a statement from the Ministry of Education and considering the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to reach the finalization of this process by this year. However, based on the joint actions of ACPD with the support of IPPF in the implementation of CSE and CSE/SGBV project, a platform was developed for young people to access information and materials on how SGBV should be prevented and addressed through the provision of CSE. Established in the ACPD website with the approval of the Ministry of

Education, the platform will also serve as a tool for out-of-school young people. In the future, ACPD and its partners will continue their advocacy to implement this document in support of out-of-school young people.

## Project Title: Comprehensive Sexuality Education for An Inclusive and Gender Equal Society-IPPF EN

### Project summary:

The “Comprehensive Sexuality Education for An Inclusive and Gender Equal Society” Project supported by International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) aimed to gather evidence on the effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) on young people’s ability to protect themselves from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

The project focused on providing evidence of the benefits of CSE to the lives of young people with a strong emphasis on the prevention and response to harmful social norms and sexual abuse practices across all levels, not just the school.

A study was conducted in a high school in Tirana with the approval of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). Through the study, which in the conditions of Covid-19 was conducted online through platforms easily accessible to teachers and students, the perceptions, nature and causes and impact of violence on children’s lives were explored. Information was obtained to design prevention initiatives and was assessed how the situation has changed after the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE).

An updated manual on Gender and Sexual Violence adapted by the ACPD from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) was used for teacher and student training.

The study was divided into 2 phases: before and after the intervention. A questionnaire was completed by a group of 30 students (intervention group) and with another group of 30 students (the comparison group). Then, 30 students of the intervention group were trained on the basis of the manual on Gender and Sexual Violence of the ACPD adapted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Also, 10 teachers were trained for CSE and SGBV. After the intervention, a questionnaire was completed by 30 students in the control group; and the comparison group composed of 30 students; 10 in-depth interviews with young people (5 with the control group and 5 with the comparison group; and 1 Focus Group with Teachers. At the end of the project, in June the control group was trained.



A forum with parents and community members was held to raise their awareness of all forms of violence and abuse. To present the intervention and the achievements within the intervention, a final workshop was held with representatives of public institutions (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Health and Social Protection; Directorate of Social Service), civil society, parents, young people, and community members to present the findings of the study and to generate recommendations and commitments to improving the mechanisms for the prevention and referral of violence and advocacy for improving the implementation of the CSE, including the SGBV component. As a result of the intervention the students who participated in the first and second round of the program were empowered to identify all types of violence and where they can get help in cases of violence and how to react to all forms of violence.

### Main Achievements of the Project

- » Ministry of Education Youth and Sports, the state entity in charge for the endorsement of this initiative, permitted the realization of the study in one secondary school of Tirana, Myslym Keta High School.

Six anticipatory meetings were carried out in total by ACPD with all actors involved in the project. ACPD staff presented the initiative and highlighted all the expected results where the collaboration with the institution is required, which was welcomed by them. During these constructive meetings, representatives from MoEYS informed ACPD staff that the procedure to access school has changed. They also inform ACPD on the process required to obtain approval and start implementing activities. In mid-February, ACPD, with MoEYS assistance, prepared the required documentation and handed it to the respective institutions to complete the revision process. On 25th March, after the procedure was completed, the MoEYS issued the Official Approval Letter (Protocol No. 1102/1) to ACPD so as to proceed with the activity in the “Myslym Keta” High School, as instructed by the Ministry. In coordination with the General Directorate of Pre-University Education and Regional Directorate of Pre-University Education, ACPD established the connection with the high school and started work to implement the planned activities.

- » A digital platform based on the translated “Safe from SGBV toolkit” for teachers and students is developed containing 6 modules to enable access to CSE/ SGBV sessions for young people and can be accessed in the ACPD official website.

A platform “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” was developed aiming to enable young people, teachers, parents and community members to access information and knowledge about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The platform is designed based on the updated manual on Safe from SGBV that the Albanian Center for Population and Development has adapted from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

The “Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” platform consists of 6 modules with information about comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and gender-based violence. Each of the modules contains theoretical information combined with practical exercises, to be completed by young people, who are finally provided with a certificate of participation.

It is the first online platform which is developed by ACPD and endorsed by MoEYS to be accessible for all teachers and young people and it is a supplement of the information and knowledge young people learn at school and even though it is recently launched the interest received by partners; stakeholders and some of the young people themselves to use it and share widely is a good hint of the great results it will provide in the future.

The platform was launched in the way forward workshop with key stakeholders, partners and close collaborators who gave their feedback for its improvement. The platform is now available and easily accessed in the official website of ACPD.

- » The baseline and impact evaluation have been carried out to provide evidence related to the effects of CSE to young people lives with strong emphasis on prevention and response to harmful social norms and practices and sexual abuse. A final report is produced containing all findings and the recommendations for improvement.

Upon consent of MoEYS, ACPD carried out research which took place in a high school of Tirana aiming to provide evidences related to the benefits of CSE to young people’s lives with strong emphasis on the prevention and response to harmful social norms and practices and sexual abuse. The research examined the perceptions, nature, extent, causes, and impact of violence in schools and evaluated how the situation has changed after the provision of Comprehensive Sexuality Education for the intervention group composed of 30 of students in comparison with the comparison group of 30 students who did not receive CSE until the end of the initiative.

Two experts of Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Gender Equality/Gender Based Violence and research who were contracted to conduct the study developed a qualitative methodology with a series of questions and guidelines for conducting structured and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers to examine the nature and impact of violence and effects of CSE in school environment.

The qualitative research consisted in two phases:

- » Baseline study carried out on 8 April 2021, where 60 semi-structured questionnaires were administered with students (30 interviews with the intervention group who were planned to receive sessions on CSE/SGBV and 30 interviews with the comparison group who were planned to receive it at the end of the project).
- » Impact evaluation phase in May. This phase included: 60 semi-structured



questionnaires carried out on 18 May 2021 (30 interviews with the intervention group who received sessions on CSE/SGBV and 30 interviews with the comparison group who didn't receive at this stage); 10 in depth interviews on 20 May 2021 (5 with young students involved with the CSE program and 5 with young people of the comparison group)

On 12 May 2021, one focus group (FG) with 10 teachers was carried out in the framework of the project on CSE/SGBV. The FG discussion with teachers was based on some questions regarding their training, how they benefited from it, how helpful the information provided to them to build their knowledge and skills was, key messages, and how positively or negatively they were affected by the training. The discussion concluded that such interventions are very helpful and supportive to teachers. They now feel more competent to have conversations with their students during class or outside it and get more involved in their problems by providing support. They are now more confident to react to problems faced in school settings and even build better relationship with their student's parents. A final report was produced and is available in English containing all findings and the recommendations for improvement. The report is available online on the ACPD web page

#### Main Research Results:

##### » Communication with Parents and Teachers on Important Topics

The findings show that most participants find it easier to communicate with their mothers about such important topics than with their fathers and / or teachers.

Most participants in both the female and male groups find it somewhat difficult to communicate with teachers. More specifically, 53.3% find it somewhat difficult and 13.3% find it very difficult; 51% of women find it somewhat difficult and the remaining 7% find it very difficult.

The overall post-intervention data analysis shows that there are changes in communication with parents and teachers before and after the intervention. In most cases the change is positive, indicating that the intervention has helped teenagers to have more communication with father mother and teacher on topics that are important to them. More has to be done in this regard, not only with the teenagers but also with their parents and teachers in order to improve the whole communication environment for the youths to speak up about what concerns them. Regarding communication with their fathers, 70% of male participants find it very easy and 30% easy. In the female group, 24% find it very easy, 44% easy and 24% somewhat difficult and only 8% difficult.

Regarding communication with their mothers, in the post-test data, we see that 100% of male participants find it very easy to communicate with the mother, while in the female group 70% find it very easy.

Communication with teachers after the intervention: 80% of men find it easy and



only 20% somewhat difficult. In the group of women, the situation has changed in the following direction, 44% find it easy and 56% difficult.

» Adolescents' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices regarding Sexuality

Regarding the level of anxiety that adolescents felt about certain situations involving sexual and physical violence, sexual and reproductive health issues, such as HIV / AIDS, discrimination based on race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, gender inequality, and sexual harassment in the school environment, the findings are as follows:

The average score for each of the questions in the pre-intervention phase ranged from 1.53 to 1.77 which indicates a very high concern for each situation. While after the intervention, the average score for each measured item varies from 1.70 to 1.93.

This is an important finding, because it shows that adolescents are highly concerned about sexual and physical violence, sexually transmitted diseases, discriminatory gender inequality, and sexual harassment in the school environment, which in turn affect their overall wellbeing.

» Support and Safety of the School Environment

The findings show that 35% of adolescents in the pre-intervention phase did not receive information about gender roles in school, while 46.7% reported that they did receive such information.

After the interventions the results showed that 70% had received information.

» Sources That Adolescents Use to Learn About Sexuality and GBV

The majority in the pre-test phase responded that 'mother' was the first source of information for the 50% of participants, while 18.3% of respondents chose social networks and around 12% picked up school/teachers. The second source of information ranks as follows: 21.7% chose schools/teachers and 13.3% preferred social networks. Interestingly, 51.7% preferred school/teachers as their desired source of information and 28.3% opted for professionals (doctors, psychologists, social workers). This is an important finding, which shows that schools/teachers are amongst the most desired sources that the pupils would like to receive information from regarding sexuality and GBV.

In addition, the sources of information after the intervention were mother for 53.3% of respondents, social networks for 26.7% and school/teachers for 10%. The second source of information in the post-intervention phase was mother and social networks for 26.7% of participants, and siblings for 23.3%, while school/teachers and fathers for 10% of participants. The desired source of information in the post-intervention phase for 60% of participants was school/teachers, followed by professionals (doctors, psychologists, social workers), and the remaining percentage opted for mother, father and siblings.





The proportion of participants who could identify where to seek support in cases of violence increased by 70%. The mean score indicating how many types of partner violence participants could identify correctly increased by 70 %.

» Differences in the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Young People After the Intervention

The results show:

- The positive effect of the intervention in terms of helping participants to get acquainted with GBV, considering that for 43.3% of participants the intervention helped them to a great extent while for 36.7% it helped them to a considerable extent (total 80%).
- The positive effect of the intervention as it helped 80% participants to recognize GBV. Some 77% of participants gained confidence in reacting to GBV, while 70% consider the intervention helpful in building their skills to self-protection against GBV. Also, 76.7% of participants stated that the intervention helped them to develop skills to help others.
- That 40% of the participants considered the intervention extremely useful in their preparation to be protected from GBV, while 31% considered it very useful (71% in total).
- That 43.3% of the participants found the intervention useful to a large extent in regards to developing skills to help others, while 33.3% considered it useful to a considerable extent (total 76.6%).

Ten teachers were able to deliver the CSE and SGBV program after the intervention. They were involved with facilitating the sessions with other 30 young people (comparison group), baseline and endline study, case study development, etc.

On 22-23 April ACPD organized a two-day training with the participation of 10 teachers from the Myslym Keta high school. The main objectives of this training included: To increase knowledge among participants on gender based and sexual violence with specific focus on on-line violence; To urge among participants the forming of an attitude where violence of any form should not be accepted, abusers not justified and victims never blamed; To build knowledge leading to action on recognizing forms of sexual abuse and how to respond to it; To sparkle ideas for incorporation of GBV and SV activities in teaching.

Moderators of the trainings pointed out to participants the importance of implementing and addressing CSE not only in physical, emotional, social and cultural aspects, but also in aspects like friendship, safety, intimacy, gender equality, security, pleasure and attraction because pupils have the right and need to be informed on sexual health issues. The teachers had the courage to freely share what they thought in front of their colleagues without hesitation. Most active teachers were social science and humanities subject related, apparently; the classical idea

that GBV and SE as “soft topics” belong to teachers of history, sociology, philosophy, etc. still prevails, something which was mitigated during follow-up visits in the school since all teachers can and must play a role in preventing any form of violence.

The main recommendation is to conduct additional events face-to-face, mainly because of the sensitivity of the topics. This was also a request expressed by teachers themselves. Additionally, there are opportunities for larger in-depth work in specific topics such as, online sexual violence.

The project coordinator, moderator and one volunteer conducted follow-up visits to the respective schools to get feedback from teachers that were part of the training session to understand the knowledge and information gained by them and their preparedness to deliver the CSE and SGBV program. Based on the feedback solicited from the teachers during discussions and interactive methods (short direct questions short exercises etc.) it was concluded that teachers are prepared to properly deliver similar trainings to students and even to their other colleagues.

Interactive methodologies were implemented focusing on role play, discussion, debate, critical thinking, group work, quizzes via Mentimeter and we noticed teachers showed hypersensitivity in this area and appreciated the role of school, parents, stakeholders and other partners in cases of prevention and management of an abuse.

Teachers agree and see the school as an educational institution where they together with students grow and learn every day.

Sixty students are equipped with knowledge and skills on CSE and how to prevent, to report and respond to the SGBV.

During 28 April-25 of May, about 20 hours of face-to-face sessions combined with online sessions were carried out by 4 trained teachers and two training experts with 30 students of the intervention group to provide them with the skills necessary to assess when sexual behaviour is acceptable and when not, to communicate about it and respond to it appropriately.

The audience was a mixture of girls and boys, who were fully engaged throughout the training. It was so inspiring to witness this level of openness, courage, and the ability to “stand for themselves” found in almost all the discussions of these participants. The main message delivered in all sessions was that violence against women is never acceptable, victims are not to blame and perpetrators are to be punished. Participants seemed very interested to understand the very signs of violence in a toxic intimate partner relationship, before that escalates into a real violence. They were enthusiastic to learn on the importance of self-respect, the ability to establish boundaries, the necessity to communicate their emotions truthfully, and act on behalf of their own interests.

It was impressive to realize the level of awareness among participants on how the



outside social environment influences life decisions and behaviours, while all the participants mentioned the necessity to be in good company among positive and supportive peers.

While it does not affect students' interactions, the teachers' presence in all sessions might still have implications on the level of openness of the attending students. Given the sensitivity of the topic, students restrained themselves from openly discussing some of the topics, which teachers themselves may have serious issues that could curb their beliefs. However, the engagement of teachers as trainers was seen as positive step in building stronger relationships with students; eliminating barriers of future communication on these topics and building trust between both teachers and students, comparing to past similar interventions when teachers were engaged as facilitators.

The topic of online violence needs to be further explored, especially online sexual harassment and bullying.

GBV –SV in particular– is a high priority topic for the Albanian society, and continuation of these series of activities, engagement of pupils in discussions related to these topics, is of paramount importance not only for the individuals themselves, but also the entire society.

The project coordinator, the moderator and one volunteer conducted follow-up visits to the respective schools to get feedback from students that were part of the sessions in order to assess the knowledge and information gained by them and their preparedness on how to prevent, to report and respond to the SGBV and to share this knowledge with other peers.

Discussions revealed that students expressed improved knowledge about sexual abuse, human rights, online bullying and online sexual abuse and could easily identify types of GBV and what actions to take in this regard. Situations that relate to the reality were brought to students and they naturally manifested improved reactions and a sustainable learning.

Twenty parents and community members improved their knowledge about children rights, and have a clear sense of their responsibilities against working together with the school for establishing a model of school as community centre to prevent children violence and abuse.

A one-day forum with participation of 20 high schoolchildren parents took place was held at the high school setting aiming to raise their awareness on all forms of violence and abuse. The participants were provided with an overview of the information delivered to the students and teachers, and they were also informed about the main components of CSE, RH and the benefits of CSE to young people's lives, highlighting its crucial role in preventing and addressing the SGBV.

The forum featured dynamic discussions on current relationship parents have with their children and the relationship with school, on their involvement and com-

munication on such topics. As part of the discussion the following issues were emphasized:

- 1) Parents are involved in their children's education and are really interested and actively participate in parents' meetings where they discuss issues about their children's grades and overall performance, but topics such as SGBV are not part of the agenda.
- 2) Parents expressed that school has an important role in providing education and information on these topics to students and that it should serve as a consistent connection between parents and children if any in appropriate situation occurs in the school premises.
- 3) Few of them expressed that find it somewhat difficult to talk about sexuality with their children, but still they manage to do so and expressed that it really helped them to bond with their children more. While, they feel more confident to talk about GBV with their children. Usually, such conversations become more persistent when cases of GBV happen in school premises or around them.

Discussions included the ways of collaboration with the school to support an inclusive and healthy environment. Parents were satisfied with this forum and suggested to have regular meetings like this in the future so as to be proactive for any unpleasant situation that might happen and to discuss and exchange ideas with each other and representatives of the school.

The forum was of great importance as it helped parents to improve their knowledge about children's rights, and have a clearer sense of their responsibilities against working together with the school for establishing a model of school as community center to prevent violence and abuse of children.

The report was shared with beneficiaries, local and central educational and health institutions, young people child protection units (until age 18th); Ministry of Education Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Social Protection and will be shared with IPPF as well. The report was welcomed by all stakeholders and the awareness on the importance of CSE for the prevention as well addressing SGBV was increased. The feedback from them was positive and quite promising for further future work.

At the end of the project, on 29 June 2021, in the premises of Hotel Rogner, Tirana and online through the ZOOM platform, ACPD held a project closeout meeting was held to present the findings of the study "Evidence of the Impact of Comprehensive Sexual Education on the Ability of Young People to Protect Themselves from Gender-Based and Sexual Violence" with Myslym Keta High School students. Attended by more than 30 representatives from MoEYS, United Nations Population Fund in Albania (UNFPA), high school director and teachers, representatives of partner organizations, experts, and gynecologists, the meeting presented the findings and launched the platform "Safe from Gender and Sexual Violence", which was one of the most important achievements of this project.



The main findings of the study combined with recommendations arising from the discussions of the participants include the following:

- 1) Comprehensive sexuality education is essential in preventing and combatting sexual violence, in and out-of-school, so to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all.
- 2) All stakeholders, including young people, teachers, parents and other members of the community, should contribute to delivering comprehensive sexuality education and create the safe environment.
- 3) Effective and appropriate teaching methodologies are critical to the sexual education and to success of the fights against GBV and all teachers involved require appropriate training and teaching materials.
- 4) The civil society organizations can play an important role in bringing sex education to young people or vulnerable groups.
- 5) The MoEYS congratulated this initiative and committed to supporting the replication of this project to other high schools in the future, by endorsing the development of 'Zero Tolerance' policy, support ACPD and other NGOs in training the teachers and students and advance the work on CSE importance for SGBV prevention.

In addition to the study, the platform "Safe from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" was launched, which consists of 6 modules with information about comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and gender-based violence. Two national TVs were invited to report on the event. An interview was given by the ACPD Executive Director in the beginning of the activity. Key messages on the effectiveness of CSE on equipping young people with skills and knowledge to prevent SGBV were delivered during the interview. A full chronicle was aired in two national media outlets - Albanian National Radio-Television and Top Channel during their primetime news editions.

A Zero Tolerance policy is prepared and a guideline for its implementation signed by the high school director. The policy is shared with students; teachers and parents for everyday use. It is published in public settings of high school so everyone can read and refer to in all cases.

As a result of the collaboration with "Myslym Keta" high school in the frame of the project a 'Zero Tolerance' policy was developed, signed by the high school director and it is publicly shared with students, teachers and parents. The policy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child.

The purpose of this policy was to focus on preventing and responding to school violence, to provide a guide for school management to be a safer space, providing the right structures, policies and enabling environment as well as for them to ori-

ent school management towards appropriate remedial and preventive interventions. The policy comprises of definitions; a section on violence prevention; section on how to identify, intervene and refer cases of violence; orientation of actions to address evidence-based violence. A guideline Prot. 176, dated 01/06/2021, was issued by the high school director on Zero Tolerance policy implementation.

The policy was presented to the participants of the closeout meetings as a comprehensive document that can guide the Myslym Keta High School towards a common approach to achieving a safe, healthy and non-violent learning environment and should be used as a good practice to learn from and expand to other high schools across the country.

## Challenges and Project Response

The project implementation went in line with the proposal. All activities were implemented in accordance with the objectives even though there were some delays on the timeframe and minor adaptations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the national restrictions intertwined with the set of regulations ACPD followed to receive the endorsement by the respective institutions.

Due to Covid-19 second wave and the New Year holidays, schools were closed. Students returned to school in the second week of January. This created a considerable delay in obtaining a confirmation from education institutions on when to start the project implementation with the partner school, given that public institutions relied on regular updates from the MoHSP regarding the Covid-19 infection situation and respective mitigating measures. An official announcement on school reopening was only launched at the beginning of January.

MoEYS imposed new rules on entering the education facilities with procedures now including the validation of AEQPUE manual and a questionnaire for sensitive data from DPC. ACPD access to high school necessitated the examination of a set of required documents (instruments to be used; a concept of the project; who is involved etc.). Once the respective institutions approved the required documents submitted by ACPD, the project implementation had a green light to go. This process required a lot of work on the part ACPD staff to properly prepare the file with all documents and additional time for the documentation to go through the review process, which was facilitated with technical support of the MoEYS.

Another challenge confronting ACPD was the limited time remaining for achieving all project objectives and goals. However, this challenge was overcome due to persistence and hard work of the excellent team of experts and project staff as well as owing to the close collaboration with the school involved in this project.

Anticipatory meetings to build relationships with MEYS, Regional Education Directorates schools' managers, Child Protection Units (in Tirana administrative units) and teachers Link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3815745438>





541876/3815719511877802/

Capacity building activity with teachers on CSE and SGBV link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3831842113598875/3831822633600823>

Sessions with students in one pilot school on CSE and SGBV link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3838165616299858/3838117682971318>

Follow up visits with teachers and students link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3851198714996548/3851196084996811/>

Focus group with teachers link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3875390105910742/3875359399247146>

In depth-interviews with young people involved with CSe program and intervention group link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3905024176280668/3905020422947710>

Preventing violence and abuse against children/young people forum link: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/photos/pcb.3917490858367333/3917481485034937/>

Dissemination of research findings and the way forward workshop link: <http://acpd.org.al/en/?p=1135>

Interviews in 2 national TV (Top Channel and RTSH): ACPD Website: <http://acpd.org.al/en/?p=1150>; Top Channel: [https://top-channel.tv/2021/07/04/adoleshentet-pre-e-dhunes-e-abuzimit-ekspertet-te-nderhyhet-ne-kurikulat-e-shkolles-per-ti-parandaluar/?fbclid=IwAR2nujulZrwUUqr5eH97k\\_OTk-D6oQBF\\_K0CEkElcC6OkIvw1SqNaqGZ13FI](https://top-channel.tv/2021/07/04/adoleshentet-pre-e-dhunes-e-abuzimit-ekspertet-te-nderhyhet-ne-kurikulat-e-shkolles-per-ti-parandaluar/?fbclid=IwAR2nujulZrwUUqr5eH97k_OTk-D6oQBF_K0CEkElcC6OkIvw1SqNaqGZ13FI); RTSH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYUPmqoFrCs>

## Project Title: Ending the Stigma and Discrimination Associated with Abortion in Albania – IPPF EN

### Project summary:

In 2018, the National Institute of Statistics estimated 191 abortions per 1,000 live births showing a slight increase from 2017 (171 abortions per 1,000 live births). Unofficial sources indicate a higher number of abortions than those published that are performed illegally in the unregistered private clinics.

As there are no national studies on abortion stigma, ACPD refers to its work with



community and service providers and a few studies, such as the study conducted in 2013 (funded by the Packard Foundation through IPPF) to analyse abortion stigma. Based on the long-term experience of ACPD working at community level, it results that Albania remains a conservative society with restrictive gender norms which impede women to access freely sexual reproductive health care including quality abortion services.

As COVID-19 pandemic is present all over the world, SRH delivery continues to be a challenge in itself as this situation has affected the access to essential SRH services, including information and counselling on SRH and CSE, contraception services, safe abortion services, maternal and new-born health services, services for gender-based violence (GBV), STIs/HIV etc.

In 2020, during the isolation, ACPD medical staff in Tirana and Vlora has provided Sexual and Reproductive Health counselling via Skype, WhatsApp for vulnerable clients and entire community and sensitization of the public about the effects of COVID-19 to SRH, to gender inequalities which were posted through our website and social media.

The medical doctor of the Albanian Centre for Population and Development recorded a video and distributed it on social media aiming to support all women and girls who seek sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion and contraception.

In June 2020, ACPD has re-opened the doors of its clinic centres in Tirana and Vlora and started to provide sexual and reproductive health services for young women and girls who seek for services.

Considering the sensitivity of the topic and limitations, in the framework of the “Ending the Stigma and Discrimination Associated with Abortion in Albania” Project supported by IPPF, ACPD aimed to:

1. Increase access to stigma-free abortion services provided by ACPD and public health sector in Tirana and Vlora.
2. Empower poor and marginalized women and girls from rural areas of Tirana, Vlora to make informed decisions about their sexual reproductive health and rights through education and information on reproductive rights and bodily integrity.

Several activities were implemented and progress has been achieved on access to quality abortion services by women and girls in Tirana and Vlora.

## Main Achievements of the Project

ACPD organized one two-day training in Tirana and one two-day training in Vlora with on value clarification on comprehensive abortion care with 60 service provid-



ers (gynecologists, medical doctors, midwives). The aim of trainings was to update services providers' knowledge on abortion care, especially related to their understanding of women and girls' socio-cultural context, personal and professional views, awareness on national legislation concerning abortion etc. Often, women's access to abortion care is denied or hampered mostly because of abortion stigma or in humanitarian situation such as COVID-19 due to limitation on access. These trainings are valuable to mitigate the effects of abortion stigma and increase provision of and access to abortion care. The training was delivered by a gynecologist and a public health expert using an existent ACPD toolkit on Value Clarification with updated information from IPPF Framing Manual, clinical guidelines on safe abortion etc. At the end of the training, an evaluation form was completed by all participants, who showed a better understanding of comprehensive abortion care, safe abortion, abortion rights and sexual rights, value clarification concepts, framing of personal values. Trained service providers shared their knowledge with 100 other colleagues as reported by them in the constant communications ACPD had with them after the trainings.

ACPD organized five one-day seminars in Tirana and Vlora with participation of 20 women and men in each workshop. Seminars were carried out by two medical doctors previously trained by ACPD on abortion stigma and aimed to address issues on barriers and challenges faced during the experience of abortion, with focus also on COVID-19 period. Moderators chose interactive ways to deliver seminars using exercises, group discussions, case studies etc. The key issues discussed were related to abortion stigma, abortion rights and sexual and reproductive rights, and exercises were performed on how to frame and talk about our values. ACPD disseminated abortion IEC materials for extra information in support of the seminars.

From the participants discussions came out some tips on how to provide solution to overcome barriers as listed below:

- » Motivation to change is key. People must be open to changing their attitudes, values and behaviours; otherwise there will be no impact.
- » Men are important actors of change- they should support their women's and decide together on the best solution to their situation.
- » Is important to talk/discuss our values and service providers are crucial actors in the process. Is important to increase the trust to service providers so to increase the access to safe abortion.
- » All women and men should learn to frame their values and eliminate the idea of abortion being a solution to a problem. This notion only feeds the concept of identifying women that have abortions as narcissist that have negative sentiments towards babies.

In addition, feedback from participants led to suggestion that will help promote activities and future project that seek to improve and/or address abortion stigma, raise awareness, digital forms of communication to reach out to target groups,

and joint activities with men and opponents of abortion.

The workshops were welcomed by all participants who gained a broader understanding on abortion, their rights to access safe abortion combined with information on how to prevent unintended pregnancies as well as the concept of birth spacing.

ACPD continued to provide abortion related services and referrals in its static clinics and through community-based delivery. It also provided online (via social media, WhatsApp, phone calls) counselling and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights including abortion stigma and discrimination. ACPD medical doctors in Tirana and Vlora provided 1585 abortion related services to their clients.

One video summarizing 8 footages from women and young people was developed with support narratives on abortion stigma and discrimination to raise awareness of women, men, young people, service providers, community members. Some young people -part of ACPD core group who implemented YATAS project- were engaged in the development of key messages used in short spots. A design expert was contracted by ACPD to combine all footages in one video which was shared in ACPD social media. The video reached out 1,500 people with messages below listed:

- » Women are not free if they can't decide on their body!
- » Abortion is a human right!
- » Her body, her choice!
- » A woman dies each 8 minutes in developed countries from the complication of unsafe abortion, despite advancements in public health and technology!
- » 77% of abortion opponents are men, and 100% of them never carry a pregnancy!
- » A woman's bodily autonomy cannot be ignored but must be protected!
- » Women should be free to make choice for their body and life!
- » Get informed! It's your choice to be consulted and decide on abortion care!

Abortion Video Link: <http://acpd.org.al/wp-content/uploads/ACPD-ABORT-video.mp4>

## Challenges and Project Response

The main challenges faced during the project implementation was to deliver trainings and seminars on abortion care in times of COVID-19. Abortion remains a sensitive topic and in times where the focus continues to be on the COVID-19 pan-



demographic, it was difficult to attract the interest of service providers, women, and men in the trainings and workshops focusing on abortion stigma. However, with the persistence work of ACPD project staff and the professionalism of experts these barriers were overcome.

Another challenge was the development of video summarizing 8 short spots with people delivering a message to a wide audience. Due to abortion stigma, it is difficult to find people, especially women that welcome an opportunity to be on camera and share a message on safe abortion to other women and members of the community. Identification of people who participated in the video was a challenge. Yet, this challenge was overcome with support of the designing expert and preliminary communication of staff with these people.

Project Title: Advancing lesson learned after 20 years of implementing cervical cancer screening program in Albania-IPPF EN

### Project summary:

The endorsement of the National Program for Screening Cervical Cancer on January 30th by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection comes after many years of advocacy and awareness-raising of ACPD in collaboration with key stakeholders under the support of IPPF and UNFPA. The national screening program targets women 45-49 years old. The goal is to provide all women in this age group with screening HPV tests, as part of the routine examinations done at primary health care centres and specialised follow-up for all those at high risk. The screening program will improve the identification of women at higher risk for cervical cancer, detect the pre-cancer lesions, and treat them accordingly. Since February 2019, IPH, in collaboration with regional public health directories and health centres, and with support from ACPD has started with the program implementation activities, including training, building regional structures for the program and distribution of HPV test consumables

Through this Project, ACPD aimed to enable access for all women 40-59 years old to the National Cervical Cancer screening program. The project increased the information level among the target group about the health services offered by Public Institutions. In close collaboration with Ministry of Health and Social Protection and in partnership with UNFPA, ACPD worked to increase the awareness of society and policy makers about the need to include more women in the program and provide more support for the cervical cancer screening program.

### Main Achievements of the Project

In 2021, ACPD continued to advance its work on cervical cancer prevention and screening program. The main achievements of the 2021 initiative were:

An information system and a dedicated registry was set up for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test. This information model is needed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and facilitate the long term follow up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the health system. The new information system will facilitate the calculation of essential indicators of the program; a) the proportion of women positive in primary screening HPV test, who have visited the gynaecologist for follow up diagnoses and treatment b) the number of pre-cancer diagnoses and their treatment. The system was created by the Institute of Public Health (IPH) technical team and can be accessed in the following link: [https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq\\_kc8kSGtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbIOHg?e=QS-peUC](https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq_kc8kSGtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbIOHg?e=QS-peUC).

Supported by IPPF EN and UNFPA and in close collaboration with technical group from Institute of Public Health, ACPD held meetings with the directors of the Institute of Public Health (Dr. Albana Fico) and two Gynecological-Obstetric University Hospitals - 'Koco Gliozheni' (Dr. Genc Hyska) and 'Queen Geraldine' (Dr. Eliona Demaliaj). Major topics discussed in these meetings included:

- a. The need to formalize the exchange of information between the hospitals and the Institute of Public Health to provide data for estimation of screening program indicators. An essential indicator of the program, which cannot be calculated without an appropriate and dedicated information system, is the proportion of women screened with primary HPV test, who perform a visit to the gynecologist for follow-up diagnoses and potential treatment.
- b. Another important indicator of the program success is the number of pre-cancers diagnosed and their treatment. It was agreed to support the information exchange between institutions with a formal memorandum. Two bilateral memorandums of understanding were signed by these institutions within that November.

In the frame of the meetings and discussions, respective directors of Queen Geraldine and Koco Gliozheni maternity hospitals signed two bilateral memorandums of understanding within that November to ensure the sustainability of the system.

ACPD carried out advocacy campaigns using different communication channels to address issue raised by the technical group of experts regarding the increased coverage with preventive services, from 15,000/year to 30,000/year. In this regard, ACPD organized a round table with the participation of 20 representatives from MoHSP, health care operator, Institute of Public Health, UNFPA Albania, health care providers and women organisations and other stakeholders. This meeting discussed the implementation of the cervical cancer screening program, the main recommendation from the CC technical group, and future steps for improvement. Participants of this meeting discussed about the HPV+ database and colposcopy register. Some of the main recommendations include:

- » The results of evaluation of colposcopy and cervical pre cancer clinical management capacities, the regional hospitals should be part of a national net-



work for colposcopy, and the role of university hospitals in Tirana for clinical reference and information management.

- » Exchange of information among hospitals and the Institute of Public Health to provide data to estimate screening program indicators
- » Agreeing about technical details and standards of registration, reporting and feedback. Variables to be included in the individual form and flexibility of the data to allow for variations between hospitals practices.
- » A simple electronic version of the reporting instrument allows the online exchange of information between institutions.

Despite the multiple efforts of the ACPD and its partners, the objective to increase testing kits from 15,000 to 30,000 per year was not achieved due to COVID-19 pandemic and the focus and support of the MoHSP to respond to this emergency situation. However, the progress made this year regarding CC will facilitate the work of ACPD to achieve this result in the future initiatives.

Outreach campaigns were organized in Durres and Elbasan, two regions that achieved particularly low coverage for the year 2020. The outreach campaigns were organized with 100 health providers and women targeted by the program. 2,000 IEC were distributed locally to ensure increase of information, while more proactive approaches are underway to assure better involvement of women in the program.

ACPD with the help of an expert from the Institute of Public Health and designer developed 20 posters delivering information and messages on CC screening program. The information materials were also shared online through social media reaching out to 15,500 people.

ACPD provided HPV health services through four mobile clinics organised in Tirana and Vlora reaching out to 80 women from marginalised and rural areas of these cities. In addition to HPV health services provided through 4 mobile clinics, ACPD continued to deliver CC prevention services to 4,568 women in Tirana and Vlora clinics, through community-based delivery and mobile clinics.

Article of Cervical Cancer Roundtable: [https://sot.com.al/politike/java-e-parandalimit-te-kancerit-te-qafes-se-mitres-gjebrea-thirrje-grav-i489503?fbclid=IwAR3XVabIQFM5UQXDED2O2kt6INP6LyN\\_ipAye92jb7BqULM2oEGkKncity-lghhttps://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4675559339227144](https://sot.com.al/politike/java-e-parandalimit-te-kancerit-te-qafes-se-mitres-gjebrea-thirrje-grav-i489503?fbclid=IwAR3XVabIQFM5UQXDED2O2kt6INP6LyN_ipAye92jb7BqULM2oEGkKncity-lghhttps://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4675559339227144)

Services: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4644912715625140>

## Challenges and Project Response

The third year of the screening program came after enormous difficulties encoun-



tered due to the pandemic of Covid-19. The problems continued through 2021 with delays in testing kits procurement at the Institute of Public Health. At the same time, health centres struggled to cover the pandemic burden and routine prevention programmes simultaneously. During the 2022, with support of IPPF, UNFPA and in collaboration with institutions, ACPD will continue to progress the work regarding cervical cancer and address the program coverage and its implementation.

## Project Title: Scaling Up the HIV Response in Albania- IPPF EN

### Project summary:

Stigma and discrimination have profound implications for HIV prevention, treatment, and support. They reduce the individual willingness to be tested and to request for HIV / AIDS and other SRH health services, to disclose their HIV status, to practice safer sex. Stigma impedes the efforts of services to reach people most in need of prevention, treatment, and care. It impacts an individual's capacity to acknowledge and management their own HIV infection, affecting their physical and psychological wellbeing and quality of life. Moreover, the social acceptability of stigma and discrimination affects governments' willingness to talk the measures required to minimize HIV transmission and to guarantee the protection of Human rights. The intervention implemented by ACPD contributed on promoting the equitable access to HIV/AIDS prevention, affordable and quality care, and treatment services with a focus on key affected population (MSM, SW and LGBT) and other vulnerable people most affected by the HIV epidemic in the region of Tirana and Durres.

Through the activities implemented, the project contributed on enhancing community support in improving health for the most affected population. The main activities implemented by ACPD were training with health care providers and journalist; round tables; online campaign.

### Main Achievements of the Project

Two three-day training were organized in May and June with participation of 20 primary service providers of health care centres from Vlora and Durres. The aim of the training was to build their capacities to provide services (doctors, nurses and psycho-social staff) without sigma and prejudices for Key Population (KP) and to





reach them out. The main HIV and KP related prejudices among primary service providers were those related with the fear from infection due to the poor infrastructure.

As the training was delivered physically, due to COVID measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19, the number of the participants was 10 per each training. The training agenda consisted of eight (8) sessions, dealing with sexual orientation and reproductive and sexual health, HIV/AIDS, Substance abuse, prevention programs and discrimination against vulnerable groups in Albania.

Participants were more interested in issues on HIV prevention services, drug addiction and treatment programs as well as the role of health providers in addressing issues related to drug treatment and harm reduction programs. However, they noticed that under the current infrastructure of health centres, such services seem to be impossible due to lack of infrastructure (space), equipment and trained providers. Participants learnt about why it is important to combat HIV-related stigma and how to successfully address its causes and consequences within health facilities.

Interactive methodologies were used by the moderators allowing participants to understand how fundamental is for KP to treat them without stigma and discrimination in order them to access freely SRH services and save their lives. Based on the follow-up meetings and regular communication of ACPD staff with health care providers, they reported on the improvement of the services provided and an increased number of clients receiving services by 10-15%.

Twenty-five representatives from state institutions, UNFPA, LGBTI community and representatives from NGOs that are part of the transitional Global Fund, participated on the roundtable organized by ACPD to advocate to the MoHSP for increased financial support to NGOs that provide outreach HIV / AIDS services for key population. Several approaches were undertaken by this group. However, due to the priorities of the MoHSP and the focus on the pandemic, the efforts will be extended to 2022. ACPD and its partner organizations will continue to place efforts and advocate through the initiative GAC Advocacy Grant to ensure support for KP.

A three-day training was organized with 20 traditional and social media representatives in Tirana. Journalists were supplied with needed information, knowledge, skills and values to inform the public in unbiased way about the HIV related cases and convey positive messages in relation to key population groups including who live with HIV, IDUs, MSM, Roma, SRH narratives, ect. Participants have been recommended to ACPD by its collaborative media partners; the main criterion for selection was their media profile which relates to health and human rights. The methodology used was very interactive and encouraged participants to discuss and share among one another. The journalists expressed that the training was very useful for their work because for the first time they have learned how to report on HIV&KP objectively, with rights based and positive message. They understood that this approach will reduce the stigma and discrimination surrounding this target group and reduce the hate speech encountered online. Also, they were happy

to have among them students from school of journalism to prepare them on the reframed language and the information they should share online.

ACPD continued to use social media platforms to inform and raise awareness about HIV aiming to create positive attitudes and a supportive environment towards key populations. Positive tailored messages were developed with the involvement of vulnerable groups activists of ACPD. The messages were distributed in ACPD social media, also on national and international days such as 1 December. 1800 people were reached with positive messages.

## Challenges and Project Response

Due to COVID19, the SRH services including HIV/Aids services were still not prioritised by the responsible health institutions.

It was very difficult to gather participants for various face-to-face events because of the fear of Covid-19 infection. The number of participants to attend such activities was decided by MoH, which restricted it to not more than 10 in the beginning of the year and later, after the first half of the year to not more than 20 people per activity.

Reaching out to key population with health care services remains a challenge because of the COVID-19 and on the other side KP were hesitant to visit health care facilities due to discrimination they face from health care providers, community members etc. ACPD invited them, especially sex workers, to get the necessary services at the ACPD clinics.

There is limited recognition of the important link between HIV-related stigma and public health outcomes, such as client quality of care, and health workforce capacity; Stigma and discrimination by health workers compromises their provision of quality care, which is critical for helping clients adhere to medications and maintain their overall health and wellbeing; Stigma acts as a barrier to accessing services for the general population, especially those from Key Population.



## Project Title: Protecting Women and Girls by Strengthening Covid-19 and Crises Response for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights-IPPF EN

### Project summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest health and socio-economic crisis of our generation. The restrictive measures put in place by many countries have pushed many health systems to the brink, resulting in 'non-urgent care' being deprioritized to make way for thousands of COVID-19 patients. Currently Albania (with a population of 2,876,787) has a total number of 7621 active cases and the number of deaths has reached 469 persons. A recent assessment by the World Bank<sup>2</sup> reveals that extreme poverty in Albania could double in the short term, assuming self-employed people lose 100% if their income and wage employees lose 50% in affected sectors. By year end Albania's GDP is expected to have contracted by 8.4 percent. The lack of funds for health systems is often borne by private households, who's out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure is high. For example, it ranges to 50 percent in Albania, compared with 14.9 percent in the EU<sup>44</sup>. Paid leave and unemployment insurance are only available to the formally employed, which virtually excludes the reach of the schemes to farmers, rural areas, and many informal workers. The COVID-19 pandemic, its consequences and the restrictive measures, have the potential to negatively affect access to essential SRH services. Overstretched health services often divert resources away from the services women need, including pre- and postnatal health care and contraceptives. This exacerbates the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services.

The Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA) survey conducted by the UN Women reported a significantly higher inability to access vital services, such as health services, gynecological services, contraceptives, hygiene products and medical supplies for personal protection. Over half of all women respondents reported difficulty accessing health/medical supplies and gynecological services. 28–38 per cent Albania did not know where to seek help if there was an incident of domestic violence. Women in rural areas faced more difficulty accessing health services. Stigma and discrimination, but also pre-existing socio-economic factors and geographic distance create barriers for the vulnerable groups within our society to access health services and search for help, a situation that is only being escalated by emergencies such as COVID-19. More young women and men followed COVID-19-related developments on the Internet and social media. Young people were more confused than older people about COVID-19-related information and often found it contradictory. This scenario highlights the importance of developing mechanisms and procedures in order to be better prepared to continue providing essential SRH services to avoid people being left behind during a crisis especially those living in remote/rural areas. Therefore, through this initiative, ACPD proposes immediate interventions with the aim: Women and girls from remote/rural areas in Tirana

&Vlora access essential and life-saving Sexual Reproductive Health (SRHR) services in the context of the COVID-19.

Links:

- » <https://www.facebook.com/435070413617953/posts/1306749473116705/>
- » <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=QSH-PZH&set=a.4644912655625146>
- » Urdher nr. 523 Per perdorimin e telemjekesise nga te gjithe spitalet.pdf
- » <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=QSH-PZH&set=a.4612157035567375>
- » <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=QSH-PZH&set=a.4614628198653592>
- » <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=QSH-PZH&set=a.4614650631984682>
- » <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=QSH-PZH&set=a.4614664201983325>

## Main Achievements of the Project

- » Extend the package of services with pre- and post-natal care provided by Tirana clinic through purchasing an ultrasound machine.

Through this project, ACPD has purchased a mobile ultrasound machine with the support of IPPF and ACPD funds which has enabled the provision of services to young women and girls visiting the clinic centers as well as through provision of community-based delivery services in rural areas of Tirana. During 2021, 1,000 SRH services (ultrasound examination, Papsmear, gynecological examinations, contraception care, GBV screening, HIV testing, abortion care, referral and follow up) were provided to 525 women and girls from rural areas of Tirana and Vlora. The continuous partnership of ACPD with primary health care centers in rural areas of Tirana and Vlora and other NGO partners contributed to increased number of clients who seeks for SRH services and visited the clinic center during 2021. Compared to the first half of the year, the number of clients increased and this is related to Albania's relaxed Covid-19 measures as a result of the increased number of recovered people as well as ongoing vaccination of the population. This increased number and service is also related with the purchase and operation of the ultrasound equipment.

- » Digital technologies, including Skype, WhatsApp, and information through SMS



Some 2,000 clients have been offered online counselling for contraception care, GBV, abortion care and HIV/STI prevention, COVID – 19, through Facebook messages, WhatsApp and clinic mobile phone. These services have been provided by the medical staff of ACPD clinics in Tirana and Vlora. A part of them have visited the clinic centers to receive other services, such as ultrasound, colposcopy, Pap smear, pre and post counseling, contraception etc. ACPD has involved and is supported by key persons in health care centers and education institutions to promote the activity and to advertise mobile clinics in order to assist women and girls from rural areas how to use technology for accessing SRH services.

- » A guideline on Sexual and Reproductive Health services during crises and post crises

A guideline on Sexual and Reproductive Health services have been prepared by an expert in the field aiming to guide the medical and programmatic staff for sustainable services in the context of the pandemic Covid-19 and after that. Topics included in the document were: adaptation of management and coordination mechanisms in time to support COVID-19 response action, including the establishment of an event management team; prioritizing essential health services and adapting to changing contexts and needs; enabling service delivery points and service platforms; quickly optimize the capacity of health personnel; ensure the availability of essential medicines, equipment and supplies; strengthen communication strategies to support the proper use of essential services; use of digital platforms to support the delivery of essential health services; the elderly; sexual and reproductive health services; sexual transmitted infections; Anti Covid-19 safeguard; vaccination and ACPD attitudes. The guideline has been shared with two ACPD clinics in Tirana and Vlora and their staff is using it in their everyday work with its clients. It has also been shared in ACPD website reaching out to 1500 people.

- » Policy papers on telemedicine and digital technologies

Two policy dialogue workshops have been undertaken to engage key stakeholders in the advocacy work to Ministry of Health and Social Protection in order to ensure their engagement towards digital health and telemedicine to enable SRH care during periods of crisis, especially for women and girls from remote/rural areas. Meetings and consultations were carried out by ACPD and its partners aiming to push MoHSP to strengthen the system in response and preparedness to crises and post crises. During the workshop, ACPD has introduced the participants with the findings and conclusions from the study realized under MISP restricted which emphasis the need to include the provision of SRH consultation and counselling through digital technologies and telemedicine. ACPD and key stakeholders have joined forces together in this initiative and advocated for adjusting the health system to the needs and requirements set by the pandemic and other potential humanitarian emergencies and invest in telemedicine and digital health so that none is left behind. Even though ACPD put efforts to advocate for endorsement of a policy paper on telemedicine and digital technologies which offer huge potential to support women and girls to achieve positive SRHR outcomes it was difficult to

reach the finalization of this process by this year. As reported by the representatives of MoHSP, there is already an order released by which relates to the provision of telemedicine and digital health services only for chronic diseases in public hospitals. This has shown a sensitization of MoHSP towards digital technology but due to the situation of Covid-19 progresses have been done in the chronic disease field while SRH is in the future agenda of MoHSP. Based on the recommendations resulted from the workshops, MoHSP expressed optimistic to expand this initiative to other health components including SRH. This paves the way for ACPD and its partners to continue its advocacy to upcoming years to concretize this document in support of women and girls especially those from rural areas.

## Challenges and Project Response

The ultrasound machine purchase was a major challenge considering the market price which was higher compared to the price foreseen in the project budget and taking into account the importance this equipment has for creating demand for SRH services in ACPD clinic of Tirana. The ACPD executive board reviewed and considered all the offers and the rationale for buying quality equipment and decided/approved a limit fund of 1,800,000 L from the organization's own budget in order to enable an optimal purchase based on the quality of the equipment and a good price. This decision was rendered by a committee of three ACPD staff in consultancy with an external medical engineer and the gynecologist of the center. Following all due processes, ACPD finalized the purchase of the ultrasound machine in pursuance of procurement procedures stipulated in the Albanian Law on Procurements. ACPD board decided/approved the additional fund to make sure an optimal purchase based on the quality of the equipment. ACPD has already paid 50% of the total amount from the association funds as an advance deposit required by the company for starting the procedure of ordering the equipment and finalized the transfer to the company for the second payment once the device was delivered and set to operation at the ACPD premises. The device is now installed and after the training, the technical medical staff started to provide ultrasound services for young women and girls who have visited the clinic. The operation of this ultrasound equipment has increased the number of clients and services that were reached out through community-based delivery and static clinic service which previously were a huge challenge.

Another challenge was to engage and involve the rural communities, specifically women and girl from Tirana and Vlora, in our activities delivered through information and communication technologies. Considering this, ACPD started to promote and enable services through online and digital technologies in order to create opportunities for women and girls in rural areas to receive life-saving SRH services in the time of Covid-19 when they need them mostly by involving key persons from healthcare centers and education institutions to promote the activity and advertise mobile clinics in order to assist women and girls from rural areas how to use technology for accessing SRH services.





Despite the efforts of ACPD to advocate for endorsement of a policy paper on telemedicine and digital technologies, which offer huge potential to support women and girls to achieve positive SRHR outcomes, it was difficult to reach the finalization of this process by this year. Due to the high engagement of ACPD advocacy work through continuous consultation meetings and workshops, the representatives of MoHSP informed the ACPD that there is already an order issued which relates to the provision of telemedicine and digital health services only for chronic diseases in public hospitals. This is an indication of MoHSP awareness on the need for digital technology but due to the situation of COVID-19, progress achieved in this direction is limited vis-à-vis chronic diseases while SRH is in the future plans of MoHSP. Based on the recommendations from the workshops, MoHSP expressed optimism to expand this initiative to other health components including SRH. This paves the way for ACPD and its partners to continue its advocacy in the upcoming years to ensure this service is also provided to women and girls, especially those from rural areas.

## Project Title: Strengthening Healthcare Response in Crisis and Post-Crisis Situations by Delivering MISIP of SRH-IPPF EN

### Project summary:

This one-year project has been implemented by the Albanian Center for Population and Development in remote/ rural areas of two large regions of Albania, Tirana and Vlora where ACPD clinics are located. Tirana has the most population infected with Covid-19. In the pandemic conditions when women and girls in rural areas are among mostly affected groups with regards to access to SRH, ACPD deems it crucial to increase opportunities for them to receive such lifesaving services.

Under the restricted fund of IPPF “Protecting Women and Girls by Strengthening Covid-19 and Crise Response for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights”, ACPD focused its work on two main pillars, including access to integrated SRH services at primary health care, and advocacy to Ministry of Health and Social Protection towards provision of integrated SRH sexual reproductive health and services for women and girls from remote/rural areas through endorsement of orders for reaching out to these populations through digital health and telemedicine.

According to DataReportAI (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-albania>): there were 2.07 million internet users in Albania in January 2020 and Internet

Penetration stood at 72% in January 2020. But there are no data available for technology literacy in terms of using telemedicine, online platforms of communication. Therefore, this is a real challenge. But ACPD started at some point promoting and enabling services through online and digital technologies in order to create opportunities for women and girls in rural areas to receive live saving SRH services they need in the time of Covid-19 when they need them mostly.

That is why this project is linked to MISP project of IPPF –restricted fund intending to examine the utilization of communication technology in the home and their daily lives by women and girls from rural remote areas of Tirana and Shkodra and to evaluate the community’s electronic health literacy.

### Main Achievements of the Project

A qualitative and quantitative analysis related to utilization of telehealth among women and girls from remote/rural areas of Tirana and Vlora took place in Tirana and Vlora rural areas where the MISP project were implemented. 70 quantitative surveys and 3 qualitative focus groups has been conducted aiming to reveal the level of health technology literacy and how often do they use smart phones, Wi-Fi, internet technology, internet texting, patient portals, mobile phone applications, and telehealth. Two experts, one of public health and another one from technology field were involved with the development of study methodology. Some of the main findings of this study include:

- » 70.8% reported that their primary access point for the Internet was at home and 84.7% revealed that possess a cell phone with internet connection (84.7%) and has also a built-in camera (80.6%).
- » In addition to cell phone, one-third reported to have a Tablet or PC connected with internet and camera.
- » - 56.9% reported to use regularly social media account/s (Facebook, Instagram, twitter, etc.) and nearly all of them who reported to have a smartphone connected with internet/camera had downloaded at least one of the communication platforms (WhatsApp or Viber).
- » Platforms are used to communicate or share information with relatives (47.2% always and 41.7% sometimes) or health providers (43.1% always and 48.6% sometimes).
- » Lack of information where to find technically correct online health information sources (48.6%), followed by lack of information on health issues in Albanian language (23.6%) and not reliable sources (16.7%) were mentioned as barriers while browsing or sharing information on health issues.
- » E-health literacy scale among study respondents was low as less than fif-



ty percent of them reported that know how to find helpful health resources (47.2%), how to use the obtained information (48.6%) or how this information would help them (45.8%).

- » Only 12.5% of them identified themselves as a person with any type of disability. Health seeking before and during the pandemic time, large majority of respondents said their frequency of using healthcare services was far less often (38.9%) or somewhat less often (36.1%) compared with one year before.
- » The main form of communication with a healthcare provider was meeting in person. None of them mentioned telemedicine services or using other smart devices or apps to communicate with the healthcare providers.
- » Knowledge about telemedicine approach and the existence of telemedicine services in their region was also found very low. However, an interesting finding is that a high level of perception for telemedicine is observed as majority of respondents (61.1%) agreed that telemedicine is a viable approach for providing care to patients, is a cost-effective approach by reducing time and money for patients and their family members.
- » Nearly two-third of respondents are willing to use telemedicine services for themselves or their relative ones and large majority of them believe that telemedicine services should be widely available in Albania.

Conclusions under this research include:

- » Despite the fact that the Albania government has prioritized the improvement of the infrastructure of the healthcare system, currently, telemedicine network is available in the regional and university hospitals and not yet merged into the primary healthcare system. This, in turn, reflects the lack of knowledge and utilization of telemedicine services among patients of primary healthcare. Therefore, appropriate steps should be taken to expand the existing service and develop online health platforms that fit to the needs of rural population and their ability to use such platforms.
- » 70 women and girls from rural areas of Tirana and Vlora in total, participated in four one day training sessions and got informed on how to use WhatsApp, Skype, patient portals and telehealth considering the pandemic situations and the barriers they face in receiving face to face services. The experts who conducted the study also moderated the sessions. During the training sessions, participants were also informed of the study findings and conclusions. Using interactive methodologies and showing examples on various apps, medical portals and telemedicine technology, the participants gained knowledge on how to use TEC for health information and consultation purposes.
- » More than 1,000 Informative brochures were disseminated reaching out women and health care providers with information on the use of technology.

Link: <http://acpd.org.al/?p=1218>

## Challenges and Project Response

The study took three months to be finalized which was more than planned because the expert was very busy by being involved also in the MERCK project. In the end, ACPD received a very good and comprehensive study that will be used for further interventions during 2022.

Training sessions seemed to be difficult for the participants in the begging because most of them had not knowledge and information on how to use it for service purpose. The moderator used interactive methodologies and showing examples on various apps, medical portals and telemedicine technology making it easier to understand.

## Project Title: Youth Voice, Youth Choice - Merck for Mothers - IPPF EN

### Project summary:

The pandemic negatively impacted the delivery of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, including maternal health and family planning, for women and vulnerable groups in almost all European countries. Covid-19 has demonstrated how fragile our systems are, within and outside the EU and uncovered the weaknesses within our systems and the unpreparedness of countries in dealing with health emergencies. Digital outreach and support have become an essential way to inform young people, especially women and girls, and support their health and safety throughout their lives. Thus, the Covid-19 crisis provides an opportunity to identify gaps, lessons learned, sharing of good practices and readiness to strengthen health systems and prepare more-inclusive plans. To do this, we need to understand the impact that crisis situations such as Covid- 19 have on the SRH of young people, especially on those within remote areas and living in unfavourable social conditions such as Roma settings.

Based upon the Covid-19 experience, this project aims to create more accessible and youth friendly SRH services and information in and beyond emergency situations, building on young people's (age 14-30) sexual, reproductive and maternal health (SRH) needs and experiences during Covid-19 crisis, with special attention to those most vulnerable in 5 countries in the Western Balkan region: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

This research was carried out in 2021 to better understand the impact of Covid-19 on young people's access to SRH services and information and the opportunity



and need to integrate digital services, especially for those most vulnerable. Desk review, focus groups discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out as part of the methodology. The research and its recommendations will form the basis for the communication and advocacy initiatives. A final report has been developed and will be translated in 5 Balkan countries and distributed in national and regional conferences with key stakeholders, actors and partners.

In 2022, the project aim will be achieved by adapting and exchanging good practices and empowering young people through a combination of online/offline education tools; while in 2023 via the development of (policy) recommendations that will support national and regional advocacy initiatives to strengthen health systems and increase access to (youth-friendly) SRH services and information to all those in need, including a context of crisis.

To bring about structural and long-term change, advocacy techniques will be combined with new powerful narratives and youth-led campaigning to raise public awareness and persuade national and regional authorities. Multi-stakeholder partnerships will support the communication and advocacy initiatives. Cross sharing and learning will empower young people to get involved in national advocacy. The IPPF EN Regional Office (IPPF ENRO) will manage the overall project coordination, supported by a researcher that will develop the research methodology and lead the data analysis. A youth-centred approach will be at the core of the project. Experts from different sectors (health care providers, decision makers, and young people) will support the development of recommendations at national and regional level. Online friendly monitoring system and tools will be used to track regional and national level progress towards set objectives in real time and to inform the end of the project summative evaluation.

## Main Achievements of the Project

In the frame of the Youth Voice, Youth Choice Project, ACPD recruited staff member as the project coordinator, the core group of young people; research experts and provided them with the aim of the initiative; and their specific role.

ACPD staff and young people participated in the inception meeting organized by IPPF Regional Office on 8-10 February 2021 with participation of all partner organizations aiming to reach common understanding of the project and its implementation, with great focus on the first Objective-Knowledge.

Three introductory meetings with participation of 5 representatives from decision-making bodies, partners, key stakeholders were carried out by ACPD staff and young people during April and May to present the project, build partnership and to ensure their engagement throughout the project phases, especially on the 2nd and 3rd year of implementation.

On 21st April, ACPD staff participated in the M&E online meeting organized by

IPPF with all partner countries to discuss on M&E framework and tools; monitoring indicators so each country to be on track of this component and to have a clear and complete idea on how to fill it out in accordance to the project objective and implementation.

The research kick-off meeting, held on 11 June was another accomplishment in the frame of the project as ACPD staff received a full insight of the research methodology; timeframe and input needed to be provided in line with the regional research experts so to have a standardized and comprehensive local research.

Three young people of the core group of ACPD engaged in the Youth Voice, Youth Choice project, participated in the training for qualitative research carried out on 18th of June by regional researchers on how to conduct the focus groups and in-depth interviews in national level, as they are crucial actors in all phases of project implementation.

A national expert group was established on the month of May and consists of 6 members mixture of representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP); Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MoEYS); a gynaecologist, Institute of Public Health (IPH) expert; young people. ACPD carried out meeting with national expert group to present the project, the main role of the group, presented the progress done so far with the qualitative research and the way forward.

Two experts were contracted by ACPD to work with the desk research through mapping of policies and literatures based on the main topics such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); maternal and new born health; sexual and reproductive health; family planning; sexuality and relationships; mental health and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). A reporting template was filled by the experts throughout the month of June with detailed information extracted from national policies; literatures and documents, together with input on good/promising practices. Two components of desk research Impact of C-19 and Promising Practices/ Responses are drafted and sent to IPPF by 2nd of July, while the experts are still working with social media listening template to be concluded by the end of July.

At the beginning of June, ACPD staff started working with the focus group's structure and in-depth interviews mapping, and provided these templates to the regional experts. They contacted all people who will be engaged as moderators and reporters of the focus groups discussion as well as the actors who will be part of the IDIs, after finalizing the schedule for both, in July ACPD staff and young people will implement all of them.

During July-August ACPD staff carried out 6 focus group discussions; 2 FGD with young people aged 18-30 years old in Tirana and Elbasan; FGD with young people from LGBTI community; FGD with young people on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE); FGD with young people from Roma community and FGD with young mothers.





During July-August, ACPD staff carried out 7 in-depth interviews; 1 IDI with representative from Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP); 1 IDI with representative from Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MoEYS); 1 IDI with mental health specialist; 1 IDI with representative from civil society working with comprehensive sexuality education (CSE); 1 IDI with representative from Roma organization and 1 from organization working on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and 1 on young key population (YKP).

Two experts who were contracted by ACPD to work with the desk research prepared and finalized the third phase of the desk research consisting in social media listening by the end of July.

On 22 September, ACPD staff participated online in the kick-off meeting for the quantitative phase of the research organized by regional experts to discuss on sample structure, sampling steps, management of the links, field launch, final draft of the questionnaire and deadlines.

Upon recipient of the online links at the end of October, ACPD staff carried out meetings with youth group of the project to map the distribution of the links and discuss details regarding the field launch and coordination of the process. They participated in meetings with experts engaged in the questionnaire distribution and followed up with the regional experts.

At the beginning of November ACPD distributed the links online, while youth group of the project distributed those among their network of peers. In the mid November ACPD staff and young people carried out meetings with experts who facilitated the process of link distribution among their networks (Roma focal point for Roma people; LGBTI focal point for LGBTI community etc.). The process was finalized by the end of November reaching out a larger number that the minimum target set by the regional experts.

In November, the three-day regional coordination meeting organized by IPPF with participation of 5 partner countries to discuss on next steps of the project was held. In specific terms, on 16 November there was a meeting about the external engagement where ACPD as other partner countries presented the plans for the next year; on 19 November a session was held on youth involvement, where project youth and a part of regional youth group presented the achievements, challenges and overall engagement of ACPD young people in the first year. While on 22 November, the session focus was on finance and reporting. This coordination meeting was very useful to share and exchange among one another; coordinate the upcoming actions among all countries.

On 13 December an M&E&L meeting was held with participation of 5 partner countries under IPPF guidance to go through the monitoring and evaluation template and tips for reporting. During this meeting, a new template for media monitoring was introduced by IPPF where partner countries provided their input and suggestions for the final version of the template.

## Challenges and Project Response

One of the major challenges encountered so far is related to the research methodology, as it was changed and adapted in a standardized way for all 5 implementing partners. This required programmatic and financial adaptations in line with the guidelines and agreements of donor.

Desk research template was detailed and covered different thematic areas, each of them with a specific set of questions, and the deadline for its preparation was very tight which required a lot of time and effort from both staff and experts to come up with a very comprehensive report.

Work with social media was also, to some extent, challenging due to the quantity of online channels and platforms which contains a lot of information that cover the thematic areas of project focus and requires additional work to structure and organize and extract the information in line with our principal research objective.

Time was another challenge regarding the completion of all phases, especially FGD and IDIs including the development of reports for submission to regional experts.

Management of the online link distribution to reach out the target set by regional experts for the quantitative phase was very challenging as it was near impossible to track and find out who filled the questionnaire. However, ACPD with the help of experts achieved to have a good mapping and distribute the links widely to achieve the desirable number of questionnaires.

Another challenge was the completion of the online questionnaires by young people under 18 years old, who needed a written approval by their parents, especially with specific communities such as LGBTI community, who are very hard to reach. ACPD staff collaborated with the LGBTI organizations who reached out to their parents and facilitated the process respecting their confidentiality and provided support to achieve our target.

## Project Title: Good Governance – IPPF EN

### Project summary:

The project covered specific activities dedicated to good governance of ACPD. In 2021, the 6-year mandate of two Executive Board members finished as per the statute of the organization and new elections of board members were expected to happen. The election of two board members was expected to happen in the Annual General Assembly meeting of 2021, but due to the situation of Covid-19 the elec-



tion was postponed and will be held in 2022.

Also, the accreditation of ACPD was expected to take place in 2021 based on the requirements and the schedule set by IPPF, but the situation of Covid-19 and other limitations have postponed this on time. An online questionnaire with feedback from members associations was filled in September on regards of the 3rd cycle of accreditation system review.

ACPD worked in involving and engaging young people in planning, implementing and monitoring different activities. The volunteers were part of planning and implementing, M&E of programs of the organizations. They were engaged in each program through direct or online meetings to gather input related to activity working plans, indicators, drafting of communication strategy, peer education, desk review, peer review, delivery of offline and online campaigns, advocacy events and service provision.

### Main Achievements of the Project

Five meetings of the executive board of ACPD were carried out on quarterly basis..

In June, ACPD organized a hybrid assembly meeting. Under the Covid-19 restrictions that banned physical public meetings because of an increased number of infections in the half of the year. The quorum in this meeting could only discuss and approve the IPPF core fund, the working plan for 2021, and the annual report for year 2020. Given the internal changes that occurred in September with the executive director and the Board, the Assembly decided to hold elections for all board members in its upcoming meeting, which will take place in July 2022.

Due to new reform of IPPF and plans for a long process of development of the Strategy 2023-2028 the development of ACPD strategic plan which expired in 2021 was postponed.

ACPD has involved all board members and young volunteers in regular and normal processes and annual plans and as well as M&E process. The group of volunteers together with ACPD staff and board members were engaged in the working plan 2021 and implemented it according to the timeline and budget. Necessary measures were taken to deliver programs and services remotely through online platforms. They have also contributed in awareness raising campaigns, fund raising activities, promotional and advocacy events carried out by ACPD.

Seven (7) monitoring visits were made by ACPD staff and volunteers' members in Vlora and Shkodra to monitor the implementation of the activities, provide programmatic and technical support and address challenges where needed.

205 volunteers were involved in the activities of ACPD from planning, implementation advocacy events, M&E, fundraising, governance and decision-making.

## Challenges and Project Response

The planned election of the new board members was postponed to July 2022 because of Covid-19 pandemic.

Strategic plan of ACPD is not developed pursuant to IPPF reform; it will be designed based on instruction/guidance provided by IPPF and the ACPD management.

## Project Title: Resource Mobilization – IPPF EN

### Project summary:

In 2021, continued to receive support from IPPF, UNFPA and other donors such as Partners Albania for Change and Development, SOS Village, Global Fund.

The project “National Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations” with the funds from EU continued in 2021 and is extended also for three other years. The total budget 2019-2021 is 81,141 EUR. The project covered the salaries of coordinators of Shkodra and Vlora centres and partially maintenance and running costs of both offices.

Aulona Center in Vlora has continued to provide High Quality SRH services that are integrated, accessible and affordable for all. The services of Vlora centre will continue to be sustainable securing the salary for one medical doctor and the nurse of the clinic.

The call for applications continued to be a mechanism for funding opportunities widely used by ACPD.

ACPD has reframed the SRHR messages to shape influential narratives in order the community of donors to help unlock rights and care for all.

Women and youth groups of ACPD were part of project activities including trainings to strengthen their capacities to support ACPD in educational, promotional activities, service provision, community mobilization, advocacy, and M&E.

The projects as CSE and SGBV and youth centre approach of the organization continued to fuel and engage young people in ACPD programs, governance, M&E and advocacy.

ACPD has implemented many advocacy events online or in person to boost policy dialogue with key stakeholders and donors around advocacy topics such as CSE for out-of-school; provision of integrated sexual reproductive health and services



for women and girls from remote/rural areas through digital health and telemedicine; incorporation of the self-testing for HIV in the Public Universal Health care; emergency shelters for women victims/survivors of SGBV etc.

ACPD has invested more in digital health and innovation technologies to provide health care, to promote its activity and to enhance the base of supporters. Attractive communication strategies were employed including ACPD website, social media to promote health, choice and rights; online blog for sexuality education in the framework of awareness raising campaigns the support of celebrities and opinion-formers.

ACPD applied for funds and participated in donor events such as the Netherlands and French Embassy; UN Agencies, USAID/Albania, Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA), Swiss Embassy, UK Embassy, Open Society Foundation Albania (OSFA), CIDA (Canadian Agency for International Development), through the Canadian Embassy etc.

## Main Achievements of the Project

Scaling up and Ensuring Sustainability of the National Response to HIV for Female Sex Workers – Transition Fund of Global Fund that covered the period 2020-2022 with a fund of 32,849\$. The project aims at creating a conducive environment for the implementation and scaling up harm reduction services for Female Sex Workers. The project is services oriented and it covers personnel and running costs. Until the end of 2021 the project reached a target of 278 female sex workers tested for HIV and provide referral as needed.

Increasing opportunities for labour market integration of youth and families at risk - YEEP with funds from the SOS Children's Villages International which is being implemented in Vlora through 2020-2021- 50,004 EUR.

Unicom's Switzerland GmbH-Sofia Brunch and Save the Children were two donors who supported ACPD with small grants in 2021. Save the Children supported ACPD with 2,855.78 USD to deliver trainings to key professionals of child unit and municipality level on health promotion. In addition, Unicom's Switzerland GmbH-Sofia Brunch supported ACPD with 1,165 USD to promote the "Safe from SGBV" platform among young people in Albania developed under IPPF initiative.

Many awareness raising activities and advocacy activities carried out by ACPD in 2021 such as roundtables, policy dialogues workshops, conferences on the topics of Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Cervical Cancer, HIV, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for SRH in Crisis Situations have served to reach out to a considerable number of key stakeholders and donors such as UNFPA, Global Fund, SOS Villages, Partners Albania, Embassy of

Netherlands, US Embassy, Sweden Embassy, Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA), raising the profile of ACPD and sustaining the existing program at the same time creating opportunities for further support by these donors and other ones.

ACPD with the communication expert conducted media monitoring and opposition towards SRH in the country. The role of media as an important source of SRH information, the capability of media to disseminate the information broadly; strategies applied to deal with opposition; results and outcomes of intervention were some of the elements included in the media monitoring mapping which will guide the work of ACPD. The most highlighted topics with regards to SRHR were those related to sexuality and relationship, gender and sexual and reproductive health rights, including family planning and contraception. Mental health and psychological support issues were less mentioned. Abortion continuous to be a sensitive topic covered mostly by faith-oriented groups and doctors who promote maternal and new-born care. Currently, another sensitive topic that is highly debated in media is the one regarding the sexual and reproductive health rights of LGBT community, as well as discussions about parenthood, where activists from LGBT community have proposed to name parents as Parent 1 and Parent 2, instead of mother or father. Of course, in this situation there are two opposite camps (pro and cons) and this topic has attracted too many followers to be engaged in discussions.

The recommendations from the media monitoring report are as follows:

- » Throughout the monitoring process, there is a need for some further recommendations to improve the situation in covering the problems of SRH in Albania.
- » Further awareness on SRH issues, not only from the media but from all actors playing a role in this field.
- » It must be borne in mind that every human being has an inalienable right to be treated fairly and equitably in the media.

Albanian society remains a politicized and polarized society. Politics-related topics dominate the media debate. as a result, SRH issues in this overall media picture remain low, except when public figures themselves pay attention to them, which automatically leads to media interest. In the same vein, even the most spontaneous media reports on SRH issues often start from the activities of various associations, where the results and conclusions are generally accurately reflected, but this information fails to become an incentive for journalists to continue to report on SRH issues.

Limited by the resources of human resources and the workload, as well as by the lack of professionalism sometimes, reporting the news and not the phenomenon seems to be a distinguishing feature of the Albanian media for a long time to come.

A more professional coverage of SRH issues would improve the debate in the coun-





try and orient this debate towards the real problems facing society.

Depending on the journalist's profile, non-governmental organizations, editorial offices themselves, or other bodies, create opportunities for occasional training on the topic covered by the journalist. Only in this way will the journalist's own understanding of the topic improve, and consequently the quality of reporting will be better.

Representatives of the print media need to know the legal framework for SRH issues. They must also know and respect the legal basis of the media and the code of ethics of journalism.

Journalists should be more informed about the problems of SRH to make more detailed analysis of these issues and to inform about the phenomenon, prevention, treatment, services, etc.

Promoting and encouraging positive models of SRH in the print media by promoting positive behaviors and changes that affect the progressive growth of their professionalism and reduce stigma and discrimination in the community.

The need for continuous training by the Media Union or the Albanian Media Institute in Albania, raising the awareness of journalists and media executives on SRH issues focusing on non-labeling, prejudice, blame, but on informing and improving the terminology used is evident.

Increase cooperation with NGOs and other institutions focusing on SRH issues. Organizing trainings, seminars, round tables that help journalists for a more professional, quality and responsible coverage of SRH issues.

Conduct periodic print media monitoring to see in more detail where intervention is needed and what improvements are noticed over time. This would also help in drafting the necessary and long-term strategies.

Encourage and foster constructive and supportive debates among media professionals, heads of departments and editors about reporting, SRH awareness articles, support in setting ethical standards among journalists and their leaders.

Aulona and PO Centers in Vlora and Tirana have continued to provide high quality SRH services that are integrated, accessible and affordable for all. For vulnerable women including those living in remote and rural areas and Roma, these services have been provided for free in the framework of APB 2021.

In October, ACPD and board members carried out a staff retreat. The purpose was to discuss regarding the work plan for 2021 as well as ongoing plans; IPPF 2022-2028 strategy and association policies, given this and the structural changes that are taking place recently. Part of the discussion were also gender equality component in linkage with ACPD policies, working plan and the importance to be included in the new strategic plan which will be developed based on IPPF instructions. Part

of the staff retreat was also a dedicated session on shaping the narratives on SRH were staff and board members were introduced again with the SRH language to be used in their everyday work on reporting, communications, proposals etc. during the activity it was decided to organize a similar workshop on shaping narratives on SRH with the ACPD core group of volunteers.

## Challenges and Project Response

With the new changes of staff, ACPD will plan to create opportunities for building capacities of new staff and volunteers through events organized by IPPF, UNFPA other partners. In 2022 new staff will have the chance to get trained on SRH, safeguarding policies, get familiar with strategic framework of ACPD and be prepared to work in the ACPD work environment; to respect and implement the manual of policies; to introduce the organization in front of partners, donors and beneficiaries accordingly and professionally and to be able to address any questions or concern raised by various target audiences including the opposition.

ACPD plans to invest more in digital health and innovation technologies to provide health care, to promote its activity and to enhance the base of supporters. Attractive communication strategies will be employed including ACPD website, social media to promote health, choice and rights; in the framework of awareness raising campaigns the support of celebrities and opinion-formers.

For 2021 it was expected for ACPD to maintain the same level of funds, however given the end of the five-year contract with UNFPA, the funds that remained available were lower than in 2020, as the donor (UNFPA) would continue to reserve these funds for the new five-year contract. ACPD has submitted the expression of interest in the first phase of the application to be an implementing partner of UNFPA for the 2022-2026. Also, we will submit our proposals as per their programme outputs which will be launched soon by UNFPA office. It is expected to sign new agreements with them by May/ June. The new mandate will ensure the same level of funds ACPD has received from UNFPA in the previous years.

ACPD will continue to apply for funds and participate in donor events such as those hosted by the Netherlands and French Embassy; UN Agencies, USAID/Albania, Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA), Swiss Embassy, UK Embassy, Open Society Foundation Albania (OSFA), CIDA (Canadian Agency for International Development), through the Canadian Embassy etc.



## Project Title: Advocacy and partnerships for Reproductive Rights & reduced Sexual and Reproductive Rights inequalities-UNFPA Country Office

### Project summary:

Despite the situation created by Covid-19, ACPD, in partnership with UNFPA Country Office and other NGOs, Institutions and community leaders, continued to advocate for different issues related to Gender, Population Dynamics, SRH and youth.

### Main Achievements of the Project

#### » Reproductive Health Law in Albania

After discussing all the documents collected and the experiences of similar EU countries, the main pillars of the draft law were designed.

The main legal provision of the draft law is as follows:

The draft law aims to regulate the organisation, functioning, and supervision of all activities in the field of reproductive and sexual health, in health institutions to protect the reproductive rights of the individual and the couple.

In contrast to the previous Law in force (Law No.8876, dated 4.4.2002 “On reproductive health”, this law introduces as a novelty the concept of “sexual health” which is defined as: state of physical, mental and social well-being related to sexuality: it’s not just the absence of disease, dysfunction or disability. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationship and the possibility of pleasurable and safe sexual experiences without coercion, discrimination, and violence. Sexual health improves personal life and relationships, not just counselling and care of reproduction and sexually transmitted infections. In order to achieve and maintain sexual health, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

The new law is more comprehensive and focuses in universal access without exclusion or differentiations. The more specific it also address LGBTI needs and challenges as below:

The recognition in front the law and sexual freedom, which includes the opportunity for individuals to

control and decide freely on issues related to sexuality, choose their sexual partner, seek to experiment to their full sexual potential and satisfaction, within the framework of non-discrimination and considering its rights others and the devel-

opment of children's skills etc

Other definitions include: reproductive health, assisted reproductive medical techniques (ARMT), artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, infertility, surrogate adoption, informed consent.

The main pillars were discussed with the working group to proceed with drafting the new law.

The draft law was developed defining the main pillars, as follows:

- o Defining forms of reproductive health care, sexual health care and women's reproductive and sexual health care;
- o Defining the responsibilities and obligations of state structures and especially the Ministry of Health and Social Protection;
- o Defining the reproductive and sexual rights of individuals and couples, in particular: the right to choose, the right to safe methods and services, the right to safe motherhood and the avoidance of unwanted pregnancy, the right of men to sexual and reproductive health care, the right to health education, the right to undergo surgical methods of sterilisation;
- o Organising the reproductive health service;
- o Determination of prenatal diagnostic tests;
- o Determination of assisted medical reproduction techniques.

The draft was finalised and passed for discussion to the National Committee on Reproductive Health to obtain the opinions of the members of the Committee. Gjirokastra Meeting: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4363079350475146> Rrogozhina Meeting: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4363040847145663> Durres Meeting: <https://www.facebook.com/QSHPZH/posts/4312766775506404>

- » Support implementation and dissemination at Local Government Unit Level of National Action Plan for Older Persons

An analysis of the situation was carried out where critical issues were identified and should be addressed:

1. In-depth analysis of the situation of the elderly in the country, especially to identify their economic and social needs.
2. Building the model of integrated services for the elderly, based on the experience of the most advanced countries, harmonised with our Country's cultural, traditional, social and institutional specificities.
3. Informing and raising awareness of the decision-making and executive struc-



tures of the municipality's social and health protection policies regarding the most recent developments on "Aging policies" and how society has to deal with it to protect and include the elderly in social life.

4. Capacity building of municipal teams regarding the provision of integrated services at the local level.
5. Ensuring the sustainability of financing of services.

In such a fertile and suitable environment, from the political point of view (with the approval of the Action Plan) and from the institutional point of view (Municipalities being ready and motivated to invest in the establishment of services for the elderly) UNFPA, through the establishment of the group of experts, led by the Program Coordinator, aimed to contribute set up a Communication Strategy and promote the Aging Plan and Develop the package of integrated services and its implementation in three municipalities of the Country, respectively in Durrës, Rrogozhina and Gjirokastra. In accordance to UNFPA aim several activities were carried out such as:

1. One online meeting with representatives from UNFPA, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Albanian Centre for Population and Development, representatives from Durres, Rrogozhina and Gjirokastra Municipalities. The main aim of this meeting was to introduce the intervention with each municipality, to discuss the main achievement regarding National Action Plan for Elderly especially for their social protection and integration; design of qualitative social services, suitable for the elderly; introduction of integrated social services for elderly and steps to make it possible. 10 Participants participated in this meeting.
2. Face to face meeting in Durres, Rrogozhine and Gjirokastra with representatives from Municipalities, Local Social Services, Local health care unit, beneficiaries, media, ect.
3. Three face to face meetings carried out in the Municipality of Durres, Rrogozhine and Gjirokastra with participation of 35 participants. The main objective of these meetings was the description of the proposed package of integrated services, based on the analysis of the situation, analysis of the capacities at the local level, and objectives of social plan.

The key outputs of these activities consist of:

- Draft Manual of Integrated services for old age people, is prepared and shared.
- The instrument for assessment of capacities and needs, is adopted in each of the three pilot municipalities.
- Capacity needs assessment were finalised and acknowledged for Durres, Rrogozhina, Gjirokastra.

- Training curricula is developed.
- The establishment of draft plans for 2022.
- » One NGO is supported based on their action plan.

YMCA: Let's live a healthy aging: Due to the achievements and success of the last year, with requests from partners and collaborators in other regions, this year intervention was a continuation of the initiative in Saranda and Shkodra. This year, YMCA offered informing/education sessions on psycho-social and medical care and free medical visits to older people in the suburbs of Tirana, Saranda, and Shkodra. The project reached elderly peoples from different categories, including Roma and Egyptian, members from families that benefit economic aid, eldest living alone and other retired seniors

The main stakeholder's beneficiaries and target groups were:

- 193 old people were reached; 124 females and 69 males.
- 6 health and psycho-social experts were involved through delivering of 12 informing sessions and delivering the booklet "Advice on a healthy lifestyle", with practical tools and information on main illness and psycho-health problems.
- 6 sessions were focused on psycho-social related issues, focusing on their emotions, psychologist aspects, communication and relation among generations in the family, management of the situation with a sick person at home, management of the covid-19 pandemic and post covid-19 situation etc.
- 20 young people, volunteers in youth centres, students from medical faculty, Public Health and Social Science University, were part of all activities, facilitating and learning by doing, enriching their knowledge and putting into practice some skills.

Main findings and suggestions:

- The Covid-19 situation, health and psycho-social consequences to individuals, to their families and society, in general, was the most discussed topic.
- The grief of losing friends and relatives due to the covid- 19 and the fear of their own lives was a topic that concerned them most.
- Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they have been more careful and went to the doctors more often when they saw signs of not feeling well, respecting the rules of keeping distance and wearing masks.
- They had an increased interest about meetings focused on health; especially regarding measurement of blood pressure and glycemia.
- Based on people needs identified in these meetings that suffer from blood





pressure and people with diabetes and after the discussion with the social workers and medical staff in the locality, to better understand their family and socio-economic situation, we bought and offered to them devices to measure blood pressure and strips for the diabetes.

- According to them, all older adults, especially those who live alone, without children/family members/relatives, need to have been offered psycho-social and medical services at home during the pandemic.
- Almost all of them wanted to be part of the meetings and asked if it will be possible for us to offer the activities continuously. It is helpful for their health and emotional aspect to be socialized with other people of the same age, interests or backgrounds.

<https://www.facebook.com/YMCA-in-Albania-1551374248412615/photos/pcb.2971101929773166/2971101589773200/>

- <https://www.facebook.com/YMCA-in-Albania-1551374248412615/photos/pcb.2971680396381986/2971680253048667/>
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- <https://www.facebook.com/YMCA-in-Albania-1551374248412615/photos/pcb.2987191118164247/2987190978164261/>

» Establishing Adult Care Centre in Vlora

The premises of Dailly Care Centre for Elderly in Vlora is in place with the neces-

sary furniture and materials. The centre is adapted to provide psycho-social and health services for those who will be part of the centre. The centre is adapted to offer recreational activities for the elderly.

A doctor, a social worker and a coordinator of the centre were recruited to deliver services and carry out meetings with people who will visit the centre. It is expected for the centre to start promoting its services for the categories of the elderly.

#### Support of the Demographic Magazine:

- UNFPA and ACPD continuously support Albanian Association of Demographers (ASD) to publish their periodically demographic magazine. During this reporting period ASD prepared, designed and printed 160 copies.
  - 6 articles were prepared from the different researchers in the socio-economic, demographic and medical fields, members of the Demographers' Association. Articles were published based on the criteria approved by the magazine's editorial office.
  - Covid19 pandemic situation was the focus of this publication. Two articles were published describing demographic, health and statistic issues.
  - In total, 320 copies of Demographic magazine were designed and printed. 13 Articles were published.
  - Magazine copies were delivered to the National Library, the Assembly Library of the Republic of Albania, the University of Tirana's Library, the Faculty of Social Work, the Academy of Sciences, and some libraries of the administrative units Tirana and various NGOs.
  - The content of the magazine is also available on our website. [www.revistademografia.al](http://www.revistademografia.al) . This page contains data from 2012.
  - Magazine nr 1 : [http://www.revistademografia.al/?fbclid=IwAR2GOMkKGf\\_ceJYXo1wxv2PxZqTeluAju0zgMQ9eP1CNfNVpch2Btp5YD94](http://www.revistademografia.al/?fbclid=IwAR2GOMkKGf_ceJYXo1wxv2PxZqTeluAju0zgMQ9eP1CNfNVpch2Btp5YD94)
- » Supporting MIPPA REPORT- MADRID INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING

The fourth report of Albania on regard of Madrid Plan on Ageing was drafted with the participation of different stakeholders, as member of technical group, set up with the Order of Minister of Health and Social Protection, no. 352, dated 27.07.2021 and using diverse sources of information, which reflected on the text as reference. Besides, it used several reports, studies, and analyses on ageing produced and published from different sources as specified in references. INSTAT updates data used in this report.

The main achievements are:



- Special emphasis was given to the encouragement of NGOs and Local Authorities that deliver social care programmes on a local level through subsidies and technical support. During 2020, within the financial support of Social Fund, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has financed the establishment of four new services for this beneficiary category, out of 14 projects funded in total.
- In 2019, home service for the elderly was based on the Albanian Government's service standards. For the first time, with the financial support from the Social Fund 2021, the provision of home assistance for the elderly in the apartment was implemented by the Tirana Region, financed in the amount of 40% of the project, in the amount of 11.5 ml ALL. The target group included elderly people without family support with socio-economic needs, which includes health care, food, socio-cultural activities and occupational therapy.
- Decision no. 864, dated 24.12.2019, of the Council of Ministers, the National Political Document on Aging, 2020–2024, approved its action plan. The Policy Document aimed to support a better integration of older people in society, quality services for all, as well as a long, healthy and productive life for them.
- Healthy aging continues to be a primary focus of the Albania Government, both through advances to public health, and in increasing the access, affordability, and quality of healthcare for older persons. The Ministry has recently approved the Strategy for the development of primary health care services in Albania 2020-2025, which for the first time provides for the integration of social health service in primary health centres. The nurse's role in the community is introduced for the first time, and provided home health assistance, which reduces by 5% the hospitalization of cases with treatable diseases: hypertension, diabetes, asthma.
- Two new national plans on control of non-communicable diseases and cancers are in final stages of development. They will provide further guarantee for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to continue with cost-effective programs and sustain the health gains for the older adults.
- During management of the Covid-19 crises, Albania has been quick and effective in early interventions and prevented outbreaks in its residential institutions.

## Challenges and Project Response

The main challenge was the fact that ACPD & UNFPA joint plan was updated due to the pandemic situation, leading to extra working time and efforts from ACPD staff to manage it on in line with requirements.

ACPD staff faced challenges on the organization of face-to-face meetings/activi-

ties due to the fear of the Covid19 infection.

The period October -December marked a large number of infections, so activities planned during this period, were very difficult to organise.

All Public Institutions and Government were focused on responding to Covid-19, so our advocacy regarding gender issues or SRH faced some challenges and created obstacles in achieving the desirable outcomes.

## Project Title: Equal Access to quality integrated Sexual Reproductive Health services-UNFPA Country Office

### Main Achievements of the Project

- » Awareness raising campaign to increase the coverage of the program

The Institute of Public Health teams completed the distribution of primary screening test consumables to all health centres of the country by the end of October. 9000 HPV test were distributed. This amount covers only second half of the year. IPH didn't manage to buy other 5000 HPV kits as it was planned in the beginning of the year due to Covid19 pandemic situation.

- » Two online meeting were organized

An online meeting was organized with directors of local unit of healthcare in Durres and Elbasan Health Authority. The main aim of the online meeting was to inform about the program and the need to keep the activities of cervical cancer screening going beside the pandemic. It was agreed to organize an event near a primary health care centre with participation of experts from Institute of Public Health, focal points from other health centres in the region, coordinator of the program in Durres and Elbasan, and community representatives. The progress and gaps from first and second year of the program was presented and more specifically the decrease of utilization of the screening examination services noted in many urban areas. The coordination between primary health care teams and gynaecologists of women centres in urban areas were also presented as an important problem of big cities where women centres are operational.

Two raising awareness events were carried out in collaboration with health authorities of Elbasan and Durres. The awareness raising activities in two selected regions were planned to re-establish the trust between women and health services



as well as to inform target population about restarting of the program after some disruptions caused by Covid 19 pandemic crises. The aim was not to lose a single testing kit to women who need it in community but are not informed about the program and not to let a single woman who results positive without a follow up gynaecological examination. Also, 500 HPV IEC materials were distributed. The event was covered by local media in Elbasan and the main messages were:

- The screening test is an excellent opportunity offered to women to prevent a cancer without any cost or bureaucracy for them.
  - The test is very easy and painless and most importantly can be taken by woman if she wants to do so.
  - For all women with positive results on primary screening test all the follow up examinations can be provided at regional hospital of Elbasan with no need to travel to Tirana.
- » Setting up an information system and a dedicated registry for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test.

The information model is needed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and facilitate the long term follow up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the health system.

There were two bilateral meetings carried out between directors of Institute of Public Health (Dr. Albana Fico) and two University Hospitals for gynaecology and obstetrics; 'Koco Gliozheni' (Dr. Genc Hyska and 'Queen Geraldine' (Dr. Eliona Demaliaj). In the meetings the main topic discussed were:

1. The need to formalize the exchange of information among hospitals and Institute of Public Health to provide data for estimation of screening program indicators. An essential indicator of the program, which cannot be calculated without an appropriate and dedicated information system is the proportion of women screened with primary HPV test, who perform a visit at gynaecologist for follow up diagnoses and potential treatment.
2. Another important indicator of the program's success is the number of pre cancers diagnosed and their treatment. It was agreed to support the information exchange between institutions with a formal memorandum. Two bilateral memorandums of understanding were signed by respective directors of three institutions within that November.

Two MoUs signed:

- Queen Geraldine Memorandum: [https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq\\_kc8kSGtBBgvlzdZX-bAqZQiaE6Lg?e=TeXPki](https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq_kc8kSGtBBgvlzdZX-bAqZQiaE6Lg?e=TeXPki)
- Koco Gliozheni Memorandum: [https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq\\_kc8kSGtBBgvlORJU1Fne9h5fmNQ?e=ffpink](https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq_kc8kSGtBBgvlORJU1Fne9h5fmNQ?e=ffpink)

Setting up an information system and a dedicated registry for women resulting positive in primary screening HPV test. The information model is needed to facilitate the systematic evaluation of program indicators and facilitate the long term follow up of HPV positive women in secondary and tertiary levels of the health system. System developed by the IPH technical team: [https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq\\_kc8kS-GtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbl0Hg?e=QSpeUC](https://1drv.ms/u/s!Aq_kc8kS-GtBBgvl-OS3XdJCQNbl0Hg?e=QSpeUC)

Three meetings carried out between a technical group of experts from the Institute of Public Health and clinical teams at University Hospitals for gynaecology and obstetrics ('Koco Gliogheni' and 'Queen Geraldine') and Oncologic Hospital at 'Mother Theresa' University Centre. In the meetings the main topic discussed were:

1. The results of evaluation of colposcopy and cervical pre cancer clinical management capacities, the regional hospitals to be part of a national network for colposcopy, and the role of university hospitals in Tirana for clinical reference and information management.
2. Potentials and gaps related to information standardisation about colposcopy examinations, other follow up examinations, diagnoses and treatment.
3. Exchange of information among hospitals and the Institute of Public Health to provide data to estimate screening program indicators
4. Agreeing about technical details and standards of registration, reporting and feedback. Variables to be included in the individual form and flexibility of the data to allow for variations between hospitals practices.
5. Finalisation of a draft of standard reporting instrument (registry) by specialists of the Institute of Public Health based on the discussions. Also, a simple electronic version of the form allows the online exchange of information between institutions.
6. A form based on the meetings' discussions was drafted and sent for comments partners (the form is attached to this report).

Gynaecologists of selected regional hospitals were also contacted and presented with the form as a basis for the new standardised registry. Discussions included professionals from Fier, Shkoder, Berat, Lezhe, Elbasan, Tirane Institute of Public Health was supported with 60000 information materials for health care providers and women.

- » Progress and achievements of the national program of screening for cervical cancer

For the year 2021: The third year of the screening program came after enormous difficulties encountered during the pandemic year 2021. The problems continued through 2021 with delays in testing kits procurement at the Institute of Public Health. At the same time, health centres are struggling to cover the pandemic burden and routine prevention programmes simultaneously. This year's activities





were carried out in this context and focussed on two main areas; 1) promote the restart of the program among target women and professionals, 2) improve coordination and information about HPV positive women in follow up.

The main progress and achievements for this year are:

- After being procured, consumables for HPV kits were distributed to all 410 health centres within a short time. ACPD facilitated printing individual information kits for women participating in the program. Some small regions have already reported completing all their screening examinations within the month of November.
  - Key responsible managers in the health system were contacted, informed and instructed about the importance of the program among their priorities.
  - In Durres and Elbasan, two regions that achieved particularly low coverage for the year 2020, awareness-raising events were organized with health providers and women targeted by the program. Communities are better informed there, while more proactive approaches are underway to assure better involvement of women in the program.
  - A new case-based hospital registry is established to allow exchange of information among gynaecological hospitals where colposcopy is performed, and institute of Public Health, the national coordinating centre of the program. The new information system will facilitate the calculation of essential indicators of the program; a) the proportion of women positive in primary screening HPV test, who have visited the gynaecologist for follow up diagnoses and treatment b) the number of pre-cancer diagnoses and their treatment.
  - Both, technical protocol for the registry (a detailed nominal hospital form) and the official institutional agreement to assure its sustainability (memorandums of understanding signed by directors) are already in place and can start functioning by next year.
- » Family Planning Virtual Program.

147 HCP have subscribed to the Online Training Manual. We expected that 70-80% of participants to finish 4 modules. One expert and one ACPD staff mentored and facilitated the whole process. This is sixth cohort organized in Albania. Every year the interest for participating in this training has increased.

Strengthening preparedness of national response mechanisms in delivering SRH services in humanitarian crisis and emergency (MISP Project)

MISP is an instrument designed to assess the level of readiness to respond to the minimum reproductive health needs in emergencies. It is commonly found that in crisis situations, 75-80% of the affected population consists of women, children, young people and young people. Based on the immediate needs of this part of the population, MISP is a set of minimum initial service packages that aims to save

lives and minimize the morbidity of this vulnerable population. SRH is an important public health issue that is frequently neglected in times of natural disasters and humanitarian crises. Albania is highly exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards. Albania is exposed to geologic (earthquakes, rock falls and landslides), hydro-meteorological (flooding and rain or snowfall induced landslides and avalanches etc.) The vulnerability of Albania's citizens and the impact of disasters in the country are significantly compounded by a relatively high degree of poverty and lack of infrastructure maintenance. Reproductive health needs have not been priorities in any emergency situations in Albania.

Based on the facts above, ACPD supported by UNFPA and Ministry of Health and Social Protection has conducted four training sessions (one day) were organized in Tirana, Shkoder, Durres and Vlora. The number of participants trained during these four training sessions was 65 health care providers. The participants were very interested on this topic, taken into consideration that we are still facing the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic. The selection of participants fitted to the aim of this activity.

The main recommendations were:

1. The health care providers need to be prepared to response to SRH needs during the emergencies.
2. The training on MISP could not be completed in one day, because the information introduced to the participants should include a lot of information related to the 6th objectives of MISP.
3. Covid-19 has increased the need for the training of health care providers during any emergencies.
4. The kits related to each objective of MISP, should be provided to the health centres.
5. The extension of MISP training for health care providers in the next years.

Roundtables organized: In the first phase, participants were introduced with legislation and other documents of civil emergencies, the general platform of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection for risk and disaster management, a sectoral approach to improving the effectiveness of civil emergencies and humanitarian crises and clarifying the mechanism of coordination.

On the second phase of these activities, the participants discussed about their activity in the reproductive health and the previous experience in the response to any emergency situation.

To estimate their capacities, we used questionnaires to collect information from participants for each objective of the MISP; Where we are? What was the impact of Covid-19 in SRH needs? What we should improve in the future? A leaflet was prepared with practical information regarding the MISP and its objectives. It will



be shared with Local health care Unit.

» International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Survey in Albania

I-SHARE (International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health) Survey examined the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on sexual and reproductive health in diverse low-income, middle-income, and high-income countries. This series of studies aimed to investigate how different isolation measures implemented by governments worldwide in response to the Covid-19 pandemic - have affected family structures, relationships, and access to sexual and reproductive health services. The main topics of the survey were: Contraceptive use; Access to reproductive healthcare; Sexual/gender-based violence; Sexually transmitted infection prevalence.

Albania joined the second wave of the I-SHARE (International Sexual Health and Reproductive Health) Survey. Overall, it was a very positive experience, and the dissemination plan conformed with the number of participants recruited in the study. Resources such as the cooperation with UNFPA, NGO, Institute of Public Health, and the Faculty of Medicine were more efficient. At the end of the study, 412 people completed questionnaires. After analysing the data simultaneously, the working group accessed valuable information about sexual and reproductive health during the Covid-19 pandemic. Online recruitment through Facebook and paid advertising did not have the expected result. The completed questionnaires didn't reflect the reached figures on the Facebook advert. This may be related to stigma, difficulties with confidentiality, and anonymity. Based on our experiences with other studies, there is an average culture of completing questionnaires and personal contribution to them in Albanian. From this experience, lessons for the future would be to start earlier the promotion either on social media or even with paid ads to become familiar with the study and find ways to recruit participants with snowball sampling. Although social media appears to be the best way to do this, it can often be the least tool that people believe.

This global study's overall goal was to understand better sexual and reproductive health among adults during Covid-19 using an online convenience sample from selected countries, including Albania.

During the implementation phase, the national experts maintained a collaborative working relationship with all the partners involved in the project implementation, such as the UNFPA office and its partners, the Faculty of Medicine, and different NGO-s. A promotion and dissemination plan were prepared.

## Challenges and Project Response

Covid pandemic delayed the procurement and distribution of HPV test to primary health care centres. During summer months many centres couldn't provide screening for women. Some activities from IPH staff were also delayed.

Pandemic also has increased the workload of PHC centres and screening program is competing with other priorities.

A round table with main stakeholders of cervical cancer program was planned but it is postponed as director of Institute of Public Health who was decided to chair it, left Institute of Public Health on 2nd December and another director is expected to be appointed.

One key partner at university hospital, an experienced gynaecologist (Mirela Rista) left to follow a teaching carrier at family medicine. It disrupted for some time the development of the colposcopy registry.

The involvement and collaboration of key actors in the implementation and follow-up of the response is a key to the success of interventions favouring persons in emergencies and crises.

Strengthening capacities of health care providers to meet sexual and reproductive health needs in every emergency or humanitarian crisis.

An efficient preparation of the response strategy (prepositioning of logistics and capacity building) well in advance combined with the availability of financial resources facilitates meeting the social needs of crisis-affected populations.

## Project Title: Gender Based Violence and Gender Equality addressed through multisectoral response- UNFPA Country Office

### Main Achievements of the Project

- » Improved tools to be used for capacity development of state service providers. During the reported period, the expert has prepared and updated different manuals and training materials to be used with different groups of health care and social care providers and members of coordinated referral mechanism. These include:
  - a. The update of training manual and PPT presentations for the capacity building activities with health care providers and the use of specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) approved for them to manage the violence against women and domestic violence (VAW&DV) cases as members of the coordinated referral mechanisms.
  - b. The preparation of the full package for the capacity building of social care



workers (training manual, PPTs, handouts, case studies, agenda, pre/post training tests, etc.). This package is prepared based on the specific SOPs approved for use in their daily cases' management.

- c. The training module preparation for the members of the coordinated referral mechanisms to improve their response on case management by using all existing tools (SOPs, protocols, and standards) that facilitate their daily work and cooperation.
- d. The preparation of the training package for health care workers to minimise the risk of VAW&DV incidents in civil emergencies (the training manual, agenda, PPT, handouts, pre/post-tests, etc) also based on the approved SOPs for health care workers cases management in civil emergencies.

Improved capacities of health care workers. During the reporting period, were organised 7 (seven) training in total, respectively in: Fier, Lezha, Kruja, Kukes, Elbasan, Gjirokastra, and Korca. The capacities of around 80 (eighty) health care workers were improved on the better understanding of VAW&DV, legislation in place and their responsibilities of using the approved SOPs. Information on other specialist support services and the existence of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism in their municipalities were also provided.

Improved capacities of social care workers. During the reporting period, were organised 4 (four) trainings in total, respectively in: Tirana, Gjirokastra, Korca and Durres. The capacities of around 55 (fifty-five) social care workers were improved on the better understanding of VAW&DV, legislation in place and their responsibilities of using the approved SOP. Information on other specialist support services as well as on the existence of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism in their municipalities, were also provided.

Improved capacities of bordering police and key members of coordinated referral mechanisms to better address the cases of women migrant and asylum-seekers, who might be also survivors of VAW&DV. Two consultative round tables were organised with representatives from the police borders and members of the coordinated referral mechanisms, respectively, in Gjirokastra and Korca. The improved legislation, the existence of the coordinated referral mechanisms, the responsibilities of key members, the existing specialist support services and guidance on cases referral were all subject of these roundtables. Around 40 (forty) representatives of police borders, municipalities, health care services, social care services, police officers and representatives from Caritas, UNHCR, UN Women and UNFPA participated in these roundtables.

Improved capacities of social administrators and specialist of community centres in the Municipality of Tirana. Within December 2021, two one-day trainings in Municipality of Tirana were planned to be organised, focusing on capacity building of Administrative Units to address VAW&DV cases better. These trainings were organised based on Municipality request, with participation of 40 (forty) participants. The training aimed to improve the participants information and knowledge

on legal changes, the CoM Decision No.327/2021 for the functioning of the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms, to raise their awareness on the specific duties and responsibilities they must fulfil during the cases' management, to increase their knowledge on SOPs and protocols for the cases management, etc.

- » EU for Gender Equality in Albania - Implementation of the EU Gender Equality acquis Joint Programme

Ten one day meetings with local stakeholders (30 persons) with the presence of ACPD project staff were carried out during October to introduce the initiative and enable support by LGUs (Local Government Unit) and involvement in the project.

A Needs assessment was carried out with 70 young people and 5 informants in Elbasan and 68 youngsters and 7 informants in Shirgjan administrative units in relation to having gender and socially-responsive area-based development plans and respective service delivery. The need assessment aim was to obtain a general overview of the situation of gender equality in local administrative units of Velipoja and Shirgjan with focus on vulnerable youngsters, access to basic services, including Sexual and Gender Based Violence and health services; evaluate the role of the local government and other public structures to support these groups in order to serve as a basis for guiding interventions to enable LGUs create a favourable environment for young people to realize their potential, focusing on providing services and reaching out to adolescent girls and boys in poor/rural areas.

The main conclusions from the quantitative phase were:

- There is a sharp difference with regard to gender attitudes: high proportions of boys than girls do strongly agree, agree or averagely agree with the statements putting girls and women in a submissive and disadvantaged position, but for some statements even high proportions of girls do think the same. This means that gender stereotypes advantaging boys over girls in many aspects of family, work and social areas are deeply rooted among Albanian youngsters.
- About one in ten youngsters experienced any kind of violence during last year, with higher proportions of Shkodra youngsters, those aged 15-18 years and females being subject of violence. Young boys and girls (aged 15 years) are especially at high risk of violence, but otherwise, violence affects all groups.
- Emotional violence was the most common type of violence with non-relatives, parents and siblings being the most frequent aggressors.
- Relatively high proportions of female youngsters experienced sexual harassment and bullying at school, and about one in twenty are still forced into dowry marriage. On the other hand, about one third of male youngsters admitted to have exerted any kind of violence during the last year.

The intention to participate in the political life is rather low: only 46% of young-





sters would vote in the next elections, if they were eligible to (significantly more male than females) and also low proportions of youngsters are interested in political issues, maintaining the considerable gap in favour of males.

- Sadly, very low proportions of youngster's trust that the local government is supportive to the needs of girls and women in the community, with lower percentages of girls thinking it compared to boys.

The main conclusions from the qualitative phase were:

- The overwhelming majority of boys and girls think that gender equality is very important, thus being in deep contradiction with what they agreed during the closed-ended questions.
- Despite being in favour, theoretically, of gender equality, the overwhelming majority of youngsters think, from their experience and others experience, that there is gender inequality and discrimination towards girls/women is widespread and is exercised in virtually all settings: at home, at work, at the neighbourhood, at school, at the community level.
- The judicial, education and health systems seems to be the settings where there is lower gender inequality compared to home, community and the work place. Gender inequality in the structures of the local government is perceived as relatively high by youngsters.

The main conclusion form key informants were:

- With regard to specific policies targeting vulnerable youngsters, at school, health centre, local health centre units (LHCU), they were unaware of such policies but they think that there must be some of them, without being able to mention any.
- The main reasons why young girls and women in rural areas face difficulties related to issues of gender equality and other issues of discrimination included the prevailing patriarchal mentality and the non-enforcing of government policies, the ineffective government policies and the insufficient work done by the education system.
- Development of the IEC materials and products with thematic messages on gender equality; youth empowerment, Sexual reproductive health and rights. IEC materials were designed and printed. IEC materials will be shared in 2022 during second phase.

Two kick-off events were carried out on 13th of December in Shkodra and 16th December in Elbasan with the participation of local stakeholders (40 participants from both municipalities) including representatives of municipalities, directorates of education and health, NGOs that work for gender equality and human rights, police, young people, schools and local health care units. Other actors such as: representatives of education directorates and schools mentioned educational pro-

grams that include the component of gender which needs to be reinforced. Young people highlighted the fact that in school, community, in health care setting there is a need for elimination of gender discrimination and for delivering services that are gender-sensitive and rights-based. Two local experts presented the findings and recommendations of the “Needs Assessment” referring to the discussions of the participants as the issues and recommendations raised totally fit to the conclusions. The full report can be found here: [https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq\\_kc8kSGtBB-gv1fajDVxf4k8\\_TjDQ?e=Xxrgte](https://1drv.ms/b/s!Aq_kc8kSGtBB-gv1fajDVxf4k8_TjDQ?e=Xxrgte); Shkoder: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=442073504082527&id=102866881336526](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=442073504082527&id=102866881336526)

- » 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in Vlora Aulona Center - The 25th of November – the 10th of December 2021

In the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the Aulona Center, ACPD' Vlora branch, organised a roundtable on 25th of November with the support of the UNFPA Albania. This activity was held in the framework of the Joint Program of the United Nations “End Violence Against Women and Girls”, financed by the Swedish Government and implemented by UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women in cooperation with Government of Albania. This roundtable brought together 20 representatives from all religious communities of the Municipality of Vlora (the head of the Muslims, the Catholics, the head of the Orthodox Church, the head of the Baptist, the representative of Bektashi community, the head of the Evangelical Church and the head of the Vlora Church of Christ) and members of the Referral Mechanism Against Gender-Based Violence. The Coordinator against GBV in Vlora municipality also had a presentation to showcase the achievement and challenges against GBV during year 2021. The main aim of the meeting was to talk about what has been done during the year 2021 and to discuss the role of the religious communities in order to prevent the violence against women and better help the victims/survivors, and stop the silence pandemic regarding this phenomenon. During the roundtable, the Aulona Centre Manager also launched the national campaign: Most active spiritual leader of the 2022 year in protecting families, gender inequalities and women's rights. The campaign aims to encourage community leaders to be more involved in media and social media to prevent and fight the GBV. The nominations will be collected from the five religious' communities on October 2022, and the prizes will be announced on the roundtable on the 25th of November 2022. The roundtable had an echo in the regional TV, 6+1 Vlora, which transmitted the awareness messages of all participants

Two publicities spot were produced with awareness messages from religious leaders in Vlora Municipality appealing to respect women, condemning the violence of any form as wrong, a factor that worsens relationships and never is considered a solution. One of the Spots with subtitles/no sound is used in the Billboard screen of advertisement in the Centre of Vlore City for 30 days from 25th of November to 24th of December. The second spot with video interviews and messages from the religious leaders is transmitted on all social media of Aulona Centre and ACPD. The same spot is transmitted in the regional TV 6+1 Vlora Tv for one month (from the 25th of November to the 25th of December).



A banner is posted in the main street of Vlora before the QTU Riviera, an area that is very much frequented by people and was there during the 16 days of activism with the message of this year: To stop violence against women, NOW! #16daysof activism.

ACPD organised in Vlora and Shkodra the Round table: “The extended Alliance of Women Municipality council members in dialogue with Civil Society to fight GBV”. The roundtable brought together 40 women from VLORA and Shkodra Municipality Council (representatives from the head of Vlora Municipality council, the director of the Alliance of Women council member) and representative of the civil society and local media to discuss ideas and initiatives to be addressed by both Municipalities council with the 2022 budget, to better serve the victims of the GBV and domestic violence and to prevent the phenomena in advance.

Two meetings with faith-based organisation: 10 religious’ leaders of all denominations in Vlora and 10 representatives of the state institutions, for the first time, gathered at a roundtable to know each other, establish a dialogue and find ways of cooperation among themselves to better address the issues of gender-based violence.

The campaign: “Most active spiritual leader of the 2022 year in the protection of families, gender inequalities and women’s rights” will serve as a catalysation to motivate community leaders to be more active in media and social media in order to prevent and fight the GBV.

A list of emergency phone numbers and phone numbers of the members of the Referral Mechanism Against GBV is distributed following the round table to all the religious representatives to improve the referring system for the victims of GBV and domestic violence.

Some 50.000 people raised their awareness through the messages of the religious leaders, that violence against women is a cruel and barbaric act that worsens and destroys relationships.

An estimate of 40.000 people has been reached with messages (through TV programs, news edition and spot publicity) against gender-based violence and domestic violence through the regional TV 6+1 Vlora (as per the number of followers in FCB)

Some 9250 is the total number of people reached with all posts, videos and messages during the 16 days of activism, through all the posts at Aulona Centre Page and ACPD on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube and social media of the local TV.

The TV program was an extraordinary example of the religious tolerance in Albania and their shared commitment to fighting GBV following the Joint Declaration of November 2020.

Two round tables with Women Council Members and civil society helped raise

awareness of 20 members of Vlora and Shkodra Municipality council about the challenges of women in their territory and brainstorm ideas of how to serve the victims better. As a result of the round table with Women Council members, the women committed themselves to advocate for the increase in the budget for the social rents for vulnerable women, to have three apartments in the Sulo Shehi building in Vlora as an emergency shelter for the victims of GBV and to advocate for the public transportation of close villages of Vlora municipality, which would give more access to women to work in the city. Link to activity [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrZbg\\_0wfKQ&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrZbg_0wfKQ&t=3s). TV program with the representatives of the religious community of Vlora Municipality is in the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doHDIDsqEAE&t=2066s>

» Support CEDAW Report

In 2020, ACPD with partner organizations carried out the desk review to orient the CEDAW report, while in 2021, the desk review report was translated and adapted in English language to be served as guidance in the future, Among the main findings and recommendation were:

There is a Reproductive Health strategy in place that dictates the need for improvement of the legal framework, while even other laws on health approved recently by the Assembly make this intervention an obligation;

The need for intervention in the LRH is related to the changes that the whole set of laws on fundamental freedoms and human rights has undergone: this is the case of the law on Gender Equality in Society, the Law on Protection against Discrimination, the Law on Measures against Domestic Violence, etc;

There is an urgent need to align laws with international human rights norms and standards. Laws that criminalize sex work and the transmission of HIV directly impact the health-seeking behaviour and quality of services received by affected persons. Albania has ratified the Istanbul Convention Obligations stemming from the implementation of international instruments such as the CEDAW Convention, GREVIO Committee Reports, EU Progress Reports, those deriving from the Cairo Action Program as well as those deriving from the SDG, dictate the need for legislative intervention in this regard. The rights and obligations that make the law effective, contemporary and sustainable. Despite the commitments made by Albania and the positive developments since its last review, specific obstacles to the realization of the right to health and to sexual and reproductive health services by vulnerable groups persist throughout Albania.

There are changes in population structure, fertility, ageing, the urbanization process that has taken place in these nearly 20 years, and the need for accessible and affordable information and services.

The development of the private health sector, which did not exist when the current law was made, asks for new provisions in the legal frame, thus addressing the private sector, the need for the full legal regulation of reproductive health services



offered in private centres and hospitals, new services some of which are not covered by current law.

There is an inevitable need to address better the requirements related to social factors and at-risk groups, the need for referral systems and services in the rural area, priorities of prevention etc.

Current law addresses important issues of reproductive health but not their full range, such as safe motherhood, breast and cervical cancers and reproductive health, menopause, andropause. Persons were facing multiple and intersecting forms of oppression, particularly rural women, Roma and Egyptian persons, as well as persons with non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, sex workers, men who have sex with men and people who inject drugs, experience limited access to healthcare services generally and sexual and reproductive health services in particular. This is primarily due to healthcare professionals' unprofessional, biased and discriminatory attitudes, lack of SRHR information by service users and providers, and unequal distribution and resourcing of healthcare facilities.

The law lacks the proper arrangements for providing free sterilization service when the procedure is legal and does not provide for sterilization restrictions, obtaining spouse approval, etc. Absence of some by-laws that make the law unenforceable;

Lack of information also of the structures responsible at the local level for their content and obligations towards clients in the field of reproductive health; Lack of information to the public on the rights guaranteed by law; Comprehensive Sexuality Education programs do not extend to children or young people based in non-formal or out-of-school settings including those from the young key populations. Many young persons from key populations are not in school, often due to the discrimination they experience in schools and are not reached by school-based programs. Despite a decade long partnership between the Albanian state and UNFPA and national civil society groups to institutionalize school-based CSE, and the current curriculum review process, widespread resistance to school-based sexuality education persists.

HIV prevention and treatment remains a significant challenge for the healthcare system. Protection gaps and key concerns include lack of access to specialized STI/HIV and SRH services, discrimination by healthcare providers, and increased mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

The analysis made during the consultancy shows that the "Reproductive Health" Law does not provide any specific reference to sexual orientation, gender identity or LGBTI persons' rights or particular healthcare needs of other vulnerable groups. For transgender persons, access to gender-confirming surgery is also limited. Conversely, intersex persons are often forced into unnecessary medical interventions. In-vitro fertilization (IVF) and assistive reproduction technology (ART) are unavailable to LGBTI persons. The Criminal Code does not criminalize forced sterilization.

## Barriers to access to health services. Violence and Discrimination:

- Decriminalize all aspects of adult consensual sex work by repealing Articles 113, 114 and 115 of the Criminal Code.
- Develop and implement minimum standards for the effective participation of minority and marginalized groups, including persons from key populations, Roma and Egyptian persons, women and youth, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and health measures.
- Increase public health expenditure and establish an adequate budgetary allocation to health care to increase access to accessible or affordable health services for all, including marginalized persons and persons living in rural areas, and put in place anti-corruption measures.
- Accelerate efforts to develop programs and policies that end all forms of discrimination, including son preference and gender-biased sex selection.
- Conduct regular national monitoring, through inter alia broad-based surveys of a robust set of sexual and reproductive health indicators disaggregated by relevant factors including gender identity, sexual orientation, age, location, race, ethnicity and others and use these to inform programs and services.

## HIV and AIDS

- Decriminalize HIV transmission and review other laws and policies which deter persons from accessing HIV prevention and treatment services.
- Scale-up HIV Prevention, Testing and Care Programs particularly for hard-to-reach communities and persons from critical populations.

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education

- Ensure the participation and views of youth, including out-of-school youth, from key populations and marginalized groups are actively sought out and included in the review of existing implementation of CSE in formal and informal settings, particularly in rural and underserved and marginalized communities, to strengthen the curriculum, implementation and impact of CSE.

## Challenges and Project Response

One of the main challenges faced is related to the amount of work that was concentrated mostly in the last three-months of the year regarding the UNFPA yearly program. Also, Covid-19 remained a factor remains a factor for obstacles and delays in organizing events.





## Project Title: Evidence-based HIV services for key populations-UNFPA Country Office

### Main Achievements of the Project

The main results of the work conducted with Young Key population include:

- 4 workshops were carried out has in 4 areas, specifically in Shkodra, Lezha, Kukes and Elbasan, with the Local Partnerships established by YWCA. 80 participants took part.
- A new VCT centre in Fushe-Kruja Male Prison was established.
- 320 prisoners with a history of substance abuse and risky behaviours were reached through field visits and awareness sessions.
- 12 people from prison staff attended a training session on infection diseases and Covid-19 management.
- 107 people were reached and received prevention services and risk reduction kits.
- 1178 injecting drug users and injecting/sexual partners were reached and received prevention services and risk reduction kits, including HIV and STIs tests and counselling.
- 100 young people were reached online and offline via different activities workshops on Drug use/HIV & SRH protection.
- Participation of 16 persons in online/ on-site workshops with staff (doctors, nurses and psychologists) of MMT centres.
- 6659 condoms were distributed.
- 2754 lubricants were distributed.
- 2800 advocacy materials were published and were distributed to beneficiaries and young people

### Challenges and Project Response

- Covid 19 has made it harder to reach young key people, increasing their isolation and the need for services, which means that new alternatives to providing socio-health services need to be explored.

- Measures imposed by the Institutions responsible for preventing the spread of Covid19 make it difficult to implement projects in prison settings.
- Difficulties in reaching young key population in community due to pandemic restriction.

## Project Title: National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania-Partners Albania with EU Funds

### Project summary:

The action is implemented by Partners Albania for Change and Development, in partnership with the Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) and the European Movement in Albania (EMA). The aim is the establishment of National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania, as a platform for strengthening local and national civil society organisations.

The Centre has three offices; the National Resource Centre main office in Tirana and two other regional offices in Shkodra and Vlora, to ensure wider territorial coverage of the country with its activities and services. The action builds on the activities/results of the work of Partners Albania for more than 15 years in capacity building, technical assistance and consultancy for civil society, facilitation and coordination of participatory processes, research, monitoring and needs assessment for the sector, and advocacy for the creation of an enabling environment for CSOs. It also builds on the long experience and expertise of the co-applicants (EMA and ACPD) in the promotion of EU integration and human rights.

In the third year of the action implementation, the Centre has consolidated its presence in the non-for profit sector as well as in relation to donor community, government institutions, media and other stakeholders, through its work in various directions by offering: help desk services and networking for CSOs in the country and beyond; building of capacities of civil society organizations in Albania; improving good governance of CSOs and increase public trust; facilitating advocacy and policy dialogue with the state institutions.

### Main Achievements of the Project

Increased awareness and research-based information of CSOs on key development issues of the enabling environment for CSOs development and thematic networking at national and regional level, through close collaboration with other



mechanisms that contribute to CSOs development, as TACSO 3.

During the reporting period are strengthened the capacities and competences of a total of 240 CSOs from both South and North Region through online trainings on topics such as: Advocacy and Lobbying, “Supporting civic initiatives in the decision-making activity of the Albanian Parliament”, “Sustainability of CSOs and youth CSOs in the pandemic and post pandemic era”, Good governance and Human Resource Management, Crowdfunding platforms- Smile.al the first Albanian platform, Organizational integrity and management of financial resources and development of social enterprises in Albania.

A total of 380 young people (200 from Vlora high schools, Vlora University and rural young people and 180 from Shkodra) raised awareness on topics of voluntarism and need for youth engagements through 25 info sessions through online and onsite sessions (13 in Vlora and 12 in Shkodra).

During the reporting period were strengthened the capacities and competences on Code of Standards principles and engagements for a total of 145 local CSOs from Vlora and Shkodra region.

Improved enabling environment for an increased role and contribution of civil society, through joint and coordinated advocacy efforts, and increased policy dialogue with the government.

Through Vlora NRC Office support for the advocacy issues addressed through petitions were strengthened the capacities of CSOs as well as the capacities of 4 informal groups in terms of understanding the procedures, the petition regulation of Vlora Municipality, the legal framework about the law on local government, different laws and Decisions of the Council of Ministers about the Protected natural areas, the Committee for Protection of Protected Areas etc. in order to properly address their needs/requests.

As a result of the advocacy efforts of the Soda Forest network of Vlora CSOs and a joint initiative for cleaning up part of the Forest (under the support and guidance of the Vlora NRC Coordinator) during 2021 was strengthened the cooperation between Vlora CSOs part of this Network and the representatives from the local officials. These efforts increased visibility of the Network of Vlora CSOs as an actor of influence at local decision-making institutions of Vlora Municipality.

Increased visibility of Vlora NRC Regional office to local institutions through: participation in the meetings with Vlora Mayor, vice Mayor and municipality council Meetings addressing the Soda Forest protection Petition issues and public transportation petitions issue for local government units of Novosela, Qendra Shushica.

Increased visibility of Shkodra NRC office to local institutions through participation of the office coordinator in the City Council Meetings in the quality of elect member in the Board of the Extended Alliance for Gender Equality representing civil society in Shkoder

Six petitions are drafted and submitted with support of Vlora NRC Office to Vlora Municipality during 2021. Among them there are petitions from Novosela and Babica Women Forums for the public transportation to cover these areas, petition of the Babica inhabitants for street lights and road safety, petition of the Rivera Blu Network of CSOs for the Marine Academy area to be transformed to a public park for citizens, petition of the "Hasan Kushta" neighborhood for the reconstruction of their apartments ruined by time and earthquakes.

The advocacy campaigns increased visibility of the Vlora NRC office, strengthened the cooperation between Vlora CSOs that got involved and made them an actor with influence in local decision making at Vlora Municipality.

Ten representatives of religious organizations (as important part of civil society) with support of Vlora NRC Office drafted (on June 2021) and implemented (November- December 2021) a joint action plan to fight domestic violence and Gender Based Violence issues and improve cooperation with state institutions and Network of Vlora CSOs.

Improved cooperation between Alliance of Women Council members and network of CSOs in Vlora and Shkodra. Raised awareness of 25 women council Members of Vlora and Shkodra Municipality Council to address women's needs in general and specifically the ones of vulnerable women in the respective budgets for 2022

A total of 6300 indirect beneficiaries have been informed about the NRC activity and news about call for proposals and capacity building opportunities, through ACPD social medias

## Challenges and Project Response

CSOs still need to improve their capacities and understanding on the proper mechanisms for the policy impact and how to use them. ACPD is offering help desk services to individual CSOs in order to raise their capacities for better advocating for community issues using the mechanism and laws which help to bring the changes they long for.

CSOs are largely dependent on the donors' funding and therefore their sustainability is at risk time after time, as long as they do not have income generation activities/services. ACPD organized trainings with them to increase their skills in social enterprising, fundraising techniques which would give them opportunity to generate funds and be more sustainable.

Civil society actors are still in the phase of the "building capacities" for active involvement in the policy shaping processes in the area of socio-economic development, particularly in the view of EU approaches and policies. ACPD through its Resource Centers is working to keep them informed and explain their crucial role for the EU integration.



The implementation of the law on volunteerism and the law for social enterprises would give a new breath to the CSOs development.

## Project Title: YEOP- Increasing opportunities for labour market integration of youth and families at risk- SOS Village

### Project summary:

The high youth unemployment rates are a major challenge for the Municipality of Vlora as in all Albania. The lack of prospects for young people leads, among other things, to extremely high migration figures to western countries. Reports from international organizations show that about 70% of young people in Albania seek to emigrate to an EU country. Young people face shortages of opportunities, social and economic policies and their disregard for decision-making institutions on employment and development issues that affect their lives

The project goal is to Increased opportunities for labour market integration of 60 disadvantaged young people and parents of families at risk, contributing on the long run to their overall improvement of socio-economic well-being. During the implementation of the project for 2021, 74 young people (at least 70% female) have increased theoretical and practical knowledge and successfully meet the demands of the labor market. A good number young people are empowered and undertake advocacy action combating youth unemployment and have shared recommendations with local decision-makers.

### Main Achievements of the Project

Throughout project implementation, was increased the cooperation with local actors considered as potential actors in identifying and referring project beneficiaries. With local actors we identify the local and regional institutions as Directorate of Social Service, Assistance and Consumer Protection, Directorate of Vocational Training Center, Head of Vlora Youth Centre, Principal of Vocational School "Pavarsia" Vlore, Chairwoman to the Municipal Council of Vlore, Regional Directorate of National Employment Agency Vlore, Representatives of Vocational "Commercial" school, social administrators of 5 local areas. Throughout project implementation, four cooperation agreements were signed with government institutions, such as Regional Directorate of National Employment and Skills Agency Vlore, Regional Directorate of Public Vocational Training in Vlore, Directorate of Financial Aid and

State Social Service, Municipality of Vlore, Vocational School “Pavarësia” Vlorë. Project staff increased cooperation with community-based organizations like “Me Komunitetin Per Ndryshim” (MKPN) With Community for Change”, Coordinator of “Re-invest world vision”, “Shqiperia” Association, representative of “Vatra” centre; as well as increased cooperation with private entities and individuals considered as potentials actors for cooperation: “Novus Traditional” bar-restaurant, Regina Group-Regina City, “Arjoli” bakery, , “ART SIG” restaurant, “Agora” bad and breakfast, ‘Tiku&Mato bar-restaurant, “Bujari” restaurant, “Kolonat” fast-food etc.

114 young beneficiaries coming from difficult social-economic backgrounds were identified, and all relevant registration forms were completed. Data of every beneficiary were entered in Youth Participation Data Base, which is constantly updated with information about the progress of each case, on the platform specifically built for updating YEEP project implementation <https://sosc.v.sharepoint.com/sites>.

Capacities of 74 youths were increased through 12-days trainings in two basic modules: Life Skills and Employability. Young beneficiaries regularly attended the training sessions, therefore acquiring essential knowledge and constantly giving their consent to the content and arrangement of training modules.

At the end of the training sessions, 56 youths enrolled in the Vocational Training courses as directed and upon everybody’s choice. 25 young people were employed through employment mediation.

“Youth Forum on Employment Issues” was established and were held 3 meetings, where the third meeting of “Youth Forum on Employment Issues” was on April 2021. In this meeting, we informed youth groups about the concept of resilience, and the current legal aspects that encourage youths’ employment. On 08/09/2021 we held the 4th meeting which covered the topic of “What is motivation, types of motivation, internal and external motivation”. During the month of December on 18/12/2021, was held the fifth meeting of the Youth Forum on Employment issues. While observing the youths attending their vocational training courses, their work apprenticeship programs and their employment experiences, we noticed that communication was a key factor to a productive interaction. Therefore, the project staff found that “Communication”, its definition, types, division and recommendations thereof, would be an interesting topic to cover for an effective communication.

Professional and financial capacities of project implementing staff (project coordinator and social employee) was increased through trainings such as on “Project Cycle Management”; “Project Budgeting and Reporting”, “Personnel development, and operational management”; “Local Resource Management”; Training on Start-Up/ Small Business Entrepreneurship etc.





## Challenges and Project Response

Project staff took all actions for the cooperation with and referral of youths by the social administrators of 5 regions of Vlore municipality. During the project implementation by the social administrators, only 3 cases of youths coming financial aid benefiting families have been referred. After contacting and meeting the referred youths, staff noticed their hesitation to involve in the project, for the reason that, if they got a job, their families would be excluded from the financial aid program.

The project supports youths with vocational training courses; however, youth interest is to engage in different courses. Except for the Vocational Training Centre, which is the government institution to start classes for the relevant courses after a certain number of applications (15 to 20 applications), there are no private entities certified in the city of Vlora to provide those vocational training courses that youths would like to attend. This often results in postponement of the schedule arranged for the commencement of the courses by youths enrolled with the Vocational Training Centre.

Following the enrollment of youths in the relevant courses, was expected for 3 courses to start earlier than they actually did. Given the postponement of the start date by the institution, we had to keep constant communication with the institution and youths, so as they remained motivated and did not lose their faith.

## Project Title: Scaling up and Ensuring Sustainability of the National Response to HIV for Female Sex Workers-Global Fund

### Project summary:

Global Transitional Fund has started to deliver its program in Albania through 2020-2021. The main focus of the program is sustainable services for key populations. The grant aims to provide a catalytic response and build structures that support the link between government and national institutions, focusing on the financial sustainability of national TB and HIV programs. The program prioritizes interventions addressing TB and HIV issues in the country, identifying and expanding interventions to key affected populations in selected cities; reducing stigma and discrimination; equal access and the provision of high-quality services for the prevention, treatment, care and support with a focus on key populations most affected by HIV and TB. The program lacks the component of the community support, awareness raising so ACPD aims to contribute in filling in this gap through a right based and gender sensitive approach and improving access to care and the

quality of that care with respect to stigma and discrimination directed towards high risk and vulnerable groups.

## Main Achievements of the Project

- 278 Female Sex Workers were provided with the package of services including testing for HIV/Hep B; Hep C; Syphilis
- 316 Female Sex Workers were been provided with psycho – social services
- 20.000 condoms were distributed to Female Sex Workers who visited the ACPD clinic center and in the hotspot areas they are working.

ACPD has continued its work to provide testing and counselling services for FSW even during pandemic situation. This was realized through adapting the hours of Tirana clinic based on the FSW needs and appropriate time for them to benefit from the services; respecting the national protocol of the measurements against COVID – 19; as well as offering them free SRH services such as Pap smear and ultrasound.

## Challenges and Project Response

The situation created by Covid-19 makes the work of achieving counselling and testing on HIV more difficult for reaching this category group.

Time constraints due to the pandemic situation have made it difficult for staff to meet with the FSW on the field because as reported by them the Covid - 19 pandemic has conditioned them to work less due to fear of infection and closing activities at 20:00 until early morning causing decrease of clients, less incomes and risk in health. There is a mapping of the hotspots where FSW are working and the outreach is responsible to reach them. Despite the testing and counselling on HIV, the outreach also informs them about the free SRH services they can receive at ACPD clinic in Tirana.

ACPD clinical centre in Tirana has offered services and consultations on Sexual and Reproductive Health free of charge for Female Sex Workers during this pandemic situation caused by Covid-19.

ACPD medical doctors have been on standby and have welcomed all the concerns of the clients, have advised as well as have provided them with medication in case of need.



## Project Title: Training of key professionals at municipality level about health promotion and educational activities in the framework of the project “Schools for Health”- Save the Children

### Project summary:

The aim of the project “Schools for Health” supported by Save the Children was to train selected key professionals, including the child protection unit, at municipality level (Kukës, Korçë and Elbasan) in charge of health promotion and educational activities for the needs of the project “Schools for Health”.

Specific objectives were:

- To train key professionals, including the child protection unit, at municipality level in charge of health promotion and educational activities.
- To identify and reach out a large audience and deliver effective training sessions for knowledge transfer, especially for child protection unit dealing with vulnerable and marginalized categories of children and their families.
- To deliver training sessions in a gender- and culturally-sensitive manner and in accordance with the local contexts, traditions and current circumstances.

Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) office in Tirana conducted training workshops in collaboration with local schools and Child Protection units in Elbasan, Korca; the organization of training in Kukës was supported by the branch of ACPD in Shkodra. Two ACPD staff were engaged in this initiative: one project coordinator from ACPD headquarters in Tirana who led and coordinated the project activities in Elbasan and Korca. A team of two experts of public health and children rights were involved with development of the training package and training delivery. Local coordinators coordinated and implemented workshops at local level. They produced reports related to workshops and followed up plans in collaboration with the team of experts.

Workshops were carried out in two major phases:

Phase 1 - Preparatory work: Three introductory/consultation meetings were carried out by local coordinators through the first week of the implementation table of project in Elbasan, Korca and Kukës (one meeting per each municipality). Meetings aimed to introduce the initiative to local institutions –Municipalities including the Child Protection Units staff, Regional Directorates of Education, Local Units for Health Care, NGOs and other stakeholders involved with health promotion interventions in schoolchildren and vulnerable and marginalized categories of children and their families. Two experts with extended expertise on public health and

children rights and previous experience in conducting workshops were contracted by ACPD for development of the training package and training delivery. The training package was based on solid and well-known resources with key professionals at municipality level and were approved by the project team.

Phase two - Implementation: 4 two-day trainings were carried out in Elbasan, Korca and Kukes in local settings: One training workshop in Kukes; two training workshops in Elbasan municipality; one training workshop in Korca municipality. The training enabled participants to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and good practices that each targeted audience should possess regarding the promotion of healthy behaviours among schoolchildren including healthy nutritional habits, physical activity, prevention of tobacco, alcohol and drug use, promotion of sexual health, mental health, as well as good hygienic practices and effective measures for the prevention of infectious diseases including the recent Covid-19 pandemic. All workshops were conducted in a gender- and culturally-sensitive manner and were tailored in accordance with the local contexts, traditions and current circumstances.

## Main Achievements of the Project

Three introductory/consultation meetings were carried by project staff with key stakeholders of respective regions (Elbasan, Korce and Kukes). The aim of these meetings was to inform and familiarize project partners with the aim of the project, plan of activities and explore the most needed topics to be covered during workshops. Participants in these meetings were representatives from Regional and Municipality institutions including the Child Protection Units staff, Regional Directorates of Education, Local Units for Health Care, NGOs and other stakeholders involved with health promotion interventions in schoolchildren and vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Key stakeholders, the expert team in collaboration with the Save the Children project team agreed on the topics to be discussed, literature/training materials to be used during the trainings and delivered among training participants. As agreed, training manuals previously developed by Save the Children, Live Healthy Brochure, developed by partner NGO and other WHO and local materials were used and distributed. The ACPD expert team composed by two distinguished experts in the field, finalized the training resource materials, handouts and other supportive training materials. The training package was approved also by the Save the Children team.

Fourty key professionals, and Child Protection Unit representatives improved their awareness, knowledge and attitude regarding health promotion interventions in school children (including healthy lifestyle habits and healthy behavioural practices) and effective delivery of educational activities with a focus on health promotion among children aged 6-16 years and their parents/families.



4 two-day trainings were organized in three regions (four in total), respectively in Elbasan, Korca and Kukes through May 24th until June 11th (two workshops in Elbasan, and one in Korca and Kukes). The number of participants in each workshop was 10 (ten) people.

The most discussed topics were those related to healthy and eating's behaviours, and substance abuse among young people. Participants were interested to know more about new interventions in school and community to engage young people in healthy behaviours. It was interesting to note, that there was a joint agreement among all participants about forging partnership among institutions as well as organizing joint activities to attract young people and vulnerable groups to be engaged in healthy behaviours. Discussions about Covid-19 issues was of particular interest for training participants, who's even though had information about prevention and some symptoms of Covid-19, yet they lacked technical information about this virus. The main focus of discussions was about the origin of virus, prevention measures, early treatment, referral and follow up. At the end of the training, participants were more familiar with the basic symptoms of the disease, critical issues where to seek treatment and how to avoid transmission in family and community. A pre and post questionnaire to measure participant knowledge regarding healthy lifestyles and behaviours. In general, participants had satisfactory knowledge about healthy foods and physical activity, but often confused with diet restrictions and fitness. Regarding Covid-19, all of them have good knowledge about the disease, transmission routs and prevention, however, most of them lacked knowledge about prevention, identification of first symptoms and where to seek help.

Another sensitive topic that draws attention and discussions among participants was regarding involvement in healthy practices and behaviours of vulnerable groups and those belonging to disability groups. It was apparent, that knowledge among participants regarding these groups were contradictory and mostly related with stigma and prejudging. At the end of the training, the percentage of people with correct knowledge about three topics was increased by at least 70%.

Schools' authorities committed to improve/strengthen the model of "Shkollat për shëndetin" (Schools for Health) and develop and/or improve their own school health policy.

## Challenges and Project Response

Overall, the implementation of the intervention went well, all the meetings considered effective ways of delivering practical information in a coherent, integrated manner offering several advantages over traditional information delivery methods. The methods employed during the meetings was based on principles of the adult learning theory (for all the other targeted audiences) and, in the context of Albania. However, there were some challenges encountered as follows:

- During these trainings number of teachers who participated in the training sessions were low. This was mainly related with the fact, that June was the end of the academic year, and teachers were occupied with finals exams.
- The time the intervention was planned to take place was very limited compared to the intervention. Even though, there were only 4 trainings there was the need to have more time to coordinate and deliver the sessions according to the objectives. Despite time limitation ACPD project coordinator and local coordinators achieved to deliver the trainings to target audience and in line with the project objectives.

## Project Title: Promotion of Safe from SGBV platform among young people in Albania- Unicom's Switzerland GmbH – Sofia Branch

### Project summary:

Albanian Centre for Population and Development, on behalf of the project “Promotion of Safe from SGBV platform among young people in Albania” supported by Unicom's Switzerland GmbH – Sofia Branch has conducted three meetings with young people 18-24 years Old. All sessions are carried out in a hybrid model. Young people participated in online and offline versions. The project coordinator prepared a presentation. In total, 80 young people participated online and offline.

### Main Achievements of the Project

Three half-day workshops were delivered on the following topics: known own rights and preventing sexual gender-based violence. These workshops were attended by nearly 80 young people, offline and online. (53 females and 27 males). A high percentage of participants are from rural areas of Prograde. During these three workshops, young people were introduced to human rights and specifically to sexual and reproductive health rights. This workshop was organized based on non-Formal education methods, including digital tools such as Mentimeter to make the workshop more dynamic and interact between the young people present in the hall and the current people online. Young people learned about forms of gender-based violence and how to identify them. Case studies were also presented to the young people, which the participants reviewed. Also, a special session was prepared for men engagement. Online platforms provided interactivity for participants who were Offline and Online. Youth participants showed a lack of information and skills





to respond to SGBV and knowledge regarding ASRHR. Some young people showed explicit non-acceptance behaviours regarding LGBTI rights and toxic masculinity approach towards women and girls. Participants showed high interest on the platform dedicated to SGBV, designed, and created by ACPD.

Findings and recommendations under this project include:

- There is a need and demand from young people to learn more about SGBV, ASRH and CSE.
- Provision of information and skills using online platforms is an excellent approach to reaching many young people.

### Challenges and Project Response

- Young people showed lack of digital skills on SRHR. Using digital platforms to empower young people on SRHR and CSE is still a barrier.
- Working with young people from region that have never been exposed to SRHR non formal education needs to be addressed.

## Project Title: Cross-border Cooperation and Competitiveness for SMEs – European Union

### Project summary:

The approach of the project was to start from the concrete cases that occurred in Italy in order to apply them in cross-border areas where the idea appears new. Analyze the main difficulties of these territories to apply the proposed solution and then to refine it in Italy. The expected change the project had in relation to the current situation is: Ensuring greater access to credit for firms, taking into account the current unfavorable economic situation. The main objectives were to:

1. To ensure easier access to credit to SMEs
2. To improve the development of small and medium-sized businesses, trade and investment
3. To promote and support entrepreneurship, the development of local cross-border markets and internationalization

ACPD finalized the study on Small Medium-Sized Enterprises with the engagement of two experts and in coordination with two contracted NGOs that provide consultancies in research in the banking spheres and in collaboration with Fieri Municipality.

Intensive in person and/or online talks and meetings were developed with 20 SMEs potential candidates for participating in the Pilot Action, in presence of banking and legal experts to support their increased understanding and participation in further action;

In-person and/or online webinars were carried out with the candidate SMEs and with representatives of interested regional institutions (Fier region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Fier Prefecture and Fier municipality, Regional Development Agency, interested Members of Parliament from Fier region).

In person and/or online consultations of the experts themselves with Bank of Albania and legal experts to prepare a first draft-law containing the proposed improvements. In-person and/or online consultations of the experts and the 20-pilot action SMEs with Bank of Albania and legal experts to prepare a first draft law containing the proposed improvements;

Consultations were organized with Members of Parliament interested and willing to present to Parliament the draft bill for improving SMEs' access to finance's legislation, in the form of a group of interested Members of Parliament or as an initiative of each single Member of Parliament.

Organization of one or more in-person and/or webinar (s) with representatives of the Pilot Action Group, Fier regions pertinent institutions, countrywide interested institutions and Project partners from Puglia and Montenegro, to present the value-added of the prepared draft law for improving SMEs' access to finance. Organization of a public awareness campaign in the local and central Albanian media to convey the messages of the paramount need for changing and improving the legislation of SMEs' access to finance, to influence pertinent legislators and increase the profile of 3C4SME activities and deliverables.

## Main Achievements of the Project

ACPD finalized the study on Small Medium-Sized Enterprises with the engagement of two experts and in coordination with two contracted NGOs that provide consultancies in research in the banking spheres and in collaboration with Fieri Municipality. The recommendations of the study were:

1. The ACPD study pointed out that enterprises in the Fier area have very low knowledge in EU financed cross-border programs that help develop business and increase SME cooperation between Italy, Albania and Montenegro. Donors and donor agencies should better reflect the need for increasing the

competitiveness in the SME sector. More economic cooperation and joint ventures are needed to provide information on markets, company typologies and create market and financial access;

2. Ascertaining the difficulties of Fier SMEs to access foreign markets in the EU, the situation of COVID 19, reflected a significant lack of capacity of these companies to adapt to new methods of communication and training in the use of new digital technologies to promote their activity abroad.
3. Banks and financial institutions should have a more friendly approach to medium and small enterprises, assist them in drafting loan applications and building business plans and strategies to increase the viability of these companies.
4. Development of capacity building trainings between bank officers and managers of these companies are needed to facilitate communication and fulfill the needs of both sectors.
5. Despite the created facilities or financial support programs, there is a lack of knowledge by the SMEs of Fier region in recognizing them, as well as a lack of capacity to apply. Mentioning here: lack of a business plan, inability to declare employees, proper knowledge in creating partnerships and for increasing their business activity;
6. For improving the access to credit of SMEs in Fier region and in whole the country, the central or local State institutions need to better monitor the financial institutions and banks, while creating mechanisms that facilitate the access to credit for companies. They should also give a green light for the function of joint corporations and establish programs that encourage the development of SMEs;
7. The existing laws and normative acts on the access to credit should be fully implemented and equally respected, to avoid the clientele-like decision making of banks or financial institutions in providing loans and increase competitiveness;
8. A very important aspect that emerges from the study is the dissatisfaction expressed by the interviewed enterprises on the bank lending system in Albania. 72% of respondents say that the interest rates on loans in banks and financial institutions are high and unaffordable on their part. Enterprises draw attention to the need to use best legal practices in the access to credit, highlighting that there is an urgent need to improve policies or even propose new legislation in the access to credit for small and medium enterprises.
9. All the above data served to ascertain the findings and recommendations regarding the improvement of access to credit and present the possibility to apply for financial mechanisms of “ConfArtigianato” type, for increasing production and services of small and medium enterprises of Fier region and

at national level.

For reaching to a good model and best practice presentation, the ACPD has engaged in a series of online and in person activities, such as:

- Intensive in person and/or online talks and meetings developed with 20 SMEs potential candidate for participating in future action;
- In person and/or online webinars with the candidate SMEs and with representatives of interested regional institutions (Fier region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Fier Prefecture and Fier municipality, Regional Development Agency, interested Members of Parliament from Fier region);
- In person and/or online consultations with Bank of Albania and legal experts to prepare a first draft-law containing the proposed improvements.
- Organization of one or more in person and/or webinar (s) with representatives of the group of interested SMEs, Fier regions pertinent institutions, country wide interested institutions and Project partners from Puglia and Montenegro, to present the value added of the prepared draft law for improving SMEs' access to finance.
- Organization of a public awareness campaign in the local and central Albanian media to convey the messages of the paramount need for changing and improving the legislation of SMEs' access to finance, to influence pertinent legislators and increase the profile of 3C4SME activities and deliverables.
- Within the 3C4SME project, the ACPD and the Fier municipality have already started the work with a legal company to consult in regard to a preliminary set of proposals, following the ConfArtiganato financial mechanisms approach.

Based on extended talks and collection of opinions via phone calls (in majority) and some in person meetings, the ACPD has come to a preliminary set of proposals for the legal improvement of SMEs access to finance, as in the following:

1. Establish by new law a new State-based guarantee fund, which would be open for SMEs from all sectors (not just agriculture) and which would serve as an example of an efficiently and transparently run guarantee fund.
2. Consider in the new law: provision of technical assistance for banks (e.g. sales techniques, SMEs' assessment); provision of advisory services for SMEs (e.g. business planning, financial literacy, more b2b meetings in person or virtual); less restrictions on the type of SMEs that can borrow (i.e. while the funding can target specific groups or regions, by not excluding any other groups, even if they are perceived as over-served); less restrictions on the origin of assets to be financed (in contrast to, for example with some soft loan programmes so far, conditioning end-borrowers to spend at least 70% of the loan amount on goods and services from donor's country origin).



3. Introduce in the new law provisions to stimulate sector-specific programmes for loans (for example, for agriculture, tourism, IT), especially if accompanied by technical assistance designed to improve the capability of banks to quickly and efficiently evaluate agricultural/tourism/IT risk and cash flows, thus reducing the cost to serve these enterprises.
4. Introduce in the new law provisions to promote programs explaining to SMEs risk capital sharing in Albania, understanding of the benefits and challenges of an equity or quasi-equity investment, supported by guarantee cooperative systems, based on experience from Italy (Puglia region). The law might consider engaging State fund in a large awareness-raising State program to support equity and quasi-equity financing for SMEs, based on guarantee cooperative systems.

## Challenges and Project Response

Closing the SME financing gap is complex and requires actions on many fronts, from building adequate institutions and legal frameworks to developing public support programs targeted at the needs of SMEs.

The cost of inaction is high: lack of access to adequate and timely finance impedes the creation of new companies and the day-to-day operations and growth of existing ones. In Albania, exist a notice-based register making it easier to administer and has lower costs. Besides that, important institutions are also the ones offering credit information services that compile data on the credit histories of borrowers who are active in a financial system.



# ACPD 2021 PHOTO GALLERY







**SEKSIONI VI**  
**Si mund të reagoni si vëzhgues**

- Pyetni njerëzit që ushtrojnë abuzime dhe kërkoni sqarime
- Jepini pamjen personit që përjeton abuzimin
- Përdorni deklaratat 'Unë'
- Reagoni pa fjalë
- Kërkoni të tjerët që janë si ju
- Siguria juaj është e para
- Ofroni ndihmën tuaj
- Përdorni butonin "Raporto Abuzimin"

Watch on YouTube

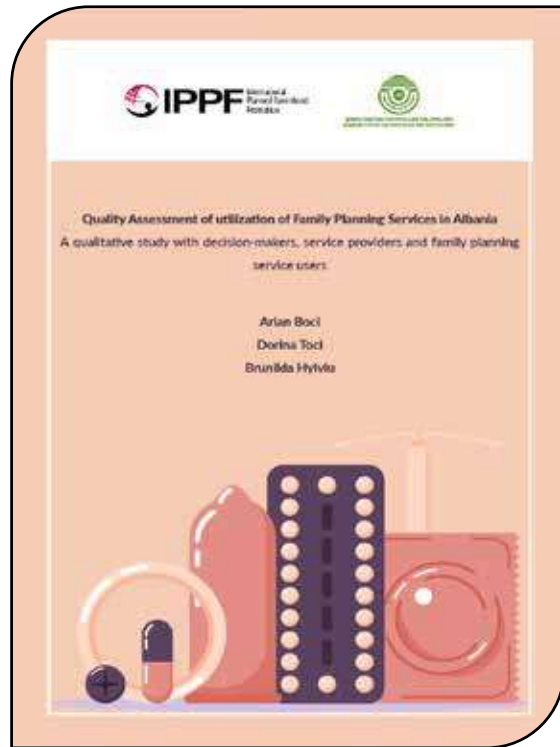
**MËMËSIA E SIGURT**  
 NË SITUATË EMERJENCE DHE/ OSE  
 KATASTROFASHI/ FATKEQËSISHI NATYRORE

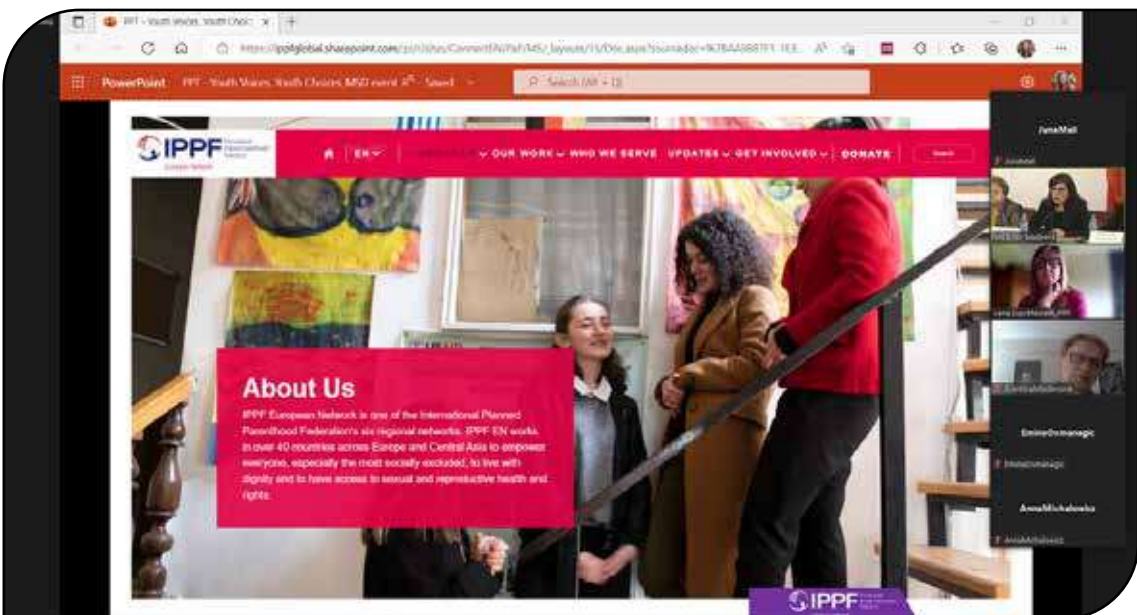
UNFPA  
 Bashkëpunim nga: Qeveria Shqiptare dhe Partitë e Përbashkëta

**ABORTI**  
 EDREJTË  
 NJERËZORE







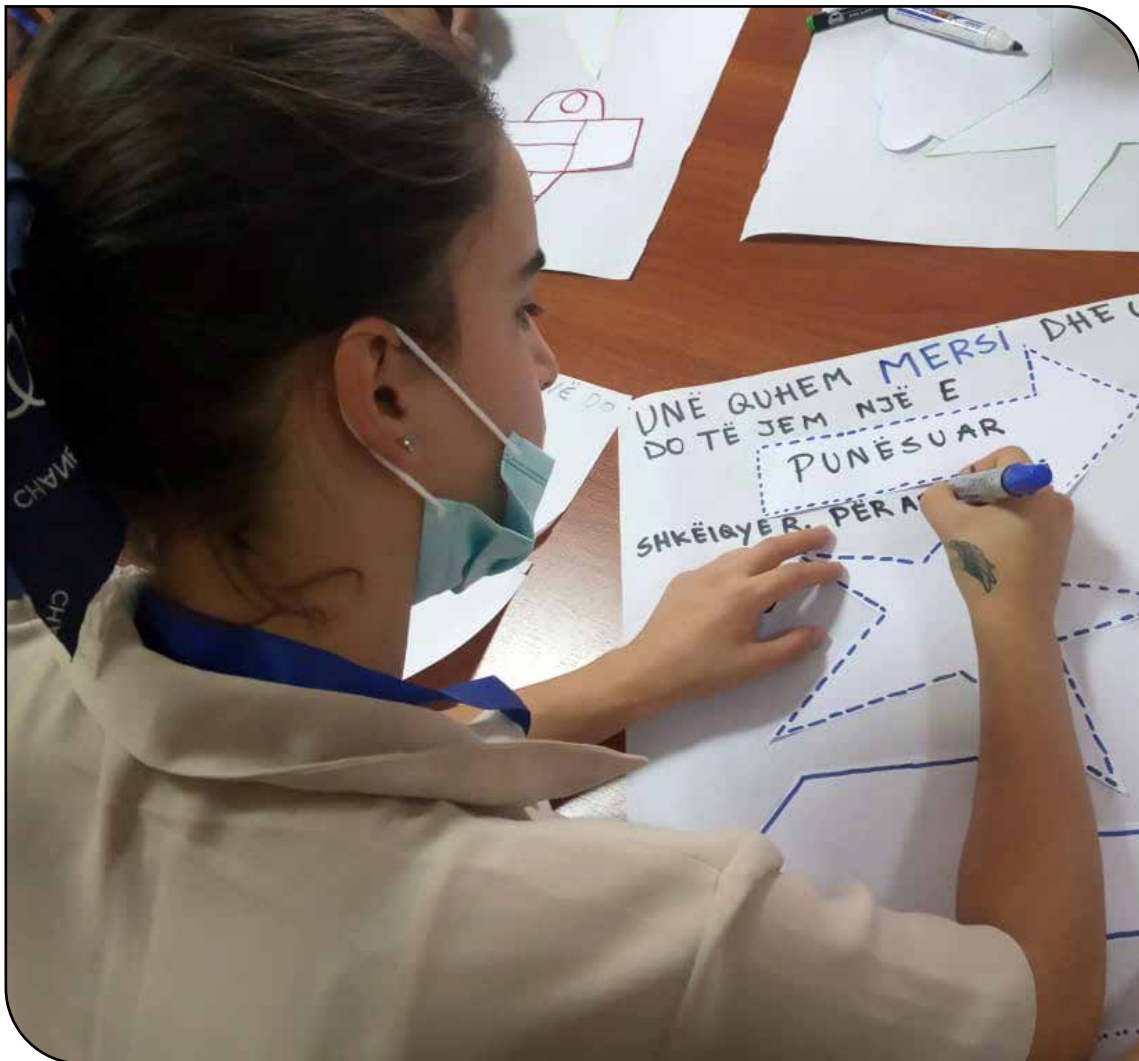






HIV/AIDS NË SHQIPËRI

International  
Planned Parenthood  
Federation  
European Network







**Aborti është një e drejtë njerëzore!  
Autonomia trupore e një gruaje nuk mund të injorohet dhe duhet të mbrohet!**

Qendra Aulona- Shërbime dhe konsulta të Shëndetit Riprodhues dhe Seksual online në Vlorë

Copy link

MORE VIDEOS

Until today there are only 5 officially confirmed cases of Covid19 in Vlorë

0:06 / 2:29

YouTube

**THROUGH A COMBINATION OF  
VACCINATION AND SCREENING, 100,000  
HPV CANCER CASES CAN BE PREVENTED IN  
MEN AND WOMEN EACH YEAR IN THE  
EUROPEAN REGION.**

publicitar mbi rezultatet e vitit te pare te projektit YEOP Vlora mbi punesimin e te rinjve





**QENDRA SHQIPTARE PER POPULLSINE DHE ZHVILLIMIN**  
**ALBANIAN CENTER FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

