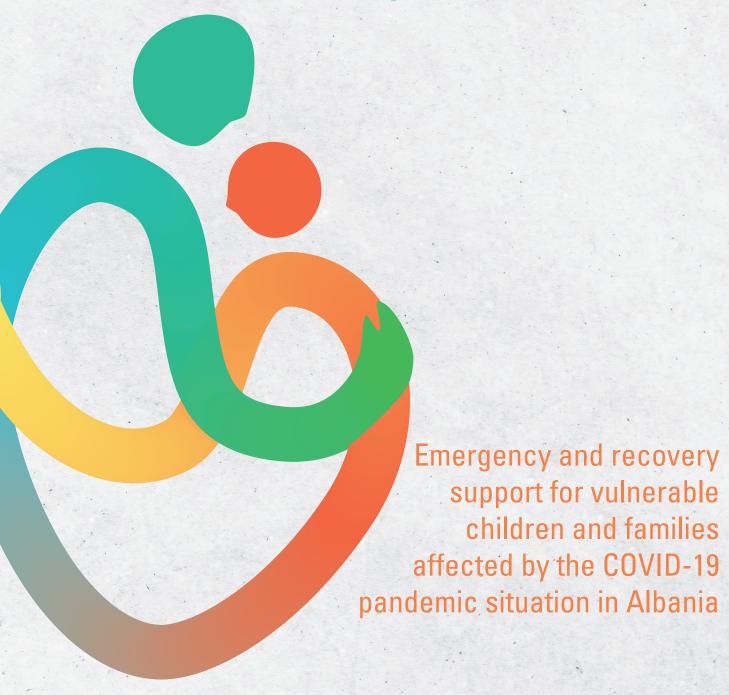




Models and best practices in response to COVID-19 pandemic



Emergency and recovery support for vulnerable children and families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Albania

This project hast been implemented in cooperation with our local partners:











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FORWARD

COVID-19 pandemic posed several and severe challenges to communities throughout the country, and those affected the most were groups and communities already living in vulnerable conditions. As the pandemic implications continue to unfold, this compels a sense of urgency to respond to the impacts it has caused and enable action to bring positive change.

The emerged crisis forced many of us to deal with uncertainty, unpredictability, and unexpected issues, but this hit the most those who were lacking access to key resources, being unable to mitigate its effects. The fact that the pandemic directly affected many people's lives, brought the need to be pragmatic and flexible to adjust to a shifting reality. In this context, to support vulnerable populations deal with the crisis, various interventions and programs have been designed and developed seeking to minimize its impact.

Building on a situation assessment Terre des hommes Albania conducted on March-April 2020, it articulated and designed an intervention that aimed at providing emergency response to reduce the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and ensure social protection of vulnerable groups and communities who have been deeply and severely affected by the pandemic and its aftermath.

This Action mobilized significant resources and applied multiple measures in the form of economic rescue packages, direct support services, case management practices, capacity building programs, and creation of partnerships, to support and protect the most vulnerable.

Terre des ommes Albania has prepared this publication to capture and promote models of work and best practices identified during the implementation of the "Emergency and recovery support for vulnerable children and families affected by COVID-19 pandemic situation in Albania" project useful to tackle a crisis during a pandemic.

The document explains the context for Action, describes support services delivered, and offers recommendations for future interventions, trying to represent a framework of actions that could be employed to maximize preparedness, response and recovery of intervention strategies in response to the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Situational background

On March 8th, 2020, Albania confirmed its first case of COVID-19. World Health Organization (WHO) included Albania in the list of 115 countries that had declared the global pandemic. In response to this situation, in March 2020, the Albanian Government imposed a national lockdown and introduced strict accompanying social distancing measures to control its spread.

The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities and inequities across various groups. Although everyone is subject to the COVID-19 virus, its consequences showed a disproportionate toll for groups who were already marginalized before the pandemic hit.

COVID-19 outbreak hardly hit the labor market, with employment rates decreasing significantly, comprising full-time employment, occasional work, and self-employed workers, including the agricultural sector¹ inevitably creating financial insecurity.

The pandemic also affected the educational system, with schools and universities forced to either shift to online learning or shut down. Main concerns related to these changes are about lack of/ weak internet connectivity, lack of digital equipment needed to pursue online education. Use of digital technology became essential to access education, exposing the gap in technology access and utilization.

Effects of COVID-19 crisis were also shown on groups with low socioeconomic status. Vulnerable groups have been unable to receive adequate care, to get basic necessities, especially food and sanitation supplies. According to a UN report (July 2020), the crisis revealed the inability of the social protection systems to provide adequate assistance.³

COVID-19 increased the risk of exploitation and abuse cases, including domestic violence, and exposed use of poor parenting practices. The pandemic brought high risks for street children, victims of domestic abuse, especially children and women, people with intellectual disabilities, Roma and Egyptian communities. During this period, the number of requests for mental health and psychosocial support and counselling increased significantly directly or indirectly linked to COVID-19.4

It became evident that the pandemic would pose long-term uncertain social and economic consequences on various sectors. The crisis it triggered demanded, and continues to demand, for the government and other development actors to address the disparate impacts of the pandemic. Intervention to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized became vital, varying from financial support, to educational support, health and psychosocial support services, capacity building and others.

¹World Vision Albania & Kosovo (2020). COVID-19 and Children: How a global pandemic is changing the lives of children in Albania & Kosovo. A mixed method study. Accessed at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/re sources/Country%20report-WAK%2019.11.2020.pdf

² Ibid

³UN Albania (July 2020). UN Albania Covid-19 socio-economic Recovery & Response plan. Accessed at https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/ALB_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan-2020.pdf

⁴ Ibid

General overview on the interventions designed in response to COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 trends and possible future scenarios mobilized various stakeholders to take action in response to the crisis. Being alert about the context and the actions needed to deal with the crisis, several response plans and programs were designed and implemented.

Government response: 5

The government instituted a range of support measures aimed at protecting the population and businesses during the pandemic. These include: i) Rigorous public health measures, ii) Welfare benefits and other support to individuals, including sick pay, cash transfers, housing relief, iii) Protection for vulnerable people in households at risk of abuse, iv) Financial support / guarantees for businesses, v) Home education support.

Development partners' response: 6

Development partners and donors have come together to showcase their support in response to the country's needs. The United Nations specifically, have developed a joint Response Plan, in alignment to the Government of Albania Response Plan and the ongoing discussions on Albania Vision 2030. This joint Response Plan is based on five fundamental pillars:

Pillar 1: Health first

- o Strengthening COVID-19 response,
- o Safe delivery of essential services and recovery,
- o Increase health system resilience towards universal health coverage,
- o Healthcare waste management.

Pillar 2: Protecting people

- o Scale up and expanding resilient and pro-poor social inclusion and protection systems and services,
- o Support access to education and learning opportunities for children,
- o Women, girls and children affected by violence (domestic, gender based and sexual),
- o Access to services for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Pillar 3: Economic response and recovery

- o Economic measures & addressing informal and vulnerable workers,
- o Building a post-covid-19 resilient tourism sector,
- o Women's economic empowerment.
- o Nature-based response.

Pillar 4: Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration

The response focuses on supporting macroeconomic stability after the immediate crisis is over. This includes support to enhance public institutions' capacities to articulate, implement and review budgets to address the macroeconomic impacts of the disease, and other.

⁵UN Albania (July 2020). UN Albania Covid-19 socio-economic Recovery & Response plan. Accessed at https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/ALB_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan-2020.pdf ⁶ Ibid

Pillar 5: Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

- o Inclusive social dialogue, advocacy, and political engagement,
- o Community resilience, participation, and equitable service delivery,
- o Governance, fundamental freedoms, and rule of law,
- o Women's political participation.

This Recovery and Response Plan is designed to be implemented in close coordination and collaboration with several national and local stakeholders.

PART 1: The Action

Context for Action

In the last two years, the world has faced a major global challenge, the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. In an unprecedented manner, COVID-19 affected all spheres of development, transforming the way the public and private sector delivered their services, how goods and services were offered, and how human relationships built. In such context, the COVID-19 pandemic could be summarized through few facts: i) Rapid outbreak throughout the country and implementation of preventive measures, including a national lockdown, ii) Economic uncertainty, affecting employment, consumer spending, and economic inequalities and poverty, iii) Health care and Social protection, affecting access of basic social services, and capability of responsible institutions and organizations to provide right and appropriate support.

To shed light on this new reality created by COVID-19 and the impact it had on families and vulnerable groups and communities throughout the country, Terre des hommes Albania, during the period of March-April 2020, conducted a situation assessment in eight major cities in the country with the final purpose of informing design and implementation of intervention strategies in response to the pandemic.

The situation assessment highlighted important findings essential to identify present priorities. Findings showed that nearly one fifth of adults had lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, and only a fifth of them continued to have a steady stream of income, exacerbating unemployment rates in already vulnerable communities. Rising unemployment and income insecurity have simultaneously impacted people's psychological health, where about 96% of the respondents claimed to worry about their capability to provide for their family's basic needs and job security.

Access to education and learning exposed another area of concern. Online education was an important alternative response to school closures, but yet it posed major distress to students and families that lacked access to the right infrastructure, such as adequate technology for learning and internet access. About 85% of the respondents addressed challenges of educational disruption, and only 15% of the respondents confirmed they could fully attend online classes.

COVID-19 perceived and observed threats had serious effects on people's emotional wellbeing. The findings from the situation assessment showed that people reported specific impacts on their emotional state, such as loneliness and fear that response measures would last too long (93%), fear of losing their loved ones (89%), struggles to overcome difficulties (80%), left out or unable to cope with problems (70%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus. Physical health issues were also reported, including headaches, sleep disturbances, heart pain, or cramping, and others.

Concerns around interpersonal relationships were also made evident. Challenges emerged particularly in regard to management of relationships within the family (parent-child/ spouse relationships) and lack of physical contact with other family members or close friends.

Another significant finding is that respondents trust in the work of public health institutions and state police to implement interventions and enforce imposed measures but are not confident that social services and economic assistance schemes will be effective to reduce its implications.

Design of short- and long-term interventions focusing on the economic recovery, continued learning, mental and physical health wellbeing, especially of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, derives as a core recommendation in the light of findings generated.

Intervention approach: Catalogue of services offered in frame of "Emergency and recovery support for vulnerable children and families affected by COVID-19 pandemic situation in Albania" project.

The Action embraced interventions that expected to ensure that vulnerable children & families who have been deeply and severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath are supported to recover and rehabilitate through provision of direct support services and proactive referral mechanisms. To achieve this, the following have been completed:

i. Quality emergency & recovery social care services offered to vulnerable communities affected by COVID-19

Direct service delivery, covering social protection, economic empowerment opportunities, educational support, and psychosocial support services.

Direct Service Delivery:		
	Basic needs: Food, shelter, clothing	
	Sanitation: Hygiene kits and packages	
Social Protection	Health: Medicines and medical treatment	
Social Flotection	Housing support: Facilities and furniture, rent payments	
	Administrative support: notarial support, referral and transfer to relevant services	
	Individual and group Counselling (online and face -to -face)	
Dayaha agaial	Psycho-social support	
Psycho-social support	Referral to support services	
aupport	Referral to local child protection, social care and other protection services	
	Training & exchange programs	
	Summer camps, serving as educational, social and cultural activities	
Educational Support	School transportation and educational support to pupils facing difficulties	
	Recreational clubs (sports, music, dance, theater, painting)	
	Educational materials (books, didactic, materials, colored papers)	
Economic	Training programs focusing on building soft skills and the labor market	
Empowerment	Professional trainings and Apprenticeship opportunities	
	Supplies and equipment to support economic activities	

Case management, including emergency child protection & case management support to individuals in need of protection, including referral to support services.

Case Management:	
	Outreach work (identification of children at risk)
	Create identification forms
Emergency Child	Develop Individual Plan of Intervention
Protection	Provision of emergency services: safe transport, psychosocial support and safe accommodation/ accommodation at emergency shelter
	Referral to Child Protection Units
	Outreach work (identification of individuals/ groups at risk)
	Open case ID files
	Family visits and conducting needs assessments
General Case	Develop Individual Plan of Intervention/ develop Plan of Services for Families
Management	Provide basic support services, including food, clothing and hygiene kits
	Ongoing and close monitoring of cases
	Referral of cases to social care services at local level, police and
	other relevant actors

ii. Capacity building of professional service providers to deliver social care support to vulnerable communities affected by COVID-19

Close collaboration with local partners to share know-how and exchange expertise.

Establishing	Organization of various meetings with various actors to decide and
Priorities	agree on current priorities
Strengthening Cooperation	Organization of joint meetings to found relationships and agree on plans of action and availability of support services (Child Protection Units, Employment Office, Legal Service providers, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination)
Coordination of services	Provision of immediate support and long-term support through an established local network of various service providers, including public and non-governmental actors.

Capacity building of child protection and social welfare professionals to increase knowledge & skills in support services delivery, and technical assistance to run-through and implement best practices.

	Mapping of services and service providers
To be to 10 and	Support Child Protection Workers to prepare files, organize documentation, and fill out paperwork
Technical Support	Regular and ongoing communication with Child Protection Workers
	Case management referrals – referral to support services
	Active participation in the Intersectoral Technical Group meetings
Procedural	Outreach work to support local actors with identification of cases
	Guidance of local actors to planning for procedures
Support	Support of local actors in terms of management of procedural work
	Support and guidance to Child Protection Workers to provide and
	implement support services
	In close collaboration with Child Protection Workers, assist social
Management	administrators with case management
Support	Follow -up and monitoring with local partners and partner
	organizations to ensure proper management of cases
	Identify, manage, and coordinate service delivery on a need basis, including logistic and financial support
	Online coaching of Child Protection Workers on case management
	procedures and action items
	Training on existing legal framework and operational tools about
Training and	prevention measures and protection processes
coaching	Exchange activities to expose and capacitate social service
ŭ	professionals on collaborative solutions for communities
	Mental Health training sessions with professional workers working
	with children and other vulnerable communities

iii. Raised awareness of vulnerable communities on COVID-19 prevention measures and relevant available social protection services.

Training and Coaching	Capacity building programs about COVID-19 coping mechanisms, including training of trainer's activities
Awareness Raising	Psycho social and sports activities to raise awareness on various educational themes, including social inclusion and relationships
	Podcasts – a series of audio talks featuring topics about mental health
Informative	Individual and group sessions to propagate child-friendly messages
Resources	on the importance of protective measures for COVID -19
	Development of self-help and other informative materials covering themes about mental health

Overall, the activities promoted an inclusive and participatory approach to allow space for all stake-holders to contribute with the implementation of the action. Expecting to initiate and sustain social change, the intervention has supported the development of tools and methods that will consolidate implementation of good practices and actions that draw attention to invest at alternatives that are more inclusive and more just to communities.

Challenges and opportunities for the successful implementation of the action in the six target municipalities

The "Emergency and recovery support for vulnerable children and families affected by COVID-19 pandemic situation in Albania" action aimed to provide emergency response in Albania to reduce the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, with a special focus on the main hotspot municipalities of Durres, Fier, Korca, Lezhe, Shkoder and Tirana.

The implementation of the Action included providing support in terms of emergency response and case management of individuals and groups identified as at immediate risk or at high risk, where support offered has covered direct support services, including fulfilling basic needs and psychosocial support, immediate protection, provision of support and resources so individuals and communities can be enabled and empowered to cope with the situation.

The Action focused on supporting efforts to ensure the social protection of vulnerable population groups like children at risk (street children, abused and/ or neglected children and their parents, children at high risk of being exploited), Roma communities, parents and single mothers and their children, families living in extreme poverty, and families facing sudden housing uncertainty, income loss, emotional trauma.

During the implementation of the Action, a range of different issues and challenges were identified having a number of implications on the project implementation. Particular challenges were unique to particular communities, where some common challenges and issues have included:

- Resources and sustainability: Public service providers human resources-related issues have posed a main challenge and have centered around staff turnover and lack of appropriately trained staff, covering of services 24/7 for emergency cases, public service providers were overloaded and this impacted coordination of work and efficiency, follow-up and continuity of service was at risk especially as the service providers shifted to emergency food and cash support..
- Prevention measures against Covid 19 released by the GoA: The prevention measures at some times during the implementation period impacted access to communities and outreach work. This was translated although for a short time to online activities thus difficult to be accessible by the most vulnerable.
- Direct support and case management to marginalized populations: Outreach of mobile populations and identification of vulnerable communities, providing direct support and protection has been another challenge. Coordination of specific support (i.e housing arrangements), have brought up discrimination issues against beneficiaries of the action.

Underlying these experiences are the partnerships formed and sustained to coordinate efforts and capabilities to tackle and address identified problems and challenges. Partnerships established in frame of the Action, with government institutions, at central and local level, non-governmental organizations, and other local partners, brought together institutional capabilities and resources, improved delivery and implementation of the action, while also building commitment to serve to the most vulnerable. Several partnerships were established, all aiding towards the same goal:

- Terre des hommes and all project implementing partners consist of actors with recognized experience in working with the most vulnerable,
- To support Action planned activities, all project implementing partners came together in terms of supporting specific case management or providing referral to relevant services,

- Various partnerships/ agreements were started with local public actors, including signed agreements/ MoUs with Municipalities,
- Close collaboration with Child Protection Workers, Child Protection Units, Social Service Directorates, Social Administrators ensured effective outreach and right support of beneficiaries,
- Engagement with various stakeholders, including the Employment Office, Legal Service providers, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, expanded access to specific services,
- Collaboration with community centers to provide direct support to communities and facilitate service follow-up communications,
- Cooperation with schools enabled offering educational support, either through educational materials or after school activities.

PART II: Models and best practices identified throughout the implementation of the action

During the course of the implementation of the Action a series of important activities and initiatives were developed. These were activities and initiatives that made possible support for a wide number of communities living in difficult and/ or at-risk situations during a global pandemic. Various models of work and several best practices were identified that could be further leveraged to strengthen interventions being implemented to cope with risks and difficulties.

Acknowledging the significance these models of practice had in addressing some of the emergent needs, it is of paramount importance to document and illustrate their contribution to the successful implementation of the Action. To achieve this, a Best Practice Capitalization exercise was conducted:

- Review of key project documents: i) The assessment of the case management process; ii) the 'state of art' of the local referral mechanisms with a special focus on Health & Protection to review the responsiveness of the services in the context of the emergency"; and iii) project reports including project proposals, monitoring and evaluation plans, project narrative reports.
- Review of relevant situational analysis reports produced in response to COVID-19 pandemic in Albania: i) Situation analysis: The impact of COVID-19 on families in need in Albania (Terre des hommes, April 2020) ii) COVID-19 and Children: How a global pandemic is changing the lives of children in Albania & Kosovo. A mixed method study (WV Albania & Kosovo, 2020); iii) Covid-19 socio-economic Recovery & Response plan (UN Albania 2020); iv) Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) Impact of COVID-19 crisis on Roma and Egyptian Communities in Fier, Kruje and Lezhe (UNDP Albania, 2020).
- Collection of models of practice: i) To consult, recognize and gain an understanding on the project implemented activities and initiatives, a workshop was organized with project implementing partners. Key challenges and opportunities were recognized. ii) Interviews conducted with project beneficiaries, Municipal representatives, Child Protection Workers, school Directors, were useful to highlight the contribution and benefits from the Action. iii) Capitalization of best practices was a tool used to capture models of work and best practices implemented in frame of the Action.

Repository of best practices: Highlight of key models of practice that have influenced positive change

#1 Direct support and case management

Title: An interdisciplinary team approach to emergency management

Short description: COVID-19 pandemic hit everyone, but its costs were worse on those who were already facing difficulties. The context has shown lack of strategies to deal with major emergencies, combined with inadequate ability of systems to address disparities. Communities continue to struggle dealing with the impact of the pandemic, and this has been more tough for vulnerable and marginalized groups as they have been pushed further into (extreme) poverty. Tdh has closely collaborated with the Directories of the Social Services providing immediate and direct support for the most vulnerable. Furthermore, in coordination with NISMA arsis have participated in technical sectorial meetings, thus providing direct support and case management services.



Picture no. 1: Interdisciplinary professional network meeting

About the Service: To respond to the impact COVID-19 had on the most vulnerable, organized attempts have been undertaken to deliver immediate support covering for basic needs. Several teams from different disciplines and sectors (public and private sector), have come together to help in an overwhelmed situation. Taking on the responsibility to respond to a range of situations, they have shared resources and duties fulfilling the emergency management function. What did this entail?

- Mapping of services and establishment of an interdisciplinary professional network,
 - o Dissemination of the information at all levels to be acquainted with available services
- Identification of people planned to be assisted by actors engaged in the implementation of the action and referral to relevant systems/ service providers,
 - o Economically disadvantaged people, those lacking basic needs like health care and housing, victims of abuse and exploitation,
- Prioritization and beneficiary selection based on available resources and resource constraints,
 - o Organization of Intersectoral Technical Group meetings
 - o Needs assessment based on consultation with various local public and private actors
- Establish communication and referral mechanisms,
 - o Planning of service delivery, including necessary logistics and teams travelling in the field
- Direct support to fulfill immediate needs,
 - o Distribution of food packages, clothing, hygiene kits, psychosocial support services

- Monitoring and follow-up to ensure the safety and security of the beneficiaries,
 - o Regular contact with beneficiaries or local actors to ensure that immediate needs are fulfilled
 - o Referral for long-term support for cases requiring long-term care.

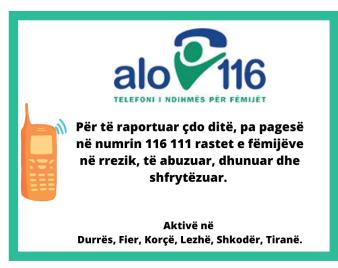
Novelty of Practice: The action brought together a wide range of professionals coming from different fields: Child Protection Units, non-governmental and local organizations, schools, community centers, municipalities, social administrators, social service directorate, police, health institutions, domestic violence Coordinators, and other. Not only this offered a great opportunity to organize joint efforts, but also helped to reduce overlap and duplication of services. Engagement of all relevant stakeholders has contributed to the increase of the number of reported incidents, sensitization and awareness of case management practices, and overall has contributed to quality case management.

#2 Counselling and referral services

Title: Child Protection Gateway – National Child Helpline ALO 116-111

Short description: To control spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Albanian government employed protection measures to guarantee safety of the population. This though, had a significant impact on the wellbeing of children - schools' shutdown and social isolation have increased the risk of children being further exposed to physical, psychological, sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation. Availability of online support services, especially counselling, has been vital during this time period.

About the Service: To respond to the impact COVID-19 had on the most vulnerable, organized attempts have been undertaken to deliver immediate support covering for basic needs. Several teams from different disciplines and sectors (public and private sector), have come together to help in an overwhelmed situation. Taking on the responsibility to respond to a range of situations, they have shared resources and duties fulfilling the emergency management function. What did this entail?



run to support children and young people through counselling or referral to relevant public and non-governmental agencies. ALO 116-111 offers its services via telecommunication means and activities on the ground, while providing active critical support services such as active listening, counselling and referral services, and direct intervention. Child Protection is the guiding principle of their work.

About the Service: National Child Helpline - ALO 116-111, is a free and confidential service

Picture no. 2: National Child Helpline ALO 116-111

- The Child Helpline has an established telephone line free of cost for the caller ALO 116-111 (a short, easy-to-remember number), through which offers counselling and referral services,
- 116-111 is a number specially reserved for child helplines in the EU, giving the service a pan-European identity,
- The Child Helpline carries out various activities and has established several partnerships to constantly communicate and promote the availability of the service,

- The Child Helpline is an entry point for children and young people seeking support, care and protection, with its services being available 24-hours a day, any day of the week, and young people contact the helpline, they will talk, chat, e-mail with a child helpline counsellor, who is a trained staff or volunteer.
- The child helpline counsellor will listen, help the caller talk about what's going on in their life, and will help them come up with solutions or get in contact with other services,
- The Child Helpline has a wide network of partners (a referral system comprised of partner organizations or government departments), who are able to offer various services, ranging from food, shelter and other basic needs to health services and legal support,
 - o More than 600 vulnerable children, youth and adults, have been referred to local social care services at local level.
 - o More than 400 children and their families have received counselling and psychosocial support through ALO 116-111,
 - o Cases referred have included abuse, violence and bullying among children themselves, domestic abuse and violence, child exploitation, online safety, homeless (in need for basic necessities or economic assistance), problems of abuse and violence in the school setting, legal cases, addiction, mental and psychosocial health; lost child/ away from home, family relationships,
- The Child Helpline has a close collaboration with Municipality of Tirana for the identification and case management of street children. Starting from 8.00am to 12.00am, as cases are reported, they are referred for necessary follow-up to the Municipal Field Team. Then, from 12.00am to 8.00am, cases are referred to ARSIS - Initiative for Social Change.

Novelty of Practice: The National Child Helpline - ALO 116-111 plays a significant role in the protection of children and young people, victims of abuse, violence and exploitation, and offers vital help and support services for them to fulfill their fundamental rights. It is a free and confidential service, creating this way a safe space and accessible gateway for children and young people to report incidents and find help. Having a harmonized number, that is part of a regional reporting system to tackle abuse and exploitation of children and young people, the Child Helpline ensures that every child is heard, everywhere. ALO 116-111 is at the forefront of child protection in Albania.

#3 School educational support

These have been the best activities I've ever attended. When I learned to use quilling, I had so much fun; I didn't know about the many of the beautiful things you could do with it.
-G. Demkollari, participant at Children's activities, Korça-

Title: After school support – Boosting education

Short description: The education system in Albania has constantly faced challenges related to student achievement, motivation in education and parent's involvement in the education processes. The COVID-19 pandemic further worsened the situation, creating a more challenging environment for schools, educators, and students. The impact it had on student academic learning was significant, leaving them behind in general education and creating achievement gaps.

About the Service: To support education and help fill in the gap caused by the pandemic; dedicated efforts were made to improve education through after school programs organized from National Association for Solidarity (SHIS). In target were children aged 5-17 years old, had a special focus in Mathematics and Language-literacy, and were implemented twice a week during a five-months period. The program designed activities were conducted within the school premise, and in close coordination with school staff. The process went through the following:



Picture no. 3: Education support & recreational activities

- In close collaboration with Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, and in consultation with Educational Local Offices, were identified and determined target schools that would benefit from the program, Coordination meetings with Schools Directors were arranged to set and agree on the program and planned activities,
- Educational program was designed and adapted in accord to selected classes and target group,
- Before starting implementation of educational hour support, a pre-knowledge test was prepared to assess students' capabilities and gaps, and to guide learning activities,
- Twice a week, pupils have attended the additional education support classes, and have been taught about major Math concepts (adding and subtracting two-digit numbers using algorithms, rounding numbers and decimals, division with two-digit divisors, comparing and ordering fractions, writing, and evaluating numerical expressions), and Language-literacy (grammar, reading, proverbs learning, dictation),
- In addition to the Math and Language-literacy classes, other participatory activities were organized, to mention here sport, cultural and recreational activities,
- At the end of the five-months long program, the pre-test was re-applied to measure changes and growth that took place during the implementation of the program.

Novelty of Practice: Novelty of Practice: The after-school support program was an essential response to educational disruption caused by the pandemic. The educational program was designed and tailored to respond to gaps identified and help pupils' academic growth. The intervention generated great interest, where high numbers of participation in the program planned activities were observed. The program used a child-friendly approach which allowed pupils to easily engage and interact with their peers and teachers and offered a great opportunity for them to easily and safely express themselves. The program played an important role to navigate them through the crisis resilient and hopeful.

#4 Mental health and emotional wellbeing

Title: Counseling and psychotherapy for mental health support through online therapy platform – miregeniamendore.al

Short description: The situation created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges for the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the population. While everyone got affected by the implications the pandemic caused, its consequences were more severe on vulnerable groups like children and women. The prolonged crisis, state of insecurity, feelings of inability to protect oneself, have made people feel isolated, insecure, and pessimistic, dramatically increasing stress and anxiety and other psychological concerns.

About the Service: An interaction space in support of people facing psychological concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform offers information and tools to learn about and treat psychological distresses. It also serves as a therapy platform, through which people can ask for professional psychological help. Services offered from Integrated Social Services (SHPI-a):

- Virtual counselling and psychotherapy individual sessions,
- Virtual and in-person group counselling sessions,
- Online trainings with professionals and key actors helping in the area of mental health,
- In-person trainings with youth to empower them in peer education and peer support,
- Virtual coaching sessions with professionals in direct contact with vulnerable individuals,
- Podcasts with mental health professional featuring diverse mental health related themes,
 - o Emotional Regulation, with Dr. Anila Sulstarova
 - o Psychological first aid, with Dr. Florian Kulla,
 - o Anxiety, with Dr. Blerta Bodinaku,
 - o Psychological trauma, with Dr. Skerdi Zahaj,
 - o Loneliness, with Dr. Anila Sulstarova,
 - o Loss, with Dr. Blerta Bodinaku,
 - o Grief, with Dr. Skerdi Zahaj,
 - o Parenting, with Dr. Florian Kulla,
 - o Anger, with Dr. Bledar Zeneli,
 - o The happiness trap, with Dr. Ermal Azisllari,



Picture no. 4: Support services for mental health wellbeing

 Published articles and self-help instruments on mental health serving as self-help tools to those in need.

Novelty of Practice: Services offered through mireqeniamendore.al - support of professionals in the area, alongside awareness raising of the wider population through dissemination of educational and self-help materials - have supported a wide number of people, from various areas across the country. Provision of such services to individuals and groups who wouldn't otherwise receive them (due to stigma or high costs) has offered a great opportunity to benefit from a personalized and confidential service tailored to their needs. Virtual therapy and counselling are innovative forms of support made available because of the pandemic.

#5 Support for street and Roma children

Title: Better care for the social integration of street and Roma children – Children Voice Bus

Short description: COVID-19 containment measures have deepened the vulnerability of the already vulnerable street and Roma children. Issues and challenges mainly affecting these groups have included social isolation within their groups, problems attending school, minimized entertaining activities, economic challenges, lack of vital information about the coronavirus and how to prevent it, exposing them to a myriad of risks.

About the Service: Children Voice Bus is a conveyance that travels around the areas where street and Roma children spend most of their time. It combines entertainment with education as an opportunity to help children "learn in a fun way" and serves two main purposes: i) offers children a space to engage in recreational and awareness raising activities, and ii) identifies and monitors the situation of street and Roma children. How it works?

- A fancy decorated conveyance is furnished with books, educational and didactic materials, and toys and games,
- According to a planned schedule, the Voice Bus travels once per week in one of the pre-determined areas,
- As it journeys around, the eponymous Voice Bus offers to children the possibility to read various books, to paint and color papers, and play several games,
- Each route is devoted to a special education topic, and a dedicated professional is attached to the bus facilitating on the topic. This professional ensures to keep regular communication with the Child
- Protection Unit, to report any incidents or special situation,
- As children embark on the Voice bus, they are not only engaged in sports, music, theater and dance activities, but are also informed and sensitized on their rights.

Novelty of Practice: Children Voice Bus has resulted to be a viable alternative to engage street and Roma children in educational activities from Murialdo Social Center. It has been an effective mechanism to attract children's attention to spend some fruitful and educational time away from the street, to inspire a culture of reading, to instill in them a sense of a healthy lifestyle. Children have had the possibility to choose their preferred activities, to choose their own books and read independently. An important aspect of the Voice Bus has been the space it offered for individual counselling and conversations.



Picture no. 5: Children Voice Bus

#6 Fostering economic empowerment

"When I was invited to attend the training, I was doubtful. But participating in the training, and gaining new knowledge, widen my horizons and made me want further what I've always dreamt of, capacitate for my professional self."

A.Shaqillari, participant at Women Training's, Tirana

Title: Supporting young people and women enter the labour market

Short description: Traditionally, young people and women have faced considerable challenges entering the world of work. This situation has become even more daunted as the COVID-19 crisis hit affecting economic activities and hindering employment opportunities. Thus, supporting young people and women employment and improving their access to the labour market in the context of a global crisis takes a special importance.

About the Service: Aiming the economic empowerment of young people and women living in vulnerable communities, a program was designed from National Association for Solidarity (SHIS) to equip them with knowledge and skills about a rapidly evolving labour market and to raise their abilities and capacities to access employment opportunities. In such pursuit, a capacity building program was developed to harness their employability potential.



Picture no. 6: Capacity building program to support employment

- Design of soft skills and job search strategies and techniques training module,
- Organize and conduct trainings with young people and women to increase their skills and capabilities in various aspects: prepare a strong Curriculum Vitae, Letter of Interest, use of social media as a tool for job search,
- Training sessions involved presentations, discussions and sharing ideas, working in groups, role plays and practical exercises, encouraging active participation and exchange of experiences,
- Informative sessions were held with the young people to inform and discuss about internship opportunities and their importance in developing job-related skills and abilities,
- Speed dating with representatives from the Regional Labour Offices, Vocational Centers and Social Service departments as a way to get information about employment agencies and education opportunities.

Novelty of Practice: The program had a particular focus on developing young people and women skills and abilities in terms of preparations to enter the labour market and accessing employment opportunities. The program was successful to introduce major concepts related to job search and labour market requirements, and it further offered a space to connect future employees with employment agencies stimulating a discourse of doing more to improve employment prospects. Overall, the program served as a steppingstone for career development and contributed to a growth process.

#7 Preventing through awareness raising

Title: Awareness raising campaign to tackle a crisis—Protective measures of COVID-19

Short description: Communities throughout the country have been impacted by COVID-19, a virus that masses do not clearly understand. To prevent spread of the virus, the government introduced and imposed various domestic restriction and preventive measures, in addition to protection measures, guidance and recommendations. Raising awareness of the consequences the COVID-19 pandemic poses and existing protection measures, is the first steps to help defeat its spread.

About the Service: As communities continue to face the effects of a global pandemic, a national wide awareness campaign was designed to increase access of vulnerable children and families to an enhanced and sustainable protective environment. The Campaign aimed to disseminate information and build knowledge among the public about measures needed to be taken to prevent and contain spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

- Design the Campaign concept a detailed implementation action plan, outlining all activities and the targets that the campaign should reach,
- Design the communication and implementation plan of the Campaign - a detailed calendar and timeline of activities, integrated with other crosscutting activities,
- Develop the brand identity concept of the Campaign & design of visibility materials,
- Design of infographics/ animations, and promotion via TV & Radio Ads,



Picture no. 7: Quick facts about services offered

- o Album Post with infographics stating Quick Facts about TDH in order to inform and raise awareness of General Public about the Action,
- o Production of "Jemi Bashke!" video, broadcasted on TV and Radio channels, as well as posted in social media channels.
- o Design of an animated infographic created to inform children how to stay safe and what precautions to take during the pandemic,
- o Production of a promotional video created to inform and raise awareness on the Action and its implementing partners, and their joint work to bring desired change,

Broadcast and social media promotion to deliver messages to the wider public.

Novelty of Practice: The Campaign reflected a commitment to raise awareness of the wide public on the spread of COVID-19, while promoting and encouraging application of precautionary measures. Recognizing the urgency of ensuring safety for all, the Campaign helped communities to raise awareness about guidelines and recommendations on how to keep themselves and others safe through sharing of messages that highlighted a range of protective measures. To intensify its outreach efforts, the Campaign used a variety of tools, including infographics/ animations, visibility materials, promotional videos, broadcasting in media and radio, and social media advertisement.

#8 Informing child protection practices

Title: Assessment of case management process and local referral mechanisms in the context of COVID-19, with a special focus on Health & Protection measures

Short description: COVID-19 pandemic rapidly changed the context in which children live. At a time when schools and child-care institutions closed, heavy atmosphere at homes due to coronavirus related-risks, children were further exposed to abuse, neglect and exploitation. These conditions brought the need to assess current management practices and advise about safer methods and practices in support to children in need for protection. Being part of vital services, child protection case management requires ongoing adaption to emergency situations and new contexts having as a quiding principle the best interest of the child.

About the Service: The assessment of case management process and local referral mechanisms is based on the current context of child protection systems' response. The assessment aims, through review of case management process of children in need of protection, referring the legal context, service response in emergency contexts, governmental response measures to respond to children in need of protection, to provide recommendations for adaption of case management interventions for children at risk and modeling of an effective local referral mechanism. Six major actions are proposed and recommended for action:



Picture no. 9: Assessment of case management process and local referral

- Structures that define clear roles and responsibilities based on the existing legal/ regulatory framework,
- Adapting the case management process (CM) according to guidelines for interventions in emergency situations,
- Strengthening child protection referral mechanisms,
 Coordination of protection, health and educational services at all levels (community, local and national level),
- Adaption of services and safety of professionals engaged in casa management (CM) processes,
- Monitoring, evaluation, and capitalization of positive models of operation of child protection mechanisms during a pandemic. Involvement of children and families in the process, is a necessity.

Novelty of Practice: The assessment recommends modelling an effective local referral mechanism among health and social protection services, highlighting adaption of key components that ensure that effective mechanisms for the protection of children at risk during emergency situations are in place. It explores issues around measures taken, and readiness of local governments in the target municipalities, to respond to the children in need of protection considering Law No. 18/2017 "On the Rights and Protection of the Children" and its bylaws, with special regard to Order No. 253, on the "Case management of Children in need of protection caused by COVID-19 pandemic".

#9 Building capacities for improved service delivery

Title: Capacity building of child protection & social welfare workers through e-training courses

Short description: Capacities of systems and professionals working with children have often been questioned in regard to their knowledge and abilities to offer quality services. This has been further made evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where several agencies, and professionals, working with children showed to be unprepared to deal with emergent situations and address immediate needs. While there are many factors contributing to this, creating a practical learning environment that offers resources and materials to develop the level of expertise, gets primary attention.

About the Service: To support protection & social welfare professionals working with children, two specialized online trainings were designed. The trainings include information and resources that help professionals do quality work and engage in initiatives and activities that promote children wellbeing. These e-learning courses attempt to provide a practical and easily accessible tool that presents main concepts of application of standards and guidelines in place for working with children.



Picture no. 8: e-Learning courses

- Design "Child Protection during emergency situations" e-learning course, targeting child protection & social welfare professionals such as Child Protection Workers (CPW), Intersectoral Technical Group (ITG) and the Needs assessment and referral unit (NARU),
- Launch the "Child Protection during emergency situations" e-learning course, covering areas of standard operation procedures, guidelines for the social workers and social welfare professionals working with children and families, explore the legal framework on the child protection system in Albania, and the specific guidelines issued to deal with the emergency situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic(https://childhub.org/en/online-learning-materials/child-protection-during-emergency-situations-albanian),
- Design "Psychosocial support for children from teachers, psychologist and social workers at schools" e-learning course, targeting teachers, psychologists, and social workers working in schools,

• Launch the "Psychosocial support for children from teachers, psychologist and social workers at schools" e-learning course, that focuses on harmonizing knowledge, attitudes and activities in psychosocial interventions oriented towards the complete activation of the 'mind-heart-body' of children, contributing to increasing the resilience (coping abilities) of children during times of a pandemic (https://childhub.org/en/online-learning-materials/social-support-children-teachers-psychologist-and-social-workers-schools-albanian).

Novelty of Practice: The e-courses were designed to help a wide range of professionals working with children, to increase knowledge and capacities in their area of expertise. Providing a space of self-guided learning, free of cost, the e-courses offered an opportunity for professionals to control their learning, while ensuring the same knowledge and principles guiding work with children is distributed to all groups of professionals. At a time of social isolation and social distancing, the e-courses managed to break through the COVID-19 related-constraints and helped to sustain learning.

PART III: Lessons learned and Recommendations

Lessons learned

The various situations experienced during the implementation of the action communicate some important messages. Capturing these messages is important to learn from experience and to reflect on process successes and challenges. The following are the most important lessons learned that could be used to capitalize future work.

Understanding community context

- Vulnerable and marginalized groups and communities are most hardly hit during periods of emergency crisis.
- There are ongoing efforts made by various development actors to recognize and understand the context and living conditions of communities. At times, these are identified as individual efforts, and other times they are recognized as joint efforts.
- To have a full and clear view of the community context, it is important to engage with all relevant factors that could provide expert or reliable insight on crosscutting issues.

Planning intervention and response plans

- Problems and challenges exist because certain care services and protection systems are not functioning properly. Acknowledging these systems and related gaps and understanding capability of institutions and local actors to be engaged, is helpful to plan the intervention.
- To ensure that the intervention is serving to the right cause and to the right people, it is essential to reflect the multiple levels of the emergency and identify the right target group. This done in coordination with local actors and partners adds value to the process.
- Effective resource planning is vital to be prepared to overcome interventions challenges, being those human, social, economic, geographical, institutional, or other.
- Groups and communities face various major challenges. Addressing all of them requires engagement of multidisciplinary teams.

Service delivery and support

- Delivery of support services, particularly in emergency situations, cannot be done alone. Public and private actors should organize together to contemplate each other efforts and combine resources.
- Situations determine how support services are delivered, to the people on the ground, or virtually using digital technology. Flexibility to adapt to beneficiaries' needs is a must.
- Delivery of certain activities could lead to beneficiaries creating false expectations. To correct this, unrealistic expectations should be addressed in a timely manner.

Sustainability of interventions

- Solid change takes time and follow-through. The majority of interventions are limited on time and based on specific donors' programs. Sustaining work beyond the grant period remains a challenge, where there is no confidence how progress and development will be maintained.
- Societal problems often reoccur and to make a difference, professionals should be enabled to stay committed to the cause. Change demands social responsibility.
- There are few opportunities to reflect on the work done and focus on building local ownership.

Recommendations

COVID-19 will have long-term effects and will require ongoing mitigation for the foreseeable future, where a realistic approach is needed to adjust mitigation goals to be responsive to the needs of the people. Based on the identified experiences and lessons learned, recommendations are provided to continue to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis and prepare for future pandemics.

1. Capacity and institutional strengthening and establishment of partnerships to ensure right resources are in place (PREPARE)

- i. Create poverty and vulnerability maps to help locate the most vulnerable communities and areas, and develop profiling tools and techniques that support the process,
- ii. Design and develop measures and programs that support actors to boost capacities, especially for public local stakeholders so they are able to perform functions in a sustainable manner,
- iii. Design and develop a resource allocation framework that will guide and support balancing priorities with available support to be activated when responding to a crisis,
- iv. Invest in digital technology to leverage opportunities and help communities overcome crisis by removing barriers and making resources easier for communities to access,
- v. Develop technical assistance programs in areas covering employment and economic empowerment, mental health and emotional wellbeing, education, and academic achievement,
- vi. Create and establish platforms for cooperation practices.

2. Emergency measures and programs are responsible and proportionate (RESPOND)

- i. Ensure emergency funding is available to allow public and civil society organizations to organize and conduct work,
- ii. Restructure operations already underway to respond to current needs and challenges, encouraging greater involvement of various stakeholders, while prioritizing offer of direct support services for those in need, technical and administrative support to carry out work effectively, capacity building and trainings to guarantee skilled professionals,
- Work across sectors should be coordinated to provide social protection for vulnerable populations, promoting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response to complement separate efforts,
- iv. Design programs and interventions that ensure that vulnerable groups and communities (rural areas, mobile populations, young people and women, victims of abuse and exploitation, poor families, and others), receive continuous attention and support, reflecting their unique priorities, local conditions, and challenges and opportunities,
- v. Ensure continuous communication with the wide public is present, not only to inform and raise awareness about response measures and programs, but also to transform them in implementing allies.
- vi. Create intersectoral coordination units to establish and monitor objectives and timeframes, allocate resources, and organize communication.

3. Assess social and economic impact of the crisis and recover better (RECOVER)

- i. Conduct a post-program assessment to recognize results achieved, and identify potential gaps and areas of risk to allow extension of social programs that offer essential support,
- ii. Design intersectoral interventions and approaches that integrate social, economic, health, educational measures and beyond, that in addition help to avoid overlap in service provision,
- iii. Minimize long term impacts of the crisis by planning and designing post-support programs and measures that ensure continuous access to essential public services,
- iv. Network cooperate and exchange between different institutions and organizations to ensure that proactive efforts are made to reach out vulnerable groups and communities, and finance continuity of service delivery.





