



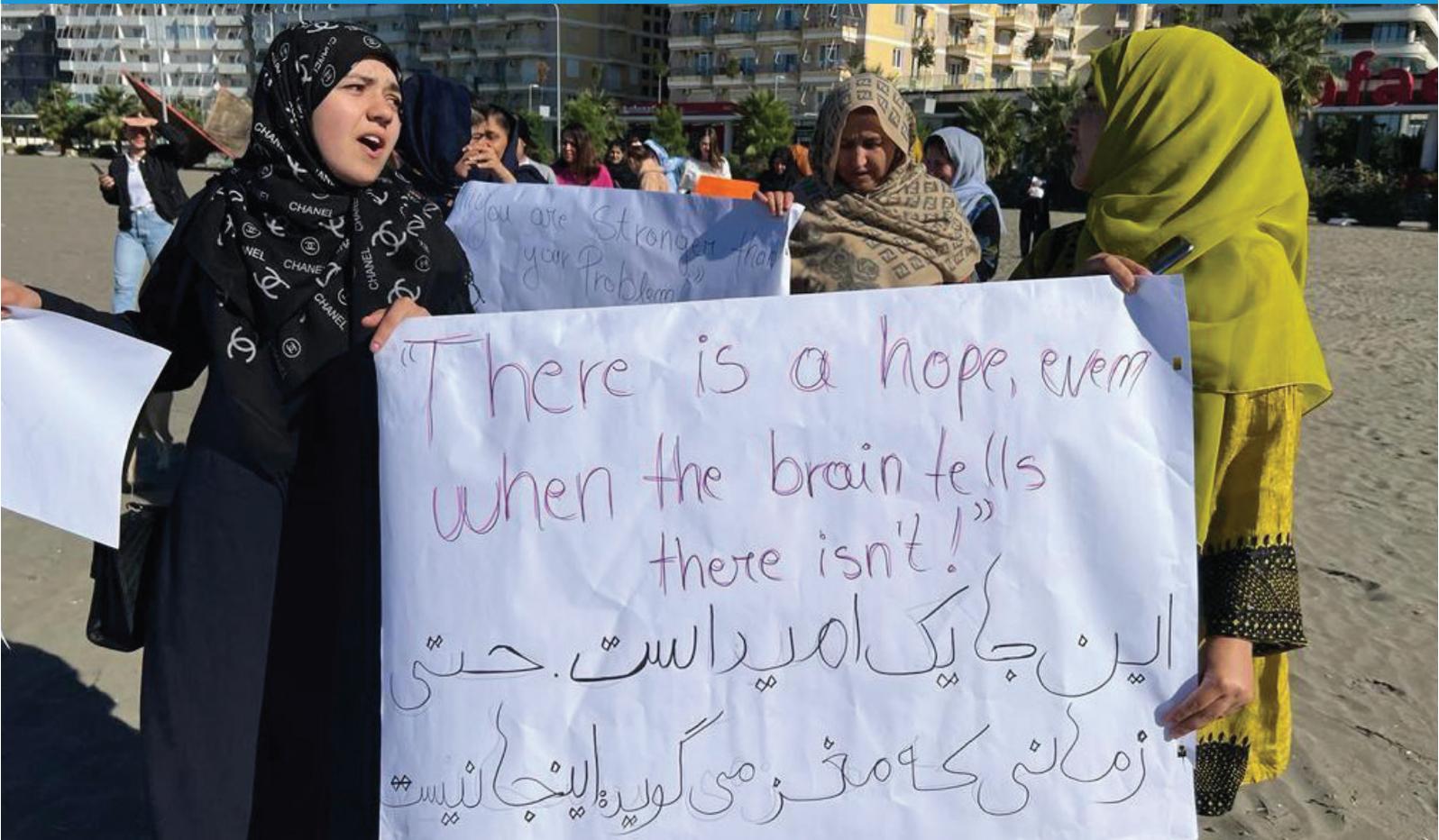
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"Good practices for responding to emergency situations related to child protection and gender-based violence"

The case of hosting Afghan citizens that were secured safe stay and protection in Albania



Prepared by Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror ARSIS
In the frame of the program:

Refugees, particularly children and women, have access to qualitative prevention and response services against abuse, violence and neglect

Implemented in partnership with UNICEF Albania
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This document provides an overview of Nisma ARSIS's, partners, services providers and stakeholders engaged in the implementation of GBV and child protection interventions to contribute to achieving child and community members wellbeing and safety in the settlement of Afghan nationals in Albania.

The document outlines current practices, presents the accumulated experience, and highlights noteworthy and inspiring learning from a diversity of operations related to GBV and child protection in Shëngjin and Kavaja locations where the Afghan nationals were placed.

This document is prepared as part of the project "Refugees, particularly children and women, have access to qualitative prevention and response services against abuse, violence and neglect", in the frame of the program "Securing child rights in times of irregularity" implemented by UNICEF Albania in partnership with the Albanian Government, with the financial assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and is made possible by the generous support of the American people."

Opinions and views expressed in the report of good practices do not necessarily reflect those of the UNICEF Albania and their donor.



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Abbreviations

CFS - Child Friendly Space

CPU - Child Protection Unit

CRM - Coordinated Referral Mechanism

GBV - Gender Based Violence

GoA - Government of Albania

INGO - International Non Profit Organizations

LCDV - Local Coordinator for Domestic Violence

LGU - Local Government Unit

MBC - Mother and Baby Corner

MHPSS - Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services

MTT - Multidisciplinary Technical Team

WGFS - Women and Girls Friendly Space

Executive Summary



This report aims to document good practices for responding to emergency situations related to child protection and gender-based violence in humanitarian responses. UNICEF Albania in partnership with Nisma ARSIS has been providing a set of interventions aiming Gender Based Violence response and child protection measures for all the Afghan nationals placed in Shengjin and in Kavaja. The program aims since May 2022: 1) communities made aware of the risks of violence, including GBV, incidents of violence against children, abuse, neglect of GBV, and harmful practices such as child marriage, and are timely identified, referred, and supported and 2) support the existing national child protection system, in order to identify, and support Afghan children/mothers with children at risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

It provides a detailed account of all the actions carried out and practices implemented that can be applied in similar emergency situations since the first group of Afghan nationals were placed in Albania (27 August 2021).

The good practices report describes some of the main examples of services provided in Shengjin for Afghan nationals, developed and implemented based on the context and mainly from the experience and expertise of International Organizations in refugee camps administration, security and wellbeing.

A psychosocial coordination group composed of NGO-s has been established and conducted regular weekly based meetings, aiming to bring together all the service providers at Durres and Lezha. Collaboration with other service providers has been established within and outside of the resort. Here is important to mention the collaboration established with the Lezha and Durres Directories of Social Services for finalizing the referral pathway for GBV cases and Child Protection Issues. A wide Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Issues campaign has been carried out aiming to raise awareness in the community related to these sensitive issues, understand their approach as well as prepare the community for the new lives in Canada and USA.

Considerable work and effort are done by Nisma ARSIS in partnership with service providers of psychosocial assistance in the accommodation unit like Vital Voice Global Partnership, International Rescue Committee, UNICEF Albania, on the first model of the most appropriate reporting mechanism for the cases of abuse violence and neglect and GBV prevention and support. Collaboration with other service providers has been established within and outside of the resort since the first weeks of Afghan refugees' accommodation at Rafaelo Resort. Collaboration is established with the Lezha Directory of Social Services for drafting and finalizing the referral pathway for GBV cases and Child Protection Issues. A wide Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Issues campaign has been implemented and is in the process, aiming to raise awareness in the community related to these sensitive issues, understand their approach, and share information on reporting pathways.

One of the main important supporting mechanisms has been the engagement of the community mediators from Afghan nationals, actively involved in the support of their community members through translation, facilitating communication between the project staff and the Afghan community members, involvement in the safe spaces, working with children and introducing their cultural approaches.

Child-Friendly Space, Mother and Baby Corner, and Women and Girls Friendly Space are safe spaces where children, girls, and women feel safe and comfortable, organization plays a significant role, both as an entry point for disclosure of GBV cases, and as a place of various services provision, or further referral when needed. As it is a space in which children, women, and girls developed ownership, as well as trust towards employees, they feel more comfortable in disclosing their experiences of violence and seeking help. All staff involved in GBV prevention and response understand the GBV principles - they are trained in recognizing such cases and responding according to their roles. These spaces have served and still are operational for informing and preventing GBV and child protection issues in the Afghan nationals' community, through creative and innovative forms for approaching children, women, and girls in the community.

It is recommended that

- 1) it is crucial that besides case management support provide protection and psychosocial support in order to further strengthen the capacity and resilience of children and adults and to protect them from violence, abuse and neglect;
- 2) implementation of regular and structured psychosocial, educational and recreational activities for children and adults co-facilitated by the already trained community cultural mediators increases the participation of the community members in activities; and
- 3) strengthening the cooperation ties with the Local Authorities (Police, Child Protection Workers, Coordinator of Domestic Violence, Health Authorities, etc) contributes to the protection and mitigation of different types of risks.

Introduction



General context of Afghan nationals in Albania

In August 2021, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan led to a deterioration of the security situation for many Afghan citizens, resulting in a pressing need for displacement. As a response, the Albanian government decided to welcome 4,000 Afghan citizens who were evacuated from Afghanistan. To manage the situation, the government established a task force led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and granted the status of "Permanent tourists" to Afghan citizens¹. It was a key element the establishment of a coordinated response mechanism among all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and local NGOs. The government of Albania played a significant role in coordinating the response with international organizations and Local NGOs. Since the beginning, the government has made every effort to provide protection and services to meet the basic needs of the Afghan population, including food, accommodation, hygiene, healthcare, and clothing. The first Afghan citizens arrived in Albania on August 27, 2021, and were initially housed in the student dormitory in Tirana. Later, the government decided to accommodate them in two Resorts, situated along the Adriatic coast as a practice established after a devastating earthquake in 2019. The decision to use the resort was part of a long-term intervention plan.

¹ Legal status of Afghans is 'temporary protection. See: Vendim Nr. 501, datë 25.8.2021 "Për dhënien e mbrojtjes së përkohshme shtetasve afganë dhe Personave pa shtetësi, me vendqëndrim të përkohshëm ose të Përhershëm në republikën islamike të afganistanit, dhe për krijimin e Task-forcës për menaxhimin e fluksit të kërkuesve të mbrojtjes Ndërkombëtare" Decision that has been postponed until june 2023.

Through the engagement of local organizations, international organizations and Task Force coordination meetings, were identified the main areas of interventions and needs like: support for Pashto and Dari translators/interpreters, social/educational activities, mental health and psycho-social support and support for the establishment of referral pathways, especially related to GBV and Child Protection issues. Moreover, without access to safe spaces, refugee children and women did not have a designated area to focus on their own wellbeing. In this vein, there were no occupational, psycho-educational, nor creative activities tailored for them. The spaces where they can regain their sense of stability and the sense of community support was sorely missing.

Based on the first needs assessment and practices from other similar context brought by international donors immediately was organized that Afghan nationals receive psychological first aid, as well as support and counselling in order to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Three dedicated Safe Spaces and accessible recreational and educational activities, for women and children were obtained, enabling environment for learning, socializing, and community cohesion in line with specific needs of each identified subgroup. Frontline staff and supervisors had equal access to the knowledge, competencies and skills necessary to implement Safe Spaces as well as Mother and Baby Corners in humanitarian settings.

Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror ARSIS in partnership with UNICEF leading the consortium composed by Tdh and P&G) from 09th May 2022 is implementing the program "Refugees, particularly children and women, have access to qualitative prevention and response services against abuse, violence, and neglect" in two Afghan placement in the Municipalities of Lezha and Durres.

The consortium has been engaged in the provision of psychosocial services, awareness raising about GBV and child protection, and strengthening the mechanism of reporting and child protection system. The process of a holistic intervention both in Shengjin and Durres has been reaching more than 584 children that have participated in the activities and made aware of risks of violence, including GBV, incidents of violence against children, abuse, neglect and of GBV, and harmful practices such as child marriage, are timely identified, referred and supported.

National legislation framework and context

Albania has ratified the major conventions and protocols of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, which emphasize that children enjoy full rights and due to their vulnerability, and lack of physical and intellectual maturity they need protection and attention, especially from family and state institutions. Since 1992, Albania has been a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This step was followed by the recognition of other important documents in this field. Albania has ratified the convention and optional protocols.

The law on social care services in the Republic of Albania is one of the most important laws for the welfare and social protection of children and families in difficult situations, including those in street living or other extreme situations. The law aims to define social assistance and services for individuals and groups in need who cannot provide for their vital needs.

The National Agenda for the Protection of Children's Rights is a cross-sectoral strategic document aiming to create conducive conditions to the healthy physical and psychosocial development of children, their social inclusion and their participation in all processes, based on their best interests. of the child.

The Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child is the most important policy document and forms the basis of the child protection system where in its Article 5, it clearly sets out the principle of non-discrimination and no distinction, regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, wealth, disability, family background or any other condition of the child or of the parent / legal representative and the elimination of all forms of discrimination or punishment of the child because of the position, activities, opinions or beliefs of the parents / legal representatives or members of his or her family.

In recent years, Albania has established a set of structures at central and local level for child protection, which have a variety of roles and functions in addressing issues that focus on children and their highest interests.

Child Protection Unit (CPU). The Child Protection Unit is part of the structure of the Directorate of Social Services and Economic Aid at the local level (Municipalities and Administrative Units). The child protection unit in the municipality is set up and functions as a separate unit within the structure responsible for social services at the municipal level and is specifically tasked with preventing, identifying, assessing, protecting and prosecuting children at risk and / or in need of protection. The purpose of the Unit's work is to protect children against all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, social exclusion, exploitation, trafficking and other phenomena that affect the development and well-being of children. Children and families in need of assistance can turn to the Child Protection Unit for information or referral to other support services as needed. The Child Protection Unit is represented by the Child Protection Officer, who works closely with the supervisor, the Director of Social Services and Economic Aid of the Municipality, with social administrators and other sectors such as the Violence Sector, Minority Sector, Youth etc.

Local Coordinator for Domestic Violence (LCDV) is part of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism. Local Coordinator for Domestic Violence (LCDV) which in most of the cases is an added function to Gender Equality Employee (GEE) rather than a dedicated function as provided by DCM 334/201, who leads and coordinates the work and services of MTTs to refer and respond to cases of domestic violence at local level.

The Albanian legal framework and policies does foresee social care services to the different vulnerable groups, but the LGUs are less prepared to respond to refugee emergencies due to lack of experience, resources and professionals. For this reason, the practices implemented in the accommodation units of Afghan nationals brought the international experience in managing similar accommodation units with refugees but in the same time focusing on the existing Albanian legislation, structures and professionals. This approach assisted the Albanian child protection system and social care services departments in the targeted LGUs to strengthen their capacities, get experience and improve their commitment.

Human, person centered, rights based and solution focused response to the needs of Afghan nationals



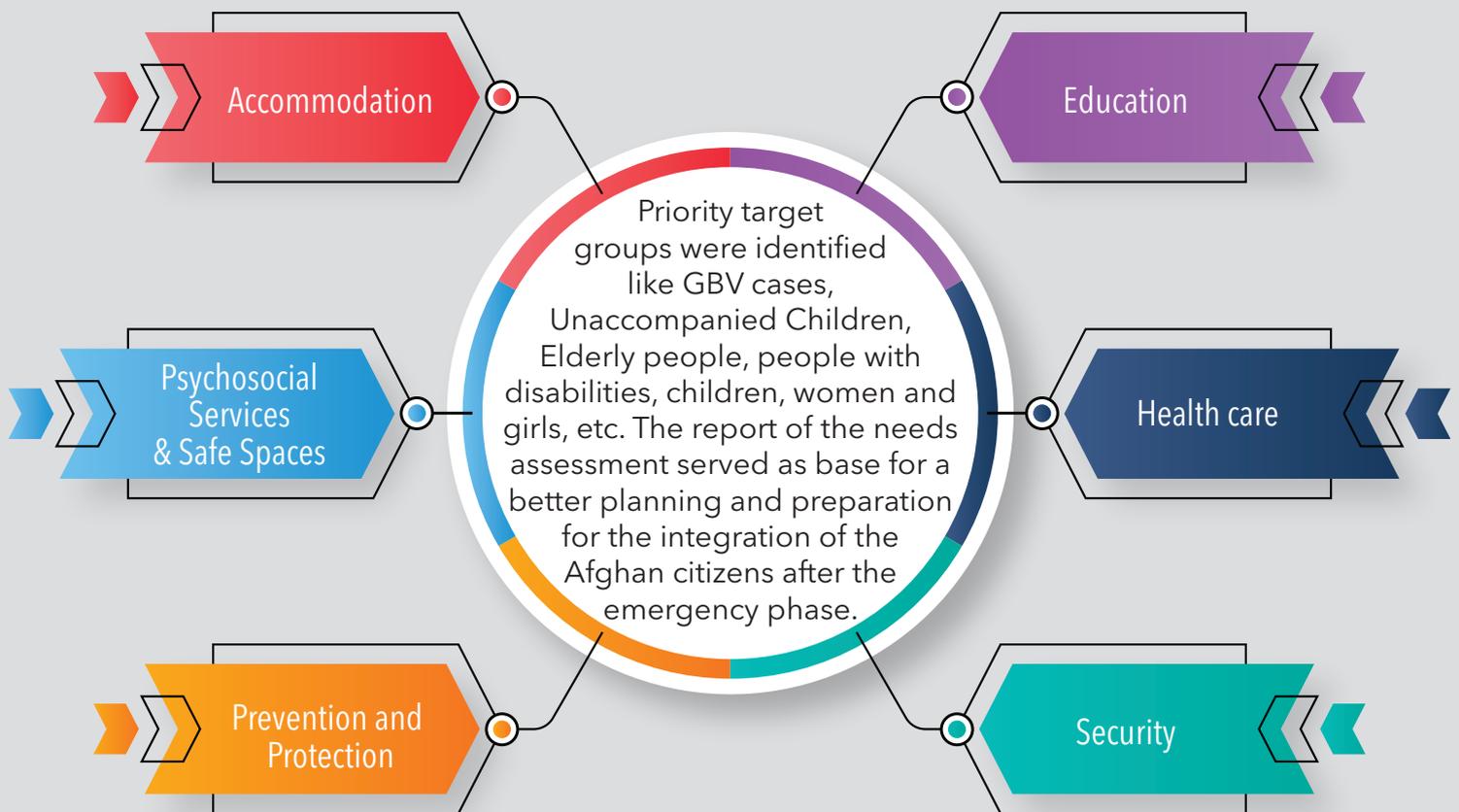
Immediate emergency response:

Immediate emergency response actions started in the airport during all group arrivals, providing administrative assistance, basic needs such as food and water, and emotional support where necessary. Under an agreement with the General Police Directory and State Social Services, the Afghans were transported safely to their shelters and were assisted during their accommodation with testing of Covid 19, psycho-social support, and all the other necessities for their safe accommodation. At the same time, it was conducted a thorough assessment to identify children who were without their parents or caregivers and they were registered, and appropriate measures were taken to ensure their protection. Also, psychosocial assessments for the Afghan population, with a special focus on children and women were conducted, and based on its data it provided support to children and women to help them cope with the trauma and stress associated with their displacement. Regular family visits were conducted to monitor their psycho-emotional state, health, or any other concerns, and hygiene kits, and other essential items were delivered to help Afghan nationals quality of life during a challenging time.

Assessment

Assessment activities were conducted prior to any programmed intervention. In humanitarian settings, affected communities are often recipients or beneficiaries of services and aid. It is important to keep in mind however, that women and adolescent girls should neither be considered just informants nor potential beneficiaries, but decision-makers who are integral to guiding the starting up of any intervention. A deep assessment process was developed in order to identify the situation of every child, youth and family members. The most important step was the identification of leaders among the families that provide connection with other people who has difficulties in communicating and referring their needs and concerns. The steps followed were:

- Rapid need assessment/situation report of the needs (within 72 hours).
- Undertake more detailed needs assessment and analysis (by 2nd week).
- Establish regular monitoring systems for continuous monitoring of the needs and interventions delivery.





Priority needs identified and followed:

- Referral pathways to be revised to facilitate timely, safe, and effective referral of survivors. Establish minimum referral pathways that include priority services.
- Clearly identified and prepared information about all reporting and support services to be available for the target population. The information was culturally appropriate, and in accessible formats and languages.
- Formal and informal service providers' capacity to provide a safe environment and shelter. Special attention was paid to diverse needs related to sex/gender, age, and disability. People with diverse gender identities and those who were married, trafficked, or unaccompanied or associated were considered.
- SGBV survivors access high-quality case management services delivered by service providers with the appropriate expertise.
- Capacity of other service providers where available so they may also provide quality case management services.

Coordination

Coordinated, situation-specific, rapid response

The assessment highlighted not only what the immediate and future prevailing issues were for people, but identified other actors and agencies who were responding to the emergency, and how. The coordination with other agencies, and with relevant government authorities responsible for child welfare and learning in site selection was crucial.

Upon the arrival of the Afghan nationals in Albania, there were different stakeholders engaged in the supporting process of refugees. In the first two weeks the overall operational intervention was managed by the National Task Force established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Albania, including all the international organizations (host, who contributed in the process of bringing their Afghan nationals in Albania) and other international NGOs in partnerships with local organizations to bring their expertise, professional experience and financial resources for establishing new services for the overall wellbeing of Afghan nationals. Decision-making was timely and transparent and involves people, or their advocates, as fully as possible, in the process. There were not identified any unnecessary delays in decisions about the provision of social care and the process was transparent with a demonstrable commitment to involving Afghan nationals in the process. A clear process that details assessment, access to services and direct support was available.

Coordination and collaboration ensured the provision of comprehensive and effective services to Afghan population. The presence of many different service providers taking care of different hosted Afghan nationals in Albania, accelerated the need for the establishment of a joint coordinated group in the beginning of their presence in Albania, which in time was splatted in thematic groups (like education coordination group, health coordination group, protection coordination, etc.).

INGOs has made considerable efforts to establish the most appropriate reporting mechanism for cases of abuse, violence, neglect, and GBV prevention and support within the protection coordinated group. Collaboration with other service providers has been established within and outside of the Resorts, where Afghan population are accommodated. One of the most critical steps in responding to emergency situations related to child protection and gender-based violence is the operation of a coordinated response mechanism. This mechanism has involved all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, international organizations, and local NGOs. In the case of hosting Afghan citizens in Shengjin, Albania, it was essential the establishment of a multi-sectoral response that involved a range of stakeholders, including:

- Local authorities, including the police and social services;
- International organizations, including UNICEF, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, Vital Voice Global Partnership, American Council, Terre des hommes, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- Community leaders and representatives from Afghan communities.

During the establishment of the protection coordinated mechanism, several training sessions were conducted to enhance the technical and operational capacities of the staff involved. These sessions targeted personnel who provide supporting services to children, women and families, as well as the workers from the Intersectoral technical Groups in Lezha and Kavaja Municipalities. The training sessions covered a range of important topics. Firstly, there were sessions on case management specifically tailored to address the needs of unaccompanied children. These sessions aimed to equip the staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support and manage cases involving unaccompanied children. In addition, specialized training was provided on interview techniques when dealing with children at risk or victims of abuse. The objective was to enhance the staff's ability to conduct interviews in a sensitive and supportive manner, ensuring the gathering of crucial information while prioritizing the well-being and safety of the children involved. Furthermore, training was provided on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), emphasizing the importance of addressing the psychological well-being of the affected individuals and providing appropriate support in emergency situations. Additional training sessions were dedicated to Safety & Security, ensuring that the staff was equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to create safe environments for both themselves and the beneficiaries they served.

Furthermore, the situation of the Afghan community members and their resettlement process was a key area of focus during the follow-up meetings. The stress and uncertainties surrounding their future had a significant impact on their overall well-being, and the discussions aimed to understand how these factors affected the children within the community. The staff also received updates and information on the ongoing discussions regarding Law no. 18 on the Protection of the Rights of Children in the Republic of Albania. These updates were crucial for ensuring that the staff were well-informed and able to align their actions with the legal framework in place to protect children's rights. Additionally, regular online contact was maintained with the Child Protection Worker of both municipalities, as well as the staff directly involved in providing services within the resorts. These online contacts served as a means of continuous communication, facilitating information sharing, coordination, and addressing any emerging issues promptly. Overall, through the training sessions, follow-up meetings, and regular online contacts, the staff's capacity and knowledge were strengthened, enabling them to effectively respond to the child protection and gender-based violence challenges within the Afghan population in Albania.



Establish programs rapidly

To mitigate the emotional and psychological impact, the prompt emphasizes the importance of initiating safe area programs promptly. INGO interventions included the establishment of safe spaces for the most affected groups like children, women, girls, and mothers. To kick start these activities, educational and recreational equipment was swiftly arranged and positioned. Three Safe Spaces were set up with a specific focus on working intensively with women, girls, mothers, children, and infants.

A specialized team was assembled to provide a comprehensive package of psycho-social services. The objective was to create a secure environment where beneficiaries could engage in organized activities, socialize, learn, express themselves, and receive emotional support, recreational opportunities, and life skills training. These initiatives aimed to assist individuals in rebuilding their lives.

Mothers and Babies Corner, Women and Girls Friendly Space, and Child-Friendly Space offered opportunities for active participation from parents and caregivers. These spaces facilitated information sharing, input, and guidance, and helped boost their self-confidence in protecting and caring for children. The three safe spaces have served as resource spaces for individual and group work for introducing and understanding GBV and child protection, identification, prevention, reporting, and treatment through the engaged professionals and community mediators.



A. Provision of psychosocial activities for children in child friendly spaces

One of the first steps followed in the community of Afghan nationals was to **identify MHPSS needs in a collaborative manner**: Afghan nationals received psychological first aid, as well as support and counseling in order to improve their mental health and wellbeing, mental health assessments, conducted through consulting with them to identify their needs and capacities, and build the assistance around their suggestions by professionals in English language, supported by community mediators (from Afghan community). People who are at higher risk than others were identified (unaccompanied children, pregnant women, and those who have gone through specific distress).

Based on conducted MHPSS assessment, it was provided psychological first aid included immediate psychological interventions and individual and group psychological support and counseling sessions.

Provision of recreational activities, with a psychosocial component to children, were part of the child friendly space (CFS): CFSs means safe spaces where communities create nurturing environments in which children can access free and structured play, recreation, leisure and learning activities. CFSs provided educational and psychosocial support and other activities that restore a sense of normality and continuity. CFS were designed and operated in a participatory manner, using existing spaces in the resorts, organized in three different groups ages of children.

Strengthening the capacity of families, political and religious leaders: Training and sensitization of families, community members and leaders in the identification, support and reinforcement of children victims/ in need of protection; parenting support, peers support etc.

Establish referrals and support and provide information about services, supports and legal rights and obligations: Up-to date factual information about where and how assistance can be obtained will be provided.

Child and Friendly Spaces (CFS) were designed to cater to preschool and school-aged children (2-4 years old, 5-11 years old, and 12-18 years old), as well as parents with children. Each CFS was coordinated by two facilitators, comprising a psychologist and an English teacher. Their primary responsibility was to supervise and support children's play activities for a minimum of 2 hours per day. They ensured a safe and child-friendly atmosphere within the CFS by conducting daily visual assessments of the children. Additionally, they organized a variety of structured games and activities that catered to the diverse needs of children in terms of age, gender, and abilities.

Creating a comfortable, safe, and respectful environment for every child within the CFS was of utmost importance. To achieve this, cultural mediators, who were exclusively women and girls, were actively engaged. Their role involved organizing and delivering awareness-raising activities for both children and adults. Project staff collaborated closely with the cultural mediators to prepare materials tailored to the age, cultural background, and educational level of the beneficiaries. The mediators also provided interpretation services during activities and facilitated communication between project staff and members of the Afghan community.

The CFS operated from 8:00 am to 16:00 pm and prominently displayed a weekly activity plan at its main entrance. The primary activities provided in the CFS encompassed creative, imaginative, physical, communicative, and manipulative pursuits.

Establishing the CFS aimed to restore a sense of normalcy and continuity to children in the community who had experienced disruptions in their lives. The spaces offered opportunities for children to develop, play, learn, and enhance their resilience. Moreover, as the facilitators supervised the children, parents were afforded child-free time, allowing them to engage in other activities as necessary.



CASE STUDY

Yousuf, energetic boy in the child friendly space

Mohammad Yousuf Noori was born in Afghanistan and he came to Albania in December 2021, together with his family, mother, father, sisters and brother. He is 6 years old and has a younger brother. Yousuf together with his younger brother became part of the Mother and baby corner space and came to the space accompanied by his mother and younger brother.

Initially, when Yousuf came to CFS (Child Friendly Space), he had difficulty adjusting to the new environment, did not cooperate with anyone, refused to participate in any kind of activity, irritated other children and exhibited aggressive behavior.

The teachers and psychologists worked with him constantly, trying to include him in all the psychosocial activities that took place in the center, making him comfortable to adapt and making him feel as safe as possible.

Overcoming Obstacles: Mohammad Yousuf Noori's Journey of Transformation

In December 2021, a young boy named Mohammad Yousuf Noori embarked on a life-altering journey, leaving behind his war-torn homeland of Afghanistan and finding refuge in Albania, accompanied by his loving family. At 6 years old, Yousuf, alongside his younger brother, stepped into the welcoming embrace of the Child friendly Space, under the watchful eyes of his mother.

However, the initial transition for Yousuf proved to be challenging. As he entered the Child Friendly Space (CFS), he struggled to adapt to his new environment. Refusing to engage in any activities and displaying aggressive behavior, he posed a unique set of challenges for the dedicated teachers and psychologists working tirelessly to provide support and guidance.

Undeterred by these obstacles, the dedicated staff at the center embarked on a mission to

help Yousuf find his place within the CFS community. With unwavering commitment, they diligently included him in a myriad of psychosocial activities, striving to create an environment where he felt safe and secure.

Through consistent and patient intervention, a remarkable transformation began to unfold. Yousuf slowly but surely started to participate in activities, breaking down the barriers that once stood in his way. Gradually, he formed meaningful connections with his peers, forging friendships that brought joy and fulfillment to his life. The once-aggressive behavior that troubled him and those around him became a thing of the past.

The journey towards transformation extended beyond Yousuf himself. The teachers and psychologists recognized the importance of nurturing a supportive relationship with his mother. Through a series of positive parenting sessions and engaging mother-child activities, they empowered her to play an active role in her son's development. By working in tandem, they laid the groundwork for a strong and loving bond between mother and child.

Yousuf's story stands as a testament to the power of perseverance and compassion. His success is a reflection of the dedication and expertise of the educators and psychologists who guided him through his journey. As he continues to thrive within the CFS community, Yousuf serves as an inspiration to others, reminding us that with the right support, every child has the potential to overcome adversity and embrace a brighter future.

The remarkable progress witnessed in Yousuf's transformation serves as a testament to the profound impact that care, understanding, and an inclusive environment can have on a young child's life. Within the walls of the Mother and Baby Corner, Yousuf's story is just one among many, as countless children find solace, hope, and the opportunity to rewrite their narratives, forging a path towards resilience and happiness.



B. Women and Girls Friendly Spaces

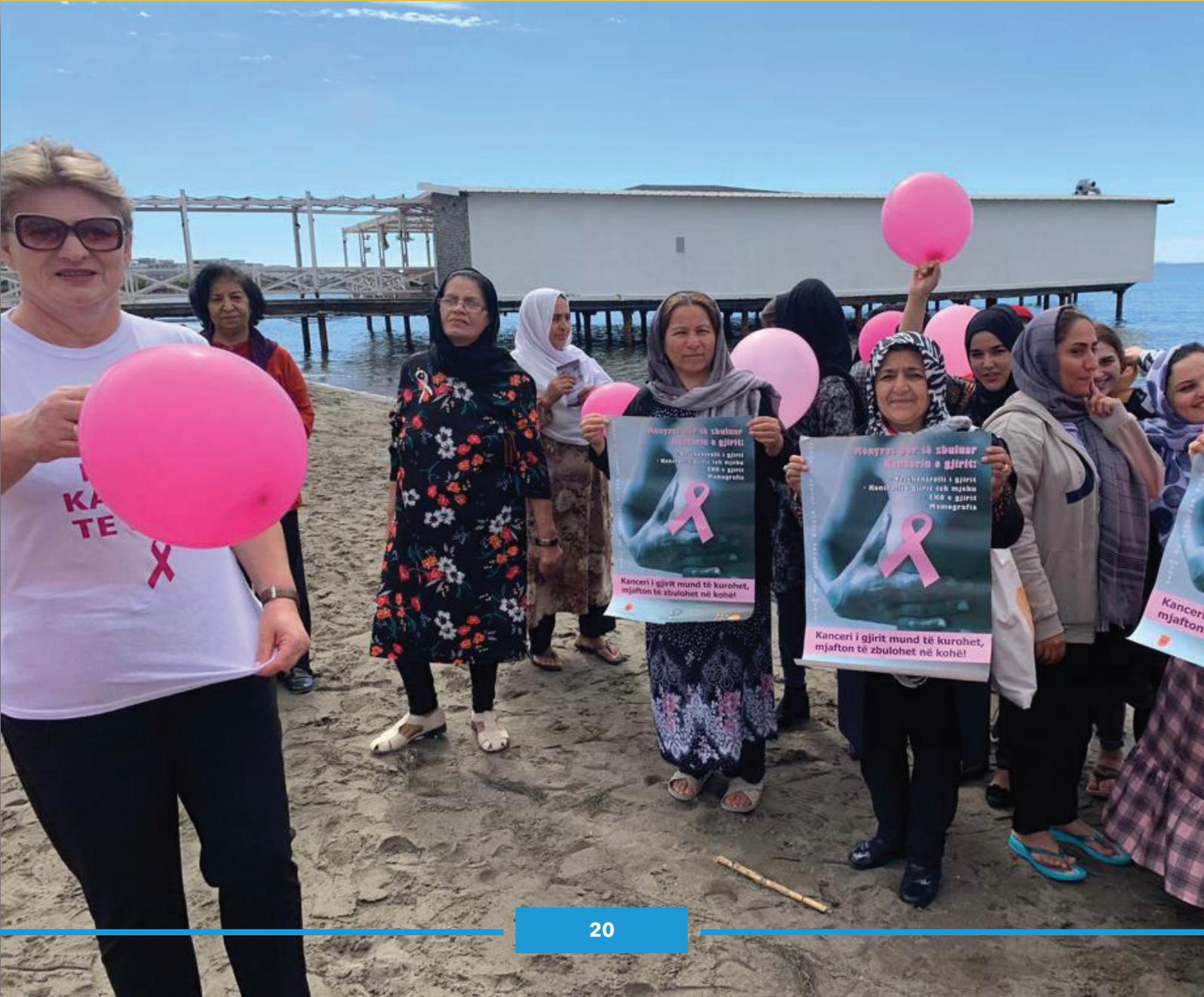
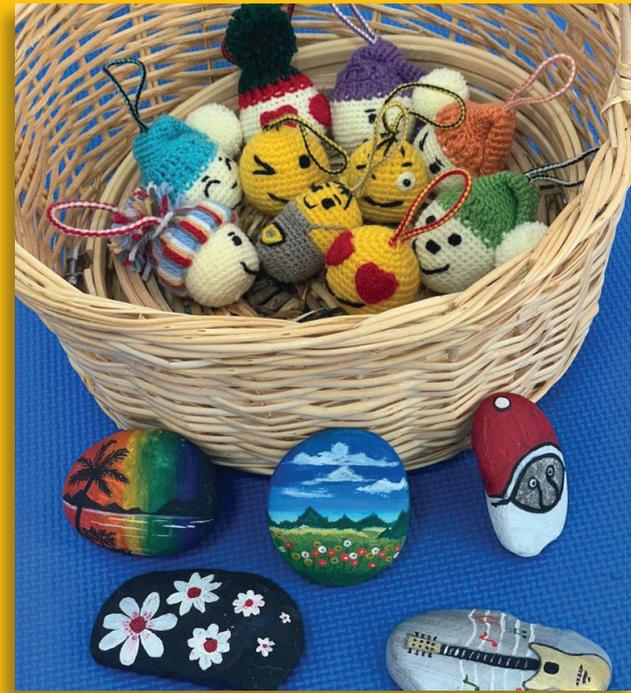
A women and girls friendly space was placed in the resort, safe location, accessing information and support, participating in activities, building their networks and strengthening relationships with peers. It was an informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term 'safe,' in this context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. Friendly and Safe Spaces integrated often a range of services, ranging from information sharing and support for social networks and recreational activities to essential and discrete clinical care and support for GBV survivors and sexual and reproductive health services.

Conduct needs and risks assessment, identify and establish spaces for women and children: Information about the most vulnerable women and children and other vulnerable groups was collected through social workers, psychologists, facilitators, community mediators and other partners and focus group discussions. Based on the findings, Women and Girls Friendly Space (WGFS) and Children Friendly Spaces (CFS) supported women and children's sense of self and empowerment.

Organize safe and accessible recreational and educational activities evaluated and tailored for each subgroup: Workshops were organized to provide safe and accessible recreational activities for women and children, and enable an environment for learning, socializing, and community cohesion. Educational programs were tailored to enhance basic literacy and information, keeping in mind that the Afghan nationals planned to be relocated to the United States.

Support facilitators, trainers, and staff in program provision

Frontline staff and supervisors had equal access to the knowledge, competencies and skills necessary to implement safe spaces activities in the accommodation units of Afghan nationals.



The WGFS is situated on the first floor of the apartment block in the Shengjin Hotel. The age groups eligible to attend the WGFS include: 15-17 years old, 18-30 years old, 31-45 years old, 46-60 years old, and over 60. The services within the WGFS are provided by a social worker, a psychologist who also covers mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for the three safe spaces, and a community mediator.

The WGFS operates from 8:00 am to 16:00 pm, and the weekly activity plan is prominently displayed at the main entrance. The main activities offered in the WGFS include age-appropriate support group sessions, recreational activities, life skills training, livelihood activities, day care services, and prevention and outreach activities. Women and girls involved in the WGFS program also have access to skills training programs, such as knitting, sewing, and embroidery, which empower them and enhance their abilities. They are also informed about reporting channels for GBV and the available services if they require support.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) are provided by a psychologist who engages in face-to-face contact with each family member. The psychologist gathers information from the community, conducts field observations, and communicates with other specialized staff members, such as doctors and nurses, who are in contact with the beneficiaries.



CASE STUDY - WGFS

Rahima, a resilient Afghan woman, empowers others through handicrafts

In the bustling Women and Girls Friendly Space, Rahima stands out as a beacon of inspiration. At 35 years old, she is a regular attendee of the sanctuary that provides solace and support for women. Rahima's journey to this safe haven began in Afghanistan, where she fled along with her mother, sisters, and two brothers, leaving behind a fractured past.

Born and raised in war-torn Afghanistan, Rahima faced the heartache of her father's abandonment at a tender age. With unwavering strength, Rahima's mother and older sister embraced their roles as both caregivers and providers for the family. Despite the hardships they endured, Rahima persevered, driven by her unyielding determination to create a better life.

Fueling her aspirations, Rahima pursued a two-year course in midwifery nursing at the esteemed University of Iran. Armed with her newfound knowledge, she dedicated several years of her life to serving her community in Afghanistan, putting her skills to use in the field she held dear.

Beyond her professional achievements, Rahima's compassionate nature has endeared her to those around her. Immersed in the Women and Girls Friendly Space, she wholeheartedly engages in the diverse array of activities it offers. However, it is through her unparalleled passion for handicrafts that Rahima truly shines. With deft hands and an artistic flair, she has woven a tapestry of crochet, needlework, and embroidery, showcasing her exquisite talent.

Rahima's expertise has not gone unnoticed. Her remarkable contributions were evident when she participated in the Arsis organization's celebrated Fair Craft event. Among the participants, she distinguished herself by presenting the largest number of awe-inspiring creations and achieving unparalleled sales from her work. Her success not only served as a testament to her artistry but also kindled a newfound sense of hope for others yearning to hone their handicraft skills.

Ever the mentor, Rahima has selflessly shared her knowledge, nurturing and inspiring other women and girls within the community. Her patient guidance and unwavering support have unlocked hidden talents and kindled the flames of creativity in those who seek solace within the Women and Girls Friendly Space.

Looking towards the horizon, Rahima envisions a future in America where her artistic prowess can flourish even further. With an entrepreneurial spirit, she dreams of establishing a small business centered around her handicrafts, offering her creations to a broader audience and generating a sustainable income for herself. In doing so, Rahima hopes to break free from the constraints of her past and build a brighter future filled with independence and prosperity.

Rahima's unwavering resilience and her unwavering commitment to empowering others through her craft serve as a testament to the strength of the human spirit. As she forges ahead on her journey, she remains an indomitable force, ready to make her mark on the world.



C. Mother and Baby Corner

Mother and Baby Corner (MBC) was established in the same time with the WGFS for dedicated support to mothers, their babies and toddlers from 0-2 years old. MBCs provided parenting support and activities for toddlers, mothers with babies and expecting mothers on the move.

Its purpose is to provide professional support to mothers regarding infant and toddler nutrition, the importance of breastfeeding, advice on health and hygiene, as well as a safe and clean environment for rest and relaxation. The establishment of MBC followed standards and guidelines while being adapted to the specific context of Afghan families. The space is equipped with the necessary materials and furniture, including baby changing facilities, baby feeding chairs, floor covers, comfortable breastfeeding chairs, baby toys, baby closets, portable baby beds, and more. Two nurses and two cultural mediators from the Afghan community are available to provide services within the MBC. These individuals are passionate about contributing to and helping their community in this particular context.

The nurses play a crucial role in the MBC, providing support to mothers and parents in creating conditions for the proper development of their children, given the circumstances they find themselves in. They monitor children's nutrition, offer advice, and provide products for adequate nutrition. The nurses carry out their tasks both in the safe space of the MBC and within the families' accommodations. They are responsible for implementing the daily activities of the Corner.

The MBC remain open from 8:00 am to 16:00 pm and displays the weekly activity plan at its main entrance. Activities and services are based on the Baby Friendly Space manual. The main activities provided in the MBC include:



1 Mental health and psychosocial support (individual/group counseling, recreational activities such as yoga, etc.): The MBC prioritizes mothers' mental health, helping them improve their coping capacity, deal with stress and emotions, enhance self-confidence, and strengthen caregiver-child relationships. Individual and group support sessions are provided, utilizing creative expression and building individual/group resources to address the challenges of the new situation. Recreational activities and relaxation exercises are popular among mothers, providing a sense of relaxation and better ability to cope.

2 Nutrition and hygiene (breastfeeding, formula feeding, bathing, diaper changing, etc.): The MBC offers services related to general hygiene education, specific hygiene education for small children, breastfeeding support, food preparation, bathing of newborns, and more. The team conducts group discussions on adapting hygiene and nutrition practices to the new context and constraints. Home visits also include advice on hygiene maintenance, breastfeeding, and nutrition.

3 Early Childhood Development (ECD) (measurement, health advice, stimulation exercises for psychomotor development, etc.): The MBC focuses on the well-being and development of children in a safe space. The team plans and implements appropriate stimulation activities across various developmental domains. These activities promote fine and gross motor skills, color and shape recognition, and speech development. Mothers have expressed positive feedback, noting increased socialization and their children's development and learning.

4 Referrals: The MBC provides referrals for children, such as vaccinations and health check-ups with pediatricians or specialists. Referrals for mothers may include visits to gynecologists or other specialists, including psychiatrists if necessary. During the reporting period, most referrals were related to health check-ups and vaccinations. If specialized mental health support is needed, appropriate referrals are made.

Overall, the MBC serves as a vital resource for mothers and their young children, providing support, education, and a nurturing environment to promote their well-being and development.

CASE STUDY

Ebadullah, A Journey of Growth and Development in the Mother and Baby Corner

Since December 2021, the Mother and Baby Corner (MBC) has been a haven for young Ebadullah, a resilient 1-year-old and 8-month-old boy who embarked on a remarkable journey of growth and transformation. Born in Afghanistan, Ebadullah, along with his parents and older sister, sought refuge in Albania, finding solace and support in the nurturing environment of the MBC.

Initially, when Ebadullah first graced the space of the Mother and Baby Corner, he was a tiny, delicate infant, displaying signs of normal physical and mental development. Accompanied by his mother and older sister, who became part of the Children Safe Space, Ebadullah entered a realm that held the promise of a brighter future.

As the days turned into months, it became evident that a strong bond had formed between Ebadullah and his mother. This attachment posed a challenge for the dedicated staff working with him, as his reliance on his mother left little room for intervention and interaction. Notably, he exhibited difficulties in maintaining eye contact and struggled to establish close relationships with both peers and teachers.

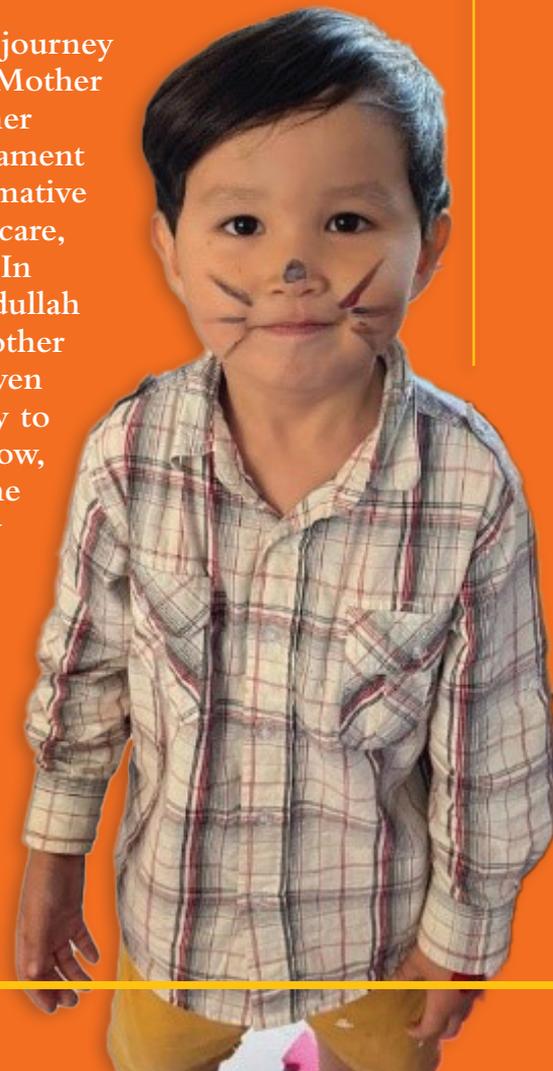
However, in recent months, a remarkable shift has taken place in Ebadullah's behavior, captivating the attention of those who have witnessed his progress. No longer reliant on breastfeeding, Ebadullah has blossomed into a more independent and exploratory young soul. With newfound freedom, he fearlessly delves into the realm of play, engaging with a variety of toys and actively embracing his surroundings.

Most inspiring of all is Ebadullah's growing ability to cooperate and connect with his

peers and teachers. Previously, his attachment to his mother left little room for interaction with others, but now he actively participates in various play roles, seamlessly integrating himself into the social fabric of the MBC. No longer tethered to his mother's side, he has emerged as a vibrant presence, eager to forge connections and engage with his newfound companions.

This positive transformation has not gone unnoticed. Ebadullah's progress is a testament to the tireless efforts of the dedicated staff at the Mother and Baby Corner. Through their unwavering support and guidance, Ebadullah has unlocked his true potential, blossoming into a confident, independent, and socially adept young individual.

As Ebadullah's journey continues, the Mother and Baby Corner stands as a testament to the transformative power of love, care, and nurturing. In this space, Ebadullah and countless other children are given the opportunity to flourish and grow, transcending the challenges they have faced. Together, they forge a future that promises hope, resilience, and boundless possibilities.





D. Case Management: Responding to physical violence and other harmful practices

Responding to violence and other harmful practices, include all patterns of violence from within and outside the families, including sexual violence. Attempt of building protective environment around the child may result in family or community members abusing children, making those children more at risk of domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse and corporal punishment. The response included:

- 1 provide age-, sex- and gender-sensitive multisectoral care for children who have been subjected to physical violence and harmful practices, and for their families (including psychosocial support, medical support, reintegration, educational and vocational training opportunities, cash transfers, legal assistance, etc.); different service providers providing responses;
- 2 identify and refer children who may be affected by physical violence and harmful practices;
- 3 establish systems to monitor the situation of girls and boys who may be at risk of violence - including neglect. This may include, for example, children in residential care; children with disabilities; separated children.



E. Awareness raising

Awareness raising aimed sharing messages to Afghan nationals (adolescent girls, children, community, etc.) within the community mechanisms in order to prevent and/or inform on overall and/or specific child protections issues. This was made possible through:

- 1 Online dissemination of information in their language;
- 2 Organization of community meetings through community leaders to deliver prepared messages;
- 3 Child-friendly spaces, WGFS and MBC;
- 4 Printed materials such as thematic flyers and posters.



F. Information and awareness provision on national services, legal procedures, and available complaint and reporting mechanisms

Afghan nationals were informed about the available national services near their accommodation units or any other placement. There was clarity about the rules and regulations of sites, legal procedures, and reporting mechanisms and complaints. They were informed in a regular base about the emergency numbers, and relevant procedures. Also, they were oriented about the facilities that provide services in the accommodation units. Local authorities were prepared to provide this support to the refugees with the support of INGOs or local NGOs.



G. Supporting services

Rapid Assessment was conducted to identify the specific needs of children and women and determine the extent and nature of gender-based violence which helped to identify the immediate needs of the population, including health, psychological, protection and education. Provision of formal and non-formal education after a rapid assessment of education needs was conducted, which intended to understand learning needs and priorities of Afghan children. Family supporting services were provided by the project staff and aim to informing parents and other adults in the community about how to prevent violence against children and the consequences of violence on children and the community. Most of the participants were women, as men tended to resist discussions related to domestic violence or child protection. The aim of these sessions was to improve parents' sense of self-efficacy and competency, as well as parental satisfaction. The sessions also aimed to bring about positive changes in parents' attitudes about parenting, self-esteem, and feelings of self-mastery with regard to parenting. During the sessions, the team promoted positive parenting practices, such as using positive language, planned discipline, and family routines. Parents were also encouraged to nurture behavior and increase their knowledge of child development and communication styles. Also, cash assistance was provided to Afghan citizens based on a formula of \$30 per child, \$100 per adult, and a maximum of \$400 per family. This support was essential for many families, enabling them to meet their immediate needs.

Child protection and Gender Based Violence referral and supporting mechanism



Referral pathway for the prevention of and response to Gender-based violence and issues of child protection in case of humanitarian emergencies in Albania

Considerable work and effort were undertaken by service providers, especially from the psychosocial coordinating group (that later on was focused on GBV and child protection issues) to develop the first model of an appropriate reporting mechanism for cases of child abuse, violence, neglect, and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and support. Since the initial weeks of the Afghan nationals' arrival in the country, collaboration has been established with various service providers, both within and outside the resorts.

A partnership was formed with the Lezha Directory of Social Services and Kavaja also to draft and finalize the referral pathway for GBV cases and Child Protection Issues. Additionally, a comprehensive campaign focusing on Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Issues was developed. The primary aim of this campaign was to raise awareness within the community about these sensitive topics, promote understanding of the appropriate approach, and provide information on reporting pathways.

As part of these efforts, the referral pathway has been successfully established and introduced to community members. Furthermore, to ensure effective coordination and response, a dedicated Focal Point for Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence has been appointed and introduced to the community.

Through these collaborative initiatives, have made significant progress in addressing the pressing issues of child abuse, violence, neglect, and GBV within the community. By establishing robust reporting mechanisms, fostering partnerships with service providers, and raising awareness, they are working towards safeguarding the well-being and protection of vulnerable children and individuals affected by gender-based violence.



Follow-up meetings were conducted with the staff to address important issues and ensure effective implementation of the referral mechanism for GBV and child protection mechanism. The organization Nisma ARSIS has been appointed as the focal point for the implementation of the referral mechanism and further follow-up for the cases of GBV and child protection issues.

This document describes minimum actions to be taken to respect international standards and a survivor-centered approach in caring for GBV survivors and child protection issues within the Albanian structures response. It outlines the guiding principles, procedures, and roles and responsibilities of all actors for responding to and preventing GBV and child protection issues in this context. By setting out minimum standards to ensure quality, coordination and coherence among organizations and actors, this good practice aim to facilitate joint action by all actors to respond to, prevent and mitigate GBV and child protection within the Albanian existing case management response and to improve services offered to GBV survivors and all individuals exposed to GBV and child protection.

Afghan nationals were introduced with the reporting mechanism in their community by group coordinators, and service providers, and through the document “GBV cases Referral Pathway” placed publicly around the resort. Also, online reporting (by name or anonymously) was developed including a template for reporting a GBV case/suspicion of GBV case, by survivor, or some other person who does not want to reveal her/his identity (anonymous reporting). Individuals were also introduced with the option to choose to report the GBV incident/case directly to the coordinator of the group/ or any other service provider in the resort. In any case the Nisma ARSIS FP as a contact point for referral of the GBV cases should provide guidance and orientation. The reporting template is the official document from Albanian authorities or any other agreed document between service providers that has all the necessary information important for providing the most needed services and protection.

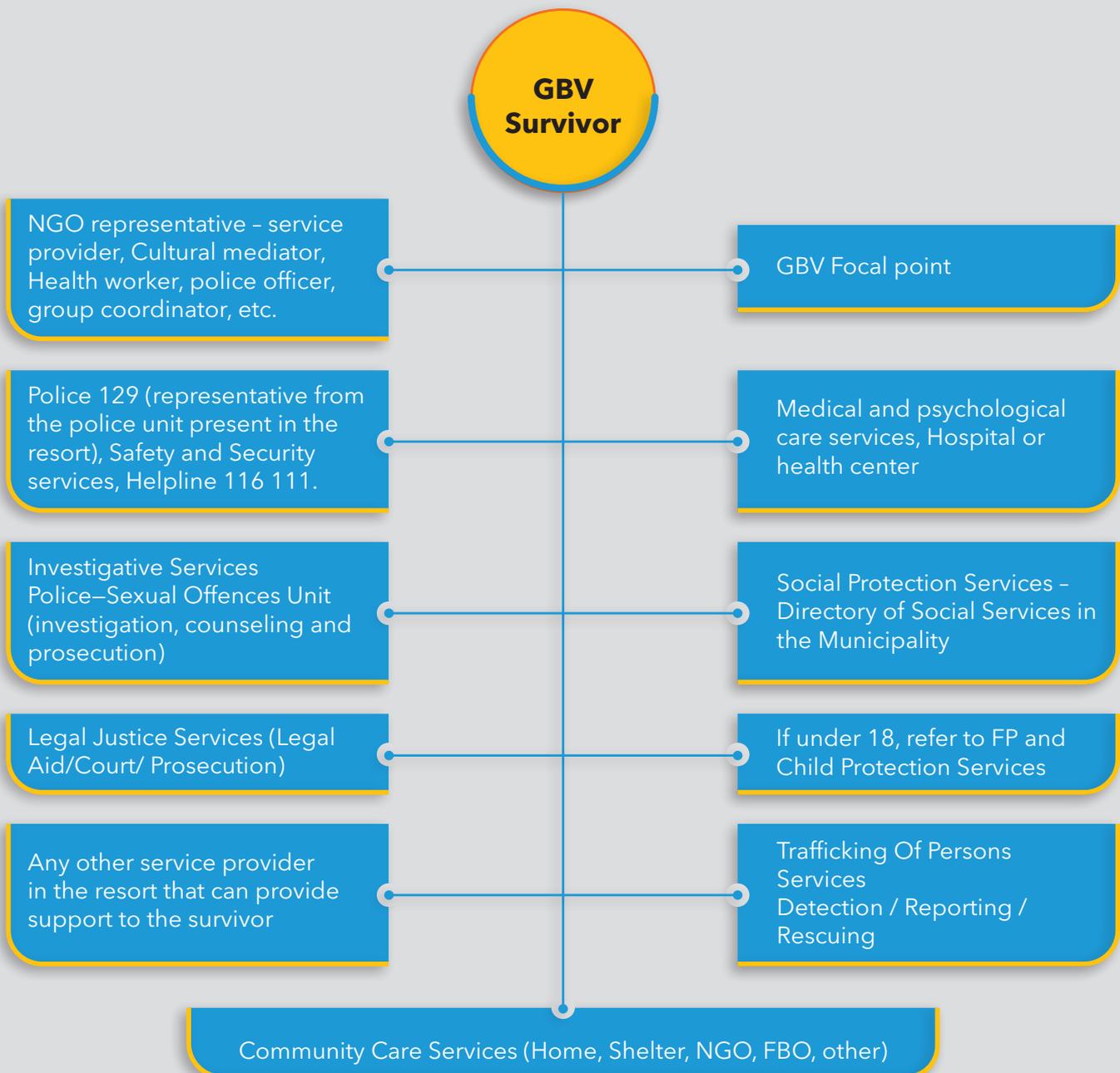


Figure 1: Referral Pathway matrix



Support the existing national child protection system, in order to identify, and support Afghan children/mothers with children at risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation

Strengthening Child Protection Systems was another key intervention of the project in responding to emergency situations related to child protection is strengthening child protection systems. This involves developing effective mechanisms for identifying and responding to child protection issues, including child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Identification and Response to Gender-Based violence through the provision of medical and psychosocial support, legal assistance, and referrals to specialized services. The project staff, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other local NGOs, provided medical and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence.

Strengthening of Local Capacities to respond to emergencies related to child protection and gender-based violence was carried out through capacity Building of Caregivers and Frontline professionals to adhere to reporting mechanisms and case management procedural pathways to identify and support children at risk or in need of protection, including Unaccompanied Foreign Children and Separated ones. children. The capacity building program aimed to serve as a comprehensive guide and to offer a concise regulatory framework containing procedural steps to ensure effective protection in the UASC case management process. It will also serve as an instrument for the activation of the integrated protection system and to ensure effective interaction of the necessary services in all areas,

especially those of social welfare, health, and safety in order to prevent and respond to the risks these children are faced with especially from sexual exploitation and abuse. The capacity building program also identifies the responsible institutions for all the described actions. In addition to public institutions, civil society organizations and the communities where these children are placed have a very important role in the management of UASC situations. The success of managing complex situations requires more involvement, skills, and knowledge, as well as human, infrastructural and financial resources.

- frontline professionals were capacitated for adhering to reporting mechanisms and case management, procedural pathways to identify and support children at risk and/or in need of protection, as well as on the identification of PSEA.
- health careers capacitated to respond to emergencies and support Afghan nationals the cases of GBV and child protection gender).
- child protection worker members of ITG in Lezha and Durres capacitated on interview techniques with children at risk or victims of abuse (disaggregated by sex, and sectors.

In addition, training on interview techniques with children at risk or victims of abuse was organized on both sites, and child protection professionals were supported through coaching and on-the-job training. The training focused on child protection, psycho-social support, and communication skills. The caregivers were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide appropriate care and support.



The case management roadmap for children in need for protection in Albania
Nisma për Ndryshim Shoqëror ARSIS

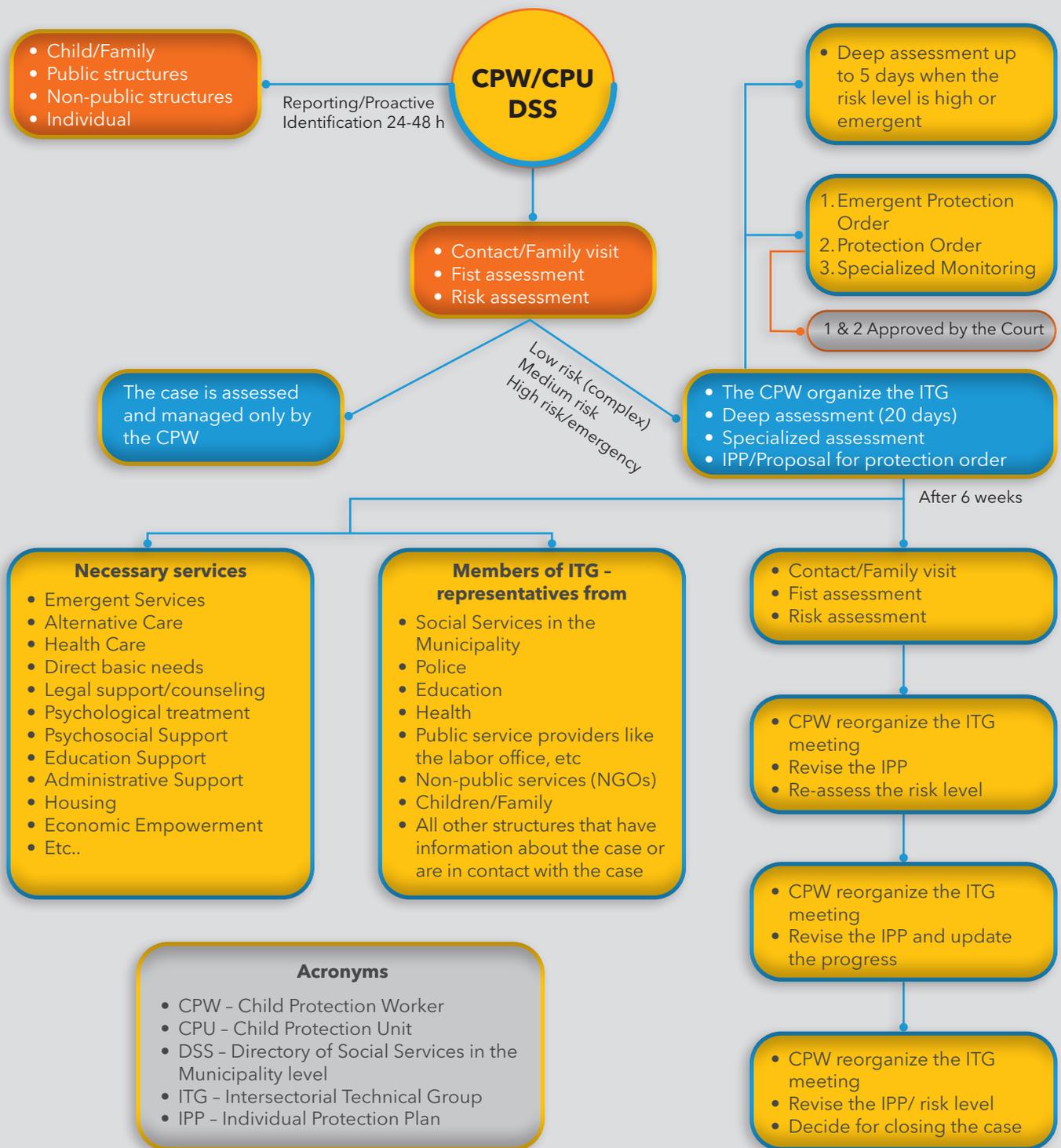


Figure 2: Case management roadmap in Albania

The referral system leaflet prepared for GBV cases and child protection issues has been frequently used as a source of information to ensure that the community is aware of different types of violence and abuse and how to refer them. The Afghan community members were initially unfamiliar with the referral system and child protection systems in Albania and other countries like Canada or the USA, where they will be resettled. However, after participating in the informative sessions, they have become more positive, feel more accepted, and are more open to discussing these sensitive topics.

Lessons learned



Lessons learned and a Road Map for concrete steps that must be initiated by institutions and partners for activating child protection and Gender based violence to response future humanitarian emergency in Albania.

1

Conduct an assessment: The first step in developing an effective child protection and gender-based violence response plan is to conduct a thorough needs assessment to determine the current status of child protection and gender-based violence in Albania. The assessment should include data on the prevalence of child protection and gender-based violence, the capacities of existing services and systems, and the needs of affected communities.

2

Develop a response plan: Based on the findings of the assessment, develop a comprehensive response plan that outlines the key activities that need to be carried out to address child protection and gender-based violence in the event of a humanitarian emergency. The response plan should include specific activities for prevention, mitigation, and response.

3

Establish partnerships: To ensure an effective and coordinated response to child protection and gender-based violence, it is important to establish partnerships with a range of actors, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and international organizations. These partnerships should be based on a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each partner.

4

Build capacity: To ensure that child protection and gender-based violence response services are effective, it is important to build the capacity of service providers and community members. This may involve providing training and technical assistance to government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations.

5

Develop communication strategies: Effective communication is essential for raising awareness about child protection and gender-based violence, and for ensuring that affected communities have access to information about available services and support. Develop communication strategies that include the use of mass media, social media, and community-based approaches.

6

Establish monitoring and evaluation systems: To ensure that child protection and gender-based violence response services are effective, it is important to establish monitoring and evaluation systems that track progress and identify areas for improvement. These systems should be based on clear indicators and should involve regular reporting and feedback.

7

Ensure funding: Adequate funding is essential for the effective implementation of child protection and gender-based violence response activities. Identify funding sources and develop a clear budget that outlines the costs of implementing the response plan.

By following these steps, institutions and partners can activate child protection and gender-based violence response to future humanitarian emergencies in Albania. It is important to note that this is an ongoing process, and that the response plan should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

This document aims to provide a set of good practices, examples that may be used in the future and perceived as a guide based on a successful model. There are needed additional efforts like the existence of preparedness responses, coordination plans and simulations, available task forces, available budgetary and flexibility operational plans, capacity building and dedicated resources.