

CSO activities related to the COVID-19 response

18-25 May

The announcements of the pandemic and the measures taken by the Serbian government to fight against the COVID-19 virus have changed the work of civil society organizations. The monitoring included 139 civil society organizations from all over Serbia. From this number only three organizations stopped all activities. Most CSOs, almost a third, are involved in humanitarian work, while fewer than 15 organizations carry out their regular activities. In addition to humanitarian work, other areas that can be categorized as organizational activities are: monitoring, information, psychosocial support and advocacy. When it comes to individual activities within these areas these are: providing legal assistance, human rights monitoring, providing psychological assistance, dealing with health care, networking, education and fundraising. Slightly less than half of the organizations are active in Belgrade, and other CSOs are located throughout Serbia.

It is particularly important to emphasize the importance of working with the most vulnerable groups, through information on the poor current situation and the possible consequences of the pandemic on the groups concerned such as people with disabilities, women, children and the elderly, as well as migrants and the homeless.

Although the state of emergency in Serbia was lifted on May 6 according to available data the organizations will continue to organize their activities in the way they did in the state of emergency, especially bearing in mind that the consequences of the pandemic will be felt by their users in the coming period.

The following are the activities of some of the organizations that have been implemented in the past period:

MONITORING

- **The Belgrade Center for Human Rights** drew the public's attention to the inadmissible behavior of workers engaged in securing the Asylum Center in Bogovđa, who verbally and physically abused children who stay in that center unaccompanied by their parents. The Center filed a [criminal complaint](#) against the mentioned employees of the security company with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Ub. In its statement, the Center states that violence of any kind, including within institutions under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Serbia, is inadmissible, which is why an urgent reaction of the competent authorities is needed, especially considering that this is a particularly vulnerable category such as children.

The Belgrade Center for Human Rights announced that since May 15, 2020, several citizens deprived of liberty serving prison sentences in institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions have contacted them, asking for help in exercising the right to one-time financial assistance introduced by the state due to negative effects of the COVID-19 disease pandemic. For these reasons, the Center [appeals](#) to the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia to provide a possibility for a large number of Serbian citizens who do not have personal document, who are living in informal Roma settlements, as well as citizens who do not have telephone and internet to exercise the right to a one-time financial assistance from the stat.

-The youth program of the Belgrade Center for Human Rights during the state of emergency conducted campaign [#About one isolated youth](#). The youth program also conducted an [online survey](#) with the aim of finding out more about how young people were informed about the current situation in the country during the state of emergency declared due to the infectious disease COVID-19. The survey was conducted within the campaign [#About_one_isolated_youth](#) in the period from March 31 to April 11, 2020 through an online questionnaire with questions related to information about the current situation in Serbia, as well as almost the whole world, as well as with questions which related to mental health and support and solidarity among young people.

- **NGO Praxis** together with the Center for Research and Development IDEAS, the Center for Crisis Policy and Response (CRPC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the Group for Children and Youth INDIGO, the Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance (HCIT) and the Belgrade Center for Human Rights on the occasion of the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on May 21, issued a [statement](#) calling for tolerance, nurturing cultural differences and non-violent communication. Unfortunately, in recent months, our society has seen a clear and increased use of hate speech and xenophobic attitudes in public towards the migrant and refugee population living in the Republic of Serbia, and citizens are presented with undemocratic and discriminatory principles as a solution to the non-existent problem.

- **The Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights - YUCOM**, together with the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, the Center for Contemporary Politics, the Center for European Policies, the Center for International and Security Affairs, and the European Movement in Serbia issued a [statement](#) that a social dialogue is needed on the state of democracy in Serbia. On the occasion of the publication of the latest report of Freedom House "Countries in Transition", in which Serbia was classified as "hybrid regimes" instead of democratic states for the first time in 17 years, they expressed serious concern about the state of democratic institutions in Serbia. They called on the Government of the Republic of Serbia to take these assessments seriously and make efforts to provide conditions for the promotion of democracy and media freedom in the country, as well as the European Union and its members to adequately recognize the importance of these issues as key to European integration.

-**The Belgrade Center for Security Policy** published a report entitled ["Police during the state of emergency"](#). The report assessed the extent to which the police acted in accordance with democratic standards of policing in extraordinary circumstances. The analysis of the context of the state of emergency in Serbia is presented, followed by the analysis of the tasks and results of the police, and cases in which there are indications of irregularities.

- **The Center for Democracy Foundation** published an analysis ["How have measures to combat the pandemic affected society?"](#) The analysis states that no decision made by the Government of Serbia during the COVID-19 epidemic was made on the basis of a previous analysis of its expected effects on society. Moreover, there was not even an announcement of the possibility of conducting any, at least symbolic, public debate in that regard.

- **The Initiative for the Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities (MDRI-S)** addressed letters to the [Ministry of Labor, Social and Veterans Affairs](#) several times during the state of emergency. In its letters, MDRI-S requested additional information on the number of sick and dead and from COVID-19 in social protection institutions for accommodation of persons with disabilities and other relevant data. They also proposed the relocation of persons with disabilities from social protection institutions, wherever possible, as well as the adoption of a deinstitutionalization strategy and action plan immediately after the end of the state of emergency. The Ministry of Labor Social and Veterans Affairs sent a joint response to the MDRI-S letters sent to this state body during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **The Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI)** is currently working on intensive media monitoring during the election campaign. In their last [statement](#), they appealed to the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) to prevent the phenomenon of "party cameras", ie. covert advertising of electoral lists in the electoral block in daily news, which violates Article 47, paragraph 2 of the Law on Electronic Media, which requires broadcasters to provide free, truthful, objective, complete and timely information to the public.

- The working group of the **National Convention on the European Union** for Chapter 5 - Public Procurement, [initiated](#) the postponement of the implementation of the Law on Public Procurement until January 1, 2021, ie September 1, 2020 at the earliest. The postponement is necessary to thoroughly prepare the implementation of the Law novelty, rules and technique. The NCEU Working Group on Chapter 5 considers it necessary to postpone the start of implementation of the Law, in order to use that time for construction, testing of functionality and commissioning of the new Public Procurement Portal, adoption of a number of bylaws and thorough preparation and training of bidders and procuring entities (but also the competent institutions). The initiative was sent to the Public Procurement Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the Government of Serbia and the Assembly of Serbia. In addition to the members of the NCEU Chapter 5 Working Group, the initiative was supported by other civil society organizations, as well as public procurement professionals.

INFORMATION

-**The Union of High School Students of Serbia (UNSS)** is conducting a [campaign](#) with the column #HeroesofStudents, which aims to promote teachers who stood out during the state of emergency and a different way of schooling, all because of their methods, work, and manner of work or engagement. So far they have had 4 Heroes of the Disciples, but we hope that number will increase.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- **The Center for the Rights of the Child** and the Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia point out that the problems that affect almost every child in Serbia require immediate systematic solutions, a strategic approach, larger and appropriate allocations for the protection and realization of children's rights. [The situation for children in Serbia](#) is further damaged by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is especially reflected for children from the most vulnerable groups - children with disabilities, migrant children, Roma children, children living and working on the streets, children with HIV / AIDS, children belonging to the LGBTI population, children from single-parent families and families without income or low income, etc. They are concerned that key laws which have been announced, such as the

Law on the Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child, the Law on Amendments to the Family Law, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Juvenile Delinquents and criminal protection of minors, have not been adopted.

HUMANITARIAN AID

-**The RAINBOW association** has launched a crowdfunding campaign on donacije.rs with the aim of raising funds to provide assistance to the most vulnerable families in the municipality of Sabac. Although the state of emergency has been lifted, they want to procure aid packages to deliver to the Roma population, people with disabilities, people who collect secondary raw materials, people who earn money by doing seasonal work, the elderly in villages, especially those most affected by the current situation. The entire budget will be focused on the purchase of food, personal hygiene products and protective equipment for 588 people, of which 136 are minors.

- **The Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation** has so far provided [\\$ 550,000](#) for humanitarian aid and assistance to health institutions, civil society organizations, the media and informal groups of citizens. The Foundation points out that they have not forgotten how important it is to help those who motivate others when it is most difficult, and 17 civil society organizations, informal groups and the media that promote civic solidarity and the spirit of community in times of crisis caused by the corona virus pandemic. The total fund for this type of support of 1.87 million dinars was provided in cooperation with the Balkan Fund for Democracy and the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway, which additionally allocated 23.5 million dinars for 10,000 packages of basic food and hygiene products to the most endangered citizens. By the end of June, the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, in cooperation with Group 484, will deliver these packages to the most endangered families in more than 10 cities in Serbia, and the amount of humanitarian aid will be enough for 50,000 people