

## CSO activities related to the COVID-19 response

*30 April-10 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 130 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 Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)** has published two studies aimed at helping everyone in the community and especially decision makers to better understand people's lives and businesses in these times of crisis. The research ["Life in the Age of Pandemic"](#) contains data on the feelings of citizens during the pandemic, their activities and the activities they are engaged in, but also assesses the degree of respect for the Government's measures in the fight against Covid-19. The research ["Business in the Age of Pandemic"](#) includes topics related to the level of information about Covid-19, the challenges that companies face in these circumstances, ways to adjust their business, as well as the satisfaction and realism of the measures adopted by the Government of Serbia to help the economy.

- **The National Coalition for Decentralization (NKD)** during the state of emergency provided support to local initiatives, monitored respect for human rights and freedoms, as well as the creation of a legal framework that emerges for the period after the state of emergency. In order to determine whether the needs of citizens for information, primarily at the local level, were met during the state of emergency, the NKD conducted an [online survey](#) with users of social networks. In the period from April 3 to 23, the survey was completed by 104 participants from all over Serbia. The results of the survey indicate that citizens are more informed about topics at the national level than at the local level; while as many as 61% stated that they are fully or partially informed at the national level. At the local level, this assessment was given by only 32% of respondents, and as many as 46% believe that they are completely or partially uninformed about the state of their local community regarding the corona virus.

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**- The Initiative for economic and social rights- A11** - reacted to the video that appeared on social networks, which shows a young man breaking into the Reception Center for Migrants in Obrenovac by car. The initiative condemned this violent intrusion and called on the authorities to respond to the event, but also to react to "other individuals and groups that publicly incite and spread national and religious hatred and intolerance." This young man is currently under arrest and it remains to be seen how the Prosecutor's Office will characterize this case. It is especially worrying that this incident is only one in a row in the past few months due to the fact that anti-immigrant rhetoric is extremely present in the public in Serbia, which often comes from certain political parties.

- **The Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI)**, at the beginning of the declaration of the state of emergency, launched an online survey, promoted by other CSOs and online media, which aimed at mapping the needs of citizens and expressing views on the state of society as a key element of human rights protection. By the way, [the first research](#) that was conducted on this topic shows that citizens do not know their rights as patients, consumers and employees during the emergency. By the end of April, more than 1,000 respondents took part in the survey, and other organizations began conducting surveys on the BIRODI platform on the situation at the local level and the human rights situation, due to which BIRODI has become a small online research resource center. Also, with the support of the European Endowment for Democracy, BIRODI started media monitoring of the COVID-19 pandemic, which covers the period from February 26 to June 15, and work on strengthening 5 media for conducting online research, as one of the ways to improve their sustainability.

- **The Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights (YUCOM)** has prepared the second analysis that chronologically shows changes in the scope of enjoyment of guaranteed rights and the way to regulate changes during the first month of the state of emergency with the assessment of compliance of activities and measures of all branches of government rights. The focus of this analysis is on the [right to a fair trial](#), in particular the elements of the right of access to a court, the right to independence and impartiality in the trial, the right to a public hearing and the principle of immediacy, the right to legal certainty. The first analysis of the change in the legal framework during the state of emergency and the impact on the enjoyment of human rights concerned [freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion](#).

- **The Belgrade Center for Human Rights** concluded in its [analysis](#) that when it comes to restricting the right to freedom of movement, Serbia decided on one of the most drastic solutions in Europe, after considering measures to restrict and ban freedom of movement in European countries. Let's remind, The Belgrade Center for Human Rights submitted to the Constitutional Court an [initiative to assess the constitutionality of the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency, as well as the Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia](#). During the state of emergency, there were deviations and restrictions of numerous human rights of Serbian citizens, guaranteed by the Constitution and ratified international agreements, and the question remains whether the state acted contrary to the Constitution and international law when it comes to freedom of movement, according to their analysis.

The Belgrade Center for Human Rights has compiled a [periodic report](#) covering the first three months of 2020, analyzing the right to asylum and the issue of accommodating asylum seekers during a state of emergency, as well as the current public discourse on migrants. The report also analyzes the right to access the asylum procedure with special reference to the access to the procedure at the Belgrade airport

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as well as the practice of the bodies responsible for decision-making in the asylum procedure through the analysis of individual decisions.

- **Belgrade Center for Security Policy**, together with eleven other citizens' associations, submitted an [initiative](#) to the Ombudsman to initiate proceedings to control the legality and regularity of work of Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding police actions on performances of some group of citizens with torches and pyrotechnic devices, as well as in connection with the permits for movement at the time of the ban on movement.

- **The Center for Democracy Foundation (FCD)** held a webinar: "Labor rights in Serbia during a state of emergency." Experts in the field of labor rights, Sarita Bradas, FCD researcher, spoke about guaranteed labor rights of young people in international documents, job availability, employment opportunities for young people in the labor market in Serbia, and then Ivan Sekulovic, public policy advisor at FCD, gave examples of violations of labor rights during the state of emergency and presented an analysis of ["COVID Pandemic 19 and labor rights in Serbia."](#)

- **The Association of Citizens EGAL** conducted a survey ["COVID-19 and LGBTI communities in Serbia"](#). The importance of this research is shown by the fact that 1198 people answered the questionnaire, which is the largest sample in the community so far, which guarantees representativeness. Respondents provided an insight into a realistic, clear picture of the situation in which the LGBTI community in Serbia is currently.

#### *INFORMATION*

- **The Women's Studies and Research Organization** is currently implementing a project called "What women aged 65+ (can't) do in Serbia today." Although the idea for the project arose before the pandemic, its implementation proved to be quite significant during the state of emergency because it deals with the exercise of the right to non-discrimination, and the most important project activities are research, which collects and analyzes the potentials, resources and achievements of older women and various forms of discrimination. The first newsletter of the project you can see [here](#).

- **Friends of Serbian children** actively participated in raising and leading the #VanrednoObrazovanje platform which is to help high school students in the situation of online schooling. Also, they provided online support to children, parents and teachers (education, psycho-social context, counseling support), provided additional support to children from vulnerable countries, monitored and analyzed the impact of the state of emergency and education on children monitored the situation in the field of children rights in extraordinary circumstances. They are currently conducting [active research](#) among children (up to 18 years) on the cultural offer for children / youth at the time of # COVID19 and the way they spend their free time.

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-One of the activities of the **SHARE Foundation** during the pandemic is the publication of a report on the state of digital rights. A new [bi-weekly report](#) on the state of digital rights during the state of emergency records a decline in the number of cases. However, pressures continue due to expression and activities on the Internet - threats, insults, as well as verbal attacks on journalists, which are, as in previous reports, a frequent target.

### *PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT*

-**The Autonomous Women's Center** during the first month of the state of emergency, provided 430 services in the form of: 148 calls on the SOS hotline by 127 women, 108 calls on the legal SOS hotline by 88 women, 113 exchanged e-mails, Viber, WhatsApp and FB messages, 52 online consultations with 36 women victims of violence and 9 written legal submissions.

### *HUMANITARIAN AID*

- **Association RAINBOW Sabac** has expanded its activities and now they work on the territory of: Sabac, Valjevo, Mionica, OSecina, Koceljeva, Mali Zvornik, Vladimiracam Ljubovije and Ub. They are currently working on sharing the 1000 aid packages they have. And the services they provide in this territory are: psychological support, social interventions, monitoring and referral of users to other service providers and development of security plans in accordance with the concept of security culture.

- **The organization Help for Children** worked on providing money for food to the poorest children from all over Serbia from the group of those to whom they normally pay for snacks. Now they have informed that they receive new requests every day. Although the state of emergency has been lifted, they believe that direct assistance will be necessary for at least another month. At the same time, they renewed the psycho-social assistance for the children of migrants in the reception center in Vranje and will continue with that type of activity.

### *OTHER ACTIVITIES*

-**SOS Children's Villages Serbia** at the beginning of the state of emergency aimed to achieve normal work in the programs of the association (care for children without parental care in SOS Children's Village Kraljevo, support centers for families in crisis, youth support center) and assistance to local communities in which they work (Zemun, Obrenovac, Kraljevo, Nis) in accordance with the possibilities of the organization. At the beginning of May, they started [a crowd funding campaign on donacije.rs](#) in order to help 120 socially endangered families they take care of go through the state of emergency caused by the corona virus more easily. In the last few weeks, the big problems that families face every day out of their care have become even bigger.

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- **Trag Foundation**, in order to respond to the problems of communities caused by the corona virus pandemic, on April 10 announced a competition for the *Active Community Program: Solidarity Response to COVID-19*, with the aim of supporting actions aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and facilitating self-isolation, as well as actions focused on the recovery and resilience of communities from the economic and other social consequences of the pandemic. The first section of applications was made, and out of 150 received projects, the team of donations from the Trag Foundation, with the great support of external advisors, selected [24 initiatives](#) from the first phase that will be supported by a total amount of 8,079,845.00 dinars.

- **The Catalyst Balkans Foundation**, within the Resource Center for Civil Society Organizations, [has prepared 28 workshops for April and May](#), ie 42 hours of video materials for learning and development from home for all representatives of non-profit organizations. Some of the virtual workshops were held on the following topics: Crisis adaptation - digital transformation of non-profit organizations, Basics of marketing for non-profit organizations, Online fundraising models for non-profit organizations.