

## CSOs activities related to the COVID-19 response

*2-8 June*

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 145 civil society organizations from all over Serbia. 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 National Coalition for Decentralization (NKD)** addressed the public again with a [statement](#) regarding the Nis airport. In the statement it is said that during the month of May, in the span of only two weeks, the NKD received two very important confirmations of the correctness of the facts they used in their fight to strengthen institutions and preserve the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia. One of them refers to the actions of the public administration of the city of Nis, specifically the Attorney General's Office and the Mayor, in connection with the illegal confiscation of the property of the citizens of Nis by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. This is information that is hidden from the public regarding the "gift" of the airport and serious procedural omissions and possible illegal actions of local authorities in Nis.

- **Initiative for Economic and Social Rights - A11** is a signatory to the [Regional Initiative for the Protection of the Rights of Workers](#). This declaration sets out the pipes and principles of cooperation between trade unions and civil society organizations. It states that it serves to improve the level of labor rights in all countries of the Western Balkans and that it is necessary to protect workers and vulnerable groups of citizens from the consequences of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement said that it would demand the preservation of collective rights, respect for regulations by

employers and that it would insist on multisectoral and social dialogue and that through solidarity action and mutual support it would strengthen its organizations in the fight for labor in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia and Serbia.

- **The Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights - YUCOM** has published info graphics entitled "52 days of state of emergency" which indicate important information regarding the restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms during the state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia. One is about the obligation of [self-isolation and curfew](#), which in a simple way shows what was allowed and what was forbidden, what were the obligations of citizens and what were the consequences of not respecting them. The second shows information on the work of the [courts and deadlines](#) during the state of emergency.

- **The Belgrade Center for Human Rights** published the [conclusions](#) of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on the implementation of two priority recommendations sent to Serbia in 2017. First, ECRI recommended that the National Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopt codes of conduct prohibiting the use of hate speech, which provides for the suspension of mandates and other sanctions for violating the provisions of those codes and establishing effective reporting channels. Second, ECRI recommended that the authorities give high priority to the employment of a proportionate number of Roma and members of other minorities in the civil service and ensure that they benefit from equally stable working conditions as other civil servants.

- **NGO Praxis** published a [report](#) entitled "Support to the Inclusion of Roma Students in (Dual) Secondary Vocational Education". The report was created as part of the experience of the project implemented by Praxis in the period from March 15, 2017 to November 30, 2019, entitled "Informing members of the Roma national minority about dual secondary vocational education and supporting the inclusion of Roma students in (dual) secondary vocational education", funded by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany.

- **Transparency Serbia** issued a [statement](#) "The state administration continues in the" acting state "". The statement states that the Government of Serbia continued to appoint officials in "acting state" this year as well, bringing 21 decisions for six months and 212 decisions by which the "acting state" by the end of May 2020 the status of existing staff was extended for another three months. The previous year, Serbia ended, contrary to the law, with just over a third of the heads of state administration appointed by the government after the competition, while the rest are in "acting state". Although this indicates a slight improvement (about 5%) in relation to the situation at the end of 2018, it is obvious that the Government systematically applies the practice of appointing easily replaceable acting officials instead of professionals whose dismissal it would have to argue, the statement said.

- **The Belgrade Center for Security Policy** published a report entitled ["Security Sector in the Captured State"](#). The Report on the Capture of the State in Serbia is a pioneering work of the BCSP aimed at documenting and deconstructing the ongoing process of capturing the state in the security sector by presenting the mechanisms, actors and consequences of this process.

-**SHARE Foundation** continued Internet monitoring during the election campaign for the parliamentary and local elections scheduled for June 21. [The fourth report](#) showed that the parties and leaders participating in the election race in the past seven days (May 27 - June 3) had over 200 active Facebook ads, among which the opposition parties are still dominant, while the ruling Serbian Progressive Party

(SNS) advertised its political messages through the unofficial page "150+ Fight for a better life in Serbia". Over 3,000 tweets were written on Twitter on the topic # elections2020 and # boycott2020, while the national online media slightly increased the coverage of the elections.

-**The Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA)** through the Open Parliament published a [short analysis](#) of the four-year mandate of the XI Parliamentary Assembly, formed 4 years ago. It is stated that it was marked by the lack of quality debate, inflammatory rhetoric, and inappropriate behavior of MPs, abuse of procedures and the boycott of the work of the parliament in which part of the opposition MPs joined. In this convocation, only the second, who lasted a full term since 2000, the deputies worked 370 days in the plenum, according to the analysis of the Open Parliament initiative.

The CRTA observation mission issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of monitoring the election campaign in the period from March 4 to May 24. It states that this period was marked by a mitigated imbalance in the media representation of political actors, eight reports to the Anti-Corruption Agency due to official campaigns, misuse of public resources and violations of funding regulations, seven reports to REM against media outlets and 38 reported allegations about voter pressures.

-**The Initiative for the Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities (MDRI-S)** has published the [text](#) "COVID-19 and Women with Mental Disabilities in Social Welfare Institutions" within the series of texts #OtherReality. The corona virus pandemic has shown that people with disabilities living in social care institutions, and especially women with disabilities, are in a much worse position and significantly more exposed to various risks, including the risks of living in large and overcrowded institutions.

## *INFORMATION*

-**Autonomous Women's Center** within the prEUgovor coalition presents the latest Alarm - an independent semi-annual [report](#) on Serbia's progress in terms of political criteria and policy implementation in the areas covered by Chapters 23 (Justice and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) accession negotiations with the European Union. The report unequivocally indicates that the state of emergency, introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed the absence of reforms in Chapters 23 and 24, the non-functioning of institutions, as well as the tendency to abolish the division and balance of power. And otherwise endangered rights and freedoms, such as the right of citizens to freedom and security, election rights, freedom of the media or the rights of migrants, suffered a serious blow during this period.

## *PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT*

-**The group IZADI** from Novi Sad plans to [organize](#) a cycle of 10 support meetings with a psychological psychotherapist, given the recognized needs for exchange, empowerment and connection. All LGBTI \* people aged 16 to 40 can apply for support meetings. The psychological support group for LGBTI \* people is implemented within the project supported through the joint program of the European Union and the Council of Europe 'Horizontal Facility II for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022'.

## *HUMANITARIAN AID*

- **The Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation** distributed humanitarian aid packages to the most endangered population in several cities. A total of 309 packages for the most endangered citizens were distributed in [Sombor](#). The packages were given to families of children with disabilities who attend the "Vuk Karadzic" School for Primary and Secondary Education, users of the Inter-Municipal Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired Sombor and Apatin and the citizens' association Center for Community Development Link, which brought together low-income users and single parents. In cooperation with the Center for Social Work Leskovac, MNRO Leskovac, school for primary and secondary education "11. October", the Women for Peace Association, the Ringeraj Parents Association will distribute a total of 765 packages to the most vulnerable residents of [Leskovac](#), including the unemployed who do not receive other assistance, single parents, caregivers, refugees, families and elderly households from remote villages and members MNRO associations. 328 packages were also distributed to the most endangered families of Obrenovac living below the poverty line, while during the distribution in Belgrade, which includes the municipalities of Zemun, Mladenovac and Zvezdara, a total of 978 packages will be distributed for endangered families, as well as for users of seven MNRO associations in [Belgrade](#).

- **The Serbian Philanthropic Forum**, during the [crisis](#) caused by the corona virus, worked every day to activate its members, but also the entire philanthropic community and connect health institutions and donors. In cooperation with the B92 Fund Foundation, thanks to donations from members of the Serbian Philanthropic Forum, more than 200 million dinars were collected to support the Serbian health system in the fight against the corona virus.