

CSO activities related to the COVID-19 response

7-13 July

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 Belgrade Center for Human Rights** filed a criminal complaint with the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade against police officers who participated in the abuse of Stefan Miletić on July 8, 2020. He was brutally beaten in Terazije during the protest held on July 8, 2020. The Center also submitted an initiative to the Protector of Citizens to initiate the procedure of controlling the work of the Ministry of Interior, and provided Stefan Miletić with an examination by a forensic doctor whose report will be submitted to the Prosecutor's Office and the Protector of Citizens. Stefan Miletić is just one of the victims of police brutality who has contacted the Belgrade Center for Human Rights in recent days to provide legal assistance. You can view his testimony [here](#).

- **The Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP)** in its [statement](#) strongly condemns the police brutality and demands an urgent investigation of the reaction of the police towards the protesters who gathered last night in the center of Belgrade. Citizens have the right to peacefully express dissatisfaction with the way the state is fighting the Kovid-19 pandemic, and the government should stop encouraging social polarization, which threatens to turn into a permanent state of street violence, the statement said. The BCSP points out that civil society organizations will inform the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment about the actions of the police during the protest in front of the Assembly

- **The Center for Democracy Foundation (FCD)** issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of publishing the NCEU monitoring report on emergency measures entitled "Urgently determine measures to help vulnerable groups who lost their jobs and income during the state of emergency." The FCD participated in the drafting of this document on behalf of the working group of the National Convention - Working Group for Negotiating Chapters 2 and 19 - Social Policy and Employment. The document presents an overview of measures relevant to the field of social policy and employment, as well as the application of measures and their consequences on the labor market and labor and social rights. During the state of emergency, many of the adopted regulations directly affected the employment status, labor rights, employment and social position, and the daily life of citizens in the Republic of Serbia. Some of the decrees directly regulated the way employees work, while others indirectly affected the employees of certain groups of employers by regulating primarily restrictions or prohibitions on performing certain economic activities.

- **The Youth Initiative for Human Rights** in a [statement](#) demanded from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Protector of Citizens to immediately launch two independent investigations into the excessive use of force by members of that Ministry at the protest in Belgrade. The public must be regularly informed about the progress of these investigations, in order to establish the trust of the citizens in the institutions and the police, after the citizens watched the conflicts between the citizens and the police in live television for hours, it is stated in the announcement.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights also [responded](#) to accusations by Deputy Mayor of Belgrade and Serbian Progressive Party official Goran Vesic that the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and the Belgrade Center for Human Rights "are chasing the police and justifying violence against the state", telling Goran Vesic that hooligans should be held accountable for any violations of the law, but also that members of the police must not beat them out of revenge.

- **The European Movement in Serbia (EPUS)** issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of the news that Serbia has officially accepted the new methodology of the European Union for enlargement, adopted in March 2020. If there is political will, the application of the new methodology can give the necessary political impetus to the enlargement process, both in the EU and in Serbia. As the public was previously informed that the Ministry of European Integration asked the EU institutions for a written explanation of how the new methodology will evaluate Serbia's progress on the path to EU membership, we believe that it would be in the public interest and transparency of the process. EU, it is stated in the announcement of EPUS.

- **The Center for the Rights of the Child** in its [statement](#) called on the Government and the Crisis Staff to respect the rights of the child and take into account the best interests of the child when making new measures and the final decision on the introduction of curfew over the weekend on the occasion of the Covid-19 pandemic. Bearing in mind that the situation of children has further deteriorated due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by the pandemic, the state should urgently plan and take measures aimed at systematically and continuously providing resources for empowerment and support of children and families, especially children from the most vulnerable groups. are children with disabilities; children living in poverty; children in a street situation; migrant children, asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced children; children belonging to the LGBTI population; children from single-parent families; Roma children; children with pre-existing health problems, including HIV / AIDS; children deprived of their liberty or isolated in police detention facilities, prisons, correctional facilities, migrant camps; and children living in institutions.

- **The SHARE Foundation** [called](#) on citizens to report digital violence at protests. During the protests in several cities in Serbia, there were indications that photos and videos of the protests were deleted from the mobile phones of individuals. They hereby called on citizens who had similar experiences or felt that their digital rights were threatened during the protest to contact SHARE CERT, in order to provide them with technical and legal assistance, in accordance with their capacities.
- **The Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA)** [demands](#) the irrevocable resignation of Police Director Vladimir Rebić due to conduct of police forces during the protest of citizens in Belgrade on July 7 and on the night between July 7 and 8, 2020. to bear responsibility due to the fact that the inadequate security of the House of the National Assembly enabled the intrusion of the demonstrators into that building, as well as due to the excessive use of force against citizens and non-prevention of violence by hooligans and so-called fans over citizens. Numerous examples of police brutality against citizens and unhindered savagery of individuals in civilian clothes, who "kept order" at their own discretion, have been documented by cameras and are proof of police unwillingness to protect law and order and grounds for suspicion of political abuse of the police institution, it is said in a statement.
- **The National Convention on the European Union** has published a comprehensive monitoring report on measures adopted during the 52 days of the state of emergency in RS. [One part](#) of the report contains a detailed analysis of the work of institutions and the state of the rule of law. The [second](#) refers to the measures of the Government of Serbia in the field of social policy, employment, public health, consumer protection and education, while the [third](#) refers to the application of economic measures.

INFORMATION

- **Fem Platz** published the [third](#) and [fourth](#) lessons on reporting violence against women within the project "Media and Information Literacy and Gender Equality". The lessons state that the media certainly have a very important role in informing the public about the occurrence and prevalence of violence against women, but in addition to informing, the media can raise the world of the public and draw attention to this very harmful social phenomenon.
- **The Union of High School Students of Serbia (UNSS)** issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of the protests organized since Tuesday, July 7, throughout Serbia, that as the highest representation of high school students, it supports all high school students who protest peacefully and nonviolently and express their views. The statement said that since everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, which we believe is the basis for creating a tolerant and pluralistic society in which different groups can live in peace, UNSS must provide full support to those who do not only do they peacefully advocate for their views and express their demands, but they also respect all the epidemiological measures currently in place due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic.
- **ASTRA** [published](#) "Analysis of Judicial Practice for Criminal Offenses of Mediation in Prostitution, Trafficking in Human Beings and Trafficking in Minors for Adoption" for 2019. The analysis of judicial practice for 2019 was conducted with the aim of objectively reviewing the current situation in this area. The analysis includes 29 court decisions made in criminal proceedings during 2019 by the competent first and second instance courts. The results indicate that the position of victims of trafficking in human beings and related crimes in court proceedings has not significantly improved compared to the situation found in the analysis of court practice for previous years.

ASTRA also organized an [online lecture](#) where students at the Criminal Police University in Belgrade had the opportunity to learn more about the topic of human trafficking and the role of the civil sector in solving and preventing this problem, as well as available types of assistance and support to victims of human trafficking.

- **The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina** published a [statement](#) from the Working Group for the Platform on Attacks and Writers on Journalists and Media Workers, which condemned the brutal prevention of reporters from several media outlets from doing their job and reporting on protests in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis and Kragujevac. The working group stated that the brutality of certain police officers towards journalists was of particular concern. The statement states that the Working Group will prepare a report and submit it to the members of the future Assembly of Serbia, the Prosecutor's Office, the Platform for Freedom of the Media of the Council of Europe and the European Federation of Journalists. The working group was formed on the initiative of the Protector of Citizens of Serbia, and it includes representatives of journalists' and media associations and trade unions.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- **Caritas Serbia** [points out](#) the importance of preserving mental health during a pandemic. Caritas explains that the situation we have found ourselves in the last few months has left us relaxed and calm. Experts around the world predict a significant increase in the number of mental illnesses in the coming period. Research shows that the number of people suffering from depression and anxiety is rapidly increasing. Caritas says that you can also seek support in one of the member associations of the Mental Health Network "NaUm", founded in 2015 within the PRO.ME.NE project implemented by Caritas Serbia and funded by the European Union.

- **The DA SE ZNA association** addressed an [open letter](#) to the Prime Minister Ana Brnabić. "We have wanted to address you for a long time in order to draw your attention to the problems of frequent violence, inaction of institutions and complete legal invisibility that we are facing, without indications that any of the above will be resolved soon by the actions of the Government of which you are president. ", the letter states. The letter has so far been signed by 120 people from the LGBT + community in Serbia.

HUMANITARIAN AID

-Association DUGA from Sabac [distributed](#) a total of 35 packages to the most endangered families within the project "Solidarity response to the consequences of COVID-19". 161 members of these families, with 64 minors, were provided with food and hygiene items for a month.

The DUGA Association, considering that a state of emergency has been declared on the territory of the city of Sabac, has organized [assistance](#) for its fellow citizens due to the worsening situation related to the corona virus pandemic. Within the project "Response to COVID 19", the expert team of the DUGA Association can give you additional advice on how to protect yourself, and if you have symptoms and do not have transportation, they can take you to the COVID clinic with all protection measures.

- The CARITAS Serbia participated in the [distribution](#) of 150 humanitarian aid packages in Aleksinac and Razanj, which included food and hygiene products, in response to the increase in poverty and the growing economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The action was realized within the project "Development of women's agribusiness in Southeast Serbia", and in addition to the beneficiaries of this project, assistance was provided to the most socially endangered families, beneficiaries of the "home help" service, as well as rural residents who mostly live from seasonal jobs.

- Catalyst Balkans announced that from the charities that marked the week behind us, more than worth mentioning are the emergency aid campaigns for [Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica](#), within which more than 2 were collected in just 9 days, with the support of 453 donors, 5 million dinars. Catalyst announced that support is now needed for other cities that have been declared new hotspots, and we can provide assistance with a donation for a [general appeal](#), or some of the currently most endangered cities, including [Prijepolje, Priboj](#) and [Vranje](#).

- The Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, together with the Coalition for Charity, announced a [competition](#) for civil society organizations "Celebrating Philanthropy". The aim of this competition is to support local associations and foundations for the implementation of local campaigns aimed at promoting philanthropy, the culture of giving and transparency among citizens in the local community, with the aim of increasing philanthropic giving, developing cross-sectoral partnerships locally and raising transparency and trust. in civil society organizations.