

CSO activities related to the COVID-19 response

23-29 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 Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)** [published](#) a preliminary report on the election process prepared by the CeSID observation mission, based on long-term monitoring of the institutions responsible for conducting and controlling the election process, analysis of the media environment and short-term observation on Election day on a representative sample of 500 polling stations. CeSID's observation mission will prepare a detailed and complete assessment of the quality of the entire election process after the completion of all election activities, ie after the analysis of the electoral protection process.

- **The Sumadija Center for Civic Activism Res Publica** addressed the public with a statement ["Responsibility and respect instead of insults"](#). The statement strongly condemns the inappropriate address of Radomir Nikolić, the commander of the Crisis Staff of the city of Kragujevac, who, explaining the decision to introduce an emergency situation, said that "our people need a stick". In that way, Nikolic insulted the citizens of Kragujevac, but also the whole of Serbia, and once again demonstrated a complete misunderstanding of his role, as well as the obligation and responsibility he has towards the public, it is stated in the statement. They appealed to the citizens to be responsible, to take care of themselves and the health of the people around them, without anyone's "order" while they called on public officials to treat people with respect, respecting the fact that it is the citizens who should hold them accountable.

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- **The Belgrade Center for Human Rights** submitted to the Ombudsman an [initiative](#) for direct supervision over the work of the Ministry of Health in connection with the management of the information system and providing data on the number of dead and infected citizens of Serbia with the COVID-19 virus and disease. The Center also submitted a request to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to submit the minutes from the sessions of the Crisis Staff for reacting due to the spread of COVID-19 disease, the decision on the formation of the Crisis Staff and information about all members of that body and their functions. After BIRN reporters claimed that the number of deaths and infections was many times higher than the number officially announced by the Crisis Staff, the Center believes that it is extremely important to carry out direct monitoring of the Ministry's COVID-19 information system and providing data from that system to the Government of Serbia and the Crisis Staff, as well as to provide insight into the minutes from the sessions of the Crisis Staff.

Belgrade Center for Human Rights on the occasion of June 26 - the [International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#) pointed out the unacceptably bad position of these victims in Serbia. In the first place, the authorities have done almost nothing to prevent torture and other ill-treatment. The Center states that the practice of courts and public prosecutor's offices in Serbia, without exception, to place more trust in the statements of police and other officials than in the allegations of citizens who claim to have suffered torture and those who witnessed it, has no legal or experiential justification. For 10 years now, the Belgrade Center for Human Rights has been collecting files of all public prosecutor's and court cases that have been kept based on citizens' reports that they were abused and tortured by officials.

- **The Foundation Center for Democracy** organized a [discussion](#) and analysis of local development policy in Backa Palanka within the project "Promotion of Gender Equality in Serbia". Sarita Bradaš from FCD, in consultation with local government representatives, sought answers to questions: what are the needs of women and what problems they face in their communities; to what extent the needs of particularly vulnerable groups of women are recognized in the local community; what actions are taken to improve the position of women by various local actors.

The Foundation Center for Democracy [presented](#) the latest activities and findings within the project "Labor rights are our rights". The latest data indicate that the crisis caused by the pandemic has hit informal workers the hardest, especially young people, and that women have been disproportionately affected, since they dominate numerically in the occupations to which the so-called frontline workers.

-The Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence held the fifth and last [webinar](#) within the online training on the project Active Citizens-Better Society: Advocating for Cooperation and Democratic Development. This module discussed advocacy as a redistribution of power, mapping power and empowering actors in the advocacy process, as well as the relationship between journalism, PR and spin in the field of public advocacy.

The Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence also held a [discussion](#) on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Serbia and Kosovo: through innovation to trust and change of consciousness. Topics discussed were: Women today in the pandemic era: what are the problems, how does this situation affect the socio-economic and social position of women ; The position of women and their perspective; women entrepreneurs, is there cooperation, what are the problems; What does a successful woman look like, what is needed for women's success in business, how do examples of successful women affect, the role of

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institutions in support, the role of the international community ; Cooperation between women of Kosovo and Serbia, in the region, what kind of cooperation is possible.

- **Citizens' Association Team 42** from Leskovac published two new texts within the framework of interpretations and information on the topic of labor law on its blog. The first refers to the [right to salary](#) and the obligation of the employer, which is clear - that he must pay the salary within the deadlines set by the general act and employment contract, at least once a month, and no later than the end of the current month for the previous month. The second refers to the [competencies of the labor inspection](#), in which they explain to the citizens to whom and how they can turn regarding these issues.

- **Transparency Serbia** presented a [research](#) on the financing of the election campaign for the parliamentary and local elections in 2020. According to TS estimates, a total of slightly more than four million euros was spent on TV advertising costs during this campaign, and more than half of the values of TV ads are those broadcasted on two televisions - Pink and RTS. In addition to the Serbian Progressive Party list, seven other electoral lists had advertisements on the main TV stations - the Social Party of Serbia spent over 900 thousand euros for that, and Movement of renewal of monarchy in Serbia is in third place with 240,600 euros. TS followed other aspects of election campaign financing and it was noticed that this year the use of social networks and advertising on the Internet increased, while mass organized gatherings, which previously accounted for close to 10% of campaign costs, were almost completely absent.

- **The Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA)** on June 29, [invited](#) the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Crisis Staff for the Suppression of Infectious Diseases Covid-19 and the Republic Election Commission to urgently and unequivocally declare the conditions for holding repeat elections on July 1, 2020 given the increase in the number of infected people recorded in recent days. As the response of the institutions did not arrive, the observation mission of the CRTA made the [decision](#) not to observe the repetition of voting at 234 polling stations due to the current epidemiological situation. "Given that as an observation mission we have a responsibility to a large number of citizens, members of our civilian observation mission, which should be deployed at polling stations, and given the increase in the number of infected recorded in recent days, we decided not to monitor our observers repetition of the elections on July 1 "they said in a statement.

- **SHARE Foundation** presented the most important [findings](#) of the monitoring of the election campaign. In the period from May 4 to June 18, SHARE followed the activities of political parties and leaders in online media and social networks. The comprehensive report contains information about the events that followed this election campaign, which political actors advertised the most on Facebook, what was tweeted, how the online media reported on the elections and what happened during the election silence with visualization.

- **The European Movement in Serbia** held a public [discussion](#) in a series of talks on Serbia after the corona virus, this time on the topic "How do we protect public goods?". The panel discussed the idea, value and meaning of the public good, the role of the state in its protection, the support of the civil sector for the defense and preservation of the public good and the impact of the crisis caused by the corona virus on prioritizing this topic in society.

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PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- **The Autonomous Women's Center** [announced](#) that no project intended to support women victims of violence, or victims of crime in general, received the support of the Ministry of Justice in the last public competition for the allocation of funds collected on the basis of postponement of criminal prosecution published in February this year. The funds awarded in this competition were collected on the basis of the application of the institute of postponement of criminal prosecution, which, among other things, implies the possibility of paying a certain amount of money for humanitarian purposes. The statement said that it would therefore be expected that at least part of these funds would be aimed at improving the situation and protection of victims of violence in Serbia (for example, providing free psychosocial or legal support to victims of violence, equipping rooms for interrogation of victims to avoid contact with the perpetrator of violence and similar activities). However nothing out of the total allocated 500 million dinars, is intended for this category of persons.

- **The Center for the Rights of the Child** presented a [new platform](#) adapted to children, which contains relevant information on the prevention and protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse on the Internet. This digital platform informs children about procedures, practices and advice on how a child can recognize online risks, how to react, as well as who to turn to for help and support. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children is still a tragic reality in all countries, and it represents a serious violation of the rights of the child and has long-lasting consequences for the development and life of children. The platform also provides information on the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ("Lanzarote Convention"), which represents a significant step forward in the prevention of sexual offenses against children, prosecution of perpetrators and protection of child victims.

HUMANITARIAN AID

-The Catalyst Foundation has launched a [campaign](#) on its donation platform donacije.rs for emergency assistance to the endangered people in Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin. The campaign was launched with the aim of raising funds due to the growing number of people infected by Covid-19, which is growing day by day while the capacities of hospitals are full, and there is not enough medical equipment and professional staff. The campaign was launched by the B92 Fund in cooperation with other civil society organizations. In just 24 hours, thanks to the support of 188 donors, more than a million donors of aid were collected for the most vulnerable. A new goal has been set, which now amounts to one and a half million dinars.

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- **The Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation** announced the beginning of the third [Philanthropy Festival](#). The festival was opened with the humanitarian competition Philanthropic BizQuiz, which brought together more than 60 representatives of companies, media and NGOs, and the proceeds from this event are intended for the Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation. The festival will last until July 4 on the online channels of the philanthropic platform [dobrocinitim.rs](#), as well as on the social networks. For the third year in a row, the Philanthropy Festival seeks to raise awareness about giving, philanthropic heritage, charitable activities and collective actions through numerous interactive and educational activities in order to improve the culture of giving in society.