RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Overview of Civic Initiatives' activities during 2020
| 01 | INTRODUCTION |
| 02 | CSO ACTIVITIES COORDINATION |
| 05 | MONITORING |
| 09 | INFORMATION |
| 11 | ADVOCACY |
| 13 | ONLINE TRAININGS |
| 14 | PUBLICATIONS & REPORT |
| 15 | "THE LIST" CASE |
DECLARATION OF A PANDEMIC AND IMPOSING A STATE OF EMERGENCY

Due to the global pandemic caused by the COVID-19 and after the Decision on declaring COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus an infectious disease and the Order banning indoor gatherings in the Republic of Serbia, a state of emergency was imposed in Serbia on March 15, 2020.

The adoption of this decision also enabled the adoption of measures that prescribe the derogation of certain human and minority rights.

The introduction of the state of emergency, as well as the declaration of a corona virus pandemic had a great impact on the work of civil society organizations. Most of them had to react quickly and adjust their activities to the new situation.

NEW SET OF ACTIVITIES OF CIVIC INITIATIVES

Remembering the days of genuine solidarity, coordination and accountability shown by the civic sector to the citizens of Serbia in 2014, and aware of the seriousness of the current situation and the declared state of emergency, in March 2020, Civic Initiatives began a new set of activities aimed at mitigating the consequences caused by the pandemic.

Activities included coordination and joint work with organizations from all over Serbia, monitoring the activities of organizations, as well as violations of basic rights of citizens during the state of emergency, informing citizens, advocating for greater involvement of organizations in combating the effects of the virus, enacting and amending regulations that would fit the current situation and, finally, online trainings to strengthen the capacities of organizations, but also teachers of civic education.
The declaration of the pandemic and the adopted measures to suppress the effects of the virus have also changed the activities of civil society organizations. In order to increase the efficiency and coordination of activities already carried out by organizations, as well as better coverage of the most vulnerable citizens, Civic Initiatives created a questionnaire for civil society organizations about their activities, the needs of groups they work with, and services they will provide to citizens during the pandemic.

Also, for ease of reference, an interactive map was created that helped coordinate organizations and connect the needs and services that organizations provide, or need. The map has been regularly updated with new activities and needs of organizations and it has been visited more than 10,000 times so far. You can visit the map - [here](#).

### THE MAP

The map includes 145 civil society organizations from all over Serbia. The largest number of organizations, almost a third, focused their activities on humanitarian work. Other areas in which the activities of organizations can be classified are monitoring, information, psychosocial support and advocacy.

It is especially important to emphasize the activities of organizations that work with the most vulnerable groups, through information on the poor current situation and possible consequences of the pandemic on the groups they deal with, namely 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, most organizations continued to operate in emergency circumstances and to focus their work on the needs arising from the declaration of pandemic, bearing in mind that the organizations and their beneficiaries will continue to feel the consequences of the pandemic.
Although fully aware of the seriousness of the situation and the declared state of emergency due to the pandemic, and precisely because of the increased need to support the work of civil society organizations and their stronger connections with citizens, a public call for institutional grants was announced in April 2020, as part of the Program “For an active civil society together - ACT”, funded by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and implemented by Civic Initiatives and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

After 3 months, 200 applications and four rounds of selection, a list of 30 civil society organizations selected for institutional support under the ACT project was announced.

Supported CSOs will become beneficiaries of financial support for institutional empowerment, but also a specially designed and adapted program for development and capacity building and improvement of skills and knowledge in many areas necessary for further development of human and organizational resources, which will be implemented fully by Civic Initiatives.

ACT grantees symbolically signing the contract
In addition to coordinating the activities of organizations, Civic Initiatives published information on civil society activities in the form of monitoring reports in the period from March 15 to July 15. The methodology of gathering information for the report included desk research on the activities of organizations (including publications on social networks and in the media), as well as direct contact with organizations by e-mail or telephone. The reports were published on a weekly basis and the monitoring included a total of 11 reports on the activities of civil society organizations in response to COVID-19.

The monitoring showed that organizations implemented activities in five areas: humanitarian aid, monitoring, advocacy initiatives, psychosocial support and information. The largest number of organizations covered by monitoring carried out activities in the field of humanitarian aid (88), followed by monitoring (22), information (18), psychosocial support (12) and advocacy (5).
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.

The measures that the Government of Serbia adopted in order to combat the virus after the declaration of the pandemic and during the state of emergency significantly affected the respect for the basic human rights of all citizens of Serbia. During that period, the citizens of Serbia had limited rights to free movement and assembly.

Although it remained questionable whether they were appropriate to the current situation, the restrictions on these rights were prescribed by the relevant institutions.

On the other hand, the monitoring of civil society organizations pointed to a very noticeable threat to the right to expression and information, the right to health and social protection of citizens, as well as labor rights.
THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS REPORTS

With this in mind, the Three Freedom reports - recording cases of violations of rights to freedom of assembly, association and information, published by Civic Initiatives on a biweekly basis since August 2019, during the state of emergency and immediately after its abolition, were published twice a week.

Given the current situation, these reports, in addition to cases of violation of the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, included violations of all other human rights. In the period from March to October, 26 reports were published, and, out of that number, 13 reports were published during the state of emergency.

During the state of emergency, the following number of human rights violations were recorded: freedom of association (7), freedom of assembly (0), freedom of expression (49) and other human rights (45). From March to the end of October, the following statistics of violations were recorded: freedom of association (20), assembly (3) and expression (96). All Three Freedoms reports are available here.

26 reports published from March to October
13 reports published during the state of emergency
119 recorded cases of violations of basic human rights
CSOS FROM SOUTHERN SERBIA: COVID-19 RESPONSE

Initial monitoring showed that South of Serbia, inhabited mostly with Albanian minority population, could suffer from bigger challenges due to previously existing discrimination and non integration into Serbian society.

In the period from mid-May to mid-July, 5 reports which included monitoring of human rights and state of civic space in three municipalities in southern Serbia: Bujanovac, Presevo and Vranje were published. Information was collected in cooperation with local organizations from these three municipalities. Local organizations collected information through desk research as well as direct contact with other organizations and media in these three municipalities.

The information presented in the reports refer to information about the municipality itself, information about civil society organizations, information about local media, information related to COVID-19 as well as the response of civil society during the crisis caused by the virus.

The reports provided information to donors, institutions and other stakeholders and helped organize better interventions.
During the state of emergency, Civic Initiatives’ Boiling Point podcast was published as a special issue, dedicated to the social and political consequences of the pandemic, called The Day After. A total of 68 episodes of this series were filmed and published, with 69 guests from various spheres of society - activists, journalists, experts and artists.

In their interviews, they commented on current political developments in the context of the virus, presented the challenges they face in their local communities due to the virus, and tried to answer questions about what different aspects of our lives would look like once this crisis passes.

The Day After episodes had on average reach of more than 50,000 listeners, with one episode, about the reaching almost 100,000 people.

In early November, Civic Initiatives launched the podcast titled Out of the Center, and its focus is the activist scene in local communities outside of Belgrade and their results.

More than 15 episodes were published during 2020, with an average reach of 15,000 listeners.
JOURNALISTS IN ISOLATION

A journalist in isolation actually sounds like an oxymoron. People and a profession that is all community-oriented through conversations and contacts, suddenly, like many citizens, found themselves locked between four walls. Their view of the outside world from this perspective was the reason for a series of texts published by Civic Initiatives during the state of emergency, wanting, above all, to offer a view of reality from another angle to which neither they nor we, as readers, are accustomed to.

A total of 15 articles were published in this series. The authors were journalists from all over Serbia that were put in isolation by government imposed measures. All the articles are available on Civic Initiatives’ website - here.

REPORTING FROM LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Local media are under increasing pressure. Far from the eyes of the public, they often become the target of arrogant politicians and authorities. Such a situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this series of texts, Civic initiatives wanted to give a stronger voice to local media and help them show concrete examples of how citizens in the smaller local communities in Serbia are coping during the state of emergency.

A total of 6 articles were published that presented the situation in Kragujevac, Valjevo, Čačak, Vranje, Niš and Leskovac. You can read the articles on Civic Initiatives’ website - here.

RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

Overview of Civic Initiatives’ activities
During the state of emergency, Civic Initiatives regularly reacted to the adoption of solutions and implementation of practices that resulted in insufficient transparency of the competent authorities, inconsistency of newly adopted acts with applicable regulations and lack of involvement of all stakeholders - primarily civil society organizations, in decision making and activities that have contributed to further narrowing the space for organizations to operate.

Civic initiatives also directed and supported the sending of several initiatives in order to interpret the adopted decisions and amend the existing regulations in order to make the humanitarian activities carried out by the organizations more efficient and impactful.
Open letter to donors who are active in the Western Balkans to adopt a more proactive and flexible approach in order to help those in urgent need as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Condemnation of police brutality during the July protests in Belgrade.

Social protection protocol for civil society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Open letter to the European institutions to recognize the role of the civil sector in crisis.

Open letter to the European Commission after the presentation of the strategy for overcoming the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the draft of the seven-year budget for the EU.

Summarizing and publishing the recommendations contained in the set of documents prepared by the UN experts, which call for the principle of inviolability and promotion of basic human rights to be incorporated as one of the main pillars when developing the strategy and selection of measures to combat the COVID-19 virus.

Complaint to the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection due to incomplete response of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut" regarding data related to the public health of Serbian citizens.

Initiative to the Ombudsman to initiate the procedure of control of the legality of the work of the Ministry of the Interior, in connection with the actions of the police on citizens' reports related to gatherings of citizens who lit torches from residential buildings in the evening, as well as in connection with granting movement permits to these groups during the ban on movement.

*Last two initiatives were successful, while the others are ongoing.
A large number of Civic Initiatives’ activities planned for this year included the organization of trainings and learning opportunities. As this has become impossible in the current situation, all trainings have been transferred to the online space.

**CIVIC EDUCATION**

In the previous period, several training modules were held for teachers of civic education. Thanks to the rich experience and competencies of the teachers who participated in the seminar, materials and examples of good practice were produced, which were singled out and shaped into an online manual for teachers, adapted for distance learning.

**RESOURCE CENTER FOR CSOS**

Resource Center continued to strengthen the capacities of organizations through various online trainings and courses. Resource Center also launched a blog with tips for working from home and remotely, and other useful information for the work of the association in the new circumstances.
In addition to monitoring reports covering various impacts of the pandemic, in 2020 Civic Initiatives also published the Annual Report on Shrinking Civic Space For the Activities of Civil Society Organizations for 2019, as well as two publications related to Civic Education.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FOR 2019
The report points to key issues in the areas of fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular the right of association, expression and assembly, as well as the involvement of the civil sector in the policy and decision-making process. The report is available here.

PARTICIPATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES
The aim of this analysis was to investigate the state of student participation in schools and the main problems and obstacles related to the roles and mechanisms important for its development, through discussion with relevant stakeholders, and accordingly formulate the main challenges and recommendations. The analysis is available here.

CIVIC EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – EQUALLY (UN) IMPORTANT?
In 2019 a study on effects of Civic education was made. The authors of this study were aware that better conclusions on the evaluation of the effects of the subject of Civic Education could be obtained only in comparison with students who did not listen to this subject. To that end, another study was organized, which was a follow-up to the previous one, and was conducted with students from the same high schools, who attend religious classes.

The study is important in the context of understanding the effects of the realization of the subject of Civic Education, i.e., providing an answer to the question of whether the subject has achieved its goal, by comparing the results of students who listened to this subject in relation to those who did not choose it during their school education. The study is available here.
"THE LIST" CASE

In July 2020, a list containing the names of 57 organizations, media and individuals, including Civic Initiatives, has been made public by a whistleblower working in a bank. The list was made by the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering and sent to all commercial banks, asking them to provide the Administration with documentation related to all money transactions of the organizations from the list, for supposed suspicion of financing terrorism and money laundering. The list consists of organizations dealing with human rights, war crimes and monitoring of government’s work, as well as investigative media.

Civic Initiatives organized a prompt reaction of all organizations from the list, calling on to the Administration to suspend the investigation against the organizations, to publish all relevant documents and to explain the process of creating the list sent to the banks, and by notifying the FATF, the Council of Europe Committee MONEYVAL and other international institutions and organizations about this abuse of the anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism financing system.

Many international organizations such as Amnesty International, Freedom House, CIVICUS, OSCE Mission to Serbia and many more, reacted calling the Serbian government to stop pressure on civil society and independent media.

The publication of the list was followed by an intensive tabloid campaign against the organizations from the list, while none of the relevant institutions gave an answer to the question on what basis did the mentioned organizations, media and individuals ended up on the list.

After two and a half months since the list has been published and no answers, civil society organized an event called "Openly about the List". The Acting Director of The Administration attended and said that the list was part of the routine analysis of risk assessment. He also stated that the article (which states the existing suspicion regarding the subjects of investigation) they referred to, when asking the information from banks, was used because they did not have a relevant article in the law. This statement clearly shows that the Administration broke the law.

After this event it is still not clear based on which criteria the list was made, trust between the state and organizations has been violated, and there is still no answer as to why only organizations that are critical of the authorities are on the list.

RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION
Overview of Civic Initiatives’ activities
These activities were carried out within projects supported by the following donors:

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

FONDACIJA ZA OTVORENO DRUŠTVO, SRBIJA
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION, SERBIA

Australian Aid

TRANSITION
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic
For more information on Civic Initiatives' activities visit our website www.gradjanske.org/en