

Civic Initiatives – Annual operational report for 2018



Civic initiatives carry out their activities through two basic programs: the CSO Capacity Building Program and the Public Policy Program.

Through the Capacity Building Program, we work on strengthening the internal and external capacities of CSOs and informal groups, at the national and local level. Within this program, we also work on strengthening individual capacities through direct work with individuals by providing customized trainings and seminars, as well as providing individual support for personal development, mastering, and applying new skills.

The activities of the Public Policy Program are focused on networking of the civil sector, in order to build a strategy and effective approach to greater influence on decision-making processes, as well as improving public policies through monitoring state activities in order to build a supportive environment for civil society, based on respect for the rule of law, efficiency and responsibility of public administration, and the implementation of documents and recommendations of international institutions.

1. CSO Capacity Building Program

1.1 Increased capacities of CSOs and their impact on decision makers

- In order to strengthen the capacity of civil society, 9 Open Doors were held on topics that were important for associations, such as: Project management, Registration of economic activity (twice), Types of employment, Pador (twice), Event organization, Budget management, Financial management.
- A new Resource Center website was developed and launched at rc.gradjanske.org. The Resource Center website is a place where you can find all the information necessary for the good functioning and work of informal groups, citizens' associations, and other interested actors, as well as services and programs for capacity building and public advocacy in Serbia.
- Over 30 technical assistance services were provided to CSOs.
- Representatives of CI (Bojana Selaković and Jelena Stević) held a training for local organizations – EHO grantees on financial management of organizations and the impact of CSOs on local government budgets.
- The Executive Director of Civic Initiatives, Maja Stojanović, held 2 workshops at the International Fundraising Congress in Amsterdam. The congress is held once a year, and the participants are people who work with fundraising from all over the world, from international and local organizations.
- We have continued to work and support informal citizens' initiatives. In the Human Rights House, we organized a panel discussion called "Until the last drop", in order to support organized civic groups that are fighting in various ways for access to water and water resources in Serbia and their better interconnection. Representatives of the association Čuvari izvora (Guardians of Springs) and informal civic groups Savski nasip (Sava embankment) and Odbranimo reke Stare planine (Let's Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina) spoke at the panel discussion. We were also the co-organizer of the press conference of the informal group of

citizens Odbranimi reke Stare planine on November 22 at the Human Rights House, on the occasion of numerous incidents and problems that accompany the systemic construction of small hydropower plants on Stara Planina mountain. The conference was attended by about 100 citizens and media representatives.

- As part of the regional project "Smart Start", we worked with associations and social enterprises that received small grants in order to develop a business plan and diversify their sources of funding. 3 three-day trainings were held: #SmartPreduzetnik/ca (#SmartEntrepreneur), Pitajte knjigovođu (Ask an Accountant) and visibility training for organizations. There were also 4 monitoring visits to grantees who had continuous support in developing their business plans.
- The international network CIVICUS has chosen Civic Initiatives to organize and host the International Civil Society Week (ICSW) 2019 in Belgrade. ICSW will bring together over 700 civil society leaders, activists and citizens from different sectors and parts of the world in Belgrade to work together to find answers to current global challenges in the field of human rights, democracy, and international development. For the first time in almost a quarter of a century, this event will take place in the Balkans, a region that provides a suitable place to explore the need for togetherness and the strength of working together. At least 30 sessions and events will be held at ICSW 2019, which address a number of critical issues, from urgent support for citizens' associations working under threats and pressure, narrowing media freedoms to greater civil society responsibility.
- The Resource Center continued to work within a new project supported by the EU. The project started at the end of 2018. In order to better respond to the needs of civil society from all over Serbia, the Resource Center has become decentralized, so in addition to the National Resource Center (Civic Initiatives), Local Resource Centers (BUM Bečej, Forca Požega and the National Parliament Leskovac) have also started operating.

1.2 Increased individual capacities of individuals (youth, civic education teachers)

- A regional strategic meeting was organized (Bulgaria, Romania, BiH, Serbia) on the topic of further work and cooperation within the YouthBuild program for young people.
- As a part of the "Exclude Prejudice" project, civic education teachers were trained to implement the DID (Deliberating on Democracy) methodology. After that, workshops were held for 120 students from 5 high schools in Niš. The students organized 12 local actions with the aim of educating their peers about the consequences of hate speech. The project ended with a conference at which the results of student actions in Niš were presented. Cooperation has also been established with organizations from the region (Croatia and BiH) dealing with capacity building of civic education teachers.
- An analysis of new modules for the first grade of high school for civic education has been published.
- A desk analysis was made on the effects of civic education teaching on young people's attitudes about human rights and related topics.
- Together with Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (National Youth Council of Serbia), the traditional MladGrad award was given on the Youth Day in Belgrade.

1.3 Increased capacity of institutions in areas related to civil society

- Cooperation with The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Republic of Serbia continued, as well as support.
- Within the Open Government Partnership initiative, work with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government continued. As part of a project supported by the World Bank, we participated in the process of participatory creation of a new Open Government Partnership Action Plan in Serbia.
- A total of 5 consultative meetings were held in the process of drafting the 3rd Open Government Partnership Action Plan: in Šabac, Niš, Belgrade, Novi Sad and Kragujevac. The Action plan has been adopted. The project implemented by CI with the support of the World Bank has made a significant contribution to the participation of the process and the inclusion of civil society proposals in the Action Plan draft. Participation in the Fifth Global OGP Summit in Tbilisi, Georgia as part of the Open Government Partnership initiative.

2. Public Policy Program

2.1 Improving and implementing the legislative framework in the field of freedom of association

- Participation in the initiative regarding the published text of the amendment to the Constitution. It was requested that the amendments be withdrawn, and that the expert public be involved in drafting new ones.
- Regular work on collecting information on the environment in which the civil society works for the Matrix for monitoring the incentive environment for the work of civil society.
- Engagement in the consultative process and involvement of organizations in the adoption of the Regulation on the financing of programs and projects of the association. The decree was passed in March.
- Five round tables were held within the project “Porez na imovinu iz ugla građana” (“Property Tax from the Citizens' Perspective”) - Užice, Paraćin, Sremska Mitrovica, Niš and Kragujevac. Participants: citizens and local government representatives.
- An initiative has been launched regarding amendments to the Law on Social Protection together with other civil society organizations. Comments were sent to the Ministry of Labor, Veteran and Social Affairs. In this process, CI systematically supported the Coalition for Social Entrepreneurship and created a web platform through which hundreds of CSOs and citizens sent comments to the relevant ministry.
- The initiative “Odbrani pravo na informacije - Da javno ne bude tajno” (“Defend the right to information – Public issues shouldn’t be kept secret”) was launched together with other civil society organizations on the occasion of amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance – still ongoing
- An open letter was sent to Federica Mogherini together with other CSOs from Serbia and Kosovo against the partition of Kosovo.
- A statement was sent to other civil society organizations regarding the draft of The Law on Free Legal Aid.

- Meetings with associations were organized on the occasion of the development of social entrepreneurship in Serbia.
- CI representatives attended the Western Balkans Summit in London 2018.
- Bojana Selaković, CI Program Director, prepared a report on narrowing the space for civic action in Serbia for the purpose of holding a meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) in Belgrade, where she presented it. The entire report refers to the situation in the EU countries and Serbia, and the authors are Marina Škrabalo, Bojana Selaković and Sonja Stojanović Gajić.
- Participation of the CI Program Director as a speaker at the events organized by the Center for European Policies: the final conference of the regional WEBER project and the presentation of the findings of monitoring public administration reform in Serbia, as well as the results of the Civil Society Sustainability Index in Serbia prepared by the National Coalition for Decentralization.
- Participation in a closed meeting with representatives of CSOs from the member states of the Council of Europe, organized by the Department for CSOs of the Council of Europe on the occasion of narrowing the space for civic action and planning a systemic response to it.
- A comprehensive analysis was made, presented on December 10 as part of the celebration of the International Human Rights Day entitled „Udruženja građana: prostor za delovanje 2014-2018” (“Citizens' Associations: A Space for Action 2014-2018”).

2.2 Exercising the full right to freedom of assembly

- Regular work on collecting information on the environment in which civil society works for the Matrix for monitoring the incentive environment for the work of civil society.
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2.3 Improving citizens' awareness by monitoring the work of public institutions and advocating for transparency of government, media freedoms and freedom of expression

- Conferences of the Intersectoral Group for Freedom of Expression and the Media on the topics of Competition Policy and Mechanisms for the Protection of Journalists. Participants: institutions, civil society, media.
- Development, setting up and presentation of the Media Freedom Matrix.
- The Media Freedom Group organized a panel discussion on the topic of excluding the professionals and citizens from decision-making on important social issues: the Constitution, media, and education
- An online action of the Media Freedom Group was organized on the occasion of the Constitution Day.
- The fifth plenary session of the National Convention on the European Union – Within it, a Panel on Freedom of Expression and Media was organized. Participants: government officials, representatives of the diplomatic corps, civil society organizations, journalist and media associations.
- Work meeting of the Intersectoral Group for Freedom of Expression and Media organized together with the WG for Chapter 23, the “Da javno ne bude tajno” (“Public issues shouldn’t be kept secret”) initiative and the Media Freedom Group. Topics included changes to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance and the process of drafting a new media strategy. Participants: representatives of government, donor community, citizens' associations and journalist and media associations.
- Work meeting of civil society organizations dealing with media freedoms on the topic of the process of drafting a new media strategy. Press release issued – Involve CSO representatives in drafting the new media strategy.
- Participation in a two-day work meeting on Rtanj organized by the Group of Citizens for Media with other CSO representatives on the topic of media freedoms.
- Participation in the two-day strategic planning meeting within the National Convention on the European Union.
- A conference on media freedoms was held in Niš.
- A crowdfunding campaign was launched within the Media Freedom Group to raise funds for the Kikindske novine (Kikinda newspaper). The crowdfunding campaign “Branim Kikindske – Za narednih 1000 brojeva” (“I defend Kikinda newspaper - For the next 1000 issues”), which was launched on April 20, on the Patreon platform, has continued, with the aim of helping the work of one of the most important local media in Serbia. An event was organized on October 12 in UK Parobrod, with the idea that the campaign would reach as many people as possible who want to give their contribution to the continuation of the work of the Kikinda newspaper. The event was attended by numerous representatives of civil society organizations, members of the Media Freedom Group, journalists, and other interested individuals.
- Regular work on gathering information for the launched Media Freedom Matrix.
- In the area of analytical support to the negotiation process of the Republic of Serbia, continuous work is being done to monitor the situation and define recommendations regarding various aspects of freedom of expression within the above-mentioned chapters.

- Civic initiatives have prepared an analysis of "Freedom of expression and media freedom in Serbia in the process of EU integration." The situation and trends in Chapters 5, 8, 10, 23, 28 and 32 related to the area of freedom of expression are analyzed. The analysis monitors the progress towards the defined goals of the online tools for monitoring freedom of expression and the media - the Media Freedom Matrix. The analysis covers the period from the adoption of the set of media laws in 2014 to mid-September 2018 and relies on existing reports from domestic and international organizations and institutions, legal regulations, and research texts.
- On October 4, a meeting of civil society organizations dealing with the topic of media freedom was held in cooperation with local organizations, the Niš Human Rights Committee and the Media and Reform Center. The meeting was attended by 10 representatives of civil society organizations that are members of both the Media Freedom Group and the Intersectoral Group on Freedom of the Media and Expression. Most organizations are members of the Citizens for Media group. The idea of the meeting was the exchange of information, an overview of the current situation in the field of media freedom, as well as agreements on the next steps and frameworks for cooperation.
- Participation in the conference dedicated to housing in the local community, organized by Echo Novi Sad in Zrenjanin. Milica Antić was one of the speakers on the topic of citizen participation in the processes of drafting local self-government budgets.
- Milica Antić's participation in the international conference organized by Civil rights defenders: FOREIGN FUNDING RESTRICTIONS: A New Challenge for European Watchdogs – Sarajevo
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- Journalist awards were given on the same occasion, as well as a special recognition to Rodoljub Šabić for his contribution to the improvement of human rights in Serbia.

2.4 Civic education

- Participation in the international conference NeCE 2018 on global civic education in Marseille with the presentation of the CI project „Isključi predrasude” ("Exclude prejudice")
- Participation of Bojana Selaković, CI Program Director, at the meeting of the international network Bridge 47 in Brussels, which deals with the monitoring of civic education within the goals of sustainable development.

- Participation of Maja Stojanović, CI Executive Director, in the public debate on changes to the curriculum for civic education. Comments on the curriculum for the 3rd and 7th grade of primary school were prepared and sent.