

# COVID-19: The Effects to and the Impact of Civil Society in the Balkan Region

## PART II: The State of CSOs, their Involvement in the Crisis Response & State and Donor Support

*[Last update: 14 May 2020]*

Civil society in the Balkans has been facing many uncertainties and difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. CSOs have been adjusting their operations and priorities to respond adequately to the emergency situation and still meet their goals, all the while struggling with the funding and support available from both the states and the donors. Despite the experience of many CSOs in providing services in a crisis response, or the expertise in areas affected by the state of emergency and the measures enacted, in most cases CSOs have not been included in the national coordinated crisis responses, and even less in the consultations or decision-making processes and crisis bodies.

Still, driven by self-initiative, CSOs have greatly contributed in filling the gaps and responding to the increased needs of citizens, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Even without acknowledgement or economic support measures by governments, CSOs have proved they can be a relevant and irreplaceable partner to the state in such unprecedented times. Having this in mind, the role of donors as partners and supporters of civil society will be even more important both in ensuring its sustainability and supporting the CSOs' efforts and shifted priorities. Now, more than ever, it is necessary for CSOs and the whole society to work together and across sectors, to support and complement as much as possible the efforts of public authorities, the private sector, academia, media and every actor helping to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

*As a regional network focused on empowering civil society, promoting an enabling environment and safeguarding civic space, the **Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN)** is closely following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on civil society in the Balkan region, in a joint effort with our 14 member organizations. This document is part of a series dedicated to the CSOs' efforts in relation to the ongoing corona-crisis, as well as the influence this crisis has on their work, aiming to provide for an overview of responses and examples we could all learn from. In addition to the first issue, focusing on the state of emergency measures and restrictions on civic space and citizens' basic freedoms, the upcoming issues will discuss the state of CSOs - their activities, crisis needs and new ways of work - and the states' and donors' role and response, including the needed ways forward for civil society also to come out of this crisis healthy and more resilient.*



## THE STATE OF CSOs: CHALLENGES, CRISIS NEEDS & (NEW) WAYS OF WORK

*The COVID-19 crisis brought several uncertainties and difficulties for civil society in the region, in terms of funding available, challenges on the implementation of their projects, and entire ways of working. Notably, the state of emergency affected the sustainability of the organizations, since they were faced with financial difficulties to cover salaries and regular administrative costs, putting in danger the continuity of the organizations' work and existence. Most CSOs urged for greater flexibility from donors, as well as institutional support. CSOs throughout the region have navigated their activities towards helping the most vulnerable groups of people in the communities they serve, which are furtherly affected during this period. They continue working online by using different platforms as a way to communicate and cooperate with their partners, target groups/beneficiaries and keep working on their regular projects' activities and objectives.*

### ALBANIA

According to a [survey implemented by Partners Albania](#), 46 out of the 90 surveyed CSOs that have projects under implementation stated that they could provide the full amount of salaries to their staff, while only 14 CSOs responded that they could fully cover the administrative costs. These circumstances may result in negative implications and concerns about the sustainability of the CSOs' work. Only 5 CSOs indicated they could fully reach and serve their beneficiaries amid the crisis, which shows a rapid need for adaptation of the activities and alternative methodologies in providing services. Majority of projects implemented by the surveyed CSOs (112 out of 159 projects) have been stopped (entirely, or delayed). 75 out of 90 CSOs responded that they provide services and direct products, while 64 CSOs offer training and capacity building activities. Only 15 of the CSOs have stated that they are currently using some of the online platforms. Enabling CSOs' access to IT solutions and online collaboration tools, as well as enhancing the skills for using them, is crucial to ensure the continuation of the CSOs' work. In terms of needed know-how support, CSOs have expressed the need for training on crisis management, adapting services to online technology, and alternative fundraising.

### BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

The COVID-19 outbreak has largely affected the work of CSOs, most of which have been forced to suspend their activities, as the funds for project implementation are often temporarily stopped. These cuts in funding have had an especially adverse effect on the working ability of CSOs that provide various social services, potentially limiting the possibility of CSOs to provide an optimal response to the crisis. Some of the CSOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina – a small number of the well-established organizations whose role concerning the developing COVID-19 crisis is to uphold respect for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights – have been able to [reorganize their resources](#) and establish services aimed at crisis management monitoring, publicly reacting to any substantial violations of democratic practices, human rights, and disinformation. The majority of smaller, locally-oriented NGOs, however, either limited or stopped their activities, or decided to engage their resources and activism in local humanitarian activities and solidarity initiatives.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BULGARIA</b></p>	<p>A <a href="#">BCNL report</a> based on online surveys among 72 CSOs, in-depth interviews with 17 organizations working in different fields and feedbacks from more than 160 organizations during several webinars outlines the respond of the non-governmental sector to the crisis. 75% declare they had to reduce their team members during the state of emergency. The most affected groups of CSOs are those working in the short term. Following the protocol of the National team for working on the field, amid the corona crisis, many CSOs shifted their work online. They started using various digital tools to continue their activities. Youth organizations had difficulties in adapting their work online since most of their activities are in the form of physical gatherings, and meetings with different stakeholders. Social organizations also experienced problems because of the lack of unique resources for their needs, which are crucial for supporting the vulnerable categories of people. The initiative “<a href="#">We Will Manage Together</a>”, showing solidarity, hope and peace for everyone concerned was created, aiming to create a hub for exchange of good practices, initiatives, and volunteering opportunities. The organizations also organized a wide range of webinars on different topics, essential for CSOs’ actions and performance during the state of emergency.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CROATIA</b></p>	<p>The CSOs’ main activities during the crisis vary from direct support to users, especially vulnerable groups, through monitoring transparency and ensuring citizen participation in decision-making, to organizing educational and cultural activities. The state administration bodies on their websites have provided recommendations, instructions, and information on how CSOs can act in the conditions of a pandemic. In justified cases, following the guidance of the competent authorities, CSOs should inform those state bodies about the change, or the postponement of specific activities and request an extension of the deadline for the implementation of projects and programs.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KOSOVO</b></p>	<p>CSOs have reported different challenges that they have been facing amid the crisis, according to a <a href="#">survey implemented by Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF)</a>. 62.5% of the respondents stated that the new situation endangers the continuity of their work due to CSOs’ incapacity to retain staff, as well as the cancelled or lack of new opportunities to apply for funding. A prevailing majority of CSOs (96.71%) indicated that the COVID19 pandemic had an impact on their everyday work - around 20% of CSOs have closed down their offices, while more than 60% are working remotely. Nearly 30% of CSOs responded to have laid off or temporarily suspended their staff, while 38% have reported a cut down of the number of volunteers. CSOs are engaged in several activities with their target groups that help combat the spread of coronavirus such as: producing protective face masks, distributing hygienic and food packages to vulnerable groups, raising public awareness; monitoring and informing the public regarding the level of respect of the workers’ rights during the pandemic; financial assistance to small and medium enterprises; assisting local governments on identifying and distributing food packages for people in need; providing online free counseling services, etc.</p>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>MONTENEGRO</b></p>	<p>According to a <a href="#">survey implemented by the Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO)</a>, an overwhelming majority of the responders (85.9%) affirmed that the Corona pandemic affected their way of working. Above 42% of them referred that there was a delay in the implementation of the financing agreements. More than one-third of the surveyed CSOs stated that due to the reduced revenues, they could not cover office rent, utilities, and maintenance. However, asked whether they will achieve to implement the projects as they have planned, more than two-thirds of the respondents (70.5%) indicated that they would succeed, but with different or reduced effects and with the extension of the contract with the donor. A large number of organizations switched to work remotely (70%). CSO started using online tools for communication, such as email, Skype video conference, as well as Zoom platform to communicate with their stakeholders, donors, and beneficiaries.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>NORTH MACEDONIA</b></p>	<p>Most of the CSOs are working remotely, fully respecting the Governments' recommendations. CSOs largely have postponed their field activities and terminated some of the projects. Online communication is the most common tool for working. Most of the organizations use various digital platforms in the form of online meetings, webinars, and trainings to regularly continue their work. The CSOs contribute to tackling the challenges of the coronavirus by: distributing social packages, providing materials with educational content, medical supplies, protection, and food, as well as humanitarian help to most vulnerable categories. They also offer online services, webinars, online legal and paralegal advice, etc. There are some initiatives on a national level that are initiated and led by the CSOs, such as the platform for fight against corruption which began collaborating with SCPC for monitoring the transparency and risks of corruption during the COVID-19 crisis.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>ROMANIA</b></p>	<p>According to a <a href="#">survey implemented by FDSC</a> (242 respondents by April 1, 2020), the majority (73%) of respondents stated that the main problems NGOs are facing relate to the postponement or cancellation of projects, programs or activities, lack of financial resources, drop-in donations, the impossibility of organizing fundraising events, etc. The collapse of their economic activities (39% of respondents), as well as significant difficulties in covering paying salaries, are recognized as problems. Although most of the organizations have already shifted working remotely and started using new collaboration and learning platforms, nearly 10% of the respondents referred to the suspension of their activities. Each field of activity for CSOs faces particular struggles i.e. CSOs in socio-medical area directly confronting with increased needs to address in communities, within the same limited budgets they managed to secure before, whilst they have to ensure the protection of their own employees and beneficiaries and cope with increased prices for most basic items (medical, food, cleaning &amp; disinfection, etc); CSOs involved in provision of educational services that normally deal with less disadvantaged groups and who strive to find alternatives to ensure basic access to education for them, combined most often with social basic assistance; CSOs in cultural/sports faced with a complete change in their regular work, severely affected by the social distancing restrictions and having to find ways of using the online as a mere alternative for survival; etc.</p>

SERBIA	<p>Based on the <a href="#">survey implemented by Civic Initiatives</a>, only three organizations responded that they had terminated their activities entirely, while most CSOs shifted their work and projects' implementation online, and by using various platforms, they continue communicating with their partners, target groups/beneficiaries. Since some CSOs base their work on field activities, the National Resource Center for CSOs, led by Civic Initiatives, accommodated their activities (mostly training) online. On the other hand, 13.4% reported to continue undertaking regular activities. The responses of 92 CSOs show that while almost one-third of them are involved in humanitarian work, CSOs are also involved in activities such as online education, research and information, psychological support, media work, and monitoring of human rights. Asked about CSOs' needs amid the crisis, 30.3% of the respondents in the survey indicated the need for medical supplies and protective equipment, 12.2% requested for material and financial support, while 12.2% needed media information support.</p>
SLOVENIA	<p>After the COVID 19 outbreak, state bodies issued directions on how CSOs in Slovenia should continue implementing their ongoing projects. CSOs recognized difficulties in financial planning, as well as problems because of the potential lack of funds, which are a result of budget cuts and a decrease of donations. Also, there is a lack of personal protective equipment for those working directly with beneficiaries. CSOs started working remotely, increasing the number of online and phone consulting services. A specific webpage was launched – <a href="#">NGOs in times of Corona</a> – where NGOs can find FAQ, relevant articles, and short videos regarding legal questions in the face of the crisis.</p>
TURKEY	<p>According to a <a href="#">survey implemented by TUSEV</a>, 33% of CSOs have difficulties complying with their operations and systems, while 29% indicated that they had to stop their activities entirely. However, other CSOs answers that although their work is affected by the Corona crisis, they still have the resources to continue working. A few CSOs also continue distributing food and providing essential services. Although there were some attempts and donation campaigns initiated by CSOs to combat the adverse effects of the crisis, they halted when the Government has canceled all fundraising activities. Besides CSOs, several solidarity networks have been initiated during this period to provide financial and in-kind support to refugees or other vulnerable groups that experiencing economic difficulties. For instance, an online platform was launched for those who have problems paying their monthly fixed expenses and those who want to pay these expenses on their behalf.</p>

## CSO INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRISIS RESPONSE

*Throughout the region, lack of coordination and cooperation between the governments and the civil society sector in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic has been noted. Although many CSOs' activities fall into the needed categories of service provision, not all of the states have decided to coordinate with CSOs and include them in a joint response to the COVID-19 crisis. Nevertheless, in all of the countries, often self-initiated, CSOs have greatly contributed in filling in the gaps and responding to the increased needs of the citizens and help them to navigate during the pandemic, especially when it comes to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Very similarly, although many of the decisions and emergency measures are related to topics for which CSOs have valuable experience and know-how, CSOs are rarely included in any consultations or decision-making processes, and have a very limited involvement in crisis bodies. Still, CSOs have showcased their resilience and ability to advocate and thus affect some of the measures taken by the state. Involvement of CSOs in economic help measures, withdrawing government actions that breach privacy or other human rights, vouching for women rights in violent households, are some of the positive outcomes of CSOs advocacy during this period. Despite the lack of acknowledgement by governments, CSOs have proved they can be a relevant and irreplaceable partner to the state, even in such unprecedented times.*

### ALBANIA

Many CSOs have continued their activities in the scope of the response to the COVID-19 crisis by providing services and direct products to the target groups they serve, including young people, women, individuals with special needs, the Roma community, people living in rural areas, social enterprises, local communities, etc. In the COVID-19 Action Plan for Albania for the prevention, preparation and response against COVID-19, one of the measures planned is "preparation of CSOs to help in the process of social services provision for the population", and CSOs are included as one of the actors responsible for the implementation of this measure, but no support is foreseen for them. In regards to the decision-making regarding the COVID-19 response, all measures have been centralized and introduced by the Prime Minister through Normative Acts, without approval of Parliament, and also without including CSOs in any consultations or crisis bodies.

### BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

CSOs have been mainly involved in humanitarian actions and providing various social services to the most vulnerable categories of the population, such as day care centers/shelters for children, women, the elderly, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

BULGARIA	<p>The state has not introduced specific measures to encourage involvement of CSOs in the COVID-19 crisis response, nor has involved CSOs in the related decision-making. However, the majority of CSOs that provide social services have been invited to be a part of the <b>coordination</b> of local authorities' teams and their relief efforts. Moreover, CSOs have been asked to collect donations by private donors and mobilize volunteers. On an individual level, some CSOs have taken their own <b>initiatives</b> to help navigate society during the pandemic. One example is the Sofia Volunteer Platform which recruits and organizes volunteers in order to help the elderly and other people that at risk. They undertake activities such as daily door-to-door visits, delivering of food, doing the necessary shopping, providing medication or simply making a friendly social phone call to reduce potential for loneliness and mental health problems within these groups. More than 3,000 citizens have received support. Another example is the #Sofia COVID-19 Viber Community, which is an online system providing people with relevant news, useful information, guidance and Q&amp;A.</p>
CROATIA	<p>CSOs have been involved in important activities in order to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. The CSOs' <b>actions</b> vary from direct support to users, especially vulnerable groups, through monitoring transparency and ensuring citizen participation in decision-making to organizing educational and cultural activities. One notable example of <b>cooperation of CSOs with public institutions</b> is the campaign "Behind the doors", being led jointly by the Croatian Ministry of the Interior and Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Center. This initiative aims to encourage reporting of domestic violence cases, whose number is increasing due to the extraordinary circumstances of social distancing and long-term stay in family homes. Another example is the "Call for Health" project, a collaboration by the Croatian Medical Chamber and the Croatian Red Cross, which provides the service of giving pharmacy advice and conducting free drug delivery to immobile and chronically ill patients. On the other hand, CSOs are not involved in related <b>decision-making</b> processes. However, in terms of oversight of emergency measures and related advocacy, one positive example is that the civil society directed a critique towards the government when an introduction of a tracing application for people's mobile phones was announced, and due to the reaction, the government withdrew the initiative.</p>
KOSOVO	<p>During the COVID-19 crisis, CSOs that are service providers have continued their <b>collaboration</b> with the Ministry of Labor and Social services and proceeded with their usual activities, without being asked by the government to alter their activities to specifically respond to the COVID-19 emergency. While a special permit to work during curfew hours is necessary to obtain, the procedure for obtaining it is simple and applies to CSOs equally as other service providers. In terms of CSOs influencing the <b>decisions</b> related to the COVID-19 response, there were some positive advocacy examples, such as the successful advocacy of the NGO coalition for child protection to include several social vulnerable groups in the government emergency packages, which was later adopted, and the measures proposed by the Kosovo women network to address COVID-19 from the gender perspective, which is yet to be decided upon.</p>

MONTENEGRO

Most of the CSOs **provide assistance** to marginalized groups and vulnerable categories of people, including Roma people, persons with disabilities, women, and children that are prone to domestic violence, etc. However, CSOs that normally provide such assistance have been limited in their service provision during the proclaimed state of emergency due to not being able to obtain a movement permit, except for the Red Cross of Montenegro, whose volunteers only have movement permit and have been delivering humanitarian aid and other necessities. CSOs that deal with provision of services to members of the LGBTIQ+ community, homeless people, drug addicts, etc. have been able to proceed with helping these people during the COVID-19 crisis by means of online tools (in cases when it is applicable). Yet, there is no **coordination** between the CSOs and the Government and there have been no CSO representatives in any of the established crisis bodies, while the National Coordination Body has disregarded all suggestions provided by CSOs. Several months ago, the Prime Minister started dialogues with prominent CSOs within the initiative Alliance for Europe to identify critical issues jointly and provide solutions, however there have not been any consultations with CSOs during the crisis.

NORTH MACEDONIA

CSO's that are **providing services** – especially the ones that provide humanitarian assistance – are allowed to obtain movement permits during the established curfew amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Some examples of CSOs activities that are notable to mention are: distribution of food to vulnerable communities, distribution of protective equipment, assistance in online educational language activities for children, compiling informational brochures from victims of domestic violence during COVID-19. However, the Minister for Health has stated that the assistance of CSOs should be limited only to humanitarian help in order for the relevant authorities to be left to do their job without interference. Moreover, the Government's decision to drastically reduce financial support for CSOs has been seen as further degrading for civil society as a relevant partner in dealing with the crisis caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, CSOs are neither involved in **decision making** nor consulted in any meeting on these acts. The Council for cooperation asked for CSOs to be involved in the crisis bodies on central level, as the business sector has so far been, however there is no response from the government yet. On a local level, though, a higher level of cooperation has been noted. A positive example is that the representative of CSOs the Municipality of Gostivar is also the president of the local anti-crisis body.

ROMANIA

During the crisis, CSOs have been among the first to react and directly support authorities and primarily the health infrastructure and not least people in need. CSOs have greatly mobilized during this period to attract resources from individuals and corporate donors, to find suppliers and directly buy necessary medical equipment and protective gear for hospitals, to provide support to most affected (elderly, persons with disabilities or those isolated, etc.), even building up modular hospital units for COVID patients. Hundreds of CSOs responded to critical needs, trying to compensate or at least cover needs that responsible public authorities were not able to address in a coordinated and transparent manner. By end of April, a group of [82 CSOs reported 14mil EUR](#) raised and used for medical equipment and supplies. Additionally, more than [6.6mil EUR were fundraised by the Romanian Red Cross](#) with primary support for hospitals. CSOs advocated and requested collaboration, transparency of information and data, and being involved in the governmental decision-making. Some good practices can be noted (i.e. [the platform developed by CodeforRomania](#) meant to channel verified information and from official sources) in order to combat fake news and disinformation. Still, CSOs are not yet coherently involved in the decision-making or preparing further support measures.

SERBIA

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, CSOs have navigated their activities towards helping the most vulnerable groups in the country. People with disabilities, members of the Roma community, women and children, elderly citizens as well as migrant and homeless people are identified as primary focus groups. Latest data indicate that most CSOs are involved in humanitarian work in three crucial areas: medical protection and food, protection of human rights, accurate and objective information to help the most vulnerable categories. However, CSOs have noted that procedures for issuing movement permits during the curfew have not been adopted, which decreases their ability to provide social protection and humanitarian assistance services. On the other hand, the Prime Minister has announced that the procedure for issuing permits will be accelerated for citizens who take care of people with disabilities, the elderly, children and others who need help. The Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' and Social Affairs has prescribed a procedure for issuing permits to personal assistants, and has designated local self-government units and a social work center for that purpose.

SLOVENIA

As part of the COVID-19 **response**, several organizations coordinated by the Red Cross, Slovene Caritas and Slovene Philanthropy provide humanitarian support to the most vulnerable categories (transfer of food, persons, and first aid activities). Social service delivery is on-going, although in an adjusted manner, but has been affected in many ways, especially with the reduced availability of funding and the announced rebalancing of the state budget (for example the announcement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it would cut funds for CSO projects by 20% if they do not change their projects in a way that at least 20% of the project funds are to be used for COVID-19 related activities). CSOs also are involved in advocacy on governmental and ministerial level for intervention measures and securing continuation of public funding, with CNVOS as national umbrella network coordinates most of the advocacy efforts, as well as engage in watchdog activities. During the COVID-19 related crisis, measures are adopted quickly and in so-called urgent procedures, which greatly impacts the duration and quality of public involvement. Nevertheless, there are still some form of **consultations**. For example, the government collects proposals from the public via various approaches, i.e. different working groups established to consult with a specific societal actor (business sector, civil society). While it is so far noted that the working groups appointed to the business sector have more often done consultations, the working groups for civil society have been mostly consulting the humanitarian and other CSOs that directly cooperate with the civil protection units.

TURKEY

The COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey has not produced structured responses and cooperation of the government with CSOs regarding **service provision**. Some CSOs have been included in the government-led social support group which is responsible for the distribution of basic foods under curfew conditions, however, reliable information about which CSOs are included or how they are selected is not available. More than half of the [TUSEV survey](#) respondents referred to the need for greater collaboration between civil society and the public administration, while they also emphasized the need for tax benefits. In addition, no state initiatives or actions for ensuring the involvement of CSOs into **decision-making** processes have been noted, as this has also been centralized to the government and its bodies.

## STATE SUPPORT: CSO FINANCIAL VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

*In times of a crisis from such proportions, the civil society sector is among the professional sectors deeply affected and in need for structural support, in order to more easily cope with the unpredictable, adapt to the new situation and make sure to contribute actively to solving the social problems generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. CSOs throughout the region struggle to follow their mission, as well as to fulfill their obligations as a responsible employer, but mostly to ensure continuity in serving their beneficiaries in such a critical period. While most of the governments, unfortunately, have forgotten to include CSOs in the economic support measures, civil society has loudly voiced its need for continuous support, stressing that apart from service-providing organizations reaching the most vulnerable groups, advocacy-based CSOs are equally important in a crisis in order to safeguard the rule of law, provide oversight of the emergency response in the countries, and ensure constitutional democratic and human rights guarantees are not subject to derogation under any circumstances.*

ALBANIA	<p>CSOs are not included in the economic support measures undertaken by the government. In terms of public funding, the Agency for Civil Society Support, since 17.03.2020, has suspended the application deadline of the open calls for proposals for financial support to CSOs until a second notification. In addition, there are no concrete action to support CSOs in this period from this structure.</p>
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	<p>The proposed Law on Mitigation of Economic Consequences by the FBiH government excludes the civil society sector, which CSOs consider degrading and endangering for the development of civil society in FBiH. According to a statement by CPCD, the current situation has largely affected the work of associations, which have been forced to suspend their activities, due to project funds being temporarily stopped, while obligations to landlords, workers and the state are still in force, which puts them at a significant disadvantage. All oversights of the draft Law, as well as proposals for improvement of the measures by including associations as legal entities treated by law, were submitted to all FBiH Parliament representatives.</p>
BULGARIA	<p>No specific measures for state support to the CSOs are introduced so far. CSOs may apply for the general state support scheme if they meet certain <a href="#">conditions</a>, however these conditions leave many CSOs ineligible to apply. One of the conditions is for applicants to declare a 20% reduction in sales revenue, which automatically excludes as eligible all organizations that are not financed by economic activity, regardless if their other income (donations, fees, funding) has decreased or they have ceased their activities. Another major restriction is that specific sectors are explicitly excluded from compensation, including education, humanitarian aid and social work, under the presumption that these sectors have not to have stopped working during the state of emergency, but only transformed their work. However, this is not completely valid for CSOs, as many of their activities cannot be performed remotely or outside the specially equipped centers.</p>

CROATIA	<p>The government has not yet introduced specific measures for lowering the hardships of the NGOs in the crisis context. Although it was announced that the planned funding calls will be implemented (e.g. the European Social Fund) as a measure to keep providing funding to NGOs, these calls will be focused on CSOs providing services and medical help for vulnerable groups as part of the COVID-19 response, leaving other types of CSOs with lack of funds. This move is seen by CSOs as an attempt of the government to reshape civil society, as it will have a noticeable impact on advocacy-based organizations, even more visible in the coming months. The <a href="#">Initiative For a Strong Civil Society</a> called on the Croatian government to revise the decision to restrict the use of state budget funds earmarked for funding CSOs and adopt measures to safeguard the work of civil society.</p>
KOSOVO	<p>Initially, CSOs were not included in the fiscal or other type of support packages by the government, available for businesses. However, upon CSOs' request to the Ministry of Finance they were included as a separate group in the list of entities that would be eligible for the economic measures under the Emergency Fiscal Package. Only CSOs that are funded by donors whose finances are not impacted by the Government's decisions are not eligible to apply. The package also lists journalists among the eligible beneficiaries, while an additional emergency help package has been announced by the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports in order to assist youth, culture and sports NGOs. Prior to the introduction of the Fiscal Emergency Package, the Government has extended the deadline for submitting of tax return forms until the end of April 2020, while the deadline for submitting annual reports by NGOs that have a Public Benefit Status is extended until end of June 2020.</p>
MONTENEGRO	<p>CSOs are not included in the economic incentives that are available to the businesses, and many of them cannot continue conducting their work during the coronavirus pandemic. Amidst the limited access to funding, there was an initiative from one CSO to reallocate government money intended for CSOs towards handling the COVID-19 crisis. However, many other CSOs disagreed with this initiative, saying it does not represent the interest and needs of Montenegrin civil society. Positively, the ministries of the Government extended their open calls for proposals for additional 30 days.</p>
NORTH MACEDONIA	<p>State funding for CSOs is very limited, and CSOs are not included in the economic measures. Amid the crisis, the government announced a 525.000 EUR <a href="#">funding cut</a> from the 2020 state budget support to associations and foundations, which has been decided without consulting the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector and the representatives of the civil society in general, as well as without any previous announcement to the public. The reduction was made by a Decision on redistribution of funds between the budget users of the central government and the funds. The Council and CSOs Civil society called on the government to reconsider and change its decision, saying it was made in a non-transparent process, which speaks to an unprincipled attitude of the government towards civil society in a time of crisis. There is still no response from the Government to the CSOs' request to reconsider and change its decision.</p>

ROMANIA

Initially, CSOs were not included in the economic measures valid for other employers. After getting mobilized and advocating strongly on this issue, with over 130 NGOs from all over the country supporting a [statement](#) by FDSC, CSOs managed to get themselves included in some of the measures (i.e. technical employment allowing CSOs not to cease contracts with people, but get funds from the state to keep people employed, continuation of the subsidy support for social service providers, extension of the period allowed to fundraise through the 3.5% mechanism allowing individuals to donate this percentage from the personal income tax they owe to the state, etc). In general, no direct actions could be observed at central level in the direction of cutting public funding to CSOs (although it represents a very low percentage within the overall sources of incomes for the sector). Few new calls for proposals were open during the period from public sources (i.e. structural funds, cultural field, etc.). Still, most support and resources were directed to immediate support or addressing current medical/social needs (i.e. technical employment, procurement of medical/protection gear, provision of food/medical supplies for disadvantaged groups, etc), with very limited indirect benefits for CSOs. Core or institutional support was limited and is even less accessible during this period.

SERBIA

The government has included CSOs in the economic support measures, but made this decision without consulting civil society, while it rejected the Philanthropy Council's proposals for philanthropy incentives and VAT exemptions for donations to CSOs. In terms of public funding, immediately after the declaration of a state of emergency, several state, provincial and city institutions announced suspending of grant procedures aimed for financing and co-financing CSO projects that have received EU funds in the 2019 calls. Decisions on public calls that have ended before the declaration of a state of emergency are also not published on the websites of competent authorities. Local self-governments have also largely stopped allocation and public calls. According to CSOs, while the legality of this decision is indisputable, such a decision threatens the financial sustainability of organizations. CSOs appealed to the Government and local self-governments to show more flexibility and to allow CSOs to adapt their activities to the new situation in order to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable groups of citizens, and to make planned payments within the deadline, which would prevent a more serious impact to the CSOs' financial sustainability in the medium and long term.

SLOVENIA

After the advocacy efforts to be included in the [Mega Corona Law](#), CSOs now have the right to the same state support measures as companies, such as salary compensation during the crisis for employees that need to take care of a child or for workers on hold, obligatory contributions for most workers who are working during the epidemic, exemptions from paying pension and disability insurance contributions, etc. While humanitarian and disability organizations do not have to meet income requirements to receive state support, there is a lack of clarity regarding these measures and some CSOs (namely those with no for-profit income, CSOs with workers in a special employment programs, etc.) will not benefit. The deadline for distribution of state funds from public tenders is shortened from 30 to 8 days, and the same applies to the payment of invoices for supplies to the state (e.g. in the context of public procurement). Nonetheless, rebalancing of the state budget has been announced, which is thought likely to have a further negative impact on the allocation of public funds to CSO in the future. Moreover, some attempts to change existing CSO contracts are noted with some public funders initiating a redistribution of the funds primarily allocated to CSOs towards activities for fighting the COVID-19.

TURKEY

The economic support packages by the government mostly do not apply for CSOs. The Turkish Employment Institution provides a short-term working allowance for employees working in workplaces whose activities are wholly or partly ceased for at least four weeks (regardless of whether this stoppage is continuous or not), or where the weekly working time is reduced temporarily by at least one third. Some CSOs have already applied for this support, and some of these applications have been accepted. Currently, the CSOs are in a lot of trouble financially – almost all fundraising activities have been canceled and only the central government is allowed to raise funds, while there is no collective action to support CSOs' long term sustainability. The taxes for associations have been postponed until August, but this measure does not apply to foundations.

## DONORS APPROACHES AND RESPONSES

*Most of the CSOs in the region are not immune to the financial implications that the COVID-19 crisis reflects on their projects' implementation. While in general CSOs in the region rely on the support and the funds from foreign donors, they do not share the same experience in their relations with the donors. In some of the countries, the donors provided clear guidelines on how CSOs can rapidly recover and should continue with the projects' implementation, while in others, CSOs are still struggling to get the donors' attention and to find a way to keep with the projects' activities. In such a way, it is necessary for the donors to openly and accurately communicate with their grantees and give clear instructions about continuing the projects or future contractual changes, taking into account budget adjustments, rescheduling or shifting the nature of planned activities, and changes in the activity methodology. Nevertheless, all of the CSOs testify that donors should be their greatest supporters during the crisis. Acknowledging the valuable role of CSOs, many of the donors have decided to increase the funds available for service provision of CSOs to help in the negative effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.*

### ALBANIA

Partners Albania survey presents that for 47 of the 159 ongoing projects reported by 90 CSOs, the work has continued (online), as donors have provided clear guidance on how they can continue the projects' implementation during the crisis, while others have reported that they had stopped implementing 112 projects in total. While some of the funding contracts have been extended, other CSOs are still expecting guidance for 48 projects from their donors. The CSOs largely depend on different foreign donors, which are also adjusting themselves in the situation, as was observed at the beginning when PA conducted the survey with CSOs with slow reactions to the situation and guidance toward CSOs. Later on, there were some direct responses from donors. For example, within the project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, implemented by a consortium of three organizations (the Open Society Foundation for Albania, Co-PLAN, and Partners Albania), LevizAlbania launched a call for fast reaction on how to respond to the situation created by COVID 19. While there has been flexibility from most donors on the rescheduling of activities, changes on the methodology, or shifting in planned activities, institutional support (personnel salaries and administrative costs) during lockdown remained an unaddressed issue by donors jeopardizing the entire institutional setting of the organizations.

<p><b>BULGARIA</b></p>	<p>A vast number of donors provided additional services during the crisis. For instance, Active Citizens Fund, EEA Grants 2014-2021, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway started supporting CSOs to adapt their project activities to continue in the crisis, including by using new digital approaches (online webinars, meetings, etc.). Moreover, Sofia municipality programs for CSOs (Culture, Europa, Social Innovations) also started a process to support the beneficiaries to adapt to the new situation, and to stop with their activities. Oak Foundation will also launch a new humanitarian program to distribute funds to CSOs. The Bulgarian Donors Forum, America for Bulgaria Foundation, the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, and the American Chamber of Commerce with joint efforts established the "United against COVID-19" Response Fund to support local communities across the country during the crisis. The aim is to provide financial assistance to CSOs working with communities, which are severely affected by the coronavirus outbreak. Moreover, United against COVID-19 has already collected and distributed 960.000 BG from multi-national and Bulgarian companies.</p>
<p><b>CROATIA</b></p>	<p>Similarly to the state providing funds mainly to service-provision CSOs, and not much support to the rest which base their work on advocacy, it was announced that most of the foreign donations will be directed only towards CSOs that work directly with handling the COVID-19 crisis.</p>
<p><b>KOSOVO</b></p>	<p>Donors have expressed different approaches regarding the reporting deadlines. While the majority of them have either put on hold or postponed deadlines for CSOs, some have not taken affirmative actions in response to reporting deadlines. However, the no-cost extension has not indicated as an opportunity for CSOs from all interviewed donors. Donors were also asked to present forms of adapting the activities into a digital format without implications to the project outcomes that were initially planned and approved when shortlisted. No new projects are to be initiated until further notice. For ongoing projects, donors have asked CSOs to continue their work from home and adapt project/program activities to the newly created situation, while requesting for additional communication and information sharing with grantees. There is no suspension of contracts, and the operating costs of grantees are covered. In some cases, donor organizations have adjusted their work so that they could also support activities of CSOs that react to the crisis (the German Embassy). The EU is the most prominent and reactive donor in Kosovo amid the crisis. One of the most important developments is that the EU will reprogramme some of the leftover funds from IPA II for a grant scheme to be used by around 50 CSOs that provide services to marginalized groups, which will be available as of September, likely including both core and project support. Still, it is problematic that the rest of CSOs which are not providing services are left behind, as without new calls for funding in 3 to 6 months the sector could be severely and visibly impacted.</p>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>MONTENEGRO</b></p>	<p>Foreign donors have shifted their regular preferences and included the issue of coping with COVID 19 in their calls, while not terminating financing of the ongoing CSOs' projects and activities and approving extensions related to the implementation of program activities. As per the CRNVO survey, an overwhelming majority (85%) of CSOs indicated that they found understanding within donors, explaining that they informed the donors about obstacles in their work and got complete support in this situation. In regards to the areas of support, although the organizations generally have a positive stance, 41% of organizations answered that donors ignore the topics they are working on, while 59% believe that donors pay enough attention to issues they are dealing with. There is a need for open dialogue between donors and NGOs on the new forms of support for CSOs' work in crisis and a need to rapidly extend projects, in order to avoid dismissal of employees, due to postponement of CSOs' activities, cancellation of lease of premises, inability to pay overheads etc.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>NORTH MACEDONIA</b></p>	<p>The ongoing CSOs' projects may be subject to suspension if the activities are not fulfilled, so many CSOs needed to elaborate to the donors whether they will be able to conduct the predicted activities. The projects that were on the ground and which included physical training and meetings, are subjected to re-examination by the donors. Some of the donors opened ad-hoc grant for crises such as the Swiss Embassy and EU Delegation in Skopje. Emergency Intervention grants were distributed to 5 CSOs through the Civil Society Resource Centre, and Civica Mobilitas awarded 10 CSOs with ad-hoc grants to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, the Foundation for Open Society Macedonia, in cooperation with the Macedonian Red Cross, donated 100.000 USD for humanitarian support, including food and hygienic packages for the Roma population.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>ROMANIA</b></p>	<p>The CSOs need accommodation of the grant schemes and the use of the available finances. The respondents of the <a href="#">FDSC survey</a> singled non-reimbursable funds adapted to the new challenges as a primary useful measure in coping with the crisis. The flexibility of current financing contracts, as well as the fiscal facilities on the payment of taxes and utilities, are considered, also. Private/institutional donors were in general responsive in terms of allowing adaptation of activities or suspending contracts if chosen as an option by CSOs (more relevant for the structural funds), but still with consistent uncertainties in terms of eligibility of expenditures and subsequent reporting. There were few new calls launched with resources coming from private companies (focused on short term direct support as response to the crisis) or from institutional donors i.e. the EEA Financial Mechanism (an ongoing call is opened under the Active Citizen Fund for rapid reaction support). The support from business community was extensive during pandemic (sponsorships, donations, pro bono assistance, etc), but the already registered economic contraction will most certainly affect resources accessible to CSOs in the coming months.</p>

SERBIA	<p>CSOs have advocated for donors to focus on not prolonging current calls and payments, as well as allocating funds from additional pools to help CSOs, instead of redirecting the support. As a positive example, The Swiss Agency, through the ACT project, has decided to provide additional funds to 3 organizations that will be supported in helping vulnerable groups in Serbia. Open calls for proposals from diverse donors have been launched, such as the UNDP call for innovation in crisis time; Central European Initiative - Emergency Call for Proposals for COVID-19 2020. Moreover, Trag Foundation created a program to support the solidarity among the citizens by relying on their capacities, taking into account the safety and health in the community. It is expected the implemented actions to reduce the further spread of the virus, to help the most vulnerable, and to launch operations focused on the recovery and resilience of communities from the economic and other social consequences. The Foundation Ana i Vlade Divac announced a specific call for associations, media, and grassroots organizations gathered around a joint idea to help citizens in facing the crisis.</p>
SLOVENIA	<p>Financial Mechanism Office in behalf of the Active Citizens Fund issued instructions on how donors should adapt the funding to COVID 19 and to support CSOs in a better way. The instructions included 100% financing of projects, granting rapid response calls, adjusting of indicators, etc. There are mostly no other donors in Slovenia.</p>
TURKEY	<p>According to a <a href="#">survey implemented by TUSEV</a>, 49% of CSOs indicated that their donations have dropped. 65% of CSOs answered there is a need for core funding for CSOs to cover salaries and office rents amid COVID-19 pandemic. Grantmakers have been flexible in terms of adapting the grantees' activities, extending the project period, etc., and have committed to continue their existing grants. Some grantmakers (i.e. Support Foundation for Civil Society) have already reprogrammed their future funding strategy by taking into consideration COVID-19 related issues. Heinrich Böll Stiftung has initiated an emergency fund to encourage projects aiming to defend human rights and support CSOs that are facing difficulties during this period.</p>

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