



BCSDN NEWSLETTER

Solidarity in Times of Corona Crisis

Third Edition



Dear members, supporters, donors, beneficiaries,

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with any challenge that may obstruct our goals. Like the previous two editions of our Newsletter, this third edition delivers regional and international stories on CSOs' efforts to handle the crisis; new actions and dynamics; donors' perspective; regional solidarity, and perpetual endeavor for just and sustainable, enabling environment in the Balkans.

In regards to the new opportunities, ties and friendships during this challenging period, we are happy to announce that BCSDN has welcomed its new member - The Bulgarian Centre for Non-Profit Law (BCNL) from Bulgaria, thus expanding our networking territories, willing to share and to work together on the enabling environment and CSOs' accountability in the region.

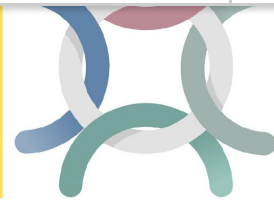
As we are closely following the corona crisis, and all BCSDN members' efforts concerning it, especially the increasing crackdowns in freedoms and threats civil society faces in this state of emergency, in this edition, we bring you our first overview, a joint regional contribution of our member organizations, of a series dedicated on the effects to and the impact of civil society in the Balkans.

We invite you to share with us your efforts so that we can all support one another by promoting our determination and our work, but most of all so that we can learn from each other in these unprecedented times.

Stay safe!

COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE EFFECTS TO AND IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE BALKAN REGION

PART I: RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIC SPACE AND CITIZENS' BASIC FREEDOMS



1

BANS ON ASSEMBLY AND MOVEMENT UNDER THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

Partial and full bans of movement, closure of border crossings, and an absolute ban on public assemblies have been introduced in all countries in the region. Gatherings with more than 5 people (and in some countries more than 2) have been banned, while all countries have also introduced the measure of 2-meter social distancing. The scope of restrictions on the freedom of movement of citizens has gradually increased as the number of infected patients with COVID-19 in each country rises. Worryingly, long curfews also preclude the field work of CSOs and their ability to reach their beneficiaries, which is even more urgent for those providing social services to vulnerable groups who are strongly affected by the crisis.

2

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: FIGHT AGAINST FAKE NEWS

The extraordinary circumstances created by COVID-19 have led many states to use it as an excuse for introduction of censorship or other disproportionate restrictions on the freedom of expression and information. Under the pretense of fighting the spread of fake news that causes panic, throughout the region, measures have been introduced that have negative implications on the work of the media and journalists, as well as citizens' rights to freedom of opinion and criticism through social media networks. Worryingly, governments have also used this period to deal with political opponents or media outlets who criticize them publicly.

3

ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

For a longer time now, journalists throughout the whole region have been subjected to an increased wave of attacks, threats and online smear campaigns, but it seems the COVID-19 outbreak has opened a new flank. During a pandemic, media have an essential role in improving public knowledge and awareness of health issues, and informing the public about news related to the crisis situation. Still, in many of the Balkan countries, journalists have been attacked, sidelined or prevented from doing their work, which not only represents a direct violation of media freedom, but also violates the right of all citizens of access to information.

4

MEASURES AFFECTING THE RIGHT TO PERSONAL PRIVACY

Although certain human rights and freedoms could be restricted or suspected in extreme emergency situations, measures enforced to introduce such limitations need to pass the test of public interest. Collecting and/or publishing personal information even in these circumstances is generally considered to cause citizens more damage than good. As several governments in the region opted for tracking patients infected with the new coronavirus and publishing personal information, CSOs have voiced serious concerns about the possibility for stigmatization, hate speech and even lynching of the people involved.

5

AMENDMENTS TO THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

While many of these restrictive measures have a tentative or a definite "end in sight", in some of the countries in the Balkan region changes to the legal framework have been introduced, with possible worrying long-term implications on citizens and civil society. Initiatives or actual amendments to the Penal or Criminal Codes, legal regulations on (electronic) communications and access to public information, or even laws increasing the police and military powers have been introduced, often followed by vocal reactions by civil society and other experts.

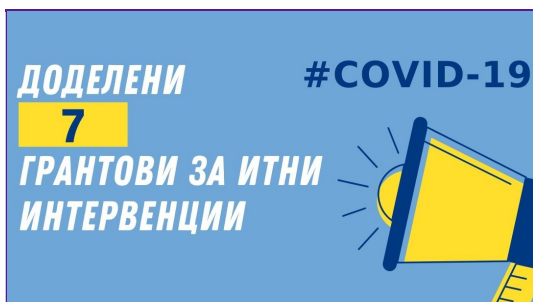
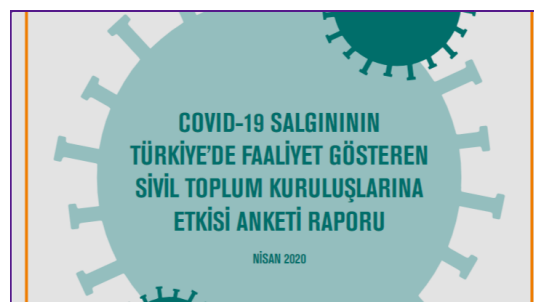
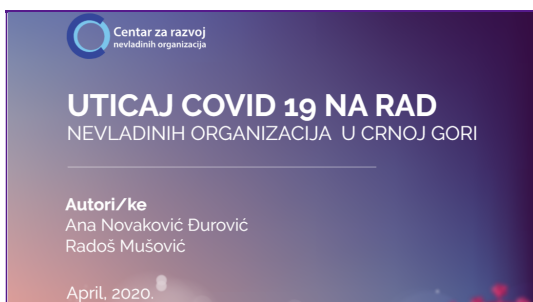
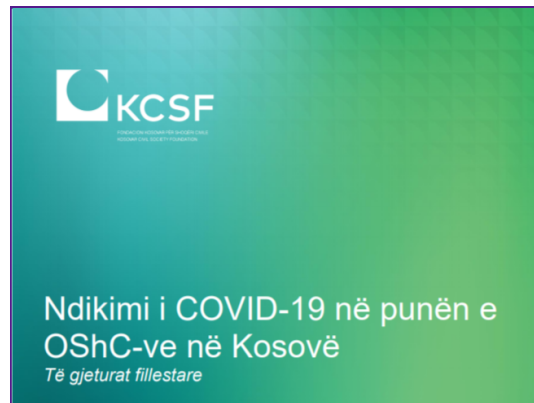
BALKAN CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The overview is part of series dedicated to the CSOs' efforts in relation to the ongoing corona-crisis, as well as the influence this crisis has on their work.

This first issue titled: *Restrictions on Civic Space and Citizens' Basic Freedoms* encompass details on bans on assembly and movement under the state of emergency; freedom of expression: fight against fake news and attacks on journalists and access to information; measures affecting the right to personal privacy, and amendments to the legal framework.

CSOs Responses on the Corona Crisis

BCSDN Member Organizations



BCNL is part of the [initiative "We Will Manage Together"](#) showing [solidarity, hope and peace for everyone concerned](#) and published an [opinion requesting support for social enterprises in the context and impact of COVID-19](#).

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[potential Covid-19 impact](#)

CNVOS published relevant articles on [changed conditions for obtaining state aid for wage reimbursement after the last corona law](#) and on [humanitarian and disability organisations that are automatically eligible for state aid](#)

CRNVO processed and published the [data from the research on how Montenegrin CSOs are affected by the corona crisis](#)

FDSC launched a new webpage www.stiri.org to provide legal, financial and information support to CSOs during corona crisis

KCSF published its research on the [impact of COVID-19 on the work of CSOs in Kosovo](#)

MCIC through Civica Mobilitas published new editions of its [specialized bulletin dedicated on the CSO responses to the pandemic](#) in North Macedonia and through the Civic Resource Centre selected [grantees that will help communities during the corona crisis](#)

Partners Albania published the [Monitoring of philanthropic activity during COVID 19 situation](#)

TUSEV published [the report of the survey to identify the impact of Coronavirus pandemic on the work of CSOs in Turkey](#)

Highlights from the Region

Vodič za zaštitu podataka o ličnosti za vreme pandemije

SHARE FONDACIJA PARTNERI SRBIJA A11* ATINA UDRUGA ZA ZAŠTITU I BRIGU PRIMO ŽIVOTNA LIČNOSTI IŠTA ODLUKA NIKOGA NEODGOVARA MAČIJA BOS BJEŽI

#EY 3A TEŽE FONDACIJA ZA OTVORENO DRUŠTVO SRBIJA B | T | D The Balkan Trust for Democracy A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

Albania:

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Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- [Democracy and the state of emergency in BiH](#)

Kosovo:

- [Opinion: Kosovo was not adequately prepared for the pandemic](#)

Croatia:

- [Croatia pushes back on Covid 19 mobile phone tracking](#)

Serbia:

- [Human rights at the time of the pandemic: violation or justified limitation?](#)

Montenegro:

- [The print media received assistance from the Ministry of Culture](#)

Turkey:

- [Parole Law releases thousands of prisoners, but excludes journalists](#)

North Macedonia:

- [CSOs reaction regarding the irresponsibility of the institutions for the most vulnerable citizens in times of crisis](#)

Romania:

- [Police abuses regarding COVID-19 restrictions](#)

Slovenia:

- [Anti-Corona law stipulates impossible conditions for NGOs to participate in](#)

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Bulgaria:

- [Coronavirus tests freedom of expression in Bulgaria](#)

ELIAMEP:

[Mapping the pandemic and response analysis during Covid 19 in the Balkans](#)

BiEPAG: [The Western Balkans in times of the global pandemic](#)

Share Foundation: [Guidelines for data protection during pandemic](#)

NALAS: [Data on adopted financial packages and other measures on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in SEE countries via the quick response service](#)

B.I.R.D: [Digital rights in the Time of COVID-19](#)

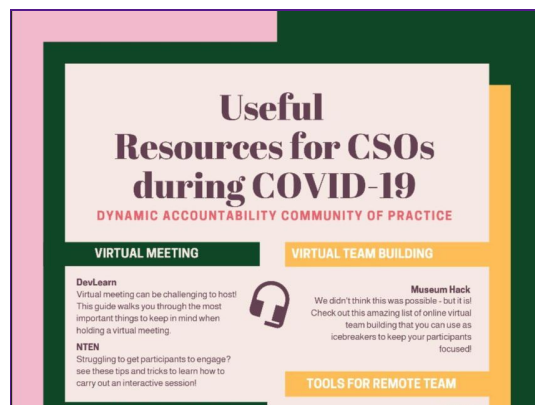
AIRE CENTRE: [COVID-19 and the impact on human rights](#)

STGM: [We are growing solidarity with CSOs in corona days](#)

International Resources



CoE: [Challenges to human rights](#)



Carnegie Endowment for

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Civicus: [Letter to states: We are in this together, don't violate human rights](#)

[despite disruption](#)[ECNL: Protest in time of pandemic](#)

Global Standard: [Useful resources for CSOs during Covid 19](#)

European Civic Forum: [10 lessons learned from the crisis](#)

ICNL: [COVID-19: The surveillance pandemic](#)

CoE: [Human rights are more important than ever in times of crisis](#)

OGP: [Statement on the COVID-19 response](#)

ICSC: [COVID-19 Resources for Civil Society #5](#)

Information for Donors

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LevizAlbania: [Call for “Fast Reaction” How to Respond to The Situation Created by COVID-19 \(Deadline: Ongoing\)](#)

Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation: [COVID-19 Fast Response Fund \(Deadline: N/A\)](#)

European Youth Foundation: [Special Call for Grant Applications for Pilot Activities Responding to Local Needs Arising From the COVID-19 \(Deadline 10 May 2020\)](#)

CoE: [Support to local CSOs for measures for fighting discrimination during COVID-19 time in Serbia \(Deadline: 11 May 2020\)](#)

Reporting Democracy: [Call for Journalists: Coronavirus Story Grants \(Deadline: 15 May 2020\)](#)

CoE: [Support to CSOs in Fighting Discrimination During COVID-19 crisis - “Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Montenegro” \(Deadline: 19 May 2020\)](#)

Trag Foundation: [Active Communities: A Solidarity Response to COVID-19 in Serbia \(Deadline: Ongoing\)](#)

European Cultural Foundation: [Culture of Solidarity Fund \(Deadline: 27 May 2020\)](#)

BIRN: [Call for Stories on COVID-19 and the Earthquake \(Deadline: N/A\)](#)

Sign up for updates!

All comments, ideas for collaboration and any feedback is welcome at executiveoffice@balkancsd.net.



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