



Ecumenical Women's Initiative

**THE EFFECTS OF
THE 2020 COVID-19 PANDEMIC
ON WOMEN'S ACTIVISM
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

A Rapid Assessment Report
August 2020

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Introduction

In EWI's guiding principles, we state our belief and trust in the experience and wisdom of women to determine the solutions to the challenges they face best suited to their context and needs. So, in determining how we would respond to the Covid-19 pandemic as it began to impact our region, our immediate first step was to ask and listen to the women we support.

The methodology behind this Report was developed by EWI together with external consultant **Ankica Dragin** who similarly led the process, analysed the findings and wrote this Rapid Assessment Report. As a tool it has informed the way we are adapting our current grantmaking programme and the accompaniment we are offering to our grantee partners.

Beyond EWI's needs, the Report can also provide useful insights to other funders in the region both into how they address current needs but also into how we can collectively support women's grassroots activism in times which are extremely challenging both economically and politically.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this Report – to our many grantee partners who responded to our questionnaires and shared their realities with us, to EWI's staff and to Ankica Dragin for her commitment and vision.

Carolyn Boyd Tomasović

EWI Managing director

Omiš, August 2020



About the Report

Why a Rapid Assessment?

Like elsewhere in the world, civil society organisations (CSOs) in the six countries¹ of the Western Balkans (WB) perform key activities in social development and human rights advocacy across in the region, often under challenging circumstances. Their role made them also major grassroots players in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic declared by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020. Despite their critical contribution since its onset, field experience indicates that CSOs have been facing a particularly negative impact of the pandemic causing severe operational and sustainability challenges.

The Effects of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic on Women's Activism in the Western Balkans - A Rapid Assessment Report by the Ecumenical Women's Initiative (EWI) resulted from the need to adapt EWI activities, most particularly its grassroots-oriented grantmaking, to the regional and local situation(s) arising from the onset of the 2020 pandemic.

In order to respond adequately to its local grantee partner organisations' newly-ensued position in 2020, EWI decided to conduct a rapid assessment and produce a report (RAR) focusing on self-assessment of their needs and expectations from EWI as their funding and/or capacity-building partner. The report primarily intends to provide an insight into the current realities faced by the local women-led community organisations within the third, civic sector in the Western Balkans. It also looks to document the self-perceived position of grassroots (women's) CSOs, identifying opportunities for EWI and its grantee partners' organisations emerging from the crisis. Grassroots-focused as it is, the RAR also portrays the realities of local women activists' strife to keep their organisations afloat during the ongoing, prospectively also lasting, global crisis.

Publication of this report in English and local language provides a common platform for (women's) CSOs, as our African activist colleagues said in their report published June 2020, 'to help strengthen solidarity and inform advocacy for grater recognition and support for the sector.'

Why EWI?

EWI is a Croatian women's fund founded in 2007. It seeks to support and promote women's active engagement as change-makers in both faith communities and society at large, perceiving women as human rights and gender equality advocates in the context of peacebuilding and reconciliation, faith-based ecumenical, inter-religious and intercultural cooperation.

EWI grew from the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Europe and Women's Desk programme titled the Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund (EWSF). From 1993 to 2007, the EWSF offered tangible

¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

support to women victims of war in ex-Yugoslavia through small focused grants. Building on this experience and the positive evaluation of a regionally positioned, indigenous mechanism which provided a flexible and culturally sensitive source of support to women, the WCC programme was closed and EWI launched.

Today, EWI is a non-governmental, non-profit making organisation supporting women as initiators and agents of change by building capacities and connecting individuals and grassroots community groups in the Western Balkans. As a pacifist, faith-based and feminist fund, EWI strives for a just and peaceful society in which diversity is a strength and source of creativity. In such a society, women have a dignified place and role in private and public life. They live in harmony with their competence and personal choices, with religion promoting and supporting the achievement of full equality between women and men.

From 2007 to 2019, EWI has developed a network of over 135 local grassroots women's organisations potentially targeting over 7.5 million women in the WB region. It has mobilised over EUR 2.5 million and distributed 346 grants to women-led CSOs, organised over 40 women activists' capacity-building events and provided 30 research grants for women theologians, scholars and activists. EWI is also a member of several international networks, advocacy and lobby groups, such as the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds and the Croatian Network for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation.

The RAR Process

Due to the postponing of many of the EWI and its local grantee partner activities in 2020 as a consequence of the pandemic, there was a need to gain feedback from the grassroots women's activists pertaining to their organisations' current situation, especially in the light of the forthcoming EWI call for proposals.

The form of the Report best corresponds to that of a case study, providing a snapshot testifying about the COVID-19 pandemic-related local realities all over the Western Balkans as perceived by women-led CSOs and their beneficiaries by mid-2020. The social context of the EWI target area in the light of the pandemic has been analysed by applying the Do No Harm (DNH) framework matrix². The empirical data from the field was collected by means of a shortonline questionnaire distributed by e-mail to 110 EWI grantee partner organisations in July 2020, with over a half of them (64 organisations, aka 58% of them) responding. The data has been processed and analysed, conclusions drawn, and future action options considered in the light of the EWI knowledge and experience, as well as the media accounts³ and available references.

² See the Appendix for detailed analysis, as well as Anderson 1999 for DNH framework background.

³ Stated in footnotes.

Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (as re. to the 2020 pandemic outbreak)
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DNH	Do No Harm
EU	European Union
EWI	Ecumenical Women's Initiative
EWSF	Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PWDs	People with disabilities
RAR	Rapid assessment report
PTS	Post-traumatic stress
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
WB	The Western Balkans
WCC	World Council of Churches
WHO	World Health Organisation

EWI grantee partner



Summary of Key Findings⁴

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic caused 86% of EWI grantee partners in local communities of the Western Balkans to change their organisations' priorities, working conditions and activities. These changes have resulted from various political, economic and social factors beyond the organisations' control. Consequently, these factors also caused new external and internal dynamics affecting EWI partner organisations, their activists and target groups - both predominantly women - in various adverse, even detrimental ways.

Political factors

- Lack of transparency in allocation of funds away from civil society
- Non-functioning institutions and poor response to the pandemic challenge
- Focus on parliamentary elections and campaigning
- Deteriorating political stability

Economic factors

- Reduced funding opportunities for CSOs
- Reduction of CSO budgets and ensuing new costs
- Increasing vulnerability of CSOs placing their survival in question
- Fall in women's income due to anti-covid measures, primarily limitation of movement

Social factors

- Difficulties adapting to meet containment measures
- Rising number of domestic and gender-based violence cases
- Increased cumulative discrimination of vulnerable social groups

Internal organisational factors

- Adaptation of CSO work to meet pandemic measures
- Restrictions on public gatherings affecting group, client support and field activities
- Postponement / cancellation of activities
- (All the above resulting in) increasing workload of CSOs

Personal factors

- Deterioration of mental health and its neglect due to other priorities
- Fear to engage in CSO activities (due to pandemic)
- Dealing with personal fears and triggers of past traumas

Priority CSO needs and expectations from EWI re. funding and non-financial support

- Unrestricted funding to strengthen organisational resilience
- (Continued) financial support for community activities
- IT education and support in accessing new technologies and online platforms
- Training to raise capacities for adapting in unprecedented situations
- Increased information and experiencesharing to further advocate for acknowledging women's CSOs' role and contribution, as well as mobilising support for the sector.

⁴ This section is based on a contribution by Carolyn Boyd Tomasović, EWI Managing Director.



EWI grantee partner

The Western Balkans Context

General Overview

Located in a post-socialist and post-conflict region, the Western Balkans countries are no strangers to challenges of transition and recession, such as rising poverty and unemployment, mass migration (esp. among the youth), decaying infrastructure or feminization of low income industries - the state-run healthcare, education and welfare, lower-level executive administration and CSOs. Generally speaking, the countries of the region are socio-politically and culturally similar, EU accession and NATO membership processes adding strain to the societies dominated by traditionalism, lingering ethnic and/or religious tensions or even open conflicts, patriarchy, violence in the public discourse, nationalist and ethnocentric historical revisionism, as well as a strong anti-CSO attitude of a significant proportion of the population.

Along with a decline in socially constructive values - solidarity, social responsibility, respecting and acknowledging human dignity or law and human rights observation - such a context increases the gap between various social groups along the lines of their different values, interests and experiences. It is reflected in the ever more emphasised 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomies (e.g. traditionalist/nationalist vs. progressive/civic, rural vs. urban, majority vs. minority, religious vs. secular, the domicile vs. 'the newcomers', etc).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and consequential introduction, even enforcement, of emergency measures, various occasions - most notably public events - symbolising such divisions and promoting the current state of affairs have been cancelled, causing additional frustration with the public. Under such circumstances,

CSOs advocating for equality, pointing to and opposing discrimination and social marginalisation are still being perceived as challenging the 'social order'. However, experience has shown that it was precisely CSOs who, based on their extensive grassroots and human rights advocacy experience had been timely pointing to the crucial forthcoming challenges to be faced by the socially most vulnerable groups, along with actors bound to provide support to them, in the light of the onsetting pandemic.⁵

As illustrated by the EWI grantee partners' experience in this RAR, CSOs have perceived such circumstances both as challenges and social dividers and, more importantly, as opportunities around similarities and connectors fostering new synergies around human human rights advocacy.

Pandemic-Stricken

'With the rapid spreading of the coronavirus in the Western Balkans, governments introduced measures to protect their fragile health systems by purchasing medical equipment and medicine, converting medical centres to specialised COVID-19 centres and concert and sport arenas to temporary field hospitals, increasing the salaries of medical staff, and changing the work hours to safeguard the medical staff. In addition, governments responded with lockdowns and partial shutdowns in the second half of March, resulting in the closure of airports and borders, educational institutions, restaurants and shops, bans on large gatherings, restrictions on domestic travel, and the instatement of curfews. These containment measures and external shock are expected to result in a notable contraction

⁵ As amply exemplified in *State of Civil Society in Serbia - Potential COVID-19 Impact 2020* or Bieber et al. 2020

across the region. The Western Balkan economies are particularly affected through several channels.' (OECD 2020: Overview)

Despite early warnings in January 2020, an official World Health Organisation (WHO) declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11 March 2020 and all the measures undertaken by the states, there is an impression with the general public of most countries in the WB⁶ that the authorities in the region seem not to have taken the virus spreading threat and its implications seriously. The general impression was that they were initially perceiving it as just another epidemic or a disaster relevant state services had been used to. Moreover, leading politicians in some of the countries in the region even joked about the severity of the situation in press conferences transmitted by major TV stations just a week before a national state of emergency, including curfew and total restriction of movement for certain age groups, would be introduced and crisis management state bodies established in a counter-Constitutional manner.⁷

The pandemic disclosed the reality of dysfunctional state institutions and services in their full scope, with the top decision-makers claiming the right to do everything in their power pursuing the agenda of the loyal elites or for self-promotion. Despite early warnings concerning unnecessary limitation of human rights and freedoms coming from CSOs and the independent media, in the media-wise still predominantly illiterate population of the region (Petković et al. 2019) the main source of information remained the state-controlled media. Once the population realised that the information presented to them was unreliable, confusing and did not add up to their day-to-day reality, the intended effects of the mainstream media propaganda have been

achieved. With the past 1990s wartime traumas retriggered, ongoing social decay for over three decades and, most recently, in fear for their lives due to lack of disinfectants, masks, other means of protection against the virus or simply being too poor to afford them, the majority of the population became convinced that there are no other ways of dealing with the pandemic than the very restrictive ones they have been subjected to.

Confined to their most personal space, without school or work commute, with public transportation cancelled and curfew in force, the 'traditional' family atmosphere became like that within a pressure cooker. The most common way to ventilate stress and frustration became lashing out on people in immediate surroundings, leading to a notable increase in reported domestic and/or gender-based violence cases. This circumstance, in turn, created additional workload for local women's CSOs, primarily those specialised in providing support to women experiencing violence. While all the limitations of the healthcare became evident with the increase of the number of the infected by the COVID-19, increased incidence of domestic and gender-based violence emphasised all the limitations of the welfare and other state institutions supposed to provide protection in such cases.

The anti-COVID-19 measures have also retriggered personal trauma due to the 1990s war-related experience of isolation, hunger and general existential uncertainty. Women's CSO activists and their beneficiaries were no exception. This circumstance was a major CSO operational factor in the WB regions where women, including today's activists themselves, had been directly victimised, so they needed some time to deal with their personal trauma first in order to be

⁶ Except in Croatia, the only EU country in the region, which, acc. to Nenad Zakošek, a Professor of the School of Political Science of the University of Zagreb, followed the European response to the crisis, but where civic initiatives had also stopped the authorities from adopting stricter limitations'. Source: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/nenad-zakosek-zapadni-balkan-jacanje-drzave-korona-virus/30577334.html> (Last visited on 10 August 2020)

⁷ Sources: <https://pescanik.net/vanredno-stanje-uputstvo-za-upotrebu/> and <https://pescanik.net/krizni-stab-revealed/> (Last visited on 10 August 2020)

able to support their beneficiaries.⁸

On the other hand, despite the increasing workload, the entire third / civic sector was faced with funds previously allocated for CSOs being relocated for other, supposedly pandemic-related purposes. The usual calls for proposals with the state institutions or other funding sources were either put on hold, re-purposed or cancelled, leaving CSOs to fend for themselves as best as they could. Moreover, with 2020 parliamentary elections happening in five of the six countries in the region, there was another priority in the eyes of decision-makers. Even more funds were drained for this purpose, mostly from the already scarce state resources allocated for the heavily feminized service sectors, those at the forefront of combating the pandemic. In some countries of the region, the independent media also reported about the abuse of public funds, even those for purposes of coping with the pandemic.⁹

The situation in the second, the business sector also worsened. Women entrepreneurs¹⁰, along with rural women, became practically equally affected by lack of income as unemployed women or women working in CSOs with their project and/or core funding postponed or even cancelled due to pandemic. Additionally, the states discriminated CSOs at this level, too. Despite being regular taxpayers, CSOs remained without entitlement to state subsidies aimed at alleviating the socio-economic effects of the pandemic.

A recent gender analysis of COVID-19 response in Serbia¹¹, among other things, states the follow-

ing about the pandemic impact on women:

'In general, the biggest change for women was the increased amount of unpaid work, along with working from home or in positions with the highest risk, such as in the health or supply sector. All unavailable services were provided by women who also performed additional work on the application of protection measures, hygiene maintenance, etc. ...

Women also make up the majority of those who were most exposed or whose position changed the most due to the epidemic. The epidemic highlighted, sharpened and intensified the existing inequalities and pointed out the true meaning of the term "vulnerability". The most disadvantaged are those who are usually not visible in the system, the poor, the unemployed or informally employed who belong to vulnerable groups, with the majority of them being women. The state measures were not sufficiently aimed at supporting these categories of population or recognising the existing inequalities.' (Pajvančić et al. 2020: 14)

A UN Women rapid gender assessment survey on the impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia also disclose that, on average, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and North Macedonia were more severely affected by the pandemic than men (Ross, Taylor Ed. 2020).

New hardships continuing left and right in 2020, people became more disoriented, confused, eventually stressed and weary, with an increas-

⁸ EWI office did a series of online meetings with its grantee partners at the end of May 2020. The purpose of these meetings was to get updates on the grassroots women's organisations' position after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerning personal fears triggered by the anti-pandemic measures, a woman activist and a CSO leader from Bosnia and Herzegovina said her personal trigger was the fact that, at one point, shops ran out of flour. A woman activist from Kosovo had a PTS experience due to the curfew and isolation.

⁹ Sources: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/korupcija-bih-korona-virus-nabavke/30637590.html> and <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/aferra-respiratori-premijer-novalic-solak-i-hodzic-sipa-tuzilastvo/30641481.html> (Last visited on 10 August 2020)

¹⁰ 'SMEs [small- and medium-sized enterprises] in the Western Balkans make up 99% firms, generate around 65% of total business sector value added and account for 73% of total business sector employment.' (OECD 2019: 3)

¹¹ Commissioned and published by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

ing toll on their mental health. Consequently, the rising distrust with the authorities, the media and service-providing institutions caused them to start behaving predominantly two ways. They either ignore the warnings by not keeping the recommended social distance, avoiding crowds and wearing a mask, which has led to increased number of the infected among younger generations. Older generations, on the other hand, have become so frightened that they resort to self-imposed isolation, to such a degree that they avoid any unnecessary personal contact

even in the open. Under such circumstances, CSOs demanding rule of law and human rights observation, appealing to reason, insisting on transparency, fact-checking and accountability, remain beacons of hope for the socially most vulnerable in the ever encroaching darkness of discrimination. For some of them, as this RAR and similar reports referred to in it indicate, CSOs have been those rare places they could resort to over the years searching for their personal light at the end of the tunnel.

Rapid Assessment Findings

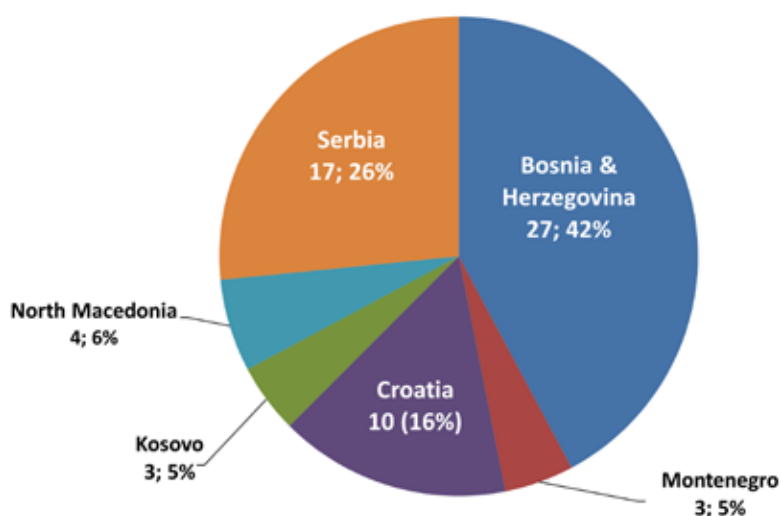
Sixty-four women's grassroots organisations from EWI grantee partners' network responded to the rapid assessment questionnaire (corresponding to 58% of the total of 110 of such organisations EWI collaborated with from 2007 to 2019). The questionnaire used for this rapid assessment contained only six questions. It was purposefully designed to be short so the rapid assessment process would avoid adding to the EWI grantee partners' existing and, under the circumstances discussed in this report, rising workload.

The respondents' feedback to the six questions¹² concerned states in which the organisations were registered, changes in their working environment resulting from the pandemic, the most common factors affecting their work and, finally, the grantee partners were asked to state their organisations' most urgent needs and major expectations from EWI as their funding and/or capacity building partner, often the only one some of them had ever had. Narrative answers to the three open questions have been coded, cumulated and also numerically processed.

EWI Grantee Partners' Location

Proportionally to the number and geographical distribution of grantee partner organisations applying to the EWI calls for project proposals, most responses to the RAR questionnaire come from women's CSOs based in Bosnia and Herzegovina (27 organisations, aka 42% of them), followed by those from Serbia and Croatia (17; 26% and 10; 16% respectively). The least number of responses came from North Macedonia (4; 6%), Montenegro and Kosovo (3; 5% from each - Figure 1).

1. Where is your organisation based?

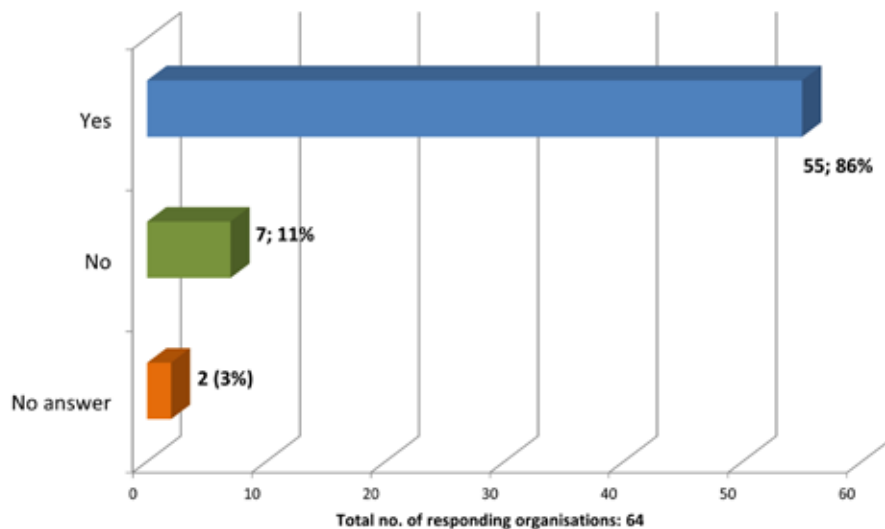


¹² Two closed, one multiple choice and three open ones. Once they had been coded and cumulated, narrative answers to the three open questions were processed numerically.

Factors Affecting the Work of WB Women's CSOs in 2020

Most respondents (55; 86%) claim their priorities, working conditions and activities have changed during 2020. Nearly a tenth of them (7; 11%) claim that their working environment and activities remained unchanged, while two organisations did not respond to this question (Figure 2).

2. Have your organisation's priorities, working conditions and activities changed in 2020



Some of the most illustrative experiences of the women's grassroots organisations' changing priorities, working conditions and activities are the following:¹³

Working Despite Everything

'We were in the field the whole time... We got only 20 disposable masks from the municipality... We engaged mothers who have finished a sewing course funded by EWI to sew masks at home, so we could distribute them to our family members and others... We had to adapt to our funding partners who had other conditions and requests, writing projects asking for help, but we got none approved or funded because the demand must have been great... Due to frequent power cuts caused by bad weather, we lost two computers, so now we are using only one, which brings our efficiency in question because many of our funding partners are asking for reports and responses to polls on the state of affairs during the pandemic. We had to make sure our children keep progressing, to provide for services of a mental disability therapist, a psychologist and other experts, so we have kept in touch with them, done counselling and workshops using an online platform...' (Western Balkans country /WBC/ 1)¹⁴

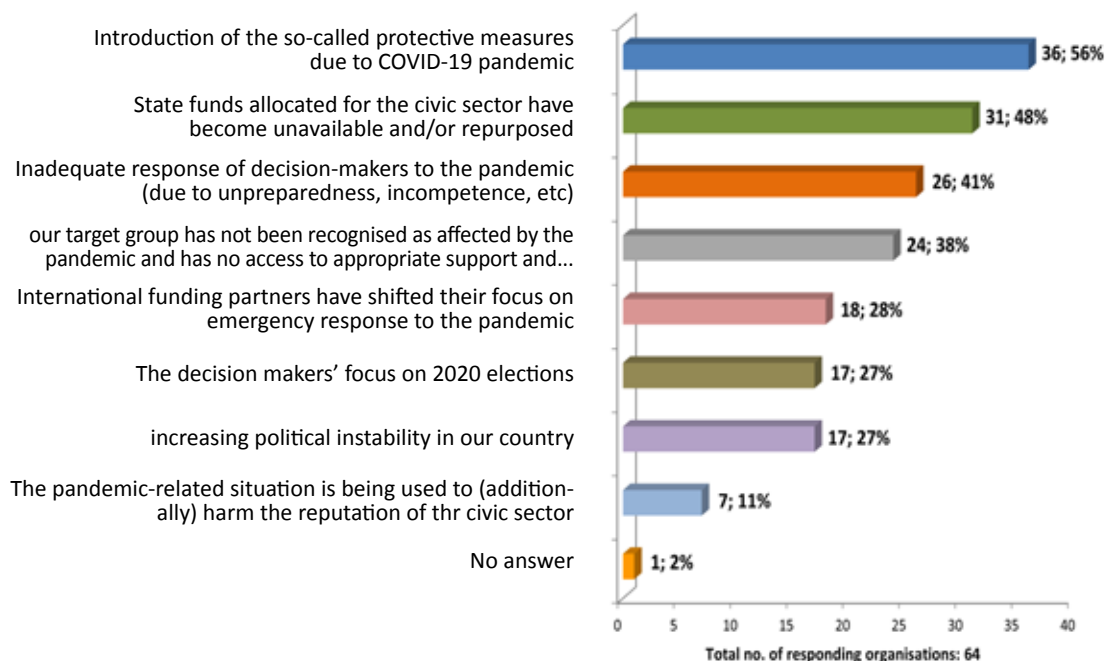
¹³ Quotations from respondents' narrative answers illustrating the RAR findings are in shaded boxes and in Italic.

¹⁴ EWI grantee partner organisations' home countries, target area, office location and other information revealing organisational and/or personal identity have been omitted for confidentiality and activist safety purposes. The 'WBC + number' code is used to show the geographical diversity of women activists' responses from various WB countries.

'Due to unforeseen circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to focus our services on working from home using a phone, providing three additional mobile phone lines accessible to citizens to report violence, for their psychosocial empowerment and confidential counselling. It was all on a voluntary basis because the decision-makers had forgotten about the civic sector partnerships due to the election year, including about the operation of norganisations contributing to decreasing discrimination of citizens (of violence victims, single parents, the elderly, people with disabilities[PWDs] and those in need of personal assistance, etc). All activities we have provided for since the onset of the pandemic have been continually provided to 40 beneficiaries. Despite everything, we still don't know what will happen with the state funds allocated for the third sector activities that relevant ministries should have had distributed to CSOs by now. We will continue working and providing our services voluntarily just like before and be available 24/7 to all citizens of our local community addressing us for help and support.' (WBC 2)

EWI grantee partners were asked to choose three out of eight predominant factors affecting their, namely grassroots women's CSOs priorities, working conditions and activities in 2020. Their answers were the following (Figure 3):

3. We think that the current state of affairs in our organisation most likely resulted from the following circumstances ensuing during 2020:



Over half of the respondents (36; 56%) hold that their 2020 priorities, working conditions and activities have been most affected by the introduction of the so-called protective measures due to COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly half of them (31; 48%) point to the fact that introduction of such measures resulted in CSO-oriented state funding (on various levels) being either stopped or

redirected to meet other needs, primarily emergency ones related to the pandemic. At the same time, a somewhat lesser proportion of respondents (26; 41%) indicate that, in their opinion, the response of the decision-makers to the newly ensued situation was inadequate, primarily due to their unpreparedness and/or incompetence:

Multiple Detrimental Factors

'Incompetent institutional response to the ensuing pandemic; unstable political situation in the light of the forthcoming economic crisis and parliamentary elections - the needs of our target groups have been pushed aside or neglected due to the overall social situation. There is also a lack of state funds and/or an insufficient number of institutional funding calls for proposals.' (WBC 3)

Over a third of responding CSOs (24; 38%) hold that the protective measures have affected their priorities, working conditions and activities because their target groups have not been recognised as affected by the pandemic and had no access to appropriate support and protection.

International funding partners' sudden emergency re-orientation due to the 2020 pandemic has been recognised as a limiting factor affecting their work significantly by over a quarter of respondents (18; 28%). Nearly the same number of them identified two undoubtedly political factors detrimental to their work: deterioration of the political situation in their countries and decision-makers' focus on the 2020 parliamentary elections (17; 27% per factor).

Around a tenth of respondents (7; 11%) hold that the pandemic-related situation has been used to (additionally) harm the reputation of the civic sector, while one organisation has not responded to this question.

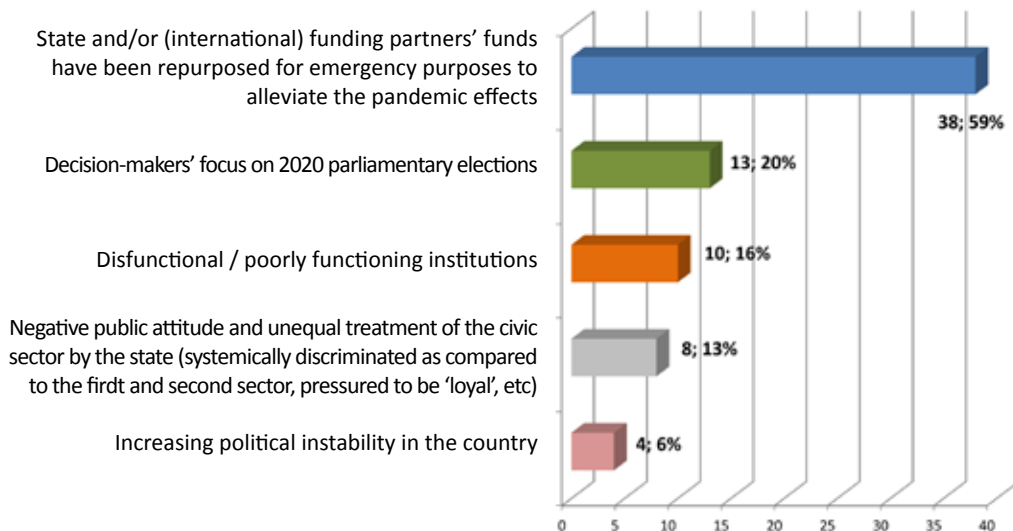
Narrative responses to the question on the current state of affairs in their organisations explicating their answers to the previous two questions indicate that there are similar predominant pandemic-related, mutually interconnected and primarily detrimental factors affecting grassroots women's CSOs' work in all countries of the WB region. The respondents have identified five groups of such factors prioritised in this RAR by the scope of their influence and working top-down: political, economic, social, operational and personal ones. Out of a total of 33 factors in these five groups, the key ones are being presented and/or discussed below.

*It is **important to note** that, depending on each EWI grantee partner's position in its local context, any of these factors may have been deciding for their work in 2020. Moreover, many of these factors may turn the tables on women's CSOs for the worse if inconducive circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic persist in the future.*

Political Factors

The respondents identified five political factors relevant to all WB countries and indicative of decision-makers' positions and activities (Figure 4):

4. Political factors affecting the WB women's CSOs in 2020



This category has the factor most responding organisations (38; 59%) identified as the predominant one. It is the fact that state and CSO-aimed funds from other sources have been repurposed for purposes of coping with the pandemic. The consequential uncertainty is mainly attributed to the urgency of introducing mandatory measures to mitigate the pandemic. The respondents' feedback, however, on their perception of the functioning of institutions as re. the CSOs and their beneficiaries during 2020 indicates also lack of transparency, even systemic discrimination, in such processes:

Questionable Emergency Measures

'In [WBC 5], a single man decides about everything, declares the state of emergency and cancels it, scares people with mass dying and too small cemeteries to bury all the dead, introduces curfew of up to 72 hours while, at the same time, he keeps on touring [WBC 5], distributing ventilators personally, getting his pictures taken and organising press conferences along the way (without wearing a mask, naturally, at any point...), then all of a sudden, decides to cancel the state of emergency and continue the pre-election campaign as if Corona was never around because it [the virus] decided to leave on its own...' (WBC 5)

No Emergency State Subsidies for CSOs

'... Even small installments of [cca.] 128 EUR have not been paid to us since February. The public call for proposals of the Town of [name of the town] we had applied to was cancelled. The Employment Law in force since the onset of introduced in the Federation, as well as no state subsidy scheme in the field of employment, did not take into account CSOs despite the fact that we are treated as equally ranked taxpayers in all the relevant laws.' (WBC 1)

Parliamentary elections were due in five of the six WB countries in 2020, making them the second most significant political factors mentioned by one fifth of the respondents (13; 20%). Election years, by rule, imply less state funds for the civic sector even without emergency measures due to a disaster. Taking into account that CSOs target the vulnerable, cumulatively marginalised social groups, as well as the rate of poverty in the region, it is no surprise that pressure on CSOs is exerted also by channelling the flow of institutional calls for project proposals based on the organ-

isations' 'loyalty'. The aim of it all is to reach as many voters as possible by convincing them that their needs - though indirectly, through CSOs - are being met from 'the state funds'. Focusing on elections in some of the countries caused the state actors in charge of implementation of public health and safety protective measures to relativise, aka diminish the potential and actual dangers of the pandemic, encouraging thus mass irresponsible, reckless behaviour:

Irresponsibility and Reckless Behaviour

'After the elections ... when it seemed there was no real opposition in [WBC 5] because everyone agreed to his terms, [the President's surname] started talking about dying, citizens' reckless behaviour already on [date - a day after the elections]. All of a sudden, his so-called crisis management team and pro-regime doctors reappeared, as if they had been on a vacation up to then. Once again, as if out of the blue, they once again started their daily public addresses on various TV stations, continually obscuring the realistic picture of the everyday state of affairs in hospitals, as well as the actual number of the infected and dead. The social media offered us a completely different picture of suffering and dying of people in the [name] region and towns becoming new pandemic hotspots. Ordinary people became confused, we simply do not know whom to trust anymore. There are speculations about continuation of online schooling from September, with the "My Holiday in My [name of the country]" promo campaign in full swing meanwhile.' (WBC 5)

Nearly a third of CSOs participating in the RAR (18; 28%) also testify about the non-functioning - unprepared, disinterested, non- or inadequately responding - institutions heavily affecting operational aspects of their work. Around a quarter of them (15; 23%) state their workload has increased as a consequence of it, esp. in cases of domestic or gender-based violence (Figure 6). Some of the organisations are also verging on taking over the legal obligations of state institutions in emergency situations:

Domestic and Gender Based Violence: Administrative Silence

'Institutions cannot be reached, making any kind of decision-making or cooperation with them virtually impossible. We can only write to them, but they still do not reply.' (WBC 5)

'We have a feeling that the authorities are simply relieved because now they have a possibility of a seemingly perfect excuse at hand - it's the Corona virus. The situation was sometimes overflowing with the 'oh-who-cares-about-the-law-now' attitude.' (WBC 1)

Domestic and Gender Based Violence: No Access to Courts

'Since the onset of the pandemic... no [domestic or gender-based] violence cases have been processed in any part of [WBC 1]. There was barely any protection available to the victims in order to stop the violence against them because the courts are handling only police detention cases... [Our organisation] is in contact with the coordination body, educating and motivating all its members on how to be of use and provide support to violence victims under the current circumstances, providing for immediate stopping of violence, its documentation and commencement of official proceedings once courts have resumed their full operational mode.' (WBC 1)

Domestic and Gender Based Violence: Police and Welfare Negligence Increasing Imminent Threat

'A serious concern of a surprising degree has surfaced recently. It is the unpreparedness of the institutions in charge to provide adequate support and protection to victims of violence. Most particularly, it relates to the police and welfare services we have been in contact with daily. The things that have surfaced are ignorance, lack of knowledge of laws and existing proceedings, lack of education on domestic violence, esp. with the police officers in field. We have been facing the following situations on daily basis:

- *Once onsite, the police officer warns the violent male partner to "keep it quiet because the neighbourshave been complaining".*
- *Despite the legal obligation of the police to act in even in cases of an anonymous call, they keep asking the woman activist for personal data of the person reporting the violence.*
- *The police ask for all data about a violence case from the women activists so they would spare some of their own time instead of investigating it "from scratch" as bound by law.*
- *Though there were witnesses to a domestic violence victim trying to escape through the window, the police accepted the violent male partner's explanation that "the victim wanted to to get out during the curfew and he was just preventing her from doing it".*
- *The police ask the women activists to check whether the violence is still happening as they speak because "if it has stopped, there's no need for them to go to the site".*
- *In cases of emergency intervention requests, they insist on them being sent to them in writing and containing all data, yet they do not know the details of how it should be done or to which e-mail address.*

Additionally, they always seem not to have read anything we had sent to them, nor do they reply to confirm receipt because "nobody reads e-mails anyway". There are simply too many examples similar to the ones stated above indicated how the dangers of non-expert victim protection may be under-estimated. When it comes to welfare services, even in cases of children victims of violence, we have had answers like: "Just refer it to the police and they will call us if necessary." Or: "We are on a passive duty call and cannot leave the office / do onsite work" and alike. I must stress that all actions described above are contrary to the law and existing official procedures.' (WBC 3)

In development and conflict transformation context analysis tools application, situations mentioned above are considered indicative of a socially detrimental, unintentional activity performed by the 'helping' actors, in this case undoubtedly well-intended CSOs. DNH framework (Anderson 1999) refers to it as a negative substitution effect. Unless voiced and counteracted, a substitution effect is likely to have the following impact:

- Institutions-to-CSOs responsibility transfer in the eyes of the target and interest groups (potentially leading also to target groups' 'CSO dependency').
- Facilitating institutional unaccountability.
- Weakening the rule of law.
- Diminishing the level of human rights observation, as well as their exercise, protection and advancement opportunities.
- Increasing social instability (despite all the intentions and efforts to decrease it).

Reflected in the realities of CSO life and as stated in the EWI grantee partners' responses (15; 23% - Figure 7), a very concrete consequence of a substitution effect is the increase of workload and pressure on women's CSOs. Such a situation, along with a perceived negative decision-makers' attitude towards CSOs (8; 13%) and in case of increased political instability¹⁵, might also lead to erosion of the civic sector reputation with an even wider public. The situation in this respect is even more concerning due to the fact that some EWI grantee partner organisations are not only dealing with literally survival issues of their beneficiaries, but have been left to fend for themselves even under such circumstances:

Relapse from Development to Aid Provision: Life-or-Death Field Interventions

'...I will state the greatest recklessness, omission, insensitivity, irresponsibility, rudeness, incompetence happening during the pandemic. NO ONE¹⁶ from the decision-makers ranks, NOR ANY of the measures introduced has taken into account children and adults WHOSE LIVES DEPEND ON MEDICATION... Relevant ministries and the Government did not even considering it before they have been pressured by Facebook groups Only later on did the Minister [name of the geographical subregion and the Minister] get involved, but still insufficiently... Most families live on welfare and to give them only one package of food and personal hygiene items equals zero. We have been coming across hungry and people suffering from primary, non-COVID-19 related diseases in the field... Our beneficiary families LIVE MOSTLY IN RURAL AREAS WITH NO OWN OR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, not even under regular circumstances. Only two taxi vehicles provided services to 20,000 people in the Municipality of [name of the municipality]... We are a regional citizens' association... and we had problems going to the neighbouring municipalities...THE LOCAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAMS simply referred EVERYONE they knew was out member to our care, as well as some other marginalised groups, whilst NOT PROVIDING ANY financial support or asking how they might help us...' (WBC 1)

Dilemma: Life-Saving or a Crime?

'... It was hard to get [life-saving] medicines from abroad because of their cost. There was an appeal for emergency financial aid, but then there was the problem of mobilising people who would like to get involved in it all, to transport the medicines because some of them require special transportation conditions, e.g. cooling, so we had to get to some portable mini-fridges somehow. It all requires money, time, no sleeping... The pressure was immense... We were also asking ourselves whether we are committing a crime by doing it...' (WBC 1)

The following responses also testify about the institutions' and decision-makers' different treatment of CSOs as compared to the state and business sectors as a political factor affecting the work of WB women's activists in 2020:

¹⁵ Openly mentioned by only two EWI rapid assessment respondents, but evident in at least four of the six WB countries and accounted for in the media (e.g. <https://www.dw.com/sr/turbo-korona-na-zapadnom-balkanu-o-poljupci-ma-i-slavlju/a-54265270>, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/pandemija-otkriva-geopoliticke-igre-na-balkanu> - Last visited on 15 August 2020)

¹⁶ Capital letters have been used in the original response, too.

CSOs to the Rescue, No State Subsidies Provided

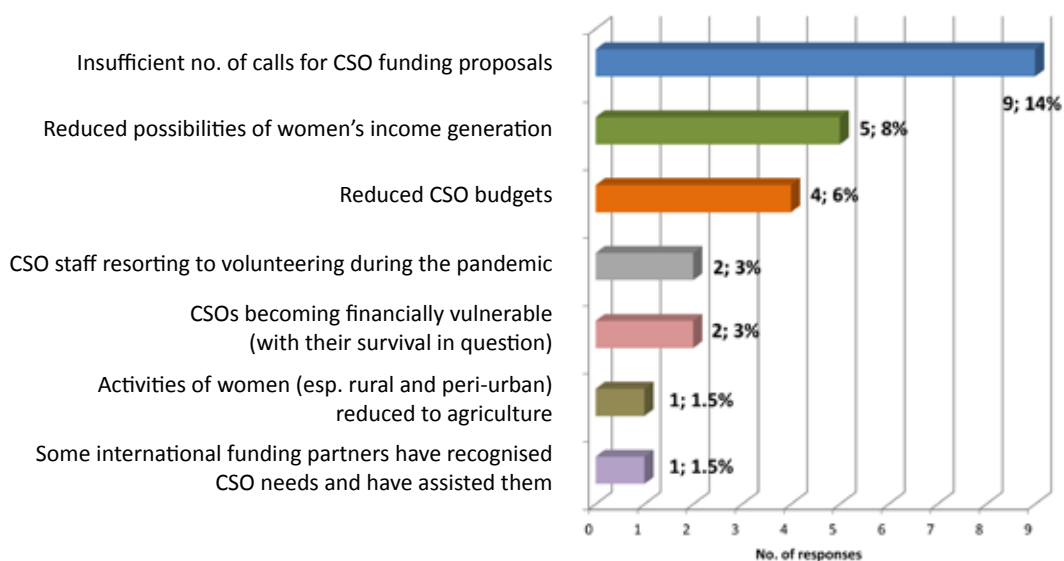
'Our target group, women (those experiencing domestic violence, single mothers, over 65, unemployed women), have not been recognised as a group needing assistance. They got no help or support. The civic sector in [WBC 1] is not recognised as belonging to this state. Companies, institutions, the private sector got some help or subsidies, like income tax or mandatory welfare insurance reduction or assistance provided by the subregional government that took over payment pay of these costs for three months. Sadly, CSOs have not been recognised as belonging to any of the categories entitled to these benefits. Although we have been paying all our dues regular and contributing to the state budget, we have been deprived of these privileges. Moreover, municipality authorities were expecting help from us.' (WBC 1)

'...State measures related to the private sector and full-time employees. The unemployed or people with difficulties accessing employment, as well as part-time employees have not been recognised, so it has been impossible to provide for sustainability of our newly-started project to sparkle new enterprenurship ideas over the last three months.' (WBC 5)

Economic Factors

The respondents' examples concerning state subsidies to alleviate the effects of the pandemic undoubtedly extend into the field of economy and circumstances influencing the financial and material power of various actors, including CSOs.¹⁷ EWI grantee partners participating in the rapid assessment have identified seven key factors affecting the welfare and standard of living of (women) activists, both employed and volunteers, as well as their target groups (Figure 5):

5. Economic factors affecting the WB women's CSOs in 2020



¹⁷ Affecting employment opportunities and sustainability, as well as income-generation.

Insufficient funding opportunities and reduced No. of calls of CSO funding proposals are the leading pandemic-induced economic factors recognised by most respondents (9; 14%):

CSO Funding Calls for Proposals Stopped

'Ministries that have CSO (co-)funding budget lines every year have stopped their public calls related activities. It affected us directly because we had already applied to their calls.' (WBC 1)

This circumstance is the direct cause of CSO budget reductions (4; 6%), jeopardising respondent organisations' operation and even survival despite modest membership fees and contributions from other, usually local sources:

CSO Survival in Question: Decreasing Funds, Accumulating Dues and Costs

'... As our running costs are covered from membership fees and donations, this has been made impossible over the course of the last couple of months. Unless the situation normalises, it will be so in the next couple of months, too. More precisely, we have no Internet connection anymore and our debt for electricity, phone, water, waste collection... is increasing. By this time of the year we would usually already have paid all our dues for the last year's coal for the winter. It is now also impossible to do, so we have a problem of heating during the forthcoming season. ...' (WBC 5)

Some respondents point to the fact that their staff have resorted to volunteering, namely working without salaries, added to the fact that their organisation's survival is in question.¹⁸ Movement and travel restriction measures are directly affecting the possibilities of CSO women beneficiaries' income generation from selling their produce and products, thus increasing their economic vulnerability and dependence on welfare services (5; 8%).

Despite some international funding partners recognising new CSO needs and supporting them in coping with the pandemic circumstances, introducing emergency measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic has once again showed that gender, an omnipresent social phenomenon as it is, persists being one of the deciding factors in women's (socio-) economic marginalisation esp. those from cumulatively discriminated groups such as rural women. Respondents' examples also testify of the way such patriarchal understanding and enforcement of gender roles operates, starting from decision-making levels all the way to the CSO beneficiary women's local community and family realities:

Gender-Based Oppression on the Rise

'There have been many practical examples these days, like those when officials, in their public address, keep talking about the national crisis management team measure that parents of children under twelve have the right to a paid leave. It often happens that they use "mothers" instead of "parents" (because in our social context it is logical that it is the mother who cares about the children even when her job is a more responsible or a better-paid one, etc). There are even situations when representatives of state institutions facilitate gender-based discrimination in their public address, creating a social environment in which it is legitimate to say "a male child for [name of the country]"; just like the coordinator of the medical sub-team has done in a press

¹⁸ Also due to increasing workload, as indicated in Figure 6.

conference of the National Infectious Diseases Prevention Coordination Team. It is a clear message to all of us that female children are less important even in the times of the pandemic.’ (WBC 3)

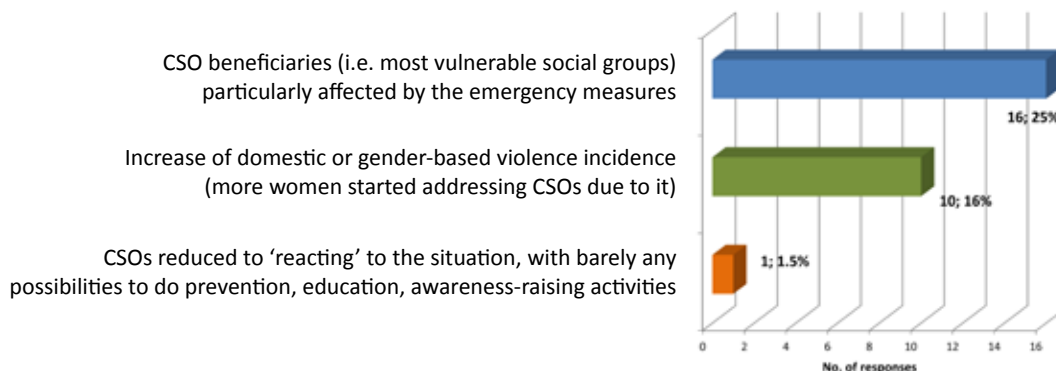
Freedom of Movement as a Gender Issue

‘Closing universities and high schools is also a factor making our work more difficult because we have lost the “time margin” when the girls can visit our office... when we can give them some advice, provide some legal aid or do some “sophisticated counselling of the head of the family”... We had to shut our office down for two months. Even before that, we had to turn our activities into online ones, which affected our women collaborators in the villages of two municipalities the most. It was conducive to the male establishment which reduced all women’s “freetime” activities, their more frequent commute to the town of [name of the town] and directed them to get more involved in agriculture... Field activities are the greatest problem... We have registered an increase in domestic minorisation of women, especially girls, due to reduced public attention paid to gender-related rights, increase in domestic violence incidence being a proof of it. ... Under such conditions, when healthcare authorities keep talking only about “protection”, yet implying nothing but politics, it creates a terrible cognitive dissonance with the public. (They glorify isolation, whilst at the same time, conducting public and physical election campaigns. Fines for not wearing protective gear have been introduced, yet no fines for law-breaking are being enforced where they should be, nobody warns reckless citizens in shops etc.). It is no wonder the public thinks it is the “wrong time” for gender-related rights protection. So, when a girl wants to meet with us, then isolation is “in force” while at the same time, (mass) religious services, family feasts, groups of people working together in fields... are not held liable for their actions. Naturally, it is all decided by men with women “assisting” in such decision-making. Decrease in seasonal work-related migration of girls is also a boost to gender insensitivity. Unfortunately, none of this will be mentioned in the Government’s “care” for “non-health-related effects of the pandemic”.’ (WBC 4)

Social Factors

Social factors, as referred to in this RAR, relate to social phenomena and processes affecting the work of (women’s) CSOs becoming more prominent during 2020 and which might have (had) a detrimental influence on EWI grantee partners’ activities’ results and effects. Social factors are especially relevant as related to the expected onset of positive long-term social changes. Respondents have identified three overarching social factors affecting their work (Figure 6):

6. Social factors affecting the WB women’s CSO in 2020



The most significant social factor in respondents' eyes is the circumstance that their beneficiaries, by rule members of the most vulnerable social groups (women, children and youth, PWDs, Roma and rural women, etc), have been particularly affected by the emergency measures. This circumstance, explicitly stated by a quarter of the women's CSOs participating in the rapid assessment (16; 25%), is reflected in an increased material vulnerability and cumulative discrimination of their beneficiaries:

Increasing Beneficiary Vulnerability

'... Some families have stressed their material vulnerability caused by lack of funds to meet even their most basic needs. ...' (WBC 3)

'... Activity-wise, a need for humanitarian aid distribution reappeared. Elderly people could not even volunteer¹⁹ and their material situation deteriorated...' (WBC 1)

'... Over the last three months, our organisation mostly worked on providing aid to our socially vulnerable women beneficiaries. The Red Cross gave fifty of their families financial assistance of [cca.] 77 EUR, hygiene parcels and clothers for children and youth. Forty families got [cca.] 51 EUR vouchers to purchase food items in a nearby supermarket. We provided for families with most members to get some food from the [another CSO name] soup kitchen. Our beneficiary girls got a two-month scholarship to cover their Internet and school supply costs.' (WBC 1)

Based on increased number of women and other people from the local communities addressing CSOs, nearly a quarter of respondents (10; 16%) testify about an increased domestic or gender-based violence incidence:

Domestic and Gender-Based Violence: An Adverse Effect of Emergency Measures

'... Necessary government measures have affected functioning of families to a great extent, especially in those with both spouses losing their jobs, working from home or alike, because they have created space for longer-lasting and more frequent domestic violence. Due to the constant presence of their male partners, women victims of violence have great difficulties asking for help. Invisibility of children as domestic violence witnesses and/or victims is particularly concerning. It is obvious from the fact that violence cases involving children are most often reported by people who are not their family members, leading once again to a conclusion that fear of the violent perpetrator is the most powerful mechanism to hiding such violence. [Our CSO] has had an increased number of domestic violence incidents reported since the onset of the pandemic. One of the characteristics of such phone calls is that it is increasingly being reported by people who have heard or witnessed such violence. The nature of help sought has also changed. Psychological violence, characterised by arguments and conflicts among partners, as well as parents and children, esp. adolescents, has become very prominent.'

¹⁹ It is a common practice in the region to provide volunteers with at least some food and refreshments, if not also some symbolic everyday goods (e.g. promo materials such as notebooks, pencils, T-shirts, a gift parcel, etc) or even a minimal financial compensation, as a way to show appreciation of their contribution. For a significant proportion of them, it is the only way to get to some (more) food, basic goods and/or company.

... What is very characteristic in this period [of the pandemic] are various forms of pressure exerted on women by their family members, relatives and friends that "it is no time to report violence because the current priority is to safeguard health and family life". All this indicates that the pandemic released "the patriarchy ghost from the bottle" which will, in turn, result in reaffirmation of the "family values", implying that in order to preserve the family one [aka a woman] needs to endure everything, even violence perpetrated against her.' (WBC 3)

Increasing Violence Incidence and CSO Workload Creating New Funding Challenges

'[Our CSO] has applied to three local calls for funding proposals (that of the city and the district), but the calls have been stopped due to the pandemic. There was no general support provided by the local self-government for women having experienced domestic violence, despite the fact that it had been rising while isolation measures [aka the curfew] were in force. On the other hand, [names of two international agencies] have recognised the need to strengthen women's CSOs and supported our activities during the crisis. Over the course of the last two months, our workload, aka the number of calls and requests for support concerning violence has doubled. Our CSO has also been faced with the challenge of looking for a longer-term financial support for secondary prevention and a sub-programme concerning operation in crisis situations as related to support provision to our target group.' (WBC 5)

Though evident from most respondents' answers, one of them explicitly points to the key social factor concerning the very essence of CSO work. During 2020, especially upon introduction of emergency measures due to the pandemic, CSOs were practically reduced to response-type activities, merely reacting to the situation in their most immediate social environment. The possibilities of their engagement in education, awareness-raising, advocacy or prevention of negative social trends have been significantly decreased:

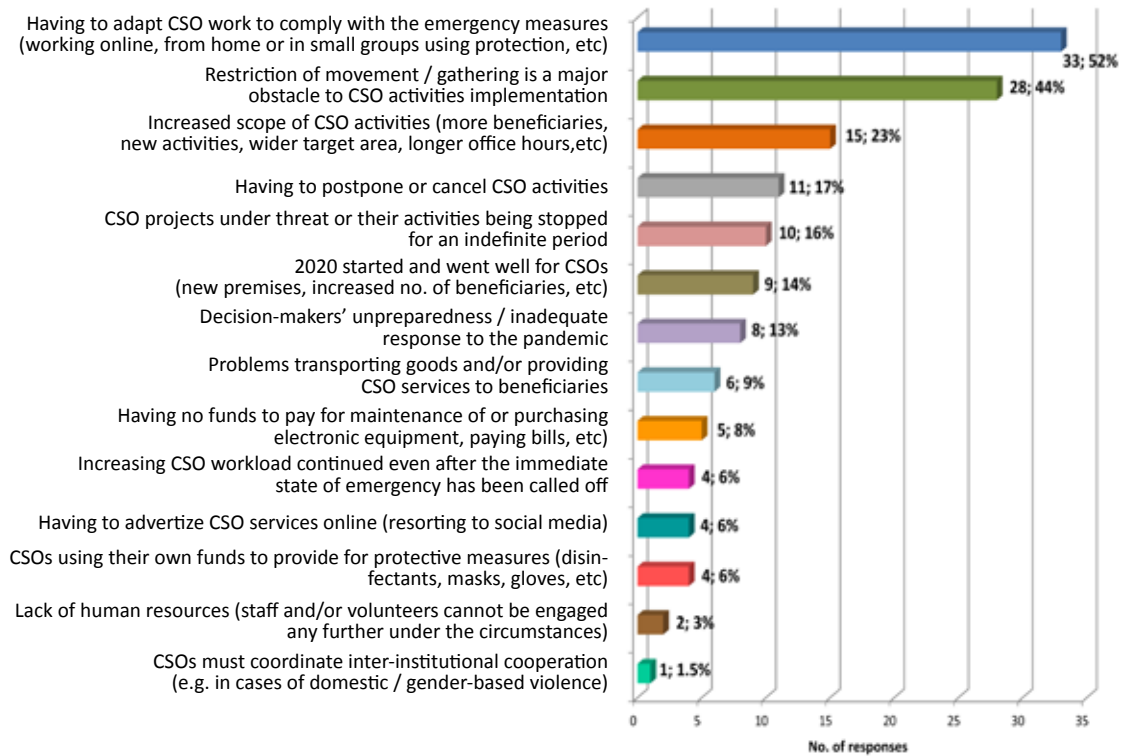
CSO Activities Increasingly Reactive, Less Space for Prevention, Education and Advocacy

'... We have recorded an increase in domestic minoration of women, especially girls, resulting from decreased public attention being paid to gender equality. The proof of it is increased domestic violence incidence. Little can be done to influence it under the circumstances because our concern is both program (frequent meetings and debates, participation, meeting rural women's authorities...) and project-based, meaning also prevention (they know that such cases will reach us eventually or the village establishment, which is not at all gentle in condemning such minoration). ...' (WBC 4)

Operational Factors

EWI grantee partner organisations responding to the rapid assessment questionnaire have recognised 14 various factors affecting the possibilities, circumstances and conditions of their operation in 2020 (Figure 7):

7. Operational factors affecting the WB women's CSO in 2020



The most significant operational factor, mentioned by more than half of the respondents (33; 52%), is that CSOs have had to adapt their work to comply with the emergency measures. They have resorted to working online, from home or in small groups using protection and observing the so-called social - actually physical - distancing principle. It is, in turn, indicative of CSOs flexibility and preparedness to adapt to the new circumstances. This circumstance was caused by movement and gathering restriction measures mentioned by nearly a half of the respondents (28; 44%).

The consequence - judging from the respondents' narrative answers: a somewhat unexpected one - of such a state of affairs has been the increasing scope of of CSO activities accounted for by nearly a quarter of EWI grantee partners participating in the rapid assessment (15; 24%). The organisations have been facing the need to extend their target group or geographical area, prolong office hours, introduce new or prolong the duration existing activities, etc:

CSOs Complying with Emergency Measures: Extending the Target Group

'... We have organised two online lectures to which we have invited 150 people. Around 20 peace activists responded to our call although they are not our target group. The funds the municipality had promised to us were repurposed. Our activities are designed for "face-to-face" work, so we had to adapt the target group as well. We have selected grown-ups who have finished their primary or high school education because they are the most susceptible to manipulation.' (WBC 6)

On the other hand, restriction of movement and gathering faced nearly half of the respondents (28; 44%) with serious operational challenges, too. This measure went hand in hand with postponing or cancelling activities of nearly a fifth of CSOs (11; 17%). Some of their activities had to be cancelled, jeopardising thus entire projects (10: 16%).

The data that over a tenth of respondents (9; 14%) claim that 2020 has started well for them (e.g. in new premises and with an increased number of women beneficiaries), providing also for sustainability of the activities already on the go, is undoubtedly encouraging. Nevertheless, nearly the same proportion of CSOs (8; 13%) hold that the decision-makers' unpreparedness, namely their inadequate response to the pandemic, has contributed to the serious, worrying state of affairs in the civic sector in 2020:

Decision-Makers' Unpreparedness for the Pandemic

'We hold that the decision-makers at the state and subregional level... where our organisation works have not made adequate decisions concerning the pandemic. They were unprepared for any kind of emergency situation, especially a pandemic... NOBODY has ever thought about the possibility of an emergency ensuing due to a virus or a bacterium of epidemic proportions...' (WBC 1)

All of the aforementioned had very concrete operational consequences concerning CSO work: transportation, goods- or service-provision difficulties (6; 9%) or no possibility to provide funds for functioning electronic equipment or to pay bills (5; 8%). CSOs had to invest their own, unplanned for funds for protective measures (disinfectants, masks and gloves), to start advertising their services online, while the extended scope of work remained even after the emergency measures had (initially) been called off (each of the factors 4; 6%):

Increasing Number of Beneficiaries, Decreasing Funds

'... Our association is in a very difficult situation because we are facing a sudden increase in the number of our clients on one hand and a significant decrease in funding on the other.' (WBC 1)

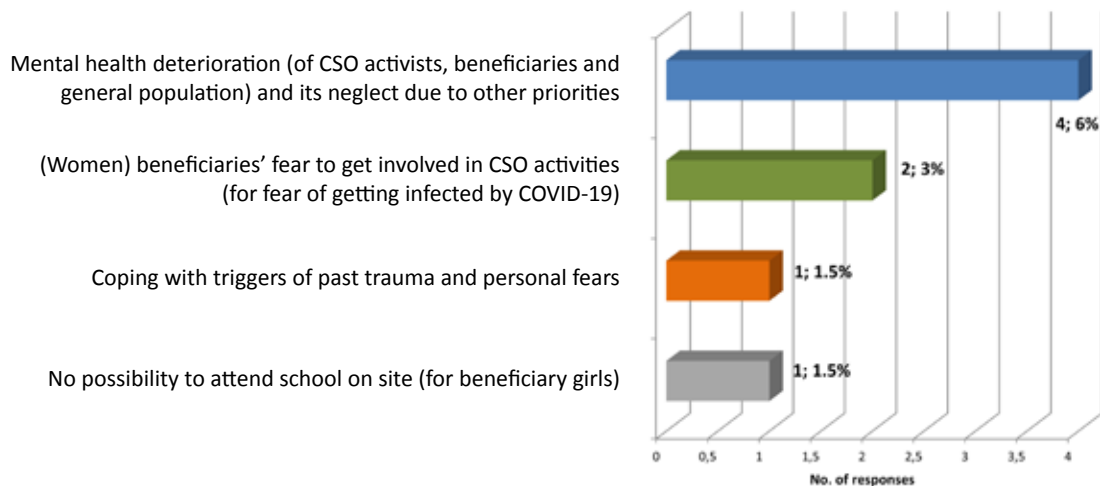
Two respondents (3%) have voiced the particularly difficult circumstance of staff and volunteers leaving the organisation due to the lack of funds for their further engagement. One organisation has been compelled to start coordinating inter-institutional cooperation, especially in domestic or gender-based violence cases, an activity it does not do normally. Implications and potential pressures on CSOs resulting from undertaking such activities have already been mentioned above, under 'Political Factors'.

Personal Factors

Personal or individual factors are the least voiced ones in the rapid assessment responses, despite often affecting CSOs most directly and/or being among the key circumstances of their operation, esp. as related to their field activities with beneficiaries. They include CSO staff, volunteer, bene-

ficiary or other stakeholders' individual capacities to cope with the circumstances in their social environment affecting not only their work, but their personal lives as well. Respondents testified about four groups of such factors (Figure 8):

8. Personal factors affecting the WB women's CSOs in 2020



As evident for the rapid assessment responses, women's CSOs in the WB point to and overall mental health deterioration (4; 6%), as well as people's fears triggered by past trauma. One of the fears is that of women beneficiaries that they will get infected by COVID-19 if they get physically involved in CSO activities:

Overriding Fear of the Pandemic

'Yes, the circumstances have become more difficult... There are fewer public calls for funding proposals, funding partners have often repurposed their funds to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic... while our organisation's planned activities are not being implemented as planned due to implementation of protective measures, but also due to citizens' fear of participating in them [impl. and getting infected]. The only thing that is on time are the bills to be paid... Nothing affects them.' (WBC 1)

'... [the President of the state in his public address] scares people with mass dying and graveyards being too small to bury all the dead in them...' (WBC 5)

After the 1990s conflicts in the WB, women activists have also experienced resurgence of their personal fears resulting from past trauma:

Activists Under Pressure: 'Helpers' Needing 'Help'

'The first thing we have done was to give each of our women colleagues 2-3 days or even 5 days off to deal with our personal fears, their triggers from the past and, with the assistance of a woman supervisor, overcome such a state, eventually bearing creativity and confidence in personal competences. ...' (WBC 1)

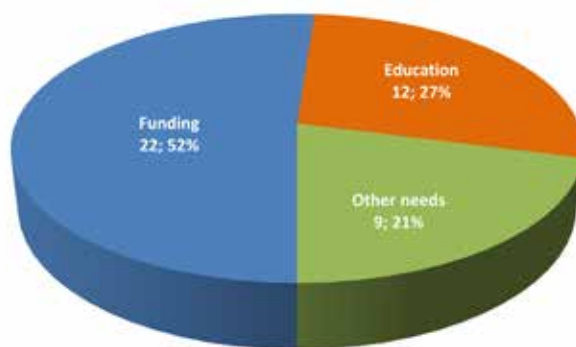
One CSO²⁰ mentions also a specific fear caused by the prevailing patriarchal state of affairs in their local community. It is the fear of their beneficiary girls to visit the CSO premises since the schools and universities have been closed down, namely since the girls 'have no time' and physical possibility for it because they are expected to stay at home under the current circumstances.

EWI Grantee Partners' Needs

The WB women's grassroots CSOs' needs stated in this rapid assessment clearly reflect the influence of various factors discussed above.

EWI grantee partner needs, as perceived in this rapid assessment, are (pre)conditions or activities necessary for the local women's CSOs in the WB to continue their work. The respondents have listed 43 different, more or less urgent needs falling into three categories: funding, education and other (miscellaneous and specific) needs (Figure 9).

9. EWI grantee partners' needs

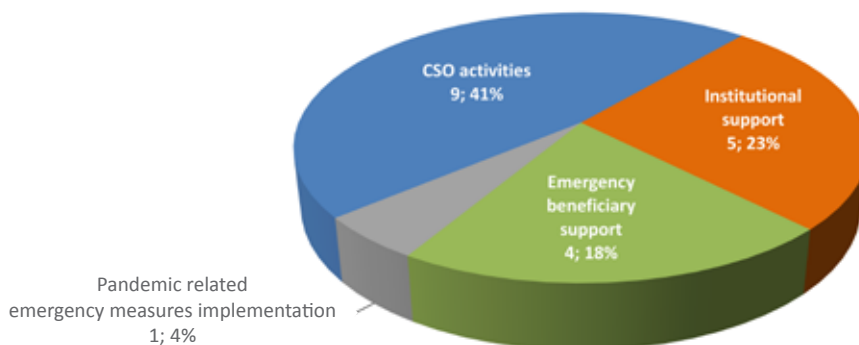


Funding Needs

Respondents' answers in Figures 10-13 indicate that EWI grantee partners' everyday financial realities became more aggravated by the 2020 pandemic.

As the biggest needs cluster (22, aka 52% of the total number of needs specified), funding is needed for CSO activities, institutional support, emergency beneficiary support, human resources and pandemic-related emergency measures implementation (Figure 10).

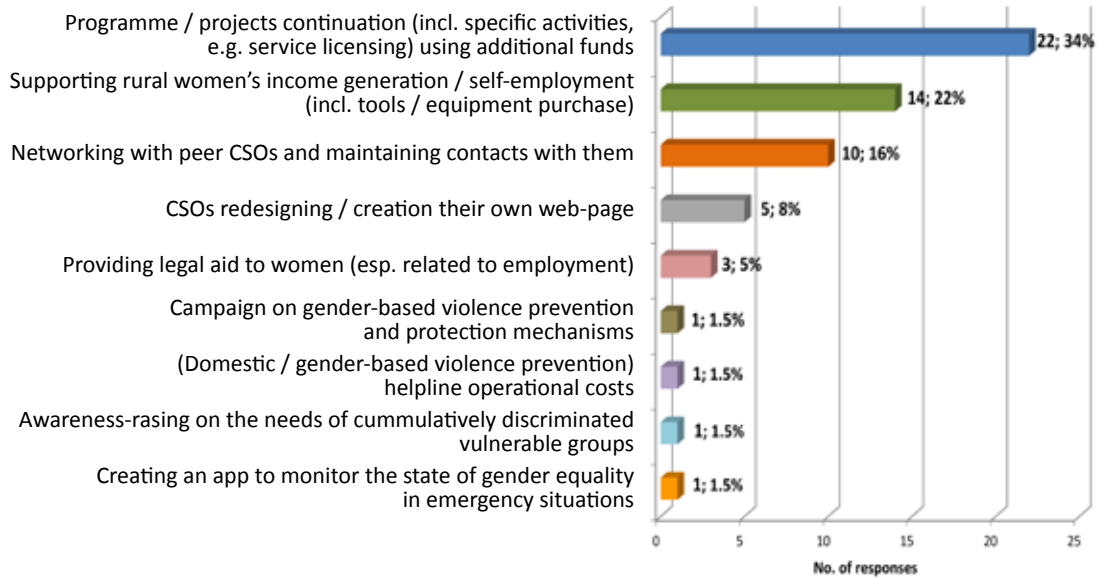
10. Specific EWI granted partners' funding needs



²⁰ See the 'Freedom of Movement as a Gender Issue' testimony under 'Economic Factors' above for details.

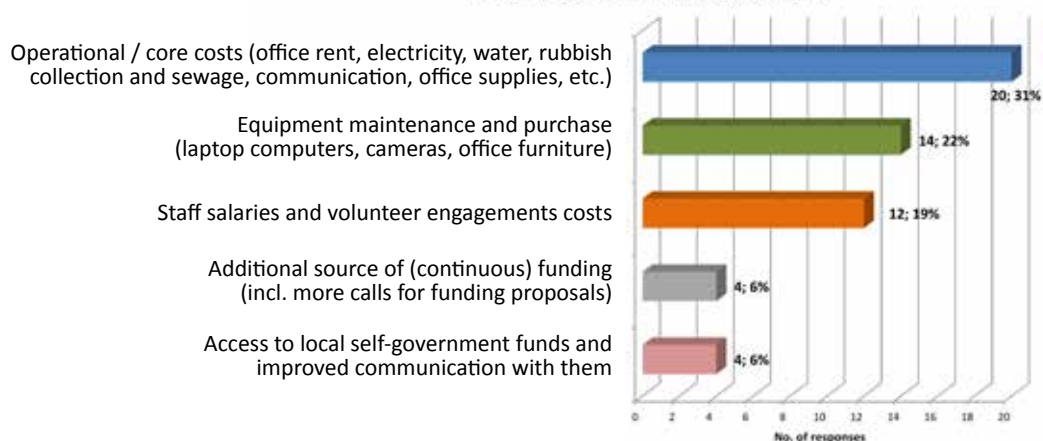
Women's grassroots CSOs in the WB need the following specific funding to support their activities and/or provide for their continued operation (Figure 11):

11. Funding Needs: CSO activities



Most respondents (22; 34%) need funding for the continuation of their activities due to the fact that CSO-aimed funding has been reduced in 2020. Answers in this group may also imply core costs. The need for funding rural women's income generation (14; 22%) is indicative of the fact that most of respondents work in rural or peri-urban, regions still heavily reliant on agriculture. Under usual circumstances, funding for CSO networking (10; 16%) would mean travel, lodging and other meeting-related costs, but in pandemic conditions they mainly imply purchase or upgrade of electronic equipment, providing access to a stable Internet connection and education in using new platforms and social media. Currently, respondents' legal aid services are mainly focused on domestic and gender-based violence. The situation with women increasingly losing jobs due to the pandemic, they would most certainly benefit from CSO-provided free legal aid on employment issues (3; 5%). Some respondents still hold that, with some additional support, they would be able to pursue campaigning, awareness-raising or social monitoring activities. One answer in this group is indicative of a particularly difficult position of women's helplines in the region.

12. Funding Needs: Institutional funding

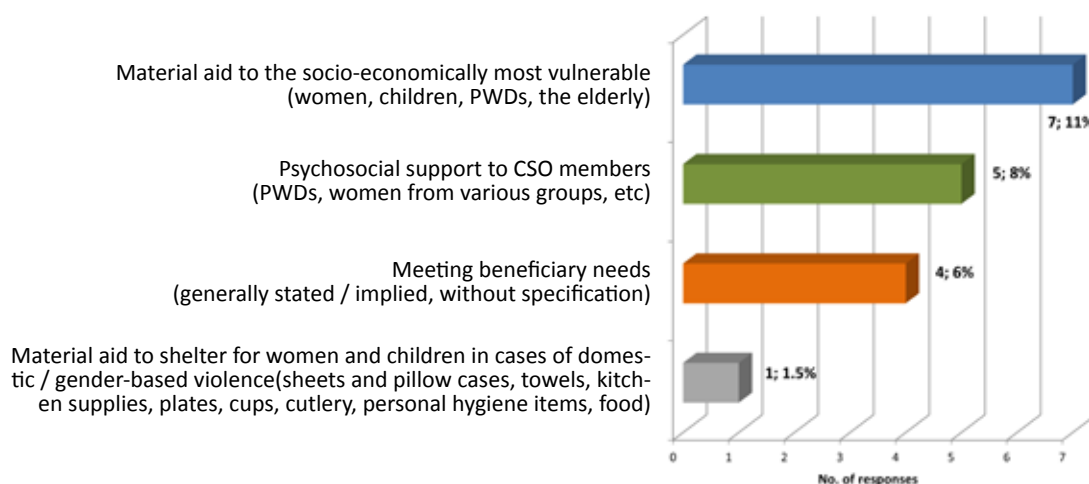


Institutional funding needs mostly relate to the CSO operational, aka core costs (20; 31% - Figure 11). Though usually proportionally small in project funding proposals, in case of grassroots organisations with very limited budgets and relying on limited number of staff and/or volunteers, these relatively fixed costs rise even more with the decrease of direct funding of their activities. Unless provided for, core costs may accumulate a debt CSOs cannot pay for and lead to termination of their work or some other situations (e.g. legal proceedings causing more expenses and/or harming CSOs' reputation).²¹

Additional equipment maintenance and purchase costs (14; 22%) are a very realistic consequence of the increased number of CSO activities happening online. Lack of funds for staff salaries and volunteer engagement in core / major organisational activities indicated by nearly a fifth of respondents (12; 19%) is one of the most direct consequences of less funding available to CSOs due to the pandemic. This circumstance is, once again, clearly referred to in the general need for additional (continuous) sources of CSO funding, as well as and increased access to local self-government funds and improved communication with it (both 4; 6% respectively).

The respondents' need for emergency intervention funds to assist beneficiaries once again confirms the fact that (women's) CSOs in the WB have been relapsing into an 'aid provision mode' due to dealing with the issues of the socially most underprivileged social groups who, as already mentioned²², have been particularly affected by the pandemic and resulting measures to counteract its effects (Figure 13). It is also indicative - as well as a consequence - of the increased CSO workload during the pandemic, increased incidence of domestic or gender-based violence, all of it in turn, resulting from the type of emergency measures to counteract spreading and the effects of the pandemic and the way of their implementation²³ by the authorities in charge:

12. Funding Needs: Institutional funding



²¹ As already mentioned in the 'Overriding Fear of the Pandemic' or 'CSO Survival in Question: Decreasing Funds, Accumulating Dues and Costs' testimonies above.

²² See the 'Relapse from Development to Aid Provision: Life-or-Death Field Interventions' and 'Increasing Beneficiary Vulnerability' testimonies above.

²³ See the 'Freedom of Movement as a Gender Issue' and 'Domestic or Gender Based Violence: Police and Welfare Negligence Increasing Imminent Threat' testimonies above.

Respondents’ funding needs related to CSO human resources reflect the necessity to engage more expert staff in the field (esp. psychotherapists, web-designers - 9; 14%). One respondent has voiced the need to provide for their staff to be able to return to work after the CSO funding has been cancelled, while another points to the need to provide for personal assistance fees for women with disabilities employed in CSOs.

Concerning the pandemic-related emergency measures implementation funding, several CSOs (4; 6%) pointed to the fact that they have difficulties allocating funds for provision of disinfectants, masks, gloves and other protective items necessary for their work. Their testimonies indicate that, in the light of the pandemic, these and some other operational costs (e.g. transportation, communication) may become a permanent, core budget item:

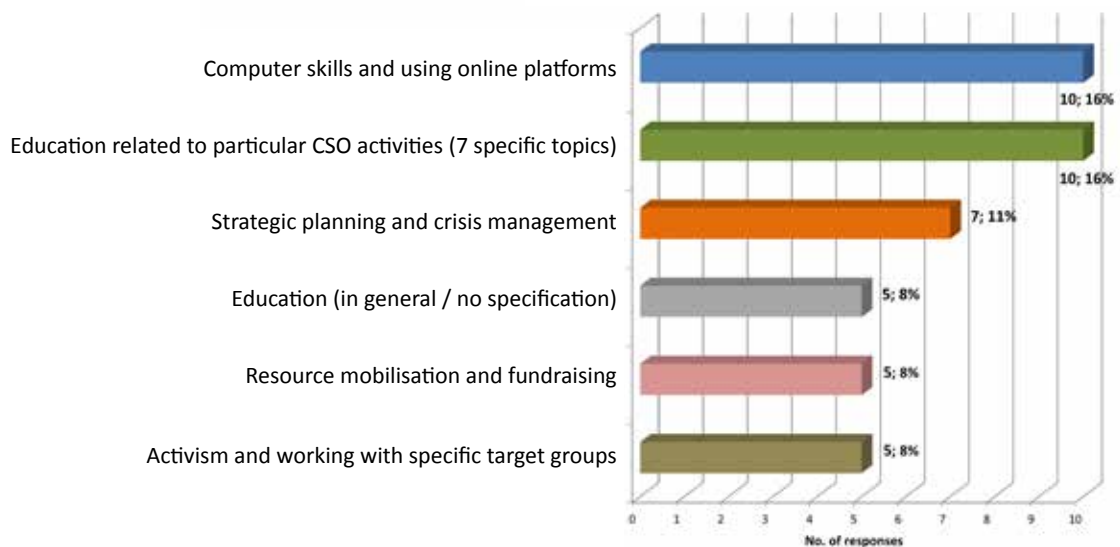
Emergency Protection Measures Implementation Increasing CSO Core Costs

‘... Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures introduced by the Government, we have been forced to implement staff and beneficiary protection measures, so a part of our funding had to be spent of purchasing masks, disinfectants and gloves. Our education work, as well as communication with the women and girls having acces to the Internet, has been reorganised and is happening online now. Nevertheless, our office remained open for women and girls not having such technical or communicational possibilities and we are working and maintaining contact with them applying the protective measures.’ (WBC 1)

Education Needs

Education needs aimed at acquiring new knowledge and skills to facilitate their work make nearly a third of all respondents’ needs (22; 27% of the total number of 43 specified needs - Figure 14):

14. Education needs



Most respondents (10; 16%) need training in computer skills and using online platforms for their

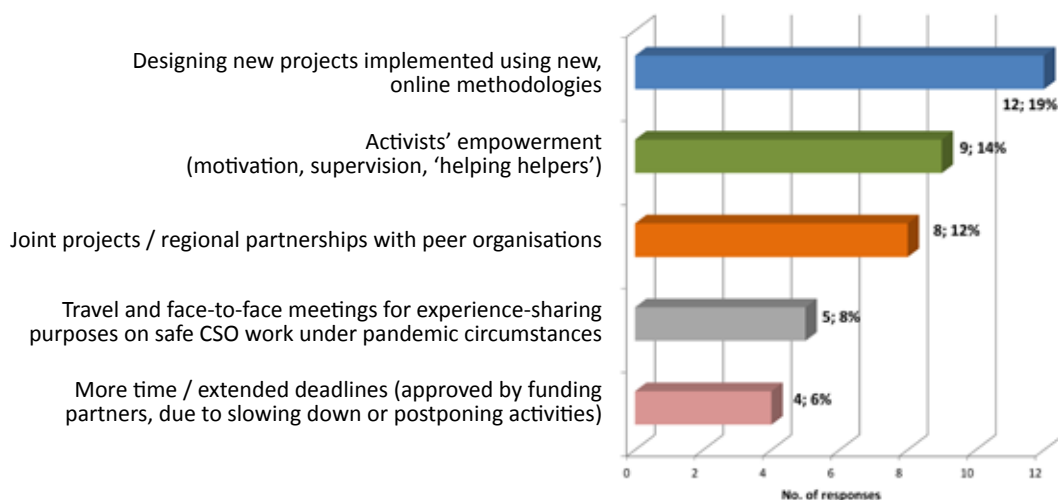
work. Over a tenth of them (7; 11%) hold that they would benefit from a strategic planning and crisis management training. Some respondents hold they would benefit from learning more about activism and working with specific target groups, as well as resource mobilisation and fundraising (5; 8% per topic), the same proportion of them (5; 8%) claim they would benefit from education (in general, not specifying any particular topics).

The remainder of the responses (10; 16%) that the education EWI grantee partners need is closely related to their specific project activities, such as gender and gender-based violence, doing outreach work, investigative journalism online, volunteer mobilisation, social entrepreneurship and startup companies or arts and crafts for commercial purposes.

Other Needs

Other respondents' needs make nearly a quarter of the total number of needs specified (9; 21%). Similarly, to education needs responses in this group indicate EWI grantee partners' awareness of the necessity to adapt to the new circumstances (Figure 15):

15. Other needs



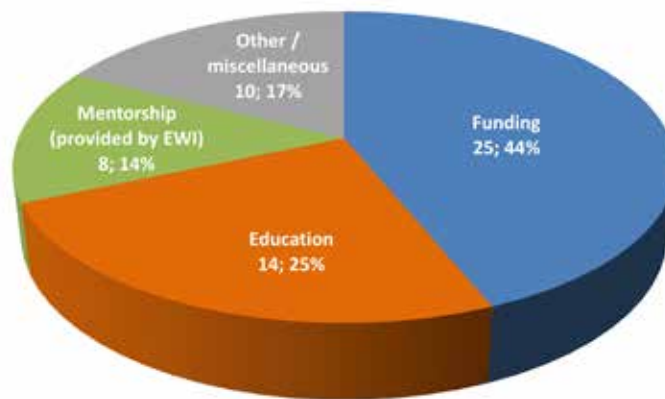
Most respondents (12; 19%) indicate their need for designing new projects implemented using new, online methodologies. Women activists in the WB region would also benefit from their own personal empowerment (9; 14%), joint and/or regional partnerships with peer organisations (8; 12%), as well as face-to-face exchanges concerning experience on working safely under pandemic circumstances (5; 8%). Some respondents (4; 6%) recognised that time has become more valuable a resource than before by voicing the need for extending deadlines for completion of their project activities.

Other specific needs in this group (each mentioned by one organisation) are the following: mapping target group needs, more stable political situation, some time off from work / a vacation, as well as developing a national CSO funding plan (in Croatia).

EWI Grantee Partners' Expectations

Respondents have expressed a total of 57 various expectations from EWI as their funding and/or capacitybuilding partner. Expectations, as referred to in this RAR, imply the support the grantee partners look for from EWI in order to continue their work. EWI grantee partners' expectations mostly reflect their needs and fall into four groups: funding, education, mentoring and other expectations (Figure 16):

16. EWI grantee partners' expectations



Funding Expectations

As the biggest group of expectations (25, aka 44% of the total number of 57 expectations specified - Figure 16), EWI funding is necessary for its grantee partners' activities, their organisations' institutional support, emergency beneficiary support, human resources and other / miscellaneous costs (Figure 17):

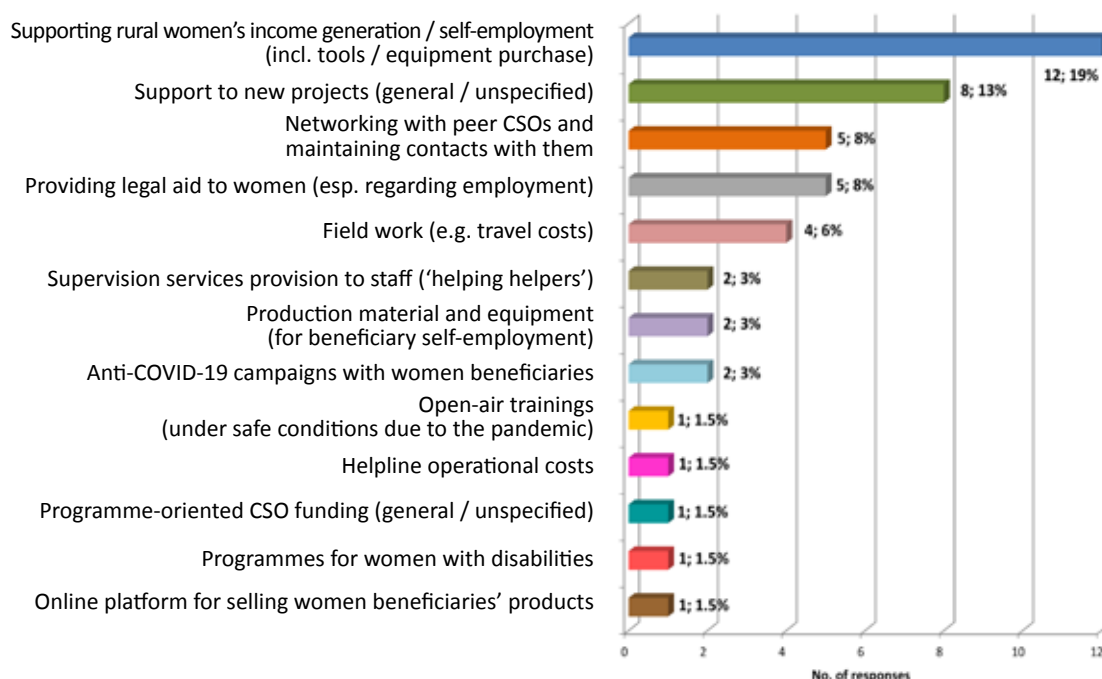
17. Specific EWI grantee partners' funding expectations



Since EWI grantee partners’ funding expectations correspond to their funding needs, with circumstances causing them being explicated in previous sections, it is **important to note** that expectations will be presented only graphically. More detailed explanations in this section will be given only for specific expectations differing from the already mentioned respondents’ needs.

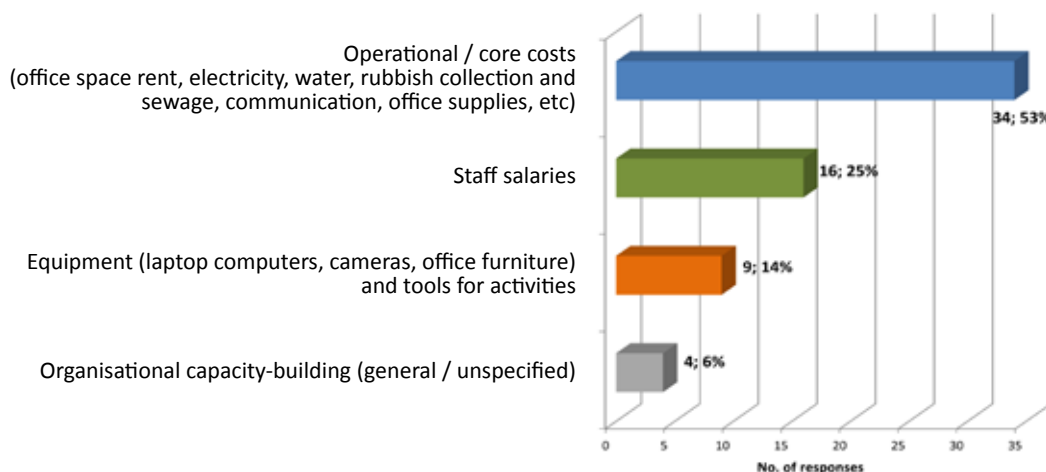
Funding CSO activities is the biggest cluster of expectations in this group (13, aka 44% of the total of 25 funding expectations). Women’s grassroots CSOs in the WB region expect the following specific funding from EWI to support their activities and/or provide for their continued operation (Figure 18):

18. Funding expectations: Type of CSO activities

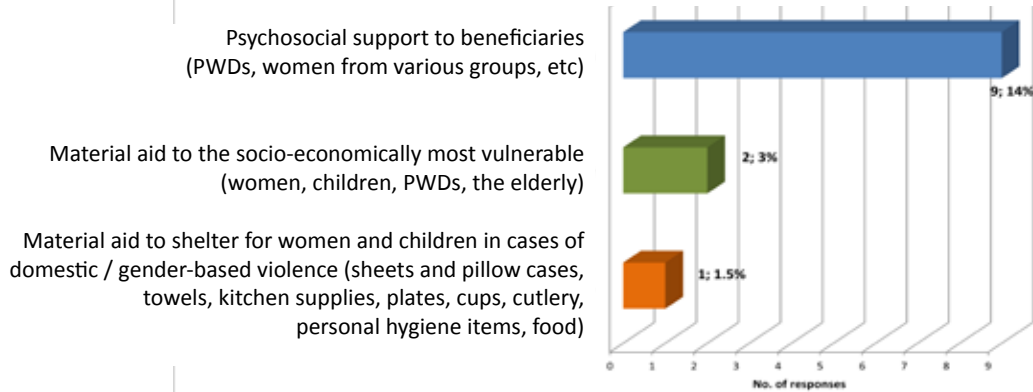


Respondents’ other funding expectations are the following (Figures 19-20):

19. Funding expectations: Institutional funding



20. Funding Expectations: Emergency beneficiary support



Emergency beneficiary funding for psychosocial support (9; 14%) implies expanding services of women's CSO who have earlier not provided this kind of support, but who have registered the emergence of the need with their beneficiaries as resulting from the onset of the pandemic and its effects.

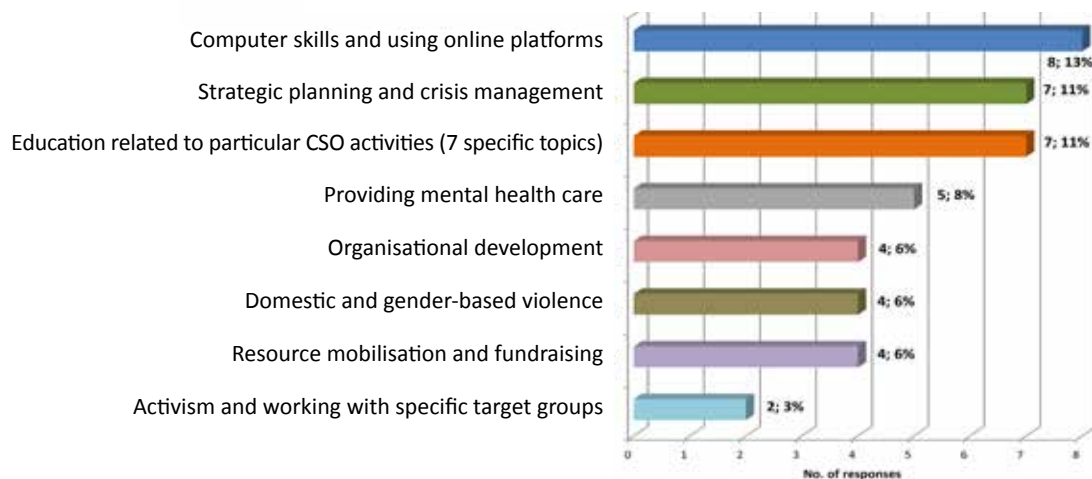
Funding expectations related to human resources include a person doing respondents' digital / online work or web-design for them (4; 6%). One respondent also voiced the expectation that funds for all CSO staff to be able to return to work full-time and get due salaries would eventually be provided.

Other / miscellaneous funding expectations include covering the costs of purchasing COVID-19 protection items (disinfectants, masks and gloves), a contingency amount for unforeseen costs that could not be planned for (e.g. doing field work when public transportation gets cancelled), as well as licencing CSO services in order to make them more competitive and attractive in the market.

Education Expectations

Expectations concerning the need for trainings and education make a quarter (14, 25%) of all EWI grantee partners' expectations (Figure 16) and correlate with the respondents' needs entirely. Topic-wise, their key education expectations are the following (Figure 21):

21. Education Expectations

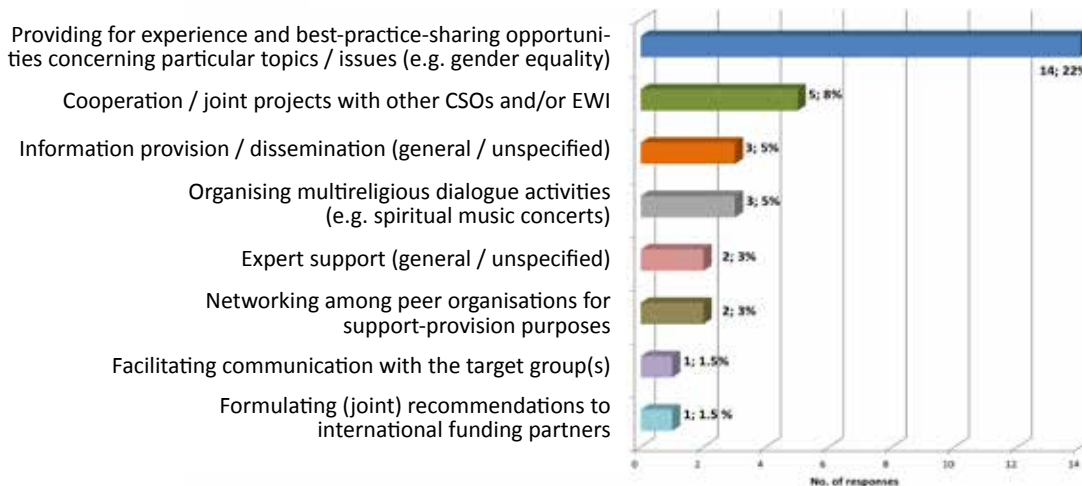


The seven specific topics related to particular CSO activities (7; 11%) include volunteer mobilisation and management, writing project proposals for EU calls, mediation and conflict transformation, providing personal assistance to PWDs, startup businesses, creative project work and online journalism.

Mentorship Expectations

Expectations concerning the need for EWI mentorship make over a tenth (8, 13%) of all EWI grantee partners' expectations (Figure 16). Mentorship, as perceived in this RAR, means putting various EWI resources beyond funding (information, experience, expertise, etc) at respondents' disposal aimed at their empowerment through capacity building, achieving greater synergies within the EWI grantee partners' network. Ideally, the impact of such support would consolidate the WB women's CSO sector at large, increasing its visibility, leading to acknowledgement of its contribution to overall social development in the region and facilitating fundraising / resource mobilisation for women's activities. The types of mentorship WB grassroots women's CSOs expect from EWI are the following (Figure 22):

22. EWI Mentorship Expectations



Due to respondents' awareness of and involvement in the EWI grantee partners' informal network activities, nearly a quarter of them (14; 22%) primarily expect EWI to provide for experience and best-practice sharing on CSO functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They hope that it would lead to facilitating cooperation among them and creation of new joint projects. The reason for it is that key CSO resources²⁴ in their local communities have diminished drastically under the current circumstances.

Knowing the WB regional and many specific local sub-contexts, it is indicative that over a third of responses concerning mentorship points to the problems CSOs have accessing and sharing (credible) work, beneficiary and funding-related information in the field.²⁵

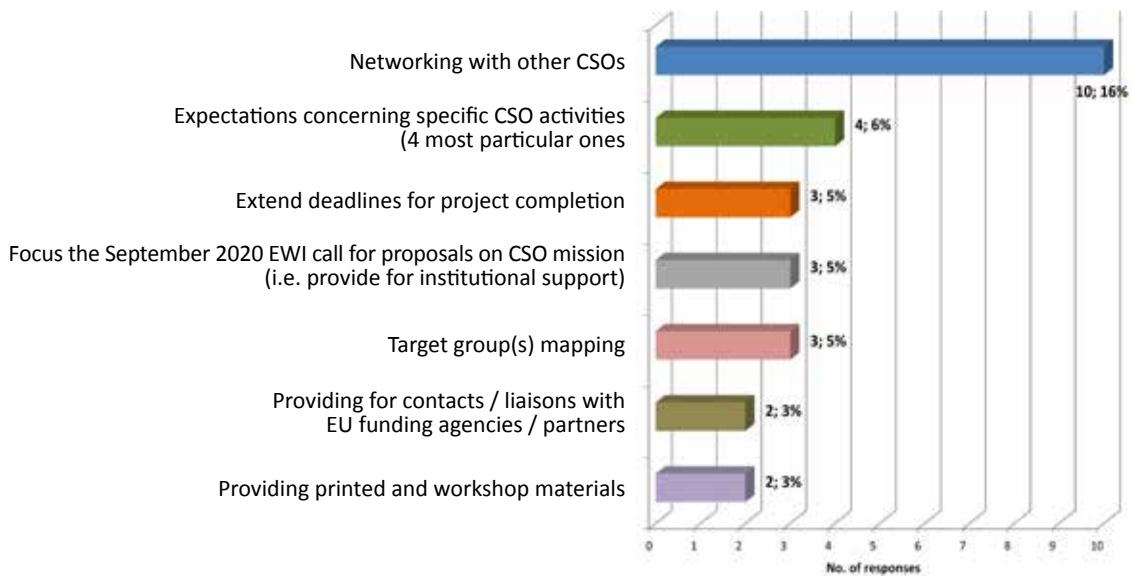
²⁴ Primarily financial, material and those pertaining to direct face-to-face communication.

²⁵ Respondent CSOs mostly operate in communities with relatively poor communication infrastructure. Just like anywhere else in the world, public media services and the most popular media all over the region are under the influence of the decision-making elites. Such media, just like the state institutions, may therefore not be considered as actors working exclusively in the best interest of their public.

Other Expectations

Other expectations make close to a fifth of all respondents’ expectations (10; 17%). Once again, the most prominent among them is the expectation from EWI to support networking among women’s organisations, followed by expectations concerning technical facilitation of project implementation under the circumstances resulting from the onset of the pandemic (Figure 23):

23. Other Expectations



The four expectations particular to respondents’ specific activities (4; 6%) concern their project branding and their multiplication, media promotion, inclusion in relevant research, as well as making a protocol on working with victims of domestic or gender-based violence in emergency situations.

Effects and Impact

Conclusions and findings of the RAR concerning the effects and impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic on the work of EWI grantee partner organisations, namely women's CSOs in the WB region, correspond to a great extent to those in the references relating to the experience of CSOs and women in other parts of the world.

Factors affecting WB women's CSOs' work in 2020

Changing CSO Realities

Respondents' feedback undoubtedly points to the fact that the priorities, working conditions and activities of their organisations in 2020 have changed due to introduction of emergency measures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Institutional Inefficiency

Emergency measures introduction, namely the response of decision-makers' in charge of them is deemed inadequate due to their unpreparedness and/or incompetence to act in emergencies such as those caused by a pandemic. The consequence of such state of affairs was not increased institutional inefficiency, but also stopping payments and/or fully cancelling allocation of the first sector/state funds for CSO work.

Decreased CSO Funding

Along with repurposing funding from other sources (e.g. international agencies or companies) to prevent spreading of the pandemic and alleviate its effects, decrease in state funding for CSOs jeopardised their further work, even survival, as indicated by the answers of most EWI grantee partners participating in the rapid assessment.

Women's CSO Sector in Jeopardy

Based on figures cumulating the narrative rapid assessment responses on the EWI grantee partners' needs and expectations, it is evident that most support is necessary for costs that are, under usual circumstances, considered secondary and which make a smaller proportion of a project budget, such as CSO core and/or institutional support costs. These costs are also implied by numerous responses concerning the necessity to support CSO activities since such costs may be - yet are not necessarily - included into the activity implementation costs to a certain proportion. Correlating responses concerning institutional support, human resources and CSO activities indicates that with the latter two there is some, yet due to the increased CSO workload very little, space for adapting to the current situation. Without institutional support, esp. for the running costs of office space and key staff, further functioning of respondent CSOs will become questionable.

More Prominent Systemic (CSO) Discrimination

The EWI rapid assessment respondents hold that they are also being systemically discriminated against by the institutions. While public and business sectors had access to state subsidies aimed at alleviating the pandemic effects, such measures did not include CSOs despite the fact that they are also regular taxpayers contributing to public funds. At the same time, civic sector deals with the needs and granted rights exercise of the most numerous and most vulnerable social groups (women, children and youth, the elderly, PWDs, ethnic and other minorities, the ill, etc). As exemplified in this RAR, the rights of members of these groups - even their most basic right, that to life itself - have been additionally violated under the pandemic circumstances.

Increased Women's Vulnerability

Existential vulnerability of certain social groups, especially women, has been increased under the influence of three particular, mutually interconnected factors. Due to movement restrictions and curfew, as well as less frequent or cancelled public transportation, the most significant economic factor affecting women is loss of work and difficulty, aka no possibility of their (self-)employment. Under the pandemic circumstances, prolonged indoors time of all family members spent in their homes caused a rise of the most significant social factor the respondents have identified - domestic and gender-based violence.

Bearing in mind the operational mode of healthcare and education institutions during the pandemic, it is most likely that women employed in these, prominently feminized and already operationally challenged industries have also experienced greater workload pressure, with women in healthcare also being under most imminent threat of COVID-19 infection.

Domestic and Gender Based Violence on the Rise

Respondents' feedback on institutional handling of domestic and gender-based violence once again points to the undoubtedly poor functioning of institutions, which creates additional strain for CSOs and even raises the level of imminent threat for women.

Fear-Mongering Public Information

The rapid assessment responses also indicate that the way of public information about the pandemic is such that predominant personal factors affecting people's lives are fears. After the 1990s trauma, such fears - the so-called primal, existential ones - have retraumatized women activists and diminished their own and their target and interest groups capacities to cope with the current situation. Their feedback indicates that they are afraid of falling ill and having no access to (adequate) medical treatment. Besides fearing for their own existence due to deteriorating political and economic stability, they are also weary of the possibility of new conflicts and/or violence emerging both in their families, local communities or countries.

EWI Grantee partners' needs and expectations

Major Women's CSO Funding Challenge: 'Staying Afloat'

Respondents' funding needs and expectations indicate that further functioning of women's CSO activities, even their survival, in 2020 might become questionable in case of downsizing of the scope of their activities or their termination. Their feedback clearly points to the circumstance that, in the new, pandemic-induced situation, their socially vulnerable target groups have been set a step back on the road of their emancipation precisely due to such vulnerability. It also implies that CSO activities have been forced to take a step back from their current realities, their activities regressing from prevention, advocacy and social development back to reaction and intervention.

Education Facilitating Adaptation to New Circumstances

Education needs, respondents' expectations from EWI in this respect, as well as the topics they have proposed reflect their awareness of the necessity to adapt to the new circumstances. It means more online activities and emergency preparedness, including fundraising under such circumstances. EWI grantee partners' needs and expectations also reflect their awareness of their target groups, most commonly those subject to cumulative discrimination, needing additional and specific support.

Women Activists' Coping Mechanisms Needing a Boost

Other miscellaneous respondents' needs, on one hand, point to the CSOs' and women activists' strategic thinking under the circumstances caused by the pandemic. On the other hand, they testify to the exhaustion of their personal resources concerning online operation knowledge and skills. Most particularly, their personal, psychosocial capacities to continue delivering quality services in their organisations and to their communities are reaching their limits.

EWI as a Regional Networking Facilitator

Rapid assessment respondents' expectations concerning EWI mentorship indicate that its women's CSO grantee partners perceive it as an integration factor and resource providing them with knowledge, skills and information they think would otherwise not be accessible to them. The need and expectation for regional networking and cooperation has consistently been repeated throughout the rapid assessment feedback. It is very indicative of EWI grantee partners' position that meeting this need is not only necessary, but also feasible, as well as that they expect EWI, as the central node of the regional informal network they feel they are a part of, to make such networking possible for them.

EWI Providing for Women's CSO Survival

Once correlated with responses concerning availability of funds for CSOs after the onset of the pandemic, EWI grantee partners' needs and expectations are indicative not only of their trust in EWI, but also of the fact that its support, especially institutional funding, may be a deciding factor most directly affecting continuation of a significant number of grassroots women's CSOs' operation in local communities of the WB region.

Emerging Opportunities and Ways Forward

EWI grantee partners' rapid assessment response undoubtedly indicates that, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, EWI has done its best to support them with adapting their already running or providing for creating alternative activities, as well as offering a possibility of funds relocation within the existing project budget, so their EWI-funded projects could be implemented as planned.

Based on the RAR findings on the effects and impact of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic on the work of women's CSOs in the WB, EWI should consider the following possibilities and opportunities of adapting its operation to the current needs and expectations of its grantee partners:

Revise Activities of the Already Running Partner Projects

In cooperation with the grantee partners, EWI should revise project activities already approved and/or running projects concerning their following aspects:

- Implementation methodology: Transform as many 'face-to-face' activities as possible into online ones or conduct them in small groups, applying protective measures.
- Deadlines: Extend project deadlines to provide for maximum quality activity implementation.

Adapt the Forthcoming Call for Proposal

EWI should adapt its forthcoming call for funding proposals to the grantee partners' needs and capacities in following ways:

- Complement the Application Form by adding:
 - A slot for an alternative activity plan in case of (a total) movement restriction/curfew.
 - A question on the ways of implementation of anti-COVID-19 measures during the project.
- Provide for flexible deadlines.
- Increase the proportion of CSO institutional support within the project budget (esp. as re. to CSO operational / core costs, full-time staff salaries and technical equipment providing for online activities implementation).
- Provide for the following costs to take up a certain, limited proportion of grantee partners' project budgets:
 - Purchase of disinfectants and disposable protective materials (masks, gloves, shoe covers / foot gloves, etc) necessary for project implementation.
 - A contingency amount for unforeseen, otherwise less easily justifiable costs that could not have been planned at the the time of project proposal composition, but which may jeopardise its implementation (esp. under the pandemic circumstances). It is necessary to consider and make a list of a limited number of potential costs that may be covered from the project contingency (e.g. increased travel costs for field work due to lack of or no public transportation, emergency material aid or medicines provision to beneficiaries whose life depends on it or alike).

Provide for Activist Education

EWI should provide for online activist training in following knowledge and skills:

- Online communication and activity implementation (e.g. using various e-platforms such as *Skype, Zoom, Moodle*, using social media and web resources, etc).
- Various topics stated in this RAR relevant for EWI grantee partners' work especially strategic planning, organisational crisis management, resource mobilisation and fundraising.

Provide (for) Psychosocial Support to Women's CSO Activists

EWI should do its best to provide for online psychological support and/or supervision²⁶ of women activists in its grantee partners' network. Such support may be in a form of a joint project providing mutual peer support among EWI grantee partner organisations. Another option may be for EWI to engage external experts directly and put their services at disposal of women activists in their network. This activity would also comply with the rapid assessment respondents' need and expectation for (regional) networking, information dissemination and experience-sharing on coping with the current situation among women's CSOs.

Provide for Regular Information Dissemination and Resource-Sharing

EWI should provide for a purposeful, effective and efficient way of information dissemination and resource-sharing in its network. It could be an info-blog or a web-page²⁷ incorporated in the EWI website and with easy access to various social media, containing various information from the field and from relevant sources, such as grantee partners' stories and experience, important press releases of relevant international actors in the local language, links to media articles, academic research papers, etc.

Methodology-wise, such an activity may be organised as a peer-run one, similarly to the ways of providing psychological support to women's CSO activists, or even combined with them, perhaps in the form of moderated weekly 'activist talks' open to the public. It would enhance synergy and access to information among the EWI grantee partners, contribute to a more efficient organisational resource and capacity utilisation. Additionally, it might serve as an advocacy platform for acknowledging women's CSOs' experience, expertise and work, as well as their contribution to the well-being of their local communities and social development in general. Sharing the findings of this RAR among the various EWI interest groups might be the first step in this direction.

²⁶ Applying the so-called helping the helpers or similar methods.

²⁷ e.g. entitled the *Third Sector Covid Forum, Western Balkans (Women's) Civic Covid Forum* or something similar.

Appendix: **EWI Do No Harm Matrix - Upon the Onset of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic**²⁸

Context: The Western Balkans 2020 upon the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

Options (to mitigate dividers)	Dividers / Sources of Tension	Ecumenical Women's Initiative- EWI	Connectors / Local Capacities for Non-Violent Action / Peace	Options (to boost connectors)
<p>What EWI could do?²⁹</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the activities of the already approved projects with the grantee partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerning ways of their implementation (do everything that can be done online, in small groups and observing protective measures). Extend deadlines for already running activities. Adapt / fine-tune the forthcoming call for proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change the application form to contain the following: 	<p>Systems and institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-socialist / transitional setting (decaying infrastructure) Rising poverty / unemployment Patriarchy Sectors / industries with lower power and income feminized (healthcare, education, CSOs, lower level executive administration) EU (non) accession NATO (non) membership <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:³⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-functioning institutions Lack of transparency in relocation of funds away from civil society Deteriorating political stability 	<p>Mandate:</p> <p>Supporting women as initiators / agents of change concerning gender equality, peacebuilding and reconciliation and interfaith/ intercultural dialogue.</p> <p>HQ organisation:</p> <p>A non-governmental, non-profit making organisation based in Omiš, Croatia. Resources: office (rented), equipment, 4 full-time staff, 4-member Management Assembly, a network of part-time collaborators and 110 grantee partner organisations, network memberships.</p> <p>Fundraising / funding:</p>	<p>Systems and institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-socialist / transitional setting (decaying infrastructure) Rising poverty / unemployment Patriarchy Sectors / industries with lower power and income feminized (healthcare, education, CSOs, lower level executive administration) EU (non) accession NATO (non) membership <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-functioning institutions Lack of transparency in relocation of funds away from civil society Deteriorating political stability Cancelling public transporta- 	<p>What EWI could do?³¹</p> <p>In order to strengthen its grantee partners capacities, EWI should consider providing for the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Online women activist education concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using online platforms in their work (e.g. Skype, Zoom, Moodle, online communication using social media, apps, etc.). Various other topics relevant for grantee partners' work, most particularly: strategic planning, crisis management and adapting in unprecedented

²⁸ For details on the Do No Harm (DNH) framework matrix application and inferences see Anderson 1999.

²⁹ As perceived by the EWI grantee partner organisations responding to the rapid assessment questionnaire.

³⁰ See previous footnote.

³¹ See previous two footnotes.

<p>a.) space for describing an alternative activity plan in case of (total) limitation of movement and gathering.</p> <p>b.) include questions on how and which protective measures preventing and containing spreading of the pandemic will be undertaken during activities implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan / provide for flexible implementation deadlines. Increase the proportion of the institutional support to grantee organisations (particularly as re. their core cost, staff salaries and provision of equipment enabling for online activities). Plan project budgets to (proportionally) include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a.) Funds for implementation of protective measures (disinfectants, masks, gloves, shoe covers / 'foot gloves', etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cancelling public transportation limited access to places and services, making the otherwise secluded communities even more isolated / vulnerable <p>Attitudes and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-conflict setting (lingering ethnic / religious tensions, open conflicts) Violence in public discourse and as a dominant model of behaviour Traditionalism Historical revisionism (nationalist, ethnocentric) Anti-CSO attitude promotion (CSOs = 'anti-state actors') <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on parliamentary elections Focusing most available funding on the pandemic Justifying / accepting domestic / gender-based violence as a 'cultural trait' Increased cumulative discrimination of vulnerable social groups Discrimination of CSOs in 	<p>International development agencies, feminist funds, private foundations, bilateral/ government funds, EU. Average annual turnover 2007-2019: 250,000 EUR</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Striving for just and peaceful society in which diversity is a strength and source of creativity, with women having a dignified place and role in private and public life in harmony with their competence and personal choices and with religion promoting and supporting the achievement of full equality between women and men.</p> <p>Where?</p> <p>Western Balkans - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.</p> <p>When?</p> <p>Since 2007</p> <p>What?</p> <p>Supporting grassroots women's</p>	<p>tion limited access to places and services, making the otherwise secluded communities even more isolated</p> <p>Attitudes and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-conflict setting (lingering ethnic / religious tensions, open conflicts) Violence in public discourse and as a dominant model of behaviour Traditionalism Historical revisionism (nationalist, ethnocentric) Anti-CSO attitude promotion (CSOs = 'anti-state actors') <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on parliamentary elections Focusing most available funding on the pandemic Justifying / accepting domestic / gender-based violence as a 'cultural trait' Increased cumulative discrimination of vulnerable social groups Discrimination of CSOs in providing state subsidies for miti- 	<p>situations, resource mobilisation and fundraising.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological support to women activists in the EWI network (e.g. along the lines of a peer support and/or 'helping helpers' scheme). Regular online information- and resource-sharing within the EWI network run by EWI. It should be organised in order to provide access to CSO relevant, reliable and credible information, facilitate experiential learning. <p>Note:</p> <p>Both 2 and 3 should be provided to alleviate the pressure women's CSOs are experiencing due to decrease of funds and other resources on one hand, as well as increased workload on the other.</p>
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<p>b.) A contingency budget item for costs that could not be foreseen at the time of project planning (e.g. increase in travel costs due to cancellation of public transportation, emergency provision of medicines to beneficiaries whose life is in danger without them or alike). It is necessary to make a list of such costs and communicate them to grantee partners within the scope of the call for proposals.</p>	<p>providing state subsidies for mitigating the pandemic effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor performance and mixed, inconsistent messages of the authorities concerning the severity of the pandemic, No. of infected, hospitalised, measured to be undertaken, etc. - Fear to engage in CSO activities due to the pandemic (do not want to get infected) lead to 'civic passivity' - Restrictions on public gatherings affects CSO group, client support and field activities <p>Different values and interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political divisions along the traditionalist / nationalist and democratic / 'citizens' state' lines - Decline of socially constructive values due to ever decreasing resources (solidarity, social responsibility, respect, observation of law, etc.) <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social polarisation around the 	<p>initiatives as driving forces of social transformation leading to dialogue and devising non-violent development options in a post-socialist and post-conflict context.</p> <p>With whom? International and national funding partners, EWI grantee partners (110 grassroots organisations), women's funds, other networks' members, local and national authorities, philanthropy networks.</p> <p>By whom? EWI staff, Management Assembly, volunteers and part-time external collaborators, grantee partners' network and research fellows.</p> <p>How? Provides small grants, education and research grants, organises events and participates in networks and advocacy initiatives locally, regionally and internationally.</p>	<p>gating the pandemic effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor performance and mixed, inconsistent messages of the authorities concerning the severity of the pandemic, No. of infected, hospitalised, measured to be undertaken, etc. - Fear to engage in CSO activities due to the pandemic (do not want to get infected) lead to 'civic passivity' - Restrictions on public gatherings affects CSO group, client support and field activities <p>Shared values and interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human rights observation and rule of law - Using the benefits of EU integration processes for social development - Preserve / build social capital for community empowerment/development - Resorting to own personal and community potentials - Decrease youth emigration 	
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	<p>issues pertaining to pandemic (applying protective measures, vaccination, causes of the pandemic, children attending school, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Competition' around access to pandemic related services (using 'small doors', clientelism and nepotism) <p>Different experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various dichotomies (esp. rural/urban, domicile/newcomers, ethnic/religious majority/minority, religious/non-religious) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic empowerment (esp. of rural women and youth) - Create / develop sustainable local welfare and other services for vulnerable social groups - Need for (re)affirmation of positive / socially constructive values <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decrease social polarisation around the issues pertaining to pandemic (applying protective measures, access to healthcare, treatment and information, etc.) - Provide continuous services to target groups, which became even more vulnerable due to the pandemic (even volunteering if necessary, despite decrease in / lack of funds for staff salaries) <p>Common experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty / unemployment - Youth emigrating from the region - Post-conflict experiences - personal (trauma, fear, uncertainty, lack of social 	
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	<p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing vulnerability of CSOs placing their survival in question <p>Dichotomies as re.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty adapting CSO work to meet pandemic measures - (Not) having access to reliable / credible info about the pandemic - (Not) having sufficient protection resources (money for masks, disinfectants, etc.) - (Not) having access to diagnostics and treatment - (Not) getting fired due to pandemic - (Not) getting infected and/ or loosing someone due to pandemic - (Not) having access to mental health support services 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - course and resources, personal disempowerment) - Post-conflict social setting: poor infrastructure, limited access to poorly functioning public services (no transparency, poor rule of law, corruption, clientelism, etc.) - Human rights violations and discrimination (e.g. limited freedom of movement, gender-based violence, sexism, ageism, etc.) - Progress resulting from 'communion' in the past (e.g. after World War II) - CSOs: Women's sector perceived as a community welfare 'hardware' <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing vulnerability of CSOs placing their survival in question - Rising cases of domestic and gender-based violence - Unreliable/not credible info about the pandemic - Insufficient protection resources (money for masks, disinfectants, etc.) 	
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	<p>Symbols and occasions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frustration due to the restriction of movement and gathering cancelling all 'traditional' events people have 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited access to diagnostics and treatment - Losing jobs due to pandemic - Losing staff and volunteers due to decrease in funds or restriction of movement - Poor performance of authorities in charge of managing the pandemic nationally and locally - Getting infected and/or losing someone due to pandemic - Increasing workload of CSOs - Need to adapt work to meet pandemic measures - Postponement/cancellation of CSO activities - Deterioration of mental health and its neglect due to other priorities - Past traumas triggered (e.g. war-related) - In Croatia: earthquake in and around Zagreb on 22 March <p>Symbols and occasions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New online platforms/ events created to mobilise public attention around the issues pertaining to the pandemic 	
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	<p>been used to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSO events and public addresses perceived as challenging the authorities <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government crisis team press conferences (confusing and even scaring the public with alarming or controversial messages) - Election campaigns (loosening, partially or totally cancelling pandemic measures or heavily relying on the circumstances resulting from the pandemic conducive to campaigning candidates' 'saviour' messages) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSOs perceived as reliable and credible source of support and information in their local communities - In Croatia: Awareness of the need to have a national civic sector funding plan <p>As re. COVID-19 pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government crisis team press conferences (confusing, causing moral panic with the public) - Election campaigns (same as with the dividers); additionally: various abuses of public funds, incl. those for combating the pandemic, became a topic in the media after the elections) 	
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The DNH analysis of EWI activity options to mitigate dividers and/or boost connectors identified over 40 potential effects of their implementation:

Potential effects of the proposed EWI activity options to mitigate dividers/boost connectors

Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Relieving the situation of grassroots women's CSOs in the Western Balkans region caused resulting in continuation of their operation + Empowerment of women's CSOs in the Western Balkans to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic challenges
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Providing for 'survival' of the so-called women's CSOs within the third/civic sector + Providing (a sense of) continuity and stability to EWI grantee partner organisations in the Western Balkans region + Raising awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic effects on women's CSOs
Intended	<p>DNH distribution effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Capacity building and setting an example of (women's) CSOs coping with the COVID-19 pandemic challenges <p>DNH market effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Providing for women's activists continued income from sources within the CSO sector <p>DNH legitimisation effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Raising the profile of women's and faith-based activism in crisis situations <p>Other effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Provide for creation of more solid grantee partners' project proposals taking into account the realities and devising action options under the pandemic circumstances + Strengthen solidarity and inform advocacy for greater recognition and support for the (overall CSO) sector

<p>Unintended</p>	<p>DNH substitution effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating (even more) dependence on EWI funds and support with grantee partners (Unless extensive advocacy activities are undertaken:) - Discouraging state actors from allocating more funds for (women's) CSOs, as well as employers to engage women (from vulnerable social groups and/or CSO experience) in the future, facilitating also institutional unaccountability - Institutions-to-CSOs responsibility transfer in the eyes of the target and interest groups (potentially leading also to target groups' 'CSO dependency') - Weakening the rule of law - Diminishing the level of human rights observation, as well as their exercise, protection and advancement opportunities - Increasing social instability (despite all the intentions and efforts to decrease it) <p>DNH distribution effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Re. target groups: providing continuous support to particular women's groups (e.g. women having experienced domestic / gender-based violence) that would otherwise have difficulties accessing state services - Some grantee partners' target groups (e.g. women with disabilities, ethnic/religious minority women, Roma, LGBTTIQ, girls or elderly women) / EWI target areas may not benefit from these EWI activities due to grantee partners' lack of sufficient experience in coping with the unprecedented situations / expertise in looking for specific types of support or accessing funds <p>DNH legitimisation effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drawing additional attention of the public supporting CSO-opposing social tendencies
<p>Direct</p>	<p>DNH legitimisation effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Dealing with specific, otherwise under- or unaddressed issues pertaining to women's social participation + Supporting, acknowledging and advancing women's (CSOs) community participation and community development contribution + Providing for continuity and sustainability of (women's) grassroots civic activism in the Western Balkans region

Indirect	<p>DNH implicit ethical messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Women (faith-driven) activists and CSOs demonstrating responsible and accountable ownership over their own activities (even) under unprecedented circumstances + Personal empowerment of women activists and their organisations' integrity and position (by asserting their community contribution and reliability) + Diminishing effects of past trauma and mental health deterioration with women activists, their target groups and local communities + Asserting accountability by advocating for/ demanding pro-CSO agency and transparency of the authorities concerning non-discriminatory third sector funding (esp. during the pandemic) - See unintended DNH legitimisation effect.
Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Providing necessary, immediate, tailor-made support to women's CSOs (financial, educational, informational, psychosocial) + Facilitating and easing women activists' exposure to new professional challenges by creating safe spaces to share experiences re. coping with working during the pandemic + New women's CSOs' projects taking into account the pandemics-induced circumstances submitted to the next EWI call for proposals - See unintended DNH distribution effect.
Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Women (CSOs) empowered and applying new knowledge/experience/ideas/know-how in their work and life + Sector consolidation: Increased level of trust and mutual reliance among women (CSOs) in the region + Raised visibility of EWI and its grantee partner organisations' contribution during the pandemic, as well as their organisational profile with various stakeholders + Raised profile of faith-based (women's) activism + Women (CSOs) perceived as key community actors, leaders and trendsetters (even in unprecedented situations) - See unintended DNH substitution effects.
Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + 'Emergency preparedness': Women (CSOs) answering the pandemic-imposed challenges for their target groups immediately and directly + Increased intra-sector solidarity and networking, esp. among women's CSOs in the region + New resources (funding, knowledge, expertise) transferred to grassroots women (CSOs) - See unintended DNH legitimisation effect.

Delayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ 'Lessons learnt': Women CSOs feeling confident and competent through knowledge and skills application in their most recent projects implemented under the pandemic circumstances+ Less pandemic-related tensions and mental health strains in the EWI grantee partners' local communities+ Community empowerment through promotion/exercise of positive/constructive community values/attitudes/behaviour+ Various online resource- and experience-sharing initiatives sparked (bi- or multilateral)+ Increased quality of life of women (CSOs), other vulnerable social groups and local communities in general- See unintended DNH substitution effects.
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Acknowledgements

EWI and the author would hereby like to express their gratitude to all EWI grantee partner organisations participating in the 2020 rapid assessment poll providing as a basis for this report. The data and information presented in it could not have been collected, processed, analysed or presented without the support and contributions of the entire EWI office team in Omiš, Croatia. Looking forward, we would also like to thank everyone who will share the information about this Report, hoping it would inspire solidarity and contribute to advocacy efforts for greater recognition of and resource mobilisation for grassroots women's activism worldwide.