



**IRIS Networking**  
CSOs for protection sensitive  
migration management

## IRIS NETWORK REPORT

### SOCIAL SERVICES DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

#### CONTEXT

Iris Network conducted the survey “Social services during coronavirus pandemic in Western Balkan countries” in order to assess the current state of the pandemic as well as the repercussions it will have on the provision of social services to beneficiaries provided by IRIS Network members in the local communities. The results of the survey serve as a baseline for this Report.

The Report provides a particular overview of the actual challenges and hardships that CSO providers of social services encounter in working with beneficiaries in light of the pandemic predicament. It also serves to map assistance models and as an instrument in advocating for policies and measures of national/regional/ EU Institutions which focus on service providers during and after the crises implicated by COVID-19.

IRIS network is the only regional network that brings together over 200 organizations that provide different type of social services to more than 10.000 people in the South East Europe region. IRIS was founded in 2012 as part of the project “Improving the provision of SSD in SEE funded by the EU”. The network aims to strengthen the role of non for-profit social service providers through South East Europe and to ensure that these organizations are recognized as equal partners by the public sector.



This project is funded by the European Union



During December 2017, IRIS Network commenced a new regional initiative “IRIS NETWORKing – CSOs for protection sensitive migration management” developed by IDC and its partners from ASB, SOS Podgorica, LIR CD, La Strada and Initiative ARSIS. The Project aims to significantly contribute to the improvement of service delivery and policy framework related to the migration in the region of Western Balkans (Albania, BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). The main objective of the project is to empower CSOs to be effective, accountable and independent actors and to improve their capacity for dialogue with governments for the purpose of influencing policy and decision-making processes. The Project is supported through the European Commission Programme Consolidating Regional Thematic Networks of Civil Society Organizations.

As IRIS Network members are facing unprecedented challenges from COVID-19 and the strain on the services and resources they provide is tremendous, we would like to take proactive steps to protect the Network members, support their ongoing activities and assist them to cope with current hardships as much as possible under the scope of the Project.

## TIMELINE

The survey was conducted during the week of April 6 to April 13, 2020.

## GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE / COUNTRIES COVERED

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

All of the 86 participants in the survey are a part of the IRIS Network. 15 CSOs come from Albania, 20 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 16 from Montenegro, 10 from North Macedonia and the greatest number (25) are based in Serbia.



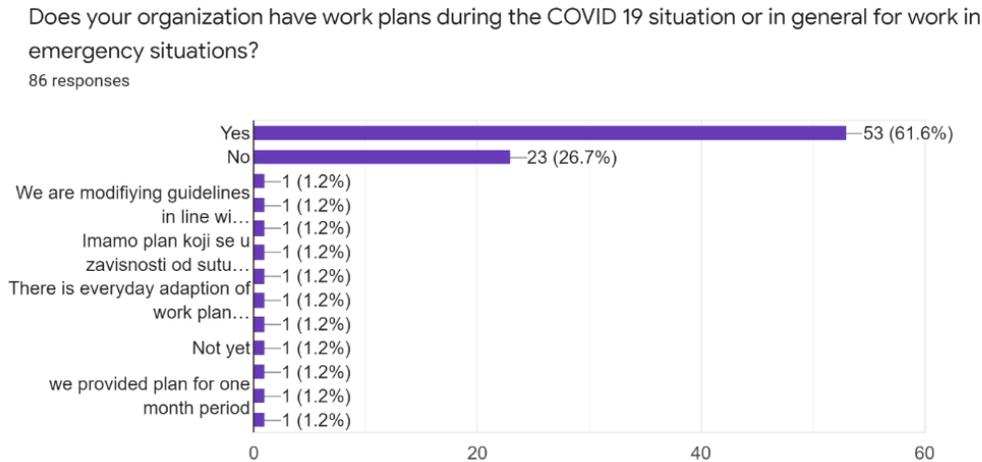
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## CAPACITIES

The quarantine and other restrictions related to the epidemic of COVID-19 harmfully affected the work and capacities of many organizations covered by this survey. However, a number of them managed to redirect the provision of their services via online tools or even to introduce additional services in order to best serve their beneficiaries and those in need.

In assessing the CSOs capacities to efficiently function during the COVID-19, the survey shows that 44.2% of the respondents have managed to organize their operations from home, while 27% have organized work in shifts.

Fortunately, over 61% of CSOs have some kind of a work plan for emergency situations. Still, a significant percentage is evidently not prepared to fully function in emergencies, and this is where the assistance of IRIS NETWORK comes in handy.

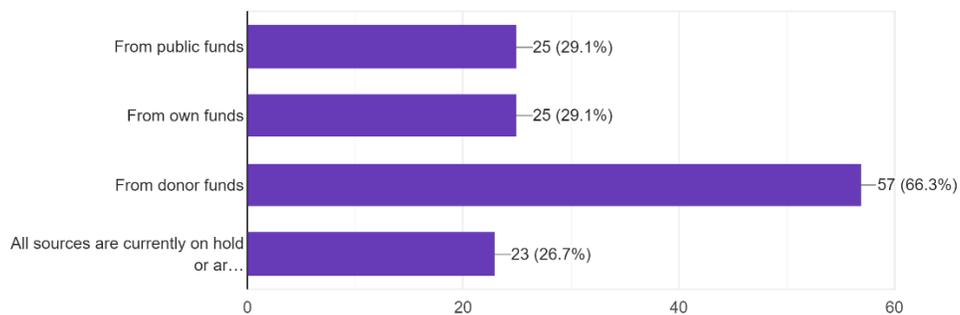




## SOURCES OF FUNDING

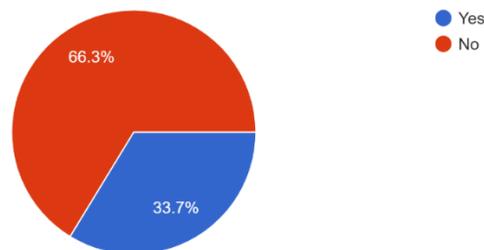
Sources of funding constitute by far the greatest challenge in the current situation. Majority of CSOs are funded by donor funds (66.3%). For 26.7% of the respondents all funds are currently on hold, which constitutes a tremendous obstacle.

Current sources of funding for your social services (multiple answers are possible)?  
86 responses



Only 33.7% managed to provide alternative sources of funding in order to cope with the crisis. Nearly all of the participants expressed their concern regarding the future sources of funding and declared that their expectations lay within the pool of international donors.

Have you been able to provide additional sources of funding in order to overcome the crises?  
86 responses



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## COOPERATION WITH LOCAL AND NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Only barely over a half of CSOs (51.2%) have classified their cooperation with local and national institutions as very good. Out of the remaining half, 24.4% sees it as unsatisfactory. Main reasons for this are the lack of the support in provision of response to the needs of various beneficiaries and socially excluded individuals.

Likewise, only 50% have indicated that their local authorities have implemented measures in order to maintain current social services, support to social service providers and mitigate the current situation. Out of the new measures proposed, 46.5% include beneficiaries of the CSOs which is an important indicator since vast majority of the beneficiaries are extremely vulnerable at this point and a large number of them are not receiving services due to the COVID-19 predicament.

The survey reveals that nearly 60% of the participants claim that their organization has not been consulted in formulating measures on the local level for their particular target groups. Considering that, IRIS Network, as the only regional network gathering CSOs social service providers in Western Balkans, we would like to emphasize that the current situation may be used to build trust between local government authorities and CSOs through regular communication and joint focus on reaching vulnerable categories and communities in full potential.

Moreover, there is a general concern regarding how possible measures aimed at decreasing the effects of the crises both from local and national institutions will be set up. When it comes to the expectations concerning possible measures aimed at decreasing the effects of the crises by the Donor community and EU, nearly all participants expressed hope that the EU and other donors will not cease to support them.

This illustrates lack of confidence in domestic institutions and policies and pinpoints that the main source of viable solutions and adequate measures still lays in the EU. Moreover, some are putting faith into direct IRIS Network support as well as into a potential new project in order to reduce the negative effect of COVID-19.



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## INDICATION OF THE LEVEL OF THE CURRENT TECHNICAL, HUMAN RESOURCES AND FINANCIAL CAPACITIES AFFECTED BY THE CRISES

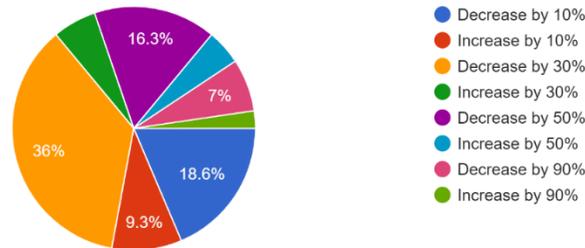
As COVID-19 crisis and the government measures that followed it took its toll, 38% of CSOs indicated that their overall technical, human, and financial capacities deteriorated by 30%.

Apart from the fact that numerous regular activities of the Network members have been stopped due to the pandemic, the vast number of them has been transferred online, to social media and telephone support (particularly psychological counseling, psycho-social support, trainings and educational workshops, etc..).

Participants of the survey are encountering the most difficult challenges in the domain of obtaining sufficient funding, retaining adequate human resources and technical capacities.

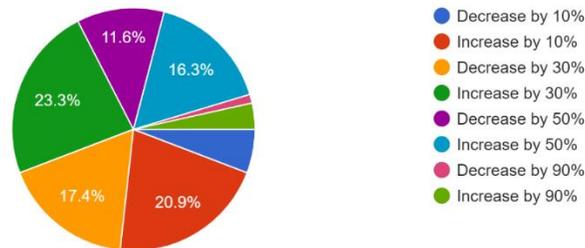
Indicate the level of your current technical, human resources and financial capacities affected by the crises – self-evaluation (mark a decrease or increase)

86 responses



What are your expectations related to increase or decrease of your services after the crises?

86 responses





## RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowing that Iris Network members work with numerous donors and depend on funding coming from local administration, national funds for social service provision and international donor community, where EU is by far the biggest and most significant contributor, the current state of affairs is problematic for majority of active projects since there is lack of flexibility and timely information exchange in the donor-beneficiary relations.

Based on a thorough analysis of the CSO responds and in order to provide meaningful assistance to CSOs to overcome at least some of the obstacles imposed by the COVID-19 situation, several proposals have been formulated:

- Support to CSOs in connecting virtually and shift as much as possible of their workload/activities to online platforms (ICT expert support and platform membership fees);
- Other know-how support: expert support in developing emergency plans, plans for reorganization, adjusting financial plans, expert support in fundraising and alternative funding opportunities;
- Communications/visibility support in order to carry out specific advocacy for vulnerable categories/groups
- Expert support in advocacy and fundraising

The proposed support could include:

- Enabling resources limited to acquiring specific ICT solutions to set up digital platforms and apps, online trainings, workshops, webinars, new software, etc.
- Enabling resources limited to obtain necessary expert and know-how support.
- Enabling resources to pay for staff and in-house experts for a limited period of time during COVID-19 situation.
- Support for the infrastructure and equipment in order to satisfy newly adopted safety technical standards for service provision.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Results of the survey demonstrate a strong unity among the IRIS Network members in the time of the COVID-19 crisis, especially when it comes to a unified approach toward external actors, be it government institutions, donors, stakeholders and other decision makers in relation to their support for the CSOs and their beneficiaries.

Joint advocacy initiatives toward all levels of government and the donor community are expected in the future and IRIS Network is seen as the leading voice for all.



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Majority of CSOs expect continuous support from the Network in facilitating dialogue between relevant stakeholders within the Network, in order to bring together those working in the same field to provide a more streamlined service.

All participants regard networking in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic very important as it facilitates efficient exchange of experience in handling the crisis, offers potential solutions to overcome certain challenges and sends the message that no Network member is set aside to combat the crisis on its own.



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