

# COVID 19 IMPACT ON THE WORK

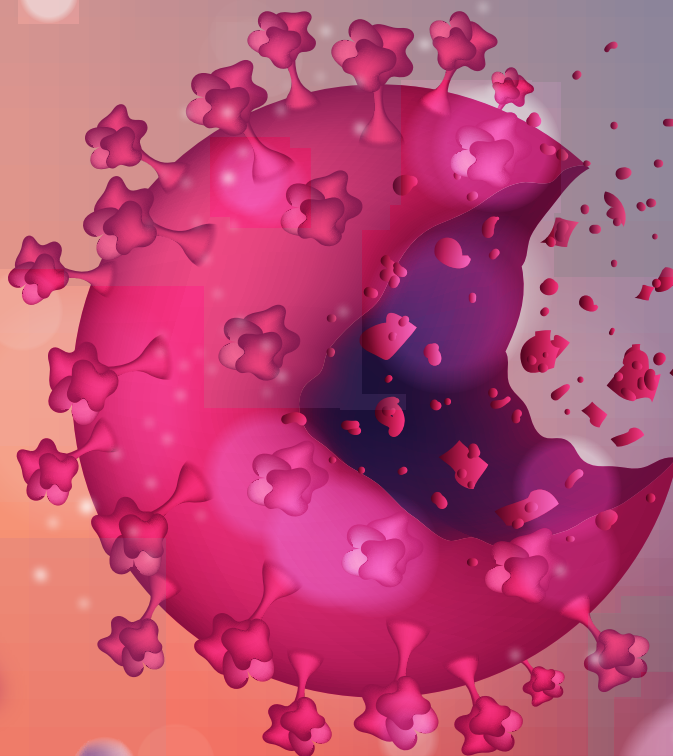
## OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN MONTENEGRO

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# INTRODUCTION

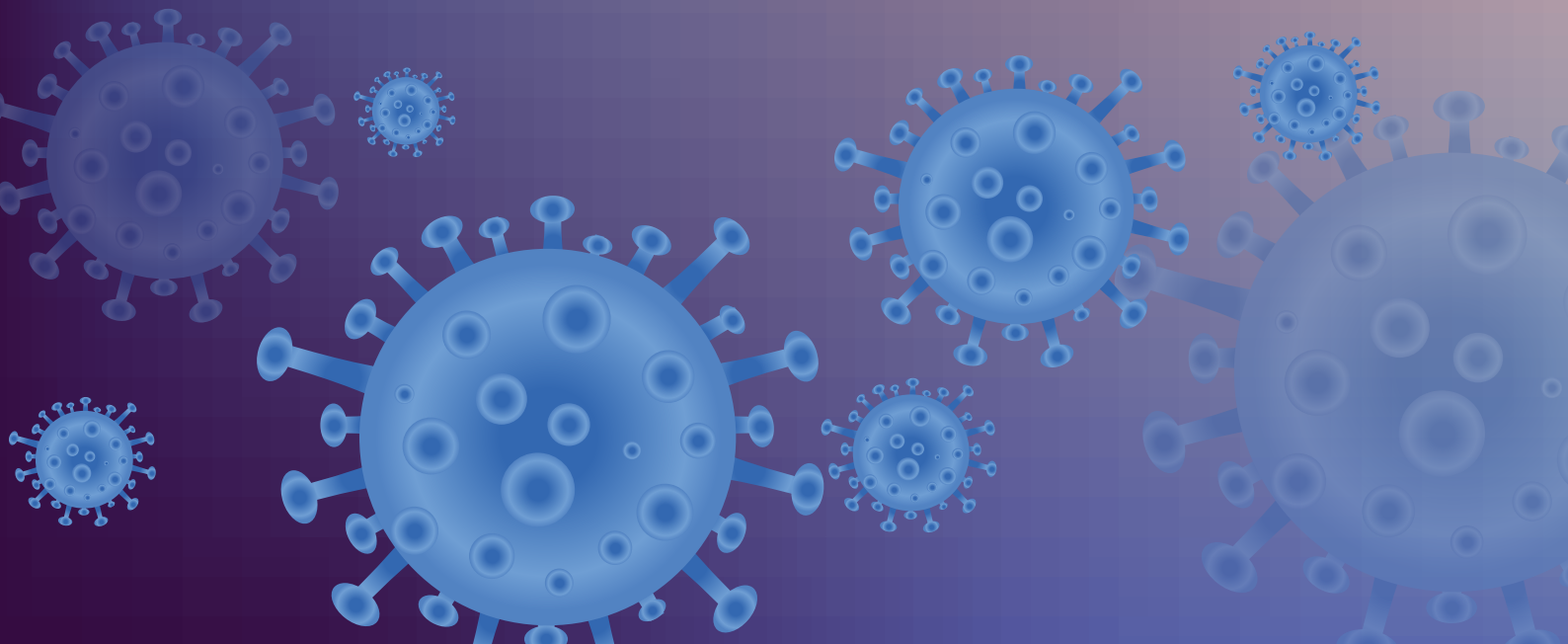
**Centre for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations (CRNVO), on 13 April 2020, published an online survey in order to gain information about the impact of COVID19 pandemic on the work of non-governmental organizations in Montenegro and their target groups, as well as possible consequences of the pandemic to further implementation of NGO activities and services.**

Civil society, as all other actors in the society, has been facing such challenge for the first time. There is an evident lack of information about the extent to which COVID19 pandemic affects the work of NGOs, and particularly on how it will be reflected on the work and activity of NGOs in Montenegro, and consequently to the thousands of beneficiaries of services and other NGO activities in Montenegro.

Some of the omnipresent questions are the following: Will there be layoffs in NGO sector, how will the programmes and projects be implemented, will the Government ensure certain support for civil society as it did for other entities, will the donors change priorities...?

For future actions, in the directions of mitigating the consequences of pandemic with regards to civil society, we needed objective and reliable data to define our future actions. Therefore, the goal of this research was to discover to what extent the recent situation which incurred due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the work and action of civil society organizations, their employees, as well as the beneficiaries of their services, programme and financial aspects of the actions and possible future consequences.

The findings, aligned proposals, suggestions and requests of NGOs will be submitted to the Government, public authorities and donors with the aim of ensuring further functional action of NGOs. The Government of Montenegro, in its Work Programme 2020, envisaged the work on new strategic document for NGOs in the fourth quarter. We believe that the new strategic document should adequately respond to the proposals and suggestions referred to in this research.



# GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS WHICH PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH:

## Area of activity:

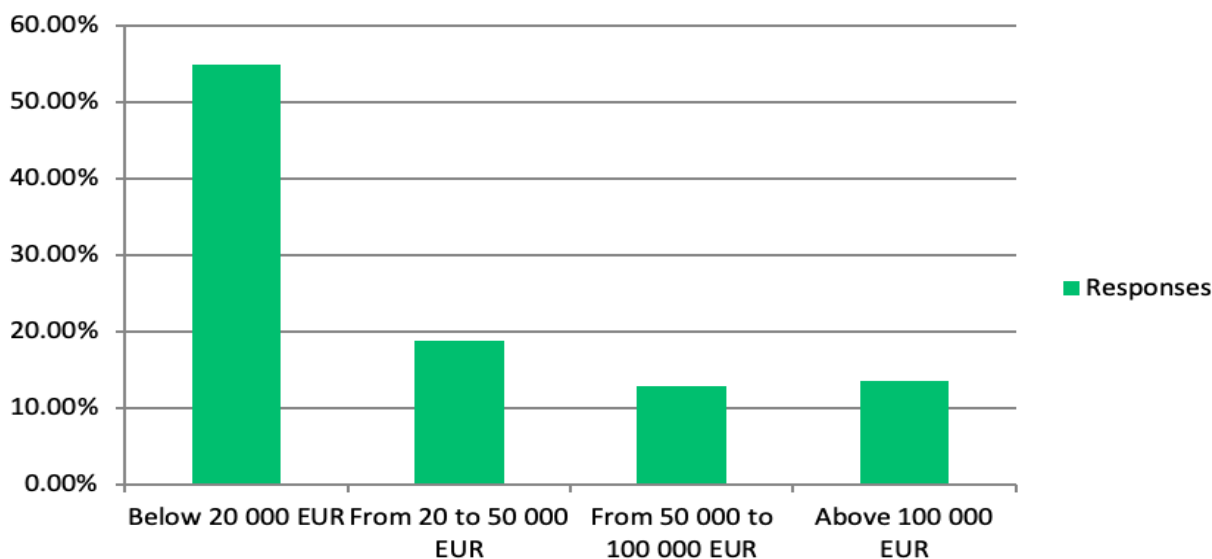
The research covered 139 non-governmental organizations in Montenegro. These organizations are from 18 fields, with the majority coming from the area of protection of persons with disabilities (15.27%), social care about children and youth (10.69%), protection and promotion of human and minority rights (10.69%).

Area	% participation of organizations in the research
Social and health protection	6.11%
Poverty reduction	2.29%
Protection of persons with disabilities	15.27%
Social care about children and youth	10.69%
Aid to older persons	0.76%
Protection and promotion of human and minority rights	10.69%
Rule of law	3.82%
Development and reform of public administration	1.53%
Development of civil society and volunteerism	4.58%
Euro-Atlantic and European Integration of Montenegro	0.00%
Institutional and out-of-institutional education	4.58%
Science	0.00%
Arts	3.82%
Culture and technical culture	6.87%
Environmental protection	9.16%
Agriculture and rural development	4.58%
Sustainable development	6.11%
Protection of consumers	0.00%
Gender equality	5.34%
Fight against corruption and organized crime	0.76%
Fight against addiction diseases	3.05%

## The amounts of annual budgets:

Out of 139 surveyed organizations, 54.89% i.e. 73 organizations have budget lower than 20,000 EUR in 2019, 25 organizations from 20 to 50,000 EUR (18.8%), 17 organizations have the budget ranging from 50 to 100,000 EUR, while 19 respondent organizations have the budget amounting above 100,000 EUR in 2019. Having analysed the organizations and their budget, we may conclude that majority of the organizations which completed COVID19 survey are the organizations mainly active on the local level.

## Budget in 2019



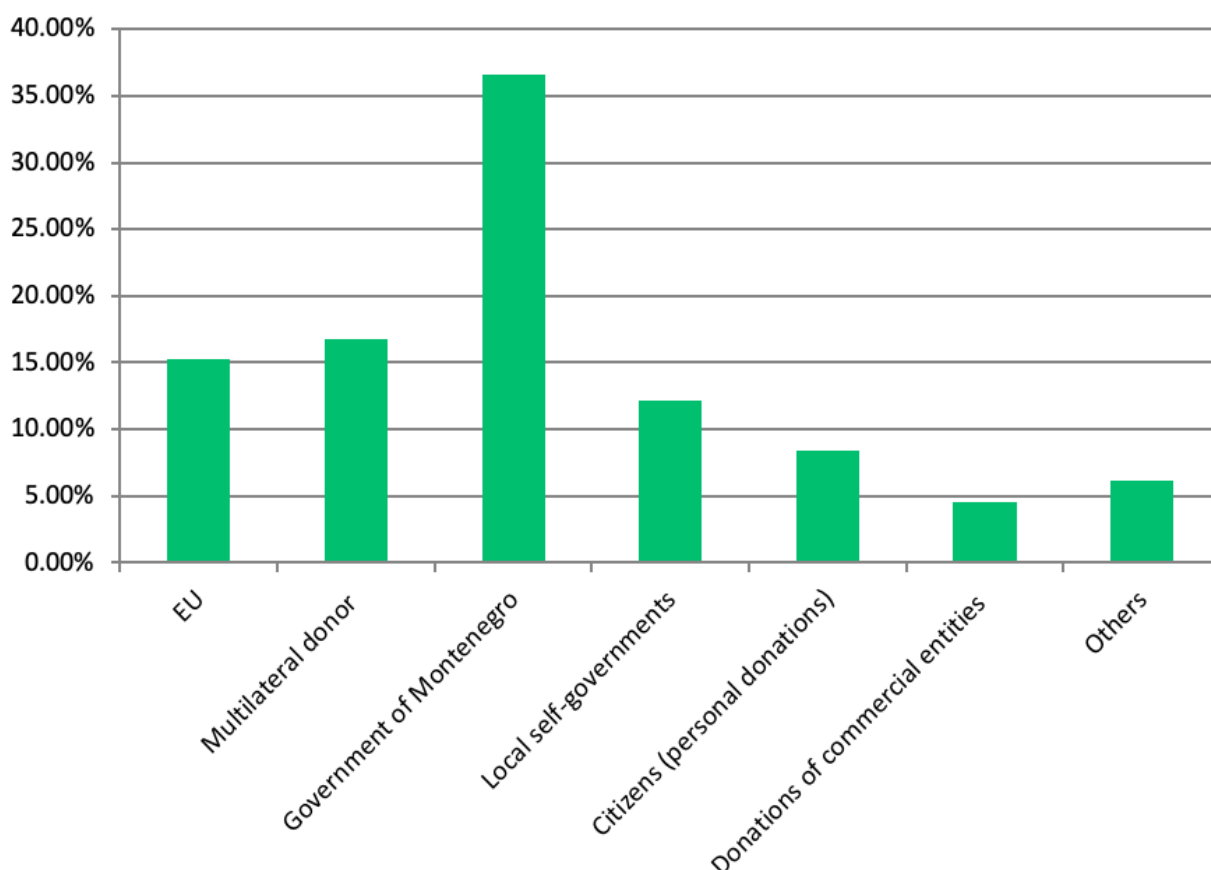
### The number of employees:

In line with the provided responses, the number of employees as per employment contracts in respondent organizations amounts to **297**, while the number of direct beneficiaries of these organizations is above **47,000** and there are several thousands of Montenegrin citizens that are their indirect beneficiaries.

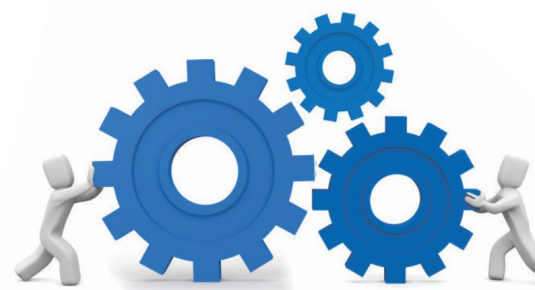
### Sources of funding:

The question - *Which donor has been dominant in terms of the support to the work of your organization up to now?* – was responded by 131 organizations. Dominant donor for the majority of respondent organizations is the Government of Montenegro (36.6%), followed by multilateral organizations (foreign embassies, foreign foundations, etc.) with 16.7% and the European Union with 15.2% organizations which regard them as the most significant donors. The next place is taken by local self-governments as the donor dominant with 12.2% respondent organizations, followed by donations of the citizens (8.4%) and donations of commercial entities (4.58%). Over 6% respondent organizations said that they are not the beneficiaries of the funds of the mentioned donors.

The offered data clearly indicate that the Government of Montenegro and local self-governments are predominant donors for the projects and programmes of non-governmental organizations in Montenegro and that over 48% respondent organizations primarily rely on state and local funds so as to implement the projects in their field of action.



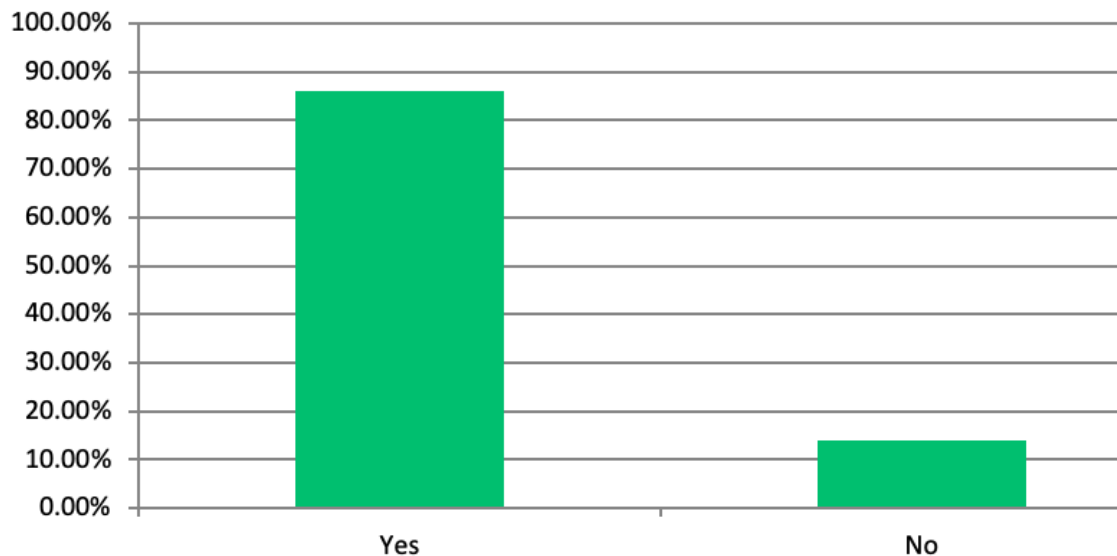
## HOW DOES COVID19 PANDEMIC INFLUENCE THE WORK OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN MONTENEGRO?



### Current situation:

To the question on whether the Corona virus pandemic influenced non-governmental organizations in Montenegro, **85.9% respondent organizations responded affirmatively, while 14% think that COVID19 did not have an impact on their organization.**

## Has Corona virus pandemic had an impact on your organization up to now?



The organizations which responded affirmatively to the previous question were asked to choose one of the most severe consequences of COVID19 outbreak on the work of their organization or if the consequence was not offered to add it.

**Over 42% respondent NGOs said that there were delays in the implementation of signed contracts on funding, while around 35% organizations stated that the existing situation and reduced incomes disabled them to pay the bills for the rental of offices, electricity, Internet and maintenance. Over 19% organizations had to cancel the rent of the premises, while around 9% organizations had to give layoffs to their staff and 7% organizations had to reduce the amounts of the salaries of their employees.**

Some of the mentioned consequences are the following:

We work with children and youth, and taking into account the situation, we are not able to deliver teaching and organize lessons!

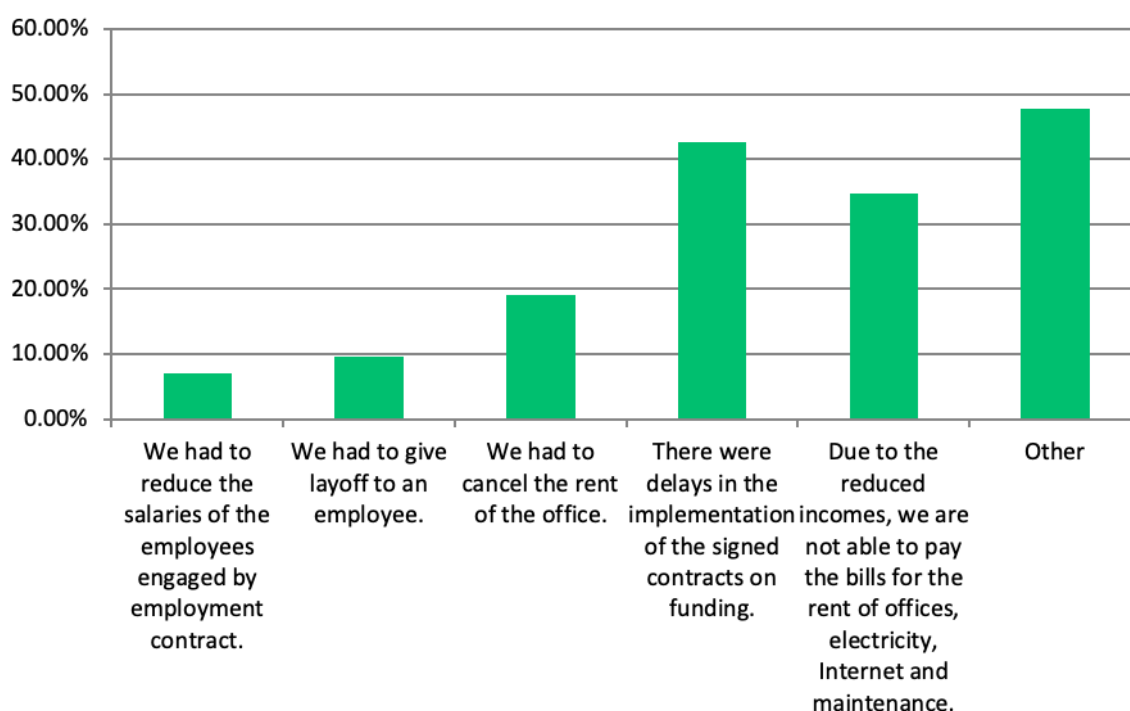
The provision of services for children and youth with developmental disabilities is stopped in 20 associations.

The organization is based on volunteer work of its members who already carry out other jobs (where they earn their salaries). Since their jobs are greatly affected and/or the scope of their movement is limited due to the measures in fight against the spread of Corona virus – their contribution to the work and research of the organization is hampered.

We still have only one donor by the end of the year, afterwards we will face a problem as we have two employees on maternity leave, while the law does not prescribe any benefit for non-profit organizations and we have the same financial liabilities as all other profitable entities.

Our main activities – artistic education of children and youth, as well as theatre production are stopped.

Public kitchen temporarily closed.

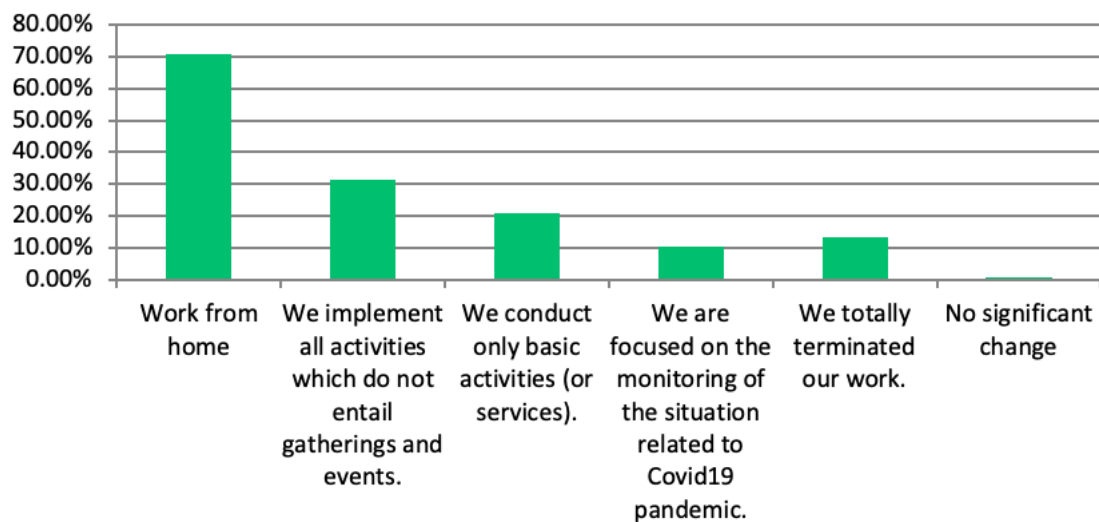


The organizations were asked about the changes in the manner of work by being offered several responses and the possibility to choose more than one response.

It is evident that the manner of work of a number of organizations has changed. Numerous organizations shifted to the “work from home” (70%), while, at the same time, they implement all activities which do not entail gatherings and events (31%) or conduct only the basic activities/services (21%). There are certain organizations that in this process committed themselves only to the monitoring of the situation of COVID19 pandemic (10.5%). What is of particular concern is that 13.4% i.e. 18 organizations completely terminated their work. Only one organization stated that there are no significant changes in the manner of its work.

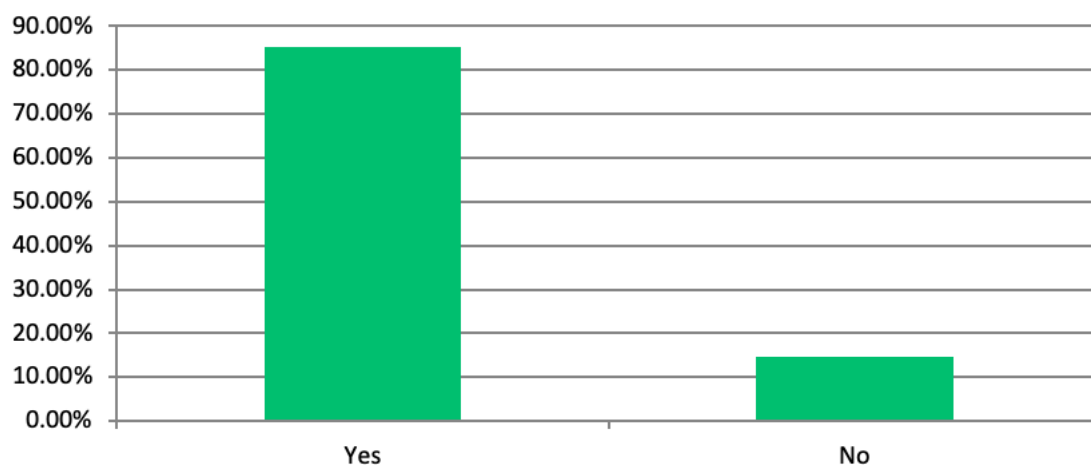


## How does your organization conducts its work during this period?



The question related to the level of understanding of donors and partners that supported the projects of Montenegrin non-governmental organizations was responded by 85% organizations that they faced understanding, while 14.7% organizations responded that they did not experience understanding of donors and partners.

## Did you experience understanding of donors and partners that supported your current projects?



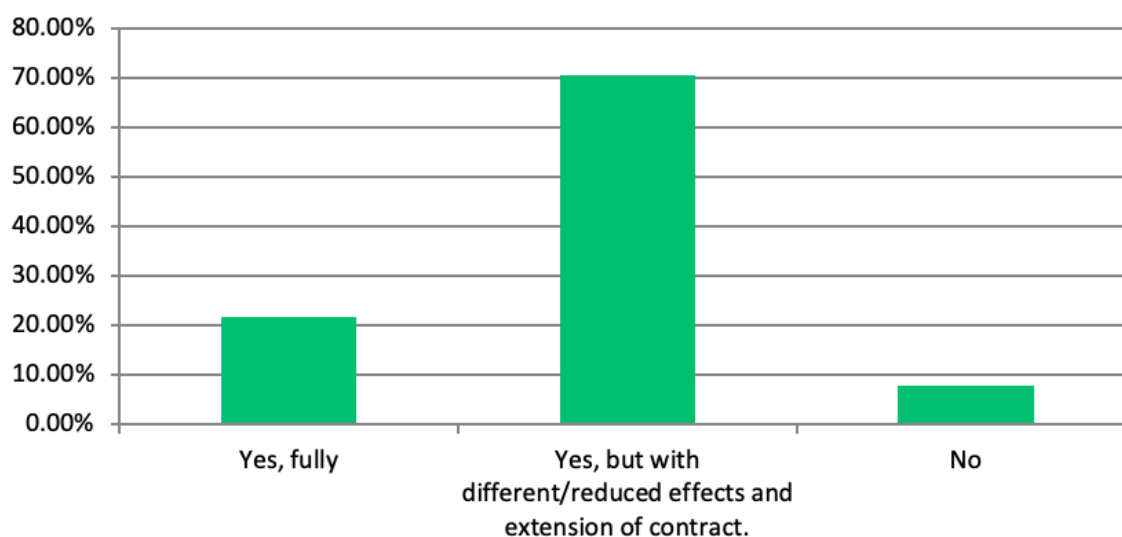
When the organizations were asked to explain their relationship with the donors in this context, a number of organizations stated that they had informed donors about the obstacles in their work and that the reactions of donors were positive, that they had shown understanding for the incurred situation. A small number of organizations stated that they were directly contacted by the donors which provided logistical support or mentioned the manners how they might help the organizations in this period.

Some of the comments are the following:

- » Donors approved the extension of the time action plan related to the implementation of programme activities, due to inabilities to provide services envisaged by such programmes.
- » Donor, whose project suffers greatest changes due to the current situation, fully agrees that all activities supposed to be implemented within the period March-August be implemented in the last quarter of the year, i.e. upon the termination of the current situation.
- » The funds for the implementation of the projects are approved, but the signing of the contract is delayed. In this period we are conducting preparatory actions for the implementation of the project with local self-government and partners in the project.
- » Considering the fact that our premises are located in the business centre of the Hotel XX<sup>1</sup>, and since it is assigned to be the quarantine, the entrance into it is prohibited and working time is limited. Donors requested reports from us and they gave us a deadline to submit them, which is impossible for us to do.
- » We are allowed to delay the activities envisaged to take place in March, April, May and June for the period July – October. Although it is difficult to organize workshops with youth in the period July-August as they were planned to be held in schools, the donor did not approve that we do not have any activities during these two months, so we have planned additional ones, adjusted to the limitations of such period.
- » Funding is ensured by the end of this calendar year, but what will happen after that?
- » The understanding of donors exists, but as we mentioned, implementation deadline is extended for some projects and everything will be completed during the extension.

However, when asked whether they think that they would manage to implement the planned projects, only **21.7%** organizations stated that they think that they would fully implement the planned projects. On the other hand, **70.5%** i.e. **91** organizations think that they will manage to implement projects, but with different or reduced effects and with the extension of the contract with the donor.

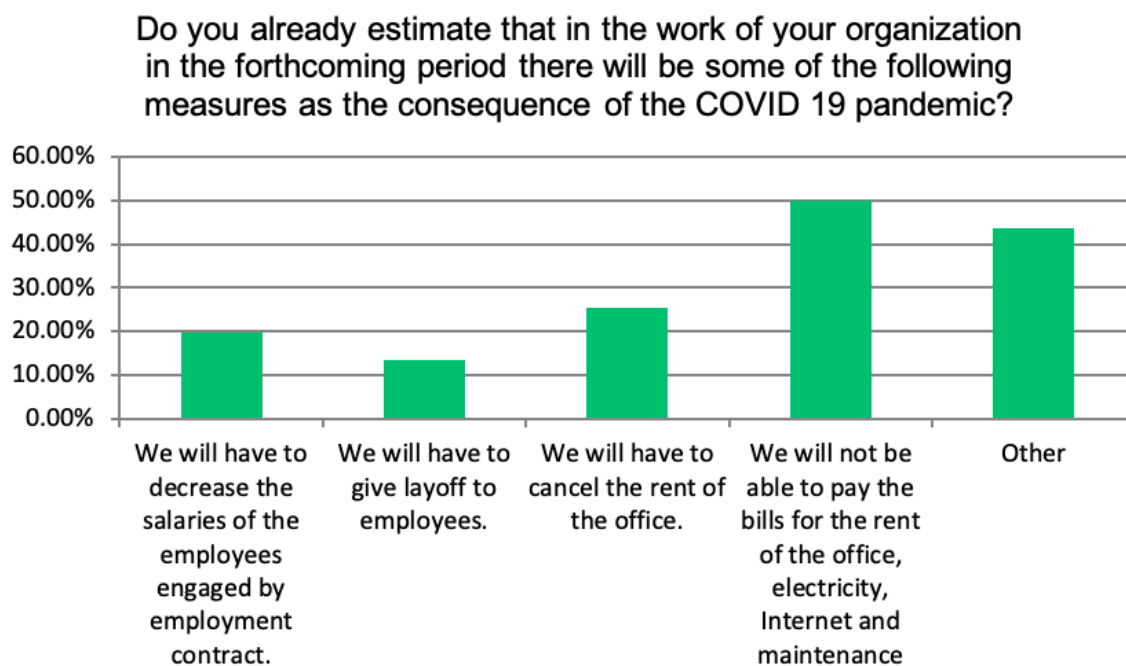
### Do you think that you will manage to implement all planned projects?



<sup>1</sup> The name is excluded for the sake of removing hotel brand, protection of information of the organization, as well as the prevention of marketing in the report

The consequences of the pandemic on further work and activity of NGOs:

The question related to the measures that will incur in the forthcoming period as the consequence of the impact of the pandemic on the work of non-governmental organizations in Montenegro, was responded by 54 organizations that they will not be able to pay the bills for the rent of offices, electricity, Internet and maintenance. Additionally, some organization (25) will have to fully cancel the rent of offices. Regarding the measures related to the employees - 25 organizations stated that they are forced to decrease the salaries, while 17 organizations will have to give layoffs to the currently employed staff.



Asked to write down additional measures that will incur as the consequence of COVID19 pandemic, the organizations, among others, stated the following:

- » *It is not easy to talk about this. It is very uncertain.*
- » *Lower level of interest/needs for visual presentation of projects which were in focus of our activity is already evident (human rights, youth, culture, environmental protection, security, etc.). We believe that such situation is exclusively caused by the lack of certainty in the forthcoming period, more than the lack of the funds of donors to implement the mentioned activity.*
- » *The payment of all fees planned by the project is stopped (coordinator, assistant, lecturers, volunteers, etc.).*
- » *We will not be able to pay the bills for bookkeeping services, maintenance of technical capacities, translation services, etc.*
- » *We do not know what will be the future relationship between the Ministry and local self-government.*
- » *We will not be able to permanently accommodate animals due to the closed borders.*
- » *The focus of the call for projects will be changed, which will be probably more focused on the mitigation of the consequences of economic crisis, and in such case it can be expected that the protection of nature become low on the priority list.*



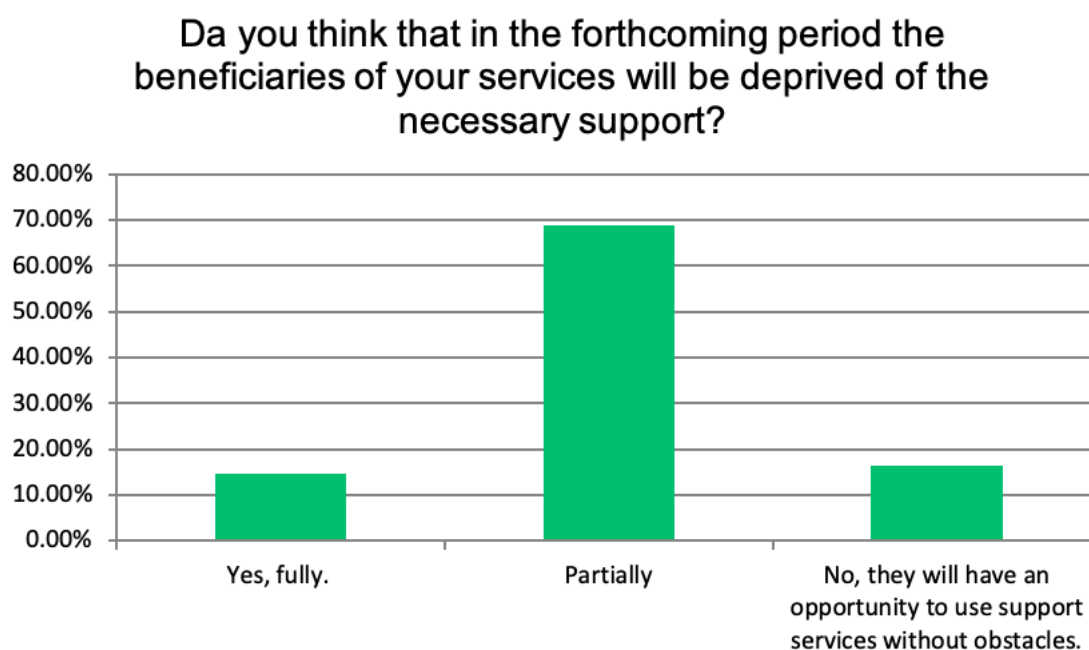
Majority of responses to the question of who are the beneficiaries of services of non-governmental organizations in Montenegro and how the consequences of COVID19 pandemic influence the beneficiaries of services, were related to the **inability of provision of support and direct services to beneficiaries, particularly persons with disabilities and women and children – domestic violence victims. In addition to this, a large number of organizations emphasized that they are not able to deliver needed equipment or material support to the beneficiaries of services due to the measures of the Government of Montenegro.** A number of organizations emphasized that not all beneficiaries of their services have the possibility to communicate via Internet and the access to applications such as Skype or Zoom so as to participate in educational workshops (this is particularly mentioned by youth activism organizations).

Some of the comments are the following:

- » *The beneficiaries we have worked with offline may use our online services now, but such channel of work is not always the most efficient one. This is particularly the case with advisory services. Our plan was to open an offline advisory hub for young people, but it is impossible now. Also, all planned activities on the spot are disabled and the problem is their postponement for the fall, when they will be accumulated and difficult to be implemented within the timeframe.*
- » *Our direct beneficiaries are persons with partial or total sight disability from the territory of Nikšić municipality. In order to prevent the health of these persons from being affected by Covid19 virus, our organization undertook a number of prevention measures. Some of them are the prohibition of public gatherings and related implementation of activities. The communication between the staff in the Organization and the members is exclusively conducted via phone, and the like.*
- » *Our beneficiaries are predominantly women and youth belonging to vulnerable categories, who attended the courses and lectures in our Centre, with the aim of acquiring knowledge and skills for easier employment or initiation of their own business. We also provided psychosocial support to them. Now the provision of these services is disabled and all activities are currently stopped.*
- » *The beneficiaries of our services are mainly children and youth with developmental disabilities and the members of their families. When group and individual treatments of professionals with the beneficiaries of our services were stopped, we ensured telephone communication between them, but, certainly, it is not sufficient to ensure the improvement of psychological and physical condition of children and youth with developmental disabilities. On the contrary, their full exclusion from social life during pandemic results in aggravated health condition.*
- » *The impact of COVID -19 to our work is multiple and what is particularly difficult is the absence of direct support services for our beneficiaries. Through the Employment Agency of Montenegro, we received a notification that our Programme "Personal Assistant– Assistance at Home and in Association" was approved, but everything is stopped now, as even the contracts haven't been signed yet. The beneficiaries of our services are children and youth with disabilities, persons with disabilities and their families, which means the most vulnerable categories.*
- » *Usual beneficiaries of our services are violence victims, persons in necessity for psychosocial and legal support, persons living in increased risk of HIV/AIDS and PPI, as well as general LGBTIQ population in Montenegro. COVID-19 had rather negative effects on the possibilities to accede support services and the services we offer, and thus it has made it difficult for the beneficiaries to use them.*

- » *The impact of Covid 19 has influenced the increased number of calls and contacts with domestic violence victims, so the workload is growing.*
- » *It has a significant influence, as there is no direct support of speech and language therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist, and sports activities are lacking as well. Our beneficiaries are children, youth and adults with disabilities.*
- » *Our organization has increased its work on the provision of services to our beneficiaries since the outbreak of COVID19. Our beneficiaries are the members of Roma and Egyptian community, and besides regular requests for mediation in the exercise of their rights, now the communication has significantly increased with the aim of articulating their needs towards competent institutions.*

**Asked whether the beneficiaries of services of non-governmental organizations in the forthcoming period will be prevented from receiving the services provided by NGOs, 14.7% organizations responded that their beneficiaries would be fully deprived of these services, while 70% respondent organizations stated that their beneficiaries would be partially deprived of their services. Only 16.2% organizations responded that their beneficiaries would have an opportunity to use their services without any obstacles.**



Taking into account the fact that COVID19 pandemic is one of the major topics in media and wider public, a large number of other significant topics is neglected, so there is a risk that wider public, donors and decision makers neglect the topics dealt with by NGOs in Montenegro.

**To the question whether wider public neglects topics dealt with by NGOs due to COVID19, 70% organizations responded that the topic they deal with is neglected by wider public, while 30% organizations provided opposite response.**

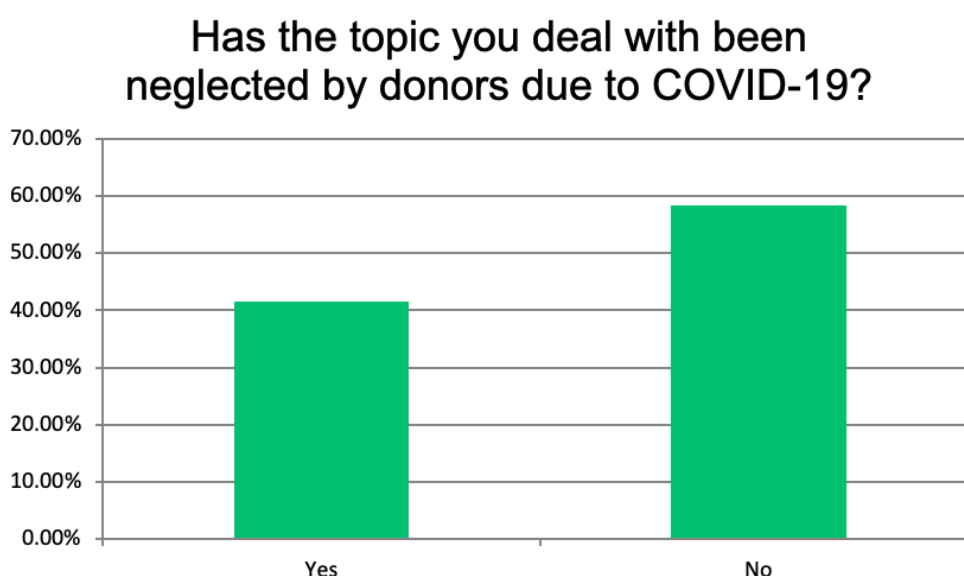
Non-governmental organizations were asked to explain why they think that the topic they deal with is neglected by wider public.

Some of the comments are the following:

- » *Not fully, but young entrepreneurs are not in focus. They are usually the owners of micro enterprises but adequate support for them is currently missing.*
- » *During this period, media find the topics of gender equality totally uninteresting. They were interesting before the Covid 19 crisis.*
- » *Roma community is indirectly discriminated even this time. Right to health protection and other spheres of life are considerably deprived. The virus affected everybody, but less attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups such as Roma community, although civil sector constantly emphasizes that.*
- » *All attention of public is focused on Corona related events, while environment issues such as air quality, construction and implementation of planned projects are totally neglected. The devastation of nature is even unnoticed.*
- » *People are frightened due to the pandemic and do not want to be in the company of older persons. The citizens are not sensitive for the needs of the elderly.*
- » *Our topics are youth, their position in the society, activism, volunteerism and non-formal education. Education has been cut down to "study at home" and volunteerism to Red Cross, and we are even not allowed to organize support actions on our own. Youth policy is fully in shadow.*

Regarding donors and their focus on the topics dealt with by NGOs in Montenegro, the organizations demonstrate more positive attitudes, but still 41% organizations note that donors neglect their topics, while 59% believe that donors pay sufficient attention to the topics they deal with.

**Asked to explain their opinion, the organizations which stated that donors neglect their topics due to the outbreak COVID19 mostly note that they believe that local self-governments as the donors will not allocate funds this year. Majority of NGOs think that a number of donors will not launch calls this year, i.e. that they have different priorities more related to COVID19. Certain number of the organizations stated that the donors require from the to be more focused on the topic of COVID19, and that other topics are in the shadow.**





# IMPACT OF COVID19 PANDEMIC ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF NGO TARGET GROUPS IN MONTENEGRO

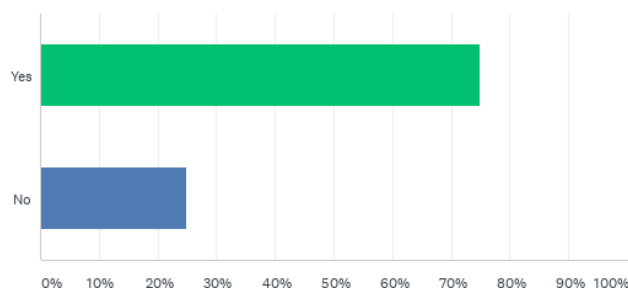


In a large number of countries there is concern due to the numerous restrictive measures and their impact on human and civil rights of citizens of such countries. In Montenegro, competent authorities allowed the publication of the list of people in self-isolation which contained personal information of Montenegrin citizens, and soon after that, the list of infected citizens containing their personal information such as unique citizen identification number, addresses, telephone numbers and the like "leaked" from the records of the Primary Health Care Centre Podgorica. Additionally, there is an evident pressure on the freedom of expression of both individuals and organizations, particularly regarding the publication or sharing of the contents related to COVID19.

Within COVID19 survey, non-governmental organizations were asked the following question – *Do you believe that socio-political climate incurred due to the outbreak of COVID-19 may lead to the violation of civil and human rights of your target group in the forthcoming period?*

Around 74% respondent organizations provided positive response, while 26% organizations responded negatively.

**Q25 Do you believe that socio-political climate incurred due to the outbreak of COVID-19 may lead to the violation of civil and human rights of your target group in the forthcoming period?**



In this part of the research, non-governmental organizations were asked several questions on the topics of what kind of mechanisms may be created by different entities (Government of Montenegro, European Union, CRNVO – Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations in Montenegro) so as to prevent the violation of civil and human rights and prevent this trend.

Regarding the Government of Montenegro, the main proposed mechanism is the establishment of coordination/advisory body of the Government for the monitoring of the consequences of pandemic which would include NGO representatives from the area of human rights protection, supported by 88% organizations.

### **Additional proposals of NGOs (other respondents) are the following:**

- » *Operational bodies in all ministries including the participation of NGOs that may provide help with their knowledge and experience*
- » *Creation of prerequisites for fair conditions in the forthcoming elections. At the very end of the term of office, it is ridiculous to create some long-term mechanisms. They may create an ad hoc body for the monitoring of all consequences, but with mandatory consultations with civil sector.*
- » *The use of the existing advisory forms such as the Council for Cooperation of Public Authorities and NGO.*

Regarding the European Union, the main proposed mechanism is greater political support for the respect of human rights and participation of NGOs in the process of monitoring of the consequences of pandemic, supported by 93.9% respondent organizations.

### **Additional proposals of NGOs (other respondents) are the following:**

- » *Clear support to the carriers of values of democracy, as well as independent individuals and organizations.*
- » *Monitoring and recommendations to already made decisions.*
- » *More direct reactions and warnings to the Government and other actors.*

Regarding CRNVO – Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations in Montenegro, the main proposed mechanism is the Coordination of communication between NGOs and the Government and its advisory bodies, public authorities and state-owned public enterprises, local self-governments and municipality-owned public enterprises, supported by 93% respondent NGOs.

### **Additional proposals of NGOs (other respondents) are the following:**

- » *Greater pressure on public sector.*
- » *Participation in advisory bodies.*

Finally, the organizations had an opportunity to provide comments and information not mentioned in the previous part of online survey.

Some of the comments are the following:

- » *We find this survey very useful. We expect from you to be the link in all important segments and the one that will explain the issues of a large number of NGOs to all relevant factors, as well propose the manners to overcome these issues.*
- » *The role of the Parliament and respect of the Constitution of Montenegro have to be revisited, i.e. legal grounds of the recent actions of executive governance have to be re-examined.*
- » *Without specific political presence and pressure by the EU, all potential decisions and recommendations adopted by the Government of Montenegro will not be implemented transparently and specifically but only pro forma.*
- » *In this situation, the Government of Montenegro should include NGOs as well as other partners in the society by the package of measures envisaged for the next month.*
- » *Greater support of local self-governments through the adoption of particular measures*

*of NGOs for the sake of ensuring adequate support for civil society organizations, due to the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, for example the adoption of decisions on: providing the working space to be used by NGOs, release from surtaxes to taxes and contributions, subsidies for payment of bills for office rent, electricity, Internet and maintenance.*

- » *Operational grants are definitively necessary for the civil sector and now even more, and that is the initiative we would be glad to support. We have the same costs as a company – rent, municipal costs, staff costs... Why then wouldn't we receive subsidies at least for municipal costs? Why wouldn't the Government support employment in civil sector for the employment of new people?*

## SUPPORT TO NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE BENEFICIARIES OF THEIR SERVICES?

In this part of the research, non-governmental organizations were asked several questions on how different entities (Government of Montenegro, European Union, CRNVO – Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations in Montenegro) may support non-governmental organizations to recover from the consequences of COVID19 to the work of their organizations and the position of the beneficiaries of their services in Montenegro. The organizations had several questions offered with several possible answers and possibilities to add their proposals.

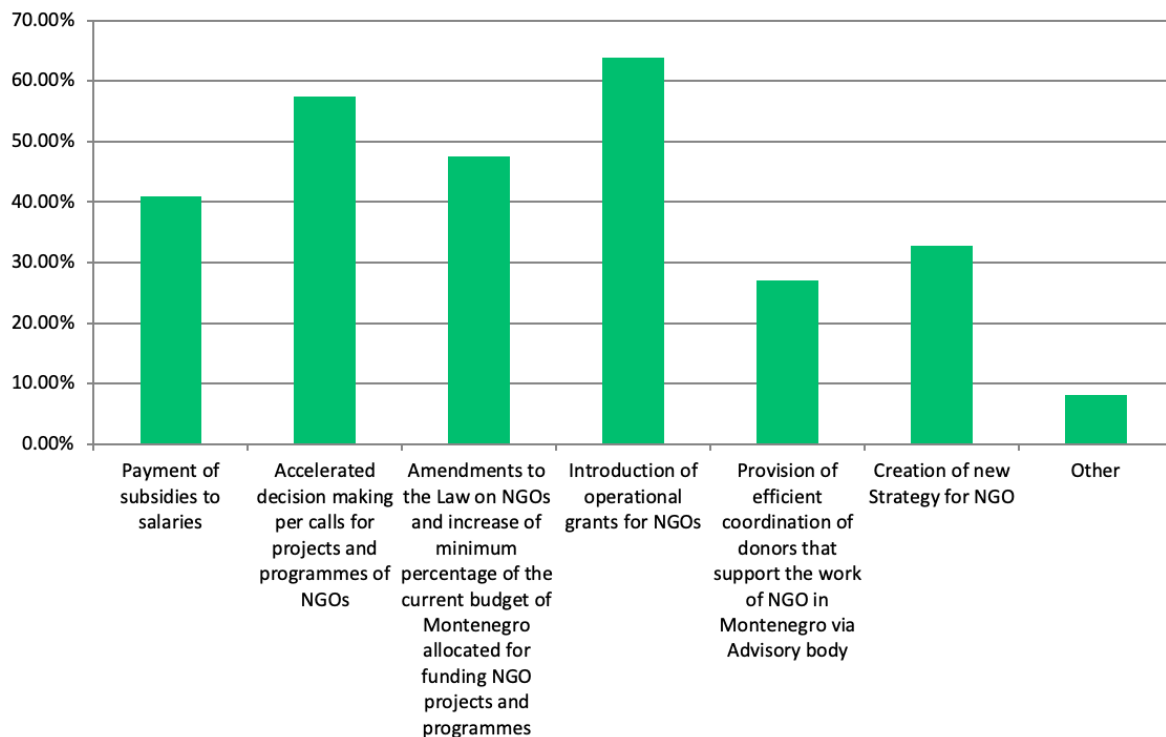
### GOVERNMENT OF MONTENEGRO:

Regarding the Government of Montenegro and its support mechanisms to non-governmental organizations in Montenegro, NGOs which participated in the research ranked the most needed support mechanisms in the following way:

- 1. Introduction of operational grants for NGOs**
- 2. Accelerated decision making per calls for projects and programmes of NGOs**
- 3. Amendments to the Law on NGO and increase of minimum percentage of the current budget of Montenegro allocated for funding NGO projects and programmes**
- 4. Payment of subsidies to the salaries of the staff (permanent employment) in the amount of 50% of average monthly salary in Montenegro**
- 5. Creation of new Strategy for NGO**
- 6. Provision of efficient coordination of donors that support the work of NGOs in Montenegro via Advisory body (Council for Cooperation of Public Authorities and NGOs)**



## GOVERNMENT OF MONTENEGRO



Non-governmental organizations had an opportunity to propose additional support mechanisms or measures which could assist non-governmental organizations in Montenegro.

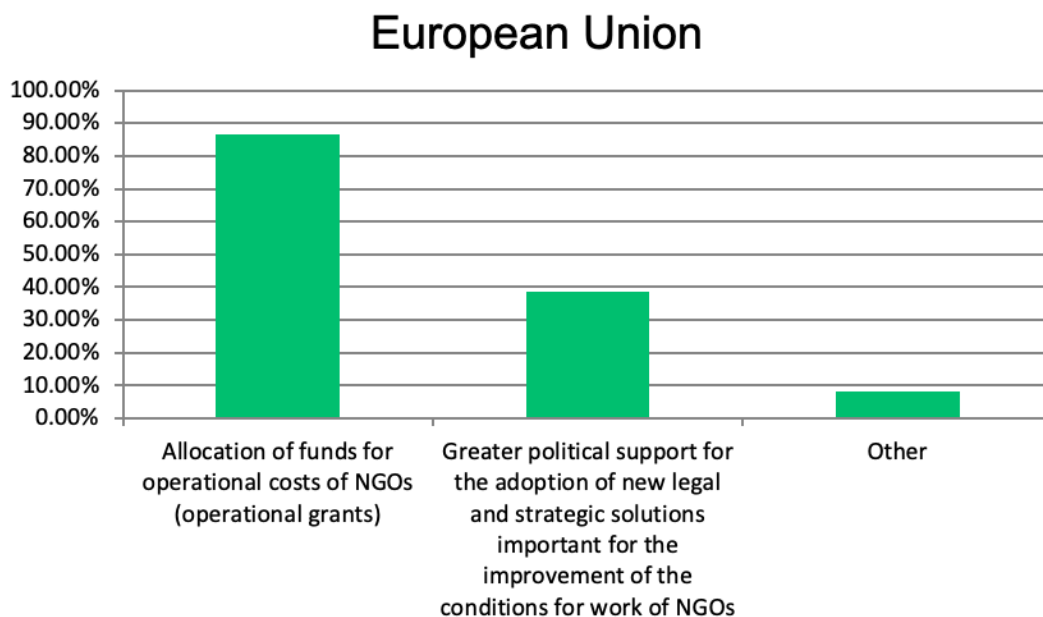
### Additional proposed mechanisms/measures are the following:

- » *Releasing from taxes on salaries*
- » *Providing premises for use*
- » *Financing projects aimed at improving the situation during and after the pandemic*
- » *Drafting new law on volunteerism and youth.*

### EUROPEAN UNION:

Regarding the European Union and its support mechanisms to non-governmental organizations in Montenegro, NGOs which participated in the research ranked the most needed support mechanisms in the following way:

- 1. Allocation of funds for operational costs of NGOs (operational grants)**
- 2. Greater political support for the adoption of new legal and strategic solutions important for the improvement of the conditions for work of NGOs**



**Additional proposed mechanisms/measures are the following:**

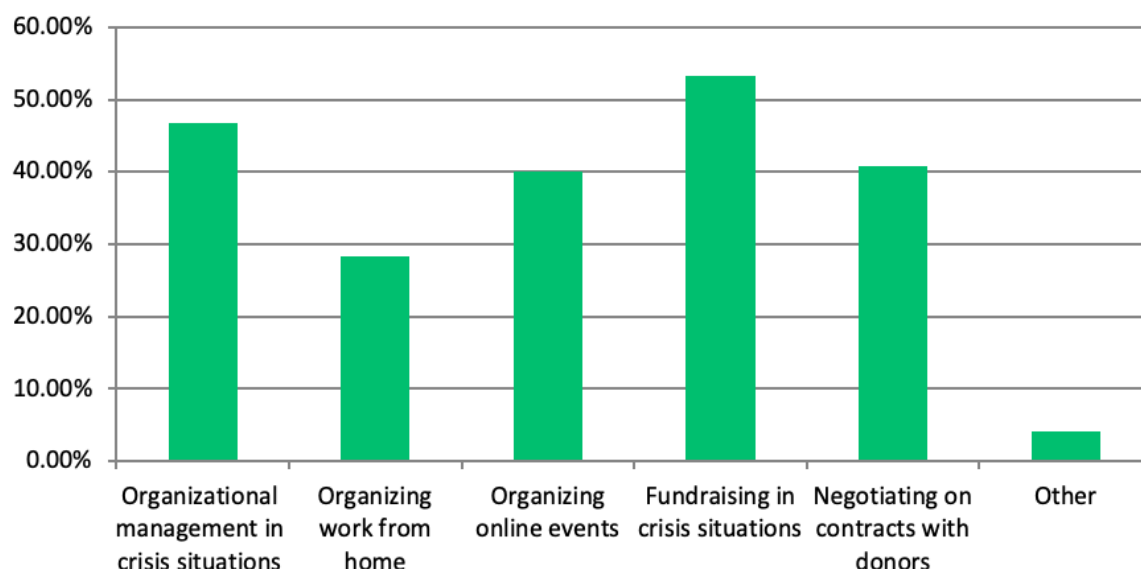
- » *Particular support for local NGOs*
- » *Accelerated decision making upon the calls by the EU committees*
- » *More effective and efficient decision making for the Cross-Border-Cooperation Programmes (CBC)*
- » *Permission to use the part of the unspent funds in current projects in the part related to human resources*
- » *Diversification of topics*

### **RESOURCE CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:**

Regarding the Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations and its support mechanisms to non-governmental organizations in Montenegro, NGOs which participated in the research ranked the most needed support mechanisms in the following way:

- 1. Fundraising in crisis situations**
- 2. Organizational management in crisis situations**
- 3. Negotiating on contracts with donors**
- 4. Organizing online events**
- 5. Organizing work from home**

## CRNVO – Resource center for civil society organisations (through capacity building)

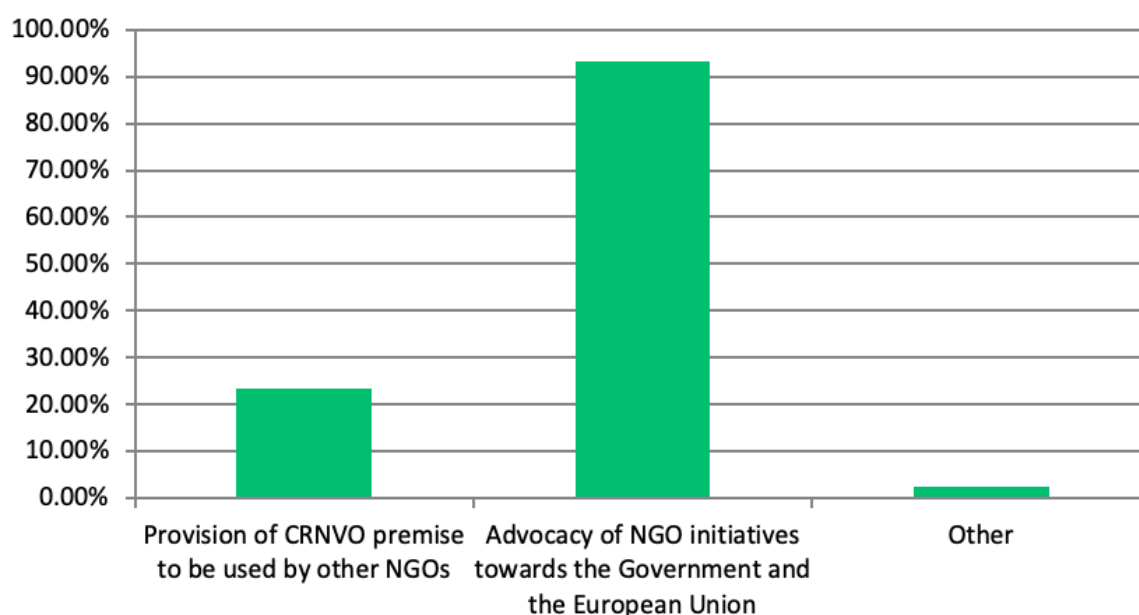


Additional comments of the organizations:

- » *To try to make the Government of Montenegro and local self-governments to find a modality to support cultural and artistic associations by separating them from other NGOs due to the specificities of their work, particularly high costs of maintenance and procurement of equipment, etc.*

Regarding the Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations, the majority of respondent NGOs expressed the need that CRNVO - Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations provide support to NGOs through the advocacy of NGO initiatives towards the Government and the European Union, while the second place is taken by the support through the provision of CRNVO premise to be used by other NGOs.

## CRNVO - Resource center through





**Other manners of support mentioned by NGOs are the following:**

- » *CRNVO has a very good mechanism of submitting useful information and accordingly it may cover greater range of service information.*
- » *Provision of mini grants for regular work.*
- » *Communication with donors for the sake of providing crisis support to NGOs*



## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the inputs provided by non-governments which participated in the research and models applied in the region and the European Union, we will present the set of recommendation's for three key stakeholders: Government of Montenegro, international donors (European union, multilateral donors) and the Resource Centre for Civil Society Organizations in Montenegro (including project partners and associates). The recommendations are categorized as urgent measures (required to be implemented as soon as possible) and mid-term measures (which should be implemented in the following 12 months).

### GOVERNMENT OF MONTENEGRO

#### URGENT MEASURES:

- » ***Involvement of NGO representatives from the area of the protection of human rights into the work of the National Coordination Body for monitoring of the consequences of the pandemic***

National Coordination Body, in the period from the introduction of extraordinary measures on the occasion of COVID 19 epidemic, adopted the most important decisions for combating epidemic, and the organizational structure of this body comprises of the sub-committees for certain specific issues. We believe that this body will continue its work until the end of the pandemic. During the period of facing the first wave of pandemic, NGOs reacted to the violation of human rights in certain situations. We believe that the participation of NGO representatives in the area of human rights protection may assist in avoiding mistakes in decision making in the forthcoming period and in practice demonstrate the readiness of the Government to show openness for all parts of the society and on specific example implement the idea of togetherness in the fight against epidemic. The selection of NGO representatives in National Coordination Body should be implemented in accordance with the existing Regulation on the procedure of the selection of NGO representatives in the bodies established by the Government and public authorities. Particular sub-committee may also be established for this issue.

» ***Payment of subsidies for endangered activities (payment of subsidies to gross salaries of the employed and subsidies for salaries of the employed on paid leave)***

NVO su tokom prvog talasa epidemije morale redukovati svoje aktivnosti, a During the first wave of epidemic, NGOs had to reduce their activities and the research also shows that there were layoffs of the employees in non-governmental sector as well as the slowdown of the implementation of support services to target groups. In addition to this, as in case of other commercial entities, employees in NGO sector used the right to paid leave on the basis of taking care of a child younger than 11. Therefore, the action of NGOs belongs to **endangered activities from the Programme of providing support to the economy and the employees with the aim of mitigating negative effects of new Corona virus – COVID 19**. Consequently, it is necessary to treat NGOs in the same way as other employers from private sector which may use subsidies to the salaries of the employees recognized by the Programme.

According to the data from Tax Administration, there were 854 people employed in NGO in Montenegro in 2019. The employees in non-governmental sector must not be discriminated in comparison to the people permanently employed in the business sector. In addition to this, the layoffs due to the consequences of epidemic would influence the increase of the unemployed recorded by the Employment Agency of Montenegro, the work of NGOs would be directly jeopardized, as well as the needs of the beneficiaries. It is important to note that the salaries of NGO employees are mostly ensured from foreign projects, not from the state budget. At the same time, NGOs fulfil their duties regarding taxes and contributions for the employees to the state budget. The treatment of NGOs in the same way as the employers from the private sector, as well as ensuring the same set of support due to COVID-19 pandemic is the practice of the European Union member states, and thus the Government of Slovenia, as well as Romania acted upon this request.

Therefore, it is required that the same measures from the Programme of the Government be applied also for NGOs as for other commercial entities whose activity was endangered, and they are the following:

- » **Subsidies to gross salaries of the employed for April and May** (As mentioned in the Programme, the amount of the subsidy is defined in relation to the value of minimum salary specified by the Decision on the specification of minimum salary ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", number 33/19), in a way that the amount of taxes and contributions is defined in proportion with the achieved salary, amounting to 50% of the taxes and contributions to minimum salary, and 50% net minimum salary for the employees in companies recorded in February 2020).
- » **Subsidies for the salaries of the employees on paid leave – the use of the paid leave for the sake of taking care of a child younger than 11** (As mentioned in the Programme, the amount of the subsidy is defined in relation to the value of minimum salary specified by the Decision on the specification of minimum salary ("Official Gazette of Montenegro", number 33/19 in a way that the amount of taxes and contributions is defined in proportion with the achieved salary, amounting to 70% of the taxes and contributions to minimum salary, and 70% net minimum salary for the employees in companies recorded in February 2020).



» ***Accelerated decision making per calls for NGO projects and programmes***

There are several ongoing calls of the ministries which conduct the procedure of allocation of funds for financing NGO projects and programmes, in compliance with the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations. **It is necessary that the Government bind the ministries to finalize decision making procedure within maximum 30 days from the days of closing the call, and within 10 days from the decision on the allocation of**

**funds, pay the funds to the NGOs.** In this way, NGOs will stabilize their work and their beneficiaries will obtain necessary support. At the same time, adequate application of the Law will be ensured in this way, as well as the implementation of project activities in the current year, not in the next one, as it was the case up to now.

## **MID-TERM MEASURES:**

- » *Introduce operational grants for non-governmental organizations*

Within the announced amendments to the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations and the adoption of the new Strategy for NGOs, it is necessary to introduce a new type of support to the work of NGOs through the funding of operational (everyday) costs of NGOs (such as: costs of office rental, electricity, Internet, part of the employees, etc.). Crisis situations, such as the pandemic, additionally showed the significance of such support to the work of NGOs, indicating that project funding opens a range of issues that cannot be solved in extraordinary circumstances, and that they have a direct negative influence on the work and action of non-governmental organizations and predominantly their beneficiaries. In this way, greater stability in the work is created for those NGOs which provide different types of services by their activities and contribute to the exercise of public interest in various areas. Within the prescribed existing procedures, in the same institutional framework, this

type of support would complement recent funding of projects and programmes of non-governmental organizations.

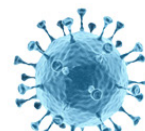
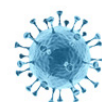
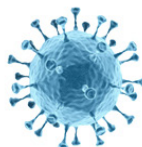
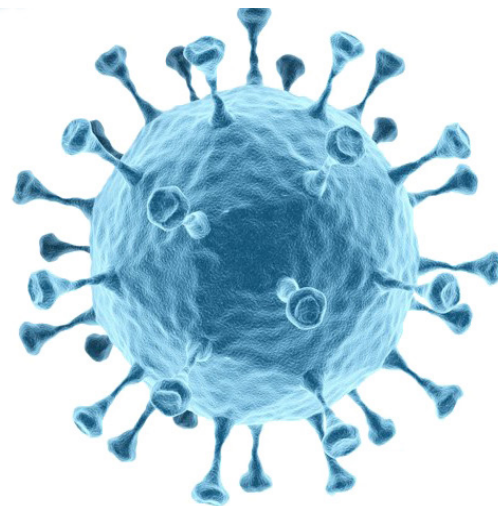
- » *Amendments to the Law on NGOs and increase of minimum percentage of the current budget of Montenegro allocated for funding NGO projects and programmes*

Non-governmental sector will certainly have a significant role in further development of the society, including the recovery from the consequences of the pandemic. NGOs provide a range of services to vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, women and children victims of violence, RAE, old persons, persons in social need) who will, unfortunately, undoubtedly feel the consequences of the pandemic to a great extent. In addition to this, NGOs have a key role in the preservation of the rule of law and the monitoring of the work of competent institutions and emphasizing the necessity of the protection of human rights and freedoms, both in regular and in crisis periods. The need for further development of the sector and empowerment of new non-governmental organizations is increasing, but the possibilities of funding the projects and programmes are currently limited. The increase of funds opens the possibilities of further development of NGO sector, with the emphasis on less developed NGOs, especially those located far away from greater town centres, which under current circumstances remain neglected and mostly excluded from the state budget support.

Therefore, it is necessary, within the announced measures of the amendments to the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations, to envisage the increase of the minimum percentage of the current budget of Montenegro, allocated for funding NGO projects and programmes from the existing 0.5% to at least 1%.

- » *Allocation of premises owned by the state to non-governmental organizations*

New Strategy for NGOs that should be adopted by the end of this year (drafted by the Ministry of Public Administration) should include the issue of the allocation of premises (property) owned by Montenegro to non-governmental organizations. In this way, the work of NGOs would be supported, as the costs of renting working space would be reduced. The issue of the allocation of the working space should be regulated by the same principle according to which the funds for funding NGO projects are allocated. In order to obtain legal grounds for the implementation of this measure, it is necessary to amend the Law on State Property (and ensure that the state property may be provided for use without any fee to other entities, besides public authorities and local self-government authorities), and, afterwards, adopt bylaws (Regulation on the provision of the state property for use by NGOs).





## **DONORS (multilateral, bilateral):**

### **URGENT MEASURES:**

- » *Allow the extension of contracts with the possibility of relocation of unspent funds to human resources where the need is justified*

Numerous projects are in the peak of their implementation which will have to be extended due to the limitations imposed by the epidemic. It is not possible to implement certain activities as planned. Donors should consider the possibility to approve the consumption of the remaining funds for the support to further work of NGOs in accordance with their needs (to use the funds for financing human resources or other organizational costs).

### **MID-TERM MEASURES:**

- » *Create new support mechanisms to non-governmental organizations in crisis situations*

The experience with the pandemic imposes the need to open the dialogue between the donors and NGOs on new types of support to the work in crisis situations. In this way, crisis funds may be designed, which will be available to the networks of NGOs which monitor the respect of human rights, deal with environmental protection, etc. Crisis situations cannot be envisaged, so it is not possible within a short period to design projects and implement calls. Crisis funds also ensure that due to the incurrence of crisis situations, regular funds for financing other topics are not stopped.

## **EUROPEAN UNION:**

### **URGENT MEASURES:**

- » *Provide political support to further involvement of civil sector in the bodies established by the Government of Montenegro and public authorities in the implementation and monitoring of public policies*

Clear political support is necessary for the involvement of NGO representatives in all bodies which monitor the implementation of the policies/decisions of the Government. European Commission provided support to the NGOs and cooperation with the Government even before, so it is necessary to continue much more clearly with the support to the requests of NGOs in this direction. Currently, it is of paramount importance to provide support to the involvement of NGO representatives in the National Coordination Body. The pandemic has shown that the participation of civil society representations in the creation of some measures is necessary, especially as they have indicated the loose border between civil rights and freedoms and the protection of «higher interests».

- » *Accelerate the approval of periodical reports and payment of contracted instalments within projects*

The projects financially supported by the EU and implemented by NGOs are ongoing and their implementation will have to be extended due to the limitations imposed by epidemic. Due to the mentioned circumstances under which NGOs have to function at the time of COVID-19 pandemic (layoffs to the employees, delay of activities, cancellation of office rents, impossibility to pay municipal costs), it is necessary to accelerate the approval of periodical reports and payment of contracted instalments within the projects.

## **MID-TERM MEASURES:**

- » *Provide greater support for the adoption of new legal and strategic solutions important for the improvement of the conditions for the work of NGO*

Greater political support of the EU is necessary to be provided to the initiatives of NGOs requiring the improvement of the conditions for the work of NGOs. Better working conditions of NGOs entail better achievement of their results, i.e. greater positive changes in the community, which contributes to greater quality of the accession process of Montenegro.

- » *Introduce operational grants for non-governmental organizations*

Within financial support for the work of NGOs, it is necessary to re-initiate the allocation of funds for operational grants so as to ensure greater stability in NGO actions. Crisis situations, such as the pandemic, additionally showed the significance of such support to the work of NGOs, indicating that project funding opens a range of issues that cannot be solved in extraordinary circumstances, and that they have a direct negative influence on the work and action of non-governmental organizations. In this way, greater stability in work is created for those NGOs which provide different types of services within their activities and contribute to the exercise of public interest in various areas.

## **RESOURCE CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS:**

### **URGENT MEASURES:**

- » *Active advocacy of NGO initiatives towards the Government and the European Union*

It is necessary that RC continue encouraging the dialogue within NGO sector and continue representing the initiatives aimed at the improvement of the setting for the action of all NGOs in Montenegro.

- » *In cooperation with donors, create the mechanism of crisis funding of non-governmental organizations through mini grants*

It is necessary that RC launch the initiative towards donors which finance NGO projects in Montenegro with the aim of creating the mechanism of crisis financing of non-governmental organizations through mini grants. In this way, the level of trust in the work of NGOs in future crisis situations is increased.

## MID-TERM MEASURES:

- » *Organize a set of trainings (online and offline) on the topics of crisis management, crisis fundraising, IT and the like*

In the forthcoming period, RC should implement trainings which facilitate the action of NGOs in crisis situations.

- » *Focus on the organization of the Forum of Donors and coordination of donors with the aim of better presentation of the needs of NGO sector*

RC will initiate the communication of donors in its further work for the sake of better presentation of the needs of NGOs so as to ensure equal development of NGOs in Montenegro

- » *Conduct surveys and examination of the needs of NGOs on a regular basis*

In order to base the initiatives for the improvement of the position of NGOs on high quality arguments, RC will continue with conducting analyses and examining the needs of NGOs and the data will be presented to all key stakeholders and wider public.

