

**CITIZENSHIP AND
LIFELONG LEARNING
MONITOR 2020**

SERBIA

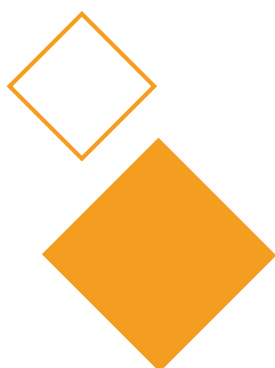




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ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of nine national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The Serbian report is focused on the general three main themes: global citizenship education, digital citizenship, and community partnerships for interculturality. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. In a year in which learning has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more apparent how essential global citizenship education is for the development of competences that prepare learners for global challenges and that prepare them to act responsible towards their fellows beyond any national border. Although this is the case, this topic is relegated to an elective course within Serbian formal education, while also being watered down to education for sustainable development. The public authorities must increase the cooperation with the civil society actors and understand that learning is

no longer limited to the formal classrooms, especially given the context of 2020. Informal or non-formal education provided by CSOs on the topic is stifled by the repressive actions of the government, which is funding counterintuitively named governmental non-governmental organisations to act as its mouthpiece and crowd out the genuine civil society. In this scenario, the learners suffer the most with their global competences being below the OECD average at a time when a quarter of the Serbian households do not own a computer and almost 20% of the households do not have internet access. There is a serious risk for the Serbian population to not adapt to the 21st century society, leaving them incapable of exerting fundamental rights. CSOs, despite the odds being stacked against them, have been setting up partnerships with CSOs from other Balkan countries providing projects and opportunities for volunteering through which the citizens have boosted their global, digital and civic competences, reflecting the importance of partnerships and of ensuring that lifelong and lifewide perspectives are used when approaching education in the current times.

INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship education (GCE) is a topic that gains ground in Serbia, but surprisingly slow given the changes brought by migration waves. The topic is still neglected in formal education, is underfunded and reveals a lack of preparedness on the side of learners to adapt to a 21st century globalized society. The pandemic revealed the lack of the transversal skills needed during distance learning, and this has also been exacerbated by the rural-urban discrepancies in terms of access to

digital resources. The government's opposition to CSOs and their efforts in shrinking the civic space have had implications on the previously mentioned issues but also on the development of intercultural education in Serbia. This struggle will only increase societal polarization and would exclude viable alternatives to learning for the most disadvantaged in society at a time when the Serbian government is not providing sufficient funding and support to catch those vulnerable people in its safety net.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

TERMINOLOGY

The way this topic is thought of across Europe has variations, which is why there must be a clarification over how the concept is defined in Serbia. Our partners report that serious consideration into the topic comes from the non-governmental actors since, currently, there is no agreed definition of GCE amongst public authorities, and very scattered efforts for running GCE related activities. The national authorities are focusing on the SDGs, but GCE, in itself, does not feature in their work revealing policy incoherence since GCE is embedded in the SDG 4.7. At the same time, SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Initiative for Development Cooperation](#) (IDC), acknowledges the importance of GCE to respond to global challenges revolving around complex social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political issues. For them, GCE promotes and instills the values, the ethos, and the competencies linked with commitment to human rights, sustainable development, economic and social empowerment, while fostering active participation in projects that address global issues, “global consciousness” and “global skills” required for active and meaningful participation in an ever-changing society.

GCE AND FORMAL EDUCATION

Though there is no structural approach to GCE in Serbia, the piecemeal approach that was already highlighted in [our previous Monitor edition](#) towards citizenship education is replicated, leading only to the existence of some actions that promote the topic. The topic is included in formal education as part of civic education

classes in secondary level education, as the classes touch upon human rights, cooperation and conflict resolution, respect for diversity and communication skills¹. However, the curriculum has not been updated since 2001, pointing towards an inadequacy in how GCE and citizenship education are approached, and it lacks any ecological component. Education for Sustainable Development is being provided as of recent as an elective course in secondary education². The issue is that as an elective course, it is not sufficiently streamlined throughout formal education leading to many pupils missing out on what should underpin the entire education system given the climate emergency in which the societies find themselves. The Serbian population seems to not be supported to adapt to the new globalized society. Our partners report that the socio-cultural and economic interdependencies across the globe are missing from education, while the impact of local actions is not linked with the global world. The Focus on GCE within the curriculum seems, therefore, in no way intentional, and reveals a lack of oversight from the public authorities to contribute to the adaptation of Serbia to the current world. Creativity and active participation are fostered only inasmuch as they contribute to the participation of citizens in the national community, without accounting for what happens beyond the Serbian borders. To paint an even more discouraging picture, even the skills needed for active participation in the Serbian society are improperly developed as teachers are found to apply a predominantly teacher-centred model, with limited emphasis on creative methods of teaching that encourages interaction, teamwork, decision-making or problem solving among students³.

1 Madzarevic, Ruzica (2019). Citizenship education in Serbia. Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe. Available at: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/citizenship-education-serbia>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

2 Orlovic Lovren, Violeta et al. (2019). Sustainable Development: Between Global Policy and Teachers' Conceptions. In Quality of Education: Global Development Goals and Local Strategies, Violeta Orlovic Lovren, Jan Peeters and Natasa Matovic (eds). Pp.99-116. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335025470_Sustainable_Development_Between_Global_Policy_and_Teachers'_Conceptions. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

3 Maghnoij, Soumaya et al. (2020). OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Serbia. OECD Publishing: Paris. P.72. Available at : <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/225350d9-en.pdf?expires=1604505869&id=id&accname=guest&-checksum=923C8DF855A65BEA17B54E76AE1D9F50>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021



SERBIAN LEARNERS AND GLOBAL COMPETENCES

Serbia lacks a strategy for the implementation of GCE even if in 2015 it launched a kick-off seminar on global education in partnership with the Council of Europe North-South Centre, under which it made a commitment to scale up the work on the topic. Unfortunately, this has not happened and it is recognized that Serbia lacks a holistic vision, a strategy, that is at most, incidentally consistent with GCE⁴. Furthermore, the educational system is not aligned to the needs of learners in terms of developing transversal competencies. The mandatory schooling years are the shortest in Europe in Serbia, with only 8 years of mandatory formal education⁵. This is an issue given that recent studies reveal that the amount of educational hours is correlated with better educational achievement⁶. 2018 PISA results also show Serbian learners scoring below average on the

capacity to examine issues of local and global significance and on understanding the perspective of others⁷. The immigrant learners are significantly more aware than their native peers about global issues – opening up issues of polarization based on such a discrepancy – , all while the native students show very negative attitudes towards migrants. Serbian learners, among all the other countries evaluated by the PISA global competences report, are some of the ones with the fewest learning activities occurring in school⁸. The report shows, however, an openness from the learners to have more knowledge on global topics, and a willingness in general to be better attuned to the needs of the current societies even if the current system is not supporting their academic curiosity⁹.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE AND THE IMPACT ON GCE

The national authorities are insufficiently keen on developing the topic due to their opposition to the CSOs who already have expertise in the delivery of GCE through non-formal and informal education. This is reflected by the absence of taskforces on GCE, and the absence of CSOs in the taskforces on SDGs. Moreover, the recent antagonistic approach the government is taking towards the CSOs is contributing to a diminished civic space and to removing viable options to prepare people for the green transition. Attacks, such as the July 2020 investigation, when 57 organisations from the civil society had their work set back when they

4 North-South Centre of the Council of Europe (2017). Balkan Global Development Education Regional Seminar. Report. Pp. 6-7. Available at : <https://rm.coe.int/balkan-regional-seminar-on-global-development-education-2017-final-rep/1680770b01>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

5 European Commission (2020). Equity in School Education in Europe. Eurydice report. Pp.201. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity_2020_0.pdf. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

6 Di Pietro, Giorgio et al. (2020). The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets. Joint Research Centre Technical Report. Available at : https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121071/jrc121071.pdf?mc_cid=ecbb7c6ba9&mc_eid=26e959399a. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

7 OECD (2020). PISA 2018 Results Volume VI - Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?. Pp.11, 25. Available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/OECD/edu/pisa-2018-results-volume-vi-are-students-ready-to-thrive-in-an-interconnected-world>. Last accessed 5 January 2021.

8 OECD (2020). PISA 2018 Results Volume VI - Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?. Pp.16, 36, 72.

9 Ibid. Pp.28-30, 45.



were checked by the Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, become more frequent. No legal basis for this action was offered, and it is in line with similar attacks occurring since the March 2019 elections¹⁰. Moreover, CSOs' participation in policymaking is reduced, since they are only given a perfunctory role within governmental working groups. The CSOs report that their amendments and comments are rarely taken into account¹¹. To further stifle the civic space, the government has been providing financial assistance to, somewhat counter-intuitively called, governmental non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and to political non-governmental organisations (PONGOs). These bodies would support the views of the government, acting as a very strong competitor to organically formed CSOs¹². The climate for cooperation is exceptionally fraught, excluding CSOs from policymaking on GCE and from implementing GCE, which is damning

given that they have a more structured position on the topic rather than the government.

CSOS' GREEN RESPONSE

In building up opposition to the undemocratic practices of the government, but also in ensuring that action is taken to tackle the environmental crisis, CSOs in Serbia formed in 2011, the [Green Initiative](#). This alliance amasses 22 CSOs and contributes to creating a sustainable waste management system in Serbia by establishing functional mechanisms for the stimulation of primary waste selection through participation of all relevant actors in society. So far, within its activities, the Green initiative collected more than 30 tons of waste (paper, PET packaging, electronic and electrical waste) that was shipped to recycling facilities. More than 3000 citizens participated in these activities and over 3.500 signatures of citizens'

10 Gradjanske Inicijative (2020). The operating environment for civil society in Serbia is still far from EU standards. Press release, 9 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.gradjanske.org/okruzenje-za-delovanje-civilnog-drustva-i-dalje-daleko-od-eu-standarda/>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

support for petition for the legalization of work of individual collectors. All these activities were covered with more than 350 media reports. To raise awareness on the importance of the primary selection and recycling, to increase citizens' participation and recycling businesses in the collection of recycling materials and to create financial conditions for organized

institutional work of individual collectors, the Green Initiative has launched a campaign called [Watch out garbage!](#) Our members report that the Green Initiative has had a period with lowered engagement rates, but they have reported that together with 6 other CSOs they have relaunched the actions of this alliance in 2020.



CASE STUDY

The Green Initiative (GI) has relaunched its activities as of 2020. SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#), is a founding partner of this alliance and it is leading its relaunch. The first main activity planned for the revamped GI will occur in 2021 and will represent the development of a multimedia platform called Recycling Educational Center (REC) which will include and engage children, youth, adults, and students of all ages and levels, through a lifelong learning perspective. It aims

to promote better planning and management of environmental protection, with constant involvement of all relevant stakeholders, to promote sustainable and efficient work of CSOs dealing with the environment with greater participation and support of citizens, to increase public awareness and involvement of citizens in environmental reform processes, and to provide greater visibility for CSOs dealing with the environment.

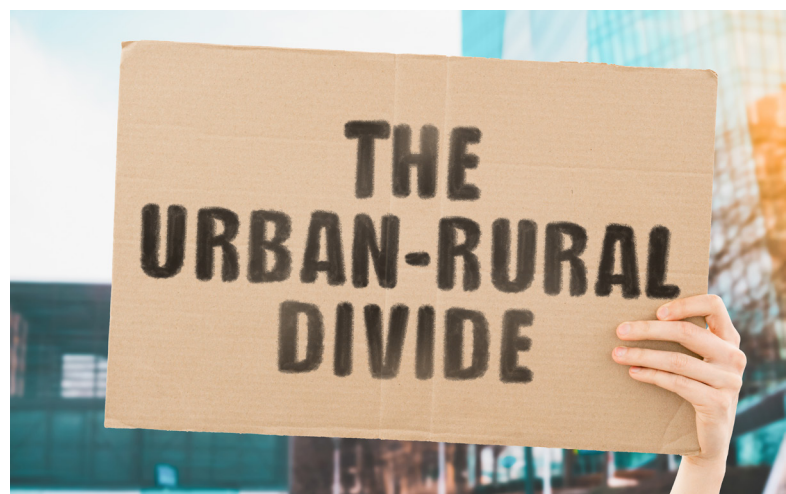
DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

On 15 March 2020 educational institutions in Serbia closed due to the pandemic. Our partners report that, given the circumstances, the government reacted exceptionally well to set up online classes and to provide educational content by broadcasting it on TV. The public broadcaster, RTS provided these classes on TV¹³, and also set up a [platform](#) where all these lessons remained recorded for further usage at a later stage. Parents and students were provided with an online app to guide them on using the platform developed by RTS so that they could access educational resources during these dire times. Education professionals innovatively reacted by using Viber, YouTube, Google classrooms, and other social media and apps to ensure learning continues. UNICEF provided guidelines for teachers on how to develop interactive materials for the platforms and on developing their digital competencies¹⁴. The [German Development Cooperation project “Dialogue on Employment Creation, Initiative and Dual Education” \(DECIDE\)](#) provided technological support and equipment to set up the [online platforms](#) and to record online classes for TV broadcasting. However, our partners report that many topics approached during this learning period were not necessarily aligned with the curriculum but also that a significant amount of learners did not have access even to this type of education. Only 80.8% of Serbian households have access to Internet connection, while only 74.3% of households have a computer¹⁵. Even if over 90% of households

have smartphones, given that the pandemic required multiple devices per household to engage in online learning, this goes to show that even if devices were present, not all household members had access to them. 4.35% of Serbian children did not have access to a device. Not least, the rural-urban divide in terms of prevalence of computers is striking: 62.1% v. 79.5%¹⁶. Our partners explain the lack of systematic initiatives to equip the rural areas learners with the needed tools during this period, revealing a striking failure considering that some even lack TVs.

The crisis did not prompt any change, as of October 2020, to the current digital initiatives, but the pandemic revealed that the Serbian government was in the top five in terms of the amount of innovative solutions for public services provided during the pandemic. 22 such initiatives were reported for Serbia, out of which four were relevant for education¹⁷.



13 Di Pietro, Giorgio et al. (2020). The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets. P.34.

14 UNICEF (2020). UNICEF's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia. P.4. Available at : <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/15111/file/UNICEF's%20response%20to%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic%20in%20Serbia.pdf>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

15 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Devices available in households. Available at: <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/270101?languageCode=en-US>. Last Accessed: 6 January 2021; Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Households having a computer, internet connection and broadband internet connection, by regions. Available at: <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/270105?languageCode=en-US>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

16 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Households having a computer, internet connection and broadband internet connection, by type of settlements. Available at: <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/270104?languageCode=en-US>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

17 Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (2020). OPSI COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker. Available at: <https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response/>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

CASE STUDY

While the numbers of learners without access to devices that facilitates access to online learning is high, the Ministry of Education and the Office for IT and eGovernment launched the [Digital Education: Leave no one behind initiative](#). This involved private sector organisations (Telekom Serbia, Telenor Serbia, Vip, Comtrade, Huawei) in a scheme to provide 2800 tablets to learners in the eighth grade that come from disadvantaged families. This initiative provided

the chance to 5% of the underprivileged families to ensure learners had the chance to participate in education. The Ministry of Education and the Office for IT and eGovernment also provided to parents, this year, with the option to register their children into [kindergartens](#) and [school](#) via an online platform, simplifying the enrolment system but also providing a safe alternative during the pandemic to this process.

COVID-19 AND THE REOPENING OF EDUCATION

As schools reopened on 1 September 2020, the education professionals highlighted the unpreparedness of the public authorities, which, though reacted promptly at the height of the first wave, engaged in poor planning for the second wave. Teacher unions have highlighted the insufficient supply of disinfectant and hygienic products, the unclear follow-up procedures in case of confirmed COVID-19 cases in schools, the unchanged curriculum for the year, essentially highlighting the risks towards

the health of education professionals but also towards learners continuing education in case the online learning would become the norm¹⁸. As of the end of October 2020, COVID-19 cases in Serbia have started to increase considerably¹⁹, so it remains to be seen what would be the impact of a potential second wave.

As Serbia boasts a significant population of migrants and refugees in various centres across the country, it is important to consider their situation at a time when the migration crisis has been relegated within the news cycle. Migrants and refugees require access to education

18 Danas (2020). Unija sindikata prosvetnih radnika traži odlaganje početka školske godine. Available at: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/unija-sindikata-prosvetnih-radnika-trazi-odlaganje-pocetka-skolske-godine/>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021. ; Danas (2020). Unija sindikata prosvetnih radnika: Povratak u škole prioritet, ali da svi budu bezbedni. Available at: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/unija-sindikata-prosvetnih-radnika-povratak-u-skole-prioritet-ali-da-svi-budu-bezbedni/>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021. ; Simic-Miladenovic, Milenija (2020). PROSVETNI RADNICI OČEKUJU OD NADLEŽNIH DA OBEZBEDE NEOPHODNE USLOVE ZA RAD U NOVOJ ŠKOLSKOJ GODINI: Predlažu da svaki predavač dobije po dve maske za svaki radni dan, a da se starijim i hronično bolesnim kolegama omogući rad na daljinu. Available at: <https://www.paragraf.rs/dnevne-vesti/170820/170820-vest6.html>. Last accessed 6 January 2021.

19 World Health Organisation (2020). COVID-19: Serbia. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/rs>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

as well, and this was being provided to them within asylum centres or refugee camps by teachers from formal education who received dispensation from their regular school classes. CSOs have been essential in providing support to these vulnerable groups, also from the perspective of education, highlighting yet again that the limited planning and resources made available by the government are translated in a

situation where the most vulnerable would be left further behind. For this reason, CSOs must be better considered through partnerships and investment to ensure that they can be a safety net for vulnerable groups. Read more in our case study about the work of CSOs to ensure education for migrants and refugees during the pandemic.



CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#), reported about the work done by its partners in migrant centres and refugee camps across Serbia to ensure the continuation of their education even during the pandemic. [SIGMA Plus](#), a CSO based in Nis, organized online Serbian language classes for migrants in the reception centers in Pirot, Tutin and Bosilegrad via a special platform. This learning platform was designed by Sigma Plus with the support of UNHCR. As of March 17, 2020 once the visits to the centers for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers had to be suspended, Sigma transferred its expertise and knowledge to an online platform in order to provide full and uninterrupted teaching support to the migrants across Serbia. Sigma Plus also provides online counseling and other information to migrants and asylum seekers.

[Refugees Foundation Serbia](#), a Belgrade-based NGO, also provided online classes of Serbian language for

the migrants in the Center for Asylum in Banja Koviljaca and the Reception Center in Pirot throughout the entire state of emergency caused by the pandemic. Using Zoom, students continued their classes, which they regularly attended and enjoyed before the COVID19 pandemic. The importance of these lessons is not only in the ability to learn a new language, but also in having the structured activity and routine, which in moments of isolation is necessary for the mental state of the individual. The CSOs rallied up to provide a safety net for education for those most vulnerable in society, ensuring that all have access to education at a time when the underinvestment in education has made it difficult for the government to support all learners. For this reason, CSOs should be more included in education policy-making but also their collaboration with public authorities and education institutions should be institutionalized to ensure that their services can always be used by the most vulnerable in society.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Our last Monitor edition highlighted many great examples of Serbian CSOs cooperating on multiculturalism, serving as an essential inspiration for our current edition, which focuses more in-depth on the benefits of partnerships and of working in various communities. The end goal of these would be to promote a bottom-up approach to inclusion and to develop people's competences allowing them to organically work towards inclusion in their own communities.

CSOS AND GOVERNMENTAL TASKFORCES

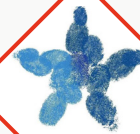
SOLIDAR Foundation member, IDC, is part of various working groups and task forces on inclusion in Serbia. To give an example of such a group, they are collaborating with UN Agencies, the Ministry for Labor, which is responsible for coordination of migrant management, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Asylum Office, international organisations operating in Serbia and local CSOs within the UNHCR Protection Working Group. Their work focuses on the protection of migrants and refugees located in or transiting through Serbia

through the sharing of information among relevant stakeholders on the current migrant management situation, including inclusion, integration, multiculturalism. The members of the Working Group raise awareness on the situation of migrants and refugees, and publish together joint press releases, meeting on a weekly basis to keep updated on the topic. This reveals some degree of cooperation among public authorities and CSOs, however, it does not seem that such a group would have impact on policymaking unless the public authorities would allow for this, which, as presented in the GCE section of this report, is not quite the case given the fraught relations between public authorities and CSOs.

CROSS-BORDER PARTNERSHIPS

The cooperation actions which appear more meaningful are the project-based partnerships among CSOs from various Balkan countries. These initiatives are uniting organisations with different perspective, to develop solutions to localised problems on migration while sharing best practices.





IRIS Networking
CSOs for protection sensitive
migration management



INITIATIVE FOR
DEVELOPMENT &
COOPERATION

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#) is a member of the [IRIS Network](#), a regional network connecting CSOs providing social services in South East Europe, ensuring that its 140 members are recognised as equal partners by the public sector. The network organised, in the framework of its EU-funded project [IRIS NETWORKing CSOs for protection sensitive migration management, a Balkan Media Caravan](#) at the beginning of November 2019 for young journalists in North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. [IDC](#) has been one of the organisations implementing the Caravan. The aim of the project was to tackle the negative narratives surrounding migrant populations, and to inform sensitive media reporting on them to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes. The countries involved in the project grappled with fake news on

migration, and the CSOs are offering training to journalists on reporting in a sensitive manner, bringing them on the field for 6 days to experience migrants' stories.

This exercise in media literacy, ethical journalism and intercultural dialogue has become possible because of IRIS Network members' cooperation. Their cross-border work serves to build up a uniform approach to combatting intercultural stereotypes and misconceptions, ensuring a climate in which intercultural dialogue thrives. The project's scope, and the large of amount of beneficiaries reveals what can be done if public authorities collaborate more with these experienced organisations to ensure that all citizens develop their skills for thriving in a multicultural and global society.

VOLUNTEERING TO RAISE UP COMMUNITIES

Beyond cross-border partnerships, CSOs in Serbia have been building up bridges across local communities to support vulnerable groups but also to develop the competences of all Serbian people to operate in a multicultural world. Volunteering represents one essential activity which SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#), relies on to strengthen its community roots.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#), developed a pillar of its work around the concept of volunteering. It is the framework of work for and with youth, recognising volunteering as a practice that activates young people, at the same time enhancing their social awareness and activism, both on a personal, collective, and community level. Volunteering is one of the most visible expressions of active citizenship. It promotes solidarity, while at the same time for the beneficiaries as well as for volunteers. It enables social inclusion, while for young people it can represent a channel through which they can more easily go through the transition to adulthood gaining first work experience.

For four years in a row, [IDC](#) organized international volunteer camps in partnership with [Young Researchers of Serbia](#). The first camp, [Volunteers for](#)

[Inclusion](#), brought together 21 young people from 8 countries. Over two weeks, they worked on remodeling the Safe Home for Women Victims of Domestic Violence, carrying out numerous activities at a local migrant center as well as various street actions in the local community such as an action dedicated to marking International Youth Day. The camp was awarded the Best International Volunteer Camp in 2017 by Ministry of Youth and Sports, of the Republic of Serbia. At the end of September 2020, [IDC](#) organized another volunteer action in the region of Stara Planina, the village of Temska, where [IDC](#) staff, young volunteers, local volunteers and local government officials participated in the activity of cleaning the river banks and the picnic area of the Temstica River, where tourists and people from local settlements created waste disposals that are damaging the ecosystem.

However, as mentioned in the previous sections, the current climate for collaboration with CSOs, especially from the side of national authorities, is not conducive to structural cooperation. Many Serbian people will be prevented from accessing educational resources linked to inclusion and multiculturalism given how the expertise of CSOs is put to the aside, contributing to an increased polarisation in the Serbian society.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [IDC](#), has been running a project titled [Re-integrate – Support to sustainable \(re\) integration of returnees in Serbia](#). The project is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany – BMZ and it will last until December 2021, having started in December 2019. The project's implementation is supported by ASB Serbia and is done in partnership with the [Regional Development Agency of Sandzak](#), the [Muslim Humanitarian Society 'Merhamet – Sandzak'](#) and with support from the [City of Novi Pazar](#), the [Municipality of Sjenica](#) and the [Municipality of Tutin](#).

The project's outcome involve the setting up of 3 Good Neighbourhood Clubs which act as community centres. The beneficiaries are both local families and families of returnees, in an effort to build up solidarity among the two groups. Activities organised in the clubs range from educational and creative workshops for children to excursions around the community, in an effort to get to know their surroundings better but also to provide an understanding of environmental sustainability in their community. The workshops focus on themes such as Serbian

language development, culture mediation, youth activism, digital communication, children's rights, sexual education, respect for others, peer mediation (empathy, emotional management, set life goals, self-respect), the Serbian legal system, ecological understanding.

Beyond the fact that it represents an oasis for socialisation, returnees could develop business plans with support from the staff members of the club and then can apply for funding to be able to re-enter in the work field as entrepreneurs. The centre's pedagogues, teaching professionals, trainers, and experts cater to the socio-emotional and socio-economic needs of all participants, regardless of age or background. Given the diversity of the attendees, intercultural dialogue is enmeshed in the fabric of the approach employed by the staff members supporting the running of the Clubs. Such activities are empowering the local community, and develop the competencies of the members in the local community to engage in a globalised and fast-paced world. This bottom-up approach serves as a great example of the benefits of preparing each citizen for the upcoming green and digital transitions.



FUNDING

This section will first cover general funding in education, and then consider the funding allocated for GCE, for the digital transition from the perspective of education and for intercultural dialogue. The public spending on education as a percentage of GDP in Serbia has been historically low for a prolonged period of time. It represented less than 4% of the GDP in 2017²⁰, significantly below the EU and the OECD average, pointing out to many years of underinvestment in education²¹.

Our members report a lack of earmarked investment in global citizenship education, which is not surprising given the generally low investment in education and the fact that GCE is missing from the Ministry of Education's agenda. The topic seems to receive more funding from the EU and via foreign donors, based on indications from our members, which cannot be sustainable long-term and cannot address the need to change the educational paradigm in a way that would facilitate the development of transversal skills for the green transition.

A similar reliance on EU funding is observed when it comes to the digital transition. 14.4 million euros were allocated by the Serbian government for the digital transformation. Parallely, the EU's ongoing assistance to Serbian education totals 35 million euros, with more than 100 million euros received since 2003. This assistance involves the necessary equipment such as interactive whiteboards, projectors, laptops and IT equipment worth € 3.2 million, but it also covers teachers' training, the overall improvement of infrastructure, and modernization of curricula²². Due to COVID-19, the Office for Information Technologies and e-Government

of the Republic of Serbia has amended its Financial Plan as of June 5, 2020 and reallocated certain funds to combat the effects of the ongoing pandemic, however it is unclear from the documents available on their website how is this going to be performed²³. Digital investment is not directly mentioned, and it goes to show that the Serbian authorities are not sufficiently committed to this task which requires significant investment for it to be successful. The gaps in access to digital infrastructure and skills development will prove damning for the Serbia also in light of its plans for EU accession, but it seems that there is no long-term approach on how to contribute to an educational system that can prepare the Serbian citizens for the societal changes.

Regarding investment in intercultural dialogue, due to the many aspects that make up funding for this topic, the focus here shall be on the support provided to CSOs given their invaluable role in reaching the most disadvantaged in their own community and given the importance of multi-stakeholder collaborations for delivering meaningful results on the topic. Our members report reduced avenues for governmental funding, and, as highlighted above, they mention the existence of so-called GONGOs and PONGOs which are competing for the same funding as the rest of the civil society, are more successful at obtaining it and represent a loudspeaker for the governmental position²⁴. The EU reports no improvement on the openness of the civic space in Serbia²⁵, and it clearly shows that the funding tactics employed by the government are less directed at securing intercultural dialogue and more directed at eliminating any potential opposition to their policies.

20 Eurostat (2019). Key Figures on Enlargement Countries. Publications Office of the European Commission: Luxembourg. P.48. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/9799207/KS-GO-19-001-EN-N.pdf/e8fbd16c-c342-41f7-aaed-6ca38e6f709e>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

21 Eurostat (2018). Total general government expenditure on education, 2018 (as % of GDP). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Total_general_government_expenditure_on_education,_2018_\(%25_of_GDP\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Total_general_government_expenditure_on_education,_2018_(%25_of_GDP).png). Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

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23 The Office for Information Technologies and eGovernment of the Republic of Serbia (2020). Updated Financial Plan. Available at: <https://www.ite.gov.rs/extfile/sr/5139/druga%20ijyvena%20plana.pdf>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

24 Gradjanske Inicijative (2020). The operating environment for civil society in Serbia is still far from EU standards.

25 CIVICUS Monitor (2019). EU Highlights Serbia's Failure to Improve Civic Space. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2019/07/08/eu-highlights-serbias-failure-improve-civic-space/>. Last accessed: 6 January 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Develop a GCE strategy to underpin the implementation of formal education, effectively mainstreaming GCE across formal education
- ◆ Provide more avenues for cooperation among CSOs and formal education institutions to ensure the implementation of GCE and the preparation of Serbian citizens for the green transition
- ◆ Increase national investment in closing in the digital infrastructure and digital skills gaps
- ◆ Ensure broadband internet connection is a public good accessible to all learners living on Serbian territory
- ◆ Provide fair funding conditions for CSOs and disband GONGOs in order to ensure a healthy civic space
- ◆ Provide more avenues for cooperation among local authorities and CSOs to ensure a structural approach to the implementation of intercultural projects
- ◆ Provide more funding to CSOs given the invaluable work provided within communities from a lifelong learning perspective

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