

# MONITORING REPORT #3

DURING THE STATE  
OF EMERGENCY

Center for Democracy Foundation - Chapters 2 and 19 Working Group  
Petnica Science Center - Chapters 25 and 26 Working Group  
European Policy Centre - Chapter 28 Working Group

## MONITORING REPORT MEASURES DURING STATE OF EMERGENCY IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL POLICIES AND EMPLOYMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH AND PROTECTION OF CONSUMERS AND EDUCATION

### Introduction

The monitoring report on measures during the state of emergency in the field of social policy and employment, public health and consumer protection and education consisted of three working groups of the National Convention on the EU (NCEU) - Working Group for Negotiating Chapters 2 and 19 - Social Policy and Employment, Working Group for Negotiating Chapters 25 and 26 - Science and Research and Education and Culture and the Working Group on Negotiating Chapter 28 – Protection consumer and health protection.

Following the decision of the NCEU Program Council, we joined analyzes of these three working groups. The aim was to present the so-called social sphere where pandemic diseases caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus made severe direct effects. Namely in employment, labor relations and the labor market, social protection of vulnerable groups and the work of social institutions, the introduction of online teaching, and of course, in the sector health care, which carried a tremendous burden in the fight against the infectious disease COVID-19.

# Social Policy and Employment

Center for Democracy Foundation - Working Group for Negotiating Chapters 2 and 19 of the National Convention on the European Union.

## Review and evaluation of measures in the field of social policy and employment

According to the official data, on March 6, Serbia had the first case of infection with the new virus. On March 11, the Government decided to ban public gatherings indoors where more than 100 people gathered. State of emergency was declared on March 15, with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, and the Prime Minister. On March 20, an epidemic caused by the COVID19 was declared throughout the country by the decision of the Minister of Health, Zlatibor Lončar. The state of emergency lasted from March 15, 2020, to May 6, 2020. On May 6, 2020, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted a Law on the validity of decrees passed by the Government with the co-signature of the President of the Republic during a state of emergency<sup>1</sup>. On May 10, 2020, the National Assembly passed the Law on Amendments to the Law on Population Protection from infectious diseases<sup>2</sup>.

During the state of emergency, many of the adopted regulations directly affected employment status, labor rights, employment, social status, and citizens' daily lives in the Republic of Serbia<sup>3</sup>. Some of the regulations directly regulated the way employees work, while others indirectly affected employees of certain groups of employers. They are regulating primarily restrictions or prohibitions on performing certain economic activities.

## Review of Measures Relevant to the Field of Social Policy and Employment:

Regulation on measures during a state of emergency (whose provisions have been changed successively)<sup>4</sup> contained the following provisions relevant for the area of social policy, employment and labor rights:

- a.) Prohibition of movement of persons over 65 years of age, except for some listed exceptions (the measure was gradually eased in the later stages of the state of emergency). In terms of labor law, it has significantly affected those employed or engaged in some other way. The complete ban on the movement of persons over the age of 65 lasted for 34 days, with the possibility of shopping once a week, on a particular day, from 4 to 7 o'clock. This measure provoked numerous criticisms from human rights organizations because it jeopardized a fundamental human right - the right to freedom of movement. There were multiple requests for mitigation of this measure, and a proposal was submitted to the Constitutional Court for evaluation of the measure's constitutionality<sup>5</sup>. The ban on the movement of persons over 65 years of age imposed an

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/pdf/zakoni/2020/556-20.pdf> 06.05.2020.

<sup>2</sup> Amendments to the Law related primarily to the tightening of sanctions for non-compliance with measures prescribed by the relevant bodies. Source: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/cir/pdf/zakoni/2020/567-20.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> In April 2020, the Center for Democracy Foundation published an analysis of the "COVID-19 Pandemic and Labor Rights in Serbia" in which analyzed acts of the Government adopted by April 8, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Decree on measures during a state of emergency, "Official Gazette of RS", no. 31 of 16 March 2020, 36 of 19 March 2020, 38 of 20 March 2020, 39 of 21 March 2020, 43 of 27 March 2020, 47 of 28 March 2020, 49 of 1 April 2020, 53 of 9 April 2020, 56 of April 15, 2020, 57 of April 16, 2020, 58 of April 20, 2020, 60 of April 24, 2020 source <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2020/31/1/reg>

<sup>5</sup> The Belgrade Center for Human Rights sent a request to the Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of the Regulation on Measures during the State of Emergency and Orders on restriction and prohibition of movement of persons on the territory of the Republic of Serbia: <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Inicijativa-za-pokretanje-postupka-za-ocenu-us-tavnosti-policijski-%C4%8Das.pdf>

obligation to urgently organize the delivery of food, medicine, and other necessities for elderly citizens who live alone, both in urban and rural areas. The measure especially endangered those over the age of 65 who did not have the right pension and could not earn any income during the state of emergency state.

- b.) A work obligation has been introduced for specific categories of employees (Article 3): “Health workers, health associates and other persons employed in health institutions from the Plan of the network of health institutions, military health institutions, state bodies and legal entities established with state-owned funds for which is provided by a special law to perform health care activities (from now on: public health institutions), may be referred to perform any work obligation in any public health institution or in a temporary hospital, which lacks the required number of executors, based on verbal orders of the manager, and following the Plan of filling health care institutions and other decisions of the Crisis COVID-19 Infectious Disease Control Headquarters. The persons referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article shall perform their work obligation by completing tasks and duties in the public health institution or temporary hospital to which they were sent to work. They exercise their employment rights in the institution they are employed (from which they are referred), without concluding outstanding contracts or annexes to employment contracts. To the person referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article who refuses to act upon a verbal order on referral to work obligations to another public health institution, following the replenishment plan and other decisions of the Crisis Staff for the Suppression of Infectious Diseases COVID-19, the manager issues a decision on work obligations. Obligor to work commitments, who does not act upon his manager’s conclusion on referral to perform work duties to another public health institution, employment is terminated. It is important to note that the work obligation is legally regulated by the Law on Defense and the Law on Military, Work and Material Obligation. In this case, provision of the Decree, which provided that a health worker could be given a verbal work order as part of a work obligation, was problematic.
- c.) Companies, other legal entities, and entrepreneurs are restricted from performing the activities of hair-dressing and beauty services, pedicures, manicures, fitness club and gym services, activities of Turkish baths, saunas and steam baths, solarium, weight-loss salon, massage salon, and other services care, maintenance, and beautification of persons and bodies where the nature of the service activity is such as to require close contact between the provider and the service user and the service users with each other, which increases the risk of transmitting the infectious disease COVID-19.” The performance of these activities has been possible only since 27.4.2020. “Provided that all preventive measures related to the prevention of the spread of the infectious disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which ensure the safety of employees, are applied and safety of service users (limited number of persons in the room, mandatory disinfection of rooms, floors, furniture, machines, tools, and devices for work after the service is provided to each user, mandatory replacement of used paper, plastic, or cloth accessories, mandatory use of protective equipment i.e., masks and gloves.) In that sense, to adopt a special plan for the implementation of measures as an integral part of the act on a risk assessment, which is adopted following the law and regulations in the field of safety and health at work.
- d.) Public transport was limited by prohibiting the operations of: 1. public transport of passengers by bus, except for special transport, which will be performed by economic entities exclusively for realization of work tasks of employees, 2. international and domestic railway transport passengers, 3. international and domestic water transport for passenger transport. (Prohibition does not apply to intercity transport and off-line transport in road traffic, as well as for transport for which, following the epidemiological situation, the permission of the Minister responsible for transportation) was obtained. Primarily to employees in health care, but also to employees who continued to work at the employer’s premises, mostly employees in companies that continued to work, trade, and other employees who continued to work at the employer’s premises, and given that transportation to do would be difficult or downright impossible. Measure the abolition of public transport has hit women the hardest because they are more numerous than men in the occupations that had to be working during the state of emergency - medical staff, trade - shops foodstuffs, etc.). This measure also affected persons with disabilities, persons employed in the informal economy, etc. Although the City of Belgrade and Serbian Chamber of Commerce have left open the possibility of concluding special contracts with employers on employees’ transportation, it is not known how many such contracts have been completed. Abolition of public transport also affected the employment status of employees in transport and traffic companies, especially in the case

of private companies, which have resorted to termination of employment contracts, absence of employees or termination of employment contracts, or contracts on temporary jobs due to the reduction of work.

Regulation on Organizing Employers during the State of Emergency (March 16, 2020)<sup>6</sup>: The Decree prescribes the duty of employers to enable employees to perform work outside the employer's premises (which involves working remotely and working from home) in all cases where it is possible to organize such work under the general act of the employer and the employment contract for each specific employee. Suppose the general act and the employment contract do not envision such work. In that case, the employer may enable the employee to perform work outside the employer's premises by introducing a special decision if the organizational conditions allow it. "With the stated decision, the employer will determine the duration of working hours and the method of work supervision, and he is obliged to keep records of employees who perform work outside the premises of the employer. The Regulation further stipulates that "if the nature of the employer's activity is such that it is not possible to organize the work in the manner provided for in Article 2 of this Regulation, the employer shall harmonize his business with the conditions of the state of emergency. Employers can organize work in shifts, have fewer employees working simultaneously in one room, or enable all business meetings to be held online or by other appropriate means via (video link, video call, etc.). The employer should postpone business trips in the country and abroad, following by the competent authority's decision on the temporary restriction of entry and movement. "Article 4 of the Regulation obliges employers "to ensure the protection and health of employees, employees, and parties provide all general, special, and extraordinary measures related to the hygienic safety of facilities and persons following the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases. For employees and employees who are in direct contact with clients or share the workspace with several people, it is necessary to provide sufficient amounts of protective equipment under special regulations."

Regulation on the Bonus to the basic salary of Employees in Health Care Institutions and individual employees who perform activities in the field of health, i.e., protection of the health of the population of the Republic of Serbia, or treatment and prevention of the spread of the epidemic of COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (March 31, 2020)<sup>7</sup>: The decree guaranteed a bonus to the basic salary in the amount of 10% of the basic salary to health workers employed in health care institutions, employees in military health care institutions, health care workers in social care institutions and doctors in enforcement institutions criminal sanctions.

Regulation on the procedure for obtaining consent for new employment and additional employment within users of public funds (April 3, 2020)<sup>8</sup>: contrary to the statutory need to be newly employed provide the consent of the Commission, and it is envisaged that users of public funds may apply without the permission of the Commission to keep at work according to the situation on March 15, all "temporary employees, persons engaged on a regular basis employment contracts, contracts for temporary jobs, through youth and student cooperatives and persons engaged on other grounds."

Regulation on organizing social protection institutions' work for the accommodation of beneficiaries and social protection organizations for the provision of home accommodation services during a state of emergency (April 10, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. This Regulation applies to all social protection institutions for the accommodation of beneficiaries and social protection organizations for the provision of home care services accommodation, whose founder is the Republic of Serbia, an autonomous province, a unit of local self-government, as well as to institutions for the accommodation of users, whose founder is another legal and natural person. The Regulation provides for

<sup>6</sup> Regulation on Organizing Employers during the State of Emergency, Official Gazette no.31, 16. March 2020. <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2020/31/2/reg>

<sup>7</sup> Official Gazette, no 48, 31.3.2020. Source: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2020/48/2/reg>

<sup>8</sup> Regulation on the procedure for giving consent for new employment and additional employment with users of public funds, "Official Gazette of RS", no. 113 of 20 December 2013, 21 of 22 February 2014, 66 of 29 June 2014, 118 of 30 October 2014, 22 of February 27, 2015, 59 of July 2, 2015, 62 of August 30, 2019, 50 of April 3, 2020. Source: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2013/113/8/reg>

<sup>9</sup> Regulation on organizing the work of social protection institutions for accommodation of users and social protection organizations for providing services dormitory accommodation during a state of emergency, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 54 of April 10, 2020. Source: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SIGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/uredba/2020/54/8/reg>

action in the event of a beneficiary or an employee tests positive to COVID19. The patient is immediately referred for treatment to a health institution. In the case referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article, other users and employees remain isolated within the institution for 14 days. Suppose the institution, a new case of infection, happens during isolation. In that case, the patient is referred for treatment in the described manner, and the isolation of previously isolated persons is extended for another 14 days. The competent epidemiological service issues an order for the isolation of users and employees who were in contact with the patient, be implemented within the social protection institution for the accommodation of users, or the social protection organization to provide home care services. Employees have limited working hours during the isolation; they can use daily and weekly rest, following the law. "Directors of institutions are obliged to ensure employees have three meals a day, accommodation in the institution, free of charge, as well as to be able to stay separated from the beneficiaries during rest time, during the duration of isolation." This Regulation has been widely criticized for violating the right to freedom of movement and violations of employees' labor rights in social protection institutions. This Regulation is accompanied by the Recommendation of the Ministry of Labor, Employment of Veterans, and Social Affairs from 13.4.2020. on the introduction of fifteen-day shift work. In this case, the directors of institutions need to have a conversation with the employee about "voluntary shift" <sup>10</sup>.

The following Government's decisions are also of importance:

- Decision on suspension of teaching in higher education institutions and secondary and primary schools, and regular work of institutions for pre-school education (25. March 2020)<sup>11</sup>
- Decision on suspension of work of institutions for pupils and student standard founded by the Republic of Serbia (16. March 2020)<sup>12</sup>

Although analyzed in more detail in the Monitoring Report section for Negotiating Chapters 25 and 26, in this section of the Report, these two decisions' influence is emphasized on the status of employees in education who are mostly sent to work abroad employer's premises).

Government measures failed to provide adequate labor and social protection for all employees who kept working on the employer's premises during the state of emergency. It was incredibly difficult for those employees who had to take care of children under the age of 12 due to classes being canceled, who could not stay alone in the house. The Ministry issued a Detailed explanation of workers' and employers' rights and obligations during the state of emergency from March 24, 2020. They recommended that work from home should be enabled for parents of a child up to 12 years of age if they are single parents, or if the other parent needs to work. If that is impossible, work in shifts needs to be organized to not overlap with the shift of the other<sup>13</sup>.

In the sphere of economy the following is important:

- The decision on the restriction of providing services in retail, which includes the sale of goods and assisting in shopping centers and shops that can be entered from the closed space from 21.3.2020: direct sale of goods to customers and direct provision of services to customers in shopping centers, is prohibited, except in the case of legal entities and entrepreneurs "who perform trade in foodstuffs, medicines and medical devices."
- The decision on special measures for the provision of services in the field of retail trade, which includes the sale of food and beverages in catering establishments and sale of food to go (21.3.2020.): legal entities and entrepreneurs are allowed to work with the application of special measures to protect employees and users.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/2020.04.13.%20Preporuka%20001.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/odluka/2020/30/2/reg>

<sup>12</sup> Official Gazette 32/2020, source <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/vlada/odluka/2020/32/3/reg>

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/detaljno-objasnjenje-prava-i-obaveza-radnika-i-poslodavaca-u-toku-vanrednog-stanja>, 24.03.2020

- The Decision on mitigation of measures prohibiting the operation of passengers' public transport during the state of emergency, adopted on April 30, 2020. This Decision refers to Instruction 08 no. 53 / 3455-2020-1 of the Crisis Team for the Suppression of Infectious Diseases Covid19 for the organization of public urban, suburban and local transport in the application of prevention measures to prevent the spread and reduce the risk of COVID-19, which provides for the phased organization of city transport, employees, then students and pupils, unemployed, tourists and other persons, and persons over 65 years of age<sup>14</sup>.

Among the Government Conclusions, the following are of the importance for this report:

- Conclusion 05 No. 53-2561 / 2020 of 16 March 2020: The conclusion suspended work with the parties through direct contact in the public sector; in all state administration bodies, AP Vojvodina and local self-government units, special organizations, institutions, public companies, and other organizations where the founder or majority owner is Republic of Serbia, AP and local self-government units.
- Conclusion 05 no. 132-2865 / 2020 of 26 March 2020. The conclusion stipulates that the employer may, contrary to the Labor Law provisions, issue a decision for giving consent for sending employees to paid leave for more than 45 days without the previously given opinion of the representative trade union. Article 116 of the Labor Law stipulates that "Exceptionally, in case of interruption of work, reduction of the scope of work that requires a longer absence, the employer may, with the prior consent of the Minister, refer the employee to go on a leave for more than 45 working days, with salary compensation referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article. Before giving consent from paragraph 2 of this Article, the Minister shall request the opinion of a representative trade union of a branch or activity established at the level of the Republic. "The introduction of the state of emergency did not stop the application of the Labor Law, and it is not clear how a Conclusion contrary to the Labor Law could have been made.
- Conclusion 05 no. 53-3008-2020-2 of 2 April 2020: Employers are recommended to provide the salaries to the amount of 100% of the basis for salary compensation in case of absence from work due to confirmed infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, self-isolation, or isolation of employees. The Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia this request to the Government of the Republic of Serbia<sup>15</sup>.
- Conclusion 05 number 53-3041 / 2020 recommended using the remaining part of the annual leave from 2019 until the end of 2020 for all employers whose employees have an obligation to perform work tasks in a state of emergency regularly. Employers who do not have the opportunity to continue working in conditions of a state of emergency recommended that preference be given using employee vacations when choosing leave from work. This recommendation does not envisage an extension of the deadline for the use of the so-called "Old" annual leave from the previous year (which, as a rule, must be used by the end of June next year) for employees who performed work outside the employer's premises during the state of emergency. FCD analysis points out that this recommendation is discriminatory concerning the last group of employees, "Considering that no recommendation was sent to employers regarding the extension of the deadline for use." annual leave for 2019, which violated the constitutional guarantee of the right to work (which includes the right to paid annual leave)<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> Instruction 08 no. 53 / 3455-2020-1 of the Crisis Team for the Suppression of Infectious Diseases Covid19 for the organization of public urban, suburban and local transport in the application of prevention measures to prevent the spread and reduce the risk of COVID-19

<sup>15</sup> The Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia, note: [https://www.sindikats.rs/aktuelno\\_files/vesti\\_pdf/brnabic\\_30mart20.pdf](https://www.sindikats.rs/aktuelno_files/vesti_pdf/brnabic_30mart20.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

## Application of Measures and the Consequences

At the beginning of the state of emergency, the most job losses happened in industries such as hospitality, tourism, and personal services, i.e., those industries whose operations were prohibited by introducing a state of emergency. The companies stopped working; employees were employed based on employment contracts, self-employed, independent entrepreneurs stopped working. Workers hired based on contracts for temporary work were the most vulnerable. The reduced economic activity affected persons engaged in employment contracts, contracts on temporary jobs, hired through youth, and student cooperatives whose contracts were easy to terminate. In addition to not having the right for unpaid leave, their position is, in case of job loss, significantly less favorable than those who are in an employment relationship - they can exercise their rights only in a regular lawsuit; the employer does not have to conduct the procedure refusal, etc. Also, they are not covered by the protection measures provided to help employers who aim to prevent redundancies - non-employed workers are not counted, for example, as a percentage of 10% workers who could be fired by the employer while retaining the right to state aid.

An extraordinary session of the Social and Economic Council was held at the request UGS Nezavisnost, immediately after introducing the state of emergency. The work of numerous economic subjects was interrupted, and many workers faced uncertainty. UGS Nezavisnost proposed introducing a moratorium on employment status for at least 90 days, the estimated length of the state of emergency. On March 19, the Union sent ten questions to the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs. In the initial phase, employees, throughout keep working throughout the faced a lack of protective equipment and the fact that "a large number of companies did not provide masks, gloves, and disinfectants in accordance with the Government Regulation on the organization of work following the emergency, the Law on Safety and Health at Work and the Law on Protection of the Population from Infected Diseases. We are aware of the lack, but the health of our workers is a priority, and we must insist that protection is provided for everyone, especially for companies that employ hundreds of workers, which is why we raised the question of purchasing the equipment through the Serbian Chamber of Commerce." The Union raised the question whether employers could send the workers to annual leave (whether using the days from last year or this year are used) without applying the provision of law on the work regarding fifteen-day notice for annual leave. The issue was whether the Ministry could shorten this deadline having in mind the state of emergency. An important point was how to enable parents to work from home if they have a child under the age of 12 and create instructions for calculating the salary. A special issue referred to employees' status in self-isolation, in the manner of calculating their earnings, etc. The protection of labor rights in the case of verbal requests was also an issue. The mismatch between the working hours of grocery stores and the start time of curfew indicates the need to introduce part-time work. The transportation is also essential, especially for those who work in the third shift, bearing in mind the curfew's introduction. This became additionally relevant after the Regulation on banning public transport passed, on the same day when UGS Nezavisnost published questions to the Ministry. UGS Nezavisnost predicted problems if public transportation is canceled, especially for employees in small and medium enterprises, where there is no organized transportation of employees. Also, there is inconsistency between measures and the real situation because "workers who get fired cannot report to the National Employment Service because direct work with the parties was suspended on March 17 to all organizational units of the National Employment Service"<sup>17</sup>.

On March 23, 2020, the Minister of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs, and Social Affairs, Zoran Djordjevic, urged the employers not to dismiss workers<sup>18</sup>. He emphasized that the Labor Inspectorate will "analyze the reports and check where the workers were fired." However, news about the termination of the employment contracts, announced dismissals were published in the media in the case of the Hutchinson Company in Ruma<sup>19</sup>,

<sup>17</sup> According to the webpage UGS Nezavisnost "We Asked Ministry of Employment", <https://nezavisnost.org-pitali-smo-ministarstvo-za-rad>, 19.03.2020.

<sup>18</sup> Who lost his job to report to the bureau for compensation: "There will be a list of all those who fired workers illegally." <https://biznis.telegraf.rs/infobiz/3169083-ko-je-ostao-bez-posla-da-se-javi-na-biro-zbog-nadoknadebice-lista-svih-koji-nezakonito-daju-otkaz>, 23.03.2020.

<sup>19</sup> Portal Mašina, according to <https://www.masina.rs/?p=13502>, 19.05.2020.

in the PKC factory in Smederevo<sup>20</sup>, Drekselmaier in Zrenjanin<sup>21</sup>, Spilit factory in Vranje<sup>22</sup>, and others. On May 6, 2020, the Minister of Finance stated that during the second half of April, “52.900 workers returned to work in 512 companies in Serbia, “ referring to the Serbian Chamber of Commerce data<sup>23</sup>.

Data on the number of layoffs, terminations of employment contracts, contracts on temporary jobs, and other forms of employment directly caused by the pandemic are not precise and are usually contradictory, as shown by data from the National Employment Service. NES Director Zoran Martinović said in a statement for RTS that “In March, there were about 515.000 people on the NES records, and at the moment it is 513.000. It seems strange, but the fact is that there were no mass layoffs, and government measures gave effects. Many employers had to lay off employees, but many of them gave up on layoffs and returned fired workers when the government defined the measures. Since the beginning of the state of emergency, about 9.200 individuals have applied for unemployment compensation, which is the actual number of those who were left jobless<sup>24</sup>”. However, the SECONS survey yields different results stating that 200.000 workers lost their jobs. “Almost half of those who lost their jobs, it was because the company suspended their operations (46.2%). One fifth of the total number (20.5%) was not offered a new contract after the previous one expired. In most other cases, employees were forced to resign because of the state of emergency, termination public transportation, closing of kindergartens and schools and suspension of social support services for the elderly They could manage to go to work and take on increased responsibilities for caring for family members.<sup>25</sup>” When asked to explain the difference in data, the representative of SECONS pointed out that “if unemployment is monitored only through NES records, we will lose sight of those individuals who are informally employed and self-employed people, and they were hardly hit by the pandemic. It should not be forgotten that according to the data of the Labor Survey there were 529.000 informally employed persons in Serbia.<sup>26</sup>

FCD states the following, “according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the number of unemployed in Serbia in the first quarter of this year, compared to the last quarter of 2019, decreased by 3.800, but the number of employees decreased by 60.800. In the last quarter of 2019, 2.938.200 workers were employed, and in the first quarter of 2020 there was 2.877.400. Out of 60,800 workers who lost their jobs, most them lost their jobs (51,400) in the informal sector.<sup>27</sup>” These are mostly precarious workers, who do not enjoy labor rights (social security), in conditions where safety and health protection measures are not respected. For example, those are collectors of secondary raw materials, individuals working in hospitality, street vendors, various types of unregistered craftsmen, workers in prohibited activities, or activities that faced a drastic drop in demand during a state of emergency, etc. The government did not address this group of individuals with any measure, except for the general right to compensation of 100 Euros. This group of people faced long term existential risk with the loss of a job, the loss of income, and the reduced volume of work in certain activities during and after the state of emergency.

The Government did not organize consultations on the draft package of assistance measures for the economy and citizens with social partners, civil society, and the professional public.

<sup>20</sup> According to Danas, <https://www.danas.rs/ekonomija/ponovo-otkazi-u-pkc-u-ovog-puta-zaposlenima-na-neodredjeno/>, 26.04.2020.

<sup>21</sup> According to N1, <http://rs.n1info.com/Biznis/a606265/U-Drekslmajeru-tvrde-da-masovna-otpustanja-nisu-opcija-sindikati-ipak-strahuju.html>, 03.06.2020

<sup>22</sup> According to N1 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a486415/Radnici-fabrike-Split-u-Vranju-zbunjeni-desavanjima-traze-pomoc-gradonacelnika.html> 24.05.2020

<sup>23</sup> According to the webpage of Serbian Chamber of Commerce, <https://www.serbianart.rs/recnik/cirilica-u-latinicu.php> 06.05.2020

<sup>24</sup> Source: [http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/info/vesti/na\\_evidenciji\\_nsz\\_2.000\\_lica\\_manje\\_za\\_dva\\_meseca.cid65511](http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/info/vesti/na_evidenciji_nsz_2.000_lica_manje_za_dva_meseca.cid65511)

<sup>25</sup> SeCons and Fridrih Ebert Stiftung, according to: <https://www.secons.net/article.php?a=131>

<sup>26</sup> According to: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-52719667> , 20.5.2020.

<sup>27</sup> According to: [https://beta.rs/ekonomija/ekonomija-srbija/128647-bradas-u-srbiji-u-prvom-kvartalu-broj-zaposlenih-radnika-manji-za-60-800?fbclid=IwAR0mqn ed9eOtnZ1ou8s4wIsiUlbiqziPUayzkY683o\\_yTXnMX4WFdbCZhl](https://beta.rs/ekonomija/ekonomija-srbija/128647-bradas-u-srbiji-u-prvom-kvartalu-broj-zaposlenih-radnika-manji-za-60-800?fbclid=IwAR0mqn ed9eOtnZ1ou8s4wIsiUlbiqziPUayzkY683o_yTXnMX4WFdbCZhl)



## Work of employees on the employer's premises

Many employees who continued to work at the employer's premises belonged to the category of workers "on the first line of risk." Most of them were health workers (51.7%), trade workers (35.8%), persons engaged in hygienic activities (4%), persons performing personal care, and professional associates in various activities, as well as drivers<sup>28</sup>. According to the research, women were the vast majority of employees "on the front line", as many as 86%. This is a consequence of segregation in the labor market which manifests through engaging women in caregiving activities, mainly health care and the trade sector. "Frontline workers faced a high risk of exposure to the infection due to an unsatisfactory level of health and safety at work, and due to the lack of protective equipment at the beginning of the state of emergency. Employers who continued to operate during the state of emergency and did not comply with protective measures exposed many workers to infection risk.

The application of the provisions on the work obligation, especially of doctors and other health workers, and employees in social protection institutions, has led to numerous problems and violations of labor rights, and some basic legal principles, such as the principle of legal certainty. The Trade Union of Physicians and Pharmacists of Serbia continuously pointed out the problems in exercising healthcare employees' labor rights by sending letters to the competent authorities. They asked the authorities to harmonize work if both parents are health workers with suggestions for solving this problem, such as working from home for one of the parents, absence from work, and separation of shifts<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, they referred to the protection of the health and safety of health workers during a pandemic<sup>30</sup>. They issued a press release asking the authorities to implement urgent anti-discrimination measures for health workers, stating that health workers do not have the opportunity to be mass-tested, that they are not informed about infected patients with whom they have been in contact, that there are health facilities where health care workers are not allowed to use personal protective equipment<sup>31</sup>. The union sent a request to the Ministry of Health to financially reward employees working in Infectious Diseases Wards, COVID hospitals, reception clinics, wards, employees who have contracted COVID 19 infection, or had to be in isolation, as well as employees who on duty or working in shifts<sup>32</sup>. With the announcement of May 10, 2020, this union stated that "there are no official data on how many health workers died during the pandemic, but that, according to the data obtained by that union, coronavirus took lives of 14 health workers in Serbia. According to official figures, 450 medical workers are currently infected; most of them were infected at the beginning of the pandemic in Serbia when the protective gear was an issue problem."<sup>33</sup>

The South Korean factory "Jura" in Nis and Leskovac was the first to show negligence in executing the recommended measures for combating the epidemic caused by the COVID19 virus. Jura's workers appealed to the competent authorities to react and ensure a safe and healthy workplace since the start of the pandemic. Despite the recommendations and measures introduced, many people worked in one place; there were crowds on the bus on arrival and departure from work and general non-compliance with prescribed measures<sup>34</sup>. The management's response to the protest was to offer a bonus daily, in the amount of 500 dinars. Control from by the Labor Inspectorate followed this. On that issue, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs issued a statement stating that "three extraordinary inspections were carried out in the production facilities in Nis, Leskovac and Raca, during which no omissions in the competence of the labor inspection were detected"<sup>35</sup>. The Protector of Citizens initiated the procedure of controlling the legality and regularity of the Labor Inspectorate

<sup>28</sup> SECONS, according to: <https://www.secons.net/files/SeConS-istrazivanje-Covid-19.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> "Report on the practical issues with request for solution and providing a set of measures" <http://www.sindikatlfs.rs/obavestenje-o-problemu-u-praksi-sa-zahtevom-za-resavanje-i-predlogom-mera/>

<sup>30</sup> "Urgent requests and recommendations for the Crisis Team for Combating Infectious Disease COVID19" <http://www.sindikatlfs.rs/hitni-zahtevi-i-preporuke-za-krizni-stab-za-suzbijanje-zarazne-bolesti-covid-19/>

<sup>31</sup> Public Release from the Union of Physicians and Pharmacists of Serbia: <http://www.sindikatlfs.rs/saopstenje-za-javnost-sidnikata-lekara-i-farmaceuta-srbije>

<sup>32</sup> Request for evaluation, respect and rewarding of health workers <http://www.sindikatlfs.rs/zahtev-za-vrednovanje-uvazavanje-i-nagradjivanje-zdravstvenih-radnika/>

<sup>33</sup> Source: <http://www.sindikatlfs.rs/panic-od-koronavirusa-umrlo-14-medicinara-posledica-nedostatka-opreme/>

<sup>34</sup> The Ministry claims that there are no omissions in "Jura", the mayor of Leskovac says the measures are not respected <https://www.juznevesti.com/Ekonomija/Ministarstvo-tvrdi-da-u-Juri-nema-propusta-gradonacelnik-Leskovca-da-se-mere-ne-postuju.sr.html>

<sup>35</sup> YURA Corporation "complied with all measures within the competence of the labor inspection" <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/srb-lat/aktuelnosti/vesti/%E2%80%9Cyura-corporation%E2%80%9C-ispostovala-sve-mere-koje-su-u-nadleznosti-inspekcije-rada>

work, after obtaining information that the measures are still not respected in Jura. In the middle of May, the Jura factory in Leskovac becomes a new hotspot of infection. After testing the workers, additional 111 infected people were registered<sup>36</sup>. Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs published an analysis of work and results during the state of emergency, saying the Labor Inspection had performed 1572 inspections, inspections on the submitted requests of employees, or 41% of the total number performed inspections<sup>37</sup>.

## Working outside of employer's premises during the state of emergency

When it comes to the content of the Regulation on the obligations of employers during the state of emergency, there were several shortcomings, especially the responsibilities of employers to regulate work outside their premises. The criterion for enabling employees to work outside the employer's premises determines is whether a general act or employment contract foresees it. We can rightfully assume that this condition is rarely fulfilled. As an alternative solution, there is a vaguely defined criterion if the employer may enable the work's performance if the organizational conditions allow it. This can be found in the analysis "COVID19 Pandemics and labor rights in Serbia<sup>38</sup>". FCDs analysis points out that the Regulation failed to: "prescribe other obligatory elements of the solution, such as means for work for performing the tasks that the employer is obliged to procure, install and maintain, which is prescribed by the Labor Law (Article 42, paragraph 3, item 3), as well as to, develop a legal norm on the manner of performing supervision over the work of an employee performing work from home and teleworking (eg, performance reports could, performance evaluation via specialized software or any other appropriate means<sup>39</sup>). The analysis notes that the Regulation failed to determine the epidemiologically justified or harmless number of employees in one room, which caused unauthorized exposure of employees to the risk of infection in some companies. This resulted in new hotspots of the disease among the workers of Jura from Leskovac. The company continued to operate against the order to stop the production issued by the Institute of Public Health. Trade unions warned that during the production process, protective measures are not respected. The company did not allow self-isolation for employees who had contact with infected colleagues<sup>40</sup>. The issue of performing work outside the employer's premises for employees who, due to the suspension of preschool institutions and suspension of classes in primary schools, had to take care of children is not resolved.

## Work Restriction for some Economic Entities

The Regulation on Measures during the State of Emergency prohibits or restricts certain groups of economic entities' work. This indirectly affected the employees, either if the employer had to terminate employment contracts, temporary employment contracts, and the termination of employment on other grounds, including workers working informally. Employers also used modalities of absence from work. The consequences are noticeable in the services sector, where employees and those registered as self-employed and micro-enterprises were particularly vulnerable. The first analysis of the implications of an almost three-month suspension of work in these activities shows a high degree of vulnerable employment of self-employed or founders of micro-enterprises. They are vulnerable whether they earn their income or employ a small number of people whose salaries they could hardly secure during a state of emergency.

The work of employees in the state administration was limited on March 16 by Conclusion 05 No. 53-2561 / 2020. The Conclusion suspended work with the parties through direct contact in all state administration bodies

<sup>36</sup> Opposition from Leskovac says the Crisis Headquarters had the authorization to temporarily close Jura

<https://www.juznevesti.com/Politika/Leskovacki-opozicionari-Stab-imao-ingerencije-da-privremeno-zatvori-Juru.sr.html>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/analiza-i-rezultati-rada-ministarstva-za-rad-zaposljavanje-boracka-i-socijalna-pitanja>

<sup>38</sup> Sekulović, I. "Pandemic and Labor Rights in Serbia", Center for Democracy Foundation, source: <http://www.centaronline.org/sr/publikacija/1803/pandemija-covid-19-i-radna-prava-u-srbiji>

<sup>39</sup> In these parts, the Regulation, does not meet the conditions prescribed by the Law on Government, that the Government regulation elaborates the relationship regulated by law, in accordance with the purpose and goal of the law (Article 42, paragraph 1)

<sup>40</sup> The union demands that undertaking measures to prevent COVID19 pandemic in Jura <https://jugmedia.rs/sindikatz-trazi-preduzimanja-mera-kakao-ne-bi-doslo-do-pandemije-korone-u-leskovackoj-juri/>

(the Autonomous Province Vojvodina and units of local self-government, special organizations, institutions, public companies, and other organizations founded or majority-owned by the Republic of Serbia, an autonomous province and a unit of local self-government). Formally, this act's main drawback is that it did apply to legal entities and entrepreneurs, which could be done based on Article 13, paragraph 1 of the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases. According to this law, every legal entity, entrepreneur, and a natural person are obliged to act under the measures to protect the population from infectious diseases determined by the by law. This led to a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution, which prohibits discrimination, as regulations on measures during the state of emergency do not prescribe limitation of this constitutional guarantee.<sup>41</sup> Three days later (March 19), the Regulation on Emergency Measures and Companies, Legal Entities and Entrepreneurs prohibited activities "in which the nature of the service activity is such that it requires close contact between the provider and the user well as the users with each other. This act's formal shortcoming is identical to that set out in the objections to Conclusion 05 No. 53-2561 / 2020; namely, this act also violated the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination, the FCD analysis emphasizes<sup>42</sup>.

## Social Protection During Pandemic

The pandemic and the measures introduced during the state of emergency have significantly affected sensitive social groups, including those over the age of 65, especially those accommodated in retirement homes, people with disabilities, people with chronic diseases, people with autism, people living in informal settlements without access to drinking water, etc. The measures introduced did not consider these persons' rights and needs and had to be adjusted during the state of emergency. This often led to different interpretations and confusion among citizens. These institutions' capacities proved insufficient to respond to special requests that arose during the pandemic and a state of emergency.

According to the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs, as of April 27, coronavirus was registered among 564 beneficiaries and 149 employees in social welfare institutions and homes for the accommodation of adults and the retirement homes." Virus appeared in gerontological centers in Nis, Krusevac, Knjaževac, Mataruška Banja, in the Gerontology Center "Jelenac" in Aleksinac, as well as part of that institution in Tešica and City Center for Social Work in Belgrade, New Belgrade Department. The virus was also present at the nursing home in Smederevo, Home Department for accommodation of adults and the elderly in Novi Pazar, Home for children and youth "Dushko Radovic" in Nis, Institution for children and youth "Sremcica" in Belgrade, Children's Shelter, the Shelter for Adults and the Elderly in Belgrade, the Center for Family Accommodation and Adoption in Nis and Center for the Protection of Infants, Children and Youth in Belgrade."<sup>43</sup>

The introduction of protective measures and guidelines on the necessary hygiene habits to protect the population from the diseases inevitably drew the civil sector's attention to particularly vulnerable groups that do not have the conditions required to apply protection measures. These are primarily informal settlements without water, overcrowded apartments, etc. Organization A11 Economic and Social Initiative proposed forming a "Third Headquarters" that must urgently take measures to eliminate or mitigate consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable categories of persons under the jurisdiction Republic of Serbia. The competent Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs, and Social Affairs did not propose measures to alleviate the situation of the most vulnerable, including those engaged in the informal economy sector<sup>44</sup>.

41 Sekulović, I. "Pandemic and Labor Rights in Serbia", Center for Democracy Foundation, source: <http://www.centaronline.org/sr/publikacija/1803/pandemija-covid-19-i-radna-prava-u-srbiji>

42 Ibid

43 According to: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/u-ustanovama-socijalne-zastite-i-domovima-za-stare-u-srbiji-zarazena-564-korisnika/> 27.04.2020.

44 "Urgent measures are needed to protect the most vulnerable during the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus" <https://www.a11initiative.org/neophodno-je-hitno-preduzimanje-mera-za-zastitu-najugrozjenijih-tokom-borbe-protiv-virusa-sars-cov-2/>, 17.03.2020. The Zrenjanin Social Forum pointed out the difficult position of collectors of secondary raw materials, estimating that the state does not recognize them as workers and that they are in great danger of being infected with the virus, given that they do not have protective equipment while being in direct contact with waste: "Collectors of secondary raw materials bare-handed in the fight against Covid 19", <http://www.zsf.rs/vesti/sakupljaci-sekundarnih-sirovina-goloruki-u-borbi-sa-covidom19/>, 26.03.2020.

Protection and support of persons with mental disabilities caused particular concern. At the beginning of the state of emergency, the platform of organizations for cooperation with the United Nations human rights mechanism sent an open letter to the competent institutions urging “to take additional measures social protection measures that would guarantee continuity of support to persons with mental disabilities in a safe manner during a state of emergency, so as not to violate their basic human rights and discriminate in order to protect their health.<sup>45</sup>” At the beginning of the epidemic, the Initiative for the Rights of Persons with Mental Disabilities (MDRI-S) appealed to the authorities to, wherever possible, transfer users from institutions to private accommodation - to their families, relatives, foster families. Attention was drawn to a group of 8 people with mental disabilities who were displaced from their homes in Petrovac immediately after the outbreak. They were placed back in the institution “Dr Nikola Sumenković,” which has more than 300 users, stating that this measure is disproportionate and violates their right to liberty. Still, it is also unreasonable because of a higher risk of infection in this institution than in the apartments they lived before<sup>46</sup>. Further on, MDRI-S appealed to the Government and relevant ministries to consider the difficulties persons with disabilities face. They demanded the mitigation of restraining orders for persons with disabilities and their families<sup>47</sup>, informing the public about those infected with Covid-19<sup>48</sup> and adopting the Deinstitutionalization Strategy and Action Plan. Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs commented on the above Letters<sup>49</sup> that the adoption of the deinstitutionalization strategy is planned and that accommodation establishments were advised to return the beneficiaries to their families when possible. The ministry also stated that there were no data on the number of deceased beneficiaries and employees in social protection institutions during the pandemic, and that these data will be available in the coming period<sup>49</sup>.

The Standing Conference of Roma Citizens’ Associations - ROMA LEAGUE pointed out the severe problems members of the Roma national minority faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality sent to the Government Initiative for drafting the Instruction on employers’ conduct during the state of emergency to overcome the problems of employed parents and single parents of minor children, who faced the problem of taking care of their children. “Several employed parents addressed the unequal position of employed fathers of minor children because some employers decided to allow mothers of children under the age of 12 to stay at home to take care of their minor children. Therefore, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality suggested prescribing an instruction to allow all employed single parents of minors children to perform work outside the employer’s premises at all workplaces where it is possible to organize such work following the general act and the employment contract. Also, if a single parent of minor children works for the employer who cannot organize the work outside the premises, due to the nature of work, the employer will allow them to stay at home, in case of need, to take care of their minor children. When deciding which employees will perform work outside the employer’s premises, priority is given to parents of minor children, who will be offered this kind of work, but without discrimination based on gender, and following the actual needs. When harmonizing his business with the conditions of the state of emergency, such as the organization of work in shifts, the employer considers the needs of employed parents of minor children related to balancing work and parenthood.<sup>50</sup>”

---

45 Open letter from the Platform of Civil Society Organizations on the Denial of Basic Human Rights to Persons with Mental Disabilities and Disabilities during a State of Emergency <https://www.mdri-s.org/saopstenja/otvoreno-pismo-platforme-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-povodom-uskracivanja-osnovnih-ljudskih-prava-osobama-sa-mentalnim-teskocama-i-invaliditetom-tokom-trajanja-vanrednog-stanja/>

46 Appeal to the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs <https://www.mdri-s.org/saopstenja/apel-ministarstva-za-rad-zaposljavanje-boracka-i-socijalna-pitanja/>

47 Request to the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the ministries for exemption of persons with disabilities from the complete ban on movement after 5 pm <https://www.mdri-s.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Molba-MDRI-S.pdf>

48 Situation in the social protection facilities <https://www.mdri-s.org/saopstenja/stanje-u-ustanovama-socijalne-zastite-covid-19/>

49 “Ministry of Social Affairs Response to MDRI-S Letters: Data on the number of deaths in homes still do not exist” <https://www.mdri-s.org/vesti/odgovor-ministarstva-za-socijalna-pitanja-dopise-mdri-s-podaci-o-broju-umrlih-korisnika-u-domovima-jos-uvek-ne-postoje/>

50 Activities of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality during the state of emergency (recommendations of measures, initiatives and warnings to the public) submitted to the FCD

## Activities of civil society organizations in the field of social policy and employment

Here we will list some of the civil society organizations' initiatives during the state of emergency related to individual social groups' economic and social position. Civic initiatives have collected many reports and testimonies on civil society activities at the local level.

During the state of emergency, the NCEU working group for Chapters 2 and 19 organized two online meetings to discuss introduced measures, respect for safety and health at work, dismissal of workers, paid leave, social services, and their organizations' activities.

The Association of Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia sent letters to the competent authorities to ensure support for artists, cultural workers, and the self-employed individuals in the culture<sup>51, 52</sup>

Media and journalist associations sent proposals to the Government of Serbia to suppress the negative consequences for journalists' labor rights<sup>53</sup>.

The Autonomous Women's Center and organizations for protecting women's rights and the fight against domestic violence pointed to the danger of increasing domestic violence due to the ban on movement, suspension teaching in schools, job loss, and earnings loss. The Autonomous Women's Center stated on May 17, 2020<sup>54</sup>, pointing to the following: "Restrictions on movement, isolation, increased levels of stress, general insecurity and a strong focus of institutions (primarily the police and the judiciary) on fighting the pandemic have contributed to the creating conditions for domestic violence to increase unhindered. At the beginning of the state of emergency the Ministry of Interior reported decrease in number of reports of domestic violence, however the number of women calling SOS phone lines of the Autonomous Women's Center during the state of emergency has tripled. Women survivors of violence faced a double risk: the risk of getting infected, and the risk of domestic violence. The victims were forced to stay with the perpetrators continuously (and 72 hours), which increased the risk of deathly outcome. The institutions showed shortcomings during the state of emergency. For example, a woman who tried to report violence during curfew was punished. There no reports of femicides during the state of emergency, but there were two disturbing cases. Previously convicted offender in Nis killed another woman. The sentence he served for the murder of his first wife was reduced by 3.5 years. Six months after being released from prison, he repeated the same crime. In Leskovac, a 20-year-old man killed his sister, stepmother, half-sister and father. The media said that the killer had an intellectual disability, and that he was under the supervision of the Center for Social Work. At the time of these femicides, Nis and Leskovac were hotspots of the coronavirus pandemic. Still, that there is no excuse for neglecting the prevention and suppression of domestic violence from the side of authorities. These cases confirmed shortcomings of the system where monitoring and controlling of former convicts for violence against women and girls have not been developed. The promise that necessary changes will be made, was given six years ago when another offender killed a woman who came to visit him. These cases are evidence of lack of political will to provide real protection to women victims of violence. "

The Association "Women at a Crossroads", an organization whose work is aimed at women aged 45+, analyzed pandemics' impact on women's economic position, especially the situation that many women had to put their entrepreneurial activity to a halt.

The Center for the Child's Rights and the Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia point to the problems that affect almost every child in Serbia. They require immediate systematic solutions, a strategic approach, more extensive and appropriate allocations of funds for protection, and realization of the child's rights. The situation

51 "Press release of the Association of Independent Cultural Scene of Serbia to the professional public", <http://nezavisnakultura.net/2020/03/23/saopstenje-asocijacije-nezavisna-kulturna-scena-srbije-strucnoj-javnosti/>, 23.03.2020

52 Pandemic COVID-19 and labor rights in Serbia, Foundation Center for Democracy, Belgrade 2020

53 Pandemic COVID-19 and labor rights in Serbia, Foundation Center for Democracy, Belgrade 2020

54 According to the website of Autonomous Women's Center <https://www.womengo.org.rs/vesti/1588-saopstenje-za-javnost-zaustavimo-pandemiju-nasilja-u-porodici>

of children in Serbia is further disturbed by the crisis caused by the COVID19 pandemic, which especially affects children from the most vulnerable groups: children with disabilities, migrant children, Roma children, children living and working on the streets, children with HIV/AIDS, children belonging to the LGBTI population, children from single-parent families and families without income or low income, etc. They express concern about the fact that fundamental laws have been announced but not adopted, such as the Law on the Rights of the Child and the Protector of the Rights of the Child, the Law on amendments to the Family Law, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Juvenile Delinquents and Criminal Protection of Juvenile's persons, have not been adopted<sup>55</sup>.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the unfavorable situation in the labor market especially affected the young. Belgrade Open School launched a platform Web4JOBS on March 16, after declaring a state of emergency, as a one-stop-shop space where unemployed young people have the opportunity to improve their knowledge and improve their prospect of employment.

### Recommendations

1. After introducing measures during the state of emergency, the measures to support citizens and the economy, it was shown how vital social dialogue is. Consultations on introducing measures could reduce potential shortcomings and provide a more selective approach to those particularly endangered and vulnerable social groups.
2. It is necessary to determine urgently, both in the short and medium-term, the support measures to vulnerable groups who lost their jobs and incomes during the state of emergency, and who are not covered by the measures introduced so far to support the economy and citizens (such as labor out-of-employment and informal workers);
3. Improve the legal framework for performing work outside the employer's premises (working remotely, working from home): the existing regulations proved to be insufficient in a pandemic or similar crisis that can occur. The improvement of the legal framework should be implemented through amendments to the Labor Law following European standards. It is necessary to oblige employers to regulate performing work outside their premises with their internal acts.
4. It is necessary to regulate work obligation differently, if possible, through other relevant laws, instead of by the Law on Defense and the Law on Military, material, and labor obligation.
5. It is necessary to improve the infrastructural and professional needs based on clearly mapped needs and plans capacities in social protection institutions to accommodate beneficiaries and social protection organizations for providing home accommodation services.
6. Improving the Labor Inspectorate capacity has been a necessity for years and how through new employment, enhancing the expertise of inspectors, increasing budget funds, and more precise regulation of competencies, now mostly based on the experience of violations of labor rights during the state of emergency.

---

<sup>55</sup> According to: <https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Aktivnosti-OCD-kao-odgovor-na-Covid-19-18-25-maj-.pdf>

## Consumer and Health Protection

European Policy Center – Working group of National Convention on the European Union for Chapter 28.

Measures in the field of public health and consumer protection – Overview.

To prevent the occurrence and spread of infectious diseases caused by the COVID-19 virus, during the state of emergency from 15.03. to 6.5.2020, the following measures were adopted in the field of public health and consumer protection:

1. Regulation on special technical requirements, standards, and application of medical devices during the state of emergency introduced due to infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus (“Official Gazette of RS” no.41/2020); measures related to procurement, putting into use medical devices and drugs not manufactured following the prescribed standards under the following conditions:
  - Submit a description of the technical characteristics and instructions for using the medical device, translating into the Serbian language.
  - That the effectiveness of the treatment is guaranteed
  - That health workers will obtain training.
  - There is an obligation in place to provide service and spare parts for the medical device and to state the service period
2. Regulation on organizing the work of employers during the state of emergency (“Official Gazette of RS” No. 31/2020) foresees the following:
  - The employer is obliged to enable employees to perform work outside the premises (working remotely and work from home).
  - The employer is obliged to keep records of employees who perform work outside the employer’s premises (duration of working hours, manner of supervising the employee).
  - If it is not possible to work from home, the employer must harmonize his work with the state of emergency. The employer: does not require additional funds, organizes work in shifts, enables on-line meetings, postpones official trips in the country, and abroad.
  - To protect employees’ health, the employer must provide sufficient protective equipment related to hygiene security of facilities and individuals, employees who have direct contact with customers, or shared workspace.
3. The decision on the restriction of the provision of services in the field of retail trade, which includes the sale of goods and the provision of services in shopping malls and shops that are entered from indoors (“Official Gazette of RS” no.39/2020); The decision envisages the following measures:
  - It is prohibited to sell goods to customers or provide services directly in shopping centers (where entering into smaller space is envisioned).
  - The decision does not apply to legal entities that sell goods through social media.
  - Number one excludes legal entities and entrepreneurs who perform retail sales of food products, basic foodstuffs, medicines, and medical devices.
  - The measure is at force as long as there is the danger of spreading the infectious disease COVID-19
4. The decision on special measures for the provision of services in the field of retail trade, which includes the sale of food and beverages in hospitality facilities and the sale of food to go (“Official Gazette of RS” No. 39/2020); The following measures are envisaged:
  - Legal entities and entrepreneurs continue to provide services in these areas, following special protection measures for the employees and service users: food and beverages cannot be served indoors and outdoors, regardless of how food is prepared or served.

- Services can be provided through delivery service or the counter for the provision of services without entry.
  - Legal entities and entrepreneurs are obliged to apply all preventive measures of the importance of employees and service users' safety and health.
  - The measures last as long as the state of emergency lasts.
5. Decision on banning the export of medicines ("Official Gazette of RS" No. 32/2020, 33/2020 and 47/2020); The decision prescribes the following measures:
1. Export and re-export of medicines from Republic of Serbia is prohibited, except:
    - if those are produced for foreign markets only
    - if a foreign individual ships drugs in the transit procedure from the customs territory.
  2. Export ban for a period of 30 days:
    - a. Exports may be approved by a Government's act;
    - b. Local manufacturers, importers and exporters of medicines are obliged make a state ment to guarantee continuous and uninterrupted supply of the domestic market with all medicines that they produce and import.
6. Decision on temporary ban on export of basic products important for the population ("Official Gazette" no. 28/2020, 33/2020, 37/2020, 39/2020, 41/2020 and 43/2020-4); The decision envisages the following measures:
- A temporary ban on the export of basic products important for the population is introduced in order to prevent shortages of these products (product table)
  - Export ban for 30 days;
  - The decision on prohibition does not apply to goods purchased by a domestic person in another state or customs territory if these goods are shipped outside the territory of Serbia after the customs procedure.
  - The export of products from the list may be approved by a special act of the Government
7. Decision on declaring COVID-19 disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus a contagious disease ("Official Gazette" No. 23/2020, 24/2020, 27/2020, 28/2020, 30/2020, 32/2020, 35 / 2020, 37/2020, 38/2020, 39/2020, 43/2020 and 45/2020-3); The decision is based on the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 15/2016 and 68/2020), the following measures are envisaged:
1. COVID-19 is proclaimed a as contagious disease.
  2. The prescribed measures shall be applied trough the Law on Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases, the Law on Health Care, the Law on Public Health, as well as other measures needed in accordance with the epidemiological situation.
    - a. Persons with the presence of the virus are treated in a specially designated and prepared facilities for isolation and treatment.
    - b. Persons are obliged to accept isolation and to adhere to measures and instructions.
    - c. A person who does not adhere to isolation after being reported to a health institution is forcibly isolated.
    - d. Persons who were released to go home after two negative tests on COVID-19, had to spend another 14 days in home isolation.
    - e. The control is performed by members of the Ministry of the Interior.
  3. Healthcare workers are advised not to travel to epidemic hotspots.
    - a. After 14 days of quarantine, health workers are obliged to resume work upon returning to Serbia or if they had a contact with an infected person,



- b. This measure also applies to workers in military health institutions and members of the Serbian Army, Ministry of Interior, and security services.
  - c. The person to whom the measure of health supervision was prescribed upon entering Serbia, as well as the person to whom the measure was determined and after making contact with an infected person, but who has the need to leave the Republic of Serbia before the measure expires, the sanitary inspector can give permission.
  - d. Within 24 hour period, the Ministry of the Interior has to be informed on the decision from the sanitary inspector
4. Foreign nationals are temporarily barred from entering Serbia. (this measure applies to)
- a. Crews of cargo motor vehicles. In the case of transit, it will be limited to a period not longer than 12 hours from the moment of entry into Serbia.
  - b. Cargo ship crews. Transit navigation - is limited to a period not exceeding 90 hours for ship formations and 60 hours for self-propelled vessels in cases of upstream navigation. In case of downstream voyages not exceeding 72 hours for ships and 54 hours for self-propelled vessels.
  - c. Railway staff of railway vehicles.
  - d. Crews and cabin crew of aircraft.
  - e. The working body of the Government will determine the conditions and restrictions of transit, namely the stay of the persons to whom permission is given to come to the Republic of Serbia.
  - f. Humanitarian convoys under obligatory escort agreed through diplomacy.
  - g. Accredited staff members of foreign diplomatic and consular missions and offices international organizations.
  - h. Foreign citizens who have been granted temporary residence or permanent residence in the Republic of Serbia.
  - i. Citizens of neighboring countries from the border area who perform agricultural work and have agricultural land.
  - j. Citizens of neighboring countries who are residents of the border area and who are employed on the territory of Serbia.
- 4a. Citizens of the Republic of Serbia and foreign citizens who have been granted temporary residence or permanent residence in Serbia, health supervision is envisaged for 14 days.
- a. Persons who have symptoms are immediately referred to health facilities.
  - b. Does not apply to persons performing international road, rail, water, or air services traffic.
  - c. It is not allowed for the ships to replace crew members for foreign nationals, for domestic ones it is allowed. They do not apply to domestic citizens and citizens of neighboring countries who perform agricultural works.
  - d. They do not apply to domestic citizens who are employed on the territory of a neighboring country and who have a document of the employer on employment.
- 4b. Measures from the points 4 and 4a of this decision are not applicable to foreign citizens who come to provide humanitarian aid
- 4c. Any air carrier operating any type of international air transport should contact the competent service to deliver:
- a. permission of the working body of the Government.
  - b. a statement proving he has informed the passengers of the measures and conditions.
8. Conclusion of the Government on the designating facilities for the implementation of quarantine measures in order to prevent the occurrence, spread and support control of infectious diseases COVID-19 ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 33/2020);

- It is determined that the quarantine measure ordered by the Minister of Health, in order to prevent the occurrence, spread and support control of infectious diseases COVID-19, in accordance with the epidemiological situation, will be carried out in the military facilities “Morović”, Šid and Miratovačko polje.
9. Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia (“Official Gazette”, No. 34/2020, 39/2020, 40/2020 and 46/2020-3); certain following measures:
    1. It is forbidden to move outside the living quarters, as follows:
      - a. More than 65 years in populated areas with over 5,000 inhabitants.
      - b. More than 70 years in populated areas with up to 5,000 inhabitants.Does not apply to the period on Saturdays from 04h to 07h.
    2. All individuals are prohibited to move from 5 pm to 5 am on weekdays, from 1 pm on Saturdays to 5 am on Mondays. Pets are allowed to be taken for a walk in the period from 11 pm to 1 am, on Sundays from 8 am to 10h, 20 min, 200m from the apartment.
    3. It is forbidden to move in all parks and public areas intended for recreation and sports, from 21. March from 8 p.m. It does not refer to health workers, members of the Ministry of Interior and the Serbian Army, persons to whom the Ministry of Interior issued a permit.
    4. The presence of more than 10 people is prohibited during the funeral.
    5. The ban does not apply to persons in need of medical assistance.
    6. Non-compliance with the prohibition from points 1 and 2 of this order shall be treated as a criminal offense in accordance with the Criminal Code, and for a misdemeanor in accordance with the Decree on Misdemeanor for violation of the Order of the Minister of the Interior.
  10. Order prohibiting gatherings in the Republic of Serbia in public places indoors: (“Official Gazette”, no. 39/2020)
    1. Public gatherings on the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia in public places indoors are prohibited - when more than five people gather at the same time.
    2. The order lasts as long as the danger from infection lasts.
    3. The Order on the prohibition of gatherings in the Republic of Serbia in public places indoors ceases to be valid space number.
      - a. Each new recruit is assigned an isolation of 14 days.
      - b. Measures of isolation for users and employees, who were in contact with the patient, issued by the competent epidemiological service is realized within the institution of social protection for accommodation of the elderly.
  11. Order on organization and implementation of quarantine measures (“Official Gazette”, No. 33/2020); It is ordered to organize and implement a quarantine measure:
    - a. passenger control and health warning for all passengers.
    - b. designation of a Reference Laboratory for the identification and certification of SARS-CoV-2;
    - c. education of medical teams to monitor the health status of individuals;
    - d. restriction of freedom of movement and mandatory medical examinations of persons who were or for whom it exists suspected of having been in contact with sick persons.
  12. Order prohibiting visits and restricting movement in the facilities of institutions for the accommodation of the elderly (“Official Gazette”, no. 28/2020);
    - Visits to all social welfare institutions for the accommodation of the elderly are prohibited.
    - Users are prohibited from leaving the facility.
    - Persons who provide services necessary for the functioning of institutions, and who are not employed in those institutions, are allowed to stay and move in the facilities.
    - Admission of new users is allowed with health documentation proving that the person is not infected.

## Evaluation of measures from the aspect of public health and consumer protection

There is a lack of reliable information on several relevant questions for evaluating measures adopted and implemented during the state of emergency, introduced on 15.03.2020. There is no possibility of giving a reliable critical assessment of the undertaken efforts according to the public health system's standards in the negotiation chapter 28. An in-depth analysis of the Government's measures is yet to come, after all the relevant data becomes available to the public, especially in special reports from the Ministry of Health and the Institute of Public Health of Serbia. The preparation and publication of such reports is necessary due to the need to revise and restructure the public health system, especially the part of the system related to protecting the population from infectious diseases.

Measures taken during the state of emergency included special conditions of procurement, trade, import and export, as well as the use of medical devices and drugs, special requirements for occupational health, protection of consumers health in retail by limiting the ways and conditions of sale and provision of services, restriction and a ban on entering the country, and restricting and banning the movement of specific categories of persons or all citizens in a certain period, a ban on gatherings, as well as the organization and implementation of quarantine measures. According to type, shape, and scope, the measures are in line with law measures in the event of contagious epidemic diseases of greater epidemiological significance. It is also in accordance with measures needed in case of an emergency that may endanger people's health and lives and in which there is an immediate danger of mass transmission of infectious diseases (Articles 50 to 53 of the Law on Protection population from infectious diseases).

A preliminary general assessment of the measures and activities of the Government and the competent authorities and bodies during the state of emergency can be marked as satisfactory. The measures are based on the assessments of the medical experts' authorized representatives. The content is following the legal provisions on the protection of the population from infectious diseases. It represents an appropriate response to the needs of combating and preventing the spread of COVID-19. For the successful implementation of measures in the part that refers to health institutions and the public health system as a whole, professional medical staff and their dedicated work were crucial.

Based on the public's insight into the implementation of the adopted measures and the discussion of the members of the NCEU Working Group for the chapter 28 - section for public health, it can be stated that, in addition to successfully combating the spread of infectious diseases by implementing these measures, the COVID - 19 epidemic simultaneously revealed certain weaknesses in the health system of Serbia. At the same time, it also pointed out the directions in which we need to act. Public health has been neglected in the past due to the orientation towards clinical medicine, so the issues preserving the health of the population and primary prevention in the prevention and control of diseases, were in the background. The COVID-19 epidemic significantly changed this situation and imposed the topic of the public health system. It is necessary to collect all relevant data, conduct a comprehensive expert analysis, and determine proposed measures for improvement in this area, which has a significant place in the negotiating chapter 28.

Regarding the engagement of health institutions for the needs of accommodation and treatment of patients infected with the COVID-19 virus, a comprehensive list was not available to the public during the state of emergency. There was only the list of COVID ambulances in health centers followed with a contact phone. Based on the data received from the media, it can be concluded that at the beginning of the epidemic, the following accommodation facilities were reserved for these purposes: KBC "Dragiša Mišović" and Zemun Hospital in Belgrade, Clinic for General Surgery in Nis, and the Institute for Pulmonary diseases in Novi Sad. Subsequently, additional capacities were provided in the KBC Zvezdara and the Institute of Orthopedics Banjica, in Belgrade.

Based on special decisions of the Government on the opening of temporary facilities for accommodation and treatment of persons suffering from infectious disease COVID-19, additional capacities were made available: the temporary facilities "Belgrade Fair", "Student House" Medical Faculty Nis, "Hall Chair "in Nis," Novi Sad Fair "and Secondary Medical School" Two Heroes " Novi Pazar. For the needs of the temporary hospitals, health workers, health associates and other individuals were hired employed in health care institutions from the Plan of the network of health care institutions, military health care institutions, state bodies and legal entities established with funds in public ownership for which a special law they are also scheduled to perform health care activities, by the

decision of their manager, in accordance with the decisions of the Crisis Staff, have been sent to the temporary hospital to perform their work duties. Those suffering from infectious disease COVID-19 were referred to a temporary hospital for treatment by health institutions determined by the competent authorities' acts for the reception and care of those persons. Capacities of the mentioned temporary hospitals were only partially used, so many other facilities that were also prepared at some point for these purposes have not even been put into work.

It is not possible to reflect with certainty on the manner of distribution and determination of individual institutions' purpose because the criteria on which this distribution was carried out are not known. Given the unsystematic decision of the purpose of the facilities, frequent changes of destination during the admission and referral of patients, as well as the order of determining the individual institutions and the establishment of temporary facilities, the assumption is that there was no previous plan in case of a large-scale epidemic and mass acceptance of infected patients. It seems that the Crisis Team brought decisions based on an epidemiological assessment and an assessment of the characteristics available capacity of health facilities.

As part of the preliminary assessment of the adopted measures and implemented activities during the state of emergency in public health, it can be stated that their character and content corresponded to the assessed epidemiological situation and the needs of prevention and control of infectious diseases. However, there are questions of reliability and quality of the analytical basis for the adoption of measures, the role of professional institutions and bodies responsible for epidemiological surveillance in the creation and proposal of these measures, supervision over their implementation, as well as the manner and conditions of implementation of the adopted measures in health care institutions and temporary facilities. Not all relevant data are made available to the public. Not even the professional public has full insight into these data. Lack of transparency in the work of the Crisis Staff and decision-making on measures and communication with the people are some of the criticized points that could be heard in public during the state of emergency.

Inconsistency could be noticed while deciding on individual measures, which did not provide citizens with enough confidence in medical justification when choosing measures and measuring their weight. Communication between the Crisis Team and the public went through several phases. Firstly, the significance and risk of infection consequences with the COVID-19 virus were minimized, and even ridiculed, through frivolous and joyful performances of individual members of the Crisis Team. Then once we started dealing with the first wave of mass infection and especially under the impression of experiences coming from other European countries (Italy, Spain), communication with the public became characterized by shock and panic, and directing blame to specific categories of the population (for example workers from abroad). We moved on to the phase of the adoption of tough measures to restrict the movement of certain categories of citizens and all citizens in the entire territory of the state in certain periods ("curfew"). Finally, once the epidemic started weakening, their measures were suddenly lifted, and we entered the phase of creating an image of significant and accelerated improvement. In terms of communication with the public, one case stands out. It was sending a text message on 31.03.2020 to all users of one of the mobile telephone networks in Serbia. The message claimed the situation was dramatic and that the "scenario from Italy and Spain" was approaching. Representatives of the Crisis Team subsequently indirectly confirmed the authenticity of the message. Still, it turned out that the claim about the dramatic nature of the situation was unfounded, and the message itself caused great anxiety and fear among the citizens. Besides, based on information which was available to the public and how daily press conferences were held, citizens could not gain full confidence that the choice of measures adopted, their content, and especially the way of implementation and supervision, was based entirely on the proposals and findings coming from medical experts.

During the implementation of the adopted measures, critical problems were relatively poor material and technical condition of health facilities, and lack of adequate equipment. Some of the essential health institutions could not be used for the treatment of patients in this situation (for example, Military Medical Academy, due to central ventilation leading to the spread of nosocomial infections), or facilities that are in extremely poor technical condition (Clinic for Infectious and Tropical Diseases). In some cases, due to the lack of adequate spatial and technological conditions, hotspots of infection happened in health care institutions (eg, KBC "Dragiša Mišović" and KBC Bežanijska Kosa).

The lack of adequate protective equipment, especially at the beginning of the epidemic, was critical for medical staff work. It can be reasonably assumed that it is one of the main reasons for the significant share of health care workers in the total number of patients. Also, there were questions about the adequacy of the subsequently pro-

vided equipment, especially the question about the sufficiency of the purchased respirators, lack of tests, delay with the results, delayed increased testing coverage, and sudden changes in algorithms. It is necessary to examine several critical issues in detail once the public gets full access to all relevant data. An especially important issue is the medical adequacy of the equipment during the emergency, especially the purchase of respirators and other equipment during the outbreak. There was also information in the public that some health facilities prohibited using protective equipment (the case of Dr. Laza Lazarević Clinic).

An additional problem is the organization of work and services, at the level of institutions and systems as a whole, and data collection and exchange. Initially, there was a problem of regulating a separate entrance for patients (separate entrances for suspected patients) and staff, questionable procedures, and ongoing changes. An issue was the separation of blocks and floors in the institution for the reception of infected or suspected patients, which many institutions have addressed by “securing” one part of the space, floor, or department. Adequate safety and health conditions for health workers and other employees posed the greatest challenge to the health care institutions that had specific roles in acceptance and the treatment of the infected.

Lack of an integrated information system, with reliable data as well as capabilities and fast and accurate entry of data on the movement of infectious diseases, the clinical picture of infected, data on possible contacts of the infected, ie, successful processing, analysis, and interpretation of the collected data, as well as referral feedback to participants in data collection, informing the professional and general public as part of the implementation of epidemiological surveillance, is now more than ever identified as one of the critical shortcomings in the field of public health in general. For the needs of centralized collection and monitoring of data within the epidemiological surveillance related to the COVID-19 virus epidemic, the Government established a unique software solution - Information System COVID-19 (IS COVID-19), run by the Institute of Public Health of Serbia, with technical support from the Office for Information Technology and Electronic Administration and the Republic Fund for Health Insurance. For now, one can only assume that the reasons for this ad hoc solution are the inefficiency of the Integrated Health Information System (ISIS). In this regard, it should be noted that it is a question of functioning health information system, in general, and in the context of combating infectious diseases, for a more extended period in the focus of the European Commission's report on the situation in the negotiating chapter 28 (screening report, EC reports on progress for Chapter 28).

Finally, it should be noted that the most significant burden is in providing the necessary medical care and assistance, as well as implementation of measures in health care institutions fell at the expense of employees from the ranks of medical and other staff. Lack of trained health workers of all profiles, from doctors to nurses and technicians, and health associates, caused by the ban on employment in the public sector and low incomes, as well as a result the outflow of qualified medical staff abroad is of a chronic nature. On this occasion, the problem has been brought up again. During the state of emergency and the biggest wave of the epidemic, the lack of health workers was solved mainly by increased work engagement of existing staff. Not at this point available data on the number of infected and deceased health workers, but there is no doubt that it was paid dearly in human lives and health of doctors and medical technicians, for dedicated work in the existing conditions.

## Conclusion

Regarding the mentioned measures and the given preliminary assessments, the NCEU Working Group for Chapter 28 adopts the following findings:

- The preliminary general evaluation of the Government and competent bodies' measures and activities during the emergency state is satisfactory. Measures adopted and implemented in the field of public health are following the legal provisions on the protection of the population from infectious diseases and represent an appropriate response to the needs of combating and preventing the spread of contagious diseases caused by the virus COVID-19;
- Questions of reliability and quality of the analytical basis for the adoption of measures, the role of institutions and bodies responsible for epidemiological surveillance in creating and proposing these measures, surveillance over their implementation, as well as the manner and conditions of implementation of the adopted measures, need to be publicly discussed after obtaining all relevant data;
- The COVID - 19 epidemics revealed certain shortcomings of the Serbian health care system, such as

inadequate material and technical equipment of health care institutions, lack of specific medical equipment, as well as the chronic problem of an insufficient number of health workers and technical staff;

- A critical remark on the manner of implementation of measures in the field of public health during the emergency refers to insufficient transparency in the work of the Crisis Team and other bodies and responsible for proposing, adopting, and supervising the implementation of measures, as well as the manner of their communication with the public;
- It is necessary that the Institute of Public Health of Serbia, as a critical national institution for monitoring and control of infectious diseases, prepare and publish a comprehensive thematic report on the virus epidemic COVID-19, with data on the results of the conducted epidemiological surveillance and impact assessments measures taken during the state of emergency to suppress the spread of the epidemic;
- The COVID-19 virus epidemic has highlighted the importance of the public health system and primary prevention, which must become a priority in developing public health policy and the implementation of the forthcoming ones activities from the negotiating chapter 28.

## Education

Nikola Božić - Working Group of the National Convention on the European Union for Negotiating Chapters 25 and 26

### Description of Governmental Measures

The Decision on the suspension of teaching in higher education institutions, secondary and primary schools, and regular operations of preschool education institutions, was adopted on March 15, 2020, and published in the "Official Gazette" No. 30-2020:

1. The measure of suspension of teaching in higher education institutions, secondary and primary, and operations of preschool education institutions, while there is the danger of spreading the infectious disease COVID-19 continues.
2. Higher education institutions, secondary and primary schools in possession of suitable equipment and means for organizing distance learning, continue the educational work by conducting classes remotely. Other institutions will organize distance learning through the television channel RTS 3, a platform RTS Planet, and internet learning platforms.
  1. Institutions from paragraph 1 are obliged to inform parents about the manner of organizing classes.
  2. A trial matriculation exam will be organized through new information and communication technologies.
3. The enrollment of children in preschool and primary school institutions continues through the portal e-Government:
  - eKindergarten - is available for enrollment to all institutions of preschool education in the Republic of Serbia,
  - eEnrolment - for enrollment in primary schools will be available from April 1, 2020.
4. Employees in the institutions referred to in item 1 of this Decision shall continue their work. Simultaneously, students and pupils exercise their rights and obligations related to implementing study programs and curricula following the law and decisions and recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development.
5. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development monitors and directs the

establishment distance learning dynamics, organizing a mock test for the matriculation exam and enrolling children in preschool and primary schools.

6. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development monitors and directs the organization of human resource management in the institutions referred to in item 1 of this Decision and ensures compliance with general instructions and recommendations coming from authorities responsible for monitoring the situation, directing, and coordinating the activities of state authorities and organizations during the danger of the spread of the infectious disease COVID-19 last, to reduce the possibility of transmission of infection among employees and protection of those who are exposed to a higher risk of health threats
7. This Decision shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”.

On March 16, 2020, a decision was made to suspend the work of institutions of student standard whose founder he is the Republic of Serbia and is published in the “Official Gazette” No. 32:

1. The measure of suspension of the work of institutions of student standard whose founder is the Republic of Serbia is prescribed, while the danger of spreading the infectious disease COVID-19 continues.
2. The institutions referred to in paragraph 1 of this Decision are obliged to inform the parents about the suspension of work and the obligation to take over students. At the same time, the risk of spreading infectious disease COVID-19 persists.
3. Employees in the institutions referred to in item 1 of this Decision shall continue their work. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development monitors and directs human resources management activities in the institutions referred to in item 1 of this Decision and ensures compliance with general instructions and monitoring bodies’ recommendations. Conditions, directing, and coordinating the activities of state bodies, organizations, and services while the danger lasts from the spread of the infectious disease COVID-19, reduce the possibility of transmission of the infection among employees, and protect those exposed to a higher risk of health threats.
4. The director of the institution is obliged to prepare the Work Plan during the suspension of work, which should ensure conducting the necessary work processes in the institution (supply of the institution, calculation of salaries, submission of data to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and other authorities and performing tasks necessary for the work of the institution in a state of emergency), but so that a smaller number of employees comes to the institution, and to perform their work duties mostly from home.
5. For foreigners (students, lecturers, etc.), who reside in institutions of student standard on the basis of interstate agreements and projects, which do not have the possibility to return to their homes, it is necessary to ensure the continued use of accommodation and food services in the institution.
6. This Decision shall enter into force on the day of its publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia

Measures of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

## Distance learning program for primary and secondary school students

Operational plan for the continuation of schools' work in difficult conditions with a distance learning program for primary school and secondary school students shall be enacted on March 16 and effective as of March 17, 2020<sup>56</sup>.

It is stated that the Government of the Republic of Serbia decided to temporarily suspend direct educational work in primary and secondary schools, due to the current epidemiological situation in the country. Temporary suspension of direct teaching in schools does not mean suspension of educational work with students, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has prepared an operational plan for the continuation of the work of schools in difficult conditions, through the distance learning in order to realize the right students to education.

Educational work is envisaged through various ways and approaches in establishing communication with students and parents/legal representatives. In this way, different forms, ways and approaches in establishing communication need to provide the necessary information flow and support in achieving educational work through distance learning, taking into account the overall human and technical school resources, as well as the technical capacity of students' families.

The focus of distance learning is on the general educational and professional subjects' program with the largest number of classes. In addition, schools are obliged to support distance learning and use available learning ways to cover content in all other subjects and programs, based on the prescribed curriculum of teaching and learning, in accordance with design their own resources.

In order to achieve equal rights to education for all children, schools were obliged to find alternative ways of providing support in learning, when there is no possibility to establish communication with students with the use of through information and communication technologies. The Ministry needs to take into account all recommendations for prevention of spread COVID-19 virus, bearing in mind, above all, students who come from families of low socio-economic status, as well as all other students who do not have tools for electronic forms of communication and other modern communication resources.

Guidelines for planning and implementation of educational work through distance learning in the period when there are no offline classes, and depending on the level of education and upbringing and the form that is provided, are:

1. Educational contents for distance learning broadcasted on the channels of the Radio-Television of Serbia for primary school students
  - Every day, starting at 8.00 am, six days a week, specially adjusted educational content for primary school students is broadcasted. It includes teaching units from chosen subjects, following the prescribed plan and program for teaching and learning.
  - For all students from 1st to 7th grade, educational content was broadcasted in blocks of two hours daily.
  - For 8th-grade students, educational content was broadcasted in blocks of three hours per day. Serbian language and mathematics were broadcasted every day, and the third class was one of the subjects taken in the final exam.
  - Classes were also broadcasted in the languages of national minorities; schools were informed about this promptly through the Ministry's website and the websites of national councils of national minorities. Also, on RTS Planet platform digital content and recordings of the classes were available for students belonging to national minorities who attend classes in their mother tongue. Students were informed through the Ministry's website and the websites of the national councils of national minorities.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/operativni-plan-za-nastavak-rada-skola-u-otezanim-uslovima-uz-program-ucenja-na-daljnu-za-ucenikeosnovnih-i-srednjih-skola/>



- For students who need an individualized approach to work, where there is a need for adjustments within the individual education plan (IEP), IEP-1, IOP-2 and IOP-3, teachers prepared special learning materials and made them available to students in agreement with their parents.
- In case the internet was not available to all students, it was the principals and the class teachers' responsibility to regularly publish the schedule of classes broadcasted on RTS in a way directly accessible to students and parents. Those could be school entrances, outdoor bulletin board and the like. The class schedule can also be forwarded via SMS and social networks (Viber group and similar).
- The school's obligation was to place a banner on the school website with a link to the site [rasporednastave.gov.rs](http://rasporednastave.gov.rs) and toward notifications related to the broadcasting of classes on RTS.
- All broadcast classes were also available on the RTS Planet platform, where they could be reviewed multiple times. Students and parents were also informed about this possibility and, if necessary, they were given appropriate support for access the platform. Operators do not charge for data transfer for the stated educational contents.
- Simultaneously with the broadcasting TV lessons, teachers in cooperation with class teachers were obliged to establish the necessary communication with students and/or their parents and when necessary to give additional instructions for learning after the broadcast content (additional presentations or exercises in a workbook, homework - essays, analyzes, presentations, illustrations, drawings and others). This also applies to less represented subjects by learning through the RTS 3 (music culture, art culture, physical and health education, foreign languages, technique and technology, informatics, etc.).

## 2. Educational contents for distance learning that are broadcasted on the channel of the Radio-Television of Serbia - RTS Planeta for high school students

Teaching units and topics were available on the RTS Planet platform. The school had to put a banner on its website with all the links that can be used to access lessons and learning platforms. The teachers were obliged to, establish the necessary communication with students and/or their parents and when they need to give additional learning instructions after the broadcast content (eg additional presentations or exercises in the workbook, homework - essays, analyzes, presentations, illustrations, drawings, mini project report and more).

Apart from content that was prepared for broadcasting on RTS and the RTS Planet platform, the teachers of elementary and secondary schools (general education and vocational subjects) could also use available digital textbooks and content to enable distance learning. They could also adjust existing teaching programs, materials and presentations with instructions for learning so that they are available to the largest number of students (e-mail, Viber group).

## 3. Online platforms to support distance learning

Primary and secondary school teachers and students had at their disposal a large number of online platforms (Viber, Zoom, Microsoft Teams), as well as the national online learning platform My School. This helped teachers and students to interact and exchange materials in order to master program content. Instructions and pedagogical recommendations for using these platforms were available on the website [www.rasporednastave.gov.rs](http://www.rasporednastave.gov.rs) and their usage was free.

Teachers in one or different schools needed to exchange information in order to make the highest quality content available to students (educational websites, digital content procured by the school, private websites and other things that contribute to the achievement of goals and tasks/outcomes of teaching a certain subject, depending on the education program in that class).

## 4. School's operational plan, implementation, and monitoring of distance learning

The principal, the teachers' council and the pedagogical board received instructions from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development to start without delaying the development of a weekly operational plan with key activities in realization of educational work. This planning aimed

to ensure students' greatest possible involvement in different types of learning, coordinated work of teachers in the preparation of educational materials for students, and monitoring daily workload of students following their age. In monitoring the daily and weekly workload class teachers were particularly important, because based on the insight into the weekly work plans, student's burnout could be avoided.

5. School principals were obliged to regularly submit weekly operational plans to the competent school administration of the Ministry

Based on the materials which teachers deliver to students and based on student feedback after following TV lessons (classes) and other educational content, teachers recorded data on student progress that can be gained through various types of exchanges (homework, structured exercises and tests, essays, projects, presentations, drawings, etc.). The students submitted their works and homework to the teachers via email (images, files) or within the selected online platform. Based on feedback from the students, and through a horizontal professional exchange of plans and experiences, teachers took care of the daily workload of students and maintained the required level of motivation for learning, which is achieved through good monitoring plans.

6. Records on the implementation of educational activities remotely

Teachers and the school principal are responsible for recording educational activities

Teachers were obliged to record all realized TV classes, units/topics that are realized through other types of communication (RTS Planet, management platforms e-learning, instructions given by e-mail and other tools for video conferencing) in the electronic diary with a note on the method of implementation (form of communication with students and communication channel). These records serve to verification implemented teaching.

Records of distance learning in schools that do not use the electronic diary were based on teachers' notes and records individually. After the situation comes back to normal, the necessary data could be subsequently entered in the books of educational work records.

7. Additional forms of support to students in distance learning

The Ministry's instruction states that class teachers must encourage students to study regularly to support them in their studies, where they can use different types of electronic communication. This communication was in the function of providing psycho-social support and was of particular importance for students and parents, in temporarily tricky conditions and prepare for the transition to a regular regime of teaching and learning.

Professional associates assisted teachers in developing teaching materials that could be used for distance learning and communication with students and parents. Also, associates needed to design workshops and/or materials for working with students in the field of organization of learning and free time, learning techniques, self-evaluation of progress through education, and in areas that are specifically related to educational work with students (one of the proposals are workshops via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype or Viber).

8. Information and communication

School principals must regularly forward information on students' health status, obtained from students' parents and class teachers, to the competent school administration. School principals were obliged to regularly follow the information, instructions, and requests of the competent authorities and services and ensure information flow to individual users.

The instructions of the Ministry of Education also stated: "We point out the need for principals and teachers to comply with all preventive measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which

means overall communication and cooperation in teaching planning should be organized so as to reduce direct contact and presence of more people in the school. With all previously introduced health and hygiene measures and their consistent application, the obligation of the school principal is to organize duties in shifts, in order to ensure daily communication with the authorities services, as well as with the parents of students who are not able to use electronic forms of communication. School principals and class teachers are obliged to forward all instructions regarding the prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, received from the competent institutions, to parents electronically or to inform them via external bulletin boards. “

## Distance learning program for primary and secondary school students

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has prepared a particular operational plan for teaching in the languages of national minorities for those to exercise their right to education in their mother tongue, in a situation when the direct teaching is suspended due to the epidemiological situation.

Throughout the Republic of Serbia, distance learning was in place for students who attend classes at their mother tongue. In providing as many digital and other online resources as possible to implement quality distance learning in minority languages, the ministry was significantly supported by national councils of national minorities.

All students could follow classes in Serbian on the RTS and RTS Planet channels - which is an additional opportunity for minorities to learn Serbian as a non-mother tongue. Additionally, in cooperation with Radio Television Vojvodina, the classes were realized in five languages in official use in AP Vojvodina. Classes from the first to the fourth grade were conducted in Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, and Slovak.

Besides public services, other private, minority, and local media participated in this critical recording and broadcasting task. Panon RTV recorded and broadcasted classes in Hungarian, while TV Copernicus did so in Albanian and Bulgarian language. For students attending classes in the Bosnian language, classes are prepared in cooperation with Bosniak National Council (BNV).

Online and other interactive digital resources in minority languages are posted at the link <https://www.raspored-nastave.gov.rs/>

## Learning from home for students who work according to the Individual Education Plan

To continue the process of teaching and learning in emergencies, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development developed a notice for parents and instructions for all schools, containing steps and ways to implement distance learning, using available digital technologies and previously prepared tools.

Like all teaching and learning programs, this type of work applies to all students involved in the educational system. Schools were obliged to include distance learning in the operational work plans working according to the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Teachers have developed unique customized materials for students who need a structured, individualized approach in work (IOP-1, IOP-2, and IOP-3) and to make them available to students in a manner agreed with the parents. Following the needs of students who work according to an individualized educational plan, content, learning instructions, and way of receiving feedback is prepared to monitor the progress students and provide additional support.

Due to students' specific needs and appropriate ways of learning, the use of digital educational platforms was limited, and it was up to teachers to implement the principle of “education for all” in a correct way in line with the possibilities in the current situation.

An essential element of support in the new situation is psychological support to parents of children who work according to the IEP because these families are even more vulnerable in times of crisis. This type of support should be provided by class teachers, teachers, and psychological-pedagogical services in telephone contact with parents or by e-mail.

For special schools, additional instructions and contents have been developed that may be useful in the development of the operational plan while for migrant children who are in reception centers, with the support of the Commissariat for Refugees, provided televisions and computers through which students can watch lectures on RTS 3 and educational platforms.

## Preschool education during the epidemic

The regular work of preschool institutions was also interrupted. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in cooperation with partner institutions, organizations, and professional associations, organized support in mobilizing/activating all available resources in the system of preschool education. The aim was to contribute to the professional connection and empowerment of individuals, institutions, and the system to responsibly and professionally respond to the complex challenges the education system faced.

## Activities at the level of higher education

Higher education institutions organized online classes for their students. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development stated that mid-term tests and final exams could not be held online because the law does not envision it. The vast majority of institutions adhered to this opinion, but some higher education institutions did carry tests.

As part of the preparations for the continuation of the academic school year, higher education institutions will start working from 05/15/2020 year, while adhering to preventive measures.

It is not planned to organize offline lectures, but only to complete all the lectures “online” until May.

Higher education institutions are obliged to organize students’ obligations following the recommendations of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia “Dr. Milan Jovanović Batut.” They need to adhere to the general instruction for the application of preventive measures at universities/faculties, academies of vocational studies and colleges, so that the students are not present in higher education institutions and student dormitories in larger number, to ensure the maintenance of social distance and adherence to all other preventive measures.

If a particular higher education institution (medical, technical, natural-mathematical...) needs to organize practical / laboratory exercises, its dynamics will be defined by the higher education institution itself.

All student dormitories are disinfected and ready to receive students in small numbers and following the recommendations regarding COVID-19.

Exam period, starting from the April exam period, will be held with all protective measures in place. Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development provided means for protection for higher education institutions and student dormitories.

Representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development consulted with KONUS, KASSS, SKONUS, SKASSS about all recommendations.

# System processes

## Enrollment and entrance exams

The enrollment of children in the first grade of primary school, which traditionally begins on April 1 was postponed this year, due to the current situation and the state of emergency. Since April 1, parents and other legal representatives could get in touch with the preferred school through the new service “Showing interest for enrollment in primary school” on the eGovernment Portal, as well as by phone.

The new e-service was jointly developed by the teams of the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Office for Information Technology and Electronic Administration.

In this way, schools recorded the interest of parents to enroll their child in a particular school in order to know how many students they could expect. All parents who have used this electronic service will be notified about the date of enrollment in primary school as soon as it gets defined.

After defining the date of enrollment in primary school, an appointment service will be available on the eGovernment Portal for enrollment and testing, which will enable parents to complete all enrollment procedures without the need to bring any documents, as well as to perform testing with a psychologist/pedagogue. Schools will ex officio obtain data from the registry book in the improved electronic e-Registration, from the records of residence and from the health information system on the performed medical examination.

In order to simplify the enrollment of children in the first grade, on the e-Government portal, from May 28, the e-scheduling service for enrollment and testing of future first grade students is provided, which will enable parents and guardians to complete everything needed for enrollment and testing.

The eSchedule service for registration and testing will be available until July 10, 2020. Via the e-Enrollment application students will be enrolled in the school, as well as the necessary documents will be taken (from the birth register, residence records and from the performed medical examination).

Parents, guardians, and legal representatives do not bring any documents when enrolling a child in school, because data will be obtained electronically ex officio. Exceptionally, if a medical examination has been performed before 16.03.2020. or if the medical examination was performed by a private doctor, the parent submits a medical report to the school.

Enrollment of students in the first grade of primary school is done from 1.06. to 20.07.2020. After enrolling in school, on the same day, the school psychologist or pedagogue will test students.

Last year, thanks to the electronic service eUpis, more than 60 thousand students were enrolled in the first grade. For the first time, parents did not have to obtain more than 120,000 different hardcopy documents, which helped them to save time.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development conducted the registration of students for the entrance exam exams for enrollment in specialized high schools (Mathematical and Philological High School, students with special abilities in informatics and computer science, music, ballet, art and others).

At the same time, candidates for enrollment in specialized departments were surveyed about the conditions how to take this exam at home. If we observe entrance exams which test skills (drawing, painting, playing, singing, playing, sculpting) and consider the possibility of conducting exams that are paper based at home, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- many students have already expressed interest in these specialized classes

- not all students have the equipment necessary for the distance exam. About 10% of the students registered so far are not able to take the exam online.

In order to respect one of the basic principles of education, and that is equal access to education for all students in the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry will conduct these exams when epidemiological risks are minimized. Until then, high schools will have the data on the number of interested students and proposed ways of organizing free online preparatory classes.

We note that some specialized high schools are already organizing this form of preparation for taking entrance exams.

Students applied electronically to take the entrance exam for enrollment in schools for students with special abilities. They used the web application (<https://prijavazaprijemni2020.mpn.gov.rs/>).

## Final exams

As in previous years, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development plans to conduct a final exam at the end of primary school, to provide students with a certificate of completion of primary school and enable the implementation of the legally regulated procedure of enrollment in secondary schools.

A decision was made to conduct an online test that will enable eighth-grade students to self-assess their knowledge, and that would be the first mock test that could be done from home. This test's primary purpose is for students to gain insight into whether they have progressed to achieve expected standards in subjects covered by the final exam. Based on the mock final exam, they will observe whether it is necessary to invest more effort into certain learning areas.

Principals, teachers, and professional associates are expected to motivate students to join this test. They need to keep in mind the technical conditions available for the students. The goal is to obtain timely feedback on their achievement, which should serve as a guideline for further learning and preparation for the final test. The test results were not evaluated because the testing takes place in insufficiently controlled conditions to ensure the results' objectivity.

After the testing is completed, students will get their results. The subject teachers will use established communication channels to determine which areas the students have mastered and what is difficult for them to devote support to them during further work. Based on these exchanges, teachers should plan to provide support to the students as part of the final exam preparations. For now, these preparations are also done online.

The test "Self-assessment of knowledge 2020" is the first online test in the Republic of Serbia that an entire generation will take. For the first time, all of the students of one grade had the opportunity to test their knowledge in entirely new conditions. It is reasonable to expect that this form of support will be part of regular educational practice in the future.

The Ministry of Education Science and Technological Development, the Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education, the Office of IT and e-Government and Comtrade, provided additional support to students, teachers, and schools with standardized tests in the online environment through implementing the online quiz "Self-assessment of knowledge 2020".

Tests for self-assessment of knowledge are designed so that students have the opportunity to test their knowledge two months before taking the exam. They needed to solve three tests that include seven subjects (Serbian, i.e., mother tongue, mathematics, physics, geography, history, chemistry, and biology). In this way, self-regulated learning is enabled, above all, self-assessment of the current knowledge levels and planning the next steps in learning.

Out of 68.504 eighth grade students, 63.215 solved their mother tongue, 62.220 took mathematics, and 62.863 took the combined test. Based on these data, each test was translated by more than 91 percent of students.

Tests for self-assessment of knowledge were created based on educational standards for primary education and education and contain questions from the teaching content from fifth to eighth grade. The results obtained on the tests of self-assessment of knowledge show that at the national level, students, on average, scored the following:

- from Serbian / mother tongue 13.68 points
- 13.56 points in mathematics
- 14.63 points on the combined test

The results of this test cannot be compared with the results of the final exams in the previous period, having in mind the type of tests and their purpose.

Also, it seems that many students solved the tests on their own and used the test knowledge in the best possible way for further learning.

Eighth-grade students can take tests and key from previous final exams that were solved by earlier graduates from 2011 to 2019. Both were also published on the site [www.mojauccionica.gov.rs](http://www.mojauccionica.gov.rs). This is another type of support for preparing the final exam for eighth graders preparing for the graduation exam via distance learning. These learning materials will be available by the end of June; future graduates can access the platform at any time and download the desired tests in Serbian and mathematics, as well as a combined test. In addition to the tests, they will be able to download the key to assess their knowledge.

## Working with teachers and student assessment

It was important for teachers to structure their documentation of student follow-up to continuously record relevant observations about their learning progress.

This refers to data on educational progress concerning learning outcomes, observations on student commitment, and further learning recommendations. Comments on education progress can be recorded by teachers in pedagogy documentation that they have structured themselves (in written and/or electronic form), using a system for tracking student's achievement through other e-learning support systems.

It was necessary for teachers in schools that keep pedagogical records electronically, using eDiary, to record critical observations on each student's learning progress.

A letter was sent to the schools regarding distance learning, containing, among other things, the obligations schools need to fulfill and instructions for monitoring student progress during the period of distance learning.

The Law regulates student assessment on the Education System's Fundamentals and regulations that prescribe two types of assessment: summative and formative. Formative and summative evaluation is part of a single process; in educational practice, the focus has been on summative assessment, usually numerical.

In these circumstances, when distant learning had to be put in place, monitoring and assessing students, asked for a change in existing practice and different ways of assessment, where there was a transition from summative to formative assessment.

Formative assessment requires greater interaction between students and teachers using electronic networks and platforms. Daily communication between teachers and students is crucial because it allows teachers to collect as much information as possible about how students learn and how far they have mastered the material.

There are many forms and tools suitable for formative assessment of student work. This includes essays, poster development, e-mail, virtual group work, Skype or Viber interviews, PowerPoint presentations (PPT), research tasks,

role-playing in a virtual classroom, and student portfolio making individual career development plans, and so on.

Distance learning enabled teachers to forward tests and exercises to students via social networks, e-mail, or platform, and students can return the tasks to teachers for review and assessment in the same way. Besides, teachers use tools to create questionnaires and quizzes with multiple choice and short answer tasks.

On the websites of the Institute for the Advancement of Education and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, it is possible to find tools for interaction, development of quizzes and questionnaires, and tools for cooperation and sharing, which can make teachers work easier when it comes to evaluating learning outcomes.

One way of formative assessment in distance learning is the electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) of students. It is a collection of student works that shows the results students achieved through various teaching activities, such as essays, posters, photographs, videos and audio recordings, and works of art created by a student.

Other tools available on the Internet provide easy e-portfolio creation, facilitated review, and use, such as a tool called Muhara.

The Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education and Upbringing has prepared instructions and checklists for teachers. These can help summarize the formative assessments collected during the period of distance learning.

In addition to summative grades, the electronic diary has fields for entering formative grades. All formative assessments and insights of teachers made during the implementation of distance learning will be used for the summative evaluation at the end of the school year.

The described monitoring and evaluation procedures can be applied to the largest part of the student population. However, a certain number of students have not been able to participate in interactive, electronic communication. In that case, schools were required to provide printed materials or use available school resources (e.g., tablets given to schools/students).

The online content platform is established in collaboration with Microsoft, which made using the platform free of charge, both during the state of emergency and after.

To make it easier for teachers to use this platform, in addition to the instructions available at <https://rasporednastave.gov.rs/alati-uputstva.php>, online trainings have been prepared.

The platform is suitable for preparing digital content, interactive online teaching, content exchange, task setting, and collecting solutions and answers. Microsoft teams enables conversations, real-time content sharing, collaboration, and task assignments in one place. As a virtual platform, it is designed to allow discussion, and its functions allow easy distribution of tasks - no matter where people are. It also helps school administrators and staff to stay connected and ensure a real-time exchange of information.

The platform allows the use of web applications Word, Excel, OneNote, Outlook, Teams, and other applications available in MS Office 365. It is also available for use on Windows, Apple, Android, and Linux (Windows, Apple Android, Linux) and can be used from any web browser (Edge, Firefox, Safari, Chrome...)

## Examples of good practice

### Online resources

Students of primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia can follow the lessons on the internet sites <http://www.rts.rs/page/school/ci.html> and <https://mojaskola.rtsplaneta.rs/>.

In addition to the opportunity to follow classes on the RTS 3 and the RTS Planeta internet platform (rtsplaneta.rs), teaching units for primary and secondary school students are also available on the RTS website



at [www.rts.rs/page/school/sr.html](http://www.rts.rs/page/school/sr.html) (on the front page, category “My school”), as well as on the specialized internet subsite <https://mojaskola.rtsplaneta.rs>.

The Office for IT and eGovernment launched the portal [digitalnasolidarnost.gov.rs](http://digitalnasolidarnost.gov.rs), which contains information on all free platforms, tools for learning and working from home, and free books, courses, movies, music, television, and cultural content during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An invitation is open to all companies and other organizations to make their platforms available to the citizens, the economy, and the state. Such companies can fill in the form located at <https://www.digitalnasolidarnost.gov.rs/budi-solidaran/>.

“Treasury of Games” is created by students of pedagogy in the fourth year of their studies. Teachers of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, also participated and representatives of the Department of Preschool and Primary Education of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. It contains suggestions of games that children can play at home. The treasury is also an incentive for children and their families to spend time quality time together. Besides, educators can use this treasury to suggest games to children and families and create unique ones jointly. In that way, creating a joint “Treasury of games” with children and families as a dynamic collection that develops over time, educators make a unique, shared story of trust, mutual support, and a strong bond between children, families, and educators in difficult the times we go through. Therefore, each Treasury will be a valuable, authentic, and unique story in itself about the lived experience. Play is an essential part of life for a child, the basic way a child gets to know the world, himself and builds relationships with other people. Play can equally help children and adults feel powerful, be active and creative, explore, create, try, change, learn together, and push the possible boundaries. In a joint game, we can better understand and support each other and create valuable shared experiences that are a more valuable lesson than any textbook.

The expert team of the Petnica Research Station intensified online communication with their attendees immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency. Petnica, wanted to make her professional materials available to all others interested in natural, social, technical sciences, art, and design. They prepared content that will help scientific fields of interest to the Research Station participants, are closer to everyone who wants it online. Their online resources are available at the link <http://petnica.rs/petnicki-online-resursi/>

### Psychological support

Psychological counseling support for students, parents, and employees in educational institutions was organized during the emergency state.

Due to the pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development repurposed the SOS reporting line violence in educational institutions and by calling the phone number 0800 200-201 from March 23, 2020. year, students, parents, and employees of educational institutions were able to receive psychological support.

The goal of support is the well-being of the individual, the family, and the entire community. Because psychological counseling support implies mitigating the impact of a crisis event, facilitating the recovery process and preventing or reducing possible consequences on the psychological level, additional efforts have been made to reduce the effects of stress on students, parents and teachers.

Expert councilors were on the phone – psychologists and pedagogists who worked on SOS phone for reporting violence in educational institutions, and other associates of the Ministry.

### Competition for choosing the best examples of distance learning

A competition for selecting the best examples of distance learning called “Magic is in the hands of teachers” is open is until May 31, 2020.

NALED and the Organization for Career Development and Youth Entrepreneurship “Connecting” in co-

operation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Institute for the Advancement of Education, and the Republic Secretariat for Public Policy, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), announced a competition for the selection of the best examples of distance learning called “Magic is in the hands of teachers.”

New circumstances and changes are there to encourage us to be flexible and learn continually. As part of the educational process that functioned in classrooms “moved” into e-space almost overnight, the challenge of adapting to it is significant. Still, it also opens up opportunities for creativity and new ideas.

The demonstrated teaching innovation in changed conditions deserves wide social recognition. This is why teachers and professional associates who played an active part in formulating a different implementing forms of distance learning in state or private primary and secondary schools were invited to participate in the Competition by filling out an online form by May 31, 2020. They were supposed to apply on the page [www.jpd.rs/konkurs](http://www.jpd.rs/konkurs) and enclose a short presentation.

The expert jury will select at least three best examples of distance learning, which will be awarded based on predefined criteria, with the possibility of giving additional recognition. A special audience award will be given based on the online votes from the audience at [www.jpd.rs/online-nastava](http://www.jpd.rs/online-nastava).

The prize for the winner is participation in a study trip to Finland / Estonia and a laptop. In contrast, other awards include a laptop, tablet, smartphone and e-book vouchers from publishers such as Laguna and Delphi. All prominent examples will be included in a single public database of best distance teaching practices.

### Distance learning project

The development of an “E-manual for planning and implementation a distance learning” is underway, which will describe the project, various digital tools, and free online resources. The manual will provide excellent examples of distance learning that teachers designed and implemented during the COVID-19 crisis. Organizations working on the manuals’ preparation are NALED, the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing, the Organization for Career Development and Youth Entrepreneurship “Connecting”, “Teach Me”.

### Research and expert opinions

It is essential to present the personal views of people who deal with education daily so that we can consider the quality of measures taken during the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic,

Are students or parents assessed?<sup>57</sup>

Prof. Dr. Danimir Mandić, Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Belgrade

Published: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development

Recently, there has been a suspicion that electronic forms of testing students’ knowledge are not reliable for assessment in the current situation where distance learning is in place. It is pointed out that parents of students help their children to give answers, so the question is whether students are evaluated or the parents? I want to make a couple of remarks in this regard.

Numerous research in the field of pedagogical evaluation shows that regular oral and written examination, as we usually have in our schools, is an uncertain, unreliable metric material for displaying students’ achievement in the form of a five-point numerical scale descriptive grades. Many researchers point out that giving grades is the most challenging part of modern education in our country and worldwide. Grading teachers is a very unreliable criterion, similar to a ship’s movement in a stormy sea, as Ramiro Bujas vividly expressed it. The criterion is raised and lowered depending on individual subjective evaluation factors. Many factors such as the halo effect, personal equation of the teacher, error of central tendency, contrast,

---

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/da-li-se-ocenjuju-djaci-ili-roditelji/>

etc. (which we cannot discuss here in detail), affect the subjectivity and unreliability of school grades. In some studies, it is emphasized that who examines the student is more important than the actual knowledge student gained. The question objectivity and reliability of the school grade are related to the current situation.

Moving on, a distinction should be made between traditional assessment and evaluation. Two students of the same level of knowledge may have different grades depending on the conditions in which they acquired that knowledge. If a student lives in difficult conditions, for example, in a small apartment, if there is a conflict in family relations, but the student manages to solve exactly three tasks out of 5 tasks, his success is just as significant as the one of another student who solved all five assignments while enjoying right learning conditions (has his room, harmonious family, modern technical means, internet access, library, etc.). We need to consider the scales of factors when evaluating student achievement, the so-called KWISO scales (Knowledge; Working habits; Interests; Subjective possibilities; Objective possibilities). We should evaluate the student's achievement with all these factors in mind. That is why teachers and professors must know their students well, their family circumstances, subjective possibilities, and include such observations in the evaluation. The point is to measure each individual's progress, depending on the subjective and objective circumstances in which the student develops. Of course, there are other elements of evaluation that we will not discuss on this occasion. I believe that the current circumstances, in which the coronavirus has created challenging working conditions and learning atmosphere, should be considered when evaluating their achievements. These are objective circumstances, and they inevitably affect the evaluation and grading process. A right solution has been found for organization distance learning. This unexpected situation probably "forced" us to find a creative solution. We strongly believe this is just the beginning of showing more attention to digital teaching models that can contribute to the more efficient organization of the school's teaching process.

Electronic testing is highly questionable because such tests allegedly value parents' knowledge, not the students. Is that so? If such forms would influence parents to help their children, it would positively impact a pedagogical point of view. It would be beneficial if parents support children and helped them in the learning process throughout the school year, but that is a rarity in real life. However, it is difficult for parents, even those who have higher education (approximately 10% of all parents), to provide some significant help to their children from certain subjects even in younger grades, let alone second-cycle or high school students. I believe that such a remark is not realistic in these circumstances and that parents' participation in the work of students of the total population is negligible. Also, students receive several grades in the last quarter, and which they cannot statistically significantly change students' success in certain subjects.

Copying from books and other sources is possible in all conditions, even during direct written or oral tests in regular teaching. However, if we observe the necessary time to solve individual tasks objectively, we can better understand if cheating on an exam. If the student does not know the answer and must ask lookup for an answer, he will "spend" time searching and will not have time to solve the test in the estimated time. If he knows where the answer is in the textbook, on which page he finds it quickly, that's it already useful knowledge and should be positively valorized. It should also be borne in mind that many teachers do not give students tests for examining memory and reproductive knowledge (which are quickly forgotten anyway) but offer tasks to solve practical and everyday problems. When resolving such requests, it is desirable to use books, encyclopedias, and other printed sources available to students.

It should be noted that the assessment function is not just about measuring students' knowledge. Evaluation has a far broader role. Evaluation is in the function of encouraging the work of students and teachers. Evaluation should follow each step of whose activities. The student must always know what he knows and what he does not know, to correct mistakes and reinforce his knowledge. If the student answered on 7 out of 10 questions, he was informed what he should do, that is to learn content that covers the answers to the three remaining questions he did not know. Evaluation is a strong motivational factor. Through evaluation and self-evaluation, the teacher should lead the student to success. Feedback is a measure of the systemic foundation of the teaching process. The system connects parts into a harmonious, unique organizational unit that is directed towards a single goal. One should strive to have systematic approach both to teaching and learning. On the opposite side of the system, there is entropy. Entropy is a measure of disorganization. Students show different attitude, readiness, and motivation if they expect evaluation and feedback at the

end of the learning process. That is why it is important that and, in this period, there are grades as a kind of feedback on students and teachers' work. Feedback allows teachers to plan the next steps in working with students.

Five minutes should tests (micro-tests of 5 questions) applied in the sixties, seventies, and eighties of the last century are a useful tool. These end-of-class tests were put into practice in all schools. Feedback was given to the teachers after every class. At the end of each unit, thematic examinations were conducted. The rulebook does not need to stipulate that a student must be graded four times in the semester. When using micro tests, this happened once a month. Each teacher developed and applied micro-tests. In the 1990s, after abolishing regional institutes for the improvement of education, this good practice of continuous and timely monitoring and evaluating student work has disappeared from our schools.

Today we have robust information technology - artificial intelligence that can revive the pedagogical evaluation system in our schools. It can positively contribute to each student through evaluation and self-evaluation, to be supported and led to success, progress, and be successful according to their needs. After this situation, better information technology-based solutions will be applied in the organization and evaluation of a more effective teaching process. The community of teachers' faculties is already involved in numerous projects for improving the quality of teaching in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, so I hope that as scientific institutions, we will make a significant contribution to this area.

Based on the available analysis of the work done so far, that the Ministry of Education and the entire Government have made great efforts, and thus managed to motivate students to take part in distance learning, which is very well received by most students, teachers, and parents. Teachers evaluate the knowledge in different ways and forms, and through interaction with the students. We expect that teachers will show the best results because they have an insight into students' overall work, as well as their habits, and the possibility of making a mistake is the smallest. I think that every knowledge test has a motivating effect on the students. If they were to expel tests completely, there is a justified fear that many students would drop out of distance learning and active learning until the end of the school year. If we are already making small mistakes, it is better to make them for the students' benefit, not to their detriment. Teachers will check student's knowledge at the beginning of the next school year through initial tests and possibly fill in the gaps if they have arisen in this period. Finally, I believe that university professors should propose solutions, analyze potential problems, and actively contribute to raising the quality of education in regular and unexpected circumstances in which we find ourselves today. It is much easier to criticize the existing solutions without proposing solutions or having a more detailed analysis of all aspects and consequences of evaluating students' work. In the triad, a student, a teacher, and a professor of the university educates teachers, the latter is the most responsible, as a distinguished professor of our faculty once pointed out. I want to emphasize the cooperation between the University of Belgrade faculties, who analyze multiple distance learning platforms and look for the best solutions. I suggest to all experts in education areas to form a working group together with the Ministry of Education and contribute to a better quality of education in Serbia through proposals and analyzes. I invite all interested colleagues to get involved and send proposals to the e-mail [danimir.mandic@uf.bg.ac.rs](mailto:danimir.mandic@uf.bg.ac.rs) and [du-san.kicovic@mpn.gov.rs](mailto:du-san.kicovic@mpn.gov.rs), after which The Ministry of Education will try to approach the problem of education in a constructive approach which we are currently facing.

### Encourage learning through assessment<sup>58</sup>

Milan Stančić, assistant professor at the Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade

Published: Danas

... One of the ways to prevent illicit behavior is to come up with tasks that do not require students to reproduce knowledge, or tasks that cannot be solved solely based on data available in the literature and on the Internet, but who seek to take a stand on what is being learned and argue...

---

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/ocenjivanjem-podsticati-ucenje/>

This way of learning is new and exciting for students.<sup>59</sup>

Nevena Budjevac, assistant professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Belgrade

Published: Talas

...I don't think teachers are prepared enough because most of them haven't had the opportunity to do anything like this before, but they still manage to do a great job. There is room for improvement in this situation, which really "threw them into the fire." It is a space for learning and progress, both for teachers and students. In particular, I think that teachers will be more and more skilled in using distance learning technologies.

Also, where I see room for improvement is the mutual coordination of teachers, because of the many comments I hear that children are quite burdened with a large number of tasks and that they spend the whole day doing all those tasks, which seems excessive. After all, no matter how great it is to teach in these conditions, the goal is to help children maintain continuity in their routines during this period obligations, to make it easier for them to get through this challenging period by engaging them and allowing them to be in contact with their teachers. By the way, it's good to learn something too, but it's not the most important, though primary the role of the school is usually educational, and its focus is on the acquisition of knowledge. In this context, however, I think that the addition of experience is not primary. And in this regard, I believe that this situation, which enables us all to look at our lives through a magnifying glass, our choices, the circumstances in which we live, because it intensifies and sharpens everything. It can enable educators to see some aspects of their work that they might ignore otherwise. That is another possible way to make progress...

What we see on the screen is not education for the 21st century<sup>60</sup>

Aleksandar Baucal, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade

Published: Podcast "The Day After"<sup>61</sup>

... For example, some of those classes were very interesting. If it's a history or biology class, it would be good if the educational system had one base of such recorded thematic units. An adequate biology teacher nicely explains the cell as one thematic unit. That one fifteen-minute recording could be a resource for all teachers who will teach that unit. They could show the film to their students, or the children could even watch it as part of homework so that when they come to school, they can interact with the teacher on that particular topic. TV lectures miss interaction and communication.

The teacher can talk to the children, ask them what they understood, what was difficult, and give them additional examples and explanations. It can be a good thing, a resource that we would take from this situation to the future.

Another thing is the use of digital services. Now, for example, a large number of teachers have discovered that they can send homework through the Google classroom, and that's one way for us to incorporate digital education into a large number of subjects. However, what we have noticed is that our school focuses on lecturing. What we see on our TV screens is not education for the 21st century. We see that children in school mostly absorb abstract and complex scientific knowledge and that children often cannot follow it, nor understand why it is important for them to learn it.

I think that now a large number of parents had the opportunity to see what the teaching in our schools is like and that it is not relevant for their children's lives in a way. Although this angle is not important to this situation, I think it can be useful. Now all of us understood what children learn in school - and, more

<sup>59</sup> <https://talas.rs/2020/04/06/intervju-sa-nevenom-budjevac/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://novaekonomija.rs/vesti-iz-zemlje/ono-%C5%A1to-vidimo-na-ekranu-nije-obrazovanje-za-21-vek>

<sup>61</sup> <https://anchor.fm/tackakljucanja/episodes/Dan-posle-011---Aleksandar-Baucal-o-deci-u-vanrednom-stanju-ecmgj9>

importantly, how they know in school - which might be an excellent basis to start a slightly wider discussion about it ...

### Some children with learning difficulties were left without classes during the corona<sup>62</sup>

Teodora Curcic, Dina Djordjevic

Published: CINS

... During the state of emergency, some schools did not organize classes for children with learning difficulties even though they had to, stated parents who contacted CINS. Where there was so-called individual teaching put in place, many problems appeared concerning the educational plan (IEP) - some teachers did not send assignments, children did not receive adequate materials, nor did they have technical conditions to attend classes, and parents also complain that professionals did not continue to work with the children, at least online.

### Being a child during a COVID-19 pandemic: Analysis of research into the impact of emergency measures on children during COVID-19 pandemic in Serbia<sup>63</sup>

Sasa Stefanovic and Tijana Karic

Published: Network of organizations for children of Serbia

Restrictive measures adopted in a state of emergency significantly affect children: kindergartens and schools ceased to operate; movement is restricted; the opportunity to meet their peers is also limited and not recommended; classes are moved to the online sphere, through various applications, and through the channels of the Radio and Television of Serbia. Children are exposed to a prolonged fear of getting infected from coronavirus.

- Children who have a more supportive family environment do better to adapt to crisis and the state of emergency.
- Most children have learned about coronavirus through television or the Internet. Only one-fifth of the children learned about COVID19 from parents. However, in most cases, their parents are the primary sources of information about pandemics.
- Children report that they miss social activities the most (friends, socializing, going out) and freedom of movement. A significant percentage stated that they miss school, but they lack these institutions' social aspects, not educational ones, judging by some answers.
- Regarding restrictive measures and state of emergency, and fear of COVID-19, children worry about uncertainty (how long it will last the state of emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic, how it will unfold, how to receive grades, how to enroll in high school). In the first place, they care about the health of their loved ones, family members, but also other people, worrying one of them might die.
- A certain percentage of children asked existential questions (whether the family will have enough money, whether they will have enough food), and are afraid of the possibility of new restrictions of freedom and new restrictions on movement.
- Of particular concern is that children appear to recognize the potential stigmatization of people infected with COVID-19. This is reflected in the answers of children who are afraid not to transmit the virus to close people because they will be "guilty" if one of them gets sick.
- Children usually share their worries with their parents, friends, other family members, and teachers.
- Most of the children (83.3%) stated that they have no problems with distance learning.

Almost half of the children own their personal computers (48.3%), 37% share a computer with housemates, and 14.7% of children do not have access to a computer at all.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.cins.rs/pojedina-deca-sa-poteskocama-u-ucenju-ostala-bez-nastave-tokom-korone/>

<sup>63</sup> [http://zadecu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Analiza\\_biti\\_dete\\_cov\\_19.pdf](http://zadecu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Analiza_biti_dete_cov_19.pdf)

- Children are largely satisfied with teachers' communication, but somewhat less so satisfied with how much parents/guardians can explain that part of material which children cannot master by themselves.
- Children who are less satisfied with communication with teachers have significantly more problems in communication.
- Regarding distance learning, children reported having a problem with the Internet (internet access, bad connection); If something is unclear from the material, they have nobody to call to; Slides change quickly on TV, and they can't always read what is written on them; if teachers use different applications, they are left without enough memory space on their smartphones.

## Recommendations

1. Consider involving psychologists and other professionals of Social Sciences in the Crisis Team in charge of managing the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts of these profiles can help prepare public information, where there are children to the great extent.
2. We must not forget that children are also informed about the spread of COVID-19 disease and the measures that are being taken to prevent it. They need to get clear and understandable information. Guides for parents on how to talk to children about pandemic need to be available.
3. Statements and notifications on planned measures and development of the COVID-19 disease pandemic must be adapted to children and these statements must not cause unnecessary anxiety in children.
4. COVID-19 patients must not be stigmatized.
5. Prepare a joint health and social protocol and instructions for the protection of children in case one or both parents are referred to hospital due to COVID-19. In the preparation of that protocol and instruction, the cooperation of health and social protection experts is necessary.
6. Fully and timely inform parents and children about the protocol that will be applied with full participation of children in case one or both parents are referred to hospital treatment due to COVID-19 disease.
7. The competent authorities should identify families with single-parent who are at risk and to be prepared to provide appropriate support if a parent becomes infected with COVID-19, and the child is temporarily left without care.
8. Prepare timely and more complete information for children to reduce uncertainty about how teaching, assessment, entrance exams.
9. The competent ministry and teachers should undertake all necessary measures and activities to teach children who do not have access to a computer and the Internet.
10. Provide food packages and disinfectants for families with children in difficult socio-economic situation.
11. During the state of emergency, ensure that no family is left without electricity, water, telephone and access to other key services.
12. Provide free internet access to school-age children from families in a difficult socio-economic situation.

## Distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis: perspectives of different actors<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Smiljana Jošić, Dr. Nada Ševa, Dr. Ivana Đerić, Institute for Pedagogical Research, Belgrade

Published: Not yet published.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.ipisr.org.rs/>

Goal of the research: Description and perception of the dynamics of the distance learning process from the perspective of different actors of the educational system. Target groups: high school students, teachers, parents, professional associates.

Only basic comments obtained during the research are stated here in order to indicate the structure of the research and the expected results. Complete study will give all the results.

Worries, challenges students faced during the first week of the pandemic ....

- The problem of grading and transcribing
- Difficulty concentrating and organizing learning
- The issue of entrance exam
- Organizing distance learning in families with more children
- Missing (friends, schools in general ...)

The biggest challenges for teachers:

- The dilemma of how to assess whether students are independent in learning (parents, peers)
- Impossibility of reliable assessment (not reliable, not objective and valid, how to describe the assessment)
- Formative monitoring is an overload for the teacher (a large number of students for monitoring, time consuming for teachers, a large amount of material is prepared and sent, unprepared)
- There is no direct communication with students, which makes it difficult to follow
- Lack of IT resources and skills (lack of devices, internet, no developed skills)
- Creating clear criteria for formative monitoring
- Creating materials, tasks, and questions so that the teacher can formatively monitor students

Lessons at the system level:

- Continuous construction of infrastructure, development of networks and learning platforms
- Continuous enrichment of learning resources
- Redefining of the curriculum (life situations in which students find themselves should be the main content of distance learning, connecting teaching units with life-practical situations)
- Further development and practice of professional learning within practitioner learning communities
- Connecting practitioners and researchers around topics of common interest

Lessons on the level of schools:

- Networking and cooperation of schools for distance learning
- More intensive communication between the school and teachers, with students and their families
- Greater involvement of schools in supporting the preservation of mental health and well-being of teachers and students
- Encouraging outstanding teachers to create distance learning instructions for other colleagues

Lessons at the level of the learning process:

- Preserving the well-being of students through affirmative online activities that encourage connectivity in an online context is a top priority.
- Predictable and structured learning time with activities and tasks that require communication and interaction.
- Nurturing an individualized approach to students



- Encouraging students to do self-evaluation
- Encouraging students to self-improve on the classes
- Creating interactive tasks and activities
- Adjustment in terms of evaluation and assessment
- Much more details will be available when the study is published

### Final comments

Online or distance learning was never part of learning in primary and secondary schools. However, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, schools, teachers, students, and parents adapted very quickly to the existing situation and started this live experiment. Despite some omissions in teaching on television and online, the education system has responded adequately to new circumstances.

As it was a live experiment, without a different model for comparison, and as the circumstances themselves changed rapidly, it is very important to approach a detailed analysis of all aspects of the system after the emergency. In that way, future distance or online teaching models can be prepared for extraordinary circumstances and ordinary ones. This experience can help improve the normal educational process.

It is very important to look at all the potential shortcomings in the preparation and implementation of teaching via television and organize it over the Internet. It is important to establish processes for reviewing such content. It is also essential to think about giving an assignment to a student when he is no longer in the classroom but more in a kind of mentoring relationship with each of the teachers. Parents' role is also changing, so it is important to find the right level of their engagement.

The assessment process is changing drastically. That is why it is important to raise teachers' and professors' capacities to create good testing knowledge and apply formative assessment. It is essential to build high ethical standards regarding the rewriting of tasks and the use of other people's copyrights. In that way, the process of knowledge evaluation and formative assessment of students will be more reliable.

Distance learning provides an opportunity to use multimedia content, individual work, and research outside the required literature. It is important to provide teachers with access to resources for such work.

Education via the Internet or television requires resources, such as computers, tablets or telephones, and television sets, to be part of the educational process. That is why it is very important to provide students and families who do not have access to such equipment. Education must be accessible to all, regardless of their social status.

The research of the Institute for Pedagogical Research is commendable. Their experts immediately recognized the need for conducting continuous research during the state of emergency among students, teachers, and parents. The results of their study will be invaluable for planning any remote ways of teaching in the future. As the results of this research have not yet been published, we gave in this Report only the research's indications. More such professional research can improve the teaching process in the future. The successful testing of the online knowledge testing system in the form of a mock final exam is also commendable for eighth-grade students, as over 91% of students took part. Other institutions should be encouraged to make all their online resources available to the general public in the way Petnica Station Researchers did.

All observed shortcomings must be identified by the Ministry and other competent institutions and eliminated through procedures and processes in the future. This experience is too valuable to ignore.

Perhaps we can safely say that the education system came from a state of emergency with many new and positive experiences that can be used for improvement. On the one hand, the system (just as some other ones) was overburdened during the state of emergency, and on the other hand, forced to leave his comfort zone. Suddenly, everything that seemed like a distant future became the present. Online classrooms, joint work via email and various communication groups, online lectures, television lessons, and interactive multi-

media content... Everything has become a reality. The system operated successfully in extraordinary circumstances, but in a very modern environment. It is important to look at all aspects and experiences and apply some of them in regular conditions.

The new norm for education in Serbia must be online teaching, use of resources on the Internet, cooperation between students and teachers via email or phone, research work, essay writing, group work ...



This project is funded by  
the European Union



**#EY  
3A TEBE**

This publication is funded by the European Union and co-financed by the Open Society Foundation Serbia. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the National Convention on the European Union and they can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union and the Open Society Foundation Serbia.



NKEUSrbija



@NKEUSrbija



NKEU Srbija

**National Convention on the European Union, Rajičeva 1, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia**  
**Tel. +381 11 4285 645, [office@eukonvent.org](mailto:office@eukonvent.org)**