Results of a regional survey

The impact of COVID-19 on civil society organisations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

October 2020

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Background and objectives

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Since then, the governments of countries all over the world have responded differently to contain the spread of the virus. This report will focus on several countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and assess how COVID-19 has impacted their traditional ways of working. The restrictions that governments implemented, such as curfews in Bishkek, the need for permission to do things such as shopping for groceries in Moscow and limited movement in Tajikistan have made it difficult for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to go about their work.

Naturally, this has a substantial effect on the groups they work with, key populations and vulnerable groups, who due to travel restrictions faced problems getting their medication, lost their job or were at greater risk of contracting the virus. In early June 2020, *AFEW International* published a report on the impact of policy measures during the COVID-19 pandemic on key and vulnerable populations with HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis in EECA. Important findings from this report show that the restrictions have impacted normal ways of communication and increased feelings of isolation. This has a severe impact on the prevalence of domestic violence and the access to health services, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. The pandemic has also highlighted existing problems that countries were facing in their healthcare systems. In the June report, *AFEW International* identified good practice examples from CSOs, governmental systems and donors. Many have shown flexibility in providing assistance to groups in need, switched to online ways of working and proven their ability to answer emergency needs.[1]

At this point, COVID-19 is still holding the world in its grip without knowing when or if things will go back to normal again. This requires strategic and long-term planning for organisations to tackle the changes still to come. It is with this in mind that *AFEW International* conducted a survey among CSOs in EECA on how the pandemic and restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 have impacted CSOs and the way they are working. How have they been coping with the restrictions, how has their cooperation with the government been affected and which needs do they have and can they foresee at this point.

AFEW International does not stand alone; all over the world, CSOs are conducting research and finding ways of working in this new environment. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of key and vulnerable groups has been significant. A rapid assessment by the European AIDS Treatment Group, in the framework of the COVID-19 community response project, also states that "HIV communities, including key and vulnerable populations, have been significantly affected". CSOs are forced to find alternative ways to support their clients.

This report draws on several sources:

Inspiration for the survey and report comes from "Impact on COVID-19 on African Civil Society Organization" from June 2020 written by @AfricanNGOs and Epic-Africa. This report assesses the impact of the pandemic on funding and operations of CSOs, explains how they are coping, and what we can learn from it.

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[1] "The impact of policy measures during the COVID-19 pandemic on key and vulnerable populations for HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia" (5 June 2020) by AFEW International.

The background and motivation draw on *AFEW International's* "Interruption and innovation" report on the impact of policy measures during the COVID-19 pandemic on key and vulnerable populations with HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

AFEW International

AFEW International, as part of AFEW Partnership (AFEW), works to make health care more accessible to people who are at greater risk of HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis. With more than 20 years of experience, AFEW has a unique position as an Eastern European and Central Asian regional partnership in public health. AFEW has built up an extensive network of organisations mostly working to improve health and wellbeing in the EECA region. As the survey was distributed among the constituencies and partners of *AFEW International*, it provides insights into the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs working in the public health area.

Methodology

The survey was conducted on Google Forms through a structured questionnaire, consisting of 26 questions. The survey was open for 2 weeks from 3rd till 18th of August 2020 and disseminated among *AFEW International's* contacts, via AFEW International's website, social media, partners' social media, EECA Platform, ITPC and harm reduction newsletters, UNAIDS EECA Hub and Nuffic alumni. We have received 103 responses from several organisations and groups from the EECA region. The survey was provided in English and Russian.

Key findings

The survey has revealed the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions related to the pandemic on CSOs, in terms of the health of their staff members, the way of working and sustainability. Almost half of the respondents confessed that staff of their organisations tested positive for COVID-19, which shows that it had a very personal impact on them. The majority of the respondents experienced a lot of changes in their work, including the introduction of new ways of working, a reduction in face to face meetings, and the need to work from home, which also corresponds with other reports about the impact of Covid-19.

More than 50% of the respondents identify the shrinking space for civil society as a threat. In Tajikistan for example, civil society is increasingly under pressure by new governmental laws. In July 2020, President Rahmon adopted a new law which punishes journalists, bloggers and civil activists who distribute "inaccurate" and "untruthful" information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect of the adopted law became immediately visible: there are far fewer discussions about the pandemic in the media and social media and the information flow has been greatly reduced. Some Tajikistani media outlets even stopped working. This seriously jeopardizes freedom of speech in Tajikistan in the long-term. In Ukraine, several vulnerable groups such as homeless people and sex workers have reportedly not had their health needs met as a result of discrimination or a lack of adequate resource allocation, according to a report from the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR). This shows that emergency governmental laws and lockdown measures need to be closely monitored in order to make sure that human rights are not violated in the long-term.

Interestingly, the survey has shed light on the need to promote greater cooperation between governments and CSOs. 62% of respondents believe that CSOs can play a key role in the national response to COVID-19. Governments should include civil society into response strategies more

actively, and rely on the strengths of community organizations in delivering support to vulnerable populations.

Additionally, more than half of the respondents feel that the existence of their organisation is threatened by the pandemic. More than half see the restriction in travel as a major threat, as it becomes more difficult to reach their clients, and half of respondents had too little capacity to meet increased demand for services due to the growth of their target audience. The majority of the respondents confessed the need to learn basic skills to work remotely in order to work with their clients and manage their organisation. Many of the organizations have switched to online working and need additional skills and support. In addition to skills to manage their teams and beneficiaries in an online format, organisations also need to learn about online activism and online advocacy with state institutions, how to do online fundraising, and raise privacy and security awareness.
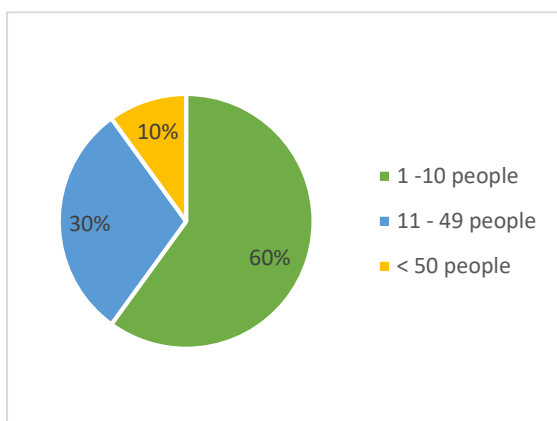
A lot of uncertainty was highlighted regarding financial sustainability. 84% of respondents mentioned loss of funding due to the consequences of the pandemic as the main threat for the future. It is still difficult to conclude whether the pandemic threatens the continuity of organisations. CSOs expressed the need for support in their fundraising efforts, and are waiting for donors and governments to reveal their funding policies and plans to work with CSOs in the near future.

There are two positive notes. Despite the insecurities caused by the pandemic, CSOs do feel that they will emerge stronger and more agile out of the COVID-19 pandemic; 66% of respondents see positive aspects in remote working. Many admit that their organizations have learned how to be strong as a team and flexible. Their experience in working with key populations has proved useful for dealing with a situation in which everyone is at risk. The survey revealed that CSOs have proved to be resilient and flexible in their way of working during the pandemic, with the majority of them (88%) adding new activities in response to COVID-19, and more than a third adding new target groups into their activities.

Results of the Survey

The Respondents

The majority of the respondents work for a small organisation (1-10 people). Some 30% work for medium-sized organisations of between 11- and 49 people. Only a small percentage (10%) work for organisations with more than 50 staff.
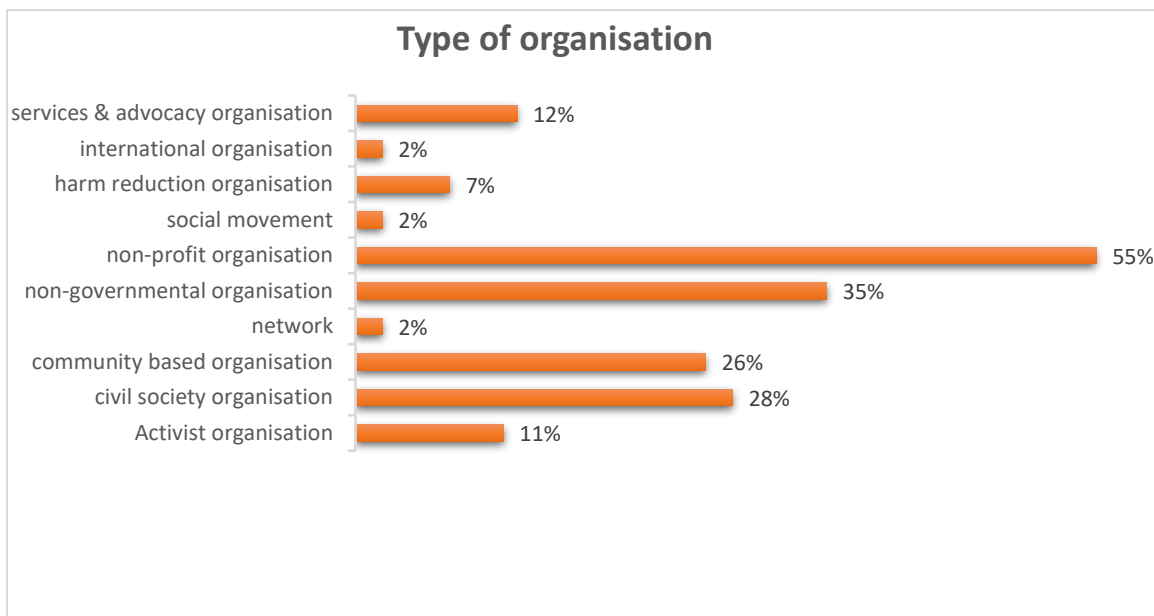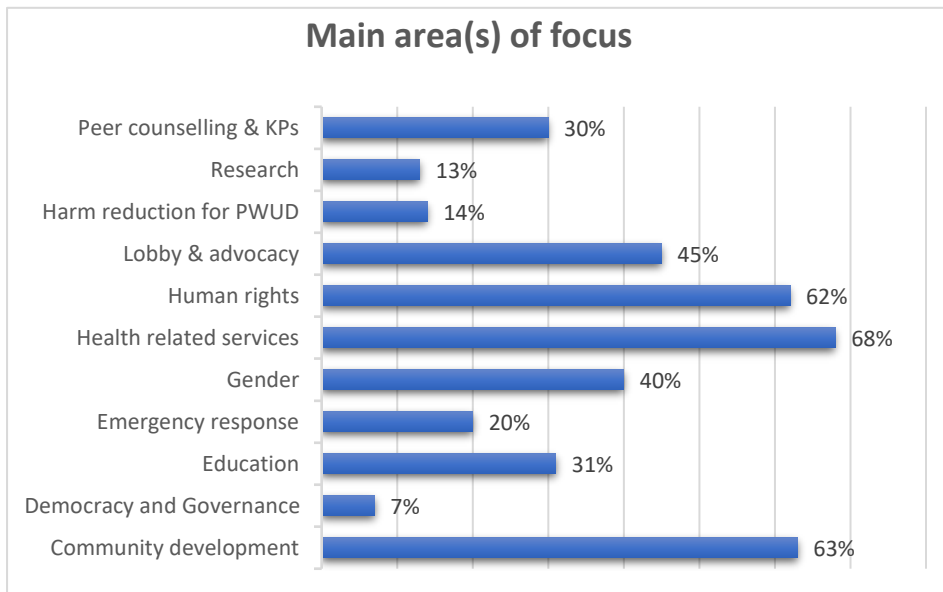

Geography

The majority of these respondents work in the Russian Federation (21.4%), followed by respondents from Kyrgyzstan (20.4%), Ukraine (17.5%), Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (15.5%), Uzbekistan (13.6%), Georgia (8%), Belarus (4%), Armenia (3%), Azerbaijan (2%) and Turkmenistan (1%) and Moldova (1%).

Type of organisation, area (s) of work and beneficiaries

In the chart below the type of organisations is represented. It´s mportant to note that in the EECA region, the terms 'civil society organisation', 'non-profit organisation' (NPO) and 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO) are used interchangeably, and community-based organisations are either NPO or NGO or both. When looking at the data, we see that the majority of the organisations identify as either three of these. The major areas of work are in health-related services, community development and human rights.

Main area(s) of focus

Area	Percentage
Peer counselling & KPs	30%
Research	13%
Harm reduction for PWUD	14%
Lobby & advocacy	45%
Human rights	62%
Health related services	68%
Gender	40%
Emergency response	20%
Education	31%
Democracy and Governance	7%
Community development	63%

Type of organisation

Type	Percentage
services & advocacy organisation	12%
international organisation	2%
harm reduction organisation	7%
social movement	2%
non-profit organisation	55%
non-governmental organisation	35%
network	2%
community based organisation	26%
civil society organisation	28%
Activist organisation	11%

Beneficiaries

The majority of the respondents work with Key Populations, of which people living with HIV (PLHIV), people who use drugs (PWUD) and Sex workers constitute the biggest groups of KPs. The majority of the organisations also work with youth and women.

Category	Percentage
All people	7%
Labor migrants	7%
Vulnerable groups, inc elderly	16%
Women	49%
Key Populations	80%
Youth	46%
Children	21%

Breakdown of KPs by type

Category	Percentage
People living with tuberculosis	1%
Sex workers	44%
Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking	5%
Young people and their surroundings	31%
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI)…	28%
MSM (Men who have Sex with Men)	33%
People Who Use Drugs (PWUD)	63%
People Living with HIV (PLHIV)	68%
Migrants and their families	27%

Budget and scale of work

The majority of the organisations work at a regional (51%), national (47%), and community level (44%). Interestingly, most of the respondents represent small and medium size organizations with relatively small annual budgets (56% under 100 000 USD).

CURRENT ANNUAL BUDGET

- 1 000 000 - 2 000 000 USD; 3%
- > 2 000 000 USD; 2%
- 500 000 - 1 000 000 USD; 9%
- 300 000 - 400 000 USD; 10%
- 200 000 - 300 000 USD; 7%
- 100 000 - 200 000 USD; 14%
- < 100 000 USD; 56%

Scope of work

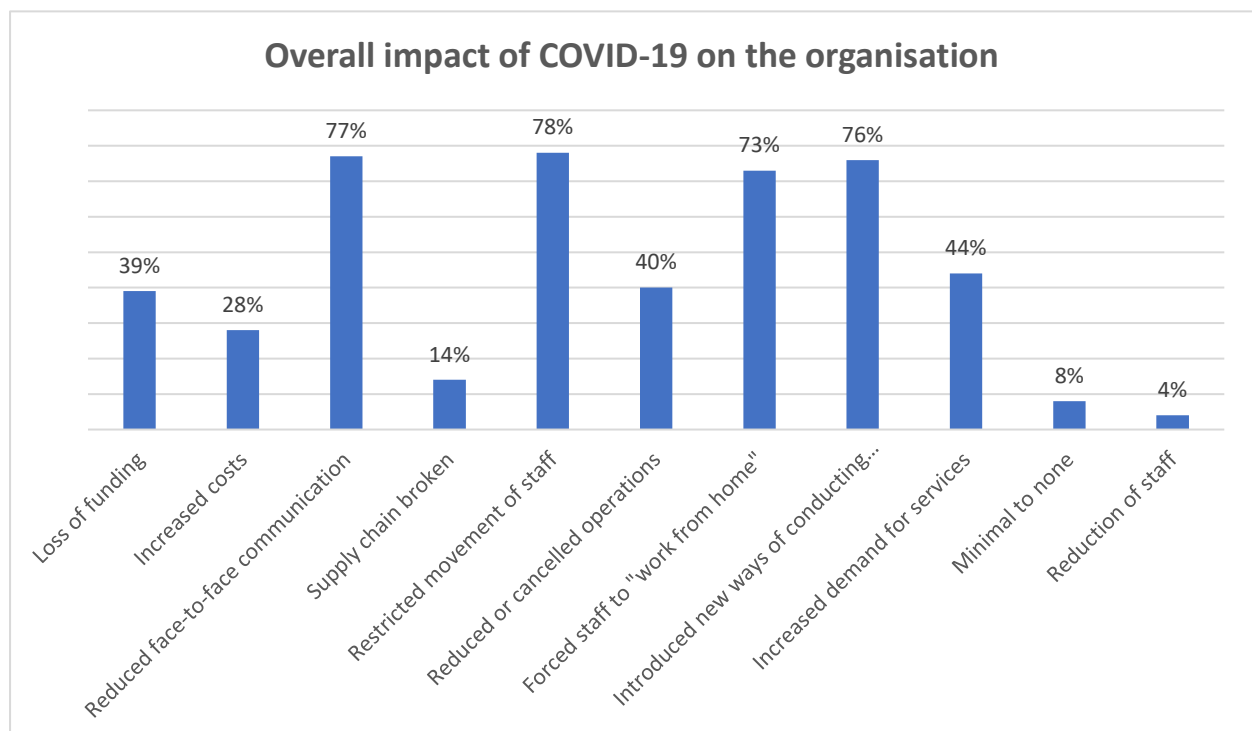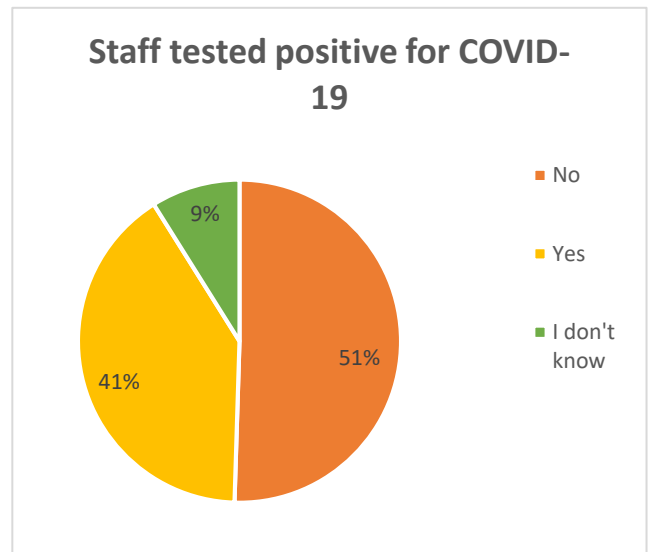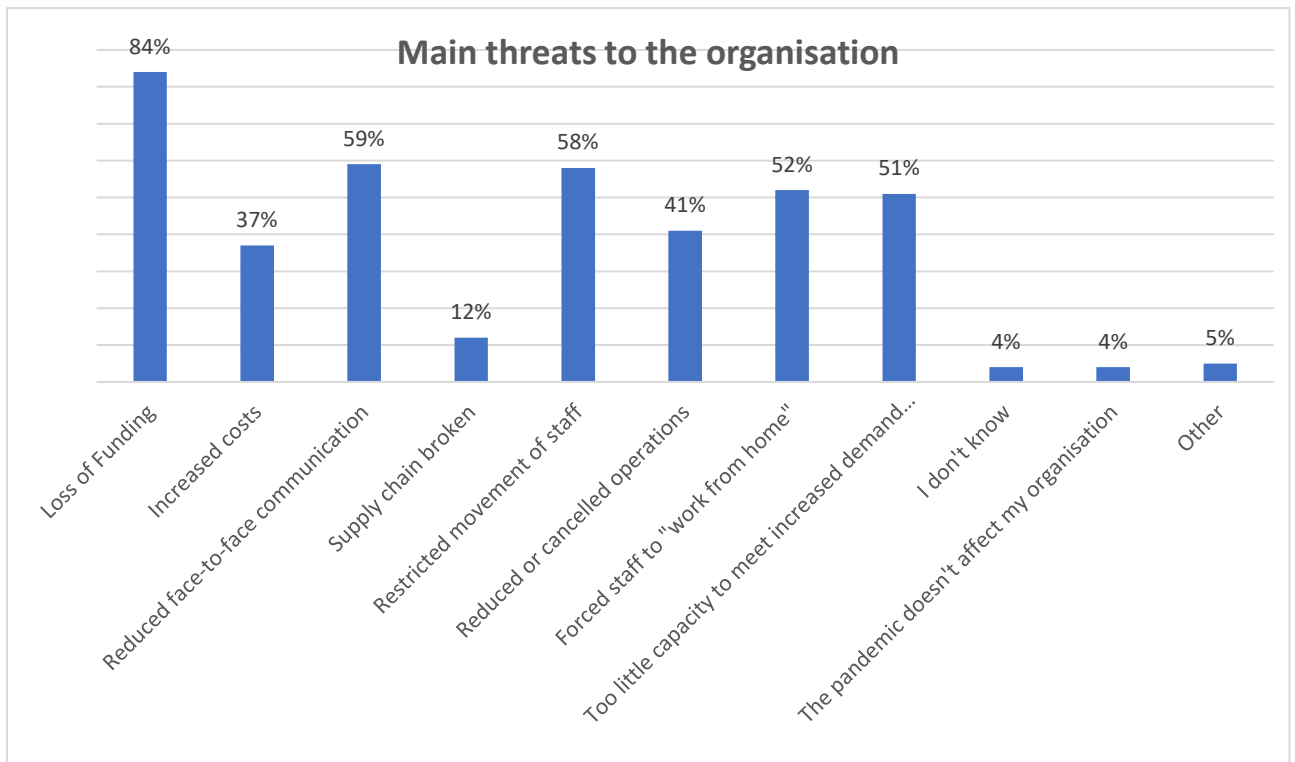| Community	Municipal	Provincial	Regional	National	International
44%	27%	16%	51%	46%	13%

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organizational level

The impact of COVID-19 on the respondents themselves has been significant. 41% of the colleagues of the respondents' organisations tested positive for COVID-19. This means that for almost half of the respondents, the pandemic was and is very close to home.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the work and activities of the respondents. 76% of the respondents had to introduce new ways of working as a result of the pandemic, 77% experienced a reduction in face to face meetings, restricted movement of staff (78%) and 74% of respondents were forced to work from home. For some organisations the pandemic has put pressure on the work itself as community-based organisations and outreach workers have faced significant barriers to reaching their target groups.

Staff tested positive for COVID-19

- No
- Yes
- I don't know

51% No
41% Yes
9% I don't know

Even though a loss of funding and increased costs is not identified as main impact at this point, an absolute majority of the respondents (84%) identify a loss of funding as the main threat for the future or fear that there will not be sufficient funding available in the future. See charts below for the breakdown of the main threats.

Overall impact of COVID-19 on the organisation

Category	Value
Loss of funding	39%
Increased costs	28%
Reduced face-to-face communication	77%
Supply chain broken	14%
Restricted movement of staff	78%
Reduced or cancelled operations	40%
Forced staff to "work from home"	73%
Introduced new ways of conducting…	76%
Increased demand for services	44%
Minimal to none	8%
Reduction of staff	4%

Main threats to the organisation

Category	Value
Loss of Funding	84%
Increased costs	37%
Reduced face-to-face communication	59%
Supply chain broken	12%
Restricted movement of staff	58%
Reduced or cancelled operations	41%
Forced staff to "work from home"	52%
Too little capacity to meet increased demand...	51%
I don't know	4%
The pandemic doesn't affect my organisation	4%
Other	5%

Continuation of the organisation

The majority, more than 50% of the respondents, fear to some extent for the existence of their organisation. Among the threats to the organizations as a result of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, respondents named loss of funding, reduced face-to-face communication and restricted movement of staff as major problems. Also, working from home and increased demand for the services which the organization did not have enough capacity to meet were mentioned as challenges. CSOs fear for loss of funding, and uncertainty about future funding could be linked to the changing dynamics with funders and CSOs in the region. It is too early to already draw conclusions on how that will develop.
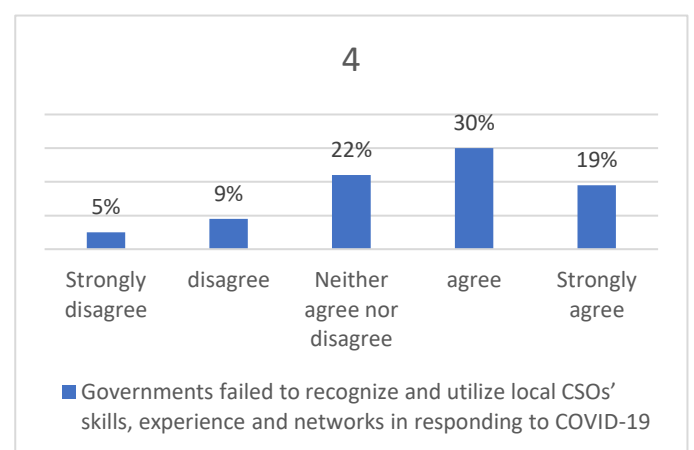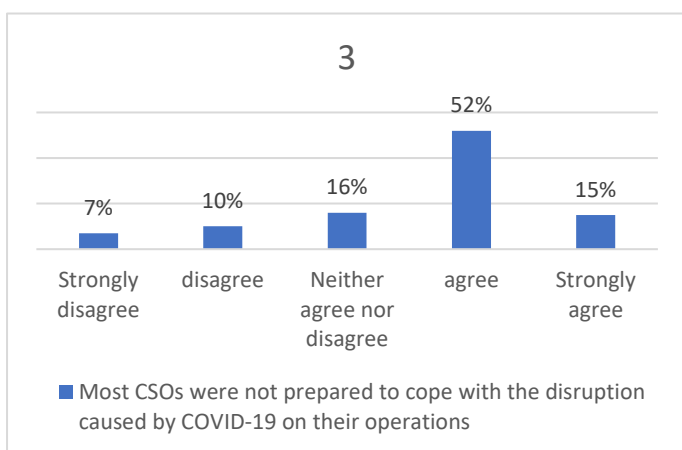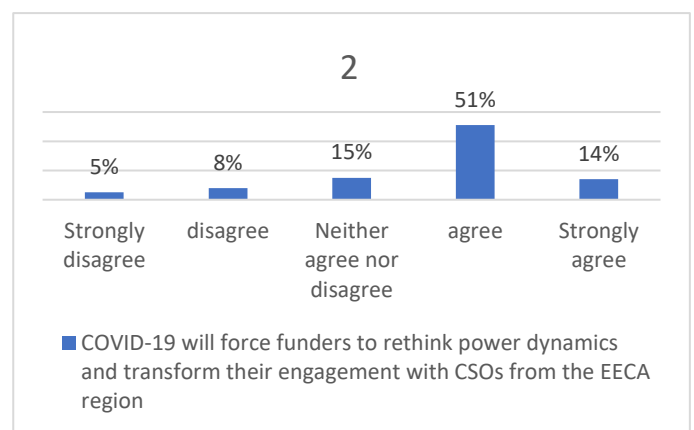
"1" meaning: no impact; "10" meaning: we will not survive

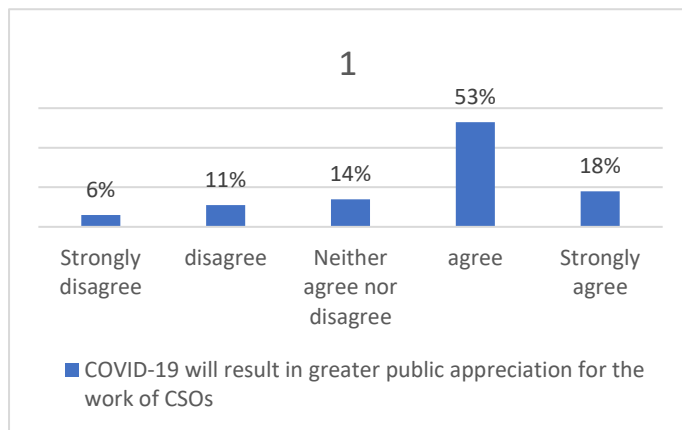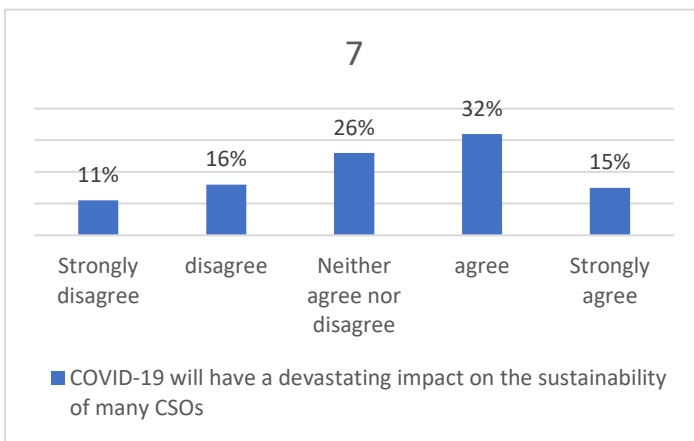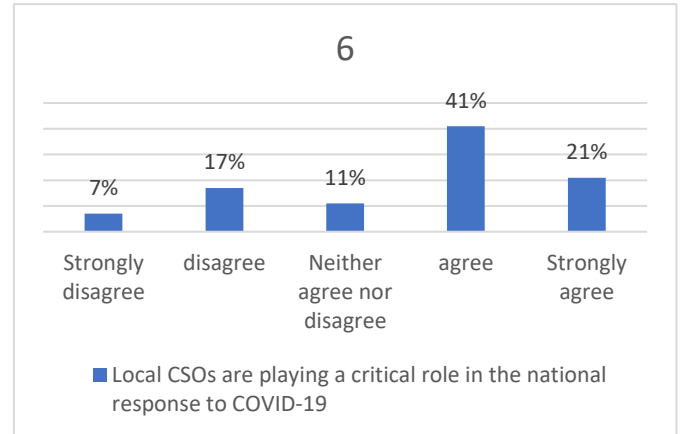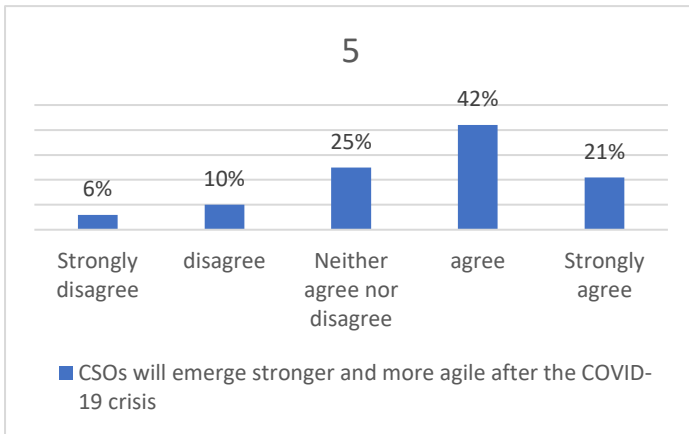| Scale	Value
1	6%
2	9%
3	15%
4	9%
5	16%
6	15%
7	10%
8	12%
9	7%
10	4%

The role of CSOs

Respondents were asked to rate statements on how they see their role in the response to the pandemic. The responses show that the majority of respondents value the role of CSOs in the national response, even though they were struggling to cope with the disruption of their work.

More than 70% of the respondents feel that the pandemic will result in greater public appreciation for the work of CSOs (Graph 1, "agree" and "strongly agree"). This ties in with the idea on the role of CSOs as 62% of the respondents feel that CSOs play a critical role in the national response to the pandemic (Graph 6, "agree" and "strongly agree"). Although 67% of the respondents feel they were not prepared to cope with the disruption in their operations (Graph 3, "agree" and "strongly agree").

Interestingly, respondents also feel that the COVID-19 pandemic will force funders to rethink the power dynamics and transform their engagement with CSOs from the EECA region (Graph 2, "agree" and "strongly agree"). Opinions are more divided on whether NGOs will emerge stronger and more agile after the COVID-19 crisis, this is a more long-term response (Graph 5). The same goes for the impact on the sustainability of the CSOs (Graph 7) and the level of government's utilization of CSOs skills – there is no uniform opinion on whether governments failed to recognize CSOs' role in response to COVID-19 (Graph 4).

Graphs

1

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
6%	11%	14%	53%	18%

■ COVID-19 will result in greater public appreciation for the work of CSOs

2

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
5%	8%	15%	51%	14%

■ COVID-19 will force funders to rethink power dynamics and transform their engagement with CSOs from the EECA region

3

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
7%	10%	16%	52%	15%

■ Most CSOs were not prepared to cope with the disruption caused by COVID-19 on their operations

4

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
5%	9%	22%	30%	19%

■ Governments failed to recognize and utilize local CSOs' skills, experience and networks in responding to COVID-19

5

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
6%	10%	25%	42%	21%

■ CSOs will emerge stronger and more agile after the COVID-19 crisis

6

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
7%	17%	11%	41%	21%

■ Local CSOs are playing a critical role in the national response to COVID-19

7

Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
11%	16%	26%	32%	15%

■ COVID-19 will have a devastating impact on the sustainability of many CSOs

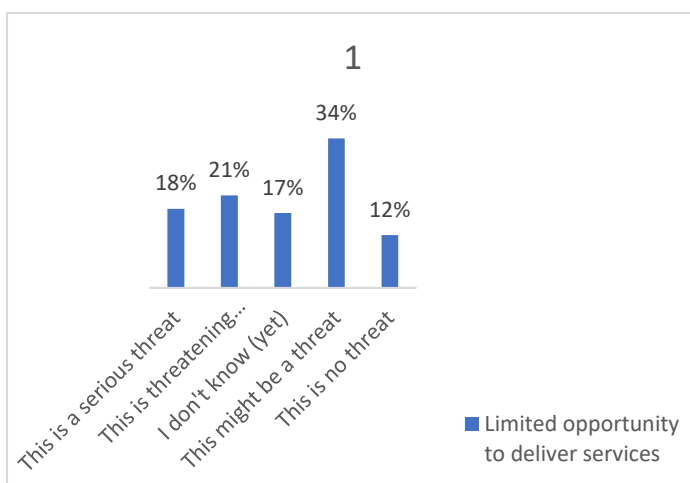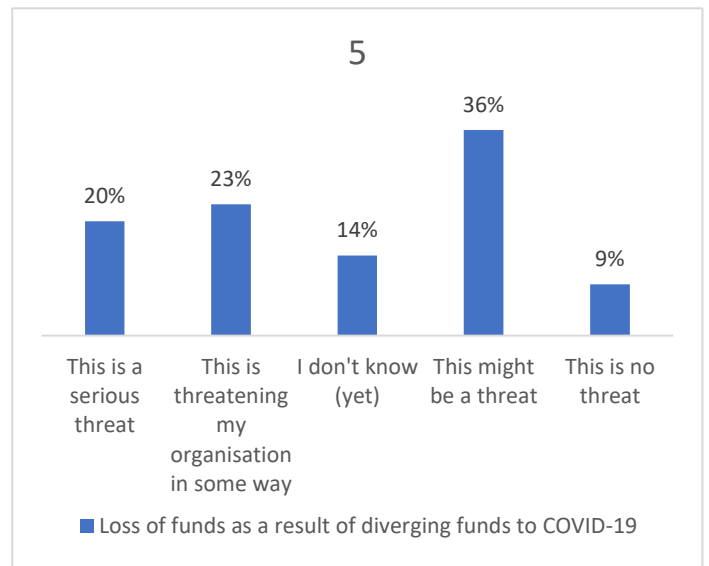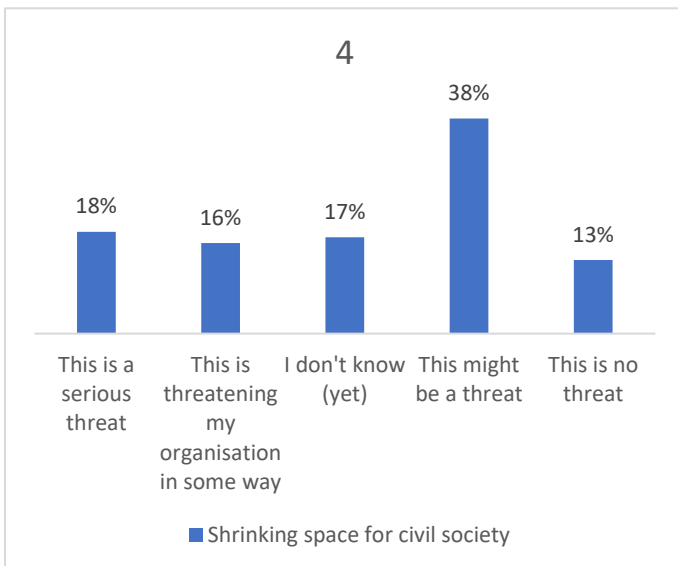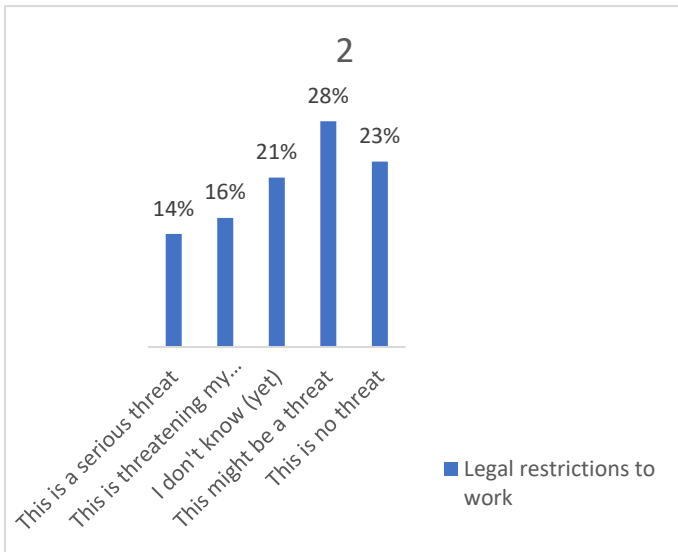### The main threats to organisations due to COVID-19 restrictions

We asked respondents to rate the extent to which changes as a result of the pandemic could be a threat to their organisation. What really stands out in graph number 5 is that the majority of the respondents fear loss of funds as a result of diverging funds to COVID-19. The ability to deliver their services was also perceived by respondents as a threat and uncertainty (Graph 1). Opinions on whether legal restrictions and shrinking space for civil society are a threat for CSOs are divided (Graph 2 and 4).

1

This is a serious threat	This is threatening...	I don't know (yet)	This might be a threat	This is no threat
18%	21%	17%	34%	12%

■ Limited opportunity to deliver services

2

14% **16%** **21%** **28%** **23%**

- This is a serious threat
- This is threatening my...
- I don't know (yet)
- This might be a threat
- This is no threat

■ Legal restrictions to work

3

12% **11%** **35%** **26%** **18%**

| This is a serious threat | This is threatening my organisation in some way | I don't know (yet) | This might be a threat | This is no threat |

■ Continuity of the Organisation

4

18% **16%** **17%** **38%** **13%**

| This is a serious threat | This is threatening my organisation in some way | I don't know (yet) | This might be a threat | This is no threat |

■ Shrinking space for civil society

5

20% **23%** **14%** **36%** **9%**

| This is a serious threat | This is threatening my organisation in some way | I don't know (yet) | This might be a threat | This is no threat |

■ Loss of funds as a result of diverging funds to COVID-19
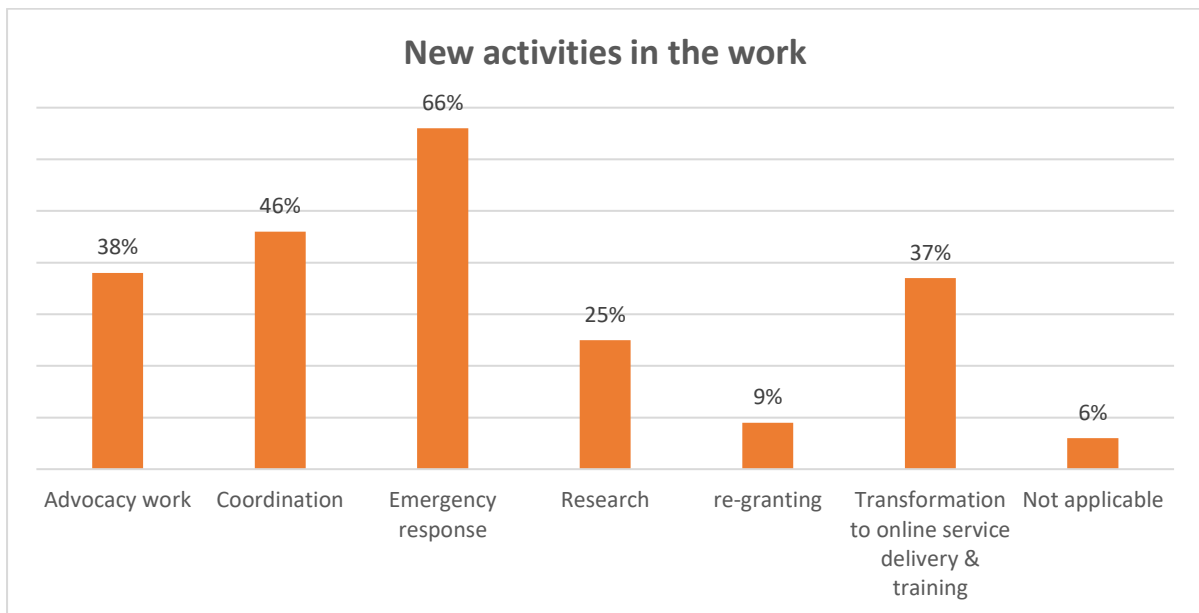
Changes in programming

The majority of the organisations either continued working with their original groups or extended the beneficiary group. Only a small percentage (7%) had to narrow the scope of groups they work with. When asked which new groups they had included when extending their outreach, there was not one group that stood out in particular. Most respondents identified migrants and their families, people in difficult situations and PLHIV and PWUD as new target groups. Respondents were also asked if they had to narrow their groups down. The majority by far answered that it was not applicable for them or that they didn't narrow their groups down. Only 8 of 47 respondents (not an obligatory question) replied that they narrowed down the groups which they had worked with originally. See the chart below, which explains which groups are included by the respondents that replied positively to this question. What this graph tells us is that many groups got into difficult situations; there is no one specific group that stands out here.

INFLUENCE ON THE GROUP OF BENIFICIARIES

- We had to narrow our groups down 7%
- I don't know 2%
- We work with our original groups 53%
- We extended our target group 38%

Extension of target groups

- Migrants and their families 21%
- PLHIV 19%
- PWUD 19%
- Sex workers 12%
- MSM 9%
- LGBTQI+ and their sexual partners 6%
- Families in difficult situations 10%
- Elderly people 7%
- Medical personel 4%
- Vulnerable people 17%
- People in difficult situations 24%
- Psychologists 8%
- Homeless people 10%
- Not applicable 34%
- Other 16%

The responses show that organisations have proved to be resilient and flexible in their way of working during the pandemic. We asked them to elaborate on how it influenced their beneficiary groups, type of activities and how it influenced their cooperation with other organisations and state institutions.
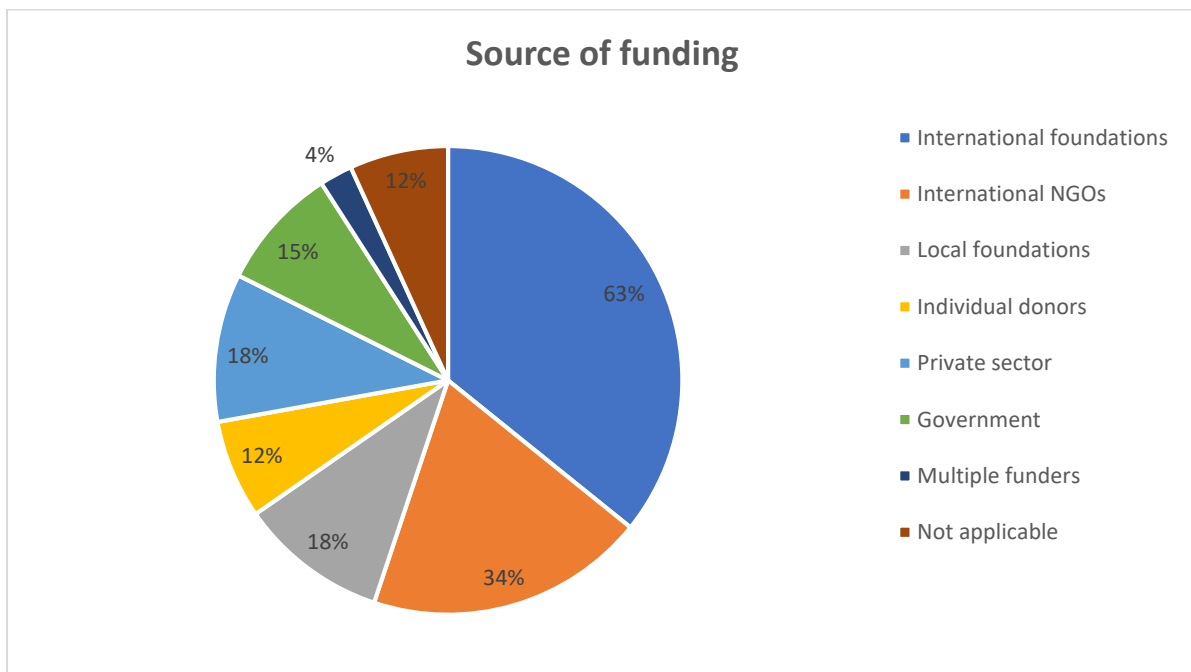
The majority of the organisations (almost 88%) of the respondents have added new programme activities in response to COVID-19. Only 12% said they haven't done so and 1% does not know. The majority of the respondents' organisations have been extending activities related to emergency response. They have distributed food and hygiene kits to respond to the urgent need of medical personnel and people in need – which is also visible in the chart above "Extension of target groups". Other activities include coordination efforts to facilitate effective Civil Society involvement and advocacy work such as highlighting and monitoring human rights abuses and ensuring transparency.

Below is a more detailed breakdown of activities. Most new activities are in line with organizations' mission (86%) and the minority (8%) have extended activities outside their mission.

New activities in the work

Activity	%
Advocacy work	38%
Coordination	46%
Emergency response	66%
Research	25%
re-granting	9%
Transformation to online service delivery & training	37%
Not applicable	6%

Main sources of funding for new activities

The main sources of funding for these new activities are international foundations and international NGOs. EECA governments are not [considered] a main source of funding for respondents' organisations.
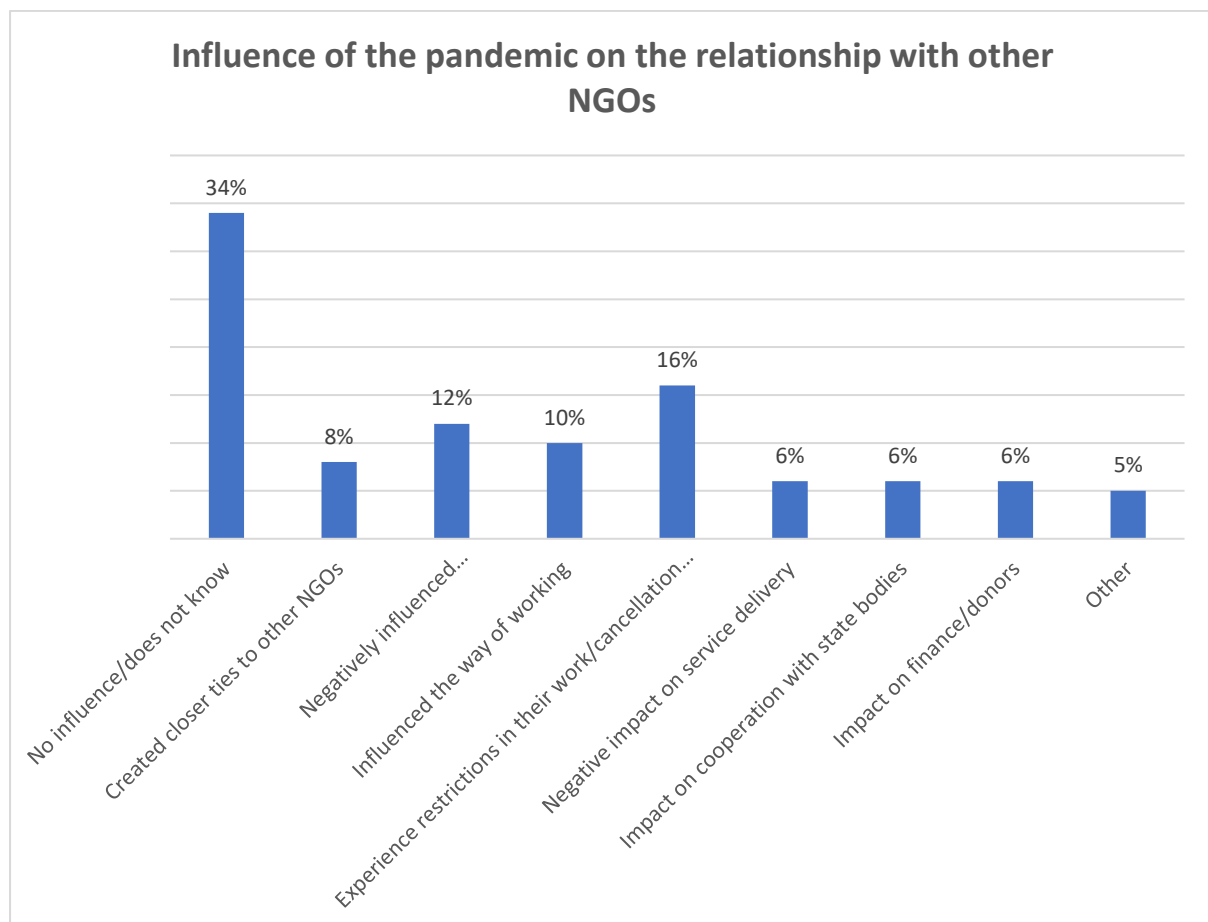
Source of funding

- International foundations — 63%
- International NGOs — 34%
- Local foundations — 18%
- Individual donors — 12%
- Private sector — 18%
- Government — 15%
- Multiple funders — 4%
- Not applicable — 12%

At the level of partnership with other organisations

A third of the respondents (34%) states that the pandemic did not change their relationship with other CSOs in the region. For the rest (66%) it did have an influence on their partnership with other organisations in some way. Negative impact on partnerships with other CSOs include restrictions on their work, cancellations of events (16%) and the feeling that the pandemic has therefore negatively affected their communication with other CSOs (12%) as some of them are not capable of working online and not used to digital ways of communication. Some feel that it will also influence with whom they will cooperate in the future, as they may lose some of their partners due to lack of financial means. This also goes for service delivery. Not all CSOs have continued to provide services during the lockdown, so it decreased the cooperation and coordination between organisations and beneficiaries.
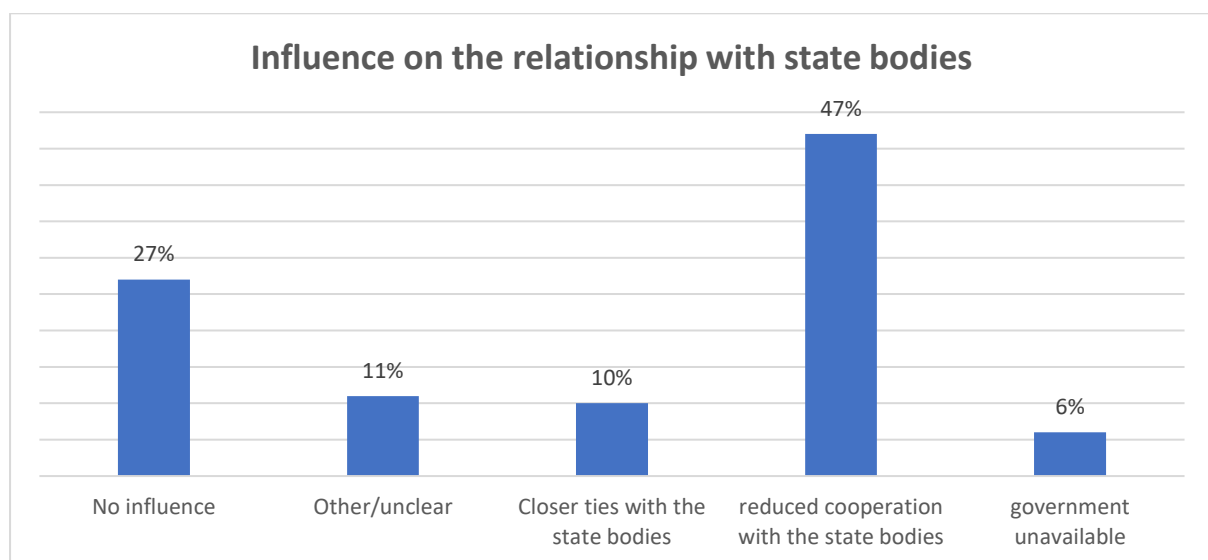
A small part of the respondents shared that it actually increased their cooperation (8%). Some of them had to respond to increased and new needs and thus had to organize service delivery at a larger scale. Therefore, it was necessary to join forces. Also, they started to cooperate more as they found solutions to common problems together.

It is interesting to see is how the pandemic has influenced the relationship between organisations and state institutions. The Chart "source of finance" on page 15 shows that the government does not appear to be an important funder, but perhaps there can be other things than funding that they have picked up. Out of the 6% that said that the pandemic has influenced their cooperation with state bodies, 5% mentioned that this cooperation got worse and only 1% said that it had a positive impact.

Influence of the pandemic on the relationship with other NGOs

Category	Percentage
No influence/does not know	34%
Created closer ties to other NGOs	8%
Negatively influenced…	12%
Influenced the way of working	10%
Experience restrictions in their work/cancellation…	16%
Negative impact on service delivery	6%
Impact on cooperation with state bodies	6%
Impact on finance/donors	6%
Other	5%

At the level of partnership with other government institutions

The chart shows that almost half of the respondents has experienced reduced cooperation with state bodies. With the 6% from the previous chart who indicated that they experienced difficulties in partnership with state institutions, this amount increases, resulting in more than half of the respondents experiencing problems working with state institutions. Organisations have experienced that the priority of local authorities has shifted. The COVID response is the major priority and harm reduction and HIV/AIDS response were pushed out of their agendas. This made it more difficult for NGOs to work with institutions, as communication was absent or extremely slow. Some replied that NGOs were not seen as a source of help during this time. Activities such as advocacy were either delayed, or more difficult to execute. 6% of the respondents indicated that the "government is unavailable" which meant that state officials either fell sick themselves or were completely overwhelmed.

Influence on the relationship with state bodies

Category	Value
No influence	27%
Other/unclear	11%
Closer ties with the state bodies	10%
reduced cooperation with the state bodies	47%
government unavailable	6%

Interestingly, 10% of the respondents indicated that the cooperation with the state bodies has increased and that actually closer ties have been established. Respondents mentioned that they have become members of governmental working groups on COVID-19, cooperation with state medical institutions, UNFPA and UNAIDS have increased and the role of NGOs in emergency coordination with governmental bodies has been strengthened.
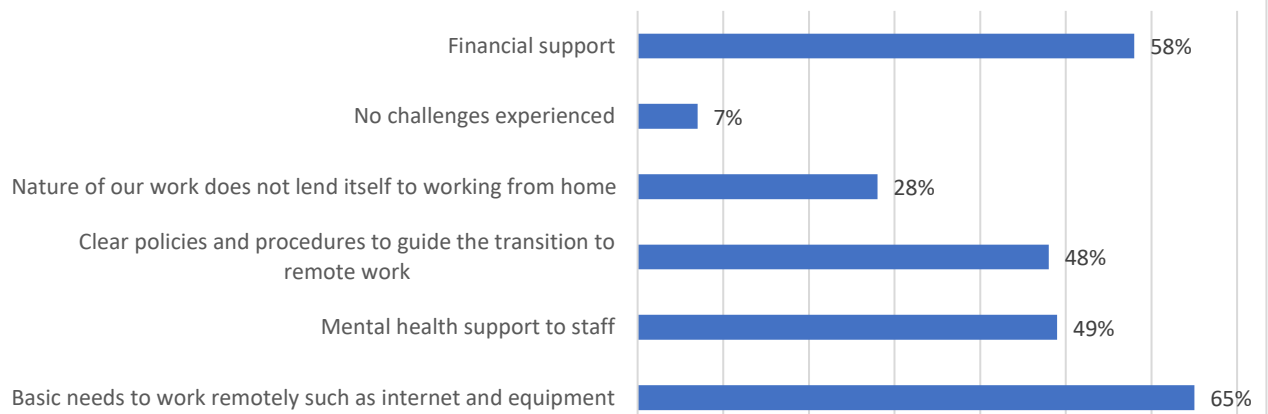
Organizations' needs in support for work in the new changing environment

The majority of respondents need basic skills to learn how to work remotely. Many of the organisations have switched to online working and need additional skills and support. Organisations not only need skills to manage their teams and beneficiaries in an online format, they also need to learn about online activism and online advocacy with state institutions.
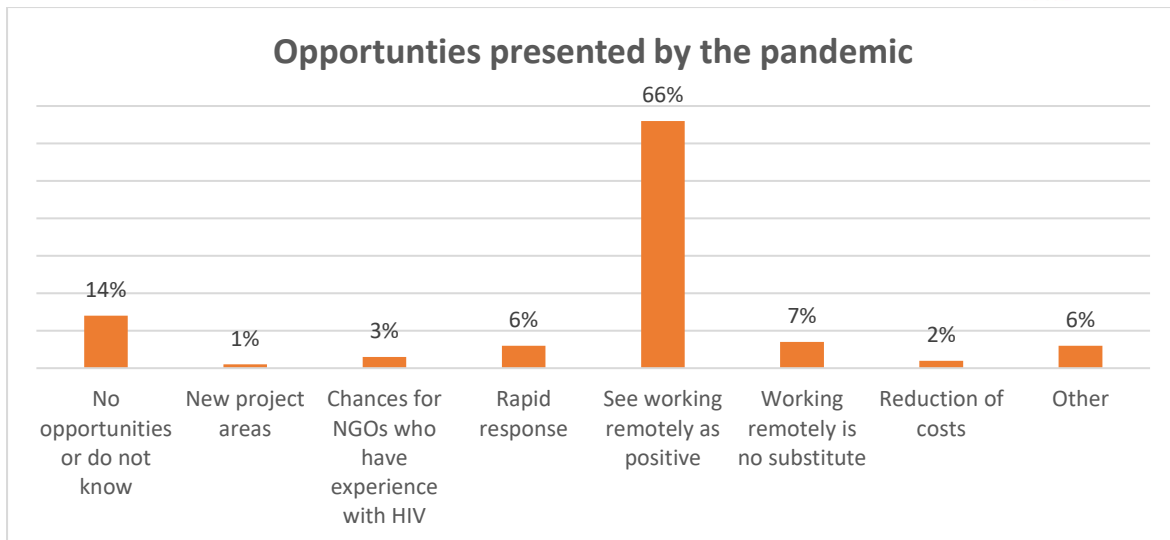
Type of skills needed

Skill	Percentage
Advertisement for social services	28%
Skills for online campaiging	27%
Privacy and security awareness	56%
Online relationship building	47%
Skills for online fundraising	60%
Skills for online activism	61%
Skills for online advocacy with government or public	62%
Skills to work remotely in terms of service delivery and outreach work	56%
Skills to work remotely in terms of team and project management	63%

Type of support needed

Support	Percentage
Financial support	58%
No challenges experienced	7%
Nature of our work does not lend itself to working from home	28%
Clear policies and procedures to guide the transition to remote work	48%
Mental health support to staff	49%
Basic needs to work remotely such as internet and equipment	65%

Opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic

The majority of people (66%) answered that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced them to rethink their ways of working, and considered this an opportunity. It has taught them how to work remotely, think about learning digital skills, provide online consultations and given the ability to quickly respond to situations. Most of them see it in a positive way, as it teaches them something new. They manage to provide safe outreach work, consultations and hope that what they learned about HIV response can be useful in the COVID response. One of the respondents mentioned that they draw parallels between the HIV and COVID response in advocacy to government, with the hope that governments now take the HIV epidemic more seriously. One respondent mentioned that the state authorities turned to them for help on how to work online. Another one even confessed that it became clear they can do without an office.
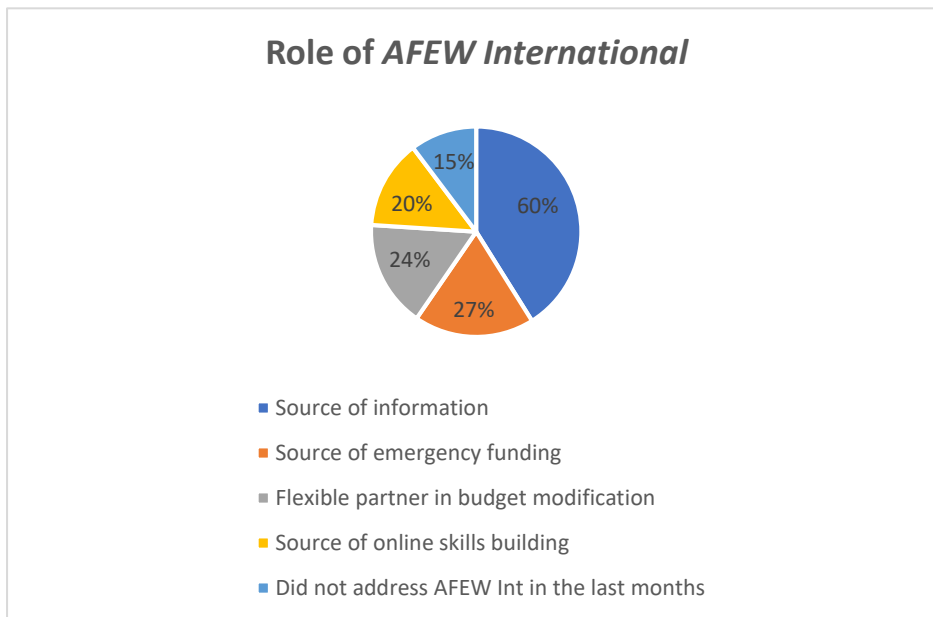
Opportunties presented by the pandemic

The respondents mentioned that their organisations have learned how to be strong as a team and be flexible. Their experience in working with key populations has proved useful for dealing with a situation in which everyone is at risk. Only a few respondents replied that they found it difficult to work in the new way and do not see it as an opportunity (7%). Some of the respondents say they don't see opportunities (yet), or found it difficult to answer.
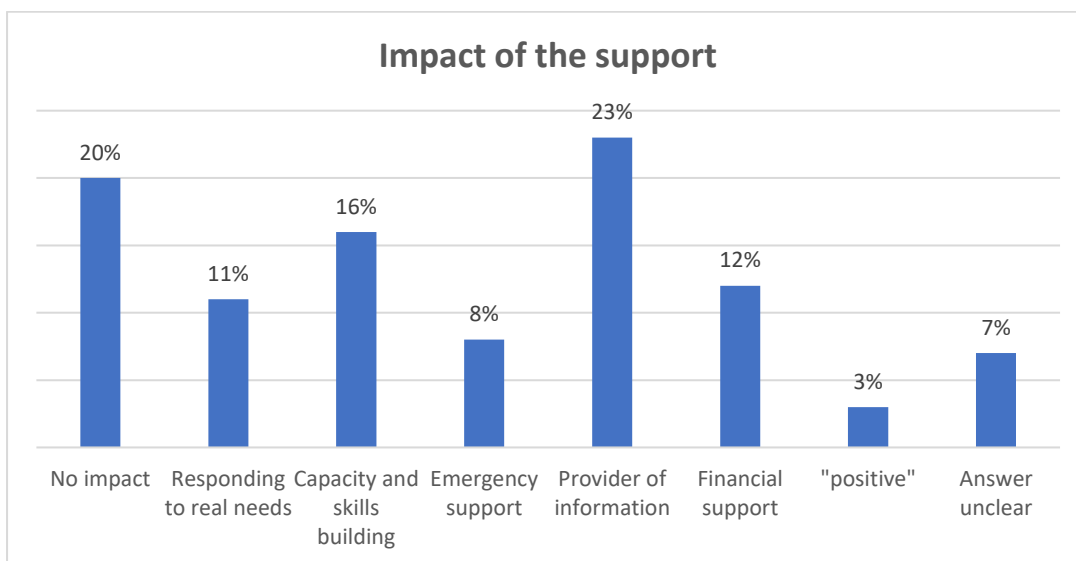
The role of *AFEW International*

In the survey we have assessed the specific role *AFEW international* has played for the respondents. Below are the results of the questions on the support AFEW International has provided, and impact it had, and the support the respondents believe *AFEW International* can give.

The role of *AFEW International* in providing support in the last months since the start of the pandemic

Many answers of respondents to this question relate to the main points in the charts above. *AFEW International* is mostly seen as a source of information (by 60% of the respondents). People mention that the website is informative, accurate and trustworthy, as *AFEW International* has the knowledge they need. The second important type of support they mentioned that AFEW provides was acknowledged was skills building. Many respondents (20%) mentioned that online skills sessions organized by AFEW helped improve overall development, build the capacity of staff and increase confidence in working online. They mentioned the Zoom training and the training on Community Based Participatory Research. Thirdly, the flexibility of *AFEW International* in making budgets available has helped them to respond to real needs. Respondents mentioned they could expand activities related to support and counselling to ensure they are meeting the needs of their target group. The Emergency Support Fund [for Key Populations in EECA] (the Fund *AFEW International* manages together with Aidsfonds) was mentioned several times.
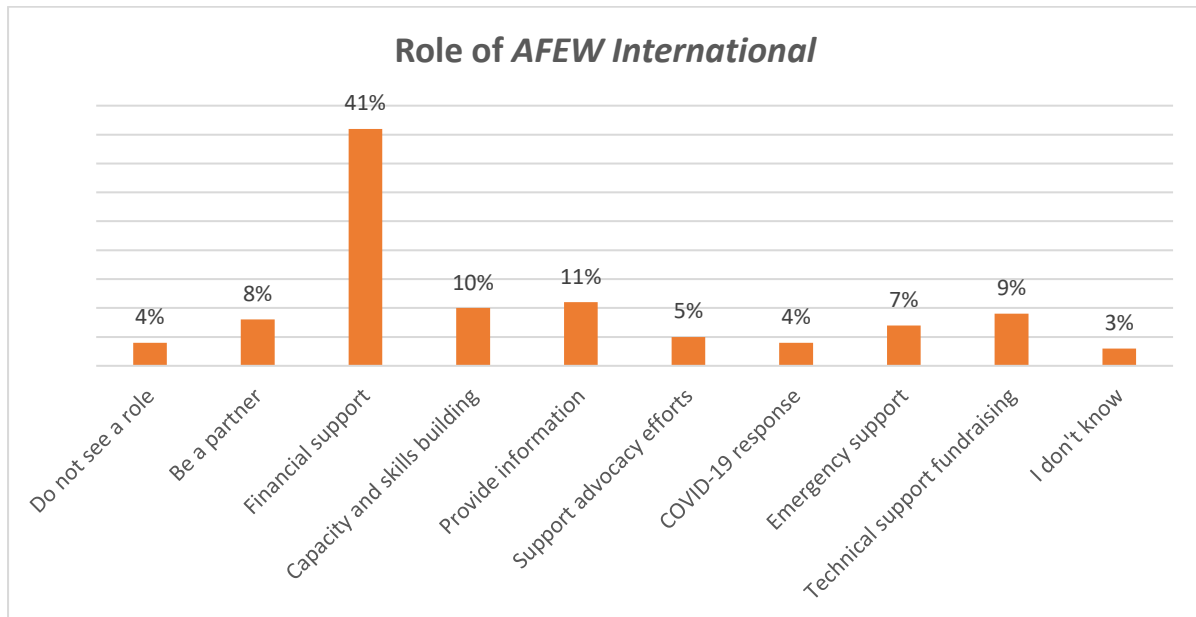
Role of *AFEW International*

- Source of information
- Source of emergency funding
- Flexible partner in budget modification
- Source of online skills building
- Did not address AFEW Int in the last months

What has been the impact of that support?

Impact of the support

20%	11%	16%	8%	23%	12%	3%	7%
No impact	Responding to real needs	Capacity and skills building	Emergency support	Provider of information	Financial support	"positive"	Answer unclear

The majority of the respondents mentioned that *AFEW International* has helped them by providing accurate information. Many of them ticked "information", but some of them mentioned that through the website they learned more about COVID. Some of the respondents responded that AFEW International helped them respond to real needs by being a flexible partner in budget adjustments, and another group received emergency help. 15% of the respondents either did not address AFEW International for help or said it did not have an impact.

Role of *AFEW International*

The majority of the respondents mention they are in need of financial support to continue their work and hope *AFEW International* can support them financially. This relates to grants, but also to Zoom subscriptions and the purchase of materials to work remotely.

Secondly, people mentioned the continuing need for information and capacity building of staff. Several ideas were proposed, such as skills development for online work, online training, launching a web portal to operate projects remotely, the development of new educational technologies, expertise, teaching women on how to find a job, education of civil society and learning how to deal with state educational institutions.

Thirdly, respondents mentioned emergency support as important response to direct needs. One person mentioned the need to keep listening and responding to what the community needs. 4% would see a role for *AFEW International* in the COVID response.

Lastly, several respondents mentioned the need for technical support in finding financial support from donors. In the changing donor environment, they would like to have access to information on funding opportunities, assistance in contacting possible donors, and long-term planning to attract resources for enhancing sustainability of services for people most vulnerable to HIV and advice.

Conclusion & recommendations

Although respondents do not know how this situation will affect their organisation in the long-term, changing relationships with partners and insecurity about future funding opportunities are causes of great concern for them. In some cases, there is increased cooperation with governments, but there is room for improvement. Governments can more actively include civil society in the COVID-19 response. Uncertainty about funding and fundraising is identified as the main threat to organisations, although the delivery of services to those in need is also considered a prominent threat.

This leads to the following recommendations.

Recommendations

➔ CSOs feel that governments are responding to COVID without consulting civil society, despite the fact that they have the ability to help given their networks and established mechanisms. Some CSOs have been included in governments' national responses, but more can be gained here.

➔ The majority of respondents are working online as it is the only way for most of them to continue functioning. As we do not know how long this situation will continue, it will be valuable to build capacity for staff to work in the digital world, in particular to facilitate online sessions and manage programs and staff. The expectation is that the new way of working will remain, even after the pandemic is over. Capacity and skills building in this domain are also one of the aspects organisations and governments should invest in.

➔ CSOs need support with fundraising and technical support for fundraising.

➔ CSOs need to be trained in doing online advocacy and activism.

➔ Provide good and reliable information to CSOs so they can anticipate on possible developments relating to the pandemic both on the financial level and in terms of service delivery.

➔ As the situation is changing rapidly, there is a need to respond to emergency needs. CSOs need flexibility from their donors to answer these urgent needs in terms of financing and communication.

Whether the pandemic threatens the continuity of their organisation is difficult to say for many of the respondents, as much is linked to how donors and governments will work with CSOs in the coming time.

Needs & possible actions

1. CSOs need to identify the gaps they face in coping with the new ways of working and address those. Actively search for ways to fill the skills or knowledge gaps.

"The lack of cooperation and coordination decreased the number of contacts and appointments for the implementation of local initiatives. Not all organizations continue to provide services during quarantine."

2. Donors need to be aware of the fact that not all CSOs are capable of finding their way in the funding landscape now that face to face contact is absent. In this case, there is a need for both CSOs and for donors to find each other.

"If we talk about the donor organizations, their activities have significantly reduced..."

"[We need] information about different funding opportunities and support in contacting potential donors"

3. Information is always key in defining your strategy and activities. *AFEW International* has launched a COVID-19 information corner with reliable information provided in Russian. As CSOs work in countries where information is not always reliable, this is essential for them to feel connected to the world. This COVID-19 corner includes actual international and regional researches, articles and statistics on COVID-19.

"We learned a lot from your website. It has helped to rapidly respond to changing circumstances"