



## ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

### Participants

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Vanja Blazenovic, **Nova Generacija, Bosnia-Herzegovina**

Tomislav Ramljak, **CNZD, Croatia**

Aleksandra Makric, Tomi Duvnjac, **TOMS, Croatia**

Carina Aaltonen, **Emmaus Åland, Finland**

Marie-France Bedleem, Emmaus **Armentières, France**

Coralie Bren, **Emmaus Trappes, France**

Simon Grainge, **Emmaus Coventry, UK**

Michael Hudson, **Emmaus Gloucestershire, UK**

Eve Poulteau, Marie Tixier, Théo Robin, **Emmaus Europe Secretariat**

The South-East Europe Collective met for the first time since July 2019 because the regional assembly was held in October 2019 and then the meeting scheduled for March in Osijek (Croatia) was cancelled.

### Groups' news

<b>Bosnia-Herzegovina</b>	
The country had a very strict lockdown from March to May.	
<b>Emmaus-ISF</b>	<b>Nova Generacija</b>
<p>The group is formally recognized by the authorities and therefore provided them with a lot of help during the coronavirus crisis, notably by distributing food packages. The rise in the number of vulnerable people has sharply increased needs and the group has had to recruit new paid employees, with the support of the public authorities.</p> <p>Work in the day centres had to be suspended during lockdown, and has now resumed with very strict social distancing rules.</p> <p>The shop was closed throughout lockdown and then reopened. The group had little in the way of stock and received two loads from Emmaus Fredriksdal. The local collection containers were closed on health grounds.</p> <p>The summer camp did take place in Srebrenica with only 50 participants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey. One of the tasks undertaken by the volunteers was building a children's centre. A second camp was arranged in August with 20 Bosnian volunteers.</p> <p>Since October the group has been working with migrants in Tuzla, where the situation is worsening every day. The group is distributing food and clothing, and is working on access to shower facilities and even housing. An accreditation is also in the process of being approved to be able to house migrant children (currently living on the streets) before the winter starts.</p> <p>There is also a plan to send a container to Burkina Faso in the near future, and to cover pupils' school fees.</p>	<p>All possible activities are now online, and some services such as the hotline (for children suffering from abuse) have been adjusted because of the volume of calls being received. The group is working on an additional mobile app, which could be a new source of income.</p> <p>Distribution of food and sanitary products has also been organised in areas where no support is in place. Activities have partially resumed, but the volunteers are yet to return. Roughly 20 children are supported every day.</p>

<b>Croatia</b>	
The country went into lockdown on 19 March.	
<b>CNZD</b>	<b>TOMS</b>
<p>The second-hand store had to close. The group generated other income by providing services to business (online communication, remote working and new technologies) but this was not enough to make up the shortfall.</p> <p>The day centre provision for children continued during lockdown. Roughly 100 children attended to continue their education. They were from relatively poor families and did not always have the technology needed (computer, telephone etc). Their parents were in unstable employment and were particularly hard-hit by the coronavirus crisis. Consequently, the group also supported the families with food and by paying their household bills.</p> <p>Two of the centres support Roma children, most of whom have been abused or neglected and do not necessarily have housing. The group has therefore worked to open a refuge for these children. A loan application was made to the Emmaus Ethical Fund and was approved. The official inauguration will take place in mid-October.</p> <p>The future is very uncertain. Public institutions have suspended most of the funding and the State has been owing the group money for several months. It is looking likely that redundancies will have to be made in early 2021.</p>	<p>During lockdown, the leaders and employees with administrative roles worked remotely, while the grassroots teams continued with their usual roles while applying social distancing rules.</p> <p>The new social restaurant was finally able to open in June. The primary aim of the restaurant is to offer employment to people with disabilities in a country in which discrimination is rife. The first few days went well, but the pandemic and the numerous restrictions on restaurants led to a real slowdown in trade, despite the restaurant being promoted to businesses in order to encourage employees to have their lunch there, and the rollout of a takeaway service. The other initiatives are also in jeopardy as the restaurant was supposed to generate income to support them.</p> <p>Some of the funding (notably for the launch of the restaurant) has been put on hold. The group is still receiving EU and Croatian government funding, and also potentially from the council areas where it works.</p>

The issue of online sales was raised during the meeting, as one of a number of ideas that would help us to adapt to the new situation. As a number of activities can be moved online, it would seem worthwhile looking into selling online, by setting up sites or creating apps, and by developing deliveries. In France, *Label Emmaüs*, a member organisation, already offers groups the opportunity to sell online. Some European groups also sell online in a “basic” way, for instance via Facebook, (see the 30 April EE newsletter).

It was stressed that we should always keep in mind people without access to technology, or who are not confident users, when discussing this kind of issue.

### **The movement's collective response**

The movement's response has “for once” been judged to be very swift and practical, which is positive. The EE and EI newsletters are appreciated. It is worth ensuring that they are passed on to as many member groups as possible.

### **European solidarity in 2021**

#### **Financial support**

There is still a great deal of uncertainty about how things will be at the end of the year, so it is very difficult to look to 2021. Moreover, there is a need to remain mindful about striking a balance between emergency support for the groups still directly affected by the pandemic, and solidarity for more long-term initiatives.

Emmaus-ISF is planning to open an education centre in Srebrenica, a centre for the mothers of Srebrenica, and a centre for unaccompanied minors; and the group may need support for these projects.

TOMS had requested support for opening the restaurant in 2020. They may still need this support but everything hinges on what happens in the immediate future.

CNZD's initiatives primarily rely on Croatian public funding and there is no clarity about this funding at the moment.

### **Shared container loads**

It was stressed that container loads are a good way of putting into practice the concept of solidarity at this time. Many groups have received a vast quantity of donations during lockdown and are able to ship them, while others need these goods to restart their income-generating activities. A support fund has been set up by EE to support the sending of container loads and is aimed at groups unable to pay for the shipping.

As a reminder, container loads entering Bosnia-Herzegovina are taxed unless they are declared as being humanitarian loads and the costs are covered by the shipper. However, a profit is still made on the container loads even after the tax is paid.

Online tools could help match requests and offers more effectively.

**Thank you to the Centre for Missing and Exploited Children for preparing for the March meeting, which unfortunately had to be cancelled, and to the participants for the worthwhile debate!**