



Europe for citizens

The project "Manage the COVID crisis with Care, reasOn, Values, unty, soliDarity" is funded by the European Union under the "Europe for Citizens" programme

**Strand 2: "Democratic engagement and civic participation".
Measure 2.3 "Civil society projects"**

Events: 10 events were organized under this project. They took place in 8 cities: Pleven, Athens, Vilnius, Prague, Granada, Dresden, Novi Sad and Łódź, and the online brochure in English STORIES OF GOODNESS was produced and distributed online. A total of 740 people participated in the events, of whom 336 from Pleven (Bulgaria), 49 from Kifissia/Athens (Greece), 61 from Vilnius and other cities (Lithuania), 71 from Prague (Czech Republic), 45 from Granada (Spain), 67 from Dresden (Germany), 56 from Novi Sad (Serbia) and 55 from Lodz (Poland). 248 people participated in the final event in Pleven (Bulgaria), including from Spain, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Serbia, Greece and Germany.

The events took place during the project period - from May 1, 2021 to December 31, 2022.

Brief description: The project "Manage the COVID crisis with Care, reasOn, Values, unty, soliDarity" is a response to the global crisis that tried to "stop the rotation of the Earth". At its heart is the idea that applying European values, care, unity and solidarity is the most effective way to deal with the consequences of the overall crisis caused by Covid-19. The main goal of the project was to discuss the problems created by the pandemic in all spheres of life: healthcare, economy, education, social care, culture and to propose measures and approaches to better deal with the next similar crisis. We achieved it with the 10 DEBATES held with experts, public figures and citizens. In the online brochure STORIES OF GOODNEES, we have collected examples and good practices from all over Europe. We held a WORLD CAFÉ with young people to discuss issues and offer ideas. At the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE we summarized the results of the project. Everything learned is systematized in a final document - an address to the members of the EC and the EP, with recommendations for European policy in the fight against crises.

Event 1

Participation: The event brought together 45 citizens from the city of Kifissia/Athens (Greece).

Place/Date: The event took place at the Underground Youth Orchestra at the Athens Concert Hall, music school in Kalamata "Maria Kallas" and music studio NMA "Salvia" on 20.06 and 16-17.07.2021.

Brief description: In 3 live debates organized by Educommart, under the title "Is there a recipe for culture in times of crisis?", artists: musicians, music school students, choristers shared their experiences and gave their "recipes". The questions discussed were: Did the crisis give birth to new associations or new creative methods? Which countermeasures and assistance are most effective? In what forms is outside aid most effective? How did music and art help you overcome the crisis? Constantly scheduling daily chores, learning music, participating in gymnastics, and utilizing free time with new interests have provided solutions to the isolation caused by the pandemic. State level assistance to manage the pandemic came after Greece's alignment with the European Union and the measures taken to protect European peoples (vaccines, medicines, hygiene rules). The crisis brought new methods regarding the use of technology and communication in new platforms with professional or educational orientation. The young musicians shared that they created online music projects and attended workshops online.

Event 2

Participation: The event brought together 53 citizens from Vilnius (Lithuania).

Place/Date: 3 online workshops, on October 13, 21 and 25, 2021.

Brief description: The event was devoted to the topic of online learning during the pandemic and the future of digital education and went under the motto "Online education: (un)learned lessons". In series of 3 online workshops with educators and students Open Lithuania Foundation sought the opinion of both parties in the process. According to the researchers, the disruption of the regular learning process by Covid-19 has necessitated collective efforts and ensuring of autonomy. Teachers had to deal with the systematic and organizational challenges of the transition to distance education. Some of the challenges were not new. Gaining skills for new IT tools, variety of learning environments, more diverse aspects of student interaction is positive. But

online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown has highlighted problems with student assessment and engagement in the learning process. As most teachers had difficulty adapting to the new way of learning, students had a heavy load of self-management, more independent work and homework, as teachers mistakenly believed that students had more free time. Young people often felt left alone.

Event 3

Participation: The event brought together **62 citizens** from Prague (**Czech Republic**).

Place/Date: The event took place **online** with the kind support of Senator Miluše Horská on **November 2, 2021**.

Brief description: The **online conference** "We live in corona times" was organized by **Spiralis** - Prague, an organization that has been supporting people in difficult life situations for 22 years by training and consulting directly threatened groups or professional teams of non-governmental organizations working for the public benefit. The topic of the debate was "Lessons from the crisis: **What are the new challenges for parents?**". One of the recommendations is to ensure adequate funding for non-profit organizations that protect women's rights. The situation of women in the pandemic has worsened more than that of men. Women bear a larger share of childcare of all ages and for their parents, which led to a more significant increase in unemployment for women than for men in the summer of 2020. The system, which is supposed to help parents and their children, often turns against them. E.g. because of administrative complexity, organizational complexity, the need to repeatedly prove the right to assistance. There is a great overload of families in lockdowns. Support and rehabilitation services were not available and children suffered from a lack of services to support their mental health. Carers are overworked and their contribution to society is undervalued. Conclusions: In times of crisis, the capacity of aid services should be further increased, not simply kept available. Recommendations made by the group also include: Establishing partnerships between the state and pro-family non-profit organizations; Provision of multi-year funding for non-profit organizations; NGO representatives should learn how to present the successes and impacts of their activities.

A recording of the presentation of all speakers and seminars is also available to interested parties on the Spiralis Youtube channel.

Event 4

Participation: The event brought together **40 citizens** from Granada (**Spain**), from whom 34 in person and 6 online.

Place/Date: The event took place in the city of **Granada** (Spain) on **March 24, 2022**.

Brief description: The debate was dedicated to the topic "**What did NGOs learn from the time of the pandemic and what have they taught the citizens?**". The meeting was held by **AIFED**, with students from the IES Hispanidad School, Granada. They talked about the coronavirus pandemic and how it affected and still affects students in their daily lives. Now that the virus appears to be largely under control, there are calls for a stronger role for the European Union in combating the crisis. In this sense, at the meeting it was also talked about the European Union, with special emphasis on the education offered to students. For example, the EU gives students the opportunity to study abroad and gain new experience through various programs such as Erasmus+. Also, since many students from different countries work at AIFED through Erasmus+ Internship, the students were able to ask many questions and the organizers were able to give them some advice or tell the young people about the NGO's previous experience.

Event 5

Participation: The event brought together **60 citizens** from Dresden (**Germany**)

Place/Date: The event took place in the city of **Dresden** (Germany), on **April 22, 2022**.

Short description: The event was dedicated to reflections on the lessons from the COVID crisis such as "**Lessons of solidarity: Why if you help others in a crisis, you also help yourself**". The discussion organized by **JPKeV** took place **live, in a club**. It focused on what true attitude is, our inner compass, and how it gives us stability in unstable times. Theater pedagogue Samuel Fink practiced the so-called theater pose with all the guests so they learned how a stable posture of the body can support us in the internal posture. The main statements of the participants were mainly related to topics such as solidarity with others, coping with loneliness and accepting other opinions. Most participants described learning a lot about themselves and society during the pandemic. People reacted very differently due to different personal circumstances. Overall, there was a general development towards more compassion, helping each other, appreciating one's closest friends, discovering who is really important in one's life, enjoying the little things, and being thankful for life. Some of the participants also stated that they saw the crisis as an opportunity to get to know their close friends better, to spend more time alone and learn more about their own desires, to use isolation and loneliness as a time to rest. However, many also expressed some disgust at the rise of selfish behavior in society since the pandemic. They have realized during the pandemic that our society has a great deficit in empathy and have seen this crisis as a great opportunity to actively live in solidarity.

Event 6

Participation: The event brought together **46 citizens** from the city of Novi Sad (**Serbia**)

Place/Date: The event took place live in the city of **Novi Sad**, Serbia on **April 21, 2022**.

Brief Description: The Minority and Local Media Development Center - **MLMDC** held a **live debate** on Lessons from the Crisis: **How social exclusion of people with disabilities and marginalized groups can be stopped**. The discussion focused on how and to what extent media content was accessible to people with disabilities and members of marginalized groups during the

pandemic, whether they had access to culture. Participants in both panels were aged 17-65+: people with disabilities, schoolchildren, students, journalists, psychologists, a representative of the deaf community, the ombudsman of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, heads of cultural institutes. A positive example was given by a news portal that strives not to fall into the traps that media often fall into during the pandemic, such as running sensational articles. It is very important in specialized media that the content should not be for people with disabilities, but should be created together with them. In due course, recommendations for measures were made to the Government of Serbia, for example, to make all media content, especially information content, accessible to people with disabilities. Two problems emerged: why disabled people are not in the audience and why they are not the creators of cultural content. The panelists agreed that it is necessary to form media crisis management teams to train journalists to work in emergency situations and to inform cultural institutions about the need for accessibility of cultural content for people with disabilities, and their participation in it. MLMDC printed and distributed a deluxe brochure about the project.

Event 7

Participation: The event brought together **53 citizens** from the city of Lodz (Poland)

Place/Date: The event took place in the city of **Lodz** (Poland), on **October 6, 2022**.

Brief description: The new Polish partner - **36.6 Competence Center** entered the project with a "flying start" and in a short time managed to organize large-scale events and media coverage of the project. Flyers have been printed. Municipal Library in Lodz (Branch 73) with Senior Club and Technical University of Lodz (Institute of Marketing and Sustainable Development) joined the **live debate** in the Miejska municipal library as partners. Young people, under the age of 30, predominated. Discussion topics: **Role of emotions in life, at work and in the social sector**; New opportunities or new difficulties for people with special needs; Relationships and applications - how to use technology in building relationships; Motivation and commitment in a crisis situation; **Social media as a threat or a solution**, etc. A study was cited that the main emotions during a pandemic are anxiety, frustration and fatigue. Over 80% of people are concerned about the health of their loved ones and less about their own health. Almost half (47%) of respondents express concern about the state of the financial resources they need to live. There is also a fear (over 60% of respondents) that the pandemic will last too long. The frustration of the respondents is mainly due to the inability to perform their duties normally (43% feel it strongly or very strongly) and the feeling of inaction and wasting time (28%). Almost half (47.4%) indicate severe or very severe fatigue from the crisis. Findings show that we fear the dangers of a pandemic – both health and economic – yet we reasonably trust precautions. Negative emotions arise from a kind of lack of control over the situation, from the daily restrictions that are imposed on us. More lessons learned from the debate: The third sector first helps the most vulnerable groups (e.g. the elderly); Bottom-up initiatives, common at many levels, on a voluntary basis, have a strong effect; Specific pandemic experience in Poland during the war in Ukraine - empathy, hospitality, organizing support for refugees. Since February 24, 2022, more than 7 million refugees have crossed the Polish border and received immediate care, 3 million of them are still living with Polish families.

Event 8

Participation: The event brought together a total of **90 citizens**, of whom 86 from the city of **Pleven**, 2 from the city of **Sofia** and 2 from the city of **Dolna Mitropolia** (Bulgaria).

Place/Date: The event took place in the city of **Pleven** (Bulgaria) on **July 8, 2022 and September 12, 2022**.

Brief description: Three **live debates** were held by **CPMF**. On the morning of July 8, in the art hall of the "Rostov" hotel - Pleven, a debate was held with **business** representatives, led by financier Martin Zaimov, on the topic "**The crisis as an opportunity to make the world greener, more digital and more efficient**". Co-organizer of the event was the Branch Business Chamber - Pleven. The presidents of the Branch Chamber and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Pleven, representatives of various economic sectors: finance, IT-business, real estate, agriculture and animal husbandry, trade, services, tourism, pharmacy, organization of exhibitions took part. In addition to the impact of COVID-19 on business, participants discussed the role of science and the media, whether there is a demographic catastrophe and why polls make generalizations, but the results are not equally valid for all groups. The implications for 3 sectors were analyzed - the real estate market, digitalization and agriculture. Conclusion - for some businesses the pandemic brought growth, but for others - losses and an urgent need for changes to be adequate for the present and with the future in mind. The afternoon debate was on "**How to recognize and deal with fake news**". The presenter of the debate was Ralitsa Kovacheva - journalist, editor-in-chief of the site factcheck.bg, lecturer at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". What is the definition of disinformation, what is the difference between disinformation and propaganda, why does disinformation about COVID-19 work so well and how does one explain the phenomenon of why there is less fake news in Bulgaria about the pandemic itself than about vaccination. The participants learned a lot, saw publications and a video on the topic. Conclusion - trust in institutions is a key factor in the spread and influence of misinformation about Covid-19. **63 participants** took part in the two debates.

Due to the summer vacation of the students, the debate on the topic "**Lessons from the crisis for health care in the EU: Higher trust in doctors and scientists, but also greater expectations**" took place on September 12, in one of the classrooms of the Medical University - Pleven. Doctors, nurses, teachers and students from Medical University - Pleven, representatives of health institutions, members of the public, journalists participated. Associate professor Kamburova presented the results of a study on the effects of COVID-19 on the Roma ethnic group in Bulgaria. Its main findings are that negative aspects of health status are more

prevalent among disadvantaged people and Roma, the COVID-19 pandemic raises questions about deepening inequalities such as racial and geographic discrimination, inequalities in access to quality treatment and vaccination, about the balance between public health and individual rights, with negative consequences of the impact of these differences on global health equity. According to the second lecturer - the leading pulmonologist Dr. Ivankovska, COVID-19 turned out to be a test for everyone, not only for medicine. It is time to part with the attitude that someone else, someone from outside, should solve the problems of the students, of the culture, of the economy. The invitation is to roll up our sleeves and look for new ways, to develop new senses, new ideas that must "invade" the state in order to overcome the crisis. The positive thing is that today we know much more about epidemiology, about immunology, about the many viral modifications. We also know more about therapy. We know more about antibiotics. But the great hope is called the Vaccine. Vaccines save lives and this has been a fact since the 17th century. The student Nikolai Tsankov shared his experience as a volunteer in the COVID department of the hospital in Svishtov. He is proud of his decision and is convinced that he has gained extremely valuable experience. For him, the bottom line is that we should always be prepared for a problem like this pandemic. It's something we know because it has happened before, and since it's sure to happen again, we need to have a plan to deal with it. The future doctor is an optimist because he believes that work is already being done in this direction and that we will overcome the next such crisis more quickly. Such opinions were also heard from the audience, despite the dose of skepticism and the comparison with neighboring countries. Colorful invitations and a poster for the event were made.

Event 9

Participation: The event brought together **43 citizens**, of whom 3 from **Athens (Greece)**, 7 from **Vilnius (Lithuania)**, 7 from **Prague (Czech Republic)**, 3 from **Granada (Spain)**, 7 from **Dresden (Germany)**, 8 from **Novi Sad (Serbia)** and 8 from **Pleven and Burgas (Bulgaria)**.

Place/Date: The event was held entirely **online** from **January 15, 2022 to June 30, 2022**.

Brief description: As a result of the discussions during the debates, interviews, reports and extensive research work, **42 stories** from 8 countries were collected: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Republic of Serbia and Spain. They are presented in an **online brochure in English**. "**STORIES OF GOODNESS**" contains photos, videos and stories of help and empathy, personal experience, good practices from the experience of doctors, NGOs, communities, cities and countries. In it you will find many personal, human stories, some of them - famous, others - about "small" characters who remained out of the limelight. The stories are arranged in 5 sections: Care, Reason, Values, Unity, Solidarity.

This booklet shines a light on the daily, quiet act of kindness that we believe is even more contagious than the virus.

Event 10

Participation: The event brought together **248 citizens**, of whom 238 from the city of Pleven (**Bulgaria**), as well as 2 from Prague (**Czech Republic**), 1 from Athens (**Greece**) (online), 1 from Vilnius (**Lithuania**), 2 from Granada (**Spain**), 2 from Novi Sad (**Serbia**), 2 from Lodz (**Poland**).

Place/Date: The event consists of **6 World Cafes** held on **24, 25 and 26 October 2022** and an **International Conference** held on **28 October 2022** in **Pleven (Bulgaria)**.

Brief description: The **World Cafe**, planned to be held during the final event of the project - International Conference, was organized by **CPMF** separately, on three consecutive days before the conference. This made it possible for the Cafe to be held in a much better quality and gave time to systematize the results. **Students from 6 Pleven school institutions** participated: SU "Stoyan Zaimov", NUI "Panayot Pipkov", PGEHT "Prof. Asen Zlatarov", DFSG "Intelekt", PGMET Pleven and High School Dormitory "Danail Popov" – **a total of 120 students and 11 teachers and principals**. Tables were prepared in each school to discuss 4 of the 10 topics set by the organizers. All topics were touched upon in the discussions, with online learning and the future of digital education, fake news and the fear of contagion, and the methods needed to increase trust in doctors and scientists proving to be the most discussed. The young people, mostly students of classes X and XI, but also eighth and ninth graders, showed great awareness, knowledge and quick orientation, combined with artistry and a rich imagination. Principals and teachers participated in the preliminary preparation and attended the World Cafes together with volunteers. The format of the event suggests that the discussion of the issues is carried out through creative problem solving, encouraging collaboration and the sharing of new ideas and opinions by all participants. The students are divided into groups and sit at their assigned tables. Each group is given a question or problem to which they must propose a solution or give ideas for a solution. At equal time intervals, in this case - 10 minutes, the participants moved to the other tables, with one host remaining at each table, who summarized the information from the previous conversation and wrote down the ideas of the new group. At the end of each event, the table hosts presented a summary. Many of the topics were attractively described in picture form.

The grand final forum of project – the **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE** with the participation of all organizations in the consortium was held in Pleven, in the conference hall of the Rostov Hotel. Organizer – Contemporary Pleven Media Foundation. Participants in the "Lessons from the Crisis" debates, young people, teachers, public figures, journalists were present. The Association of Medical Students in Bulgaria was strongly represented, mainly by foreign students of the Pleven Medical University. A presentation prepared by the project coordinator described what had been done in the past months. The discussions and conclusions from the World Cafe, organized in 6 schools, were presented in a video film. All the illustration boards from the World Cafe were displayed as a background in the international conference hall. In presentations, the partners shared their own

contributions, highlighting the conclusions of the debates and the stories they prepared for the STORIES OF GOODNESS online brochure in English. The partner from Athens joined online, as October 28 is the national holiday of Greece, so the audience heard the Greek anthem in addition to the greeting. Bill Gates' TED lecture "We can make COVID-19 the last pandemic" was watched with great attention. In the subsequent discussion, representatives of the Association of Medical Students in Bulgaria, of the non-governmental sector, Bulgarian Air Force Academy "Georgi Benkovski" - Dolna Mitropolia and of the host schools of the World Cafe took part.

The participants united around the general conclusion of the work on the project – COVID can mean care, reason, values, unity, solidarity.

From all the highlights in the partner debates and the ideas of young people, a document was prepared with recommendations to the European Commission for actions in case of crisis. It was supplemented by proposals made at the conference.