

## Civic Update

### Adapting to the Realities of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Citizen Participation & Inclusion Team | February 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed acute stress on governments and civil society actors. Even as the promise of vaccines points to an end to the health crisis itself, the impact on societies will be felt long after the virus is defeated. Countries will continue to struggle with a combination of pervasive socioeconomic challenges and a growing imperative to improve governance through more participatory, inclusive, transparent and accountable political processes. These are the means to produce policies and programs that best meet citizens' needs and interests. Likewise, citizens are more likely to support governments that are responsive and work on their behalf. Although crises require immediate action to prevent suffering and hardship, they also present opportunities for positive change. As countries enter into recovery, there is a demand to "build back better," ensuring that governments and communities alike are more resilient, cohesive and prepared for the next crises. It is important to acknowledge that recovery efforts cannot be undertaken in a vacuum, as countries must also simultaneously address impending crises, such as climate change, while confronting endemic ones such as sexism, racism, social injustice, and other forms of socioeconomic and identity-based marginalization. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities, and individuals marginalized due to their race, ethnicity, age or other aspects is well documented and cannot be understated.

This issue of the Civic Update explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities experiencing increased marginalization and exclusion and how NDI



*Equal Rights in Action Fund partner CODIVA in Timor-Leste organizing trainings for police forces on sensitivity towards LGBTI citizens*

programs have adapted to ensure greater inclusion and equity in COVID-19 response and recovery. This update features program adaptations in Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, Libya and Ukraine.

### The Pandemic and Communities Experiencing Marginalization

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis, but also a social, economic and political shock for communities and countries around the world, particularly women, young people, PWDs, LGBTI communities, and individuals marginalized due to their race, ethnicity, age or other aspects of their identity or background. The government and civil society actors necessary for response and recovery efforts are limited in their capacity to fulfill their mandate, which places undue pressure on vulnerable communities. Throughout the pandemic, there have been a range of responses from governments and national leaders. While



*NDI parliamentary youth fellows in Jordan assigned to women members of parliament helped connect communities with resources during the pandemic.*

some have implemented prevention measures in good faith, others have weaponized the pandemic and used emergency measures as an opportunity to limit citizens' rights. Governments are also curtailing political processes, such as elections, limiting citizen participation during key political processes, such as during peace negotiations, or placing undue limitations on the ability of civil society to monitor government actions or take political action. These measures disproportionately impact members of marginalized communities and correspond with trends in closing civic space and a broader pattern of democratic repression. Although international human rights law recognizes that some restrictions may be justified in the context of official public emergencies, it does not justify the alarming rate at which states have infringed on citizen's rights in the name of COVID-19 response. The pandemic and government responses highlight and exacerbate existing gaps and the deep-rooted discrimination and exclusion present in societies around the world. The long-term implications of the pandemic and the contributions of marginalized communities during a crisis cannot be understated.

## Young People

People between the ages of 15 and 30 have experienced two major global shocks – the financial crisis of 2008-09 and the COVID-19 pandemic. While young people are categorized

as low-risk with regard to the health impact of the novel coronavirus, they are especially vulnerable to the social and economic impact, particularly young women and young people from communities experiencing increased discrimination and marginalization. For the majority of young people, particularly highly vulnerable youth, the pandemic poses long-term risks for education, employment, and mental health. As schools around the world shut their doors, millions of girls are seeing their education curtailed and simultaneously being forced to take on additional household work and care responsibilities. The World Economic Forum estimates that many of the 1.6 billion children and young people currently out of school, many will never return.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic is also fueling a mental health crisis for young people. A survey from the World Health Organization found that 72% of mental health services for children and adolescents have been disrupted due to COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> According to a UNICEF report on adolescent mental health and COVID-19, 73% of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean have felt the need to ask for help concerning their physical and mental well-being; however, 40% did not ask for help.<sup>3</sup>

Young people have also been thrust into leadership positions during the pandemic, which creates opportunities for youth to establish themselves as trusted intermediaries and community leaders. In [Jordan](#), parliamentary fellows contributed to response efforts by visiting local vendors to ensure compliance with government-imposed price ceilings, connecting local farmers with the Ministry of Local Administration to issue travel permits so produce could be delivered across the country, and alerting local officials about water shortages. The crisis has proven that young people and youth-led organizations or networks can act as partners in providing support to the communities' well-being, especially for vulnerable groups who are unlikely to be aware of relevant government services and support. For example, diverse groups of young people in Lebanon have remained actively involved in mutual aid networks throughout the pandemic and after the August 4th explosion in Beirut. However, greater dependence on young people in the short-term

response has not resulted in sustained opportunities for them to take part in long-term decision-making processes on response and recovery. To better engage young people in building community resilience while avoiding exacerbating intergenerational inequalities, governments need to anticipate the impact of recovery measures across different age groups and work directly with young people to develop responsive, targeted policies.

## LGBTI Communities

Already considered one of the most marginalized groups in the world, LGBTI communities are experiencing higher levels of violence and exclusion during the pandemic, while homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination are being amplified. LGBTI communities are disproportionately represented in the informal work sector and are experiencing a complete loss of livelihoods resulting in higher levels of food insecurity and evictions as governments shut down countries. Transgender and intersex communities are seeing an interruption in routine healthcare and have in some cases delayed or outright refused care when infected with the novel coronavirus. Violence is a constant threat for many LGBTI individuals and is even more pronounced during a pandemic, where people are making difficult decisions between violating shelter-in-place orders or facing violence in their homes. The inability to access safe spaces, such as drop-in centers, and fears of being “outed” at home, on top of the daily stress of living in homophobic or transphobic environments, have led to higher levels of anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation.

There is also a historical pattern of scapegoating LGBTI communities during times of crisis. Governments, elected officials and religious leaders often blame LGBTI communities for their hardships. In Kenya and Ukraine, religious leaders claim that COVID-19 is God’s punishment for the sins of LGBTI people, while government officials in Poland and Bulgaria are using the guise of the pandemic to pass discriminatory, anti-LGBTI and gender discrimination laws. The government’s unwillingness to

consult with LGBTI communities is also apparent in government prevention measures. In Panama and Peru, the government issued guidelines mandating separate shopping days for men and women, claiming the order would minimize disease exposure. These measures discriminated against transgender and non-binary communities, even resulting in instances of abuse and arrests.<sup>4</sup>



## Persons with Disabilities

When the pandemic began, core inclusion principles of “leave no one behind” and “nothing about us without us” were brushed aside and the barriers that prevented PWDs from living independent and dignified lives were amplified. Government responses have overwhelmingly failed to be inclusive of disability voices or take sufficient measures to protect the rights of PWDs, resulting in fatal consequences, particularly for those living in institutions and people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.<sup>5</sup> One of the most common barriers reported is the lack of accessible information on the virus, virus prevention and government containment measures. Very few governments are providing guidance in accessible formats such as Easy Read, Braille or sign-language. The lack of accessible information is particularly pronounced in remote and rural settings where the digital and information divide is stark. In one notable case in Uganda, a man who is deafblind was shot by police after being perceived as violating curfew. However, this person later noted that he was unaware of the curfew due to a lack of





*Screen capture of sign language interpretation during a meeting in Kenya*

information in accessible formats.<sup>6</sup> PWDs have also reported the inability to access personal protective equipment (PPE) and found mandates, such as social distancing and mandatory facemasks, did not take into consideration the needs of PWDs, such as those who are deafblind who rely on touch or those who are deaf and rely on the ability to read lips. Disability rights activists are raising alarms as, in many cases, PWDs have been unable to access routine healthcare as hospitals prioritize COVID-19 patients, reach capacity, and turn PWDs away from treatment.

PWDs are disproportionately represented in the informal work sector and therefore greatly impacted by shutdowns and curfews. In consultations with PWDs, many reported having to close their businesses completely, increasing their risk of homelessness or food insecurity. This has taken an additional toll on women with disabilities, who are often the heads of households. Persons with albinism face increased rates of violence and public humiliation due to being scapegoated as carriers of the virus, while many PWDs are left homeless or forced into institutions when families can no longer care for them. Women, young women, and girls with disabilities face challenges unique to their intersecting experiences of gender, age, and disability. Before the pandemic, women and girls with disabilities were ten times more likely to experience violence than women and girls without disabilities and this risk has grown as women and girls are

required to shelter in place with their abusers.<sup>7</sup> The pandemic also poses a major disruption to education for students with disabilities, especially girls and young women with disabilities, as schools shift to remote learning and inaccessible virtual platforms.

## **Ethnic and Religious Minorities and Indigenous Peoples**

Ethnic and religious minorities and Indigenous Peoples, already marked by discrimination, racism and poverty, are facing higher risks and instability during the pandemic. Extreme rhetoric and treatment of these communities has pushed them further to the fringe, heightening the potential for interethnic and interreligious conflict. According to a study of Roma communities in six European Union states, participants reported an increased presence of soldiers and police personnel in their communities. They also found that health measures were inadequate for extreme poverty conditions and government emergency aid was not enough to bridge the poverty gap exacerbated by the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Far right groups spread disinformation and frame the Roma as a public health threat, further entrenching and politicizing hatred. And as schools transitioned online, Roma students have been unable to access and continue their education which contributes to already high dropout rates within Roma communities.

Other ethnic and religious minorities around the world have been scapegoated as carriers and spreaders of the virus, often being described as more dangerous than the virus. In Burma, the pandemic culminated in an uptick in violence in ethnic states and in India, sectarian violence increased after the #CoronaJihad disinformation campaign against Muslims went viral.<sup>9</sup> Members of religious minorities have reported being denied services as a result of their beliefs or being forced to convert to receive government support. For refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are ethnic and religious minorities, the pandemic impacts every aspect of resettlement and support services. Countries closed their borders and put a halt to legal

services, leaving many refugees in limbo or forced into detention and providing governments with cover to pass anti-refugee and migrant legislation.

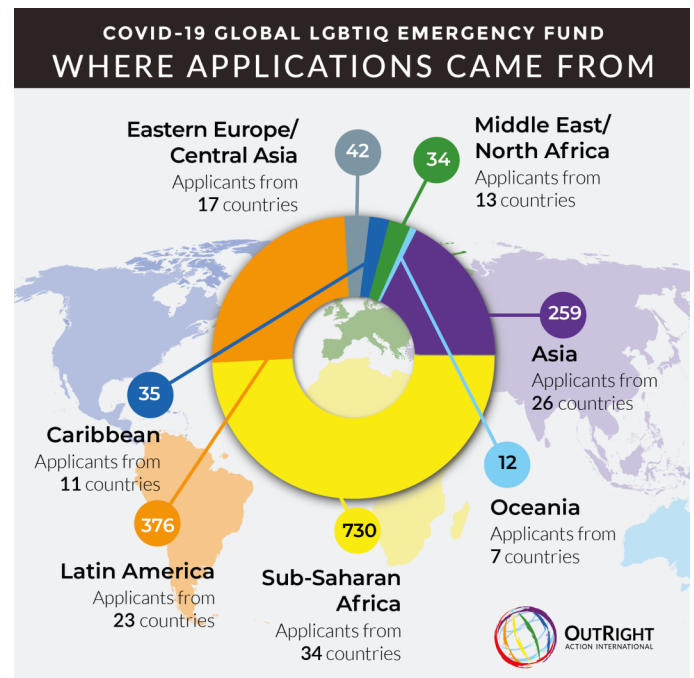
For Indigenous Peoples, pre-existing barriers in access to healthcare, education, and information are fueling the disproportionate impact of the pandemic. Prevention and protection measures are not available in Indigenous languages and shutdowns have left many Indigenous communities unable to work, resulting in food insecurity.<sup>10</sup> Afro-descendant communities reported an uptick in attacks against human rights defenders as a consequence of shelter-in-place orders, with armed actors taking advantage of the moment to advance their strategies.<sup>11</sup>

## What's Working?

Despite the gaps in COVID response from governments and political institutions, civil society has taken a substantive, leading role. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are serving as vital sources of support and information, defending human rights, monitoring and holding governments to account and sustaining movements through creativity and innovation. Locally, organizations have pivoted to raising money and providing basic necessities such as food, shelter and referral services. Disabled persons organizations (DPOs) and organizations representing and led by ethnic and religious minorities and Indigenous Peoples are advocating for culturally appropriate healthcare and for information to be made available in accessible formats, including multiple languages. They are also pressing the government to engage them as experts to develop more inclusive responses. Human rights defenders are closely monitoring and documenting human rights abuses to hold their governments accountable to international frameworks and ensure response and recovery measures respect the rights and identities of marginalized communities.

International groups such as OutRight International and All Out rapidly mobilized

funds to provide small grants to local organizations to meet their immediate needs and keep organizations' doors open and staff paid. [ILGA World](#) and [Stonewall UK](#) developed and maintain in-depth resource pages detailing for individuals where to get help and for organizations how to safely conduct activities online and promote well-being across the movement. International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of PWDs and their Families (RIADIS) hosted weekly Facebook live discussions, bringing together activists from around the world to share challenges and best practices. A coalition of seven international DPOs launched the [COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor](#) to capture much needed data on the needs of PWDs. And collectively groups from around the world are demanding governments renew their commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), noting that proper implementation of the CRPD could have mitigated many of the issues experienced by PWDs.



## Accessibility and Online Facilitation

Although the pandemic exposed the many challenges facing marginalized communities, it

also presented a unique opportunity to redirect efforts toward inclusive and accessible design, particularly for technology. Facebook recently announced updates to their Automatic Alternative Text technology, providing clearer, more inclusive and accurate image descriptions for screen reader users. Zoom is now fully compliant with international accessibility guidelines, featuring keyboard shortcuts, language translation channels, color contrast and video spotlight and pinning. These features have been used successfully by NDI teams in Kenya and Ukraine, ensuring participants who are deaf or hard of hearing can actively participate throughout a meeting. Google Meet and [Otter.ai](#) have made it easier to provide closed captions when sign language interpretation is not available and evidenced-based guidance on [digital accessibility](#) and [facilitating accessible virtual events](#) is more readily

available. Alongside accessibility, emerging best practices around online facilitation promote safe and equitable virtual spaces, noting that power dynamics and inequalities such as lack of digital literacy skills and poor internet bandwidth can undermine important perspectives and voices.<sup>12</sup> Best practices note that events should be planned in advance, allow for participants to request reasonable accommodations, and consider the schedules of participants who are caring for family members or supporting their child's online learning. Facilitators should also consider that not everyone will have a private, quiet, well-lit or safe space from which to work and determine if there are better and safer ways to connect offline. Online engagements should be kept short, provide frequent breaks, utilize virtual collaboration platforms such as [Jamboard](#), [Padlet](#), [Miro](#) or [Mentimeter](#) and maximize the

### Flexibility and Collective Care under the Equal Rights in Action Fund

Collaborating with partners during the pandemic highlighted the need for NDI to demonstrate greater flexibility, including prioritizing the health, safety and well-being of partners and setting clear expectations regarding workflow and deliverables. At the start of the pandemic, NDI staff also set new parameters for communication and routinely asked partners about virus prevalence in the community and new government mandates or policies. In some cases, governments and national leaders were denying the existence of the pandemic, which put partners and the communities they work with at an increased risk. In all follow-on communication, NDI stressed the importance of safety and discouraged partners from implementing risky activities. NDI also encouraged partners to take stock of their needs and make requests that would help keep themselves and others safe, such as materials that were not in their original budgets, like PPE. In some cases, partners had negative experiences with previous donors who dictated or closely regulated the implementation of activities through an inflexible structure. NDI staff relied heavily on the trust built with partners over the course of the relationship and restructured work deliverables, as necessary, to best respond to the new context. For example, some partners needed to make significant changes to their activities, such as moving them online or changing the date, because of government restrictions and the disproportionate impact of the crisis on the communities with which these groups work. Under the funding mechanism, Fixed Amount Awards, partners have more flexibility to change their activities, as long they are able to meet previously agreed upon milestones. During this period, a partner working with LGBTI communities expressed the stress of being an activist in their country and the need to implement wellness initiatives within their organization, such as group therapy or more flexible working hours. While the donor community can be slow to respond to these requests, it is critical to support these initiatives to sustain the motivation and resilience of partners. As part of the ERA Fund, NDI added a reference to wellness in capacity-building materials so that partners understand that they can request that type of support as part of their partnership with NDI.



use of breakout rooms and polling features. As mentioned above, there are certain forms of systemic inequality and privilege at play when facilitating programs virtually. The digital divide disproportionately impacts women and marginalized communities, with one report noting rates of mobile and smartphone ownership is lowest among women with disabilities.<sup>13</sup> The report also notes that digital inclusion efforts often overlook marginalized communities, putting them at risk of falling further behind. However, appropriate planning and partnerships can reduce many of these challenges. NDI programs should first seek to understand the ways people communicate and leverage those platforms when planning activities. This may include broadly used platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp or simpler technologies such as SMS and voice messages. To mitigate the financial burden, programs should budget for reasonable accommodation and data reimbursement or purchase dongles, which give phones and laptops additional functionality. The NDI team in Afghanistan found dongles to be an economical and readily available resource that helped boost hotspots and provide greater access to wireless broadband. Where digital literacy skills are low, NDI should provide training on the use and features of digital platforms prior to an event or activity. NDI can also partner with local technology-focused organizations to provide support and training and encourage the inclusion of remote and marginalized communities in their digital literacy programs.

## *Creative Campaigns*

Maintaining connections between communities, particularly excluded populations, is more important during a crisis, but it can be difficult to sustain when in-person contact is limited. The pandemic requires activists and organizations to find creative and innovative ways to stay connected and keep focused on priority issues. Their creativity in the development of campaigns has manifested in simple, yet effective measures that remind communities of their shared experiences and struggles. Demonstrations have included banging pots and pans on balconies to show support for



*KyivPride flew a rainbow flag attached to a drone around Kyiv to celebrate Pride month*

healthcare workers and other communities heavily impacted by the pandemic, online performances to raise money and awareness and political art displays, projections and the use of holograms as a form of protest without violating stay-out-home orders.

In Ukraine, after the country's largest pride parade in history in 2019, LGBTI communities were eager to sustain momentum; however, in-person pride parades weren't possible in 2020. NDI partner Sphere hosted a socially distant car pride parade in Kharkiv and KyivPride flew a rainbow flag attached to a drone around Kyiv, proving to be an effective method in continuing the conversation around LGBTI rights in the country during lockdown.<sup>14</sup> In Poland, as LGBTI communities were being categorized as part of the so-called "homosexual plague," a married couple distributed 300 rainbow facemasks to raise awareness and protect people from a real plague, the novel coronavirus. Acknowledging the potential risks related to community spread of the virus and elections, CSOs worked with election commissions to ensure safety at the polls. An NDI partner in Nigeria, Inclusive Friends Association (IFA), collaborated with other DPOs to draft a set of protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among PWDs at the polls. IFA also produced a series of accessible infographics, using positive and affirming

images of PWDs to share information about the Dos and Don'ts of coronavirus prevention.



*Infographic produced by NDI partner, Inclusive Friends Association*

## Inclusive Recovery and Preparedness for Future Crises

There is a need to prepare for a world altered by the pandemic and at risk of backsliding in terms of socio-economic development and democratic governance. NDI has a role to play in helping partners find democratic and sustainable solutions to the pandemic's fallout. These are challenges NDI can address through its comparative advantage working on the political dimensions of development. Since obstacles to economic and social development are rooted in the political economy of a country, progress cannot be achieved through funding, technical inputs, or capacity building alone. Meaningful changes to the status quo require persistent political activity—such as 'bottom-up' pressure from organized citizens or 'horizontal' pressure from other institutions—that incentivize governments to tackle difficult development challenges fairly and equitably. Since these challenges often reflect a particular distribution of power, solutions require political analysis, organizing and action to ensure that the public interest, rather than elite interest, is represented in public policies and programs.

There seem to be a number of opportunities to align NDI program efforts with fostering a more democratic and sustainable pandemic recovery. This includes redoubling NDI's gender and inclusion efforts, jump-starting anti-corruption programs, strengthening parliaments, combating disinformation, expanding political process monitoring of areas such as public procurement and fostering more robust and participatory policy deliberation. Some of these examples are highlighted below.

## Program Examples

### Colombia

Colombia is one of the few countries in the world that is navigating a deadly pandemic and maintaining and implementing a peace agreement, complicating an effective pandemic response. Although Colombia was early to adopt prevention measures in March 2020, marginalized communities, particularly in conflict-affected areas and rural communities, have been disproportionately affected due to a lack of access to pre-existing services and infrastructure. However, long overdue economic investments that would improve the lives of and create more space for marginalized groups and citizens to participate in political processes are at the heart of President Duque's 2018-2022 National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, or PND). While the government seeks to balance pandemic response and recovery with PND initiatives, the pandemic is compounding an already fragile situation and potentially threatening progress.

Acknowledging the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities, NDI has continued to prioritize the meaningful inclusion of these communities to ensure access to local legislators and political parties in order to advocate for their needs. NDI, in partnership with local LGBTI organizations, convened multiparty roundtables with the LGBTI Observatory on Political Participation to give space for organizations to discuss the impacts of the pandemic on LGBTI individuals, including



lack of connectivity to participate in online activities, homophobic attacks online and disregard for LGBTI rights. From there, groups presented best practices and strategies political parties could take to mitigate or lessen the impact of the pandemic, such as including



*This image was the product of roundtable sessions with LGBTI elected officials and refer to challenges and difficulties facing LGBTI communities.*

LGBTI communities in development plans, promoting visibility projects, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and advocating for proper implementation of laws that protect and promote the rights of LGBTI communities. Parties discussed designing action plans to address these issues and NDI provided support in developing a social media campaign focused on LGBTI political leadership and its contributions to strengthening Colombian democracy. NDI also partnered with local groups to convene separate roundtables to discuss increased violence towards and growing digital divide among Afro-Colombians as a result of the pandemic. Based on the discussion, roundtable participants developed and presented strategies to better meet the needs of Afro-Colombians, resulting in the creation of three multiparty working groups to address: 1) the differentiated impact of COVID-19 on Afro-Colombian communities; 2) political participation of Afro-Colombian communities; and 3) a working group between members of the multiparty roundtable and the Congressional Legal Congressional Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Black and Communities or Afro-Colombian Population. With NDI’s assistance, these committees have developed action plans, created campaigns against racism and discrimination, and planned for future exchanges with international experts in the field.

## Libya “Access” Campaign

Since 2019, the “Access” campaign, a coalition of nine civil society organizations from across Libya, has worked collectively to increase the development of government policies that directly address disability-specific issues. In early April, the campaign pivoted its focus to address the government's response to the pandemic, which lacked support for PWDs. The coalition drafted an Inclusive Emergency Plan which prioritized the establishment of an urgent care unit dedicated to PWDs during the pandemic, the provision of health offices in each municipality with comprehensive data on PWDs in their communities, the establishment of a helpline for PWDs, the activation of a home health-care service, and the delivery of medications. Through direct advocacy with the National Planning Council and National Center for Disease Control, the plan was accepted and is currently being implemented. The “Access” campaign also provided much-needed prevention and protection information to PWDs in accessible formats, including sign-language videos and pamphlets. The positive receipt of the campaign’s plans was a significant step forward in crafting an inclusive emergency response that takes into account the particular vulnerabilities of PWDs in Libya and has moved the government towards a vision of more consultative and inclusive policy making, a practice that will hopefully continue following the crisis.



*The Libya Access campaign organized to sterilize DPO offices and help set them up for social distancing as they prepared to reopen.*

These initiatives, coupled with increased civil society oversight over local governments, provided marginalized communities with an avenue for political engagement during the pandemic. These initiatives are just the beginning, with some political parties developing strategies to better engage and include Afro-Colombians and LGBTI communities and Afro-Colombian groups collaborating on political advocacy. The work being done to address the impacts of COVID-19 is anticipated to prompt local organizations and political parties to continue to collaborate and address priority issues for LGBTI communities and Afro-Colombians. This continued collaboration will contribute to Colombia's overall democratic resilience and ensure the country will emerge stronger from this crisis.

## Ukraine

COVID-19 spread so rapidly throughout the world that it left many political leaders little time to enact plans to prevent the virus from reaching their countries and instead required they direct their focus on plans to contain and slow the spread. Although the situation was dire throughout Ukraine, its disproportionate impact on rural and conflict-affected areas demanded that leaders make quick decisions to address the pandemic and implement

comprehensive plans later. These areas were left without proper protection and information to prevent infection, demonstrating the need for local solutions and local leadership. In anticipation of this disproportionate impact, local leaders, many of whom are members of gender-focused caucuses (GFCs), organized to become primary actors in combating the spread of the virus within days of the first reported COVID-19 cases in Ukraine.



*Local doctors in Netishyn city hospital in Ukraine trying on hazmat suits.*

Taking inspiration from the success of the Equal Opportunities Caucus established in Parliament in 2011, GFCs have been established throughout Ukraine at the village, city and regional levels to bring elected officials of different genders together to address gender-related issues in their communities. In addition to promoting inclusion and raising the visibility of female elected officials, GFCs provide a space for cross-party dialogue and cooperation that is otherwise rarely available. Over the last three years, with support from NDI and its regional partners, more than 100 GFCs have been established across Ukraine, successfully advocating for the

rights of women and creating more gender-sensitive institutions at the local level. Given the GFCs' capacity, it was no surprise that they played instrumental roles in meeting the needs of their constituents when the pandemic arrived at their doorstep. Leveraging their local contextual knowledge, GFCs were able to easily assess the needs of their communities and tap into their networks to provide relief. In the Dolynska Amalgamated Community in Zaporizka oblast, the local GFC gathered information from citizens and organized the delivery of food and medicine to their homes. In Tairovska Amalgamated Community in Odeska oblast, members of the local GFC partnered with a local CSO to collect masks, gloves and disinfectants to be sent to members of the armed forces. And in Khmelnytska oblast, under the "Protecting Doctors, Saving Lives" campaign, members of the GFC coordinated with city councils and local government representatives to provide the materials needed to produce PPE for doctors and nurses at the local hospital to a local sewing factory. Throughout the country, GFCs have taken a leading role in raising awareness: appearing on television programs, making phone calls and publishing information on the local council's websites and Facebook pages to educate constituents on both the spread of the virus and

the government's quarantine measures. Key to the GFCs' success in Ukraine was both the motivation of women leaders to create change in their communities and the skill sets they have acquired through NDI support. Practical skills provided to the GFCs well before the pandemic, such as fundraising, project proposal development and gender-responsive budgeting, were extremely useful to the GFCs as they developed and pitched their ideas. The GFCs used their advocacy skills to garner community support and leveraged their networks to deliver quick relief to those most affected by the pandemic. Communication skills were also critical in ensuring local communities had accurate information to prevent further spread of the virus. Just as GFCs were pivotal in meeting the needs of their communities, they have been equally integral in raising the profile of women leaders and challenging gender stereotypes. As a result, more women ran for office in the October 2020 elections. Increased political participation of women can only benefit Ukraine as the country continues to manage and eventually emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Kyrgyzstan Youth in Action**

The "Citizens in Action" model, a grassroots program launched in 2015, focuses on training community organizers at the local level to increase political engagement, spur community dialogue and resolve long-standing community issues in collaboration with government. This program has since expanded to include a focus on young people as leaders and community organizers. At the start of the pandemic, when a stay-at-home order put a halt to in-person activities, six student organizers from the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek pivoted their organizing efforts and created an online training course to support young people and aspiring community organizers. The training focused on best practices and strategies for organizing during and after a crisis, such as starting an initiative, communicating with local and administrative officials and developing action plans. NDI supported their efforts by providing organizational assistance and content expertise and connecting organizers with civic activism experts. The 30-day course included ten video tutorials featuring international and local experts, virtual consultations and lessons taught by the student organizers. Recognizing the stress of organizing and working during a crisis, particularly for young people, training participants were also provided space to focus on their mental health and well-being through the practice of meditation and yoga and engaging in friendly e-sport competitions. The success of the initiative, and the overwhelming interest and engagement from youth prompted the university to develop a course on civic activism that will start in 2021.



## Resources

### [\*\*A Practical Guide for Civil Society Organizations During a Crisis\*\*](#)

This guide is intended to help CSOs plan and act during a crisis, including understanding a given crisis, planning a course of action, ensuring the flow of critical information and fostering solidarity and cooperation among relevant stakeholders. The guide also provides useful recommendations to address and protect the well-being of staff to prevent mental or physical illness and burnout.

### [\*\*GWD: COVID-19 Adaptation Resources\*\*](#)

NDI's Gender, Women, and Democracy team developed resources for COVID-19 related program adaptation to ensure programs are informed by gender issues related to the pandemic. The materials are useful for both program pivots and for new program development.

### [\*\*NDI Guidelines for Office Re-Opening\*\*](#)

As countries and communities begin to stabilize from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments will start to lift restrictions. As this change occurs, organizations will start to reopen their workplaces. These guidelines include recommended practices and protocols for the safe and healthy return of staff to their workplaces.

### [\*\*COVID-19 - A Human Rights Checklist\*\*](#)

Human Rights Watch identified 40 questions to guide a "rights-respecting" response to the COVID-19 crises. The questions in the checklist address the needs of groups at most risk and identify a variety of positive and problematic responses to the pandemic to demonstrate the different types of policy choices governments should avoid or consider when upholding their human rights obligations.

### [\*\*COVID-19: How to Include Marginalized and Vulnerable People in Risk Communication and Community Engagement\*\*](#)

During emergencies, marginalized communities become more vulnerable and their marginalization is exacerbated. Building on evidence from previous crises that illustrate the value of engaging with

marginalized communities when communicating about risk, this guide provides approaches to engage with marginalized groups to ensure they receive priority assistance and have meaningful participation in the decision-making processes for response, recovery, preparedness and risk reduction.

### [\*\*Training for Change Online Facilitation Tools\*\*](#)

The learning curve in shifting from in-person to virtual activities can be challenging for civil society organizations, especially those with limited resources. In response, Training for Change assembled a list of online facilitation tools to support participant engagement during virtual events. The list includes an eBook which outlines considerations for facilitators including preferred platforms, the amount of time for an online activity and maintaining human connection virtually.

## Resources Cited

1. World Economic Forum, "[COVID-19 Put 1.6 Billion Children Out of School. Here's How to Upgrade Education Post-Pandemic](#)," (2020).
2. The World Health Organization, "[COVID-19 Disrupting Mental Health Services in Most Countries](#)," (2020).
3. UNICEF, "[The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Adolescents and Youth](#)," (2020).
4. OutRight International, "[Vulnerability Amplified - The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on LGBTIQ People](#)," (2020).
5. Inclusion International, "[People with Intellectual Disabilities Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19](#)," (2020).
6. Oduti, B. "[People with Disabilities Left Stranded During National Lockdown in Uganda](#)," *Global Voices*. (2020, June).
7. Plan International, "[Leaving no Girl Behind - The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls and Young Women with Disabilities](#)," (2020).
8. Open Society Foundations, "[Roma in the](#)

[COVID-19 Crisis - An Early Warning from Six EU Member States](#),” (2020).

9. Bajoria, J. “[CoronaJihad is Only the Latest Manifestation: Islamophobia in India has Been Years in the Making](#),” Human Rights Watch. (2020, May).
10. Indigenous Navigator, “[The Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Communities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator](#),” (2020).
11. Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights, “[Afro-descendants in Latin America Battling COVID-19](#),” (2020).
12. Arellano, E. “[Power Dynamics and Inclusion in Virtual Meetings](#),” Aspiration. (2020).
13. GSMA, “[The Digital Exclusion of Women with Disabilities - A Study of Seven Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#),” (2020).
14. SOGI Campaigns, “[The Sky’s the Limit for Ukrainian Pride](#),” (2020).

*[Civic Update](#) is a production of NDI’s Citizen Participation & Inclusion Team*

*For more information, comments or suggestions contact:*  
Rachel E. Mims | Senior Program Officer | Washington, D.C.  
202.728.5406 | [rmims@ndi.org](mailto:rmims@ndi.org)

**National Democratic Institute**

