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# EFFECT OF THE PANDEMIC ON NGO ACTIVITY

The coronavirus pandemic has continued to have an effect on numerous aspects of our lives. A large number of NGOs have also been affected by it. A significant number of processes have gone online – seminars, conferences and presentations have been cancelled, postponed, or reformatted taking into account the new realities. A number of NGOs were practically forced to cease their work; others, on the contrary, successfully learned or developed new technological approaches and continued their activity in new formats.

Many NGOs are successfully overcoming technical difficulties and the pause in travel. Some of them are beginning to work with new topics – for example, human rights under pandemic conditions or the NGO's digital transition. Changes in approaches to strategy, planning and communications are being discussed active-ly. All this has yet to be comprehended in detail, so this study is intended to provide a preliminary overview of the current state and possible topics for future research.

More than 100 NGO representatives were interviewed in the process of this research both through surveys (a survey with 27 questions and more than 100 options for answers), as well as through interviews of leaders and representatives of NGOs (10 questions in each). More than 50 publications were monitored devoted to the problems NGOs faced in the pandemic. Thus, the methods of monitoring, survey and expert interviews were used. NGOs from Germany, Czech Republic, Lithuania, the USA, Russia (more than 30%), Ukraine and Kazakhstan took part in the research.

More than half of those surveyed are think tanks or NGOs working with trans-border projects. Service NGOs, research centers and NGOs working in the area of the arts made up one third of those surveyed.

Influence of Pandemic

Other
20.0%

Serious influence
40.0%

Very strong
12.0%
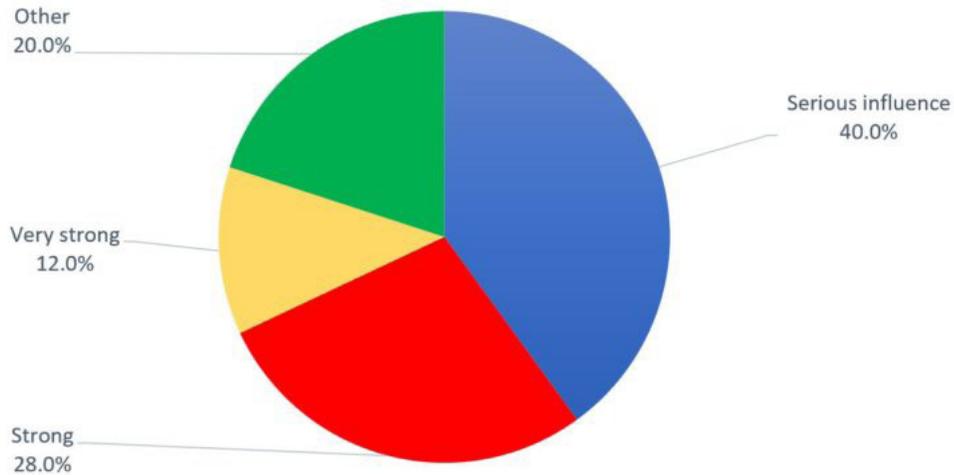
Strong
28.0%

40% of NGOs felt the pandemic had a serious influence on them; 28% said it had a strong influence and 12% a very strong influence.

30% of NGOs reduced their activity, and 20% increased it, but none of those surveyed totally ceased their work.

Financial losses

Other
4,0%
Very significant
16,0%

Minimal
48,0%
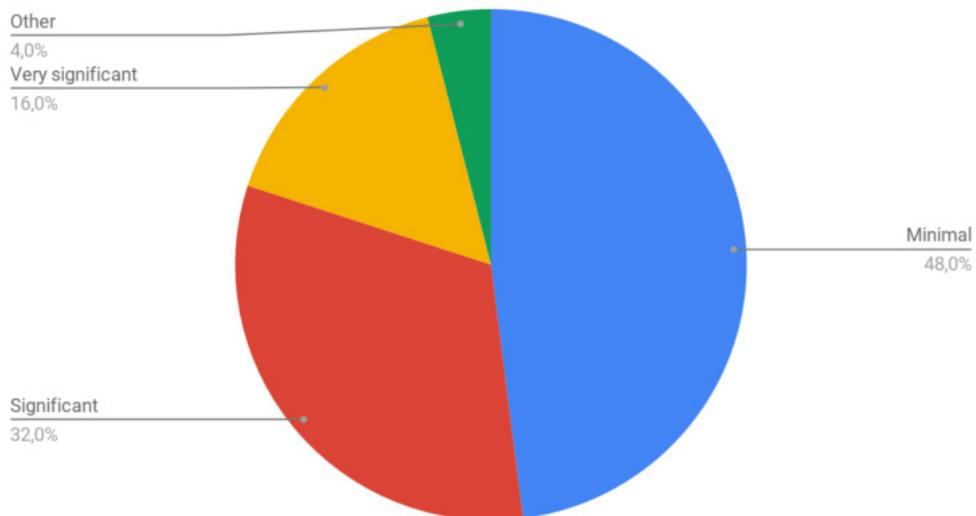
Significant
32,0%

48% of NGOs evaluate their financial losses as minimal; 32% as substantial, but they hope to survive this period; and 16% expect to wind down a significant part of their activity or are on the verge of closure.

Social capital losses
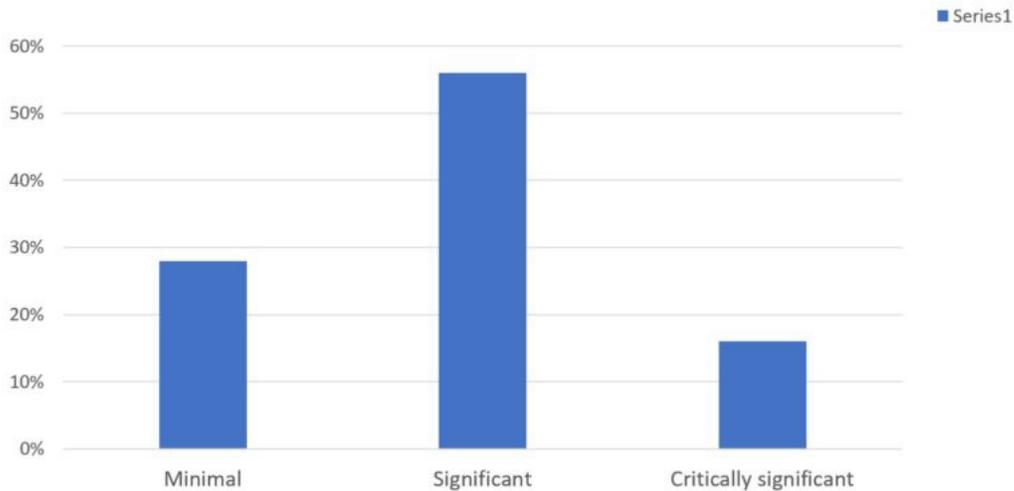
28% of NGOs evaluate their loses of social capital as minimal, but 56% as substantial, although not critical. For 16%, these losses are critical.

52% of NGOs have successfully transferred their activity online and only 28% encountered noticeable difficulties along the way.

84% of NGOs have transferred practically all their employees online and only 8% remained offline to a significant extent.

80% of NGOs have kept almost all their employees and only 8% have made a significant number of dismissals.

56% of NGOs believe that employees' loyalty has not grown less related to distance work; 40% do not agree with them.

Office
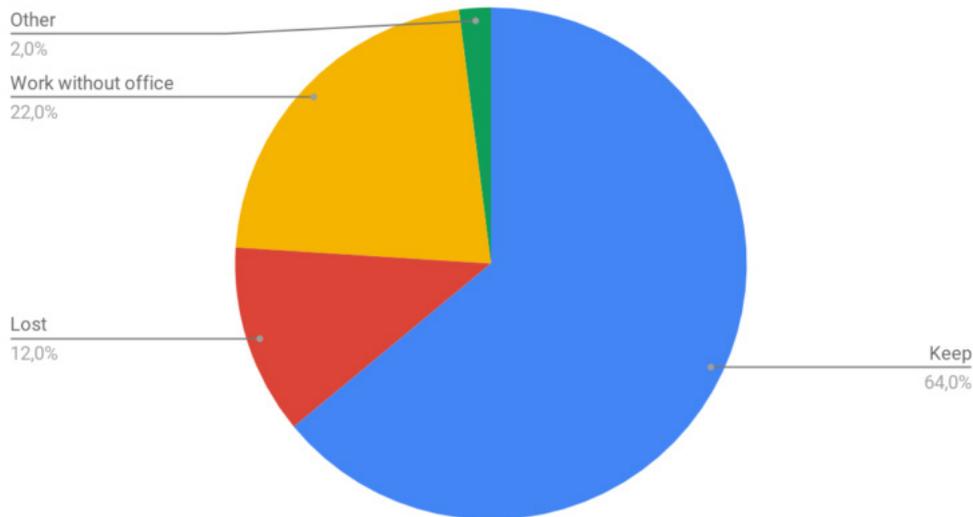
64% of NGOs have kept their offices; 12% were forced to give up their offices. It should be noted that 22% previously worked without offices.

40% of respondents believe that a reduction in the number of trips has weakened interaction between partners. 42% report damage to social capital and difficulty in implementing ongoing projects.

28% of NGOs continue to conduct interviews with new employees online (and practiced this previously); 16% do not plan to hire new employees.

52% of NGOs have had a long practice of online conversations with donors

and partners; 16% have begun to conduct and evaluate such a practice positively; and 12%, negatively.

Employees from other regions, countries
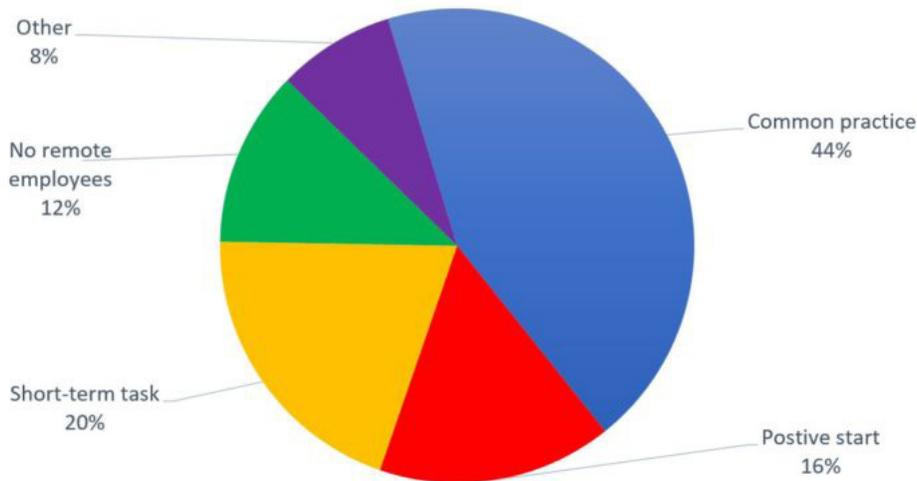
44% of NGOs have long practiced recruitment of employees from other regions (countries) for remote work; 16% have begun such a practice and evaluate it positively. 20% recruit remote workers but only for short-term assignments, and 12% do not recruit them at all since they cannot monitor their work.

72% of NGOs have changed practically nothing in the area of IT; 20% have purchased additional software; 24% have improved their technical support.

Communication platforms
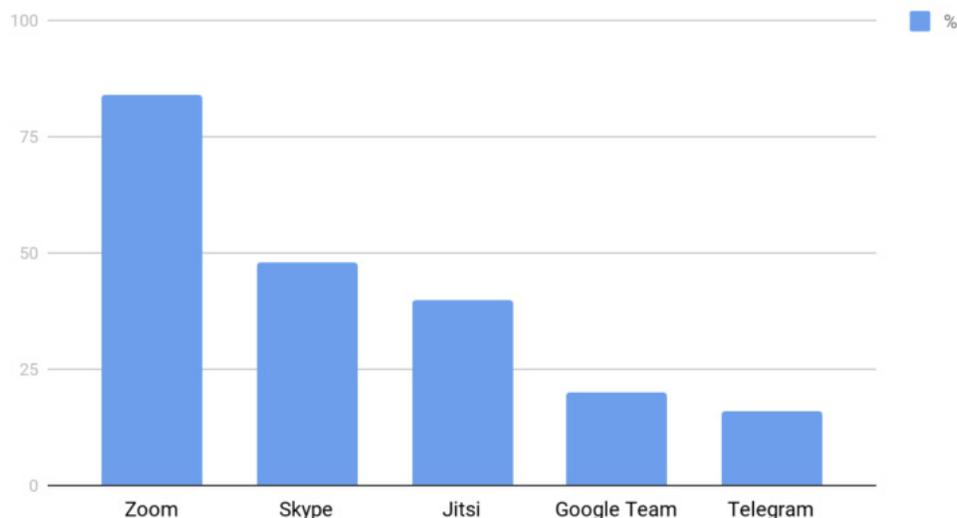
Among communications platforms, Zoom is the absolute leader; 84% of NGOs use it; next comes Skype at 48%; Jitsi, 40%, Google Team, 20% and Telegram, 16%.

For remote group work, Slack is most often used (16%) and Zoom (12%); even so, 16% of NGOs do not use such platforms at all.

64% of NGOs believe that their digital image has remained the same; 40% have begun to regularly conduct webinars, streaming and other forms of online events.

28% of NGOs have increased their activity on social networks.

32% of NGOs are considering whether to create their own online school; 20% have already begun creating their own online educational modules.

60% of NGOs are positive about online training; 36% are neutral.

76% of NGOs believe it is necessary to increase online communications among employees.

NGO representatives believe it is important (from most to least important):

1. To conduct an evaluation of changes in their activity to understand what forms of activity has successfully gone online, and which have not, and why?

2. To evaluate the tools (both new and customary) used for work under new conditions. To create a list of needs.

3. To prepare for reorganization of their online assets considering the new situation.

4. To begin an evaluation of losses, financial, reputational, and so on. To clarify which of these are related to successful or non-successful digital transformation.

5. To prepare a plan for coming out of quarantine, taking account the previous points.

50% of NGOs are prepared to conduct the first two items on their own. Practically all are ready to take part in projects to facilitate the fulfillment of these items.

CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, the NGOs surveyed have coped fairly well with the crisis and have learned new methods of work. Previous practices and attention to the latest software developments, as well as the desire to reduce the cost of communications, have an impact.

A large number of those surveyed acknowledge the serious influence of the pandemic on their work; that is, the need to develop work strategies under the new conditions is becoming obvious (proceeding from the thesis that the world will no longer be the same).

NGOs have suffered fewer financial losses then some types of business (the tourist industry, entertainment industry and so on). But a discernible number speak of the seriousness of the losses and the possibility of closure. We will understand the real financial consequences only by the end of the year.

A significant part of NGO work is built on the people-to-people model. That is, losses of social capital are acknowledged and predictable. And here it is possible to speak about emerging new practices of distance work which is also based on the people-to-people model.

A large number of NGOs have successfully managed and are continuing to cope with the transition to a remote work format and in doing so, have kept almost all their employees. This indicates several positive points: 1) NGOs have been actively practicing remote schemes for work and interaction, which came in very handy under the conditions of the pandemic (there was simply organizational and technological reinforcement of these schemes); 2) Both leaders and employees of NGOs have demonstrated their flexibility in adapting to new conditions, and the

learning and application of new schemes; 3) The geography of workers has been extended; if before the pandemic, only some NGOs practiced recruitment of employees from other regions and countries, now this will become a full-scale trend, which in turn requires new strategies and technological solutions.

In connection with the expansion of the practice of distance work, one of the new directions will be the development of new approaches for encouraging the loyalty of employees and volunteers in the new situation. It is quite possible that developers of platforms for online cooperation should give some thought to this.

The absence of trips and, as a consequence, opportunities for communication in person with partners, donors and so on is evaluated by a significant number of NGOs as a negative phenomenon, leading, in turn, to difficulties in implementing a noticeable number of projects. Hence the conclusion follows that that is one of the areas of activity most anticipated for resumption (after the removal of restrictions) and at the same time, we can surmise potentially more attention to the details of organization and effectiveness of in-person meetings through preparatory online work, selection of participants and so on.

A large number of NGOs surveyed had passed through the first phase of digital conversion even before the pandemic. It appears possible to assume that the general picture is somewhat sadder, but that is exactly why we must devote new strategies and projects to digital conversion.

Among the newest directions it seems reasonable to devote attention to the following:

1. Further testing of communications platforms and interaction with developers for possible mutually beneficial cooperation with NGOs.

2. Testing and even possibly development of relevant platforms for online co-operation. Presumably, there is very serious potential for development here.

3. Strategies, tactics, study of webinars, streaming and so on. The demand for quality production grows with the move online, and this also opens up greater prospects for access to new audiences.

4. Online schools and other online educational modules – well-known technologies – take on new relevance under the conditions of the crisis and the restrictions – presumably, this is one of the directions with the greatest prospects as a whole, as well as in the third sector.

5. The digital image and presence of NGOs on social networks – here we observe a rapid obsolescence of approaches and the need not even for a review of strategies, but a total redevelopment of them. In the near future, every NGO, aside from a press office, must have social media marketing.

6. Online interaction among employees is another new topic which must be thought about seriously. What can replace team-building, drinking coffee together or going to a restaurant, not to mention office parties and birthdays? After all, this is a significant part of the social interaction from which motivation in fact depends, as well as the team's effectiveness.

A significant number of the NGOs surveyed expressed a readiness to take part in joint projects, in which facilitation will be provide for:

1. Evaluation of the successful move of NGO activity online.
2. Evaluation of the ongoing status of tools and creation of lists of new tools needed.
3. Evaluation and reorganization of online assets.

NGOs have shown their flexibility, desire, and opportunity to reorganize their

work in connection with the new conditions and restrictions. In many cases, NGOs have expanded their activity (that is, they have undertaken activity not characteristic of a normal time), taking part in creation and support (structural, resource, digital) of self-help groups in connection with the pandemic. This was particularly clearly seen in major cities – more than 20 such initiatives have been recorded. It should be noted that active cooperation between NGOs and business and finding new models for work under the conditions of the pandemic – for example, an NGO working with the homeless, a network of mini-hotels and cafes.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the third sector is expecting a major review of strategies both structural and ideological, the appearance of new topics such as violations of human rights in the pandemic. We can also presume that a significant part of the activity which has gone online will remain there and will develop along its own path. The third sector has demonstrated serious resilience to the crisis and also flexibility and adaptability in learning new methods and topics.

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