



## COALITION FOR WORK WITH PSYCHOTRAUMA AND PEACE KOALICIJA ZA RAD SA PSIHOTRAUMOM I MIR

### MONTHLY REPORT MAY 2019

#### INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The month has been very busy, and we expect that the coming months will be as busy or busier.

The state of the region is colored by the migrant situation and by Croatian politics. With regard to the migrant situation, it gets worse and worse. Pushbacks by the police in all countries in the region are quite violent. Living conditions, even in the official camps, are inhumane. With regard to local and regional politics, things seem to be moving more and more in nationalist directions, as was shown by the European elections. We continue to be the only organization in the region providing talk therapy without charge onsite and online.

With regard to external affairs, first, we continued our work with clients. The issues that we are seeing are those which we always see – sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of children who now are grown up, this added to war trauma and to a substantial amount of trans-generational transmission of trauma. The Split group did not meet in May because of the absence of the participants. We continued supervision with Ivan Maslow and Alphonse Kanda.

With regard to migrants, we continued our work of education and psychological supervision onsite and online with No Name Kitchen in Šid, Serbia and the Velika Kladuša/Bihač area of Bosnia, and started a group online with volunteer lawyers in Greece with Advocates Abroad.

We are following a free online course on work with unaccompanied minors and youth given by the University of Strathclyde.

This month we gave a seminar for students of psychology at the University of Osijek, Croatia, two online seminars for students at the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic, and have started a series of seminars for students wishing to work with migrants from the Departments of Psychology and Political Science from the University of Belgrade.

We have begun, again, to work on the second self-paced online course, namely that on interpersonal and group communication, in the Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET) series.

We have heard the term “voluntourism” on the BBC. We find it extremely appropriate. We do not really like people who come in that context.

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In the coming months, we will continue our work to the greatest extent possible, given our limited financial and human resources. Our concentration will be on migrant issues. We also will continue our work on the Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET) courses.

### **STATE OF THE REGION**

The migrant crisis continued, with the police employing ever harsher measures to control the borders. In Bosnia and Serbia, people are sleeping in parks, on footpaths, and in dangerous buildings. Migrants also face the hazard of landmines left over from Bosnia's war in the 1990s. Most of the migrants are concentrated in the western towns of Bihač and Velika Kladuša where resources are overstretched. The situation is dire.

For this reason, the night before the visit of Angela Merkel, posters appeared on the streets of Zagreb with her statements, "We can do it?" and "Croatia is doing an extraordinary job with its security forces, which I will especially appreciate". These depict Merkel, with, in the background, the face of a beaten refugee. The signs point out the hypocrisy and turnaround of European policy toward refugees and migrants.

There is an obvious mistrust of political elites as well as of democracy itself. The worst thing is that the citizens are right. The fact is, that some political systems are called democratic and have basic democratic institutions. Yet, the power functions are the same as in the old authoritarian system, so democracy exists only as an empty form. In general, citizens do not like to vote and hardly decide to go out for elections, even for national elections.

From the perspective of a regular voter, the so-called "ordinary man or woman", the experience of almost three decades of life in this kind of democracy tells him or her the following: vote or don't vote, you will be dealt the same hand. One party is like the other, because all of them are against ordinary people. They only promise and, when they come to power, they start to behave quite differently. They all lie and steal.

The result of election shows a disparity of 14 percentage points between left and right voices, which may not be only the result of the unconvincing SDP and the still less successful new left-wing options. The reason for such a disparity lies, perhaps, in a deeper change of the electoral/demographic structure of the Croatia, namely that emerging through emigration. For the final conclusions, we will have to wait for scientific analysis, but the Croatian voter body simply has become more conservative than it ever has been. Perhaps in the medium term, we only will be able to choose a nuance of black.

We repeat that, generally speaking, there has been very little change in the psychological state of people in the period that we have been in the region. We are the only organization in the region offering assistance on psychological traumatization. The importance of mental health and wellbeing is still highly undervalued and stigmatized.

## EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

### Introduction and Summary

Client work went on as it did April. The primary issues that we see are sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that these people had as children, with, added to this, war trauma and trans-generational transmission of trauma. All clients seem to be progressing.

The Split group did not take place this month because of the absence of the participants. We started an educational and supervision group in Johannesburg online that will take place twice per month. Other groups that have the potential for starting are in Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Uganda, and in northern Nigeria.

We continued psychological supervision with Ivan Maslow in Split and Alphonse Kanda in Johannesburg.

With regard to migrant work, we see the situation for migrants getting worse and worse. There are violent pushbacks by the police. We see migrants being exploited physically, psychologically, sexually, financially, and in other ways by officials and by smugglers and others. We continue to work online and onsite with No Name Kitchen in Šid, Serbia and in the Velika Kladuša/Bihač area of Bosnia. We are giving seminars and psychological supervision to volunteers and a small amount of assistance to migrants themselves. This month, we also have begun psychological supervision and education for volunteer lawyers working with Advocates Abroad in Greece.

Further, we have been following a free online course on work with unaccompanied minors and youth given by the University of Strathclyde.

This month we gave a seminar for students of psychology at the University of Osijek, Croatia, two seminars for students at the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic, and have started a series of seminars for students wishing to work with migrants from the Departments of Psychology and Political Science from the University of Belgrade.

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### Clients

We had five regular clients in May. Their issues were the ones that we have reported on in the past. The primary issues that we see are sexual, physical, and psychological abuse that these people had as children, this in addition to their war traumas and the trans-generational transmission of trauma. All clients seem to be progressing.

### Groups

The Split group did not take place this month because of the absence of the participants.

We started a new group online in Johannesburg, South Africa with Alphonse Kanda. Three people, one of them working professionally as a social worker and another as a teacher in the community, were present for this meeting. The potential is for eight people. All members of the group are involved with a Protestant church in the community. The group will be working in the townships around Johannesburg. The group will meet twice monthly.

We are working on setting up groups in refugee camps in Uganda.

We continue to work on setting up a group in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In June, we may start an online group in northern Nigeria.

Please also see the section on our work with migrants for information on the work in Šid, Kladuša/Bihač, and with Advocates Abroad in Greece.

We are open to starting other online educational groups with 4-10 participants.

### Supervision

The supervision with Ivan Maslow goes on.

The supervision with Alphonse Kanda also is continuing. As mentioned, one group already has formed and there is a possibility of another forming in Durban.

As to Alphonse himself, he is working very hard. He has a large group of students in logotherapy. He also is under a large amount of pressure with his thesis of which he hopes to finish a first draft by the end of the year.

## Migrant Work

### Introduction

The migrant situation in the region continues to worsen. The police are quite violent in their pushbacks, and many migrants are being injured. Both inside and outside the official centers, migrants are living under inhumane conditions. Further, in all of the camps, official and unofficial, there is mafia-like structure of smugglers. Males and females are being physically, psychologically, and sexually exploited. Official organizations are not dealing even with the serious medical issues of the migrants, and no one is dealing with their psychological needs. We continue to do what we can onsite and online in Šid in Serbia and Velika Kladuša/Bihač in Bosnia, this together with No Name Kitchen, and have started a seminar for lawyers in Greece, this together with Advocates Abroad. We also are taking a free online course on work with unaccompanied minors. Our funding situation does not allow us to do more, as much as we would like to.

### Work and Contact with No Name Kitchen

We continue our work with No Name Kitchen in the border town of Šid, Serbia and in the Velika Kladuša/Bihač region of Bosnia, near the Croatian border. We are speaking with them about working in other areas.

### Work in Šid, Serbia

During May, we started to work with the volunteers from No Name Kitchen and, to a small extent with the migrants, in Šid every Monday. This will continue. The situation at the “squat” in Šid, which is a destroyed factory without a roof, is deplorable. The migrants, virtually all of whom are young men, are living in tents. There is a generator. The volunteers provide food, wash clothes, provide water for showers, and give other services requested by the migrants. The squat is being run by a mafia-like organization of smugglers. There is psychological, physical, and sexual abuse of the young men. The volunteers are afraid of the smugglers, and have been physically threatened by them. Further, some of the volunteers have formed relationships with the migrants that we would argue get a bit too close. Also, we would prefer to see volunteers – this in all places – who would stay for long periods of time so that they understand the situations more fully and learn to cope with them. At the end of May, most of the volunteers, particularly those who had been there the longest, left and will not return. The volunteers are extremely burned out. The migrants are receiving no further psychological support. The volunteers have told us that the few “regular” psychologists in Šid are not willing to go to the squat. Further, the hospital is not willing to provide support to any but the most urgent cases. It seems that other migrants in other facilities, official and unofficial, in Šid also are not receiving psychological support. We see this as an urgent situation. Our current funding does not permit us to provide further service. We thus feel extremely frustrated.

### Work with Velika Kladuša and Bihač, Bosnia

Work with Velika Kladuša and Bihač is restarting, this with two excellent volunteers from Italy. Again, most volunteers are there for a very short time. The reports that we are getting say that there is a great deal of violence in the region, most of it from the police. Further, the migrants feel helpless and cannot move forward or backward.

Advocates Abroad

In connection with the Global Psychosocial Network (GPN), we had contact with Advocates Abroad, a US-based group of volunteer lawyers working in Greece and other regions with migrants. We agreed to do supervision with their attorneys and other staff. The meetings started on the last day of the month and we agreed to hold them weekly. The volunteers again are young. From all reports, the migrants in Greece urgently need assistance and are not getting it. Also, the volunteers also need assistance to minimize burnout.

Again, we repeat that we are willing to work online with volunteers and with migrants themselves in whatever region. Please contact us.

Course on Work with Unaccompanied Children and Youth

We have started to take a free online course given on FutureLearn, given by the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, on work with Unaccompanied Children and Youth. It is reasonable, although we know most of what is there. The link is <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/caring-for-children-moving-alone>. We recommend it to people who haven't got this sort of knowledge.

Work with UniversitiesUniversity of Osijek, Croatia

Charles Tauber gave a seminar for about 20 students of the Department of Psychology under Prof. Gorka Vuletić at the beginning of the month. Notably, of those 20, only two were males. This points out the lack of males, who are urgently needed in this work. The topic of the seminar was field work and PET, with discussion of migrant psychology, highlighting humanistic psychology and existential psychology. Prof. Vuletić indicated that she would invite us to give a similar seminar each year.

University of Olomouc, Czech Republic

Charles Tauber and Sandra Marić gave two online seminars for a group of four students. The students are studying social work, political science, religion, and philosophy. Two were from the Republic of Georgia, one was from the Ukraine, and one was from France. Before the second session of the seminar, the students submitted questions, which we then discussed.

University of Belgrade

A series of weekly seminars began this month, organized by Prof. Tamara Džamonja of the Departments of Psychology and Political Science. There is a group of 11, all female, all volunteers, who want to work with migrants. They are fairly enthusiastic and participate actively. This is a blended series, that is, online with occasional onsite visits.

Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET)

We finally are returning to work on the manual for the second course in the series, that is, the course on interpersonal and group communication. It is moving slowly because of our other commitments. The plan is to complete the manual, then to do the audios and videos. We hope that the course will be finished by the end of 2019.

### Miscellaneous

At the May Global Psychosocial Network meeting, Ariel Riker of Advocates Abroad explained their legal work with migrants in Greece.

Recently, a program on the BBC used the word “voluntourism”. We think that that is appropriate for people coming for a short period and who want a vacation and to get something on the CVs rather than actually doing something meaningful and learning about a situation. Obviously, we’re not at all fond of such people, as they take up our time and energy and don’t give back things, either to the beneficiaries or to us.

### **INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

The financial situation continues to be worrying. We are no closer to a solution of it.

### **PLANS FOR THE COMING PERIOD**

Externally, our concentration will be on work with the migrant situation. We will continue work with No Name Kitchen onsite and online in Šid, Kladuša, and perhaps elsewhere, and with Advocates Abroad. We also will continue the work with the group in South Africa and, hopefully, get groups in other places.

We continue to search hard for new funding sources. We also need more personnel to do what we would like to do. That takes funding, unfortunately.

We also would like to work further on the PET courses.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE**

June and the months after it thus will be very busy.

Still, we are progressing.