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I. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name:	Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia In Serbian – „Otvorena vrata pravosuđa“
Project Start Date and End Date:	January 7 th , 2019 – January 6 th , 2024
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights - YUCOM
Cooperative Agreement Number:	72016919CA00003
Name of Subcontractors/ Sub awardees:	1. European Policy Centre, 2. Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia, 3. CHRIS Network, 4. Judges' Association of Serbia, 5. Transparency Serbia, 6. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 7. Partners for Democratic Change Serbia, 8. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 9. CEPRIS, 10. People's Parliament Leskovac, 11. Forum of Judges of Serbia.
Project Timeframe:	January 7 th , 2023 – January 6 th , 2024

CONTENTS

1. PROJECT INFORMATION	1
2. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	3
3. PROJECT SUMMARY	5
3.1 Implementation framework	5
3.2 Project background	7
3.3 Executive summary	9
4. PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS	13
4.1 COMPONENT 0: Project Management	13
4.2 COMPONENT 1: Enhancing Communication Channels Between Citizens and the Judiciary	13
Activity 1.1 - Developing an online platform	14
Activity 1.2 - Regular maintenance and promotion of the Open Doors of the Judiciary Platform	16
Activity 1.3 - Local councils for access to justice	22
Activity 1.4 - Citizen-friendly guidance booklets	25
Activity 1.5 - Micro sub-grants	27
4.3 COMPONENT 2: Empowering Civil Society Monitoring to Identify Citizen Needs in Judicial Reforms	28
Activity 2.1 - Producing the monitoring methodology	29
Activity 2.2 - Development of the monitoring manual, monitoring tools and techniques	30
Activity 2.3 - Conducting a series of capacity building workshops for partners and sub- grantees on policy monitoring implementation	31
Activity 2.4 - Collection of monitoring data on judiciary functioning	32
Activity 2.5 - Preparation of a baseline report and an annual monitoring report on the state of affairs in courts and PPOs	33
Activity 2.6 - Dissemination of monitoring report	36
4.4 COMPONENT 3: Fostering Judicial Integrity via Citizen-Focused Accountability Mechanisms in the Judiciary	39
Activity 3.1 - Developing standards for improvement of Courts and PPOs' integrity plans	40
Activity 3.2. Developing a digital application for complaining procedures	41
Activity 3.2. Evidence-based participation and advocacy on monitoring findings, integrity and access to justice	43
5. PROJECT CHALLENGES	45
6. LESSONS LEARNED	46

2. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACAS- Anti-Corruption Agency
AP- Action Plan
AOR - Agreement Officer's Representative
AO - Agreement Officer
B&M plan- Branding Strategy and Marking Plan
BCHR - Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
BCSP - Belgrade Centre for Security Policy
CEP - European Policy Center
CHRIS Network - Network of the Committees for Human Rights in Serbia
CEPRIS - Center for Judicial Research
CSO - Civil Society Organization
FJS - Forum of Judges of Serbia
FM - Financial manager
FOI - Freedom of Information
HJC - High Judicial Council
IP – Implemented Partner
IT - Information Technology
IPA - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JAS - Judges' Association of Serbia
LP - Lead Partner
MEL - Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NJRS - National Judicial Reform Strategy
PAS - Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia
PARTNERS - Partners for Democratic Change Serbia
PPL - People's Parliament Leskovac
PC- Project Coordinator
PP - Project Partner
PMU - Project Management Unit
PA - Project Assistant
PPR - Program Performance Report
PB - Program Board
RoL - Rule of Law
RFA - Request for Applications
SC - Sub-grant Coordinator
SPC - State Prosecutorial Council
SC - Supreme Court
TS - Transparency Serbia

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WeBER - Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform

WB - World Bank

YUCOM - Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights

3.PROJECT SUMMARY

3.1 Implementation framework

Within the Project *Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia*, funded by USAID for the period January 7th, 2019 – January 6th, 2024, the prime implementing partner - [Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights – YUCOM](#), gathered 11 prominent professional associations and civil society organizations in action, namely: [European Policy Centre \(CEP\)](#), [Association of Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors of Serbia \(PAS\)](#), [CHRIS Network](#), [Judges' Association of Serbia \(JAS\)](#), [Transparency Serbia \(TS\)](#), [Belgrade Centre for Human Rights \(BCHR\)](#), [Partners for Democratic Change Serbia \(PARTNERS\)](#), [Belgrade Centre for Security Policy \(BCSP\)](#), [CEPRIS](#), [People's Parliament Leskovac \(PPL\)](#), [Forum of Judges of Serbia \(FJS\)](#).

The **overall objective** was to increase the level of trust in the judiciary by improving the mechanisms of communication between the citizens and the judiciary. This overall objective was achieved through three components of activities, precisely: establishing communication channels between the citizens and judiciary in order to increase understanding of citizens' rights and obligations and the role of the judiciary (SO1); detecting the citizen's priorities related to judiciary reforms via empowering civil society monitoring (SO2); and by improving judicial integrity via citizens oriented mechanisms for influencing the establishment of the accountable judiciary (SO3). The project was organized into 3 components that correspond thematically to each of the specific objectives. In addition to the key three components (Component 1-3), the horizontal Component 0 used a different structure and logic.

Recipients' capacities: YUCOM has gathered a strong front of 12 organizations with different perspectives and working experience in judicial reforms, which have already worked in different formats on providing greater access to justice to the citizens. All participants are leaders in their fields of work, with proven integrity, capacity and experience for the implementation of similar Contracts.

The expected **outcomes** of the Project were: 1. Improving communication between the citizens and judiciary through established innovative channels for interactive communication 2. Detecting the citizens' priorities related to judiciary reform through evidence-based monitoring and advocating for integration in future public policy documents. 3. Improving judicial integrity and accountability through making the complaining procedures more transparent and more available, and providing integrity plans that better recognize citizens' problems and needs.

Target groups: at least 100.000 citizens (with respective gender balance) who will benefit from specifically designed tools and mechanisms for greater access to justice, and judiciary – through their greater engagement and activities designed for empowering their integrity, as well as 100 CSOs, not only involved in the project front, but also local CSOs who will participate via sub-granting scheme.

Expected sustainability: The project implementation framework is genuinely a collaborative coalition model that includes many of the country's strongest and most relevant CSOs, but also maintains local representation and outreach. Project actions provide the basis for a sustained mechanism for communication, monitoring and integrity building. Raised citizens' awareness and knowledge, communication channels between citizens and judiciary, monitoring tools and

mechanisms for influencing the establishment of accountable judiciary were one of the most important impacts of the actions. From the institutional point of view, local councils were the most appropriate instrument for maintenance and further development of local centered discussion on the judiciary problem. Partnership with representatives of local authorities was one of the most important maintenance methods for further sustainability of local council meetings. By building links among state sector, NGOs, media and public, the project helped to better develop capacities within these structures to discuss the judiciary issues on the partnership principle. Developed monitoring tools (monitoring methodology) were offered to other CSOs, to conduct research on a periodical basis, after the USAID project cycle, thus making the results of the monitoring sustainable. Since the project coalition includes CSOs and professional organizations that are involved in the judicial reform process, part of our advocacy efforts was directed to the inclusion of monitoring results in the strategic documents. Outputs and outcomes stemming from project work all are contributing to the quality of the reform policies, better information, and raised knowledge of the citizens, about the reform judiciary process.

The project was organized in 3 components that correspond thematically to each of the three specific objectives (outcomes), which are achieved through one or more project results (outputs) consisting of different sets of activities.

First goal of the three specific goals that the project aimed to achieve was to establish proactive relationship between the representatives of the judiciary and the citizens and their better acquaintance with the system itself, which would help citizens to better meet and understand their rights, as well as how to reach them. The project aimed to establish this type of relationship through several channels of communication with citizens, which have been adapted to the different social structure of the population, age, and education level. This includes communication through a digital platform, digital media and blog posts, as well as through local councils' meetings in cities and municipalities all over the Serbia. The project engages experts who explain, in a simpler manner, certain topics of relevance to understand the various procedures in which citizens' rights are exercised, with the possibility for citizens who are interested in a specific topic to interact.

Led by the spirit of developed democracies, the project wanted to adopt the principle of open dialogue between citizens and the judiciary, and to encourage their greater engagement in local communities. The task of the project was to help citizens to understand their rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and to inform citizens how the judicial system works and how judges and prosecutors make fair and rational decisions.

The **second goal** of the project involves organizations to work on researching and detecting the primary needs of citizens in their everyday practice with the judiciary in Serbia. Through research based on interaction with citizens, non-governmental organizations identified the priorities of judicial reforms from the perspective of the citizens and suggested that these priorities be included in future strategic documents. This activity understood and investigated citizens' reasons for low level of trust in the judicial system, widely monitoring citizens' experiences in meeting with the judiciary. As a result of this activity, the coalition on the project created three comprehensive reports and one issues specific that serves as a mean of further public policies formulation that support citizens' needs.

The **third goal** of the project was to raise the accountability and integrity of judicial institutions. The project aimed to work with judicial and civil society stakeholders to enhance the integrity and accountability of judicial institutions through an improved methodology of integrity plans and

an open procedure for appeals and free citizens' complaints, making them more transparent, more accessible, and engaging citizens themselves. The project seeks to identify what the citizens mean by the integrity of the representatives of the judiciary in their own communities, to set the integrity plans in accordance with local specifics. Standards for improvement of courts and PPOs' integrity plans in those local communities were presented and the Project advocated for their adoption. At the same time, NGOs with professional associations offered a model complaint mechanism that, in the citizens' opinion, would be simple and at the same time respect the highest level of trust.

Since the communication between judiciary and citizens is at a low level, the main objective of new Communication strategies of State Prosecutors' Council and High Judicial Council was establishing proactive communication to enable wider public and citizens to understand judiciary procedures and make them more transparent and available. The main problems of judiciary communication are that internet communication of courts is passive and courts user's services exists in more administrative than "communication" form. Also, courts in Serbia do not communicate in a planned and strategic consistent manner, which provides lack of transparency and there is no proactive sustainable communication mechanism with the public and media.

3.2 Project background

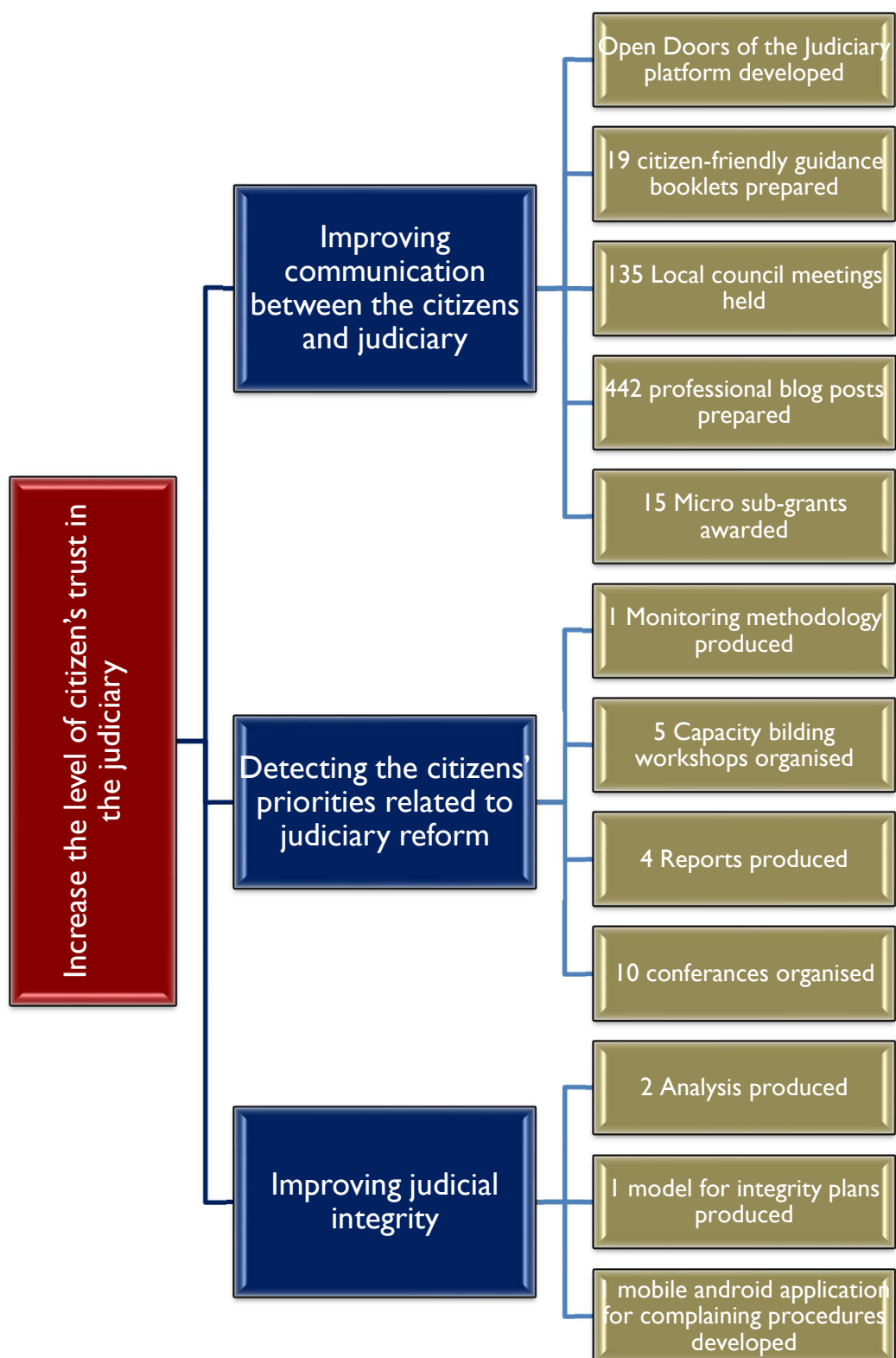
Since citizens are largely left out of the focus for various projects tackling judicial reform progress, the situation creates urgency for a complementary civil society led project, which would put citizens to the forefront.

According to Experiences and Perceptions of Justice in Serbia (2013) more than 40% of the general population had a negative opinion about overall functioning of judicial system. The Serbian people generally have little or no knowledge about how the Court or Public Prosecutor operates. Lack of integrity or even active corruption within justice institutions mandated to enforce and safeguard the rule of law is particularly alarming and destructive to society. The social effects of such fact-based and perceived systemic corruption undermine the legitimacy of the state and democracy itself. The project action contributed to raising integrity in the judiciary and improving citizens perception of judicial integrity.

Public awareness of complaint mechanisms and disciplinary rules is low since public education has not been provided. Also, system of complaining procedures is fragmented which causes duplication that leads to confusion among ordinary citizens. Anti-corruption mechanisms, such as Integrity plan, are not effective since they became more administrative documents than instruments for the prevention of corruption.

Any approach aiming at strengthening judicial integrity needs to be considered, to be truly effective, it is not enough to establish an anti-corruption system such as integrity plans and a complaining mechanism: parallel measures need to be undertaken to restore the public trust in the judiciary itself. So, this project includes a specific complementary strategy to enhance the public's trust in the judiciary through established communication channels, raise accountability of judiciary branch and recognize problems later addressed in public policies. Only if such a trust relationship is restored, the public will begin to have confidence and trust in the judiciary.

Project overview



3.3 Executive summary

The development of an interactive online platform known as "Open Doors of Judiciary Platform" formed the central focus of the project activities. This platform was designed to serve as a digital space where citizens could engage in discussions related to judicial reform and the rule of law. Crafted to be user-friendly and accessible to individuals of all ages, the platform provided a valuable resource for those seeking advice or information regarding judicial reform and their legal rights. Continuous updates ensured that the platform remained a relevant and informative resource concerning the judiciary. Promotion efforts involved leveraging social media, organizing events, and utilizing traditional media channels to reach a broader audience. To simplify complex judicial matters, infographics and professional blogs were created. These blogs were contributed to by experts and organizations, with a focus on translating intricate legal concepts into easily understandable content. The goal was to populate the platform with informative materials that empowered citizens to actively participate in the ongoing process of judicial reform. Furthermore, Project established local councils for access to justice in 15 Basic Courts across Serbia, that were later adapted and replicated in over 70 Courts and Public Prosecutors Offices. These councils served as bridges between local communities and the judiciary, bringing together civil society organizations, members of the public, and representatives of judiciary. The primary objective was to improve communication and interaction between citizens and the judiciary at the grassroots level. Next to local judges and project partners, local prosecutors, law professors, State Prosecutors Council and High Judicial Council representatives, as well as attorneys, bailiffs, free legal aid providers from the local self-government units, representatives of other CSOs, international organizations and Centers for social work participated on **135 implemented events on over 60 different topics**. Campaign aimed to educate citizens about access to justice in Serbia through the creation of **19 citizen-friendly guidance booklets** was conducted. These booklets employed infographics, visualizations, and practical tips to explain various legal procedures. Corresponding video animations were also developed to present judicial reform topics in an engaging and accessible manner. My Rights in the Enforcement Procedure is just one of the 19 booklets prepared. It instructs the parties what rights are available to them, what the procedure looks like and how much it will cost them, what the templates that the parties need to fill look like etc. The Chamber of Bailiffs is the most credible judicial institution dealing with this topic, and after seeing this booklet prepared by the Project, they agreed that this is exactly the kind of tool they need in their daily work, that it simply teaches parties about everything their employees spend hours explaining. They approached us with a desire to publish booklet on their [web portal](#) to make it available to the general public as well as to send it all of their offices in Serbia.

The platform boasts a diverse and extensive roster of **over 160 accomplished authors**, comprising a wide spectrum of legal professionals and experts in the field. These contributors include judges, public prosecutors, attorneys, professors, and other legal experts who have lent their knowledge and insights to create a rich repository of blog posts. Their diverse backgrounds and wealth of experience have enriched the platform's content, offering a comprehensive understanding of various legal aspects and issues. Through their valuable contributions, the platform has been able to provide readers with a multifaceted perspective on matters related to the judiciary, law, and legal reforms. These authors have played an important role in ensuring that the platform remains a trusted and informative resource for individuals seeking guidance and

information on legal topics. As the popularity of blog posts among citizens became evident, project establish ongoing collaboration with newspapers such as "Danas," "Vreme," and "NIN" for promoting these blog posts in both printed and online formats continued during the current year. By leveraging media outlets like "Danas," "Vreme," and "NIN," project was able to reach a broad audience across Serbia, as all three newspapers enjoy national circulation. The diverse and informative content provided by these blog posts resulted in the platform receiving a significantly higher number of page views than initially anticipated. A total of **442 blog posts were published**, with 220 of them featured in the online and printed editions of "Danas" (125 posts), "Vreme" (61 posts), and "NIN" (34 posts). Additionally, nearly every blog post was shared by local micro sub-grantees, including Paragraf, as well as by several local portals such as Pancevo Online and Vranje News, which consistently shared a majority of project content on a weekly basis. Collectively, these 220 blog posts garnered over 770.000 views across all online versions of selected newspapers, with printed editions ranging from 20,000 to 75,000 views per specific newspaper edition.

To actively engage citizens and ensure the campaign's success, materials were shared on the Open Doors of Judiciary Platform and promoted through social media and local outreach efforts. The campaign was implemented in **50% of municipalities in Serbia**, ensuring wide-reaching impact. A micro sub-grant scheme, known as "Engaging for Justice," encouraged local civil society organizations to play an active role in disseminating information on access to justice. Eligible **15 organizations received funding** to support project initiatives, fostering further engagement with citizens at the community level. With the help of local organizations, Project organized 45 street actions in local communities throughout Serbia, thus covering as much as one-fourth of all local self-government units in Serbia. Most of these activities were shared on the project Facebook page. The most important segment of these street actions is that local organizations representatives were approached by people of various educational profiles and ages, with also various problems related to justice, and direct contact with over 6,500 citizens (around 150 for each place where the action took place) directly contributes to raising public awareness of their rights and the functioning of judicial institutions. Together with local organizations, **over 50.000 booklets were shared** in courts, public prosecutors' offices, local self-government units and other institutions.

Level of citizens' trust in the work of judicial institutions is influenced by many factors, and our task was to prove that the establishment of new channels of communication between the representatives of the judiciary and citizens, their continued maintenance, increases this trust. We continued to confirm that such events influence and have the effect of increasing citizens' confidence in the work of judicial institutions and that such events help citizens to better understand how the judiciary functions.

During Covid-19, the focus was on publishing more frequent blog posts explaining different situations to citizens. Since useful information is provided by different blog posts, it led to the fact that the Platform in very short time had 300 % more visitors than usual, for just a week it had more page views than in the whole 2019. For example, blog post [What does it mean to introduce a state of emergency for people in Serbia](#) prepared by YUCOMs attorney at law, published in the night when a state of emergency was declared, had over 500.000 reach.

Over 800 posters were made and sent with a memo to all courts, public prosecutor's offices, centers for social work, local self-government units and NGOs dealing with the rule of law, so that they could display them in their premises. Judicial institutions of all jurisdictions responded

to join to the campaign and more than 100 of them wrote us with positive feedback. As the number of judicial institutions involved in the campaign grows, it is very important to note that in their responses they praise the usefulness of the platform and express a desire for them to be involved in the whole project in a more active format.

As Google analytics for the Platform showed us that more and more citizens were coming back to read our content, we used this situation to intensify blog posts writing by covering a wide range of topics that most citizens are interested in. A lot of people get back to us with questions about how to resolve their problems concerning work contracts, safety at work, social benefits, entering the country etc. YUCOMs legal team gave free legal advice to all people that addressed to us. We used those received questions to feed the next topics to be explained in blog posts. These actions led to an increasing number of Project Facebook page followers up to 15.000, LinkedIn up to 2.900 and Twitter up to 370 in five years of existence. Within this five-year period, Platform had **over 800.000 unique users, over 1.350.000 pageviews**, which is very good having in mind that our target was to have 750.000 pageviews in the whole project implementation period. The average session per user was 1.31 which shows us that after visiting our Platform, almost every third person was checking other useful materials on the platform. The analysis further confirms that our audience was mostly between 35 - 54 years of age. 74 % of our visitors use mobile devices while 24 % use Desktops, and 2 % use other devices. The platform **now generates over 2.000 pageviews per day**.

"Empowering Civil Society Monitoring to Identify Citizen Needs in Judicial Reforms" component served the purpose of enabling civil society organizations (CSOs) to actively monitor the ongoing judicial reforms and assess their impact on citizens. The primary goal was to bolster the capacities of CSOs in collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data to provide evidence-based feedback on the effectiveness of judicial reforms. Through the development of a comprehensive monitoring methodology, including the identification of measurable indicators aligned with strategic frameworks such as the National Judicial Reform Strategy and EU accession requirements, CSOs were equipped to evaluate reform outcomes. The collected data informed the preparation of baseline and annual monitoring reports, which highlighted key developments, challenges, and recommendations for improving the judiciary's performance and accessibility. Dissemination activities, including national conferences, press conferences, and advocacy meetings with policymakers, aimed to ensure that monitoring findings reached a wide audience and contributed to informed decision-making and accountability within the judiciary.

Together with the Basic Court in Vranje, on January 22nd 2020, [the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights YUCOM, hosted H.E. Anthony F. Godfrey, U.S. Ambassador to Serbia](#) to discuss ways of making the judiciary more transparent and accessible to citizens. Representatives from the Public Bailiffs Chamber, the USAID Rule of Law Project and the Civil Society Organization from Vranje also joined the meeting.



The 2022 White House Legal Aid Report features the Open Door of the Judiciary project as a noteworthy example of effective implementation. The Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable, which

brings together 28 federal agencies to enhance coordination between federal programs and enable citizens to access justice without legal assistance, published the report. The report highlights initiatives by agencies to streamline information sharing and improve access to federal services, programs, and benefits. Additionally, the report recognizes Serbia's success in USAID-supported projects aimed at establishing trust between citizens and the legal system. One of the notable achievements is the creation of the Open Doors of the Judiciary digital platform, which has facilitated communication and transparency between judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and citizens.¹

In December 2022, Supreme Court invited our project to present its results as an example of good practice on their conference 'Courts and media', organized for all presidents of courts and their spokespersons from Belgrade Appellate jurisdictions. Project manager of the Open Doors of the Judiciary project had a [presentation](#) on the topic "Cooperation of courts, civil society and the media in order to improve the transparency of the work of the courts - experience in the implementation of the Open Doors of the Judiciary project".



Managing officers of the YUCOM attended the annual International Association for Court Administration (IACA) conference. This conference was focused on Access to Justice and People-Centered Justice programs. During the three-day conference, on October 27th, Momčilo Živadinović presented the Open Doors of Judiciary project, showcasing all the results and their strategy in addressing many questions citizens have when interacting with the judiciary. These achievements were accomplished over the past 5 years. Andrew Solomon, USAID Senior Rule of Law Adviser, joined in the presentation of their work, providing a broader context of their efforts, and highlighting their significance and potential application in other countries. Participants from 40 countries presented their programs.



¹ <https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-03/Legal%20Aid%20Interagency%20Roundtable%202022%20Report.pdf>

4. PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

4.1 COMPONENT 0: Project Management

Within this component, all activities related to establishing the working framework have been successfully implemented, specifically work plans for each project year with accompanying timelines, MEL plan, and Branding and Marking plan. In addition to these program documents, all evaluation-related documents have been continuously provided, including quarterly narrative and financial reports, and annual reports on project implementation.

4.2 COMPONENT I: Enhancing Communication Channels Between Citizens and the Judiciary

Component I, titled "Establishing Communication Channels Between Citizens and the Judiciary," was a critical aspect of the project aimed at fostering improved understanding and communication between Serbian citizens and the country's judicial system. At its core, this component sought to bridge the gap between the intricacies of the judiciary and the general public's comprehension by creating effective communication platforms. Component I strived to create an extensive framework for communication and interaction between Serbian citizens and the judicial system. Through a combination of online platforms, mobile applications, local councils, and informative campaigns, it aimed to empower citizens with knowledge about their legal rights and the functioning of the judiciary, ultimately contributing to a more transparent and accessible judicial system.

The development of an **interactive online platform** known as "Open Doors of Judiciary Platform" formed the central focus of the first part of Component I. This platform was designed to serve as a digital space where citizens could engage in discussions related to judicial reform and the rule of law. Crafted to be user-friendly and accessible to individuals of all ages, the platform provided a valuable resource for those seeking advice or information regarding judicial reform and their legal rights. Importantly, **citizens were encouraged to submit questions and provide feedback on various judicial topics**, thereby fostering a two-way communication channel. The second facet of Component I entailed the regular maintenance and promotion of the Open Doors of Judiciary Platform. Continuous updates ensured that the platform remained a relevant and informative resource concerning the judiciary. Promotion efforts involved leveraging social media, organizing events, and utilizing traditional media channels to reach a broader audience. To simplify **complex judicial matters, infographics and professional blogs were created**. These blogs were contributed to by experts and organizations, with a focus on translating intricate legal concepts into easily understandable content. The ultimate goal was to populate the platform with informative materials that empowered citizens to actively participate in the ongoing process of judicial reform.

Furthermore, Component I established local councils for access to justice in 15 Basic Courts across Serbia, that were later adapted and replicated in over 70 Courts and Public Prosecutors Offices. These councils served as bridges between local communities and the

judiciary, bringing together civil society organizations, members of the public, and representatives of judiciary. The primary objective was to improve communication and interaction between citizens and the judiciary at the grassroots level.

To complement these efforts, an information campaign titled "What if..." was initiated. This campaign aimed to educate citizens about access to justice in Serbia through the creation of 19 citizen-friendly guidance booklets. These booklets employed infographics, visualizations, and practical tips to explain various legal procedures. Corresponding video animations were also developed to present judicial reform topics in an engaging and accessible manner. To actively engage citizens and ensure the campaign's success, materials were shared on the Open Doors of Judiciary Platform and promoted through social media and local outreach efforts. The campaign was implemented in 50% of municipalities in Serbia, ensuring wide-reaching impact. Lastly, a micro sub-grant scheme, known as "Engaging for Justice," encouraged local civil society organizations to play an active role in disseminating information on access to justice. Eligible 15 organizations received funding to support project initiatives, fostering further engagement with citizens at the community level.

Activity 1.1 -Developing an online platform

The development and launch of the "Otvorena vrata pravosuđa" platform represented a significant achievement in the project's Component I. The platform was designed to bridge the gap between citizens and the judicial system, offering valuable information and facilitating constructive communication between the two parties. Its successful launch and initial engagement demonstrated its potential to serve as a vital resource for citizens seeking information on judicial reform and their legal rights. The resulting platform, "Otvorena vrata pravosuđa" (www.otvorenavratapravosudja.rs), was designed to be interactive and user-friendly, with the goal of attracting a wide audience of all ages seeking advice and information on judicial reform and related options. The platform offered citizens the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on various judicial topics without requesting information on individual cases. This engagement with the judicial system was facilitated through project partners, local courts, and public prosecutor's offices spokespersons, who had established strong cooperation with YUCOM. Moreover, citizens were encouraged to share their personal testimonies and experiences with courts, with a commitment to publishing both positive and negative comments. The feedback collected through the platform would also contribute to the achievement of results within other activities. YUCOM took on the role of Platform administrator, while project partners actively contributed to its development and ongoing updates.

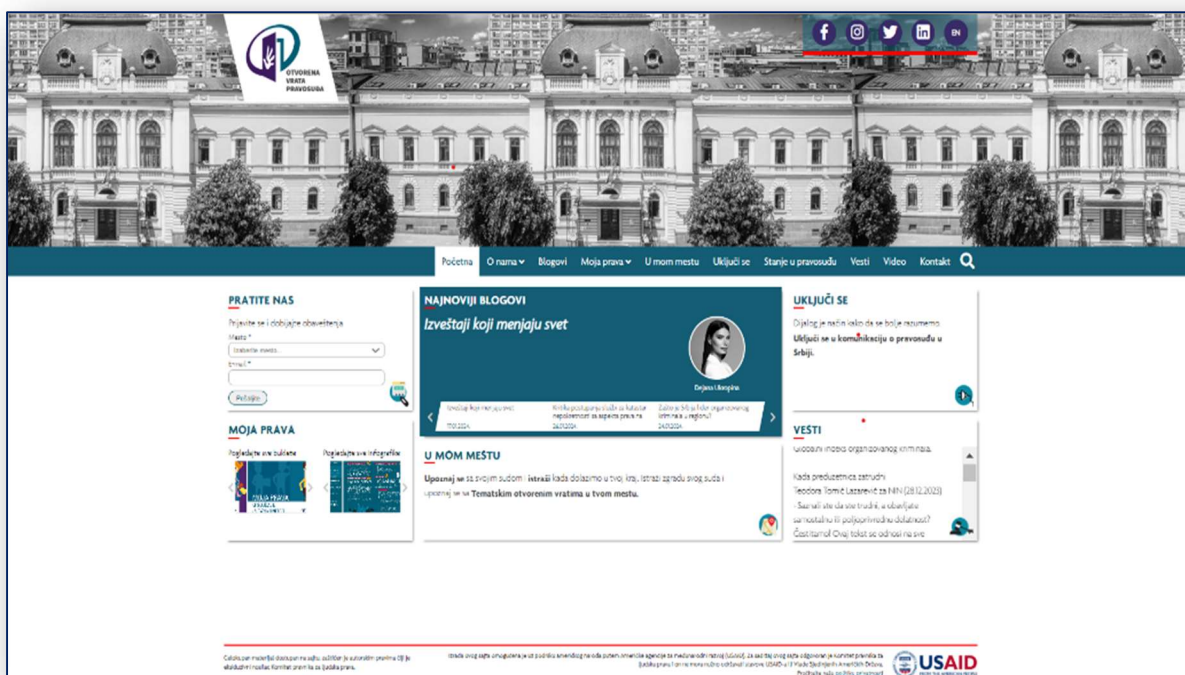
The platform served as a vital space for exchanging perspectives and critical opinions among professional associations, civil society organizations, and key stakeholders in the judicial sector. It provided citizens with the opportunity to share their experiences and offer feedback on the functioning of courts and public prosecutor's offices. Additionally, the platform functioned as a communication and visibility tool for public outreach, where USAID support and all project outputs were made accessible. Furthermore, YUCOM engaged with the President of the Supreme Court (SC) and the President of the High Judicial Council (HJC) to present the project's activities and their significance for the HJC's Communication Strategy and the public's understanding of the judiciary system. The SC expressed support for the project and committed to informing selected administrations of Basic Courts to provide full support for the project's implementation.

The platform was structured with various categories, including sections about the project, the platform's purpose and content, and information about the project consortium. It also featured a blog section with posts from judges, prosecutors, legal experts, and others, allowing citizens to interact with the authors. Furthermore, it included a "My Rights" section with booklets offering guidance to citizens in simple language, infographics to present content visually, and an "At My Place" section providing information about local events, Basic Courts, and an interactive map with contact information for various legal entities.

A "Get Involved" section encouraged citizens to suggest topics for future local council meetings and leave their contact information for participation in future events and updates on new materials. Additionally, a "News" section provided detailed information on all project activities, while a "Video Gallery" featured video recordings from various TV stations where project partners discussed the project and its activities. Finally, the "Contact" section offered the platform administrator's contact information.

Following the drafting of the initial version, the platform underwent modifications based on feedback from USAID before its official launch. The launch involved promotion through social networks, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with representatives from project partners inviting citizens to engage. Furthermore, promotional online banners were updated on the websites of all project partners and sub-grantees, and Google advertisements were employed to enhance visibility.

Print screen of the Platforms home page



Activity 1.2 - Regular maintenance and promotion of the Open Doors of the Judiciary Platform

1.2.1. - Infographics

Infographics related to access to justice were visual representations of information and data that aimed to simplify complex legal concepts, procedures, and information related to access to justice. They used graphics, charts, and concise text to convey key messages and make legal information more understandable and engaging for the general public. During this reporting period, 50 infographics were prepared by project partners, all in consultations with YUCOM. All graphics are available on the platform. These infographics covered various topics within the realm of access to justice and courts, including:

Legal Rights and Procedures

These infographics provide valuable insights into various legal rights and procedures that individuals need to navigate. They cover topics such as the management of residential communities, the progress of civil cases in court, changes in laws related to access to public information, reporting irregularities in public procurement, obligations of journalists, plea agreements, services of public notaries, control of special evidence actions, consumer rights, mechanisms to combat hate speech online, protection against discrimination, and safeguards against unjustifiable deprivation of liberty. These infographics offer essential guidance for individuals seeking legal information and understanding their rights and responsibilities within the legal system.



Example of developed infographics

Citizen Rights and Participation

This category focuses on infographics that empower citizens by providing information about their rights and how to participate in civic processes. Topics include citizens' rights during public assemblies, reporting irregularities in public procurement, protection against hate speech online, protection against discrimination, safeguards against unjustifiable deprivation of liberty, and the right to free legal aid. These infographics serve as educational tools to help citizens engage more effectively in their communities and access justice when needed.

Public Information and Access

In this category, infographics shed light on access to public information and related legal aspects. They cover novelties in laws concerning access to public information, mechanisms to combat hate speech online, and reporting irregularities in public procurement. These infographics emphasize the importance of transparency, public access to information, and the protection of individual rights when dealing with public authorities or entities.

Legal Procedures and Processes

Infographics in this category provide step-by-step explanations of legal procedures and processes. They offer insights into the progress of civil cases in court, reporting irregularities in public procurement, plea agreements, the control of special evidence actions, and the regular flow of criminal procedures. These infographics help demystify complex legal processes, making them more understandable and accessible to the general public.

Consumer Rights and Protection

This category focuses on consumer-related infographics, covering topics such as traders' obligations regarding reclamations, consumer rights, and the costs associated with court proceedings. These infographics empower consumers to understand their rights, seek remedies for disputes, and protect themselves when engaging in commercial transactions.

Specialized Legal Bodies and Committees

Infographics in this category provide information about specialized legal bodies and committees. They explain the roles and responsibilities of entities like the Ethics Committee of the High Judicial Council and address public prosecutions following constitutional amendments. These infographics offer insights into the functions of specialized legal institutions.

Access for Specific Groups

This category addresses the unique challenges faced by specific groups in accessing justice. It includes an infographic highlighting the obstacles encountered by people with disabilities when seeking justice. These infographics raise awareness about the importance of inclusive and accessible legal systems.

Serbian Constitutional Changes and Resulting Impact

This category delves into infographics explaining the changes made to the Serbian constitution and their consequences. It provides insights into how constitutional amendments have affected

various aspects of the legal system, citizen rights, and the rule of law. These infographics aim to inform the public about the evolving constitutional landscape and its implications.

Rules of Conduct in Court for Citizens

Infographics in this category outline the rules of conduct and etiquette that citizens should adhere to when attending court proceedings. They offer guidance on appropriate behavior, courtroom decorum, and the expectations placed on individuals who participate in legal hearings. These infographics promote respect for the judicial process and ensure that citizens understand their role when present in a court of law.



Infographics within the Court

The infographics created as part of this comprehensive initiative have proven to be invaluable tools for courts and various public institutions in Serbia, as they have been strategically utilized to educate and inform citizens about their fundamental rights and legal processes. These visually engaging infographics have been prominently displayed within court premises, making them readily accessible to those seeking justice. In addition to courts, public institutions have also incorporated these infographics into their informational campaigns, disseminating essential knowledge to a wider audience. Over 100 institutions joined the campaign of promoting project visuals. By harnessing the power of these infographics, courts and public institutions have empowered citizens with a clearer understanding of their rights, thereby fostering transparency, accessibility, and increased public engagement within the legal system. This innovative approach to legal education has not only benefited the citizens of Serbia but has also contributed significantly to the overall enhancement of the rule of law within the country.

1.2.2. - Blog posts

Blog posts in this project served as an essential component of the overall strategy aimed at enhancing legal awareness and empowering citizens with information regarding their rights and the legal processes in Serbia. The primary purpose of these blog posts was to provide a platform for judges, prosecutors, legal experts, and other professionals within the legal field to share their insights and knowledge on various legal topics and everyday issues that citizens might encounter. Blog posts were used to educate the public about complex legal matters in a more accessible and reader-friendly format. They broke down legal concepts, procedures, and rights into understandable language, making the law more approachable for the general audience. By addressing common legal problems and challenges that citizens faced, these blog posts raised awareness about the legal rights and options available to individuals. This helped citizens make informed decisions and seek legal remedies when necessary.

Also, blog posts contributed to transparency in the legal system by explaining how courts operated, the stages of legal proceedings, and the roles of various actors within the justice system. This transparency-built trust between citizens and the legal institutions. Blogs often allowed for reader engagement through comments and discussions. This interaction helped clarify doubts, provided further information, and fostered a sense of community among those interested in legal matters.

Ultimately, the goal was to empower citizens with the knowledge they needed to navigate the legal landscape more confidently. When people understood their rights and the legal processes, they were better equipped to protect their interests and access justice. Blog posts played a crucial role in this project by making legal information more accessible, understandable, and engaging for the general public.

All blog posts were divided into several legal categories:

- **Criminal Law** - blog posts categorized under Criminal Law delved into various aspects of criminal justice, including the legal procedures, rights of suspects and defendants, the role of law enforcement, and discussions about specific criminal cases. These articles aimed to educate the public about their rights when facing criminal charges and the workings of the criminal justice system in Serbia. (E.g. [How to file a criminal complaint?](#) or [What is the job of the public prosecutor's office?](#))
- **Labor Law** - blog posts focused on matters related to employment, workers' rights, and employer obligations. They provided insights into labor contracts, workplace regulations, employment disputes, and legal protections for workers. These articles were designed to help employees understand their rights in the workplace. (E.g. [I want to quit my job, what are my rights?](#) or [The most important rights of employees in cases of termination of the employment contract by the employer](#))
- **Family Law** - blog posts centered around issues concerning family relationships and legal matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody, adoption, and inheritance. They aimed to clarify the legal aspects of family life and guide individuals through the complexities of family-related legal processes. (E.g. [How do I collect alimony arrears?](#) or [Joint Ownership of Spouses: What Do We Need to Know?](#))
- **Constitutional Law** - blog posts delved into the fundamental principles and provisions of the Serbian constitution. They explored topics like constitutional rights, the structure of government, and key constitutional amendments. These articles sought to enhance public awareness of the country's constitutional framework. (E.g. [Constitutionality in the Service of Human Rights Protection](#) or [Paradoxes of the Constitutional Court Practice](#))
- **Commercial Law** - blog posts in the Commercial Law category addressed legal matters related to businesses, commerce, and trade. Topics included contract law, intellectual property, corporate regulations, and commercial disputes. The objective was to provide businesses and entrepreneurs with legal insights for informed decision-making. (E.g. [How to Question an Expert Witness in Commercial Disputes at the Main Hearing?](#) or [Being an Entrepreneur – Basic Rules](#))
- **Administrative Law** - Administrative Law blog posts covered issues pertaining to government administration, public services, and administrative procedures. They explained citizens' rights when dealing with government agencies, administrative appeals, and legal recourse in administrative matters. These articles aimed to demystify

interactions with the government. (E.g. "[Filing an Administrative Lawsuit Against the State](#)" or "[Everything You Need to Know About Legalization](#)")

- **Other** - the "Other" category encompassed a diverse range of legal topics that didn't fit neatly into the other categories. It allowed for flexibility in addressing emerging legal issues, unique cases, or legal developments that didn't fall within the specific domains mentioned above. (E.g. [Freedom of Expression and Online Threats](#) or [Misdemeanor Procedure](#))

Each of these categories played an important role in disseminating legal knowledge and empowering citizens to navigate the complexities of the legal system in Serbia. They served as valuable resources for individuals seeking information and guidance in various legal contexts, contributing to a more informed and legally aware society.

The platform boasts a diverse and extensive roster of **over 160 accomplished authors**, comprising a wide spectrum of legal professionals and experts in the field. These contributors include judges, public prosecutors, attorneys, professors, and other legal experts who have lent their knowledge and insights to create a rich repository of blog posts. Their diverse backgrounds and wealth of experience have enriched the platform's content, offering a comprehensive understanding of various legal aspects and issues. Through their valuable contributions, the platform has been able to provide readers with a multifaceted perspective on matters related to the judiciary, law, and legal reforms. These authors have played an important role in ensuring that the platform remains a trusted and informative resource for individuals seeking guidance and information on legal topics.

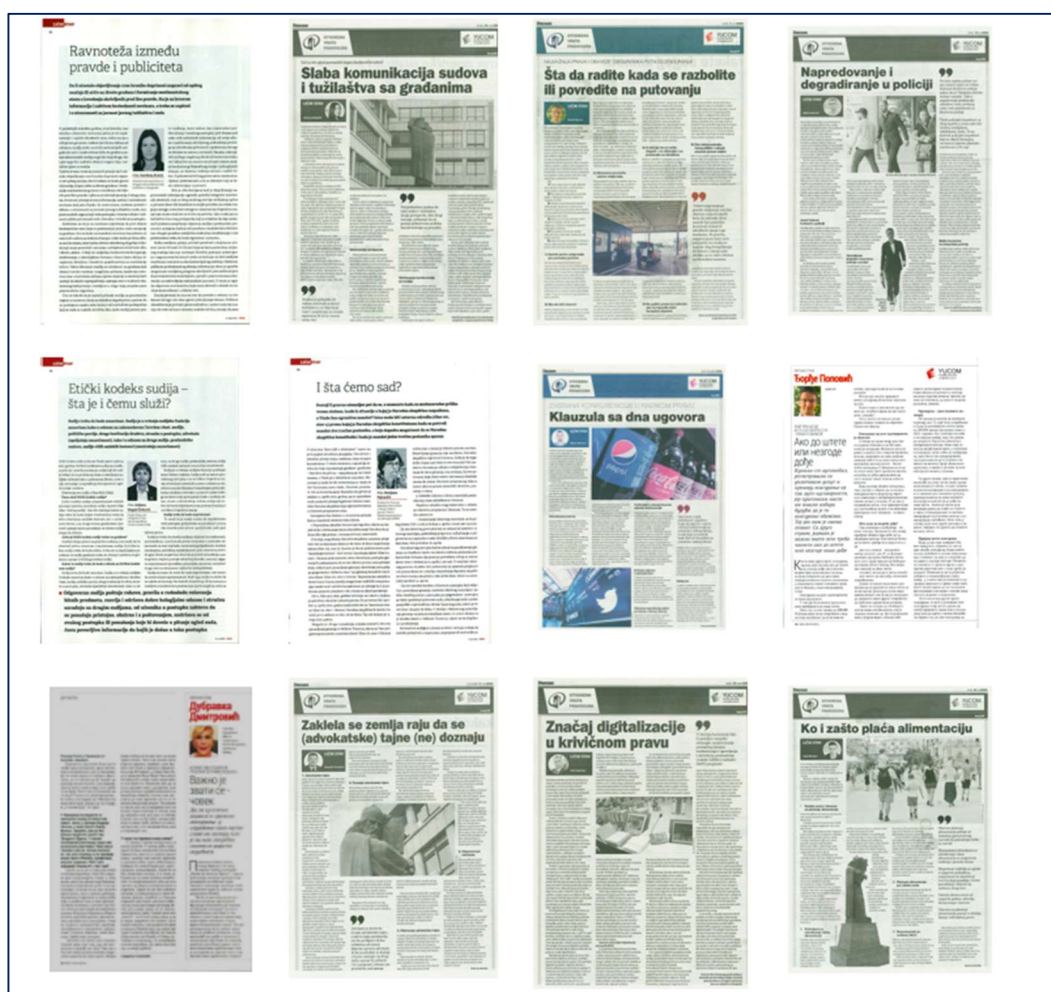
As the popularity of blog posts among citizens became evident, project establish ongoing collaboration with newspapers such as "Danas," "Vreme," and "NIN" for promoting these blog posts in both printed and online formats continued during the current year. By leveraging media outlets like "Danas," "Vreme," and "NIN," project was able to reach a broad audience across Serbia, as all three newspapers enjoy national circulation.

The diverse and informative content provided by these blog posts resulted in the platform receiving a significantly higher number of page views than initially anticipated. A total of **442 blog posts were published**, with 220 of them featured in the online and printed editions of "Danas" (125 posts), "Vreme" (61 posts), and "NIN" (34 posts). Additionally, nearly every blog post was shared by local micro sub-grantees, including Paragraf, as well as by several local portals such as Pancevo Online and Vranje News, which consistently shared a majority of project content on a weekly basis. Collectively, these 220 blog posts garnered over 770,000 views across all online versions of selected newspapers, with printed editions ranging from 20,000 to 75,000 views per specific newspaper edition.

As Google analytics for the Platform showed us that more and more citizens were coming back to read our content, we used this situation to intensify blog posts writing by covering a wide range of topics that most of citizens are interesting in. A lot of people get back to us with questions about how to resolve their problems concerning work contracts, safety at work, social benefits, entering the country etc. YUCOMs legal team gave free legal advice to all people that addressed to us. We used those received questions to feed next topics to be explained in blog posts. These actions led to an increasing number of Project Facebook page followers up to 15,000, LinkedIn up to 2,900 and Twitter up to 370 in five years of existence. Within this five-year period, Platform had over **1.350.000 pageviews**, which is very good having in mind that

our target was to have 750.000 pageviews in the whole project implementation period. The average session per user was 1.31 which shows us that after visiting our Platform, almost every third person was checking other useful materials on the platform. The analysis further confirms that our audience was mostly between 35 - 54 years of age. 74 % of our visitors use mobile devices while 24 % use Desktops, and 2 % use other devices. The platform **generates over 2.000 pageviews per day**.

Publishing our blog posts in newspapers has been a strategic approach to extend the reach of valuable legal information and insights to a wider audience. Collaborating with reputable newspapers like "Danas", "Vreme", and "NIN" allowed us to bridge the gap between online and offline readers, ensuring that our content reached citizens through both traditional print and digital media. This partnership not only enhanced the accessibility of legal knowledge but also contributed to raising awareness about various legal topics, empowering individuals to better understand their rights and responsibilities within the legal framework. The synergy between our platform and these newspapers has proven effective in disseminating essential legal information across Serbia, promoting legal literacy, and fostering a more informed and empowered citizens.



Example of published blog posts in newspapers

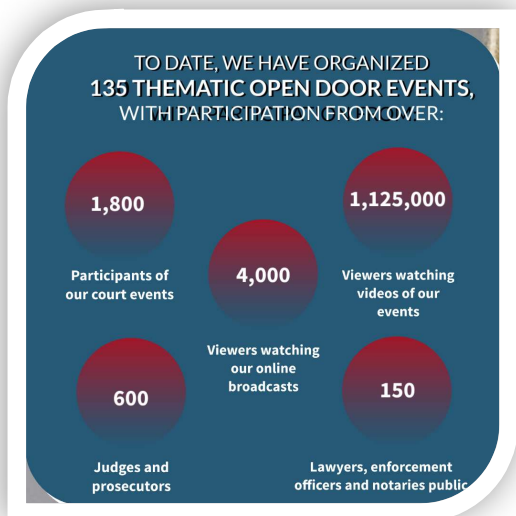
Activity 1.3 - Local councils for access to justice

Local Council Meetings (LCMs) were a cornerstone of the project's community engagement and communication strategy, providing a dynamic platform for citizens to directly connect with members of the judiciary and legal experts. LCMs served as educational forums where citizens gained insights into the intricacies of the justice system. Local attendees learned about the roles of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, effectively demystifying the legal process. The educational aspect of LCMs was a fundamental component of their purpose and significance. LCMs were designed to serve as accessible and informative platforms where citizens could learn about various aspects of the legal system, their rights, and the broader implications of legal processes. LCMs broke down complex legal terminology and concepts into easily understandable language, aiming to eliminate the intimidation factor associated with legal proceedings, helping citizens grasp legal issues without feeling overwhelmed. Attendees gained insights into their legal rights and responsibilities as individuals and members of their communities, learning about their entitlements under the law and the corresponding duties they must fulfill. LCMs provided step-by-step explanations of legal procedures, such as how to file complaints, what to expect in court, and how to navigate the legal system effectively. This practical knowledge empowered citizens to engage with the legal system confidently. Educational materials, guides, and resources were often distributed during LCMs, equipping citizens with the tools they needed to explore legal issues further, access legal aid services, or conduct legal research independently.

One effective strategy employed during LCMs was the use of real-life case studies and examples. These case studies drew from past legal situations or scenarios, anonymized and stripped of any personal or sensitive details. By examining these cases, attendees gained valuable insights into how legal principles were applied in practice. These practical examples helped bridge the gap between abstract legal concepts and the everyday situations citizens may encounter. For instance, these case studies illustrated how to address issues related to contracts, property disputes, family law matters, or employment rights, grounding legal discussions in relatable scenarios.

However, it's important to note that during LCMs, the primary emphasis was not on discussing ongoing trials or individual cases, ensuring privacy and legal compliance. Depending on the focus of the meeting, LCMs delved into specific legal contexts, such as family law, labor law, or property

disputes, ensuring attendees received relevant information tailored to their concerns. LCMs often prioritized reaching out to vulnerable or marginalized communities, providing legal education to individuals who may face discrimination or unequal treatment, empowering them to assert their rights. LCMs encouraged active participation, allowing attendees to ask questions, seek clarifications, and engage in discussions with legal experts and practitioners. This interactive format enhanced the learning experience. In some cases, LCMs addressed legal issues that were particularly relevant to the local community, such as land disputes or environmental concerns, ensuring citizens received information tailored to their unique needs.



The educational dimension of LCMs played a crucial role in promoting legal literacy and awareness among the public. By demystifying the legal system, clarifying rights and responsibilities, and facilitating ongoing learning, these meetings empowered citizens to make informed decisions, engage with the justice system, and advocate for their rights effectively. The trust-building aspect of LCMs was vital to their success in fostering a positive relationship between the justice system and the public. Trust was a cornerstone of effective justice systems, and LCMs aimed to establish and strengthen this trust in several ways.

LCMs provided a platform for open dialogue between citizens and judiciary representatives, including judges, prosecutors, and legal experts. This direct interaction fostered trust by allowing citizens to voice concerns, seek clarification, and receive responses from those responsible for administering justice. By bringing justice professionals into local communities, LCMs made the justice system more accessible and approachable. This accessibility helped break down barriers that may have hindered trust, such as a perception of the legal system as distant or unresponsive. LCMs held justice sector representatives accountable for their actions and decisions. When judges and prosecutors engaged with citizens in an open forum, they were more likely to be perceived as accountable for their conduct, which contributed to trust in the fairness of the system. When citizens provided feedback or raised concerns during LCMs, justice sector representatives had an opportunity to address these issues directly. This responsiveness led to positive changes and improvements in the justice system, further enhancing trust.

By actively working to establish and maintain trust, LCMs contributed to a justice system that was not only effective but also deeply trusted by the communities it served. This trust was a cornerstone of the project's overall goal, which was successfully achieved during the project's implementation period.

In 2023, there has been a growing concern about domestic violence, which was becoming more frequent across the country. In response to this alarming trend, YUCOM team received requests from several judges, prosecutors, and the Director of the Social Protection Chamber to organize training sessions on “Professional support in cases of domestic violence” as part of the “Open Doors of the Judiciary” project, so set of these trainings were organized across Serbia. The aim was to enhance the knowledge and skills of professionals involved in dealing with domestic violence cases. Given the project’s success in establishing a recognized brand among judicial institutions, it has become much easier to convene representatives from various institutions such as judges, prosecutors’ offices, centers for social work, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The primary aim of the training was to equip participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify and comprehend domestic violence.



During project implementation period, **135 LCM were implemented in over 65 different topics**, such as: Why do trials take so long?, How to ensure efficiency and fairness in enforcement proceedings?, Availability of the prosecutor's office to the citizens, What do we need to know about the costs of court proceedings?, What are my rights if the trial lasts unreasonably long?, Right to free legal aid etc. Addressed topics covered several areas, such as:

Legal Procedures and Processes

This category includes topics that focus on explaining various legal procedures and processes to the general public. These discussions aim to provide citizens with a better understanding of how the legal system works and what to expect when they are involved in legal matters. Some of the topics covered in this category include statutes of limitations, burden of proof, access to public information, alternative criminal sanctions, child custody after court decisions, probate proceedings, misdemeanor orders, deprivation of legal capacity, divorce, and evidence in legal proceedings. These topics help citizens navigate the legal system and make informed decisions when they encounter legal issues.

Legal Rights and Responsibilities

In this category, the project addresses citizens' legal rights and responsibilities in different contexts. Topics in this category cover issues such as discrimination at work, criminal complaints, domestic violence, accountability of criminal perpetrators, the right to a healthy environment, defendants' rights, compensation in criminal proceedings, false testimony, and more. These discussions empower citizens by educating them about their legal rights and obligations, enabling them to take appropriate actions and make informed choices in various legal situations.

Judiciary and Legal Institutions

This category focuses on the judiciary, legal institutions, and their roles in the legal system. Topics in this category shed light on the structure and functioning of the judiciary, the importance of an independent and efficient judiciary, anti-corruption efforts within the legal system, and changes brought by new legal provisions (such as the Constitution). Additionally, this category covers subjects related to legal aid, availability of legal institutions, labor disputes, and the rights and responsibilities of witnesses in court proceedings. These topics aim to improve citizens' awareness of the legal institutions that play a crucial role in their lives and the legal processes they may encounter.



COVID-19 pandemic and LCMs

Adapting to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we made the decision to postpone our planned local council meetings, which were originally intended to be held in person. However, as we closely monitored the evolving situation and maintained ongoing communication with court administrations, we recognized the need to continue our mission of educating and engaging with the public. It's important to note that our online formats had already proven to be a significant success. By taking our programs online, we were able to reach a wider audience, extending our educational efforts to citizens across Serbia. This digital approach not only ensured the safety of our participants but also substantially increased the interest and participation in our programs. The adaptability and flexibility to switch between online and in-person formats underscore our commitment to serving the public's needs, especially during challenging times. Our goal remains steadfast: to provide valuable legal education and resources to the citizens of Serbia, regardless of the circumstances. Organizing online local council meetings offers several advantages. It expands our reach to citizens across Serbia, making discussions more inclusive. Online accessibility eliminates travel and time constraints, resulting in higher attendance and engagement. Multimedia integration enhances the learning experience. Flexibility in scheduling accommodates participants' busy lives, and the online format allows quick adaptation to unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring continuous program delivery.



All of those online Local council meetings were organized via Zoom platform with direct broadcasting to official project Facebook page. Events are recorded and can be found on Project official Facebook [page](#), on Platform [portal](#) and on YUCOMs YouTube [channel](#). In order to reach as many as possible people from professional and legal community, material was promoted on the official LinkedIn [page](#) as well.

Activity 1.4 - Citizen-friendly guidance booklets

Citizen-friendly guidance booklets play a crucial role in empowering individuals by providing them with clear and understandable information about their rights, obligations, and available recourse in various legal situations. These booklets serve as valuable resources for citizens, helping them navigate complex legal processes with confidence and ease. One of the key aspects of these guidance booklets is their accessibility. By presenting legal information in a language that is easily comprehensible to the public, they ensure that individuals from diverse backgrounds can understand and exercise their rights effectively. This accessibility is particularly important in promoting transparency and accountability within the legal system, as it enables citizens to actively engage with their rights and responsibilities.

They provide practical guidance on a wide range of legal matters, from enforcement proceedings to consumer protection and reporting corruption. By equipping citizens with knowledge about their rights and the procedures they can follow to uphold them, these booklets empower individuals to advocate for themselves and seek redress when necessary. Furthermore, the importance of presenting information in a citizen-friendly manner fosters a sense of trust and confidence in the legal system, as individuals feel supported and informed throughout their interactions with the law. This, in turn, promotes a more inclusive and participatory democracy, where citizens are actively involved in shaping and safeguarding their rights.

Citizen-friendly guidance booklets serve as invaluable tools for promoting legal literacy, empowerment, and accountability among the public. By making legal information accessible and understandable, these booklets enable individuals to navigate the complexities of the legal system with confidence and advocate for their rights effectively. As such, they are essential components of a transparent, inclusive, and just society. The guides have been printed in over 50,000 copies and distributed to judicial institutions throughout Serbia to make them accessible to all citizens.

Following booklets were prepared:

1. My rights in enforcement proceedings
2. My rights in case the trial takes unreasonably long time
3. A guide to protection of consumers' rights
4. My rights in case of (illegal) wiretapping
5. How do I report corruption and what are my rights and obligations if I do so?
6. What should I do when I receive summons to testify?
7. What if I am deprived of my liberty?
8. Why do we need an independent judge?
9. My rights in case of identification, search, and deprivation of liberty
10. Guide through the Law on Misdemeanors - my rights and obligations
11. A Guide through the Probate Proceedings
12. A Guide for Individual Submissions to United Nations Committees
13. Appeal to the European Court of Human Rights
14. How can I help the election campaign to be more fair?
15. Constitutional appeal – a guide for addressing the Constitutional Court
16. My rights in the event of a traffic accident: a guide to the procedure before insurance companies
17. Guide through the legal arrangement of marriage
18. Guide to the Attorney's Tariff
19. Agreements between the public prosecutor and the defendant/convict

By continuously entering and accurately recording all the problems in our database, YUCOM has a clear overview of the areas in which citizens have the most problems with and what are their most common questions. We translated user friendly guidance booklets into a special online format and presented it in the form of [the most common questions and their answers](#). This section contains a corpus of over 400 questions and answers that provides citizens with the opportunity to get information in an easy, clear, and concise way.

The citizen-friendly guidance booklets have been updated on the educational portal of the Judicial Academy to ensure accessibility to participants undergoing training, including judges and prosecutors.

To briefly present the booklet content and its usefulness in a visually attractive way, video animations were prepared. For each of 19 booklets, a video animation that clearly and illustratively describes the steps to exercise a certain right was prepared. USAID communications team were consulted on whether something needed to be corrected and whether all guidelines for visual identity were in line, and then published. Video animations were published on the project's official social media profiles (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), which were shared on USAID's Instagram profile as well, in cooperation with the USAID communications team. Video animations were updated on the project platform, YouTube channel and promoted by all project partners and local sub-grants.



Activity 1.5 - Micro sub-grants

All micro sub-grants have been involved in the process of preparation of Local council meetings, mainly through street action to invite citizens to participate in our events. This concept of having a local organization while organizing events on a local proved to be very useful. Citizens from the local are more uninterested when there is some kind of seminar, training, or course, so having people from the local to animate citizens is very useful.

An additional advantage is that through this project, local organizations must cooperate with all local self-government institutions to ensure that all of them receive invitations. Continuously, they have been sharing among local citizens content available on the Platform securing the wide reach of our materials. Since Local council meetings were adjusted to be organized in online formats, activities of micro sub-grants were focused on sharing and involving as many as possible citizens from their communities.

All 15 local organizations, who were selected in a public call for cooperation on the project, have had activities in their own and nearby local communities. The activities were related to the promotion of project activities and their contents to citizens throughout Serbia. Each local organization had the task of organizing a street action in the two closest places to its local self-government unit and to promote all our activities in some way throughout the day. Such activities of local organizations are very important for several reasons: they promote the content of the project locally, they present useful materials and content to citizens and representatives of various local institutions, they raise the visibility of local actors in addressing citizens' problems with the judiciary in specific local self-government units, etc.

Following street actions that were organized by our 15 local sub-grantees in numerous different local communities, on European Day of Justice, which is celebrated on October 25th, all 15 local sub-grantees organized 15 more street actions covering places where our Project did not have any activities previously.

4.3 COMPONENT 2: Empowering Civil Society Monitoring to Identify Citizen Needs in Judicial Reforms

Component 2, titled "Empowering Civil Society Monitoring to Identify Citizen Needs in Judicial Reforms" served the purpose of enabling civil society organizations (CSOs) to actively monitor the ongoing judicial reforms and assess their impact on citizens. The primary goal was to bolster the capacities of CSOs in collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data to provide evidence-based feedback on the effectiveness of judicial reforms. Through the development of a comprehensive monitoring methodology, including the identification of measurable indicators aligned with strategic frameworks such as the National Judicial Reform Strategy and EU accession requirements, CSOs were equipped to evaluate reform outcomes. The methodology emphasized citizen-facing aspects of judicial functioning, ensuring that reforms were responsive to the needs and expectations of citizens. Additionally, the project facilitated the creation of monitoring manuals and tools in implementing the methodology consistently across different areas of judicial reform. Capacity-building workshops provided training to partners and sub-grantees on data collection, systematization, and monitoring techniques. Subsequent data collection efforts involved a combination of desk research, focus groups, surveys, and in-depth analysis to gather both qualitative and quantitative insights into the functioning of the judiciary. The collected data informed the preparation of baseline and annual monitoring reports, which highlighted key developments, challenges, and recommendations for improving the judiciary's performance and accessibility. Dissemination activities, including national conferences, press conferences, and advocacy meetings with policymakers, aimed to ensure that monitoring findings reached a wide audience and contributed to informed decision-making and accountability within the judiciary.

Monitoring judicial reforms through civil society involvement was crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it ensured transparency and accountability within the judiciary by providing an independent assessment of reform progress. Civil society organizations acted as watchdogs, scrutinizing the implementation of reforms, and holding authorities accountable for their commitments. Secondly, citizen participation in monitoring efforts helped to amplify the voices of ordinary people and ensure that reforms addressed their needs and concerns. By soliciting feedback directly from citizens and incorporating their perspectives into monitoring reports, the process became more inclusive and citizen-centered, ultimately leading to reforms that better served the interests of the people.

Additionally, equipping CSOs with the capacity to conduct research and analyses independently ensured sustainability beyond the project's lifespan. Once the project concluded and international stakeholders are no longer active in the country, local CSOs could continue their monitoring efforts, contributing to ongoing oversight and accountability within the judicial system.

Activity 2.1 - Producing the monitoring methodology

Project partner, the European Policy Centre (CEP), initiated a comprehensive effort to develop a specialized monitoring methodology specifically tailored to address the nuances of Serbia's judicial reform landscape. This intricate process was led by a team of seasoned legal experts and methodology development specialists within CEP. Beginning with an extensive mapping exercise, the team surveyed and cataloged existing initiatives related to judicial reform monitoring not only in Serbia but also across the broader Western Balkans region. This mapping phase served as a crucial foundation upon which the subsequent development of the monitoring methodology would be built.

A pivotal workshop convened on April 11th, 2019, where CEP presented the initial draft of the methodology to a gathering of 13 stakeholders, including project partners. This workshop provided a vital platform for constructive dialogue and feedback, with participants offering valuable insights from their diverse perspectives. Subsequently, the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) played an important role in organizing a series of preparatory focus groups held from May 22nd to July 23rd, 2019. Fifteen focus groups were organized in total as part of the preparatory phase of the project. These focus groups, conducted across various municipalities and cities in Serbia, aimed to capture firsthand insights into the challenges encountered by citizens within the judicial system.

The insights gleaned from these focus groups were analyzed and integrated into the evolving methodology, ensuring that it accurately reflected the grassroots perspectives. Building upon these foundational inputs, a second interactive workshop convened on July 1st, 2019, where CEP presented an updated draft of the methodology. This session provided partners with an opportunity to further refine and enrich the methodology, aligning it more closely with the project's overarching objectives and stakeholder expectations.

The culmination of these efforts came with the unveiling of the finalized Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform at a Peer Review Workshop held on December 23–24th, 2019. This workshop served as a crucial forum for comprehensive review and discussion of the methodology's indicators and sub-indicators before transitioning to the active monitoring phase. Throughout these project meetings and workshops, comprehensive documentation was generated, including programs, attendance lists, reports, and photographs, providing tangible evidence of stakeholder engagement and methodology refinement. This meticulous groundwork has laid a robust foundation for the ongoing monitoring activities, ensuring that they are well-informed, comprehensive, and aligned with the needs and priorities of Serbia's judicial reform landscape.

This preparatory phase set a solid foundation for the forthcoming monitoring activities, poised to empower civil society, and enhance the quality of judicial reform monitoring in Serbia. This phase indicated a comprehensive approach to laying the groundwork for effective monitoring of judicial reform in Serbia. Through extensive mapping exercises and stakeholder consultations, led by the European Policy Centre (CEP) and supported by partner organizations like the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), the project successfully identified key areas for monitoring and engaged diverse perspectives from stakeholders across Serbia. The execution of 15 focus groups provided invaluable insights into citizens' specific needs and challenges within the judicial system, enriching the dataset with grassroots perspectives. Furthermore, the collaborative workshops and consultations ensured alignment and buy-in from project partners, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the methodology's development.

The methodology developed for monitoring judicial reforms in Serbia encompasses a systematic approach to assessing various aspects of the judicial system's performance and effectiveness. It begins with a comprehensive mapping exercise to identify existing initiatives related to judicial reform monitoring, providing a baseline understanding of the landscape. Subsequently, the methodology outlines specific monitoring areas, including legal aid, court transparency, procedural efficiency, judiciary ethics, access to criminal justice, and service accessibility. Within each area, the methodology defines key indicators and sub-indicators to be measured, focusing on compliance with legal standards, implementation of regulations, and satisfaction levels of system users, primarily citizens. Data collection methods include desk research, focus groups, surveys, and analysis of qualitative reports, ensuring a multi-faceted assessment approach. Additionally, the methodology emphasizes stakeholder engagement and participatory development, involving partners and stakeholders throughout the process to ensure relevance, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. Overall, the developed methodology provides a robust framework for monitoring and evaluating judicial reforms in Serbia, facilitating evidence-based assessments and recommendations for enhancing access to justice.

Monitoring areas of the Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform in Serbia are:

1. Legal aid,
2. Access to data and transparency of courts,
3. Access to courts,
4. Efficiency of the procedure,
5. Judiciary ethics,
6. Access to criminal justice,
7. Access to services.

Activity 2.2 - Development of the monitoring manual, monitoring tools and techniques

Activity was focusing on developing essential tools and techniques for effectively monitoring judicial reform, with a particular emphasis on enhancing access to justice and incorporating the perspectives of justice system users. The main output of this activity was the creation of a comprehensive Monitoring Manual, designed to offer guidance and templates for civil society organizations engaged in the monitoring process. Tailored to the specific needs and capacities of these organizations, the Monitoring Manual has facilitated data collection, monitoring, and reporting on predefined indicators across seven key areas of judicial reform. These efforts culminated in the production of a Baseline Report and Annual Monitoring Reports, which tracked progress towards these indicators and informed civil society proposals for policy formulation in the justice sector. The Monitoring Manual aimed to provide a structured approach to continuous monitoring, covering dimensions such as compliance with legal standards, application of regulations, user satisfaction with judicial services, and analysis of official judicial statistics relevant to citizen satisfaction.

It was specifically designed to provide step-by-step instructions, tools, and templates necessary for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to judicial reform indicators. By offering clear guidance tailored to the needs and capacities of civil society organizations, the Monitoring Manual aimed to facilitate effective monitoring of progress in key areas of judicial reform, such as access to justice. Additionally, the Manual aimed to ensure consistency and standardization in monitoring practices across different organizations, thereby enhancing the reliability and comparability of

monitoring data. Ultimately, the data collected and analyzed using the Monitoring Manual would inform the production of baseline and annual monitoring reports, which served as valuable resources for advocating evidence-based policy reforms that better met the needs of citizens.

Activity 2.3 - Conducting a series of capacity building workshops for partners and sub-grantees on policy monitoring implementation

Activity 3 involved conducting a series of capacity-building workshops for project partners and micro sub-grantees on policy monitoring implementation. One such workshop, organized and facilitated by CEP, took place on February 3rd, 2020, at the Mona Plaza hotel in Belgrade, with attendance from 19 representatives of partner organizations. This full-day event was carefully structured to equip project partners with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively execute planned research activities aligned with the Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform in Serbia. The workshop commenced with a comprehensive review and discussion of the Research & Monitoring Activity Plan presented by CEP, providing partners with clarity on deadlines and assigned responsibilities. CEP further introduced monitoring templates and tools tailored to different research clusters, such as legal analysis templates for examining legal standards, templates for collecting Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) responses, and guidelines for conducting focus groups. Through interactive sessions and detailed instructions, partners received invaluable guidance on research methodologies and template utilization, ensuring alignment with the activity plan's timelines and objectives. By convening this workshop, the European Policy Centre (CEP) aimed to empower participants with the requisite skills and knowledge essential for conducting planned research activities effectively. Specifically, the workshop focused on familiarizing attendees with the Research & Monitoring Activity Plan outlined by CEP, ensuring a shared understanding of timelines and assigned responsibilities. Moreover, the workshop served to introduce monitoring templates and tools tailored to various research clusters, facilitating practical application in data collection and analysis. Through interactive sessions and detailed instructions, participants gained insights into research methodologies and template utilization, thereby enhancing their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the monitoring process aligned with the Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform in Serbia.



The Capacity Building Workshop (WS) for micro sub-grantees, held on June 1st, 2020, aimed to equip participants with the necessary training and guidelines for implementing the mystery shopper technique in the Access to Judicial Services monitoring area. Hosted online via the Zoom platform by the European Policy Centre (CEP), the workshop engaged 13 representatives from local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), along with three representatives from CEP and one from YUCOM, totaling 17 participants. The workshop agenda focused on enhancing research capacities, with participants briefed on the research objectives and progress, particularly

emphasizing the assessment of the quality of judicial services provided by public notaries. CEP provided a comprehensive presentation on the mystery shopping technique and its application in research, accompanied by detailed instructions for executing the local mystery shopper action. Each participant received a template document for verification at the local public notary office, along with a survey/checklist for evaluating service quality. With a one-month deadline set for implementation, participants were tasked with submitting completed documents, including the verified document, survey/checklist, and a narrative report detailing the mystery shopping experience and any encountered obstacles or feedback from the notary. Furthermore, the workshop facilitated planning and coordination of other project activities at the local level, including the organization of local council meetings and assistance in conducting promotional campaigns.

Activity 2.4 - Collection of monitoring data on judiciary functioning

During project implementation partners initiated the process of collecting data for monitoring various aspects of judicial reform in Serbia. During the implementation of the project, three cycles of research were conducted to gather data on various aspects of judicial reform in Serbia. These cycles involved extensive efforts to collect and analyze data in alignment with the Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform. Despite facing challenges such as delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project partners persevered in their data collection activities. The monitoring areas, as outlined in the Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform, encompassed legal aid, access to court data and transparency, court access, procedural efficiency, judiciary ethics, access to criminal justice, and service accessibility. The primary objective of this data collection was to continually assess access to justice by analyzing both the legal framework and its practical implementation, focusing on citizen satisfaction with the judicial system. The data collection methodology involved evaluating compliance with legal standards, the application of regulations, and user satisfaction through research activities such as desk analysis, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, system user surveys, and mystery shopper exercises. However, due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, some aspects of the research plan experienced delays. For instance, the collection of data through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and focus groups were postponed, with partners facing difficulties in conducting in-field data collection techniques. Nonetheless, efforts were made to adapt to the circumstances, with partners commencing data collection through semi-structured interviews and initiating the system user survey using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Additionally, training sessions were organized to prepare sub-grantees for implementing mystery shopper exercises, with input gathered from these exercises integrated into the assessment of notary services' practical functioning. Despite the challenges, progress was made in drafting questionnaires, conducting interviews, and analyzing data, laying the groundwork for comprehensive monitoring reports on judicial reform progress. The research was implemented by project partners and micro sub-grantees involved in the monitoring of judicial reform in Serbia. These partners and organizations collaborated under the guidance of the European Policy Centre (CEP) to conduct various research activities aimed at assessing different aspects of the judicial system and gathering data on citizens' experiences and perceptions.

Various techniques were employed for the research conducted during the project implementation. These techniques included:

- Desk analysis: Analysis of legal frameworks and regulations related to judicial reform areas.
- Focus groups: Group discussions with participants to gather insights and perspectives on specific topics related to judicial reform.
- Semi-structured interviews: One-on-one or small group interviews with stakeholders to gather in-depth qualitative data.
- System user surveys: Surveys conducted with users of the judicial system to assess their satisfaction and gather feedback.
- Mystery shopper exercises: An undercover approach to assess the quality of services provided by public notaries through simulated interactions.
- Qualitative analysis of reports from local council meetings: Examination of qualitative reports to understand citizens' priorities and concerns related to judicial reform.

These techniques were chosen to ensure comprehensive data collection from various sources and perspectives, enabling a holistic assessment of the judiciary's functioning and citizen satisfaction levels. The System User Surveys were administered by a reputable professional agency specializing in public opinion research. The questionnaire utilized in these surveys was thoroughly crafted by the project partners involved in monitoring judicial reform in Serbia, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in capturing valuable insights from system users.

Activity 2.5 - Preparation of a baseline report and an annual monitoring report on the state of affairs in courts and PPOs

[The Baseline Monitoring Report](#) for Judicial Reform in Serbia for 2020, provided an in-depth analysis of the Serbian judiciary's status within the current legal framework and institutional context. It aimed to offer an impartial mechanism for monitoring judicial reform progress from the citizens' perspective, providing objective assessments and recommendations based on factual data and expert evaluations. Compiled by a network of civil society organizations involved in the Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia project, the report systematically presented findings and assessments across key areas, utilizing a scoring system to evaluate standards and methodologies for measurement. Drawing on the latest available data primarily from 2018 and 2019, the report underwent rigorous internal quality assurance processes, including peer review and cross-validation by project expert team. It featured detailed assessments and recommendations for improvement across seven key areas, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders. The Baseline Monitoring Report serves as an impartial mechanism for monitoring progress in judicial reform from the citizens' perspective, offering objective assessments and recommendations based on factual data and expert evaluations. The report aims to systematically present findings and assessments across key areas, utilizing a scoring system to evaluate standards and methodologies for measurement. The Baseline Report aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and civil society organizations involved in judicial reform efforts.

The idea behind baseline report is to establish a starting point or reference level for measuring progress or change over time in the judiciary field. By documenting the baseline status,



stakeholders can better understand the existing circumstances, identify areas for improvement, set realistic goals, and track advancements over time. Baseline report served as a foundation for future evaluations, comparisons, and decision-making processes throughout the development of project annual reports.

The purpose of the report is not to observe the entire judicial system from a "bird's eye view" and give assessments according to official data on the work of judicial bodies, as do the state institutions responsible for formulating public policies in the field of justice. The goal is to provide a view "from the ground", from the discourse of individuals who need to protect their rights in court. Given this approach, it is a unique methodology, which was specially developed for this report, and which breaks down this individual's discourse into objective criteria, defined through indicators and standards, and presented in seven key areas.

[The First Annual Report](#) on monitoring the situation in the judiciary for 2021 arrived at a pivotal moment, coinciding with public attention directed towards systemic changes in the judiciary. These changes were spurred by the implemented referendum on constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening judicial institutions and ensuring higher guarantees of independence, all in the pursuit of improving the rule of law. These reforms, which involve restructuring the composition and jurisdiction of the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council, as well as significant alterations to the method for electing judges and public prosecutors, are closely linked to Serbia's progress towards accession to the European Union. The overarching goal remains the alignment with European standards and criteria. Concurrently, amidst these reform efforts, regular judicial proceedings continue, with parties striving to exercise or protect their rights.

The primary objective of this report was to provide insight into the existing norms and practices of judicial bodies, particularly from the perspective of individuals seeking judicial protection of their rights. It sought to examine how judicial protection operates in practice, the obstacles citizens face in accessing the courts, the predictability of court practices, the availability of legal aid mechanisms, and the conduct of court proceedings from the viewpoint of involved parties. This report aimed to address these inquiries and provide comprehensive answers.



Prepared through collaboration among civil society organizations and the Open Doors of the Judiciary project, the report emphasized the shared value of enhancing the rule of law by strengthening mechanisms for judicial protection of citizens. It evaluated systemic prerequisites in the context of real-world conditions and the protection of citizens' rights in court proceedings. This report marked the culmination of the second cycle of monitoring the judiciary's situation, covering the period up to the end of 2021, following the publication of the baseline report for 2020. It provided an independent and objective assessment based on identical indicators and standards as in the previous report, thus offering insights into changes observed between the two reporting periods.

[This Second Annual Report](#) concluded the third cycle of monitoring the state of the judiciary, which was initiated with the report for the year 2020. Like its predecessors, it was prepared through collaboration between civil society organizations, united by the shared goal of advancing the rule of law by strengthening mechanisms for judicial protection of citizens. Preconditions for achieving these values included an independent judiciary, the expertise and impartiality of judges, non-selective and independent actions of public prosecutors, as well as various material, technical, and organizational conditions for the successful and efficient functioning of the judiciary. Based on a special, original research methodology, these systemic preconditions were observed and evaluated in the context of the actual environment and the realization of citizens' rights protection in judicial proceedings. The report contained monitoring results based on identical standards and criteria for assessment, as in the previous two cycles, with data relating to the year 2022.



Specific Report - Report on the need to solve the issues of mass litigations and the possibilities of introducing class actions in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia.

The subject matter of [Report on the need to solve the issues of mass litigations and the possibilities of introducing class actions in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia](#) was to examine the possibility of addressing and resolving the issues associated with the negative trends observed in the previous monitoring cycle of the judiciary situation in 2021. This document served as a separate thematic report, connecting two identified problems: the prevalence of mass litigations, notably prominent in cases related to the protection of financial service beneficiaries (commonly known as "banking cases"), and the consequential backlog of cases in Belgrade courts, primarily consisting of individual litigations. Various instances of numerous identical lawsuits burdening the courts were observed, particularly in Belgrade due to its territorial jurisdiction based on the presence of numerous legal entities as defendants in these cases. Repetitive cases incurred significant expenses, especially in terms of legal fees, and hindered citizens' access to justice in each individual case. Consequently, it led to unnecessary redundancy in court



proceedings, raising concerns about legal uncertainty due to the potential for unequal decisions in identical matters.

The imbalance in the distribution of new cases, particularly with heightened pressure on Belgrade courts due to periodic waves of identical litigation cases, has resulted in numerous consequences. The disproportionate burden of these cases has impeded the efficient processing of cases and strained available resources, thereby complicating access to justice for citizens. Additionally, in certain areas such as consumer protection, there has been a notable emergence of collective protection needs, stemming from trans-individual infringements or identical infringements of subjective rights, which are often of minimal value in individual cases, discouraging individuals from pursuing legal protection through individual lawsuits.

The specific objective of this report was to explore the feasibility of addressing the aforementioned issues through the reintroduction of class actions in litigation proceedings as a legal protection mechanism. This approach would facilitate discussions on numerous identical requests or a single request impacting an entire category of entities facing similar legal situations within a single legal case. The report was the culmination of insights and analyses of the current legal landscape, with a particular focus on consumer protection, which already had certain forms of collective protection. In the European context, this area had seen the proliferation of various models of class actions. Additionally, the report included analyses of relevant comparative solutions for collective legal protection.

Activity 2.6 - Dissemination of monitoring report

National conferences

The project hosted three big national conferences after each monitoring cycle, along with five smaller press conferences at local levels to share important findings. These events helped spread the results and suggestions from the monitoring reports widely. The press meetings aimed to keep locals informed and engaged, especially about what citizens had to say in surveys. Besides these activities, CEP and other key partners also had at least three meetings with top officials from policymaking and implementation groups. These talks were important for updating them on what's happening and pushing for the adoption of our suggestions.

The purpose of these conferences was to disseminate the findings and recommendations of the monitoring reports on judicial reform in Serbia to a wide audience. They served as platforms for sharing insights gathered through extensive research conducted by civil society organizations and professional associations. By presenting key issues and challenges faced by citizens in accessing justice, these conferences aimed to raise awareness among stakeholders, including project partners, media representatives, and officials from organizations like USAID in Serbia. Additionally, the conferences provided an opportunity for discussion, collaboration, and advocacy for the implementation of recommendations to improve the judicial system.

On April 28th, 2021, a national conference titled "Introduction of the Baseline Monitoring Report on Judicial Reform in Serbia for 2020" took place. The conference, held in a hybrid format at the Hotel Mona Plaza in Belgrade, combined both live and virtual elements broadcasted on the official project Facebook page. The report showcased at the event is the culmination of collaborative efforts from 12 civil society organizations and professional associations in Serbia, referred to as project partners. It delves into critical issues and challenges encountered by citizens in accessing justice, marking the culmination of the initial monitoring cycle. The report covers seven key areas:

legal aid, transparency of courts and prosecution offices, court accessibility, judicial efficiency, judiciary ethics, criminal justice accessibility, and access to judiciary services.

Most of the findings across these areas received an average rating of 3 out of 5. Through the report's preparation, the research team identified the penal policy within the realm of criminal justice access as the lowest-rated aspect. Factors such as the application of penal policy in individual cases by courts and consistency across all defendants contributed to a score of 2 out of a maximum of 5, as per the established methodology.

The conference saw attendance from representatives of project partners, media outlets, and USAID in Serbia. Following the presentation of findings, the report was disseminated to all courts and public prosecutors' offices across Serbia.



On January 28th, 2022, the project hosted a conference titled "Unveiling the Monitoring Report on Judicial Reform in Serbia for 2021". This event adopted a hybrid format, taking place at the Human Rights House in Belgrade, which seamlessly integrated both live and virtual components. The report showcased during the conference is the outcome of collaborative efforts involving 12 civil society organizations and professional associations in Serbia, collectively referred to as project partners. It delves into critical issues and challenges encountered by citizens in accessing justice. The project partners presented key findings and recommendations spanning all seven areas covered in the report. The conference garnered attendance from project partner representatives, members of the media, and delegates from USAID in Serbia.

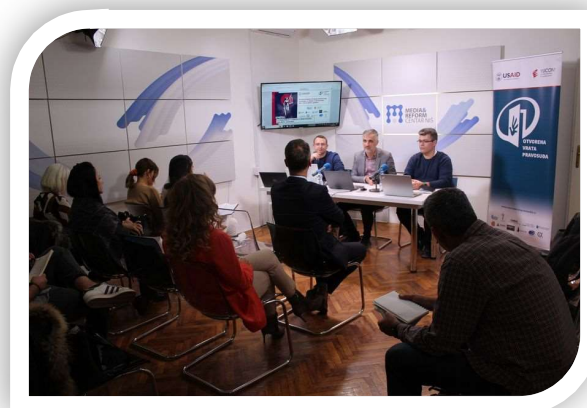


On December 18th, 2023, project hosted an [online event](#) to present the Monitoring Report on the State of the Judiciary for 2022. The event aimed to disseminate key findings and recommendations from the report. The report analyzed the state of the judiciary in Serbia based on data available for 2022. It evaluated the effectiveness of the current legal framework, organizational structures, and institutional mechanisms in protecting citizens' rights in court proceedings. Seven key areas were assessed again. Most areas assessed received an average grade of 3 out of 5. The lowest-rated aspect was penal policy in the area of access to criminal justice, scoring 2 out of 5 due to inconsistencies in court practices and sentencing. During the online event, representatives from project partner organizations presented the report's key findings and recommendations. They emphasized the importance of an independent judiciary, expertise, and impartiality of judges, and the need for non-selective and independent actions of public prosecutors to ensure effective functioning of the judiciary. The event was attended by representatives of the media and partner organizations. Participants engaged in discussions about the report's implications for judicial reform in Serbia and exchanged views on potential strategies for addressing identified challenges. The online presentation of the Monitoring Report on the State of the Judiciary for 2022 provided valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the Serbian judiciary system. The recommendations outlined in the report serve as a roadmap for improving access to justice and upholding the rule of law in Serbia.



Small scale conferences:

Two small-scale conferences were organized online, focusing on participants from Niš on October 8th, 2021, and from Kragujevac on December 1st, 2021. These events were attended by most of the project partners involved in drafting the monitoring report and were livestreamed on the official project Facebook page. The third national-level conference, dedicated to the issue-specific monitoring report, took place on October 26th, 2022, at the Mercure Excelsior Hotel in Belgrade. It was attended by 15 representatives of the media and project partner organizations. The third issue-specific monitoring report examined the possibility of addressing and resolving problems related to negative trends observed in the previous cycle of monitoring judicial reforms in Serbia in 2021. During 2023, local small-scale conferences were organized in Niš on October 18th, Vršac on October 11th, and Kragujevac on October 4th.



to present the Monitoring Report on the State of the Judiciary. These events were pivotal in bringing the findings and recommendations of the report directly to the communities affected by judicial issues. By hosting these conferences at the local level, stakeholders, including citizens, legal professionals, and community leaders, were given a platform to engage with the content of the report and discuss its implications for their respective regions. This grassroots approach fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by local judicial systems and encourages community involvement in the pursuit of reforms aimed at improving access to justice for all.

4.4 COMPONENT 3: Fostering Judicial Integrity via Citizen-Focused Accountability Mechanisms in the Judiciary

Component III played a significant role in strengthening the integrity of courts and Public Prosecution Offices (PPOs) while enhancing citizens' access to justice through a series of targeted actions. One key focus was on improving integrity plans, which are documents created by institutions to assess their own integrity risks and outline measures to prevent corruption and uphold ethical standards. Through qualitative analysis conducted from the perspective of citizens, the project aimed to align these plans with public views and experiences, thereby strengthening trust in the judiciary and promoting ethical behavior among judicial personnel. By improving integrity plans and advocating for reforms, Component III contributed to the prevention of corruption within courts and PPOs. Integrity plans serve as proactive measures to identify and mitigate corruption risks, while advocacy efforts aimed to address systemic issues and strengthen institutional accountability. Additionally, the development of a digital complaint application was instrumental in making the complaints process more accessible and transparent for citizens. By providing guidance on the complaint process and directing users to appropriate channels for addressing their concerns, the project empowered individuals to report misconduct and seek redress, thereby enhancing their access to justice. Furthermore, evidence-based participation and advocacy activities were undertaken to promote judicial integrity and accountability and transparency. By utilizing data and findings gathered throughout the project implementation, the component advocated for policy changes and reforms, ensuring that judicial institutions were held accountable for their actions and decisions. Ultimately, these efforts aimed to build a more transparent, accountable, and trusted judicial system that serves the needs of all citizens. Component III aimed to build public confidence in the judiciary and its ability to uphold the rule of law. By empowering citizens to participate in the accountability process and advocating for reforms that promote integrity and transparency, the project sought to create a judicial system that is trusted and respected by all members of society. Through these efforts, the project sought to build a more transparent, accountable, and trusted judicial system that served the needs of all citizens.

Activity 3.1 - Developing standards for improvement of Courts and PPOs' integrity plans

Activity I aimed to strengthen the integrity plans of courts and Public Prosecution Offices (PPOs) through the development of standards. Integrity plans are documents created by institutions, such as Courts and Public Prosecution Offices (PPOs), to assess their own integrity risks and outline measures to prevent corruption and uphold ethical standards. These plans typically involve a comprehensive evaluation of potential vulnerabilities within the institution, including areas where corruption or unethical behavior may occur. Integrity plans aim to establish protocols and procedures for addressing these risks, ensuring that the institution operates with integrity and accountability.

The process began with Prosecutors Association of Serbia (PAS) organizing meetings with various judicial entities, including prosecutor offices and courts, to review existing integrity plans and identify areas for improvement. Despite some disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, key insights were gathered through interviews and assessments. PAS collaborated with Transparency Serbia and received feedback from the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) to finalize the methodology for standards development. Following this, virtual meetings were conducted to collect relevant information based on the finalized methodology, as in-person gatherings were not feasible due to the pandemic. The research process involved gathering integrity plans from judicial entities in accordance with relevant legislation. PAS's legal team assessed this information and analyzed the integrity plans to identify strengths and areas for enhancement. An outline for qualitative analysis was prepared, aligning with partners on the structure and content. Recommendations were made for improving the preparation and monitoring of integrity plans, incorporating feedback from stakeholders such as partners, courts, prosecutor offices, and the Anti-corruption Agency. The result of this activity was the development of standards for the improvement of courts' and PPOs' integrity plans. These standards provided guidelines and benchmarks for enhancing the integrity of judicial institutions, outlining measures to prevent corruption and uphold ethical standards. Additionally, the qualitative analysis conducted as part of this activity helped identify strengths and weaknesses in existing integrity plans, paving the way for targeted improvements.

Additionally, an advocacy plan was developed to present the standards to judges and prosecutors, aiming to garner support and buy-in for their implementation. Meetings were held with key stakeholders, including members of the State Prosecutorial Council, to discuss the proposed enhancements and the role of relevant bodies in the integrity plan process and monitoring. These efforts underscored a collaborative approach to enhancing integrity within the judicial system, ensuring transparency, accountability, and public trust.

The project encountered significant challenges regarding the adoption of developed standards for integrity plans by judiciary institutions, revealing a gap in the recognition of the benefits associated with these frameworks. Despite the consideration given to local context and specificities in crafting the integrity plans, many judiciary institutions failed to fully appreciate their potential advantages in combating corruption and promoting transparency. Integrity plans serve as anticorruption mechanisms adopted by institutions, aiming to mitigate risks and uphold ethical standards. However, the lack of institutional cooperation hindered realizing these benefits for citizens. Despite concerted efforts to advocate for the acceptance of these standards, the project faced difficulties in garnering interest and commitment from judiciary institutions, highlighting the

need for continued engagement and dialogue to bridge this gap and facilitate meaningful change in promoting judicial integrity and accountability.

Activity 3.2. Developing a digital application for complaining procedures.

In Activity 3.2., the focus was on developing a mobile Android digital application to streamline the complaints process.

The public awareness of complaint mechanisms and disciplinary rules within the Serbian judiciary has been notably low, leading to underutilization of these avenues for addressing grievances. Despite a significant percentage of court users feeling they have grounds to file complaints, the actual number of complaints lodged is considerably low. According to the 2013 ACA Survey of Court Users, only a fraction of respondents who felt they had valid reasons for complaint actually submitted one. Reasons for this disparity include a lack of trust in the system's responsiveness and a dearth of information about the complaint procedures. Furthermore, the focus of complaints primarily centers on judges, particularly regarding the timeliness of proceedings, indicating a need for broader mechanisms to address systemic issues. Although multiple channels exist for lodging complaints, including various oversight bodies and offices, there is little coordination among them, leading to duplication of efforts and inconsistent practices. Capacity constraints within these complaint-handling bodies further exacerbate the situation, with inadequate staffing and lack of data aggregation hindering effective complaint resolution. Additionally, the legal framework governing complaint handling lacks clarity and enforcement mechanisms, allowing courts to largely ignore recommended measures without consequences.

The image displays two screenshots of a mobile application interface for filing complaints against judges.

Left Screenshot: Pritužba na rad sudije

← Pritužba na rad sudije

Odaberite jedan ili više osnova pritužbe

- ☐ Glavna rasprava ili glavni pretnes nisu zakazani u zakonskom roku
- ☐ Zakazivanje ročišta ili pretresa u neopravdano dugim intervalima
- ☐ Odlaganje ročišta ili pretresa zbog nepravilnog dostavljanja stranci, veštaku ili svedoku
- ☐ Kašnjenje u izradi presude
- ☐ Neopravdano kašnjenje u pribavljanju ili izvođenju dokaza
- ☐ Kašnjenje u dostavljanju podnesaka strankama
- ☐ Nedostavljanje predmeta nadležnom sudu po uloženom pravnom leku
- ☐ Bilo kakav uticaj na tok ili ishod postupka
- ☐ Sud ne vodi računa o procesnoj disciplini tokom postupka

DALJE

Right Screenshot: Želim da podnesem:

← Želim da podnesem:

Pritužbu na rad sudije

Neopravdano odugovlačenje, neefikasno vođenje postupka i ostale nepravilnosti u sudskom postupku

VIŠE

PODNESE

Prigovor radi ubrzanja postupka

Zbog predugog trajanja postupka, nezakazivanja ročišta ili drugog neopravdanog kršenja u postupku

VIŠE

PODNESE

Zahtev za izuzeće sudije

Povezanost sudije sa učesnicima u postupku i druge okolnosti koje dovode u pitanje sudijinu nepristrasnost

VIŠE

PODNESE

These are the reasons why project initiated the development of the digital application for complaining procedures. The process started by creating the first working version of the document, which outlined the structure, steps, and information gathering process for the application. This initial version was shared with judges from project partners to gather feedback and ensure comprehensiveness. Additionally, collaboration occurred with colleagues from the USAID Rule of Law Project and OSCE Mission to Serbia to incorporate their insights. Consulting a member of the Working Group for Complaints formed by the High Judicial Council and IMG provided further guidance.

The mobile Android application, titled "Pritužujem se!," was launched in August 2021 and made available on the Google Play Store. The application serves as a user-friendly platform for individuals to register complaints about the conduct or processes within the judiciary, particularly concerning judges and the timeliness of court proceedings. It allows users to submit three types of complaints: complaints about a judge's work, objections to expediting proceedings, and requests for the exemption of a judge. Each type of complaint is accompanied by clear instructions and tools to assist users in preparing and submitting their submissions. Through the app, users can access detailed information about the complaint process, including explanations of legal terms and procedures. Clear instructions are provided at each stage, ensuring that users understand their options and obligations. Additionally, the application offers guidance on which complaint channel to use based on the nature of the grievance, helping users choose the most appropriate avenue for redress.

Subsequent to its public release, the application underwent upgrades based on user feedback. It serves as a platform for citizens to lodge complaints regarding various irregularities encountered during legal proceedings. Users can generate selected data within the application and submit their complaint with a single click, enhancing accessibility and efficiency in addressing grievances within the judicial system.

Unfortunately, the "Pritužujem se!" mobile Android application has not yielded the expected results due to the lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and the High Judicial Council. Without this essential cooperation, the application has struggled to effectively address citizen complaints and ensure accountability within the Serbian judiciary. The absence of coordinated efforts has led to delays in resolving grievances, inconsistencies in the handling of complaints, and a failure to meet public expectations for transparency and responsiveness. It underscores the critical need for meaningful collaboration between key institutions to enhance the functionality and impact of such digital platforms in promoting judicial integrity and citizen participation in the justice system.

Activity 3.2. Evidence-based participation and advocacy on monitoring findings, integrity and access to justice

The project's focus on evidence-based participation and advocacy involves a multifaceted approach to improving judicial integrity and access to justice. One significant aspect is the commenting on the "Judicial Development Strategy for the period 2019-2024," aiming to enhance impartiality and accountability within the judiciary. The project played a significant role in this endeavor by submitting comments to the Ministry of Justice, leading to the acceptance of several recommendations. These recommendations included improving the legislative framework for handling court complaints, enhancing the capacity of the High Judicial Council, and raising public awareness about complaints mechanisms and disciplinary rules.

Moreover, project fostered collaboration with the USAID Rule of Law Project, facilitating two meetings to explore areas of cooperation. Additionally, YUCOM's president, Ms. Katarina Golubovic, seized opportunities to address key stakeholders, such as court presidents, representatives of prosecutor's offices, and civil society organizations, during events like the Presentation of the Annual Report of the Court of Appeal in Kragujevac and Novi Sad. These engagements provided platforms to discuss planned activities aimed at strengthening citizens' confidence in the judiciary.

The project's impact extended beyond national borders, earning recognition in international forums. For instance, the ODIHR Mission acknowledged the project's contributions by citing its insights into the challenges faced by courts during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the project's success garnered attention in the 2022 [White House Legal Aid Report](#), where the Open Door of the Judiciary project was highlighted as an exemplary initiative promoting transparency and public engagement in Serbia's legal system.

In addition, the project's advocacy efforts were showcased in various webinars and conferences, such as the "User-Friendly Courts" webinar organized by the International Association of Court Administration (IACA). Milan Filipović, Research Director at YUCOM, presented Serbia's experiences with the Open Door of the Judiciary project, emphasizing its role in ensuring access to justice for all. Furthermore, YUCOM's participation in the IACA conference provided a platform to showcase the achievements and strategies of the Open Doors of Judiciary project, garnering interest from participants representing 40 countries.

To enhance accessibility and engagement, YUCOM translated informative videos into English, offering insights into the Open Doors of Judiciary project and providing guidance on individual submissions to United Nations Committees. These efforts underscore the project's commitment to fostering inclusive justice systems and promoting transparent, citizen-centric judiciary.



5. PROJECT CHALLENGES

1. **Judicial Reserve in Public Discourse:** Convincing judges to engage in public discourse presented a formidable challenge due to their traditional reluctance towards public appearances. Overcoming this cultural barrier required extensive efforts to build trust, foster open communication channels, and demonstrate the benefits of engaging with the public. Addressing concerns about impartiality, privacy, and potential repercussions for speaking out were essential aspects of navigating this challenge.
2. **Complex Project Management:** Coordinating a project involving 12 partner organizations, overseeing 15 sub-grants, and managing collaborations with dozens of courts and prosecutor's offices posed significant logistical and administrative hurdles. Ensuring effective communication, harmonizing activities across diverse entities, and adhering to project timelines required robust project management strategies, including clear delegation of responsibilities, regular monitoring, and prompt issue resolution.
3. **Legislative Amendments and Political Interference:** The project intersected with ongoing debates surrounding amendments to the Constitution and judicial laws, making it susceptible to political influences and interference. Balancing the diverse interests of stakeholders while maintaining the project's integrity and objectives necessitated careful navigation of political landscapes. Striving for transparency, impartiality, and adherence to judicial reform goals amid external pressures was crucial for preserving the project's credibility and effectiveness.
4. **Legal Support for Citizens:** Providing comprehensive legal support to address citizens' inquiries on various legal issues through blog posts, demanded expertise across diverse domains of law, including civil, criminal, and administrative law. Responding to citizens' questions promptly, accurately, and comprehensively required a robust network of legal experts, efficient information dissemination channels, and mechanisms for quality assurance. Tailoring legal assistance to meet the specific needs and circumstances of each inquiry while ensuring accessibility and affordability for all citizens posed ongoing challenges throughout the project duration.
5. **Institutional Cooperation:** One significant challenge has been the difficulty in fostering institutional cooperation and acceptance of the developed standards for integrity plans within judiciary institutions. Despite efforts to introduce integrity plans as anti-corruption mechanisms tailored to the local context and specificities of Serbia, some judiciary institutions have not recognized the benefits of these standards. This lack of recognition has hindered the project's ability to effectively promote ethical behavior and transparency within the judiciary.
6. **Digital Tools:** The project has encountered obstacles in fully realizing the potential of digital applications such as "Pritužujem se!" The effectiveness of such applications relies

heavily on cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and the High Judicial Council in resolving complaints. However, the expected results have not been achieved due to the absence of established collaboration between these entities. This has undermined the application's ability to provide efficient grievance redressal mechanisms for citizens.

7. **COVID-19 Impact:** The project "Constituencies for Judicial Reform in Serbia" also faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak led to disruptions in project activities, particularly those involving in-person meetings, consultations, and public events. The declared state of emergency and limited functioning of courts during the pandemic further impeded the implementation of planned activities, such as the local council meetings. The shift to remote work and virtual platforms presented logistical challenges and hindered direct engagement with stakeholders, including citizens, judicial personnel, and decision-makers. Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated existing barriers to accessing justice, as court closures and restrictions on physical interactions delayed proceedings and limited individuals' ability to raise complaints or seek redress for grievances. Despite these challenges, the project endeavored to adapt its strategies and utilize digital tools to continue its efforts in promoting judicial reform and citizen participation amidst the unprecedented circumstances posed by the pandemic.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Enhanced Judicial Communication:** Enhancing citizens' comprehension and confidence in the judiciary is facilitated when they are provided with clear explanations regarding the trial procedures and the rationale behind court decisions. Moreover, illuminating the perspectives and roles of all involved parties, including the opposing side, fosters a more informed and balanced understanding among citizens, contributing to greater trust in the judicial system.
2. **Knowledge as Trust Catalyst:** Allowing judges and prosecutors to actively participate in public discourse on various legal topics fosters transparency and accountability within the judiciary. When representatives of the judiciary are given the opportunity to share their insights and perspectives, it enriches public dialogue and strengthens the connection between the judiciary and society. Legal literacy among citizens plays a vital role in fostering trust in the judicial system. As citizens become more knowledgeable about their legal rights and the workings of the judiciary, they develop a deeper trust in the fairness and effectiveness of the legal system, leading to greater confidence in seeking justice.
3. **Educating Citizens in Legal Uncertainty:** During periods of legal uncertainty, such as states of emergency or mass demonstrations, providing citizens with clear information

about their legal rights, obligations, and available recourse options is crucial. By empowering citizens with knowledge and guidance, it reduces anxiety and increases confidence in navigating the judicial system, even amidst challenging circumstances.

4. **Institutional Support Vitality:** The success of reform initiatives like digitizing complaint mechanisms or implementing integrity plan standards relies heavily on institutional support and collaboration. Without buy-in and cooperation from within institutions, these initiatives struggle to gain traction and achieve their intended impact, highlighting the importance of fostering internal support for sustainable reform efforts.
5. **Civil Society Vigilance:** As Serbia advances towards EU accession, it is navigating through a series of reforms, bolstered by assistance from various international entities like the Council of Europe, the World Bank, among others. Nevertheless, even after the completion of these reforms, civil society in Serbia remains vigilant, poised to oversee subsequent reform endeavors. This project demonstrates the capacity of civil society organizations to conduct thorough research, provide insightful analysis, and offer constructive feedback on judiciary reform processes, ultimately contributing to the transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of the reform efforts.
6. **Local inclusivity:** For a local initiative to thrive and yield positive outcomes, it must actively engage a wide array of local stakeholders who possess a nuanced understanding of the community's unique context, challenges, and needs. This inclusivity ensures that the initiative resonates with and effectively addresses the diverse concerns and priorities of the local population. Additionally, by fostering collaboration and ownership among local actors, the initiative is more likely to gain traction and achieve lasting impact within the community.

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