



Ecumenical  
Humanitarian  
Organization



THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS

**CHARITY  
AT THE DAWN OF  
A NEW CENTURY**





THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS

**CHARITY  
AT THE DAWN OF  
A NEW CENTURY**



[www.ehons.org](http://www.ehons.org)

## PUBLICATION DATA

**Authors:** Branislava Opranović, Nenad Stojanović

**Publisher:** Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO)

**Director:** Anna Brtka Valent

**Editor-in-chief:** EHO

**Proofreading and editing:** Aleksandra Gojković

**English translation:** Mark Daniels – Odista.com

**Design:** Ivana Đurđević

**Photographs:** EHO, Ian Wright

Novi Sad, April 2023

## Contact information:

Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation

Ćirila i Metodija 21, 21000 Novi Sad

Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia

**Tel:** +381 (0)21 466 588

**Email:** office@ehons.org

**www.ehons.org**

Copyright © 2023

ECUMENICAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION

CIP - Каталогизacija y publikaciji

Библиотека Матице српске, Нови Сад

061.2:27-675(497.113 Novi Sad)"1993/2023"

ОПРАНОВИЋ, Бранислава, 1959-

Dobročinstvo na prelomu dva veka : Ekumenska humanitarna organizacija : prvih trideset godina / [Branislava Opranović, Nenad Stojanović ; English translation Mark Daniels]. - Novi Sad : Ekumenska humanitarna organizacija, 2023 (Novi Sad : Brain made). - 88 str. ; 27 cm

Uporedo srp. tekst i engl. prevod. - Tiraž 300.

ISBN 978-86-85043-71-0

1. Стојановић, Ненад, 1980-

а) Екуменска хуманитарна организација (Нови Сад) - 1993-2023

COBISS.SR-ID 114819081

## CONTENT

A word from the director	6
Visible signs of change for the better	8
Fighting inequality for a civil society	10
Humanitarian work	11
Interfaith and interethnic cooperation	18
Diaconia	20
Civil society	23
Social welfare	30
Publishing	32
Awards	33
Changes	34
Looking to the future	38





## A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR



"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it." (The Bible, Proverbs 3:27)

### Dear friends, esteemed partners and valued users of our services

It falls to me to be first among equals at the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO), that great and complex family, at the time when it celebrates a significant anniversary – three decades since the founding of our organisation and yours, and it is a great honour and privilege for me.

The core ideal of the Christian churches in Vojvodina that established EHO in 1993 – a difficult year of war and suffering – was to serve people not through words but by deeds, deeds of love. On behalf of our churches we have served our neighbour and continue to do so, our guiding lights being the needs of those in distress and the desire to contribute to the well-being of our society. Over the last 30 years our organisation, walking the path of good deeds, has testified to the greatness of God's love by which He loves every person regardless of confession, skin colour, ethnicity, gender or age. All of my predecessors at the helm of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service, and later the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation have, in performing their duties, been guided by Christian values, as have I and, I am sure, all of our staff. We have extended our hand, given our hearts and harnessed our skills in order to draw close to those of us who are afflicted, weak, poor, ill, elderly, marginalised, exiled and stigmatised.

Since its establishment, the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation has contributed to shining a light on social misfortunes, often playing a pioneering role in creating initiatives that contribute to the resolution of social problems and to empowering people from marginalised groups. Many of the projects we have conducted have served as models of good practice, spurring other civil society

organisations on to themselves help forge a path towards the building of a true civil society together with us.

Our organisation has grown and evolved from one distributing humanitarian aid to vulnerable people into an organisation providing comprehensive support to many vulnerable groups in our country and region.

There have been many who have helped us along the way, and our gratitude goes to all those who have been involved in the work of our organisation over these years: the management, employees, contractors, volunteers, member churches, members of the Assembly and other boards of the organisation, all stakeholders at the local, provincial and national level, institutions and organisations with which we have partnered and all people with good will and a positive attitude towards our organisation who have supported our work in a variety of ways. We are especially grateful to all our donors, since without them we would not have managed to survive and thrive for so many years and help such a great number of people in need.

We thank all of our traditional church donors, but also the numerous local and international organisations and agencies which have supported and continue to support our ideas and projects, thus enabling us to be as effective as possible in achieving our vision and mission – to be ever present in the midst of troubles and crisis, bringing to bear Christian ethical values in order to contribute to building a more just society in which the human, their values and their diversity are respected.

Last, but by no means least, on behalf of all of our partners I would like to thank the users of our services from whom we have learned and go on learning on a daily basis how to be selfless towards our neighbour and to seek to be better people every moment of our lives.

Anna Brtka Valent

Novi Sad, April 2023

# Alongside neighbors, with neighbors, for neighbors!



## VISIBLE SIGNS OF CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Until you have been to the Roma neighbourhood on the outskirts of town at least once in your life, seen and heard the stories of people who have fled as refugees or as migrants, the horror of flooded and destroyed homes, the pleas of the sick, the helplessness of the elderly, the cries of a beaten woman and a young girl married against her will, the desperation of the hungry, the frostbitten feet of the shoeless child living on the street... only then can you grasp the importance of everything that EHO has been doing for the well-being of its neighbours over the 30 years it has existed, through the daily dedicated and devoted work of thousands of employees, outside partners and volunteers gathered together in one great empathetic family.

Below are just a few of the facts and figures which these people can take credit for, together with numerous donors from within the country and internationally:

During the time of war and sanctions in the former Yugoslavia, EHO sought to ensure that the poorest in Vojvodina did not go hungry – over a period of seven years, in Novi Sad, Titel, Zrenjanin and Pačir, a total of 4,242,000 meals were provided to the most vulnerable. More than 30 tons of medicines were distributed to healthcare institutions, pharmacies and individuals (with a prescription) in Serbia and Montenegro, as well as to psychiatric clinics in Vojvodina. Several tonnes of infant formula were provided, as well as large quantities of reagents for laboratories. Tens of tonnes of humanitarian aid were distributed to the local and refugee populations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, along with 300,000 vegetable seed packages. Laundry services, occupational workshops and healthcare were provided in all transit and reception centres in Vojvodina for migrants and refugees from Asia and Africa; Children from Roma families were brought into in the regular education system; Aid in the value of €250,000, which included small animals for breeding in rural households, was provided to displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija living in Vojvodina – more than 1000 families. During the floods in Serbia, 400 houses were renovated and 37 new dwellings built; Home care services and a sense of preserved dignity were provided to more than 10,000 elderly people in Vojvodina; More than 7,000 telephone calls to the Cancer Info phone line were answered, and more than 30,000 cancer patients visited.

We will now attempt the impossible – with as few omissions as possible to present to the reader the great deeds of those sincere people of pure and noble heart on the thorny but noble road EHO has travelled since 19th February 1993 when it was established under the name of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service. Since its first day EHO has had a significant social impact on communities and in people's lives. This impact has been achieved step by step – tiny (only seemingly), resolute, difficult but brave steps, nevertheless leaving a visible and permanent trace, changing the world, always for the better. Unfortunately, despite all the work, all the empathy and all the expertise, and all the different forms of assistance provided by numerous foreign and local donors and people of good will, the needs around us have almost always far outstripped what we have achieved.

### ACTIVITIES

Since its founding, EHO has followed the path laid down for it, grouping its activities into five programme areas:

**Humanitarian work**

**Diaconia**

**Interethnic and interfaith cooperation**

**Civil society**

**Social issues**

To help someone in need we know that we first need to feed them, clothe them and put shoes on their feet, then help them get out of poverty, get a job, secure a roof over their head, learn literacy and educate their children. In addition to providing these types of direct assistance to people, EHO also seeks to mobilise the local community so that through shared effort we can empower our beneficiaries to rely on their own skill and motivation to change their lives and the lives of their families.



### Threefold discrimination

“As soon as it was established, EHO came under threefold discrimination: it carried the burden of a general public hostility towards non-governmental organisations and we were always under suspicion, often considered unpatriotic traitors; our founders came from faith communities, which bore a stigma of its own; and thirdly our founders were from so-called minority churches. It sometimes pained us to have to explain that we had no ill intent, that our only wish was to help others...!”

*Ankica Dragin, former EHO Public Relations Coordinator*

## FIGHTING INEQUALITY FOR A CIVIL SOCIETY

EHO has transitioned from being an organisation distributing humanitarian aid to an organisation seeking through social activism and implementation of projects to improve living conditions and advance the social rights of numerous vulnerable groups in our society, thereby assisting them in overcoming social exclusion, inequality and poverty. Through its humanitarian and diaconal work, EHO has borne witness to a series of changes and events happening not just in Vojvodina, the whole of Serbia or the Balkans, but the world at large. EHO's activism has made an indisputable contribution to the establishment of a civil society.

From the first day, and throughout the 1990s, EHO provided humanitarian aid to vulnerable people in Vojvodina, and later continued its work by listening to the needs of other vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, the elderly, women, children and youth, Roma people, the rural population, the unemployed, people with health problems and those affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, refugees, migrants, street children, returnees under the readmission agreements) and responding quickly to new crises, be they the result of social upheaval or adverse weather.

EHO was established during the terrible years of war in Yugoslavia on the initiative of the World Council of Churches. The call was received, understood and accepted with open arms and heart by Reformed priest and electrical engineer by profession, Károly Béres. The mission behind EHO's establishment was to provide humanitarian aid (meals, medications and firewood) to vulnerable people in Vojvodina in times of hopelessness, fear and poverty, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. This primarily humanitarian activity earned EHO a reputation as a leading humanitarian organisation during the 1990s, and a unique example of cooperation between churches in conducting diaconal work.

At the turn of the century, the organisation was a witness to major social change and an active participant in building a more just society. Its beneficiaries were those hardest hit by social upheavals, geopolitical frictions, adverse weather and health, social and economic crises. Amidst these disasters afflicting mankind EHO did not hold back but plunged in to help people whilst at the same time learning from them and looking out for signposts directing its further work.



### THE VISION OF KÁROLY BÉRES

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Service/Organisation would never have become what it has today without the man whose vision built EHO and who until the end dedicated himself to its establishment and development. Without Károly Béres – scholar, man of the world, electrical engineer, priest, earthly chair of the Reformed Christian Church in Serbia, who ran the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service from 1993 to 2008. Béres will be remembered as someone who took the right decisions in difficult times and was brave enough to take risks and stand behind his decisions, but also stand behind the people he worked with. The impact he left can still be seen today in the work and growth of the organisation. In February 1993 the core of the EHS comprised: Károly Béres, Peter Eberhardt, Anna Bu, Klara Erdes, Julia Ghandour Schal and Ljubomir Ivanov. Over time, in various ways, they were joined by numerous associates who further grew the organisation.

## HUMANITARIAN WORK

In the war year of 1993, humanitarian aid and support was provided to members of the public in Vojvodina and to a great number of health and social institutions, thereby contributing much to preventing the collapse of the health and social system. Tens of thousands of tonnes of food, medical equipment, bedding, furniture, medications, hygiene supplies and footwear and clothing were provided to people in health and social institutions, as well as to the poverty-stricken population.

### SOUP KITCHEN

#### The teacher and the loaf

“At the time I was working in the Hleb [state-owned bakery] company. A truck full of bread, guarded at night by a retired teacher, was worth two German Marks! His pension wasn't enough to last the month, he was hungry, he had no money for bread! We took him a meal, he wept, we could barely persuade him to take it... In those devastating war years these free meals saved the dignity of many and ensured they lived to see another day.

I hate to think it and yet I fear it's possible, unfortunately: that those days, which we barely survived, could return...”

*Irenka Beres, EHS staff member*

## FOUR MILLION HOT MEALS

Between September 1993 and April 2001, EHO fed the poorest in Vojvodina. The soup kitchen was the first large-scale project to make a significant impression in the community. Distribution of free meals to those most vulnerable began in Novi Sad and expanded to other towns in Vojvodina. At one point, 4,500 meals per day were being prepared and distributed. Over the seven years that the soup kitchen was in operation, activists, volunteers, partners in non-governmental organisations and priests in their parishes provided a total of 4,242,000 meals to people who could not provide themselves with even one meal per day.

### Joy, sadness and pride

“I ran the EHO soup kitchen. It fills me with joy, sadness and pride that in seven years we managed to provide 4 million meals to those most vulnerable in Novi Sad, Titel, Zrenjanin and Pačir. In Novi Sad alone, food was distributed daily in 18 locations!

These were churches, the Occupational Disabled Association, the Association of the Blind and Sight-Impaired, the Association of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, the Circle of Serbian Sisters and local community centres who were willing to join the effort.

I worked at EHO for 19 years, and if I had not reached retirement age I would have stayed. It was hard work, but we did it with great pleasure – Károly’s enthusiasm was infectious.”

*Ljubomir Ivanov, former EHO Soup Kitchen Coordinator*



During the 1990s humanitarian aid was also collected, for the vulnerable and poor both in Vojvodina and outside the borders of our country. Serbia was under heavy sanctions, the healthcare system was barely functioning, and there were not enough medicines in pharmacies. With the help of donors and people of good will EHO managed to secure significant quantities of medications for healthcare institutions and hospitals, as well as for many individuals with chronic illnesses. Mobile medical teams were also set up to visit the most vulnerable areas, take medicines there and perform basic medical examinations.

## PHARMACY

### Thirty tons of medicines

EHO set up the Humanitarian Pharmacy, which distributed more than 30 tons of medicines to healthcare institutions, pharmacies and individuals (with a prescription) in Serbia and Montenegro. Baby food and infant formula were also provided for the youngest.

From 1993 to 1995 EHO, with the help of its donors, responded to the urgent needs of patients in institutions for the care of those with learning and mental difficulties, securing medicines for all psychiatric clinics in Vojvodina. More than 3.5 tons of priority medications were supplied to pharmacies, emergency wards, municipal health clinics and hospitals in Vojvodina, and 8.5 tonnes of medications were distributed to 12 hospitals and 22 pharmacies in Vojvodina. 19.5 tons of medications and other medical equipment were sent to five general hospitals in Serbia and Montenegro. EHO also helped more than 50 healthcare and social institutions, providing them with food, hygiene supplies and medications.

Several tonnes of infant formula, which was unavailable in Serbia, was distributed through the Novi Sad Pharmacy, with some also donated to the maternity ward and children’s hospital in Novi Sad, the hospital in Senta and municipal health clinics in Vukovar, Čajniče, Stara Pazova, Novi Kneževac and Bačka Topola. The project was revived during and after the NATO bombing campaign.

We assisted women’s health and pregnancy clinics in Vojvodina and emergency laboratories in the Provincial Hospital during the sanctions and embargo, securing the most important medications, equipment, chemicals, reagents and medical supplies.

### Medicine for an expectant mother

“Many people in Novi Sad, desperate and with no-one to go to, often knocked on the door of the house in the Telep neighbourhood where we lived. One day the postman rang:

‘There’s a woman, she’s pregnant, she’s ill, and she can’t get the injections she needs in the pharmacies, we’re afraid it’ll soon be too late...’

‘Come in and tell us about it...’

‘It’s no problem Irenka, tell them we’ll do everything we can.’

Right away Károly contacted a pharmacist neighbour, and then friends in Dortmund, and we got hold of the medicine. The pharmacist sent somebody to the airport to take delivery of the injection. Soon after receiving the medication, the woman gave birth to a healthy baby.

If my Károly were still with us we would have continued to build our lives around the same mission – helping people. Sometimes I think I ought to apologise to our children, because our humanitarian work, which we never wavered from, caused us to unwillingly neglect them. But the children witnessed everything we did and have grown into good people.”

*Irenka Béres, loyal wife and partner to Károly Béres in the good works of EHS*



## EHO APPEALS

The EHO Appeal is another ongoing campaign which the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation has been conducting for three decades in response to crisis situations such as armed conflict in the region, refugee and migrant crises, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EHO Appeal for Vojvodina was first organised in 1993 when a request was made of the World Council of Churches to assist us in providing food for refugees and the poor in Vojvodina, bedding for maternity wards and the most essential medications for seven neuropsychiatric clinics in Vojvodina.

With arrivals of a large number of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, humanitarian aid consisting of food packages, clothing and footwear was distributed.

Over a period of three years, several projects were conducted providing humanitarian aid to refugees from Krajina, improving their quality of life and facilitating their integration, whilst at the same time training volunteers to help refugees. Assistance was provided to around 20,000 people, 90% of them refugees, who every two months over a four-year period received food and hygiene packages and other humanitarian aid. Assistance was distributed through the EHO Psychosocial Advisory Service, refugee centres and EHO diaconal groups.

## The great misfortune of a people

“I was deeply shaken that August of 1995 when I first witnessed the great affliction suffered by all these people who had fled to Vojvodina, to a new environment, a whole new world to them... In Bingula we wasted no time in organising aid...”

*Ondrej Marčok, priest and Chair of the EHO Assembly*

## GO – SEE!

The work with refugees was not just humanitarian in nature. After the war, with the help of donors, EHO also organised a campaign called “Go – see!” as part of a project titled “Supporting the sustainable return of refugees”, with the idea of helping refugees go back to visit their homes and assess the possibility of returning. Those who decided to return were given assistance in the form of building materials to repair their damaged houses. EHO also secured funds to purchase firewood. As a result of this project around 2,000 people returned to Croatia and to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## “I, too, was a refugee...”

“I, too, was a refugee in 1995. I wanted to help those who were in a similar situation to the one I had been in. I began to volunteer in the Psychosocial Advisory Service for exiles and refugees from BiH and Croatia. Later I got involved in humanitarian aid – there were refugees coming for aid but also refugees volunteering and distributing that aid. They included many schoolteachers



and university lecturers, economists, students... all of them volunteering to help distribute humanitarian aid because they had no work, but also, primarily, because they had a need to re-establish broken ties with other people.”

*Tanja Stojković – EHO Project Coordinator*

This was followed by the Winter Appeal (providing food to refugees and the poor), the Appeal for Aid to the Islamic Community in Novi Sad (food packages and modest financial assistance for accommodation for around 850 families expelled or fleeing as refugees from the former Yugoslavia). For a full eight years there were Spring Appeals, with EHO distributing more than 300,000 family packages with vegetable seeds for refugees living with host families or in collective centres, for local socially vulnerable people and for farmers.

In spring of 1999 came a new Appeal for aid amidst the crisis in Kosovo and Metohija and the bombing of Serbia. This campaign was aimed at providing urgent aid to refugees and expelled persons in the form of food packages, hygiene packages and packages for children.

In the years that followed, EHO Appeals for the poor in Vojvodina continued (300,000 people – around 15% of the population of Vojvodina – received various material assistance: food and hygiene packages, free meals from the soup kitchen, vegetable seed packages, medicines for the humanitarian pharmacy and mobile medical teams) and for displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija (1,100 families displaced from Kosovo and Metohija and living in Vojvodina were supported with food, hygiene and children’s packages, cash grants, heating fuel, flour, blankets, vouchers for the purchase of food and hygiene products to a total value of €250,000 and small animals to be raised in rural households).

In 2005 in response to the flooding in the Banat district we launched the Appeal for Banat, securing food, water, bedding, blankets, hygiene products, medicines, chickens and chicken feed and family packages of vegetable seeds to those most vulnerable.



A year later, in 2006, floods hit other parts of Vojvodina too when the rivers Tisa and Danube burst their banks. Then, too, EHO mounted an urgent and effective response, helping those people whose houses and land had ended up submerged. Wherever possible houses and other buildings were disinfected and repaired.

During the 2014-2017 floods in Serbia, EHO helped more than 1,800 socially vulnerable families, providing them with building materials, doors and windows and bathroom fixtures in order to repair the damaged parts of their houses and establish minimum sanitary standards. Aid was also provided in the form of food and hygiene products, home appliances and furniture and farm animals and feed. After the 2014 floods, 400 damaged dwellings were renovated in Obrenovac, Šabac, Lazarevac and Valjevo, and new apartments built in Obrenovac and Lazarevac. A team of engineers worked with a team of workmen in order to help families impacted by the floods return to their homes as soon as possible. After the floods 37 families were moved from temporary accommodation to newly constructed apartments. EHO thus provided permanent housing for these families, handing them the keys to their new homes in 2017.

The refugee crisis which reared its head in 2015 when Serbia became a transit country for more than 750,000 refugees and migrants from Africa and Asia on their journey towards the EU, and the new set of problems arising from this situation, once again proved EHO's readiness. An Appeal was launched to help these refugees, and thanks to international partners, staff and volunteers were able to work every day distributing humanitarian aid where it was needed, and the EHO mobile medical team was also mobilised. EHO helped tens of thousands of people on the move and showed that it was one of the most mobile and effective organisations providing humanitarian aid in refugee centres.

From 2015 till the present day, under the EHO Appeal, aid and support has been provided to migrants from Africa and Asia in a range of ways. EHO has alleviated the vulnerable situation of refugees and contributed to better acceptance of them by the local population. This has been achieved, among other ways, through projects to improve living conditions in local communities and by improving access to education for refugees accommodated in Serbia. Those staying in



Serbia for more than a year have been provided with help in the form of food, footwear and clothing, hygiene products, medical services and medications and maintenance of hygiene in their living quarters. For those affected by migration, laundry services have been provided in all transit and reception centres. EHO is especially proud of the support provided to child migrants through the children's Safe Corner. As of 2016, EHO has focused on renovating, repairing and equipping reception transit centres, building additional facilities for reception and for psychosocial and educational work with women, children and youth. EHO's contribution to accommodation capacity for refugees in Serbia has reached 20%. Support for the integration of migrants has been provided in the form of training for school staff, equipping of schools and networking between local and migrant populations. Another great source of comfort to people on the move has been the psychosocial support provided, as well as financial assistance in the form of cash cards.

### Towards a more dignified life

“I hope that we have been like a safe ship for all those people on the move who have sailed with EHO and partners as part of the 'Support for protection and humanitarian aid to people on the move' project, and that we have put at least a little wind in their sails. We want to thank all the children, women and men from Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Algeria, Somalia, Morocco and Burundi who have selflessly shared their time with us and left their mark at our workshops, like a footprint on the road they have travelled. EHO wishes them a safe arrival in the place they have set out for and a future life of dignity.”

*Milica Milović Kinoli, EHO Project Coordinator*

In 2020, when the whole world was caught up in the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the EHO Appeal was on alleviating the impact of the pandemic in Serbia. Humanitarian aid was provided to vulnerable population groups, with more than 10,000 packages of humanitarian aid distributed. Children living in substandard conditions were recognised as being particularly sensitive to the impact of the pandemic. In addition to support for the families of these children and the distribution of packages of humanitarian aid, a programme of additional educational support was organised. Through working directly and individually with the children in school, EHO's team of young people and peer volunteers helped them learn, use digital devices and overcome other difficulties in school and prevent the risk of social exclusion.

### A leading light

“A campaign I am very proud of is connected with the COVID pandemic, when EHO succeeded in a time of unprecedented health crisis all over the world to collect aid which we distributed to the public through our network of local officers, churches etc. We did it in the quickest and most efficient way possible at that time and demonstrated that we are one of the leading organisations of this type in Serbia, and perhaps even in the region!”

*Anna Brtka, EHO Director*

## INTERFAITH AND INTERETHNIC COOPERATION

### German in the synagogue

“We had a regular, interfaith ecumenical meeting to pray for peace. On this occasion, which was around the time of the Dayton Agreement, it was held in the Novi Sad synagogue. The Jewish place of worship was full to bursting, there were guests from Geneva and Brussels, representatives of many international organisations, and I, together with Anna Bu, was tasked with interpreting. When one guest began speaking her words of greeting in German, Šošberger, representing the Jewish community, went pale and, visibly distressed, jumped up from his seat, stood stock still like that for a while and then sat down, thinking better of saying anything. Later he told us that the Jews had sworn, after the terrible massacre in Novi Sad, to never again allow a single word of German to be spoken in the synagogue. But then, seeing representatives of all confessions praying together, he decided that it was time to put an end to that, that we had to forgive, to value one another and to continue on in peace and fellowship.”

*Julia Ghandour Schal, EHO member since its founding*

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation is a shining example of interfaith and interethnic cooperation between churches in conducting diaconal ministry all over Serbia.

EHO is a witness to the mission of the church in working with the poor and with all people on the margins of society. In its early years this unique network of diaconal groups made up of more than 500 volunteers of different religious confessions has become the trademark of EHO throughout Vojvodina, demonstrating that traditional social structures such as churches represent a driving force in the development of a civil society.

Our organisation initiated the only interconfessional prayers to be held regularly in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the wars of the 1990s. Each Wednesday in Novi Sad, from July 1993 to December 1995, people of Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith prayed together for peace. From 1996 up until 2002, every second Wednesday of the month, ecumenical prayers for peace in the world were held in Novi Sad.

From 1994 onwards, EHO has been the coordinating organisation for Vojvodina and the coordinator of all activities related to World Day of Prayer, which was established and is organised by women as part of the ecumenical movement. In 170 countries all over our planet, every first Friday in March, women pray together for peace and love in the whole world.

Since 1997 EHO has also coordinated the work of the Ecumenical Women's Forum in Vojvodina, which works to promote networking and partnership amongst women from different churches, strengthen women's initiatives and promote peace and tolerance amongst Christians. More than 300 women from different churches have taken part in regular meetings and training.



Between 2007 and 2016, more than 3000 young people passed through various programs aimed at building tolerance among young people from different ethnic and faith groups. The regional School of Ecumenism worked towards building sustainable peace through non-confessional theological education for laypeople. The school involved more than 400 participants – activists from different churches and religious communities, staff, students of social and theological faculties and members of civil society organisations, who then further spread this direct ecumenical impact to at least 10,000 people in their immediate surroundings.

EHO also contributed to building tolerance and sustainable peace through the development of interreligious dialogue and interchurch relations. More than 1000 church leaders gained skills and knowledge in project management. Attendees became promoters of positive social and ethical change and contributed to a greater role played by churches and faith communities in civil society in Serbia.

#### CHURCHES INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF EHO

The Assembly of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (until 1998 the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service) is today composed of representatives of the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia, the Reformed Christian Church in Serbia, the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Saint Nicholas of Ruski Krstur and the Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia – Vojvodina. The members of the Assembly, together with the director, run the organisation and have, despite all the challenges, financial and otherwise, worked together for 30 years now to ensure the survival of the organisation and its mission to help others in need.

Other churches which have contributed to the establishment and development of our organisation since 1993 have been the Serbian Orthodox Church – Eparchy of Bačka and the Evangelical Methodist Church in Serbia.

## DIACONIA

As the only ecumenical organisation in Serbia, EHO has restored diaconia as charitable, social and humanitarian action on the part of churches in helping to relieve the difficult situation of many thousands of poor, marginalised and vulnerable social groups.

The EHO Diaconal Centre has existed since 1998. Independent programmes have emerged from this centre focusing on different target groups: diaconal groups (a network of 85 local diaconal groups), the Home Assistance and Care service, the Martha Centre, the Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities, the Roma Resource Centre and the Volunteer Centre.

## Food for soul and body

“I’m from a family of priests – my father, mother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin... they are all priests. All of them feed souls, but I feed people in other ways – with humanitarian aid, building materials, training... I have been here since my youth, I found my place here. The hardest times were probably during the flooding and when the refugees and migrants began to arrive – we had to respond immediately. Every morning at dawn we would load our van with food, water, and some clothes and footwear, all hurriedly collected. We would see terrible sights – people with lacerated feed, little children sick and crying who might not have eaten in days...”

*Stevan Balthory, began as a volunteer, now employed in EHO for 20 years*

Over the last 15 years, more than 1,500 EHO partners, associates and volunteers from diaconal groups have received knowledge and skills through organised training. Support has been given to 22 diaconal groups in local communities through small grants.

The Martha Centre humanitarian service has given assistance to socially disadvantaged people in Novi Sad and all over Vojvodina, providing them with second-hand clothing, footwear and household items. More than two tons of second-hand clothing are distributed to beneficiaries annually. Laundry services have also been set up at the Martha Center for socially vulnerable beneficiaries.

EHO played a pioneering role in establishing the Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities, the first of its kind in Serbia. The Centre was established in 2002, and 15 years later took on a new form as the Day Centre for Persons with Disabilities. It is particularly significant that EHO was the first organisation in Serbia to implement assistive technologies in order to support the education, employment and greater independence of people with disabilities. It is also important to note that this project took a multisectoral approach to disability. At the Centre, advisory services were provided to beneficiaries using assistive technologies and selecting



suitable tools depending on their disability. Training and courses were organised, such as in computer literacy and English language. The professional staff of the Centre provided psychosocial support and also lobbied and served as mediators in securing employment for people with disabilities. One of the most important roles of the Centre was in providing legal support and mediation in employment. For a time, the Centre also published the Linker magazine. More than 1000 people with disabilities have been helped through support programmes over the last 15 years, as well as more than 50 disabled persons’ associations.

Today in the Day Centre, people with disabilities are helped to socialise and various skills development courses are organised for them in order to increase their competitiveness in the labour market.

The most significant activity of the Centre is the EHO Tailoring Workshop (the forerunner to a social enterprise), which employs difficult-to-employ women or women with disabilities in redesigning and recycling second-hand clothing. The women process up to a tonne of donated second-hand clothing on an annual basis, sewing unique items of clothing and original fashion accessories. These products are shown and sold at fairs, exhibitions and other events, thereby raising money for people with disabilities.

## Tailoring workshop, grannies and fritters

“I came to EHO 23 years ago from a state-owned company and was amazed at the good organisation, fast decision-making and ability to mobilise a team, something that is often vital when helping people in trouble. The director at the time, Károly Béres, was a unique man. It is a pleasure to see his professionalism and dedication in the young people who are part of the EHO team today.

I find great fulfilment working with people with disabilities in the Károly Béres Social and Diaconal Centre. The Tailoring Workshop which I run is a fantastic idea – we recycle, sew and remodel clothing that people bring to us, and from it create unique items which we exhibit and sell. We have achieved a great deal, people know about us.

The Seniors' Club is a gathering place for wonderful, elderly people full of energy. The organised activities and social aspect mean a great deal to them, the feeling that they are not abandoned and are of use to society. They sing in a choir and also bake the renowned langoš fritters.”

*Marija Parnicki, EHO Project Coordinator*



Voluntary support provided to cancer patients and members of their families is an activity conducted by EHO in cooperation with the Vojvodina Institute for Oncology. This support includes the **Cancer Info (Rak Info)** hotline and visits by the “**Ladies in Green**” to cancer patients.

The Cancer Info phone number is a unique voluntary support service providing information, emotional and spiritual support and encouragement to cancer patients, their families and their friends.

The **Ladies in Green** are volunteers trained to provide patients with emotional support, including being there to talk to during tough times of hopelessness and isolation. The Ladies in Green also help sick people on a day-to-day basis – going shopping for them, helping prepare food, walking with them in the hospital grounds, helping them communicate with staff, accompanying them to examinations and so on.

In addition to improving the psychosocial well-being of patients and the quality of their stay in hospital, this service also promotes the importance of voluntary work in healthcare institutions in Serbia. To date, volunteers have received over 7,000 phone calls to the **Cancer Info** line and made more than 30,000 visits to cancer patients.

The **Seniors' Club** in Novi Sad is another programme for the oldest members of society. Membership is increasing – currently around 250 older beneficiaries come to the premises where they socialise and take part in themed workshops and cultural and entertainment programmes, and receive spiritual support and a daily meal. The Club is a remedy for loneliness and a way for the elderly among us to preserve their dignity.



## CIVIL SOCIETY

### EHO has changed my life

“I came to EHO at the prompting of Anna Bu, who was part of the Civil Initiatives training team. I got involved and it was one of the best decisions of my life. EHO changed my life. For nine years now I have been running the family accommodation unit in Novi Sad. This is a state institution which cares for children lacking adequate parental care and living in foster families. I founded this institution and have been running it since the very beginning – EHO was where I learned every part of the job, from the hardest to the easiest aspects, in the office and out in the field.”

*Ivana Koprivica, former EHO employee*



EHO also places great significance on strengthening the civil sector and promoting public, private and civil partnership between similar organisations in our country and in the Western Balkans as a whole.

As a result of its many years' experience and advocacy for the development of civil society, EHO has been recognised by foreign donors, partners and communities as a credible organisation in this sector. It also focuses on monitoring and analysing the activities of the government as regards legislation and implementation of policies in the areas of human rights, civil participation and the protection of those most vulnerable. It also invests great effort in influencing public policy in regards to improving mechanisms for cooperation with state and local government bodies.



EHO keeps a close watch to ensure that the key values of civil society, democracy and respect for human rights, are adhered to and respected in legislation and in practice. Through its proactive work in public advocacy, education and campaigning, EHO has influenced change in existing practices and policies and prompted the creation of new ones among institutions at the local and national level in regard to vulnerable population groups.

**The Small Projects Fund** was one of the first projects fostering partnership with the civil sector. Up until 2008, 313 small "know-how grants" were awarded to support the strengthening of capacities and credibility of civil society organisations through organised education and training in improving conditions for life in the local community. Through local action, EHO initiated the establishment of 12 new civil society organisations which are still active today.

EHO is an active member of networks of national and international civil society organisations: ACT Alliance, Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), Eurodiaconia, and the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW). At the national level, EHO has taken an active part in creating the legislative framework for the functioning of civil society.

In the area of civil society development, EHO projects have contributed to the creation of a more favourable environment for the operation of civil society organisations and helped civil society organisations representing marginalised groups to assume a more significant role in the civil sector. Through numerous projects, teachers have been trained to conduct intercultural education and apply the principles of interculturality in schools, while



professionals in the social welfare and healthcare systems have been empowered to adopt a more sensitive approach to vulnerable groups through training, study visits and partnership projects. Through projects for the promotion of intercultural education, EHO has created a policy paper with proposals for changes to the education system through the introduction of intercultural learning.

EHO has significantly contributed to strengthening the capacities of organisations representing people with disabilities through training, publications and advisory and consulting work covering more than 70 organisations with nearly 50,000 members in Vojvodina.

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation has also worked to empower Roma associations, especially the Serbian Association of Roma Women. By working intensively on building up the organisation and supporting project activities conducted by Roma organisations, very gratifying results have been achieved – Roma women have become more visible not only in the Roma community but also in society as a whole. From 2015 to 2020, Roma communities were supported in Roma settlements falling under 16 local government authorities. 14 informal groups were established, out of which 9 associations were officially registered. EHO equipped these and trained their members in the management of their organisation. EHO has initiated the creation of local policies and actively lobbied for increased budget funding for the improvement of the status of the Roma and the employment of coordinators for Roma issues in several local government authorities. Through training and grants, support has been provided for the activities of newly-established groups and associations – more than 6,000 Roma men, women and children have taken part in training in the areas of education, social welfare and protection of human and civil rights and access to justice, thereby also providing them with support in employment.

EHO has also taken active part in the IZVoR initiative, the first initiative in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina lobbying for a Law on Volunteering. More than 100 civil society organisations have been connected with trained volunteers.

EHO has conducted a great many of its activities with the active participation and wholehearted assistance of a great number of volunteers distributing humanitarian aid, free meals, medicines and clothing. Hundreds of volunteers have worked directly with beneficiaries every year. With the help of volunteers, more than 200 children accommodated in the Safe House in Novi Sad were able to get through some of the toughest times in their lives.

### Street children learn to fly

“Education and books are a great source of wealth, but practical experience is something without which knowledge cannot be complete. I graduated from university – pedagogical studies – and had always wanted to work with children. It was only through practical work with EHO that I honed and shaped my education. All those things that you can't see or fully assimilate from lessons in textbooks I learned first by working for one of the oldest children's magazines in Serbia, Neven, and then EHO took me on to work in the Drop-In Centre for children. Wards of the Drop-In Centre – children in street situations – have prepared a programme which will be part of EHO's 30-year anniversary celebration and I am very proud. I share in that indescribable joy of life which these wonderful, talented children selflessly emanate to all those around them. When they are provided with ongoing support – which is most often absent, unfortunately – these children can learn to fly!”

*Vedrana Bjelajac, former volunteer, now EHO Project Coordinator*

A great step forward was made in cooperation between the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation and local institutions caring for children in Novi Sad when the Drop-In Centre project for children living and working on the streets became a state institution. The inclusion of more than 2,000 street children in the systems of education, welfare and healthcare was facilitated. Decision-makers in Novi Sad, recognising the work of our organisation and the results it had achieved and understanding the importance of a service such as this, secured budget funding for the Drop-In Centre to become a state institution. The role of EHO in this project was not just to identify needs and push for the institutionalisation of EHO services – EHO still actively partners with the Drop-In Centre to make daily life easier for children living and working on the street.

The **Red Line project** was the first hotline service of its kind in Vojvodina, providing direct support by phone to people with HIV, hepatitis and other sexually transmitted diseases. Through the numerous services the organisation provided under this project, the physical and mental health of people with sexually transmitted diseases was promoted, their social isolation reduced, and a major contribution made to networking and improving the services of health and social institutions in Vojvodina and Serbia. From 2005 onwards, the project was expanded to new target groups. When the project ended, an NGO of the same name was established.

The Roma Resource Centre (RRC) was tasked with supporting the Roma, the most numerous ethnic minority in our country. Unfortunately, their socio-economic and

education status, and exposure to daily discrimination, social exclusion and long-term deprivation have led to them being one of the most vulnerable social groups. EHO has been providing support to the Roma through various activities for more than 20 years now.

Through a multisectoral approach, convinced of the need to promote equal rights for all citizens of Serbia, EHO has fought prejudice by providing information and advice, through advocacy and lobbying, and by empowering beneficiaries through programmes of education, vocational training and in providing opportunities for employment and self-employment.

At the same time, members of the Roma community have been encouraged to themselves fight for their rights and influence, and to take equal and active part at all levels in decision-making processes which affect their lives, their exercise of autonomy and their participativeness.

### Now I help others

“EHO helped me when I was unemployed, and a single mother. Today I help others, my fellow citizens. I got on board the vocational training support programme. As someone very familiar with the Roma community I am part of, I soon got involved in the important task of bringing Roma children into the education system in Bačko Gradište – and that’s how the story began. I went through training in writing projects, strategic planning and public relations. Today I run my own NGO called Đina and have also been a member of the National Council of Roma.”

*Dobriła Đin, former beneficiary, now EHO associate*

In view of the fact that many Roma have a low level of education and that society’s attitude towards them is full of prejudice, EHO believes it also has an ethical obligation to advocate for their rights. In addition to support in education, ongoing assistance is provided to improve housing conditions for Roma in numerous Roma settlements which, unfortunately, often lack even basic living amenities.

The **Readmission Agreement** prompted the repatriation to Serbia of a large number of Roma from Western Europe. The impact of this Agreement only compounded the troubles of the Roma community. Conditions first needed to be provided for the successful integration of Roma returnees through support in education, employment, exercising their rights in the areas of social welfare and healthcare and securing personal documents.



## I have learned to give and receive love and support

“It all begins with approaching people as humans and according everyone respect with absolute sincerity. All of us learn from the people we help. The greatest impact it has had on me is that I have learned how to give and receive love and support I have developed empathy and learned to recognise, feel and take on board the energy of people who are facing great upheaval in their lives and yet are able to find authentic joy in every new morning and to never lose hope – never! They have taught me to be softer, more flexible, to truly respect our differences and develop my own intercultural competencies.

Having worked for years in the field and as part of the project supporting returnees under the Readmission Agreement, I can say that without the support of all stakeholders in the local community, true progress and results will be hard to achieve. Services must not be left to the civil sector alone, networking is essential. In addition to this we very much need the professionalism, good will, hard work and dedication of all those involved.”

*Milislav Milinković, EHO Project Coordinator*

The many years of experience in working with vulnerable groups has meant that projects of the RRC which emerged as independent and follow-on projects continue to be implemented today as successful participative models for working with the Roma ethnic community.

A comprehensive approach was devised for supporting Roma returnees under the Readmission Agreement and Roma people forcibly displaced from Kosovo and Metohija, which first and foremost entails being constantly present in the field through a well-developed network of officers, and the active participation of beneficiaries at every step of the way in the process of deciding on support measures to be taken. Through this comprehensive approach, returnee families have been given new prospects for a more dignified life in Serbia. These projects have eased their integration and reintegration and facilitated their connection with state social welfare, legal, education and healthcare institutions, as well as providing assistance with improvements to their housing conditions. More than 400 beneficiaries, 54% of them returnees, have been supported with self-employment start-up grants. In parallel to implementing programmes directly working with beneficiaries, EHO has also conducted public advocacy work through campaigns, by publishing informative and educational multilingual materials and by sharing examples of the best integral models for the integration of the forcibly displaced and for the reintegration of returnees.

In order to improve housing conditions for Roma, EHO has developed a unique model of sustainable development for substandard and informal settlements based on the needs of their populations. The model is founded on an approach that respects the principles of human rights and facilitates effective multisectoral operation, and has been devised, tested and implemented in the Republic of Serbia since 2008. The results of this program have been improved housing conditions for more than 2,000 Roma and other socially vulnerable families living within 42 municipal authorities in Serbia. This model is implemented in partnership with local authorities and includes the following activities: getting substandard settlements included in urban planning and neighbourhood improvement planning; legalisation of dwellings in substandard settlements; improving housing conditions through the repair, adaptation, reconstruction or construction of dwellings; access to basic utilities infrastructure, first and foremost clean drinking water.

The EHO team has also invested its knowledge and experience in the area of social housing and planning of housing and settlement interventions through research work. A study of the situation in substandard settlements was written for 21 local authorities in Serbia, which served as a basis for planning local strategies for improvement to housing conditions for the most vulnerable populations.



### TOOLS FOR VOJVODINA

One of the best ways to help someone is to give them tools to work. A project is currently in progress which enables members of marginalised groups in Vojvodina municipalities, the unemployed and people with low income, to receive economic empowerment grants, which include tools, machines and equipment for work, training, support from a consultant and support in registering a company and free accounting services for the initial six months.



EHO has continued its activities in providing housing support through various interventions in the area of improvement to social housing, financed by the EU and other international donors in Serbia. As a key organisation, with 20 years of experience in this area, EHO has established partnership in carrying out housing and infrastructure interventions both with local and national authorities. Each of these partnerships is aimed at resolving the housing difficulties of those most vulnerable in a quality, sustainable and permanent way.

## Critical thinking and human kindness

“For the decade-and-a-half I have been with EHO I have had the pleasure of providing support to people from various vulnerable groups. The last six years I have been coordinating a project aimed at providing educational support to children and young people – some of the children are Roma, some people with disabilities, and some have returned from abroad after a protracted stay there. My experience in the job thus far has helped me to learn and now to apply in the work with children the fact that if we are to at least move in the direction of achieving the ideal of equal opportunities and non-discrimination then support is the most important factor. Support first and foremost in education, which must be accessible by every child. We are here to make this a reality, and I deeply believe that education is important not only in order to improve people’s opportunities in the labour market but also to develop their critical thinking and make us and the world around us a kinder place.”

*Damir Krkobabić, EHO project coordinator*

EHO has also worked intensively on improving education for vulnerable groups through greater inclusion for socially deprived children (children from poor families and children from especially vulnerable categories such as those from the Roma community or children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties).

Since 2008, EHO has been working on including returnee children in the education system, providing them with additional teaching assistance and support and with school supplies, and getting their foreign school certificates translated. These activities contribute to a reduction in drop-out rates from the education system, better performance in school, and greater motivation to continue schooling and greater awareness of importance of education on the part of pupils. A particular benefit of this programme has been to influence changes in attitude in the environment through mentorship and, in the long term, increase opportunities for employment. In parallel with this, consistent with its holistic approach, EHO has educated and motivated parents to support the education of their children. Through training and consultative support more than 500 teachers and non-teaching staff in schools in Serbia have been empowered with additional skills and knowledge to increase their competence in working with children from socially sensitive groups. EHO has also supported the efforts of schools and local communities in investing in the education of children from poor families and in so doing achieve positive personal, social and economic change.

EHO has also made a significant contribution in establishing a comprehensive system to combat violence against women in Vojvodina through its close consultative and logistic operation with the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality as part of its programme for the protection of women against domestic and intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence. In the context of EHO projects, many meetings and public debates have been held on the topic of combating violence, its forms, recognising it, ways to report it and on the violence often suffered by women, children and elderly members of the family. EHO has contributed to improved recognition of violence against women and domestic violence, and of the roots and concepts of gender equality. Debates have been held on international standards, especially the Istanbul Convention and other national prevention and protection laws and regulations. Hundreds of women, especially those from vulnerable groups, have not only gained knowledge and skills in recognising violence and its forms, but have also been trained in tools for active reduction of multifaceted discrimination against women, especially Roma women in our society.

## SOCIAL WELFARE

Almost all of the listed activities of EHO have comprised social welfare in some aspect, whether the focus has been on humanitarian aid, interfaith and interethnic dialogue, diaconia or civil society. Services provided in towns and municipalities in Vojvodina are as follows: home assistance for children with developmental disabilities; home assistance for adults and the elderly; child personal assistant services and counselling/therapeutic and social/educational services.

EHO holds a licence issued by the relevant Ministry for all of these services. Home assistance and home care is a support service for elderly people who have physical or mental difficulties which prevent them from living independently in their own homes. EHO's staff testify to the touching gratitude of these elderly people who, lacking regular assistance with their daily needs for care and supervision and lacking family who can meet all their needs, could not get by alone. In developing this service EHO has improved quality of life for elderly and sick people.

### We will not abandon the people who need us

“I am a child of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation. I began as a volunteer, I grew up here, and I'm very attached to this organisation, in which I learned so much – from good manners to the most important lessons: to always give my all and above all to value people. EHO feeds me, it's where my colleagues and friends are.

My colleagues and I work with elderly people who need home assistance and home care. We have been witnesses to a great many distressing and difficult times in the lives of these people, and it is our task to fill their remaining days with respect, attention and human kindness, and to ensure that even in the most difficult situations they preserve their dignity. In our country being old unfortunately often means being alone. Our carers and field officers experience the greatest expressions of unreserved, sincere and warm gratitude when they make the lives of elderly people less lonely – it's huge, you can't place a value on it. Sometimes, unfortunately, we are the only ones that knock on their door.

We see poverty becoming more and more widespread, the needs are ever-increasing and there is less and less money. Our desires and ideas to meet the needs of our beneficiaries are great and they are ambitious – among other things we would like to organise a transport service, as well as “meals on wheels”, because a warm meal feeds body and heart. We will see what the future brings. One thing is sure, we will not abandon the struggle, nor the people who need us!”

*Borka Vrekić, former volunteer, now EHO Project Coordinator*



Since 2007 this program has been conducted in over 10 municipalities in Serbia and has helped more than 10,000 elderly people. More than 90 nurses and carers have been employed by this service. In addition to this, the psychosocial support voluntary service in Novi Sad has been used by more than 150 elderly persons annually.

**Home assistance for children with developmental disabilities** is a service provided to children with developmental disabilities. The children are helped to achieve independence in everyday life with the assistance of EHO officers and family members. Beneficiaries of the services are children up to the age of 18, and young people up to the age of 26. The home assistance service for children with developmental disabilities is provided in the beneficiary's home, but also offers opportunities for the child to be involved in the community.

**Child personal assistant services** are available to children with disabilities and developmental difficulties who need support in their everyday lives in getting around, maintaining personal hygiene, feeding, dressing and communicating with others. These children are included in the preschool and school system and are given support up until they complete regular schooling, including secondary school.

**Counselling/therapeutic and social/educational services** involve clinical psychological and special needs assessment and diagnosis and speech, mental and psychological therapy for children, individual rehabilitation for children from birth to the age of 18, and counselling for parents. For adults falling into this category support is provided in the form of vocational training using machines for working with wood, metal, plastic, paper and textile, depending on their abilities and needs. The beneficiaries of these services are children, young people and adults with mental and physical developmental difficulties in the municipality of Raška.





## PUBLISHING

EHO is also active in publishing – in addition to regular, detailed, publicly accessible annual reports on our operations we have issued numerous publications over the years, reporting on completed projects and offering proposals for solutions going forward based on our experience in the field and the information and experience we have accumulated. EHO's publishing activities foster openness in the way we work, visibility for the results achieved, and accessibility to information for the public as a whole, as well as to a variety of assistance and practical advice.

EHO publications serve to communicate truthful, timely, accurate, adequate and actionable information to beneficiaries, the public, business partners and donors.

Another very important role played by EHO's publishing is to form public opinion and motivate the community towards common goals in order to have the maximum positive impact for our beneficiaries.

Our publications cover a wide range of topics and can be categorised into several groups:

- ✓ Annual reports
- ✓ Civil society development (EHO publications and publications by relevant networks of which EHO is a member; themed EHO publications covering management of migrations, inclusion and advocacy; publications of ongoing and completed EHO projects involving work with children)
- ✓ Social welfare services (publications of ongoing EHO projects relating to home care and home assistance; publications of completed EHO projects and publications by relevant networks of which EHO is a member)
- ✓ Diaconia (diaconal social services, including those in church parishes; the Ladies in Green; old age and sickness)
- ✓ Ecumenical and interethnic partnership (Ecumenical Journals; Map of Religious Communities in Novi Sad; the Ecumenical Charter – guidelines for increasing co-operation among the churches in Europe)
- ✓ EHO is especially proud of its e-publishing and its software platform for e-accessible education. The software is aimed at the occupational and social training of children with developmental difficulties and people with disabilities – users can click on a picture and get help learning letters, sounds, words and sentences.




### NOBEL AWARD NOMINATION FOR ANNA BU

Anna Bu, from the founding team of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service, was one of five women from Serbia and one of 1000 women from around the world to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, by the organisation Swisspeace. The following year the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina gave her its annual gender equality award.

## AWARDS

Numerous awards are additional testament to the visibility and recognition of the results of EHO's work both in our country and in the international community:

- ✓ 2010 – the annual Eurodiaconia Award for reduction of poverty and social exclusion
- ✓ 2012 – the Norwegian Embassy presented EHO with the "Making a Difference" award for its exceptional work with the Roma ethnic minority in Vojvodina and for its contribution to improving the socio-economic status and living conditions of Roma people
- ✓ 2014 – the Golden Wheel award from the Serbian National Council of Roma for its exceptional contribution to the inclusion of Roma in Serbia
- ✓ 2014 – the "Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma in Serbia" project was short-listed as one of ten finalists for the prestigious international housing award, the World Habitat Awards (WHA)
- ✓ 2014 – EHO received recognition from the OSCE/ODIHR for its "Dweller-Driven Upgrading of Roma Settlements" model, which was deemed one of the most promising initiatives aiming to improve living conditions for Roma people in the region. This was concluded in a report by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) titled Best Practices for Roma Integration – Regional Report on Housing Legalisation, Settlement Upgrading and Social Housing for Roma in the Western Balkans
- ✓ 2014 and 2016 – the EHO Resource Centre for People with Disabilities received Innovative Practice 2014 and Innovative Practice 2016 certificates
- ✓ 2015, 2019 and 2021 – EHO received its licences from the Serbian Ministry for Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy for its home assistance services (2015), child personal assistant services (2019) and home assistance for children with developmental disabilities service (2021)
- ✓ 2022 – EHO received the Quality Label: a licence confirming that it meets quality standards for hosting and managing volunteers from the EU

### CHANGES

The day-to-day work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation is best reflected in the responses of our beneficiaries. The change brought about by our efforts are an inexhaustible inspiration, mission and objective for EHO.

People going through great challenges, experiencing misfortune, yearning for a home, suffering with illness and struggling against injustice have all testified that EHO has:

- ✓ contributed to a reduction in poverty
- ✓ improved the position of people from vulnerable groups
- ✓ improved literacy in adults and expanded the knowledge and skills of young people
- ✓ preserved the dignity of elderly people
- ✓ provided assistance and comfort to the families of those suffering from chronic and malignant diseases
- ✓ assisted in building and equipping the houses of refugee and Roma families, and of returnees under the Readmission Agreement
- ✓ protected and empowered women and girls
- ✓ contributed to better school performance by children
- ✓ shown love to street children
- ✓ fed, shod and dressed those less fortunate

EHO has contributed to a reduction in prejudice against marginalised social groups and in increasing the awareness of the broader community regarding the misfortunes of those most vulnerable in our society.

Better and firmer interfaith cooperation has been achieved. Friendly relations have been advanced amongst churches in Serbia.

Tolerance has been increased among people of varying faiths.

Dialogue has been improved between the civil sector and representatives of government, and partnerships with the state and local authorities have been established.



## DONORS

The efforts, the mission and the work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation have been wholeheartedly supported, among others, by:

- ACT Alliance
- Amt für Mission, Ökumene und kirchliche Weltverantwortung der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen (MÖWE)
- ASPEM ASS. Solidar Paest Emergent-Italia
- Brot für die Welt (BfW)
- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)
- Center for Regionalism, Serbia
- City of Novi Sad
- Christian Aid
- Christoph Tapernoux
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
- Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe
- Diakonia Austria
- Diakonisches Werk Württemberg (DWW)
- EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)
- Eurodiaconia (Belgium)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
- Evangelische Kirchen von Westfalen, Germany
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg
- Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Dortmund
- Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche des Kantons St. Gallen
- Federal Office for Migration (FOM)
- Foundation for an Open Society
- German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Global Ministries
- Gustav Adolf Werk (GAW)
- Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina
- H. Stepic CEE Charity
- Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz (HEKS /EPER)
- HOE
- Hoffnung für Osteuropa HfO (HfO)
- Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA)
- Kirchenkreis Dortmund
- Kerk in Actie Global Ministries, Netherlands
- KMOP-Athen, Greece
- Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
- Municipalities and cities in Serbia: City of Novi Sad, municipalities of Plandište, Odžaci, Babušnica, Gadžin Han, Raška, Apatin, Surdulica, Stara Pazova, Sečanj, Bački Petrovac, Bela Palanka
- Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA)
- Open Society Foundation, Serbia
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) - Serbia
- Otto per Mille – Tavola Valdese
- Red Cross Novi Sad
- Royal Norwegian Embassy in Belgrade
- Staatsministerium Baden Württemberg
- State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women (EFECW)
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brunswick
- The Fellowship of the Least Coin
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Serbia
- Yugoslav Youth Association Against AIDS (JAZAS), Serbia
- Ministries of the Republic of Serbia

## WHAT OUR DONORS SAY:

As Bread for the World we are glad that we can look back on a long cooperation with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation. We appreciate the dedicated work to serve the people of the region and are grateful for the reliable partnership. In this sense we wish you only the best and God's blessing for the next 30 years and are excited about the further developments!

*Kaya Van der Wyst, Project Officer South Eastern Europe, Bread for the World*

Dear friends at EHO. Your work is highly professional because you are willing to learn and look for new, innovative ways of empowering people. We are also happy to see the compassion and empathy you share. Witnessing how you build bridges and understanding between diverse communities is a privilege and we are more than willing to tell the world how you promote social justice and human rights.

*Pétur Thorsteinsson, Managing Director of the Regional Office of Hope for Eastern Europe, Diakonie Württemberg*

Friends at EHO, we are thankful to celebrate 30 years of your organization working for justice and accompanying the most vulnerable among us. Thank you for your continued efforts to empower diverse communities and advocate for the marginalized. Most of all, we are grateful for the joy with which you engage in this work; that joy energizes and motivates us all to continue our collective work toward a more just world.

*The Rev. Rachel Eskesen, (she/her/hers), ELCA Europe Desk Director, Service & Justice*

A big strength I see in the work of EHO is the long-term commitment to work with marginalized groups, which contributed to build trustful relationships both with these groups and with local authorities and service providers involved in this work.

*Angela Elmiger, Head of Programmes Eastern Europe / Middle East HEKS/EPER*

## DIRECTORS OF THE ECUMENICAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION:

**Károly Béres**

from 1993 to 2008

**Anna Bu**

Acting Director (from 2008 to 2009)

**Vladislav Ivičiak**

(from 2010 to 2015)

**Edit Mokus**

Acting Director (end of 2015)

**Tilda Gyenge Szlifka**

(from 2016 to 2019)

**Anna Brtka Valent**

(from 2020)

## EHO MANAGEMENT

Director

**Anna Brtka Valent**

Assembly

Reformed Christian Church in Serbia

**Halász Dániel**

**Edit Mokus**

**Árpád Móricz**

Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia – Vojvodina

**Tomislav Konečni**

**Ernest Baračkai**

**Ibolja Konečni**

Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia

**Jaroslav Javornik**

**Jan Brtka**

**Andrija Marčok**

Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Saint Nicholas of Ruski Krstur

**Julian Rac**

**Đura Rac**

**Joakim Hrubenja**



## A TIME-CAPSULE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

We who have authored these words (in the pages of this publication issued to mark three decades of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation), convinced that this sentiment is shared by all the staff of EHO, dare to think that one day in the future, when artificial intelligence learns to observe life like a HUMAN (it seems we are already approaching this point), only a tiny fraction of its training will have been drawn from the many tiny, quiet, but powerful and indelible traces left by people who one day in their lives helped one person.

In that cosmic eyeblink of our earthly existence, among the good deeds of our civilisation – which unfortunately are still all too few – the deeds of people from humanitarian organisations all over this planet will surely be numbered. We will do everything to ensure that the impact of the women, men and children who wholeheartedly gave themselves to the work of the work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, remains preserved in this time-capsule, buried as a legacy for future generations.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

### Education changes the world for the better

“Events in our country, the region and the world as a whole will of course impact, sometimes steer and even dictate many of the steps EHO will make in the future.

In this work, which is more than just a job – it is our life too – mere moments can sometimes decide the moves and responses we make, and they must be well thought-out and weighed up, but often quick, decisive and bold at the same time. Our activities require observation, research and careful planning, and yet real-life situations can change in a flash.

EHO should not, I believe, change the course laid down for it: to conduct its mission having PEOPLE and their needs at the centre of everything. The technological and other progress being made by civilisation must not strip us of our humanity and empathy for our neighbour. And there is another thing which I believe is of vital importance – education! Education for all, and especially young people and people from vulnerable groups, will contribute to change for the better in this world!”

*Tijana Đorđijevski, youngest member of EHO*

### No peace until churches make peace

“We worked every day. We have Heaven and one another to thank for that. And as EHO’s oldest member today I am convinced it will remain that way in the future – EHO will continue working devotedly day by day, and that is why the organisation will survive and thrive. There is one thing we must not forget – that there can be no peace and harmony in the world until the churches make peace. Only when churches make peace can they truly work for the good of the community. State institutions, for their part, should work closely with churches of all confessions in rooting out poverty and injustice, and together helping people in crisis situations.



EHO has always relied on another major pillar – volunteers! Volunteers are people of noble heart – they have helped us a great deal. Unfortunately today they are lacking in sufficient motivation and enthusiasm – young people need to be taught empathy.”

*Julia Ghandour Schal, oldest member of EHO*

### The challenges of the future demand learning and change

“In the future I hope that EHO will preserve all that has made it a strong, sustainable organisation over the last three decades – its values, its ecumenical spirit, its peacemaking, its readiness to respond quickly and efficiently whenever humanitarian aid is needed and its innovative development projects, including those which have promoted the rights of Roma, people with disabilities, migrants and other vulnerable groups – without neglecting its own development in doing so. That it will remain an organisation which is always learning and changing, because this is the only way for EHO to respond to the challenges that the future will bring.”

*Ana Bu, EHO founding team*

### A message of love through good deeds

“EHO has a future. Unfortunately, all around us in the world today is strife and conflict, and help is needed almost everywhere, all the time. People are suffering in wars and struggling with illness, climate change and migration disasters, they are afflicted by poverty, they have no food and water... But in these struggles we have seen that there are always people and organisations who do not neglect humanity and empathy and who are committed to helping, sending a message of love through good deeds, sacrificing even their lives and devoting them to charity and to working every day for the good of the community. EHO will not stray from that path.”

*Ondrej Marčok, priest and Chair of the EHO Assembly*

## EHO'S HOME

EHO's premises in Novi Sad are today located at Ćirila i Metodija street no. 21. For its first 10 years, EHO operated in eight locations in Novi Sad, which greatly slowed and hindered our work. In 2006, the organisation moved into a new building with 725 m2 of floor space, accommodating storage space, a laundry, a space for second-hand clothing and footwear, classrooms, rooms for working with beneficiaries, offices for EHO staff and volunteers and a library. An additional 300 m2 is occupied by the Károly Béres Social and Diaconal Centre – our day centre for the elderly and people with disabilities – and by volunteer accommodation.

The home of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, in addition to staff, is used by associates, volunteers, beneficiaries and other civil society organisations and state institutions.



## WHAT OUR USERS SAY

### Dressing the wounds inside

**"My uncle said to me, 'If evil won't flee from you, then you flee from it!'"**

I decided to flee Syria and set off for Turkey on foot. I've been on the move since 2014. I lived in and walked around Turkey for several years. Then a few of us bought a small boat and set off for Greece. We were caught up in a storm, many of us were lost under the waves... I survived. We had to turn back. From Turkey we reached Bulgaria and spent eight days in the forest there without water. I survived even that, but I lost my best friend – my shoes disappeared! Fortunately I still had my mobile phone, which saved me in the Bulgarian forest, it helped me find water. I survived. From the hell of the Bulgarian forests I reached Serbia, first Belgrade then Sombor.

At the reception centre in Sombor the good people from EHO gave us psychosocial support. I will never forget who it was helped me to ease the trauma and the harsh life of a migrant, and dress the wounds inside caused by separation from my family, so that I would not be completely crushed by the violence and discrimination we experience on our journey. Thank you."

*Ali, 35, Syria*

### Lighting up homes

**"Since my husband died I have been very lonely, I can hardly wait for the EHO carer to visit so we can talk. She lights up my home."**

*Stanojka, 70, Sivi Do, Blace*

### Volunteer support for children

"In the first and second grade I went to the extended day programme at Jožef Atila Primary School, that was six years ago. There we learn, do our homework, play, go out in the yard with our friends, that's how we spend our time until our parents come to get us. I met a lot of volunteers then who helped me learn, and it meant a lot to me. I always wanted to stay longer, I didn't want to go home. They were wonderful, we carried on spending time together and I took part in other activities outside school. My favourite was the art workshops where we drew and made all sorts of things. We also went on day-trips with the volunteers, and in school we had shows for New Year and got presents from Santa Claus. I'm really happy and I like it in school. My favourite subject is Home Economics because we learn lots of practical things. The teachers and my classmates are great. In the beginning I found it difficult to learn the material but I managed it with the help of the volunteers of EHO."

*Zuhrija, seventh-grade pupil at Jožef Atila Primary School Novi Sad*

### Three supports

"I think I am a strong woman. But no-one can do it all alone, you can't do anything alone. You always need someone to lean on, to be there for you when not everything is perfect and when you don't know where to turn first because you think that there is no way out. You've got to have someone you trust, who has never let you down. On my journey I have three supports like that, EHO and my friend the Roma coordinator, Dobrila."

*Sofija Trbanos Petrović, Bačko Gradište*