

WHO COLLABORATES WINS

An analysis of long-term partnerships between businesses and the civil sector, recipients of the Virtus Philanthropy Award



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A DECADE OF CSO SOLIDARITY
ON EDC ADVOCACY AND PRACTICE



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VIRTUS
PHILANTHROPY
EXCELLENCE AWARD

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Summary

For 15 years, the Trag Foundation's Virtus Awards have recognized the best long-term partnerships between the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Over the years, we became familiar with more than 115 partnerships between civil society organisations (CSOs) and businesses. This study aims to describe them and reveal the secrets behind those whose designs showed the best grasp of strategy that lasted the longest.

Believing that the picture of partnerships gained from the 115 applicants for the Virtus Awards was a faithful reflection of the entire Serbian landscape of these collaborations, we first describe their general features. Serbian branches of foreign companies were more likely to engage in these partnerships than the local firms. Serbian foundations were four times more likely to be chosen as partners than civic associations. The primary areas in which the partners collaborated were the promotion of entrepreneurship and career development (one-quarter) and enhancing the quality of life for vulnerable groups (one-quarter). As many as one-half of all partnerships targeted children and young people. Besides these general descriptions, the Virtus Awards archives also contain all scores that the independent jury awarded to the partnerships over the years. We employed statistical analysis to determine that the jury recognized material differences in quality between the partnerships, and that those which ultimately won the award were objectively the best possible examples of cooperation at the time. In that context, we devoted much of this publication to describing 13 partnerships (some of which received the award more than once) from their establishment to date.

Having outlined the features of these partnerships in Serbia and provided detailed descriptions of those recognised as objectively the best, we went on to analyse the key features of these best practice examples. The diversity of methods and means of cooperation was the quality that most reliably and consistently distinguished those who did and did not win the award. To interpret what made a cooperation methodology robust and ensured a long-lasting partnership, we left the archive to conduct a series of interviews with the award jury and the 13 winning pairs.

Good partnerships were those where members from both sectors could demonstrate that they entered the relationship in good faith, respecting the rights of their staff and showing responsibility towards external associates and the environment. In doing so, they did not jeopardise the other partner's credibility in their mission to create a good society. Good partnerships were those where both parties were free of the dominant narrative that claimed the sole motives for inter-sectoral cooperation were financial sustainability for the CSO and a more pristine image for the business. Both outcomes did matter, but organisations were those that enjoyed community trust and had expertise in the topic or with the social group they represented. Only when the parties understand their contributions to inter-sectoral cooperation are equally valuable can democratic decision-making and open communication occur. We have seen good partnerships endure thanks to no more than token financial or advisory exchange, even without ongoing extensive shared projects. We have found that good collaboration between the business community and the civil sector allows both parties to work with the public sector to seek far-reaching societal change. Even at the first stumbling block, for instance, complicated red tape that can make it difficult to achieve timely results, a good partnership will continue to operate and strive to attain its objectives. In a good partnership, the CSO and the business understand that institutional cooperation is driven by enthusiastic individuals. In nurturing their collaboration, good partners also promote relationships between people and seek to make this cooperation a pleasant experience.

We approached this analysis of the best partnerships between the civil and the business sector from the perspective of a foundation that promotes the development of an open and civil society based on solidarity. The analytical strategy of this report was shaped by the available dataset, which was derived from practical work. The conclusions we make are also meant to be as applicable as possible. We will be glad to see both the findings and the methodology evaluated against the current body of knowledge by those with more significant experience in investigating economic theory or theories of good organisational or business governance.

What prompted this analysis of long-term partnerships between businesses and the civil sector, recipients of the Virtus Philanthropy Award?

The Trag Foundation established the Virtus Philanthropy Awards¹ in 2007 as the first Serbian competition seeking to award companies and businesses. Since 2014, it is also awarding individuals that have strategically supported community development and served as the best examples to others. During these 15 years, with support from numerous donors and Trag's partners², Virtus has gained an exceptional reputation, according to Radojka Nikolić, Editor-in-Chief of *Ekonometar* and *Bizins* magazines and a long-serving member of the Virtus jury.

One of the five main categories of this annual award is the Virtus Award for a long-term partnership between the business and the civil sector³. The Trag Foundation defines 'partnerships' as exceptionally successful, well-designed, multi-annual instances of cooperation between a company or a small or medium-sized business, on the one hand, and a CSO, on the other, with the goal to address a significant social issue. These partnerships primarily entail inter-sectoral cooperation, joint efforts, and actions focused on problem-solving rather than financial support. Radojka Nikolić stresses that the distinguishing mark of this category that differentiates it from other Virtus brackets, such as the corporate philanthropy award (a part award that recognised the national contribution of a business), was that here the cooperation was a truly symbiotic

relationship between the stakeholders. It revealed the extent to which the company was integrated into the life of the community in which it operated, doing so in a particularly transparent and clearly defined way.



Long-term partnerships are symbiotic relationships between the stakeholders.

Prominent researchers⁴ in this area have stated that *'Cross-sector partnerships are one of the most exciting and dynamic areas of research and practice within business and society relations. Partnerships connecting different sectors (public, private, and non-profit) are thriving worldwide.'* This study by the Trag Foundation seeks to analyse successful examples of long-term partnerships between the business community and the civil sector in Serbia and shed light on their building blocks. Previous academic papers and partnership-building manuals have attempted to answer how cross-sectoral partnerships develop,⁵ how organisations from both sectors benefit from the

1 For more about the award, see tragfondacija.org/en/virtus-award.

2 Over the years, the awards have been supported by numerous donors: the European Union, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Balkan Fund for Democracy, Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Trag's long-standing partners, the Czech Via Foundation and the South-East European Indigenous Grantmakers Network (SIGN).

3 In earlier competitions, the long-term partnership category was open to companies working with non-profits in their broader sense, which included the public sector (such as education, health, and culture). Starting with the 2021 Virtus Awards, only partnerships between businesses and CSOs are eligible for this category.

4 Van Tulder, R., Seitani, M., Crane, A. & Brammer, S. (2016). Enhancing the impact of cross-sector partnerships. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2756-4>

5 Waddock, S. A. (1989). Understanding Social Partnerships: An Evolutionary Model of Partnership Organizations. *Administration & Society*, 21(1), 78-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009539978902100105>

collaboration⁶, and which challenges cross-sectoral partnerships face.⁷ We did not arrive at how the civil and the business sector collaborate – the question posed by the Trag Foundation – and the need to identify the features shared by the most successful and longest-lasting ones through systematic reading of the current body of knowledge. This publication does not intend to test a particular economic or good governance theory applicable to an organisation or a business. This publication bases itself on the vision of an equitable and open society. For over 20 years, Trag has been a foundation committed to supporting civic associations in their efforts to improve lives in their communities. Even though we have been the loudest advocates of closer civic partnerships, we know that a solid civic sector cannot build sound communities and a good society on its own. We agree with Edwards, who wrote in his *Civil Society* that ‘...those who search for the good society must find their allies – and identify their enemies – wherever they can, among those elements of government, business and associational life which share a similar agenda, since not all do.’⁸



...those who search for the good society must find their allies – and identify their enemies – wherever they can, among those elements of government, business and associational life which share a similar agenda, since not all do.

We have produced this publication in the firm belief that it will inspire our readers and representatives of both sectors to find their allies in building a better society for all of us – a democratic and open society based on solidarity.

Analytical strategy

Having assessed all partnerships nominated for its Virtus Award, the Trag Foundation has a unique dataset of all Serbian cross-sector partnerships at its disposal. The Virtus Award archives span 15 years and include descriptions of these partnerships, partners’ reflections on the collaborations, and scores awarded by the jury looking to find the most successful ones. Although the partnerships in this dataset were not sampled at random from the universe of all Serbian partnerships, we have no reason to believe that the picture available to the Trag Foundation based on these nominations would significantly differ from the impression that could derive from an assessment of all long-term partnerships established in Serbia within the same period. As such, we firstly summarised the

most prominent social objectives and the features of the businesses and CSOs that chose to engage in cross-sector cooperation between 2007 and 2022.

The remainder of the study focuses on identifying the key features underpinning the most successful and longest-lasting partnerships. Here, we relied on three sources of data: the jury, businesses, and CSOs. The first data source was the scores awarded by the jury to all partnerships over the years: those nominated for the award, short-listed ones, and those awarded. In addition to the scores, we were also interested in juries’ impressions of the scoring process, decision-making, and the partnerships that received the award. To obtain this information, we organised a one-hour focus group

discussion with Ana Tozzi, past Executive Director of the Foreign Investors Council, who served on the Virtus jury for 12 years after the awards were instituted, and Radojka Nikolić, Editor-in-Chief of *Ekonometar* and *Biznis* magazines, who has chaired the jury since 2012. The semi-structured guide for this interview can be found in Appendix A.

Apart from impressions of the award jury, the analysis also looked at views of the award-winning companies and CSOs. We decided to extend the scope of the assessment only to the partners that received the award after a statistical analysis revealed the scoring process in the past 15 years was objective and followed the required criteria. Companies’ perspectives were collected from information supplied in their competition application forms (the questions posed in the application forms are provided as Appendix B), as well as from their reports about the subsequent progress of the partnerships collected for this study.

The views of CSOs involved in the award-winning partnerships were obtained in a survey questionnaire

administered to nine of these organisations. The survey findings were subsequently complemented by information received in conversations and written communication with the CSOs. The organisations described the course of the collaboration, the most useful options for company involvement in the joint efforts, key results that would not have been attainable without partner support, and strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, and offered advice to other CSOs for making similar partnerships durable. The questionnaire and the list of CSOs that responded to the survey are in Appendix C of this report.

Lastly, we have used the insights from all three groups to inform recommendations for current and future collaborations between businesses and CSOs. To illustrate the juries’ and partners’ perspectives and to clarify the resulting recommendations, we have described each award-winning partnership to provide an overview of their activities and achievements.



6 Shumate, M, Fu, J. S., & Cooper, K. R. (2018). Does cross-sector collaboration lead to higher non-profit capacity? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 150(2), 385–399. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3856-8>

7 Babiak, K & Thibault, L. (2009). Challenges in Multiple Cross-Sector Partnerships. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(1), 117–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764008316054>

8 Edwards, M. (2004). *Civil Society*. Polity: Cambridge, United Kingdom, p. 53.

Partnerships nominated for the award as an illustration of all Serbian partnerships

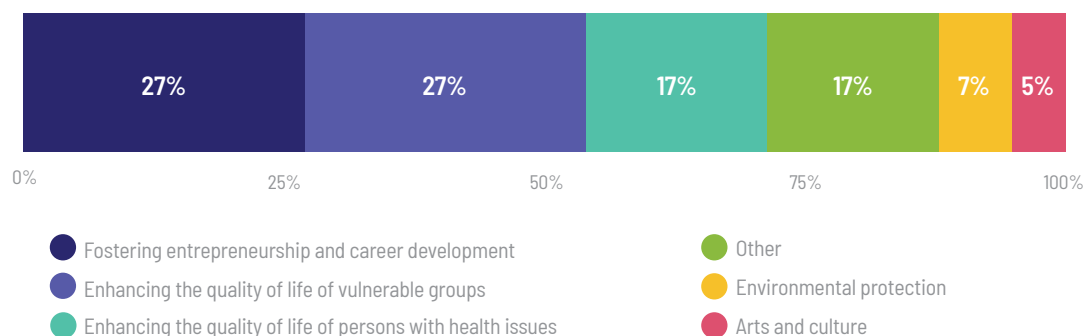
Every year, an average of eight partnerships between the for-profit and the non-profit sector are nominated for the Virtus Philanthropy Award. Trag has recorded a total of 123 such nominations over the past 15 years. As many as 115 of these nominations are partnerships between businesses and CSOs. The CSOs nominated for the award included Serbian associations, international organisations, sports associations and federations, and foundations. Some of these partners have had long-standing and close partnerships and were thus nominated in more than one annual competition. In the past 15 years, we registered no fewer than 100 different partner pairs of CSOs and businesses.

No fewer than 100 partners applied for the Virtus Award in the past 15 years, and all pairs of CSOs and businesses engaged in long-term and strategic cooperation.

Nominating a large company or small or medium-sized firm requires it or its partner organisation to complete an application form containing questions in various areas. The first of these categories comprises information about the firm's corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and the results of its CSR activities. The second group is devoted to the partnership itself: this is where the partner non-profit and the length of the collaboration are identified and where the type of the partnership is described in detail (for instance, joint actions or donations of products, services, or employee time). Here is where the company's motivation for this collaboration and its objectives are also explained, together with information about the benefits of the partnership for the CSO and the company and progress made in resolving the issues the partners have been addressing. The final part of the form is dedicated to describing the partnership in the calendar year for which the firm was nominated.⁹

We used information provided in these forms to group all CSO-business partnerships into broad categories, which allowed us to detect some patterns. One-quarter of all partnerships aimed to foster entrepreneurship and career development, one-quarter were devoted to enhancing the quality of life of vulnerable groups (see Figure 1), and the remaining half was characterised by many other avenues of action.

Figure 1. Areas of collaboration collaboration

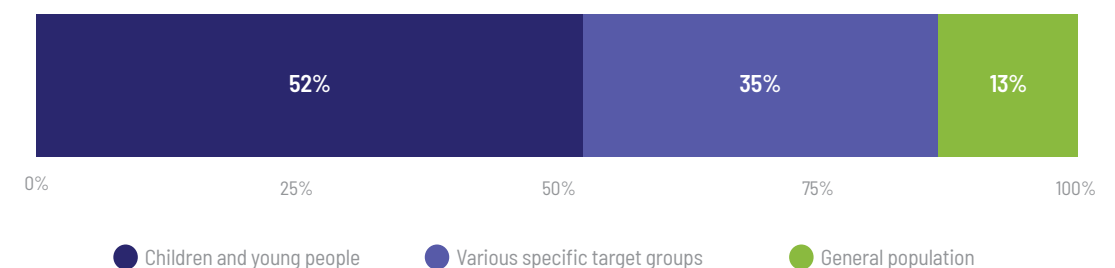


⁹ Alongside the form, companies are also encouraged to submit additional documentation that helps the jury gain an idea of the nominated partnership, such as activity reports, media clippings, and photos and videos showing joint activities.

As many as one-half of all partnerships nominated for the award were either fully dedicated to supporting children and young people or involved some activities targeting this population (see Figure 2), whilst one-third targeted another specific target group (such as women or persons with disabilities). No more than one in seven cross-sector projects sought to attain social goals that affected the entire society equally or entailed initiatives everyone could directly participate in, such as environmental protection or cultural efforts. Conclusions can be drawn about cross-sector partnerships' likely target areas or groups even without awareness of the proportion of

these collaborations that focus on children and young people. Both the CSOs and the businesses had their own social action strategies and were free to shift their focus areas over time. They were free to deal with particular issues and target groups depending on the prevailing social context at the time. As such, it seems that the trends identified in the Virtus dataset – where the partnerships were primarily aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and career development and helping improve the quality of life of impoverished groups whilst mainly targeting children and young people across all strategic focus areas – were more than just a coincidence.

Figure 2. Target groups of collaborate efforts



As many as three-fifths of all partner companies were foreign-owned (see Figure 3). With that said, we should be wary of rushing to judgment about the readiness of some firms to enter into these collaborations. A more cautious approach involves checking relative percentages of various types of businesses in the Serbian company register. For instance, an infographic¹⁰ released by the Serbian Business Registers Agency (SBRA) shows that Serbian-owned ones vastly outnumber foreign-owned firms and associations. This mismatch between the official register and the Virtus dataset may suggest differences in readiness to engage in partnerships. Given that the comprehensive SBRA data is not available and that the Virtus dataset is not suitable for categorisation along similar lines, the two cannot be directly compared and, as such, there can be no reliable conclusions on the higher levels of readiness of the foreign firms to involve CSOs in their corporate social responsibility efforts than those of the Serbian ones. On the other hand, based on her extensive experience in the jury

panel and her profession, Radojka Nikolić was more inclined to conclude that foreign corporations are better prepared for this collaboration since they can adopt their parent firms' readily available value systems and only adjust it to the local context. She added there were also Serbian businesses with well-developed corporate organisations and clear CSR strategies and that local companies were not as ready to recognise the business values that Virtus tends to promote. Unlike information on the foreign and domestic companies, precise data were available about company sizes as measured by employee numbers.

The proportion of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in the SBRA database was much more significant than in the Virtus partnership dataset,¹¹ suggesting that these firms were either less prepared to engage in long-term partnerships or were less likely to be deemed reliable partners by CSOs.

¹⁰ Registered businesses and their beneficial owners, Serbian Business Registers Agency infographic, available at ap.gov.rs/%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5.4318.html?infold=72 (accessed on 3 July 2022).

¹¹ Businesses by employee numbers, Serbian Business Registers Agency infographic, available at ap.gov.rs/%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5.4318.html?infold=94 (accessed on 3 July 2022).

Figure 3. Businesses participating in partnerships

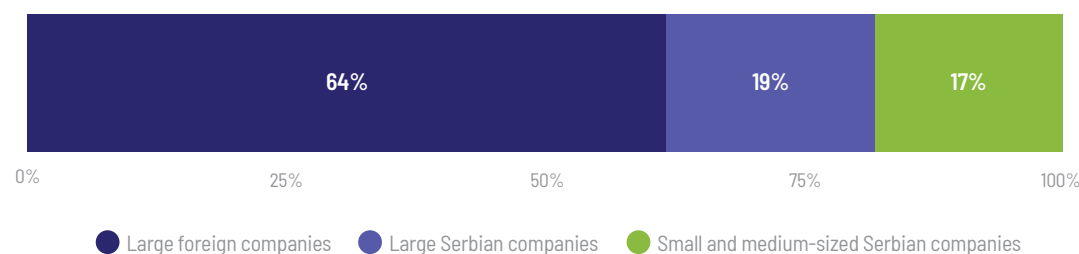
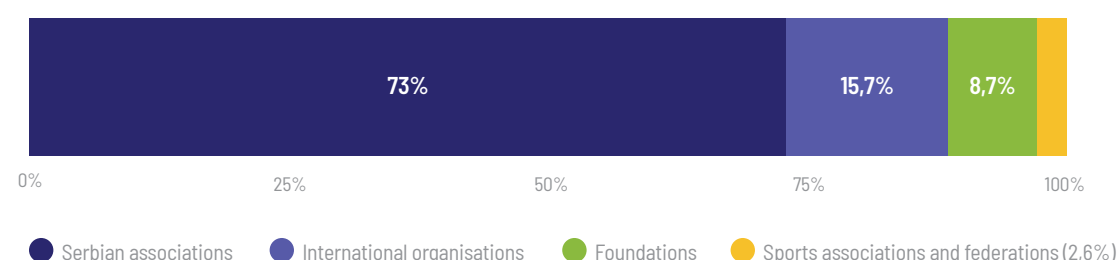


Figure 4. CSOs participating in partnerships



Large foreign and local companies and medium-sized Serbian firms tended to cooperate with a multitude of civil sector stakeholders, such as foundations, civic associations, sports associations and federations, and international organisations. Small and micro-enterprises found reliable partners in Serbian associations only. Local associations accounted for the vast majority of civil sector partners over the years (see Figure 4).

The SBRA's latest count of associations (both foreign and local) and foundations¹² seems to suggest foundations were likelier than associations to be perceived as reliable partners. Associations registered in Serbia in 2022 outnumbered foundations by a factor of 36, while the ratio in the Virtus dataset was one foundation to 10 associations. The conclusion is that the few Serbian foundations enjoyed a slight advantage over the much larger cohort of the country's active associations, having a 3.6-times greater chance to partner with businesses.

¹² SBRA Counter, Serbian Business Registers Agency apr.gov.rs/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%87%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%bd%d0%b0.3.html (accessed on 3 July 2022).

Partnerships differ objectively and measurably by quality

An independent jury selects the winning cross-sector pair in the Virtus Awards. The jury consists of distinguished representatives of the business community and civil sector, public figures, media workers, and academics. On average, each award winner is selected by five jury members from these sectors. Over the 15 years of the awards, 34 individuals have served on the jury for varying lengths of time.

Based on the application form, the jury score each partnership on a scale from 0 to 10 in five dimensions:

- **CSR strategy and actions taken over the past year**
- **The extent of collaboration between the partners**
- **Methods and avenues of cooperation between the partners**
- **Results achieved and progress made by the partnership in addressing issues**
- **Overall impression of the company, CSO, and partnership**

The nominated companies are ranked by their total score upon awarding the scores, and finalists are short-listed based on these rankings. In 12 of the 15 contests, the three highest-ranked partnerships made the short-list. Jury members then discuss the finalists and decide on the winners by consensus. Before undertaking an in-depth inquiry about the key ingredients shared by the best partnerships, we

checked whether winning the award was a reliable indicator that the award-winning partnerships should serve as examples to others.

The starting assumption was that the scoring was objective if the jury tended to show agreement about the scores they awarded to the partnerships. If the scoring is objective, we can conclude that the partnerships indeed reveal differences in quality that can be rated using the five scoring dimensions defined by the Trag Foundation. We have calculated the interclass correlation coefficient¹³ which can take any value between 0 and 1. The result of 0.631 is interpreted in a variety of statistical circles as moderate to a good agreement. This shows that, in the 123 nominated partnerships to date, the jury demonstrated a similar assessment of the extent of collaboration, methods used, and results achieved but also the differences in general impressions of the partnerships and overall approach to CSR by the business. Even though some jury members only served in one annual competition, Ana Tozzi believed that uniformity in scoring was promoted by the exceptional quality of application materials and the assessment methodology, adding that 'Clear instructions helped us reach conclusions from the wealth of materials and translate our assessments into scores.'

¹³ Cicchetti, D. V. (1994). Guidelines, criteria, and rules of thumb for evaluating normed and standardized assessment instruments in psychology. *Psychological Assessment*, 6(4), 284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.6.4.284>

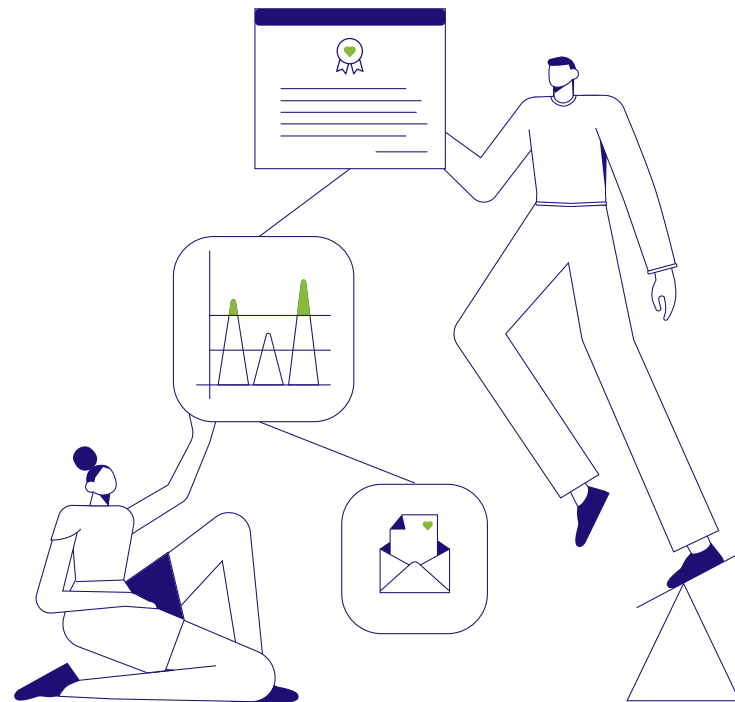
Koo, T. K & Li, M. Y. (2016). A guideline of selecting and reporting intraclass correlation coefficients for reliability research. *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, 15(2), 155-163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcm.2016.02.012>

Objective nuances in the quality of partnerships could be recognised and then measured. As such, the award-winning collaborations are the best examples of cooperation between the civil sector and businesses in Serbia at the time.

Moreover, in most competitions, the jury members awarded the prize to the partnership with the highest total score after discussing the finalists. This validated the importance of the scoring dimensions for differentiating partnerships based on their quality.

Before discussing what the partners themselves believed were the key ingredients for successful collaborations, we will describe the 13 award-winning partnerships.¹⁴ These descriptions will be brief out-

lines based on selected information about their activities and achievements, with the partnerships grouped by strategic area of focus. The data is drawn from application forms, online resources, and discussions with the partners. The brief outlines do not include additional reflections nor elaborate on the motives underpinning the collaborations, the ways in which the partnerships were established, or why some ended. The following section covers some of those aspects in greater detail.



¹⁴ Three partnerships were awarded in 2012 as opposed to only one in all other annual competitions, making a total of 17 awards for the 15 years of the awards. However, because two partnerships received the prize twice, the total number of individual collaborations is 15. One of these 15 involved a public institution rather than a CSO. Of the remaining 14 awards, one went to a company that provided substantial support to multiple CSOs. As a result, this section describes 13 partnerships with similar formats that had clear timelines and involved extensive one-on-one cooperation.

Partnerships recognised for activities aimed at improving the quality of life of persons with health issues

Mastercard Europe SA Belgrade and National Association of Parents of Children with Cancer (NURDOR)

2019 The two organisations have been working since 2019 to extend the capacity of NURDOR's Parent Relief Home, a facility that accommodates children undergoing medical treatment in Belgrade and their parents. Mastercard encouraged cardholders to pay by card rather than in cash, with the company donating funds to NURDOR for each cashless transaction. Just six months of this drive resulted in a donation of 250,000 euros, the most considerable contribution by a foreign company to NURDOR since its creation.

2021 In 2021, the initiative was complemented by the innovative *Superhero* (superhero.rs) internet donation platform, where users can make either a one-off donation or pledge a recurring monthly amount for a three-, six-, or 12-monthly period. An alternative option is the *Superhero* fashion brand, launched jointly by the partners. Choosing one of the urban and practical clothing items from the *Superhero* collection allows the buyer to pick an amount to donate to NURDOR. Donations can be made on superhero.rs using any payment card, not necessarily

a Mastercard one. A campaign with the tagline *Biti nečiji superhero. Neprocenjivo* ('Being someone's superhero. Priceless') raised three million dinars (approximately 25,000 euros) in only 45 days using this online platform, while the total amount of donations to NURDOR increased by some 22 percent relative to 2020. *Superhero.rs* has given NURDOR a significant and efficient avenue to raise funds for its valuable initiatives and activities. Mastercard also won a Virtus Award in 2021 for its long-term partnership with NURDOR, which delivered comprehensive and continuous improvements to the treatment and living conditions of children with cancer and their families.

2022 Following the company's goal of doing well by doing good, Mastercard continued working with NURDOR by introducing a new *Superhero* collection signed by talented young fashion designer Tatjana Ostojić.

GlaxoSmithKline and BELhospice Centre for Palliative Care and Palliative Medicine

2006 BELhospice and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) recognised they shared a common mission to promote accessible healthcare for all, regardless of where they lived and whether they could afford health services. BELhospice offers palliative patients and their families the care they need entirely free of charge. This support is a significant help to terminal patients who lack support

from their family members, have limited means, or cannot receive end-of-life care from the public health service. The partnership between GSK and BELhospice was launched in 2006 with support to charity events organised by BELhospice that were designed to ensure its financial sustainability and help it keep its team of palliative care experts working.

2014 Cooperation between GSK and BELhospice broadened over the years to include consulting and media assistance, and, by 2014, BELhospice was included in PULSE, the company's long-term volunteering programme. PULSE allowed GSK's staff to leave their positions (with some even leaving their home countries) to volunteer for six months yearly. The first BELhospice volunteer worked on the CSO's most significant fundraising project in 2014. The money collected permitted BELhospice to continue providing free-of-charge services to patients for one year – a relatively short-lived but significant impact of the partnership on the sustainability of this health service. The long-term impact of this collaboration and a major achievement of PULSE was the development of a strategic plan to launch a capital campaign allowing the charity to build Serbia's first inpatient hospice with an annual capacity of over 1,000 patients. A strategy to implement palliative care in cities and towns throughout Serbia was also created, which relied on programmes similar to those of BELhospice. The success of the partnership hinged on the mix of values brought to the

collaboration by each organisation in its respective areas of activity: BELhospice invested its comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the issues faced by patients and their families, while GSK provided strategic direction and skills the CSO was unable to develop. The company noted that the most significant impact of its worldwide PULSE partnerships lay in the enthusiasm, new knowledge and ideas, and greater ownership of the company's mission the volunteers brought back to their workplaces after returning from their volunteering sabbaticals.

2015 The partners won the Virtus Award for the best long-term partnership in 2015 for their collaboration on the PULSE programme. Another long-term volunteering engagement by a GSK employee took place after the partnership received the prize.

2019 The company continued making financial donations to BELhospice until 2019, when the GSK office in Serbia was closed.

bank branches to promote helpful practices for persons with disabilities and the use of appropriate terminology. At the initiative of CRID, Eurobank Direktna redesigned its website (at eurobank-direktna.rs). Using dedicated hardware, software and a text-to-speech website plugin, persons with visual impairments (blind and sight-impaired persons and those with limited upper limb functions) can have texts, picture descriptions, and links read to them, helping them navigate the website. The partners jointly organised a conference on Design for All in May 2006 to raise awareness of this issue, where they drew on their experience in implementing specific solutions. After the conference, CRID joined EIDD – Design for All Europe, a European organisation that promotes inclusiveness.

2008 In mid-February 2008, the partners signed a donation agreement worth four million dinars (some 48,000 euros at the time), with the funds used to refurbish and expand a park for children and persons with disabilities. *The Eurobank Rainbow Park* (located in Norveška Street in the Belgrade neighbourhood of Bežanijska kosa) was the first of its kind in the region, boasting specialised furniture for children with disabilities and gymnastics equipment. The park has become a gathering place for children from a multitude of associations of children with disabilities and a venue for painting and music workshops and unlimited fun every day. *The Rainbow Park*

won the partners the 2008 Virtus Award for long-term partnership between business and the civil sector.

2009 The following year, the CRID and the bank launched a joint project titled *Pokretni inkluzivni muzej* ('Mobile Inclusive Museum'). This initiative included a competition where arts, architecture, woodworking, and design students were invited to come up with practical items that would make life easier for people with disabilities and their families. The winning designs were manufactured by Serbian companies and are being used. For this effort, the bank received the 2010 Virtus Award for the most innovative project.

2013 In 2013, the bank, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), and the CRID signed a tripartite contract for the *Umetnost za SVE* ('Art for ALL') project aimed at making the SANU's gallery fully accessible to persons with disabilities. A multimedia guide and tactile and audio aids were installed in the gallery, which gave persons with disabilities equality in accessing exhibitions. This successful cross-sector project was also the final initiative in the long-standing partnership between the company and the CSO.

Partnerships recognised for activities aimed at improving the quality of life of vulnerable groups

Eurobank Direktna a.d. (formerly Eurobank EFG Štedionica a.d. Belgrade) and Inclusive Society Development Center

2005 When Eurobank Direktna a.d. (Eurobank EFG Štedionica a.d. at the time it won the award) began its work on creating a society of equal opportunities for all, it decided to follow the slogan of the international movement of persons with disabilities, 'Nothing about us without us'. Guided by this motto, in 2005 the bank reached out to the Inclusive Society Development Center (CRID), which brings together persons with disabilities. That year, the bank's Vasina Street branch in Belgrade was the first bank branch in the region to

be made fully accessible. The entrance, cashpoint, and service desks were arranged to allow free access to wheelchair users. For the first time in the region, tactile strips were used to assist visually impaired people, and a ramp with handholds was installed to allow movement from one level to another. In addition to these physical enhancements, Eurobank Direktna and CRID motivated bank staff to get involved in ensuring equal treatment of persons with disabilities, with training sessions held at the refurbished

OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and littleBig People humanitarian organisation

2008 The bank was motivated to launch this collaboration in 2008 by littleBig People's efforts to improve the difficult position of children with developmental difficulties housed in residential care homes throughout Serbia. This meant OTP became involved in the ongoing programmes and activities of littleBig People, which made it one of the 80 or so 'friends of children' (benefactors).

2012 The crowning success of this cooperation came in 2012, when it won the Virtus Award. At the time, the bank was the main corporate sponsor of the *Sanke Deda Mraza* ('Santa Claus's Sleigh') project, which allowed more than 2,000 children in homes for those without parental care to experience the magic of Christmas and

New Year's holidays by getting to know Santa Claus and his elves, receiving gift packets of toys and candy, and watching pantomime shows and fireworks displays. The bank also supported the *Stvaramo srcem* ('Creating With Heart') project, a humanitarian market that brought together residents of seven homes for children with developmental difficulties throughout the country. This humanitarian activity aimed to familiarise the population at large with

2015

these children's problems and showcase their skills by presenting their artworks.

The eight-year partnership gave littleBig People more financial stability. Apart from OTP providing funding, some of the bank's staff volunteered in the humanitarian drives and offered professional services. OTP also sought to involve its partners and clients in collaborating with the charity.

Yettel d.o.o. Belgrade (formerly Telenor d.o.o.) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia

2007

Yettel (at the time Telenor d.o.o.) and UNICEF first joined forces in 2007. Yettel's customers were the first in the world to be able to send well-known UNICEF greetings cards as MMS messages. The entire income generated by selling these cards online was used for activities aimed at systematically addressing three primary issues faced by children in Serbia: violence, poor treatment of children without parental care, and early childhood quality of life.

2010

In 2010, Yettel and UNICEF strengthened their collaboration by engaging in long-term projects to tackle national issues comprehensively. In 2008, the Ministry of Health launched its health mediator project to improve the health and quality of life of Roma communities in the country. Health mediators are women who work with outpatient clinics and are trained to present the benefits of prevention and treatment and vaccination to Roma families and help them access their rights to healthcare and health insurance. They are mothers, speak the Roma language, and have completed at least primary education. In 2010, Yettel designed its *Povezivanje* ('Connection') project, which leveraged the company's expertise and core business to assist the health mediator effort. This joint initiative of Yettel, the Ministry of Health, and UNICEF provided training in healthcare and social protection for the health mediators and donated mobile phones, computers,

and tailor-made software. It gave them subsidised access to Yettel's voice and data network. This made it easier for the health mediators to communicate with Roma families and their supervisors and allowed them to exchange information more efficiently and develop detailed databases of the Serbian Roma population. Starting with no more than 15 mediators covering as few as 5,000 families under the government's 2008-2010 programme, after Yettel and UNICEF became involved, the initiative expanded to include as many as 75 health mediators in 59 Serbian towns and municipalities, who together covered some 140,500 Roma in informal settlements (of which some 51,000 were children and 46,500 women). The health mediators allowed each child to access their selected paediatrician, and their engagement increased the number of pregnant women using antenatal and postnatal health services.

2011

Connection won the 2011 Virtus Award for the best long-term partnership. The global group Yettel was part of at the time recognised this project as a particularly useful initiative and chose to duplicate it in its other markets.

2012

In 2012, the partners joined the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development for the project *Zaustavimo digitalno nasilje* ('Stop Digital Violence'). The key outcome of this project was the

2018

relevance of the findings of a survey¹⁵ administered by the project to the public and school members when planning interventions.

Starting in 2017, the partners launched *Bezbedan internet za celu porodicu: Pametno od početka* ('Safe Family Net: Smart from the Beginning'), their third national project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Užice Child Rights Centre. This initiative included another representative survey devoted to internet use by younger children (aged four to eight) and parental awareness. This survey informed the planning of support activities. Training of trainers was designed, strengthening trainer teams based in Niš, Belgrade, Užice, Kragujevac, and Novi Sad. Their capacity-building events trained 150 early childhood educators and primary school teachers, who piloted a workshop programme for some 3,750 children and about 2,000 parents. Leaflets were distributed to each Serbian first-grader, with 10,000 parents also targeted by tailored publications. Panel discussions were held with over 500 teachers and parents. A Digital Guide was developed with positive and constructive messages on online safety (available at digitalni-vodic.ucpd.rs) and covered topics such as personal data protection, online privacy, ways in which children spend screen time, video gaming, internet predators, digital device settings for using the internet safely, and included a knowledge quiz and other useful materials.

2020

Apart from short-term project results, the partnership also devised systemic and lasting solutions. It improved the capacities of teachers and early childhood educators to raise awareness and build knowledge of the risks and internet safety for parents, early year primary school pupils, and children in early childhood education. The Ministry of Education distributed the materials and resources developed by the project to all early childhood education centres and primary schools throughout the country and made them permanently available.

2022

As part of the joint project *Premošćavanje digitalnog jaza u Srbiji za najugroženiju decu* ('Closing the Digital Gap in Serbia for Children Most at Risk'), which began in 2021 and is set to last until 2023, the company provided more than 2,000 internet SIM cards and 300 wireless modems enabling internet access to 30 Serbian schools. The firm has said doing so will help facilitate remote learning regardless of the place and circumstances in which the children live.

Telekom Srbija a.d. and National Children's Free Helpline (NADEL)

2005

NADEL, founded in 2005 at the initiative of Princess Katarina, the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Health, and Youth and Sports, the former People's Office of the President of the Republic, and Telekom Srbija, was the first national helpline for children and young people in Serbia available

around the clock, 365 days a year, from all landline and mobile networks. The service covered all of Serbia and employed more than 40 counselors (education specialists, psychologists, social workers, doctors, and lawyers). Protecting children and building their resilience is at the core of NADEL's

¹⁵ Popadić, D. & Kuzmanović, D. (2013). Korišćenje digitalne tehnologije, rizici i zastupljenost digitalnog nasilja među učenicima u Srbiji. Beograd: UNICEF/Institut za psihologiju Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu. Available at researchgate.net/publication/272114966_Koriscenje_digitalne_tehnologije_rizici_i_zastupljenost_digitalnog_nasilja_medu_ucenicima_u_Srbiji.

philosophy, which begins with listening to them. Telekom Srbija supported NADEL by donating equipment and funds, waiving telephone charges and subscriber fees, and providing free support anytime or night. The volume of calls increased annually (from some 13,500 in 2006 to close to 102,000 in 2015), suggesting that this counseling was necessary for both children and parents.

2016 A review of calls to NADEL over the years found many of them were made by parents. This prompted the creation of a parents' helpline (ROLIN), which Telekom Srbija facilitated in April 2016. As the number of calls grew, so the shared activities became more complex, increasing to include joint media appearances, technical support to address any issues, tracking call numbers and duration, and assessments of previous operations to improve the efficiency of this service targeting children in need of professional counselling. Calls to NADEL

2022 Even after being recognised by Virtus, Telekom Srbija has continued to support the National Children's Helpline to ensure children's voices are heard and their needs appropriately met, as well as to raise public awareness of children's rights. In doing so, the company has clearly acknowledged that children and the family were instrumental in creating a healthy, sustainable, and modern future for all community members.

OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and Belgrade Food Bank

2006 The partnership was launched in late 2006, shortly after the creation of Belgrade Food Bank, a charity that regularly donates food to Serbians living below the poverty line.

2009 In addition to regularly donating funds to the Food Bank, OTP organised volunteer drives of its staff that included food distribution initiatives and, in 2009, also presented the charity with two computers. The company helped the Food Bank collect and distribute more than 57 tonnes of food by that year, which allowed it to assist some 8,000 beneficiaries in Belgrade and throughout Serbia. The bank received a Virtus Award for what was at the time a three-year partnership.

2012 Another project completed by the partners was collecting food for school canteens in the most vulnerable areas. OTP and the Food Bank again won a Virtus Award for this

and ROLIN remained free, anonymous, and confidential, and consultants were available at any time of day or night. Telekom Srbija and NADEL won the 2016 Virtus Award for a long-term partnership for their assistance to children and parents in getting timely information and providing direct help and support to help them solve their problems.

2012 initiative, which saw staff collect more than three tonnes of food for 314 vulnerable pupils of six Serbian primary schools. The food aid was intended to help school canteens in rural areas prepare hot meals for the schoolchildren and supplement their government allowances allocated for this purpose.

2015 Until December 2015, OTP donated funds to the Food Bank, engaged in corporate volunteering, and provided pro bono accounting and communications services to the charity. Thanks to the partnership between the Serbian branch of OTP and the Belgrade Food Bank, similar collaborations were set up between OTP in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Croatia and food banks active in those countries.

Partnerships recognised for environmental activities

Ernst & Young d.o.o. and Young Researchers of Serbia

2009 2009 Ernst & Young started working with Young Researchers of Serbia in September 2009, when the firm joined the group in organising environmental volunteering drives. The project was aimed at nature conservation areas and other protected reserves throughout Serbia that faced issues such as low visitor numbers, poor government support, and lack of staff. Ernst & Young wished to help safeguard these areas by organising volunteering activities for their team.

2010 Until 2010, when the partnership received the Virtus Award, four events took place: *Gradac 2009*, in the Gradac river gorge near Valjevo (October 2009); *Zelena četvorka* ('Green Four'), near Ada Huja in Belgrade (April 2010); *Đavolja Varoš 2010*, in this rock formation area near Kuršumlija (June 2010), and *Zasavica 2010*, in a wetland area close to Sremska Mitrovica (September 2010). The response rate amongst the company's staff ranged from 30 to 50 percent, which the firm considered an excellent result since the volunteering activities were elective and not mandatory for its employees. Each of the actions followed a cycle consisting of several stages: the partners firstly together set the desired date and location, based on inputs from Young Researchers of Serbia. The next step was identifying the volunteering activities that would suit the site. The following phase involved putting

together a budget, including costs of raw materials and operations, travel expenses, meals, and promotional materials. Young Researchers of Serbia prepared for the events by drawing on their extensive network of field contacts, while Ernst & Young communicated the initiatives to their staff, alums, and company friends to create volunteer groups. The final stage was the actual volunteering effort in the field. To illustrate the extent of this partnership, this section will describe one of the joint actions, *Zasavica 2010*. The activities involved clearing 'plugs' formed by weeds on the water surface to help preserve the habitats of beavers and other animals and birds; setting up planters in visitors' areas; and constructing a dam enabling the building of a boat landing stage. The idea behind this drive was to promote the sustainability of Zasavica, Serbia's only beaver habitat. The company also noted it allowed its staff and friends of the firm who had not previously visited the site to do so as part of the volunteering effort.

2011 The positive mood promoted by the volunteering actions and both organisations' highly favourable experiences led the partners to organise another Green Four activity in Belgrade's Ada Huja before the collaboration ended.

Partnerships recognised for improving entrepreneurship and fostering career development

OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and Junior Achievement Serbia

2009 Junior Achievement Serbia offers training in entrepreneurship and financial literacy. These courses run throughout the year and are free for all Serbian primary and secondary school students. The collaboration began with OTP becoming involved in juries for various contests and fairs organised by Junior Achievement. The following year, the bank broadened its work with the organisation by providing financial and mentoring support for Junior Achievement's *Učenička kompanija* ('Student Company'). As the collaboration progressed, OTP and its staff sought to contribute to achieving the organisation's vision of a successful and sustainable society of economically literate individuals, educated and empowered to achieve their entrepreneurial potential. Student Company helps young people learn how companies operate, from incorporation to governance, marketing strategies, and production of final statements. OTP Bank mobilised its branches throughout the

country to help prepare young people to manage their companies successfully. At the end of the academic year, the students could take part in a national competition of students' companies which bank staff judged. Besides sponsoring the national event, OTP helped Serbian winners participate in the European finals.

2012 In its third year, the partnership continued with the bank investing more funds into the programme and expanding its volunteer network, becoming the Student Company's most significant corporate partner and winning the 2012 Virtus Award for its work with Junior Achievement. The Student Campaign became one of Serbia's largest economic education and youth entrepreneurship programmes, offered in over 180 schools in almost all Serbian cities and towns.

2016 The bank remained the programme's sponsor until 2016.

Telekom Srbija a.d. and Junior Achievement Serbia

2011 Junior Achievement Serbia and Telekom Srbija first partnered in 2011 through financial assistance and support in the form of staff volunteering. By taking part in the initiatives, the company's employees directly helped promote entrepreneurship training in Serbia and fostered direct links between schools and businesses.

2013 2013 Telekom Srbija financially supported Junior Achievement's *Poslovni izazov* ('Business Challenge'), an entrepreneurship training course aimed at secondary

school students, by organising regional competitions in four Serbian cities. *Business Challenge* was a one-day event for some 100 students from various secondary schools divided into 20 teams. Telekom Srbija designed a real-life business problem that the contestants needed to address. The company's staff mentored the teams and judged the solutions developed by the teams. *Business Challenge* won the 2013 Virtus Award for a long-term partnership.

2018 Telekom Srbija supported the *Business Challenge* from 2011 to 2018, during which time over 3,000 students of nearly 700 Serbian secondary schools participated in the event. Collaboration between the company and Junior Achievement was extended in 2017 to include another related programme, *Poslovni izazov Zapadnog Balkana* ('Western Balkans Business Challenge'), where secondary school teams from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina competed to solve a business case designed by the company.

2022 In 2022, the company's staff were involved in judging the Student Company, the other Junior Achievement programme.

Telekom Srbija supported Western Balkans *Business Challenge* in 2017 and 2018, and these two years saw 160 students from more than 100 secondary schools across four countries participate in the contest.

Philip Morris Operations a.d. Niš and EcoNomic Expert Community Association (ENECA)

2009 Philip Morris was determined to help address unemployment, a key issue in Serbia. In 2009, the firm partnered with ENECA, which put forward an original and innovative approach to promoting employment by fostering the creation and enhancement of family businesses in agriculture, production, traditional handicrafts, and services. Philip Morris provided financial, professional, operational, and technical support to this initiative, dubbed *Pokreni se za posao* ('Startup for Business'), which helped 100 firms each year. The tobacco maker donated equipment worth on average 2,000 euros annually, and offered free education and training in finance, marketing, sales, organisation, human resources management, legal issues, and strategic and business planning. ENECA and Philip Morris jointly worked on most of the project's stages and activities, from selecting and adjusting support instruments to defining eligibility criteria to monitoring and engaging in efforts beneficial for local communities. The programme began in Niš, Southern Serbia, home to some of the country's most deprived communities. The outstanding results of the project incubating the supported businesses (all were able to weather the financial downturn, expand and modernise production, hire new staff,

increase production and sales volume, and invest in new equipment) and its extraordinary positive impact on local economic development, prompted its transformation into a more comprehensive nationwide programme.

2012 Startup for Business was scaled up across Serbia in 2012 and 2013 and the collaboration broadened to include the strategic involvement of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, National Employment Service, regional development agencies, and local economic development offices in local authority areas throughout the country.

2014 The fifth year of the programme saw the partners win the Virtus Award for a long-term partnership between business and the civil sector.

2019 Huge public interest from all over the country recorded during the ten years of the programme (with applications coming from more than 150 local authority areas in total and 2,500 applicants on average annually) showed entrepreneurial spirit in Serbia was alive but had to be nurtured and promoted, including through expert support and a helping hand. In total, the programme supported no fewer than 800 entrepreneurs, delivered at least 1,000 training sessions, and helped generate more than 2,000 jobs.

2020 The company continued working with ENECA to promote entrepreneurial spirit in Serbia. Late 2020 saw the launch of StarTech, an ongoing three-year project worth 5 million dollars in support of the innovation and digital transformation of the Serbian economy. This initiative is

implemented by the National Association for Local Economic Development (NALED) and financially supported by Philip Morris, with ENECA remaining a key operating partner.

Philip Morris Operations a.d. Niš and Leadership Development Centre

2007 Starting in October 2007, Philip Morris partnered with Belgrade-based Leadership Development Centre on two headline projects, *Pokreni se za budućnost* ('Move for the Future', implemented from 2007 to 2016) and *Pokreni se za nauku* ('Move for Science', 2015 to 2020). The collaboration involved daily contacts to facilitate the two initiatives, joint appearances, and promotional activities designed to promote young people's leadership potential and increase the visibility of achievements made by Serbian research and development facilities and young scientists. During its ten years, the Move for the Future awarded nearly 380 scholarships and helped more than 90 projects that benefited local communities, whereas the Academic to Business project trained 75 young people in entrepreneurship. The initiative's ten public advocacy campaigns included an effort to introduce the concept of academic integrity into the Serbian Research and Development Law. Over the years, the programme evolved to meet the community's needs, focusing on assisting young researchers. Since 2015, the Move for Science has helped 45 researchers, assisted 24 research projects, and resulted in investments of 14.4 million dinars (some 120,000 euros).

2018 In 2018, Philip Morris and the Leadership Development Centre shifted their focus to promoting research and development in Serbia through their Move for Science initiative, winning a Virtus Award for their partnership. The first activity of this

programme, *Istraži.Promeni* ('Research. Change'), is aimed at young researchers in biomedicine and the natural sciences to help them become sustainable and achieve scientific excellence. According to the SASA (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts), Serbia spends less than 0.3 percent of its GDP on science, compared to the European average of 2 percent. Nevertheless, young Serbian researchers have consistently been achieving notable results on the international scene. Move for Science was launched in the year when the government-sponsored competition for research projects was abandoned. The partnership initiative has proven its value as the government competition is yet to be advertised again. The researchers that have benefited from this support regularly report the results of their work, promote their participation in the programme when they publish their papers, and participate in various conferences in Serbia and abroad. The second activity, *Opremi.Primeni* ('Equip. Use'), is designed to improve researchers' working conditions, help them access the necessary equipment, and refurbish their labs. Equip.Use cemented the partnership with universities and research institutes engaged in research into biomedicine and the natural sciences in all four of Serbia's university centres. Four grants worth a total of 2.9 million dinars (some 25,000 euros) were awarded that helped the beneficiaries purchase specialised equipment, which significantly improved their research ability.

2020 The company continued cooperating closely with the Leadership Development Centre on the Move for the Future programme until 2020, when the last competition took place as part of this initiative. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 largely curtailed the programme, and it was not resumed in 2021. Philip Morris said they had continued to work

with the Leadership Development Centre after the programme closed, although not consistently and through structured programmes, but rather on individual initiatives designed to foster links between the research and development community and businesses that are exceptionally important for Serbia's economic and social development.

NELT Co d.o.o, G12 HUB, and Nova Iskra

2014 Being strategically oriented towards investment in youth programmes, in 2014 Nelt launched a collaboration with G12 HUB modern art gallery, where the partners organised the first round of training courses titled *Interdisciplinarna saradnja kao potencijal razvoja mladih profesionalaca na polju umetnosti, nauke i novih tehnologija* ('Interdisciplinary cooperation as the potential for development of young professionals in the field of the arts, science, and new technologies'). The Nova Iskra creative hub joined the partners for the second round of the course.

2017 The partnership won the Virtus Award after the third round of Nelt's free one-year courses for students of accredited faculties of arts and engineering from all over Serbia. The partner organisations contributed to the programme by helping select the applicants and choose course topics, teachers, and mentors who guided the young talents in their unique year-long experience of developing critical thinking and teamwork and designing and implementing projects. The successes the course achieved each year were showcased in its final shows, where the participants exhibited the art they started, worked on, and completed during the course. The programme involved over 20 lectures, ten one-day and ten multi-day workshops, more than ten visits, and many mentoring meetings, workshops, and sessions. More than 80 talented students took part in the three years of the course, who described the programme as a major learning opportunity that gave them a better insight into the country's business and social

environment. As part of the programme the participants also founded the start-up Thunder Strike Games, which launched the first audio game for the visually impaired.

2019 Nova Iskra, the G12 HUB gallery, and Nelt offered the last round of the training course in 2019. All told, over 90 young people took part in the four rounds of the course. This is how the company described the benefits of this programme in 2019: '*Designed as a horizontal platform for exchanging knowledge and ideas, this programme stands in opposition to the hierarchical logic of the teacher-student relationship. The programme was centred on meetings and discussions with artists, researchers, and professionals active in various areas, from economics to IT, environmental protection, science, urban planning, modern art, design, theatre and performance art, to entrepreneurship and business. Over the years, the programme evolved depending on the interests and needs of its participants, while the team of teachers and associates constantly grew.*' Since the initiative was based on physical contacts and direct exchanges in workshops, lectures, and mentoring sessions, the fifth round, planned for 2020, was not organised due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the core of the most successful partnerships lies the right cooperation methodology that always yields results

For this publication, we developed a unified database of all partnerships nominated for the Virtus Award over the 15 years it has been awarded, together with the scores given to them by the respective jury members. The first step in uncovering what made long-term partnerships tick was to compare the juries' scores for all 123 nominated partnerships. Their agreement was moderate to good, which suggests that the scoring was guided by objective differences in the quality of these partnerships. Having determined factual differences in quality between the partnerships, we could identify the traits that differentiated successful collaborations from those less so.

To that end, we analysed the importance of the traits scored by the jury members (results, methodology, extent of collaboration, corporate social responsibility, and overall impression) that determined how well the partnerships did in the competition: nominated but not progressing further, shortlisted, or awarded. There was a high correlation of scores for the various dimensions,¹⁶ indicating that if a jury scored one trait of a partnership highly, they also likely did so for the other characteristics of that partnership. The scores seem to suggest that three key attributes of partnerships – results, methods, and collaboration – were largely related. Close cooperation would give rise to sound strategies and creative methods of involving businesses and CSOs in efforts to attain societal objectives, leading to good results.

Nevertheless, results scores¹⁷ were especially important for distinguishing between the shortlisted partnerships (which numbered 47) from those that did not make it into the finals (76). As such, progress in addressing community issues was key to propelling a partnership onto the shortlist and marking it as more successful than others. Unexpectedly, it was not scores for results but those for methods that made the most difference between awarded partnerships (a total of 17) and non-awarded shortlisted ones (30).¹⁸ Therefore, a discussion of the best partnerships' key traits will begin with considering methods' bearing on results. No fewer than 34 different jury members agreed that the progression from methodology to results differentiated between good partnerships and the best ones: the results bear witness to the fact that the partners were guided by a clear idea throughout all the stages of their collaboration; engaged in regular, committed, and democratic communication; and originated ideas jointly and strategically. Reviewing partners' opinions about the dynamics of their collaborations, we observed three possible avenues they used to exchange knowledge, services, products, marketing channels, and financial contributions. The first avenue involved the partners jointly creating new programmes or products; the second entailed the company joining a CSO's existing programmes; and the third involved the CSO joining a company's existing business operations.

¹⁶ The average Pearson correlation coefficient for all five dimensions was 0.734. A correlation coefficient is a statistical measure that shows to what extent changes to one variable are followed by changes to another. In our case, the variables were the juries' scores, which differed between partnerships. Correlation coefficients can range from -1 to +1. A coefficient of 0 means that a change to one variable is not followed by a change to another. A coefficient ranging from 0 to +1 means that an increase in one variable is accompanied by an increase in another, whilst a value from 0 to -1 means that an increase in one variable is followed by a decrease in another. In this case, correlation coefficients between all scores had high positive values.

¹⁷ The t-test was used to compare shortlisted and non-shortlisted collaborations across all five dimensions. All five t-tests revealed that the shortlisted group received more points than the non-shortlisted cohort, and the strength of the difference was compared using Cohen's d. For the results dimension, Cohen's d stood at -1.380, for overall impression it was -1.146, for extent of collaboration -1.112, for CSR it stood at -1.105, and for methodology Cohen's d was -1.084.

¹⁸ The t-tests compared awarded and non-awarded shortlisted partnerships across all five dimensions. All five t-tests showed that the awarded shortlisted group received on average a higher score than the non-shortlisted partnerships, excepting only for the CSR dimension. The strength of the difference was compared using Cohen's d, which stood at -0.810 for the methodology dimension, -0.546 for extent of collaboration, -0.503 for results, and -0.503 for overall impression.

Joint development of programmes and products

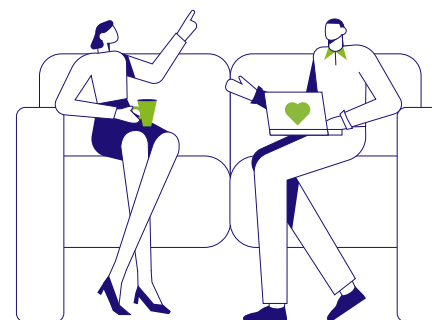
The products and programmes developed by the award-winning partner pairs were the *superhero.rs* platform (Mastercard and NURDOR); *Nelt's Training Course* (Nelt, G12 HUB, and Nova Iskra); *Mobile Inclusive Museum, Design for ALL, and Rainbow Park* (Eurobank Direktna and Inclusive Society Development Center); *Move for Science and Move for the Future* (Philip Morris and Leadership Development Centre); *Startup for Business and StarTech* (Philip Morris and ENECA); and *Safe Family Net* (Yettel and UNICEF Serbia). Two instances of collaboration are outlined below to illustrate the extent of cooperation in developing shared programmes and products.

In the juries' focus group discussion, Radojka Nikolić highlighted that the primary reason for recognising Mastercard and NURDOR was the three-million-dinar amount raised within the first six weeks after *superhero.rs* was set up. NURDOR's revenues grew by some 22 percent during this period. She went on to clarify the importance of this collaboration: 'All sorts of large donors support NURDOR, but I also don't know of anyone who increased their revenue by one-fifth. Besides, the platform wasn't a one-off solution but a lasting answer to funding the parent relief home.' The interview with NURDOR led us to conclude that the partnership was best described as a collaboration based on an excellent methodology that inevitably achieved results. According to the charity, this unique methodology allowed NURDOR to become financially sustainable in the long run. Mastercard's payment services intersected with NURDOR's needs. Here is the charity's unedited opinion: 'For years, we at NURDOR had been thinking about how to allow online donations by credit card. With card payments (not just donations) on the increase in recent years, and online payments indisputably being the trend of the future, it was essential for us to gain this ability. In

addition, as the pandemic began in 2020, we lost our major fundraising avenues such as public events and large-scale gatherings (such as concerts, fairs, markets, and the like), and it became even more important for us to reach people online. We want to highlight this as a particularly important result because without support from Mastercard and the partners they brought in, we would not have managed to do so, or at least would not have done so in the time and in the way, *Superhero* allowed us to.'

The charity explained how, ever since they first started collaborating in 2019, both partners appointed officers tasked with communication and implementation, and most decisions were made in coordination between these points of contact. Communication was described as close: 'We communicated almost daily when campaigns were in progress, by email, and in online meetings, while outside of campaigns we met on average once every six weeks for strategic planning and presenting new ideas.' The partners' operational roles were clearly differentiated: Mastercard hired a professional creative team to develop a design for the campaign, whereas NURDOR was involved in consultations, suggesting changes, or approving the creative solutions. The charity was more actively engaged regarding other operational issues, such as how the website would operate, who the delivery partner would be and what the related arrangements would look like, and what operating agreements would be in place with banks, payment operators, and lawyers. This is how they summarised their impressions of the collaboration: 'In general, we were involved in the whole process from the beginning, for some things by providing advice and making the final decisions, and for other operating matters we were actively involved from A to Z.'

In Nelt's Training Course, the partnership between Nelt, G12 HUB, and Nova Iskra, the decisions were made by the project's Programming Council that brought together representatives of all partners. The Programming Council set out the course curriculum, defined participant numbers, chose topics, and planned the budget. Moreover, for each round of training the partners invited several alums of the previous course to serve on the Council to help improve the programme and select new candidates and participants. G12 HUB found the participation of company representatives on the Council particularly helpful: 'This was invaluable for designing the course, developing a network of contacts



with potential lecturers and associates, organising study visits to the business for participants and talks with company staff, and many other aspects of course development. Their professional experiences were both invaluable and compatible with the programmatic profile of the project, and the collaboration took place in the true spirit of partnership, mutual trust, and support. I believe the project's Programming Council truly helped us collaborate as partners, which involved working together, spending time together, exchanging experiences, engaging in dialogue, and all other aspects of working in tandem that also allowed our partnership to be democratic and open.'

The extent of both partners' involvement represented a mark of respect for the collaboration and commitment to achieving the shared objectives. The recipe for commitment was delegating points of contact, clearly defining roles, and ensuring regular communication.

Companies contributing funds, time, knowledge, services, and products to CSO programmes

Working together to develop programmes and products provided a shared sense of achievement and pride in a job well done but also required substantial commitment in terms of time and human resources for both the company and the CSO. The somewhat less intensive collaboration involved businesses joining CSO's existing programmes.

Two telecommunication companies, Yettel and Telekom Srbija, took part in national projects that improved child welfare, on which they worked with UNICEF and NADEL, respectively. Both partner firms directly contributed to the projects by providing products, knowledge, and time: they offered special rates for mobile voice and data services, donated mobile phones, computers, and specialised software, provided training in using the software and equipment, and designed customised databases to facilitate record-keeping and tracking programme outcomes.

OTP Bank, which won the award for its partnerships with littleBig People and Belgrade Food Bank charities, provided financial support and encouraged its staff to volunteer to distribute New Year's gift packages and food. As they stated in their Virtus Award nomination, OTP differed from many other Food Bank donors by making regular donations of institutional funds to assist

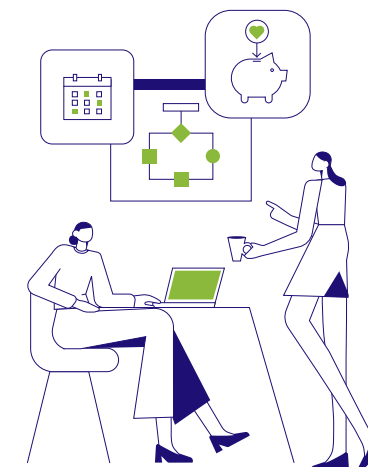
the charity with day-to-day operations. The financial support also helped raise public awareness of poverty, as the funds were used to produce and disseminate Belgrade Food Bank brochures, posters urging the public to take part in its initiatives, and awareness-raising features in daily newspapers and magazines (with more than 80 articles published) and radio and television appearances. This outreach led to Belgrade Food Bank being contacted by new potential donors and volunteers looking for ways to become involved.

To help promote entrepreneurship in Serbia, Telekom Srbija and OTP Bank became involved in Junior Achievement Serbia programmes as both sponsors and expert volunteers and were instrumental in delivering the programmes' training courses. Ana Tozzi was not surprised to learn of the preponderance of entrepreneurial and career development projects amongst both nominees and Virtus Award winners: 'You can donate funds, but a partnership means giving more, not just being a sponsor. So, the most valuable thing a well-established company can give is know-how, for a business, it's how to manage the firm, and for a private individual, it's leadership skills.' Junior Achievement echoed Ana's views, adding that it would not offer some of the programmes in the format they ultimately took, had the company's staff not been involved. The CSO

explained how its annual Business Challenge included as many as four regional and national competitions, each requiring between 20 and 40 volunteers from the civil sector and industry. They also conceded that 'There would have been no Business Challenge if we hadn't had the money to buy lunch for the 100 or so kids who came for the day', adding that 'It's great if the partner has the potential to provide volunteers, but financial support is essential, because it underpins both our sustainability and the sustainability of whatever happens in school'. Guided by that reasoning, since its inception, Junior Achievement Serbia has managed to reduce the share of funds donated by donor organisations, mainly international ones, from 90 to 25 percent while increasing the proportion of contributions made by businesses. The CSO added none of their partnerships involved exclusively financial aid but that company involvement, over and above donations in money, depended on the firms' preferences and capacity. Junior Achievement reported seeking to consolidate the volunteering potential of their partners that are both willing and able to provide volunteering assistance. They noted they had previously attempted to create a database of potential volunteers and were considering doing so again, given the growth of remote working and education in recent years. Online mentoring opportunities would facilitate meetings between small-town students and business advisors based in large urban centres.

Any support is useful, but regular financial support helps ensure the sustainability of both the organisations and the partners' shared programmes.

Collaboration between BELhospice and GSK was like the partnerships cited above in being comprised of regular annual financial support and long-term volunteering aimed at helping company staff transfer their knowledge and skills to the charity. BELhospice explained, 'Two employees from the company's Spanish and Omani offices volunteered at BELhospice. They spent several months in Belgrade, helping us with administrative work, translation, event organisation, design, and making presentations following their preferences and inclinations. We've remained in touch with them on social



media. This collaboration greatly helped the organisation and was closer than other such efforts because the volunteers helped with day-to-day duties and, in effect, acted as extra staff members. The engagement also allowed the volunteers to become familiar with the organisation's mission and feel they were making a difference and directly helping our beneficiaries.'

In addition to winning a Virtus Award, GSK's PULSE programme was recognised by the CSR Forum for its innovative approach to volunteering, advocacy, and impact. BELhospice reported the best part of the partnership was the excellent communication with GSK staff and their selfless commitment to the charity's objectives. Regardless of their positive experiences in working with international volunteers, BELhospice claimed the greatest help came in the form of annual financial aid disbursed by GSK's Belgrade office, as it allowed the charity to provide all its services free of charge. Palliative care was offered to cancer patients free of charge for an entire year as GSK financed the annual salary of a doctor, which the charity cited as an outcome they would have been hard pressed to achieve without the company's assistance.

BELhospice also shared some practical advice for facilitating regular donations from business partners: CSOs should report expenses regularly, thank their donors, and never miss an opportunity to make each donation visible on the organisation's website and social media pages.

CSO involvement in company operations

Collaboration less often took the form of CSOs becoming involved in the operations of their partner businesses. The first example was the collaboration between Young Researchers of Serbia and Ernst & Young. The company's goal was to contribute to nature conservation by organising volunteering activities for its staff. The partnership was initiated by Young Researchers of Serbia, who had a wealth of experience running volunteer camps. The corporate volunteering culture the firm wished to promote and nurture amongst its staff proved to be a suitable mode of collaboration for Young Researchers, who noted that 'environmental protection was not popular in those days and it was a problem to motivate and find volunteers'. Even though the collaboration was short-lived, Ernst & Young and Young Researchers of Serbia made a considerable contribution to nature conservation through their small-scale, highly focused work in the field. The company was happy to see its preferred mode of action yielding concrete and tangible results: *'The changes were simple, and the results useful in multiple ways'*. Young Researchers echoed these impressions, adding that an outcome they were particularly proud of was increasing trout numbers in the Gradac River near Valjevo following a 2010 joint action by the organisation and the firm.

A similar route was taken by Eurobank Direktna (at the time Eurobank EFG Štedionica) in its efforts to help

build a more inclusive society, where it started from its operations by working to make its branches and website more accessible and fostering employee sensitivity. Although the Inclusive Society Development Center (CRID) initiated the collaboration, the bank approached the initiative from the very outset as the organisation's client. Soon the work outgrew the initial project to improve the bank's inclusiveness and transformed into the shared projects that eventually won the award. The organisation claimed the best part of the seven-year collaboration was that the partners had the freedom to be creative and dedicate themselves to ideas that were both innovative and matched the organisation's needs and values. The partners achieved a symbiotic relationship, the term Radojka Nikolić uses to describe long-term partnerships. They worked together to align their collaboration's steps, stages, and objectives, communicating closely – at least once a week – and holding meetings as frequently as once every fortnight. As noted by CRID, *'Collaboration between Eurobank and CRID was recognised by both the civil and the banking sector. Even when we worked with other banks, we couldn't do it in the structured way we employed with Eurobank. They respected it as an unwritten rule of sorts.'*

Controversies in socially engaged advertising

In addition to corporate volunteering (a universal resource for a variety of organisations) and helping improve company's inclusiveness (where only a few CSOs find room for involvement), well-developed *advertising networks* are another aspect of the business world that civil society organisations can draw on to achieve social objectives. CRID claimed their programmes greatly benefited from their partner bank's resources and avenues for effective outreach to a broad range of audiences, which meant that no communicated piece of information went unnoticed. Nova Iskra singled out its ability to access the Nelt public relations and communications infrastructure as a major contributor to the growth and success of Nelt's training programme. Mastercard and NURDOR

skillfully utilised the potential of socially engaged advertising by using the company's well-developed communications channels. In this partnership, as outlined above, Mastercard invited its cardholders to pay by card rather than cash, with the company setting aside a percentage of each transaction to assist NURDOR. Just six months of this effort resulted in a donation of 250,000 euros, the most significant contribution by a foreign company to NURDOR since its creation. By promoting this activity and the Superhero platform, the charity added that Mastercard helped carry NURDOR's mission and vision to many people the organisation could not have reached otherwise.

The focus group discussion with award jury members

touched on the lucrativeness of collaborations with a major advertising component. Radojka Nikolić concluded that this aspect of the partnerships proved a thorny issue for jury members when scoring the collaborations, adding she did not prefer to praise partnerships where the joint activities resulted in companies tightening their hold on customers. Ana Tozzi agreed but noted that companies' community engagement inevitably strengthened their brands and reputations. Also pertinent to this discussion were NURDOR's views about what they felt was the most beneficial aspect of their collaboration with Mastercard, reproduced in full below: *'Mastercard properly recognised the fact that a company's legitimacy in the community in which it operates depends not only on the quality of its products and good advertising. Social responsibility is slowly becoming a key driver of brand success. This does not only mean listing achievements in the annual report but also the essential recognition that a company that sells its products to a community also contributes to it. Obviously, this is part of the advertising, but a company's efforts to promote that it does good for the community should by no means be perceived as bad. Since we live in a time when nothing travels as quickly as news, companies want to ensure the news that circulates about them is always*

good. Mastercard approached this properly to promote its brand while fully respecting NURDOR's key mission, support for children with cancer. A company must acknowledge that it should join the fight to achieve this objective and publicly use its name to support this idea. On the other hand, a firm should be cautious in its messaging, which ought to make it clear that the idea of contributing to the community should be at the forefront, with the company's advertising here only being a consequence of the good it does for the community. Mastercard was successful at this and made no mistake regarding their corporate social responsibility actions and cooperation with NURDOR.'

The discussion of hidden interests that may underlie philanthropy (including corporate social responsibility actions) remains open to this day in altruism studies undertaken by psychology and philosophy. The outstanding question about the nature of altruism is whether there are any acts of kindness devoid of at least a sense of personal satisfaction and the benefits of constructing a positive impression of oneself.

Developing collaboration methodologies and achieving results requires establishing and maintaining intersectoral relationships

Any assessment of potentials for intersectoral collaboration ties in with the foregoing discussion about the interests that both partners find in this cooperation. One prominent challenge identified by the CSOs we surveyed that appeared when negotiating to start or continue collaboration was the tendency for corporate partners to structure collaborative projects around areas, activities, and audiences attractive for promotion. The respondents noted that support programmes targeting children were the most appealing to the businesses. This motivation could explain why as

many as one-half of all partnerships nominated for the Virtus Award were aimed at children and young people. Not only were these partnerships more common, but they also tended to be maintained more carefully. Collaborations aimed at children and young people lasted up to 18 months more than other partnerships.¹⁹

For her part, Radojka Nikolić added that her reading of the prevalence of partnerships targeting this group was that since the start of transition in Serbia, companies had been strategically oriented to assisting the least

19 The t-test results showed statistical significance, with the intensity of intergroup difference expressed as Cohen's d amounting to -0.359.

well-regulated sectors, in particular young people and education. Some businesses with well-developed CSR strategies had even initiated collaboration with CSOs they saw as reliable partners for achieving the shared vision of a better society. According to Mastercard, the starting point for their work with NURDOR was a market research exercise undertaken by the company that asked the public which aspects of society they felt needed investment. Healthcare was identified as the most pressing need by far. After a detailed assessment of health charities, the company chose to partner with NURDOR, an organisation devoted to children's health. The Leadership Development Centre recalled the start of its collaboration with Philip Morris: *'As early as 2007, our organisation delivered the highly successful programme 1000 Young Leaders of Serbia (at the time, this was also the name of our association). Philip Morris recognised this effort as noteworthy and contacted us to help implement their community investment programme (specifically investment in young people in the Niš area and programmes relevant for developing the City of Niš). In the meeting, we concluded that we were both guided by the same CSR ideas and have been collaborating continuously ever since and developing various support programmes. Crucially, since 2015 we have been operating together throughout Serbia.'*

Unlike NURDOR and the Leadership Development Centre, the remaining organisations we surveyed initiated the award-winning partnerships themselves. Junior Achievement Serbia noted it was now increasingly fielding queries from companies seeking to take part in entrepreneurship training courses. Still, at the very beginning of their programme development efforts they approached various companies whose doors were open thanks to members of their board of governors. They attributed their success in forging partnerships, including the collaboration initiated as far back as 2009 with OTP Bank (Societe Generale Bank at the time of the award) and one begun in 2011 with Telekom Srbija, to their tenacity and commitment, as some negotiations with partners took more than 18 months to complete.

The Inclusive Society Development Center reported sending a written proposal to Eurobank's marketing department, in another example of a CSO reaching out to a business. This simple first step was followed by multiple shared projects over the following seven years. The organisation advised it was essential to follow companies' cues: clients and the market were what mattered to firms, and so partner organisations should consider these aspects as well. The Center believed the

CSO ought to view the partner company as an important client while remaining faithful to its mission and values.

Young Researchers of Serbia, which initiated the collaboration with Ernst & Young, offered a simple piece of advice: a successful partnership with a business required patience and well-developed skills for working with the corporate sector through either dedicated training or experience.

Cross-sector partnerships require CSOs to balance the company's consumers, their target groups, and the company as the CSO's client. This process requires both patience and the specific set of skills necessary for working with the business sector.

Overcoming role asymmetry

Not even CSOs with a wealth of experience working with the business sector were immune to challenges associated with negotiating partnerships with commercial entities. Communication with senior managers was seen as the greatest obstacle as these individuals did not differentiate between CSR and advertising. An important dilemma in discussing the terms of a future collaboration is whether an investment is cost-effective if it does not instantly yield results that the company can quickly and easily promote. There are few quick fixes if any, and using CSR to achieve meaningful social change requires time and strategic commitment. In these cases, civil society organisations are compelled to convince firms to invest in a partnership or programme. *'We need to work together to enhance CSR activities. Civil society must manage their expectations of these collaborations if they are to survive. It would be better if all of us in the civil sector took a firm stance to encourage the business community to invest in the right changes.'*

NURDOR also observed a similar mismatch between partners' understanding of their roles, believing that the relationship between CSOs and businesses regarding CSR and philanthropy should not be asymmetrical: *'CSOs often assume that asking firms for funding will solve all their problems. They frequently portray themselves as being worse off than other similar entities in a bid to attract more money. This approach may be beneficial in the short term as it can ensure they get the money to address a single issue. In the long run and from the perspective of enhancing the culture of giving in society, this relationship is neither good nor sustainable.'*

The organisation recommended that both approaching companies and embracing their proposals for collaboration should entail equitable partnerships in which both sides are equally committed to investing in the community. Both organisations surveyed for this report agreed with civil society theorist Edwards²⁰ in observing that *'Only joined together in a relationship that ensures mutual respect and recognises the importance of the various contributions of both sides do we contribute to the public good.'* Along with this right attitude towards the roles of both sectors in developing a good society, we recall another

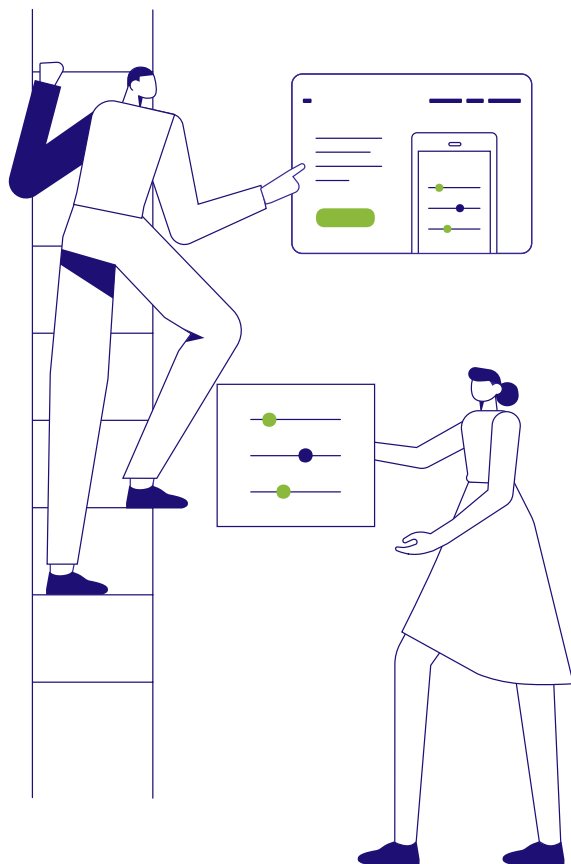
recommendation by Edwards, that allies should share a desire to develop the good society, and also a vision of what a good society is. The focus group discussion



CSOs often assume that asking firms for funding will solve all their problems. Only joined together in a relationship that ensures mutual respect and recognises the importance of the various contributions of both sides do we contribute to the public good.

with the jury members also touched upon cases when the award was not presented, which mainly involved the lack of trust in the reputation or operations of one of the sides. Regardless of the partners' willingness to work together to achieve a societal aim, dubious practices by one of them may jeopardise the credibility of the shared project and the other partner. Frozen bank accounts are an example of such reputational risks. This information is readily available on the SBRA website or from the National Bank of Serbia, which operates a single register of bank accounts. It can also be gleaned from reliable and objective local media or investigative reports highlighting businesses' disreputable practices. For this reason, Radojka, Ana, and the Trag Foundation all agreed that background checks to uncover less publicised information about the operations of both partners were important for the award process. This can also serve as a key criterion for future selection of counterparts from the other sector to ensure that the good society visions align on both sides.

20 Edwards, M. (2004). *Civil Society. Polity*: Cambridge, United Kingdom, p. 53.



Nevertheless, assessing if the counterpart was beyond reproach was not always easy. Ana Tozzi recalled that, in the early years of the awards, not even the jury members could reach an unequivocal decision as to whether sectors of questionable ethics, such as the tobacco or the gaming industry or major polluters, should be recognised for their philanthropy. The Virtus Awards jury took on the devil's advocate role until they were satisfied that the partners merited the high scores they received. We do not wish to undermine trust between people in general or faith in good human nature by suggesting partners from both sectors exercise caution when considering such cross-sectoral collaboration. We believe it is essential that there is sufficient overlap between the values espoused by both partners so that the partnership, ultimately, does not hurt the construction of the good society as envisioned by either side. When asked to advise civil society organisations on maintaining long-term partnerships, Nova Iskra highlighted the need to carefully choose collaborators: *'Be honest from the beginning, think about your credibility and*

final beneficiaries, and understand the company's true desire and wish to collaborate with you.'

After the outlined partnerships were successfully launched and won the Virtus Award, all 13 remained in effect for at least several years, and some still exist. As of 2022, the average duration of the 13 award-winning partnerships was no fewer than nine years. Before asking the award-winning partners for advice on nurturing such long-standing collaborations, we checked whether their efforts to maintain long-term partnerships were superior to those of the other nominated collaborations. At the time of the award win, the average partnership had been in effect for four years, with one-half of the total lasting between three and 11 years. At the time of nomination, partnerships that did not win the award lasted on average one year less than the award-winning ones.²¹ The median duration of the 115 nominated partnerships between businesses and CSOs was three years at the time of nomination, while one-half had been in place for between two and six years. The length of a partnership was a trait that was appreciated. Not only did the jury members recognise it by awarding longer-lasting partnership higher scores,²² but the partners also acknowledged the benefits of relying on mutual long-term support.

Facilitating societal change can easily lead to burnout since the impact of large-scale changes, such as reducing unemployment or poverty, can be measured only many years after the fact, which can significantly delay the expected satisfaction with one's contribution. For activists to remain motivated to achieve their visions of a good society for all, selfless and consistent mutual support is required.

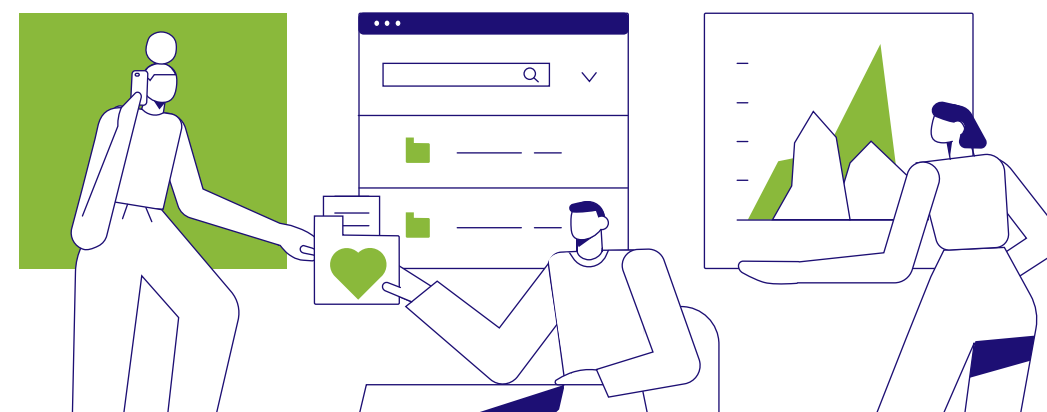
Institutional collaboration is based on the efforts of individuals

We found several CSOs came to the same conclusions as to why their cooperation with partners ceased. Enthusiastic individuals are key to institutional cooperation between CSOs and businesses. The Inclusive Society Development Center explained that their partnership formally ended once the relevant decision-makers left Eurobank and CRID. Junior Achievement observed that banks had high staff turnovers, which challenged the length of partnerships: *'In three or four years, you get an entirely new set of people with completely different personal focuses and ideas about what the firm ought to prioritise in the future.'* According to several organisations, since partnerships are carried by individuals, this is how they ought to be approached. Junior Achievement added: *'Maintaining a cross-sector partnership has a lot in common with maintaining personal partnerships and relationships. Some people like to meet over coffee, others prefer having a pint, and others see the partnership as strictly business – I want to see you once a year or never if possible. For some, this is just an assignment their boss gives them. You need to approach business partners differently; preferences are individual.'* G12 HUB noted that developing relationships with partners mattered for long-term collaboration: *'What we mean by relationships with partners is open communication, exchange, mutual respect between all partners, and equal consideration of all investments into a programme, regardless of whether this involves time, knowledge, effort, or money. Communicating well and building trust opens opportunities for long-term cooperation.'*



Maintaining a cross-sector partnership has a lot in common with maintaining personal partnerships and relationships. Open communication and trust are the way to achieving success and lasting collaboration.

The Leadership Development Centre observed that *'For a partnership to be long-lasting, each organisation needs to learn everything there is to know about the operations, processes, objectives, results, and weaknesses of their partner company. It needs to understand these processes to adjust its efforts as much as possible to the business to make the impression that it was not just a partnership, but that when we work it's US. Not a donor and a CSO, but WE, together. This ensures mutual trust and loyalty from both sides. And that can only lead to a positive outcome of the joint action.'*



²¹ Findings of the t-test were statistically significant, and the strength of the difference as measured by Cohen's d stood at -0.552.

²² Standing at 0.233, the Pearson correlation coefficient between scores and partnership duration was statistically significant.

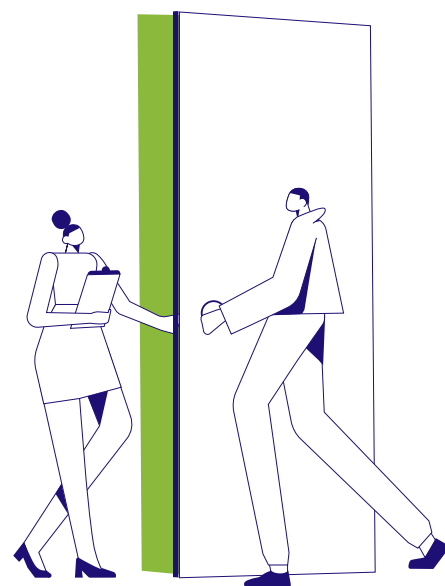
Good collaboration between the two sectors enables additional cross-sector linkages

A review of the cooperation between Yettel/UNICEF and Eurobank Direktna/Inclusive Society Development Center suggests that the partners knew one another well, showed respect for all mutual contributions to their joint societal aim, and allowed each other to be creative and persistent. This relationship of respect naturally opened the door for broader cross-sectoral collaboration. By involving a third party, in this case, the public sector, the partners sought to extend their impact to the national level or the governance of public resources managed by the public sector.

In their nomination, Yettel observed that without UNICEF it would have been much harder for them to help systematically improve the living conditions of children and young people at the national level. As a credible international organisation, UNICEF was the primary link with public authorities, primarily the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. By contrast, the Inclusive Society Development Center described their ability to access the public sector differently: 'it was easier once we had a bank by our side.' To illustrate, they cited an example where the CSO needed support from the bank's experts to reach a particular government department to obtain its approval for an activity.

Involving a third partner in collaboration makes the exercise more complex because it increases the number of decision-makers whose contributions

need to be appropriately coordinated. Moreover, the changes managed by the public sector can be much more demanding, in terms of administrative requirements and extent, than the initiatives often successfully handled by the civil sector and businesses. As observed by UNICEF, the partners learned about one another's ways of working while delivering their programmes. The Inclusive Society Development Center explained how involving a public authority in a programme they were implementing with the bank made the process much more sluggish, ultimately preventing them from achieving results. Nevertheless, the public sector has a pervasive influence on society. If the government is left out, many doors remain shut to build a better society. In this context, the organisations with experience in involving public authorities in collaboration advised patience and perseverance. The view voiced by UNICEF can serve as a model to emulate: *'The most important thing we all learned from this collaboration was that combining the resources, knowledge, and competences of various partners achieves sustainable results and solutions that have a long-term positive impact on the exercise of children's rights.'*



Conclusion

At the end of this publication, we will try to explain the title behind it. The title is ambiguous for a reason. Depending on the motivations they bring to this publication, different readers will complete it on their own and draw for themselves the conclusions they deem appropriate.

This publication has allowed those who have taken part in the Virtus competition or would like to do so in the future to identify the features of the most successful partnerships by either quality or durability. These readers have learned that the path – from sound methods to the inevitable results – was the benchmark the expert jury members used to award the prizes. Over the 15 years of the Virtus awards, the 34 people who assessed the nominees, coming from different areas of expertise and (even more pertinently for this analysis) from various sectors, agreed there were objective differences between the partnerships in terms of their quality. They also agreed that showcasing this collaboration's results was important, but it was even more important to show the modalities of cooperation that yielded those results transparently. Results reveal that a collaboration stands on a firm foundation from the beginning – that the partners stand by their mission and vision and that the two are aligned. The right method of cooperation shows that the partners are open, ready to talk, understand their own and their partners' abilities, and democratically decide whether to develop new programmes or build on the existing activities of either the civil society organisation or the company. The message for those planning to participate in this competition or other philanthropy or CSR contests is that **working well together creates opportunities for being publicly recognised for such successful and long-standing cross-sector cooperation.**

The takeaway for businesses reading this publication is that **working with civil society organisations leads to legitimacy in the community.** Civil society organisations elaborate their objectives in detail and possess well-thought-out action strategies. In addition, these organisations enjoy substantial trust from their beneficiaries, with many also gaining the confidence of their core or broader communities. What these organisations do could almost be termed surgery on the open, beating heart of the community.

Without collaborating with a CSO, a business will find it difficult to come close to a community's heart. The CSOs reiterated that corporate social responsibility was a major component of building a brand. A business first has to do all that is in its hands: provide socially responsible value chains and working conditions, and then ensure respect for the labour rights of its staff. Once these prerequisites are met, the CSOs say they have nothing against the businesses working with them to strengthen their reputation and increase their profits. The dominant narrative, increasingly present in society, suggests CSOs face a pressing need to work closely with the business sector to secure financial sustainability. Civil society organisations did not seek to downplay the importance of financial donations; their views were quite the opposite. Without constant and regular support for an organisation whose primary task is to work on achieving a particular societal change, that change is quite unlikely to be either possible or visible. However, positions in society cannot be measured solely by finances. Companies can better make financial investments to effect societal change, but organisations have closer links with the community and know its needs more thoroughly. Cooperation requires awareness of the fact that any exchange moves in both directions.

To CSOs that have decided to read this publication we would like to convey that **working with businesses leads to more opportunities to create the good society.** Stable, diversified funding is required for CSOs to operate without interruption and achieve their missions and visions. Apart from funds, collaborating with businesses may open new horizons for achieving the good society, including opportunities for better meeting the society's needs that previously went unrecognised. A telling example is the partnership between Eurobank and the Inclusive Society Development Center, where the CSO helped ensure inclusiveness when the bank refurbished its branches. With experience in making banks accessible under their belt, the pair embarked on several exploits where they renovated public spaces and institutions. Similarly, the collaboration between Young Researchers of Serbia and Ernst & Young allowed the CSO to access a multitude of volunteers, benefiting from the company's need to organise team-building events. These two illuminative examples reveal that the partners faced

no value-based obstacles to impede their search for creative solutions for their collaboration. We understand that major value-based obstacles cannot motivate CSOs to seek financial contributions from businesses, let alone engage in closer forms of cooperation such as developing joint projects, socially engaged advertising, or corporate volunteering. By contrast, even a seemingly incongruous pairing between an animal welfare group and a company that tests cosmetics on animals revealed an opportunity for cooperation to improve animal rights. If the company makes the strategic decision to introduce cruelty-free production practices in, say, the next two years, it will require expertise from those who know the proper steps in such a transition. A CSO and its motivated staff would be the best option here, given their knowledge of cruelty-free production standards, contacts with experts, and commitment to attaining this objective. Obviously, civil society organisations are primarily accountable to their core and broader constituencies and should leave decisions on whether to engage in reputationally risky collaborations to, for instance, their founding assemblies or boards of governors.

We bring this publication to a close with a simple conclusion aimed at all future readers: **working with the other sector provides the building blocks for the foundations of the good society.** The business, public and civil sectors all operate differently in size, team structures, and motivation. A lack of information about how those in other sectors work can lead to a lack of understanding for those others, which can, in turn, create stereotypes. In his study of social stereotypes, as far back as 1954, the psychologist Gordon Allport formulated the contact hypothesis. This theory states that contact with a group we are prejudiced against can reduce that prejudice. This hypothesis was empirically tested on numerous occasions since it was first posited. It was shown that contact reduces bias, provided certain conditions during the interaction are met. Readers may also recognise advice for successful partnerships identified by CSOs in this survey in the four conditions listed below (Popadić, 2021: 347).²³

- *'In a situation of contact, both groups must have equal status. If they do not, their communication will be impeded by hierarchical differences, and differences due to different socio-economic statuses or educational attainment will be ascribed to members of either group.'*
- *Contact must be an opportunity for both groups*

to get to know one another. This means that the contact should be relatively long-lasting and cannot be reduced only to brief or superficial encounters. Superficial encounters will only trigger existing stereotypes without offering an opportunity for the negative image of the outgroup to be revealed as false.

- *There must be interdependence between the groups, an overarching goal that the groups can achieve only by working together. A competitive environment may only deepen pre-existing hostility.*
- *Contact must be supported by authorities and group norms. If contact with the outgroup is met with condemnation by the ingroup, then those who communicate with the outgroup will be exposed to actual or imagined pressure from the ingroup. In a bid to prove their loyalty to the ingroup, they will seek to demonstrate to themselves and others they have not succumbed to the outgroup's influence, and so may even exhibit greater hostility.'*

As shown by contacts with other social groups, structured cross-sector cooperation has the potential to teach us about how processes take place in the other sector and the desires or tribulations those working in that sector face. Long-term strategic cross-sector cooperation is a good way to enhance trust in all segments of a society and, as such, in people themselves.

Yet, we would not want to end this publication with the impression that we advocate nothing more than collaboration for collaboration's sake. This paper intends to draw attention to the added value that cross-sector cooperation has for its direct participants by fostering tolerance and respect for differences. In fact, tolerance and respect for differences are woven into the very fabric of good society. Ultimately, our key conclusion about what partnerships worked best was still guided by the scores given to them by Virtus jury members. These experts from various sectors felt partnerships that achieved more robust and effective results were more valuable. These outcomes showed that the partners had clearly defined goals that motivated them to tread the path towards attaining those objectives democratically and openly. And the most valuable collaborations were those that respected all opportunities for making contributions and engaging in exchanges on equal terms on that path.

Appendices

Appendix A. Semi-structured guide for one-hour discussion with award jury members

1. How do you feel about the process of quantitative scoring of partnerships against pre-defined criteria: CSR strategy and measures taken within the last year; extent of collaboration between the parties; methods/means used by the partnership; results achieved, and progress made in addressing issues; and overall impression of the partnership? When considering these issues, please note that statistics reveal significant agreement between your assessments of 41 partnerships from 2012 to 2016, when both of you served on the jury.
2. Overall impression of the partnership was one of the assessment criteria. What does that mean to you?
3. What decisive factor prompted the jury to choose one business in the final meeting after the scoring was closed?
4. Please compare the businesses recognised over the years in this award category.

Appendix B. Questions posed in the competition nomination form

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy and areas

Corporate social responsibility is a corporate governance concept that 'maintains a balance between economic and social objectives' with the aim of 'attaining higher living standards whilst keeping a company profitable, for people at the company and outside it'. Simply put, CSR helps a company be responsible towards the community from which it earns its profits, treating all societal actors in the community and the company socially and ethically.

1. Please outline your CSR focus (such as ethical business; relationships with suppliers, partners, customers, and the like; employee training; community volunteering; environmental protection; cooperation with civil society organisations; environmental impact of the company; etc.).
2. Which specific CSR activities have you undertaken recently? What have been the results of those activities? Please list no more than five specific examples in particular areas (employees, social inclusion, environment, etc.).

II Information about the partnership

1. Which partner non-profit organisation does the nominated business collaborate with?
2. What is the partnership with the non-profit organisation like? Please describe the types of collaboration you engage in (such as joint appearances, product/service donations, contributions in terms of company time: hours/days of volunteering, know-how, and the like) and indicate what motivated the business to embark on this collaboration, what groups were targeted by it, etc.
3. How long has the partnership been in effect?
4. What benefits has the civil society organisation derived from this partnership?
5. How has the partnership been useful for the nominated business?
6. What progress has been made in addressing the issue/meeting the need that the partners have been working towards?

23 Popadić, D. (2021). Elementi socijalne psihologije. Beograd: Institut za psihologiju.

III Description of the partnership over a one-year period

Please provide a detailed description of the partnership and be sure to include the following:

- *Starting point – issue or need (period and conditions in which the project was initiated, thematic area, region),*
- *Partners involved in the collaboration (creation of the partnership, types of cooperation, and projects delivered),*
- *Development and outcomes of the partnership (how have the partners contributed to delivering the programmes, how has the partnership been managed, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement, outcomes of the collaboration),*
- *Future support (please indicate whether the collaboration will continue by stating the reasons, the positive or negative answer, and the objectives for the near future).*

Appendix C. Questions posed to civil society organisations and list of civil society organisations surveyed

The following eight questions received responses from nine civil society organisations: CRID, Young Researchers of Serbia, UNICEF, Junior Achievement Serbia, BELhospice; G12 HUB Gallery, Nova Iskra, Leadership Development Centre, and NURDOR.

1. Who initiated the partnership and how?
2. How are your organisation and the company's decisions regarding the methods of company involvement in the partnership being made (financial grants, donations of products/services, volunteering, know-how, time, socially engaged advertising, etc.)? How are objectives set? How does cooperation take place when activities are undertaken? What are the dynamics of your communication in general? Focus on processes in your response. *If this was a long-term partnership, cite the most recent examples to illustrate any patterns you may have identified with this collaboration.*
3. What method of company involvement in the

partnership (financial grants, donations of products/services, volunteering, know-how, time, socially engaged advertising, etc.) did you find the most relevant and why?

4. Describe one outcome you may not have achieved at all, or may not have achieved as easily, if it had not been for the partnership. This can be either a societal objective or an internal issue at your organisation.
5. If the partnership is no longer active, how and why did it end?
6. Please give any advice you may have for other organisations: how can partnerships with businesses last longer?
7. What was the best aspect of partnering with the company?
This is an entirely open-ended question. Feel free to write as much as you like about any aspect of your partnership, such as outcomes, methods, or length and intensity of the collaboration. You can also reference your responses to the previous questions.
8. What aspects of partnering with the company could have been better?
This is an entirely open-ended question. Feel free to write as much as you like about any aspect of your partnership, such as outcomes, methods, or length and intensity of the collaboration. You can also reference your responses to the previous questions.

Appendix D. Detailed overview of shortlisted nominees and award winners over the 15 years of Virtus Awards

Year	No. of nominations	Shortlisted nominees (award winners shown in bold face ; partnerships listed in alphabetical order, not by score)	Jury (affiliations shown only at first mention; jury members listed in alphabetical order)
2007	7	Hemofarm a.d. Vršac and multiple partners; JP Elektoprivreda Srbije and Dečje Srce Humanitarian Organisation, Belgrade; Microsoft Software d.o.o. Belgrade and International Aid Network (IAN) Belgrade	Aleksandar Đukić (PricewaterhouseCoopers), Ana Tozzi (Foreign Investors Council), Ivan Vejvoda (Balkan Fund for Democracy), Mijat Lakičević (<i>Ekonomist</i> magazin), Srba Jovanović (Hauska&Partner, Serbian Public Relations Society), Vlade Divac
2008	14	Banca Intesa a.d. Belgrade and Serbia Paralympics Committee Fund; Eurobank Direktna a.d. (formerly Eurobank EFG Štredionica) and Inclusive Society Development Center (CRID); Holcim (Srbija) a.d. and SMART kolektiv	Aleksandar Đukić Ana Tozzi, Dragan Bisenić (<i>Ekonomist</i> magazin), Ivan Vejvoda, Srba Jovanović, Vlade i Ana Divac
2009	4	Serbian State Lottery Belgrade and Serbian Psycho-Oncology Association (SAPO); OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and Belgrade Food Bank; U.S. Steel Serbia Smederevo and Klub Samohranih Majki Smedereva civic association	Ana Tozzi, Ivan Vejvoda, Biljana Stepanović (Business Info Group) Milan Čulibrk (<i>Ekonomist</i> magazin), Miloš Đajić (Društvo Srbije za odnose sa javnošću), Vlade i Ana Divac
2010	8	Credit Agricole Srbija a.d. and Belgrade Food Bank; Ernst & Young d.o.o. and Young Researchers of Serbia; Metro Cash&Carry d.o.o. and Belgrade Food Bank	Ana Koeshall (Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation), Ana Tozzi, Biljana Stepanović, Ivan Vejvoda, Miloš Đajić, Tamara Koštro (EkonomEast Media Group)
2011	10	Erste bank a.d. Novi Sad and Trag Foundation (formerly Balkan Community Initiatives Fund); OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and Belgrade Food Bank; Yettel d.o.o. (formerly Telenor d.o.o.) Belgrade and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia	Ana Tozzi, Biljana Stepanović, Isidora Orlović (National Bank of Serbia), Miloš Đajić, Tamara Koštro, Zdravko Lončar (eKapija website)

Year	No. of nominations	Shortlisted nominees (award winners shown in bold face ; partnerships listed in alphabetical order, not by score)	Jury (saffiliations shown only at first mention; jury members listed in alphabetical order)
2012	10	OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (at the time of the award Societe Generale Banka Srbija a.d. Belgrade) and three charities: Belgrade Food Bank, Junior Achievement Serbia, and littleBig People; Telekom Srbija a.d. and Lice ulice; UniCredit Bank Srbija a.d. and Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation	Ana Trbović (Faculty of Economics, Finance, and Administration), Ana Tozzi, Isidora Orlović, Ivana Ćirković (Government of Serbia Civil Society Cooperation Office), Radojka Nikolić (Nira Press Magazines – Ekonometar and Biznis)
2013	5	Holcim (Srbija) d.o.o. and Naša Srbija; Telekom Srbija a.d. and Junior Achievement Serbia; Top rest d.o.o. and Naša kuća	Ana Tozzi, Ivana Ćirković, Lana Krnić (National Bank of Serbia), Radojka Nikolić
2014	9	Erste bank a.d. Novi Sad and SMART kolektiv; Hemofarm Foundation and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia; Philip Morris Operations a.d. Niš i ENECA	Ana Tozzi, Ivana Ćirković, Radojka Nikolić, Svetlana Logar (IPSQS Strategic Marketing)
2015	9	Delta Holding d.o.o. and Sačuvajmo Selo Association, Priboj; Elixir Group d.o.o. and Humano Srce Šapca Foundation; GlaxoSmithKline and BELhospice Centre for Palliative Care and Palliative Medicine	Ana Tozzi, Ivana Ćirković, Radojka Nikolić, Svetlana Logar
2016	8	OTP banka Srbija a.d. Novi Sad (formerly Vojvođanska banka a.d) and Matica Srpska Gallery; Telekom Srbija a.d. and National Children's Free Helpline (NADEL); Titan Cementara d.o.o Kosjerić and Mito Igumanović Primary School; UniCredit banka a.d. and Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation	Ana Tozzi, Ivana Ćirković, Marija Vojinović (National Bank of Serbia), Radojka Nikolić, Svetlana Logar

Year	No. of nominations	Shortlisted nominees (award winners shown in bold face ; partnerships listed in alphabetical order, not by score)	Jury (saffiliations shown only at first mention; jury members listed in alphabetical order)
2017	10	NELT Co d.o.o., G12 HUB Gallery, and Nova Iskra; Philip Morris Operations a.d. Niš and Leadership Development Center; Yettel d.o.o. (formerly Telenor d.o.o.) Belgrade and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia	Ana Tozzi, Radojka Nikolić, Nenad Blagojević (Priče sa dušom website), Katarina Obradović Jovanović (Ministry of Economy), Robert Čoban (Color Press Group)
2018	5	EKO Serbia a.d. and littleBig People; ManpowerGroup Srbija and Junior Achievement Serbia; Philip Morris Operations a.d. Niš and Leadership Development Center	Ana Tozzi, Galjina Ognjanov (University of Belgrade Faculty of Economics), Katarina Obradović Jovanović, Radojka Nikolić, Robert Čoban
2019	8	TeleGroup d.o.o. Belgrade and Junior Achievement Serbia; Telekom Srbija a.d. and Mathematical Grammar School; Yettel d.o.o. (formerly Telenor d.o.o.) Belgrade and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia	Marko Radenković (Nova Iskra creative hub), Radojka Nikolić, Vesna Đukić (Belgrade Open School), Vladimir Radomirović (Pištaljka.rs and Journalists' Association of Serbia), Žarko Stepanović (Government of Serbia Civil Society Cooperation Office)
2020	12	Generali Osiguranje a.d. Serbia and Novak Đoković Foundation; Nordeus d.o.o. and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Serbia; Raiffeisen banka a.d. Belgrade and Yugoslav Drama Theatre; Raiffeisen banka a.d. Belgrade and O3ONE Civic Association	Galjina Ognjanov, Jelena Bulatović (Serbian Association of Managers), Radojka Nikolić, Sonja Dragojević (New Startegy), Vladimir Manigoda (Kontrast publishers)
2021	4	Mastercard Europe SA Belgrade and National Association of Parents of Children with Cancer (NURDOR)	Galjina Ognjanov, Jelena Bulatović, Maja Vidaković (Alliance International Media), Radojka Nikolić, Sonja Dragojević



A DECADE OF CSO SOLIDARITY
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