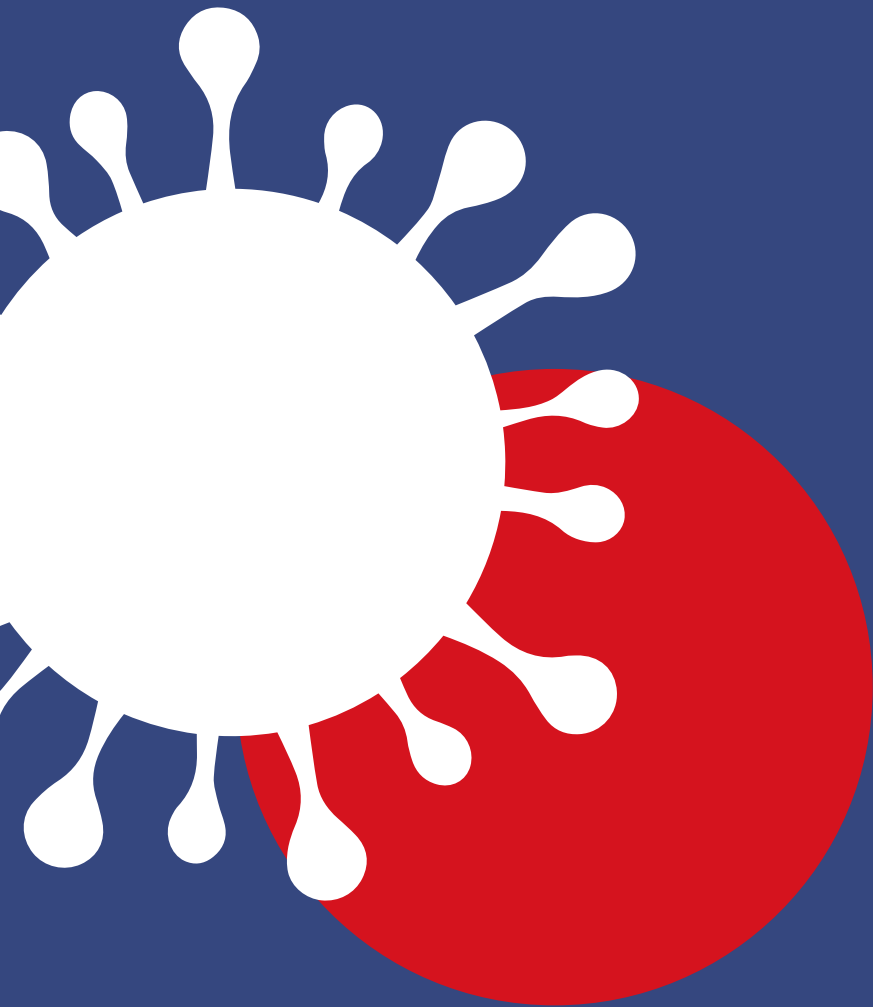


IMPACT OF COVID-19 on European Healthcare Clowning Organisations



REPORT

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Intro

COVID-19 has impacted societies at all levels, with health- and elderly care finding itself in the centre of the pandemic. The cultural sector also became one of the most affected areas as a consequence of the restriction measures.

In March 2020, the daily mission of healthcare clowns to bring joy and laughter to vulnerable groups in different sensitive settings, such as hospitals and elderly homes, was suddenly halted in facilities all across Europe. Working at the cross-section between culture and health, Healthcare Clowning Organisations were in the middle of those sectors most affected by COVID-19.

RED NOSES International and *efhco* conducted a survey in June 2020 to determine the initial impact of COVID-19 on European Healthcare Clowning Organisations and gather some insights into how organisations dealt with the unprecedented situation and disruption of their work. Starting with an assessment on the effects of the pandemic in Healthcare Clowning Organisations (organisational set-up, the artistic field, fund-raising, and communication), we proceeded to look at which learnings Healthcare Clowning Organisations plan to take on for the future.

The survey targeted European Healthcare Clowning Organisations since most European countries were in comparable situations during the months of March–June 2020.

All the organisations surveyed work with professionally-trained and fairly-remunerated clown artists. In total, the report represents the responses of **40 Healthcare Clowning Organisations operating in 21 countries.**



| | |
|----------------|----|
| Austria | AT |
| Belgium | BE |
| Czech Republic | CZ |
| Croatia | HR |
| Denmark | DK |
| Finland | FI |
| France | FR |
| Germany | DE |
| Ireland | IE |
| Italy | IT |
| Lithuania | LT |
| Netherlands | NL |
| Norway | NO |
| Poland | PL |
| Portugal | PT |
| Slovakia | SK |
| Slovenia | SI |
| Spain | ES |
| Sweden | SE |
| Switzerland | CH |
| United Kingdom | UK |

The European Healthcare Clowning sector was highly impacted by the pandemic. Nevertheless, most organisations managed to get through this first lockdown phase quite resiliently. For the time being, none of the 40 organisations that responded to the survey reported having to close down permanently, even though 23 of them had to cancel all their activities for some time and 36 had to cancel or postpone at least some activities.

With this in mind, we asked ourselves which factors contributed to this resilience of the Healthcare Clowning Sector in the aftermath of the first lockdown phase. Some answers are explored in the following report.



© Fondation Théodora

In a nutshell:

- 1** Healthcare Clowns work in a field where the need for the offered services was bigger than ever, so alternative offers were warmly welcomed.
- 2** Healthcare Clown Organisations are flexible and creative: 34 of the 40 responding organisations adapted and innovated their artistic work to meet the needs of the crisis.
- 3** Most Healthcare Clowning Organisations operate as Non-Profit Organisations, financing their operations from a mix of individual-, corporate- and, in a smaller part, institutional donors. Therefore, for most organisations a drop in the number of visitors/audiences did not cause a full collapse of their finances.

While the Healthcare Clowning Sector can congratulate itself on an initial skilful handling of the crisis, it must also not forget the important lessons learned during this unique experience. We hope this report will be a helpful tool to that end. Several recommendations that came out of the survey results are listed in the final section.

efhco
www.efhco.eu

efhco.
EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF
HEALTHCARE CLOWN ORGANIZATIONS

RED NOSES International
www.rednoses.eu

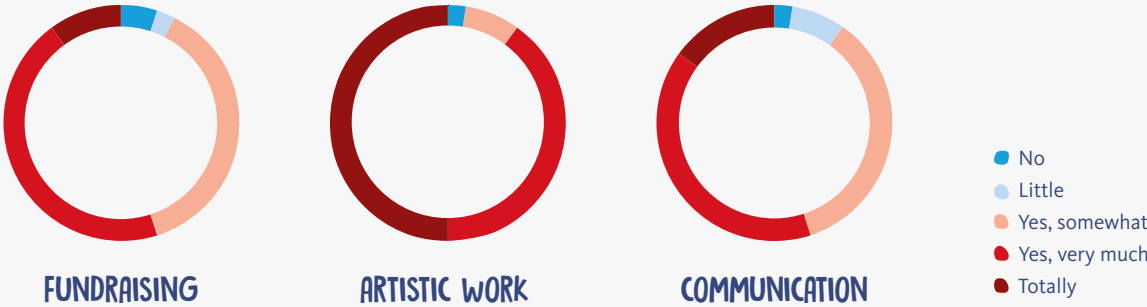

RED NOSES
CLOWNDOCTORS
International

General Impact OF COVID-19 on European Healthcare Clowning Organisations

COVID-19 seems to have impacted all organisations participating in the survey in at least one of their main fields of activity, be this artistic work¹, fundraising or communication. 93% of the organisations (37/40²) were affected in all three fields.

Has COVID-19 impacted the following areas of your organisation?

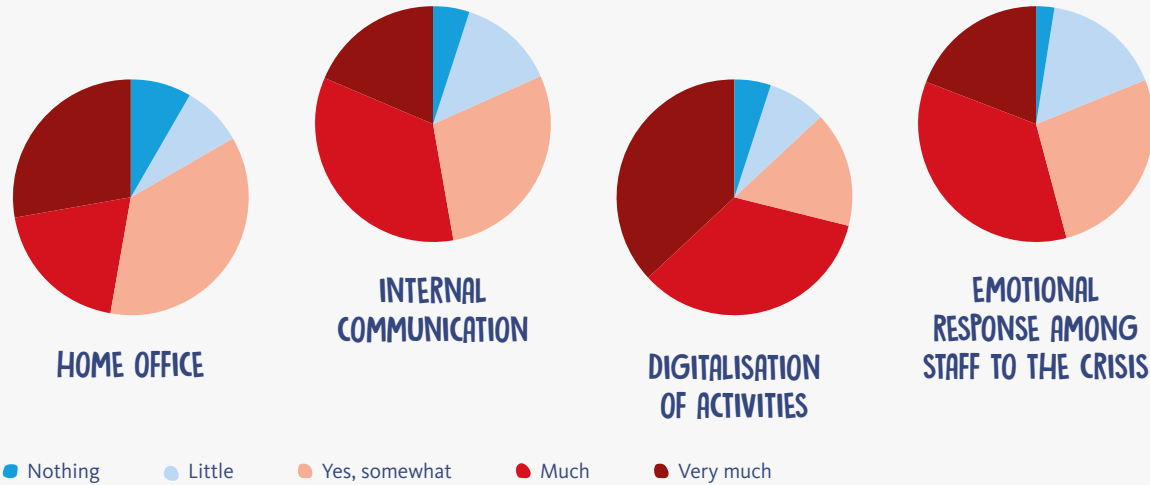
Fig. 1



When asked about other challenges, many mentioned “home office”, “internal communication”, “digitalisation of activities”, and “emotional response of staff to the crisis”. The **digitalisation of activities** was the most disruptive challenge, with 26 respondents being affected “much” and “very much” by this.

What other challenges have you encountered during the crisis, and how much have they affected your organisation?

Fig. 2



1: Artistic work in this context entails both the artist’s interventions for and with vulnerable groups as well as on-going education and training for clown artists.
 2: 37 out of 40 responding organisations.

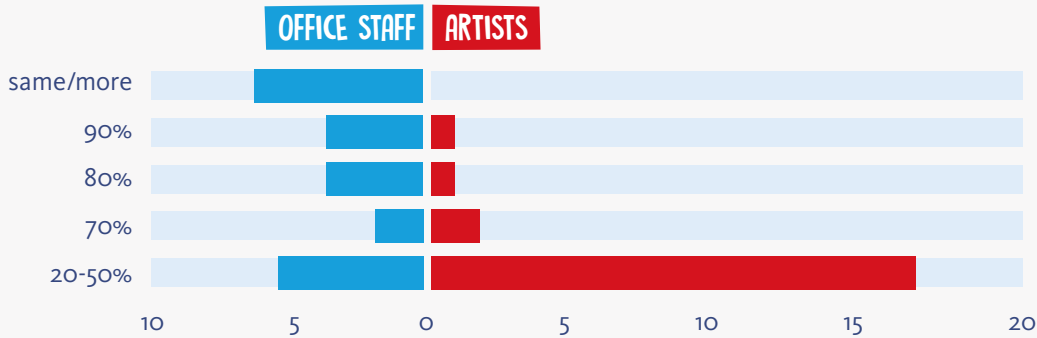
On Human Resources

When it comes to the impact of COVID-19 on human resources, experiences varied considerably. 38% (14/37 respondents) said that their staff has not been impacted in any way. A majority of the respondents (54%, 20/37) mentioned that their staff and/or artists have had their working hours or payslip reduced. Indeed, it was not possible for most organisations to provide artists with work to the usual extent – or at all – during the crisis. **46% of the organisations (17/37) mentioned that their artists had their time reduced considerably and worked only between 20% and 50% of their time.** Nonetheless, 95% (35/37) were able to keep all of their staff employed.

Interestingly, 7 organisations reported that their office staff worked the same amount of time, or even more. Cervený Nos (SK) explained: *“The office staff in cooperation with some artists were working on developing new programs and also prepared new fundraising and communication activities”.*

% of working time during COVID-19 as opposed to before (100%)*:

Fig. 3



* Within the 20 organisations that stated that their staff and/or artists had their working hours or payslip reduced.

In relation to other aspects of human resources, the surveyed organisations mentioned that COVID-19 put a **strain on the emotional wellbeing** of their staff. Organisations mentioned how difficult it was to keep the team together and produce new creative work given the stressful situation. At the same time, maintaining good internal communications and keeping good contact within the team working in home office also proved to be challenging. Hearts and Minds (UK) explained: *“It has been a difficult time managing the balance from those on the furlough scheme and ensuring that they still feel part of the charity and just as needed and valued and ensuring those that remain working do not reach burnout due to workload”.* One organisation (Sykehusklovnene, NO) mentioned that the crisis seemed to affect the emotional wellbeing of the freelance artists more than the office staff.

Crisis Management

73% of the surveyed organisations (29/40) did not have any Crisis Management Plan (CMP) in place. 28% (11/40) said they did have a CMP in place, but only 8% (3/40) said that their CMP was adequate to deal with the specific crisis at hand.

The helpful plans were those which guided organisations to, for example, hold weekly meetings with the crisis team and send out regular e-mail updates (Le Rire Médecin, FR); follow a clear decision-making path which helped move the activities online quickly and adjust the organisation's plans (Czerwone Noski, PL); and research new channels for fundraising activities (Comici Camici ETS, IT).



© Hôpiclowns

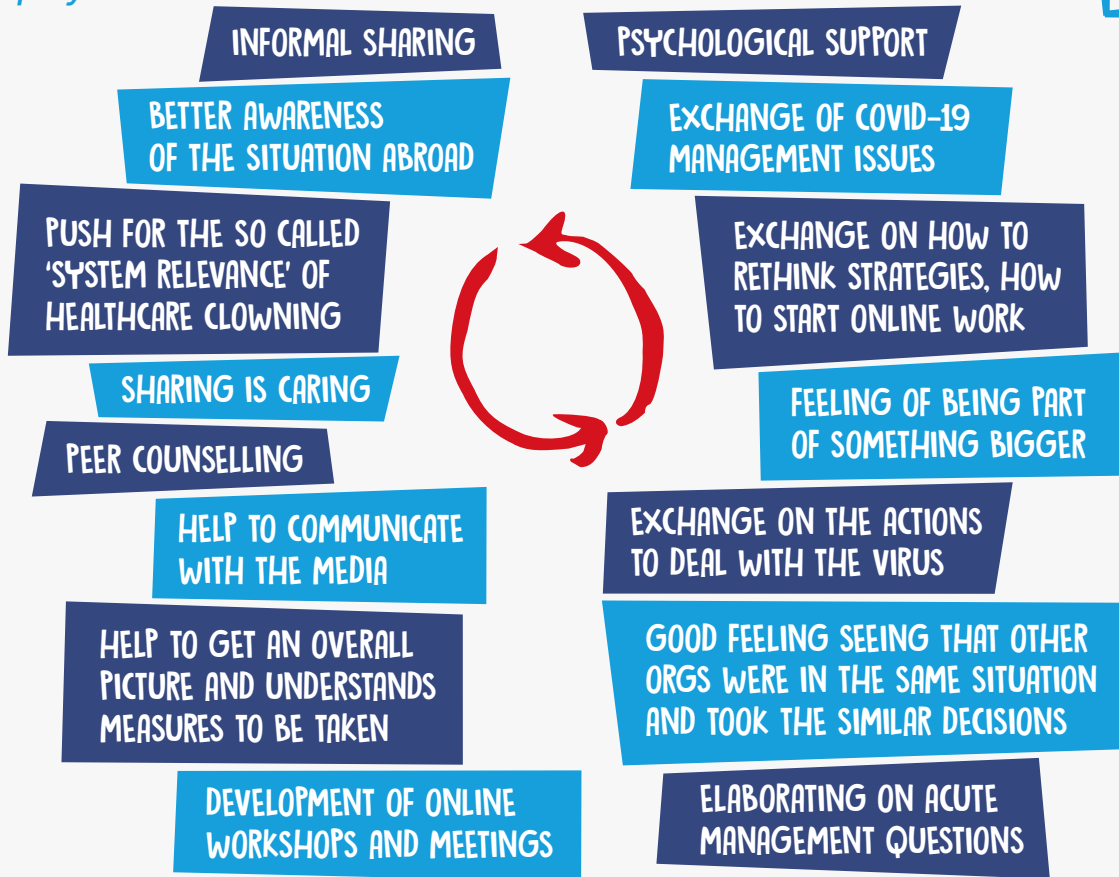
8 organisations mentioned they had a CMP but it was not useful/applicable to the situation. The most common reason was that the organisations had not foreseen a crisis of this magnitude, obliging them to cancel all visits for several weeks and months. Other organisations had a crisis management plan focused on communication processes, but not financial or operational issues.

National and International Cooperation

The exchange within national and international networks helped European Healthcare Clowning organisations to better deal with the situation (see figure below).

How has the exchange with other European Healthcare Clowning Organisations helped you?

Fig. 4



Exchanging experiences and ideas inspired the organisations to adapt to the new situation. It also made them feel part of something bigger and gave psychological support and moral comfort during the challenging times. Cliniclowns Belgium explained: *“It did help just to feel the confirmation of certain decisions we took, to see that other organisations were in the same situation”*. Similar feelings were shared by several other organisations.

65% of the organisations (26/40) were able to count on a **membership in a wider network** (networks such as efhc - the European Federation of Healthcare Clown Organisations, RED NOSES International, Dachverband Clowns in Medizin und Pflege Deutschland e.V., Federación Española de Payasos de Hospital, Theodora Foundation and others.) Some of the partnerships consist of informal networks or collaborations with other clown organisations, local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local authorities or artists from other artistic fields.

Most of these organisations (24/26) said they benefitted from the support of their respective networks; only two mentioned not having received any help from their network. The crisis situation also encouraged organisations to seek out further support from their peers. As a result of COVID-19, 7 organisations said that they had entered **new partnerships with networks**.

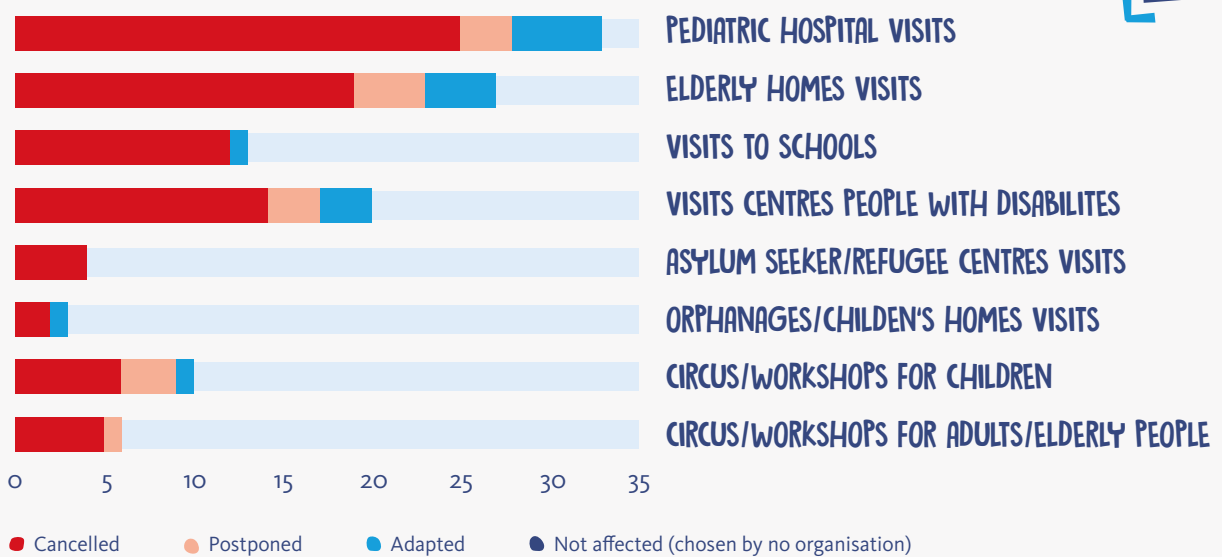
Artistic Programs

IMPACT ON ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES

97% of the organisations (38/39 respondents) agreed that their artistic activities have been affected by COVID-19. **92% (36/39) postponed or cancelled some of their activities**, while 59% (23/39) cancelled all their activities.

In which way have artistic activities been affected?

Fig. 5



This pandemic had a huge impact: there was no healthcare clown activity not being affected and most activities were cancelled for at least some time. Organisations also mentioned that the **capacity building** sphere was subjected to significant changes, including all kinds of artistic workshops and trainings as well as humour workshops for medical staff.

Activities in hospitals were particularly difficult to resume or adapt, as hospital staff were overburdened during the crisis. As Zdravotni klaun (CZ) stated, online visits were easier to organise in the elderly homes than in hospitals thanks to the support of the staff, who helped with the logistics.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTATION

Even with the challenging situation many of the surveyed organisations were quick to adapt, so that their audiences were not left without artistic interactions in a time of great need. 85% of the organisations (34/40) reported that they have either adapted or created new artistic formats to meet the challenges brought by COVID-19. Whereas 25% (10/40) adapted some of their activities following the lockdown measures; **78% of the surveyed organisations (31/40) created some brand-new artistic activities or addressed new target groups in response to the crisis.**

The main route taken and mentioned by 27 organisations was to transform in-person activities into virtual ones. Organisations started to produce and upload videos of live online clown performances. Different

videos were tailored for different age groups – from new-born babies to adults – and for different target groups – from patients to healthcare staff. Live virtual visits were either conducted through (1) social media platforms, for example live videos and TV shows on Facebook or YouTube, (2) online booking systems where parents could book clown visits for their children and access individual calls via zoom or similar communication apps, (3) with the help of medical staff, who facilitated the online calls between children and clowns.

Furthermore, many associations tried to keep their in-person activities running as far as possible. Amongst others, organisations in Germany, Hungary, Croatia, Finland, Czech Republic and Switzerland organised concerts and clown performances outside of the medical and social facilities. The performances took place in front of windows or balconies and in courtyards. Some organisations thought even more outside the box and arranged aerial clown performances. During these interventions, clowns were standing on top of hydraulic platforms (so-called hoists, usually used by window cleaners or on construction sites), to engage with target groups through the windows of hospitals or elderly homes.



© Operação Nariz Vermelho – YouTube TV show

© Zdravotní klaun



The elderly dancing and singing in their balconies during the concerts was particularly moving and enchanting – seeing the joy, energy and longing for being a part of the community and activities again.

Crveni Nosovi, HR

A more traditional idea, implemented in Czech Republic, Switzerland and Germany, was to initiate pen-friendships (sending letter and parcels) between the clown artists and their elderly acquaintances in care homes.



Every week we would wait together and look forward to more letters, photos and other pictures that were attached to the letters. The clients wrote back to the clowns whenever possible. And when the restrictions were eased and the clowns and their elderly friends met again, the reunions were very nice.

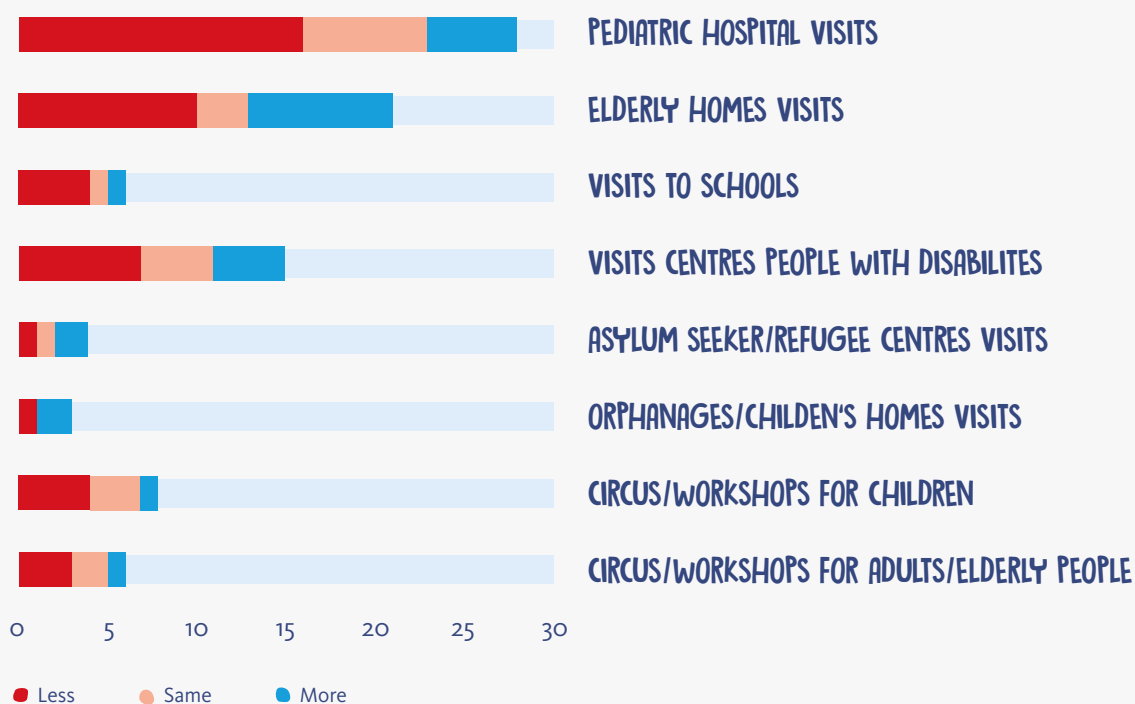
Zdravotni klaun, CZ

IMPACT OF ADAPTED ACTIVITIES ON BENEFICIARIES

It is applaudable that Healthcare Clown Organisations adapted their artistic programmes to COVID-19 regulations, but we also need to critically evaluate the impact of those visits as compared to traditional in-person visits. There are no reliable data or evaluation reports available yet to allow for a substantiated analysis. However, we asked the responding Healthcare Clowning Organisations what their impression was concerning the impact of the adapted intervention formats.

Level of impact of activities on the beneficiaries compared to pre-COVID-19:

Fig. 6



55% of the organisations (18/33) who compared their activities before and after the beginning of the crisis, believe **the impact of the adapted activities was much lower**. This mostly related to the obvious difference between connecting with somebody face-to-face and connecting to them via screen. The interaction between the clowns and the children is often more difficult, and the relationship created during the online visits is very different to that created in person.

On the other hand, 35% of the organisations (12/33) found that they had **more impact during the crisis**. One reason mentioned is that the audiences missed the clowns during the period in which all visits were suspended. The reunion after a period of separation created a higher impact than usual as everyone was particularly emotional, even though the clowns could not work in their traditional way.



This video call clownery opens a new way of getting to understand the child's visit in the hospital. The girl was able to show me her room directly from the point of view of her bed. After the call, I felt that I had seen the hospital room in a way I had not seen it before. It felt like I had the possibility to visit the way the girl herself sees her hospital room.

Sairaalaklovnit ry, FI

Another reason for increased impact is that **the pandemic increased people's need for joy.**

This may explain why, for many organisations, visits to elderly persons had a higher impact during COVID-19 than visits to children. Elderly people have a higher risk and fear related to COVID-19, and have been more likely to be completely isolated for their own protection. One organisation mentioned that the impact of their visits to elderly homes and to people with disabilities had a higher impact during COVID-19, because their need for contact to the outside was particularly high, as most of them were denied visits even from close family members during the pandemic.

© RAUDONOS NOSYS



Even behind a glass, even behind a mask, they recognized us. An old lady came up to the window in order to put her hand against the hand of a clown. It was just a moment of shared joy and sadness.

Compagnie du Bout du Nez, FR

Stiftung HUMOR HILFT HEILEN GmbH (DE) also explained that the impact of the adapted visits was due solely to the unique needs of the crisis:



Online and face-to-face activities cannot be compared. All activities carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic have a very high level of impact. Hospital patients and senior home residents are not able to have people come to visit, so the Healthcare Clown visits, even if they took place outside or via a digital medium, had a high level of impact on the beneficiaries. As soon as indoor visits are possible again, these alternatives will perhaps lose their value.

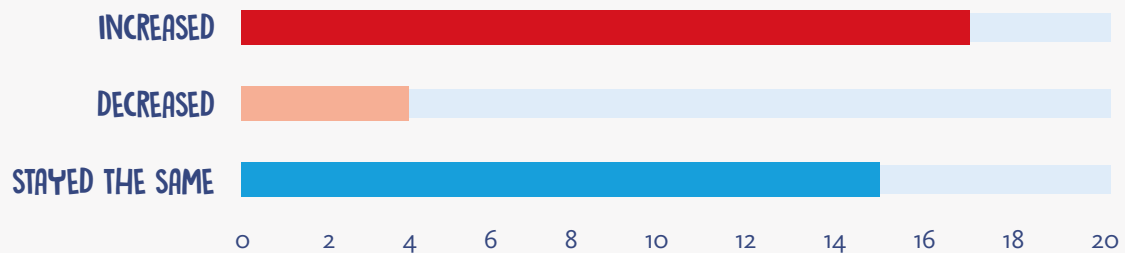
All in all, it seems that a majority of organisations felt that they cannot reach the same level of impact via online or outdoor visits than regular face-to-face interactions. However, the alternative activities came at a time when the need for human connections was very high, and so the clown interventions were indeed effective.

Communication

Despite the high saturation with news and information during the months of the lockdown in spring 2020, it seems that people didn't lose interest in the activities of Healthcare Clowing Organisations or often even showed more interest than before COVID-19. **47% (17/36) mentioned that the public interest towards their organisation increased** during COVID-19.

Did the public interest towards your organisation change during COVID-19?

Fig. 7



73% of the organisations (27/37) used the lockdown period to develop **new communication activities** to engage with their target groups, which are composed by a mix of beneficiaries, donors and others.³

The new activities often went hand in hand with the new online programmes developed on the artistic level, such as clown TV and video channels and stories. Another factor was the intensified use of social media channels. For example Sykehusklovnene (NO) related that a video tutorial produced by them on how to wash hands received more than 250.000 views on Facebook and social media.⁴

Seeing that the communication strategies of Healthcare Clowing Organisation were quite successful, it is worth looking at the broader context. Healthcare Clowing Organisations make it their mission to share positive messages; during the pandemic the need and interest of people for more joyful and positive messages may have increased.



© Sykehusklovnene

3: Developing new communication activities did not always lead to an increase in public attention. Among those 17 organisations who saw an increase in public attentions, some did not develop any new communication activity. And vice versa, some of the 27 who developed new communication activities, did not see an increase in public interest towards them – actually some of them saw a decrease, and for others, public interest stayed the same.

4: Available at the link: <https://youtu.be/jRIQGoQpDUc>

Financial Aspects

FUNDRAISING

A critical point for Healthcare Clowning Organisations in the face of the pandemic was the financial challenges. 92% (34/37) mentioned that COVID-19 impacted their fundraising activities. Interestingly, 43% (16/37) were impacted negatively, whereas another **46% (17/37) were impacted both positively and negatively**. One organisation was even able to come out of the first phase of the crisis with a wholly positive result.

The fundraising activities that were more positively impacted included direct mailing, telemarketing and online fundraising. Donations from corporate donors were the most negatively impacted fundraising activity, followed by fundraising with institutional donors and foundations. One organisation (Le Rire Médecin, FR) explained:



Many foundations and institutional donors have postponed their decisions; some corporate donors don't know if they can go on supporting us.

Moreover, in person face-to-face and door-to-door fundraising were cancelled in many organisations. Also here, creative activities were sought and sometimes found. For example Rote Nasen (AT) was able to keep their door-to-door fundraising activities running by using a red carpet. In front of each house, the fundraisers rolled out the carpet to mark that a safe distance will be kept between them and the potential future donors.

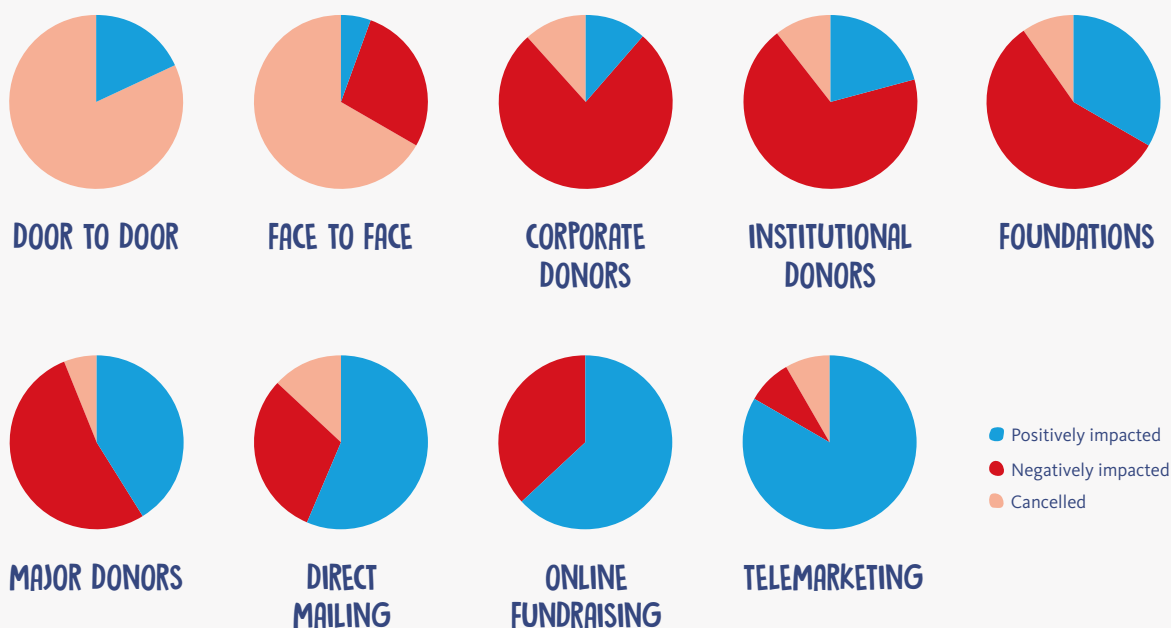
A few organisations faced difficulties in raising funds, as they are paid directly for their services by the facilities they visit – as the visits were cancelled, the facilities also stopped the payments.



© ROTE NASEN

How has COVID-19 impacted the various funding sources of your organisation?

Fig. 8

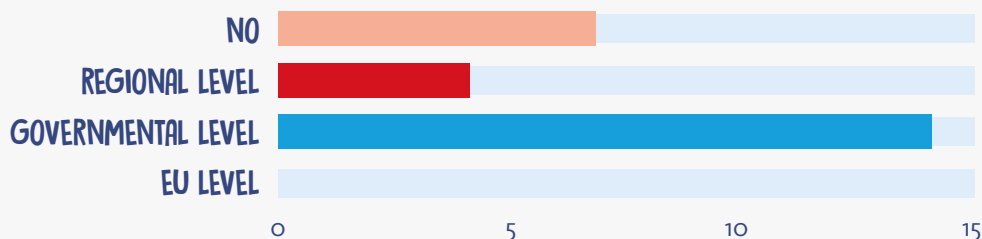


GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT

Some organisations received financial support from institutional entities since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Among 24 respondents to this question, 14 benefitted from support measures at the government level. Within 7 of these organisations, the clowns received funds directly as artists (self-employed), while the organisation per se did not receive any support.

Have you benefited from any support measures offered?

Fig. 9



Many organisations highlighted the need for financial support to the freelance artists (the clowns), who in some organisations were the ones hit the hardest financially. For example, Hearts and Minds (UK) explained:

“We are currently not delivering as much as we were previously which obviously has a massive impact on our freelance artists, all of whom will therefore be earning less income than before. This is a serious issue that needs to be looked at, as it will affect all of the arts.”

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At the same time, many organisations mentioned that there should be some sort of **financial support from the government and/or the European Union for NGOs** to secure basic operations. For example, Clownsvsite e.V. (DE) explains:

“For NGOs there was no support, although we have running costs for the office and staff. We are not able to finance these running costs out of the funds because the funds are connected to the visits in clinics.”

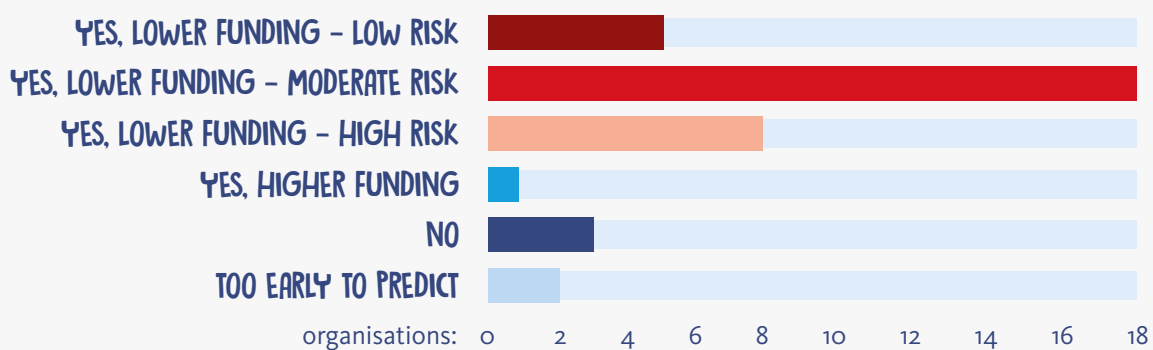
All in all, it can be said that compared to other institutions and organisations working in the cultural sector, many Healthcare Clowning Organisations got quite well through this first COVID-19 lockdown phase. The income of other places of cultural encounter, such as theatres or concert halls, is much more tied to their ability to deliver public performances in bigger settings. In comparison, Healthcare Clowning Organisations often still received financial support from their donors and were able to adapt their already usually very small-scale and personal performances to the digital area or the outside world. In terms of fundraising, individual donor fundraising continued working well or even improved during the crisis, the key successful tools being mailings and tele-marketing, whereas face-to-face fundraising activities were cancelled.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

As a result of the impact of COVID-19 on fundraising activities, **84% (31/37 respondents) expect a lower revenue in 2021**. 49% (18/37) assess the risk as moderate, while 22% (8/37) see a high risk of lower funding. 8% (3/37) expect a similar revenue in 2021, and one organisation expects higher funding in 2021. Two organisations mentioned that it is too early to predict.

Does your organisation expect a different revenue in 2021 due to COVID-19?

Fig. 10



Recommendations

It is clear from the survey responses that Healthcare Clowning Organisations have learned valuable lessons from the pandemic. Recommendations for five different stakeholders emerged from these learnings.

For Healthcare Clown artistic departments:

Since COVID-19 appeared in Europe, most organisations ventured into the world of online clowning visits and video produc-

tion. Although for most of the organisations this will not replace the personal interactions in the future, 18 organisations mentioned that they want to keep the new online formats to a certain extent. Six even mentioned wanting to expand the online visits (for example to connect to new and hard-to-reach target groups, such as children in palliative or other care at home or children in isolation rooms in the hospital). In general, there was a wish to keep the spirit of flexibility, innovation and creativity in the development of new formats, as another 7 organisations noted. As such, Operação Nariz Vermelho (PT) mentioned that they want to **“keep exploring new ways of doing things and do several pilots in the different areas”**.

**BUILD ON THE ARTISTIC
INNOVATIONS OF THE CRISIS**

For Healthcare Clown fundraising departments:

**DIVERSIFY FUNDRAISING
METHODS, WITH A FOCUS
ON ONLINE FUNDRAISING**

The unstable and unpredictable financial situation and the loyal support seen from many individual donors increased the wish to invest more in the care of the online fundraising community and communication with the latter via social media platforms. Additionally, a better mix of fundraising methods was noted by some as a good way to create a more sustainable income base.

For Healthcare Clown management:

Organisations have realised that they must improve communication lines with the artists working for the organisations and keep creating possibilities for staff to work effectively from home. Seven organisations mentioned that the pandemic showed that they need to be better prepared for crisis situations by working on suitable Crisis Management Plans. Or as Le Rire Médecin (FR) put it: **“Hope for the best, prepare for the worst”**. In particular, the survey results imply that such plans should include measures that care for the clown team in times of crisis.

**STRENGTHEN
ORGANISATIONAL
STRUCTURES
TO BE PREPARED
FOR FUTURE CRISES**

For governments and the EU:

The Healthcare Clowning sector in Europe has shown resilience during the COVID-19 crisis by adapting to the new situation in creative ways and being able to count on the support of their donors. Nevertheless, it is not a given that the situation will continue like this – the success of fundraising efforts will depend on hard-to-predict factors such as the spread of the virus in the winter season, as well as the development of a functioning and widely available vaccine. In order for Healthcare Clowning Organisations in Europe to get through the crisis in the long term, measures at the governmental (national- and EU) levels will be needed to support freelance artists as well as cultural and non-profit organisations who take on the indispensable task of offering arts for health and wellbeing.

**ENSURE THAT
HEALTHCARE CLOWNS
CAN PROVIDE THEIR
ESSENTIAL SERVICES
TO VULNERABLE
POPULATIONS**

Healthcare Clowning is needed more than ever during a crisis that affects the medical and social care system in an unprecedented way. The question should not only be how the status quo can be upheld, but also how services of Healthcare Clowning Organisations can be expanded to reach even more people in need of joy.

For leaders and decision makers:

**EVALUATE THE STATUS
OF HEALTHCARE CLOWNS
WITHIN THE HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM**

Finally, the current crisis revealed that there is the need to think about the position of Healthcare Clowning in the health and social care system – which was mentioned by 11 organisations in the survey as a priority in the coming months and years. There were and are no clear guidelines as to when services have to be cancelled, when they can be taken up again and what alternative ways of intervention can be implemented. These questions had to be clarified with each hospital and social care facility individually. This situation brought a lot of uncertainty and stress for the Healthcare Clowning Organisations, artists, the hospitals and beneficiaries. Finding in mid-term more regularised frameworks for the healthcare clowning visits could save time and effort in moments of crisis.

Regulations should be drafted that encourage everybody to think not only of the physical, but also mental health of patients and other vulnerable groups. The concerns of Healthcare Clowning Organisations are always with those in need of joy. Therefore, it is clear that the physical safety of vulnerable groups is of utmost priority at all times. Nevertheless, the hope is that in similar situations, the emotional wellbeing as well as the access to social and cultural rights will be given the attention they deserve.

We thank all the organisations
participating in the survey:



| | |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------|
| Aoife's Clown Doctors Ireland | Ireland |
| Asociación Payasospital | Spain |
| Bremer Klinikclowns e.V. | Germany |
| ČERVENÝ NOS Clowndoctors | Slovakia |
| Clinicclowns Belgium | Belgium |
| ClownClubben | Sweden |
| Clownprojekt e.V. | Germany |
| Clownronden | Sweden |
| Clowns & Clowns e.V. | Germany |
| Clowns im Dienst e.V. | Germany |
| Clownsvisite e.V. | Germany |
| Comici Camici ETS | Italy |
| Compagnie du Bout du Nez | France |
| CZERWONE NOSKI Kłown w Szpitalu | Poland |
| Danskehospitalsklovne | Denmark |
| Demiclowns vzw | Belgium |
| Društvo RDEČI NOSKI | Slovenia |
| Fondation Théodora | Switzerland |
| Fondazione Theodora Onlus | Italy |
| Hearts and Minds | United Kingdom |
| Hôpiclowns | Switzerland |
| KlinikClowns Bayern e.V. | Germany |
| Le Rire Médecin | France |
| Les clowns à l'hôpital de Fables Rondes | Belgium |
| Mediclowns | Netherlands |
| Operação Nariz Vermelho | Portugal |
| Palhaços d'Opital | Portugal |
| RAUDONOS NOSYS Gydytojai klounai | Lithuania |
| ravensburger clowns e.v. | Germany |
| CRVENI NOSOVI | Croatia |
| ROTE NASEN Clowndoctors | Austria |
| ROTE NASEN Deutschland e.V. | Germany |
| Sairaalaklovnit ry | Finland |
| Simsalabim Productions | France |
| Soccorso Clown | Italy |
| SONRISA MÉDICA | Spain |
| Stichting CliniClowns Nederland | Netherlands |
| Stiftung HUMOR HILFT HEILEN GmbH | Germany |
| Sykehusklovnene | Norway |
| ZDRAVOTNÍ KLAUN, o.p.s. | Czech Republic |



This survey was conducted by RED NOSES International (www.rednoses.eu) and efhco, the European Federation of Healthcare Clowning Organisations (www.efhco.eu).

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