

The background is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are white line-art drawings of a crowd of people. Some figures have their arms raised, and some are wearing hats. In the lower right quadrant, there are several solid red circles of varying sizes, some of which appear to be part of the crowd's attire or accessories.

# **LIFE STORIES, WORKERS' RIGHTS, AND fem-Minism**

**A PUBLICATION  
BY THE RESEARCH  
Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March**

# LIFE STORIES AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL RESISTANCE

Stories shape us. They talk about life, they point to social inequalities. We can connect with each other through stories; stories help us maintain the community. At the Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March, however, we found that life stories of individuals in need can be an important means of social rebellion. We use them in our campaigns, we use them to put pressure on decision-makers, and we use them as an important part of our fight for a different society.

In this publication, we will present two examples of life storytelling that we employed at the Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March last year. The first project is a campaign for workers' rights, which we carried out at the Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March before the epidemic; while the second is a campaign to help self-employed parents during the coronavirus epidemic.

In Slovenia, humorous profiles have appeared on the social network Instagram, reporting on current issues and hardships among young people.

Profil Delozlom has been publishing testimonies of employees for more than a year, especially students who face impossible conditions, exploitation, harassment and employers who often avoid paying regular fees in absurd ways. Among the most representative stories collected in the minimalist form of text messages is for example the testimony of a worker whose employer requires him to postpone a medical examination because of work, or the story of a worker who applied for a salary increase after one year. Instead of being promoted, she was immediately fired. In a few months, more than 280 such records were published on Delozlom. Among them, most are records and correspondence between employer and em-

ployee. Numerous job vacancies with questionable requirements from employers have also been published.

The Instagram profile, which was born as a platform for venting about poor labor market conditions, has grown into a movement.

At the Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March, we recognized the specificity of a given historical moment: people began to speak publicly about distress in the workplace. They talked about the exploitation of employers and began to draw attention to the injustices that were happening to them. However, we noticed that there was no awareness of the given problems among them. They perceived them as problems for which they were responsible themselves, blaming the capricious behavior of their employer for discomfort at work.

We decided to get in touch with them. We arranged a press conference and launched a petition calling for changes in the field of labor law. Among other things, we demanded: strengthening of the labor inspection staff and restructuring of hidden employment relationships into regular ones, determining the maximum share of student work in companies, a mandatory 12-hour rest between consecutive working days for student work, allowance for night and Sunday student work and banning of free internships. Our efforts for workers' justice continue: but they have changed dramatically due to the outbreak of the epidemic and the new right-wing government. The life stories of individuals have helped us raise awareness of the importance of workers' rights.

The second campaign took place during the coronavirus epidemic. The testimonials you will read are stories of self-employed parents who were left without everything during the epidemic. With the help of these testimonials, we convinced the authorities to provide them with emergency assistance funds.

Long live stories! Long live the rebellion!

## **Delozlom and the Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March rally together in defense of workers' rights**

*Delozlom* is an Instagram profile that has been collecting testimonials from students and workers facing atrocious working conditions, exploitation, harassment, low wages and irregular payments, the exploitation of their employment contracts, mobbing and other rights violations since November 2019. The founders of the profile have been collecting anonymized portions of conversations between workers and their employers. These conversations highlight a myriad of various experiences of workers, some bringing to light serious violations. The *Delozlom* profile was initially created to "whine"; however, through its cooperation with Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March (*Inštitut 8. Marec*) it has since become a movement. It has received numerous testimonies by students working shifts longer than eight hours with no proper breaks; many employers do not comply with the mandatory 12-hour rest period between two consecutive days/shifts; a considerable amount of submissions shows late payments are widespread. The following example showcases the equally common practice of getting student workers to do unpaid internships:

*Worker: Hello, the Student Work Agency lists that I worked for only 7 hours, when in reality I worked for 14.5 hours. 7.5 hours are not listed despite me having worked. I expect you to pay me for the missing hours within a week. Kind reg(deleted).*

*Boss: You forgot the internship.*

*Boss: To settle this, you can come collect EUR 20 on Monday.*

*Boss: If you want.*

*Worker: You owe me for 7.5 hours of work which is €33.75. I only intend on collecting the exact amount. Regards*

The collected testimonials have proven that workers' rights in Slovenia are systematically infringed upon, as well as that workplace exploitation is highly normalized. Together with the Institute, *Delozlom* has launched a

petition “DELOZLOM AND THE INSTITUTE 8<sup>th</sup> MARCH: AFTER WHINING, COMES REVOLT: AGAINST WORKPLACE EXPLOITATION”. It demanded the immediate implementation of measures that would ensure rights that, so far, only exist on paper, as well as structural changes. The demands of the petition were:

1. **Adding systematic education on workers’ rights to the school curriculum** – they believe that to fight for one’s rights, one must first know what they are. “What struck us while reading these stories was that workers don’t know their rights. During a recent conversation with high schoolers we learned most of them do not know what holiday pay is, for example,” said Institute member Mojca Lukan. As the testimonies submitted to the *Delozlom* page have proven, not being familiar with their rights makes young people an easy target for exploitative employers;
2. **a mandatory rest period of 12 hours between two consecutive workdays/shifts for student workers (Article 155 of the ZDR-1 Law on the Statute of Workers);**
3. **a compensation for night and Sunday work for student workers;**
4. **a ban on unpaid internships;**
5. **setting a maximum share of student work in companies, thereby increasing full-time employment** – in Slovenia certain companies employ mostly students;
6. **all employers that are late in paying the self-employed and students should cease to be eligible for state subsidies and doing business with the public sector;**
7. **the strengthening of the labor inspection’s human resources and the restructuring of hidden employment relationships into full-time employment** – too often contracts that do not provide the neces-

sary social and economic security for workers are exploited; full-time employment is thus often supplanted by precarious forms of employment.

When speaking about the petition, the editors of the *Delozlom* Instagram profile mentioned that the previous two months had shown “that these are not isolated cases but indicators of a systematic and almost normalized exploitation of the workforce. Exchanges between workers and employees are proof of this, as are certain comments under posts in which employers shamelessly admit that they are for example unwilling to pay interns; that candidates should be grateful for having work at all, even if that work is extremely underpaid; that they expect them to be available 24/7; and they also sometimes go as far as to admit that they wish to only hire people of certain genders or that lead a certain type lifestyle.” The following example of gender discrimination was also published on the profile:

*Employer: I wanted to let you know that we have opted not to pursue our professional cooperation. I wish you all the best of luck in finding employment. :)*

*You are a very likeable and kind young lady and I thank you for taking an interest in our company; however, for this position we had in mind somebody that won’t “run off” :) on maternity leave in two years’ time.*

Around the time that *Delozlom* and Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March published their petition the existence of a Facebook group called “Whose shift is it?” (*Kira Dela na Smeni?*) was revealed, causing public outrage. “The purpose of the group was for members to post stealthily taken photographs of waitresses that other would then grade based on their appearance,” explained Nika Kovač. The group had a total of over 4,500 members and boasted an extremely sexist self-description. Its activity of photographing waitresses without their consent and posting the photos online violated their rights; they were categorized as being either hot or not, as well as having their outward appearance commented upon in a sexist manner.

Unfortunately, violations of women’s and workers’ rights too often find common ground. “Women are asked all manners of things during job

interviews, ranging from whether they plan on having a family to certain job adverts explicitly requesting women to work as, for example, waitresses. The jobs in question are most often precarious and hinge on female objectification. At the same time statistical data shows that among self-employed women tend to be more affected by poverty. Gender thus has an important bearing on employment possibilities, as well as the subsequent structuring of said employment,” Kovač is certain. In addition, a substantial percentage of sexual harassment cases take place in the workplace as evidenced by #jztudi, the Slovenian take on #metoo launched by the Institute. From a total of 160 testimonials, over 15% describe instances of sexual harassment and violence that occurred in the workplace, further highlighting that violence and harassment are chiefly perpetrated by individuals holding positions of power.

The testimonies collected by the Instagram profile and analyzed with the help of Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March indicate an increase in precarious work within our society. The petition was an attempt to exert pressure on the competent authorities to give power back to the workers and a proposal of concrete solutions to the issue at hand. When asked whether workplace conditions for women have changed in the past ten years, the director of the Institute replied, “With the increase of precarious employment and self-employment, violations of workers’ rights have increased. We often fall into the trap of saying that Slovenia has a great maternity leave system. However, we tend to forget what happens to women that work in precarious, part-time forms of employment.” Precarious work leaves workers without basic job security and social rights, putting them in an incredibly insecure position. This includes student jobs, service contracts, royalty-bearing contracts and personal supplementary work. Self-employed are charged with ensuring their own safety, especially in difficult situations. This means that their employer does not pay contributions to their pension insurance scheme, health insurance and other benefits; they are obligated to cover these themselves, no matter how much of a profit they turn, if any. That is the main reason why in Slovenia so many of them barely exceed the poverty line.

Until 1 May 2020 the petition was signed by 1,317 people. *Delozlom* and Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March used this petition as a way of bringing to light the violations and issues faced by individuals in the labor market. One of the principal problems is also that workers are most often unaware of their own rights, something that leads to increasing precarization of the work environment. The petition is *Delozlom* and the Institute’s bid to demand that these rights be observed and claim that “Rights are meaningless if they are not put into practice. This must change!”



## Delozlom Instagram Profile Workers' Rights Stories

1

My employer asked me to resign. He plans to hire me from another company for a fixed term of 14 days, after which I would have to sign in at the job center. :( I refused and consequently still have not received my paycheck. What am I supposed to do now?

2

Our boss told us he would not be paying us a crisis compensation. "Until the labor inspection comes, I don't plan on obeying the law." Of course, the state covered our contributions; and, of course, he cut everybody's pay beforehand.

Can he get in trouble with the labor inspection because of this?

No.

3

**Boss:** Look, just tell me if you want to work. :)

**Worker:** I want to work.

**Boss:** You can't.

4

How about the warehouse of the *Pikapolonica* toy manufacturing company. They divided work into two shifts separated by a 30-minute interval so that, to quote their chairman, if one group gets sick, the other can still come in. If there's one thing we need during an epidemic, it's children's toys.

5

I was interviewed for a student job as a receptionist. The guy gave me their conditions: a 180-hour internship, after which they would ask me 10 questions; if I answered them correctly, the internship would be paid, if not, we would part ways. The questions would be like, What does room No. 14 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor look like, and, How many stories does the hotel have? If I answered seven correctly, I would get my money, if not, bye.

6

Because the sons of bitches won't close. I have to come in to work be-

cause I'm expendable. Meanwhile the bosses are safely tucked away at home.

7

Spar employees are not allowed to wear protective masks. If they come in with a mask, they are forced to remove it.

8

Do you know the feeling when almost everything has been closed for two weeks now but only your bosses claim that in a 1,000-person collective there is not one person infected with coronavirus (despite nobody having been tested), and that, should somebody get infected, the warehouse will close for two days to get everything disinfected and then we'll come in again.

9

We continue to work on location. My boss comes up to me and says, If you ask me, I've already got it. My old man has been home with a fever for a week. I've been coughing all weekend. I'm just waiting for the fever to hit. Only 10% will die anyway, none of us are at risk.

10

My partner works in a factory and was informed today how things were going to proceed... They are going to work until they run out of work or until everybody gets sick. Awesome.

11

When I declined the offer to walk for an hour and a half to my workplace that has been closed by decree to perform the unessential task of managing the archives, my boss pointedly said, "Oh, I can see you're of no use to me."

12

My mom works at a factory that manufactures, trims and shapes ferrous castings. It's very difficult work, especially for women. Then the corona situation hit Slovenia; the company could have at least shut its doors for a week. Not to mention some workers were taken away from work last week because they were suspected of being infected. It gets worse: they have to work this Saturday too, all three shifts. Nobody has mentioned stopping production in any way due to the



virus – they are putting all their workers' lives at risk. Some office workers have decided to work from home. Once again, workers are the most expendable. RIP Slovenia.

## 13

The following is a statement from an employee in the Odelo manufacturing plant:

Production has not stopped; during a meeting, workers were asked to look after themselves and to remain healthy so they could continue working. The mayor had asked the chairman to halt production, to which the latter replied that would mean a loss of five million euros. Three employees' children have tested positive for the coronavirus; however, their parents are still coming to work instead of being quarantined at home. The logistics officer tested positive, a worker that showed signs of infection has stayed home, yet everybody who was in contact with her is still forced to come in to work. The company has got 1,800 employees.

Is money really worth more than people's lives?

## 14

[3 NEW FREE WEBINARS]

Because we would like to help corporations, employees and the self-employed combat this situation, we have prepared 3 NEW AND FREE webinars for you.

They will take place on 3/24/20.

They will mainly focus on answering any questions you might have pertaining to the title of each of the webinars:

1. Webinar: Coronavirus – Individual worker redundancies (for businesses) – 3/24 at 9 am
2. Webinar: Coronavirus – Collective worker redundancies (for businesses) – 3/24 at 10 am

## 15

I feel like I have something to add to the collective pile of shit that has been slowly, peristaltically churning at the heart of the proletariat. Of the roughly 100 employees in our company around 20% are over fifty years old. Two are over sixty. Management has ordained that in

the following week we are to work in three shifts. They act as though they are immune. Meanwhile we are cannon fodder...

## 16

Today my manager told me that all I have to do anyway is get in my car and drive to the office. There is disinfectant at the entrance, and I'm only in contact with three people at the office, all of whom are healthy. That's it. Why would I even want to work from home?

## 17

*Friend 1:* Any talk of closing?

*Friend 2:* No. No use hoping. They're working us even harder. No thoughts of closing.

*Friend 1:* Just asking.

*Friend 2:* Full speed ahead.

*Friend 1:* Hahahhh.

*Friend 2:* We'll go down one by one. You get over it and come back. If you die, you die for the good of the company.

*Friend 1:* Somebody else takes your place.

## 18

International company, workers in offices and in production. A total mess. No protection, only one disinfectant at the entrance. At the coffee machines people are literally piled on top of the other. Disgusting. You tell your boss you would like to take a leave of absence because you have two at-risk family members at home, and he coldly replies, "Yeah, me too, so what?" Allegedly, there aren't enough workers. To deescalate the situation, he later says I can go on leave next week. Today I find out that's not possible either. When I say, okay, then I'll go on sick leave, he says, "Go ahead, if they'll even approve it." When you want to protect yourself – with a mask, gloves, etc. – he loses it and says to take them off as not to scare everybody; because when the first person gets infected the company will have to shut down. In short, I'm out of there as soon as possible, it's awful.

19

*Friend 1:* I'm so anxious every time I go to bed.

*Friend 2:* The shit is going to hit the fan any minute... My mom's boss is at home. He came to work the other day and they asked him why others weren't allowed to go home. He said, We're all going to get sick anyway. And went back home.

*Friend 1:* WTF?! What a creep.

20

Check this out. My mom ISN'T ALLOWED to go to work. She HAS GOT to work from home. But... he's going to record it as if she were on administrative leave.

21

My parents work as self-employed and have been left without work. I'm a student on a state scholarship that, now that my parents are both out of work, will not be enough to cover my monthly rent in Ljubljana and my monthly food shop. Those responsible increase their wages instead of helping the

weakest survive. Will the virus be what kills us, or will it be hunger?

22

*Friend 1:* I really hope they give us some kind of subsidy because this is fucked up...

*Friend 2:* Yeah, but it's not a lot. Think positive or something.

*Friend 1:* I only wish I had about €70 to pay my phone bill and to have something left over... Instead of having literally nothing. What I'm most worried about is that there's an economic crisis coming after this. Who knows when they'll go back to hiring students?

*Friend 2:* Of course they will, they're always "the cheapest". You didn't get fired, did you? It's just until there's no more work.

*Friend 1:* Yes, but we're going down now because of the virus and we still have to hit rock bottom (until May-ish). Then the economic crisis is going to hit and that will last for at least six months.

23

Today I learned my boss was angry at me because I had spent two weeks in self-isolation and because I hadn't worked during this time. I work in a warehouse. How could I have actively worked in a warehouse from self-isolation?

24

Day 12 of the civilizational collapse: We ordered takeout. I asked the delivery man how things were going and if they were busy. He said it was insane, that they had never worked so much since the student workforce had been taken away.

25

150 euros, yeah, hahahaha, with a 100% loss of income. Self-employed get 700 and don't have to pay their contributions, whereas students are supposed to cover 500 euros worth of rent, 150-euro food expenses and 100-euro expenses with 150 euros. By selling one of their kidneys, of course.

26

My boss told me I would work until I got sick. I told him that I guess I'd work until the end then, since I seem to have no luck in life.

27

Our roommates and I called our landlady today to ask her if we could arrange for her to reduce our rent during the coronavirus. All four of us are students, one is from Turkey (doing an ERASMUS exchange); the rest of us have all lost our student jobs and consequently all our income. Our parents have found themselves in a similar situation and are (in spite of wanting to) unable to finance us. Our landlady said she had been expecting our call, that she had called up a few of her friends and asked them about it... And that her answer was (a long, dramatic pause like in Who Wants to be a Millionaire) no. Her argument was, "We each have to fight our own battles."

28

Due to the coronavirus the acting principal will not grade our performance because we were on mater-



nity leave and they are unfamiliar with our work. That consequently prohibits us from advancing to a higher pay grade.

## 29

I called my landlord and asked him if he could at least slightly lower my rent. His answer: Look, are you in the apartment? Then you have got to pay, I don't care about the rest. Have a good one. :)

## 30

My boss said she'd pay us when she got some money from the state, but nobody knows when that is going to happen.

## 31

*Friend 1:* I asked them if they could raise my fees after one year, because I was struggling to make ends meet.

*Friend 2:* And?

*Friend 1:* Nothing, they fired me.

## 32

What the f\*\*\*, we have money for teambuilding and picnics, but when I ask them for paid overtime, they use "bad business results" as an excuse.

## 33

*Friend 1:* I made up for a couple of months' sleep

*Friend 2:* Level of overworked: post-op feels like a nap

*Friend 3:* Hahaha

## 34

You know that feeling when you have to edit the personal blog of your boss? Is this normal? It's not, is it?

## 35

Tomorrow I was supposed to sign the contract but she said she didn't manage to prepare it. And that she will pay me in cash for November. I don't want to hear another 50-year-old talking about how great we are doing and how lazy we are and how we would find a job if only we tried a bit.

## 36

I asked her if I can leave work early to pick up my child in the kindergarten. And she responded "Of course you can leave early every day at 2 PM if you finish your work by then." But you know the thing is, there is enough work till holidays and it still wouldn't be done because we lack at least 10 extra workers.

## 37

They were late with paying me for a week and then the director cries about how bad she feels because she forgot it for the third time. Seriously, she was about to cry. But she still didn't pay for the next two days.

## 38

Have you ever heard of a grocery worker burning out and resigning? Not really, huh. That's a term that was made up by PR agencies for the ones employed in the PR agencies. So that they can go to the Maldives for three months. The rest just work until they get sick and die.

## 39

*Friend 1:* Yep, that's it, that's life now. Tomorrow and until we die. Haha :)

*Friend 2:* And then I tell him "Can I be free on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of February?" and the boss says "I don't know yet."

## 40

*Friend 1:* When are you coming home?

*Friend 2:* I don't know. I think I'll be here till 9 today. I'm about to lose it. I have to be here the whole day tomorrow as well. And on Saturday. I can just cry.

## 41

We have to pay our own New Year's party at work – 30 euros each. What a disaster.

## 42

*Friend 1:* When it's crowded I'm expected to be there and work. The overtime is not paid and I can't use it in any way.

*Friend 2:* How come not? Protest. How can they even exist? They should employ another person.

*Friend 1:* They say it's the conditions in the architecture.

## 43

*Boss:* Good morning, write when you can work next week. I need you all for the weekend. :)

*Worker:* Hello! I can only work on Saturday afternoon/evening, because I have to be back in Ljubljana on Sunday afternoon already.

*Boss:* Good day, can you work next Saturday from 7 AM to 6 PM or 7 PM?

## 44

*Boss:* Hello. Can you work for the whole day on 28.7.?

*Worker:* Hello, I can only work from 10 AM to 3 PM, I can't work after that.

*Boss:* Ok, noted. 28.7. from 10 AM to 9 PM.

## 45

*F\*\*\*:* I have bronchitis and I'm on sick leave. But I have to come to work to Ljubljana on Friday. Because no one can replace me. You know, Saint Nicolas and stuff.

## 46

*Worker:* Hello, I won't be coming in today and tomorrow because I fell ill.

*Boss:* Are you kidding me??

*Worker:* I'm afraid I am not.

*Boss:* You got sick one hour before work? Good job!

## 47

*Worker:* I am very sorry but I won't be coming today because my head has been hurting for the past two days.

*Boss:* Are you f\*\*\*\*\* with me? How am I supposed to get someone at this hour? Come to work and you'll stay at home the rest of the days. My head hurts often as well but I still have to work despite that.

*Worker:* Well I can't work today, really.

*Boss:* You could have told me in the morning, not one hour before work. You don't have to come back ever again.

## 48

So a company offers me work – writing articles. When I ask them about the payment they tell me that the prices aren't set yet, so I set them myself. I send them the articles, everything is good, but of course I don't get paid for another two months. When I remind them to pay me, they respond that there was bad communication between us and that their tariff is set in advance and that they pay 10 euros for an article. This means I worked for 2 euros an hour, and the tariff also says that the due for payment is 10 years. #welcometoslovenia #Ionlyworkforforeigncompanies-fromnowon

## 49

*Worker:* Hello, I still haven't received the missing part of my paycheck from October.

*Boss:* Please write to me next week.

*Worker:* I can do that, but it's a bit funny that I have to remind you for the third time already. So I kindly ask you to take care of that. Thank you :)

*Boss:* I wish you were as meticulous with work :)

## 50

*Worker:* Hey, what's up with the payment?

*Boss:* I just got to the phone ... I'm working ... I won't be able to help you today ... unfortunately ... too many duties.

*Worker:* OK, I understand. How about tomorrow?

*Worker, one day later:* This evening my landlord is picking up rent ... is the payment coming anytime soon?

## 51

Got my paycheck and just paid 400 euros of self-employment fees and various insurances ... I haven't yet reached the rent and my bills. At least I paid my telephone bill so they won't turn it off this month.

52

*Potential employer:* I am notifying you that we did not decide to work with you in the future. We wish you a successful job search in the future and good luck with your choices. :) You are a very cute and nice girl and we thank you for your interest, however, for this job we need a person who won't "run away" to some maternity leave in two years. :)

53

*Friend 1:* Look, I won't manage today. They just told me that I have to stay at work for the whole day. They're f\*\*\*\*\* up.

*Friend 2:* Whooot? How come? Till when?

*Friend 1:* I am so angry, they just told me this now ... I don't know they just told me that I have to work in the afternoon as well.

*Friend 2:* That's really bad.

54

Yesterday I was talking to my boss about the hourly rate and I tell him that according to the law, we are

supposed to get a 150% compensation to the hourly rate if we are working on a holiday (that is supposed to be work free) and the guy tells me that he could also pay his workers a minimum wage, BUT HE DOES NOT (bravo, best boss ever) and that is why he won't be paying the compensation. Can you imagine that? I feel like throwing up.

55

After three months you tell your boss to pay you and she says that the paycheck will be on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Comes 15<sup>th</sup> and she says that she pays the students on the 18<sup>th</sup>. You call her on the 18<sup>th</sup> and she is just about to send the money to the student service and tells me that they pay students on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Today is the 24<sup>th</sup> and guess what? I still haven't received my paycheck! I will let no one else tell me that we young people don't want to work. We want and like to work and we don't have an issue with working, but what we want is fair payment on time.

56

*Boss:* Can you come do the night shift today? I just got a message

that another one who was supposed to work tonight got sick.

*Worker:* I am in Austria right now with my relatives and I won't be back soon enough. Because I thought I wasn't working ... As I said, I can do the night shift tomorrow.

*Boss:* Could you come a bit later today, around 9 PM?

57

You know, for example, I was never able to get social support because I am married and my husband has some income. For me this logic was crazy, the logic that I have to be financially dependent on my husband. But listen, in Yugoslavia it was not like that, the social transfers of a woman were calculated solely according to her income, everything was set so she would be financially independent.

58

Why am I looking at a sign saying "sick days" with 39°C fever and 3 hours of sleep and still going to do my student work, so they won't think that I am not serious enough.

59

I am constantly working for nine hours, I don't have a parking space as the employees do, I lock the business twice a week and am the jack-of-all-trades for them, while they pay me a minimum student rate ... and yes, if I look at it from another angle, when I get my Master's Degree I will have a higher education than 80% of my coworkers.

60

*Friend 1:* I call my office in the morning, I tell them that I won't be coming because I threw up the whole night, I had diarrhea and so on. And the boss tells me that she doesn't care and that I have to come because she doesn't have anyone else.

*Friend 2:* Seriously?

*Friend 1:* And listen to what happens next. Me, a good working puppy, I come to work and work for a couple of hours and I get sick again and I don't manage to reach the toilet so I throw up all over the place. Then they yell at me asking me what's wrong with me and how dare I come to work like that.

## How did we change the law with the help of life stories?

The corona crisis has deepened inequalities between individuals. A self-employed mother with a small child wrote to Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March at the beginning of the crisis. The authorities did not plan state aid for her. She wrote about severe hardships, insecurities, and helplessness. She shared other women's life stories with us. Some of them (single mothers) lost all of their income. They did not even have money for food. It was becoming increasingly clear that many groups will not be helped and that a lack of action is putting the large group of people in distress.

At Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March, we found that the government excluded a group of self-employed people from aid measures; those, whose contributions are partly paid by the state; such as part-time entrepreneurs due to parenthood, partially disabled and cultural figures. At Institute 8<sup>th</sup> March, with the help of the Left party, we submitted an amendment to the law to the National Assembly, which was not supported by other parties.

We started a campaign to raise awareness of the situation of self-employed parents. We organized a humanitarian fundraiser for parents and paid them with the funds raised. In the end, with the help of the life stories of brave individuals, we managed to get the government to change the law and provide them with help.

## LIFE STORIES

**1** I'm a single mother with two children who attend school. I have my own business; I rent a beauty salon. €200 for contributions, €250 for rent, currently €100 for other expenses (internet, phone bill, bookkeeping). At home I have a €400 lease, €250 in bills and a €130 leasing on my car. What am I supposed to live on? I work myself to the bone every month to survive. It's not my fault I had to close. Those of us who work part-time do so because we have small children. It would be humane to treat us equally to those who work full-time. Those on welfare will receive a compensation; so will the pensioners. Why? I'm not jealous, they should get one. I'm only curious as to how I will get through the month with nothing.



**2** I am a mother and entrepreneur who took advantage of the possibility of working part-time because of my child. For those who don't know, you are permitted to work part-time until your first child is three years old; with your second child this is extended until they are six. Because we are given this possibility by the government, it is only normal that we should take it, as it means that half of our contributions are paid for by the state, whereas a full-time occupation is still recorded in your occupational record.

Of course, there are smart alecks that reproach us for allegedly receiving an allowance and compensations... Let me enlighten you, we do not. The only bonus is that we pay half of our contributions, while the rest, up to an eight-hour workday, that is, are paid by the state, going into our occupational record. Mothers, like myself, who work like this, have no other means of income and are in no way different from other self-employed.

We were given the opportunity to pay reduced contributions, and we, of course, accepted!

Now what happens? The draft of the Anti-Corona bill states that a write-off of contributions and a compensation is granted to those insured according to Article 15 of The Pension and Disability Insurance Act (ZPIZ-2) and on no other insurance basis. Those of us that work part-time because we are parents are insured according to Article 19 of the aforementioned act and are therefore not eligible for the aid outlined in the bill.

But, whatever, right? We are just mothers working as private entrepreneurs. Most people think that does not even qualify as work. Sure... Whoever claims that should try walking a mile in our shoes. We have currently been left without any source of income; some of us have rent to pay, we have children to feed and clothe at home; we have no means to do that. How will we survive? Without a write-off of our contributions we will have to pay an additional €200 in contributions; so, we have a starting deficit of €200. Then there's the rent for our workspace and expenses, power, water, phone, internet... All that would have been hard to cover with a €700 supplement anyway. But, alright, it would have been at least something. Now, without any financial aid, we will be at rock bottom. After paying off the expenses of our business, nothing will be left to feed our children with.

We have ended up in a sort of gray area. If we appeal to the Government, the Financial Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, we receive the same answer. I quote, "The Government has currently already approved the so-called Mega Law, the aims of which are to preserve jobs, preserve the environment and generally mitigate the consequences of the coronavirus. The bill was proposed and posted online on 3/29/20. It has been forwarded to Parliament for confirmation.

Based on these posts and your presentation, numerous other issues arise regarding the interpretation of certain articles, beneficiaries, procedures, validity etc., and not only in your case. Unfortunately, we must inform you that we are currently not obliged to explain the bill."

Thank you, so, in other words, you are entirely clueless and don't give two shits what happens to us. While we are terrified as to how we are going to survive the month, feed our children, and what we are going to do. The virus was not our fault! We have diligently followed all directives and have ceased working. What have we gotten in return? Nothing, figure it out.



### 3

This is a summary of my story. I am a private entrepreneur and I opened my business ten years ago. In all these years I have regularly paid all my contributions and taxes on time and have not owed a cent to anybody. In 2017 I gave birth and, after maternity leave, accepted the possibility of working part time until my first child was three; a possibility legally offered to us by the state. Now I read that private entrepreneurs that work part-time because they have children are not entitled to anything. We have been left out of the measures.

Where do we figure in this story? Have we been forgotten? Perhaps punished for having children?

We have also been forced to shut our businesses down; we have also been left without income; our income is currently zero; we also have bills to pay for our businesses, as well as our apartments; we also have leases to pay; and, lastly, we and our children have got to eat!

My question is where exactly are we supposed to get enough money for all of that since our business is our only source of income?





## 4

Dear Sir or Madam,

faced with the anxiety that this crisis has caused me I would like to tell my story and express why I care so deeply about what is happening. I am a mother of two, aged three and one. But I also have another “baby”, that is, my small business.

I started my own business fairly young, at the age of eighteen. I was lucky enough to know what I wanted to do in life. I wanted to be a dance instructor. I had also decided to start a business because I knew I wanted to teach in a school where dancers would not only dance but be surrounded by love, understanding, heart, dedication and energy.

Since the very beginning I have lived for them. For my dancers; for my company. To give them, to the best of my abilities, all the love of dancing I could possibly give. My dedication became even stronger when I became a mother. My children do not attend kindergarten because I work in the afternoon. I leave home around 1:30 pm and come back around 9:30 pm. I wake up at 4:00 am to do paperwork, issue bills, work on my dance program, etc. Both my husband and my mother do their best to accommodate my work; in the ten years since starting down this path, they have never once denied me help. All because everybody close to me sees the heart and soul I put into my work. Nothing is ever too hard. I simply live and breathe my business; I am committed to it with all my heart.

When this whole COVID-19 business started, I didn't panic. I believed everything would be alright in the end. Until now, when I realized that according to the new proposed bill I was not eligible for any type of financial aid, as I had been exempt from paying half of my contributions due to parenthood and insured according to Article 19 of The Pension and Disability Insurance Act (ZPIZ-2). I had also gone on maternity leave in 2019, which would make me once again not eligible for financial aid or, rather, mean that I would be forced to return the aid in full, as I would be unable to prove that I had less profit in the first half of 2020 than last year.

My monthly expenses remain unchanged; contributions; rent for my dance studio; bills; advanced income tax. That totals to around €1000 per month. What is most important – my two children. How are we supposed to survive?

I will admit that I am crying as I am writing this. Why? Because I don't even want to think about having to close my business. Having to let down all my dancers that have put their trust in me all these years; leaving behind all the sleepless nights I have dedicated to them. No! I will not do it. I will continue to fight as I always have. I would go without sleep every single night of the week for my children if I had to. It's all worth it for them. And for them it is also worth asking for help... For all the mothers that have found themselves in a similar situation. We are one of the most vulnerable groups because we have not only ourselves to take care of; we have children who are counting on us. We will not be silent now because we deserve equal treatment as all others who are self-employed.

All who know me know I have a heart. A heart that loves all positive things that surround me. A large portion of that love is devoted to my baby, my business. It may be difficult to understand, but if you were in my shoes for a week, you would know what I was talking about.

I am imploring you to hear us. Allow us to continue with our work. This will be impossible without help. We care for our businesses as if they were our own children. I had never imagined somebody could strip me of this life. That is why I am imploring you again to reach out a helping hand so we can continue living the life we have carved out for ourselves.



## 5

Hello, I am writing because I am desperate. The government has completely forgotten us. I am mother to two small children and part-time self-employed. My incredibly busy schedule is split between my work and my family. When the COVID-19 crisis hit, my company completely shut down



because I work in tourism. My income in March is close to zero, the coming months promise to be even worse. The government has promised to help the economy and, therefore, the self-employed. I was left speechless when I found out that I would not be eligible for the aid package because I work part-time due to being a parent. In my case (and the case of many other parents), I am insured according to both Article 15 and Article 19 – that is not included in the aid package – of The Pension and Disability Insurance Act (ZPIZ-2). Are parents really being punished for having chosen to spend more time with their children? Does this make them worth less? Or, I can only believe, has there been some mistake that will be rectified as soon as possible? Who will listen to us? Will we be heard and acknowledged in time?



## 6

The COVID-19 virus and a world of trouble for us – all five of us.

Let me begin at the moment when I shed my first tear, though I did my best to hide it from my three babies – well, one is still practically a baby, and can still be fooled – whom I am normally all sunshine and smiles around; the other two, Lina and Luka, already attend school and know and understand what is happening. If you ask me, they understand perfectly well. Albeit differently than we do, but they are still able to answer when I ask them. “Mom, we are in quarantine because there’s a virus.” They understand we have to do school at home. How? Nobody cares about that: not how, nor when, nor with what. Or if you even have an internet connection for that matter (obviously everybody does, right?). Wrong. Everybody has got a printer to print out worksheets, right? Wrong.

Kindergarten is closed, schools are closed – with good reason, of course. Applying for financial aid from the Ministry and Social Services. Dealing with online customer service; you cannot submit it in person. Ma’am, you can send it online. Can I? Thank you, can I? We haven’t got a computer;

we’ve only got internet on our phones. Wonderful, isn’t it? The country is, of course, solidary, helpful, caring, we will all be fine as long as we just stay home. Will we?

Now we can really get into the thick of it. I don’t sleep at night; not because of my children. I don’t go do the housekeeping that normally provides my weekly food income in the afternoons; not because I am lazy. No, because I have nowhere to put my children since my job is non-essential and we have been told to stay home because of the COVID-19 crisis.

No problem, they say! You get temporarily laid off and wait. That’s all you get. There’s a supposed 80% indemnity, but for whom? A mother of three, working part-time (a possibility given by the state to help us better balance our family obligations), lovely, isn’t it? And pensioners, disabled people... all will be taken care of. Are you a private entrepreneur? Oh, part-time. That’s where the trouble begins. The proposed bill clashes with two contradictory articles. The result? A short statement, explaining you are “unfortunately” not eligible because...

Day breaks and the worries remain. “Mommy” cannot get her kids a computer or internet, she does not even know how long she will be unable to pay her lease. The same “mommy” that her children adore still cannot figure out how to make eating porridge three different ways organic and New Age because she is worried about this new tomorrow; worried about the virus, worried about quarantine; and worried that the bills stay the same, the lease stays the same but the bottomless pit of despair, so deep and dark you cannot see a single spark, keeps getting bigger.

I am lost in fear, despair, hope that with a small compensation I would be able to weather this terrible storm. No luck there. I am no longer living under a totalitarian regime, still, I do not have a choice: I am not allowed to go to work; I have got to pick up my kids after nine hours (when I work, by the way, eight hours a day and live quite far from their kindergarten). But, no, I am not eligible for financial aid because I wanted to be self-em-

ployed and a mother at the same time. Oh, but I do pay all my contributions, each month; they act quite quickly if you don't.

You see, "quarantine" means isolating an individual from society, separating them so thoroughly from others that nobody can get infected. When everybody goes back to being healthy, us "mothers" will still be in quarantine. It will go on and on, leaving indelible stains on "our progeny" that is supposed to stalwartly go to work and pay taxes, no questions asked.

COVID-19 is a virus. It will leave just as it came. Getting absolutely zero help from your own country, however, is something that does not go away so easily.



# 7

I am a single mother; because of the current situation in the country and the ban on working I have been left without any income whatsoever. Unfortunately, I have neither parents nor grandparents, aunts, uncles or any family I could go to for help. My work is my only way of surviving, and I am now unable to do it. I have a lease and rent out a business space; I regularly pay my contributions and all other expenses, so I don't have much left over to put in a savings account off of which I could now live. As a private entrepreneur the struggle to stay afloat in the market is already considerable due to numerous factors. Being now forbidden to work and not entitled to any financial compensation despite regularly contributing to the public treasury is absurd. Have you ever stayed up all night, wondering what you were going to feed your child? I do, every day. I am not home because I want to be home; I am home because I have to be home.

I am afraid for the future. I am sad that the state and those in power have neglected self-employed mothers, an already vulnerable group.



# 8

I am a father of two children with a third on the way. To help my wife raise our children and to spend as much time with them as possible, I switched over to part-time work due to parenthood, although that meant having a slightly smaller income. Work has been made very, very difficult following the government declaring a pandemic. After some calculation, in the coming two months my income is expected to decrease by 70% and now I do not even know if I will get a write-off on my contributions. A few days ago, Matej Tonin, the Slovenian Minister of Defense, said this bill would not leave any citizen behind. It looks like it has left its most vulnerable behind: young families.

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