

Bravo za mame!



RIGHTS FOR MOMS

Story about moms who made a power shift in
Serbia

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PROBLEM

In Serbia, state guarantees maternity leave of 11 months for women who are employed at the full-time contract. However, in practice these payments are late for 3-6 months. The process is that employer is in charge of paying a salary to a woman who is on maternity leave, and the state is supposed to reimburse it. However, in reality the state is late with these payments which puts the employer in the difficult situation of paying several salaries without being reimbursed which becomes a serious financial burden to small firms. To protect themselves, employers don't pay salaries to women who are on maternity leave, and as a result women with little babies at home are left without money in the moment when they need it the most. With an idea of solving this problem Serbia on The Move started a campaign to pressure the state to take full responsibility for women on maternity leave and pay them directly from the state budget.



OUR PEOPLE:

Pregnant women and moms with kids under five who have experienced a problem with maternity leave payments.

THE CHANGE:

Women on maternity leave receiving their salary on time



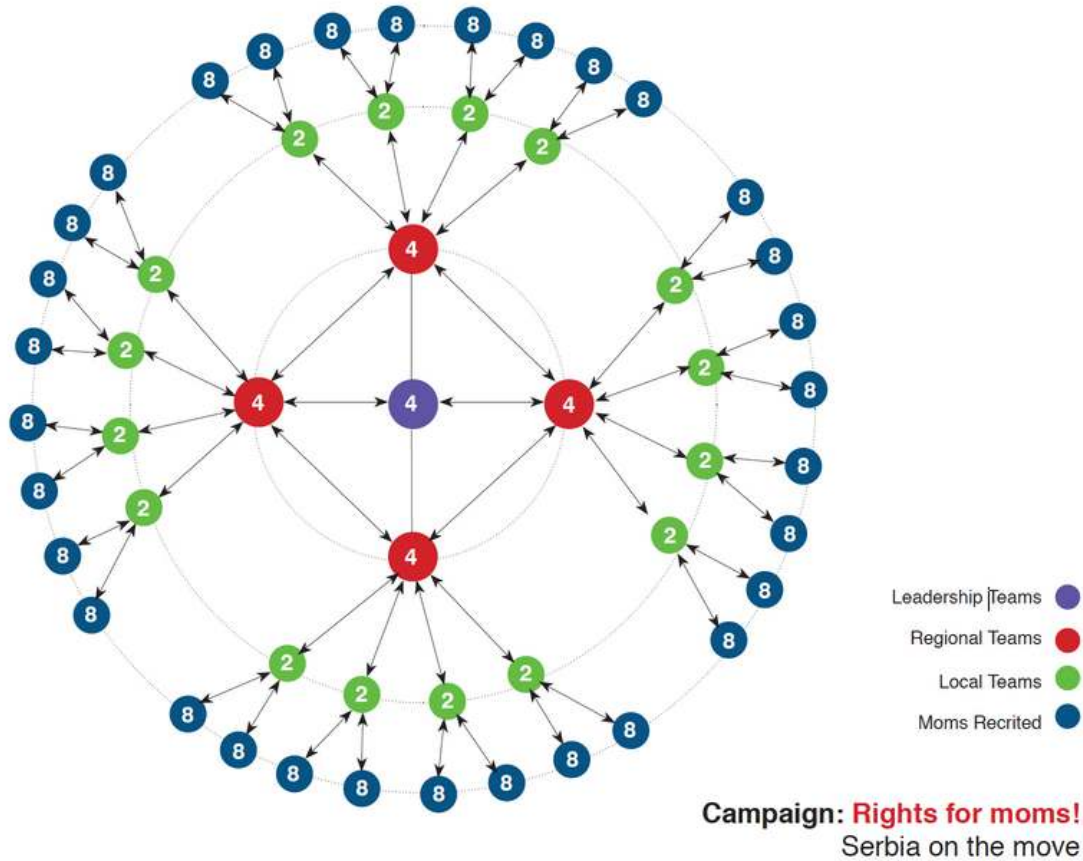
LOOKING FOR POWER

While thinking of this campaign, we analysed the actors map and realised that there were several actors who could change this situation and make sure that payments would arrive on time: employers, chambers of commerce, Government and Parliament could all have decided to make it happen. The one who had the most power was the Government as in Serbia at that moment all political power was in this institution. However, we remembered the rule of “never go for power to those who have it”, thus we decided to do something completely un-expected. We decided to engage the Parliament and create power within it, and to use that power to push the Government to make the change.



HOW DID WE DO IT?

In order to reach this goal, we needed to have 250 women all over Serbia. We started with a core team consisting of four members, each responsible for building a team of 4 leaders in charge for one region in Serbia. Each of the members of the regional team was in charge of 2 team leaders at the local level, who in turn were in charge of recruiting 8 women who will talk with MPs. So the initial core 4 national leaders recruit and support 16 regional leaders, who recruit and support 32 local team leaders, who recruit and support 256 women activists. The structure of the campaign is best explained with a visual below.



WHERE DID WE START?

One morning in different parts of Belgrade babies' laundry could be seen hanging on the main streets and squares. People started asking, "why is it hanging there?" Pictures were posted on FB and TW with the hashtag #momsarentotalone. To unveil the secret and launch the campaign, 20 moms supported by 100 citizens, gathered in front of the National Parliament on the morning of March 8th, 2014. They hung the babies' laundry there as symbol of babies' needs and held up the campaign's name (Rights for moms).



IMPROBABILITY OF THE TACTIC CHOSEN:

For Serbia, the chosen theory of pressuring MPs was highly unusual. It's worth mentioning that in Serbia MPs are not directly elected by citizens, so they always vote as per instruction of the Party's lead. They don't feel they have a constituency they represent and they seldomly consider their needs when doing their job as MP. By the end of April, as per the campaign timeline, 250 moms were recruited and trained to have 1:1s with MPs. They started contacting MPs to schedule meetings. In two weeks 250 moms sent over 250 emails contacting MPs. They got no response. In addition to this, Serbia was hit by huge floods and the campaign's leverage point got lost. It was clear that campaign won't make it if we didn't do something different. We made the decision to slow down the campaign for one week, and to try again later. After a week, campaign members continued contacting MPs. They started to get opposition MPs to commit to meet and support the campaign, which was both good and bad for the campaign as the opposition parties didn't have the majority in the Parliament. We needed to get parties in power to meet moms. The campaign decided to try one more tactic. One day, 30 moms called one office of one parliamentary group, reaching the same assistant each time, asking for a meeting with each of 30 different MPs that that parliamentary group had. That was the breakthrough in our campaign. Politicians realised Moms were quite serious. At that point a flood of meetings started to happen; in one day we had 40 meetings with MPs. One after another, they were persuaded to support the change in the law. Those who didn't get the first meetings soon realised they need to do it before it was too late, so they started calling moms for meetings.





POWER SHIFT

Campaign leaders need government to say yes too, and they knew from the beginning that this wouldn't be an easy task. That's why they decided to build the power in the parliament first and then to use that power to push the Government. After getting the majority votes in the parliament, the campaign announced their victory in main media: the headlines were "Moms won majority in the Parliament – the Law will be changed." The day later, two Government Ministers called leaders of the campaign asking for meetings. Campaign leaders met with two ministers in charge and they agreed to start working to change of the law with a timeline for adoption by the end of that year.

After nine months of hard work and very challenging campaign we can say BRAVO for MOMS.

The campaign, "Rights for moms" was a zero budget campaign and all the people in it were engaged as volunteers contributing their own resources.

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