



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

Zagreb, 30 March 2023

PROPONENT: Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities

SUBJECT: National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and
Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

**NATIONAL PLAN FOR THE PROTECTION AND
PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMBATTING
DISCRIMINATION FOR THE PERIOD TO 2027**

Zagreb, March 2023

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The terms used in this National Plan that have a gender expression refer in equal ways to both the male and female genders, regardless of the gender in which they are used.

1. Introductory considerations

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is a strategic-planning act adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia, which defines and sets specific objectives regarding the exercise of human rights and combatting discrimination in the Republic of Croatia.

This medium-term strategic-planning act has been prepared by the Working Group for the elaboration of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period from 2021 to 2027 (hereinafter: the Working Group), coordinated by the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities. It builds on earlier versions that planned activities in the field of protecting and promoting human rights, among which the last strategic-planning act – the National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights – was valid from 2013 to 2016. Furthermore, the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 builds on the activities aimed at combatting discrimination defined by the National Plan to Combat Discrimination for the 2017–2022 period.

The principles of protection and promotion of human rights are the foundation of modern democratic states, and equal rights, ethnic equality and gender equality, social justice, respect for human rights and the rule of law are among the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia. Therefore, this area has been afforded special attention through the continuation of strategically-designed activities that are also harmonized with the long-term development needs of the Republic of Croatia.

In addition to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia¹ (hereinafter: the Constitution of the RoC) and the laws regulating various areas of social and economic life, human rights and freedoms are also protected at the international level, through international treaties. The Republic of Croatia is a party to key international human-rights treaties adopted under the auspices of the United Nations: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006). Croatia also translated the generally accepted Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) and published it in its Official Gazette in 2009.

At the regional level, the Republic of Croatia is a party to the Council of Europe instruments for the protection of human rights, namely the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), the European Social Charter (1961), the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2018).

¹ Official Gazette, nos. 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10 and 05/14.

In addition to being part of the Croatian legal order and thus introducing high standards of human-rights protection into it, certain international instruments are particularly significant because they oblige states to report to the treaty bodies monitoring their application. The Council of Europe is active in the field of developing and promoting human rights through its Committee of Ministers and expert bodies, and it also has independent bodies composed of experts gathered in committees such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), as well as the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Alongside freedom, democracy, equal rights and the rule of law, the protection of human rights is one of the fundamental principles on which the European Union is founded. These principles are also enshrined in the fundamental acts of the European Union: the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union as the key tool for protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens of the European Union. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union as an instrument for the protection of human rights became legally binding for the European Union institutions and bodies vested with public authority. Consequently, the institutions and bodies of the European Union, as well as the Member States, when applying European law, are obliged to ensure the rights and freedoms guaranteed by it. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union reflects the rights established by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the principles of the national constitutions of the Member States of the European Union.

However, action is also needed that goes beyond the application of regulations, in the form of strategic policy making, as highlighted in international documents. Thus, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights² confirmed that work undertaken to eliminate violations of human rights is a priority, and recommended that national action plans be developed with steps to protect and promote human rights. The Durban Declaration, adopted together with the Programme of Action at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance, reaffirmed international commitment to the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and also recommended the adoption of national policies and plans to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, including their gender dimension.

The European Union has legal instruments and a comprehensive policy to build equality and equal rights, and strategies have been developed for the forthcoming period that provide guidance for the activity of Member States. Thus, in drawing up the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, complementarity was sought with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as with European Union policies aimed at combatting discrimination and protecting citizens' rights, such as the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030, the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027 and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024.

The promotion of equality and equal opportunities, as a horizontal priority of all public policies, has been incorporated into the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period to 2030 (hereinafter: NDS 2030), highlighted in the Programme of the Government

² Available at: <http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/hre-edc/files/2015/02/Zbirka-me%C4%91unarnodnih-i-doma%C4%87ih-dokumenata.pdf> (19 January 2021).

of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office, and additionally strengthened by the Operational Programmes for National Minorities for the period 2021–2024.

The Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office specifies that, when conducting its activities, the Government of the Republic of Croatia will be guided by the highest values of the constitutional order: freedom, equal rights, equality, peace-making, social justice, respect for human rights, inviolability of property, preservation of nature and the environment, the rule of law and a multiparty democratic system, which are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, as the highest legal and political act. The Programme also underscores that the Government of the Republic of Croatia will pay special attention to the further development of a society that respects human rights and the rights of national minorities, and to the continued construction of an inclusive and tolerant society, and that it will lead the fight against all forms of violence and hate speech in society and strengthen the legislative framework aimed at suppressing hate speech, especially against vulnerable groups and national minorities. The fight against hate speech and all forms of violence will be encouraged by investing in education, expert conferences, public campaigns and improvement of media literacy, with a view to acting preventively. Croatia will continue its active participation in the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

In accordance with the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, a culture of tolerance will continue to be promoted, and the policy of the rule of law and the rights of national minorities guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities³ and other legislation will be consistently implemented. Continuous application of the provisions of the Constitution of the RoC, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and the Act on the Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia⁴ will be ensured in all units of local government where the requirements, as stipulated by law, have been met. The Government of the Republic of Croatia will support the implementation of the models of minority education as prescribed by law.

This National Plan seeks to strengthen the achievement of the horizontal priority set in the NDS 2030 and achieve synergies with other sectoral and multisectoral strategic-planning acts that regard the protection of human rights and equality. Multiannual planning seeks to coordinate the activities of stakeholders in achieving horizontal objectives that are not covered by sectoral and multisectoral strategies, but are very important for the area of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination.

The implementation of specific objectives over a five-year period will contribute to the long-term achievement of a higher level of social inclusion and social solidarity, quality of life and the rule of law, as well as the achievement of the Global Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 at national level.

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is a result of participatory cooperation of relevant stakeholders from the state administration, civil society, independent human-rights institutions and academia, taking part in the Working Group. An inclusive approach and a partnership dialogue will also be ensured during the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this strategic-planning act.

³ Official Gazette, nos. 155/02, 47/10, 80/10, 93/11 and 93/11.

⁴ Official Gazette, nos. 51/00 and 56/00.

Finally, this strategic-planning act was created in a period of multiple global crises. Significant changes at the global and national levels have further underlined the importance of human rights, equality and non-discrimination in crisis situations, which is why the new circumstances and their medium-term implications will be taken into account when formulating the implementation plans of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027.

In addition to the plight of displaced persons, the war in Ukraine has directed attention to a number of human-rights issues, and one of those highlighted among them is the importance of media freedom. The pandemic of the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, whose socio-economic consequences have a disproportionate effect on vulnerable social groups, has deepened existing social inequalities, which is why coordinated action in the field of protection of the rights of all people without discrimination has taken on special significance in the new circumstances.

In addition to the pandemic and the growing impact of climate change at the global level, the Republic of Croatia was hit by devastating earthquakes in March 2020 in the City of Zagreb, Zagreb County and Krapina-Zagorje County, and in December of the same year in Sisak-Moslavina County, Karlovac County, Zagreb County and the City of Zagreb. On top of extensive material damage and the loss of seven lives, citizens of the earthquake-stricken areas had to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently.

The new circumstances pose an additional challenge for the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, which is why mid-term strategic activities should be considered, taking into account the future implications of the aforementioned crises for the area of human-rights protection and equality.

2. Purpose and medium-term vision

In order for the protection of human rights and protection against discrimination to be ensured for all citizens in everyday life, it is also necessary to act beyond the application of regulations, in the form of drafting strategic-planning acts. The purpose of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is to ensure – through multiannual planning – coordinated action of state administration bodies in the field of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination, to supplement the relevant existing sectoral policies and to raise the level of knowledge and awareness of equality in order for all citizens to exercise their rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC and international instruments for protecting human rights.

MEDIUM-TERM VISION

In 2027, the Republic of Croatia is a country in which full respect, protection and promotion of the exercise of human rights and protection against discrimination are ensured, and equality and equal opportunities for all citizens are promoted, in accordance with international standards and the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia.

In order to achieve the purpose and vision, the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 will enable in the medium term:

1. multiannual planning of goals and measures that support the implementation of national legislation, strategic guidelines of the European Union and international recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia through human-rights protection mechanisms, and
2. coordinating the actions of bodies governed by public law and other stakeholders in strategic activities aimed at protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination.

The specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 target areas that have been recognized as priorities on the basis of consultations conducted with the Working Group, where the starting point for defining the needs and priorities for action in the medium term were the recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia through international and national mechanisms for protecting human rights and combatting discrimination, as well as European strategic guidelines for action in the field of combatting all forms of discrimination and promoting equality.

The achievement of the specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 will facilitate the fulfilment of the long-term vision of a society without discrimination, in which all Croatian citizens are equally present in all areas of public and private life, have equal status, equal opportunities to exercise their rights and equal benefit from the results achieved, as expressed in the NDS 2030. The protection and promotion of equality as the highest value of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia and protection against discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity or colour, gender, language, religion, political or other belief, national or social origin, property status, trade-union membership, education, social status, marital or family status, age, health status, disability, genetic heritage, gender identity, expression or sexual orientation, as defined by the Anti-Discrimination Act, will be further strengthened.⁵

In the field of *education, employment and work*, activities will be aimed at strengthening the capacity of educational institutions to transfer knowledge of human rights, and also apply their principles in everyday work, and at equalizing opportunities in the labour market. Targeted measures aimed at equalizing opportunities at all levels – from early-childhood education to higher education – will support national public-policy priorities in the field of education, that is, respect for the right to education under equal conditions, inclusion of everyone in education and continuous professional development of those directly involved in educational work. Measures relating to combatting discrimination in employment and at work will be continuously implemented, and the inclusion of groups frequently discriminated against in active employment policy measures will be encouraged in order to improve their position in the labour market.

Strategic action regarding *improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the judiciary, public administration and public governance*, will be supported through raising awareness and the

⁵ Official Gazette, nos. 85/08 and 112/12.

level of competence of public servants (with an emphasis on public servants working with groups at risk of discrimination) and judicial officials as regards national and international human-rights instruments, national and international anti-discrimination legislation, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, thus also supporting the effective application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union at the national level, and particularly as regards the implementation of European Union funds in the forthcoming seven-year period.

Strategic action aimed at achieving *a healthy, active and high-quality life* will be supported through measures designed to raise the awareness of health professionals about the protection of patients' rights, and also to improve the monitoring of data on the health status of particularly vulnerable groups of citizens, which is especially important in the context of crisis situations such as the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Systematically monitoring health-status data, training key stakeholders, and informing citizens about their rights also contribute to enhancing the healthcare-system crisis response and improving health care for vulnerable groups who are more often exposed to discrimination.

In accordance with the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, efforts will be made to contribute to the *further development of a society that respects human rights and the rights of national minorities and the continued construction of an inclusive and tolerant society*.

The reports of the Ombudsman and special ombudsman institutions, as well as the recommendations of international bodies and organizations, consistently list members of some national minorities, especially the Roma, Serbian and Jewish minorities, in the context of discrimination and violation of certain rights. Therefore, the Operational Programmes for National Minorities, as part of the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, are also an important indicator of the necessary interventions in the field of protection of human rights and the fight against discrimination, especially through activities aimed at strengthening the implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities.

As regards long-term strategic goals aimed at the *ecological and energy transition towards climate neutrality*, this National Plan will implement activities aimed at raising the awareness and level of knowledge of citizens about the right to a healthy life and environment.

Taking into account the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office, and European initiatives such as the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 10 June 2020, entitled "Tackling COVID-19 disinformation – Getting the facts right" (JOIN(2020)0008) and the European Union Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025, special attention will be paid to raising awareness of the presence of hate speech in the public space, that is, suppressing discourse that encourages racial and ethnic discrimination and spreads through disinformation.

Considering that equality, the promotion of equality and the equalization of opportunities is a horizontal priority within the framework of the NDS 2030, equality should be included in public policies relating to various areas of social and economic life, and also during the evaluation of their impact, taking into consideration European guidelines for gender mainstreaming.

3. Development needs and medium-term priorities in the area of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination

Development needs	Priority	Related specific objective(s)
<p>Systematic suppression of discrimination, especially for groups more frequently discriminated against⁶ and in certain sectors of life⁷</p> <p>Availability of direct support for groups more frequently discriminated against, with the aim of strengthening trust and level of awareness</p> <p>Availability of reliable data to make informed decisions in the area of policy of human-rights protection and anti-discrimination</p> <p>Development of an inclusive and high-quality education system with special emphasis on equal access for groups more frequently discriminated against</p> <p>Adapting public health services and raising awareness of health professionals to ensure equal access to health care with special emphasis on groups of citizens more frequently discriminated against</p> <p>Creating a level playing field for exercising the right to housing for groups at risk of discrimination</p> <p>Availability of data on the presence of structural discrimination, discrimination in access to goods and services, and multiple discrimination</p>	<p>Combatting all forms of discrimination</p>	<p>Improving the prevention of discrimination and providing support for victims of discrimination</p>

⁶ The term "groups more frequently discriminated against" is used in this document in order to focus action aimed at combatting discrimination especially on the occurrences of discrimination on those grounds that more frequently cause unequal treatment of citizens. The groups more frequently discriminated against will be defined on the basis of the data provided in the Ombudsman's report, which contains consolidated data on complaints of discrimination received by all ombudsman institutions and the analysed occurrences of discrimination, and on the basis of data from relevant research. According to the latest statistical data available, provided by the Ombudsman, the most frequent discrimination is based on race, ethnic affiliation and skin colour, as well as national origin (members of the Serbian and Roma national minorities and migrants), health status, age and financial status. According to data from special ombudsmen, frequent occurrences of discrimination are based on sex, marital or family status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and disability.

⁷ According to the latest statistical data available, provided by the ombudsman and special ombudsmen, discrimination most frequently occurs in the areas of employment and work, access to goods and services, education and housing.

<p>Prevention and suppression of xenophobia and other forms of intolerance</p> <p>Raising knowledge and awareness of hate crime and hate speech and systematic monitoring of these phenomena in society</p> <p>Fostering and promoting a culture of remembrance</p>	<p>Combating all forms of discrimination</p>	<p>Improving mechanisms for combatting hate crimes and raising awareness of the importance of combatting racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and fostering a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide</p>
<p>Adequate public-administration capacities for a high-quality application of international and European human-rights instruments</p>	<p>Protecting and promoting human rights</p>	<p>Improving the efficiency of public administration and the judiciary for action in the field of human-rights protection</p>
<p>Coordinated action of bodies governed by public law in the enforcement of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights</p>		
<p>Ensuring the protection of rights for particularly vulnerable groups in crisis situations</p>		
<p>Improving interdepartmental coordination and cooperation of bodies governed by public law with independent human-rights institutions and civil society</p>		
<p>Increasing the availability of human-rights education</p>		
<p>Resolving all cases of persons who went missing during the Homeland War</p>		
<p>Raising the level of citizens' trust in institutions</p>	<p>Protecting and promoting human rights</p>	<p>Raising the level of awareness of citizens and institutions about instruments for protecting and promoting human rights, and facilitating access to justice and bodies governed by public law</p>
<p>Effectively informing citizens about their rights and opportunities to exercise them</p>		
<p>Raising awareness and spreading information about the application of international instruments for the protection of human rights with special emphasis on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union</p>		

Informing citizens about the right to a healthy environment and raising the level of environmental literacy		
Improving the implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities	Protecting and promoting human rights	Strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring and implementing the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities
Ensuring a high degree of media pluralism and standards of media work	Protecting and promoting human rights Combatting all forms of discrimination	Improving cooperation with civil-society organizations and the media in protecting human rights and combatting discrimination
An empowered civil society that contributes to the development of human-rights protection and anti-discrimination policies and the provision of direct human-rights protection services		
Stable, transparent and appropriate system of public funding of civil-society organizations		

3.1. Effective protection from unequal treatment and promotion of equality

Equality is one of the fundamental values of the Republic of Croatia and the European Union. The equality of citizens before the law is guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC⁸ (Article 14), and, consequently, a legislative, strategic and institutional framework for combatting discrimination has been established. Among the European anti-discrimination documents adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the most important is the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,⁹ which, in its Article 14 and the related Protocol 12, prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the Convention. The principle of non-discrimination is equally emphasized in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 21).¹⁰

The Republic of Croatia is a signatory to the international human-rights instruments of the United Nations, all of which contain the prohibition of discrimination on various grounds, namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention against Torture (CAT) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In accordance with the Constitution of the RoC, these contracts are part of the legal order and their legal force supersedes national legislation.

⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10 and 05/14.

⁹ Official Gazette, nos. MU 18/97, 6/99, 14/02, 13/03, 9/05, 1/06, 2/10 and 13/17.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12016P/TXT>

An important aspect of the equality framework of the European Union is its secondary legislation – directives that regulate the issue of non-discrimination more precisely and comprehensively. Currently, the non-discrimination framework contains 9 directives.¹¹

The key directive in the field of equality between women and men, at least in terms of frequency of its application in practice, is Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.¹²

Two other directives should be mentioned that prohibit discrimination on the following grounds: race or ethnicity, age, religious or other belief, disability and sexual orientation. Those are Directive 2000/43/EC, implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and Directive 2000/78/EC, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, adopted by the European Union on the basis of the powers referred to in Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

At the end of 2020, the European Commission published the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025. The document calls on Member States, the European Parliament and civil society to act and implement a number of measures, recommendations, public policies, legislative solutions, actions, communication plans and public campaigns, with adequate funding for all these activities. The main goal is to improve the position of LGBTIQ persons and build an open and tolerant society.

At the national level, the Anti-Discrimination Act¹³ (hereinafter in this chapter: the Act) ensures the protection and promotion of equality as the highest value of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia. The Act defines, inter alia, the concept of discrimination, its forms (direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, incitement to discrimination, omission of reasonable accommodation, and segregation), scopes of application, judicial protection mechanisms, the competence of the Ombudsman as the central body for combatting discrimination and of special ombudsmen, and the significant instrument of shifting the burden of proof from the plaintiff to the defendant. The Act defines discrimination as the placing of any person, or a person related to that person by kinship or other relationship, in a less favourable position on the basis of one of the discriminatory grounds explicitly listed, or on the basis of a misconception of the existence of one of those grounds, without there being one of the situations covered by the exceptions specified in the Act. In addition to the aforementioned institutional and procedural forms of protection, as prescribed by the Act, it is especially underscored that discrimination is prohibited in the Republic of Croatia in all areas of life and that the prohibition of discrimination applies to everyone. The aforementioned Act provides

¹¹ Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation; Directive 2004/113/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in access to and supply of goods and services; Directive 96/34/EC on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded between UNICA, CEEP and ETUC; Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements of the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding; Directive 86/613/EEC on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood; Directive 79/7/EEC on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment between men and women in matters of social security.

¹² Resolution of the European Parliament of 8 October 2015 on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (2014/2160(INI)) OJ C 349, 17/10/2017, pp. 56–66. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015IP0351&from=HR>

¹³ Official Gazette, nos. 85/08 and 112/12.

protection against victimization, whereby no one may be placed in a less favourable position because he/she has reported, in good faith, discrimination, witnessed discrimination, refused an instruction to discriminate or participated in any way in proceedings conducted due to discrimination.

In addition to the application of the Act, the strategic action aimed at combatting discrimination included the adoption of the National Plan for Combatting Discrimination for the period 2017–2022.¹⁴ During the 2013–2021 period, anti-discrimination measures were also included in other strategic-planning acts, such as the National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence for the 2017–2022 period,¹⁵ National Strategy for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Croatia for the 2014–2020 period,¹⁶ Strategy for Combatting Poverty and Social Exclusion (2014–2020).¹⁷ the National Strategy of Roma Inclusion for the 2013–2020 period,¹⁸ and in the Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the 2017–2019 period,¹⁹ National Strategy for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities²⁰ for the 2017–2020 period, and the Action Plan for Combatting Poverty and Social Exclusion 2014–2020.²¹

Despite the established legislative and strategic frameworks and efforts undertaken at the national and European levels, surveys by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)²² and Eurobarometer²³ suggest that discrimination is a wide-spread phenomenon in the European Union, where certain groups (persons of different skin colour or ethnic affiliation in comparison to the majority population, members of sexual and gender minorities, the elderly, persons with disabilities, women, persons of lower socioeconomic status) are particularly exposed to discrimination that is more common in certain areas of life (employment and work, access to goods and services, education, housing).

The Eurobarometer survey on discrimination has also indicated some positive developments, whereby fewer respondents from the Republic of Croatia feel discriminated against compared to the previous period (16% in 2019 compared to 33% in 2015), and the vast majority of respondents find it acceptable that a woman (89%), a young person (81%) or a person with a disability (83%) be elected to the highest political office.

¹⁴ Available at:

<https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20borbu%20protiv%20diskriminacije%20za%20razdoblje%20od%202017.%20do%202022..pdf>

¹⁵ Available at:

<https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/MDOMSP%20dokumenti//Nacionalna%20strategija%20zastite%20od%20nasilja%20u%20obitelji%20za%20razdoblje%20od%202017.%20do%202022.%20godine.pdf>

¹⁶ Available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/ZPPI/>

¹⁷ Available at:

<https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/ZPPI/Strategije/Strategija%20borbe%20protiv%20siroma%C5%A1tva.pdf>

¹⁸ Available at: <https://nsur.hr/>

¹⁹ Available at:

<https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/AKCIJSKI%20PLAN%20ZA%20INTEGRACIJU%202017-2019.pdf>

²⁰ Official Gazette, no. 42/17.

²¹ Available at:

<https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Glavno%20tajni%C5%A1tvo/Godi%C5%A1nji%20planovi%20i%20strate%C5%A1ka%20izvje%C5%A1%C4%87a/Akcijski%20plan%20borbe%20protiv%20siroma%C5%A1tva%20i%20socijalne%20isklju%C4%8Denosti%20%20za%20razdoblje%20od%202021%20do%202024.pdf>

²² Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey – Main results, 2017, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, Muslims – Selected findings, 2017, Experiences and Perceptions of Anti-Semitism – Second survey on discrimination and hate crimes against Jews in the EU, 2018; Second European Union Minorities and Roma Discrimination Survey - Selected findings, 2016, Being Black in the EU, 2018.

²³ Special Eurobarometer survey 493 from 2019 available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>.

More detailed insight into the occurrence of discrimination at the national level is also provided by the latest available analysis, the 2022 Survey of Attitudes, Level of Awareness of Discrimination and Forms of Discrimination,²⁴ which indicates that 60% of respondents who have stated that they had been a victim of discrimination have not sought protection, most often because they thought that this would not change anything. It should be noted that in 2016 as many as 68% of respondents stated that they had not sought protection.

It is precisely the lack of reporting of cases of discrimination in comparison to its actual occurrence, insufficient awareness of citizens, an expensive system of judicial protection, lack of court proceedings for the protection of collective interests, the need for further professional development of judicial authorities and attorneys in Croatian and European anti-discrimination law and case law that pose challenges for combatting discrimination, according to the Ombudsman's report.²⁵

In 2021, the number of complaints of discrimination filed with the Ombudsman increased. A significant share of those complaints related to the circumstances of the pandemics, and thus the number of complaints based on health status was 161% higher than in 2020, making complaints based on health status account for 10% of the total number of recorded complaints for 2021. A large number of complaints in which no grounds for discrimination were mentioned was also related to the circumstances of the pandemics (30%).

Certain social groups are continuously recognized as more frequently exposed to discrimination. When it comes to grounds for discrimination specified in the Act, race, ethnic or national affiliation (15%) are the most common basis of complaints of discrimination filed with the Ombudsman in 2021. The highest number of discrimination cases has been continuously concentrated in the field of work and employment (28% in 2019; 28.5% in 2020; 28% in 2021). During 2021, complaints of discrimination in access to goods and services (17%) became more frequent, and their number significantly higher, than in 2020. The majority of those related to the circumstances of the pandemics and regarded public information and the media (9%) and the areas of public administration (7%), education (5%) and health care (5%), while other areas were represented with much smaller numbers.

The 2022 Survey on Attitudes, Level of Awareness of Discrimination and Forms of Discrimination indicates that the Roma (18.3%) are perceived as the group most frequently discriminated against, followed by sexual and gender minorities (LGBT persons) (16.2%), persons with disabilities (9.7%) and women (9%), while the latest data available from the Ombudsman's Report for 2021 suggest that national origin, together with race, ethnic affiliation or skin colour, are the most common grounds of discrimination, based on the registered complaints.

The Republic of Croatia has a broad and systematic approach to the rights of national minorities, and reports on the implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and on the utilization of allocations from the state budget of the Republic of Croatia for the needs of national minorities indicate a significant increase in funding intended for the exercise of the rights of national minorities, especially in the field of education, cultural autonomy and the right to manifest one's religion.

However, the recommendations addressed through the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights, reports on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority

²⁴ Ombudsman, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/istrazivanje-o-stavovima-i-razini-svijesti-o-discriminacija-i-pojavni-oblicima-discriminacije-2022/?wpdmdl=15351&refresh=63e36565dc4c31675847013>

²⁵ Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/izvjesca-puckog-pravobranitelja/>

Languages, as well as contributions of the Council for National Minorities, also highlight some examples of insufficient and/or inconsistent securing of the exercise of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities, such as access to the media or the right to official and public use of national minorities' languages and scripts, at the local or regional levels.

Analyses of the functioning of councils and representatives of national minorities and elected deputy mayors and county prefects from among persons belonging to national minorities and from among members of the Croatian people, reveal difficulties encountered by persons belonging to national minorities in exercising their rights, especially as regards young people and women, unsatisfactory understanding of local authorities for the civil sector and councils of national minorities, and their failure to fulfil obligations towards councils and representatives of national minorities. In some units of regional and local government, the exercise of the right to political representation in the executive power is limited by unequal working conditions.

The Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office underscores that "a culture of tolerance will continue to be promoted, and the policy of the rule of law and the rights of national minorities as guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and other laws will be consistently implemented. The Government of the Republic of Croatia will continue to consistently protect and promote human and minority rights guaranteed by concluded international and multilateral treaties, agreements and conventions and the Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union".

Furthermore, the findings of the 2022 Survey on Attitudes, Level of Awareness of Discrimination and Forms of Discrimination reveal the presence of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards Roma (55% think that they live off social assistance and do not want to work), young people (39% think that the younger generations are rude and have no moral compass) and members of trade unions (35% think that they only create problems), and also women (24% believe that women and men are not equal by nature and thus cannot play an equal role in society). Negative attitudes towards the homeless are also widespread (a quarter of respondents think that they are to blame for the situation in which they find themselves) and people with mental disorders (a quarter of respondents would find it uncomfortable to work with a person with mental disorders).

An earlier survey aimed at establishing the attitudes of Croatian citizens and their readiness to accept and support the integration of third-country nationals²⁶ granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia has shown that attitudes towards persons granted international protection are on average neutral, with a slightly more pronounced, but still mild, sense of threat concerning the perceived lack of labour-market opportunities in local communities and a decrease in social resources, which would increase in the event of a greater presence of persons granted international protection. The 2017 survey on the presence and indicators of discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes in the Republic of Croatia, the aim of which was to establish whether and to what extent citizens' attitudes towards discrimination and xenophobia had changed in comparison to 2013, revealed that the fear and prejudice in relation to the immigration of foreigners had increased.²⁷

²⁶ Ajduković D. et al., 2019, Challenges of integration of refugees into Croatian society: attitudes of citizens and preparedness of local communities, <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Izazovi%20integracije%20izbjeglica%20u%20hrvatsko%20dru%C5%A1tvo.pdf>

²⁷ For example, in 2013, 29.8% of respondents somewhat agreed with the statement "I do not feel comfortable in contact with foreigners who have moved to Croatia", and in 2017 that percentage was 41.5%. If compared with the results from 2013, the

Although more detailed and new research is needed to assess the attitudes of the population, it is necessary to empower all stakeholders of key anti-discrimination processes for preventive action. Given that, following granting of the right to international protection, the integration process primarily takes place at the local level, it is necessary to inform and raise the awareness of representatives of local and regional authorities and employees of public institutions at the local level about their own obligations within the integration system, and about the rights and obligations of persons under international protection regarding their integration in Croatian society. At the same time, it is important to educate persons under international and temporary protection about their rights, also to prevent them losing their rights due to failure to meet legal obligations, and to set realistic expectations about their life in the Republic of Croatia. Moreover, in the coming period, with the arrival of a large number of displaced persons from Ukraine, it is necessary to further strengthen the support system and ensure the conditions for the exercise of the rights of displaced persons in the Republic of Croatia.

Finally, taking into account the period of development of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, it is necessary to consider the possible consequences of the crisis caused by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, and also other crisis situations, on the economic and social dimension of social inclusion and the increased incidence of discriminatory practices under the influence of new circumstances. Therefore, strategic action will be taken to improve the capacity of public administration to apply mechanisms for the protection of the rights of particularly vulnerable groups of citizens in crisis situations.

With the view of making the protection of citizens' rights and protection against discrimination as effective as possible in the medium term, measures aimed at increasing awareness of the prohibition of discrimination will be implemented among state officials and public servants, professionals and the general public. In order to ensure equal access to certain areas of life and goods and services for all citizens, especially groups of citizens who are more often disadvantaged, measures have been developed in the field of education, work and employment, health and housing, as well as a specific objective aimed at strengthening the rights of national minorities.

3.2. Combatting racism, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance

In line with its democratic beliefs and fundamental determination to respect all human rights and fundamental freedoms that are inviolable and established by the provisions of the Constitution of the RoC, the Republic of Croatia is fully committed to combatting all forms of racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. Hate crime²⁸ and hate speech²⁹ are just some of the manifestations of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and other forms of intolerance, the suppression of which will be sought through preventive mechanisms in the coming period. Given that these are acts that are based on bias or prejudice, these acts are also called criminal offences, i.e. crimes motivated by prejudice.

eight statements that are common in both iterations show a negative shift in attitudes, i.e. increased fear and prejudice towards the immigration of foreigners.

²⁸ In Croatia, the term 'hate crime' is formally and legally regulated by the Criminal Code (Official Gazette, nos. 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21 and 114/22). In Article 87(21) of the Criminal Code, hate crime is defined as a criminal offence committed on account of a person's race, skin colour, religion, national or ethnic origin, language, disability, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. The same provision stipulates that such conduct will be taken as an aggravating circumstance, if the Code does not expressly prescribe a more severe punishment.

²⁹ [Public incitement to violence and hatred, Article 325 of the Criminal Code.](#)

In the period from 2016 to 2020, the legislative and strategic framework of the Republic of Croatia developed. In the context of combatting racism and xenophobia, substantive criminal legislation has been aligned with convention law (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Additional Protocol of the Council of Europe to the Convention on Cybercrime³⁰), as well as with secondary sources of European Union law (European Union Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combatting certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law)³¹.

It is also worth mentioning that the provision of Article 14 of the Electronic Media Act³² prohibits the incitement of hatred and discrimination, as well as the favouring of their incitement or spread, in audio and audiovisual media services on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin or skin colour, gender, language, religion, political or other belief, national or social origin, property status, trade-union membership, education, social status, marital or family status, age, health status, disability, genetic heritage, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, antisemitism and xenophobia, and ideas of fascist, nationalist, communist and other totalitarian regimes.

The introduction of the institute of individual victim assessment into the procedural legislation of the Republic of Croatia³³ has ensured an individual approach of the competent authorities, especially towards victims of hate crimes. The aim of the individual assessment of the victim is to determine whether there is a risk of secondary and repeated victimization and the risk of intimidation and retaliation during criminal proceedings. If this risk exists, the individual assessment is used to determine specific measures to be applied (special method of examination, use of communication technologies to avoid visual contact with the offender and other measures prescribed by law).³⁴ A system for monitoring and documenting offences related to discrimination and offences related to hate crime has been established. The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration regularly submits records and statistics on court cases relating to discrimination to the Ombudsman.

Among the non-normative acts of particular importance there is the 2011 Protocol on Procedure in Cases of Hate Crimes,³⁵ which conceptually expands the notion of hate crimes to include misdemeanours. In order to improve the system for combatting hate crimes, the Working Group for drafting of the Protocol on Procedure in Cases of Hate Crimes revised the Protocol in 2021.

The revised Protocol stipulates obligations of the competent bodies involved in identifying, proceeding and monitoring the results of proceedings conducted for hate crimes, provisions on the composition and competence of the Working Group for monitoring hate crimes, the manner and content of cooperation among competent bodies involved in identifying, proceeding and monitoring the results of proceedings conducted for hate crimes, and other activities of competent bodies involved in identifying, proceeding and monitoring the results of proceedings conducted for hate crimes, which regard training on combatting hate crimes.

The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities will monitor the course of proceedings in each individual case, aggregate statistics on hate crimes, and publish them on its

³⁰ Official Journal, no. IT 4/08.

³¹ Council Framework Decision 2008/913/PUP of 28 November 2008 on combatting certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, OJ L 328, 6/12/2008, pp. 55–58. Available at: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_framw/2008/913/oj

³² Official Journal, nos. 111/21 and 114/22.

³³ Criminal Procedure Act (Official Gazette, nos. 152/08, 76/09, 80/11, 121/11, 91/12, 143/12, 56/13, 145/13, 152/14, 70/17, 126/19, 126/19, 130/20 and 80/22).

³⁴ Ordinance on the method of conducting individual victim assessment (Official Journal, no. 106/17).

³⁵ Official Journal, no. 43/21.

website. The published statistics will contain the motive (indication of a protected characteristic) and the legal qualification of the criminal offence or misdemeanour by all the competent bodies that took part in the proceedings.

One element of the toolbox for combatting hate speech is the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online, which is based on close cooperation among the European Commission, online platforms, civil-society organizations and national authorities (see more in the chapter entitled: Code). The seventh evaluation has shown that platforms which acceded³⁶ to the Code checked 81% of flagged content within 24 hours, compared to 40% in 2016, while the data for the Republic of Croatia show that 51.1% of content considered to be illegal hate speech was removed in 2021, compared to only 33.6% in 2016.³⁷

In strategic terms, the National Plan for Combatting Discrimination for the period 2017–2022 defined the objectives that were implemented by the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Plan for Combatting Discrimination for the period 2017–2019. The objectives regarded raising awareness about countering hate crime which targets ethnic, sexual and gender minorities and improving the collection of data on hate crime.

In the following period, guidelines for combatting racial and ethnic discrimination were provided by the European Union Action Plan against Racism 2020–2025, which provided for the strengthening of the application of Union legislation, cooperation with Member States and the use of future financial instruments of the European Union with the aim of strengthening the fight against racial discrimination.

One form of racial, religious and social intolerance is antisemitism. According to the working and legally non-binding definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), antisemitism is "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." The Republic of Croatia applies this definition in teacher education, and in May 2019 the Croatian translation of the guidelines for its application in the education system was published. The importance of the definition was also recognized at the parliamentary level. In 2020, the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Croatian Parliament adopted a Conclusion³⁸ encouraging Croatian public institutions and civil society to promote the definition of antisemitism. In addition to the development of the educational component of combatting racial, religious and social intolerance, it is necessary to adequately manage and develop sites of suffering and genocide and to foster the culture of remembrance of genocide.

Systematic monitoring of data on hate crime is particularly relevant for combatting racial discrimination and suppressing intolerance, as it points to motives and (non-)reporting of incidents. The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities submits data on hate crime each year for the previous year to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR). The data are then processed and made public in accordance with the methodology adopted by the OSCE ODIHR.³⁹

³⁶ Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and Youtube, Instagram, Google+, Snapchat, Dailymotion and Jeuxvideo.com.

³⁷ Available at: European Commission, 2022, Factsheet - 7th monitoring round of the Code of Conduct.

<https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/Factsheet%20-%207th%20monitoring%20round%20of%20the%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>

³⁸ Conclusion on the adoption of the legally non-binding Working Definition of Anti-Semitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Official Gazette, no. 8/23.

³⁹ Data on hate crimes are published at: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/croatia>

According to the latest available data from 2021, 101 hate crimes were recorded by the Ministry of the Interior (including the data on the criminal offence of public incitement to violence and hatred referred to in Article 325 of the Criminal Code). This is a noticeable increase from 2018, when 33 criminal offences were recorded.

More comprehensive insight into hate-crime cases over a five-year period is provided by the research conducted within the IRIS project – Improving the fight against intolerance through research, development of recommendations and training⁴⁰ – within which the report “Hate Crime in Croatia: Empirical Research of Cases from the Period 2013–2018” was published.⁴¹ Analysis of its content has suggested that, among the cases the police and State Attorney’s Office conducted for hate crime, ethnicity and ethnic origin are represented most as the protected characteristic (recognized in 60% of cases by the police, compared to 80.4% by the State Attorney’s Office).

Of the cases highlighted by the police or the State Attorney’s Office as having ethnicity or ethnic origin as the protected characteristic, slightly fewer than two thirds regarded hatred towards Serbs (57.1% of cases, 62.2% of defendants from that group). It is important to point out that the findings also suggest frequent cumulation and inconsistent listing of certain protected characteristics – most often ethnicity and ethnic origin. An alternative source of information is the data collected by civil-society organizations, which differ from official statistics in the methodology of collection, making them incomparable; however, the gap between official data and alternative sources may indicate insufficient reporting of cases of hate crimes to the competent authorities.⁴²

In the context of hate crime and hate speech, special attention should be paid to young people. According to the findings of the research conducted within the IRIS project – Improving the fight against intolerance through research, development of recommendations and training – the average age of perpetrators of hate crimes is 23 years.

The results of research on hate speech among young people on the Internet⁴³ also indicate that hate speech is very much present in public space (in the form of graffiti and posters, at political gatherings, on television and radio), on the Internet, and on instant-messaging services most commonly used among acquaintances (*Whatsapp, Viber, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat*). According to the statements of young respondents, hateful comments and expressions of intolerance are a constant phenomenon in the virtual space and can most often be seen in posts and comments on social networks (36% see them daily).

In the coming period, the aim will be to increase professional-development activities concerning hate crime for law-enforcement officers, undertake interventions aimed at effective identification of hate crimes, and also to act on the suppression of hate speech in political and other public space, sport, the Internet and the media. Continuous training is needed, with an emphasis on police officers and judicial officials, with a view to ensuring an appropriate

⁴⁰ The project was implemented by the Croatian Law Centre in partnership with the State Attorney’s Office of the Republic of Croatia, the Police Academy and the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, and in cooperation with the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia and the High Misdemeanour Court of the Republic of Croatia.

⁴¹ Available at: <https://www.hpc.hr/2020/10/09/projekt-iris-unapredenje-borbe-protiv-nesnosljivoje-kroz-istrazivanje-izrada-preporuka-i-obuku-empirijsko-istrazivanje-slucajeva-u-period-from-2013-to-2018/>

⁴² For example, data on cases of historical revisionism, ethnically-motivated violence and hate speech directed at members of the Serbian national minority have been published in the Bulletins of the Serbian National Council since 2013. According to the collected data, 506 such cases were recorded in 2021.

⁴³ The research was conducted in 2019 by the IPSOS agency for the Office of the Ombudsman. The results are available at: https://www.ombudsman.hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Istra%C5%BEivanje_Govor-mr%C5%BEenje-me%C4%91in-youth-on-the-Internet.pdf

classification and prosecution of hate crimes and to improving their knowledge of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Detailed analyses are needed, and ultimately the setting up of a data-monitoring system, with a view to providing better insight into the position of groups more frequently discriminated against in comparison to the majority population. For this purpose, the plan is to develop a system for monitoring equality data and conduct research, and, on this basis, create better public policies and targeted evidence-based interventions in the field of combatting discrimination.

Then it is important to prevent hate speech and hate crimes by raising citizens' awareness of these negative phenomena, with an emphasis on hate speech in the public space, electronic media and social networks, and by actions aimed at raising media literacy.

Emphasis will also be placed on more accurate keeping of statistical records of hate crimes, with a clear indication of the discriminatory grounds. It is also necessary to systematically monitor and improve records of hate crimes, where the revised Protocol on Monitoring Cases of Hate Crimes is a significant step forward, because it regulates the monitoring of cases from the moment the offence is committed until the proceedings are concluded with a final decision. In this way, it is possible to monitor the course and outcome of each case, and also to collect data on the characteristics which motivated the crimes.

In the coming period, it will be necessary to work on combatting all forms of intolerance not only at the national level, but also at the local level, as stipulated in the European Union Action Plan against Racism 2020–2025.

3.3. Equality in education

The right to education, as one of the fundamental human rights, implies that a person has the right to access education, at all levels, in keeping with the principles of equality and non-discrimination, as highlighted in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The key national document in the field of education, the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, underscores that the goal of the strategic action is, among other things, to achieve a system of education that provides equal opportunities according to which every child and youngster can achieve their full individual potential in the education system, in keeping with the Constitution of the RoC and legal regulations, regardless of their sex, gender, ethnic or social origin, sexual or religious orientation, academic abilities and other characteristics.⁴⁴

In previous years, the Republic of Croatia has made several significant changes in its education system, including the adoption of national curricula for early pre-school education and primary and secondary education, while, at the level of higher education, results-based financing has been improved.⁴⁵ The rate of early leaving of education and training (2.4% in 2021⁴⁶) is the lowest in the European Union (EU 27 average is 9.7%).

⁴⁴ Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, p. 28, available at:

[https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/ZPPI/Strategije/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije%20\(radni%20materijal\).pdf](https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/ZPPI/Strategije/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije%20(radni%20materijal).pdf)

⁴⁵ The Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia on programme-based financing of public institutes of higher education in the Republic of Croatia in the academic years 2018/2019–2021/2022 (Official Gazette, no. 87/18) established the four-year method and amount of funding for programme-based financing of public institutes of higher education, which includes the funds necessary for co-financing the material costs of teaching, scientific and artistic activities at public universities and teaching activities at polytechnics and colleges in the Republic of Croatia. The programme-based funding of teaching, scientific and artistic activity consists of the basic funding and funding based on results.

⁴⁶ Overview of education and training for 2022 - Croatia. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/hr/country-reports/croatia.html>

Currently, two key projects are being implemented in the education system: e-School and curricular reform, which has entered the phase of drafting new curricular documents for the education of pupils with disabilities. The e-School project expands the use of information and communication technologies in educational institutions, trains teachers and introduces digital teaching content, and the Strategic Framework for the Digital Maturity of Schools and the School System in the Republic of Croatia for the period to 2030 has also been adopted. The e-Enrolment project will enable users of the services provided by the Ministry of Science and Education to quickly and easily enrol in the desired educational institution; it will improve and connect existing e-services, and develop new ones relating to application and enrolment in the education system and to education databases.

From the perspective of equality of access and suppression of discrimination, it is particularly important to point out that the Strategic Framework was supplemented by the National Plan for Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019–2021 and the Action Plan for the Prevention of School Violence for the period from 2020 to 2024.

Despite the advances, there are a number of structural challenges that can affect the placing of certain groups in a less favourable position in the medium and long term. A recent survey⁴⁷ on educational inequalities in a lifelong perspective, from kindergartens and schools to university faculties and other forms of adult learning, has demonstrated that at every level of education there are challenges concerning the availability and accessibility of education, inequalities in the level of well-being of participants in education, and inequalities in the educational achievements of individuals belonging to various groups.

Some of the groups identified as being in a less favourable position are: those of lower socioeconomic status; those living in rural, remote and isolated areas; those with mental-health problems and behavioural problems; refugees and asylum seekers; children/pupils living in areas affected by the earthquake; pupils/students in difficult family circumstances (children / young people from single-parent families, from conflicted families, from alternative care and children of Croatian war veterans); pupils/students belonging to one of the minority sexual groups; children with developmental disabilities / persons with disabilities, and members of national minorities.

According to an international survey conducted in the framework of the Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (PISA OECD), the skills of Croatian students are below the European Union average, with large gender differences (girls performing better in reading and science, and boys in mathematics). Due to the demographic decline in the period from 2013 to 2019, the number of students in primary (9.37%) and secondary schools (19.17%) decreased, with the decline being much more pronounced in rural counties.⁴⁸

Furthermore, educational achievements and success of university students in the Republic of Croatia are still influenced by their socioeconomic status. For example, although as many as 81% of general secondary-school students and four-year vocational secondary-school students enrol in university courses, only 34.1% complete them, mostly those from families of higher educational level and property status. According to Eurostudent surveys,⁴⁹ in recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of university students whose parents did not complete

⁴⁷ Source: Farnell, T. (ed.) (2022). Educational inequalities in Croatia: challenges and needs from the perspective of education system stakeholders. Zagreb: Institute for the Development of Education

⁴⁸ Overview of education and training for 2020 - Croatia (online). Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/countries/croatia.html>

⁴⁹ Overview of education and training for 2020 - Croatia (online). Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/countries/croatia.html>

higher education (up from 45% in 2011 to 58% in 2016), which suggests that the interventions introduced have yielded positive changes.

Over the past decade, significant advances have been made in improving access to high-quality early-childhood education and in improving the coverage of children. Nevertheless, the proportion of children participating in early learning remains below the European Union average and the Europe 2020 target. Thus, in the Republic of Croatia, 78.8% of children between the ages of 3 and school age participate in pre-school education, while the EU average is 93%.⁵⁰ The system of early-childhood education in Croatia is mainly decentralized, and local governments are responsible for most of the financing and provision of services. Children from disadvantaged families face obstacles in accessing early pre-school education, and some of the disadvantaged groups that should be highlighted are children in rural and less developed areas (where there are no pre-school education institutions), children belonging to the Roma national minority, and children from families at risk of poverty.

The Analysis of Accessibility, Quality, Capacity and Financing of the System of Early and Pre-school Education in the Republic of Croatia,⁵¹ commissioned in 2018 by the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, demonstrated that pre-school education institutions apply many more criteria in practice than legally prescribed, and only a minority of local-government units (37.3%) have clearly elaborated priority criteria set in advance. The primary and legally prescribed criterion is that both parents be employed, which, as a rule, puts children of unemployed parents or job seekers – who belong to vulnerable groups – in a less favourable position. Since the founders of pre-school education institutions are local-government units, it is necessary to work on informing and raising the awareness of local authorities about the specific needs of the category of beneficiaries belonging to more-discriminated groups, and to inform them about examples of good practice as regards including their needs in the local authority's social-welfare acts, as well as about the benefits prescribed at the national level relating to their inclusion in education programmes.

It is necessary to continue and enhance the practice of providing support for the children of applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection as regards their attending educational programmes, given their – as a rule – insufficient knowledge of the Croatian language, but also bearing in mind their experience, often traumatic, which preceded their arrival in the Republic of Croatia. In order to facilitate effective integration of those students, the school is obliged to organize individual and group forms of educational work with the goal of enabling those students to efficiently master the Croatian language and compensate for insufficient knowledge in certain teaching subjects.

It is also necessary to continue applying the right of persons granted international protection to learn Croatian language, history and culture, and the modalities of learning the Croatian language for applicants for international protection, with a view to including them in the education system of the Republic of Croatia or including them in Croatian society. In addition to the funds allocated from the central budget of the Republic of Croatia, these activities were financed by allocations from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund within the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, and this will continue in the new European Union financial perspective for the 2021–2027 period.

⁵⁰ Overview of education and training for 2022 - Croatia. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/hr/country-reports/croatia.html#1-key-indicators>

⁵¹ Dobrotić, I., Matković, T. & Menger, V. (2018) Analysis of the Accessibility, Quality, Capacity and Financing of the System of Early and Pre-school Education in the Republic of Croatia. Zagreb, Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy.

The topic of education in minority languages and scripts in accordance with the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and the Act on Education in the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities⁵² is also very important. The results of a research project on the education of national minorities and inter-ethnic attitudes⁵³ conducted in four multi-ethnic environments (Baranja, Daruvar, Istria and Vukovar), indicate that teaching in minority languages according to Model A is not, as one might expect, ethnically homogeneous and does not include only students belonging to the minority in whose language the classes are held. An exception is teaching in Serbian, which is ethnically nearly homogeneous – as many as 98% of students are Serbs. In addition, the perception of the school climate and inter-ethnic relations is more negative in Vukovar than in other environments, and thus intergroup contact is the least acceptable there, while the feeling of ethnic discrimination is more pronounced. Nevertheless, research has shown that all children, regardless of their selected minority-education model, advocate multiculturalism to an equal degree, and the differences in the attitudes of parents who prefer one or the other model are minimal: the attitude is positive for all, slightly less for the majority than for the minority, which agrees with the results obtained in other multi-ethnic contexts.

In the Operational Programmes for National Minorities for the 2021–2024 period, which specify mechanisms for ensuring the protection of the rights of national minorities, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has envisaged special activities aimed at improving education in the languages and scripts of national minorities.

The right to human-rights education is also an essential aspect when considering the quality of education. According to the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education, education for human rights and democratic citizenship has been defined as education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights. In doing so, human-rights education not only promotes knowledge about human rights and mechanisms for their protection, but also seeks to develop the skills needed to promote, apply and protect human rights in everyday situations. In this way, it influences the development of attitudes and skills and contributes to democratizing society and spreading the idea of a responsible and active democratic citizen.

Research on political literacy of high-school graduates⁵⁴ points to the low level of competence of children and youths as regards their civic, media and political literacy. The report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (fifth reporting cycle)⁵⁵ recommended the introduction of compulsory human-rights education as part of civic education in all curricula, especially as regards the right to equality and the prohibition of discrimination.

In order to respond in the medium term to the existing challenges concerning the exercise of the right to education and to promote equality and non-discrimination in the field of education, efforts will be made to strengthen the capacity of educational workers to transfer knowledge about human rights and the application of their principles in everyday work, to develop measures that guarantee inclusive education (at all levels) for groups at risk of discrimination, and to provide support in exercising the right to education in the languages and scripts of national minorities.

⁵² Official Gazette, nos. 51/00 and 56/00.

⁵³ Čorkalo Birushki, D., et al. (2020). "Educational choices and attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism of the majority and minority in four Croatian multi-ethnic communities", *Društvena istraživanja*, 29 (1), pp 23-47.

⁵⁴ Bagić, D. & Gvozdanović, A. (2015) Research on the political literacy of final year high school students in Croatia (report).

⁵⁵ Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-croatia-croatian-translation-/16808b57c0>

Activities will be conducted to improve the level of knowledge of educational workers on topics in the field of human rights, prevention of discrimination and violence, and application of inclusive teaching methods for working with students from disadvantaged groups, and to strengthen the system of professional support in educational institutions for children who are victims of discrimination and peer violence.

In the field of higher education, the introduction of educational content relating to human rights and democratic or active citizenship in study curricula will be encouraged in order to expand the accessibility of human-rights education and improve the knowledge of future professionals, especially future lawyers, social workers, teachers and all those who will work with children, young people and groups that are more vulnerable and more frequently discriminated against.

3.4. Equal opportunities in the labour market and protection of workers' rights

Active employment policy targets those groups of unemployed persons who find themselves in a less favourable position in the labour market for a variety of reasons, with particular emphasis on the young, elderly, long-term unemployed, low-skilled and inactive, as well as those with disabilities, with a view to their activation and employment.

The strategic framework for the implementation of active employment policy in the Republic of Croatia until 2020 was set out in the Guidelines for the Development and Implementation of Active Employment Policy in the Republic of Croatia for the 2018 to 2020 period (hereinafter in this chapter: the Guidelines). The Guidelines specified priorities and goals of the overall employment policy in the Republic of Croatia: increasing the employment rate, matching the supply and demand in the labour market and strengthening the provision of information for participants in the labour market, taking into account all relevant strategic-planning acts of the Republic of Croatia and the strategic framework and recommendations of the European Union.

In keeping with the Labour Market Act, the Croatian Employment Service⁵⁶ implements active employment policy measures. Since 2018, the measures have been improved several times, more clearly categorized and unified as part of the "From Measure to Career" package. They have been harmonized with labour-market trends on an annual basis. The implementation of active employment policy measures has been financially strengthened in comparison with the previous period. When financing active employment policy measures, in addition to its national funds, the Republic of Croatia has also used financing from the European Social Fund, in the framework of the Operational Programme, Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020, within which a third of the funds have been allocated for operations aimed at increasing the employability and mobility of the workforce.

As of 2020, vocational training for work without employment contract is no longer financed in the framework of active employment policy measures. Persons who are employed for the first time in their profession may use employment support, that is, the employment-support measure for acquiring their first work experience/internship, in order to gain independence in performing their activity and learn the tasks encompassed by their profession. This measure has been implemented since 2018. There are several advantages of these measures, the most important being that they encourage employment, i.e. the concluding of an employment contract that guarantees all the rights arising from the employment relationship and collective agreements.

In addition, due to the special circumstances caused by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, subsidies aimed at preserving jobs have been of utmost importance and become the main protective mechanism for preserving employment and preventing unemployment. From

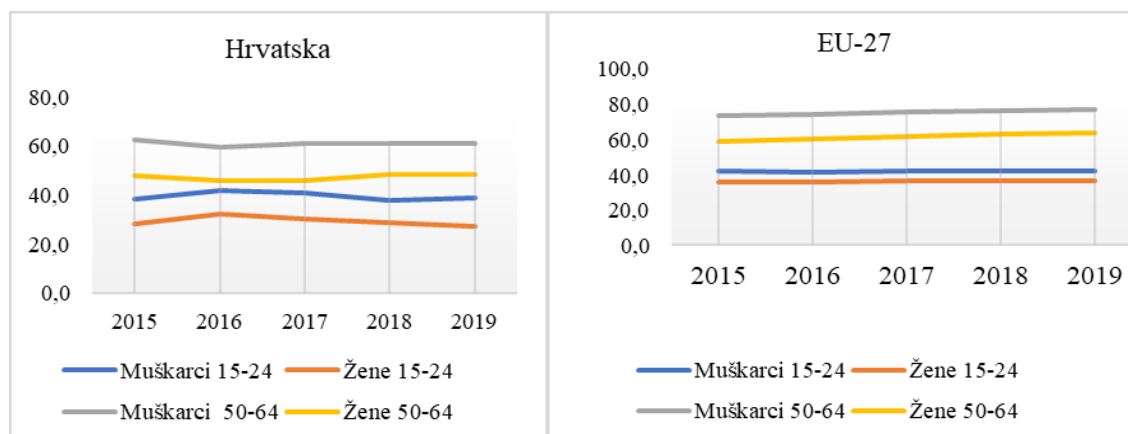
⁵⁶ Official Gazette, nos. 118/18, 32/20 and 18/22.

2016 to the end of 2021, almost 181,000 people were included in active employment policy measures, while more than HRK 12 billion was paid for about 700,000 workers to almost 126,000 employers in the period from the beginning of the implementation of subsidies for the preservation of jobs to December 2021.

Furthermore, at the end of 2015, the Strategy for Lifelong Guidance and Career Counselling in the Republic of Croatia 2016–2020 was adopted. The Strategy was a formal framework for promoting lifelong career guidance and its implementation in education, employment and social-inclusion systems.

It is also important to emphasize that, in accordance with the 2013 Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on Establishing a Youth Guarantee, the Republic of Croatia has implemented a series of measures aimed at the rapid activation of young people in the labour market. The measures have been integrated in the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which contains a full description of the reforms and measures that need to be implemented to facilitate the transition of young people from the education system to employment, and a Youth Guarantee system has been set up.

Figure 1. Population activity rate by sex and age (%)⁵⁷



The National Plan for Work, Occupational Health and Safety and Employment 2021–2027 is the basis for further development of policies and activities aimed at integrating persons in less favourable position into the labour market. The emphasis continues to be on strengthening active employment policy measures and other programmes that encourage inclusion in the labour market. Raising the quality of jobs is one of the key tasks. In addition, the capacity of the labour-market institutions will be enhanced, with the aim of providing high-quality service to users. At the same time, career guidance and an increase in programmes aimed at lifelong learning and the harmonization of knowledge and skills with the needs of the labour market will be used to contribute to the development of human resources.

As part of the 2019 pension reform, the position of persons with disabilities has improved, although in comparison to the number of persons with disabilities who are of working age (211,078), the proportion of employed persons with disabilities is still low (11,610).⁵⁸ In order to keep persons with disabilities in work, the compensation paid to them during vocational rehabilitation has been increased to match the minimum wage. At the same time, the age until

⁵⁷ Available at: Eurostat, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_wc160/default/table?lang=en, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TEPSR_WC130/default/table?lang=en&category=tepsr.tepsr_fvc.tepsr_fvc_si

⁵⁸ Available at: <https://posi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Izvjecje-C5%A1%C4%87e-o-radu-POSI-za-2019.pdf>

which the right to occupational rehabilitation is granted has been raised from the previous 53 to 55 years of age. This encourages the employment of persons with disabilities, especially those of greater age, which will result in the inclusion of more people with disabilities in the labour market. Furthermore, the basis for determining financial compensation for bodily injury has been increased by 15% for those beneficiaries whose bodily injury has been caused by an injury at work or occupational disease.

In addition, the coverage has been expanded of insured persons / persons with disabilities entitled to pensionable insurance periods of an increased duration (accelerated retirement), whereby every 12 months of pensionable insurance periods are counted as 15 months. (These are persons with Down syndrome, deafblind persons, and persons suffering from systemic inflammatory diseases of the joints and connective tissue.) It is important to note that persons with disabilities are entitled to pensionable insurance periods of an increased duration even if they have worked part-time. The necessary age for the acquisition of the right to retirement has been reduced for this category of persons by one year for every five years of pensionable insurance.

As for the increase in the minimum wage, it should be noted that, in the recent period, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has shown determination to consistently implement the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission in November 2017. Within these principles, the issue of an adequate minimum wage is strongly emphasized. Thus, principle no. 6 stipulates that "All workers have the right to fair pay, for a decent standard of living", and "An adequate minimum wage shall be guaranteed, which can meet the needs of workers and their families under specific national economic and social conditions".

Due to legislative interventions of 2017 and 2021, which supplemented the definition of the minimum wage, the position of recipients of the lowest wages in the Republic of Croatia has significantly improved. The Act on Amendments to the Minimum Wage Act⁵⁹ implemented additional legal interventions, whereby the definition of the minimum wage has been supplemented, and the position of minimum-wage recipients in the Republic of Croatia improved. The ratio of minimum wage to average wage was increased, from the initial 35.7% in 2012 to 46.29% in 2021. However, in addition to the visible administrative increase of 36.22% in the 2016–2020 period, the real value of the minimum wage also increased due to the decision to exclude legal increases of wages due to overtime, difficult working conditions, work on Sundays and work on holidays from the minimum wage, resulting in a total increase of 39.61%.

Since the minimum wage is a social protective instrument, this development has had positive repercussions for so-called in-work poverty, because, according to the new model, the target groups of workers receive those legally prescribed wage increases on top of the legally guaranteed amount. Systematic and expert monitoring of minimum-wage trends has also been introduced through the setting up of a special commission acting as an advisory body to the minister responsible for labour issues, during the process of proposing the amount of the minimum wage to the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

With regard to the unofficial labour market, the suppression of undeclared work has been identified as a priority activity for labour inspectors in the work programmes of the State

⁵⁹ Official Gazette, no. 120/21.

Inspectorate. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, due to multiple forms of undeclared work, regulated by various regulations, there is a strong need for cooperation among several competent inspections and the Tax Administration to achieve effective supervision. Therefore, between October 2016 and April 2018, the ministry responsible for labour issues, in cooperation with the competent authorities from Slovakia and Germany, implemented the *twinning* project "Strengthening Policies and Capacities to Reduce Undeclared Work", funded by the European Union IPA Programme for the Republic of Croatia. The project was successfully completed, and it resulted in recommendations for the setting up of a more efficient system of policies, measures and control mechanisms that will contribute to combatting this undesirable social phenomenon, which affects the most vulnerable groups of workers in Croatia the hardest.

Further to this project, in 2019, a working group was set up which developed a strategic framework for combatting undeclared work – the National Programme for the Suppression of Undeclared Work in the Republic of Croatia 2021–2024 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Programme – adopted on 25 February 2021. An efficient and comprehensive implementation of the measures stipulated therein will have an impact on improving the protection of labour rights of those workers who are exposed to illegal practices of individual employers, such as, for example, completely undeclared work, partially undeclared work, or work based on inadequate contracts that do not entail employment or rights guaranteed to workers by labour legislation.

For the purpose of preventing abuse, the Act on Amendments to the Labour Act⁶⁰ has introduced modifications of provisions concerning fixed-term employment contracts. The amendments to the general labour regulation have supplemented those legal provisions as regards stipulating or limiting the maximum number of consecutive contracts. It is important to emphasize the exceptional importance of the possibility of reaching an agreement between the social partners concerning this topic. The amendment is justified by the data relating to the high proportion of fixed-term employment contracts in the total number of employment contracts (official data of the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute), as well as the 2020 Report of the Ombudsman, according to which 16.5% of fixed-term employees are young people between 25 and 29 years of age, which makes them the most highly-represented group in fixed-term work, severely affected by the labour-market crisis triggered by the pandemic. The amendments to the Labour Act have also regulated work carried out through digital work platforms, in accordance with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026. This part of the Amendment to the Labour Act will enter into force on 1 January 2024.

Despite the progress achieved in recent years, structural statistical indicators, as well as the annual reports of the Ombudsman, point to the need to undertake further efforts with the aim of equalizing employment opportunities for particularly vulnerable groups of citizens. According to the Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality, inequality between men and women in Croatia is one of the highest in the European Union.

Only 66% of the population in the age bracket 15–65 participate in the labour market, and the gap between the female and male labour-force activity rate is 10 percentage points, in favour of men. The unemployment rate of women has constantly been higher than that of men, and the differences are even greater if the position of particularly vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities or women of Roma origin, is considered separately.

⁶⁰ Official Gazette, no. 151/22.

According to the reports of the Ombudsman, the area of work and employment is the one with the largest number of complaints of discrimination received year after year. (In 2020, 28.5% of complaints regarded work and employment; in 2021, 28% of complaints regarded work and employment.) One should also take into account the fact that, when discrimination occurs in the work environment, many people decide not to report it, fearing that their situation in the workplace will worsen.

In the medium term, it is necessary to work on raising employers' awareness of the identification, resolution and prevention of future cases of discrimination in the area of work and employment. At the same time, the education of people working in the field of human-resource management and development is crucial for identifying and suppressing discrimination, and it is one of the key instruments for overcoming such situations. In addition, it is necessary to inform other relevant stakeholders, such as civil servants, about the provisions of anti-discrimination legislation. Empowerment activities for disadvantaged citizens are also needed, such as people over 50, the long-term unemployed, young people who are neither employed nor involved in a system of regular education or adult education, members of national minorities, women and other groups that are recognized as more often discriminated against in the area of work and employment.

An additional dimension that needs to be taken into account is the short-term and medium-term impact of crisis situations on increasing the existing inequalities in access to work. Young people, the elderly, people of lower financial status, parents of young children and single parents are at greater risk of further violation of their labour-related rights due to the unfavourable economic situation caused by the crisis triggered by the global pandemic.

In order to respond to needs in the field of employment and work in the medium term, the National Plan for Labour, Safety at Work and Employment for the 2021–2027 period will be implemented, while measures relating to the prevention of discrimination in the area of work and employment will be incorporated in the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, which includes the area of combatting discrimination. The planned action is aimed at raising the awareness of employers, experts in the field of human-resource development and workers' representatives about the position of groups more often exposed to discrimination in employment and work, and empowering victims of discrimination and persons at risk of discrimination by strengthening their competences and capacities for equal participation in the labour market, as well as systematic monitoring of data on equality in the area of labour and employment.

3.5. Improving health care for groups more frequently discriminated against

The right to health care in accordance with the law is guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC (Article 59), and at the European level by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 35), according to which everyone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national law and practices. Consequently, in the Republic of Croatia, health care is provided for the entire population, *inter alia*, in line with the principles of equality, continuity and availability, in accordance with the provisions of the Health Care Act,⁶¹ the Mandatory Health Insurance

⁶¹ Official Gazette, nos. 80/13, 137/13 and 98/19.

Act,⁶² the Act on the Protection of Patients' Rights⁶³ and other laws and bylaws. The number and distribution of health-care institutions are determined by the Public Health Service Network, which is established on the basis of the total number of inhabitants, the total number of persons insured by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund, demographic characteristics, health status, population gravitating towards certain centres and its social structure, characteristics of individual areas, availability of health-care resources, environmental impact on the population's health, and economic prospects.

However, implementation of the guaranteed access to public health services is complex and determined by a number of factors. The 2016 Report on Access to Health Services in the European Union by the European Commission's Expert Panel on effective ways of investing in health lists the following factors as those influencing equality of access: the level of public and private financing of health care, the simplicity and understanding of the health-care system and the availability of services, the geographical distance of health institutions, the availability of medical staff, and the availability and accessibility of innovative medicines and capital medical equipment.

The report of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies for 2019 for the Republic of Croatia shows that health-care expenditure per capita in 2017 amounted to EUR 1,272, and this was among the lowest in the European Union, where average expenditure amounted to EUR 2,884. In Croatia, 6.8% of GDP is allocated to health care, while the European Union average is 9.8%. However, the proportion of public financing in Croatia is no less than 83%, and is higher than the European average. Mandatory insurance includes a variety of health-care services, but a participation fee is charged, and for this reason a supplementary health insurance is required. Direct payments, which do not include supplementary health insurance, accounted for a total of 10.5% of health expenditure in 2017, below the Union average of 15.8%.

According to Eurostat data for 2018, the Republic of Croatia had a very low rate (1.4%) of unmet health-care needs, according to the self-assessment of respondents, while the European average (EU 28) was 2%. However, the rate of self-perceived unmet need for health care is much higher in low-income groups than in high-income groups. In addition to the level of income, there are also differences depending on the level of education, age and gender.

For example, the rate of unmet need for health care is particularly high among respondents over 65, where data for the Republic of Croatia are among the most unfavourable in the European Union. These differences may indicate problems in the accessibility of health care for certain population groups, such as the elderly and people in rural areas distant from hospital facilities. Surveys conducted at the level of the European Union Member States,⁶⁴ as well as national reports,⁶⁵ indicate that migrants express that their medical needs have not been met more often than the majority population, which may be related to limited access to health insurance, lack of information on how to obtain access to services, lack of financial resources or the language barrier.

⁶² Official Gazette, nos. 100/18, 125/19, 147/20, 119/22 and 156/22.

⁶³ Official Gazette, nos. 169/04 and 37/08.

⁶⁴ Migrant Integration Policy Index - MIPEX in Croatia, available at: <https://www.mipex.eu/croatia>

⁶⁵ The evaluation of the Action Plan for the integration of persons granted international protection for the period from 2017 to 2019 (authors: Peurača B., Đurić I., Novak I.) was published within the Framework for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection at the Local Level, available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Okvir%20za%20integraciju%20osoba%20kojima%20je%20odobrena%20me%C4%91unarnodna%20za%C5%A1tita%20na%20lokalnoj%20razini.pdf>

Furthermore, mental health is an important component and inseparable part of health and, as such, one of the public-health priorities of the World Health Organization. Given the severity of the problem and the seriousness of the consequences of mental disorders on society as a whole, it is necessary to continuously implement comprehensive and specific measures in the field of promotion and protection of mental health and treatment of mental disorders.

The need for a new strategic approach in mental-health protection is also driven by several major challenges to the mental health of the population, such as demographic changes, especially in terms of an increasingly elderly population, and a growing proportion of mental disorders in overall morbidity. The ageing of the population is likely to increase the need for health care while at the same time reducing the working-age population.

Psychosocial stress is one of the significant risk factors for the emergence and maintenance of mental-health problems and contributes to the increase in mental-health disorders. It is therefore necessary to plan specific interventions to reduce stress on human health. The economic burden caused by mental-health disorders in 2015 amounted to 2.2–4.4% of GDP in the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

With this in mind, the Government of the Republic of Croatia has adopted the Strategic Framework for the Development of Mental Health until 2030. Its purpose is to establish long-term goals for the improvement of existing models of mental-health protection and the development of new ones, in accordance with the complementary strategies already adopted in other areas, especially in the field of health care, in order to reduce the occurrence of mental disorders, and the disabilities associated with them, and increase the availability of care throughout the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

Figure 2.⁶⁶ *Self-assessment of unmet health-care need (%) – reported reasons for unmet health-care needs*



Furthermore, international recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia within the framework of human-rights protection mechanisms indicate the need for more balanced regional coverage of health-care services and greater availability of health-care services to disadvantaged groups (persons with disabilities, persons of Roma origin and persons living in rural and remote areas), integration of mental-health services into general health-care and social services in the community, and greater availability of prenatal and postnatal care for women from vulnerable groups.

The recommendations of the Ombudsman point to the unequal level of medical and technical equipment in health-care institutions, the need for systematic financing of expensive medicines, and also the need to educate health-care professionals about patients' rights and inform citizens about rights ensuing from health insurance, with special emphasis on groups more frequently discriminated against.

Potential barriers to gaining access to public-health services were further highlighted during the crisis triggered by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights⁶⁷ emphasized that the risk of infection was higher in specific settings, due to difficulties with physical distancing and the application of epidemiological measures, for example, for people in institutional settings such as homes for the elderly and the prison system. Then, during the pandemic of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the level of psychological stress and the possibility of neglect were higher, and elderly people in nursing homes, people with disabilities and people deprived of liberty were identified as risk groups.

In order to respond to the needs described above, measures will be implemented aimed at raising the awareness of health workers about the needs of groups more frequently discriminated against, equalizing the availability of public-health services and raising the level of awareness

⁶⁶ Source: Eurostat, 2019. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_EHIS_UN1E/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=367aa546-b087-416c-942b-1babef8db381

⁶⁷ Available at: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020, Coronavirus pandemic in the EU - Fundamental rights implications: with a focus on contact-tracing apps. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-may-1>

of relevant stakeholders and the public about the obstacles to exercising the rights of groups more frequently discriminated against, such as transgender people.

3.6. Equal opportunities in access to housing

Since human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, the violation of the right to housing can affect the exercise of a number of related rights. International documents in the field of protection of human rights (for example, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) emphasize the need for social care for housing policy, the right to a decent life, including adequate food, clothing, housing, health care and necessary social services.

International conventions also recognize or refer to the right to housing or some aspects of the right to housing, such as the right to inviolability of the home and ownership. The importance of access to adequate housing is also recognized by Global Sustainable Development Goal number 11: *Make cities and settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, within which progress will be monitored in adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all.

In the European context, Article 31 of the European Social Charter (revised) emphasizes the need for housing of an adequate standard, and also the need to prevent and eradicate homelessness, as well as the necessity to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources. The homeless also represent the most socially vulnerable group of the population in the context of access to housing, and their housing is especially highlighted in the Strategy for Combatting Homelessness in the European Union.

The issue of access to housing was one of the goals of the National Plan to Combat Discrimination for the 2017–2022 period. In the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Plan to Combat Discrimination in the 2017–2019 period, a measure of putting into use vacant housing units owned by the Republic of Croatia was implemented. Then the Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the 2017–2019 period emphasized the importance of continuous implementation of measures to prevent and eliminate discriminatory procedures and behaviour towards foreigners, including in the field of housing. It is also important to highlight the National Plan for Combatting Poverty and Social Exclusion for the 2021–2027 period, which describes the challenges relating to housing, planned investment in infrastructure for adequate housing / organized housing / social housing, care for the homeless in extreme winter conditions, and in infrastructure intended for social housing for young people who leave alternative care, as well as for housing of Croatian Homeland War veterans and members of their families.

In previous years, measures were also implemented aimed at improving housing conditions for persons of Roma origin, housing of refugees and returnees and the reintegration of returnees, as well as housing of persons granted international protection in accordance with the Act on International and Temporary Protection.⁶⁸ With the aim of improving the asylum system and aligning it with the best practice of the European Union, in addition to amending its legislation, the Republic of Croatia has also undertaken activities for the development of administrative and technical capacities, such as increasing accommodation capacities for applicants for international protection, and training and increasing the number of officials working on tasks relating to international protection. These activities targeting applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection are co-financed by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund under the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, and

⁶⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 70/15 and 127/17.

such financing will continue under the new financial perspective of the European Union for the 2021–2027 period.

Housing programmes are also implemented with a view to securing conditions for the development and settlement of war-damaged and other assisted areas. With the intention of achieving positive effects in terms of settling such areas and the population staying there, people of professions and occupations in high demand have also been provided with housing. Victims of domestic violence have been provided with housing throughout Croatia; and, since 2018, housing units have been provided to accommodate persons with approved international protection.

Some of the housing programmes that should be highlighted are the Housing Programme for Victims of the Homeland War, the Socially Supported Housing Construction Programme (POS), the Housing Programme for Returnees, Former Tenancy-Right Holders and the Socially Supported Housing Rental Programme.

In exceptional circumstances, such as floods, fires, landslides, earthquakes, explosions and other similar circumstances, in the area of application of the Act on Housing in Assisted Areas, a family that has lost its only housing unit is also provided with housing. One of the measures to help citizens solve their housing issues is the subsidization of housing loans, as an incentive providing young people with subsidies for paying part of the housing loan during the first five years of housing-loan repayment.

The Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing focuses on enhancing the coverage of those social groups which are in any way prevented from resolving their housing-related problems and works on solving housing issues for the following disadvantaged groups: displaced persons, returnees and refugees as former tenancy-right holders, victims of domestic violence, persons who have been deprived of their only housing unit due to extraordinary circumstances (floods, earthquakes and similar circumstances), persons with approved international protection, socially vulnerable groups, groups at risk of poverty, young families who do not own another housing unit, and the most vulnerable groups of returnees and refugees in need of housing that meet the criteria of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Continuous efforts are being invested in putting into operation vacant flats owned by the Republic of Croatia. The regular activities of the Office include those aimed at solving housing problems using tools to encourage the return, stay and settlement of the population, based on the conclusion of the Government of the Republic of Croatia of 4 January 2021. In addition, the Office has been providing temporary accommodation, using the available housing pool it manages, for families and individuals who were left – due to the devastating earthquakes in Croatia in 2020 – without the housing units in which they lived, and who cannot afford to provide adequate accommodation for themselves. For the duration of the temporary accommodation, the beneficiaries are exempt from all accommodation costs.

On the basis of applications for temporary housing, requested because, due to the earthquake, somebody was left without the only housing unit in which they lived, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing has provided temporary accommodation in the shortest possible period of time for families and individuals who were left without housing in the earthquake-affected areas, and who cannot afford to provide adequate accommodation for themselves through their work or income, or otherwise.

All available housing units have been put in use to temporarily accommodate people from earthquake-affected areas. Between the end of 2020 and 19 April 2022, 116 decisions on

temporary accommodation were adopted, of which 96 are active, while 20 beneficiaries have withdrawn their applications in the meantime. In line with the amendments to the Earthquake Reconstruction Act, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing is also responsible for temporary accommodation in mobile housing units (residential containers) in the area where disaster was declared.

For this purpose, in January 2022, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing took 359 containers and mobile homes for the housing of beneficiaries from the Ministry of the Interior. The majority of the housing units managed by the Central State Office are furnished with the most necessary household equipment and furniture and the beneficiaries have been exempted from all housing-related costs for the duration of the temporary accommodation. For those beneficiaries who have not accepted the accommodation offered in other regions, the solution for their housing problem will be provided either by reconstruction or construction of new housing units. The reconstruction or removal of damaged family houses and construction of replacement houses has been conducted on the basis of the Act on the Reconstruction of Earthquake-Damaged Buildings in the Territory of the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje County, Zagreb County, Sisak-Moslavina County and Karlovac County.⁶⁹

The Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing has been providing housing by renting state-owned family houses, renting state-owned apartments, donating uninhabitable state-owned family houses and building material for their renovation or reconstruction, upgrading and completion of the construction of beneficiary-owned family houses. Furthermore, for the purpose of the provision of housing, lease contracts have been concluded, and protected rent for the use of state-owned housing units has been paid.

Capital subsidies for sustainable return have been realized by co-financing construction projects for pre-school education institutions, health institutions, energy renovation of institutions, public lighting, eco-designed lighting, construction of pumping stations, construction of footpaths and unclassified roads, improvement of unclassified roads, reconstruction of roads, modernization of transport and utility infrastructure, construction of water-supply systems, furnishing of cultural centres, renovation of community centres and construction of sports grounds.

One of the basic principles applied in the Central State Office's operation is equal treatment as regards solving housing problems and providing equal opportunities for everyone, in order to create preconditions for an adequate inclusion in society, and equal presence in all areas of life for almost all the beneficiaries, by solving their housing problems.

Despite the activities carried out at the national level, certain challenges have been identified. According to recent research, the affordability of housing is still the main obstacle to meeting housing needs and exercising the right to housing as a social right in Croatia. According to the available research on housing status,⁷⁰ in the previous decade there was a noticeable insecurity of housing achieved through market mechanisms, be it by money-borrowing or private renting. On the one hand, there are problems of over-indebtedness and difficulties households have with repaying their housing loans, resulting in an increasing number of frozen bank accounts, foreclosures and evictions; and, on the other hand, the private rental market is not properly regulated. Some of the extremely high number of frozen bank accounts in Croatia, which peaked in late 2016 at just over 327,000 frozen citizens' accounts, related to debts ensuing from

⁶⁹ Official Gazette, no. 21/23.

⁷⁰ Rodik, P., Matković, T. & Pandžić, J. (2019) "Housing careers in Croatia: from self-managed socialism to the crisis of financial capitalism", *Revija za sociologiju*, 49(3), pp. 319–348. Available at: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/index.php/rzs/article/view/8726> (accessed on 20 January 2021).

housing loans and mortgages, while the number of foreclosed apartments and houses increased from 738 in 2007 to 3,225 in 2014.

Renting of a flat or house on the private rental market in Croatia – as in other post-socialist countries⁷¹ – is still largely part of the grey economy, characterized by informal agreements, rather than formal contractual arrangements, which impacts the security and stability of the tenants' housing status.

According to Eurostat data for Croatia in 2019, 35.7% of tenants who paid market rent were overburdened: that is, housing costs accounted for more than 40% of their disposable income.⁷² Apart from the fact that different housing statuses are accompanied by different types of (in)security, their inherent risks do not equally affect various demographic and socio-economic groups.

Recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia through national and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights and combatting of discrimination regard the provision of social housing for groups of less favourable socioeconomic status, including young people leaving alternative care,⁷³ ensuring affordable and adequate social housing in integrated areas for the Roma, and the legalization of housing units and prevention of forced evictions.⁷⁴

In addition to international recommendations, the European Court of Human Rights, in *Statileo v. Croatia* (Judgment, 10 July 2014, application no. 12027/10) found a violation of Article 1 of Protocol no. 1 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The judgment states that the Apartment Lease Act places a disproportionate and excessive individual burden on lessors, since they must bear most of the social and financial costs relating to housing. Furthermore, the recommendations of the Ombudsman also highlight the unequal status of the elderly, given that the beneficiaries of state-owned old-people's homes enjoy subsidized accommodation, unlike those in private homes, who are thus placed in a less favourable position.

Consequently, certain groups, such as returnees/refugees as former tenancy-right holders, victims of the Homeland War, homeless people, young people who have left homes for abandoned children and young adults without parental care, and international-protection seekers have been recognized as particularly vulnerable in the context of access to adequate housing. Furthermore, in the context of access to housing, another vulnerable group is dispossessed persons and members of their households, who may be left without the only adequate and safe shelter for life as a result of a forced eviction, which can lead to homelessness and be especially devastating to the health and life of dispossessed persons and members of their households.

Habitability is yet another relevant aspect of the right to adequate housing. Housing is not adequate if it cannot guarantee safety or provide adequate space, as well as protection from cold, humidity, heat and other health and structural risks. Therefore, the concept of energy poverty is closely related to access to housing. In Croatia, there is still no single and generally accepted definition of energy poverty, while the definition most commonly used in various documents of the European Union is that which says that a household can be described as a

⁷¹ Pandžić, J. (2018). 'József Hegedüs, Martin Lux, Vera Horváth (eds.): Private Rental Housing in Transition Countries. An Alternative to Owner Occupation?', *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 25(2), pp. 230-234. <https://doi.org/10.3935/rsp.v25i2.1546>

⁷² Eurostat, 2019. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tessi164/default/table?lang=en>

⁷³ Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168046ccea>

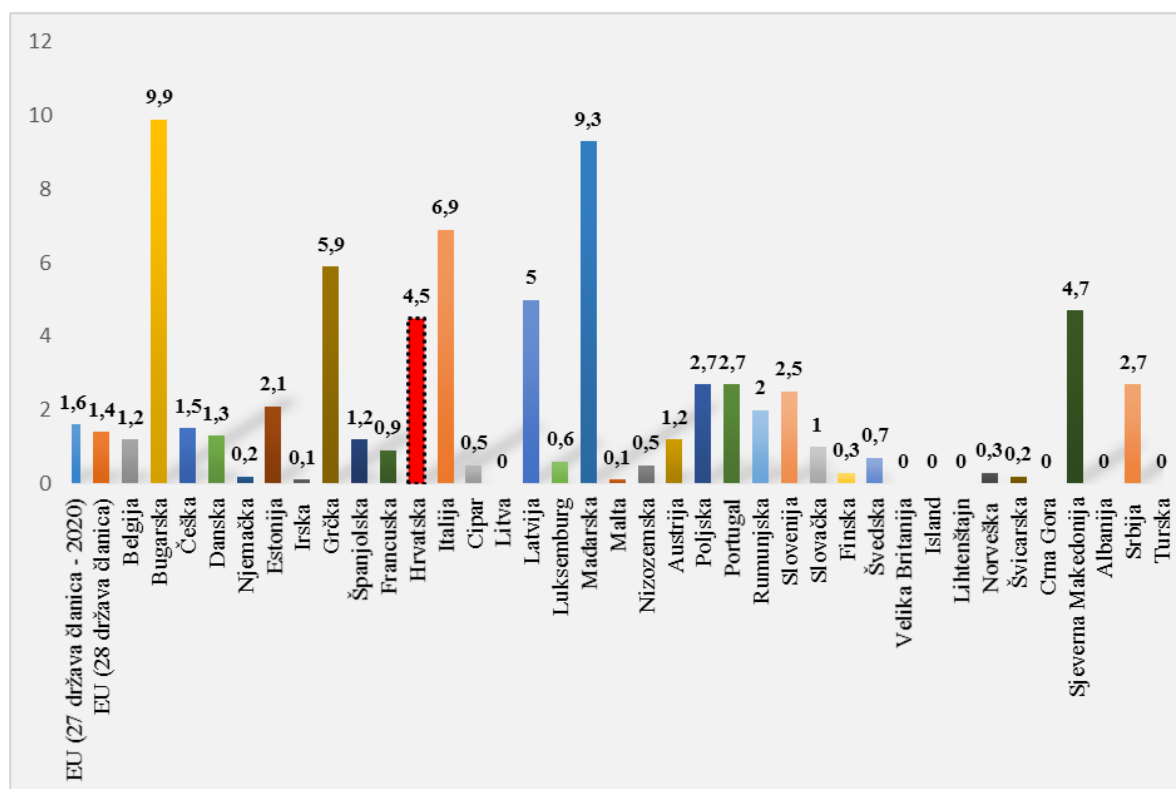
⁷⁴ Report on the Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies for 2019.

household at risk of energy poverty if its energy costs account for more than 10% of household income. Energy poverty is most often described as a combination of several factors: low income, high energy expenses and low household energy efficiency. Energy poverty is therefore a complex problem that requires an interdisciplinary approach of various sectors: energy, social-welfare system, health-care system.

Among the recommendations of international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, and in relation to energy poverty, one that is highlighted is the need to ensure access to clean water, basic infrastructure and key municipal utilities for all, with explicit protective measures for members of the Roma national minority.

The need for interventions in the field of energy poverty is also indicated by Eurostat data from 2018, according to which 17.5% of households in the Republic of Croatia cannot cover their costs of electricity, gas, heating and water, while, according to the 2021 Population Income Survey,⁷⁵ 5.7% of people live in households that cannot afford adequate heating in the coldest months.

Figure 3. Rate of severe deprivation of the population by housing status⁷⁶



In order to respond to development needs, measures will be taken to create equal conditions for the exercise of the right to housing, funding will be provided to investigate inequalities and occurrences of discrimination of certain groups, the level of knowledge of relevant stakeholders

⁷⁵ Survey harmonized with the EU regulations and Eurostat methodology for the EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) surveys.

⁷⁶ Regards the proportion of population in overcrowded housing units with at least one indicator of housing deprivation. The figure is based on Statistics on Income and Living Conditions in the EU (EU-SILC).

and the public about inequalities in the field of housing will be raised, citizens living in the earthquake-affected areas will be informed about the possibilities of exercising their right to adequate housing, and the implementation of the measure of putting into use vacant housing units owned by the Republic of Croatia will continue, together with the implementation of housing programmes.

3.7. Protecting citizens' rights and combatting discrimination in crisis situations

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 was developed in a period marked by numerous crisis situations at the global and national levels. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, war in Ukraine and the highest level of displaced persons on record since World War II, and consequences of the disaster caused by earthquakes at the national level, emphasized the importance of protecting human rights for the resilience of societies and efficient coping with crises. At the same time, they also deepened the existing challenges in the field of human rights and equality. Crisis situations have highlighted the necessity to invest in human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in order to respond efficiently to crisis situations.

The recent period was marked by efforts aimed at combatting the pandemic of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which affected a number of areas of social and economic life, including the exercise of citizens' rights. The global crisis of unparalleled proportions additionally highlighted existing challenges in the field of protection of human rights and deepened existing inequalities, in particular as regards access to public services.

Due to the possible implications for the exercise of citizens' rights, in 2020 international bodies active within the framework of human-rights protection mechanisms pointed to the need to mitigate inequalities and protect against discrimination in the context of the crisis caused by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. Thus, the holders of the mandate of the United Nations Special Procedures issued a series of press releases and direct communications in which they emphasized that, when adopting extraordinary measures to protect the health and well-being of the population, human rights must be in the focus.

The Council of Europe has published a document entitled “Respecting democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis”⁷⁷ which provides guidance to Member States highlighting the need to ensure respect for human rights while responding to the health crisis, to protect particularly vulnerable groups (the elderly and those not covered by health insurance) and to take action against racism, xenophobia and stigmatization. At the national level, the Ombudsman has published, in cooperation with the Special Ombudsmen, a report entitled “The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on human rights and equality: Recommendations to enhance resilience to future crises”, which contains a list of general and specific recommendations for particularly vulnerable groups in the context of crisis situations.⁷⁸

Taking into account that the implementation of epidemiological measures has resulted in significant changes in various areas of socioeconomic life, certain groups have been recognized as particularly vulnerable. Among them, the following stand out: elderly people (difficult access to care and increased risk of poverty), persons with disabilities and chronic diseases (difficult

⁷⁷ A Croatian version of the document is available on webpages of the Office of the Representative of the Republic of Croatia before the European Court for Human Rights at: <https://uredzastupnika.gov.hr/vijesti/informativni-dokument-vijeca-europe/629>

⁷⁸ Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/izvjesce-utjecaj-epidemije-covid-19-na-ljudska-prava-i-jednakost-preporuke-za-jacanje-otpornosti-na-buduce-krize/>

access to health care), single-parent families (increased risk of poverty due to unemployment), homeless people (difficult access to public services, public transport), women (increased stress and risk of infection for those working in supporting professions, more often at risk of domestic violence), people in institutional environments (prisoners, people in reception centres for international protection-seekers), children of lower socioeconomic status (difficult regular attendance of on-line classes, access to technologies for on-line learning, access to the Internet), people living in inadequate housing conditions, those in overcrowded spaces where physical distance cannot be maintained, and households with no running water.

Furthermore, people who had undergone treatment that has been suspended (such as transgender people) and people who have been subjected to hatred and/or violence in their homes for various reasons, as well as other groups whose position is particularly jeopardized under the impact of the crisis.

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, there has been an increase in xenophobic and racist incidents in most Member States, an increase in discrimination as regards access to goods and services, and xenophobic statements reported in public, as well as an increase in disinformation in the media, while issues relating to the protection of personal data have also been raised. Some significant risks to the protection of personal data relate to the use of personal data for the purpose of developing tracking applications.⁷⁹

Although not all the consequences of the crisis caused by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic on the protection of human rights and the suppression of discrimination in Croatia are known at the time of drafting this document, the data collected at the level of the Union and at national level can serve as a guideline for designing measures aimed at combatting negative consequences of the current crisis and achieving equality in the level of protection of citizens' rights. The Ombudsman's reports for 2020 and 2021 indicate that the crisis caused by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic was also reflected in an increased number of complaints relating to the circumstances of the pandemic, and problems caused by the (non)application of epidemiological measures.

In 2021, the number of complaints for discrimination based on health status increased by 161% compared to the previous year. According to the data provided by the Ombudsman, a large number of complaints regarded the circumstances of the pandemics without citing any grounds for discrimination (30%), with the complainants claiming that epidemiological measures were discriminatory, but it was not possible to identify the grounds from the Anti-Discrimination Act.

The Ombudsman's recommendations based on the analysis of the situation in 2020 and 2021 especially emphasize the need for legislative changes, strategic action in the field of developing mental-health systems, informing citizens about their rights in the health-care system (including opportunities for getting psychological help) and taking measures to enable equal access to health-care services in crisis situations (including access to health-care services for the homeless and other socially vulnerable groups who do not have the basic health insurance).

In addition to making access to health-care services more difficult, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has affected the overall possibility of exercising a number of citizens' social and economic rights, such as rights in the field of employment and civil-service relations. The number of complaints of discrimination based on property status (relating to the availability of public

⁷⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020. *Fundamental rights implications of COVID-19*. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/themes/covid-19>

services) has also increased. Complaints of discrimination based on ethnic origin continue to be among the most prevalent under the new circumstances, so it is necessary to intensify efforts to raise awareness of the professionals and the general public about the right to equal treatment and mechanisms for combatting discrimination.

In the context of the health crisis, it is particularly important to improve the system of monitoring data on equality broken down by ethnicity, gender, property status and other characteristics (while ensuring the protection of personal data), in order to enable the identification of particularly vulnerable groups of citizens in crisis situations.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia has emphasized strengthening of resilience to crisis as one of the four directions of development, that is, strategic determinants of development in the NDS 2030. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Croatia for the 2021–2026 period has also been adopted, which envisages a series of reform and investment measures.

Under the conditions of the pandemic, measures were taken to preserve economic activity, in order to make it easier for entrepreneurs to operate under the new circumstances and to enable them to continue operating while preserving jobs. State-administration bodies developed instructions, directions and recommendations with the aim of preventing and combatting the spread of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, and special models were developed for the work of educational institutions under the new circumstances.

In addition to the pandemic, in 2020, the Republic of Croatia also experienced catastrophic earthquakes: in March in the City of Zagreb, Zagreb County and Krapina-Zagorje County, and in December in the Sisak-Moslavina County, Karlovac County, Zagreb County and the City of Zagreb. The earthquakes particularly affected the population of Petrinja, Glina, Sisak and numerous surrounding villages. The 2020 earthquakes in the Republic of Croatia caused loss of human lives and significant damage to property and infrastructure, but in the short and medium term they will also affect the ability to exercise one's rights, especially in the context of access to housing and access to public services, taking into account that many citizens from the earthquake-affected areas have left their homes either temporarily or permanently, and that many institutions have been moved, or their operation hindered, in the aftermath of the earthquakes.

In order to mitigate the position of people affected by the earthquake, prior to the adoption of a special law on the reconstruction of the City of Zagreb, measures were adopted to provide direct assistance to citizens in the form of construction material or financial assistance for the purchase of construction material and/or for construction works. Property owners and protected tenants in difficult social circumstances, and those with health problems, were invited to conclude temporary lease agreements for apartments owned by the City, if they did not own another property. The Government of the Republic of Croatia provided EUR 1,858,119.32 for the reimbursement of costs to persons who urgently repaired their properties. The Decision on financing the rent for the accommodation of owners and protected tenants of properties marked as unusable and unfit for housing was also adopted.

For the purpose of eliminating consequences of the disaster caused by the earthquake in Sisak-Moslavina County, Karlovac County and Zagreb County, a series of activities have been carried out,⁸⁰ such as providing individual and organized accommodation, writing off energy-related

⁸⁰ A list of activities undertaken by central state administration bodies aimed at eliminating consequences of the disaster caused by the earthquakes is available at: <https://potresinfo.gov.hr/aktivnosti-vlade/16>

debt in earthquake-affected areas, exempting those affected from paying participation fees for health-care services, providing psychological help, organizing food distribution etc., in an attempt to provide direct assistance for persons affected by the earthquakes, and access to public services to which they are entitled.

Despite numerous measures, in the medium term, it is necessary to monitor the impact of crisis situations on the capability of exercising citizens' rights in affected areas. It is also necessary to develop additional measures, relating to informing and educating key stakeholders involved in the post-earthquake reconstruction process about human rights and non-discrimination, in order to strengthen the capacity to protect rights in crisis situations.

In order to ensure the respect of rights in crisis situations and to combat all forms of unequal treatment, activities have been planned with the aim of building the capacity of public administration to apply mechanisms for the protection of rights in crisis situations.

In addition to providing direct assistance (such as free legal assistance, and psychological assistance) to particularly affected groups, attention should also be paid to public-service providers and civil and public servants (including those employed in public authorities at the local level), so that key stakeholders are adequately informed about the importance of ensuring the exercise of rights in crisis situations.

In the forthcoming period, it will be necessary to implement measures aimed at strengthening the capacity of the entire public administration in the field of protection and promotion of citizens' rights, with a special emphasis on crisis management. In the medium term, the system of monitoring data on the health status of groups more frequently discriminated against will be improved, the knowledge and competences of public officials engaged in preventing discrimination, especially among public-sector service providers, will be improved, and measures will be implemented with a special emphasis on the protection of citizens' rights in crisis situations. In the period to 2027, financing will be secured for civil-society organizations and local-government units for the implementation of activities relating to the provision of direct support to groups more frequently discriminated against and other groups recognized as particularly affected by crisis situations.

3.8. International and European instruments for the protection of human rights

In addition to the Constitution of the RoC and national regulations, human rights are also protected at the international level, through international treaties. The basis for the validity of international treaties in the Republic of Croatia is prescribed by the Constitution of the RoC, which stipulates in Article 134 that international treaties are a component of the domestic legal order and have primacy over domestic law. The Republic of Croatia is a party to key international instruments for the protection of human rights adopted under the auspices of the United Nations: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006). Croatia also translated the generally accepted Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and published it in its Official Gazette in 2009.

The Republic of Croatia is a party to the instruments for the protection of human rights adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe, namely the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), the European Social Charter (1961),⁸¹ the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995).

In addition to being part of the Croatian legal order, and as such introduce into it high standards of human-rights protection, certain international treaties are especially important because they oblige the state to report to the treaty bodies that monitor their application. As part of this monitoring process, recommendations are addressed to the states. In the field of human-rights protection, an interdepartmental analysis of the impact of ratification on the national legislation of the Republic of Croatia has also been planned for the forthcoming period. It will serve as the basis for adoption of appropriate decisions on future ratifications.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia through mechanisms for the protection of human rights. In light of the 2030 Global Sustainable Development Goals, it is evident that the highest number of recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia can be linked to goal 16, *Peace, justice and strong institutions*, which regards building an inclusive society based on respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance at all levels. In terms of representation, the following group of recommendations relate to goal 5, *Gender equality*, and goal 10, *Reduced inequalities*, focused on reducing inequalities in income, as well as inequalities based on gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity and religion, both within and between countries.

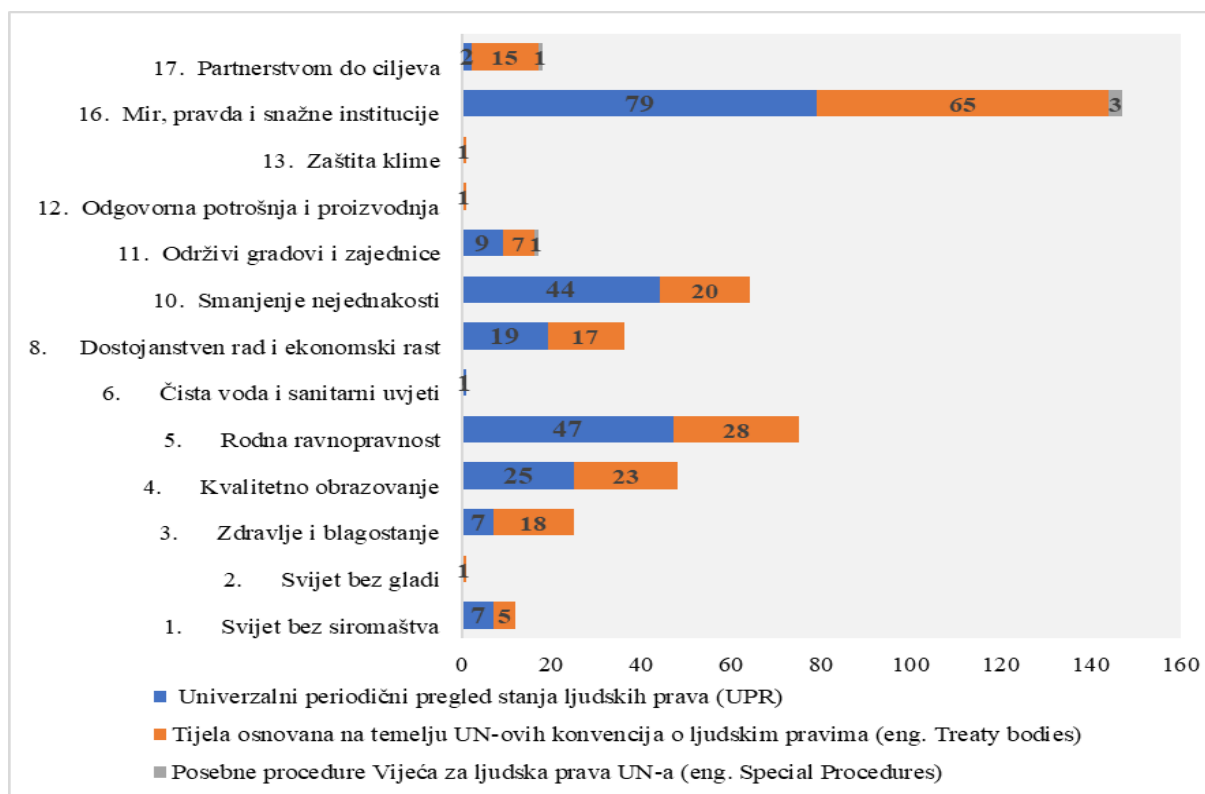
Recommendations addressed to states by treaty bodies supervising the application of individual human-rights treaties and other supervisory mechanisms (so-called non-treaty procedures or Charter-based mechanisms), which are based on the United Nations Charter, contribute to further improvement of protection standards. The recommendations should be continuously followed, and effort should be invested in their effective implementation, often requiring coordinated action by a number of public bodies. In addition, it is necessary to conduct activities that will contribute to raising awareness of the rights arising from international instruments for the protection of human rights and to regularly educate the professionals and the general public.

Figure 4.⁸² *Recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Situation, by bodies established under United*

⁸¹ In 2002, the Republic of Croatia ratified the European Social Charter, Additional Protocol and Protocol Amending the European Social Charter, which has established a system of collective complaints and regular reporting.

⁸² The figure includes all the recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia that are linked to at least one of the 169 SDG indicators.

*Nations conventions or by the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council*⁸³



In addition to the aforementioned international human-rights treaties adopted under the auspices of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, the Republic of Croatia attaches particular importance to instruments protecting the rights of citizens of the European Union. The protection of human rights is one of the fundamental principles on which the European Union is founded, along with freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. These principles are also embedded in its basic acts – the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union⁸⁴ and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁸⁵ (hereinafter: the Charter) as a key instrument for the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of the citizens of the Union. While, on the one hand, the scope of the Charter is broad, on the other hand, its application is limited only to the institutions and bodies of the Union, while Member States apply it when they implement Union law, as highlighted in Article 51, which serves to establish the boundary between the scope of the Charter and the scope of national constitutions and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.⁸⁶

According to the Report on the implementation of the Charter in the institutional framework of the European Union,⁸⁷ despite the clarifications provided by the Court of Justice of the European Union, national practices reveal that it is still difficult to assess whether the Charter is applied in practice, and in which specific way. It has been observed that the Charter is

⁸³ Special Procedures – the largest independent expert body within the UN – is the general name given to independent, investigative and monitoring mechanisms of the Council which examine specific situations in various countries or global thematic issues.

⁸⁴ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016ME%2FTXT>

⁸⁵ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/HR/legal-content/summary/charter-of-fundamental-rights-of-the-european-union.html>

⁸⁶ Official Gazette, nos. MU 18/97, 6/99, 14/02, 13/03, 9/05, 1/06, 2/10 and 13/17.

⁸⁷ The report is available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0051_HR.html

sometimes used by national judges as a positive source of interpretation, even in cases falling outside the scope of Union law. The lack of clarity in the application, combined with the widespread lack of awareness of the Charter and the lack of national policies aimed at promoting its application, leads to its underutilization.

The lack of awareness of the rights arising from Union instruments is also indicated by the results of a Eurobarometer survey,⁸⁸ according to which more than half of the respondents in 2019 stated that they were not familiar with the Charter or its relevance. The majority of respondents (72%) stated that they were not well informed about the Charter, and 60% expressed interest in obtaining additional information. The 2020 Report on Fundamental Rights in the European Union⁸⁹ revealed that, even among experts (judicial officials, legal experts, civil-society organizations and independent human-rights institutions), there is an insufficient understanding of the added value of the Charter compared to other human-rights instruments at the national and international level, and pointed to the need for additional research on the application of the Charter, activities aimed at increasing its visibility and raising awareness among civil-society organizations and independent human-rights institutions, public bodies and the general public. The Report encourages consideration of compliance with the Charter when assessing the effects of regulations, and strengthening the capacity of independent human-rights institutions so that they are able to provide information, as well as support, for state bodies in charge of law-making, policy-making and implementation of European Union funds in the application of the Charter at national level.

In order to ensure the necessary preconditions for the efficient and effective use of European Union funds, a list of requirements allowing the implementation of European Union funds in the period from 2021 to 2027 has been established, which includes a horizontal precondition – Effective implementation and application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Consequently, in the period to 2027, it is necessary to work continuously on improving the level of knowledge of public officials working in the system of management and control of European Union funds, as well as potential applicants for and beneficiaries of aid, with a view to increasing their understanding of the possibilities for the application of the Charter in this area.

Ultimately, the need for strategic action aimed at informing and promoting international, regional and European instruments for the protection of human rights, with particular emphasis on the Charter, stems from the findings of a comprehensive survey in 2019 on the attitudes of citizens of the European Union about fundamental rights.⁹⁰ The results of this survey indicate that citizens of lower income status and lower level of education are more likely than other groups of respondents to believe that they do not have the same level of rights and that they are not efficiently informed about their rights or opportunities to exercise them. For example, no fewer than 44% of respondents of lower socioeconomic status (compared to 27% of respondents of higher socioeconomic status) showed a high level of distrust towards the system of protection of citizens' rights. Elderly respondents and disadvantaged people, such as people with disabilities and those with severe health problems, expressed more negative attitudes about human rights.

The findings of the same survey indicate that there is a lower level of knowledge about the Charter in comparison to other human-rights instruments, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Only 53% of respondents stated that they were familiar with the

⁸⁸ Special Eurobarometer survey 487b.

⁸⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020, Fundamental Rights Report 2020. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-report-2020_en.pdf

⁹⁰ Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2021/frs>

Charter, compared to 67% of those familiar with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Moreover, the level of knowledge about human-rights protection instruments is lower among persons of lower socioeconomic status (lower income status and lower level of education), the elderly and the unemployed.⁹¹ All of the above indicates that measures are needed to efficiently inform citizens who are disadvantaged and at risk of social exclusion and discrimination about their rights and opportunities to exercise them. An important role in the information process should be played by civil-society organizations and independent human-rights institutions.

In the medium term, the needs identified will be met by strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation with the aim of more effective monitoring and response to the recommendations of ombudsman institutions at the national level, as well as international recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia by treaty bodies supervising the implementation of international human-rights treaties and other supervisory procedures and mechanisms established under the auspices of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Information will also be provided about international, regional and European instruments for the protection of human rights and opportunities for the exercise of citizens' rights. In parallel, the capacities of judicial officials, legal and other experts, public-policy makers and all those involved in the preparation and adoption of laws for the application of the Charter at the national level will be strengthened.

3.9. Rule of law and equal access to justice

The right of access to court and other institutions of the judicial system is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the human right to a fair trial. This right is guaranteed at the constitutional and legislative level, and through the application of international law. Access to justice is one of the central topics addressed by the Council of Europe, with a number of resolutions highlighting that the right of access to justice for all, regardless of their property and other differences, is a fundamental feature of any democratic society. The rule of law and equality in access to justice are also present among the Global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (goal 16, *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*).

The 2021 European Union Justice Scoreboard, a report that presents and compares indicators of the independence, quality and efficiency of judicial bodies, indicates that the citizens' perception of the judiciary in the Republic of Croatia is unfavourable. The level of negative perception of judicial independence among the general public deteriorated in 2021 and remains among the lowest in the European Union. (The proportion of the public that considers judicial independence to be good or very good decreased from 24% to 17%.)⁹² In addition, the results of the 2019 survey on the attitudes of European Union citizens on fundamental rights conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) confirm a lower level of trust in the independence of judicial authorities among Croatian respondents compared to the Union average, with the largest differences in attitudes determined by the income criterion.

⁹¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Fundamental Rights Report 2020*, pp. 27-28. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-report-2020_en.pdf

⁹² European Commission, 2021, *EU Justice Scoreboard for 2021*. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/hr/publication-detail/-/publication/b2a115fd-3d1d-11ec-89db-01aa75ed71a1>

Respondents of less favourable economic status expressed a higher level of distrust in the independence of judicial bodies, as well as respondents with disabilities or some other long-term restrictions causing them to be beneficiaries of social transfers.⁹³ The link between a more disadvantaged socio-economic position and a more negative perception of the state of protection of fundamental rights indicates that it is necessary to continue with efforts aimed at increasing the availability of information to all citizens (and especially to those groups in disadvantaged socioeconomic position) about the rights they can exercise, including the right to free legal aid.

The latest reorganization of the judicial system in the Republic of Croatia was implemented with the adoption of the Act on Areas and Seats of Courts⁹⁴ and the Act on Areas and Seats of State Attorneys' Offices,⁹⁵ and in part also with the amendments to the Courts Act⁹⁶ and the Misdemeanour Act.⁹⁷ A new network of judicial bodies became operational on 1 January 2019.

In the field of access to judicial bodies and increasing the efficiency of the judiciary, the reorganization of the judicial system involved primarily merging municipal and misdemeanour courts and ensuring greater accessibility of judicial bodies to citizens, adjusting the existing network of municipal and commercial courts and municipal state attorney's offices. On the one hand, the number of courts has been reduced, and on the other hand, the number of cities in which courts have their seats has increased.

These changes contribute to the harmonization of the workload of those in charge of solving the cases, shortening the duration of court proceedings, the possibility of unified and full exploitation of all human resources of the judicial bodies that have been merged (especially the possibility of appointing the former judges of misdemeanour courts to other types of cases) and facilitating access to courts for citizens (new courts in the network, the emphasized obligation of court presidents to ensure that all procedural actions are carried out by all staff services in order to resolve cases within the judicial jurisdiction relating to their area of responsibility so that citizens from these settlements do not have to travel to other places, where the courts have their seats).

The adoption of the new Act on Amendments to the State Judicial Council Act⁹⁸ and the new State Attorney's Council Act⁹⁹ contributes to increasing the quality of the judiciary by providing more objective and transparent criteria for the appointment of judicial officials. Improving the efficiency of the judiciary is also achieved by computerization and rationalization of judicial bodies.

Between 2016 and 2020, the technical and IT equipment of the courts was improved. During 2018, e-Spis (*e-File*) was also introduced to the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia. Public access to basic information on court cases or e-Predmet (*e-Case*) is a public and free service available to parties, proxies and other interested persons participating in court proceedings. All commercial courts now have the capability of e-communication with legal councils, notaries public and the State Attorney's Office.

⁹³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020) What do fundamental rights mean for people in the EU? - the results of the fundamental-rights survey. The English-language version is available at the link: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-human-rights_en.pdf

⁹⁴ Official Gazette, nos. 67/18 and 21/22.

⁹⁵ Official Gazette, nos. 67/18 and 21/22.

⁹⁶ Official Gazette, nos. 28/13, 33/15, 82/15, 82/16, 67/18, 126/19, 130/20, 21/22, 60/22 and 16/23.

⁹⁷ Official Gazette, nos. 107/01, 39/13, 157/13, 110/15, 70/17, 118/18 and 114/22.

⁹⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 116/10, 57/11, 130/11, 13/13, 28/13, 82/15, 67/18, 126/19, 80/22 and 16/23.

⁹⁹ Official Gazette, nos. 67/18, 126/19 and 80/22.

Data from the 2019 survey on the attitudes of EU citizens about fundamental rights¹⁰⁰ indicate that special attention should be paid to anti-corruption measures, taking into account the impact this phenomenon can have on fundamental human rights, especially in terms of equality of access to public services. Thus far, the Republic of Croatia has had several strategic frameworks in this area (the 2002 National Anti-Corruption Programme and the associated Action Plan, National Anti-Corruption Programme 2006–2008, 2008 Anti-Corruption Strategy, Anti-Corruption Strategy for the 2015–2020 period), in the scope of which the necessary legislative and institutional framework in the field of repressive action against corruption offences has been set up, together with corruption-prevention mechanisms.

Furthermore, at its session of 29 October 2021, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Corruption Prevention Strategy for the 2021–2030 period, with a view to continuing the incessant strategic implementation and improvement of the system of anti-corruption measures in the Republic of Croatia. The continued implementation of judicial reform and the implementation of measures aimed at an uncompromising fight against corruption, with an emphasis on its prevention, are also listed among the objectives in the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office.¹⁰¹

In addition to the Anti-Corruption Strategy for the 2015–2020 period,¹⁰² three biennial action plans were implemented during the six-year strategic period. During the period of implementation of these documents, numerous activities were carried out with the aim of strengthening the anti-corruption mechanism. With the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Council in 2017, the Government of the Republic of Croatia additionally enhanced the mechanism for monitoring the implementation and assessing the success of the effects of anti-corruption measures, with a view to ensuring the effectiveness of overall national anti-corruption efforts.

With the aim of strengthening mechanisms in the field of combatting corruption, the Act on the Protection of Persons Reporting Irregularities (“Whistleblower Protection Act”) was adopted in February 2019.¹⁰³ The Act combines all legal standards for the protection of whistleblowers in one special law (*lex specialis*), which will form a system that will enable potential whistleblowers to efficiently report irregularities and adequately protect their integrity, with the aim of raising public awareness among employees and citizens about the need to report illegal and corrupt behaviour and generally increase accountability and transparency of the public and private sectors’ operations. The Ombudsman has been appointed as the body responsible for external reporting of irregularities, thus further expanding the institutional framework in the field of anti-corruption.

In the same year in which the Republic of Croatia adopted the Act mentioned above, the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law was adopted at the level of the European Union, and the adoption of a new Act on the protection of persons reporting irregularities¹⁰⁴ was initiated due to the need to harmonize our legislation with the EU Directive. The new Act was also used to additionally regulate certain issues which have emerged from the practice. The new Act strengthened the legal protection of whistleblowers by ensuring their right to primary, free legal aid, expanded

¹⁰⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020) What do fundamental rights mean for people in the EU? - the results of the fundamental-rights survey. The English language version is available at the link:

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-human-rights_en.pdf

¹⁰¹ See: Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office, 2020, p. 13.

¹⁰² Official Gazette, no. 26/15.

¹⁰³ Official Gazette, no. 17/19.

¹⁰⁴ Official Gazette, no. 46/22.

the circle of persons entitled to protection and simplified the reporting procedure, which will encourage citizens to report irregularities.

In terms of greater availability of free legal aid, the Free Legal Aid Act¹⁰⁵ introduced significant modifications to the system and simplified the procedure for obtaining primary legal aid. The expansion (compared to the previous regulation) of the form of primary legal aid allowed for the so-called legal counselling of beneficiaries, in order to identify the specific legal issue and solve it. The inclusion of civil-society organizations, legal clinics and state administration bodies in the primary legal-aid system has increased the territorial availability of primary legal aid, which, in addition to simplifying the procedure for exercising the right to primary legal aid, has resulted in an increase in the number of beneficiaries of this type of legal aid.

Although the planned funds for financing projects of authorized associations and law faculties for the provision of primary legal aid in 2016 and 2017 were reduced in comparison to earlier years (in 2016 they amounted to EUR 92,905.97, and in 2017 to EUR 138,849.96), in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 these amounts were increased. (In 2018 the planned funds for financing projects for the provision of primary legal aid amounted to EUR 172,539.65, in 2019 to EUR 254,960.51, in 2020 to EUR 280,045.13, and in 2021 to EUR 263,454.77.)

Efforts were also invested in increasing the visibility of the institution of free legal aid. As a result, in 2016 there was a significant increase in the number of beneficiaries compared to earlier years. Despite some positive developments, data from the Report on the exercise of the right to free legal aid and the usage of funds in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 indicate that the number of applications for secondary legal aid fell. (In 2017, 8,186 requests were received, in 2018, 6,779, in 2019, 5,850, in 2020, 4,459, and in 2021, 4,011.) Despite the progress achieved in terms of availability of legal aid, within the process of monitoring the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended undertaking measures to make legal aid available to all members of all minority groups under simpler requirements, in order to make justice available to all.

Similarly, in the framework of monitoring of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Human Rights Council has recommended increasing the availability of free legal aid with an emphasis on increasing resources and establishing a quality monitoring system for the provision of legal aid. The need for further action in the field of availability of free legal aid is also suggested by the number of complaints submitted to the Ombudsman. In 2019, 50% more complaints were received than the year before due to (not) obtaining free legal aid, difficulties in hiring a lawyer, and the length of time required to obtain a response to the application for secondary legal aid.

In previous years, progress has also been made in the field of protection of the rights of victims and witnesses. On 2 July 2015, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the National Strategy for the Development of the Victim and Witness Support System in the Republic of Croatia for the 2016–2020 period,¹⁰⁶ and in January 2019, the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of the Victim and Witness Support System in the Republic of Croatia for the period to 2020 was adopted.¹⁰⁷ The Action

¹⁰⁵ Official Gazette, nos.: 143/13 and 98/19.

¹⁰⁶ Official Gazette, no. 75/15.

¹⁰⁷ Available at: <https://pravosudje.gov.hr/pristup-informaciama-6341/strategije-planovi-i-izvjesca/nacionalna-strategija-razvoja-sustava-podrske-zrtvama-i-svidocima-u-republici-hrvatskoj-za-period-from-2016-to-2020/9193>

Plan includes most of the goals and measures that were previously implemented under the National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the 2013–2016 period.

In the period to 2027, the plan is to strengthen the capacity of organizations and individuals providing direct assistance for victims of discrimination and to allocate financial support for the implementation of direct assistance and support for persons belonging to groups more frequently discriminated against. Taking into account the efforts made in previous years, and the presence of objectives relating to the suppression of corruption and the protection of victims' rights in planned or existing strategic-planning acts, action will be taken in the framework of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 to further improve access to justice by informing the citizens about their rights and raising their awareness of free legal aid, with particular emphasis on groups of citizens who are more frequently beneficiaries of these services.

3.10. Protecting of the rights of persons deprived of liberty

The prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is embedded in key international and European human-rights instruments (the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms). Particular emphasis should be placed on the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 7) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 37) also contain provisions prohibiting torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It is important to point out that the European Court of Human Rights has also considered the issue of the dignity of persons deprived of their liberty in cases submitted (for example, the conditions of accommodation in prisons in the *Muršić v. Croatia* and *Ulemek v. Croatia* judgments).

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (hereinafter: the Optional Protocol) provides for a complementary system of surveillance of places where people are deprived of their liberty, and this mandate has been assigned to the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture.

With this, a mechanism for visits to States Parties has been established at universal level, similar to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The Optional Protocol also provides for the establishment of a preventive mechanism at the level of State Parties. Independent monitoring of the penal and prison system has been ensured by the Act on the National Preventive Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,¹⁰⁸ which specified the Ombudsman as the body in charge of performing the tasks of the National Preventive Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

¹⁰⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 18/11 and 33/15.

The Republic of Croatia has incorporated into its legislation numerous protection mechanisms relating to victims of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The rights of persons deprived of their liberty are guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, the Execution of Prison Sentences Act,¹⁰⁹ the Criminal Procedure Act¹¹⁰ and the Juvenile Courts Act.¹¹¹ Treatment of juveniles sentenced to a disciplinary measure of referral to a correction facility, and juveniles sentenced to juvenile imprisonment, is carried out on the basis of the Act on the Execution of Sanctions Imposed on Juveniles for Criminal Offences and Misdemeanours.¹¹² Sanctions imposed on juveniles in misdemeanour proceedings are also enforced pursuant to the provisions of this Act. The Act on the Protection of Persons with Mental Disabilities¹¹³ specifies the rights of persons with mental disorders, the consent of persons with mental disorders and protection against all forms of exploitation, abuse and inhuman or degrading treatment.

In previous years, the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration for the 2019–2021 period aimed to increase the accommodation capacities for prisoners, hire employees in the prison system, and modernize and procure the necessary equipment. As a result, the problem of the lack of accommodation capacity in criminal-justice bodies has been significantly reduced, and overcrowding is present only in some of the prisons and closed penitentiaries. The overall situation is satisfactory, with an accommodation capacity of 3,919 places and an average presence of about 3,300 prisoners per day.

Activities aimed at raising the level of competence of officers in the prison system have also been carried out. In 2019, a total of 90 officers of the Prison System and Probation Directorate of the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration received training in communication skills of the judicial police when working with young people and in handling incident situations, as well as in the preparation of the discharge procedure.

Among the applications addressed to the European Court of Human Rights for violations of rights, 6.54% regarded the prohibition of torture, that is, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: in other words, violation of Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Violations of rights often regard the ineffectiveness of investigations in cases of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, which is why additional efforts in developing the system should be directed towards further training of prison and judicial staff.

In addition, persons deprived of liberty have been recognized as a vulnerable group in the context of the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, as a result of which it is necessary to define special measures to protect the rights of persons deprived of liberty in crisis situations. The 2021 Ombudsman's report states that, as in previous years, the most common reason for complaints of prisoners is health care (with an emphasis on low availability of health care in 2021), followed by accommodation conditions, the conduct of officers and the length of enforcement of judges' procedures, while persons with mental disorders complained of forced detention and accommodation, coercion measures and accommodation conditions in psychiatric institutions, which also indicates the need for systematic work to address these challenges in the coming period.

¹⁰⁹ Official Gazette, nos. 14/21.

¹¹⁰ Official Gazette, nos. 152/08, 76/09, 80/11, 121/11, 91/12, 143/12, 56/13, 145/13, 152/14, 70/17, 126/19, 126/19, [130/20](#) and [80/22](#).

¹¹¹ Official Gazette, nos. 84/11, 143/12, 148/13, 56/15 and 126/19.

¹¹² Official Gazette, no. 133/12.

¹¹³ Official Gazette, no. 76/14.

In the medium term, preventive action is planned through training of prison-system officers about ensuring the protection of human rights of persons deprived of liberty and strengthening the capacity of civil-society organizations to monitor the respect of human rights of persons deprived of liberty, as well as the development of post-penal programmes.

3.11. Effective application of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter: the European Court) acts as a subsidiary system for the protection of human rights, that is, a correction mechanism for those violations that have not been corrected at the national level. Its decisions are based on applications submitted by an individual, a group of individuals, a company or civil-society organizations that consider that their rights stemming from the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (hereinafter: the Convention) have been violated, or on an interstate application filed by one state against another. All States Parties to the Convention have undertaken to enforce the European Court judgement rendered in any case to which they are parties.

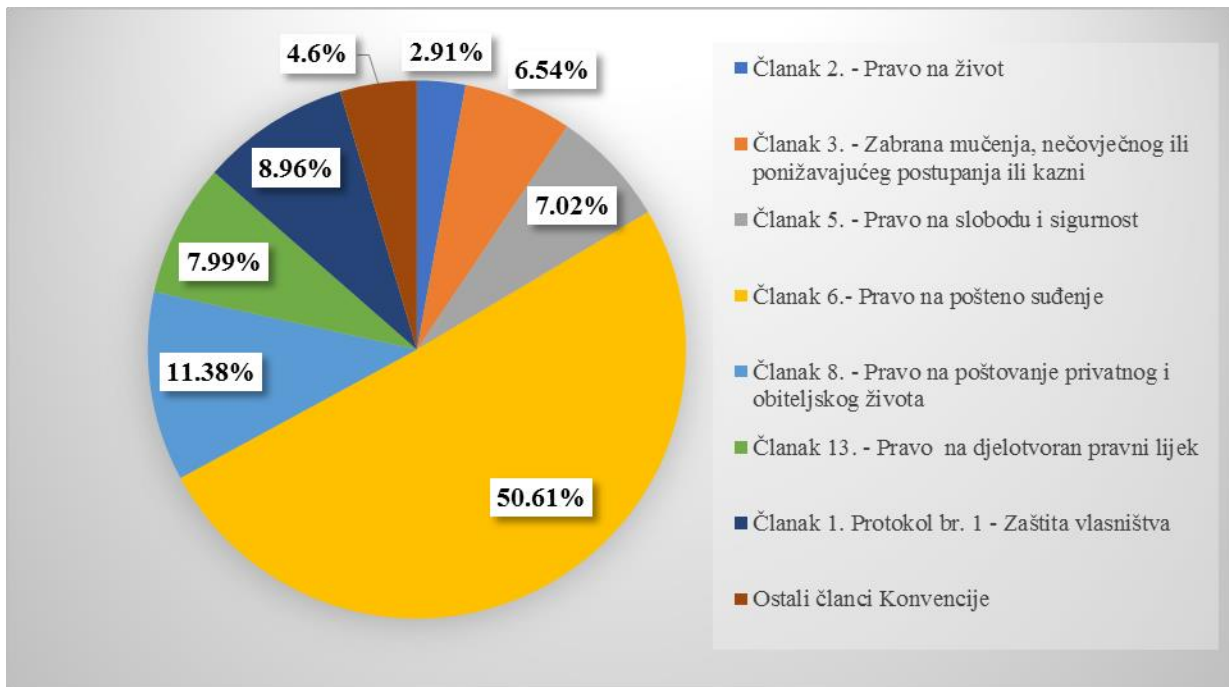
Enforcement of judgments implies the implementation of individual measures aimed at ensuring, as far as possible, restitution to an individual applicant for a violation of Convention rights established by the European Court of Justice, and also the implementation of general measures preventing all future violations of the same kind in similar cases (for example, amendments to national legislation or case law). The national authority (or authorities) which, in the specific case, caused the violation of the Convention by its actions or omissions is responsible for the implementation of measures enforcing the judgment, as well as the authority competent for any matter recognized as the cause of violation in the judgment of the European Court.

The supervision of the judgement's enforcement is carried out by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, as a Council of Europe body authorized to make decisions and monitor the fulfilment of commitments of the member states. The work of the bodies responsible for the enforcement of the European Court's judgments in the Republic of Croatia is coordinated by the Office of the Representative of the Republic of Croatia before the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter: the Office of the Representative) as the central body responsible for communication with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Office of the Representative submits action plans and action reports on the measures undertaken to the Committee of Ministers.

According to a publication of the European Court,¹¹⁴ which contains facts and figures about Croatia based on the judgments rendered, steps and reforms have been made in the field of court efficiency, education of children belonging to the Roma national minority, equal treatment of biological parents and adoptive parents, investigations of war crimes, and independence of the judiciary. On the other hand, in 80% of judgments rendered in cases against the Republic of Croatia, at least one violation of convention law was found. The figure showing the thematic distribution of judgments against the Republic of Croatia (Figure 5) demonstrates that no fewer than half of the judgments regard violations of the right to a fair trial (Article 6 of the Convention).

¹¹⁴ The English version of Facts and Figures - Croatia, 2021 is available at: https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Facts_Figures_Croatia_ENG.pdf

Figure 5. *Thematic distribution of judgments against the Republic of Croatia in which violations of human rights guaranteed by the articles of the Convention have been established*



The judgments issued against the Republic of Croatia point to areas in which additional efforts are needed to ensure full compliance with the standards of human-rights protection. In order to make progress, it is also necessary to improve the efficiency of the implementation of European Court judgments through coordinated action by public bodies, judicial bodies and other stakeholders relevant for the enforcement of judgments in the national context. Consequently, measures to strengthen the capacity of public administration and the judiciary for a more efficient enforcement of the judgments of the European Court will be implemented in the period to 2027.

3.12. The right to a healthy life and environment

The importance of human rights for achieving sustainable development has been increasingly recognized at the global level. Principles and standards for the protection of human rights are the foundation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global framework adopted at the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. The Agenda responds, among other things, to global challenges in a comprehensive manner, placing equal emphasis on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and defines a set of seventeen global goals for sustainable development.

The crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic further emphasized the interconnectedness of climate change, the environment and human rights. In the document *Key Messages on COVID-19, Human Rights and the Environment*, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasize that the states and key stakeholders are obliged to ensure the right to a healthy life and environment, review the attitude towards nature, protect the poor and those discriminated

against, strengthen the rule of law in environmental matters, protect human-rights defenders involved in environmental protection, guarantee everyone access to information and participation in environmental decision-making, minimize harmful effects of medical waste, and use the existing crisis to establish better economic and social systems.

The issue of climate change is regulated globally by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The fundamental objective of the Convention is to achieve stabilization of greenhouse-gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic effects on the climate system. The Republic of Croatia became a party to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1996, with the adoption of the Act on the Ratification of the Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹¹⁵ The Kyoto Protocol is also in force in Croatia, whereby industrial countries have committed to reduce the emissions of six greenhouse gases by an average of 5% by 2012, while in 2015 the Paris Agreement was adopted, in which 195 countries agreed to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and keep the global temperature rise significantly below 2 °C, preferably up to 1.5 °C.

In the context of human rights, the UN General Assembly Resolution (A/76/L.75) entitled "The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment" of 26 July 2022 is also relevant. It recognizes the right to a healthy environment as a human right. The right to a healthy environment also implies strengthening procedural rights, such as access to information in the field of environmental protection and participation in decision-making processes. By implementing the provisions of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the so-called Aarhus Convention), the Republic of Croatia strongly supports the development of environmental democracy and the right of citizens to a healthy environment. This ensures conditions for public participation in environmental decision-making, but it is necessary to work on informing the public about these opportunities.

It should also be noted that in 2019 the Republic of Croatia acceded to the Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), adopted in Paris on 21 June 1976, and related legal documents, among which particularly relevant in the context of the right to a healthy living and the environment are the Council Decision on the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Council Recommendation on Due Diligence Guidelines for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, Council Recommendation on Guidelines on Responsible Supply Chains in Agriculture, Council Recommendation on Due Diligence Guidelines for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement in the Extractive Sector, Council Recommendation on Due Diligence Guidelines on Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector, and the Council Recommendation on Due Diligence Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct. At the OECD Environment Policy Committee meeting held on 31 March 2022, the Republic of Croatia endorsed the new OECD Declaration on a Resilient and Healthy Environment for All.

Sustainable development has long been at the very centre of the European project. With the Treaty of Amsterdam, promoting sustainable development has become one of the fundamental objectives of the European Union, and in 2019 the European Commission presented the European Green Deal, a strategy for achieving sustainability of the economy by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities in all policy areas and ensuring a fair and inclusive transition.¹¹⁶ After the global youth protests called "Fridays for Future" began in 2019,

¹¹⁵ Official Gazette, no. MU 2/96.

¹¹⁶ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_hr

which is considered the beginning of the global climate movement, the European Parliament declared a climatic and environmental crisis in its motion of support for the climate movement.

The findings of a 2019 Eurobarometer survey on EU citizens' attitudes towards the environment¹¹⁷ also point to the importance of environmental protection. Environmental protection is considered important by 94% of Union citizens, and 91% of them consider climate change to be a significant problem. In doing so, the vast majority of respondents believe that environmental problems affect their daily life and health (78% of respondents at the Union level, 82% of Croatian respondents).

In the national context, the preservation of nature and the environment is one of the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia (Article 3). In addition, the right to a healthy life and environment is one of the fundamental human rights guaranteed by Article 69 of the Constitution of the RoC. The basic legislative framework governing the field of environmental protection in the Republic of Croatia consists of the Nature Protection Act,¹¹⁸ the Environmental Protection Act,¹¹⁹ the Air Protection Act,¹²⁰ the Water Act,¹²¹ the Utility Management Act,¹²² the Waste Management Act¹²³ and the Climate Change and Ozone Layer Protection Act,¹²⁴ with associated implementing regulations. The Environmental Protection Act is an umbrella law that systematically regulates the entire field of environmental protection, taking into account European legislation.

The main framework for the implementation of environmental policy is set out in the Nature Protection Strategy and Action Plan of the Republic of Croatia for the 2017–2025 period¹²⁵ as the fundamental strategic-planning act in the field of nature protection, which determines long-term goals and guidelines for the conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity and the manner of its implementation. Since 2020, long-term energy-policy guidelines have been defined by the Energy Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia to 2030 with an outlook to 2050,¹²⁶ which established a framework for a new period of energy policy in which the vision of the transition to low-carbon energy is also pursued. In increasing energy efficiency, benefits for the environment in terms of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions are also sought, and the need for action to combat energy poverty is emphasized.

From the perspective of the protection of human rights, it is necessary to ensure access to safe water for human consumption for the entire population, especially for vulnerable groups. In the Republic of Croatia, water services (public water supply and drainage) are services of general interest. They are performed as a public service, and may only be performed by public water service providers founded exclusively by local-government units in the area they serve. Public water providers are obliged to provide water services to end users (consumers) under non-discriminatory and socially affordable conditions.

Despite the normative strategic framework, certain challenges remain that need to be additionally addressed. Despite the high level of capability to connect to public water-supply

¹¹⁷ Available at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getSurveydetail/instruments/special/surveyky/2257>

¹¹⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 80/13, 15/18, 14/19 and 127/19.

¹¹⁹ Official Gazette, nos. 80/13, 153/13, 78/15, 12/18 and 118/18.

¹²⁰ Official Gazette, nos. 127/19 and 57/22.

¹²¹ Official Gazette, nos. 66/19 and 84/21.

¹²² Official Gazette, nos. 68/18, 110/18 and 32/20.

¹²³ Official Gazette, no. 84/21.

¹²⁴ Official Gazette, no. 127/19.

¹²⁵ Official Gazette, no. 72/17.

¹²⁶ Official Gazette, no. 25/20.

systems (about 94% of the total population), according to the latest data available from the Ministry of Health, 91.5% of the population is actually connected.

The Water Services Act¹²⁷ is a new reformative law regulating the field of water services, which were regulated by the Water Act prior to the entry into force of the new law. The Act ensures participation to local government units, including those local-government units that do not own and have not founded any of the existing public water service providers, the availability of water for human consumption of at least 50 litres per household member per day, even in cases of justified delivery suspensions (e.g. due to non-payment of bills or damage to water meters), and a social price for the entire water service (including public water supply, drainage and waste-water treatment) to which socially vulnerable citizens are entitled and which cannot be higher than 60% of the price paid by other citizens, not only for water supply, but also for drainage and waste-water treatment. In the last decade, the Republic of Croatia has brought access to the public water supply to an enviable level, with 94% of the population having the ability to use water from the public water-supply system. For comparison, in 2010, the capability of the population to connect to public water-supply systems was 80%, and the capability to connect to public drainage systems was 43%. As regards the supply of safe water for human consumption, significant challenge is posed by local water supply systems that are not managed by public water service providers.

Individual water supply systems still exist (those that supply water for fewer than 50 inhabitants or deliver less than 10 m³/day) and those are not encompassed by systematic monitoring of water safety. Due to the aforementioned, the municipalities or towns in whose territories individual water supply systems are located are obliged to carry out activities aimed at health protection, and ensure that the population supplied with water from the individual water supply system has the necessary information about water safety.¹²⁸ According to the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development, the rate of connection to public drainage systems is insufficient and amounts to 57% in 2021, while the real connection rate is even lower and amounts to about 53%.

The Ombudsman has published a special report entitled *The Right to a Healthy Life and Climate Change in the Republic of Croatia 2013–2020*, which shows the link between human rights and environmental protection and provides an assessment of respect for the right to a healthy life. It also contains recommendations that will be considered when implementing measures are developed in the forthcoming period.

In addition, with the aim of protecting and promoting the right to a healthy life and environment in the strategic framework for the period to 2027, activities will continue to inform and educate key stakeholders, as well as citizens, about the right to a healthy environment and, where necessary, to further harmonize national environmental legislation with Union legislation. The education of key stakeholders is of particular importance, taking into account that the competence over individual environmental components is divided among various state bodies, and the effectiveness of monitoring, planning and implementing environmental protection as a whole largely depends on efficient coordination.

¹²⁷ Official Gazette, no. 66/19.

¹²⁸ For example, information that they are exempt from the monitoring plan and that the provisions of the Water for Human Consumption Act and accompanying implementing regulations do not apply to them; that the water used from the individual system is potentially unsafe and can have adverse effects on health; that, if the water from such systems is proven in any way to be unsafe, the municipality, or the town, in cooperation with the locally competent public-health institute, will provide advice for the affected population on the possible usage of such water (e.g. after boiling), or the fact that it cannot be used at all for human consumption.

3.13. Evidence-based human-rights protection and anti-discrimination policy

Protecting human rights and combatting discrimination are two areas of public policies whose successful planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation cannot be achieved without cross-sectoral cooperation. Therefore, it is extremely important to consider the policy of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination horizontally, i.e. in a way focused on the development and integration of collaborative approaches and practices among various stakeholders in the processes of policy drafting, directing and monitoring. Such a complexity of the area is further deepened by the strongly pronounced dimension of international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, which all developed countries, especially members of the European Union, strive to respect. In concrete terms, this implies that a wide range of stakeholders have a certain understanding of the content of key instruments, supervisory mechanisms and procedures of the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe, the relationships and overlaps between various international instruments, and mechanisms for their incorporation into national implementing practices.

Successful action to protect human rights and combat discrimination presupposes adequate information, awareness and acceptance by the general public. Therefore, the human-rights protection and anti-discrimination policy should be based on four fundamental pillars: 1) pronounced horizontal approach to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with an emphasized coordination role of the central state (i.e. the Government of the Republic of Croatia); 2) capacity-building within the state and public administration; 3) focus on respecting international standards for protecting human rights and combatting discrimination, and 4) intensive information, education and awareness-raising of citizens on the importance of these topics.

However, for horizontal public policies on human rights protection and combatting discrimination to be built on reliable data, it is necessary to increase the availability of data on the exercise of fundamental and human rights at the national level, and it is particularly important to ensure the collection of data on equality broken down by gender, age, ethnicity and other characteristics that may indicate inequalities in society. This will allow for a more accurate picture of the situation to be formed, and for future needs to be based on evidence. In the medium term, it will allow for exclusively evidence-based monitoring of the implementation of public policies in the field of human rights protection and combatting discrimination.

The need for data was particularly pronounced when outcome indicators were defined for monitoring the specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027. For this reason, in the period to 2027, strengthening of the knowledge base about exercising human rights and about discrimination is envisaged, as well as research and analytical activities aimed at monitoring the presence of discrimination, especially in the field of access to goods and services, of structural discrimination, and of hate crimes and hate speech.

Pursuant to the *Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data*,¹²⁹ developed by the EU High Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity and the Equality Data Subgroup, a system will be set up for equality-data collection, and cooperation will be

¹²⁹ Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/ec-july-2018-guidelines-equality-data-collection.pdf

encouraged among academia, public bodies, independent institutions and civil-society organizations, with the aim of implementing joint projects and targeted collection of relevant data. These measures will improve the mechanisms for evidence-based monitoring of the protection of human rights and suppression of discrimination.

3.14. The role of the media in the promotion and protection of human rights

In today's society, freedom of speech is one of the fundamental rights, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 10), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 11), and at the national level also by the Constitution of the RoC. Freedom of speech is embedded in key human-rights instruments of the United Nations and the Council of Europe: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19), the Declaration on the Freedom of Expression and Information of the Council of Europe, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC are elaborated in the Media Act,¹³⁰ the Electronic Media Act,¹³¹ and the Croatian Radiotelevision Act.¹³²

The Media Act (Article 3) stipulates that freedom of the media comprises in particular: freedom of the expression of opinion; independence of the media; freedom to collect, investigate, publish and distribute information for the purpose of informing the public; pluralism and diversity of the media; free flow of information and openness of the media to different opinions and beliefs and diverse contents; availability of public information; respect for the protection of human personality, privacy and dignity; freedom to establish legal entities to perform the activities of informing the public, printing and distributing the press and other electronic media; autonomy of editors, journalists and other creators of programming content in accordance with the rules of the profession.

The Electronic Media Act also guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of programming for the electronic media. It regulates broadcasting of programmes relating to the exercise of the right to public information, and the right to receive information, of all citizens of the Republic of Croatia and members of Croatian national minorities, and the exercise of the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia, as well as the exercise of political rights of citizens. The same Act defines the role of the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media as a fund under the Agency for Electronic Media. It is used to finance various programmes of local-level and regional-level television and/or radio broadcasters, which contribute to the improvement and protection of human rights.

The Croatian Radiotelevision Act stipulates the obligation of the public broadcasting organization to contribute to the respect and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms. In particular, Croatian Radiotelevision is obliged to produce, co-produce and broadcast programmes aimed at exercising human rights, equality and political rights, and report objectively, pointing out violations of human rights. This obligation is additionally regulated in a contract signed by Croatian Radiotelevision and the Government of the Republic of Croatia, together with other programming obligations.

¹³⁰ Official Gazette, nos. 59/04, 84/11, 81/13 and 114/22.

¹³¹ Official Gazette, nos. 111/21 and 114/22.

¹³² Official Gazette, nos. 137/10, 76/12, 78/16, 46/17, 73/17, 94/18, 114/22 and 20/23.

Freedom of expression and freedom of information, just like other rights, are not absolute and may be subject to certain restrictions, conditions and limitations. For this reason, some limitations have been incorporated into legal provisions, with a view to combatting hate speech and protecting certain interests of the state and individuals. However, the Media Act (Article 3) stipulates that limitations to the freedom of the media are permitted only when and to the extent necessary in a democratic society, and only in the manner prescribed by law.

Pursuant to the Electronic Media Act (Article 14(2)), in audio and audiovisual media services discriminatory treatment is prohibited. The provisions of the Act are aligned with *Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities*, under which it is prohibited to incite, facilitate the incitement to, or spread hatred or discrimination based on race or ethnicity, skin colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin and other characteristics recognized and provided for in the Anti-Discrimination Act. The media are also obliged to respect the right to protect the identity of witnesses and injured parties of criminal offences and must not disclose their identity without their knowledge and consent.

Children and other minors are specially protected by the provisions of the Electronic Media Act, which prohibit the publication of information revealing the identity of a child under the age of 18 involved in cases of violence of any kind. Furthermore, minors are also protected by the provisions of the same Act that prohibit commercial messages that could cause moral or physical damage to minors, that is, those that directly encourage minors to make purchases by exploiting their inexperience or innocence, or the trust minors have in parents, teachers or other persons. The Electronic Media Act also stipulates that the Electronic Media Council will encourage media service providers to develop action plans for the accessibility of their services to children with developmental disabilities and persons with disabilities.

It is also important to underscore that the rights of children in the digital environment are one of the five priority areas of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016–2021, which contains the definition of the right to secure access to information and communication technology and digital media.

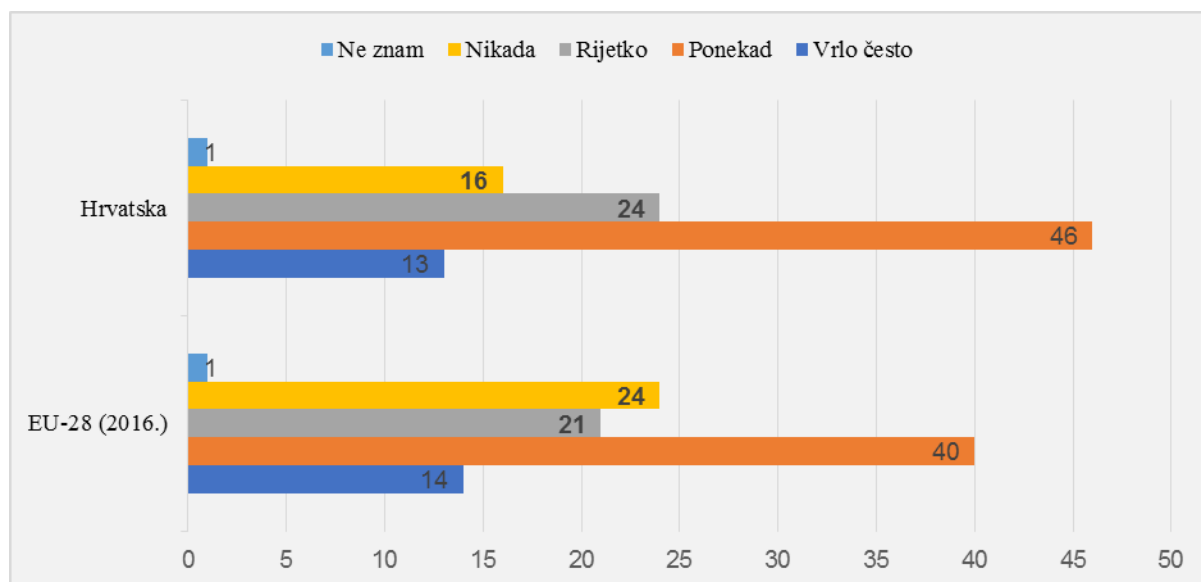
The regulations mentioned above also protect the rights of national minorities and guarantee them freedom to produce and broadcast radio and television programmes, as well as the government's financial support for the production and broadcasting of radio and television programmes in languages and scripts of national minorities. Despite the well-established legislative framework, there are challenges at both the European and national levels, such as the increasing presence of disinformation in the media, which can affect public opinion.

The European Union Action Plan against Disinformation¹³³ was a response to the European Council's call to take action to protect democratic systems and combat disinformation. In 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe established an *Ad-hoc* Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI) tasked with considering a future legal framework for the development, production and deployment of artificial intelligence in line with the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In early 2020, the European Commission adopted the *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence: a European Approach to Excellence and Trust*,¹³⁴ aimed, inter alia, at considering a future legal framework for a European approach to artificial intelligence.

¹³³ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52018JC0036>

¹³⁴ Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/hr/publication-detail/-/publication/ac957f13-53c6-11ea-aece-01aa75ed71a1>

Figure 6.¹³⁵ *Answers of Croatian respondents to the question "Have you ever heard, read, seen or personally experienced cases in which abuse, hate speech or threats were directed at journalists/bloggers/people active on social networks?"*



In addition to the spread of fake news in the public space, another challenge consists of the presence of hate speech, which, according to the annual reports of the Ombudsman, is often directed at persons belonging to national minorities, especially those belonging to the Serbian and Roma national minorities, members of religious communities, sexual and gender minorities, and also at migrants, state officials and public servants, and many others.

The findings of the 2019 survey on the attitudes of citizens of the European Union about fundamental rights¹³⁶ indicate that the independence of the media is the most important thing for citizens after free and fair democratic elections. On the other hand, the respondents' attitudes vary depending on their level of education and socioeconomic status. Thus, respondents with a lower level of education and poorer economic status attach less importance to freedom of speech than those who are highly educated and enjoy a better economic status.

All of the above suggests that, in the forthcoming period, it will be necessary to support the work of the media, especially those dealing with human-rights issues and the position of marginalized social groups, and to support the implementation of activities that contribute to improving the knowledge of media professionals about human rights, and to increasing the standards of media work.

¹³⁵ Source: Special Eurobarometer survey 452 (2016).

¹³⁶ Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2016/surveyKy/2119>

3.15. Civil society in the protection and promotion of human rights

The institutional framework for supporting the development of civil society in the Republic of Croatia is based on three forms of institutional support composed of the Office for Cooperation with NGOs, the Council for Civil Society Development and the National Foundation for Civil Society Development. In a broader sense, the institutional framework for supporting the development of civil society includes not only an institutional framework, but also a strategic and financial one, in which all state administration bodies, offices of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and public institutions, as well as local and regional government units, take part.

The Office for Cooperation with NGOs is a staff service of the Government of the Republic of Croatia that performs professional tasks relating to the creation of conditions for cooperation and partnership with civil society. The Office's mission is to provide a stimulating legal, institutional and financial framework for NGO activities, and support the development of a strong and autonomous civil society as an indispensable partner of the state when it comes to preparing and implementing public policies. The National Foundation for Civil Society Development was established with the basic purpose of supporting the development of civil society in the Republic of Croatia, while the Council for Civil Society Development was set up as a mechanism of cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the civil sector. Since 2012, the institutional framework for supporting the development of civil society in the Republic of Croatia has also included the "Kultura Nova" foundation, for the purpose of promoting and developing civil society in the field of contemporary culture and art by providing professional and financial support for the programmes of civil-society organizations active in the field of culture.

Civil-society organizations are indispensable partners when it comes to improving good governance and enhancing inclusive and open public policies. Involvement of civil-society organizations and other stakeholders in the shaping and implementation of public policies has a direct impact on increasing transparency and trust in public administration. However, in Croatia, civil-society organizations still face numerous challenges caused by the lack of human and financial resources, insufficient capacity for policy analysis and use of public data, insufficiently developed potential for mobilization of citizens and volunteers in the policy-development process, lack of sustainable structures for open dialogue with national and local authorities, and still a rather low level of recognition of civil society as a valuable partner in shaping and implementing policies at all levels of government. These challenges are present particularly at local levels, where less-developed civil-society organizations have limited access to funds, and face challenges of inadequate internal governance and low potential to mobilize volunteers, expand the membership base and ensure greater visibility of public programmes and services, resulting in an underdeveloped level of individual and corporate philanthropy in Croatia, which is a basic prerequisite for the long-term sustainability of civil-society organizations.

The Thematic Report of the Human Rights House entitled *Human Rights Defenders: Challenges and Obstacles*¹³⁷ indicates that human-rights defenders face difficulties in the areas of public participation in the adoption of public policies and regulations, insufficient funding of civil-society organizations' programmes in the field of human rights, a growing administrative burden, legal actions of investors against environmental organizations – SLAPP

¹³⁷ Available at: https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/KLJP_Tematski-Branitelj-FIN-3.pdf

(strategic lawsuit against public participation) lawsuits against human-rights defenders, access to the media and the exercise of the right to public assembly.

The National Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2012–2016 emphasized the importance of establishing partnerships, especially with local-government units, for the purpose of developing civil society and consequently reducing the disparity in regional representation of civil-society organizations.

Partnership between civil-society organizations in achieving the development goals of islands and underdeveloped areas is also particularly important, as civil-society organizations can increase their resources by associating, and reduce existing weaknesses. This was also supported by the Programme for the Promotion of Civil Society Development on the Islands 2021–2027, where the development of partnerships among civil-society organizations on the islands and their networking and cooperation are defined as one of the fundamental points of departure of the Programme.

Civil-society organizations are some of the key stakeholders for achieving the goals of sustainable development of islands and underdeveloped areas, and this is emphasized in the Regional Development Act of the Republic of Croatia.¹³⁸ The Act emphasizes partnership and cooperation between the public, private and civil sectors as one of the cornerstones of regional development policy. The networking and cohesion of civil-society organizations also gives strength to the civil-sector influence, enables the exploitation of their potential, and increases the prospects for achieving common goals. At the same time, the provisions of the Islands Act¹³⁹ encourage and create a favourable environment for the development of civil society on the islands by supporting their networking. This is further emphasized in the National Plan for Island Development 2021–2027, where the needs and potentials for civil-society development on the islands are defined, and civil-society organizations are recognized as creators of social content, providers of social services, and also catalysts for employment and social cohesion on the islands, aimed at strengthening the island community.

The Office for Cooperation with NGOs prepares annual Reports on the financing of civil-society organizations' projects and programmes from public sources, submits them to the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and informs the interested public about the NGOs' and other civil-society organizations' programmes and projects financed by public sources through a comprehensive analysis that includes the national, regional and local levels and levels of other public donors, including European Union funds and other foreign funds.

Financing of projects and programmes of general interest that are implemented by NGOs and other civil-society organizations is one of the most common forms of cooperation of state bodies and local and regional government units with civil-society organizations in implementing public policies, i.e. solving priority social problems. The analysis of the financial resources allocated in 2019 by area of financing has found that EUR 8,637,579.11, or 5.1% of the total funds allocated at the national level, was allocated to the area of human rights. This includes a number of specific areas of support, with most finances allocated to the protection of the rights of national minorities.

¹³⁸ Official Gazette, nos. 147/14, 123/17 and 118/18.

¹³⁹ Official Gazette, nos. 116/18, 73/20 and 70/21.

Civil-society organizations in the Republic of Croatia have successfully applied to numerous tenders financed from the budget of the European Union, including programmes of significant monetary value. However, when implementing projects financed from European funds, many civil-society organizations face the problems of pre-financing, interim financing and co-financing. In addition to the issue of co-financing, civil-society organizations in the Republic of Croatia are increasingly faced with the problem of insolvency during the implementation of projects and are often forced to reduce the scope of project activities and beneficiaries, which ultimately affects the overall results of the project, and also of the tender as a whole.

Aware of these challenges, since April 2011, the Office for Cooperation with NGOs has been providing support for co-financing of compulsory contributions of civil-society organizations as project beneficiaries through public calls for applications for co-financing of projects of civil-society organizations contracted under the European Union programmes. Since 2018, the public call has also included projects financed by foreign funds, more precisely the Swiss-Croatian cooperation programme, since in these projects the applicants and partners are obliged to provide co-financing from their own funds of 10% of the total eligible costs of the project.

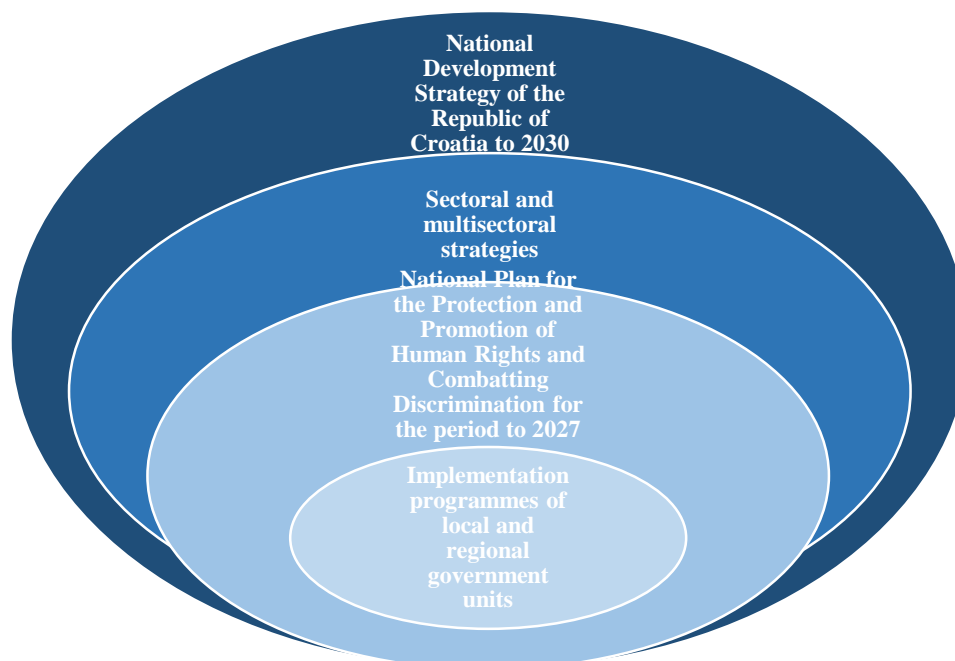
Given that these are high-value projects, and the funds for co-financing civil-society organizations have not been planned by any other body, the Office for Cooperation with NGOs has co-financed high-value projects of the European Territorial Cooperation by increasing the percentage of co-financing of the mandatory share for the organization that is the project developer or project partner from 40% to 70%. Also, the funds intended for co-financing are divided into two financial envelopes, one of which for projects contracted under the European Territorial Cooperation programme, and the other for all other programmes and tenders. The need for greater co-financing of projects under the European Territorial Cooperation remains, and funds will continue to be distributed in two financial envelopes.

In order to respond to the medium-term needs of civil-society organizations, the Office for Cooperation with NGOs has been coordinating the drafting of the National Plan for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2023–2030 as an umbrella strategic-planning act for a wide scope of civil society. The implementation of civil-society development policies requires horizontal coordination of state administration and local and regional government and non-institutional actors, while the specific needs of civil society in the field of protection and promotion of human rights require separate elaboration within the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027.

As part of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, measures will be implemented that increase the visibility of activities of civil-society organizations and strengthen the capacity of public servants to apply standards of planning, implementation and monitoring of the allocation of financial resources. In addition, in the period to 2027, action has been planned to improve transparency of funding of civil-society organizations from public sources, financing models and sustainability for projects and programmes of civil-society organizations aimed at protecting human rights. Financial support has also been planned for enhancing the capacity of local civil-society organizations to effectively address the needs of the local community.

4. Compliance with the strategic framework of the Republic of Croatia and the European Union

Figure 7. Link between the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 and strategic-planning acts



Human-rights protection and combatting discrimination constitute a horizontal public-policy area whose successful planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is not possible without cross-sectoral cooperation. Therefore, in the policy of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination, a collaborative and partnership approach in the process of policy drafting, directing and monitoring is crucial. Consequently, the promotion of equality and equal opportunities is a horizontal priority for achieving the strategic goals of the NDS 2030. This implies that equality and equal opportunities should be taken into account when developing strategic-planning acts in various areas of social and economic life, and also during the evaluation of their impact, in keeping with the European guidelines for gender mainstreaming.

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 (hereinafter in this chapter: the National Plan), as a key strategic-planning act in the field of human-rights protection and anti-discrimination, contributes to the achievement of the long-term strategic goals of the NDS 2030 with the implementation of specific objectives, and is associated with a number of sectoral and multisectoral strategies, as well as a strategic framework at the European level which envisages action in the field of equality, equal opportunities and human rights.

Sustainable economy and society (Direction of development 1 of the NDS 2030) is largely related to respect for social rights, such as the right to education and equality in education, equality in the labour market and at work, and also the right of access to justice. The specific objectives of the National Plan ensure a synergy of long-term development goals and medium-

term goals aimed at promoting human rights and combatting discrimination for the period to 2027.

In this regard, the implementation of the specific objectives of the National Plan will enhance the capacities of educational institutions to transfer knowledge about human rights and respect those rights in their daily work. The inclusion of content on human rights and equality will be encouraged in the education of future professionals who will encounter vulnerable social groups in their work, such as social workers, lawyers, teachers, police officers and others. In addition, measures will be implemented to prevent unequal treatment in education. In the field of labour and employment, systematic provision of information for employers and workers' representatives has been planned, about non-discrimination and the legal framework that regulates the prohibition of unequal treatment in employment and work, which will contribute to improving public labour-market policies and achieving long-term strategic goal 5: *Healthy, active and high-quality life*.

Achieving long-term strategic goal 3: *Efficient and effective judiciary, public administration and management of state property*, will contribute to strengthening the capacity of public administration to act efficiently in the field of human-rights protection, in particular as regards protecting the rights of citizens in crisis situations and through raising awareness about the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, international human-rights treaties, the Union legislative framework and national legislation. In particular, action will be taken to promote the use of free legal aid, ensuring greater access to justice for particularly vulnerable groups of society. Through the systematic and continuous implementation of professional training and the training of public and civil servants, judicial officials and other key stakeholders, competences in the judicial system and the efficiency of the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights will be improved. Increasing the level of knowledge and awareness of non-discrimination will improve the quality of work of public bodies in the long run and ensure a higher level of protection of rights for citizens.

At the national level, previous years were marked by significant challenges: the fight against the global pandemic, strong earthquakes in Zagreb and Banovina, and an increased number of displaced persons arriving in the Republic of Croatia as a result of the war in Ukraine. Consequently, the idea of recovery and strengthening of resilience to the crisis (Direction of development 2 of the NDS 2030), i.e. strategic goal 5: *Healthy, active and high-quality life* of the NDS 2030, will be supported by the implementation of measures enhancing the capacities of public bodies to protect the rights of citizens in crisis situations, especially in the field of health, and contributing to the reduction of inequalities in society through the development of knowledge bases and human capacities.

Since social security and accountability are among the long-term priorities of the NDS 2030, the National Plan includes objectives and measures focused on ensuring respect, protection and promotion of rights and combatting all forms of discrimination, where emphasis will be placed, inter alia, on improving mechanisms for the prevention of racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance through research, education and the raising of awareness about hate crime and hate speech among key stakeholders and the general public. In this regard, special attention will be paid to complementarity with the strategic action of the European Union in the field of combatting racial and ethnic discrimination. Efforts will be invested to achieve equal opportunities for groups of citizens more frequently discriminated against and to provide effective care for those who are unable to satisfy their basic needs. For example, efforts will be invested to create equal opportunities for exercising the right to housing for groups at risk of discrimination in housing policy.

The achievement of strategic goal 5: *Healthy, active and high-quality life* of the NDS 2030 will also be supported by enhancing the capacity of the public administration to apply mechanisms for the protection of the rights of citizens particularly affected by the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic, such as persons in institutional environments, and other groups identified as particularly vulnerable in the context of crisis situations. Such measures and similar ones will undoubtedly strengthen the efficiency of human-rights protection and positively contribute to the sense of security of all citizens and persons temporarily or permanently residing in Croatia, as well as to strengthening crisis resilience.

Furthermore, the efficiency of the existing system for protection against discrimination will be evaluated, multiple and structural discrimination, as well as discrimination in access to goods and services, will be investigated, and data on equality in Croatian society will be made available. In partnership with the media, civil society, representatives of social groups that have higher potential exposure to discrimination, and representatives of local communities, action will be taken to prevent discrimination by raising awareness about unequal treatment and encouraging reporting of such incidents.

The long-term priorities of policies in the field of protecting the dignity of Croatian war veterans and promoting the values of the Homeland War will be achieved, starting primarily from the right of families to learn the truth about the fate of their members and through the implementation of activities aimed at resolving the issue of persons missing since the Homeland War.

Due to the impact that policies in the field of protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination have on various areas of life, they require horizontal coordination in order to avoid overlapping measures and duplication of the use of resources. During the drafting of the National Plan, the current sectoral and multisectoral strategies and strategic-planning acts were analysed, and consultations were conducted with representatives of relevant state-administration bodies with a view to achieving synergy, and at the same time ensuring that the existing goals and measures from sectoral and multisectoral strategies and national plans do not overlap with the goals set by the National Plan.

In consultation with the developers of strategic-planning acts, specific areas of human rights and anti-discrimination have been identified, which will primarily be the subject of other strategic-planning acts, and as such they have been excluded from the National Plan, in order to reduce the duplication of measures and resources. Thus, certain vulnerable social groups (such as persons with disabilities, elderly persons, persons belonging to the Roma national minority) – for whom separate strategic-planning acts have been developed or planned – have been largely excluded as target groups of measures of this National Plan in order to avoid duplication of resources.

For example, in parallel with the preparation of this National Plan, the following strategic-planning acts with related content have been prepared: the Proposal for the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the period to 2027, Proposal for the National Plan for Gender Equality for the period to 2027, National Plan for Combatting Poverty and Social Exclusion 2021–2027, National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021–2027, National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities for the 2021–2027 period, National Plan for the Development of Social Services for the 2021–2027 period, National Plan for Work, Occupational Safety and Employment for the 2021–2027 period, and Strategic Framework for Mental Health until 2030, as well as a series of short-term acts such as the Programme for Elimination of Energy Poverty, which includes the use of renewable energy in residential buildings in assisted areas and areas under special state care for the period to 2025, the

Programme of Energy Renovation of Multi-apartment Buildings for the period to 2030 and the Programme of Energy Renovation of Family Houses to 2020.

Social inclusion of persons granted international protection will be the subject of a short-term strategic-planning act for the integration of persons under international protection, while measures relating to the reconciliation of professional and private life, encouraging the use of parental leave by men and better protection of pregnant women and mothers through the maternity and parental-leave system, are planned within the framework of the future Strategy of Demographic Revitalization of the Republic of Croatia for the period to 2031, and of the planned comprehensive regulation of the system of maternity and parental benefits.

The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy was responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence for the 2017–2022 period. Due to the expiration of the strategic framework, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy initiated the process of drafting a strategic-planning act in the field of protection against domestic violence for the forthcoming period.

Below is a list of strategic-planning acts containing objectives and measures relating to the field of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination:

- National Plan for Work, Occupational Safety and Employment for the 2021–2027 period
- National Programme for the Suppression of Undeclared Work in the Republic of Croatia 2021–2024
- National Plan for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities for the 2021–2027 period
- National Plan for Combatting Poverty and Social Exclusion for the 2021–2027 period
- National Plan for the Rights of Children in the Republic of Croatia for the 2022–2026 period
- National Plan for the Suppression of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment for the period to 2027
- National Plan for Roma Inclusion for the 2021–2027 period
- Operational Programmes for National Minorities for the 2021–2024 period.

It should be underscored that the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the 2020–2024 term of office stipulates that the Government of the Republic of Croatia will continue to promote a culture of tolerance, consistently implement the policy of the rule of law and the rights of national minorities guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and other laws, and that it will continue to consistently protect and improve human rights and minority rights guaranteed by concluded international and intergovernmental treaties, agreements and conventions and the Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union. The Operational Programmes for National Minorities for the 2021–2024 period form an integral part of the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. In them, mechanisms are specified for ensuring the protection of the rights of national minorities and supporting the activities of their bodies, in accordance with the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and other special regulations.

Since the specific objectives of the National Plan relate to combatting discrimination based on race/ethnicity and/or national origin – that is, those characteristics that cause discrimination of citizens or make them victims of hate speech and/or hate crime – a specific objective has also

been formulated entitled *Strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and implementing the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities*. This objective will further strengthen the action the Republic of Croatia undertakes in the field of minority-rights protection. When the National Plan was drafted, efforts were made to ensure its complementarity with the guidelines of the current Union strategies concerning the area of equality and protection of human rights.

In addition to the European Pillar of Social Rights, key documents of the Union strategic framework are: European Union Action Plan against Racism 2020–2025; European Union Strategy for Equality of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Non-binary, Intersex and Queer Persons; European Union Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021–2027, European Union Strategy on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021–2030).

In order to ensure complementarity with the European Union Action Plan against Racism in the 2020–2025 period, the National Plan includes the specific objective of *Improving mechanisms for combatting hate crimes and raising awareness of the importance of combatting racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and fostering a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide*, within which measures relating to the suppression of racial and ethnic discrimination will be implemented. In accordance with the guidelines from the European strategic framework, action will be aimed at combatting racial and ethnic stereotypes through the media and education, a system for collecting data disaggregated by racial or ethnic origin will be developed, and a series of training sessions on hate crime and hate speech will be conducted for civil servants and law-enforcement officers. The system for monitoring hate-crime data will continue to be developed. Measures aimed at combatting all forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin, will be developed in the fields of labour and employment, education and housing, and access to goods and services.

The European Union LGBTIQ Equality Strategy will be supported at national level through the implementation of specific measures aimed at combatting hate crime and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities.

5. List of specific objectives and key outcome indicators

The implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 supports, to the greatest extent, the achievement of the horizontal priority of the NDS 2030 – the promotion of equality and equal opportunities – in order to achieve the long-term vision of a society without discrimination based on race or ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national or social origin and disability, in which all Croatian citizens are equally present in all areas of public and private life, enjoy equal status, equal opportunities to exercise their rights, and equal benefits from the results achieved.

In terms of the scope of the strategic-planning act, two horizontal priorities have been singled out that go beyond individual sectors:

Protection and promotion of human rights

Three objectives have been defined within this medium-term priority:

- Improving the efficiency of public administration and the judiciary for action in the field of human-rights protection
- Raising the level of awareness of citizens and institutions about instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights, and facilitating access to the judiciary and public bodies
- Strengthening the mechanisms for monitoring and implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities.

Prevention and suppression of all forms of discrimination

Two objectives have been defined within this medium-term priority:

- Improving the prevention of discrimination and providing support for victims of discrimination
- Improving the mechanisms for combatting hate crimes and strengthening awareness about the importance of the fight against racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, as well as encouraging a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide

One horizontal special goal has been identified, which is connected with both priority areas: Improving the cooperation with civil-society organizations and the media in protecting human rights and combatting discrimination.

The table below shows the linkage between the strategic goals of the NDS 2030 and the specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027.

NDS 2030 DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT I: SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE JUDICIARY, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF STATE PROPERTY

<i>Performance indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2030</i>
Global Competitiveness Index (GCI): Pillar 1, Institutions < 60	Ranked 77 th (2019)	< 60 (2027)

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE JUDICIARY FOR ACTION IN THE AREA OF HUMAN-RIGHTS PROTECTION

<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>OI.02.14.82</i> Proportion of Ombudsman's recommendations that were effectively pursued by public bodies over the 12-month period ¹⁴⁰	43% of recommendations from the Ombudsman's Report for 2020 implemented	73% of recommendations from the Ombudsman's Report for 2026 implemented
<i>OI.02.14.83</i> Number of cases from the European Court of Human Rights being executed ¹⁴¹	80 (2022)	78 (2027)

MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

Measure 1.1. Improve interdepartmental cooperation and coordination of the human-rights protection system
Measure 1.2. Improve the protection of the rights of particularly vulnerable groups of citizens in crisis situations
Measure 1.3. Increase the efficiency of the execution of judgments from the European Court of Human Rights
Measure 1.4. Improve the quality and availability of human-rights education
Measure 1.5. Ensure resolution of the fate of persons who went missing in the Homeland War and tracing of the remains of those who died and whose burial site is unknown
Measure 1.6. Improve the knowledge of public and civil servants about the protection and promotion of human rights

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: RAISING THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS ABOUT INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND FACILITATING ACCESS TO THE JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC BODIES

<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>OI.02.14.87</i> Citizens' awareness of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ¹⁴²	40% (2019)	50% (2027)
<i>OI.02.14.88</i> Perception of availability of information on citizens' rights ¹⁴³	29% (2019)	50% (2027)
<i>OI.02.14.89</i> Number of cases of provision of primary legal aid ¹⁴⁴	24,950 (2021)	25,782 (2027)

¹⁴⁰ Data source: Office of the Ombudsman, and Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities.

¹⁴¹ Data source: Office of the Representative of the Republic of Croatia before the European Court of Human Rights.

¹⁴² The indicator refers to the proportion of respondents who are "well", "very well" and "excellently" informed about the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The initial value is based on the results of the Survey on Fundamental Rights in the EU conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

¹⁴³ The indicator reflects the proportion of respondents who believe that public bodies provide citizens with adequate information about their rights. The initial value is based on the results of the Survey on Fundamental Rights in the EU conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

¹⁴⁴ Data source: Ministry of Justice and Public Administration.

<i>OI.02.14.90</i> Number of approved applications for secondary legal aid ¹⁴⁵	3,425 (2021)	4,089 (2027)
MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE		
Measure 2.1. Promote efficient application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union		
Measure 2.2. Strengthen administrative capacities for the application of the European Union Charter on Fundamental Rights in the area of European Union funds		
Measure 2.3. Ensure the sustainability of the system of free legal aid, and systematically inform about access to free legal aid		
Measure 2.4. Strengthen the awareness of institutions and the general public about the right to a healthy life and environment		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTING THE CONSTITUTIONAL ACT ON THE RIGHTS OF NATIONAL MINORITIES		
<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>OI.02.14.93</i> Number of procedures conducted in languages and scripts of national minorities before administrative bodies of local units and judicial bodies ¹⁴⁶	17 (2021)	34 (2027)
<i>OI.02.14.94</i> Proportion of members of councils and representatives of national minorities who declare that they are satisfied with their participation in the decision-making of local and regional government units that concern minorities ¹⁴⁷	0 (initial value not available)	40% (2027)
MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE		
Measure 3.1. Ensure monitoring of the participation of members of national minorities in public life and management of local affairs through councils and representatives of national minorities		
Measure 3.2. Enhance the implementation of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities		
Measure 3.3. Prepare and implement the final secondary-school examination (state matura) in national-minority languages and scripts		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 4: IMPROVING COOPERATION WITH CIVIL-SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE MEDIA IN PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMBATTING DISCRIMINATION		
<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>OI.02.14.95</i> Ranking of the Republic of Croatia according to the Press Freedom Index: political context ¹⁴⁸	Ranked 49 th	< 30

¹⁴⁵ Data source: Ministry of Justice and Public Administration.

¹⁴⁶ Data source: Ministry of Justice and Public Administration.

¹⁴⁷ Data source: Survey questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027. The first survey cycle will be conducted in 2023.

¹⁴⁸ Data source: Reporters Without Borders (results of comparative panel research by country).

<i>OI.02.14.96</i> Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) ¹⁴⁹ in Croatia	3.4	3.1
MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE		
Measure 4.1. Encourage sustainable and long-term development of civil-society organizations that protect and promote human rights		
Measure 4.2. Ensure a free media space and enhance the professional work of journalists		
NDS 2030 DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT 2: RECOVERY AND STRENGTHENING OF CRISIS RESILIENCE		
STRATEGIC GOAL 5: HEALTHY, ACTIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY LIFE		
<i>Performance indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2030</i>
Total rate of risk of poverty and social exclusion	23.3% (2019)	< 15%
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 5: IMPROVING THE PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DISCRIMINATION		
<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>OI.02.14.84</i> Proportion of respondents who personally felt discriminated against in the past 12 months ¹⁵⁰	17% (2019)	3% (2027)
<i>OI.02.14.86</i> Proportion of state and public servants who completed training in the field of combatting discrimination in the 12-month period ¹⁵¹	0.49 (2021)	5% (2027)
<i>OI.02.14.85</i> Total number of complaints of discrimination handled by ombudsman institutions ¹⁵²	1,308 (2021)	1,439 (2027)
MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE		
Measure 5.1. Improve competences of public and civil servants to act in the field of combatting discrimination		
Measure 5.2. Create prerequisites for the implementation of the project "Supporting equality through a stronger system and planning"		
Measure 5.3. Support the development of a support system for victims of discrimination		
Measure 5.4. Establish a system for collecting data on equality		
Measure 5.5. Increase the awareness of the business community about the prohibition of discrimination against groups protected by the Anti-discrimination Act and the Gender Equality Act		
Measure 5.6. Prevent inequality in access to health care with a special emphasis on groups protected by the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Gender Equality Act		
Measure 5.7. Improve the conditions for exercising the right to housing for groups at risk of discrimination in housing policies		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 6: IMPROVING MECHANISMS FOR COMBATTING HATE CRIMES, STRENGTHENING AWARENESS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIGHT AGAINST		

¹⁴⁹ Data source: US Agency for International Development (USAID) in cooperation with local organizations from countries where the Index is applied (in Croatia: CERANEO – Centre for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations),

¹⁵⁰ Data source: Report with the findings of the Special Eurobarometer 493, Eurobarometer Discrimination Survey.

¹⁵¹ Data source: Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, based on collected administrative data.

¹⁵² Data source: Office of the Ombudsman (combined data of ombudsman institutions).

RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND OTHER FORMS OF INTOLERANCE, AND ENCOURAGING A CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF GENOCIDE		
<i>Outcome indicator</i>	<i>Initial value</i>	<i>Target value for 2027</i>
<i>01.02.14.91</i> Public perception of the incidence of discrimination based on ethnicity ¹⁵³¹⁵⁴	40% (2019) of respondents believe that discrimination based on ethnicity is widespread in the Republic of Croatia	< 30% (2027) of respondents believe that discrimination based on ethnicity is widespread in the Republic of Croatia
<i>01.02.14.92</i> Number of cases of hate crimes committed because of race, ethnicity or ethnic origin ¹⁵⁵	67 (2020)	53 (2027)
MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE		
Measure 6.1. Efficiently coordinate interdepartmental cooperation, monitoring and analysis of the occurrence of hate crimes		
Measure 6.2. Improve the prevention of hate crimes and hate speech		
Measure 6.3. Enhance awareness of the victims of genocide (including the Holocaust and Samudaripen)		

5.1. Contribution of the specific objectives to the implementation of the related goals of the National Development Strategy to 2030 and the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda

Specific objective 1: Improving the efficiency of public administration and the judiciary for action in the area of human-rights protection

One of the key strategic determinants of NDS 2030, direction of development 1: *Sustainable economy and society*, is the construction of a public administration and judiciary which correspond to citizens' expectations regarding the quality of public service, clearer communications that are accessible to a wider public, and the construction of a society based on the rule of law, so as to ensure an economy and society that will be sustainable in the long run. While the priority policies relating to this direction of development underscore improving competences and management skills in the judicial system through enhancing the transparency of the work of public authorities and openness to consultation and participation of citizens and civil-society organizations in formulating and implementing public policies, it is also emphasized that a better, faster and more modern judiciary and more efficient public administration need to be created in order to increase trust in the institutions.

The Republic of Croatia, like other members of the European Union, is a party to the key conventions of the United Nations and the human-rights conventions and treaties of the Council of Europe. It implements the provisions of international human-rights law by passing legislative acts and judicial, administrative and other measures. The protection and respect of human rights is the responsibility of all levels of the government and require multi-level and intersectoral cooperation of the public administration. By implementing the above-listed measures within

¹⁵³ The indicator tracks the share of respondents who answered the survey question about the prevalence of discrimination that discrimination based on ethnicity is "widespread" in the Republic of Croatia

¹⁵⁴ Data source: Special Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union no. 493. Data for the Republic of Croatia are presented in the document Country Factsheet

¹⁵⁵ Data source: OESC Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) / Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities

specific objective 1 of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, the cooperation and coordination of all levels of government in the field of human-rights protection will be improved, with a view to allowing unhindered access to the exercise of rights for individuals and social groups, ensuring better use of resources and higher-quality partnership with institutions for the protection of human rights, civil-society organizations, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders within the public administration system, and including fundamental-rights issues in all public-policy areas. It is especially important to strengthen coordination as a tool for efficient implementation and monitoring of objectives, and to develop the competences of civil servants, especially those working in the police, the social-welfare system and the health-care and education sectors, so that everyone receives the training necessary to harmonize their daily work with the rights guaranteed under key human-rights protection instruments. The implementation of this specific objective is particularly relevant in the context of multiple global crises resulting in deepened social inequalities, which may affect the exercise of the rights of individuals and vulnerable social groups.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

By strengthening the capacity of public bodies for effective action in the field of human-rights protection – through improving interdepartmental and multilevel coordination, and training and professional development of relevant civil servants and judicial officials – the implementation is supported of Sustainable Development Goal 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*, since it is crucial for a sustainable society to promote and ensure, at all levels, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that allow for the rights of citizens to be exercised and contribute to reducing inequality and social exclusion.

Specific objective 2: Raising the level of awareness of citizens and institutions about instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights, and facilitating access to the judiciary and public bodies

Access to the judiciary and public bodies is jeopardized by insufficient awareness about the rights and ways to access these bodies, especially when it comes to groups of citizens in an unfavourable social position (people of lower financial status, lower level of education, etc.). A series of informative and educational events aimed at raising awareness of instruments and mechanisms for the protection of human rights and equality, with special emphasis on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, will ensure a higher level of information for the general and professional public.

In the context of specific objective 2, it is particularly important to build the capacities of public and civil servants who work within the system of European Union funds management and control, and also of the beneficiaries of European Union funds, for the effective application of the rights and principles contained in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It is also important to inform the beneficiaries of EU funds about their rights, which will be achieved by organizing targeted training. Information will be systematically provided about free legal aid in order to facilitate access to justice and public institutions for as many citizens as possible, and efforts will be made to raise environmental awareness and inform citizens about the right to a healthy life and environment. The aforementioned action is aligned with the priorities of the NDS 2030, especially its strategic goal 3: *Efficient and effective judiciary, public administration and management of state property*, which recognizes the need to improve

the work of public administration and the judiciary in order to release the potential for economic growth, and also to respond to citizens' expectations regarding the construction of a just society based on the rule of law.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The measures specified under specific objective 2 of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 will improve access to information about fundamental rights, promote the rule of law and equal access to justice, and support inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making. This activity is aligned with the determinants of Sustainable Development Goal 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*

Specific objective 3: Strengthening mechanisms for monitoring and implementing the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities

The Republic of Croatia has a broad and systematic approach to the rights of national minorities. With a view to continuing the promotion of a culture of tolerance in the forthcoming period, consistently implementing the policy of the rule of law and the rights of national minorities guaranteed by the Constitution of the RoC, the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and other legislative acts, measures will be implemented to enhance exercise of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities, for example, their access to the means of public communication or their right to official and public use of languages and scripts of national minorities, at the local or regional level.

An analysis of the functioning of councils and representatives of national minorities will be conducted, and of deputy mayors and county prefects elected from the ranks of persons belonging to national minorities, and persons belonging to national minorities will be encouraged to exercise their rights, especially young people and women. This activity is aligned with long-term goals of NDS 2030, since the promotion of equality and equal opportunities is set as a horizontal priority, and thus all public policies should be implemented with the aim of achieving equality and promoting equal opportunities. Furthermore, one of the long-term social-policy priorities within the NDS 2030 is improving the quality of life and strengthening social cohesion as a way to reduce the risk of social exclusion and reduce inequality in society.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Sustainable Development Goal 10: *Reduce inequality within and among countries* calls for reduction of income inequalities, as well as those based on age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. In order to reduce social inequalities, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities for all individuals and groups participating in society, regardless of their characteristics. Strengthening the political participation of persons belonging to national minorities, and improving opportunities for the equal use of the language and script of national minorities in education and their right to cultural autonomy, and implementing activities that will motivate them to exercise their rights, will contribute to a more equal participation of persons belonging to national minorities in society and reduce the possibility of social exclusion.

Specific objective 4: Improving cooperation with civil-society organizations and the media in protecting human rights and combatting discrimination

Civil-society organizations and the media are indispensable partners of the state in improving good governance and enhancing inclusive and open public policies and society in general. The involvement of civil-society organizations and other stakeholders in formulating and implementing public policies directly leads to an increase in transparency and trust in public administration. In order to ensure a stimulating environment for the operation of the media and civil-society organizations, public authorities will carry out activities aimed at promoting the visibility of civil society, and work on raising the level of knowledge of media workers about ethics and topics relating to human-rights protection, and increasing the capacity of civil society at the local level.

Efforts will be made to increase the capacities of public servants to apply the standards of planning, implementation and monitoring of the allocation of financial resources, and to improve the transparency of funding of civil-society organizations from public sources, and develop financing and sustainability models for projects and programmes of civil-society organizations aimed at protecting human rights. Support for strengthening the capacity of local civil-society organizations for effectively addressing the needs of the local community, and research on civil society, have also been planned.

The aforementioned activities will improve the cooperation of public bodies with civil society and the media. The partnership of stakeholders from the public and business sectors and civil-society organizations, aimed at ensuring the well-being of all Croatian citizens and the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, is important for long-term and inclusive growth, to the benefit of all members of society. Growth can be sustainable in the long term, as specified among the determinants of direction of development 1 of NDS 2030 and within the framework of strategic goal 3: *Efficient and effective judiciary, public administration and management of state property*.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Implementation of measures for achieving objective 4 of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is connected with Sustainable Development Goal 17: *Partnerships for the Goals*, since effective public, public-private and civil-society partnerships will be encouraged and promoted through the activities planned, by building on experience and strategies of partnership funding.

Specific objective 5: Improving the prevention of discrimination, and providing support for victims of discrimination

NDS 2030 says that social solidarity is the foundation of the Croatian social-security system; and, in the forthcoming period, a society imbued with solidarity and justice will be developed, with equal opportunities for all, while ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms and combatting all forms of violence, discrimination and exclusion. Reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion, and reducing inequality in society, are listed among the priorities of social policies until 2030, while the promotion of equality and equal opportunities is also a horizontal public-policy priority. The implementation of objective 5 of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, by

investing in preventative activities that will strengthen the actions of key stakeholders to combat unequal treatment and provide support for victims of discrimination, will support the long-term priorities of NDS 2030. Within the framework of planned projects financed from EU sources, a package of research and analytical activities will be conducted by the end of 2027. This will include evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and the existing system for protection against discrimination, investigating multiple and structural discrimination, as well as discrimination in access to goods and services, and securing the availability of data on inequality in Croatian society. In partnership with the media, civil society, representatives of social groups potentially more exposed to discrimination, and representatives of local communities, a package of activities aimed at preventing discrimination will be implemented by raising awareness and encouraging the reporting of unequal treatment and suppressing discriminatory attitudes. All of the above is aimed at combatting discrimination and providing support for victims of discrimination, and will contribute to strengthening equality and equal opportunities in society, and reduce the risk of social exclusion for those groups that are at greater risk of unequal treatment in various areas of life, such as labour and employment, health care, housing, social care, education, access to goods and services, and other areas of life recognized as particularly relevant in the context of discrimination prevention.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

The planned measures of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 will be implemented with the purpose of strengthening the system of protection against discrimination, promoting the right to equal treatment, and improving opportunities of disadvantaged groups, as well as preventing discrimination based on race/ethnicity or skin colour, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, sex, age, religion/beliefs or other characteristics, i.e. those grounds that can cause citizens to be discriminated against or become victims of hate crimes / hate speech. Given that special attention will be paid to improving the competences of relevant stakeholders for action in the field of combatting discrimination, and also to strengthening institutional capacities for equality, the development will be supported of institutions that promote equality and responsibly implement non-discriminatory practices and guidelines for sustainable development in accordance with Goal 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*

At the same time, the aim is to ensure a greater level of openness of institutions and to encourage citizen participation in the legislative and policy-making processes. The measures planned ultimately strive to reduce inequalities in society and promote equality at all levels in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 10: *Reduce inequality within and among countries.*

Specific objective 6: Improving mechanisms for combatting hate crimes, strengthening awareness about the importance of the fight against racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, and encouraging a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide

NDS 2030 strives to achieve a society imbued with solidarity and justice, with equal opportunities for all, while ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms and combatting all forms of violence, discrimination and exclusion. The fundamental value of a safe society is that a person can live without fear of being exposed to hatred and violence. In order to achieve the

long-term priority of social policies aimed at improving the quality of life and strengthening social cohesion, reducing the risk of social exclusion and, consequently, inequality in society, action has been planned within the framework of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, aimed at suppressing manifestations of discrimination – hate crimes and hate speech – encouraging a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide, and raising public awareness of the importance of combatting all forms of intolerance.

Specific objective 6 of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the Period to 2027 is especially connected with the implementation of the guidelines contained in the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025. Accordingly, the development has been planned of tools for monitoring phenomena relating to inequalities such as hate crime and hate speech, as well as empowering victims and potential victims of discrimination for equal participation in society, providing direct assistance and support for victims of discrimination (for example, providing free legal assistance, psychological assistance, counselling on opportunities for exercising rights), activities aimed at empowering victims of discrimination and potential victims by strengthening their competences for equal participation in society, and by cooperative activities in combatting discrimination, including cooperation among local government units and international cooperation. In the context of promoting equality and combatting discrimination, and with a view to preventing and suppressing the spread of hate crimes and hate speech, it is necessary to enhance mechanisms for combatting this phenomenon.

Contribution of the specific objective to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Improving the mechanisms for combatting hate crimes and raising awareness about the importance of the fight against racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, and encouraging a culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide, support Sustainable Development Goal 10: *Reduce inequality within and among countries*, within which the aim is to provide equal opportunities and reduce inequalities in outcomes, including by removing discriminatory laws, policies and practices and by promoting suitable legislation, policies and actions.

6. Financial framework for achieving the specific objectives

The goals set in the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 will be achieved by implementing measures defined in two action plans for 2023, where one action plan will regard primarily the area of protection and promotion of human rights, and the other combatting discrimination. At the end of this period, the development of two-year action plans has been envisaged. Those action plans will specify measures and planned financial resources for the 2024–2027 period. The allocation and availability of financial resources for the implementation of measures, sources of funding and planned financial resources by year will be presented in more detail in the implementation action plans.

Financial resources for the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, and measures from associated action plans, will be earmarked primarily in the state budget of the Republic of Croatia, and partly secured also in the framework of European financial instruments

in the new European Union financial perspective for the 2021–2027 period. Certain measures will be financed from the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media,¹⁵⁶ as well as from one part of the revenue generated by games of chance (so-called lottery funds). An indicative financial plan for the entire time frame for the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is given here below.

¹⁵⁶ The Fund's financial sources are those provided by the provisions of the Electronic Media Act and the Croatian Radiotelevision Act in the amount of 3% of the total sum collected each month by Croatian Radiotelevision from licence fees.

STRATEGIC GOAL OF NDS 2030	3: EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE JUDICIARY, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF STATE PROPERTY						
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Global Competitiveness Index (GCI)						
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMBATTING DISCRIMINATION FOR THE PERIOD TO 2027	OUTCOME INDICATORS	FINANCIAL PLAN 2023 (EUR)	FINANCIAL PLAN 2024 (EUR)	FINANCIAL PLAN 2025 (EUR)	FINANCIAL PLAN 2026 (EUR)	FINANCIAL PLAN 2027 (EUR)	TOTAL 2023–2027 (EUR)
Improving the efficiency of public administration and the judiciary for action in the field of human-rights protection	OI.02.14.82 Proportion of Ombudsman's recommendations effectively pursued by public bodies over the 12-month period OI.02.14.83 Number of cases from the European Court of Human Rights being executed	1,323,792	101,864	198,635	101,864	101,864	1,828,019
Raising the level of awareness of citizens and institutions about instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights, and facilitating access to the judiciary and public bodies	OI.02.14.87 Citizens' awareness about the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union OI.02.14.88 Perception of availability of information on citizens' rights OI.02.14.89 Number of cases of provision of primary legal aid OI.02.14.90 Number of approved applications for secondary legal aid	17,520	17,519	17,519	17,519	17,519	87,596
Strengthening mechanisms for monitoring and implementing the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities	OI.02.14.93 Number of procedures conducted in languages and scripts of national minorities before administrative bodies of local units and judicial bodies	143,450	96,477	417,416	412,401	/	1,069,744

	OI.02.14.94 Proportion of members of councils and representatives of national minorities who declare that they are satisfied with their participation in the decision-making of local and regional government units that concern minorities						
Improving cooperation with civil-society organizations and the media in protecting human rights and combatting discrimination	OI.02.14.95 Ranking of the Republic of Croatia according to the Press Freedom Index - political context OI.02.14.96 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) in Croatia	1,511,929 (extra-budgetary funds)	46,452	46,452	46,452	46,452	1,697,737 (including extra-budgetary funds)
STRATEGIC GOAL OF NDS 2030	5: HEALTHY, ACTIVE AND HIGH-QUALITY LIFE						
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Total rate of risk of poverty and social exclusion						
Improving the prevention of discrimination, and providing support for victims of discrimination	OI.02.14.84 Proportion of respondents who personally felt discriminated against in the past 12 months OI.02.14.86 Proportion of state and public servants who completed training in the field of combatting discrimination in the 12-month period OI.02.14.85 Total number of complaints of discrimination handled by ombudsman institutions	39,825,609	1,632,829	1,351,118	563,939	563,939	43,937,434
Improving mechanisms for combatting hate crimes, strengthening awareness about the importance of the fight against racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, and encouraging a	OI.02.14.91 Public perception of the incidence of discrimination based on ethnicity 01.02.14.92 Number of cases of hate crimes committed because of race, ethnicity or ethnic origin	290,662	213,020	213,020	213,020	213,020	1,142,742

culture of remembrance of the victims of genocide							
INDICATIVE ALLOCATION TO THE STATE-ADMINISTRATION BODY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NP / ACHIEVEMENT OF STRATEGIC GOALS PER YEAR	43,112,962	2,108,161	2,244,160	1,355,195	942,794	49,763,272	

7. Framework for monitoring and evaluation

High-quality monitoring and evaluation are extremely important for the successful and efficient implementation of the strategic framework. For the successful implementation of horizontal objectives and measures provided for in this National Plan, harmonized and coordinated action of implementing partners and other stakeholders whose activities are aimed at protecting human rights and combatting discrimination is necessary. Coordination and concerted action must be achieved among the main stakeholders, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, Government offices, state administration bodies, other public institutions, independent bodies for the protection of human rights, civil-society organizations and academia.

The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, as the entity responsible for the implementation of the strategic-planning act, will ensure continuous monitoring of progress in the implementation of measures, activities and projects designed to achieve the specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027. Monitoring and evaluation processes will be conducted in line with the obligations arising from the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Management of the Development of the Republic of Croatia¹⁵⁷ and its by-laws, the Regulation on Guidelines for Drafting Strategic-planning Acts of National Significance and of Significance for Local and Regional Government Units,¹⁵⁸ the Ordinance on Deadlines and Procedures for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of Strategic-planning Acts of National Importance and of Importance for Local and Regional Government Units,¹⁵⁹ and the Ordinance on the Implementation of the Evaluation Procedure,¹⁶⁰ which specify the criteria and standards for the implementation of the process of evaluation of strategic-planning acts.

The monitoring process implies regular and timely reporting on the implementation of the strategic-planning act and associated action plans in relation to outcome indicators set in advance, as well as public-policy goals. In accordance with the provisions of the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Management of the Development of the Republic of Croatia and its by-laws, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities will coordinate the preparation of a report on progress in the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 and associated action plans. The reports will be submitted to the Coordinating Body for the system of strategic planning and management of the development of the Republic of Croatia.

Data collected during monitoring, which form part of regular reports, will be published on the website of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities. With the aim of ensuring continuous and timely monitoring of the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, a Working Group will be established to monitor the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027. The Working Group will include implementing partners, primarily

¹⁵⁷ Official Gazette, nos. 123/17 and 151/22.

¹⁵⁸ Official Gazette, no. 89/18.

¹⁵⁹ Official Gazette, no. 6/19.

¹⁶⁰ Official Gazette, no. 66/19.

representatives of those state-administration bodies that are responsible for the implementation of the measures, as well as other interested stakeholders.

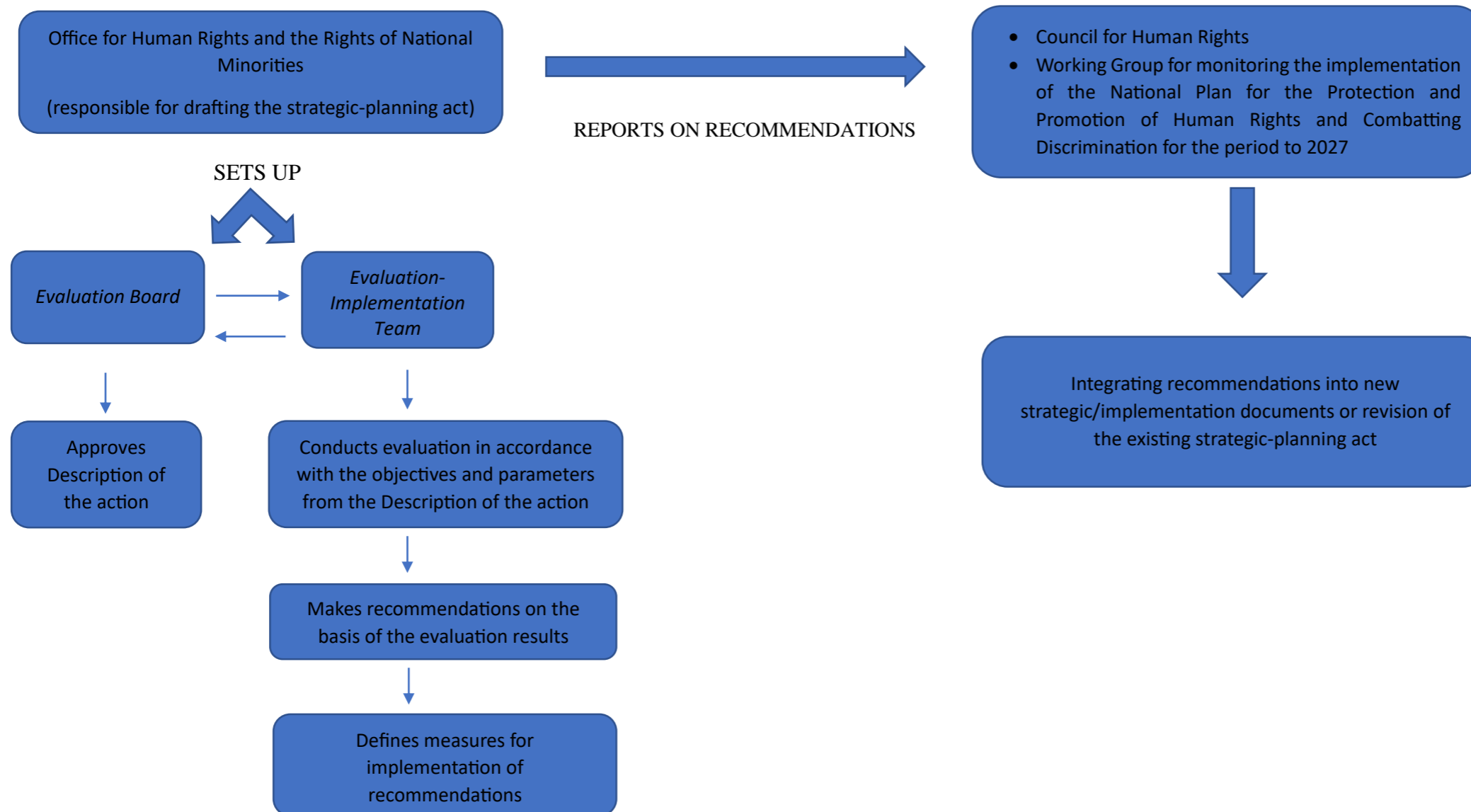
Alongside continuous monitoring of the progress achieved in reaching the objectives, independent evaluation is also essential, since it will establish the outcomes and potential effects of the implementation of the strategic framework in the area of protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination. The evaluation will be carried out in several stages.

The medium-term evaluation, to be conducted by external experts, is planned for 2025, while the evaluation of the development effects and results achieved after the implementation of the National Plan (ex-post evaluation) will be conducted after 2027.

After the adoption of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, a framework/mechanisms for the effective implementation of the evaluation of the strategic-planning act will be established (Figure 8). For the purpose of implementing the evaluation procedures, setting up an Evaluation Board and an Evaluation Implementation Team has been envisaged. The Team will comprise independent external experts and advisers from the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities.

Furthermore, evaluation findings and recommendations resulting from the monitoring and evaluation process, in addition to being publicly available, will also be discussed with interested stakeholders within the Working Group for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 and at the sessions of the Council for Human Rights.

Figure 8. Mechanisms for evaluation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027



Annex 1. Consultation strategy

In the Republic of Croatia, the normative framework for conducting consultations with the interested public is regulated by the Act on the Right of Access to Information,¹⁶¹ Code of Consultation with the Interested Public in Legislative Procedures, and other regulations and acts.¹⁶²

In accordance with the normative framework and good practice of consultation with the public, during the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, special attention will be paid to distribution of information, consultation, inclusion and partnership as the highest level of cooperation with representatives of the interested public.

The consultation process includes:

- *Informing* the interested public about the strategic document's preparation process, and regularly reporting on progress in achieving set goals, as well as informing about the results of external evaluation;
- *Consultation* as a two-way process during which state bodies seek and receive feedback from citizens – that is, the interested public – during the process of adopting the strategic document;
- *Inclusion* as a higher level of the two-way process through which representatives of the interested public are actively involved in working bodies for the preparation of the strategic document, monitoring of its implementation and evaluation of its outcomes, and
- *Partnership*, implying the highest degree of cooperation and mutual accountability of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and representatives of the interested public for the process of adoption and implementation of programmes, laws, other regulations and acts.

The process of preparing the National Plan and methods of collecting opinions

Activities of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities from 2016 to 2021

The preparation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 was conducted in four stages. In the *first stage*, focused on elaborating the concept and identifying priority areas, the Working Group for Evaluating the Implementation of the National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the 2013–2016 period was established. After the completion of the Expert Analytical Report, the Working Group for the Preparation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the 2021–2027 period was established, and tasked with drafting a medium-term strategic-planning act.

The Working Group included representatives of state administration bodies, academia, representatives of national minorities, civil-society organizations and independent institutions. In addition to developing the strategic framework, the Working Group undertook the task of proposing and giving opinions on associated implementing action plans, the draft Action Plan

¹⁶¹ Official Gazette, nos. 25/13, 85/15 and 69/22.

¹⁶² Official Gazette, no. 140/09.

for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for 2023 and the draft Action Plan for Combatting Discrimination for 2023.

The *second stage* consisted of reviewing the current legislative and strategic framework, and developing a database of recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia by national and international mechanisms for protecting human rights and combatting discrimination. The Republic of Croatia has ratified a large number of international treaties on human rights at the European and global levels. In addition to being part of the Croatian legal order, and thus introducing high standards of human-rights protection into it, certain international instruments are particularly important, because the state party is obliged to report to the treaty bodies that monitor their application. On the other hand, the Council of Europe acts in the field of development and promotion of human rights within the framework of the Committee of Ministers, as well as expert bodies, and there are also independent bodies composed of experts gathered in committees, such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities, and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The position of the Commissioner for Human Rights is also important.

When the database was compiled, the latest available recommendations to the Republic of Croatia submitted through national and international mechanisms for protecting human rights and combatting discrimination at the national and international levels were analysed. Those can be found in the following documents:

- Report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Croatia (5th monitoring cycle)
- Report on the Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies for 2019 (general recommendations)
- Report of the Ombudsman for 2020 and 2021
- Interim Report on the Recommendations of the Human Rights Council under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism
- National Report submitted in accordance with point 5 of the Annex to Resolution 16/21 of the Human Rights Council, January 2020
- Third National Report of the Republic of Croatia under the Universal Periodic Review on human rights
- Recommendations from the Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – OHCHR (A/HRC/26/22) – 2017
- Presentation of recommendations of the Ombudsman for persons with disabilities from the 2018 Annual Work Report
- Report on the work of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities for 2018
- Presentation of the state of human rights in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman for Gender Equality – excerpts from the summary of the Work Report for 2018
- Assessment of the implementation of the European Union Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the 2016 Council Recommendations on Effective Roma Integration Measures in the Member States (urgent priorities for all Member States)
- Expert analytical report on the implementation of the National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the 2013–2016 period

- UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health – preliminary observations during his visit to Croatia from 28 November to 6 December 2016
- Concluding comments of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on VI, VII and VIII periodical reports of the Republic of Croatia
- Concluding comments of the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women from 2015
- Concluding comments of the Committee against Torture from 2014
- Concluding comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 2014
- Concluding comments of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from 2015
- Concluding Comments of the United Nations Human Rights Committee from 2015
- The report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing after her visit to Croatia.

The above-mentioned database of recommendations addressed to the Republic of Croatia was used as a basis for identifying intervention areas where implementation measures of the associated action plans should be directed.

The *third stage* consisted of four consultative meetings of the Working Group, with the aim of gathering opinions and finding agreement concerning the proposed specific objectives of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, and the priority areas for action. Due to the extraordinary circumstances caused by the global pandemic, opinions were collected not at the planned thematic meetings in subgroups, but rather using online consultative questionnaires that were then processed, and all open questions were discussed at individual meetings with implementing partners. A total of 15 meetings were held with representatives of state administration bodies, civil-society organizations and the ombudsman, with the aim of elaborating action plans and resolving open issues.

The final, *fourth stage* of the preparation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 involved public consultation of the interested public via the e-Consultation platform, following which the final revision of the Proposal of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 and the related action plans was made, and the National Plan was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

With the purpose of informing the public, the website of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities published an overview of key information on the preparation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, as well as information on the document submitted to public consultation and that adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

Composition of the Working Group

The Working Group for the preparation of the National Plan includes:

- representatives of 20 state administration bodies
- representatives of the ombudsman, the ombudsman for gender equality, the ombudsman for persons with disabilities and the ombudsman for children
- representatives of 5 civil-society organizations
- representatives of the Rector's Collegium

- representatives of national minorities as external members.

Consultation with the interested public

Consultation with the interested public through the central-government e-Consultation portal will consist of several procedural steps:

- submitting the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 and associated action plans for public consultation via the e-Consultation platform
- submitting comments received during the public consultation and drafting responses by state bodies
- preparing a report on the consultations conducted
- finalizing the document and submitting it to the state bodies for their final responses.

Key stakeholder groups

The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities involved the following stakeholders in the process of preparing the medium-term strategic-planning act, i.e. the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, and the associated action plans:

- representatives of state administration bodies and other state bodies, staff services of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and public institutions
- representatives of ombudsman offices
- representatives of civil-society organizations, with an emphasis on the participation of representatives of those civil-society organizations that focus on protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination
- representatives of academia
- representatives of trade unions
- representatives of national minorities.

Representatives of local and regional government will be involved through the County Coordinating Bodies for Human Rights, whereby units of local and regional government will be encouraged to include measures in the area of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination in their implementation programmes.

Goals and methods of consultation

Consultation goals

- AGREE on the priority areas and specific objectives of the strategic document
- AGREE on outcome indicators
- DEFINE key measures in the action plans that will be drawn up with the aim of positively affecting the needs identified in the priority areas, including horizontal policies.

Form/method of consultation

Formal consultation mechanisms:

- Working Group for the Preparation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the 2021–2027 period

- consultation with the interested public through the central government's e-Consultation portal

Annex 2. Communication strategy

Introductory information

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027 is a strategic-planning act that defines and sets specific objectives relating to the exercise of human rights and equality in the Republic of Croatia. Given that the principles of protection and promotion of human rights are the foundation of modern democratic states, special attention is paid to this area through the continuation of strategically-designed activities that are also aligned with the long-term development needs of the Republic of Croatia. The implementation of the measures in the action plans will contribute to achieving a higher level of social inclusion, social cohesion, quality of life and the rule of law, and thereby promote the attainment of the long-term strategic goals defined in the NDS 2030.

The achievement of specific objectives and measures aimed at promoting fundamental principles of human rights, such as dignity, equality, freedom, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, responsibility, cooperation and acceptance, will contribute to the attainment of the global Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and also to the fulfilment of European policies in the field of equality and human-rights protection.

Given that the protection of human rights is a horizontal topic included in the sectoral and multi-sectoral strategies of state-administration bodies, it is necessary to coordinate their activities through multiannual strategic planning and define the responsibilities of stakeholders in the achievement of the targets set. The goal of the communication strategy in the forthcoming period is to establish effective communication with key stakeholders and emphasize projects, measures and achievements realized by the state administration in the field of human-rights protection and suppression of discrimination. In the medium term, efforts will be made to inform the general public about the work done to protect rights and combat discrimination.

Communication goals

General goals

1. Strengthen transparency of the procedures for drafting, implementing, monitoring the implementation of and evaluating of the National Plan
2. Contribute, through effective communication, to a higher level of intersectoral coordination and cooperation in order to attain the objectives defined by the strategic-planning act
3. Raise the awareness of the general public and relevant stakeholders about strategic action in the area of protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination
4. Inform the public about the level of success in attaining the objectives of the strategic document

Specific goals

1. Provide continuous and high-quality information to all key stakeholders about the process of drafting and implementing the strategic document and evaluating its final effects, with the aim of increasing the participation of stakeholders in all processes relating to the document
2. Set up intersectoral bodies (the Council for Human Rights and the Working Group for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion

of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027) with the aim of achieving effective information exchange and monitoring the implementation of the strategic document

3. Provide continuous information for the general public and relevant stakeholders about strategic action in the area of protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination, and about the progress or challenges in the attainment of the objectives
4. Continuously raise the awareness of the general public about the measures implemented in the area of protecting human rights and combatting discrimination

Communication activities and budget

The goals of the Communication Strategy will be realized by implementing activities that will be defined in Action Plans accompanying the Communication Strategy. The Communication Strategy Action Plans will follow the implementation cycles of the Action Plans accompanying the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027. For the purpose of implementing the Communication Strategy, three action plans will be drawn up (Communication Strategy Action Plan for 2023; Communication Strategy Action Plan for 2024–2025; Communication Strategy Action Plan for 2026–2027).

The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, as the body responsible for preparation of the strategic document and its associated action plans, as well as monitoring, evaluating and reporting on their implementation, is also responsible for the implementation of activities under the Communication Strategy Action Plans, and for achieving the goals of the Communication Strategy. Funds for the implementation of the Communication Strategy, i.e. the activities under the Communication Strategy Action Plans, will be allocated in the budget of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities.

Target audience

As mentioned above, the general goals of the Communication Strategy regard strengthening transparency and raising the level of awareness of the general public and key stakeholders about progress in attaining the objectives set in the strategic document.

With the aim of strengthening transparency and involving relevant stakeholders in the procedures for drafting, implementing, monitoring the implementation and evaluating activities under the Communication Strategy, the following will be addressed:

- state-administration and public-administration bodies
- civil-society organizations
- the scientific and professional public
- independent institutions.

With the aim of raising awareness about the objectives of the strategic document and measures for achieving the defined objectives, the following will be addressed:

- the media
- human-rights defenders
- social groups targeted by measures under the implementing documents
- representatives of local and regional government
- the private sector.

Communication activities aimed at the private sector will expand the current communication model of the competent authority, and appropriate attention will have to be paid to these activities when drafting associated action plans. Finally, most of the communication activities will be directed at the national level, but some communication activities will also include the relevant public at the European Union level.

In this regard, the target groups will include working bodies of the European Commission and the Council of Europe (European Integration Network; High-level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity; High-level Group on Combatting Racism, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance; Subgroup on Equality Data; LGBTIQ Equality Subgroup; National Implementation Subgroup of EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025; Council of Europe’s Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion).

Communication channels, key communicators and tools

Communication to target groups will be conducted:

1. *through direct communication:*

Throughout the implementation of activities, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities will organize the provision of information to the participants about various stages of preparation, or implementation, of the strategic document. Conferences, round-table discussions and seminars will also be used to map the difficulties that may occur in the implementation of the document. In addition, such opportunities will be used to provide additional information for the public about the content published on the official website, and encourage its viewing. In addition, key stages, such as the adoption of the strategic document, and publication of the results of the planned evaluations, as well as the final evaluation report on the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, will be presented at public events before a wide circle of stakeholders, in accordance with the earlier practice of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities. It is important to underscore that regular meetings of the intersectoral bodies mentioned above will be held, where the human-rights situation will be discussed, reports given on the implementation of the strategic document, and challenges discussed.

2. *through communication channels:*

- a. *the media*, where the term covers all types of media: television, radio, press and internet portals. Key messages will also be communicated within a media campaign, which will be carried out as parts of EU projects aimed at combatting discrimination.
- b. *digital communication channels*. The website <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr> is one of the key communication channels which will be used to provide continuous information for the public about the implementation of the strategic document and the results of its evaluation, and also about the effects of the document’s implementation.

Key communicators

The successful implementation of the Communication Strategy depends, among other things, on a clearly defined hierarchy, protocols and responsibilities for the implementation of

communication activities. Special attention must be paid to the identification of key persons who will be responsible for external communication. When addressing the public through the media or other communication channel, it is necessary to ensure clarity, recognition and uniformity of the communication's content.

Communication tools and planned activities

Implementation of the Communication Strategy will include the following activities:

Creating and distributing press releases – with the aim of ensuring the distribution of a larger quantity of relevant information to a large number of media active at different levels (national, local, specialized media). This will be used when providing the information about the adoption of the strategic document and when announcing the results of the evaluation of the strategic document's implementation.

Giving statements to the media – an activity that will be conducted when providing information about novelties in the process of preparing, implementing or monitoring; on occasions when it is necessary to communicate quickly and proactively; or when the media are especially interested in certain topics. It will be conducted by persons authorized to communicate with the media at the level of the coordinating body.

Interviews and guest appearances in the media by key communicators – these activities will support all other methods of provision of information to target groups of the public, and they can be used to place a wider range of relevant information.

Answers to enquiries – these will be used in order to achieve high-quality two-way communication and to place relevant and accurate information with the media as well as with interested citizens who have posed individual enquiries to the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities.

Presentations as parts of events organized by the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities – at events organized by the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, such as conferences, round-table discussions or celebrations of important dates, printed copies of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027, and of the report with results of the strategic document's evaluation, will be presented and distributed. If necessary, separate events will be organized, such as round-table discussions with representatives of the scientific and professional community, focusing on topics of special importance for the implementation of the strategic document.

Presentations at events at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe – in order to provide information for target groups outside the national context about the creation, monitoring and final results, the Office will present what has been done at events (working meetings / conferences / round tables) organized by competent bodies at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Presentation in the framework of the working bodies tasked with drafting strategic documents relating to protecting and promoting human rights and combatting discrimination – representatives of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities who participate in the working bodies preparing strategic documents that fall under the responsibility of other state-administration bodies will regularly provide timely information, within the

framework of their activities, with a view to achieving synergy and links among strategic documents with complementary content and priority areas.

Key messages

- Everyone has equal rights, without discrimination.
- The Government of the Republic of Croatia is committed to preserving fundamental rights and freedoms.
- The Government of the Republic of Croatia acts strategically in the field of building an inclusive and tolerant society that respects human rights and the rights of national minorities.
- The Government of the Republic of Croatia has made efforts to combat all forms of racial discrimination and other forms of intolerance.

Monitoring and evaluation

Along with continuous monitoring of implementation, it is necessary to evaluate the success of the implementation of the Communication Strategy. Thus, as part of the mid-term evaluation, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities will also evaluate the success of the implementation of the Communication Strategy, on the basis of set indicators and performance measures. Based on the evaluation results obtained, the coordinating body will revise the Communication Strategy Action Plan, as necessary.

INDICATOR	CRITERION
Creation and distribution of press releases	The ratio of press releases published to the number of publications planned of a given press release
Statements to the media	The number of statements published, in comparison to the number of events for which they were prepared
Interviews and guest appearances in the media	The number of interviews and guest appearances in the media planned, in comparison to the number of interviews and guest appearances broadcast
Answers to media enquiries	The number of enquiries received from the media, in comparison to the number of answers to media enquiries
Organized events	The number of events planned, in comparison to the number of events realized/implemented
Presentations at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe	The number of presentations planned, in comparison to the number of presentations realized

Interconnections

Given that the protection of human rights is a horizontal topic included in sectoral and multi-sectoral strategies, state-administration bodies will endeavour to ensure complementarity through participation of representatives of the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities in working bodies for the preparation of strategic documents and through efficient communication in intersectoral bodies involved in monitoring the implementation of

the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination for the period to 2027.