

# Social Inclusion of Persons Granted International Protection in the Republic of Croatia

– DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM

DEVELOPMENT AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

# INCLUDED



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## – intersectoral

PROTECTION

## cooperation in the

IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA – DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM

## empowerment

DEVELOPMENT AND

## of third-country

RECOMMENDATIONS

## nationals

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# Foreword

Migrations, whether voluntary or forced, are an integral part of contemporary society, both in Europe and globally. An important element of the migration process is integration. With enhancing legal pathways for migration, the issue of (successful) integration is of pivotal importance. Years of discussions on the importance of the newcomers' integration into European societies have led to some kind of a consensus, with integration being understood as a multidimensional, two-way process. In that sense, reciprocity is possible only if immigrants are included in the economy and society of the host country and if they are given equal opportunities. In that sense, migrants are recognised for their potential to participate in the society's economic, political, cultural and social life, while their (un)successful integration affects social cohesion and development. While unsuccessful integration can result in undermined social cohesion, lost talents, social fragmentation and similar consequences, successful integration benefits society in general. It values diversity as a resource, promotes it in institutions, residential and public areas, and reduces segregation by fostering the culture of recognition and reciprocity.

However, regardless of the amount of effort made to develop integration policies, to achieve progress, it is necessary to know whether the effort itself was successful. Development of evidence-based policies and efficient monitoring of integration outcomes with the aim of measuring progress would allow for monitoring the progress on the implementation of integration policies, determining resource constraints and adequacy and, if necessary, adjusting policies. The very purpose of this research was to take a step towards developing evidence-based integration policies with the aim of increasing the capacity of existing social structures to ensure equal prerequisites for the social participation of vulnerable groups, minimising inequality and avoiding polarisation. Such integration policies will meet the European human rights standards, including those related to social cohesion, equality and antidiscrimination.

## **Alen Tahiri, M.A. Pol Sci**

Director, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of Republic of Croatia

# Abbreviations

Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund **(AMIF)**  
 Education and Teacher Training Agency **(AZOO)**  
 Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education **(ASOO)**  
 Agency for Science and Higher Education **(AZVO)**  
 Centre for Culture of Dialogue **(CCD)**  
 Centre for Peace Studies **(CPS)**  
 Central Health Information System of the Republic of Croatia **(CEZIH)**  
 European Union **(EU)**  
 Croatian Red Cross **(CRC)**  
 Croatian Legal Centre **(CLC)**  
 Croatian Employment Service **(CES)**  
 Croatian Health Insurance Fund **(CHIF)**  
 Jesuit Refugee Service **(JRS)**  
 International Organization for Migration **(IOM)**  
 Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy **(MLPSFSP)**  
 Ministry of the Interior **(MUP)**  
 Ministry of Health **(MH)**  
 Ministry of Science and Education **(MSE)**  
 Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care **(CSORHC)**

# Introduction

Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities is a beneficiary of the project “INCLuDE – Intersectoral Cooperation in the Empowerment of Third-Country Nationals”, co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The project aims to improve the preconditions for the social inclusion of third-country nationals, with a focus on persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia, and to ultimately empower key stakeholders in the integration system to design, implement and monitor integration measures for third-country nationals in Croatia. Between November 2020 and October 2021, a research titled “*Development of a system for collection of data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia*” was conducted as part of the INCLuDE project. Its purpose was to create a database on the social inclusion of persons granted international protection and to develop a data collection system to systematically monitor the successfulness of their social inclusion.

The main research objective was to monitor and evaluate the impact of integration policies in individual areas using a set of indicators.

Creating a database on the beneficiaries of integration measures and on the system of monitoring the use of measures will benefit not only public policy makers, but also public service providers, local and regional self-government officials, employees of non-governmental organisations and charities and other stakeholders involved in the integration process.

Since the early 1990s, the number of refugees has been increasing across the EU. This was particularly noticeable during the European migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016, when the number of persons seeking international protection rose dramatically. Years of discussions on the importance of the newcomers' integration into European societies have led to some kind of a consensus, with integration being understood as a multidimensional, two-way process. The two-way nature of the integration process means that it involves both migrants and the host society, while its multidimensionality is reflected in the host country's institutional and normative structure. Integration can therefore be defined as the process of inclusion and acceptance of immigrants in core social institutions (Esser 2004) and as the process of immigrants becoming an accepted part of society (Penninx 2007).

Considering that EU pays great attention to migrant integration, especially persons under international protection, public policies should ensure that such groups have equal social rights as citizens and recognise their potential to participate in the society's economic, political, cultural and social life. To achieve that, countries adopt integration policies aiming to equalise the rights and obligations of migrants with those of citizens (Wolffhardt et al., 2019).

EU documents highlight the fact that integration is understood as a process based on mutual rights and related obligations of migrants (i.e. third-country nationals) and the host society. On the one hand, this implies the host society's responsibility to allow migrants to participate in the society's economic, social, cultural and political life and, on the other hand, migrants' respect for the host society's fundamental norms and values.<sup>1</sup> Studies have shown that better migrant integration leads to greater long-term economic, social and fiscal profit of a host country. Due to different specific requirements pertaining to the integration of migrants in EU countries, it is difficult to adopt a single comprehensive integration policy shared by all member states. To encourage the integration of third-country nationals in member states, the EU seeks to develop a coherent legislative framework fostering integration through legally binding regulations and directives and through non-legally binding instruments and recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Immigration, Integration and Employment (2003), Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 3.6.2003 COM (2003) 336 final.

An important step towards a common integration policy of EU countries was made in 2004 by adopting the Common Basic Principles – 11 principles representing the foundation for any future integration-related initiatives. However, the implementation of this document rests on a voluntary base of EU member states and it has a limited impact on member state policies. In April 2010, at the European Ministerial Conference on Integration in Zaragoza, the Council of the European Union adopted a Declaration identifying indicators (known as “Zaragoza indicators”) in four key areas of integration policies with the aim of monitoring their outcomes and the outcomes of the integration process. The areas in which the successfulness of migrant integration is measured include employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship. The indicators serve to measure key areas of integration policies and to review and monitor the situation by individual areas.

In 2011, the *European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals* was adopted, which discusses the European integration and identifies the areas in which the Commission and member states may propose and adopt measures for promoting integration policies. The 2015 *European Agenda on Migration* highlights the need for effective integration policies. Considering the current developments with regard to migrations, especially after 2015, there has been a need for revising and strengthening the common approach to public policies. Consequently, the Commission adopted the *Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals* in

2016, which provides a comprehensive framework within which member states can develop and strengthen their integration policies.

Regardless of differences in integration models, EU member states seek to standardise the policies ensuring lawful residence and access to employment, housing, education and political participation for immigrants. It is also possible to notice certain similarities in citizenship policies among host countries, as well as efforts in combating discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

The majority of EU member states believe that acquiring citizenship rights is also important for migrant integration, in addition to access to welfare state institutions. There are some key differences among host countries when it comes to the implementation of measures and policies for exercising those rights. Some countries have restrictive citizenship (naturalisation) policies, while others are much more liberal and allow many migrants to acquire citizenship rights. There is a consensus on economic incorporation, i.e. inclusion of migrants in the labour market and education system. Migrants' economic activity and education (professional qualifications) are prerequisites for ensuring income and instruments which will help them become independent of public assistance. In addition to the integration into the labour market, integration policies also focus on encouraging language proficiency, participation in civil society and establishing contact with the local population.

The European Commission advocates the adoption of evidence-based policies both at the EU and member state level (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2018). A prerequisite for developing such policies is setting up a data collection system. When it comes to integration policies related to the social inclusion of persons granted international protection, it is important to develop a system for monitoring the outcomes of such policies in order to see if they are effective or not. However, the implementation of integration policies and the efficiency of resulting measures and activities in most EU countries are not monitored systematically. All member states lack quantitative data on migrant integration and the outcome of integration policies in different areas is often unknown. Only about 50% of member states carry out some form of periodic assessments or reviews of national integration action plans or strategies. Even when such reviews are carried out, they are usually not based on common EU standards and indicators for monitoring integration policies. Eleven EU member states measure the results of integration policies using the Zaragoza indicators, as agreed in 2010. Nine member states developed additional indicators to supplement the Zaragoza indicators, including examples directly related to fundamental rights, such as discrimination or victimisation. To ensure efficiency, the use of indicators must be complementary to the analyses of other countries and the EU level. Improving the outcomes of integration policies is important for fulfilling the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for inclusive growth, as well

as the UN's sustainable development goals of combating exclusion and promoting human rights.<sup>2</sup>

It is also important to note that some research (Koopmans, 2010) has shown that migrant integration indicators which can be presented as integration outcomes sometimes do not correspond to the development of integration policies. Regardless of the level of development of integration policies and legislative framework, migrant integration depends largely on the implementation of the legislative framework, migrants' willingness to integrate and the host society's openness to migrants. Institutionalisation of policy frameworks often leads to insufficient implementation or application in practice.

Collection of data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia and the creation of a database might help with eliminating the integration-related obstacles they face.

Although persons under international protection are provided with necessary protection in Croatia, besides the aforementioned factors, the process of adapting to the host society also depends on the local communities' readiness for their arrival and willingness to support them in the integration process. Persons under international protection in Croatia are confronted with many integration challenges related to the language, culture and legal and institutional framework. Institutional support in terms of allowing and encouraging language learning is essential for integration into the education system. Research has shown that migrant and refugee students achieve worse results in school compared to domestic students, especially students included in the education system as mature minors. In some countries (Finland, the Netherlands, the UK), children of newly arrived refugees are entitled to an individual curriculum during their first year in the formal education system. Curricular activities have been adjusted to their specific needs and profile, even taking into account whether students are unaccompanied minors, refugee children from war-affected countries or come from some other background (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, 2019). In that sense, the Croatian education system, especially when it comes to primary education, should also allow every refugee student to be included in preparatory and supplementary classes as an essential prerequisite for completing the syllabus and achieving social integration.

Besides language learning, professional training and employment service, persons under international protection also need specific services, such as a cultural orientation program. It is important that representatives of governmental and non-governmental institutions involved in carrying out integration activities share their experiences and give examples of good practices in order to improve the level of services and deepen mutual understanding. Shortcomings can be remedied by introducing feedback and consultation mechanisms in which refugees actively participate.

# Methodology

The research on the social inclusion of persons under international protection was conducted in three stages. The first stage included the preparation of an expert background study and data collection plan. As part of these activities, the areas of measurement of integration policy outcomes were defined and indicators were developed for each area.

To develop indicators and design a questionnaire, besides the Zaragoza Declaration, which defines integration indicators in four areas (employment, education, social inclusion and active citizenship), the research also used other EU documents aimed at increasing the efficiency of integration measures and policies. Their function was to review and monitor integration impacts in individual areas and they include the *European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals* (2011), *European Agenda on Migration* (2015) and the *Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals* (2016). In these documents, the areas of education and language learning, employment, access to housing and health and social services are considered the most important integration tools that must be made available to third-country nationals and persons granted international protection.

During this research stage, consideration was also given to the Framework for the integration of persons who have been granted international protection at the local level, which evaluated the implementation framework with the aim of supporting local and regional self-government units and adopting local strategies and action plans for the successful integration of persons granted international protection into local communities. Besides the evaluation of the efficiency of integration policies in the area of social welfare, healthcare, education and employment, which are considered in the aforementioned Framework for the integration of persons who have been granted international protection at the local level, naturalisation, i.e. acquisition of citizenship (including a sense of belonging) and discrimination were included in the research as well.

Naturalisation allows immigrants (refugees) to become equal members of the political community and to acquire the right of political participation. A developed sense of belonging to new surroundings, a host country, town or local community is an indicator of successful integration in terms of identification. The research also included an indicator of discrimination, which pertained to the share of individuals discriminated against on the

basis of ethnicity, race and/or nationality, since integration into a particular society is possible only when there are no discriminatory practices and when migrants' and refugees' rights are respected.

Finally, seven areas for measuring integration policy outcomes were defined:

1. SOCIAL WELFARE
2. HEALTHCARE
3. ACCOMMODATION AND HOUSING
4. LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EDUCATION
5. EMPLOYMENT
6. NATURALISATION AND SENSE OF BELONGING
7. DISCRIMINATION.

Indicators for evaluating the efficiency of integration policies and their improvement were developed for each area.

The second stage of the research involved three activities:

- identifying data sources that can be used to monitor the social inclusion of persons granted international protection;
- collecting data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection;
- creating a database on the social inclusion of persons granted international protection.

## Identifying sources of data about social inclusion of persons granted international protection

Sources of data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in Croatia were identified based on insight into the scope of work of individual institutions that also covers persons under international protection. Besides state authorities, i.e. competent ministries and other government and public institutions, non-governmental organisations and charities with long experience in working with persons granted international protection or which had recently focused on assisting persons granted international protection and overcoming integration challenges through project activities were also invited to participate in the research. Non-governmental organisations and charities actively work on almost all areas of integration, in particular language learning, intercultural mediation, exercise of rights to healthcare and social welfare, adequate housing and employment. Therefore, they are well acquainted with integration challenges and obstacles.

City of Zagreb was also included in the research as a local unit with the most experience in integration. In the *2014-2020 City of Zagreb Social Plan* (Official Gazette of the City of Zagreb 17/14, 23/16, 4/21), persons under international protection were recognised as one of the target groups. Furthermore, the *2021-2022 Draft Action Plan for Integration of Persons*

*Granted International Protection* was developed and is currently being adopted. *The Social Welfare Decision of the City of Zagreb* (Official Gazette of the City of Zagreb 26/14, 19/15, 6/16, 16/16, 23/16, 4/19, 06/20, 17/20 – consolidated text 22/20 and 8/21) stipulates that the social welfare system rights defined in the Decision may be exercised by the citizens of the Republic of Croatia with registered permanent residence in the City of Zagreb, asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection with registered permanent residence in the City of Zagreb and family members of asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection legally residing in the Republic of Croatia and granted international protection in accordance with the Act on International and Temporary Protection. It is important to note that the City of Zagreb was the first local community to include asylees temporarily residing in the City of Zagreb as persons entitled to exercise social rights and use social services under said decision in 2014. In 2016, this category was expanded to include asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection with permanent residence in the City of Zagreb who were granted international protection in accordance with the Act on International and Temporary Protection. In March 2019, social welfare rights were extended to include family members of asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection.

#### **Collecting data about social inclusion of persons granted international protection**

To complete the second stage of the research, a questionnaire consisting of 56 questions/indicators was designed with the aim of monitoring and evaluating the impact of integration measures and policies in individual areas. The indicators were divided in seven areas: social welfare, healthcare, accommodation and housing, language learning and education, employment, naturalisation and discrimination.

Based on a previously made list of key stakeholders, the questionnaire was e-mailed to state authorities, social service providers, non-governmental organisations and charities involved in the integration of persons granted international protection.

Research participants were not sent the complete questionnaire, but only select questions (indicators) based on their scope of work. Where applicable, data was collected for 2018, 2019 and 2020. Monitoring of individual indicators by year suggests possible deviations in the exercise of individual rights by persons under international protection. However, to prove that, it is first necessary to obtain information about the exact number of persons under international protection, which is not available in the Republic of Croatia.

The questionnaire was sent to the following institutions in order to collect data:

- Ministry of the Interior
- Ministry of Science and Education
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy
- Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care
- Ombudswoman
- Croatian Employment Service
- Croatian Red Cross
- Croatian Legal Centre
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- International Organization for Migration Croatia
- Centre for Culture of Dialogue
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Centre for Peace Studies
- City of Zagreb.

Following the analysis of the data collected from state authorities and other public institutions, it was concluded that the list of data sources must be expanded because it was not possible to collect relevant data about language learning and education from the competent ministry. Institutions that should be included in the list of relevant sources of data about the social inclusion of persons under international protection are the following:

- Education and Teacher Training Agency
- Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
- Agency for Science and Higher Education/National ENIC/NARIC Office
- Zagreb Student Centre
- Osijek Student Centre
- Rijeka Student Centre
- Zadar Centre for Student Standard of Living
- Split Student Centre
- Dubrovnik Student Centre
- Pula Student Centre
- Šibenik Student Centre
- Požega Student Centre
- Karlovac Student Centre
- Varaždin Student Centre
- Slavonski Brod Student Centre.

To get a better and more complete insight into the evaluation of the impacts of integration measures, besides institutions, the research also included persons granted international protection. A relatively structured data collection research strategy was applied using the semi-structured interview method, allowing for more detailed and richer data about integration indicators pertaining to the seven areas as it is based on an idiographic approach and captures a subjective perspective and experience. Qualitative research was conducted using a convenience, non-probability



sample consisting of 10 persons (four women and six men). The interview was carried out with persons under international protection from Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Before the interview, the respondents were informed about and familiarised with the research objectives and subject matter by e-mail. The interviews were held in Zagreb and Sisak at locations proposed by the respondents and lasted 60-90 minutes. The conversations took place in Croatian and English. In some cases, Arabic-Croatian translators were used.

The data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews was analysed and the results were recorded in a database on the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in the form of an Excel table.

The final, third research stage included making recommendations and a plan for collecting data about social inclusion of persons granted international protection using redefined indicators.

# Research findings

## SOCIAL WELFARE

Data concerning social welfare indicators was collected from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (MLPSFSP), Croatian Red Cross (CRC), Centre for Culture of Dialogue (CCD), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Croatian Legal Centre (CLC).

The social welfare system rights to which persons under international protection are entitled include *social welfare system rights* (care and assistance allowance; one-time allowances; up-to-employment allowance, education-related allowances; allowance for vulnerable energy buyers; housing allowance – right granted at the level of local self-government units; fuel allowance – right granted at the level of regional self-government units; personal needs allowance for a residential care beneficiary; personal disability allowance; status of a parent caretaker or status of a caretaker; guaranteed minimum benefit) and *social welfare services* (initial social welfare service; counselling and assistance; attendance; psychosocial support; early intervention; assistance with inclusion into programmes of upbringing and regular education – integration; day care; accommodation and organised housing).

The MLPSFSP collects data about the number of social welfare system rights exercised and social welfare services used by persons under international protection (asylees, foreigners under temporary protection and foreigners under subsidiary protection).

In 2018, persons under international protection (asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection) exercised mostly the right to one-time allowance (226) and the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit<sup>3</sup> (389). Regarding social welfare services, the majority of beneficiaries used the initial social welfare service (provision of information, recognition and initial assessment of needs) (63).

In 2019, the number of persons (asylees and household members) under international protection exercising the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit and initial social welfare service decreased to 225 and 137, respectively. In 2020, the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit was exercised by 213 asylees with household members, while 107 of them exercised the right to the initial social welfare service.

<sup>3</sup> Including household members.

The MLPSFSP does not keep a record of analyses of needs of persons granted international protection. Available data about the exercise of social welfare system rights includes data about asylees and persons under subsidiary protection by year. Although the MLPSFSP has no information about the period of use of a guaranteed minimum benefit by persons under international protection, based on 10 random samples, it was found that the average period of use was approximately 13.6 months.

**Table 1. Number of beneficiaries of social rights among persons granted international protection in 2018, 2019 and 2020**

Social rights	2018	2019	2020
Care and assistance allowance			5
One-time allowance	226		2
Up-to-employment allowance	2		
Education-related allowance		1	1
Allowance for vulnerable energy buyers			
Housing allowance – right granted at the level of local self-government units	2	43	28
Fuel allowance – right granted at the level of regional self-government units	1	21	10
Personal needs allowance for a residential care beneficiary	1		1
Personal disability allowance			5
Status of a parent caretaker or status of a caretaker			1
Guaranteed minimum benefit	391	225	282

Source: Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

**Table 2. Number of social service users among persons granted international protection in 2018, 2019 and 2020**

Social service	2018	2019	2020
Initial social welfare service	63	158	107
Counselling and assistance			11
Attendance			
Psychosocial support			15
Early intervention	1		7
Assistance with inclusion into programmes of upbringing and regular education (integration)			2
Day care	1		
Accommodation	1		1
Organised housing			

Source: Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

Data obtained from the Croatian Red Cross and non-governmental organisations, such as the Centre for Culture of Dialogue, Jesuit Refugee Service and Croatian Legal Centre, concerns mostly assistance related to the exercise of healthcare system rights, but also assistance in finding adequate accommodation, the exercise of social welfare system rights, etc. Some of the greatest obstacles caused by insufficient knowledge of Croatian include issues with communicating to health professionals when exercising the right to health insurance, dental services, maternity leave and allowance, paying for medicines, etc.

Non-governmental organisations supporting refugees also indicate obstacles within the banking system. These pertain to discriminatory practices of banks towards persons under international protection in various forms of banking business (account opening, withdrawal, etc.) because the system does not recognise them as persons under international protection, but as third-country nationals. Consequently, they have limited access to services and are required to present documentation they do not have, such as information about their permanent address in the country of origin.

Besides state authorities, non-governmental organisations and charities, we also obtained data by interviewing persons under international protection. Based on the results obtained from the interviews, it can be concluded that the social welfare system provides financial support to persons under international protection in accordance with law. However, that support is rather modest and insufficient to cover the cost of living without other sources of income. Two married asylees receive HRK 960<sup>4</sup> together, which is not enough to cover all living expenses and a language course (high level). One asylee stated that due to low income she was not able to have a social life that she wanted and that the majority of people in Croatia had (she does not go to bars, the movies, concerts, trips, etc.).

## HEALTHCARE

It is extremely important to ensure that persons granted international protection have access to health services because poor health and inability to access health services can be a fundamental and longstanding obstacle to integration, which consequently affects all areas of life and makes employment, education, acquisition of the host country's language and interaction with public institutions impossible.

Data concerning this area was collected from the Ministry of Health and non-governmental organisations whose project activities were aimed at persons granted international protection – the Croatian Red Cross (CRC), Centre for Culture of Dialogue (CCD), Croatian Legal Centre (CLC) and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

The data collected shows that the exercise of the right to healthcare by persons granted international protection does is still not harmonised with legal regulations. Obstacles to the exercise of this right, which are the rule rather than the exception, are eliminated ad hoc by paying a visit to the Ministry of Health office or contacting it by e-mail or phone. Non-governmental organisations helping refugees exercise the right to healthcare by providing mediation, accompaniment and translation services at health facilities also indicate certain obstacles to exercising this right. They result from the fact that health professionals are largely unfamiliar with the provisions of the Act on Mandatory Health Insurance and Health Care for Foreigners in the Republic of Croatia, so beneficiaries are often referred to the Croatian Health Insurance Fund (CHIF) or charged for services. The greatest obstacle for persons under international protection to exercise the right to healthcare is the fact that the system does not recognise them as persons insured by the CHIF. Due to the different status of such persons, a special engagement of health professionals is required in terms of administration, with the final outcome depending on how well informed they are. Many health professionals do not know how to record such beneficiaries in the information system, which is why they refuse to admit them under the pretence of not having room for new patients.

<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to the Social Welfare Act, the amount of a guaranteed minimum benefit is determined as a prescribed percentage of the base amount defined by a decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Based on the aforementioned, in 2021, the guaranteed minimum benefit amounted to HRK 480 per household member.

In 2019, 36 persons granted international protection approached the Croatian Legal Centre at a legal consultation and 61 consultations were held with them during the year. Five persons at seven consultations in total inquired about exercising healthcare rights. Inquiries pertained to payment of medicines, exercising the right to dental services, right of children to cochlear implants, right to maternity leave and allowance, as well as inquiries about health insurance as a condition for permanent residence. In 2020, the CLC was contacted by 32 persons granted international protection and 64 consultations were held with them. However, in 2020, there were no inquiries about exercising healthcare rights until early June. This can be explained by the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and society focusing exclusively on the issue of combating coronavirus at the expense of all other issues and needs of various social groups, including asylees.

Results obtained by interviewing asylees also confirmed that it is difficult for asylees to receive health services without an insured's ID number (MBO), which requires them to contact non-governmental organisations to help them get the service they need. As long as persons under international protection *de facto* cannot choose a primary care physician as legally prescribed and as long as they do not have the status of an insured person and the insured's ID number, they cannot be registered in the system, which consequently compromises the possibility of creating a database using these indicators.

## ACCOMMODATION AND HOUSING

In Croatia, under Article 67 of the Act on International and Temporary Protection, asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection are entitled to accommodation if they do not have the funds or assets to support themselves for a maximum period of two years from the date of receiving the decision granting international protection. After this right expires, they are expected to leave the apartment provided to them and find adequate accommodation. The majority of persons granted international protection find this extremely stressful. Due to their modest financial status, inability to speak the language and sociocultural differences, such persons are at a disadvantage when it comes to finding accommodation in a free market compared to the local population.

The majority of data about the accommodation and housing of persons under international protection was collected from the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care (CSORHC), which collect and monitor such data systematically. Besides the CSORHC, questions about housing were also sent to non-governmental organisations.

Since 1 January 2018, when the CSORHC took charge of providing accommodation to persons granted international protection, 321 lease contracts have been concluded for 751 persons. At the moment<sup>5</sup>, accommodation

<sup>5</sup> Data as at 2 September 2021.

is used by 99 persons in 46 housing units under state (25) and private ownership (21).

So far, for the purpose of providing accommodation to persons granted international protection, 64 state-owned housing units have been renovated and equipped, 46 of which are managed by the CSORHC and 18 of which have been put at the CSORHC's disposal by the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets.

*The Act on International and Temporary Protection* (Official Gazette 70/15, 127/17) does not stipulate the number of square metres necessary to accommodate persons granted international protection with regard to the number of household members. However, when it comes to accommodating persons granted international protection, the CSORHC usually follows Article 17 of *the Act on Housing Care in Assisted Areas* (Official Gazette 106/18, 98/19), which stipulates living area in the manner that the applicant for the family is entitled to 35 m<sup>2</sup> of living area with additional 10 m<sup>2</sup> per each family member, although said Article does not prescribe living area for persons under international protection. Under this standard, there are no persons under international protection living in inadequate living areas in apartments provided through the CSORHC. However, based on field experience, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has noticed that the issue of inadequate living area occurs in families with many children. CSORHC accommodates beneficiaries in state-owned housing units or rents apartments on their behalf from private renters with whom they had already worked in the past. Therefore, there were no reports on the inability to rent a property in a free market. However, although there were no official reports, the CSORHC noticed there were problems with finding renters willing to rent a property to refugees after their legal right to free accommodation has expired. Non-governmental organisations (JRS, Croatian Red Cross, Centre for Culture of Dialogue) that participated in the research also mentioned discriminatory practices when it comes to renting accommodation. Landlords very often do not want to rent an apartment to refugees despite them having sufficient funds to pay the rent.

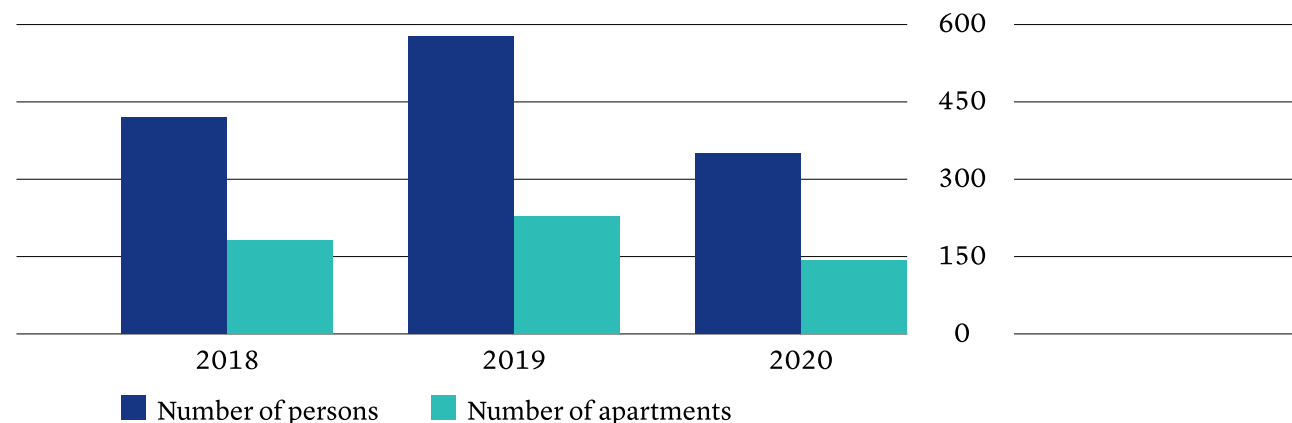
The CSORHC pointed out that one important aspect of accommodating persons under international protection is avoiding ghettoization, which is always taken into account. For that reason, beneficiaries are not accommodated in housing units at a same address, nor are persons under international protection accommodated in one town, but all over the Republic of Croatia.

If a person cannot find accommodation or is not able to pay the rent, it can lead to homelessness. To the knowledge of non-governmental organisations, it is difficult to tell the exact number of homeless persons, since not all of them are registered at homeless shelters, but manage to get by some other way. JRS reported eight homeless persons under international protection during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. Croatian Red Cross

stated that two persons under international protection were accommodated in their homeless shelter in Zagreb.

Results obtained from the interviews with asylees also confirmed the statements made by non-governmental organisations regarding the discriminatory practices faced by asylees when renting apartments/houses. Asylees who were interviewed were mostly happy with their living space. However, those who will no longer be entitled to free accommodation (due to expiry of the two-year period of free housing provided by the CSORHC) expressed concerns about where they would live and how they would cover housing costs.

**Figure 1. Number of persons granted international protection exercising the right to accommodation and the number of apartments rented to them under the right to accommodation in 2018, 2019 and 2020**



Source: Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care

## LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Language learning, education, professional training and acquisition of basic skills necessary for integration into the labour market are the foundation of successful integration. Learning the language of the host country is one of the most important individual indicators of integration.

Despite being essential for integration of all categories of foreigners, including persons granted international protection, only some of the data requested was received from the Ministry of Science and Education as the ministry competent for education. The data concerns the total number of students approved to take preparatory classes, the total number of approved classes for learners of Croatian and the total number of approved Croatian classes, including methodical preparation for teachers. Between 2018 and 2020, the number of students under international protection included in primary education (101) for whom preparatory class-

es have been approved was at its highest in 2019. That year, the total number of approved classes for learners of Croatian (7,070) and the total number of approved Croatian classes including methodical preparation for teachers (10,605) were at their highest as well. In 2020 and 2021, the number of students belonging to this category decreased significantly, especially in 2021, when only 29 students granted international protection attended primary school.

The Croatian Language, History and Culture Learning Programme, consisting of 70 or 210 classes, was taken by 128 and 49 persons granted international protection, respectively<sup>6</sup>.

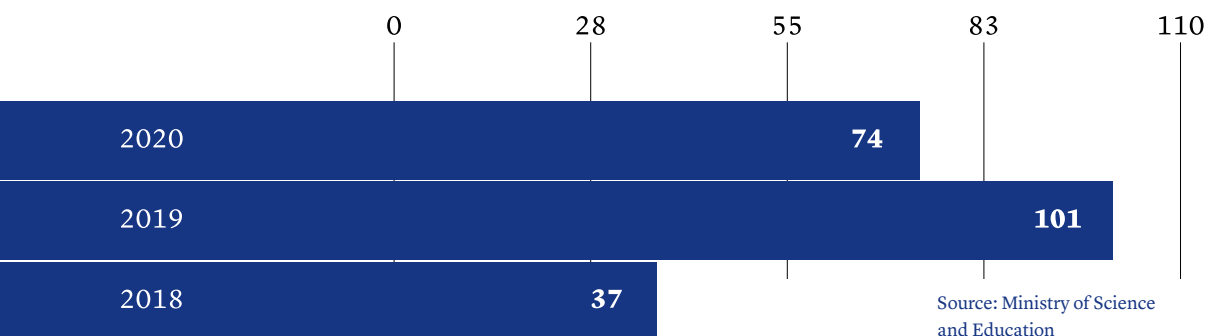
According to the information obtained from the Ministry of Science and Education, in the Republic of Croatia, there are no students granted international protection on scholarship.

City of Zagreb as a regional/local self-government unit has a system for collecting information about persons under international protection which is somewhat better organised compared to the Ministry of Science and Education as a state authority. In the City of Zagreb, 25 children under international protection enrolled in preschool in 2020, while 59 children enrolled in primary school (in 2019 and 2020). Only four students under international protection attended secondary school in 2020.

Based on conversations with asylees, we found that slow language learning poses the biggest obstacle to successful integration. In Croatia, there are no courses where asylees can attend Croatian classes regularly and systematically at a level they require. Asylees who graduated from college and whose diplomas are currently being recognised are actively learning the language so they could reach the B2 level and find jobs requiring a high level of proficiency in Croatian. However, they have to pay for it themselves. Even if language courses are organised, there are only A1 or A2 courses available, which most of them have already completed.

<sup>6</sup> In its response to the questionnaire, the Ministry of Science and Education did not specify what period the data about attending the Croatian Language, History and Culture Learning Programme concerned.

**Figure 2. Number of students integrated into primary education in 2018, 2019 and 2020**



Source: Ministry of Science and Education

## EMPLOYMENT

Besides learning the host country's language, one of the main indicators of integration is also integration into the labour market and employment. Finding a job is essential for migrants to participate in the economic and social life of the host country and it makes it easier for them to access adequate accommodation, living conditions and economic inclusion. Persons under international protection very often face specific obstacles, such as losing personal documents, not having or losing records of qualifications, diplomas not being recognised, long-term economic inactivity, limited social contacts and poor involvement in social networks.

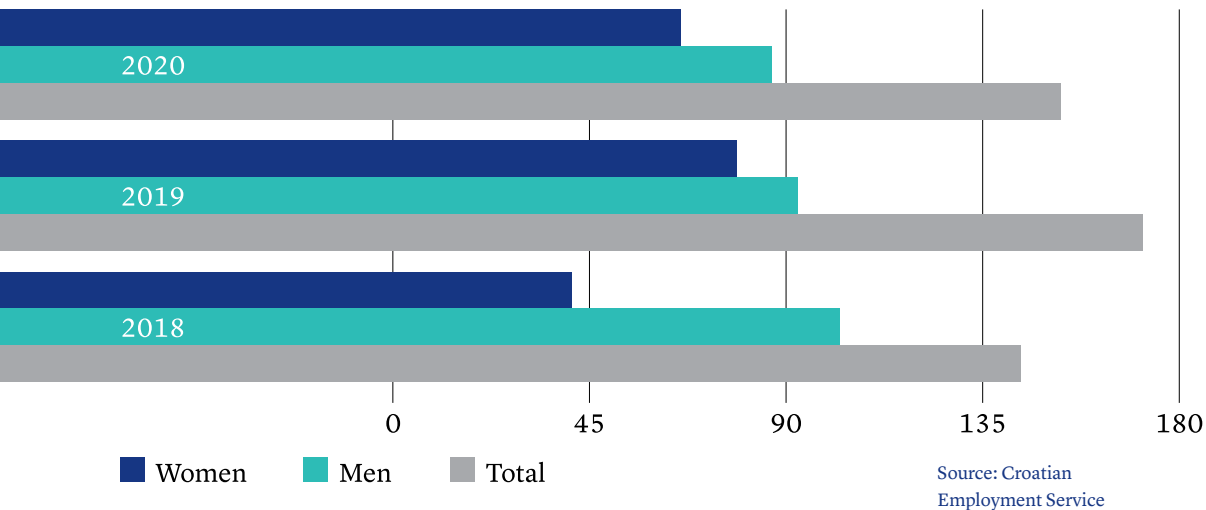
Data about employment indicators was obtained from the Croatian Employment Service, which collects such data systematically. They gave a concrete answer supported by figures to almost all the questions in the questionnaire.

The number of persons granted international protection who registered with the Croatian Employment Service in the last three years (2018, 2019 and 2020) was at its highest in 2019 – 172 (93 males and 79 females). Compared to 2018 and 2019, in 2020, the number of persons using counselling and career guidance services dropped significantly, similarly to the number of persons using active employment policy measures. The majority of people using active employment policy measures were from Syria.

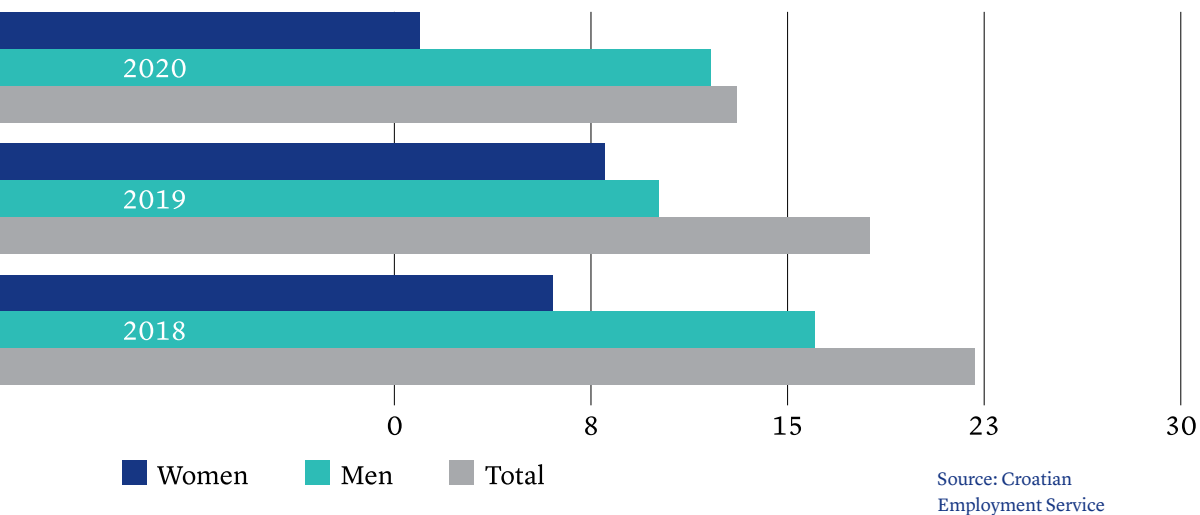
The number of unemployed persons participating in adult education (professional training, retraining, education) increased in 2020 compared to 2018 and 2019, amounting to 31. Twenty-two persons used the sub-measure aimed at obtaining a public document on professional qualifications, which, besides in-service training with a mentor, also includes theory classes at an adult education institution. The remaining nine persons used the sub-measure aimed at obtaining a certificate from the employer. The data about the number of persons with in-demand occupations is available only for 2018 and it amounts to 31.

The results obtained from the interviews with the asylees showed that some migrants faced downward occupational mobility when entering the labour market because they were not employed at positions corresponding to their professional qualifications. It was also found that the level of language training provided to migrants in Croatia is too low for practical application, i.e. for performing the majority of jobs in and outside of the labour market. The costs of a higher level language course (B1 or B2), which is often a job requirement, are paid by asylees themselves if they have sufficient funds to do so.

**Figure 3. Number of persons granted international protection registered with the Croatian Employment Service in 2018, 2019 and 2020**



**Figure 4. Number of unemployment persons granted international protection using active employment policy measures by sex in 2018, 2019 and 2020**



### NATURALISATION (ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP) AND DEVELOPING A SENSE OF BELONGING

The data about indicators related to the acquisition of Croatian citizenship was obtained from the Directorate for Immigration, Citizenship and

Administrative Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior. The data obtained includes the number of asylees and persons under subsidiary protection granted Croatian citizenship, but not the data about the total number of applications for citizenship submitted by asylees, which the Ministry of the Interior does not record. In 2018 and 2019, no person granted international protection acquired Croatian citizenship. In 2020, nine persons were granted Croatian citizenship.

A sense of belonging to the country where a person has been granted asylum and to the environment in which he/she lives (local level) was studied using the interview method. Most respondents stated they felt connected with Croatia as a country where they had been granted asylum. However, this sense of belonging is stronger towards the city where they live (local level) than the country. The Jesuit Refugee Service, as an organisation working with refugees on a daily basis, whose mission is to accompany, serve and advocate the cause of refugees, stated: "Our subjective estimate is that about 30% of persons granted international protection have developed a sense of belonging. The estimate is based on the number of persons whose next step is to have their permanent residence approved, who speak Croatian very well and who have a job where knowing Croatian is essential (stores, hospitality industry, such as waiters and alike), as well as persons who have not experienced discriminatory practices in any system or socialisation process." (Jesuit Refugee Service, 7 June 2021)

### DISCRIMINATION

According to the official data, there have not been many reports submitted by persons under international protection due to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race and/or nationality in Croatia. Since 1 January 2019, the Ombudswoman has received 11 discrimination reports from refugees on the basis of race, ethnicity or race, while religious discrimination has not been recorded.

Non-governmental organisations and charities involved in integration affairs have witnessed discriminatory practices related to renting apartments or houses, so asylees often cannot rent an apartment without their assistance.

Based on the information obtained from the interviews, two female respondents suffered insults from the local population because of wearing a hijab. This is not a common occurrence and it has happened only once to each of them. In one case, insults came from adolescents and in the other from an alcoholic or a mentally disturbed person. What bothered them more, however, was the lack of response from bystanders, who did not offer to help them, protect them or respond in any other way to condemn the abusers' behaviour.

# Plan for collecting data about social inclusion of persons granted international protection

Based on the data obtained from state authorities, public sector social service providers, non-governmental organisations and charities, it was concluded that the draft research, which initially included 56 indicators, needed a redesign. It turned out that data for some indicators could not be obtained because no institution was competent for such data. Furthermore, some new indicators considered important to monitor during the processing and interpretation of research results were also included in the data collection plan. Besides these new indicators, new institutions competent for collecting data about language learning, education and student accommodation were also identified and included in the plan.

The data collected should be updated in the database twice a year (on 30 June and 31 December). If that is not possible, updates should be annual, i.e. at the end of the year (on 31 December).

## SOCIAL WELFARE

Continue collecting data from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy about the number of beneficiaries and types of

social rights exercised and services used by persons under international protection.

## Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

1. Number of beneficiaries (asylees, subsidiary protection) and type of social rights exercised and services used by persons under international protection.

## HEALTHCARE

Collect data from the Ministry of Health and civil society organisations relevant in this area.

## Ministry of Health

2. Number of primary care physicians with registered patients under international protection.
3. Frequency of informing health professionals about the rights of persons under international protection and prescribed procedures.

## Civil society organisations relevant in this area

4. Accompaniment and mediation services when exercising the right to healthcare

## ACCOMMODATION

Continue collecting data from the CSORHC about the use of residential properties owned by the Republic of Croatia.

## Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care (CSORHC)

5. Number of residential properties provided
6. Number of persons exercising the right to accommodation
7. Number of persons who lost the right to accommodation in residential properties owned by the Republic of Croatia and the reason for loss of accommodation
  - 7.1. expiry of the two-year period during which persons under international protection are entitled to free accommodation;
  - 7.2. leaving apartment before expiry of the two-year period;
  - 7.3. treatment of property contrary to housekeeping standards

## Civil society organisations

8. Instances of assistance provided to persons under international protection when renting apartments

## LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EDUCATION

### Ministry of Science and Education should collect the following data<sup>7</sup>:

<sup>7</sup> All the data required pertains to persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia.

9. Number of children integrated into early childhood and preschool education (nurseries and kindergartens)
10. Number of students enrolled in primary school by classes at school year start
11. Number of students enrolled in primary school by classes at school year end
12. Number of consents to include students (asylees) in preparatory or supplementary classes
13. Number of students attending secondary school
14. Number of secondary school graduates
15. Number of students who completed secondary education
16. Number of students in undergraduate and integrated study programmes
17. Number of students in graduate study programmes
18. Number of students who completed undergraduate and integrated study programmes
19. Number of students who completed graduate study programmes
20. Number of persons requiring translation of secondary school completion certificates
21. Number of secondary school completion certificates translated
22. Number of persons requiring translation of diplomas
23. Number of diplomas translated
24. Number of persons taking the Croatian Language, History and Culture Learning Programme for asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection for their integration in Croatian society
25. Number of persons completing the programme (attended 280 classes)
26. Number of students on scholarship

Zagreb Student Centre, Osijek Student Centre, Rijeka Student Centre, Zadar Centre for Student Standard of Living, Split Student Centre, Dubrovnik Student Centre, Pula Student Centre, Šibenik Student Centre, Požega Student Centre, Karlovac Student Centre, Varaždin Student Centre, Slavonski Brod Student Centre

27. Number of students exercising the right to accommodation in a student dormitory

### Education and Teacher Training Agency

28. Number of persons initiating the procedure for recognition of foreign primary and secondary education qualifications

29. Number of certificates of recognition issued to persons initiating the procedure for recognition of foreign primary and secondary education qualifications

### Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education

30. Number of persons initiating the procedure for recognition of foreign vocational education qualifications for the purpose of finding employment or continuing education
31. Number of certificates of recognition of foreign vocational education qualifications issued

### Agency for Science and Higher Education/National ENIC/NARIC Office

32. Number of persons initiating the procedure for recognition of higher education qualifications (professional recognition) for the purpose of employment in Croatia
33. Number of certificates of recognition of higher education qualifications issued

### Croatian Employment Service

34. Number of persons exercising the option of free retraining and professional training

## EMPLOYMENT

Croatian Employment Service, which has been systematically monitoring the situation with persons granted international protection on the labour market, must continue collecting employment data.

### Croatian Employment Service

35. Number of persons granted international protection registered with the CES (males and females)
36. Number of mature minors granted international protection registered with the CES
37. Number of Croatian mature minors registered with the CES
38. Number of overqualified employed persons
39. Number of unemployed persons using counselling and career guidance services (males and females)
40. Number of CES employees undergoing training on the needs and rights of persons granted international protection
41. Number of unemployed persons using active employment policy measures (by sex, age and nationality of the country of origin)
42. Number of unemployed persons participating in adult education (professional training, retraining, education)



43. Number of persons participating in study programmes for in-demand occupations
44. Number of persons involved in public works
45. Number of persons employed under social entrepreneurship programmes
46. Number of self-employed persons granted international protection

#### ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP

Data about the acquisition of Croatian citizenship is recorded by the Ministry of the Interior. Since the Ministry of the Interior does not record the number of applications for citizenship submitted by persons granted international protection in its information system, it should start keeping such records.

##### Ministry of the Interior

47. Number of asylees granted Croatian citizenship
48. Number of applications for citizenship submitted by asylees

#### DISCRIMINATION

Office of the Ombudswoman collects and analyses statistical data about cases of discrimination by social group and area. It is necessary to continue collecting data about cases of discrimination against persons granted international protection by all areas (work, employment, public information and media, access to goods and services, social welfare, education, administration, judicial system, healthcare, pension insurance, housing, science, sports, membership in trade unions, civil society organisations, political parties, cultural and artistic productions, health insurance, discrimination in general).

##### Office of the Ombudswoman

49. Number of reported cases of discrimination against persons under international protection based on their status (persons under international protection), ethnicity, race

# Conclusion

There are significant inconsistencies between state authorities and other institutions when it comes to collecting data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia, both in terms of the quality of data collection and its monitoring and transparency. While some institutions (Croatian Employment Service, Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy) collect data systematically and update it regularly, some state authorities (Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Health) do not have a systematic method of collecting and monitoring relevant data or collect data to a limited extent (Ministry of the Interior, Ombudswoman). It has been found that a better network between state authorities in terms of data exchange would contribute to having better insight in integration outcomes. Creation and introduction of a register of persons granted international protection as a database which is constantly updated and contains accurate, up-to-date information would allow state authorities and other stakeholders to improve the coordination of mutual integration activities based on the indicators from the register. The register would also provide insight into the exact number of persons under international protection in the Republic of Croatia as a baseline indicator necessary for evaluating integration impacts and useful for developing integration activities and measures.

To ensure timely, systematic and comprehensive collection of data about the integration of persons granted international protection, state authorities should appoint an official in charge of coordinating data collection in state authorities, non-governmental organisations, charities and public institutions. It is also recommended to appoint a coordinator for collection of data in state authorities and public institutions (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care, Croatian Employment Service, Ministry of Science and Education). The coordinator would be responsible for timely data updates, data monitoring and communication within and among state authorities.

Fieldwork carried out as part of the research has shown that the integration of persons under international protection is often left to be dealt with by civil society organisations, especially when it comes to language learning, education and exercising the right to healthcare. A lack of institutional activity in certain areas of integration is probably the reason

why some institutions do not have relevant databases or data collection systems. Civil society organisations (non-governmental organisations and charities) collect data based on their project activities. Their databases have no clear definitions of a sample of service users, so it is hard to draw a conclusion about the exact number of service users.

# Recommendations

- **At the level of state authorities, appoint an official in charge of coordinating collection of data about the social inclusion of persons granted international protection in state authorities, non-governmental organisations, charities and public institutions to ensure timely, systematic and comprehensive collection of data about the integration of persons granted international protection.**
- **Appoint a coordinator in state authorities and public institutions (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care, Croatian Employment Service, Ministry of Science and Education) responsible for collecting, timely updating and monitoring data about persons granted international protection, as well as for communication within and among state authorities.**
- **Establish a register of persons under international protection as a database which is constantly updated with accurate data for the purpose of improving the monitoring of integration outcomes. The register would allow the collection of social welfare data by monitoring the period of exercising individual rights (e.g. the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit), employment data (duration of employment) and data about many other areas in which persons under international protection are involved.**
- **For better insight into the situation in primary healthcare, it is necessary to start collecting data from the Ministry of Health about the number of primary care physicians with registered patients under international protection.**
- **Collect data from civil society organisations about instances of assistance provided to persons granted international protection when exercising the right to healthcare.**
- **Develop an application in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Croatian Health Insurance Fund to facilitate the legitimate exercise of the right to healthcare for persons granted international protection not registered in the Central Health Information System of the Republic of Croatia (CEZIH), i.e. persons who do not have the status of a person insured under health insurance, cannot exercise the**

right to choose a primary care physician and do not have the health insurance card issued by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund.

- Ministry of Science and Education should collect data about children (school and university students) granted asylee status at all education levels (preschool, primary school, secondary school, faculty) in terms of number, sex and Croatian language proficiency level.
- Systematically monitor the number of persons completing a basic language course (280 classes) and the level of knowledge they acquire by certifying language courses.
- Start collecting data about the procedure of recognising foreign education qualifications of persons granted international protection from the Education and Teacher Training Agency and from the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education.
- Start collecting data about the procedure of recognising foreign higher education qualifications of persons granted international protection from the Agency for Science and Higher Education/National ENIC/NARIC Office.
- Start collecting data about the number of applications for Croatian citizenship submitted by asylees.

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Međuresorna  
suradnja u  
osnaživanju  
državljana trećih  
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