



**CENTAR
ZA MIROVNE
STUDIJE
25 GODINA**

**CENTRE
FOR PEACE
STUDIES
25 YEARS**

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Centre for Peace Studies (Croatia):
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GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Office for Cooperation with NGOs

1. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all participants of this research who were willing to openly share their experiences, vulnerability, suggestions, and ideas with us.

Dear people, we appreciate your stories and contributions.



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2. Executive Summary

The number of third-country nationals (TCNs) immigrating and staying on the territory of Croatia and the European Union (EU) is continuously increasing. By the beginning of October 2022 only in Croatia there were 10.316 TCNs with approved permanent or long-term residence and 96.526 TCNs with approved temporary stay in Croatia. Additionally, by the end of June 2022 TCNs submitted 2.955 requests for international protection and by the end of July 2022 16.175 people received temporary protection in Croatia.

These numbers are indicating a significant increase of the immigration flows which is why it is evident that integration measures and the capacity of local service providers and CSOs to provide and/or enable access to basic services in Croatia must be efficient and corresponding to the needs of TCNs.

The project “*Accessing services, Sharing Approaches and Practices*” (ASAP) is focused on understanding the capacity of local service providers and CSOs while at the same time attempting to increase their capacity by establishing strong collaboration between them, improving and sharing of the knowledge on the migrant’s needs and informing all the stakeholders about replicable and effective responses to challenges in migrant’s access to basic services.

As part of this project, a needs assessment has been carried out at a local level in Croatia with the purpose of identifying in detail the major obstacles for TCNs in accessing basic services and their specific needs in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health with special consideration on the needs and challenges of the migrant women and vulnerable refugees/asylum seekers.

Needs assessment research consisted of desk research and out of 15 in-depth interviews and 1 focus group based on which inputs were gathered from 21 TCNs and 6 representatives of CSO and public authorities.

During the needs assessment research, it was detected that TCNs were eager to participate in this research and express their needs, frustrations, challenges and problems indicating that the potential barrier for TCNs integration in Croatia is lack of space and forums where TCNs can freely and without judgment express their thoughts and discuss about barriers that hinder their integration. It was also concluded that it is imperative that Croatian language courses must be organized and modeled by the state in a way to enable every person staying in Croatia for a longer period of time to learn the language at a level allowing for a successful integration and access to basic services in Croatian society.



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4. Introduction

4.1. General Introduction

Within the European Union (EU), third country nationals (TCNs) are persons originating from non-EU countries, whether they are economic migrants, students, asylum seekers, family members or other categories. They do not enjoy the same freedom of movement as EU citizens, their stay being governed by both international laws and agreements, and national legislation specific to each country. Although the various integration policies fall within the national legislative field, they are monitored by the European Union, especially when it comes to the fight against discrimination.

Currently, more than 22 million TCNs live in the European Union, or more than 4% of the European Union's population, and about half of them have been living in an EU state for more than 10 years.

Those with a medium or high level of education are more likely to find a job and integrate socially, regardless of their country of origin and the country where they settle.

Over 6 million TCNs live in poverty, and less than 25% are the owners of the homes in which they live.

Among the TCNs, a special category is represented by asylum seekers and related groups, namely refugees and those who benefit from the temporary protection of an EU state.

In 2015 and 2016, the European Union faced an influx of refugees and immigrants unprecedented after the Second World War. More than 1.2 million people applied for protection in an EU state in both 2015 and 2016, the majority of whom came from Syria. So far, this number has halved, with 630,550 asylum applications across the European Union in 2021. Most asylum seekers come from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the countries that receive the most applications are Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Austria.

UNHCR's Global Trends – Forced Displacement 2020 report mentions the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on asylum seekers worldwide, including in the European Union. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact in almost every country, disrupting health, political and economic systems around the world. People who have been forcibly displaced or are stateless have been among the hardest-pressed groups, facing rising food and economic insecurity, as well as the challenges of access to health and protection services.

The European Union makes available to third country nationals, on various websites and not only, a collection of data related to the right of residence, the right to work, public health, culture and other subjects of interest. In the future it is desired that the dissemination of the data needed for a more successful integration of the TCNs to become even easier to access.



4.2. Introduction to the ASAP Project

Public services and Civil Sector Organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in facilitating access to basic services for third-country nationals (TCNs) thus helping to strengthen the integration processes. While public service providers should deliver appropriate, culturally, linguistically and gender-responsive services and information, CSOs should be able to communicate well with migrants and have capacities to engage with migrants' communities.

Their capacity to fulfill their roles is therefore important for integration to truly take root and develop in every part of the society.

The project "Accessing services, Sharing Approaches and Practices" (ASAP) is focused on understanding the capacity of local service providers and CSOs while at the same time attempting to increase their capacity by establishing strong collaboration between them, improving and sharing of the knowledge on the migrant's needs and informing all the stakeholders about replicable and effective responses to challenges in migrant's access to basic services. Specifically, ASAP Project aims to support local service providers and CSOs in 6 European countries (Austria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain) in the implementation of effective and replicable practices which can respond to TCNs needs in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health.

To identify activities and practices that effectively contribute to the elimination or mitigation of obstacles in integration of migrants into society firstly is needed to assess the current state of migrant's needs and challenges. Hence, a needs assessment has been carried out at a local level in each country, including Croatia which is presented herein, with the purpose of identifying in detail the major obstacles for TCNs in accessing basic services and their specific needs in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health.

4.3. Croatian Migration Context

Croatia is traditionally a country of emigration¹, however as per the data collected by the European Statistical Office (EUROSTAT) the number of TCNs immigrating and staying on the territory of Croatia continuously grows. Moreover, according to the data reported by the Ministry of Interior² on 4 October 2022 there were **10.316 TCNs with approved permanent or long-term residence in Croatia** and **96.526 TCNs with approved temporary stay in Croatia** (85.342 for the purpose of work and 9.504 for the purpose of family reunification).

Migration in Croatia became an especially discussed topic in the period from September 2015 until March 2016 when 660,000 migrants and refugees migrated through Croatia, and again in 2022 with the rapidly increased number of people entering Croatia as foreigners under the temporary protection. By the end of July 2022 **16.175 people received temporary protection**³, while in the period from 2006 when the first asylum claim was positively resolved until the end of June 2022⁴ only **1.034 people received international protection**, including both asylum and subsidiary protection.





Additionally, it is important to note that not all people under international protection have decided to continue living in Croatia.¹ In consideration of the above-mentioned numbers and the fact that **2.955 requests for international protection have been submitted by the end of June of 2022** indicating significant increase of the immigration flows, it is evident that integration measures and the capacity of local service providers and CSOs to provide and/or enable access to basic services in Croatia shall become crucial in the near future and the following years.

In the employment sector, newly adopted Foreigners Act⁵ simplified the procedure for obtaining the work and stay permit leading up to **33.744 work and stay permits issued in 2021** and **12.744 issued by the end of August 2022.**⁶ On 31 December 31 2020 a total of **945 third-country nationals were registered with the Croatian Employment Service**, of which 153 were under international protection.⁷ As per the information received from Croatian Employment Service on 21st July 2021 there were:

- 661 unemployed people under the temporary protection;
- 539 people under the temporary protection that deregistered from the system due to finding employment;
- 745 unemployed people under international protection; and
- 525 employed people under international protection

Additionally, it is important to note that the asylum seekers or seekers of the international protection cannot be employed in Croatia unless nine (9) months have passed from the date of submission of the request for the international protection and only provided that MoI omitted to adopt a decision on such request and asylum seekers did not influence the reasons for not adopting a decision.⁸

In the housing sector, the apartment rental cost significantly increased in recent years. In Zagreb, capital city of Croatia, **the monthly rent per square meter in 2022 averages at around 10.74 euros**, while for **smaller apartments that amount reaches to 17 euros** meaning that average price range of apartments in Zagreb is from **450 to 650 euros per month, while apartments below 350 euros make up only 10 percent of the total offer in Zagreb.**⁹

Asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation at Reception Centers for international protection seekers managed by the MoI in Zagreb and Kutina, however since October 2021 center in Kutina, center primarily intended for housing vulnerable groups of international protection seekers who need additional acceptance and procedural guarantees, is not in operation due to renovation works.¹⁰ Upon request the state is obliged to provide accommodation to the beneficiaries of the international protection for a maximum period of two (2) years from the moment of delivering the decision on granting the international protection provided that such beneficiaries don't have money or assets to support themselves, however beneficiaries may be required to participate in the compensation of the monthly rent.¹¹ Accommodation is provided in the form of collective housing within the Reception center for international protection seekers in Zagreb (or Kutina) at the beginning and upon finding the housing units, at the housing units owned by the state or third-parties located in Zagreb, Požega, Sisak, Karlovac or other Croatian city under the organization of the Central office for reconstruction and housing. Beneficiaries of the temporary protection that don't have their own financial resources are also entitled to accommodation at collective housing or individual housing units owned by third-

¹ Estimation of people under international protection that continued living in Croatia goes from 1/3 to 1/2 of the people.



parties and beneficiaries may be required to participate in the compensation of the monthly rent under the same conditions as beneficiaries of the international protection.¹²

In the education sector, right and obligation to elementary education is guaranteed to all children from the age of 6 to 15, while the possibility to attend elementary education classes above the age of 15 is generally exercised within the institutions for adult education.¹³

Asylum seekers under 18 years of age have the right to primary and secondary education under the same conditions as Croatian citizens, while any person under international or temporary protection, under and above 18 years of age has the right to primary, secondary and higher education under the same conditions as Croatian citizens.¹⁴ People under international protection are obliged to attend Croatian language, history and culture course organized under the Ministry responsible for education, however as of 12 September 2022 **Ministry of Interior (MoI) terminated the inter-ministerial contract with Ministry for Science and Education for the financing of the aforementioned courses due to mismanagement in organizing the courses, whereby the Ministry allegedly violated principles of good financial management and rules of the profession and didn't adhere to the agreed deadlines.** Croatia doesn't organize Croatian language courses for any other adult foreigner.

In the health sector, people under international or temporary protection and foreigners who are their family members can exercise the right to health care to the same extent as a person insured under compulsory health insurance¹⁵, however they cannot register to the Central health information system of the Republic of Croatia (CEZIH) in the same manner as an insured person which prevents them from being uniquely identified within the health digital system. Asylum seekers are entitled only to emergency medical care and urgently needed treatment for illnesses and serious mental disorders¹⁶, while foreigners that don't have a regulated stay in Croatia are entitled only to emergency medical care and urgently needed treatment for illnesses under the special procedure.¹⁷

There were several researches conducted on the needs of TCNs in Croatia among which two were identified as the most relevant to consider for this needs assessment report. Based on the data collected in the period from September 2018 until April 2019 **PANDPAS Social Survey Report**¹⁸ highlighted experiences, concerns and needs of the refugees while focusing on the common experiences of integration in six cities in five European countries, including Croatia. Research "Izazovi integracije izbjeglica u hrvatsko društvo: stavovi građana i pripremljenost lokalnih zajednica"¹⁹ focused on identifying the attitudes of Croatian citizens and their willingness to accept and integrate people under international protection and on identifying the needs and challenges of local and regional self-governmental units in the process of integration of people under international protection.

All of these researches helped in guiding the needs assessment research, the results of which you can find on the following pages.



5. Methodology

In order to collect data for this needs assessment report, interviews and focus group were used as well as desk research. These are qualitative tools, which are credible because they offer the space to participants to explain their lives in Croatia from their own point of view, based on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It was very important for us to provide the participants with a safe, anonymous and open space where they could express whatever was bothering them and creating difficulties in their lives.

The research process was performed by all project partners in the five participating countries, using common templates (adapted to the local context), according to a standard set of interviews and focus group guidelines. The research design included two levels of analysis: TCNs level and stakeholders' level. Overall, the total number of participants in the research was 27. Participants were selected by indicator of different nationalities, ages and legal statuses in which members of a particular group (TCNs and stakeholders) were contacted through personal contacts, social media, official emails etc. Data collection took over a 3-month period between July 2022 and September 2022.

In order to carry out this research we conducted:

- 9 in-depth interviews with TCNs, and 6 with CSOs staff and public authorities.
- 1 focus group with 12 TCNs

The interviews and focus groups were conducted face-to-face, on zoom or in a written form.

In the interviews and focus group the participants participated actively without limitations, and were willing to share openly their experience. However, the public authorities were not so open to go deep into discussion and were not so responsive. Most of them responded very generically or didn't respond at all.

Face-to-face interviews and focus group were recorded with the permission of the participants (TCNs, CSOs and public authorities) for later transcription, translation and analysis. As for the written interviews we did the same. Also, the participants who were TCNs were asked to sign additional documents in accordance with GDPR.

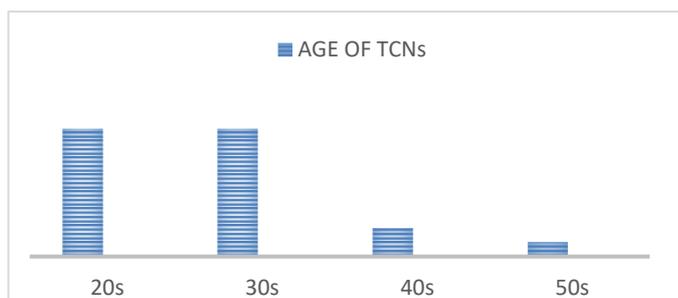
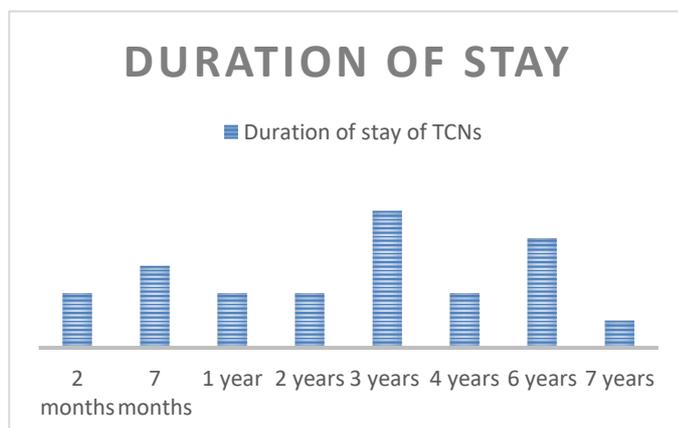
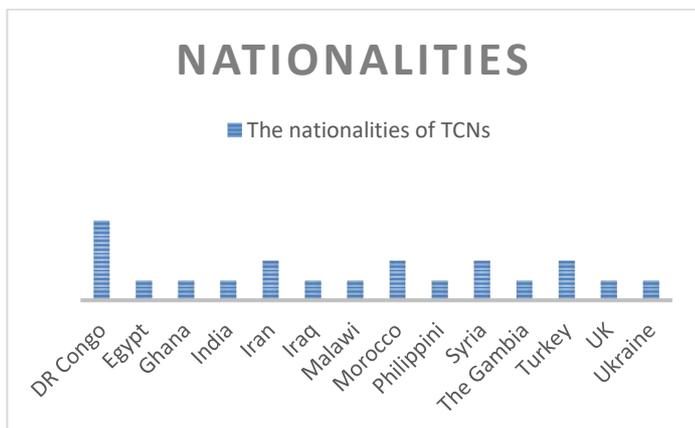
Considering that the research participants are people of different statuses, it was extremely challenging to establish what the specific obstacles are because almost all problems arise from the status that a person enjoys.



6. Results and Discussions

6.1. Participants

Needs Assessment was carried out with TCNs of various nationalities, legal statuses, age group and duration of stay in Croatia.



Needs assessment was carried out with:

- 1 representative of the CSO providing direct humanitarian aid and working in the field of integration of asylum seekers and people under international or temporary protection;
- 5 representatives of the following public authorities:
 - Agency for Science and Higher Education;
 - Ministry of Science and Education:
 - Sector for the Development of Higher Education;
 - Sector for Education - Service for Secondary Education and Adult Education;
 - Central Office for Reconstruction and Housing;
 - Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social Policy;



6.2. Employment Sector

6.2.1. Barriers & Solutions

In the employment sector the following barriers to accessing services were identified by the TCNs:

1. CROATIAN LANGUAGE

- Lack of state support in learning the Croatian language or in cases where language courses are organized TCNs are not able to attend because of the working hours;

People under international protection

“I think the language is the first thing that we need, of course our skills matter but when we don't know how to communicate then the problems start.”

“I work in an IT company and we talk in English there but some of the colleagues are Croatian so in some local's meetings they use the language in the meetings. My manager knows that I have limited knowledge of Croatian language. I can understand maybe 60-70% in English but I'm afraid that I'm missing something.”

“When I am working I don't have time to learn the Croatian language. When I haven't diploma from the Croatian language or if I couldn't talk the Croatian language, I cannot find an easy job.”

Asylum seekers:

“I'm working until 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock, from the morning until the evening. Okay, I want to learn Croatian, really, but how can I go to school at six o'clock in the evening? Okay, show me one school starting evening from six o'clock until eight o'clock in the evening?”

TCNs proposed the solution that Croatia should organize free Croatian language courses (see more in section “Education Sector”).



2. CROATIAN EMPLOYMENT SERVICE:

- Croatian Employment Services is not providing relevant information about employment and labor law or employee's rights;

People under international protection

“Job center didn't work very well in this process. So I did my research alone.”

“When we applied we were unemployed and we were interviewed about skills. If they found something for us, they would let us know. But nobody called or contacted us.”

“Representative of HZZ² should have given me at least some recommendations, and she should have known to treat us like Antonia did—explain everything to everyone, every time a person needs this help. Not like, ‘OK, OK, you are connected...Maybe because they have not been informed or instructed what to do. Maybe they don't know. We came up with the conclusion that maybe they don't know.”

“Yes, I was in classes there and I registered to look for work. Every month I was sending them like I'm still jobless. And yes, every month I was repeating the same email until I found this job, then I sent them I found a job and they answered OK, you don't need to, you don't need to write to us never while you work, just.”

Asylum seekers

“...automatically after nine months if you didn't get a negative decision from the government, you can have a work permission and OIB number and the insurance number. But they give you just paper and on the paper you have every right, but they don't help you find a job or guidance. For example, they give me work permission without any information about labor law and rights in Croatia. I don't know what the rules, how much hour I have to work, what is the minimum salary, how months I have to work, nothing.”

3. WORKING OPPORTUNITIES:

- No possibilities to work in medical sector and public sector as a foreigner without Croatian citizenship;

Some of the TCNs who participated in the research are students of medicine or qualified in the medical field. They expressed great concern and dissatisfaction with the law that does not allow them to work in their profession and suggested that more work should be done on advocacy in that area. All of them express the need to be allowed to work in public hospitals and institutions as foreigners regardless of their citizenship.

² Croatian Employment Service



- Only low paid jobs are available on the market for TCNs. Salaries usually range from the minimum, which is 465 EUR, to 730 EUR.

The same barrier was also identified by the CSO stating that due to ignorance or insufficient knowledge of the Croatian language, caused by the lack of well-organized state courses, people who have qualifications that would enable them to do better-paid jobs are unfortunately forced to do jobs for which qualifications are not required and which are then correspondingly compensated with lower pay.

“Persons who have received international protection in Croatia or who are asylum seekers, unfortunately, mostly work in lower paid jobs. For example, jobs in catering (assistant cook or waiter), cleaning jobs, warehouse jobs. So, manual jobs. The reason for this is lack of knowledge of the Croatian language or insufficient knowledge of the language and the inability to prove one's qualifications. These jobs do not provide economic independence, especially if they are people who are here with their families. In that situation, usually only one member of the family works and they are mostly men, and that money is simply not enough to support the whole family economically.”

4. RECOGNITION OF DIPLOMA

- TCNs without a document proving their qualifications are often registered within the register of unemployed people as unqualified regardless of their educational or professional qualifications which they obtained in their country of origin - consequently such TCNs are offered only low-paid jobs;
- During the interviews and focus group TCNs expressed their discontent with a lack of clear information regarding the recognition process provided by the public authorities. TCNs agreed that lack of clear information is preventing them to understand what this process is and why is it so important to go into the procedure:

“I have a lot of different degrees, since I have a PhD in philology, but I first need to make it work; so this diploma, this certificate, this everything, should be recognised. The recognition procedure is a bit different. That's why I cannot start working as I want to, i.e. working as a teacher, as a professor at some kind of institution, as a mentor, and so on—I need to wait. “

CSO detected that there is a huge scope for educating and empowering women and enabling women to obtain their first qualifications.

5. 9-MONTH BAN ON THE POSSIBILITY TO GETTING EMPLOYED FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS (see the section Croatian Migration Context)



6. LACK OF SUPPORT IN FINDING A JOB;

- There is no effective state-organized support for TCNs in finding a job;

During the research TCNs proposed a solution in the form of a website or an application that would explain and explore the possibilities and opportunities in the English language. Such a website should contain clear and simple information, and Croatsians would be invited to give their editing and help in pointing out what may a foreigner not know about the market, opportunities, requirements and so on.

TCNs who are asylum seekers or under international protection suggested that it is necessary to organize education for asylum seekers and people under international protection about labor law and rights.

Type of support offered by one of the CSO in a sector of employment:

- a support program for people who have lost their jobs. This program was created in 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic, when a lot of people who were under international protection lost their jobs. They couldn't pay the rent or they didn't have finances to support their families. Since then this NGO has supporting program where people can get the amount of one rent or money for food if they don't have the funds to pay.
- A team of volunteers is providing information regarding labor rights and law
- Assistance when writing CV and job searching
- Contacting the employers and connecting them with persons who are searching for the employment
- Volunteers translators
- Monitoring the job conditions and communication with employers
- Language classes for free
- Accompaniment to job interviews and institutions

7. CSO also identified additional barriers in the field of employment that hinder integration:

- Insufficient support from the employment office;

“My personal opinion is that the practice of CES is not good. Not only related to the group of people we are talking about, but in general for all persons who are in the institution, therefore including Croatian citizens and other persons. I think that CES does not actively look for jobs for people, but only from time to time offers them some jobs that are often located too far away. We are talking about people who mostly do not have any means of transportation and only use public transportation or are very, very poorly paid.”



- Overloading of CSOs;

“Within the civil society sector there are initiatives to support persons under international protection in finding employment. However, I would say that due to the overload of organizations with all the problems that arise during integration, this support is not systematic because it depends on the capacities of the organization. Most of the time, organizations do not have enough capacity to have a high-quality mediation program when finding jobs.”

- The language barrier between organizations, institutions and migrants;
- Lack of official and volunteer translators;
- Asylum seekers and persons under international protection do not know the concept of a CV;

“Also, I think that an additional challenge is just the concept of a CV, which may not be familiar to all the people to whom we were looking for a job, so it is necessary to explain to someone exactly what goes in a CV and why it is important, and to understand what their competencies are, especially if we are talking about the so-called „soft skills“ or some other skills that do not concern their occupation and field of work, detecting them is sometimes a challenge.”

- Demotivation of volunteers;

“Our program was volunteer-based, so another challenge was the weak motivation of the volunteers, which resulted from the fact that it is difficult for someone to find a job in Croatia, especially if it is difficult to employ groups, e.g. people who do not speak the language or do not have some qualifications, extremely difficult. So, due to some degree of success, let's say, lower than with other volunteer activities that we carry out, there is often a demotivation of volunteers because they do not see a concrete shift in what they are doing. Sometimes they send 40, 50 inquiries to employers and no one answers them.”



6.3. Health Sector

6.3.1. Barriers & Solutions

In the health sector the following barriers to accessing services were identified by the TCNs:

1. LANGUAGE BARRIER

- All TCNs identified language as a barrier in the access to medical services such as registration with a general practitioner, difficulties during the medical examinations, understanding their rights and in general communication;
- Lack of translation support when visiting the doctor or during specialist examinations in the hospital;

2. LACK OF INFORMATION REGARDING THEIR RIGHTS

- TCNs proposed to establish a system where they can get more practical information that is provided by CSOs and state authorities;

3. DIFFICULTIES IN ACHIEVING THE RIGHT TO HEALTH CARE

Both TCNs and CSOs detected same difficulties in accessing the health care services:

- Not having registration number of the insured (persons under international protection);
- Impossibility of possession of a health card (persons under international protection);
- The health system does not recognize persons under international protection as insured persons;

CSO representative stated:

"When persons under international protection are employed, they have an insurance number and a health card. But not because they are under international protection, but because they are workers. But as soon as they lose their job, they cannot exercise the same rights as unemployed persons who are Croatian citizens, but fall into this system again. When they are not employed, when they do not have health insurance, although they have the right to health care, they cannot contract additional insurance."

- Impossibility of issuing an electronic prescription or referral to asylum seekers;
- Long wait to get appointment for specialist examinations;

Identified suggestions by CSO representative:



"The whole problem would be solved very simply, and that would be if these people should simply be given health cards. This would solve most of these problems except for translation, but it would really solve a set of bureaucratic problems that actually arise from legislation. As far as translation is concerned, there should be some kind of system that would finance translators and these translators should be paid either from the state or city budget and should be tied to the institution for which they translate and not to an organization."

4. LONG PERIOD OF WAITING TO GET APPOINTMENT WITH A SPECIALIST;

- CSO representative expressed dissatisfaction with not having any funds to cover specialist examination costs for asylum seekers

5. EXPENSIVE ADDITIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE;

6. MEDICAL SYSTEM IS NOT PREPARED TO WORK WITH TCNs;

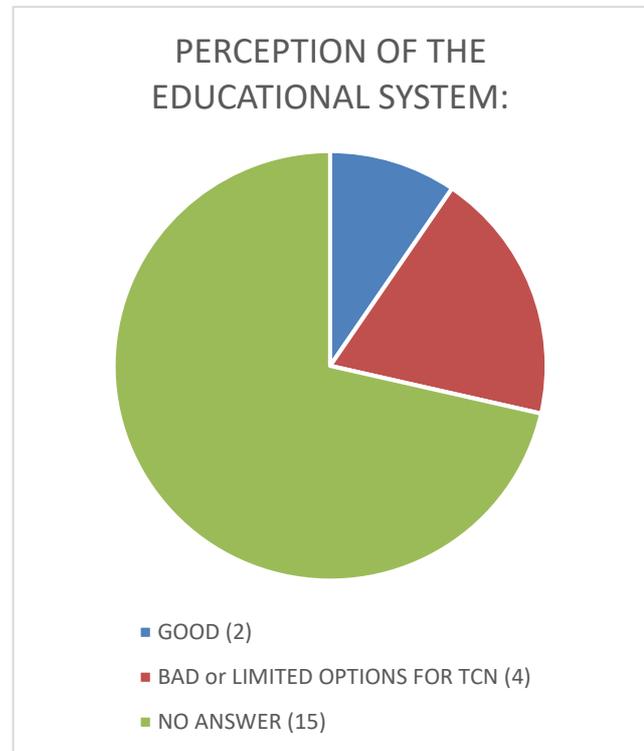
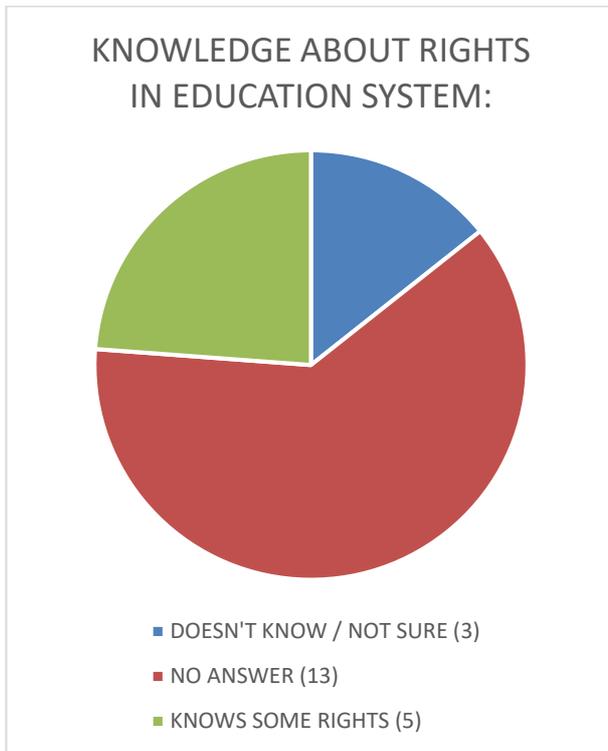
Both TCNs and CSOs detected the following:

- TCNs proposed that more financial resources needs to be invested into the medical staff and medical facilities so that doctors and nurses have more time;
- TCNs expressed the need to be treated equally no matter the nationality;
- Information on the rights of TCNs in health system must be more transparent so that doctors and medical staff can be informed and can sign up people;
- Doctors and medical staff are not educated about rights of people under international protection;
- Doctors have a lot of administrative work with persons under international protection, because they have to send all bills for examinations, medical history and other documentation to the Ministry of Health, which then should reimburse them for the costs. In most of the cases Ministry of Health do not reimburse;

The Ministry of Health did not respond to the request for an interview regarding issues of the health sector for TCNs.

6.4. Education Sector

In every interview and in the focus group Croatian language was mentioned in the context of a barrier to accessing basic services.



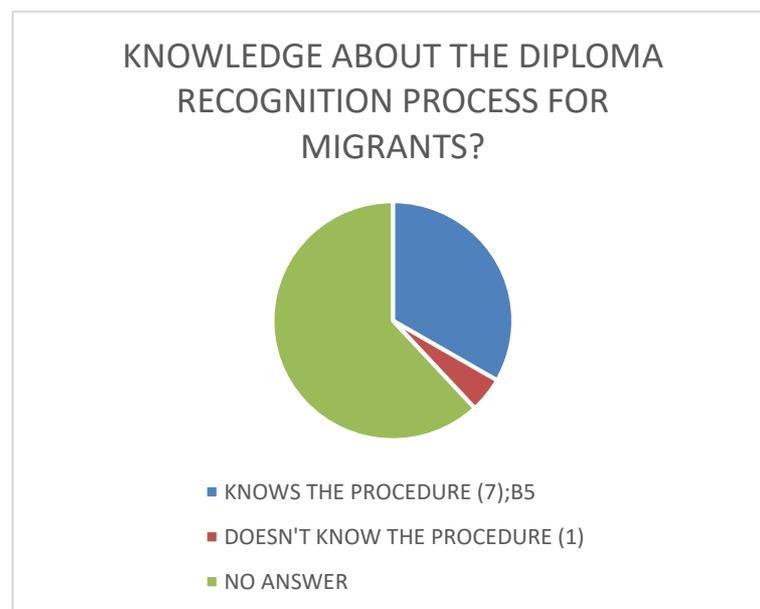
While 3 TCNs stated that they can access the educational system the same as Croatian citizens, 4 TCNs disagreed stating that they cannot access the system the same way due to:

- Universities don't understand that foreigners under international protection should enjoy the rights in accordance with special regulation which guarantees the same rights as Croatian citizens (also recognized by the interviewed CSO).
- People with study permits can access the educational system (in certain fields) but at their own costs which are significantly higher than other citizens).
- People who don't have their stay regulated cannot access the formal educational programs which means that a child cannot enroll in kindergarten and an adult cannot enroll in any of the educational programs offered by the institutions.
- Access to the educational system is not the same due to the language barrier and all the effects it has on enrolling to any educational program.

TCNs proposed that public authorities, as well as any other service provider, should improve accessibility of basic information about first steps in Croatia and about rights and procedures in the employment, health and education sector. Such information should be at least in the English language, but also in other languages according to the state of migration context in Croatia.

- Certain vocational training (for e.g. for becoming a physiotherapist are not available for foreigners.
- Access to education is conditional on existence or recognition of the previous education.

TCNs proposed that for people coming to Croatia that express their intent to work, and especially for people under international or temporary protection, Croatia should organize vocational training which would allow them to get opportunity to get employed and access to the higher-paid jobs.



Out of 7 people that are acquainted with the diploma recognition procedure 4 of them complained that the procedure is generally too long which was additionally corroborated by the CSO.

TCNs proposed that the diploma recognition procedure should anticipate more active role of the authorities (for e.g., contacting the authorities of the country of origin instead of requiring TCNs to obtain such documentation), that the information on the recognition procedure should be clearer and there should be no specific requirements for recognition of qualifications for the purpose of accessing the labor sector.



The Agency for science and higher education explained that the duration of the procedure for the purpose of accessing the labor market as per the law was previously 60 days and from 25 June 2022 is 45 days. Cost of the procedure is 400 HRK, however people under international and temporary protection are released from obligation to pay the cost of the procedure. In respect of the translation of the documentation, the Ministry responsible for education is a competent body for organizing the translation of the documentation for people under international and temporary protection, however there were cases where some people decided to pay the translation for themselves in order to speed up the process.

The Agency for science and higher education mentioned that lack of knowledge of the Croatian language is the main barrier in the recognition/evaluation procedure because this process is very administrative and abstract.

In the education sector CSOs were mentioned multiple times as service providers or as organization that assist in accessing services. Interviewed CSO mentioned that they assist TCNs with the following:

- Support for children in learning the Croatian language, writing homework's and preparing for the tests, including the support with the enrolling procedure and other;
- „Big Brother / Big Sister“ program where volunteers provide support to families with the communication with school;
- Organizing Croatian language courses for adults: (i.) independently; and (ii.) in cooperation with another body on B1 level;

6.4.1. Barriers & Solutions

1. CROATIAN LANGUAGE COURSES:

- Lack of state support in learning the Croatian language:

People under international protection

„Našao sam jednog čovjeka u Ministarstvu obrazovanja (...) Rekao je da zna da je odgovoran za to, ali da nemaju novca.“

„They just need you, you pay tax for the government, that's it. Starting from the 22-23% and after that until 30%. When you're going to talk with the government, they say it's not my problem.“

„I was a ghost in my school until school got the permission that gave me a teacher for instruction of Croatian language.“



Asylum seekers

“We didn't have enough support for the language courses. That's why it's always a minus in my eyes. It's always a zero – not zero, zero is too much – minus minus minus hundred minus. This is a problem related to education.”

Other TCNs

„When, only the international protection, that you have the access for free education, for the language and for the minors free education from elementary to high school and then...but when you are under the working visa, you don't have those kind of privileges, you pay everything, from tram, anything, small thing, particles, you pay everything.”

- Lack of financial resources to pay Croatian language courses;
- Lack of information (schedules, methods of teaching, the language in which the course is conducted) on organizations and people that provide Croatian language courses;
- Opportunities to learn Croatian language are hindered by the lack of support in other integration sectors:
 - Person under the international protection who wishes to work during the first 2-year period within which the state provides for accommodation, such person will most likely need to participate in the coverage of the accommodation cost. Considering that salaries in some cases are not sufficient this person will need to work more meaning that there will be lack of time and/or money needed for learning Croatian language, while at the same time due to not knowing the Croatian language this person will not have access to higher-paid jobs.
 - Parents who cannot enroll their child in kindergarten or other type of care-service cannot attend Croatian language courses.
 - Utilizing the English language for studying Croatian language is difficult.
 - Language barrier preventing foreigners to get acquainted with the procedures and rules applicable on the faculty and/or integration activities (for e.g. „Big Brother, Big sister“ program);

CSO also mentioned that Croatian language courses provided by the state are organized (i.) sporadically, (ii.) by the institutions and organizations not certified for teaching Croatian language as a foreign language, although this certification is needed for regulating for e.g., permanent or long-term stay and (iii,) only for beginners with no options to learn Croatian language on B1 level, although 270 hours were supposed to cover both beginners and advanced courses. Additionally, CSO emphasized that there are no B2 Croatian language courses offered either by the state or organization, although this is the minimum level of knowledge needed for accessing higher education. Exceptions are made only for individuals and after the NGOs intervention.



The Ministry of Science and Education doesn't organize or finance certified course for the B2 Level of Croatian language for people under the protection who wish to enroll in higher education, however within the interview the Sector for Development of Higher Education - Directorate for Higher Education mentioned a possibility of changing such practice. It is unclear how this will be achieved considering that the inter-ministerial contract based on which the funding for Croatian language courses was provided has been terminated (please see the Croatian Migration Context.).

CSO and TCNs formulated the following recommendations for eliminating or at least mitigating this barrier:

- State should organize free and certified Croatian language courses which enable TCNs to reach B1 and B2 level of Croatian language either in voucher-form model or any other type of model.
- There should be options to study the Croatian language course in the native language spoken by the person seeking to learn the Croatian language;
- The course should be organized with respect to the working schedule / study schedule of the persons seeking to learn the Croatian language;
- There should be a special department in elementary/high-school education for teaching Croatian language in summer season;
- Ministry responsible for education and/or universities (for e.g. Croaticum) should enter into agreements with NGOs based on which NGOs could send people to the certified Croatian language courses free-of-charge;

2. ACCESS TO THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND HIGH-SCHOOLS

- Persons that reach the age of 18 are prevented from enrolling in the elementary schools and high-schools.
- Enrolling in the elementary and high-school is essentially prevented for those children that haven't attended such education in their Country of Origin or children that don't have documents proving they attended such education.
- Process of enrolling children in school takes too much time.



- TCNs identified that the following should be improved in relation to the access to the elementary education school and high-schools:
 - Enrolling in the elementary and high-school should be enabled for adults - persons that reached the age of 18;
 - Enrolling in the elementary and high-school is essentially prevented for those children that haven't attended such education in their Country of Origin or don't have documents proving they attended such education.

NGO also identified specific challenges in respect of enrolling the TCN children into the elementary schools and high-schools:

- Instead of allowing the children to enroll in the grade-level in accordance with the documented educational qualifications, children are subjected to non-standardized tests conducted by schools to evaluate children's knowledge based on which results schools enroll the children into the grade which is sometimes 2-3 grades lower the chronological age of the child causing motivation problems and difficulties in making social contacts with their peers.
- Undocumented children cannot enroll into the elementary schools and high-schools meaning that children whose stay is not regulated cannot attend school and children under the family reunification process have to wait for the decision on the temporary stay in Croatia before enrolling which is a very long period.
- Children above the age of 15 cannot enroll in the elementary schools and if such children want to receive elementary school education, they need to enroll in the institutions offering education programs for adults.
- Institutions offering education programs for adults are rarely providing elementary education of lower grades because there are not enough candidates for such programs, and are providing such programs only when sufficient number of candidates has applied.
- Under the scheme of free elementary education, the Ministry responsible for education refuses to pay or doesn't pay frequently the institutions offering education programs for adults which causes obstruction of on-going elementary school classes or even cancellation of classes at the end of the school year.



3. HIGHER EDUCATION & STUDENT STANDARD

- Migrant students don't have the same scope of rights as students that are Croatian citizens in terms of access to subsidized student dormitories, subsidized meals and other benefits. TCNs proposed that students that are migrants should at least have the same scope of rights as students that are Croatian citizens.

Additionally, TCNs consider that:

- university professors, as well as professors on lower-level education should be entitled for bonuses if they conduct courses in English language.
- Croatian and foreign student programs shouldn't be separated as this would allow easier integration into society;

CSO also emphasized that access to higher education is restricted for people under international protection due to the information system algorithm (PostaniStudent, Studomat) categorizing any person without Croatian citizenship as „foreigners“ who have fewer options of study programs to enroll in.

Additionally, CSO mentioned that there were cases where faculties demanded and received payment of tuition by the people under the protection, although people under the protection should enjoy the same rights as Croatian citizens, including the right to free higher education in accordance with the law;

Contrary to the above, the Ministry for Science and Education considers that students who study on a „regular program“ enjoy rights from the student standard, i.e. subsidized housing, subsidized food, transportation for students with disabilities, state scholarships and employment through student centers.

4. NO STATE INTEGRATION MEASURES FOR FOREIGNERS THAT ARE NOT UNDER INTERNATIONAL OR TEMPORARY PROTECTION

- There is no support from the government for the integration of foreigners under the working permit.



5. COMMUNICATION WITH AUTHORITIES/PUBLIC BODIES

- Officials and people working for the authorities/public bodies don't speak English and/or are not educated on how to work with matters involving refugees. This has also been recognized as a barrier by the CSO with the additional note that within the Ministry responsible for education there is no one-person who is in charge for people under protection and asylum seekers making communication with such ministry significantly harder. In order to enable easier communication and information flow the Ministry responsible for education, as well as any municipality department responsible for education, should organize a specific contact person who would provide information and guidance in respect of accessing education services.

TCNs and CSO proposed that the state should organize education, seminars, workshops for workers in the public bodies to acquire and develop skills of working in matters involving people with migrant backgrounds and to develop awareness on foreign cultures and how to approach people who are in a foreign land among the staff working within the institutions (especially for health and housing).

NGO also identified that teachers are not sufficiently educated regarding migrants 'needs due to lack of support and information from the Ministry responsible for education. Solution that was proposed was to replicate good practice examples evident in education of the children displaced due to war in Ukraine (information about the rights of people under the international and temporary protection, school materials and manuals about methodology of working with children speaking foreign language) and within school where most of the children from reception centers are enrolled.

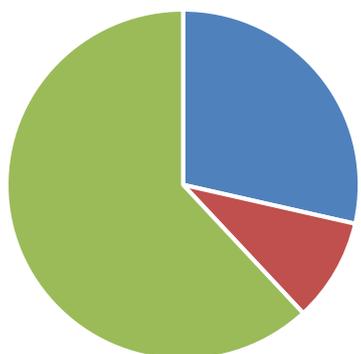
CSO also identified additional barriers in respect of vocational trainings:

- There is no state support for vocational training or for the possibility to change vocational qualification. Such support only exists if it is planned as part of the project that the NGO received funding for;
- Vocational training, as well as possibility to change vocational qualifications are too expensive;
- If there are projects for changing vocational qualifications then usually such change is made only for changing the qualifications to defintory professions (assistant chefs or similar);

CSO proposed a solution in the form of the voucher system where state would provide money vouchers that TCNs can utilize in institutions that provide vocational training.

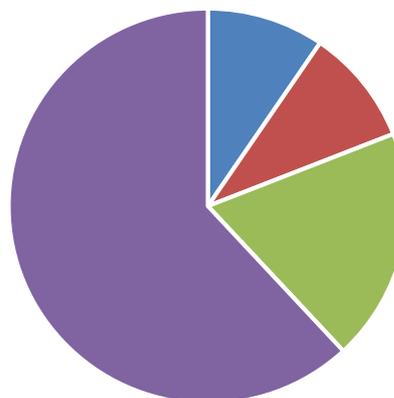
6.5. Housing Sector

PERCEPTION ABOUT THE HOUSING SECTOR:



- DIFFICULT AND/OR EXPENSIVE (6)
- DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKS (2)
- NO ANSWER (13)

IS SOCIAL HOUSING ACCESSIBLE FOR YOU? DO YOU NEED IT?



- YES, but I don't need it (2)
- NO, but I don't need it (2)
- NO, but I need it (4)
- NO ANSWER (13)

6.5.1. Barriers & Solutions

1. ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS (check the section **Education**)

2. ACCESS TO RENTING AN APARTMENT

- Apartments in the City of Zagreb are expensive.
- Foreigners, and especially people under international protection, are discriminated on the market. CSO specifically mentioned that there were cases of denial of rent just because the TCNs are of different ethnicity or race.
- Difficulties in finding an apartment if you have pets or if you are looking for the apartment as a solo-men.

CSO also mentioned the following barriers:

- difficult or impossible to rent an apartment if (i.) TCN is not employed or (ii.) in case of big families with low financial resources.
- Apartment owners don't want to register persons' residence at their address because of information that a contract is needed for such registration (although in practice its not



needed) and due to tax avoidance.

- For asylum seekers Ministry of Interior (MoI) conducts check-ups with consequences in case of not being on the registered address.
- Amount of rent indicated within the contract usually doesn't correspond to the actual rent paid by the TCNs which then causes a possibility that in case person get terminated TCNs request for social aid in the form of compensation of rent is granted in the amount indicated within the contract;

3. 2-YEAR ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED BY THE STATE FOR PEOPLE UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

- Limited number of apartments in Zagreb that are provided within the scheme of 2-year accommodation provided by the state for people under international protection.
- Personal conditions are not taken into account within the process of providing an apartment. For e.g., if the person has a job in Zagreb or participated in other activities in Zagreb, this person will not necessarily receive the apartment in Zagreb.
- If the person works and receives a salary then the person must participate in coverage of accommodation costs which usually means that almost the whole salary is spent on rent.

CSO explained that if a person starts working and receives more than 2.500 HRK as a single-person-household or 1.500 as part of the family-household then this person must participate in coverage of the accommodation costs which in practice encourages people not to work because if they don't work then they can also receive social aid.

CSO also identified additional barriers and problems in respect of this scheme:

- Waiting period for receiving housing unit is 2-3 months and, in some cases, even longer;
- Not able to choose the city where the accommodation will be located causing forced internal displacement regardless of their work-location.
CSO mentioned that there was a case where a TCN was forced to terminate its employment in Zagreb because of receiving accommodation in Sisak as there was a obligation to participate in the costs of the accommodation and no coverage of the costs of the train-ticket from Sisak to Zagreb.
- First issuance of the asylum-card is free, however the card is referring to the address of the reception center. Once receiving the accommodation outside the reception centre TCNs have to request a new card at their own cost for 370 kn per person.

The Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care considers this scheme as a good scheme as it sees no room for progress in this field.



4. CSO also identified additional challenges in respect of quality of the accommodation in Reception centers for people seeking international protection:

- if centers is at full capacity (500-600 people) then 5 or 6-member family will receive 4-bed room, however if center is not at full capacity such family will receive 2 rooms;
- electric appliances like fridge, stove or heater are forbidden while at the same time there are no communal appliances, however there is a communal kitchen on every floor (which is not sufficient causing constant occupancy of the kitchen);
- canteen meals is not adaptable to people's needs and is usually of low-quality;
- minimum humanitarian standards are not satisfied in this accommodation;

TCNs didn't formulate or proposed any solution in respect of the housing sector, while CSO highlighted the following:

- owners of the housing units should be educated in this matter;
- service providers should provide systematic support for TCNs in finding accommodation. Specific barrier identified by the CSO is that the volunteers are often less motivated to work in this sector.



7. Conclusion

The conducted needs assessment, including this report, is part of the ASAP Project whose main goal is to support local service providers and CSOs in 6 European countries (Austria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain) in the implementation of effective and replicable practices which can respond to TCNs needs in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health.

The most challenging part of the research was to identify and analyses different categories of needs, barriers and solutions which raised out of diverse statuses of the TCNs involved within the research as the needs and barriers are tightly connected with their statuses and the way how they regulated or didn't regulate their stay in Croatia. Similar researches on TCNs needs in Croatia were conducted in the past (see section Croatian Migration Context) and while the results of those researches are corresponding to the results of the conducted needs assessment it is important to note that majority of the TCNs needs are still not met by the local service providers.

Despite multiple researches and different project activities revolving around TCNs, it was surprising to detect that the involved TCNs were very eager to participate in this research and express their needs, frustrations, challenges and problems indicating that the potential barrier for TCNs integration in Croatia is also lack of space and forums where TCNs can freely and without judgment express their thoughts and discuss about barriers that hinder their integration.

Based on the conducted needs assessment it was detected that one of the most expressed needs by the TCNs is the need to learn the Croatian language, while at the same time language barrier remains as the biggest barrier in all four sectors (employment, health, education and housing) identified by all the stakeholders of this research. Another cross-cutting barrier that was detected by the TCNs and corroborated by the CSO is that people working for public bodies don't speak English and/or are not educated on how to work in matters involving foreigners.

Therefore, based on the needs assessment it was detected that it is imperative for the TCNs integration that Croatian language courses are organized and modeled by the state in a way to enable every person staying in Croatia for a longer period of time to learn the language at a level allowing a successful integration and access to basic services in Croatian society. Additionally, the state should organize education, seminars, workshops for workers in the public bodies to acquire and develop skills of working in matters involving people with migrant backgrounds and to develop awareness on foreign cultures and how to approach TCNs.





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