



National report on state of the art of cultural policies for the integration of migrants in Croatia



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Introduction

The Republic of Croatia was declared in 1991, after the fall of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is the youngest member of the European Union and it is still not a member of the Schengen Area. According to the census in 2021 it has a population of 3 888 529 people (a decrease in the population according to the 2011 census when 4 284 889 people lived in Croatia).

According to the data provided by the Ministry of Interior, since 2004. Croatia had 16 878 persons seeking asylum, and 1026 persons that were given refugee status (880 asylum, 138 subsidiary protection). Since 2022 there are 17 000 people coming from Ukraine that have either sought temporary protection or will do it. According to the State Office for Statistics, there are 33 414 migrants living in Croatia.

Integration of refugees and other migrants in the Republic of Croatia within the framework of the EU integration policy is a new concept that started in 2013, when Croatia entered the EU as a member state. Living with migrants was not a new concept though, as in the former Yugoslavia it was common that migrants came to work or study - through the Non-alignment movement.

Institutions responsible for integration policy in Croatia are the Governmental Office for Human Rights and National Minorities Rights, as the coordination body among relevant ministries; Commission for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into Croatian society, where members are the representatives of the ministries (mostly state secretary, as the power position); Working Group of the Commission for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into Croatian society, where members are the representatives of the ministries (operational level), other relevant offices and representatives of civil society organisations (Croatian Red Cross, Croatian Law Centre, Centre for Peace Studies) and international organisations (UNHCR); and last the Advisory Group of Third-country Nationals and Persons with a migrant background.

Legal frameworks that define integration policy are the following: Foreigners Act (OG 2020), Asylum Act (OG 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013) - which was changed into the Act on International and Temporary Protection that is valid today and was in public consultation in May 2022. Migration policy was declared only two times: Migration Policy for 2007 - 2008 and Migration policy for 2013 - 2015. After 2015, the Government explained how migration policy is not needed since all the strategies and political directions are put into the Act on International and Temporary Protection (what is quite strange since the Act itself is mentioning Migration policy for 2013 - 2015).

Documents focused on integration were: Action Plan for Integration of Foreigners 2013 - 2015, that was later on changed into Action Plan for Integration of Persons with International Protection 2017 - 2019, as the Government wanted to focus more on refugees and not all migrants living in the country. In the end of 2019 the Working group for Integration started to work on the new Action plan, but the COVID-19 pandemic and economical crisis stopped the developments and the new Action plan was not declared up until today.



The presented framework shows development of integration policy in Croatia and directions that were taken while creating the policy. It is clear how Croatia was following all the necessary steps in order to become a part of the EU (in 2013), while later on we can see decline in the establishment of integration policy and practice based on human rights. There never was a political will for creation of a long term and quality integration policy, while the political narrative was more focused on presenting Croatia as a transit country. And this is what Croatia has become - since no quality integration measures were implemented and since there isn't an Action Plan for Integration that could start the process. Therefore, from the total population of more than 1000 refugees, only around half of them actually stayed in Croatia. In 2022, there is a big change in the political approach toward the integration policy and practice - again followed by the EU initiative related to the Ukrainian refugees that fled the country due to the war. The Government is making changes in the policy that were advocated for years from different actors - related to certain segments of the integration process. It is a shame that a war needed to happen that these steps are being taken (and it is a disgrace that it didn't happen when the wars in Syria and Afghanistan happened), but this change in political climate should be taken as a possibility to improve the integration policy and practice for all - without segregation!

National cultural policies for the integration of migrants

Croatia has ratified the following international conventions:

- International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1993,
- European Cultural Convention in 1999,
- Convention on the Establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1999,
- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention 1954, in 2002,
- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2006 (approved but not yet ratified).
- Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society in 2007.

Croatia doesn't have a framework for cultural policies related to the integration of refugees and other migrants. Cultural rights are only very briefly and superficially mentioned in the acts relevant for refugees and other migrants. According to the Act on International and Temporary Protection, there are following aspects mentioned:

- An asylum seeker has the right to freedom of religion (article 52)
- Refugees have the right to freedom of religion and help in integration; while they are obliged to attend Croatian language courses, as well as courses on Croatian history and culture (article 64)



Representatives of the Ministry of Culture are members of the Standing Committee for the implementation of the integration of foreign nationals into Croatian society (power position) and the Working Group of the Standing Committee for the implementation of the integration of foreign nationals into Croatian society (operational position).

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia states that the Republic of Croatia is established as a national state of the Croatian people and states belonging to national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Bosniaks, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Russians, Bulgarians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Turks, Vlachs, Albanians and others who are its citizens, who are guaranteed equality with Croatian citizens and the exercise of national rights in accordance with democratic norms of the UN and free countries. A national minority in the sense of the Croatian Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities is a group of Croatian citizens whose members traditionally reside in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, and whose members have ethnic, linguistic and religious characteristics different from other citizens.

Croatia has signed contracts with several religious communities:

- Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on cooperation in the field of education and culture, in 2006,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia on issues of common interest, in 2003,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Islamic Community in Croatia on issues of common interest, in 2003 and 2014,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia on issues of common interest, in 2003,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Croatia, Croatian Old Catholic Church and Macedonian Orthodox Churches in Croatia, in 2003,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Evangelical (Pentecostal) Churches in the Republic of Croatia, Christian Adventist Churches in the Republic of Croatia and Association of Baptist Churches in the Republic of Croatia, in 2003,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Coordination of Jewish Communities in the Republic of Croatia and Jewish religious communities Beth Israel in Croatia, in 2012,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Covenant of Churches "Word of Life", Church of the Complete Gospel and Protestant Reformed Christian Churches in the Republic of Croatia on issues of common interest, in 2014.



History and general framework of cultural policies

Cultural policies related to refugees and other migrants in Croatia could be better defined within the existing legal framework related to integration. However, there is the need for a precondition that needs to be implemented in practice - that is the access to all the basic rights written in the law.

Integration rights for persons granted international and temporary protection are regulated by the Act on International and Temporary Protection. Certain rights are additionally regulated by separate legislation and regulation, depending on the field of competence.

The Republic of Croatia has not had experience with the implementation of the part of the law relating to temporary protection so far, but the activation of the Directive on temporary protection at EU level has resulted in the establishment of a basic framework for the reception and integration of persons who meet the criteria for temporary protection. Having in mind the previous experience of monitoring the implementation of integration policy and establishing practices related to persons granted international protection, here are recommendations for improving the integration system for all.

ACTIVATION OF COMPETENT INSTITUTIONS AND URGENT ADOPTION OF THE ACTION PLAN ON INTEGRATION

Since 2013, the competent authority for coordinating the implementation of integration policies and practices has been the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities. The Director of the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (hereinafter: the Government Office) is the chairman of the Standing Committee for the implementation of the integration of foreign nationals into Croatian society. Within the framework of this committee, the Working Group of the Standing Committee for the implementation of the integration of foreign nationals into Croatian society was established (hereinafter: the Working Group). For the Government of the Republic of Croatia, the Working Group drafts proposals for national strategies and plans in the field of integration, ensures operational implementation of planned tasks, reports to the Standing Committee on the course of implementation and progress or possible difficulties related to the implementation of planned activities and performs other tasks entrusted to it by the Standing Committee. Representatives of the operational level of state administration bodies, government offices, local and regional self-government units and a public institution representative are appointed as members of the Working Group. Given the structure of the already existing institutional framework, it necessary to:

- Involve the Government Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities in the process of integration of persons granted temporary protection.
- Urgently adopt an action plan on integration covering asylum seekers, persons granted temporary and international protection.
- Use existing resources in the integration process established by the Government Office in its work:
- Cooperate with local integration coordinators in different local self-government units;



- Cooperate with the Advisory Group of Third-Country Nationals and Persons of Migrant Origin in planning integration policies and practices;
- Provide professional trainings for institutions in which integration rights are exercised;
- Provide support to local self-government units who do not have experience working with refugees and who are establishing a local integration system for the first time.

TRANSLATION/INTERPRETATION SERVICES

The integration practice so far for persons granted international protection has shown that in the process of exercising rights in all sectors defining the integration system there is no possibility of using translation or interpretation services. Persons who have been granted international protection in the process of seeking it are not entitled to a Croatian language course, which is why they often do not speak or understand the Croatian language in the initial integration phase. Accordingly, in order to understand the rights and obligations regulated by the legal framework, the following should be done for all persons granted international and temporary protection:

- Funds allocated in the state budget for translation and interpretation services in all sectors where the rights regulated by the Act on International and Temporary Protection are exercised.

RIGHT TO ACCOMMODATION

The institutions competent for accommodation of persons granted international protection are the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing and the competent social welfare centre. The institutions competent for accommodation of persons granted temporary protection are the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. Persons granted international protection shall benefit from the right to accommodation for a period of two years following the grant of international protection. Persons granted temporary protection shall benefit from the right to accommodation in individual housing for a period of 6 months with the possibility of extension for up to one year. The financing of accommodation, as well as the participation of persons entitled to co-financed accommodation, is defined in the Ordinance on the participation of persons granted asylum, aliens under subsidiary protection and aliens under temporary protection in the payment of accommodation costs. Therefore, it is necessary to:

- Enable persons granted international protection not to be obliged to participate in the process of co-financing accommodation during the first 18 months of this status, and for persons granted temporary protection during the first 8 months (in the case of employment) in order to create basic conditions for their independent and viable life in Croatia. Practice has shown that people most often find minimum wage jobs with which they have difficulty living in



Croatia. The measure of ensuring full financing of accommodation during the first period of the stay (18 months/8 months) would facilitate the initial period of integration and create incentives for inclusion in the labour market. The period in which persons would participate in the process of co-financing accommodation would thus begin in the final phase of their right to co-financed accommodation, which would prepare them for an independent and viable continuation of their life in Croatia.

- Avoid accommodation in collective housing because it does not enable life in dignity, privacy or basic conditions for the preservation of mental health.
- When ensuring accommodation in different local self-government units in Croatia, to consider the social, cultural and economic context acquired by the person exercising the right to accommodation during the process of seeking international protection. This gives people the opportunity to choose and cooperate in the initial phase of social inclusion.

EMPLOYMENT

Persons who have been granted international and temporary protection have the right to work from the day the protection is granted. In order to improve that right even more, it is necessary to:

- Provide Croatian language courses in all local self-government units where the persons reside. Courses must be organised regularly and continuously and be adaptable to the capacity of persons (the population that comes is of diverse backgrounds - some persons are highly educated, and some are illiterate).
- As a possible solution for the problem of unavailability of language courses, in places where possible, we propose introducing a voucher system through which persons entitled to a language course would receive a voucher with funds that would be used to enrol into a Croatian language course for foreigners in accredited language schools offering it.
- Provide continuous employment counselling in a language that persons understand.
- Include persons granted temporary protection and members of their families in the proposal for amendments to the Act on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Education Qualifications (Article 20). Current amendments include persons granted international protection and the same should be provided to persons granted temporary protection.
- The Ordinance establishing recognition and evaluation criteria for the purpose of continuing education at the higher education level should provide for quick and simple mechanisms for evaluating and verifying competencies of persons who do not have proof of completed education, for the purpose of employment.
- Ensure more flexible criteria for recognition of qualifications in regulated professions. We also propose not to analyse every individual diploma within the protection instrument, but that chambers issue a temporary validation, and then for each regulated profession determine the compatibility of educational programmes with the ones in Croatia and EU, respectively.



- Monitor the implementation of labour law and anti-discrimination legislation in order to prevent violations of rights and exploitation of workers of foreign origin.
- Design upskilling and reskilling programmes that also include Croatian language lessons for a particular profession within the programme. This would actively prepare the person to participate in the labour market.
- Include in the Civil Servants Act certain situations in which it is possible to admit persons under temporary and international protection into the civil service without the obligation of them having Croatian citizenship, e.g., for shortage occupations.

EDUCATION

Persons granted temporary protection are entitled to primary and secondary education and upskilling and reskilling under the same conditions as Croatian citizens. Persons granted international protection have a wider range of rights which also include tertiary (higher) education. We propose that persons granted temporary protection be granted equal rights in the education system to those granted international protection, and that existing obstacles and challenges identified in many years of practice be urgently addressed for both groups.

- In the Act on International and Temporary Protection, increase the scope of asylum seekers' rights in such a way that they are entitled to attend Croatian language courses during the process of seeking international protection in order to facilitate social inclusion if the protection is granted.
- Ensure enough teaching assistants in schools, working with children who have been granted international and temporary protection.
- Enable children granted international and temporary protection to be included in kindergartens in order to facilitate socialisation and integration (even in cases when parents are not employed, in order to facilitate employment).
- Coordinate the introduction of preparatory classes and the inclusion of children in regular classes, so that they do not lose time in the process of inclusion in the regular education system, and to enable them to understand the content taught in the classroom.
- Ensure continuous Croatian language learning with an increased number of hours, in such a way that the Croatian language is taught as a foreign language and not as a mother tongue.
- Provide good access to preparatory and regular classes in extraordinary circumstances, as was the case with distance learning, for children (both asylum seekers and those granted international and temporary protection). It is the responsibility of the system to identify the specific risk of exclusion to which asylum seekers and refugees are exposed and to respond adequately.
- In the Act on International and Temporary Protection, extend the scope of the rights of persons granted temporary protection in such a way as to provide them access to the system of higher education, adult education and the recognition of foreign education qualifications.



- Enable students who have been granted international and temporary protection to continue their education at the appropriate faculty in Croatia (taking into account the year of their study at the time they arrived to Croatia, when possible with regard to study curricula).
- In order to facilitate access to the higher education system, regulate enrolment into faculties by enrolling persons granted international and temporary protection within quotas for Croatian citizens (*in previous practice, persons granted international protection were enrolled through quotas for foreign nationals and with tuition fees for Croatian citizens; however, since some faculties do not have quotas for foreign nationals, there have been difficulties in exercising this right).
- Enable regular schooling to young people who have been granted international and temporary protection in cases where they are beyond the scope of regular schooling under Croatian law (*there are cases of dropping out of school due to time spent as a refugee, e.g. persons 19 or 20 years old who have lived in war and were refugees for the previous 5 years; such persons could not complete their education and should be given the opportunity to do so in Croatia).
- Enable adults who have been granted international and temporary protection to receive additional education and training programmes.
- Provide additional and extra-curricular activities for older children who, after assessing their level of knowledge, enrol in lower classes without contact with peers, which affects the socialisation process (especially in higher grades of primary education and in secondary education). Additional and extracurricular activities could make up for lost time with peers.

HEALTH CARE

The right to health care is regulated by the Act on Mandatory Health Insurance and Health Care for Foreigners in the Republic of Croatia, which as of recently equates the right to health care for persons granted international protection (asylum and subsidiary protection) and persons granted temporary protection (Article 21). Previously, persons granted temporary protection had the right to health care which was equal to that of asylum seekers and regulated by the Ordinance on health care standards for applicants for international protection and foreigners under temporary protection. Upgrading this right is commendable, but it is important to draw attention to the difficulties in practice and make recommendations to facilitate access to the right to health care.

- Include persons granted international and temporary protection in the categories of insured persons with the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance. This will enable the persons to receive the insured person ID number (MBO) and prevent them from having difficulties in exercising their right to health care (*up until now, they did not receive an MBO or health insurance card, which is why health care professionals often refused to provide health care services).
- Provide funding for affordable and sustainable prevention services in the field of mental health protection, including trauma-informed psychological counselling, through the state budget and European projects (e.g., National Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund).



SOCIAL WELFARE

The right to social welfare is defined by the Act on International and Temporary Protection. For persons granted international protection, this right is conferred (Article 73) in accordance with the regulations governing the field of social welfare for Croatian citizens; and for persons granted temporary protection (Article 83) it includes the means of subsistence. According to the Social Welfare Act, this would be a one-off monetary benefit granted to persons by the competent social welfare centre. Due to the large number of persons who had to leave their homes because of the war and their potentially longer stay in Croatia, we propose to:

- Amend the Act on International and Temporary Protection so that persons granted temporary protection are also granted the right to social welfare, in accordance with the regulations governing the field of social welfare for Croatian citizens.

The current situation regarding cultural policies

Croatia has a very poor integration system for refugees and other migrants, and as such it doesn't recognise the importance of cultural policies related to integration. There are many preconditions for it but they haven't been used due to the small numbers of refugees and migrants living in Croatia and the lack of political will to create the framework for cultural policies that would improve integration of refugees and other migrants. Examples that exist are the short-term projects organised within the civil society, but once the projects are implemented and financial means are spent - the practices stop.

Croatia, as a part of the former Socialist Federal Yugoslavian Republic, has a past of the Non-Alignment movement where some practices were also created and were supported by the Republic. However, they tend to be forgotten and erased. The MIGRarts project gives the possibility to explore more and create proposals for the implementation in policies and practice that would improve the use of cultural policies in the integration of refugees and migrants - learning from other partner countries, but also from the past.

Best practices on the integration of migrants through artistic/creative projects aimed at cultural integration

Project Description

The Women to Women collective uses art as a way to bring together women who want Croatia to be their home together for whom Croatia is already home, to facilitate the integration of women into a



new ever-evolving community. Through workshops, gatherings and excursions, women share and gain skills, knowledge, and empowerment while building on a support network and shared values of mutual understanding, tolerance and embracing of diversity into a dynamic inclusionary society.

The idea of the project is to create a safe, secure and intimate space for women to exchange ideas, problems, solutions or simply to spend time together by connection through womanhood that often take precedence over cultural biases projected or perceived.

The project is organised by Living Atelier DK, and has attracted many volunteers who have come to be part of the collective and support the activities including individuals affiliated to different organisations from Are You Syrious, Center for Peace Studies, the Welcome Initiative! (Welcome Refugees), Domaćigosti, the Food Not Bombs collective, Klub Močvara, Mali Zmaj and Borders None. The project itself is a show of successful cooperation among civil society members.

Duration of the project: from 2016 to today

Number of artist involved:

> around 20

Number of:

> volunteers: n. - 30

Number of beneficiaries involved: they do not provide this information

> status

- migrants n:

- refugees n.

- asylum seekers n.

> age group

- children (**5 to 12**)

- young people (14 to 25)

- adults (from 26 to...)



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