



SHADOW REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATION MEASURES IN CROATIA

**Authors: members of the Steering Committee –
Committee for the Promotion of Human Rights**

October 2023

PUBLISHER: Centre for Peace Studies

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Zagreb, October 2023

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NOTES:

This report, as well as related research, are part of the project *Thinking of integration process as a two-way inclusion (2incING)*, funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The content of this report represents the views of the authors and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission accepts no responsibility for the use of the information contained therein.

The project is co-financed by the Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs. The views expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the Centre for Peace Studies and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs.

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1. Summary

Within the framework of the project Thinking of integration process as a *two-way inclusion* (2incING), the Centre for Peace Studies encouraged the establishment of a Steering Committee, which was established by two employees of the Centre for Peace Studies and eight members with different legal statuses in Croatia – refugees, foreign students, foreign workers – who all worked in this process as our colleagues, sharing their experience and knowledge in the field of integration. As part of the work of the Steering Committee, the implementation of integration measures was analysed from the perspective of the persons to whom the integration measures apply, and this Shadow Report is the result of the aforementioned analyses.

The shadow report consists of 8 short papers in which the implementation of integration measures is placed in the context of personal experiences or testimonies of refugees and migrants, in accordance with the methodology contained in the Shadow Report Toolkit, created by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Each paper is followed by a list of recommendations aimed at public authorities and prepared with the help of employees of the Centre for Peace Studies.

The papers were originally written in English or Croatian by the persons designated as their authors, while the role of the Centre for Peace Studies was to intervene in the text of the paper as little as possible and with the consent of the authors. In that way, we wanted to create a report that would, in an original and authentic way, convey the thoughts, criticism and recommendations of the people affected by the integration measures. As the key part of this Shadow Report, the papers represent real human stories and reflect problems in the system and in the measures that are either implemented, not implemented, or non-existent, but necessary for integration to be truly successful.

This is the first Shadow Report in the context of Croatian integration policy and practice written by the very people directly affected by the integration measures. One of the goals of this report is to encourage the inclusion of persons affected by public integration and migration policies in the processes of their development and improvement as much as possible. We hope there will be more such and similar reports.

2. Recommendations

Considering the number of topics covered in this report, the recommendations refer to a wide range of areas related to integration and integration policies and measures. The most important recommendations are listed below. However, to understand each of them, it is necessary to read the papers in the following chapter.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

1. Create and adopt the Immigration Policy in accordance with Article 246 of the Foreigner's Act (OG 133/20, 114/22, 151/22), which must define: (i) clear and precise conditions under which the issuance of a visa can be refused; (ii) procedure on the basis of which people from Nigeria, DR Congo, as well as other African and Asian countries can legally enter and stay in Croatia; and (iii) obligation to regularly review reasons and justifications of visa refusals to citizens of African and Asian countries.

PROMOTING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FOREIGNERS FROM AFRICA AND ASIA

2. Plan and provide greater financial and other types of support towards focused approach on awareness raising and informational campaigns on racism and discrimination towards foreigners coming from Africa and Asia, racism reporting mechanisms and presence of forums to discuss the issues faced by foreigners in Croatia.

INFORMING AND SUPPORTING THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS IN FULFILLING BUREAUCRATIC REQUIREMENTS

3. It is essential to provide third-country citizens with adequate information and support. This can be achieved by setting up information centres with multilingual staff to assist non-Croatian speakers in completing the necessary paperwork. Additionally, the Croatian government can simplify the process by providing more online services and making official documents available in multiple languages.

SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR REFUGEES WITH MINOR CHILDREN

4. Public authorities must establish a system of material aid and support for persons under international protection who have minor children, and especially for single parents, within which material aid and support would be provided for persons who cannot, without jeopardizing their own existence, provide school textbooks, accessories and equipment, excursions and other extracurricular activities for their children, as well as other things necessary for the harmonious development appropriate to the age of the child.

REMOVAL OF DISCRIMINATORY REGULATIONS

5. Amend all laws and regulations that unjustifiably discriminate persons under international protection on the basis of their citizenship, especially public tenders for scholarships or other financial aid, as well as public tenders for employment.

PROVIDE CROATIAN LANGUAGE COURSE FOR FOREIGNERS

6. The state must provide Croatian language courses for foreigners that will be held regularly, that are in accordance with the needs of the refugees and that provide the means for acquiring adequate knowledge of the Croatian language.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT IN PUBLIC SERVICES

7. Civil Servants Act and any other law regulating access to employment in public services should be amended in such a way to allow foreigners under international and temporary protection, as well as any other foreigner with a regulated stay in Croatia, to be admitted in Croatian public services.

COSTS OF TRANSLATION AND THE PROCEDURE FOR RECOGNITION AND EVALUATION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

8. Public authorities or relevant professional/expert organizations should cover the costs of translation and nostrification (or recognition and evaluation) process, as well as any other cost that needs to be incurred for a person under international protection to access labour market in accordance with their qualifications.

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF UNIVERSITIES IN PROVIDING PROGRAMS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

9. Universities should promote linguistic diversity by means of (i) establishing partnerships and collaborations with renowned international universities and educational institutions that offer English-taught courses, not only limited to Universities in the EU but expanding to different continents. Universities should participate in combined academic programs, faculty exchanges, and curriculum development initiatives. (ii) Faculty Training and Development: provide faculty members with training programs and materials that will enable them to effectively teach their topics in English, assist faculty members in the creation of English-language instructional materials and the adaptation of current courses for English instruction. (iii) Language Assistance and Resources: create language support centres for language exchange for students to help each other. Whilst local students enhance their English language skills, international students get to learn a foreign language; Croatian. This includes free language courses, tutoring, conversation practice sessions, and access to language learning tools.

ESTABLISHMENT AND ADAPTATION OF INFORMATION MATERIALS AND OTHER PROCEDURES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY FOR PEOPLE WHO DO NOT SPEAK THE CROATIAN LANGUAGE

10. Develop comprehensive guidelines and tools that provide clear information on the enrolment process, admission requirements, and required documentation for third-world nationals. Universities in Croatia should take special consideration of the students who are not familiar with the Croatian system of education and who do not speak the Croatian language when designing and implementing integration measures and especially faculty orientation activities.

ESTABLISHMENT OF MEASURES FOR THE STUDENT STANDARD OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS

11. Foreign students that are third-country nationals should have the same level of students' benefits as students who are Croatian citizens in terms of subsidized students' dormitories and students' meals.

12. Student's rights should be guaranteed not only to the enrolled students but to the student candidates who are taking language courses in order to enrol to the faculty as well.

FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING A LONG-TERM RESIDENCE PERMIT AFTER CONTINUOUS STUDIES IN CROATIA

13. Third-country nationals that came to Croatia to study should be allowed to apply for long-term residence upon having an approved temporary stay in the Republic of Croatia for an uninterrupted period of five years. The number of years to acquire long-term residency should not be any different for third-country nationals that came to study than it is for third-country nationals that came to work, for family reunification or other purposes.

SIMPLIFICATION OF PATIENT REGISTRATION WITH FAMILY DOCTORS

14. It is essential that family doctors have an easy way to register their patients, especially patients under international or temporary protection, into the system quickly and accurately.

SYSTEMATIC SUPPORT TO MENTAL HEALTH OF REFUGEES

15. Provide systematic support to all refugees who need it during the process of obtaining protection and after – by securing institutional provision of services of mental health experts, particularly those who focus on trauma, together with trained translators.

3. Shadow Report on the implementation of integration measures in Croatia

3.1. Introduction

The beginnings of systematic measures for the integration of migrants into Croatian society can be found in the Asylum Act from 2003, which guaranteed certain rights to asylum seekers and their family members and which determined that *"the Republic of Croatia, within its capabilities, ensures the conditions for inclusion of asylum seekers in cultural, economic and social life."*¹

Today, integration measures are no longer considered only within the framework of the asylum system, but are designed and implemented in the context of modern migrations, entailing a wider circle of stakeholders than the one covered exclusively by the system of international protection. For example, in May 2023, the City of Zagreb adopted the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024², which includes persons under international and temporary protection, seekers of international protection, foreign workers, persons on the move, and others foreigners who have arranged their stay in Croatia in some other way. Nevertheless, we still need to work on systematically recognizing the necessity of including different migrant groups in strategic documents and public policies dealing with the topics of migration to Croatia and integration procedures.

Additionally, integration today implies the inclusion of people to whom it refers, not only during implementation and evaluation of integration measures, but also during their creation and development.

That is why the Centre for Peace Studies, within the framework of the project *Thinking of integration process as a two-way inclusion (2incING)*³, encouraged the establishment of the Steering Committee, which was established in 2023 by eight members who are refugees, foreign students, foreign workers and other migrants engaged in advocacy and by two employees

of the Centre for Peace Studies. As part of the work of the Coordination Committee, the implementation of integration measures was analysed from the perspective of the persons to whom the integration measures apply, and this Shadow Report is the result of the aforementioned analyses.

The Shadow Report was preceded by the first National Conference on the Promotion of the Rights of Migrants and Refugees in Croatia, which was designed, implemented, and led by migrant and refugee activists, human rights advocates, and integration experts.⁴ Many of the topics shaped at the conference found their place in this report. The Shadow Report consists of 8 (eight) short papers in which the implementation of integration measures is placed in the context of personal experiences or testimonies of refugees and migrants, in accordance with the methodology contained in the Shadow Report Toolkit, created by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Each paper is followed by a list of recommendations aimed at public authorities, which were prepared with the help of employees of the Centre for Peace Studies.

The papers were originally written in English or Croatian by the persons designated as their authors, while the role of the Centre for Peace Studies was to intervene in the text of the paper as little as possible and with the

¹ Asylum Act (OG 103/2003)

² City of Zagreb, Action Plan for the Implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024, Official Herald of City of Zagreb 17/2023

³ More about the project itself can be found here: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/aktivnosti-na-projektu/promisljanje-procesa-integracije-kao-dvosmjernog-ukljucivanja-2incing>

⁴ More about the conference can be found here: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/azil-i-integracijske-politike/odrzana-prva-konferencija-za-zagovaranje-prava-organizirana-od-strane-izbjegličkih-i-migrantskih-aktivista>

consent of the authors. In that way, we wanted to create a report that would, in an original and authentic way, convey the thoughts, criticism and recommendations of the people affected by the integration measures. As the key part of this Shadow Report, the papers represent real human stories and reflect problems in the system and in the measures that are either implemented, not implemented, or non-existent, but necessary for integration to be truly successful.

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3.2. Path to Croatia: diplomatic relations and the position of foreigners abroad and in Croatia (Oladayo Hamidat Hassan)

3.2.1. Introduction

The Republic of Croatia has been a member of the European Union for the past ten years, marking a significant milestone in its diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the country recently joined both the Schengen Area and the eurozone at the start of this year. However, despite the country's efforts to integrate and include foreign nationals, many still face significant obstacles. This report will explore some of the economic and cultural factors that impede the integration and inclusion process, as well as potential solutions. Croatia needs foreign workforce and demographic revitalization badly. It is a beautiful, peaceful, and safe country that offers diversity and comfort to most of its citizens. How come then that foreigners, especially third-country nationals, find it so challenging to live permanently or even to settle in temporarily? Many economic and cultural reasons impede and often prevent the integration and inclusion process, but we will focus here on those that might be significantly improved by the government's affirmative actions and policies.

3.2.2. Area of Concern

A LACK OF EMBASSIES AND BILATERAL AGREEMENTS The first, seemingly insurmountable barrier for a person trying to enter and settle in Croatia by emigrating from one of the countries of the African continent, for example, is an appallingly inadequate ambassadorial representation and grossly deficient bilateral agreements⁵. Croatia simply must acknowledge these disregarded issues timely and turn them into great political and economic advantages.

It is truly shocking that, despite being an integral, or rather a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement as a part of former Yugoslavia, receiving thousands of

⁵ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. *Embassies of foreign countries in the Republic of Croatia*. Retrieved 2023, March 14, from <https://mvep.gov.hr/embassies-and-consulates/embassies-of-foreign-countries-in-the-republic-of-croatia/244602>

foreign students⁶ from the late 1960s to mid-1980s⁷ and hosting hundreds of millions of global tourists for decades, modern-day Croatia still does not recognize its interest in increasing multiculturalism and mutual trade. Croatia is a country of some 56,000 square kilometres with a bit more than 3.8 million people and somehow it is neglecting a large part of the Asian market (44.6 million square kilometres with almost five billion people), as well as virtually overlooking almost the entire African market (30.3 million square kilometres with almost 1.5 billion people). One cannot but wonder how is that reasonable for the overall country's export. These vast numbers offer tremendous opportunities for the whole of Croatian society, so they should be approached methodically and analytically to find the best possible approach to accessing these developing or already advanced markets.

Why even dwell on this seemingly disconnected topic when it comes to migration issues? Well, mostly because the prejudices and unawareness of the potential that inhabitants of these two huge continents might bring in terms of economy, science, education, and culture are still prevailing in the minds of the policymakers and government officials, as well as in the minds of average Croatian citizens. The whole faulty collective premise needs to shift from *"they are arriving in our country because it is much worse in theirs"* to *"we will all gladly profit from awarding diversity, fresh knowledge, and international know-how"*.

This manner of thinking would not leave Croatia with only 15 embassies (11 in Asia, 4 in Africa) and 16 consulates (7 in Asia, 9 in Africa) within the 103 bicontinental countries in total, according to the irregularly updated website of the Ministry of Foreign and European affairs of the Republic of Croatia.⁸ Also, Africans and Asians who have fruitfully found their arduous way to Croatia could ask for help, advice, and support in more than existing 15 embassies (11 Asian, 4 African) and 14 consulates (10 Asian, 4 African) operating with more or less success on the Croatian soil. You can only imagine what kind of obstacles someone from Nigeria (220 million people) or DR Congo (97 million people), for example, wanting to move to Croatia has to face on the very first step, let alone throughout the whole lengthy, tiresome, and costly process.

Let us now present a short illustration of the issues to exemplify as well as simplify. A Nigerian citizen can come to Croatia only by marriage or if the Federal Government backs them with student grant programs accepted by local Croatian authorities, which in the case of Nigerians happens rarely. If such a person

marries a Croatian and decides to move with them in, for instance, Zagreb, the Croatian must first legalize their singlehood and birth certificates and send them exclusively by DHL, otherwise, the future spouse in Nigeria will never actually receive them. The Nigerian has to submit the translated and legalized papers to a local court to get its approval. After several months, if the approval was given, the Croatian has to fly 6,000 km to Nigeria, show up in front of the court, sign several testimonies, and wait for weeks or months to get a wedding date. At this point, it is important to stress that the couple must wed in Nigeria to ever have a chance of being together, as the Nigerian may in no way enter Croatia without it. When the, in every word, spent couple finally marries and legalizes their papers in Nigeria, they must part ways, as the Croatian goes back home, whereas the Nigerian must acquire a visa, which is more often than not rejected, fly 6,500 km to South Africa to the Croatian embassy that covers Nigeria and wait for several months to legalize their papers there as well, before returning to their homeland. After everything is abundantly prepared, various vouching letters of recommendation sent left and right by the Croatian spouse, as well as a substantial amount of money deposited to the Nigerian's bank account as an assurance of decent intentions and the validity of the claim, the Nigerian must acquire a transit visa, which is more often than not rejected, to buy a non-direct Schengen plane ticket, as there are no direct flights from Nigeria to Croatia. In comparison with the "privileged" Nigerian, unfortunate Congolese who find themselves in a similar situation have to fly 8,000 km to another continent, specifically France, to contact the Croatian embassy covering DR Congo, which makes things even more complicated. So here it is: a "simple procedure" of coming to Croatia as an African.

REFUSAL OF VISAS In a way, this topic is just a brief continuation of the previous one and it is based on personal experiences of friends and colleagues who were interviewed. For years, Croatian authorities nominally had five types of visa⁹, yet in practice they

⁶ Culture for Solidarity. Retrieved 2023, March 15, <https://cultureforsolidarity.eu/tag/foreign-students-in-yugoslavia>

⁷ More about the impact of the foreign students in Croatia can be found here: <https://www.bilten.org/?p=41718>

⁸ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Embassies of the Republic of Croatia in the world. Retrieved 2023, March 14, from <https://mvep.gov.hr/embassies-and-consulates/embassies-of-the-republic-of-croatia-in-the-world/244601>

⁹ VisaGuide.World. Croatia Visa: Detailed information about the Croatian visa policy, the required documents, the visa types and the application process. Retrieved 2023, March 15, from <https://visaguide.world/europe/croatia-visa/>

mostly approved only one or two, before desperately needing workforce and eventually entering the Schengen. These visas were labelled Tourist Visa, Business Visa, Work Visa, Student Visa, and Family Visa, respectively. The first two were rejected openly and by default. The second two were approved purely if a third party (an employer or a college) was involved and willing to go to extra trouble in pleading the subject's case at the Ministry of Foreign and European affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the University of Zagreb or the Croatian Employment Service. The last one was occasionally granted if the overly strict requirements of assurances, including pricy health insurance¹⁰, considerable money deposits, and extensive letters of recommendation, were provided.

UNREASONABLE REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDYING IN THE COUNTRY A catch-22 situation in which a student from Africa could not use the Croatian language Croaticum¹¹ course as grounds for coming to Croatia to study in Croatian, as only a handful of English programs in the country existed, was only one of the most notorious examples of bias and injustice towards young, go-getting, self-driven and talented people, who were stopped short of following their dreams and ambitions. If by any chance people that were interviewed succeeded in finding an English study programme, they did not have access to scholarships, the right to work, as well as subsidized food and access to accommodation. For people habitually not financially backed by their families, that was usually simply too much. Others, who married young, managed to somehow come to the country, spent tons of money on Croaticum courses, acquired a B2 level of Croatian, and wanted to study Spanish and French at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, e.g., had to pass unreasonable, complicated and culturally-specific tests of logical reasoning in very advanced Croatian, without which all their pre-knowledge enrolment exams that had been already passed were worth nothing.

UNREASONABLE REQUIREMENTS FOR STAYING IN THE COUNTRY If the roaming Nigerian pilgrim from the first topic miraculously reaches the "sacred Croatian ground", the third stage of the wedding papers legalization¹² begins, with many red tape procedures and registrations in the system. Before our Nigerian subject can get a temporary stay¹³ as a spouse of a Croatian citizen, they have to report to the Ministry of the Interior, wait for impromptu police check-ups at their new place of residence, acquire an identification number from the Tax Administration, register in the National Register, pay all at once mandatory health insurance for the entire previous year because of non-existent bilateral health

insurance agreements, pay for the first month of the current health insurance and yet again submit all this to the Ministry of the Interior for acquiring a one-year temporary stay. Simple enough, is it not?

JOB AND HOUSING DIFFICULTIES, PREJUDICES, EXPLOITATION, XENOPHOBIA, AND RACISM... The final topic covers cultural differences and collective prejudices towards everyone who does not come from the most developed countries, or at least from those that are more economically advanced than Croatia. It is extremely difficult to explain xenophobia and racism to people who self-righteously reason that they cannot be considered as such under any circumstances, as much as their fellow neighbors, acquaintances, friends, and families. It is even more difficult to explain these issues to people who seem to think that these backward traits are reserved solely for the nations of the former colonial powers and they cannot possibly be contributed to countries such as Croatia.

It is tremendously difficult to answer the same silly questions of not having wild animals running around buildings in our native countries, of us surprisingly having schools, factories, electricity, mobile phones, and the internet, of us being ever so grateful for coming to the country that is not the best, but it is positively much better than our home countries, etc. It is very annoying when cab drivers repeat how they "met one of yours from Cuba", although you have not been to Cuba ever in your life, and very frustrating when total strangers all of a sudden start touching your face or grabbing your hair without any warning because they think that is cute and sociable.

¹⁰ The Government of the Republic of Croatia: e-Citizens. Mandatory health insurance. Retrieved 2023, March 14, from <https://gov.hr/en/mandatory-health-insurance/288>

¹¹ Croaticum or "Centre for Croatian as a Second and Foreign Language" is part of the Department of Croatian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. More information on courses offered by Croaticum can be found here: https://croaticum.ifzg.unizg.hr/?page_id=4674

¹² The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Legalizacija isprava. Retrieved 2023, March 14, from <https://mvep.gov.hr/informacije-za-gradjane-244593/konzularne-informacije-22730/legalizacija-isprava/22736>

¹³ The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. Granting Stay in Croatia. Retrieved 2023, March 14, from <https://mvep.gov.hr/services-for-citizens/consular-information-22802/stay-of-foreigners/granting-stay-in-croatia/22839>

It is extremely discouraging to come for a job interview and find out that they called you without any intention of giving you the job, but rather only to see you in person as you were found exotic or to self-consciously explain that they too speak English and probably better than you. It is saddening and humiliating to be paid less than the locals, blackmailed, and overworked. It is utterly depressing when at least 50 percent of landlords immediately hang up on you upon hearing that you do not speak fluent Croatian, and 95 percent of those who do not do that from the get-go hang up upon hearing that you are not a foreigner from the UK, the US or Germany, but rather from The Gambia, Cameroon or Ivory Coast.

It is poignant to be called a monkey and sexually harassed while riding a tram, walking the streets, or simply buying groceries just because you are judged as repulsive or appealing, depending on the preferences.

However, the worst feeling of all is when you try to explain all this to your Croatian friends and they are blissfully ignorant about it, incredulous and eager to persuade you how you must have understood it wrong, how nobody in the country is racist except a few idiots, and how people are just trying to be friendly and nothing more.

3.2.3. Recommendations

1. Creation and adoption of the policy on improving the level of accessibility of Croatia for foreigners which would include strategic measures to increase the number of Croatian embassies on the territory of Asia and Africa, as well as to increase Croatia's presence in foreign countries via conclusion of bilateral and multilateral treaties which would allow foreigners to approach near-by embassies of other countries to conduct Croatian visa and migration related activities.

2. Creation and adoption of the Immigration Policy in accordance with Article 246 of the Foreigner's Act (OG 133/20, 114/22, 151/22)¹⁴) which must define: (i) clear and precise conditions under which the issuance of a visa can be refused; (ii) procedure on the basis of which people from African and Asian countries can legally enter Croatia and stay in the country; and (iii) obligation to regularly review reasons and justifications why visas are refused to citizens of African and Asian countries.

3. Planning and providing greater financial and other types of support towards focused approach on awareness raising and informational campaigns on racism and discrimination towards foreigners coming from Africa, racism reporting mechanisms and presence of spaces to discuss the issues faced by foreigners in Croatia.

¹⁴ Unofficial English version of the Foreigner's Act can be found here: [http://digarhiv.gov.hr/arhiva/32/223454/mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/zakoni/ALIENS%20ACT%20\(Official%20Gazette%20No%20133_2020\).pdf](http://digarhiv.gov.hr/arhiva/32/223454/mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/zakoni/ALIENS%20ACT%20(Official%20Gazette%20No%20133_2020).pdf)

3.3. Challenges of third-country nationals in regulating their stay in Croatia and the impact on their position (Mohammad Shafi Rassa)

3.3.1. Introduction

Croatia has been a popular destination for migrants and tourists from third countries who are seeking employment opportunities and a better life. With its picturesque landscapes, moderate climate, and rich culture, Croatia is a desirable location for residency and work. However, regulating stay in Croatia can be a complex and time-consuming process, leading to numerous challenges for these citizens. These challenges not only affect third-country citizens but also have an impact on the Croatian economy since migrants and tourists contribute significantly to the country's economy. Therefore, this report aims to provide an overview of the issues faced by third-country citizens in Croatia and suggest possible solutions to address these challenges.

3.3.2. Area of Concern

THE LACK OF ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION One of the primary challenges faced by third-country citizens in Croatia is the lack of accessible information available to them. The procedures and requirements for obtaining residence permits, work permits, and other necessary documents are often unknown to them. As a result, they experience delays in processing their applications, leading to a prolonged stay in Croatia without proper documentation which I experienced at first hand in my first period of volunteering in Croatia where neither I nor my supervisor knew about the timing of application for extension of my residence permit, which caused a needless return to the origin country and waiting 3 months for a new residency and visa to come back to the country. Hence, it is essential to provide adequate information and support to make the process smoother.

LANGUAGE BARRIER Another challenge faced by third-country citizens is the language barrier. The majority of official documents and forms are only in Croatian, making it hard for non-Croatian speakers to comprehend and complete the necessary paperwork.

The Croatian government can overcome this challenge by making official documents available in multiple languages.

BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES Apart from these challenges, third-country citizens also face bureaucratic hurdles. Obtaining the necessary permits and documents can be a complicated process with many requirements to meet. This can be overwhelming, especially for those who are not familiar with the Croatian legal system.

For instance, for many administrative procedures a birth certificate is required to not be older than 3 or 6 months. This is required for getting married, permanent residency or applying for Croatian citizenship, which can be challenging for a number of reasons: some may not have embassies of their country of origin within Croatia, some have political restrictions to fly back to their home country, and it is a financial concern as well. Therefore, providing legal and financial support to third-country citizens can help them meet the requirements for obtaining the necessary permits and documents.

High skilled third-country citizens and volunteers who got their education and experience outside Croatia and who want to find a job and settle in the country face the bureaucratic hurdles of employment in Croatia. Current laws of Croatia don't let employers hire third-country citizens and volunteers as easily as European citizens. As an Afghan national I myself volunteered in Croatia for more than a year but with all the effort I put in to integrate and find a job I failed to find one in accordance with my qualifications, which is now pushing me to move to a different country, like Germany or England, which has much more relaxed laws than Croatia. For example, in Germany you can get a visa allowing you to enter and stay for 6 months to find a proper job with your qualifications, while in England after a year of Master's degree you can get a work permit allowing you to stay for 2 years in the country which enables a possibility for you to stay and settle in the country for good. If Croatia wants to be a welcoming country for high skilled foreigners and fill the gap of job deficit in the labor market, it needs to improve the law for foreign workers and implement it in the system.

IMPACT ON THE POSITION OF THIRD COUNTRY CITIZENS The challenges faced by third-country citizens in regulating their stay in Croatia have a considerable impact on their position. Without proper documentation, they cannot access essential services such as healthcare, education, and social security. Moreover, these citizens are often exploited by employers who take advantage of their vulnerable position, paying them low wages and

providing poor working conditions. Hence, it is crucial to ensure that these citizens can regulate their stay in Croatia without facing unnecessary challenges.

Furthermore, lack of transparency and mistrust within society can lead to social exclusion and marginalization of citizens of third countries. This can make it difficult for them to integrate into Croatian society and have a negative impact on their mental health. The stress, anxiety, and depression caused by the lengthy application process, administrative burden, and social exclusion can be detrimental to their overall well-being.

Additionally, the challenges faced by third-country citizens in Croatia have a negative impact on the country's economy. Migrants and tourists contribute significantly to the country's economy, and without them, the economy would suffer. Hence, it is in the best interest of the country to ensure that these citizens can regulate their stay in Croatia without facing unnecessary challenges.

3.3.3. Recommendations

1. **LANGUAGE BARRIER AND BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES:** It is essential to provide third-country citizens with adequate information and support. This can be achieved by setting up information centers with multilingual staff to assist non-Croatian speakers in completing the necessary paperwork. Additionally, the Croatian government can simplify the process by providing more online services and making official documents available in multiple languages. They can also provide legal and financial support to third-country citizens to help them meet the requirements for obtaining the necessary permits and documents.

2. **RAISING AWARENESS:** The Croatian government should raise awareness among third-country citizens regarding their rights and responsibilities in the country. This can be done through conducting awareness campaigns and providing information through various media channels.

3. **PROMOTING INTEGRATION:** The Croatian government must support third-country citizens' integration into Croatian society. This can be achieved by providing language classes, cultural programs, and other social activities that can help them feel more connected to the country. The more they feel integrated, the more they can contribute to society.

4. **MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** The Croatian government must regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. This will allow the identification of areas requiring improvement and ensure that the solutions achieve the intended results. It's all about continuously improving and ensuring that the right things are done.

5. **COOPERATING WITH THE EU:** As a member of the European Union, Croatia can benefit from the EU's policies and programs aimed at supporting third-country citizens. Therefore, it's crucial to reinforce cooperation with the EU in this regard. By doing so, Croatia can learn from the best practices and implement them to create a better environment for third-country citizens.

3.4. Starting life over in Croatia: access to education for refugee children through the eyes of parents (Safaa Salem) ¹⁵

3.4.1. Introduction

All people want to live in safe places where they can meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, safety, and education. As a refugee from Syria and a single mother of three sons, I would like to warn about the shortcomings and obstacles that I have encountered in my six and a half years in the Republic of Croatia.

3.4.2. Area of Concern

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT When I came to Croatia six and a half years ago, I needed psychological and material support, both for myself and for my children who were minors when we left Syria, which was affected by the horrors of war and offered no conditions for education and a normal life. When children start school, they need school supplies and other things for school, which requires financial expenses, and in addition to the necessities of life, this is a significant burden for parents, especially for a single mother with three children.

ENROLMENT AND PREPARATION OF CHILDREN Enrolling children in school was one of the first obstacles I faced. I could not enrol the children in schools on the grounds that the children did not speak the Croatian language, and I have managed to do so only after the intervention of the Ministry of Science and Education, which took place at the request of my brother. There should be some sort of preparation of children (under international protection) for enrolment in secondary school. This preparation should include: 1) an intensive language course starting from "scratch", 2) a mentor to guide them in everything they do not understand and to socialize with them, which would help them learn the language better and faster, 3) organisation of many events for socializing with Croatian people. Such preparation should be ensured by the Government of the Republic of Croatia with the help of civil society organizations. If these things had been available then, my son would have started school happy and mentally relaxed.

LANGUAGE LEARNING After a year, my eldest son decided to change his school from gymnasium to secondary medical school. However, this was not possible and we were rejected on the grounds that the class was full and his grades were insufficient. He finished the first class with a grade of good, while a very good grade was required for admission. This all points to the next problem, which is language.

There was no free and compulsory¹⁶ language course for refugees. I think that Croatian language courses should exist, because my son would have better results. Learning the language was not easy for my children, and I could not help them with the language, I could only provide moral support. We were not good at English back then.

In the end, my children mostly learned the Croatian language through socializing with students and volunteers, and only secondarily with the help of learning the language in schools and using the language in the community. The organization JRS (*Jesuit Refugee Service*) found volunteers who came to our home and helped the children. I learned the Croatian language with the help of my brother and his family and due to my employment in the association Živi atelje DK.

My brother paid the amount of 700 euros for my Croatian language course at the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences¹⁷. As for the course I have completed at the Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences, the course was excellent, we always had assignments and exams. The course was difficult - everything was difficult at the beginning, but with my effort and determination to succeed, and with the help of my brother's family, I managed to finish with a very good grade and received an A2+ certificate.

ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIPS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT CROATIAN CITIZENSHIP The youngest son enrolled in high school for auto electrician. Since it was a profession in demand,

¹⁵ The text was originally written in Croatian.

¹⁶ Article 74, paragraph 1 of the Law on International and Temporary Protection (OG 70/15, 127/17, 33/23) stipulates the obligation to attend a course in Croatian language, history and culture in order to integrate persons under international protection into Croatian society. However, the mentioned courses are not implemented.

¹⁷ Croaticum or "Centre for Croatian as a Second and Foreign Language" is part of the Department of Croatian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. More information on courses offered by Croaticum can be found here: https://croaticum.ffzg.unizg.hr/?page_id=4674

one could obtain a scholarship. I submitted a request for "Scholarships for students in craft professions" to the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts, as did his other friends. The scholarship amounted to HRK 9,000.00 per year, but my request was rejected¹⁸ given that my son does not have the citizenship of the Republic of Croatia. Namely, pursuant to point 5 of the Conditions for applying for this scholarship, it is prescribed that the only eligible applicants are citizens of the Republic of Croatia residing in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

It had a negative effect on my son, he felt it was racist because he couldn't achieve it like all his friends who achieved it.

EMPLOYMENT IN AN INCLUSIVE WORKING COMMUNITY After a long search, I found a job in the association Živi atelje, where I work as an assistant and I feel happy. Živi atelje is a humanitarian, non-profit organization that helps women to overcome the problems and difficulties they face in their lives more easily. I feel useful at work because I help women who encounter the same problems that I have encountered when I first came to the Republic of Croatia.

The association organizes get-togethers, parties, and discussions about problems and their potential solutions. It is a place where a woman feels welcome regardless of language, culture, and religion. We have workshops where everyone does something they like (painting, working with clay – making various clay objects, handicrafts, glass workshops) and interactive gong fu tea, and finally we organize exhibitions and sales of objects made of glass, clay, and other handicrafts.

It would be good if there were more such organizations that would help women to integrate into the society they live in as quickly and well as possible, and to feel useful. Unfortunately, state institutions that should help refugees overcome their problems as quickly and well as possible do not have time or the will, so refugees must manage on their own or with the help of humanitarian organizations.

3.4.3. Recommendations

1. Public authorities must establish a system of material aid and support for persons under international protection who have minor children, and especially for single parents, within which material aid and support would be provided for persons who cannot, without jeopardizing their own existence, provide school textbooks, accessories and equipment, excursions and other extracurricular activities for their children, as well as other things necessary for the harmonious development appropriate to the age of the child.
2. It is necessary to amend all laws and regulations that unjustifiably discriminate persons under international protection on the basis of their citizenship, especially public tenders for scholarships or other financial aid, as well as public tenders for employment.
3. The state must provide Croatian language courses for foreigners that will be held regularly, that are in accordance with the needs of the refugees and that provide the opportunity to acquire adequate knowledge of the Croatian language.

¹⁸ Pogledati Aneks 1.

3.5. Access to the labour market for persons under international protection (Nawar Ghanim Murad)

3.5.1. Introduction

Although persons under international protection and foreigners under temporary protection can work in Croatia without residence and work permit or work registration certificate, in practice, that is very difficult to achieve for many reasons.

This part of the research on the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in the Croatian labour market and (un)employment issues was partly conducted through interviews with persons granted international or subsidiary protection in the Republic of Croatia. Namely, we have looked at the Croatian labour laws and asked our subjects to comment on them, why and where these laws are problematic in relation to their cases and what changes would make these laws more functional, and the research has been completed with consulting articles and statistics that are relevant to the issue of (un)employment and the labour market.

We conducted the interviews with four people under international or subsidiary protection. The interviews were not recorded, as the interviewees stated that any possible identification of their identity could have a negative impact on their private lives and the lives of their family members in the Republic of Croatia. They also stated that they did not trust any kind of technology to be secure. As a result, the questions were asked verbally, while the answers were written down by the interviewers as notes while the respondents were speaking.

3.5.2. Area of Concern

Employment is one of the most complicated issues concerning the life of foreigners in general and the life of persons under international protection or subsidiary protection in particular. Once employment is mentioned, it is difficult to talk about it without including integration, social welfare, health care, housing, language learning

needs, a sense of belonging to the place where they live and, in a few cases, problems of discrimination. Employment is closely related to all of the above issues. Therefore, this part of the research may touch on these issues, although our main topic is employment and access to the Croatian labour market.

For people under international protection, finding work can be fraught with obstacles. We are all aware that economic independence is first and foremost a good start for integration, which is an objective of every host country. According to the statistics of the Croatian Employment Service for years 2018, 2019 and 2020¹⁹ the average number of registered women and men is as little as two digits each. Another fact is that Croatia lacks at least a five-digit number of employees to meet the basic needs of the country. On the website of the Croatian Employment Service, there is a list of "[The most sought-after occupations for which a positive opinion has been issued with information on the average gross salary per occupation](#)" and after checking the figures we found that each occupation is a three-digit number and there are 18 fields. This could somehow give the impression that it's not a complicated task to include people under international protection. However, there are many obstacles and they fall into two different categories: (i) general issues for all registered in the Croatian employment system, and (ii) specific issues for beneficiaries of international protection.

GENERAL ISSUES FOR ALL REGISTERED IN THE CROATIAN EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM One of the critical problems, among the general issues for all in the employment system, is the high number of unemployed people in Croatia. According to the Croatian Employment Service on 10 March 2023, there were [115.198](#) people registered as unemployed or according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics that is [7.2%](#) of the total population of Croatia.

Another more modern problem, which has arisen just after the COVID-19 pandemic, the earthquake in Zagreb and Sisak, the Russian-Ukrainian war and the currency change from the Croatian kuna to the euro, is the rapid increase in the prices of basic goods and almost everything else, i.e. inflation rates have been extremely high in recent months. This basically made it more difficult for anyone (citizen or not) to get a job that would give them some kind of financial independence.

¹⁹ Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, *Social inclusion of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia, 2022, page 23*

Regarding our third issue, we can point out to the fact that Croatia ranks [5th among the EU countries with the lowest minimum wages](#).

Croatia also has a very high rate of VAT in Europe, according to the Trading Economics website which deals with tax indicators across the world, [Croatia shares the second place \(with Sweden, Denmark, and Norway\) as the highest VAT country in Europe i.e.](#) the sales tax in Croatia is 25%. This immediately makes the country very expensive for those of low incomes.

1. Employment in the public service is reserved (almost) exclusively for Croatian citizens.
2. Financing the following actions:
 - a. Requalification documents (such as diplomas);
 - b. Croatian language courses;
 - c. Translation of documents required for any type of employment;
 - d. Paying for the study subjects that are taught differently from the country of origin;
3. Integration program (2 years) basically doesn't include employment programs;
4. Further training in areas that can enrich employment opportunities (German model);
5. Lack of employment counsel who would guide people in their job search according to their knowledge, qualifications and skills.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IS RESERVED EXCLUSIVELY FOR CROATIAN CITIZENS Access to employment in the Croatian public services is available only for Croatian citizens. In accordance with article 44. of the Croatian Constitution²⁰ the right to be admitted to public services is guaranteed only for persons with the citizenship of the Republic of Croatia. Although article 48 of the Civil Servants Act²¹ anticipates the possibility of employing foreigners or stateless persons in the Croatian public services in case where prior approval of the central state administration body responsible for official relations has been granted, and although, for example, the Croatian Public Health Service is short of staff, public hospitals and other public health institutions do not employ people under international protection, even if they were qualified. Our interviewees suggested that the above-mentioned law should be abolished and that anyone who is qualified for the job should be accepted, regardless of their nationality or citizenship.

LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT Employment means financial stability and it is one of the key aspects of real integration for all categories of foreigners, but one category in particular needs some financial assistance in order to be registered with the employment services: the

category of graduated persons under the international protection, or those with diplomas. In fact, these people would have to undertake a recognition and evaluation process of all their documents²², a process that costs a fortune and takes a lot of time and effort. However, these people would also need a referent to direct them to the right institutions to get the job done, and most people under some form of protection do not have the financial capacity to pay for the whole process, which can cost thousands of euros in some cases. A solution proposed by the interviewees is that the costs should be covered by the Croatian Employment Service and/or the associations related to the required field (for example, the Croatian Medical Association).

For this same category of people to enter the labour market and get a decent job, language skills would be considered a high priority, but there are very few (if any) academic institutions accredited by the Ministry of Education that offer supported language courses for work or other purposes. Usually, such facilities are not easy to find and certainly cost more than a full month's salary for each level. This issue can challenge the integration process and not only employment.

LACK OF EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS DURING THE 2-YEAR INTEGRATION PLAN During the two-year Croatian integration programme, the main focus is on housing issues and orientation to the institutions and the city in which they live. Some time may also be spent on socializing, which is the first small step towards integration. However, these programs rarely include other activities related to vocational training or skills development. The program does not offer any work-related orientation. One of the solutions to this problem offered by our interviewees is the German integration model, which offers members of this category paid internships in a profession with language lessons (Work and Language Combination).

²⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (OG 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14), Art. 44. "Every person with the citizenship of the Republic of Croatia has the right, under equal conditions, to participate in the performance of public affairs and to be admitted to public services."

²¹ Civil Servants Act (OG 92/05, 140/05, 142/06, 77/07, 107/07, 27/08, 34/11, 49/11, 150/11, 34/12, 49/12, 37/13, 38/13, 01/15, 138/15, 61/17, 70/19, 98/19, 141/22), Art. 48.

²² The Agency for Science and Higher Education. Recognition and Assessment of Foreign Educational Qualifications in the Republic of Croatia. Retrieved 2023, March 15, from <https://www.azvo.hr/en/enic-naric-office/recognition-and-assessment-of-foreign-educational-qualifications-in-the-republic-of-croatia>

The addition of courses offering certificates in crafts for those who have some kind of interest or hobby can, in principle, speed up the process of employment (e.g. courses in plumbing or electrical installation).

3.5.3. Recommendations

1. Civil Servants Act and any other law regulating access to employment in public services should be amended in such a way to allow foreigners under international and temporary protection, as well as any other foreigner with a regulated stay in Croatia, to be admitted in Croatian public services.
2. Public bodies or relevant professional/expert organizations should cover the costs of translation and nostrification (or recognition and evaluation) process, as well as any other cost that needs to be incurred in order for a person under international protection to access labour market in accordance with their qualifications.
3. Croatian 2-year integration program should include employment program i.e. programs related to vocational training or skills development.

3.6. Studying in Croatia — access to higher education and to rights from the student standard for foreigners with a focus on persons under international protection (Hüseyin Semih Adigüzel)

3.6.1. Introduction

Croatia has been implementing the European Union regulations and directions into its legal system ever since it joined the European Union. The essentials and the standards for fundamental refugee rights and obligations are mostly being drafted on the European level and the implementation of those rules, which are pre-determined and hard-lined as an obligatory duty of the state according to the conventions, the EU acquis, but also the Policies to improve the standards in accordance with the state's financial and economic competence. There is no doubt that Croatia, in the process of Europeanisation, has adopted countless regulations and protocols (or "copy-pasted" may be better suited for migration and refugee rights). The real adaptation comes with the actual implementation and application of the acquired laws, in which Croatia has shown inadequacy on many levels for years, when it comes to the field of migration and refugees. The reason and the cause for this can be discussed in various ways, however, the most accurate explanation would be to cite the words of the vice-president of the government of Croatia from a closed meeting with people of refugee background: *"Up until 2020/2021, The Croatian government proposed migration laws and migration policies for the sole purpose of getting rid of the pressure from the EU and the society with no intention of actually implementing them."* These words are conclusive proof of the lacking political will of the government to improve the real situation for refugee rights, but also the real reason why it is a great challenge for refugees to access some of the most fundamental rights, such as to access higher education and language courses.

Consequences of not having the political will or political agenda, which can be seen from the fact that since 2019 Croatia hasn't had an Action plan for integration on the country level, to regulate and/or to improve the existing refugee system are in most cases suffered by refugees

themselves. To give an example, if a person wants to learn the Croatian language and if the government isn't providing necessary courses, the entire burden of finding a course, financing, learning, etc. falls onto the refugee. According to AIDA (The Asylum Information Database) „*The Ministry of Education organizes language courses, but they remain at the elementary level, while faculties require higher levels of language proficiency, most commonly B2 or C1. Thus, although by law they have the right to access higher education in Croatia, most beneficiaries of international protection would have to invest a considerable amount of their own money to be able to apply for enrolment.*“²³

3.6.2. Area of Concern

THE CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION With the Law on International and Temporary Protection²⁴ Croatia has recognized some of the fundamental rights for refugees, from housing, work, and social care to education. The matter of higher education is articulated in Article 70, in which the law recognizes equal rights for refugee students as Croatian nationals and leaves the details to the bylaws regulated by the Ministry of Education. However, as it is mentioned above, the lack of political will shows itself here again in the form of just changing the titles or the first article of the bylaws without having a comprehensive adaptation of the new system, which disables refugees from having access to the rights provided by the law. Although by recognizing the fundamental right in its national law the Croatian government might have managed to escape criticism from the EU, in practice it surely failed to prescribe a clear answer to the questions like:

- How will a refugee apply to the higher education institution?
- What is the process of enrolment to such institutions like?;
- What is the availability of advanced language courses?;
- How to obtain recognition of refugees' previous diplomas and studies?;
- How to access basic student rights like accommodation, scholarships, student restaurants, etc.?.?;
- and many more.

One of the biggest problems is the lack of communication between the Ministries and other institutions such as universities and faculties.²⁵ The faculty administrations in most cases don't know about the rights of the refugees nor do they know how to enrol them in the faculty.

The chain of challenges when a refugee wants to become a student and enrol in the university can be generally listed as the following (not conclusive):

- a. Finding an appropriate language course to learn the language to a level (B2/C1) in which the student can follow the lectures;
- b. Trying to find the system or authorities responsible to find out the procedure of enrolment (is it the faculty administration?; is it the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Interior?, etc.);
- c. The lack of a clear procedure and set of requirements for a refugee to become accepted as a regular student;
- d. Once accepted, the unclarity of the status of a student in the faculty and state system. Refugee students are most of the time categorized with foreign students which causes problems regarding student rights (i.e., the faculty might ask for a tuition fee that only applies to foreign students, however, students with a refugee status have equal rights as Croatian nationals to study without having to pay the fee...);
- e. Additional difficulty when it comes to accessing basic student rights such as accommodation, student restaurants, and state scholarships;
- f. The student with a refugee status doesn't get a social healthcare identification card, unlike every other student, making it more difficult to access healthcare services such as choosing a doctor, online appointments, pharmaceutical needs, etc.

THE FINAL EVALUATION, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS The asylum system in Croatia is clearly favouring working-life, and labour for refugees over their access to education and student life. The system functions relatively better for those who decide to get employed and work instead of studying, which is probably the main cause of the low number of refugee students in higher education. This results in potential refugee students giving up on their goal to study and forces them into the labour market with less favourable options as opposed to jobs that they would be able to get with a university degree.²⁶ To give an example, the young refugee in the Netherlands is primarily aiming to get a degree and the existing system is ready to provide everything that there is to make it happen, from scholarships, and social help to student accommodation, student loans, language courses, mentorship programs, etc. This

²³ <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/croatia/>

²⁴ Act on International and Temporary Protection (OG 70/15, 127/17, 33/23)

²⁵ <https://h-alter.org/ljudska-prava/fakulteti-tesko-dostupni-azilantima/>

²⁶ H-alter.org, Fakulteti teško dostupni azilantima, available here: <https://h-alter.org/ljudska-prava/fakulteti-tesko-dostupni-azilantima/>

is only possible with a government policy for human potential management and with a visionary migration action plan.

Not having a laid-out system for refugees to follow to enrol in a faculty is a major problem. The students have to foresee the needs and the requirements by themselves and find out ways to overcome those requirements and negotiate with the faculty for the possibility of enrolment. Whereas the ideal system would take the student in and follow him to the point where he/she will be equipped enough to study in the preferred field of study and interest.

Is it then not possible to become a student? No, it is possible, if the person is ready to fight off the system and ready to sacrifice all of their time in trying to get to be enrolled. Over the years the number of cases has risen and more students with a refugee status have started to enrol in the faculties and study. With the arising numbers and interest, the Ministry of Education was made aware of the shortcomings of the system. In an attempt to remove some of the obstacles related to student rights, the Ministry of Education has brought changes to one of its bylaws regulating state scholarships. Removing the discriminatory parts and adding a fairer, more just system of calculating points, for the first time in the academic year ^{2021/2022} one refugee student qualified for a state scholarship. The changes however deemed to be insufficient by not waging the age limit of ²⁶ years for refugee students (considering they most probably are starting their studies in those years having to go through the asylum procedure and then learning the language etc.) Further promises have been made to change more bylaws regarding student rights for accommodation and subsidized food at “*Menza*”²⁷, however, the changes haven’t proceeded because of the special authority of the Ministry to solve those issues with its own special discretionary decisions. Alternative solutions, however effective and also necessary in the short term, fail to provide the clarity, foreseeability, and sufficiency of the system in the long term.

Following the G100 conference²⁸ the Agency for higher education brought remarks on the new adjustment of the whole system. According to the new law on the recognition of diplomas, the Agency is taking over all the procedures regarding being a student for the first time in Croatia. The Agency is going to set up a clearer system for refugee students on how to get their previous (primary school/high school/other) diplomas and documents recognized, how to start the enrolment process, or what the requirements are for the aimed study. This approach provides at least some level of

clarity on whom to contact in case of a shown interest in studying and where to seek information about the overall procedure of enrolment.

Croatia is a highly centralized country and the question of integration of migrants is regulated by the highest level of the state institutions. However, the local authorities’ importance is not to be underestimated/neglected. With its Action plan on Integration, the City of Zagreb plans to introduce new projects, filling in the shoes where the state has shown to be insufficient. The local community plays the most important role in regulating and implementing the regulations for integration. According to the City of Zagreb, from next year on the students with refugee status will be able to apply for city scholarships, and hopefully, other cities in which the refugees are settled will follow the example of the City of Zagreb.

For everything to function at its best, the state agencies, institutions, faculties, and municipalities must cooperate and bring common systems and regulations. If the state is showing incompetence in organizing language courses, the local authorities can swoop in and take over the duty. The clarity of the system is only achievable if the standardization of the entire process of enrolment and studying for refugee students is implemented on all levels, the state, the agency, and the municipality. Higher educated refugees who speak fluent Croatian will only be a very valuable asset for the future of Croatia (considering the government is bringing tens of thousands of foreign workers from third world countries), and the institutions on the city level, state level, or EU level will benefit from the perspective of those who have gone through the process of integration and achieved naturalization by acquiring citizenship. That is why higher education should be not only regulated and standardized, but also encouraged and designed to be more attractive and appealing for young refugees to choose over work life.

²⁷ *Menza* is the name for student restaurants and cafeterias in Croatia where students can buy cooked food and drinks for a significantly subsidized price.

²⁸ More about the G100 Conference or „Nacionalna konferencija o promicanju prava migranata i izbjeglica u Hrvatskoj“ can be found here: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/azil-i-integracijske-politike/odrzana-prva-konferencija-za-zagovaranje-prava-organizirano-od-strane-izbjeglikih-i-migrantskih-aktivista>

3.6.3. Recommendations

1. The Croatian government should regulate the entire process of becoming a student for refugees and in general for the migrants.
2. Universities and the faculties should enable appropriate language courses as part of the enrolment process and provide guidance for students on how to enrol.
3. Student's rights should be guaranteed not only for the enrolled students, but also for the student candidates who are taking language courses in order to enrol to the faculty.
4. Faculties should additionally provide mentorship for foreign students with their applications, adaptation, exams etc.

3.7. Access to higher education with a focus on access to postgraduate and doctoral studies for foreigners in Croatia (Fadzai Praise Musakana)

3.7.1. Introduction

This first part emphasizes the decision to approach the research topic using a qualitative framework. This presented considerable difficulties because universities tend to be very closed-off institutions and because accessing particular documents was either very difficult or unattainable. Therefore, this study is highly reliant on case study research and individual interviews based on first-hand accounts. Information was acquired from credible websites and a variety of online channels. The material was also drawn from a variety of earlier studies that were published as journal articles, conference abstracts, and thesis papers and made available on Croatian Scientific Bibliography (CROSB). In order to draw attention to the issue above, two international students who are attempting to enrol in PhD programs at the Engineering Faculty in Croatia were interviewed.

3.7.2. Area of Concern

The total number of students enrolled in post-graduate specialist courses in the Republic of Croatia for the academic year 2020–2021 was 1429, with 98% of them being Croatian residents and 2% being foreigners, according to the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics (2021). The issue of institutional integration can be explored here. Croatia became part of the Bologna process in 2001, which on paper requires the mobility of students and researchers to stimulate cooperation between European and International researchers. **Implementation of the policies therein has not been in full effect as education attained from a majority of third world countries cannot be fully recognised and therefore reduces the number of eligible international students for enrolment.**

The study's results identified problems with foreigners' access to higher education because of the following:

1. THE LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF ENGLISH-TAUGHT COURSES MAKES THEM LESS APPEALING TO A WORLDWIDE AUDIENCE.

Informational websites frequently lack an English language option, which results in misunderstandings and a need for translation services. Only 10 of the top 30 universities that offer postgraduate and doctoral degrees offer the chance to study the chosen English-taught course in very specialized departments such as Medicine. The capacity of international students that institutes can accept is just 1 or 2 per academic year, thus reducing the chances.

2. LIMITED SCHOLARSHIPS FOR CITIZENS OF THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES.

The Croatian Government Scholarships are provided to foreign higher education students, teachers at higher education institutions, and researchers who wish to gain additional professional experience in Croatian higher education institutions or research institutes by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia (Ministry) and the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (Agency). The awarded mobilities were to be implemented during the academic year 2022/2023 (from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023, July and August excluded). Only individuals nominated by foreign partner institutions, i.e., national competent bodies in charge of carrying out the bilateral scholarship programs, are eligible to receive the scholarships. In other words, applications addressed to the Agency, the Ministry, or the desired host institution in Croatia by individual applicants who have not been recommended for the Scholarships by the responsible national institution will not be processed. **Each of the eight scholarships, ranging in type from A1 to F, has prior knowledge of the Croatian language requirement, which means you must not only be recommended for the scholarship but also have language proficiency.** Research Projects Scholarships, Zagreb School of Economics and Management Scholarship Programs, CEEPUS Scholarships, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMD), Croatian Government Scholarships, Scholarships of Bilateral Programs in Croatia, The Central European Exchange Program in Croatia are some additional scholarships available to international students but not to students from the Third World countries.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES. Croatia needs to assess the administrative challenges that many international students have before and after they arrive. There has to be an enhancement of a number of non-academic student services that provide support with issues con-

cerning the lengthy wait for study permits. Occasionally, students have to wait more than three months for the processing of their study permit applications after submitting them to Ministry of the Interior.

4. DEMOCRATIZATION OF INFORMATION. Merlin, which is unfamiliar to the majority of overseas students, is the most widely used application for the dissemination of information among students. In Croatia, there is a widespread misconception that simply because information is available, it is also accessible to everyone.

5. STANDARDIZED DATA. Institutions have not exactly created a framework for evaluation, which is crucial. In the same department of study, various institutes have varied entry criteria. This causes a great deal of misunderstanding and false information among prospective students.

6. SUPPORTING THE DIVERSITY OF THE POSTGRADUATE AND PHD POPULATION. Making the assessment process more transparent is one step towards this. Another is as simple as creating a section of various institutions' websites showcasing the stories of current students, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, sharing their own stories on the website and generally injecting fresh perspective and energy. This also can include a culture of student reps involved in developing the whole-person approach, thus widening access strategy.

7. SOCIAL SUPPORT. Most findings on this topic discuss government policies and financial support. In addition to financial support, social support influence (by peers, by family, by teachers, by university officers, and via programs) to improve access and equity in higher education is also discussed. Social support emerges as crucial for both access and equity. This section alerts researchers, teachers, administrators at the university level, and policy-makers at the national level to focus more on social relations between peers, students, and lecturers, supported by the managerial level, and on establishing programs that provide basic academic skills to disadvantaged groups. This also includes access to counsellors at the institute and mental health screenings.

8. LACK OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIRD WORLD NATIONALS. This issue involves internship opportunities and post-graduation employment. A lot of job postings require only Croatian nationals to occupy the jobs which is discouraging to foreign students who acquired their degrees in Croatia. This can be combated by informational material which would raise awareness

about foreign students who acquired their degrees in Croatia. The universities should work with companies in organizing information days for students and staff, cooperating with international student recruitment agencies, and organizing workshops on the academic exchange of students with an interpreter or translator.

3.7.3. Recommendations

1. The availability of English-taught courses is frequently limited, limiting students' access to quality education and their competitiveness in the global labour market. To address this issue, we propose promoting linguistic diversity by means of:

- establishing partnerships and collaborations with renowned international universities and educational institutions that offer English-taught courses, not only limited to Universities in the EU but expanding to different continents; and participating in combined academic programs, faculty exchanges, and curriculum development initiatives.
- Faculty Training and Development: Provide faculty members with training programs and materials that will enable them to effectively teach their topics in English. Assist faculty in the creation of English-language instructional materials and the adaptation of current courses for English instruction.
- Language Assistance and Resources: Create language support centres for language exchange for students to help each other. Whilst local students enhance their English language skills, international students get to learn a foreign language; Croatian. This includes free language courses, tutoring, conversation practice sessions, and access to language learning tools.

2. Access to quality higher education is critical in individual empowerment and socio-economic development therefore in order to combat the issue above we could implement a comprehensive evaluation methodology to examine the effectiveness and impact of scholarship programs. Examine scholarship winners' academic performance, graduation rates, and professional outcomes. Also, expand existing scholarship programs and create new ones specifically designed for citizens of third world countries. These could be merit-based scholarships and/or need-based scholarships.

3. Develop comprehensive guidelines and tools that provide clear information on the enrolment process, admission requirements, and required documentation for citizens of third-world nations. To improve comprehension and accessibility, translate these resources into commonly spoken languages in third-world countries. This material should be disseminated through embassy networks, educational institutions, and online channels. Also, establish dedicated enrolment support teams or offices within educational institutions to assist citizens of third-world countries with the enrolment process. These teams should be well-versed in admissions rules, visa procedures, and required documentation. Respond to enquiries promptly and provide individualized advice to assist students in successfully navigating administrative procedures. In addition, collaborate with Immigration Authorities by engaging in constructive dialogues with immigration authorities in Croatia to streamline visa procedures for students from third world countries. Advocate for transparent and efficient visa processes, simplified documentation requirements, and expedited processing for student visas. Most importantly, provide Cultural Sensitivity Training to administrative staff and enrolment officers in order to increase inclusivity and knowledge of the particular issues that people of third-world nations confront.

4. Third-world migrants to Europe frequently experience social issues due to cultural differences, language barriers, and a lack of support networks. These variables can lead to feelings of isolation, restricted social integration, and decreased well-being. Institutions should collaborate with organizations to foster Cultural Orientation Programs that provide information and guidance on the host country's culture, social norms, and systems. Also establish mentorship programs that connect citizens of third world countries with local mentors that can offer language courses and intercultural training. Create dedicated helplines, internet platforms, and resource centers to provide information on legal rights, healthcare, housing, education, culturally sensitive counselling services and job prospects, especially for third world nationals. Advocate for inclusive policies that promote third-world citizens' social integration. Collaborate with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations to increase awareness of the unique issues experienced by international students. Develop an inclusive legal framework, promote equal opportunities, and combat prejudice.

5. Access to employment is crucial for the successful integration of third world citizens in Croatia. It is essential to promote the recognition of qualifications obtained by third world citizens to ensure their skills and expertise are valued in the European job market. Develop tailored employment support programs that provide guidance, training, and mentorship to third world citizens seeking job opportunities after graduation. Companies should offer language acquisition programs and language support services to help third world citizens improve their language skills. Encourage employers to participate in mentorship initiatives and provide guidance on industry practices, career advancement, internships and professional networking opportunities. Advocate for diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace, encouraging employers to embrace a diverse workforce and create inclusive environments. Promote awareness of the benefits of diverse teams, cultural competence, and the value of international perspectives. Provide support for third world citizens interested in entrepreneurship and self-employment. Offer entrepreneurship training programs, workshops on business planning, access to financing options, and mentorship for aspiring entrepreneurs. Engage with policymakers, governmental organizations, and non-governmental entities to advocate for policies that promote equal job opportunities for third world citizens.

3.8. Access to healthcare services for foreigners, including persons under international protection with special reference to mental health care in Croatia (Salam Ibrahim Kadhim Al-Nidawi)

3.8.1. Introduction

In Croatia, the integration of refugees – people under international and temporary protection and people with subsidiary status – into the health system is a major challenge. This shadow report chapter will explore various problems that negatively affect the integration of such people into the healthcare system in Croatia. It will look at issues such as access to medical services, language barriers, cultural differences, and other factors that make it difficult for these individuals to receive adequate healthcare. The report will also examine how these problems can be solved in order to ensure a better quality of life for refugees and those with subsidiary status in Croatia.

To truly understand the scope of the problems and to find a solution, we must first understand the issue from the perspective of those who live it. That's why this report focuses on knowledge gathered from the experience and daily work with refugees. Through this report, we will gain insight into the challenges faced by refugees and how they can be addressed in order to create lasting solutions.

3.8.2. Area of Concern

According to the Law on International and Temporary Protection (NN 70/15, 127/17) people under international protection exercise the right to health care in accordance with the regulation regulating health insurance and health care for foreigners in the Republic of Croatia. The costs of a person's health care are paid from the State Budget of the Republic of Croatia by the ministry responsible for health affairs.

It is a common misconception that refugees are not financially covered and have to depend on their own resources. However, this article highlights the fact that refugees are in fact financially covered but in a different way.

The family doctor – primary health care doctor – is the first point of contact with the health care system, but for refugees this is a problem. It's difficult for doctors to register a person into the system because refugees don't have an MBO number (*matični broj osiguranika* or Identity Number of the Insured Person) and consequently don't have a health insurance card.

There were also cases where doctors weren't able to issue electronic prescriptions or electronic referrals.

For example, during my work as a translator within the organization dealing with mental health I witnessed a case where a person who has refugee status in Croatia was referred to the clinic (Pathological analysis laboratory) for a blood test. The doctor wrote the referral and it was ok in the laboratory. They saw it in the system and everything was good.

The same person was also supposed to be referred for a Dental x-ray, however the dentist wasn't able to issue the referral and the Dental clinic wasn't able to see it in the system. So, this is one small example from the practice.

Also, the doctors and nurses are not so well or not at all informed about how to solve this, which leads to further complications in providing quality healthcare.

Moreover, this problem can be compounded further if the patient has multiple conditions or needs complex treatments.

It is evident that there are certain difficulties associated with the registration process for refugees and this can be a deterrent for them when it comes to accessing health care services.

This issue is especially visible in situation where the employed person with refugee status receives an MBO and insurance card based on their employment; however, if the person loses their job they will again have to deal with the issue of not having an MBO and health card.

In addition to this, there is also an issue of language barriers which can make it difficult for refugees to communicate effectively with their doctors.

There is no official place where people can get free help with translation services. So most of the help the people can get is from the NGOs if they have an interpreter for the relevant language or in cases where no such interpreter is available people can pay to get the translation service.

There is also a bigger problem – when parents use their kids to help them with translation. While this may seem like an easy solution, it can have a negative impact on children's development and education as they are not able to focus on their studies when they are constantly needed as interpreters for their parents or family members.

Interpreting health matters is an important task that needs to be done accurately and efficiently. It requires interpreters who are well-versed in the subject matter and have the ability to accurately convey information from one language to another. This is especially true when it comes to medical terminology, as even a small mistake can have serious consequences. As such, it is essential for interpreters to be highly proficient in order to ensure accuracy and avoid any potential mistakes.

Mental health services are an essential part of the refugee experience, yet they often go overlooked. Refugees face a variety of traumatic events during their journey, from the initial displacement to their destination country. It is important to recognize that these experiences can have a profound effect on mental health and well-being and that providing mental health services is key to helping refugees process these experiences and move forward with their lives. We must ensure that refugees have access to adequate mental health services so they can heal and thrive in their new homes. Important to note is that in Croatia, both asylum seekers located in reception centres as well as people with international protection lack systematic provision of mental health services, which are, again, left to the limited capacities of the non-governmental sector.

Mental health is an important part of overall wellbeing and should not be ignored. Unfortunately, many people are unable to get the help they need due to cost or lack of access. In 2020, FOCUS conducted a research that sheds light on how we can provide quality mental health services for all people depending on their needs and at a lower cost. This research helps us gain a better understanding of mental health and what we can do to ensure everyone has access to the care they need.

3.8.3. Recommendations

At the end of this small report about health care services, I would like to propose some steps or solutions for better health care for refugees and for helping them to better integrate into the creation society.

1. It is essential that family doctors have an easy way to register their patients into the system quickly and accurately.
2. It is important that doctors and nurses are properly informed about the rights of the people under international protection so that they can help their patients without any hassle.
3. There should be more awareness and understanding that helping refugees to integrate actually helps the society to develop.
4. Educate both refugees and the integration providers about their rights and responsibilities.
5. Providing a better service leads to better integration. And better integration improves development outcomes.
6. Provide systematic support to all refugees who need it during the process of obtaining protection and after – by securing institutional provision of services of mental health experts, particularly those who focus on trauma, together with the trained translators.

3.9. Challenges of Students from Africa in Croatia (Abdoulie Jobe)

3.9.1. Introduction

This research focuses on students from Africa studying in Croatia under self or family sponsorship. I believe this topic is necessary for discussion due to difficulties students from African countries encounter. This part of the report is based on the lived-in experience, as well as on the basis of the conversations with current and former students about their experiences in connection to the issues they are facing as third-country nationals coming from Africa.

Some of the students' benefits all full-time students are entitled to, such as proper orientation at the university as an international student, access to student restaurants and dormitories, language learning courses, possibility to regulate residency and get employed, are not available for students from third countries. Conversations concerning rights of foreign students in Croatia are nothing new, but often, focus is given to either exchange students such as ERASMUS students, students on exchange via Central European Program for University Studies (CEEPUS), students on bilateral agreements etc. The literal beautification of an entire student experience seems to oversee or disregard the so-called "third country" nationals, thereby invalidating their experience by not mentioning their experience the way it is.

3.9.2. Area of Concern

LANGUAGE BARRIER One of the biggest challenges faced by students of third country nationals is the language barrier. Although few universities in Croatia offer programmes in English, the majority of the universities conduct lectures in Croatian. According to the official data from the University of Zagreb²⁹, ten programmes

²⁹ University of Zagreb, Programmes in English, retrieved March 15, 2023, available here: <http://www.unizg.hr/studiji-i-studiranje/upisi-stipendije-priznavanja/strani-studenti/>

at the University of Zagreb are held in English, ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate study programmes.

INTEGRATION OF THE FOREIGN STUDENTS FROM AFRICA Integration is an important part of settling in a new academic environment. Whether it is getting familiar with the new system of education, making friends or even accessing adequate information about your university, there is very little effort towards these services being provided to foreign students. The emphasis is on “third country nationals” because university integration measures are rarely designed and implemented in consideration of the foreign students that are third-country nationals – especially those not speaking the Croatian language.

Ministry of Science and Education reported that as per the data collected by University Computing Center or Sveučilišni Računalni Centar (SRCE) 1715 foreign students were enrolled in higher education institutions in Croatia as regular students, while as per the data collected via Information system of higher education institutions (ISVU) in the academic year 2021/2022 there were 1427 foreign students out of which 1311 had foreign citizenship and 116 had dual citizenship – mostly Croatian and one more.³⁰ As per the Statistical Report published by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics,³¹ u akademskoj godini 2021./2022. u Hrvatskoj je na visokim učilištima studiralo 2175 stranih studenata, od čega su 52 studenta državljani afričkih zemalja.

In December 2022, Pan-African Society in Croatia organized a roundtable conversation „African Adversities in Croatia“³² to talk about challenges faced by Africans in Croatia. Integration was the most important topic discussed, as foreigners in general face a lot of difficulties integrating in Croatian society. Integration as a two-way process is very necessary but while many foreigners try to learn the language as the first step towards integrating, little help or assistance is received from the other end.

Amongst the challenges mentioned in the area of studies are as follows;

- Difficulties in learning the Croatian language. Foreign students who are on a scholarship based on bilateral agreements and who intend to study in the Croatian language are obliged to enrol for an academic year at ‘CROATICUM’, however, one year of learning Croatian is not sufficient to study a course at the higher education institution in the Croatian language.
- The cost of living, as well as education, is expensive, and having to study as well as work while studying in Croatian is impossible. As a result, students can be

indecisive about prioritizing the academic obligations in the process. Students from third countries are also not allowed to apply for subsidized housing in student dormitories³³, or even eat at student restaurants at subsidized prices unless they are on a scholarship³⁴. This means that students from third countries not only have to pay the tuition fee, but also have to find and rent an apartment and pay meals at full prices. In addition, students, as third-country nationals, are also obliged to pay fees to be medically covered under the obligatory health insurance³⁵ ³⁶.

- Difficulties with obtaining residence permits³⁷ – after completing university in Croatia, third country nationals need to acquire a permit to stay in Croatia and in most cases this means finding a job, as well as acquire work and stay permit. However, third-country nationals are usually hindered or prevented to access jobs in accordance with their academic qualifications. Besides the fact that waiting periods of processing residence permits take very long, the preconditions for applying for permanent residence are discriminatory towards third-country nationals that came to Croatia to study. Namely, under normal circumstances upon having an approved temporary stay in the Republic of Croatia for an uninterrupted period of five

³⁰ Novi List, *The number of foreign students in Croatia has increased by 20 percent, here are the faculties for which they come the most*, retrieved 2023, April 15, available here: https://www.novilist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/broj-stranih-studenata-u-hrvatskoj-porastao-za-20-posto-evo-zbog-kojih-fakulteta-najvise-dolaze?meta_refresh=true

³¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Report - Students, 2020/2021 Academic Year*, available here: https://podaci.dzs.hr/media/w24asnrf/si-1688-studenti-u-akademskoj-godini-2020_2021_web.pdf

³² *African Adversities in Croatia, round table organized by PADUH (Pan-African Society in Croatia) held on 10 December 2022*, video available here: <https://www.facebook.com/110086958094331/videos/927446754925705>

³³ *Students' Centre Zagreb, Natječaj za raspodjelu mjesta redovitim studentima za subvencionirano stanovanje u studentske domove Studentskog centra u Zagrebu u akademskoj godini 2022./2023.*, available here: <http://sczg.unizg.hr/smjestaj/smjestaj/kriteriji-za-raspodjelu-mjesta/>

³⁴ *Regulations on the conditions and method of exercising the right to cover student meal expenses (OG 120/2013, 8/2014, 113/2022)*, art. 2 (4)

³⁵ *The University of Zagreb: The Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering. Student life: Health Insurance*. Retrieved 2023, March 15, from <https://www.petroeng-master-rqn.eu/student-life-health-insurance>

³⁶ *Rent A Local. Croatian Healthcare System and Health Insurance in Croatia*. Retrieved 2023, March 15, from <https://rentallocal.eu/post/croatian-healthcare-system-and-health-insurance-in-croatia/>

³⁷ *Expat in Croatia. How non-EU/EEA family members of EU/EEA citizens can apply for permanent residency in Croatia: Guide for 2023*. Retrieved 2023, March 15, from <https://www.expaticroatia.com/non-eu-family-eu-permanent-residence/>

years, third-country nationals with a valid temporary stay status may apply for the long-term residence provided that all other conditions have been fulfilled, but for third-country nationals that were staying in Croatia under „study permit“, each one year of stay in Croatia is counted only as 6 months thus hindering the process.³⁸

In conclusion, it is necessary to have these laws and regulations revisited. Policy makers also need to be aware of the problems highlighted above so as to consider the affected individuals when making laws. An example is in 2019 when a new law concerning the ban for third country students' rights to work was passed, the affected individuals publicly showed their disappointment and they made it known by speaking to various media outlets. The law got revised almost immediately³⁹.

3.9.3. Recommendations

1. Universities in Croatia should take special consideration of the students who are not familiar with the Croatian system of education and who don't speak the Croatian language when designing and implementing integration measures, and especially faculty orientation activities.
2. Foreign students that are third-country nationals should have the same level of students' benefits as students who are Croatian citizens in terms of subsidized students' dormitories and students' meals.
3. Third-country nationals that came to Croatia to study should be allowed to apply for long-term residence upon having an approved temporary stay in the Republic of Croatia for an uninterrupted period of five years. The number of years to acquire long-term residency should not be any different for third-country nationals that came to study than it is for third-country nationals that came to work, for family reunification or other purposes.
4. Highly qualified nationals who studied in Croatia and are fully integrated in Croatia should be able to work in their fields of interests.
5. Faculties within Croatian universities should introduce more courses and programmes in foreign languages.

³⁸ Ministry of Interior, *Državljeni trećih zemalja*, Retrieved 2023, April 19, available here: <https://mup.gov.hr/gradjani-281562/moji-dokumenti-281563/stranci-333/drzavljeni-trecih-zemalja/281820>

³⁹ *Srednja.hr*, *Kraj diskriminaciji: I strani studenti moći će raditi preko student servisa*, retrieved March 19, 2023, available here: <https://www.srednja.hr/faks/kraj-diskriminaciji-strani-studenti-moci-ce-raditi-student-servisa/>

4. Conclusion

This Shadow Report is not a typical report sent by civil society organizations or professional organizations as part of their work. This report was written by people who are not employed or professionally engaged to deliver a detailed set of recommendations that that would only need to be taken by public authorities. The report was not written for the purposes of a specific invitation or as an alternative to any other report prepared and published by the state.

This report was written by people who want to contribute to a better society and advocate changes so that others who are yet to come to our society are spared the experiences and unnecessary obstacles that the authors of this report faced in the process of the so-called integration. The fact that the report is not accompanied by a detailed set of data and statistics should not detract from the importance of the real-life stories of people to whom integration measures and policies most often apply. On the contrary, when creating and developing policies, it is important to consider the needs of third-country nationals and real situations they experience in order to detect patterns of behaviour that can then be corrected, removed, or improved.

At the same time, other stakeholders should recognize these patterns and, based on the stories heard and read, recognize their own role, powers, and duties, and create measures and policies leading to successful integration in Croatian society. This task implies the continuous creation of new spaces and forums where new members of society will have the opportunity to express their opinions, and representatives of public authorities and civil society organizations will patiently and deeply listen to such expressed opinions.

This Shadow Report represents one of such spaces. The people who wrote this report were invited to write about what they consider important for integration – what they think is missing, what should be worked on, but also what helped them to establish and maintain themselves in Croatia. Based on such stories, recommendations were created and they are the basis for starting discussions and dialogues aimed at understanding the challenges that the system poses to third-country nationals. By initiating at least one such discussion within the working body of a particular ministry, university senate or committee of a local self-government unit, the purpose of this report is fulfilled.