



ANNUAL REPORT 2020 ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

NATIONAL REPORT (PART 2)



June 2021

Funded by the
European Union's
Asylum, Migration
and Integration Fund



EMN
European Migration Network
Europska migracijska mreža





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMIF – European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

CEPOL – European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training

EASO – European Asylum Support Office

ESF – European Social Fund

EURES –European Job Mobility Portal

Europol – European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation

Frontex – European Border and Coast Guard Agency

INTERPOL – International Criminal Police Organisation

ISF – Internal Security Fund

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund



Summary

According to preliminary data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, and in line with the Eurostat methodology, a total of 22,095 first residence permits were issued in the Republic of Croatia to third-country nationals in 2020. Out of the total number of first residence permits issued in 2020, there were 20,327 permits granted for the purpose of stay and work, 1,327 permits granted for the purpose of family reunification, 85 permits granted for the purpose of schooling and university studies, and 356 permits granted for other purposes.

During 2020, a number of legislative changes took place in the area of legal migration, the most significant of which was the enactment of the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 133/20). With the enactment of the new Act, annual quotas for employment permits for third-country nationals were abolished and labor market tests were introduced. Other legislative amendments include the entry into force of the Act on the Posting of Workers to the Republic of Croatia and Cross-border Enforcement of Fines (Official Gazette, No 128/20) and the enactment of the Act on amendments to the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members (Official Gazette, No 144/20) implementing the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community. By adapting legislation to the epidemiological situation, on 1 May 2020 the Act Amending the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 53/20) and the Act Amending the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members entered into force (Official Gazette, No 53/20).

The number of applicants for international protection did not change significantly in 2020 compared to statistical indicators in 2019, and despite the exceptional epidemiological circumstances, decisions were taken within the statutory deadline. The area of international protection was not subject to legislative changes, but the work and operation of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of International Protection Applicants and the Department for International Protection were constantly adapted to the epidemiological measures in place. In order to achieve an integrated approach to the protection of unaccompanied minors and public health, Guidelines on the Protection of Unaccompanied Children in Situations of Risk of Threat or Epidemic were established on 25 March 2020.

In order to protect the population of the Republic of Croatia from COVID-19, the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters made decisions to restrict movement at Croatian border crossing points during 2020. On 19 March 2020, the first Decision on the temporary ban on crossing border crossing points of the Republic of Croatia was adopted. Similarly, as of 16 March 2020, the receipt of applications for Croatian short-term visas by diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Republic of Croatia was suspended with exceptions that were introduced, changed and supplemented throughout the year.

The new Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 133/20) introduced for the first time a long-term visa (type D visa) into Croatian legislation. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of



Croatia recorded an increase in illegal border crossings in 2020. At the same time, returns of third-country nationals were suspended for some time due to the pandemic and there was an overall decrease compared to 2019. The border police procedures towards irregular migrants and return procedures were adapted to the epidemiological measures in place.



1. INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth Annual Report on Migration and Asylum drafted by the National Contact Point for the European Migration Network in Croatia. The European Migration Network (EMN) is a network of experts for migration and asylum whose activities are coordinated by the European Commission. National Contact Points (EMN NCP) have been established in each EU Member State and in Norway.¹ The Ministry of the Interior is EMN National Contact Point in Croatia.

The purpose of the Annual Report on Migration and Asylum is to provide an overview of the most significant policies and legislative developments in the area of asylum and migration in Croatia, as well as an overview of political and public debates on asylum and migration. This Report covers the following topics: legal migration, international protection, unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups, integration, citizenship and statelessness, borders, Schengen and visas, return and readmission, irregular migration, including smuggling and the fight against trafficking in human beings.

This Report covers the period between 1 January and 31 December 2020.

1.1. Methodology and definitions

The 2020 Annual Report on Migration and Asylum was prepared by EMN NCP HR on the basis of common specifications developed by the EMN, in order to facilitate comparability between the reports of all Member States. At the same time, the format has remained to a certain extent flexible to allow for the production of a report targeted at national audiences. The annual report gives an overview of the evolution of policies, legislative framework and practice and the impact of COVID-19 on migration and asylum in the Republic of Croatia in 2020. It also provides the most significant statistics, according to specific thematic areas. The information presented in the report was provided by members of the National Migration Network from the relevant sectors of the Ministry of the Interior, other state administration bodies, the professional service of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, as well as non-governmental and international organisations.

¹ The European Migration Network includes all EU Member States (except Denmark, which has observer status) and Norway, and in 2021 Georgia and Moldova joined the EMN as observer states.



2. CONTEXT FOR ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

2.1. Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union from 1 January to 30 June 2020

From 1 January to 30 June 2020, the Republic of Croatia held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time. The Programme of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, based on Croatia's national priorities, Strategic Agenda of the European Union 2019 - 2024, and the Trio programme, was developed around four pillars: "A Europe that develops", "A Europe that connects", "A Europe that protects" and "An influential Europe".

"A Europe that protects" emphasized, inter alia, the establishment of a **comprehensive and sustainable migration policy**, focusing on strengthening the control of the Union's external borders and interoperability of relevant information systems, a coherent and comprehensive approach to the external and internal aspects of migration, including legal migration, the reform of the Common European Asylum System, as well as deepening cooperation with third countries, including South East Europe. The focus was also on **the protection of freedom and democracy**, in particular the return to the full and effective functioning of the Schengen area.

In this regard, the Justice and Home Affairs Council's priorities were: Effective and humane migration management, better border protection of the European Union and

return to Schengen, interoperability of information systems and strengthening the internal security of the European Union, finalising negotiations on home affairs funds and establishing all components of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

In addition, within "An influential Europe" pillar, the Croatian Presidency presented the **European Union as the guarantor of the prosperity and stability of South East Europe**, with a focus on fostering continued reform processes in South East Europe and regional cooperation and continuation of enlargement policy, which was one of the priorities of the General Affairs Council.

At the very beginning, the Croatian presidency was confronted with unpredictable crises at the level of the European Union and beyond. The first challenge was the pressure of the new wave of migration on the borders of the European Union, i.e. the increase in the number of illegal crossings of the Greek-Turkish border.

Following the outbreak of the migration crisis at the Greek-Turkish border, on 3 March 2020, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenković together with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Parliament David Sassoli, visited the Greek-Turkish land border in this way supporting the efforts made by Greece to



protect its external borders, also preventing irregular migration. In addition, an extraordinary Council meeting took place on 4 March 2020 in the format of Home Affairs Ministers, where the Council expressed its solidarity with Greece and other countries that might find themselves in a similar situation. All Member States, the European Commission and the European Union agencies have stressed their determination to protect the external borders of the European Union, as well as the ineligibility of illegal entry and abuse of the asylum system.

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant implications for the implementation of the programme and the planned priorities and activities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, adapting it to the crisis mode of operation. In total, 22 proposals proposed by the European Commission in response to the COVID-19 crisis were adopted under the Croatian Presidency as a matter of urgency.

In addition, a number of priorities in the area of external relations and common foreign and security policy were met during the Croatian Presidency of the Council. The Croatian Presidency managed to bring the issue of enlargement of the European Union to the centre of attention of the Member States, by opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia and by advancing the accession negotiations with Montenegro. On 5 June 2020, Council of the European Union's conclusions were adopted on strengthening cooperation with the Western Balkans partners on migration and security. The Council conclusions called for continued support to the Western Balkans to achieve a more effective

migration and border management policy, to further improve their asylum systems and to improve cooperation on readmission and return, to effectively combat organised crime, terrorism and violent extremism, to increase their capacity to tackle the spread of disinformation and fake news, and to respond to possible cyber attacks and hybrid threats. The strengthening of operational cooperation is encouraged, in particular by developing information exchange.

On 11 May 2020, the Council of the European Union also approved conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, reaffirming its strategic importance and its shared commitment to building a common space of democracy, prosperity and stability. On 18 June, a virtual summit was held between the Heads of State of the European Union and the six Eastern Partnership Countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

Furthermore, on 8 June 2020, the Council of the European Union approved conclusions on Team Europe – a global response to the COVID-19 crisis, authorising the mobilisation of almost EUR 36 billion to help partner countries tackle the pandemic and its consequences.

The adoption of conclusions on the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, on cooperation with the Western Balkan countries in the area of security and migration, on cooperation with the Eastern Partnership and on the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Team Europe) has resulted in the achievement of the priority of promoting stability, security and resilience in



the European Union's neighbourhood, notably in South East Europe.

Also, on 28 May 2020, in the capacity of the Presidency of the Republic of Croatia of the Council of the European Union, a video conference of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers of the European Union and the United States was held. The video conference discussed European and US views on important justice and home affairs issues during and after the pandemic, focusing on the exchange of information on measures taken, lessons learned and plans for the coming period. This included criminality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effectiveness of restrictive measures and travel conditions, and visa reciprocity.

2.1.1. Zagreb Summit

On 6 May 2020, the Zagreb Summit took place at the initiative of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia. The meeting represented the central event of the Croatian presidency. The meeting took the form of a video conference in the full format of all leaders of the 27 Member States of the European Union, Mr Michel, President of the European Council, and Ms von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, the leaders of the six countries of South East Europe, and international financial institutions. In addition, the President of the European Parliament, Mr Sassoli, and the Vice-President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mr Borell, participated in the meeting. The meeting focused on the COVID-19 crisis and the perspectives of the Western Balkans.

At the meeting, the European Union encouraged Western Balkans leaders, by deepening regional economic integration and bringing the region and its companies closer to the European Union's internal market, to exploit the potential of regional cooperation in order to facilitate the economic recovery after the crisis. Furthermore, the European Commission presented an economic and investment plan for the region to boost economies while improving competitiveness, which should enable the Western Balkans to: fully connect with the European Union's single market, create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, improve the business and investment environment, promote the Green Deal in the Western Balkans and strengthen the digital economy and connectivity. The Summit participants discussed common security challenges and called for further development of cooperation to stem irregular migration flows. Increased cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism was agreed upon. It was concluded that the fight against corruption and organised crime is essential for the region's transformation and its security and stability.

The Zagreb Declaration was adopted at the meeting, which confirmed the European perspective of the South East European countries and the commitment of the Western Balkans partners to uphold European values and principles. The Declaration highlights mutual solidarity in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, and the countries of the region are expected to respect European values and the rule of law of the European Union, which is preparing a major economic package of over EUR 3.3 billion. Emphasis was placed on the cooperation of the Western Balkan countries in addressing migration challenges,

including the fight against migrant smuggling, as well as the desire to further develop and use new instruments such as cooperation with Frontex, EASO and Europol. Further support for improving reception capacity in the Western Balkans is also highlighted.

2.1.2. Croatian EMN e-conference during the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

On 24 June 2020, as part of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the EMN e-conference “The challenges of irregular migration on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route during the COVID-19 pandemic” took place. The conference built on the issues that the

Republic of Croatia put into focus of the Presidency.

Keynote speeches were given by Zoran Ničeno, Head of Border Police Directorate, and Johannes Luchner, Director for Strategy and General Affairs in the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission. The speakers at the conference were representatives from European institutions, international and non-governmental organisations, police services and universities (European Commission, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Europol, International Organisation of the Red Cross, Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb).



Figure 1 – View of an invitation to the Croatian EMN Conference
Source: Ministry of the Interior



The closing speech was given by Mr Magnus Ovilius, Head of Agencies and Networks Coordination Sector and Chair of the European Migration Network in the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission.

In his opening speech, Mr Ničeno pointed out that the Eastern Mediterranean route has been one of the main entrances to Europe for many years, with a decrease in illegal border crossings, mainly due to the spread of COVID-19, in 2020. Also, reinforced border controls and inaccessible terrain have led to an increase in the number of migrants stranded in the region and, as a consequence, there is an increase in demand for smuggling services. For this reason, cooperation with neighbouring countries in the fight against smuggling networks was a priority during the Croatian Presidency. Mr Ničeno stressed that all activities of the Member States and of the European Union in relation to irregular migrants must comply with the international and fundamental rights protection standards of the European Union.

Mr Luchner announced a new Pact on Migration and Asylum with a view to finding a fair and efficient way to foster solidarity between Member States and with an emphasis on legal migration as a key priority. He also stressed, in the context of the new Pact, the importance of consensus on the need for a reformed sustainable Common European Asylum System that can operate effectively in normal times as well as in crises, and how to link asylum and return procedures more closely in order to prevent secondary movements, speed up asylum application decision-making, prevent abuses and facilitate returns. With

regard to solidarity, he stressed that countries under pressure must receive substantial support in the area of asylum and in effectively addressing irregular migration and return.

The conference then continued in three panels where the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route and the impact of COVID-19 on migration movements and smuggling of migrants were discussed.

The first panel highlighted that the application of restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly reduced the mobility of migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route until mid-May, when there was increased migratory pressure at the borders of North Macedonia and Albania. The humanitarian dimension of the impact of pandemic-related restrictive measures on migrants was highlighted. The European Commission pointed out that in response to the pandemic, it has provided guidance on how to ensure the smooth continuation of asylum and return procedures during the health crisis.

The panel on migrant smuggling highlighted that smuggling activities in the Western Balkans take place through well-organised criminal networks using resources that put migrants at high risk. This criminal activity is difficult to tackle as it is a highly profitable job with relatively low detection risks. Cooperation with third countries is essential to implement a comprehensive, holistic and structured response to fight against migrant smuggling on the Western Balkan route.

The final panel on the protection of fundamental rights in the context of irregular



migration showed that recent changes in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have opened up a new understanding of states' border surveillance obligations.

In conclusion, the conference provided an opportunity to present a Practical handbook on fundamental human rights when carrying out border control at the land borders of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). When presenting the handbook, it was pointed out that the practical

implementation of respect for human rights mainly binds officials working at border crossing points and along the green border (Figure 2). Therefore, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has prepared a practical handbook aimed at supporting the implementation of the safeguards relating to the respect of fundamental human rights laid down in the *Schengen Borders Code* (Regulation (EU) 2016/399) and other legal instruments of the European Union in their daily work when carrying out border control at external land borders.

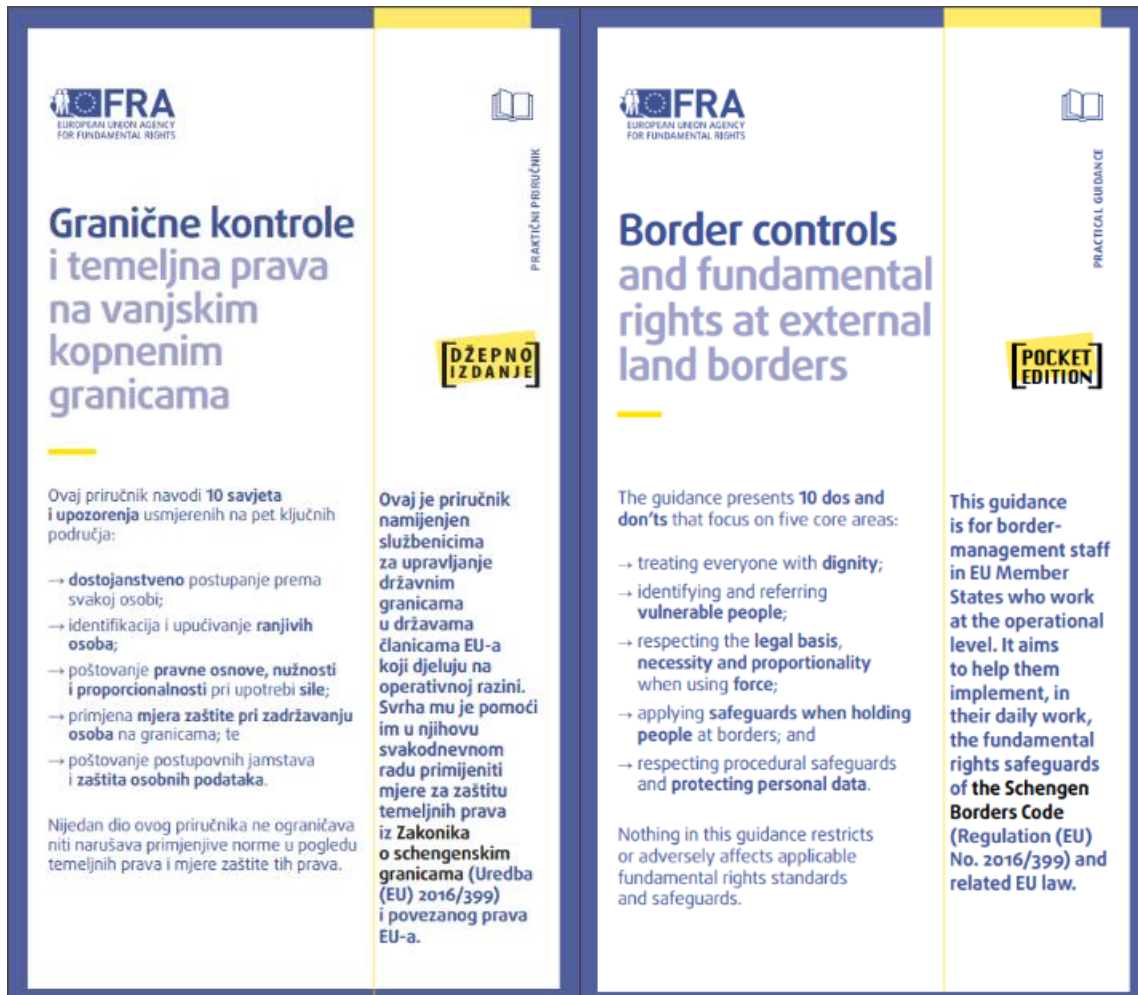


Figure 2 – Practical Guidance on Border controls and fundamental rights at external borders (FRA)

Source: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/border-controls-and-fundamental-rights-external-land-borders>



One of the key messages of the conference was that migration will not disappear but will continue and that we should strive to achieve sustainable and predictable migration management while respecting the fundamental rights and fundamental values on which the European Union is founded.

The conference was organised in cooperation between EMN NCP HR and the European Commission, while technical support for the conference was provided by the National Contact Point for EMN Luxembourg.

2.2. National context for the development of migration policy

The context for the development of asylum and migration policy in the Republic of Croatia was largely determined in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was reflected in all areas of migration. The Republic of Croatia adapted to the new situation by introducing a series of measures and decisions aimed at preventing the further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Epidemiological measures also affected the working conditions of national authorities, changes in administrative procedures, adaptations of the prescribed time limits and the modalities for regulating the stay of third-country nationals.

One of the most significant legislative changes in the field of migration is the work on a proposal for a new Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 133/20) adopted at the end of 2020, which provides for the abolition of annual quotas for employment permits for third-country nationals, the introduction of a labour market test in order to respond more effectively to the needs of the labour market

and the introduction of a new category – digital nomads. The Act on amendments to the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members (Official Gazette, No 144/20), adopted also at the end of 2020, implemented the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community.

Despite the pandemic, the Republic of Croatia continued to carry out capacity-building activities for implementers of procedures in the area of international protection, return, irregular migration and in border procedures in general. In addition, it continued to invest in border control equipment, capacities related to the equipment of reception and accommodation facilities for irregular migrants and asylum seekers. In doing so, the Republic of Croatia draws on the experience and practices of the European Union by participating in the working bodies of the institutions of the European Union and in the activities of Frontex, EASO and others.

The activity of strengthening the capacity of the border police to protect the external border of the European Union was also the subject of a number of joint meetings between the State Secretaries of the Ministries of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia and Slovenia in 2020. The meetings also focused on joint cooperation to combat cross-border crime, in particular smuggling of persons, where the implementation of operational actions at the Croatian-Slovenian border was agreed upon. The meetings also addressed the perspective of Croatia's



membership in the Schengen area. With regard to the abovementioned, later in 2020, and more specifically following the re-targeted visit of the Schengen evaluation team for the management of the external borders, the European Commission confirmed that Croatia had fulfilled the technical conditions for entering the Schengen area and successfully completed the Schengen evaluation process, which started in June 2015.

The protection of the European Union's external border and countering irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean route was also discussed at the Ministerial Conference on Home Affairs in July 2020 in Vienna. The conference brought together representatives of the Member States of the European Union, the European Commission, the Western Balkan countries, relevant European Union agencies such as Frontex, Europol, EASO and CEPOL, Schengen partners and other international partners. The importance of cooperation between Member States, European law enforcement agencies, third countries and other external actors in combating migrant smuggling was underlined. The contribution to security and stability on the Eastern Mediterranean route in relation to all situation-affected sides, with a focus on saving lives, preventing and combating illegal migration, the effective protection of external borders, the prevention of new migration, the strengthening of individual states' asylum systems and the functional return to countries of origin, was identified as an objective of common interest of all actors involved.

A Declaration on strategic issues and further operational actions was adopted at the Conference, which also referred to the conclusions of the Council of the European Union on enhancing cooperation on security and migration with the Western Balkans partners adopted at the initiative of the Croatian Presidency.

The importance of Republic of Croatia's effective cooperation with the countries of South East Europe was also highlighted in the video conference of the Ministers of Interior of the European Union in November 2020 held under the German Presidency of the Council of the EU. Referring to the new Pact on Migration and Asylum and its key elements, the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, Davor Božinović, pointed out that the key to a successful functioning of the European migration and asylum policy lies in coordinated actions towards countries of origin and transit and that without effective cooperation the issue of return will not be possible. He stressed the importance of uniform messages on the importance of bilateral and European cooperation on return, defining a common list of safe third countries and countries of origin of the European Union, and strengthening cooperation with third countries in establishing digital tools to better control migration and promote further development of legal migration pathways. With regard to the second key element of the new Pact, the issue of mandatory border procedures and the distinction between applicants for international protection and those who do not exercise such a right, Mr Božinović pointed out that, in order to carry out the related security checks, it is essential



that the new information systems are also applied in the Member States at the external borders of the Union. He stressed Croatia's willingness to carry out checks, but also the need for access to the systems, which depends on the membership in the Schengen area.

As regards the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, the meeting stressed that the Republic of Croatia supports a flexible and mandatory approach, but with the three pillars of solidarity defined in the Pact, and as a fourth proposes to take into account the Member States' efforts to protect the external border.

2.2.1. Organisation of the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

In 2020, there was an institutional change in the work of state bodies in the Republic of Croatia, which affected changes in the competence of work on certain migration issues.

The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy was set up by the Act on the Organisation and Competence of State Administration Bodies (Official Gazette, No 85/20)² adopted by the Croatian Parliament at its session on 22 July 2020, which took over the remit of two ministries: Ministry of Labour and Pension System and Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy.

2.2.2. Virtual Roundtable on Integration

On 21 December 2020, EMN NCP HR organized a virtual roundtable on the topic of integration challenges in the Republic of Croatia, where Croatia and the European strategic framework for integration were discussed. The roundtable was an opportunity to share the experiences of different stakeholders in the integration process and to identify space for further partnership among all participants.

The European Union Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 was presented at the roundtable. It promotes the inclusion of all people and the removal of potential obstacles to the inclusion and participation of migrants in European society. The Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia presented the work on the new Action Plan for persons granted international protection for the period 2021-2023, which formalises cooperation with local self-government units, establishes a system for monitoring the results of the implementation of integration measures and contains educational activities for representatives of public institutions and NGOs at local level. Subsequently, representatives of NGOs and state institutions presented and discussed the challenges and experience of implementing projects related to the integration process so far. Good practice was presented by the City of Karlovac, which successfully integrated

² https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_07_85_1593.html



migrants through a resettlement programme. The panel also included two successfully integrated migrants who have been living and working in the Republic of Croatia for many years.

They shared with the audience their experience and all the challenges they encountered when they were going through the process of integration into Croatian society.



3. LEGAL MIGRATION

3.1. Statistical data on legal migration

According to preliminary data provided by the Ministry of the Interior,³ and in line with the Eurostat methodology, a total of 22,095 first residence permits⁴ were issued in the Republic of Croatia to third-country nationals in 2020. Out of the total number of first residence permits issued in 2020, there were 20,327 permits granted for the purpose

of work, 1,327 permits granted for the purpose of family reunification, 85 permits granted for the purpose of schooling and university studies, and 356 permits granted for other purposes (Chart 1).

Comparison of the available data on the first residence permits issued in 2019 and 2020 indicates that the total number of first permits issued during 2020 does not amount to half of the total number of first permits

Total first residence permits issued in the Republic of Croatia in 2020 (according to EUROSTAT methodology)

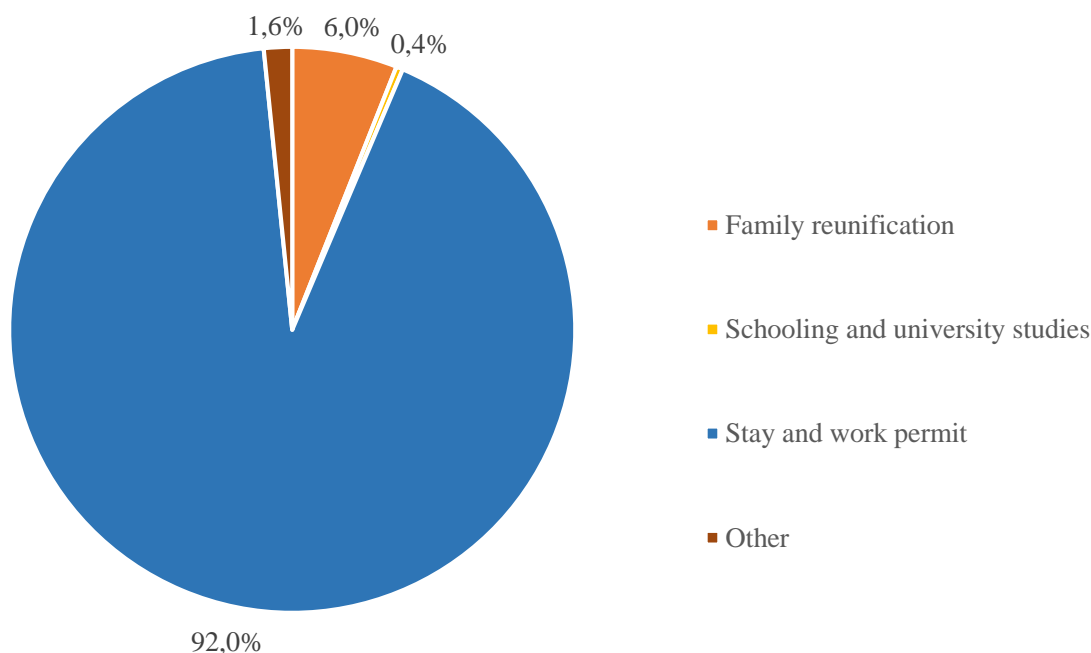


Chart 1. The total number of first residence permits issued in the Republic of Croatia in 2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior (preliminary data)

³ The data refers to preliminary data on 21 April 2021, which is still being processed and does not include UK nationals. Data is submitted to Eurostat by 30 June, after which official records will be published on the Eurostat website.

⁴ Definition of first residence permits:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/Annexes/migr_res_esqrs_an1.pdf.



issued during 2019 (Chart 2). This reduction can be related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a significantly smaller number of first stay and work permits issued, representing the largest share in the first residence permits issued in 2019 and 2020.

In addition to the decrease in the number of first residence permits for stay and work, notable was also a decrease in the total number of issued stay and work permits, i.e. temporary residence for the purpose of work. Thus, in 2019 a total of 72,484 permits were issued, in comparison to 66,706 permits issued in 2020.

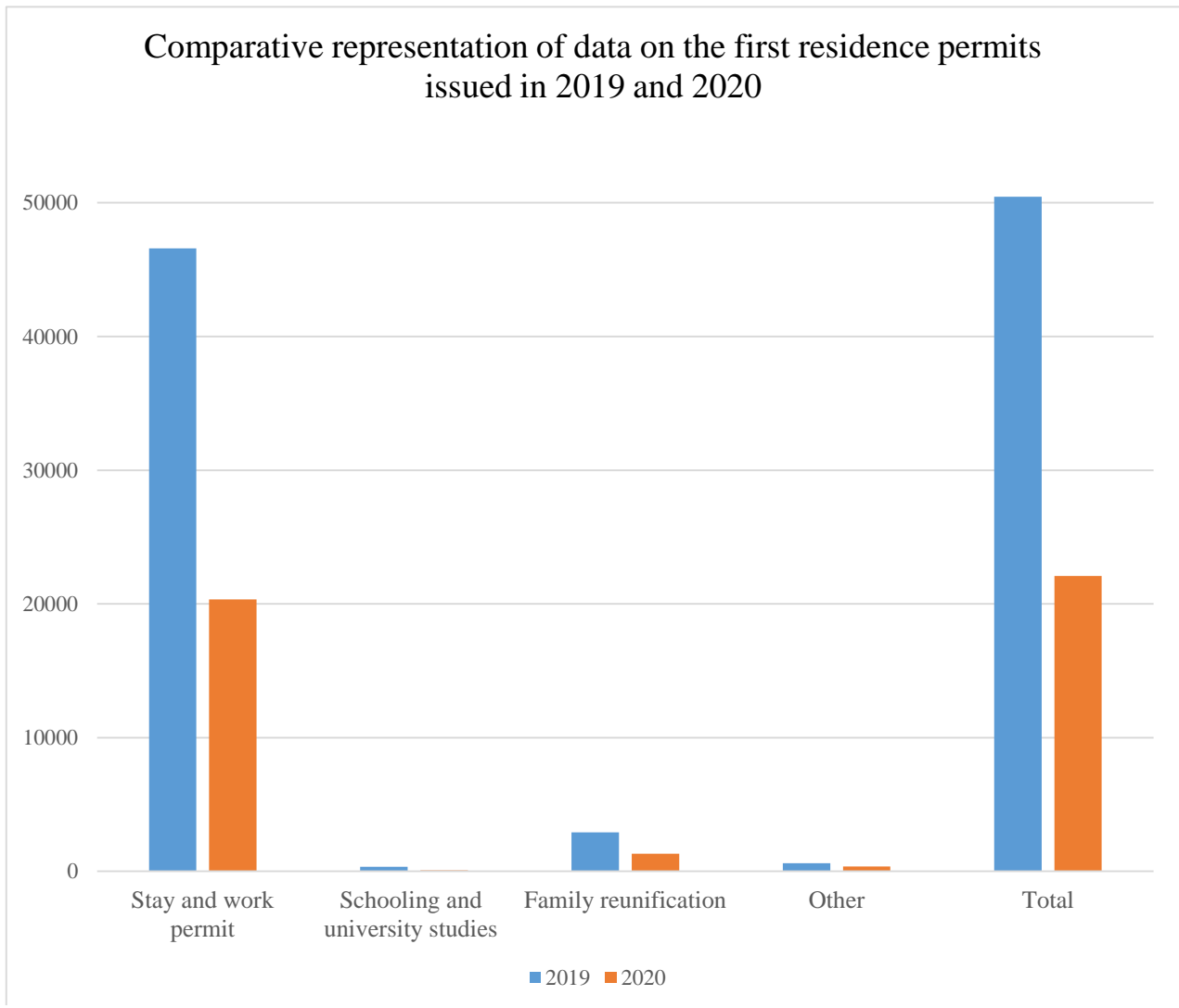


Chart 2. Comparative representation of data on the first residence permits issued in 2019 and 2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior (preliminary data)



3.2. Legislative amendments

3.2.1. The Act on the Posting of Workers to the Republic of Croatia and Cross-border Enforcement of Fines

The Act on the Posting of Workers to the Republic of Croatia and Cross-border Enforcement of Fines (Official Gazette, No 128/20)⁵ entered into force on 1 January 2020, and with its enforcement the Act on the Cross-border Enforcement of Decisions on Fines in the Area of Posting of Workers (Official Gazette, No 101/17) ceased to be valid. The provisions regarding posted workers, which were previously regulated by the Aliens Act, were removed from the new Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 133/20), and they are now regulated by the Act on the Posting of Workers.

This Act regulates the working conditions and rights of workers who are sent to work for a limited period of time in the Republic of Croatia from the European Union, a contracting state of the European Economic Area, the Swiss Confederation or a third country, in order to ensure the protection of workers. The Act on the Posting of Workers also prescribes the obligations of employers and the legal provisions and procedures for mutual assistance and cooperation of competent authorities of Member States in cross-border enforcement of fines issued by the competent authority or certified by the administrative body or court

of a Member State, imposed on a service provider established in a Member State of the European Economic Area for the infringement of rights of the posted worker or the infringement of the posting rules. The amounts of fines are also stated, and the legal provisions define the duration of the posting, the obligations of the foreign employer, the working conditions of the posted worker, judicial protection, access to information and administrative cooperation, assessment of the facts inherent in the posting, and it is stipulated that the supervision of the implementation of the Act is performed by the ministry competent for labor affairs.

3.2.2. Legislative amendments due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The area of entry, residence and work of third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia during 2020 was regulated by the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 130/11, 74/13, 69/17, 46/18 and 53/20). On 30 April 2020, the Croatian Parliament promulgated the Act Amending the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 53/20),⁶ which entered into force on 1 May 2020. The amendments were made due to the epidemiological situation caused by the COVID-19 disease in order to reduce social contacts in police departments and stations. The amendments allowed third-country nationals to use expired biometric residence permits, with the obligation to submit a request for regulating residence status.

⁵ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_11_128_2438.html

⁶ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_04_53_1059.html



The Croatian Parliament also concurrently promulgated the Act Amending the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members (Official Gazette, No 53/20). The amendments also allow nationals of a Member State of the European Economic Area and their family members, who have been issued with a temporary residence permit and residence card, to postpone the application for a temporary residence permit and residence card for the duration of the pandemic. Pursuant to the amendments to both Acts actions in administrative proceedings that third-country nationals and citizens of the European Economic Area are obliged to take within the deadlines prescribed by the Acts may be taken no later than 30 days from the date of the declaration of cessation of the pandemic.

3.2.3. The Act on amendments to the Act on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications

The Croatian Parliament promulgated the Act on amendments to the Act on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications (Official Gazette, No 47/20)⁷ on 7 April 2020. It is important to state that by these amendments the EU Directive 2018/958 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 June 2018 on the examination of proportionality before the adoption of new regulations governing professions has been implemented.

3.2.4. Implementation of the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community

On 17 December 2020, the Croatian Parliament promulgated the Act on amendments to the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members (Official Gazette, No 144/20), which entered into force on 1 January 2021. This Act implemented the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community (OJ L 29, 31.1.2020). With this Act, nationals of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and members of their families were singled out, as defined by an article of the Agreement relating to personal scope, as persons to whom the provisions of the Act on EEA Nationals and Their Family Members continue to apply, if not stipulated otherwise by the Agreement.

3.2.5. The Ordinance on the amendments to the Ordinance regarding the status and work of third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia and the Ordinance on the amendments to the Ordinance regarding highly qualified TCNs residence and work in the Republic of Croatia

The Ordinance on the amendments to the Ordinance regarding the status and work

⁷ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_04_47_948.html



of third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 146/20)⁸ and the Ordinance on the amendments to the Ordinance regarding highly qualified third-country nationals residence and work in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 146/20),⁹ entered into force on 1 January 2021. The amendments to the ordinances in question ensure the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2017/1954 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2017 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1030/2002 laying down a uniform format for residence permits for third-country nationals (OJ L 286, 1.11.2017). Therefore, the amendments to the ordinances were aiming to achieve standardization and administrative alignment of residence permit formats for third-country nationals with the legal provisions in force.

3.2.6. The Aliens Act

During 2020, a Proposal for the Aliens Act was being drafted, and was adopted by the Croatian Parliament on 25 November 2020.

Some of the novelties of the new Aliens Act (Official Gazette No 133/20)¹⁰ include issuing a long-stay D visa by a diplomatic mission/consular post of the Republic of Croatia to a third-country national who has been granted a temporary residence permit/stay and work permit. Special emphasis is placed on a new category of persons who are enabled to live and work

from the Republic of Croatia - temporary residence permit for the purpose of digital nomads, given that it is an innovative approach to migration movements: a digital nomad is defined as a third-country national who is employed or performs business through communication technology for a foreign company or his own company not registered in the Republic of Croatia and does not perform jobs or provide services to employers in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Temporary residence permit for the purpose of stay of digital nomads is granted for one year. The stay cannot be extended. Rather, third-country nationals can reapply after the expiration of 6 months from the expiration of temporary residence of digital nomads. The digitalization of the administration has enabled the submission of applications for temporary residence permits for the purpose of digital nomads through the web application available on the official website of the Ministry of the Interior and on the web application *Enter Croatia*.

The Aliens Act enabled the regulation of temporary residence for humanitarian reasons for Croatians who have a foreign citizenship. More favorable provisions have been prescribed for the acquisition of permanent residence in the Republic of Croatia for family members of Croatian nationals and members of the Croatian people who have foreign citizenship.

One of the most significant amendments in the new Act is the abolition of

⁸ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_12_146_2838.html

⁹ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_12_146_2837.html

¹⁰ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_12_133_2520.html



annual quotas for employment permits for third-country nationals. Since stay and work permits are not granted on the basis of the annual quota, they are granted on the basis of labour market testing and opinion of the Croatian Employment Service. The labour market test is conducted at the request of the employer before applying for a stay and work permit. The Croatian Employment Service, which is responsible for conducting the labour market test, analyses the situation in the register of unemployed persons in the Republic of Croatia and conducts the mediation procedure if there are persons in the register of unemployed persons on the domestic labour market who meet the requirements of the employer. If the labour market test shows that there are no available persons in the unemployment register who meet the employer's employment requirements or they cannot be met by migrations of unemployed persons in the country, the employer may request the opinion of the regional employment office on the employment possibilities of third-country nationals.

Consequently, the new model of regulating the employment of third-country nationals stipulates that a positive opinion of the Croatian Employment Service is attached to the applications for stay and work permits. Exceptionally, an employer who intends to employ a seasonal worker in agriculture, forestry, catering and tourism for up to 90 days during a calendar year will not be required to submit the opinion of the Croatian Employment Service if an extension of a stay and work permit is requested for the same employer and the same third-country national. The Aliens Act also prescribes

certain categories of third-country nationals to whom the Ministry of the Interior may issue stay and work permits through the competent police administration or police station without a labour market test and the opinion of the Croatian Employment Service. The new model of regulating the employment of third-country nationals requires strengthened cooperation between state institutions, especially in the area of implementing supervision and protection of workers' rights.

3.3. Impact of COVID-19 on measures regarding legal migration

3.3.1. Measures of regulating expired temporary residence permits and visas due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The emerging pandemic situation in 2020 has created complex challenges in human migration, which were addressed by prescribing and adapting measures regarding legal migration in accordance with the epidemiological situation in the Republic of Croatia. In order to resolve the residence status and find favorable solutions for third-country nationals on temporary residence in the Republic of Croatia whose residence permit has expired, or visa holders whose visa has expired, and who could not leave the territory of the Republic of Croatia in time, these categories were allowed to apply for temporary residence for other purposes at competent police administrations or stations. However, third-country nationals still had to meet the conditions prescribed by the Aliens Act.



3.3.2. Impact of COVID-19 on the procedure for applying and issuing residence permits

Despite the extraordinary conditions caused by the epidemiological situation, applications for temporary residence, permanent residence and stay and work permits could be submitted throughout 2020, while taking into account the proportionality between ensuring public health and maintaining the continuous operation of civil services so that third-country nationals can exercise guaranteed rights and perform prescribed obligations. A number of measures have been taken to reduce physical contact including urging the parties to communicate with police administrations and stations remotely, as much as possible. Applications for stay and work permits, temporary residence and registration of residence for citizens of the Member States and members of their families were submitted by e-mail. The issuance of biometric residence permits to third-country nationals by the Ministry of the Interior through police administrations or stations has also been adapted to epidemiological conditions. When obtaining biometric residence permits, third-country nationals could arrange their arrival at the police administration or station via e-mail or by telephone.

3.3.3. Work of third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia

During 2019, the Ministry of the Interior enabled employers to submit applications for stay and work permits based on the annual quota via e-mail. By enabling the submission of applications by e-mail,

efforts were made to relieve employers and reduce congestion at the premises of police administrations or stations, and the simplification and digitization of administrative procedures in the epidemiological situation proved to be extremely useful as it reduced social contact.

Job protection measures were introduced in March 2020 to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Croatian economy. These measures, implemented during March, also included financial support to employers in sectors affected by epidemiological circumstances, whose final beneficiaries were employees. Financial support amounted to the average minimum wage in March, and the support was increased by 20% during April and May 2020. Job protection measures remained in place until the end of 2020, with some adjustments, but it is important to point out that the right to support was also provided to third-country nationals with a valid residence permit.

3.3.4. Impact of COVID-19 on international students

Entry into the Republic of Croatia was challenging due to the extraordinary epidemiological situation and the implementation of epidemiological measures and restriction of movement across the border, which also affected the issuance of visas. In certain periods, visa applications proceedings were suspended, however in accordance with the epidemiological situation the suspensions were gradually removed if the situation allowed it. The possibility of students applying for a visa was



extended on 15 June 2020 by including students who were granted temporary residence in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. As some of the higher education institutions recorded delays in the visa issuance process, the above unfavourable circumstances were taken into account during the administrative deadlines of the higher education institutions that were extended in favour of students. Also, some higher education institutions applied digitalization for submitting documentation and provided remote access for submitting applications, and the Ministry of Science and Education encouraged educational institutions to enable distance learning, particularly when it comes to international students, in order to maintain educational mobility even in extraordinary epidemiological conditions.

3.4. Economic migration

3.4.1. The quota system and labour market needs in 2020

The Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Decision on determining the annual quota of permits for the employment of foreigners for the calendar year 2020 (Official Gazette, No 113/19),¹¹ on 22 November 2019. The annual quota of permits for new employment of third-country nationals, seasonal work, intra-corporate transferees and the implementation of strategic investment projects amounted to a total of 78,470 permits. The annual quota for

the employment of third-country nationals is set at 64,604 new employment permits, 12,770 for seasonal work (of which 12,000 for seasonal work in tourism and catering, and 770 in agriculture and forestry), 96 permits for intra-corporate transferees, 1,000 for the implementation of strategic investment projects and 25,000 permits for the extension of already issued work permits (Table 1).

The decision to determine the annual quota of employment permits for foreigners for the calendar year 2020 was made on the basis of needs and the state of the labour market in accordance with the number of stay and work permits issued to third-country nationals by work activities and occupations during 2019, and the number and structure of unemployed persons in the records of the Croatian Employment Service. The proposal for the Decision was initiated by the Ministry of Labor and Pension System based on the number of residence and work permits issued to third-country nationals during 2019 and the structure of unemployed persons in the records of the Croatian Employment Service. The competent ministries, the Croatian Employment Service, the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, the Croatian Employers' Association and social partners responded to the proposal.¹² The proposals of the competent ministries and institutions were adopted while taking into account the real needs and situation on the labor market, the

¹¹ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_11_113_2271.html

¹² Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy: „Održana 191. sjednica Vlade Republike Hrvatske“ <https://mrosp.gov.hr/vijesti/odrzana-191-sjednica-vlade-republike-hrvatske/5981?big=1>



number of unemployed and employment opportunities and education of the available workforce. The Minister responsible for labour is authorized by a Decision to increase and redistribute the established quota of permits in the activities of tourism and catering for up to 5,000 permits and construction for up to 5,000 permits, depending on the needs and situation on the labour market. Since 2020 was marked by

extraordinary epidemiological circumstances that affected the migration and the economy, there were significant changes in the situation and demand in the labour market, so during 2020, unlike the previous years, no supplement decisions were made to increase annual quota for employment of foreigners.

Table 1 – Annual quota of permits for the employment of foreigners 2020

The annual quota of permits for the employment of foreigners for the calendar year 2020	Quota
1. CONSTRUCTION	33,300
2. SHIPBUILDING	1,100
3. TOURISM AND CATERING	18,370
4. CULTURE	25
5. TRAFFIC	2,904
6. HEALTH CARE	90
7. SOCIAL CARE	250
8. FOOD INDUSTRY	1,410
9. MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY	890
10. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY	1,380
11. METAL INDUSTRY	2,300
12. IT SECTOR	685
13. ECONOMY AND TRADE	1,900
NEW PERMITS (TOTAL)	64,604
SEASONAL WORK	12,770
(AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY)	(770)
(TOURISM AND CATERING)	(12,000)
INTRA-CORPORATE TRANSFERS	96
STRATEGIC INVESTMENT PROJECTS	1,000
TOTAL	78,470
QUOTA FOR EXTENSION OF ISSUED WORK PERMITS	25,000

Source: Decision on determining the annual quota of permits for the employment of foreigners for the calendar year 2020 (Official Gazette, No 113/19)



Utilization of the annual quota by work activities in 2020

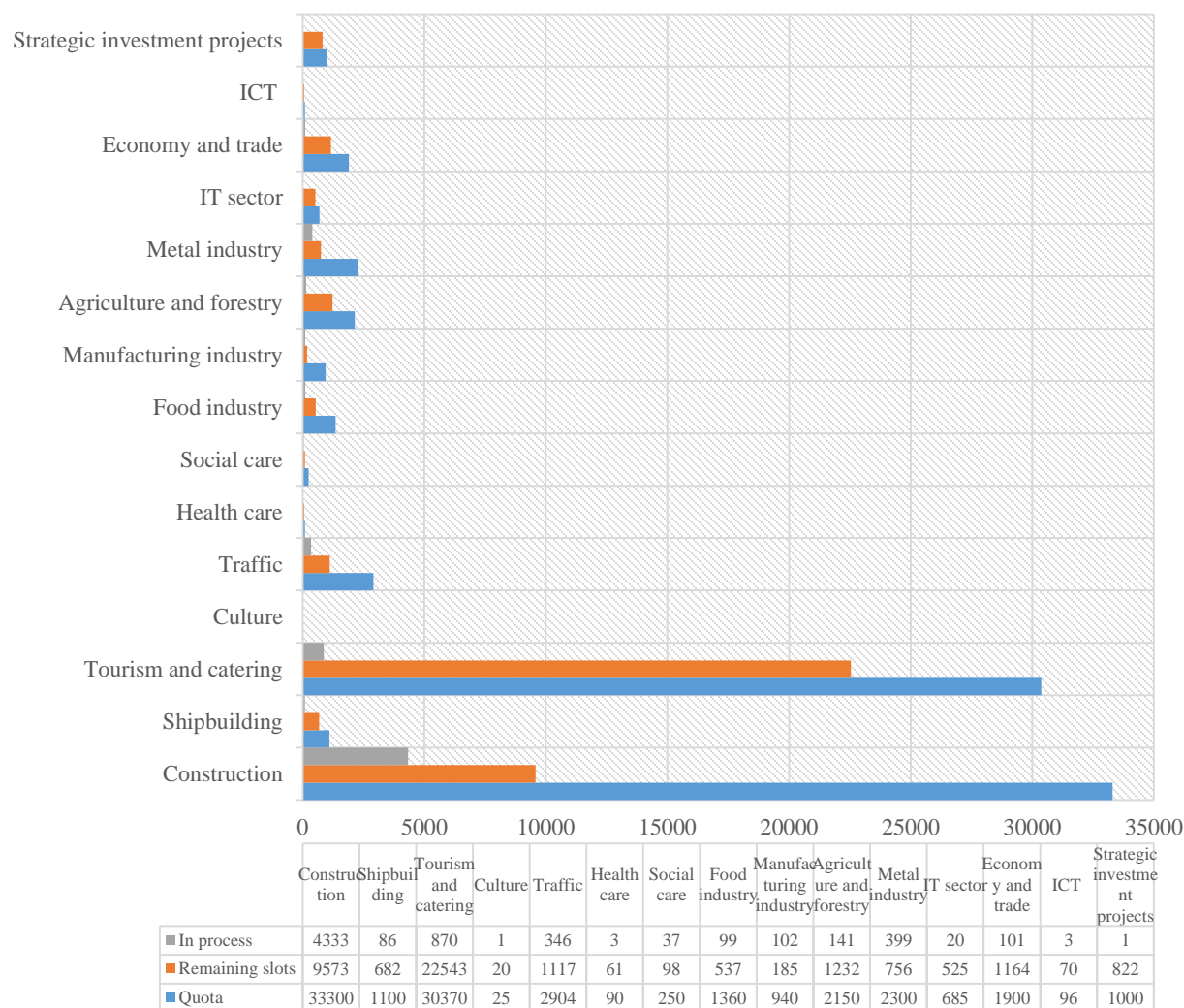


Chart 3 – Utilization of annual quota for 2020 on 31 December 2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior

<https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2020/Kvote/ISKORISTENOST-GODISNJE-KVOTE-NA-DAN-31-12-2020-GODINE.pdf>

When comparing the utilization of the annual quota by work activities in 2020 and 2019, it is evident that during 2020 only 50% of the quota envisaged by the quota of employment permits for foreigners for 2020 was utilized, while the total utilization of the annual quota in 2019 exceeded 90% (Table 2). It is also notable that during 2020 there

was a significant decline in quota utilization in almost all work activities, except the culture sector, and a slight decline in health care and social care work sectors.



Table 2 – Utilization of annual quota for 2020 on 31 December 2020

Title of work activities	Quota 2020	Utilized places 2020 ¹³	Percentage of utilization 2020 ¹⁴	Increasing of the quota in 2020 compared to 2019	Quota 2019	Utilized places 2019	Percentage of utilization 2019
Construction	33300	23727	71%	38%	24115	21685	90%
Shipbuilding	1100	418	38%	0%	1100	852	77%
Tourism and catering	30370	7827	26%	64%	18516	17668	95%
Culture	25	5	20%	0%	25	4	16%
Traffic	2904	1787	62%	21%	2404	2052	85%
Health care	90	29	32%	0%	90	32	36%
Social care	250	152	61%	0%	250	158	63%
Food industry	1360	823	61%	5%	1300	1118	86%
Manufacturing industry	940	755	80%	18%	800	730	91%
Agriculture and forestry	2150	918	43%	33%	1620	1167	72%
Metal industry	2300	1544	67%	2%	2250	1784	79%
IT sector	685	160	23%	251%	195	101	52%
Economy and trade	1900	736	39%	0%	1900	1595	84%
ICT	96	26	27%	20%	80	38	48%
Strategic investment projects	1000	178	18%	133%	430	329	77%
Total	78470	39085	50%	42%	55100	49317	90%

Source: Ministry of the Interior

¹³ Utilized positions are calculated by subtracting the number of non-utilized positions from the total quota.

¹⁴ Percentage of utilization is calculated by recalculating the percentage of utilized positions from the total sum.



The most significant decline was recorded in the sector of tourism and catering, where the utilization of quotas reached only 26%, while the utilization of the quota for tourism and catering in 2019 amounted to approximately 95%. This decline can be linked to the effects of the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19 on the world economy, migration and preventive measures. Consequently, the tourism and catering sector in 2020 proved to be an extremely vulnerable industry. Significant declines were also recorded in shipbuilding, agriculture and forestry, economy and trade, followed by intra-corporate transfers, and the utilization quota in these activities was almost halved compared to 2019. The activities of transport, food industry, manufacturing and metal industry recorded a slightly smaller decline. The utilization of the license quota in the activities of the IT sector was halved compared to 2019, but given that the increase in the total quota in 2020 was the most pronounced in these activities, the final amount of issued permits was 58% higher than the previous year. Despite the quota increase for strategic investment projects, quota utilization was only 18%.

3.5. Dissemination of information on legal pathways

Information on the conditions for stay and work of third-country nationals in the Republic of Croatia, other information concerning residence, visas, international protection, citizenship, traffic regulations and registration certificates, status of citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and temporary residence permits for the purpose of digital nomads is

published on the official bilingual website of the Ministry of the Interior: <https://mup.gov.hr/aliens-281621/281621>.

Information related to visas, citizenship, travel documents, stay of foreigners, and legalization of documents is also available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs: <http://www.mvep.hr/hr/konzularne-informacije/vize/pregled-viznog-sustava0/>.

The official website of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for timely and accurate information on coronavirus - *Koronavirus.hr*, is a bilingual website. It provides data on epidemiological measures in force and the epidemiological situation in the Republic of Croatia related to the arrival and stay of foreign nationals <https://www.koronavirus.hr/en>.

The multilingual website of the Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social Policy *Migracije.hr* contains a number of useful and practical information for third-country nationals and nationals of the European Economic Area, as well as a list of current laws relating to residence, work, health and social affairs, security of migrants residing in the Republic of Croatia; <https://migracije.hr/>. The website of the Croatian Employment Service is coordinated with other members of the European Employment Service in order to achieve job mobility of citizens of the Member States of the European Economic Area and useful information and services, especially for Croatian employers; <https://eures.hzz.hr/>.

Information on academic mobility is available on the websites of some higher education institutions of the Republic of



Croatia, however, centralized information is also available on the website of the Ministry of Science and Education dealing with international and EU cooperation, including categories of foreign students and researchers; <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute teme/medjunarodna-suradnja-i-eu/194>.

An overview of a number of programs, projects, activities in the field of research and education, as well as in the field of science and innovation is available on the website of the Agency for Mobility and European Union Programs; <https://www.mobilnost.hr/hr/>.

4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

4.1. Statistical data on international protection in 2020

According to the data of the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. statistical indicators of applicants for international protection by nationality and gender for the period 1 January 2020-31 December 2020, a total of 1,932 applicants for international protection were registered in the Republic of Croatia. Also, according to the available data, the most common countries of origin of applicants for international protection were: Afghanistan

(934), Iraq (435), Iran (100), Syria (96), and Turkey (93). Compared to last year's data, it is evident that there was no significant change in the total number of applications for international protection, but there are visible changes in the share of countries of origin of international protection applicants (Chart 4). The number of applicants originating from Afghanistan has tripled compared to 2019, the number of applicants originating from Iraq has decreased, and a significant decrease in applicants originating from Syria, Iran and Turkey has been recorded.

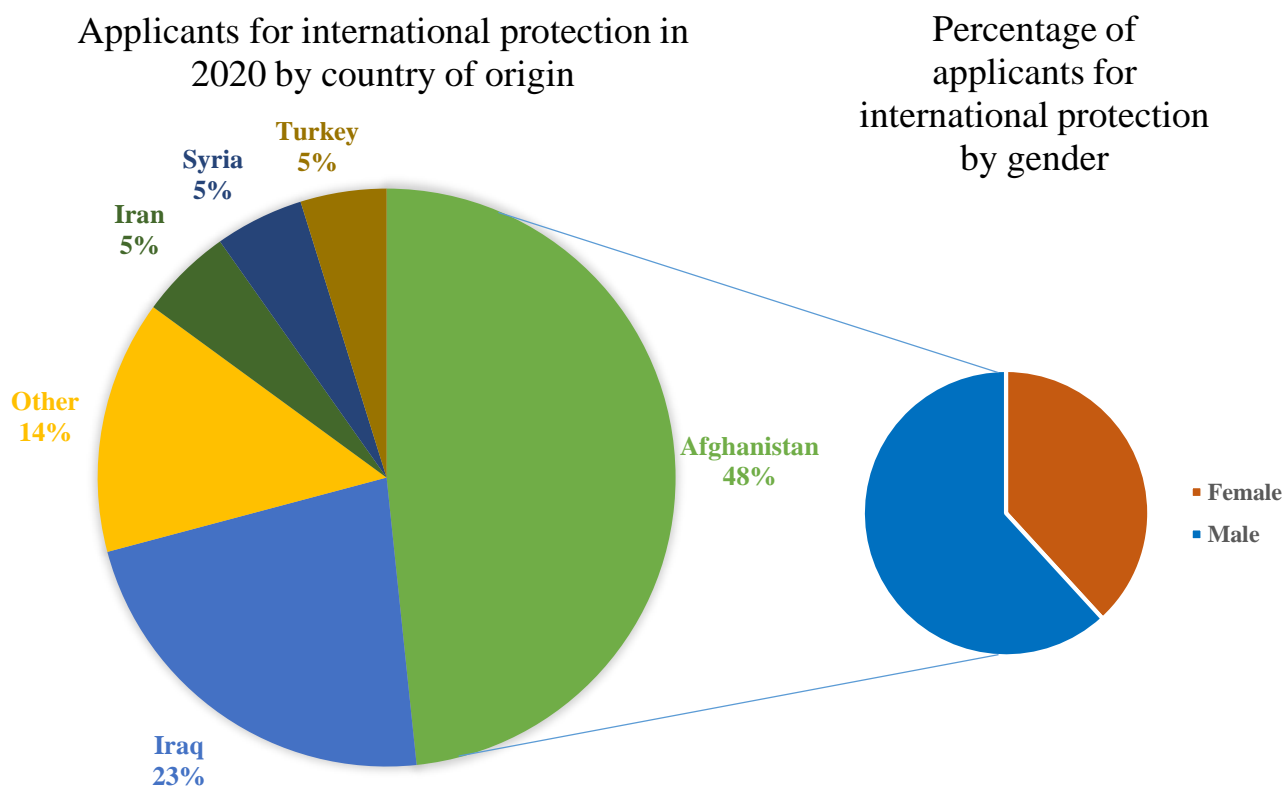


Chart 4 – Applicants for international protection by country of origin (nationality) in 2020

Source: https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/statistika_medjunarodna_zastita_2020.pdf

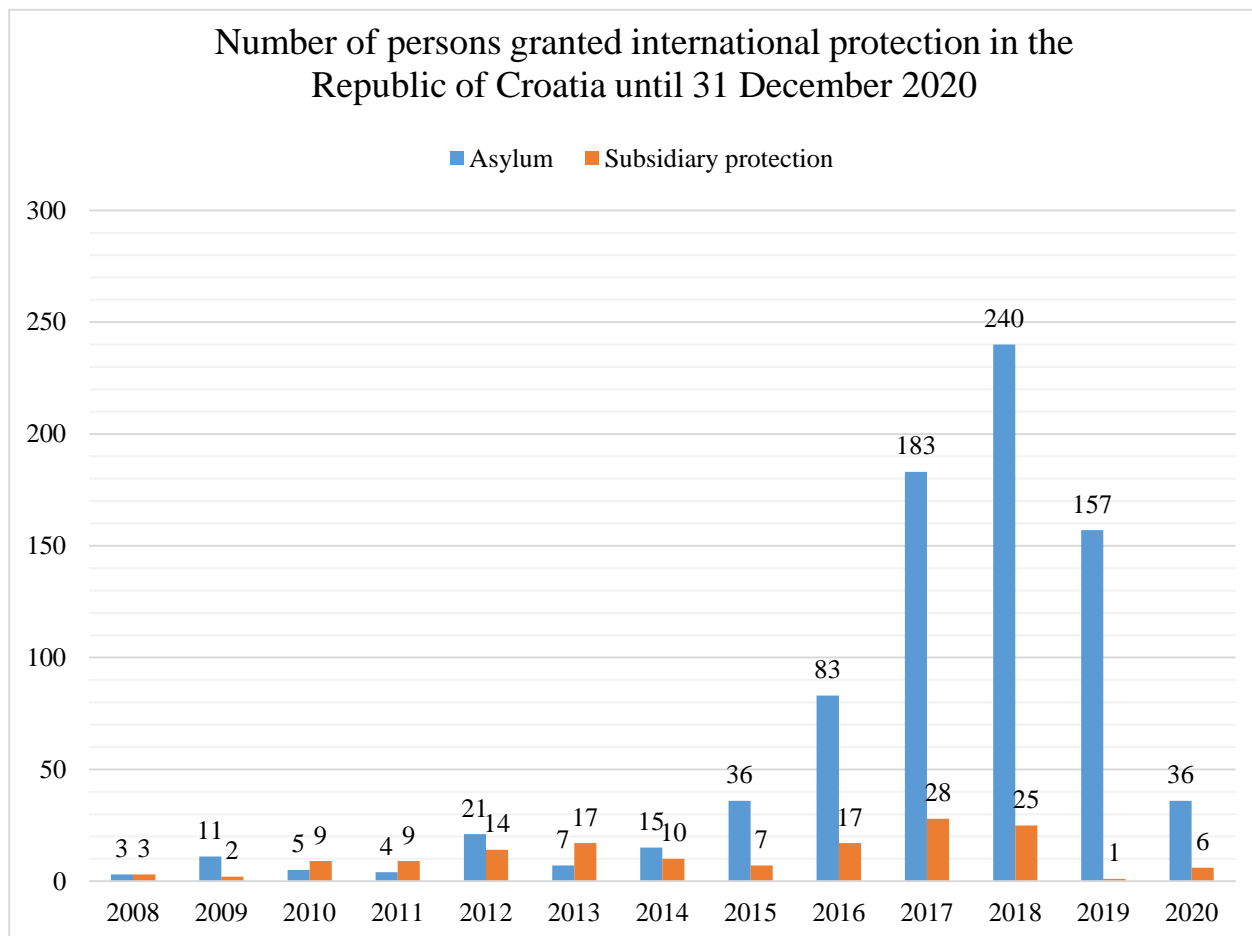


Chart 5 – Number of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia until 31 December 2020

Source: https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/statistika_medjunarodna_zastita_2020.pdf

During 2020, the applications of unaccompanied minors remained a priority, followed by unfounded applications, and also the applications of applicants for international protection who met the conditions of special procedural and reception guarantees, i.e. vulnerable groups of applicants and applicants in detention.

In the period in question, a total of 42 applicants were granted international protection, of which 36 persons were granted asylum, while 6 persons were granted subsidiary protection (Chart 5). Tables and graphs with more detailed data representing granted international protection by age and gender are available in the Statistical Annex (Annex 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

4.2. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of International Protection Applicants and the Department for International Protection

In order to maintain functionality of reception centers and prevent the potential spread of the disease caused by COVID-19 among applicants for international protection, the protection of workers in reception centers has been identified as one of the priorities. The following epidemiological measures were introduced as precaution in everyday operation: social distancing, unnecessary contacts with other employees reduced to a minimum, the number of employees in offices reduced, self-isolation of employees when necessary, protective equipment such as masks, gloves, disinfectants, periodic complete disinfection of premises, continuous ventilation of facilities, installation of plexiglass in positions where there is direct contact between employees and

applicants for international protection (Figure 3). The entry of non-essential persons into reception centers was also limited, and communication with other relevant parties was carried out through electronic communication as much as possible, such as the communication with legal representatives of applicants for international protection in administrative disputes.

Work was organized in two separate teams (Team A, Team B) to ensure continuity of work and implementation of international protection procedures in case of potential contacts with persons infected with COVID-19. The Recommendations ceased to be valid in June, and there were no new recommendations or special work organization until September. In accordance with the Recommendations of the Civil Protection Headquarters and epidemiologists, work in Reception centers for applicants for international protection in Zagreb and Kutina was again organized in separate teams from September to the end of 2020. Ultimately, the



OBAVEZNA DEZINFEKCIJA RUKU!
MANDATORY HANDS DISINFECTION!

تعقيم اليدين إلزامي!
ضد عفوني كردن دستان إلزامي است

DÉSINFECTION DES MAINS OBLIGATOIRE!

OBAVEZNO PRANJE RUKU!
MANDATORY WASHING HANDS!

غسل اليدين إلزامي!
شستشوي دستان إلزامي است!

LAVAGE DES MAINS OBLIGATOIRE!

OBAVEZNO NOSITE MASKU!
MANDATORY WEAR MASK!

ارتداء القناع إلزامي!
پوشیدن ماسک إلزامي است!

PORT DU MASQUE OBLIGATOIRE!

Figure 3 - Display of labels and instructions for compliance with epidemiological measures
Source: Ministry of the Interior



activities taken and the epidemiological measures implemented in shelters were based on the principle of proportionality of ensuring the health of persons residing and officials working in the reception centers.

4.3. Impact of COVID-19 on the international protection procedure

4.3.1. Impact of COVID-19 on access to international protection and reception of applicants for international protection

From the very initial stages of the procedure for granting international protection, i.e. when making an application and registering applicants for international protection, the officials of the Ministry of the Interior acted in accordance with the epidemiological measures in force. When police approached migrants making an application for international protection, the presence of COVID-19 symptoms was systematically checked. If the presence of COVID-19 symptoms was determined, the competent epidemiologist was notified and took further action regarding the health care of the applicant. If it was determined that the foreigner had no symptoms, the police continued to take action, i.e. make a decision regarding return in accordance with the Aliens Act or regarding the application for international protection.

The implementation of epidemiological measures to prevent the spread of disease caused by COVID-19 throughout 2020 affected the adjustments of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of International Protection Applicants, as well as the adaptation of

procedures to ensure material conditions of reception. Prevention of the spread of the disease caused by COVID-19 was based on the reorganization of the reception and accommodation of international protection applicants within the facilities in order to create acceptable conditions for self-isolation of new international protection applicants.

When accommodating applicants for international protection in the Reception center for applicants for international protection in Zagreb, potential administrative and health circumstances that would affect the exercise of rights or fulfillment of obligations of applicants for international protection were taken into account. Therefore, the deadlines for applying for international protection were flexible, and the possibility of postponing the application for international protection was applied in favor of applicants for international protection, taking into account potential delays such as self-isolation of applicants.

The Ministry of the Interior informed applicants for international protection about the epidemiological situation, responsible behavior of individuals and the importance of prevention and self-isolation in order to prevent the spread of disease caused by COVID-19 through leaflets and posters of the Croatian Institute of Public Health translated into the languages most frequently used by international protection applicants (Figure 4).

4.3.2. Impact of COVID-19 disease on the Dublin procedure

One of the more significant impacts of the COVID-19 disease pandemic on the process of granting international protection is certainly the temporary suspension of Dublin transfers, which occurred after 13 March 2020. However, it is important to point out that the suspension of transfers, as well as the work of many public institutions of the Republic of Croatia, were affected by extraordinary circumstances caused by earthquakes in continental parts of the Republic of Croatia. Despite challenging working conditions, transfers were potentially considered in some specific cases, such as family reunification or in the cases of presence of well-founded humanitarian

reasons. Tables with data on incoming and outgoing transfers to the Member States of the European Union and nationalities of applicants for international protection are available in the Statistical Annex (Annex 7).

4.3.3. Impact of COVID-19 on the procedure for granting international protection

There was no significant decrease in the number of applicants for international protection in 2020, compared to 2019, and despite the extraordinary epidemiological conditions and adjusted working conditions, all decisions were made within the statutory



Figure 4 - Display of leaflets for the purpose of informing applicants for international protection in shelters about the disease caused by COVID-19

Source: Ministry of the Interior



deadline. Manifestly unfounded applications were addressed as a matter of priority, as well as applications of applicants for international protection in need of special procedural and reception guarantees, i.e. vulnerable groups of applicants for international protection (unaccompanied minors, single mothers, the disabled and other vulnerable groups) and detainees.

4.4. Access to information and provision of legal assistance

Provision of access to information to applicants for international protection requires continuous communication with them, which was particularly important during the epidemiological situation in 2020, and it was done directly, as well as through written notes. The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior, recognized the continuous importance of establishing communication with applicants for international protection and issued a Decision on the allocation of funds for the implementation of the project "Translation and expansion of the network of translators in the process of granting international protection" within AMIF on 13 July 2020. Ensuring a network of translators participating in the international protection procedure is crucial for the implementation of the international protection procedure, therefore the purpose of the project is to provide translation services to persons who made their application for international protection in the Republic of Croatia.

The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union

Funds of the Ministry of the Interior, issued a Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "Free legal aid in the process of granting international protection" under AMIF on 3 July 2020. The purpose of this project implemented by the Ministry of the Interior is to ensure the use of legal remedies and protect the rights of applicants for international protection in accordance with the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette, No 70/15, 127/17) and the Ordinance on Free Legal Aid in the Procedure for International Protection (Official Gazette, No 140/15).

In March 2020, the implementation of the project "Providing legal advice in the process of granting international protection" within AMIF, implemented by the Croatian Law Center (HPC) since 1 April 2019, was completed. This project provided legal advice to applicants for international protection in order to protect their rights and interests. The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior issued a Decision on announcing a public tender for financing projects in the field of providing legal advice in the process of granting international protection on 12 November 2020.

4.5. Psychosocial support and health care of applicants for international protection

The Ordinance on Health Care Standards for Applicants for International Protection and Foreigners under Temporary



Protection (Official Gazette, No 28/20)¹⁵ was adopted in March 2020 pursuant to the Act on the Compulsory Health Insurance and Health Protection of Foreigners in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, No 80/13, 15/18, and 26/21). The Ordinance lays down health care standards for applicants for international protection and foreigners under temporary protection, this time including explicitly applicants for international protection and foreigners under temporary protection who need special acceptance and/or procedural guarantees, especially victims of torture, rape or other severe forms of mental, physical or sexual violence. Representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy and the Croatian Health Insurance Institute participated in the expert working group for drafting the Ordinance. Significant changes include aligning regulations with the current strategies for infectious diseases, establishing and prescribing basic forms for obtaining certain health services, and stipulating that in order to determine acute infectious diseases and the need for possible isolation and cohorting, a health worker in reception centers performs medical triage at admission.

The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior issued a Decision on allocating funds for the project "Social services and psychosocial support to applicants for international protection" within the AMIF on 11 February 2020. Pursuant to

the Decision in question, it is envisaged that the Croatian Red Cross will be the beneficiary of financial resources. The purpose of the project "Social services and psychosocial support to applicants for international protection" is to provide support and assistance to applicants for international protection in everyday life through the provision of social and health services, developed in accordance with their needs.

The program of support to applicants for international protection in the reception centers for applicants for international protection, under the contract with the Ministry of the Interior through the project, included the provision of psychosocial and practical support and assistance to applicants for international protection, based on identified needs of individuals and families; identifying vulnerable groups and planning work tailored to their specific needs; participation in the organization of daily life in reception centers; procurement and distribution of hygiene supplies and humanitarian aid; providing various types of information and assistance in solving everyday problems; assistance in accessing health services, procurement of medical equipment and supplies, organization of social, educational and sports activities, involvement of applicants in programs and activities in the local community, search services and Restoring Family Links (RFL). The Croatian Red Cross carried out educational and social activities in the reception centers in their entirety until March 2020, when due to the declaration of a

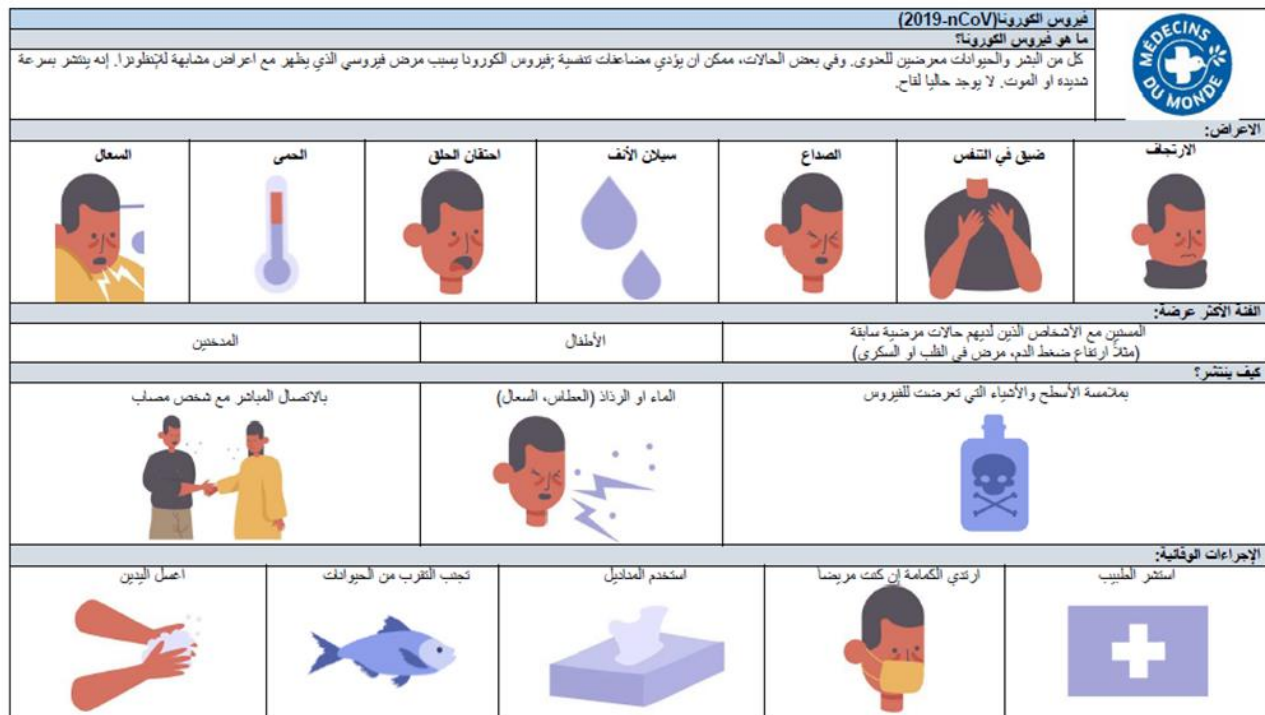
¹⁵ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_03_28_658.html

pandemic caused by COVID-19, all activities involving a large number of users were temporarily stopped in accordance with epidemiological measures in force.

The Croatian Red Cross psychosocial support team operated at the reception centers, and the initial needs assessment, assessment of the physical and mental condition of the beneficiaries, the need for medical and other types of assistance and psychosocial support were carried out with most of the beneficiaries of the Red Cross services.

During 2020, psychosocial support was provided to 1246 applicants for international protection who were aware of the increased risk of potential human trafficking and other forms of violence.

Based on the project, as part of medical assistance to applicants for international protection, access to health services was provided to 963 applicants. Specialist examinations were provided in the clinics of pediatric surgery, pediatrics, gynecology, polyclinics for child and adolescent psychiatry, dentistry and many other institutions.



Source: Ministry of Health of the Republic of Croatia; WHO / Project: Disease prevention, psychological support, assistance and access to healthcare for asylum seekers - 4P / Project is funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Government of Croatia



Figure 5 – Display of the leaflet made as part of the project "Disease prevention, psychological support, access and assistance in health care for applicants for international protection - 4P"

Source: Ministry of the Interior



In addition to a number of medicines, prescription glasses, orthopedic aids, pregnancy tests and many other medical aids were provided for all applicants in need.

During 2020, Medecins du Monde Belgique also operated in the reception centers in Zagreb and Kutina, pursuant to the Decision on the allocation of financial funds and prolongation of project implementation “Disease Prevention, Psychological Support, Access and Assistance in Health Care for International Protection Applicants – 4P” within AMIF of 23 April 2020 (Figure 5).

The Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of

the project "5P - Disease Prevention, Health Promotion, Psychological Support, Access and Assistance in Health Care for International Protection Applicants" within the AMIF was made on 31 July 2020 as a continuation of the previous project including health promotion and protection within the scope of the project objectives (Figure 6). The purpose of the project is the protection of health and disease prevention among applicants for international protection in the Republic of Croatia through improved access to first examinations and medical consultations in reception centers for international protection applicants. Medecins du Monde Belgique provided an initial

PSYCHOLOGICAL QUARANTINE GUIDE

- In times of crisis, unpleasant emotions are a completely normal and natural response to unusual situation
- It is normal to feel anxious, stressed, sad, scared and angry
- You are not alone in this, and others around you feel that way too
- Some people feel these emotions more than others, and that is absolutely OK

ASK FOR HELP TALK TO THE PSYCHOLOGIST

If you feel the need for support we are here for you!
Even though psychologists cannot physically be next to you, they can talk to you through our MDM skype call. When MDM doctor visits you in quarantine inform him that you would like to talk with a psychologist and give him your skype name or phone number so we contact you (through Skype, WhatsApp or Viber)!

MANAGE STRESS DURING YOUR TIME IN QUARANTINE

Talk to others
Contact friends, family or people that you can talk with. Share your fears and how you feel, try to hear their advices and support. Bring some humor in the situation. If you are preoccupied with bad thoughts try talking about something else even if you don't feel like it.

Remember why is this important
Self-isolation and quarantine are normal measures in these exceptional times, and they are necessary to prevent the epidemic from spreading further. Regularly wash your hands, cough and sneeze into a handkerchief or elbow and stay in your room.

Maintain your daily routine
Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle as much as you can: don't skip meals, maintain the proper rhythm of sleep, exercise (squats, push ups), identify activities that you can exercise with your family on a daily basis.

Rely on your skills
Rely on skills that would otherwise help you to manage your stress: praying, breathing deeply, talking to others, writing, drawing, reading or other things. If you notice something is upsetting you (such as news), let go of it and search for some pleasant content.

Helpful thoughts
Remember that you have already been through bad times and that this too shall pass. Remind yourself that people are very resilient and capable of living through multiple life conditions. Focus on what you can do, instead of focusing on what you can't.
Be kind to yourself as much as you can.

OP: Prevencija bolesti, promocija zdravlja, psihološka podrška, pristup i pomoć u zdravstvenoj zaštiti
Hrvatska zajednica / OP: Obnova zdravlja, promocija i podrška psihološkoj, pristup i pomoć u zdravstvenoj zaštiti

OP: Prevencija bolesti, promocija zdravlja, psihološka podrška, pristup i pomoć u zdravstvenoj zaštiti
Hrvatska zajednica / OP: Obnova zdravlja, promocija i podrška psihološkoj, pristup i pomoć u zdravstvenoj zaštiti

Figure 6 - Display of the leaflet made within the project "5P - Disease Prevention, Health Promotion, Psychological Support, Access and Assistance in Health Care for International Protection Applicants"

Source: Ministry of the Interior



examination for international protection applicants upon their arrival at the reception centers and organized subsequent medical examinations by a doctor of primary health care, or in some cases after discharge from the hospital. They also provided transportation and organized interpreters where necessary, vaccinations for children, gynecological examinations and psychiatric examinations for applicants in need, as well as transport and examination of addicts in health care centers.

4.6. Projects to improve the reception and accommodation of applicants for international protection and the procedure for granting international protection

As part of the ongoing efforts to improve the quality of reception and accommodation of applicants for international protection in the Republic of Croatia, in 2019, the Directorate for Immigration, Citizenship and Administrative Affairs initiated the development of project proposals for the Reception centers for applicants for international protection in Zagreb and Kutina funded by the AMIF. Improving the quality of reception and accommodation of applicants for international protection is envisaged by the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union for the period 2014-2020 to ensure the highest standards of material reception conditions, focusing on improving reception and accommodation services as well as working conditions. The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior, as the responsible body for the management of the national programs of the

AMIF and the ISF, adopted the following decisions in accordance with the Multiannual Plan: Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "Improvement of the Reception center for applicants for international protection in Kutina" within the AMIF on 13 January 2020, Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "Improvement of the Reception centers for applicants for international protection in Zagreb" within the AMIF on 16 March 2020 and the Decision on the allocation of additional funding for the implementation of the project "Assistance in maintaining an adequate level of accommodation in reception centers for international protection" within the AMIF on 20 March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic caused certain challenges that also affected the material conditions of reception and accommodation of applicants for international protection, and in accordance with the new challenges, the need for adjustment arose and on 12 May 2020 the following decisions were made: Decision on amendments to the Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "Improvement of the Reception center for applicants for international protection in Kutina" and Decision on amendments to the Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "Improvement of the Reception center for applicants for international protection in Zagreb". The last decision on the allocation of additional financial resources for the implementation of the project "Improvement of the Reception center for applicants for international protection in Kutina" was made on 6 November 2020.



In order to improve data management and data processing, the Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior issued a Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project "RECORD - development, implementation and maintenance of the application for international protection" within the AMIF on 23 November 2020. The purpose of the project is the development and implementation of a new application that increases the quality of collection, management, processing, monitoring and reporting of data in the area of international protection. The development of the information system and solution in question is intended for everyday use by officials participating in the procedure of granting international protection. The primary advantage of this solution is the creation of a database in which all data would be stored, i.e. the centralization of data related to international protection. The implementation of this project represents a significant development for data management and processing because it will contribute to the accuracy and quality of data processing and collection, improve current information systems in use, and consequently affect the timeliness of data access and the quality of the international protection process.

4.7. Capacity building and international cooperation for the purpose of improving the reception conditions and the national system of international protection

In 2020, trainings were conducted for the border police regarding fingerprinting for

EURODAC. Through the project "EMAS - Strengthening border control activities on the Croatian part of the external border due to increased migratory pressure", the Border Police Directorate organized trainings for border police officers in cooperation with the Croatian Law Center, Croatian Red Cross and International Organization for Migration (IOM), addressing the issues of migrants' human rights, access to international protection, protection of unaccompanied children and vulnerable groups in migration movements, understanding of cultural differences and first aid procedures. These trainings show efforts in strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of the Interior in the field of international protection. They were conducted in 2020 despite the pandemic caused by the disease COVID-19.

The Republic of Croatia cooperates with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) with the aim of ensuring that the conditions in the international protection procedure are in accordance with the highest European standards. Cooperation takes place through national contact points and through educational seminars organized by EASO. Also, Croatian experts provided assistance to Member States facing a large influx of migrants (Greece, Italy, Cyprus). During this period, the Republic of Croatia participated in EASO missions in Italy, Malta and Cyprus.

One official of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of Applicants for International Protection participated in two EASO missions entitled "Measure CY 2.0: Cyprus enhances the implementation of CEAS reception conditions and improves its overall reception mechanism". The first



mission lasted from 3 March to 18 March 2020 and was suspended by EASO due to the spread of the disease caused by the COVID-19, and the second mission was held from 16 July to 27 August 2020.

The support in Malta was provided under the measure "MT 2.0: Malta has increased capacity to manage and reduce asylum backlog at first-instance determination" in the period from 10 February 2020 to 16 March 2020. The support to Italy was related to the measure "Support to the standardization of Dublin cases management", which took place in the period from 24 February 2020 to 12 March 2020, and in the period from 9 August 2020 to 19 September 2020. The mission in Cyprus was conducted from 20 July 2020 to 11 September 2020 as part of the measure "Cyprus has increased capacity to efficiently and effectively manage and reduce first instance backlog" in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The capacities of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of Applicants for International Protection were strengthened through trainings conducted in 2020. Their officials participated in trainings of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) which was the implementing partner of the Government of the Republic of Croatia in the project for the integration of persons under international protection and resettled persons from Turkey and integration and care of persons on the basis of other forms of solidarity with EU Member States. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) organized trainings entitled "Experiences, challenges and positive practices in integration of persons from the Resettlement Program". Officials of

the Department for Reception and Accommodation of Applicants for International Protection participated in a workshop entitled "Standards for financing and contracting programs and projects of common interest implemented by MODULES I and II", organized by the State School of Public Administration for officials cooperating with associations and other civil society organizations, and working on the preparation and implementation of tenders for the financing of projects and programs of associations in local and regional self-government areas. As part of the EASO module "Interviewing Children", national training was held for professionals working with children, which was attended by 19 employees of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of Applicants for International Protection.

Officers from the Department for International Protection participated in a series of EASO trainings; 10 officers participated in the module "Interviewing Children", while nine officers participated in the training "Gender, gender identity and sexual orientation" for the purpose of training for better implementation of procedures in which the reasons for international protection applications are related to gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. The "Dublin III" training was attended by seven officials with the aim of acquainting officials with the implementation, development and application of the Dublin procedure. 11 officers participated in the national training for the "Inclusion Advanced" module, and the purpose of training was to acquaint the trainees in more detail with the Qualification Directive and the case law of the European



Union, while one of the officers participated in the training module "Interview Techniques" in order to improve the conducting of interviews. The training "End of protection" was held for the purpose of training officers to better identify cases of annulment and termination of protection and the implementation of the procedure of revocation of protection, and was attended by 12 officers.

4.8. Joint European Union Resettlement Program

The planned quota for the resettlement program in 2020 was 100 third-country nationals or stateless persons on the basis of resettlement, but the resettlement program was temporarily suspended due to the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and numerous earthquakes that affected Croatia in 2020.

Throughout 2020, integration projects of persons previously resettled through European Union resettlement programs were implemented in the Republic of Croatia, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. "Integration" - 6.6. "Measures for the integration of persons resettled through European Union resettlement programs".



5. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

The procedures towards unaccompanied children are based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: protection of the well-being of the child, protection against all forms of discrimination, the right to life, security and development, and the right to participate and freely express opinions. The level of implementation of the Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council “Protection of children in migration” in the Member States is reviewed annually by means of a questionnaire from the European Migration Network. During 2020, the competent national authorities contributed to the assessment of the implementation of the Communication in the Republic of Croatia.

5.1. The impact of COVID-19 and capacity building regarding the improvement of procedures towards unaccompanied minors

In 2020, a standard operating procedure was established and created concerning the implementation of the Dublin procedure for unaccompanied minors. The standard operating procedure in question was developed in cooperation between the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy and representatives of social welfare centres.

In order to achieve an integrated approach to the protection of unaccompanied

children and public health, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy set out Guidelines on proceedings aimed at protecting unaccompanied children in situations of threat or epidemic on 25 March 2020, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Inspectorate. The Guidelines provided an integrated approach by implementing detailed treatment based on interdepartmental cooperation between ministries – coordination with relevant epidemiologists, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and sanitary inspectors.

Statistics on unaccompanied minors applying for international protection between 2009 and 2020 show a certain decrease in the number of unaccompanied minors since 2017, while in 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, there was again a significant increase with 186 unaccompanied minors (Chart 6). A table with more detailed data showing international protection granted to unaccompanied minors by age and gender is available in the Statistical Annex (Annex 6).

In relation to unaccompanied minors who are also applicants for international protection, during 2019, EASO module “Interviewing Children” was held in Malta, which was attended by two officials of the Department for Reception and Accommodation of International Protection Applicants in order to organize national

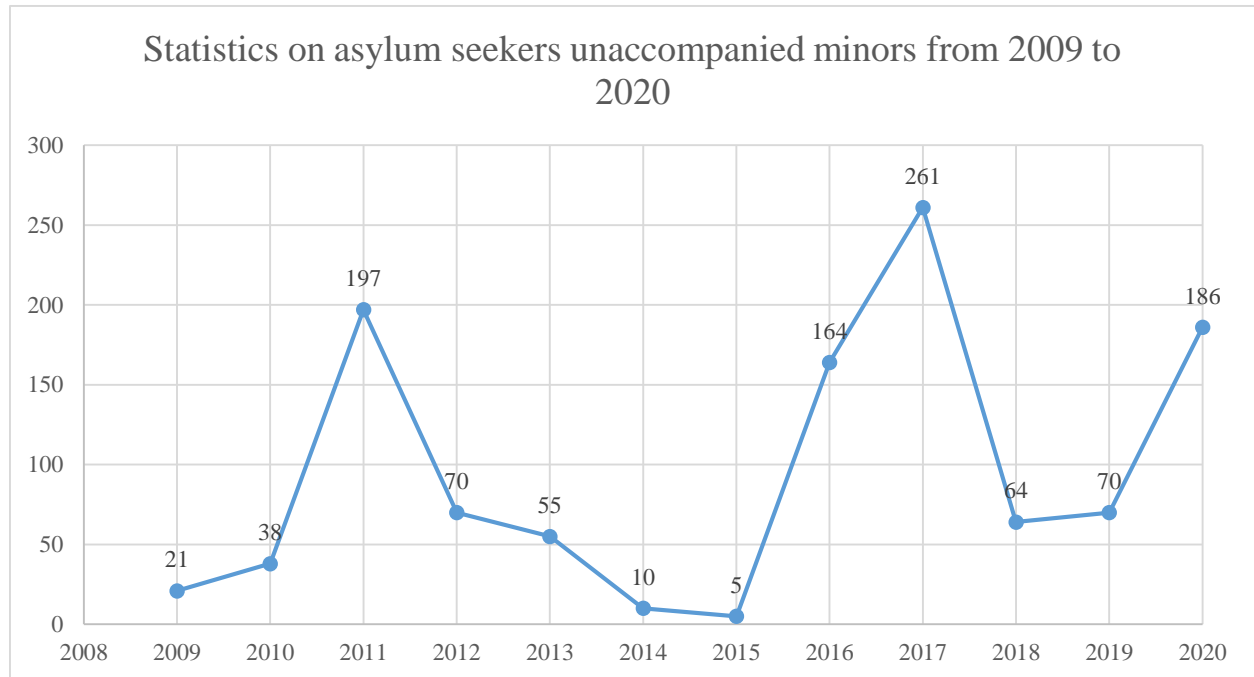


Chart 6 - Statistics on asylum seekers unaccompanied minors from 2009 to 2020

Source: https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/statistika_me_djunarodna_zastita_2020.pdf

training from the module for other officials during 2020.

A total of 33 officials of the Ministry of the Interior participated in the national training of the EASO module "Interviewing Children" intended for professionals working with children in all steps of granting international protection: from applying for international protection, through the procedure of examination of applications for international protection (interviewing) to integration procedures after obtaining international protection.

The implementation of a new two-year project "Expanding the community social services network - integrative support for unaccompanied children" began on 1 May 2020. The project is funded by the European

Social Fund. The main goal of the project is to increase the social inclusion of 120 unaccompanied children through involvement in non-institutional activities, expanding their social network and peer support, as well as strengthening local community capacity and networking of all stakeholders to support unaccompanied children and establishing a system of easily accessible and specialized special guardians and professionals in institutions where unaccompanied children are placed. Also, 130 experts will acquire adequate competencies for work in the trainings envisaged by the project. The partners on the project are local branches of the Red Cross and the Croatian Law Center. By the end of 2020, the mobile team of the Croatian Red Cross visited six institutions where unaccompanied children are accommodated.



As part of the visit, an initial needs assessment and individual work plan was prepared for 29 unaccompanied children and professional support was provided to 12 officials working with unaccompanied children: 4 special guardians and 8 educators in institutions where unaccompanied children are accommodated. Given the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19, support to officials working with children was provided through e-mail and telephone calls.

5.2. Integration of minor international protection applicants and minors with granted international protection

Ongoing efforts to integrate minor beneficiaries of international protection into Croatian society, including unaccompanied minors, are primarily based on integration into the education system. Minor applicants for international protection are entitled to primary and secondary education under the same conditions as Croatian nationals with the aim of more successful integration. Continuous efforts are being made to include minor applicants for international protection in the education programs as soon as possible after lodging an application, i.e. within 30 days from the day of lodging an application, and this process includes establishing strong cooperation with primary schools in Zagreb and Kutina as well as with competent state and city authorities.

In order to ensure successful integration of persons who were granted international protection, including unaccompanied minors, the Ministry of

Science and Education has been implementing the project “Integration of asylees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection into Croatian society, education and preparation for inclusion into the labour market“, within AMIF. The purpose of the project is to provide preconditions for the inclusion of asylees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Croatian society by increasing the level of knowledge of Croatian language, history and culture, translation of certificates and diplomas that will enable international protection beneficiaries’ integration, education and/or training for labour market inclusion.

During 2020, the integration of minor beneficiaries of international protection into Croatian society was achieved within the project that includes the Program for learning Croatian language, history and culture for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection for the inclusion in Croatian society (Official Gazette, No 154/14). The Program provides for a minimum of 280 hours. The courses of Croatian language were organised in Zagreb, Sisak and Karlovac, and were intended for persons who arrived in the Republic of Croatia within the European resettlement program for third-country nationals or stateless persons who meet the requirements for international protection, while in Zagreb and Slavonski Brod courses were held for other beneficiaries of international protection that reside in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Due to the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19, the Croatian language course was interrupted for short periods, distance learning was implemented, and 128



users regularly attended the Croatian language course in 2020.

Support to all minor applicants for international protection and minor beneficiaries of international protection who were in the process of inclusion in the education system was provided in primary and secondary schools within the integration process by organizing preparatory and supplementary classes in accordance with Articles 43, 45 and 46 of the Act on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Official Gazette, No 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10-isp., 90/11, 16/12, 86/12, 94/13, 152/14, 7/17, 68/18, 98/19, 64/20). In accordance with the relevant articles of the Act, schools are obliged to provide special assistance to children who have the right to study in the Republic of Croatia for the purpose of effective integration of students, in the form of 35 or 70 hours of preparatory and additional Croatian language classes. During 2020, 61 students were approved for primary education inclusion, of which 32 in Sisak Moslavina County, 6 in Karlovac County, 1 in Zagreb County and 22 in the City of Zagreb. Preparatory Croatian language classes for secondary education were organized for one person in the City of Zagreb. All persons who have exercised the right to international protection in the Republic of Croatia are provided with free translation and certification of higher and secondary education diplomas needed for the purpose of continuing education and inclusion in the labor market. 12 beneficiaries of international protection exercised this right in 2020.

5.3. Cooperation of the Ministry of the Interior with other governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations in improving the conditions and integration of minor applicants and beneficiaries of international protection

In the reception centres for applicants for international protection, certain rooms have been converted into children's playrooms, where non-governmental organizations, such as the Croatian Red Cross, organize activities to enable children seeking international protection to participate in the process of normalization and recovery from stressful events. As part of the children's playroom, the Croatian Red Cross held IT workshops for children, which encouraged the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, language learning, social networking and intercultural learning. In 2020, the workshops were attended by 646 users.

Employees of the Croatian Red Cross continued to assist children in reception centers in enrolling in the primary school curriculum. They carried out activities to prepare children for school, provided enrolment assistance, but also monitored their education process, helped with online education and homework, and provided support to parents and teachers during the process of adapting children to school. During 2020, the Croatian Red Cross provided support to 258 minor applicants for international protection.



Unaccompanied minors who were accommodated in reception centres were continuously informed by Croatian Red Cross workers about the importance of compliance with social distance measures, the importance of maintaining personal hygiene and hygiene of their own space, all in order to prevent the spread of the disease caused by COVID-19.

The Directorate for European Affairs, International Relations and European Union Funds of the Ministry of the Interior issued a Decision on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the "New home" project within the AMIF, on 18 September 2020. The allocated funds are used exclusively for the implementation of the project in accordance with the conditions for the use of funds from the national program AMIF in the field of internal affairs, and the beneficiary is the Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

The purpose of the project "New home" is to ensure early integration of unaccompanied minors through reception, accommodation, care and psychosocial support for unaccompanied minors and their involvement in the life of the local community, as well as to provide interpretation and translation services from the Croatian language into the language used by unaccompanied minors.



6. INTEGRATION

6.1. Institutional and regulatory framework

At its meeting on 29 October 2020, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Decision amending the Decision establishing the Standing Committee for the Implementation of the Integration of Foreigners into Croatian Society (Official Gazette, No 119/2020)¹⁶. By amending the above Decision, in addition to officials of state administration bodies, representatives of government offices, high-ranking representatives of local and regional self-government units, representative of a public institution and representative of a non-governmental organisation, a representative of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia is included in the work of the Standing Committee for the purpose of improving the coordination of the system of integration of persons who have been granted international protection. A representative of the Islamic Community in Croatia is also included in the work of the Standing Committee by the new Decision.

The Standing Committee provides guidelines to the Working Group for the development of national strategies and plans in the field of integration of asylees or foreigners under subsidiary protection, monitors and coordinates the implementation of regulations, programs, strategies and plans

in the field of integration of asylees or foreigners under subsidiary protection. The Working Group also monitors the recommendations at the European Union level for the development of integration policies.

During 2020, a draft Action plan for integration of persons who have been granted international protection for the period from 2021 to 2023 was prepared. The purpose of this document is to provide beneficiaries of international protection with access to guaranteed social services in the areas of social welfare and health care, language courses and education, housing and employment, as well as the preconditions for inclusion in the local community, through coordination of all relevant departments with special emphasis on the involvement of local and regional self-government units and persons granted international protection in dialogues with the competent authorities, related to the creation and implementation of integration policies and practices. The draft Action Plan envisages formalizing cooperation with beneficiaries of international protection through the establishment of advisory groups (young people) granted international protection, which will be formed to discuss challenges and opportunities within the Croatian integration system.

¹⁶ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_10_119_2310.html



The draft Action Plan will be further aligned with recommendations and guidelines provided in the European Union Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, which was published by the European Commission on 24 November 2020 and referred to the adoption procedure in the first half of 2021.

Furthermore, the Working Group for the Development of the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and the Suppression of Discrimination for the Period from 2021 to 2027, coordinated by the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, drafted the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Suppression of Discrimination for the period from 2021 to 2027. The National Plan contains goals aimed at equal access to education, housing, labor market and employment, in which applicants for international protection and asylees are recognized as one of the target groups.

The adoption of the strategic document and accompanying action plans (Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights 2021-2023 and Action Plan for Suppression of Discrimination 2021 to 2023) is planned for the first half of 2021.

6.2. Integration of third-country nationals through continuous measures by the competent authorities

In order to ensure successful integration of persons who have exercised the right to international protection, the Ministry

of Science and Education has been implementing the project "**Integration of asylum seekers and foreigners under subsidiary protection into Croatian society, education and preparation for inclusion in the labor market**" within AMIF since 2018. The purpose of the project is to provide preconditions for the inclusion of asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection in Croatian society by increasing the level of knowledge of Croatian language, history and culture, translation of certificates and diplomas that will enable asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection to integrate, continue education and/or training for labor market inclusion.

During 2020, integration into Croatian society was achieved within the above-mentioned project which includes the Program for learning the Croatian language, history and culture for asylees and foreigners under subsidiary protection for inclusion in Croatian society (Official Gazette, No 154/14). In 2020, Croatian language courses were held in Zagreb, Sisak and Karlovac, and were intended for persons who arrived in the Republic of Croatia within the implementation of the European resettlement program for third-country nationals or stateless persons who meet the requirements for international protection, while in Zagreb and Slavonski Brod courses were held for other beneficiaries of international protection residing in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Due to the epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19, the teaching of the Croatian language course was interrupted for very short periods, and distance learning was applied. A total of 128 users regularly



attended the Croatian language course in 2020.

The Ministry of Science and Education provides funding for primary adult education and training programs for less complex jobs for Croatian citizens who have permanent residence in the Republic of Croatia, and during 2020 the right to access was exercised by beneficiaries of international protection who were explicitly listed in the Decision on Financing the Implementation of Primary Adult Education and Training for Less Complex Occupations in 2019. The said Decision was continuously applied during 2020 as well, and beneficiaries of international protection are just some of the beneficiaries of the implementation of primary education and training for less complex occupations.

For minor beneficiaries of international protection who are in the process of inclusion in the education system, support was provided in primary and secondary schools within the integration process by organizing preparatory and supplementary classes.

With regard to housing, during 2020, the Central State Office for Reconstruction and Housing Care, which is responsible for accommodating persons granted international protection, provided accommodation for 44 persons granted international protection. Out of that number, 15 persons were accommodated in state-owned apartments, and 29 persons were accommodated in apartments rented on the market for that purpose. Due to the commissioning of state-owned apartments, the time period between

the issuance of a decision on international protection and moving into housing units has been significantly reduced and now takes a maximum of two weeks.

Regarding access to the labor market, during 2020, 50 third-country nationals used active employment policy measures, out of which 13 are persons granted international protection or are applicants for international protection with the right to work.

6.3. Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in integration and rising awareness on migration

In 2020, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia started the implementation of the project “**INCLuDE - Interdepartmental cooperation in the empowerment of third-country nationals**”. The aim of the project is to strengthen the preconditions for social inclusion of third-country nationals with an emphasis on persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia by improving the system of development and monitoring of national integration policies; strengthening inter-ministerial cooperation of stakeholders in local and regional self-government units; raising awareness of key stakeholders, including the general population, to the integration of persons granted international protection.

The project includes research activities, educational activities, awareness raising activities on the challenges of integration, coordination activities, public events in the form of round tables and conferences (international and domestic),



study trips to Greece and Portugal and publication activities. The implementation of all activities is based on the strengthening of inter-ministerial cooperation among the stakeholders of the integration system at all levels. Beneficiaries, i.e. target groups that will be included in the project activities are state administration bodies, regional and local self-government units, public institutions, civil society organizations, members of the academic community, civil initiatives, persons in need of and/or granted international protection, children and youth and the general population. The locations of implementation are north-western, central and eastern Croatia. The estimated duration of the project is 36 months, and the implementation phase will last until December 2022. The initial conference of the project was held on 26 February 2020. As part of the project, integration coordinators at the local level have also been appointed with the aim of formalizing cooperation between the national and local levels through the establishment of a single coordination point.

Regarding the implementation of project activities, two studies were started in 2020 and continued to be conducted during 2021. The first study includes an analysis of media content in reporting on migrants with an emphasis on persons granted international protection with the ultimate goal of determining the role of the media in integration, while the purpose of the second study is to collect data on social inclusion of persons granted international protection.

During 2020, several educational models were developed within the framework of the project intended for the education of

stakeholders in the integration process. An educational model has been developed for education intended for third-country nationals, which includes topics of integration policies and human rights protection systems in the Republic of Croatia and the European Union, introduction to the data collection and documentation of human rights violations system, human rights advocacy and direct action and participation. The purpose of education is to strengthen the participatory role of third-country nationals with an emphasis on persons who have been granted international protection for active inclusion in society.

An educational model for representatives of local self-government units has been developed, and includes topics of policies and best practices of integration of third-country nationals at the local level, use of EU funds to strengthen the integration system, anti-discrimination and monitoring and evaluation of integration measures. The purpose of the training is to strengthen the capacity of local self-government units for the integration of third-country nationals at the local level.

Furthermore, an educational model for school professionals has been developed, and includes the topic of best practices for the integration of persons granted international protection, anti-discrimination and the possible role and activities of educational institutions in promoting social inclusion of third-country nationals. The aim of this education is to prepare participants for developing local actions for social inclusion of third-country nationals, with the ultimate purpose being to implement those actions.



The development of an educational model for public officials and representatives of civil society organizations in local self-government units is also planned.

The project also established a group of **integration coordinators at the local level** whose goal is to formalize cooperation between the national and local levels through the establishment of a single coordination point and to strengthen the capacity of local governments to integrate third-country nationals at the local level. In 2020, the first meeting of integration coordinators was held at the local level.

Also, throughout 2020, the website <https://integracijskapolitika.hr/> was regularly maintained as part of the project. It was created with the purpose of monitoring the implementation of integration policy in the Republic of Croatia.

In March 2020, the Center for the Culture of Dialogue began implementing the project "**New neighbours - inclusion of persons with granted international protection in Croatian society**", co-financed by AMIF, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior. The project aims, among other things, to raise the awareness of integration stakeholders such as public officials, the media and the local population in communities where asylees and persons under subsidiary protection settled. The planned duration of the project is until the end of 2022, and it is being implemented in the territory of the entire Republic of Croatia.

The awareness of integration stakeholders is raised through various sports, cultural, artistic, educational activities and

meetings of local population and persons with granted international protection; through an educational program for public officials in the field of education and health, a media campaign, training for journalists and media representatives.

The project will also prepare an evaluation study on the success of the integration and inclusion of persons with granted international protection in Croatian society.

In 2020, the Croatian Law Center, as an implementing partner, implemented the project "**Legal support in the asylum system**", with the financial support of the UNHCR. Within the project, the Asylum Coordination was established with the aim of exchanging information between all actors in the asylum system. At the first meeting of the Coordination, on 4 March 2020, the topic was the provision of social services to persons granted international protection in the Republic of Croatia. A total of 28 representatives of non-governmental organizations, public and state bodies and lawyers participated.

During 2020, an electronic publication entitled "Integration of refugees into Croatian society: legal regulation and implementation in practice" was being prepared as part of the project. It will represent a framework for the integration of refugees into Croatian society, and it will address in detail the rights and obstacles to exercising certain rights in practice, with emphasis on the right to work and access to the labor market, the right to recognition of qualifications, the right to family



reunification, and the right to free legal aid. The publication will be intended for lawyers and all other experts who deal with integration issues in their work.

The Jesuit Refugee Service has continuously conducted an informative media campaign "Yesterday Strangers, Today Neighbours" - which seeks to inform and raise the awareness of the public and society about the coexistence and the needs and rights of refugees in the Republic of Croatia. The campaign is carried out on social networks, through public appearances and events, cooperation with the media, partners and stakeholders who work to promote sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation, intercultural meetings for refugees and the local community, various educational, artistic and other activities. Among other things, the Jesuit Refugee Service publishes the magazine "Staze" through which it communicates the needs and rights of refugees.

On the occasion of the World Refugee Day and as part of the event "7. Tjedni IZBJEGLICAMA!" ("7th Refugee Week!"), the Jesuit Refugee Service held a series of webinars "#JučerStranciDanasSusjedi!" ("#YesterdayStrangersTodayNeighbors!") with the aim of exchanging experiences, knowledge and best practices of participants in the field of reception and integration of refugees. Webinars were held from 16 to 25 June 2020, in Croatian and English.

The City of Sisak and the Jesuit Refugee Service have been participating in the project "**EPIC - European platform of integrating cities**" since January 2020. It is a

three-year project financed by AMIF that is being implemented in nine other countries. The aim of the project is to exchange knowledge and best practices in the integration of migrants at the level of cities and local communities, which includes the City of Sisak.

6.4. Providing support and information to third-country nationals in the process of integration into Croatian society

Within the activities of the project "**New neighbours - inclusion of persons with granted international protection in Croatian society**", implemented by the Center for the Culture of Dialogue, the aim is to contribute to full integration of persons with granted international protection into Croatian society through direct work with persons with granted international protection. The integration case manager and cultural mediator participate in the work with persons with granted international protection, and they work with each person individually according to the individual integration plan created as part of the project. Persons are provided with assistance in the administrative steps of integration, and in achieving political-legal, socio-economic and cultural-religious integration.

As part of activities funded by the UNHCR within the framework of the project "**Support to the integration of persons granted international protection and prevention of xenophobia**", the Croatian Red Cross provided counselling to persons with granted international protection in the Integration House of the Croatian Red Cross.



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visits to the Integration House have been limited since March 2020, and counselling has been taking place mainly by telephone and e-mail. The most common forms of assistance were assistance in resolving administrative issues and access to rights, providing psychosocial support and health assistance related to the selection of doctors and ordering specialist medical examinations.

Within the project "**Legal support in the asylum system**" implemented by the Croatian Law Center, project activities also include persons with granted international protection who are provided with legal information and legal advice. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been changes in the way certain activities were carried out, which usually took place via telephone, mobile applications and e-mail.

As part of this project and activities, on the occasion of the World Refugee Day 2020, the Croatian Law Center prepared nine instructive videos entitled "And you have the right to..." in which the lawyers of the Croatian Law Center set out certain rights guaranteed to persons granted international protection and ways of exercising those rights in practice. The videos have been translated into English, Arabic and Farsi. In addition to the production of video material, written materials on these rights were prepared and included in the brochure "Even though you are a refugee, you have the right to ..." prepared in an electronic form, which is available not only in Croatian but also in English. A translation into Farsi and Arabic is under way.

On 1 May 2020, the Civil Rights Project Sisak signed a project entitled "**Providing support to persons granted international protection for their inclusion in the life of the local community and the labor market**" funded by the Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. The project provides ongoing support for 20 families with a total of 100 members - persons with granted international protection in Sisak and Karlovac in exercising their status and other rights, provides legal aid through direct visits to beneficiaries, their arrival at the office of Civil Rights Project Sisak in Sisak and Karlovac and a free legal telephone. Also, during 2020, a workshop "Understanding the public health system and health care in the Republic of Croatia" was held.

In 2020, the Civil Rights Project Sisak designed and produced a short brochure/educational material on the rights and obligations of persons granted international protection in the field of education, labor and employment, social rights, etc. The brochure will be translated into Arabic and then printed and distributed in the offices of the Civil Rights Project Sisak.

Through its Center for Refugee Integration "SOL", the Jesuit Refugee Service, which opened in early 2018, continuously provided psychosocial support, counselling, education, partnership meetings, and intercultural meetings with the local community throughout 2020. In accordance with epidemiological measures, the Center operated on a reduced scale throughout the first part of 2020, and again from



October/November 2020, and services were provided online and via mobile devices.

As part of the activities carried out by the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia within the project **"INCLuDE - Interdepartmental cooperation in empowering third-country nationals"** in 2020, the content of the Danube Compass platform was updated in Croatian and English and was translated into Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. The Danube Compass is an online platform that contains basic information on the rights and obligations of third-country nationals in the areas of residence, work, language learning, education, daily life and health.

6.5. Social integration and integration into the labor market of third-country nationals

The new two-year project **"Building systematic and comprehensive support for persons granted international protection through the development of inclusive social services"** began on 15 May 2020. The project developer is the Croatian Red Cross, and the project partners are the Croatian Employment Service and the local branches of the Red Cross Karlovac and Sisak. The project is funded by the ESF. Project activities are focused on individual and group work with beneficiaries, workshops and education for beneficiaries, but also for volunteers and employees involved in working with beneficiaries of international protection. Given that the project focuses on employment, the topics of the workshops for beneficiaries are socio-cultural orientation,

work culture in Croatia, empowering people to join the local community. Meetings with employers are also planned in order to connect beneficiaries and employers with the aim of hiring them.

Project activities implemented during 2020 included, among other things: the first coordination meeting, working meetings with other relevant institutions and organizations working in the field of integration, individual activities with 131 beneficiaries (needs assessment, visits of a mobile team, support for families with children, sharing humanitarian aid), two meetings with employers and beneficiaries of international protection for the purpose of their employment. In cooperation with the Agency for Education, training was held for professional staff of kindergartens on "Migration and integration of persons granted international protection."

The Jesuit Refugee Service, together with the Zagreb Open University, implemented the project **"TrAZILica - social inclusion and strengthening the competitiveness of asylees in the Croatian labor market"** until 28 September 2020, co-financed by the ESF through a public call from the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy. The project provided support to education and integration into the labor market for persons with granted international protection.

During 2020, the project **"Education for better integration of asylees"** co-financed from the ESF was implemented through a public call of the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social



Policy. The English Language and Culture Initiative, with the Jesuit Refugee Service and the Craft College as partners, has been implementing the project since October 2019, and its estimated duration is until October 2021. The aim of the project is to increase the employability of asylees through the implementation of language and cultural integration programs, individual mentoring and the implementation of professional training programs for less complex occupations in the tourism and hospitality sector where there is a shortage of labor force. It is planned to include 40 unemployed asylees in the project activities, and so far Croatian language courses and certain training programs have been held.

During 2020, the project of the Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma **"Skills for the future - encouraging the integration of women and children granted international protection through the acquisition of digital and STEM competencies"** was also implemented. The project is funded by the call of the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, and aims to improve information and communication skills and increase the employability of 15 women with granted international protection in the City of Zagreb and Zagreb County, improve STEM skills in basic programming in at least ten preschool children with granted international protection, raise the awareness of at least ten employers to employ women with granted international protection. During 2020, planned workshops were held for preschool children, several workshops were held on the topic of information and communication technologies and communication and

presentation skills, and part of the project beneficiaries became employed.

From September 2018 to September 2020, the Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma implemented the project **"MENTOintegration: Mentoring in social and work integration of asylees"** together with the Center for Social Welfare Zagreb. The project was co-financed from the ESF through a public call of the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy. The aim of the project was to improve social integration and integration into the labor market of asylees and migrants by developing targeted skills improvement programs and a specific mentoring approach in order to increase sustainable employment and reduce dependence on social benefits.

Within the project **"Providing support to persons granted international protection for their inclusion in the life of the local community and the labor market"** implemented by the Civil Rights Project Sisak, support is provided for their easier access to the labor market. The workshops "Fundamentals of information literacy for the development of communication skills for easier access to the labor market" and "Opportunities for employment in agriculture" were held throughout 2020.

At the end of November 2020, the Croatian Employers' Association and the Jesuit Refugee Service concluded a cooperation agreement which will provide institutional support to the integration process of third-country nationals into Croatian



society and facilitate their easier employment and entry into the labor market.

6.5.1. Statistical overview of data on third-country nationals at the Croatian Employment Service

On 31 December 2020, a total of 945 third-country nationals were registered with the Croatian Employment Service, of which 153 were persons granted international

protection. In the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020, there were 1,505 applications of third-country nationals registered in the unemployment register of the Croatian Employment Service, of which 167 were persons granted international protection. In the same period, 771 third-country nationals were deregistered from the Croatian Employment Service's unemployment register due to employment, of which 97 were persons granted

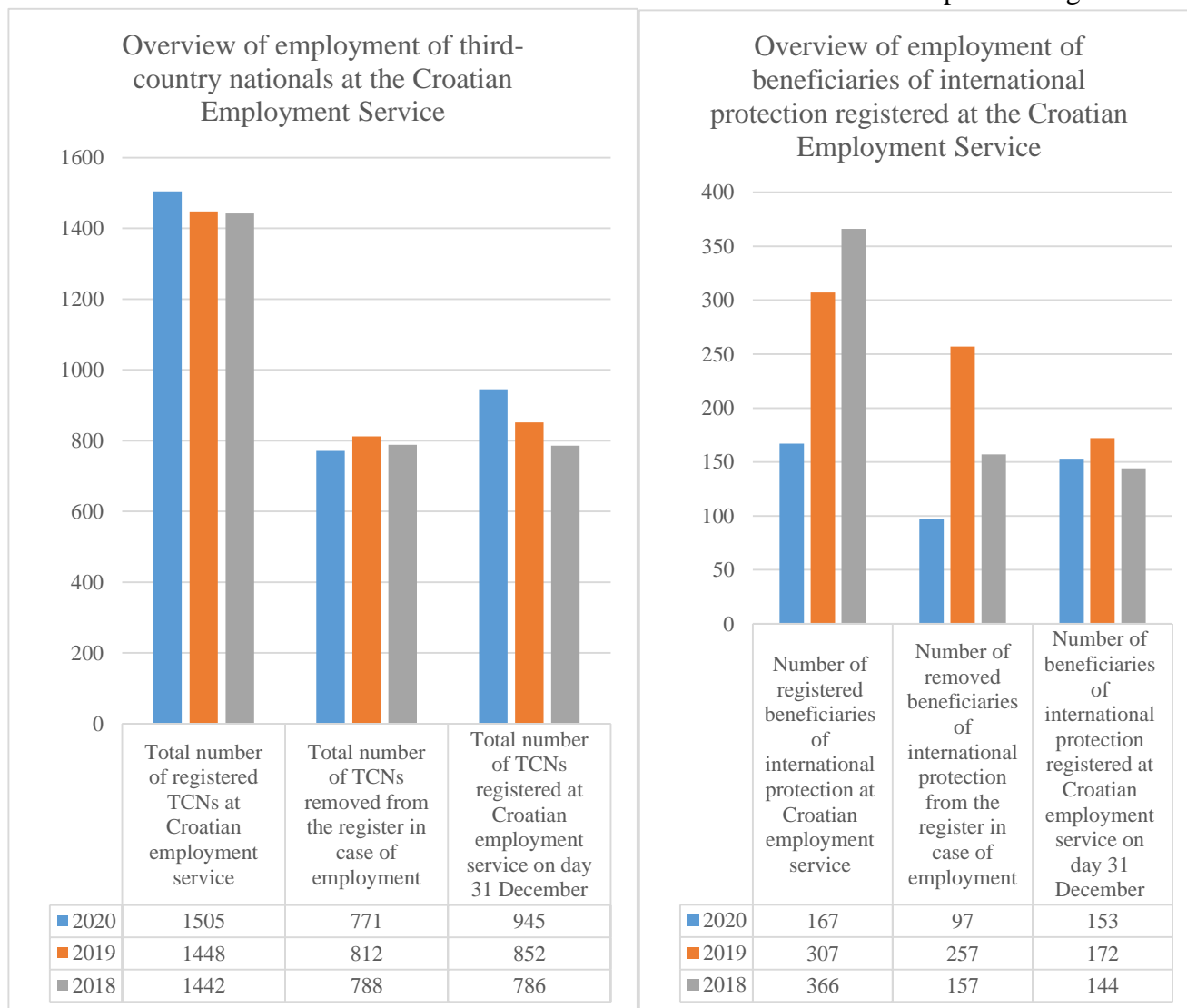


Chart 7 - Statistical overview of data on third-country nationals at the Croatian Employment Service

Source: Croatian Employment Service



international protection. A comparison with previous years can be seen in Chart 7.

6.6. Integration measures for persons resettled through European Union Resettlement Programmes

Although the state of emergency in the Republic of Croatia did not lead to the resettlement of third-country nationals or stateless persons, a mobile application was developed in 2020 as part of the project “**Establishment of resettlement mechanisms**” implemented by the Ministry of the Interior under the AMIF. This application is available in Croatian, English, Arabic and Kurdish-Kyrmian and contains practical information for persons from the resettlement programme. In addition, within the project, a video material was created as short informative content to display the integration process in the Republic of Croatia as part of the resettlement programme. Both media are intended for all selected persons, i.e. third-country nationals or stateless persons, whose purpose is to familiarise resettled persons with the Resettlement Programme, the integration procedure and other aspects of life in the Republic of Croatia.

In April 2020, the two-year project “**ARCI – Red Cross activities for the integration of resettled and relocated refugees**” was completed. The aim of the ARCI project was to improve and encourage the integration process of persons arriving in the Republic of Croatia under a resettlement and relocation programme. The project leader was the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the project

was implemented in cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross, the Bulgarian Red Cross and the German Red Cross.

In 2020, the Jesuit Refugee Service, continued to implement the project “**Integration of persons granted international protection resettled from Turkey and the integration and accommodation of persons based on other forms of solidarity with the Member States of the European Union**”, on the basis of an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior in 2018 and a supplementary agreement. The project ended on 31 October 2020 and activities included support to project beneficiaries in early integration, communication with institutions and local community. All the children covered by the project were enrolled in primary school, the programme’s beneficiaries passed Croatian language and retraining courses, and some of them became employed. In addition, the Jesuit Refugee Service also held educational meetings in several cities in Croatia with the aim of sharing experience and practice and raising awareness, informing and educating the local media and the local community on the integration of refugees. In addition to the lectures, the Jesuit Refugee Service organised intercultural events where refugees resettled from Turkey could socialize and network with the local community and volunteers.

6.7. Integration measures for the Croatian diaspora

6.7.1. Integration measures abroad

In order to enable members of the Croatian diaspora to receive language



training before returning to Croatia, the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, offered free online courses in Croatian A1.HR and A2.HR, in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. In December 2020, there were more than 7,400 A1 level users from 116 countries and 740 A2 level users from 60 countries. Internet users in the US, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Chile and Argentina were among the most represented users.

At the same time, the Welcome Office, as an independent organisational unit within the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, provided information and support to interested returnees and descendants of Croatian emigrants in order to plan their return to Croatia.

The Central State Office for Croats Abroad also implemented other integration programmes on an ongoing basis in 2020: the programme to support Croatian expatriate communities and the Programme to finance special needs and projects of interest for Croatians outside of the Republic of Croatia.

6.7.2. Integration measures in the Republic of Croatia

The Central State Office for Croats Abroad supports financially and operationally those diaspora organisations and non-governmental organisations in Croatia which provide support to diaspora and returnees also in liaising with local Croatian communities and authorities in order to facilitate their integration into Croatia on a daily basis.

The Office financially supported the project “**Support to foreigners in integration to Croatian society**” (“SIDRO”) which was implemented by the Jesuit Refugee Service with the support of the Central State Office for Croats Abroad between October and the end of December 2020. Between November and the end of December, four online information sessions were held for Croatian expatriates in English and Spanish on: *Croatian Employment Service and working in Croatia, How to get a Job in Croatia, The rights and responsibilities of workers in the context of citizens and foreigners and New law on foreigners – changes in terms of obtaining stay and work permits.*

A conference “MEETING G2.6” was held through a video session to give businesspersons of Croatian origin from around the world an opportunity to network, focusing inter alia on investment topics in Croatia and thus on the export of Croatian products. Over two days, the conference involved speakers from a number of countries (United Kingdom, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Australia, South Korea, the United States, Argentina, Poland, Latvia, Israel, Ireland, etc.), state institutions and representatives of successful Croatian companies.

The Central State Office for Croats Abroad has also successfully implemented integration programmes such as the Croatian language learning programme in the Republic of Croatia, the project – Special enrolment quota for members of the Croatian national minority and Croatian expatriation, the Programme of fellowships for Croatian



nation outside of the Republic of Croatia and the Integration support programme through the Welcome Office. The Domovina Birthright Programme for young adults aged 18 to 30 of Croatian origin who wish to familiarise with the Republic of Croatia and with Croatian identity and meet other young Croatian people was launched for the first time in 2019 and extended to 2021 due to travel restrictions and epidemiological measures. The Croatian language learning programme in the Republic of Croatia, implemented through awarded scholarships for Croatian language learning in Croatia and awarded scholarships for online learning of Croatian language, has achieved a high level of competence among the younger age groups (18 to 40). As a result, the Central State Office for Croats Abroad increased the number of scholarships awarded for the academic year to 250 scholarships as of the academic year 2019/2020. Participants in the course attend one or more semester courses in Croatian at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek or attend the Croatian online course Hit-1.

Specific events, information sessions and thematic sessions have been organised for target and interested groups from Croatian expatriation, such as scholarships from the Central State Office for Croats Abroad and returnees from countries with specific characteristics.

A new active employment policy measure – on-the-job training of Croatian expatriates developed in 2019 was further improved in 2020. In 2020, two persons benefited from this measure.

The new Aliens Act that has been in force since 1 January 2021 provides that temporary stays on humanitarian grounds are regulated for humanitarian reasons by members of the Croatian nation with foreign citizenship or those who are stateless and who have been certified by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad and who have access to the labour market with such authorised stay without the need to obtain a stay and work permit, the right to attend a course, vocational training, education and study. The Act also lays down a provision which allows members of the Croatian nation who are stateless or who have foreign nationality to acquire permanent residence in a more favourable manner, provided that they have been found to have returned with the intention of living permanently in the Republic of Croatia without having been granted temporary residence until the date of submission of the application. Once permanent residence is authorised and residence in Croatia is registered, people are entitled to work and to self-employment, training, education and student grants, social welfare, child allowances, tax benefits, access to goods and services markets.



7. CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

7.1. Acquisition of citizenship - legislative changes

On 1 January 2020, the Act Amending the Croatian Citizenship Act (Official Gazette 102/19)¹⁷ entered into force and was adopted at the session of the Croatian Parliament on 18 October 2019. Amendments to the Act include raising the age limit from 18 to 21 when acquiring citizenship by origin, providing young people with the opportunity to apply independently for entry in the register of citizens. In addition, there have been changes to the Act regarding the regular ways of acquiring Croatian citizenship and a person's legal capacity is no longer conditioned.

Some of the significant changes also include the absence of a generational restriction on the acquisition of Croatian citizenship for the descendants of emigrants. This category of foreigners is released from the obligation to meet the prerequisites of knowledge of Croatian language and Latin script, Croatian culture and social system. The notion of emigrants is specified, which simplifies the presentation of evidence for members of the Croatian nation and enables the acquisition of Croatian citizenship by birth for minor children whose one parent acquired Croatian citizenship as an emigrant or descendant of an emigrant from the Republic of Croatia (Article 11, paragraph 1

of the Act) or as a member of the Croatian nation (Article 16 of the Act).

The aim of the amendments to the Act, i.e. more lenient conditions for acquiring Croatian citizenship by members of the Croatian people abroad and Croatian emigrants, was to address demographic issues and encourage immigration to the Republic of Croatia.

7.2. Statelessness

The non-governmental organization Civil Rights Project-Sisak, as an implementing partner of UNHCR, continuously provides free legal aid to stateless persons and those at risk of losing citizenship throughout the Republic of Croatia through the organization's main office in Sisak and its contact points.

Some of the activities of the Civil Rights Project-Sisak include work within the Coordination for Statelessness established by the Civil Rights Project-Sisak in 2019 with the aim of identifying and comprehensively addressing the issue of statelessness in the Republic of Croatia. The coordination brings together various stakeholders: UNHCR, Ministry of the Interior, Office of the Ombudsman, Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, social welfare centers, Croatian Red Cross, Croatian Employment Service and Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. The second meeting of

¹⁷ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_10_102_2050.html

the Coordination for Statelessness was held on 23 October 2020 through an online platform attended by all members of the Coordination and attended by the European Network for Statelessness as a guest. It was concluded that work aimed at addressing the issue of identifying third-country nationals would continue, with an emphasis on Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 2020, the Civil Rights Project-Sisak, together with the Information Law Center Slavonski Brod, participated in the development of the document "Statelessness Index" within the European Network for Statelessness. The "Statelessness Index" shows how a country protects stateless persons and what it does to prevent and combat new cases. The plan is to publish the "Index" in 2021, in which, among other European countries, the Republic of Croatia will be included.



8. BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

8.1. Border control during the COVID-19 pandemic

In order to protect the population of the Republic of Croatia from COVID-19 disease, in 2020 the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia issued several decisions, and amending decisions, on restrictions of movement across border crossings of the Republic of Croatia. On 19 March 2020, the first Decision on the temporary ban on crossing border crossing points of the Republic of Croatia was adopted (Official Gazette, No 32/20)¹⁸.

The documents of the European Commission and the Council of the European Union were used as guidelines when the Republic of Croatia was making decisions related to the closure of external borders with third countries. On 16 March 2020, the European Commission adopted a *Communication on the Temporary Restriction on Non-Essential Travel to the EU*, proposing to the European Council a coordinated decision to close the external borders. The agreement was adopted the next day in the European Council (Conclusions of the President of the European Council following the video conference with members of the European Council on COVID-19, 164/20). On 8 April, 8 May and 11 June 2020, the European Commission adopted further communications

recommending an extension of the restriction of the so-called non-essential travel until 30 June 2020. Furthermore, on 30 June 2020, *Council Recommendations (EU) 2020/912 on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction* were adopted.

The above-mentioned documents of the European Commission determine categories of the so-called essential travel, i.e. special categories of passengers with an essential function or need. In accordance with the above mentioned, the Republic of Croatia envisaged categories of persons - third-country nationals who were exempted from the temporary ban on crossing the border.

Thus, according to the decision of 19 March 2020, healthcare professionals, health researchers and associates, elderly care professionals, persons requiring urgent medical treatment, cross-border workers, cargo carriers and other transport personnel, diplomats, military and police staff, civil protection staff, staff of international organisations and transit passengers were exempt from the general prohibition to cross the border. The categories of persons, third-country nationals who were exempt from the decision, were supplemented and amended in 2020. Thus, by the amending Decision (Official Gazette, No 56/20)¹⁹ of 9 May 2020, persons travelling for urgent personal reasons

¹⁸ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_03_32_714.html

¹⁹ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_05_56_1133.html



are also exempt from the decision. On 30 June 2020, according to the Decision on the temporary ban on crossing border crossing points of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, No 74/20)²⁰, a category of persons travelling for tourist or other professional reasons or with other economic interest is added, and the category of persons travelling for the purpose of study is also added as an exception to the decision. The Decision to temporarily prohibit and restrict crossings at border crossing points of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, No 132/20)²¹ of 30 November 2020 also adds the category of seafarers.

In addition to these exceptions, and related to third-country nationals, the amendments to the Decision of 9 May 2020 stipulate that family members of nationals of other Member States, Schengen area and third-country nationals with the right of residence in the EU can enter the Republic of Croatia for business reasons or other economic interest.

By amending the Decision of 24 June 2021 (Official Gazette, No 73/20)²², the Republic of Croatia provided entry for persons coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of Serbia and North Macedonia with the obligation to stay in self-isolation for 14 days from the day of entry into the Republic of Croatia, regardless of the reason for arrival or whether they have residence in the EU. This was valid

until the new decision of 30 June 2020 was adopted.

According to the Decision of 30 June 2020, third-country nationals who are family members of nationals of other Member States and the Schengen area and third-country nationals with the right to reside in the EU may enter the Republic of Croatia without the need for any economic interest.

The latest decision in 2020, that of 30 November 2020, in accordance with *Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020 on a coordinated approach to restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, further stipulated that the prohibition of cross-border movement does not apply to persons coming directly from countries and/or regions of the European Union or countries and/or regions of the Schengen Area which are on the green list of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Based on the Council Recommendations, a colour-coded system has been set up where regions are labelled in green, orange, red and grey, depending on the rate of cases reported and the rate of positive tests.

Persons who do not come from countries/regions that are on the ECDC green list but who come from another country/region of the European Union or the Schengen area, third-country nationals who are family members of nationals of other Member States and the Schengen area, and

²⁰ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_06_74_1439.html

²¹ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_11_132_2510.html

²² https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_06_73_1420.html

third-country nationals with the right to reside in the EU may enter the Republic of Croatia subject to the presentation of a negative PCR test that is not older than 48 hours or if they undergo PCR testing upon arrival in Croatia and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. Exceptionally, these epidemiological conditions will not be required if, for example, they are: health workers, frontier workers, transport personnel, diplomats, staff of international organisations, military and police personnel, humanitarian and civil protection personnel, transit passengers, school travellers.

It is also possible to enter the Republic of Croatia without a negative PCR test for persons (regardless of nationality) coming directly from countries listed in Annex I of *Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/912 on the temporary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU and the possible lifting of such a restriction*, in line with the current amendments to that Annex.

As regards the other categories of third-country nationals who are allowed to enter the Republic of Croatia, it is necessary to present a negative PCR test not older than 48 hours or a get a PCR test upon arrival in the Republic of Croatia and self-isolate until the receipt of a negative test result in the case of seafarers and persons travelling for urgent personal/family reasons, business reasons or other economic interest. Other exceptions (such as healthcare workers, cross-border workers, transport staff, diplomats, military and police staff, transit passengers, school travellers) are allowed to enter the Republic of Croatia without these conditions.

All persons crossing the state border were obliged to comply with the instructions and measures adopted by the Croatian Public Health Service.

Since June 2020, it has been recommended to use the application

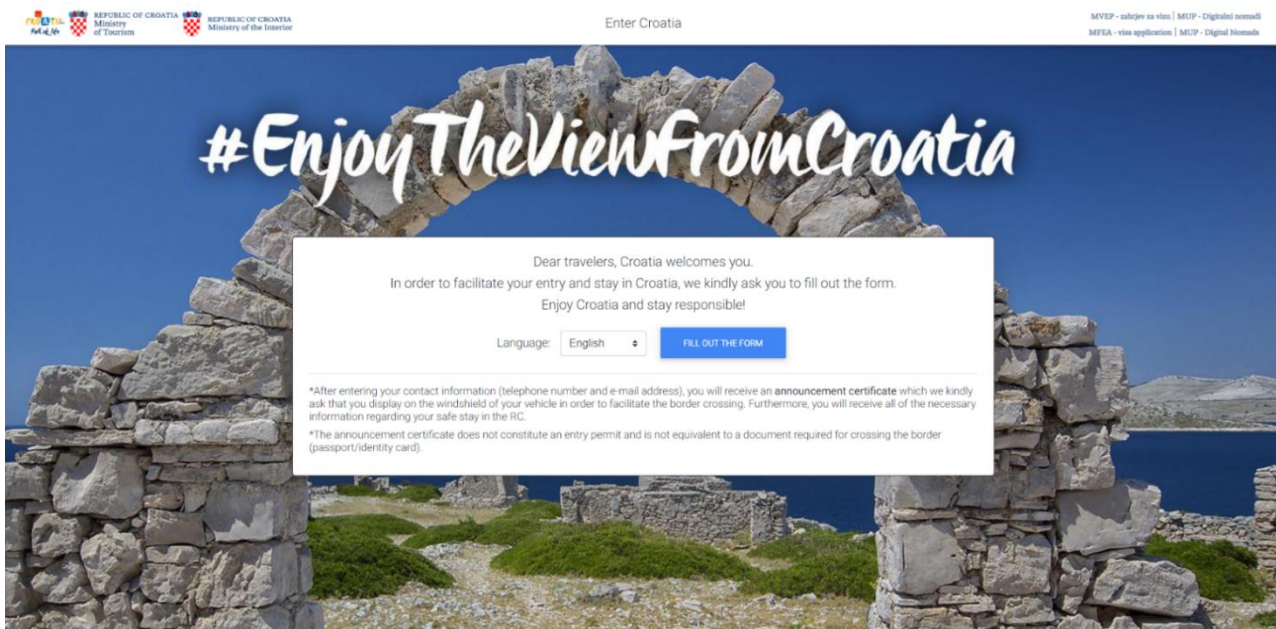


Figure 7 – Cover interface of the web application Enter Croatia — <https://entercroatia.mup.hr/>



<https://entercroatia.mup.hr/> to announce entry into the Republic of Croatia (Figure 7).

8.2 Improving the effectiveness of external border control

In 2020, the Republic of Croatia continued to invest in border police capacities such as equipping border crossing points, technical equipment, education, etc. to effectively control the external border. In addition to national funds, AMIF and ISF funds are being used. Furthermore, the strategic framework for external border surveillance was updated, and a new Instruction for the preparation of risk analysis at the border police was also adopted in 2020, which entered into force on 1 November 2020. The new instruction has been developed in line with the needs of effective border control and with a view to further developing the risk analysis system. The main changes concern the introduction of new analytical documents and the strengthening of cooperation between all organisational units of the Ministry of the Interior in the area of risk analysis systems.

8.2.1. Strategical framework

Border control is carried out on the basis of plans for enhanced border control. In order to improve border control, the Single Plan for reinforced control of the external land border of the Republic of Croatia to combat irregular migration (on the border with the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) was updated in November 2020. Also, the Concept of land border surveillance of the Republic of Croatia, a strategic document of the Croatian

border police, was updated in September 2020.

Both documents have been drafted in accordance with European standards for the purpose of timely planning and taking joint measures and actions to combat human trafficking and irregular migration.

8.2.2. Technical equipping for external border control

In 2020, 12 heart rate detectors were procured for the purpose of border control, and placed at border crossings at the external border. The use of these devices has significantly increased the number of detected attempts of illegal border crossings at border crossings. In order to increase the efficiency of detecting forged documents, the database of travel document specimens on travel document verification devices was regularly upgraded.

Moreover, the following state border surveillance equipment was procured: three medium-range unmanned aerial vehicles (40 km), two long-range unmanned aerial vehicles (80 km) and 500 short-range motion detection cameras. Training of police officers was conducted for all equipment. Through the project “Establishment of perimeter protection at the external border of the EU“, 100 day/night cameras were procured. In addition to technical equipment, 50 dogs were procured for the protection of the state border.

Also in 2020, equipment was procured through the ISF funds, the delivery of which is expected in 2021: eight stationary large-range thermal camera systems, eight mobile thermal cameras with off-road vehicles, 84 IC

devices, 505 tetra connections and 70 specialised vehicles.

Equipment has also been donated by the police of the Federal Republic of Germany with which the Croatian Border Police has maintained good relations for many years: 10 hand-held thermal imaging cameras, 10 off-road vehicles, 10 vans and two mobile ANPR devices.

In 2020, investments were also made in information systems for the purposes of the border police through ISF resources. On 17 February 2020, inter alia, the Decision on granting funding for the implementation of the project “Improving and maintaining the

operation of the SIS II“, aimed at upgrading the Schengen Information System in Croatia (N.SISI II) and the national applications using SIS II, was adopted.

Due to the upgrade of the SIS II system with additional functionalities, the reinforcement of the border control system in line with the Schengen standards and the reinforcement of the border control capacity, a Decision was adopted on 13 July 2020 on the allocation of financial resources for the implementation of the project “Upgrading of the Ministry of Interior hardware infrastructure“.



*Figure 7 – Heart rate detector
Source: Ministry of the Interior*



8.2.3. Strengthening the capacity of the border police

In 2020, 250 new border police officers were recruited and trainings were carried out involving a total of more than 800 police officers.

In 2020, 25 participants completed the Border Police course.

A total of 414 police officers were trained through complementary training at regional level in the following modules: “EU and Schengen law”, “Preventing the Misuse of Documents”, “Detection of Stolen Vehicles”, “Second Line of Border Control”, “Fundamental Human Rights”, “NBMIS Functionalities” (National Border Management Information System), “Tackling Trafficking in Human Beings”, “Risk Analysis” and “Issuing Visas at Border Crossing Points”.

Furthermore, in 2020, professional trainings took place. For example, in cooperation with the Police Academy, through seven training sessions for border protection group leaders in the field of “Tactics of dealing with a group of migrants at the land border”, a total of 153 police officers –border protection group leaders – were trained. In cooperation with the Forensic Science Centre “Ivan Vučetić” and the Police Academy, 15 new border police multipliers were trained through one training programme in the field of “Preventing misuse of documents”. Both trainings were funded by the “EMAS” project (“Reinforcement of border control activities at the border section of Croatia due the increased migratory pressure”).

Three trainings for border police officers were organized by the Border Police Directorate and the Croatian Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration and the Croatian Law Center as part of the “EMAS” project. Those were trainings for multipliers in the field of migrants' human rights, access to the asylum system, protection of unaccompanied children and vulnerable groups in migration movements, understanding of cultural differences and first aid procedures. In addition, four trainings were held for multipliers for taking fingerprints at EURODAC workstations within the project “EMAS”. They were completed by 40 participants. Training of dogs was also held in accordance with the Specialist Course Program for state border protection for dog handlers and service dogs.

In addition to national trainings, 12 participants from the Republic of Croatia participated in Frontex trainings.

8.2.4. Participation in Frontex joint operations

In 2020, the Republic of Croatia participated in Frontex joint operations as a seconding country and as a host country. In Croatia, a joint operation was implemented at the border crossing points of Bajakovo, Tovarnik, Karasović and Nova Sela.

The Republic of Croatia also participated in joint Frontex operations in Albania, Greece, Spain, North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Montenegro.



8.2.5. Joining EU Systems for effective border control

On 25 January 2019, the Decision establishing the Working Group to implement Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) and the Decision establishing a working party to implement Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) were adopted.

The purpose of the EES is to improve the management of European Union's external borders, in particular to check that the provisions on the permitted period of stay in the territory of the Member States are being complied with. The system electronically registers the time and place of entry and exit of third-country nationals who are allowed a short stay in the territory of the Member States each time they cross the external border of the European Union, and calculates the duration of their permitted stay. It should replace the obligation to stamp the passports of third-country nationals, which applies to all Member States.

The purpose of the ETIAS is to increase the internal security of European Union's borders by controlling visa-free passengers before they arrive in the territory of the European Union. Citizens of countries exempted from the visa system will need to complete an e-form before traveling to assess whether or not their presence in the territory of the Member States poses a security risk, a

risk of irregular immigration or a high possibility of an epidemic risk.

During 2020, draft documents were prepared defining the establishment of the EES and ETIAS system in the Republic of Croatia with the planned tasks to be performed in the upcoming period. It was decided that an ETIAS national unit would be established within the Border Police Directorate as part of the National Coordination Center.

Also, on 17 September 2020, the Decision on allocating funds to the Ministry of the Interior for the implementation of the project "Upgrade of the information system for state border management for the needs of Entry/Exit System" was made within the ISF, aimed at upgrading the National Information System for state border management (NBMIS) for the needs of the Entry/Exit System.

8.2.6. Cooperation with third countries through mixed patrols

Mixed patrols with Bosnia and Herzegovina are conducted in accordance with the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina on Cooperation in State Border Control and in accordance with the Protocol between the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, the General Police Directorate and the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Border Police, on conducting mixed patrols along the common state border (about 1000 per year).



In January and February 2020, 190 mixed patrols were conducted, of which 95 in the territory of the Republic of Croatia and 95 in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, mixed patrols have been suspended since March 2020, until further notice.

During 2020, four joint mixed patrols with Montenegro by police vessels at sea were also conducted. Mixed patrols with Montenegro are conducted on the basis of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of Montenegro on police cooperation and the Protocol between the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, the General Police Directorate and the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro, the Police Administration, on cooperation during the tourist season.

8.3. Visas

8.3.1. Legal basis

At the end of 2020, the new Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 133/20) was adopted and on 1 January 2021, it entered into force. It introduced a long-stay visa (type D visa) in Croatian legislation for the first time.

A long-term visa is a permission to stay in the Republic of Croatia for up to 30 days and is issued to a third-country national who has been granted temporary residence, i.e. a stay and work permit and if he needs a

short-term visa to enter the Republic of Croatia.

8.3.2. Reciprocity mechanism

On 12 January 2020, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of the State of Qatar on the abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic and special passports (Official Gazette - International Agreements, No 1/19) entered into force²³.

In accordance with the provisions of Articles 1 and 2 of the Agreement:

- Citizens of the Republic of Croatia, holders of a valid diplomatic passport, do not need a visa for the State of Qatar,
- Citizens of the State of Qatar, holders of a valid diplomatic or special passport, do not need a visa for the Republic of Croatia,

for transit or stay for a period not exceeding 90 days in any 180-day period.

Also, on 5 July 2020, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Government of the Republic of Fiji on the abolition of visas for certain categories of citizens of the Republic of Croatia and citizens of the Republic of Fiji (Official Gazette - International Agreements No. 4/2019)²⁴ entered into force.

²³ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/medunarodni/2019_02_1_10.html

²⁴ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/medunarodni/2019_05_4_37.html



In accordance with the provisions of Article 1 of the Agreement:

- Citizens of the Republic of Croatia, holders of a valid diplomatic, official or ordinary passport, do not need a visa for the Republic of Fiji
- Citizens of the Republic of Fiji, holders of valid diplomatic passports, do not need a visa for the Republic of Croatia

for transit or stay for a period not exceeding 90 days in any 180-day period.

The Republic of Croatia directly applies Regulation (EU) 2018/1806 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement (codification), which establishes, inter alia, the list of third countries whose nationals are required to obtain a visa when crossing the external borders of the Member States.

8.3.3. Issuing visas and the work of diplomatic missions and consular posts during the COVID-19 pandemic

In order to combat and prevent the spread of COVID-19, the receipt of applications for the issuance of Croatian short-stay visas in diplomatic missions and consular offices of the Republic of Croatia was temporarily suspended on 16 March 2020. Holders of diplomatic and official passports, family members of Croatian

citizens (spouse and child) were exempted from the above mentioned.

During 2020, the categories of persons who were exempted from the suspension of receipt of applications for Croatian short-stay visas were changed and supplemented in accordance with the changes of the European Union documents (Commission Communications of 16 March, 8 April, 8 May and 11 June 2020 and Council Recommendation of 30 June 2020 referred to in chapter "Border control during the COVID-19 pandemic") determining the categories of essential travel, and in accordance with the decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia on the temporary ban on crossing the border crossings of the Republic of Croatia (first adopted on 19 March 2020).

Therefore, on 27 April 2020, the categories of persons who were not covered by the suspension of receipt of applications for Croatian short-stay visas were extended to: health care workers, health researchers and care workers for the elderly and persons requiring emergency medical treatment, traffic staff, police and military officers, Civil Protection staff, staff of international organizations, passengers in transit and third-country nationals whose visa application may be received in exceptional cases, where there is an interest of the Republic of Croatia, as confirmed by the head of ministries in accordance with the prescribed scope.

On 28 May 2020, certain changes were made and the category of persons traveling for urgent personal reasons such as: death in the family - attending a funeral, serious and urgent health reasons, ownership



of real estate in Croatia and ownership of a moored vessel in a Croatian port was added.

Since 5 June 2020, the category of transit passengers includes seafarers in transit. On 15 June 2020, persons who have been granted temporary stay for the purposes of Article 47 of the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 130/11, 74/13, 69/17 and 46/18), or have been issued with a stay and work permit in the Republic of Croatia and who need a visa for entry into Croatia, were added as a category not covered by the suspension of the receipt of applications for short-term visas.

As of 16 July 2020, the category of family members of citizens of the EEA, the Swiss Confederation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the category of persons traveling for education have been added.

On 1 December 2020, the exemption from the suspension applies to: family members of persons granted temporary residence for the purposes of Article 47 of the Aliens Act, or persons who have been issued with a stay and work permit in the Republic of Croatia, and they need a visa to enter, if those persons are already in the Republic of Croatia and they have been issued with a residence card.

As of 9 December 2020, the suspension of receipt of visa applications did not additionally apply to the following categories:

- citizens of Rwanda and Thailand who reside in the country of their

citizenship and travel to Croatia from Rwanda or Thailand;

- third-country nationals (if they need a visa) who are authorized to stay in Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Rwanda, Singapore, Thailand or Uruguay, and who travel to Croatia from those countries.

Temporary suspension of receipt of visa applications was still in force for Chinese nationals, as the reciprocity with China and its specific administrative areas was not established.

Depending on the epidemiological situation, diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Republic of Croatia organized their work in the global COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with the instructions of the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and depending on the epidemiological situation and national/local measures, temporarily restricted work with the parties to the extent necessary. In the event of a serious deterioration of the epidemiological situation in certain third countries, it was possible to temporarily completely suspend the receipt of visa applications, but applications for short-term Croatian visas for family members of Croatian citizens and family members of EEA and Swiss Confederation, and the United Kingdom citizens were nevertheless accepted.

The total or partial suspension of the receipt of visa applications by diplomatic missions and consular posts of the Member States of the European Union/Schengen area, and certain epidemiological measures in



individual third countries led to the total or partial closure of VFS Global visa centres, with which the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs had agreed to cooperate on receiving applications for short-term Croatian visas (in 29 third countries). By the end of 2020, most VFS visa centres had reopened and continued accepting applications for short-term Croatian visas from all non-EU nationals falling under the so-called ‘essential travels’ category.

8.4. The Schengen issue

Between 24 and 27 November 2020, a further targeted visit of the Schengen evaluation team for the management of the external borders took place in Croatia.

Following the visit, the European Commission confirmed that the Republic of Croatia had fulfilled the technical conditions for entering the Schengen area and that it had successfully completed the Schengen evaluation process, which started in June 2015.

9. IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING

9.1. Statistics

In 2020, there were 29,094 cases in which actions were taken against persons encountered illegally crossing the state border, which is an increase of 43.5% compared to 2019. The trend of illegal border crossings per month in 2020 shows a short decline in March - April due to the COVID-19 outbreak, followed by an increase, with the highest number of cases in the period from August to October (Chart 8).

The first five countries of origin of persons who have crossed the state border illegally are Afghanistan, whose nationals account for 29% of all illegal border crossings, followed by Pakistan (20% of all illegal border crossings), Bangladesh, Morocco and Syria (Table 3, Chart 9).

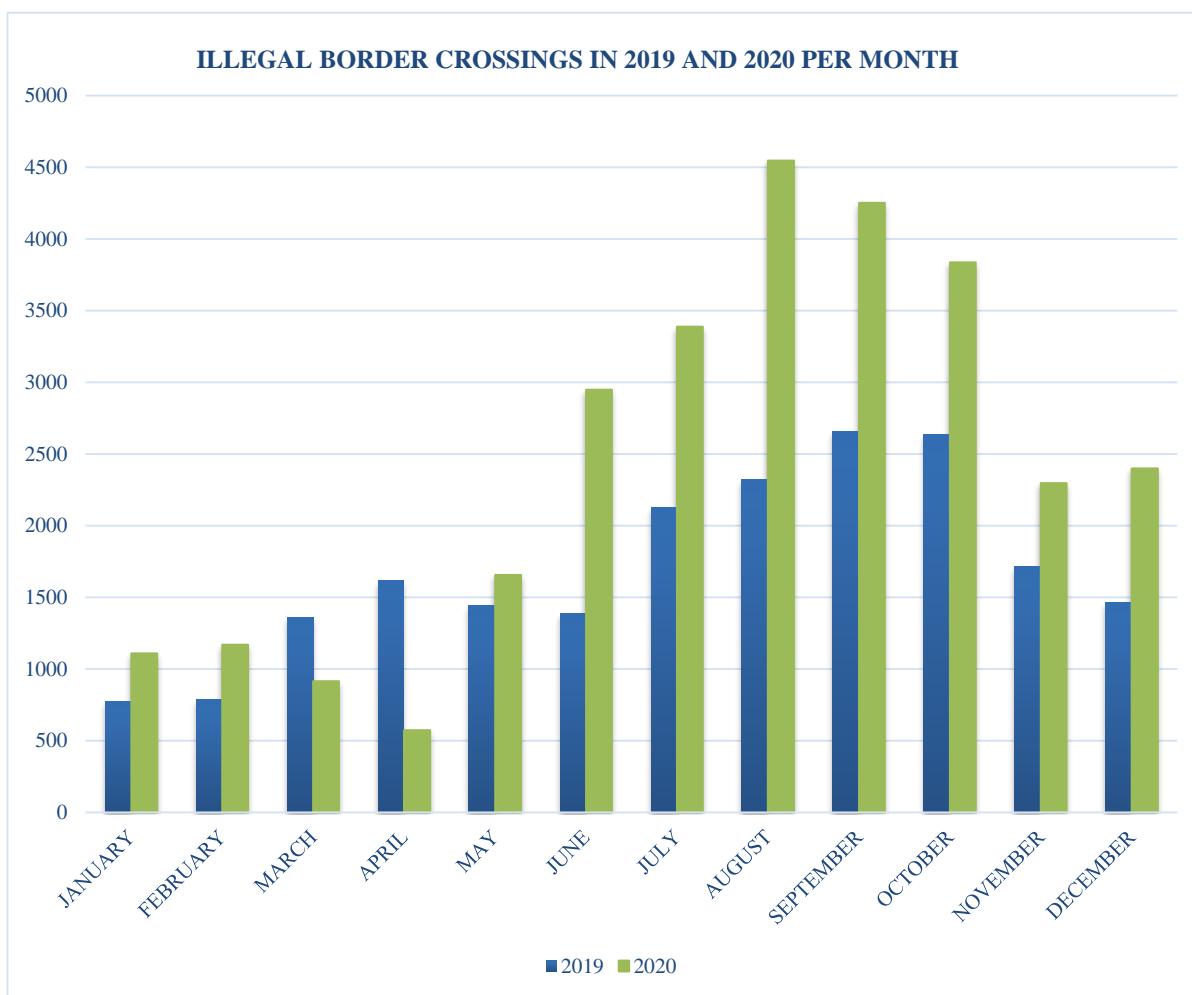


Chart 6 – Illegal Border Crossings in 2019 and 2020 per month
Source: Ministry of the Interior

Table 3 – Illegal Border Crossings by Nationality

Nationality	Illegal Border Crossings		
	Jan-Dec 2019	Jan-Dec 2020	+ - %
Afghanistan	3776	8505	125,2
Albania	463	310	-33,0
Algeria	1223	753	-38,4
Bangladesh	1129	2915	158,2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	90	100	11,1
Egypt	211	565	167,8
Iraq	1730	1651	-4,6
Iran	894	1005	12,4
Kosovo	662	505	-23,7
Morocco	829	2366	185,4
Pakistan	4060	5923	45,9
Syria	1258	1842	46,4
Serbia	85	62	-27,1
Tunisia	241	127	-47,3
Turkey	1874	984	-47,5
Other	1753	1481	-15,5
TOTAL	20.278	29.094	43,5

Source: Ministry of the Interior

Illegal Border Crossings - top 10 Nationalities in 2020

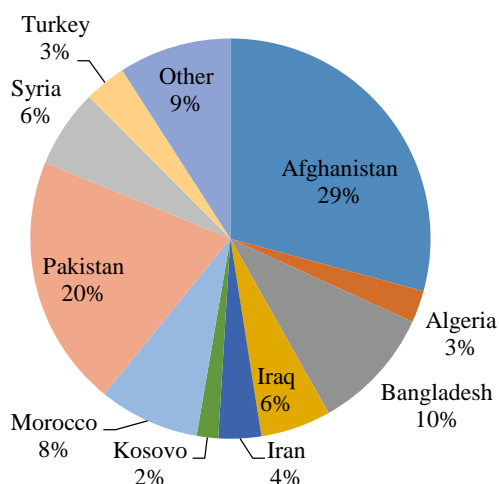


Chart 7 – Illegal Border Crossing - top 10 Nationalities in 2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior

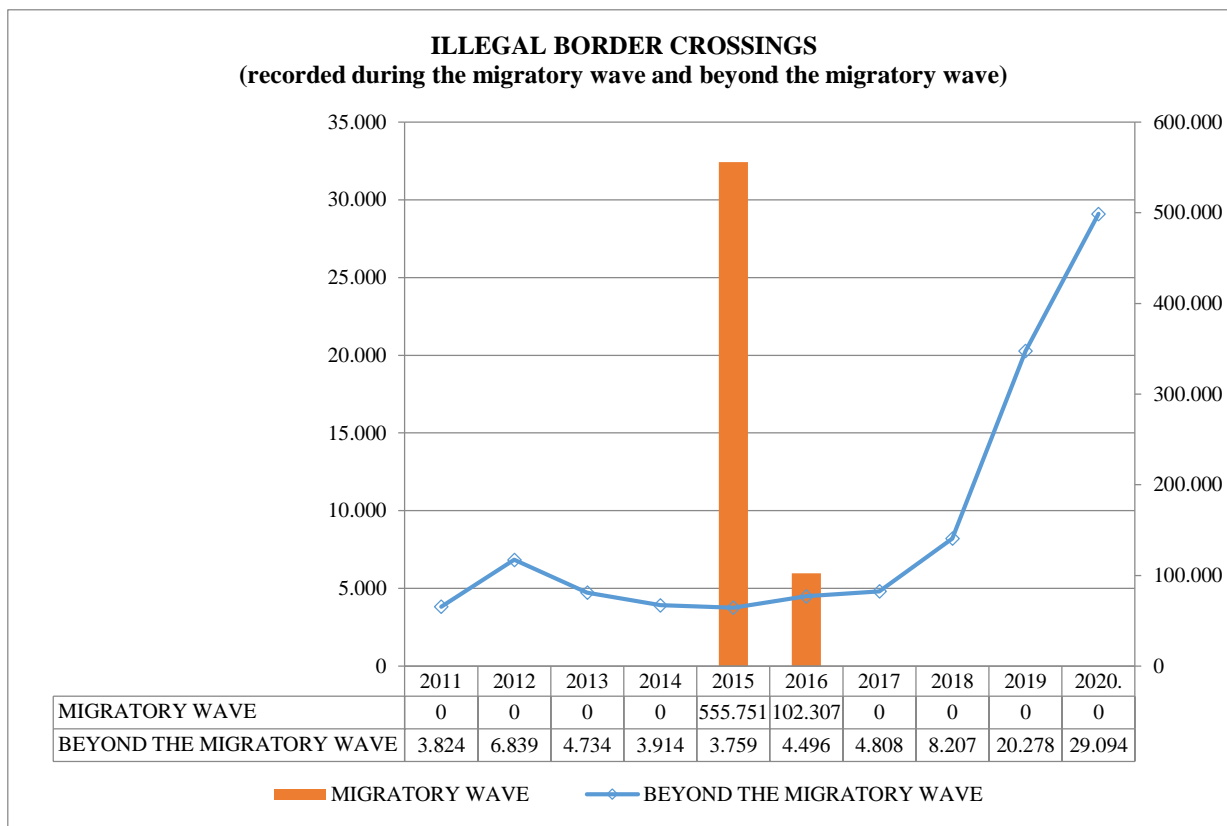


Chart 8 – Illegal Border Crossings 2011 to 2020
Source: Ministry of the Interior

Trends in illegal border crossings between 2011 and 2020 can be seen in Chart 10 with a noticeable increase in irregular border crossings over the last two years.

In 2020, a total of 698 criminal offences were recorded under Article 326 of the Criminal Code “Illegally entering, moving and staying in the Republic of Croatia, another Member State of the European Union or a signatory to the Schengen Agreement”, with 692 offenders.

In 2019, 946 crimes and 983 persons were recorded. The number of offences fell by 26.2% in 2020, compared to 2019. The reduction of detected criminal offences is a consequence of the measures put in place to combat COVID-19. Epidemiological

measures to restrict the movement of citizens have had an impact on the decline of offenders, as foreign offenders who make up a significant proportion of all perpetrators, have in a large number of cases previously used legal possibilities of transnational traffic, which was significantly limited in 2020, i.e. it was allowed but with significant limitations. Also, the decrease in the number of reported criminal offences is due to the dismantling of smuggling chains as a result of criminal investigations carried out in the framework of joint international police research with the Member States of the European Union and South East European countries, which have intensified over the past years. The decline in the number of

offenders and offences can be seen in Table 4.

Most perpetrators are nationals from the Republic of Croatia, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia, with the highest number of smuggled persons being nationals from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iraq.

9.2. Preventing illegal stay

In order to prevent that stay of third-country nationals whose visa or residence permit has expired and who were unable to leave Croatia in time due to unforeseeable circumstances caused by COVID-19 (cancelled flight etc.) becomes illegal, the Republic of Croatia allowed them to remain in the country until the conditions for their departure were met. They had to report their stay to the competent police station. They could also apply for a temporary stay for other purposes at the competent police administration/station. Regardless, the conditions listed in the Aliens Act (valid travel document, proof of health insurance and means of subsistence) had to be met. It is possible to apply for temporary stay via e-mail.

9.3. Projects under implementation

On 17 February 2020, a Decision was made, and amended on 11 May 2020, on the allocation of funds to the Ministry of the Interior for the implementation of the project "Procurement of equipment creates new and improved existing IT databases for registration of illegal migration in the return process" within AMIF. The purpose of the project is to ensure a sufficient number of portable EURODAC workstations, flatbed scanners, cameras and scales with an altimeter for quality processing of foreigners staying illegally in the Republic of Croatia.

On 22 September 2020, a Decision was made within AMIF to allocate funds to the Ministry of the Interior for the project: "Improving the functionality and maintenance of stationary and portable workstations for digital fingerprinting EURODAC" with the purpose of improving the functionality and maintenance of the EURODAC system and workstations

Table 4 – Number of offences and offenders for the offences referred to in Article 326 of the Criminal Code in 2018, 2019 and 2020

	2018	2019	2020	+ - %
Number of offences	619	946	698	-26,2
Number of offenders	620	983	692	-29,6

Source: Ministry of the Interior



10. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

10.1. National strategical framework

On 7 December 2020, the Croatian Government adopted a new Decision establishing the National Committee for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings (Official Gazette, No 136/20). The above-mentioned Decision includes representatives of the judiciary.

In order to improve the existing legislative framework and with a view to ensuring the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings and the detection, prosecution and adequate sanctioning of perpetrators of trafficking in human beings and reducing demand, the Croatian Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities began drafting a Protocol on the exchange of data on identified victims of trafficking, which is planned to be adopted by the end of 2021. A Working Group to draft a Protocol on the exchange of data on identified victims of trafficking in human beings was set up by a decision of May 2020. The first meeting of the Working Group took place in June 2020. With this Protocol, the Republic of Croatia aims to improve the database of cases of trafficking in human beings and the prosecution of perpetrators of human trafficking and related crimes.

10.2. Activities to improve the identification of third-country nationals victims of trafficking in human beings

10.2.1. National trainings

As training of target groups is an important supportive part of the overall anti-trafficking strategy in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, more training courses in this field were held in 2020 for police officers, including border police officers.

Police officers of the Criminal Police Directorate provided online training for border police officers through the e-education system of the Police Academy on the topic of combating trafficking in human beings.

In addition, the Croatian Red Cross provided training for border police officers on the identification of victims of trafficking in the migrant population.

10.2.2. International cooperation

In 2020, the Criminal Police Directorate also pursued intensive international police cooperation with the Member States of the European Union and third countries in the course of more significant criminal investigations, through organised operational meetings (including online meetings) and international police cooperation channels, through Europol, INTERPOL and police liaison officers.

10.3. Prevention and awareness-raising activities on trafficking in human beings

Several campaigns, trainings, projects and other activities related to trafficking in



human beings were carried out in the Republic of Croatia in 2020 with a view to preventing and raising awareness about this issue.

With regard to third-country nationals, activities under the project “Social services and psychosocial support for applicants for international protection”, implemented by the Croatian Red Cross in the reception centres for applicants for international protection in Kutina and Zagreb, under a contract with the Ministry of the Interior, were carried out.

One of the areas of work of the Croatian Red Cross was the identification of vulnerable groups and the planning of work tailored to their specific needs, including potential victims of trafficking. As part of psychosocial support, all beneficiaries are also aware of the increased risk of potential trafficking in human beings.

11. RETURN AND READMISSION

11.1. Impact of COVID-19 on return procedures

In 2020, returns were suspended for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the basis of bilateral agreements on the admission of persons with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, returns started again in June, to a limited extent, and later on all other returns to the region and beyond (Turkey) also continued.

Return procedures have been adapted to the new situation. Thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of the Interior applied instructions from the Croatian Institute for Public Health and, when dealing with irregular migrants, checked for any symptoms of COVID-19. In the event that the migrant had symptoms, the relevant epidemiologist was informed, who took over the follow-up. If the third-country national did not have any symptoms, the police continued the proceedings, i.e. issued a decision on return in accordance with the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, No 130/11, 74/13, 69/17, 46/18 and 53/20). In the event that the third-country national was unable to leave the Republic of Croatia due to travel restrictions, the time limit for return was extended, and/or a decision on the postponement of forced return was issued.

Furthermore, since December 2020, third-country nationals have been tested for SARS-CoV-2 as requested by the countries of return.

11.2. Statistics

In 2020, the total number of returned third-country nationals was 1,517. Compared to 2019, a decrease in the number of forced returns is visible due to difficulties in return during the COVID-19 pandemic (in 2019, 1,566 third-country nationals were forcefully returned and in 2020, this number amounted to 879). Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, forced return to countries of origin was also not possible because foreigners in the Republic of Croatia seek asylum or because of the impossibility of establishing their identity and obtaining travel documents.

It was possible, albeit in a reduced volume, only to the countries in the region. An overview of voluntary and forced returns between 2014 and 2020 can be found in Table 5.

Under readmission agreements with neighbouring countries, a total of 10,434 third-country nationals were readmitted in 2020, while 413 were returned (Table 6 and 7). The largest number of readmitted persons were nationals of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Morocco and Syria (Table 6), which is also consistent with the representation of these national groups in illegal border crossings.

Table 5 – Voluntary and forced return 2014-2020

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Voluntary Return	830	1250	940	1040	894	890	638
Forced Return	1415	690	950	1085	1318	1566	879
<i>Total</i>	<i>2245</i>	<i>1940</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>2125</i>	<i>2212</i>	<i>2456</i>	<i>1517</i>

Source: Eurostat (migr_eirt_vol), Ministry of the Interior

Table 6 – Readmitted and returned third-country nationals in 2019 and 2020 by nationality under readmission agreements with neighbouring countries

Nationality	Readmission		+ - %	Return		+ - %
	2019	2020		2019	2020	
Afghanistan	1323	2120	60,24	80	35	-56,25
Algeria	986	388	-60,65	12	6	-50,00
Bangladesh	1001	1402	40,06	9	24	166,67
Iraq	576	382	-33,68	141	40	-71,63
Iran	394	254	-35,53	98	7	-92,86
Kosovo	121	108	-10,74	26	5	-80,77
Morocco	684	1327	94,01	8	49	512,50
Pakistan	3453	2994	-13,29	94	44	-53,19
Syria	732	531	-27,46	14	14	0,00
Tunisia	127	41	-67,72	27	4	-85,19
Turkey	388	219	-43,56	207	97	-53,14
Other	1167	668	-42,76	154	88	-42,86
Total	10.952	10.434	-4,73	870	413	-52,53

Source: Ministry of the Interior

Table 7 – Readmitted and returned third-country nationals in 2019 and 2020 with neighbouring countries

READMISSION AND RETURN 2019/2020						
Border	Readmission		+ - %	Return		+ - %
	2019	2020		2019	2020	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	29	25	-13,79	612	260	-57,52
Montenegro	0	0		16	34	112,50
Hungary	301	537	78,41	0	0	
Slovenia	10620	9871	-7,05	29	60	106,90
Serbia	2	1	-50,00	213	59	-72,30
TOTAL	10.952	10.434	-4,73	870	413	-52,53

Source: Ministry of the Interior

11.3. The work of Detention centre for foreigners in Ježevo during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, detention centres remained open, but efforts were stepped up to ensure adequate care for third-country nationals hosted in the centres. In the detention centres, information leaflets were provided on the conscious and responsible behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were translated into 26 languages by the International Organization for Migration. The centres also provided leaflets with instructions from the Croatian Institute for Public Health on proper hand hygiene, which have also been translated into the languages used by third-country nationals (Figure 8). Additional measures have also

been taken in the centres to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as hygiene supplies, disinfectant dispensers, medical staff, temperature measurements, etc.

Until December 2020, third-country nationals were examined for COVID-19 symptoms before being placed in the centre. Since December 2020, a negative PCR test for SARS-CoV-2 is required.

11.4. Return projects

In 2020, several return-related projects were being carried out in the Republic of Croatia. The projects were implemented by the Ministry of the Interior alone or in cooperation with certain international or non-governmental

organisations on the basis of a contract with the Ministry of the Interior. All projects were funded by AMIF.

The Detention centre for foreigners in Ježevo implemented the project “Improving accommodation and working conditions at the Detention centre for foreigners in Ježevo”. Through the project, sanitary facilities were renovated, windows in accommodation rooms were replaced, playgrounds used by third-country nationals were renovated, as were offices, and new computers were purchased.

In December 2020, the projects “Implementing the process of returning third-country nationals” and “Assistance in maintaining an adequate level of accommodation at the Detention centre for foreigners” were extended until the first quarter of 2023.

The “Monitoring of forced returns” project, implemented by the Croatian Law Centre on the basis of a contract with the Ministry of the Interior, also continued in 2020. A total of 35 monitoring of forced returns took place in 2020.

The projects “Free legal aid in the return process” and “Translating and expanding the network of translators for the return process”, are being implemented on an ongoing basis.

The International Organisation for Migration implemented the “Assisted Voluntary Return” project in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they provided information and other assistance primarily through online channels and applied sanitary measures throughout the assisted voluntary return process. In 2020, 40 third-country

nationals returned to their country of origin through the project and 22 persons received reintegration assistance.

11.5. Trainings

In 2020, police officers working on return procedures participated in several international and national trainings and workshops.

Police officers of the Detention centre for foreigners participated in FRONTEX “Course for escort leaders during forced returns by air” and in FRONTEX workshops on “Training on Quantitative Reporting on Returns” for users of the Integrated Return Management Application (IRMA). They also participated in workshops of representatives of detention centres in the European Union organised by the European Migration Network and at a workshop organised by the Croatian Red Cross on “Enhancing professional capacities, exchanging best practices and strengthening international cooperation”.

11.6. International activities and cooperation with third countries

In 2020, police officers of the Detention centre for foreigners cooperated internationally by supporting Greece in the FRONTEX joint operation “JO POSEIDON Readmission activities” – readmission of third-country nationals to the Republic of Turkey and fingerprinting/registration of third-country nationals in the Moria Camp on Lesbos, from 29 January to 28 February 2020 and from 24 February to 27 April 2020.

In addition, a police officer from the Centre participated in regular FRONTEX

meetings: Meeting of the Direct Contact Points for Return (DCR) and the Pre-Return Action Network (PRAN).

International activities also included the participation of the police officers from the Centre in a FRONTEX working session regarding the project “VCI Afghanistan – Identification and acquisition of travel documents of Afghan nationals” – video-conference with the Afghan Embassy in Vienna, and participation in an on-line workshop on “Electronic readmission case management system for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan” under the Readmission Agreement between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.



STATISTICAL ANNEX

Annex 1. Utilization of annual quota for 2020 until 31 December 2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior

<https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2020/Kvote/ISKORISTENOST-GODISNJE-KVOTE-NA-DAN-31-12-2020-GODINE.pdf>

ACTIVITY SECTORS	OCCUPATION	QUOTA	REMAINING POSITIONS	IN PROGRESS
Construction	Carpenter	4600	1339	581
	Mason	5580	1150	933
	Reinforced concrete worker	2500	1065	259
	Concrete worker	1500	979	100
	Construction machinery manager	850	499	30
	Crane operator	100	68	2
	Installation electrician	900	209	90
	Electrical technician	500	108	46
	Roofer	600	464	27
	House painter	850	157	158
	Tiler	1200	383	173
	Welder	1100	588	89
	Plumber	450	112	48
	Plasterer	1850	365	295
	Geodriller	30	21	0
	Insulation worker	500	230	47
Driver	200	76	31	



	Asphalt worker	150	89	3
	Mechanic	100	44	6
	Woodworker	400	266	32
	Stonemason	70	23	6
	Chimney sweep	20	18	0
	Floor layer	250	137	21
	Auxiliary construction worker	3000	280	472
	Construction worker	3200	491	458
	Fitter	2800	412	426
	Total:	33300	9573	4333
	Shipbuilding	Shipfitter	230	133
Straightener		5	5	0
Electric welder		120	115	6
Welder		205	137	29
Locksmith		80	32	7
Ship pipefitter		160	123	11
Ship scaffolder		25	9	2
Anti-corrosion worker/painter		105	32	9
Grinder and metal cleaner		80	45	4
Ship woodworker		30	20	0
Ship mechanic		10	8	0
Ship electrician		40	14	1



	Cargo driver	10	9	0
	Total:	1100	682	86
Tourism and catering	Tourist animator	250	225	2
	Masseur of special types of massage	300	230	16
	International cuisine chef	200	187	1
	Chef	2000	1592	105
	Travel agent	80	68	3
	Diving instructor	20	18	0
	Auxiliary worker in tourism	12000	8025	596
	Waiter	2450	1870	70
	Receptionist	200	168	5
	Baker	450	297	17
	Confectioner	200	168	5
	Lifeguard	80	52	0
	Tourist train driver	20	20	0
	Yoga therapist	10	9	0
	A physician of traditional Chinese medicine	30	27	0
	Barber	30	23	1
	Spa therapist	50	41	5
	Auxiliary worker in tourism - SEASONAL WORK up to 6 months	12000	9517	43

	Total:	30370	22543	870
Culture	Ballet artist	10	8	1
	Orchestral artist	10	7	0
	Opera singer	5	5	0
	Total:	25	20	1
Traffic	Cargo driver	1650	242	222
	Bus driver	400	360	11
	Motor vehicle driver	720	488	106
	Vehicle repair and maintenance worker	114	7	7
	Aircraft mechanic	15	15	0
	Cabin crew	5	5	0
	Total:	2904	1117	346
Health care	Doctor of medicine with specialist education	10	6	1
	Doctor of medicine on specialist training	15	13	0
	Doctor of medicine	20	11	1
	Dentist with specialist education	5	2	0
	Nurse	25	22	1
	Dental assistant	10	4	0
	Master of pharmacy	5	3	0
	Total:	90	61	3
Social care	Psychologist	5	5	0

	Speech therapist	5	5	0
	Nurse	55	31	3
	Caregiver	90	12	20
	Physiotherapist	10	5	0
	Occupational therapist	5	5	0
	Social worker	5	5	0
	Chef	10	5	1
	Assistant chef	15	7	2
	Cleaner	50	18	11
	Total:	250	98	37
Food industry	Baker	500	72	49
	Fish processing worker	230	40	13
	Fruit and vegetable processing worker	100	90	2
	Butcher	375	208	31
	Confectioner	100	88	2
	Commercialist - a specialist in the sashimi market	5	5	0
	Delivery vehicle driver	25	14	2
	Machine service technician	10	5	0
	Miller	15	15	0
	Total:	1360	537	99
Manufacturing	Sewist	130	1	6
	Tanner	20	3	1

	Tailor	20	3	2
	Woodworker	160	59	22
	Knitter of aluminum rattan furniture	5	5	0
	Upholsterer	10	4	0
	Glassblower	5	5	0
	CNC operator	50	31	8
	Auxiliary production worker	75	17	16
	Production worker	390	31	38
	Total:	940	185	102
Agriculture and forestry	Auxiliary cattle farmer and shepherd	120	37	11
	Mechanization operator	70	45	0
	Woodman	70	18	5
	Cutter	140	39	10
	Worker on fishing vessels	40	22	4
	Worker pruning fruit trees and vines	15	15	0
	Horse logger	15	15	0
	Agricultural worker	535	269	73
	Shepherd	15	1	0
	Aquaculture worker	30	22	2
	Veterinarian	10	7	0
	Agricultural technician	20	15	0

	Auxiliary worker (agriculture, fishing, forestry)	450	150	31
	Worker in fruit, vegetable, and grape growing – Seasonal work up to 90 days	600	567	5
	Worker in grafting fruit trees and grapevines – Seasonal work up to 6 months	20	11	0
	Total:	2150	1232	141
Metal industry	Welder/Electric welder	610	218	98
	Locksmith/ Machinist	710	162	76
	Milling machine operator	15	15	76
	Turner	50	40	4
	Pipefitter	120	14	31
	Varnisher	120	74	2
	CNC operator	60	32	9
	Metallurgical worker	150	22	9
	Mechanic	50	24	24
	Fitter	180	30	22
	Installer	85	59	2
	Technician in the metal industry	15	13	2
	Metal industry operator	20	11	0
	Auxiliary worker in industry	70	17	15

	Grinder/Metal cleaner	45	25	29
	Total:	2300	756	399
IT sector	Software engineer	60	29	1
	System engineer	20	12	0
	Business analyst	20	7	1
	Electrotechnical engineer	20	16	0
	Mechanical engineer	25	15	1
	Product designer	20	15	1
	Computer game designer	10	8	0
	Database administrator	15	0	1
	Database administrator	10	9	0
	Copywriter	40	27	0
	Designer	65	62	1
	Multimedia programmer	100	94	1
	Specialist in digital marketing	50	45	2
	Digital analyst	30	26	1
	Project manager	70	56	2
	Advisor for public relations	50	43	3
	HR manager	30	19	1
	Total:	685	525	20
		Salesman/Tradesman	1550	1020



Economy and trading	Butcher	50	31	0
	Driver	100	76	4
	Warehouse worker	190	28	35
	Florist	10	9	0
	Total:	1900	1164	101
Intra-corporate transfer	Manager	40	32	3
	Expert	38	21	0
	Intern	18	17	0
	Total:	96	70	3
Strategic investment projects	In accordance with strategic investment projects	1000	822	1
	Total:	1000	822	1
	Total:	78470	39385	6542



Annex 2. Statistical indicators of granted international protection by nationality, type of protection and gender for the period until 31 December 2021

Source: Ministry of the Interior

International protection	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Asylum	1	3	11	5	4	21	7	15	36	83	183	240	157	36	802
M		3	6	4	4	15	4	12	31	50	132	152	90	22	525
0-13			3			3	2		3	7	33	42	30	8	131
14-17			1	1	1	3				5	4	14	9	1	39
18-34		3	1	3	1	4		9	21	29	80	65	25	10	251
35-64			1		2	5	2	3	7	9	15	31	26	3	104
F	1		5	1		6	3	3	5	33	51	88	67	14	277
0-13			3			2	2		2	15	22	35	25	5	111
14-17						1				1	2	14	5		23
18-34	1			1		3		3	2	15	17	17	17	5	81
35-64			2				1		1	2	10	21	19	4	60
65>													1	1	2
Subsidiary protection		3	2	9	9	14	17	10	7	17	28	25	1	6	148
M		3	2	6	4	8	9	10	5	11	18	13	1	4	94
0-13				1	1	2	3			3	5	6		1	22
14-17				2	1	1	1	1		2	3	3	1		15
18-34		3	2	1	2	2	5	8	3	6	5			2	39
35-64				2		3		1	2		5	4		1	18
F				3	5	6	8		2	6	10	12		2	54
0-13				1	3	2	3		1	1	2	8		2	23
14-17							2				4				6
18-34				2	2	2	2			2	3	2			15
35-64						2	1		1	3	1	2			10

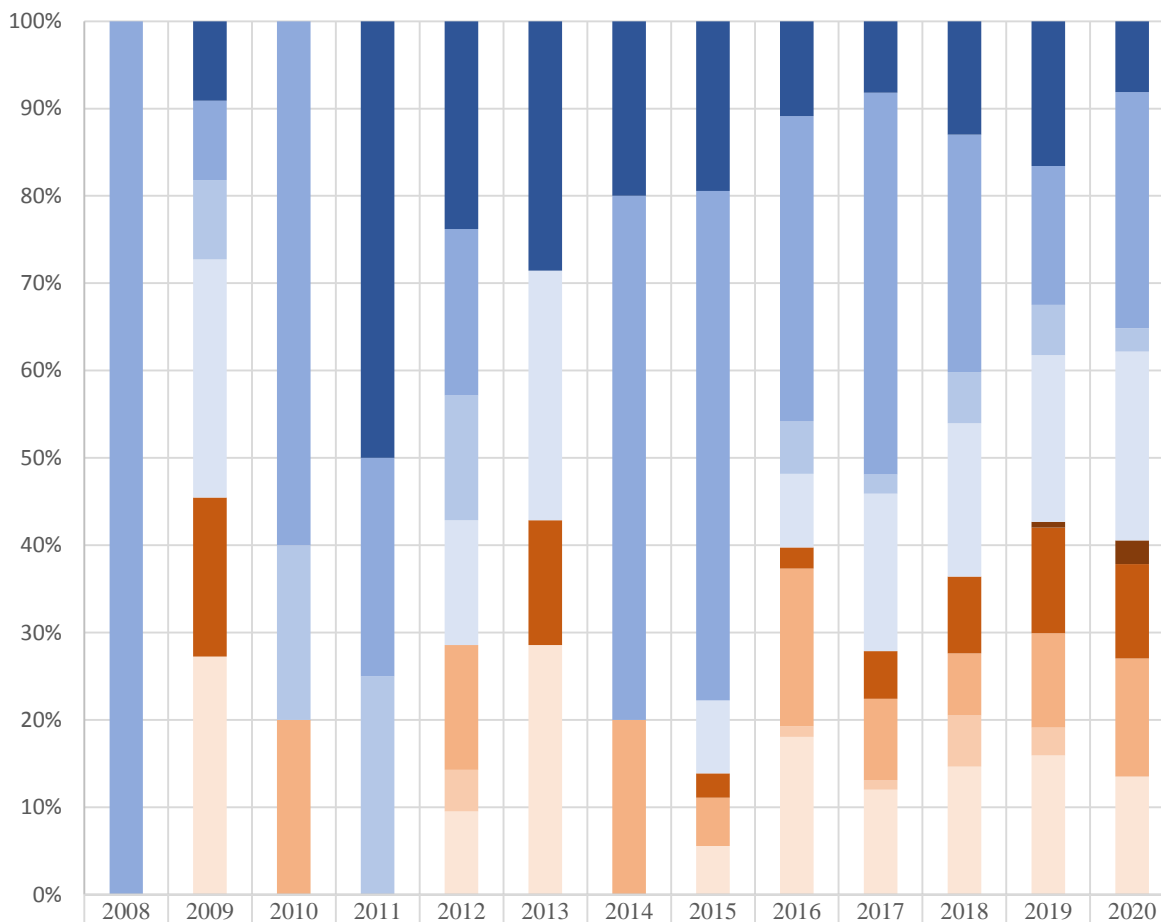


Annex 3. Asylum in the Republic of Croatia by gender and age groups in the period 2008-2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior

https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/statistika_medjunarodna_zastita_2020.pdf

Asylum in the Republic of Croatia by gender and age groups in the period 2008-2020



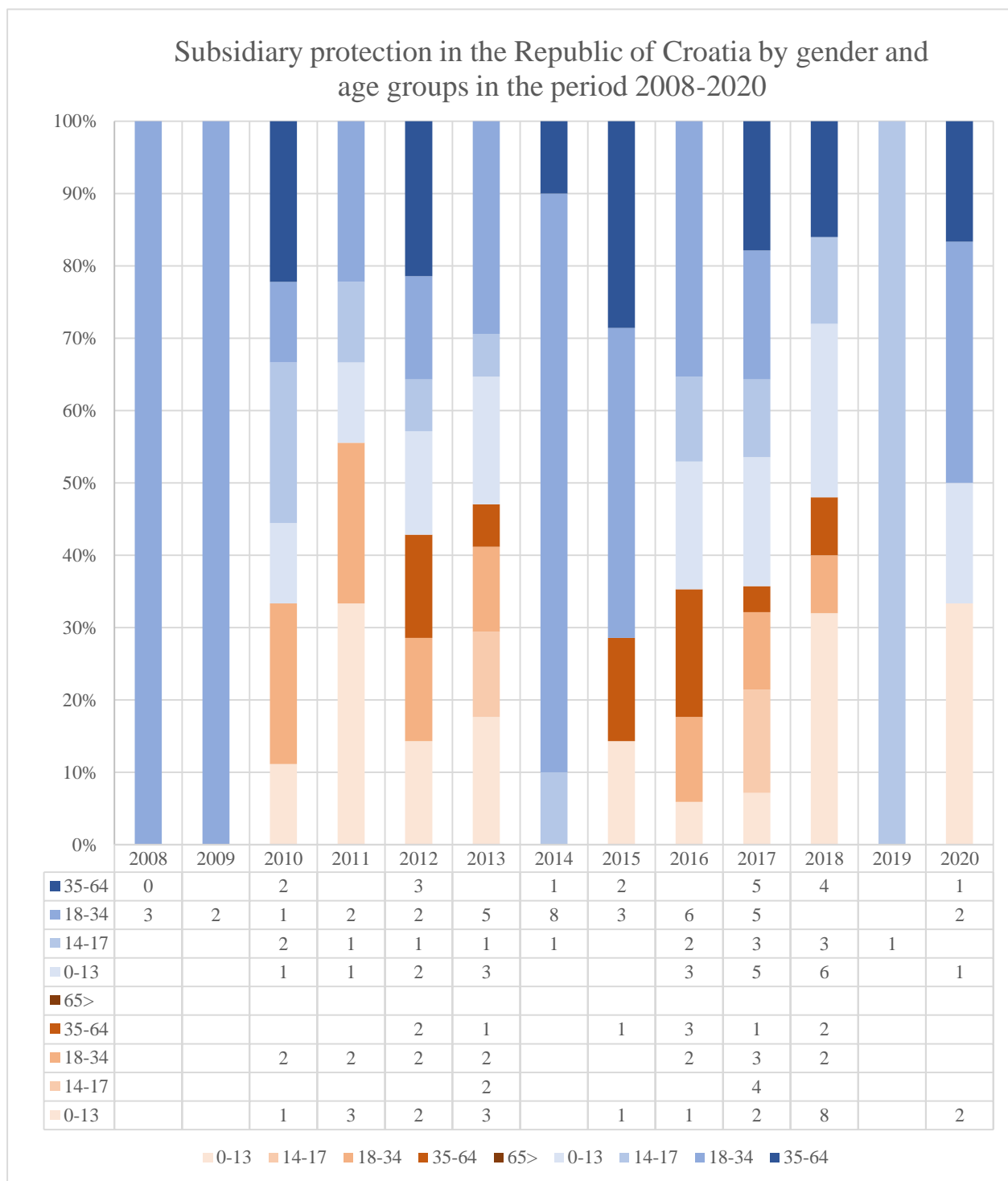
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
35-64	0	1	0	2	5	2	3	7	9	15	31	26	3
18-34	3	1	3	1	4		9	21	29	80	65	25	10
14-17		1	1	1	3				5	4	14	9	1
0-13		3			3	2		3	7	33	42	30	8
65>												1	1
35-64		2				1		1	2	10	21	19	4
18-34			1		3		3	2	15	17	17	17	5
14-17					1				1	2	14	5	
0-13		3			2	2		2	15	22	35	25	5

0-13 14-17 18-34 35-64 65> 0-13 14-17 18-34 35-64

Annex 4. Subsidiary protection in the Republic of Croatia by gender and age groups in the period 2008-2020

Source: Ministry of the Interior

https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/statistika_medjunarodna_zastita_2020.pdf





Annex 5. Statistical indicators of applicants for international protection by nationality and gender for the period 1 January - 31 December 2020. Source: Ministry of the Interior, https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/Medjunarodna_zastita_4kvartal2020.pdf

Statistical indicators of applicants for international protection by nationality and gender for the period 1 January - 31 December 2020			
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	M	F	TOTAL
AFGHANISTAN	541	393	934
ALBANIA	2		2
ALGERIA	23		23
AZERBAIJAN	1		1
BANGLADESH	12		12
STATELESS	3	1	4
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	2		2
DR CONGO		3	3
EGYPT	56		56
ERITREA	13	5	18
INDIA	3	3	6
IRAQ	239	196	435
IRAN	60	40	100
YEMEN	5	3	8
CHINA	3	1	4
KOSOVO	5	2	7
CUBA	2	2	4
LEBANON	1		1
LIBYA	3	1	4
NORTH MACEDONIA	1		1
MOROCCO	39	7	46
MYANMAR	1		1



NEPAL	2	4	6
NIGERIA	3		3
PAKISTAN	28	2	30
PALESTINE	10	5	15
RUSSIA	3	2	5
SYRIA	57	39	96
SLOVAKIA	1		1
SERBIA	1		1
TAJIKISTAN	2	2	4
TUNISIA	3	1	4
TURKEY	68	25	93
UKRAINE		1	1
UZBEKISTAN	1		1
TOTAL	1.194	738	1.932



Annex 6: Statistical indicators of unaccompanied minor applicants for international protection by age and gender for the period until 31 December 2020 Source: Ministry of the Interior, https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/Medjunarodna_zastita_4kvartal2020.pdf

Statistical indicators of unaccompanied minor applicants for international protection by age and gender for the period until 31 December 2020													
Gender/ Age	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
M	21	38	194	69	54	10	5	163	251	59	65	169	1.098
0-13 unaccompanied	3		3				2	15	23	11	3	21	81
14-15 unaccompanied	4	6	18	11	8		1	47	62	13	12	30	212
16-17 unaccompanied	14	32	173	58	46	10	2	101	166	35	50	118	805
F			3	1	1			1	10	5	5	17	43
0-13 unaccompanied								1	4	2	1	7	15
14-15 unaccompanied									1		2	4	7
16-17 unaccompanied			3	1	1				5	3	2	6	21
Total	21	38	197	70	55	10	5	164	261	64	70	186	1.141



Annex 7. Statistical data on the implementation of the Dublin procedure for the period 1 January – 31 December 2020 Source: Ministry of the Interior

https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/Medjunarodna_zastita_4kvartal2020.pdf

Incoming transfers by nationality (in HR):	
NATIONALITY	2020
Afghanistan	2
Algeria	6
Egypt	1
Iran	2
Iraq	17
Libya	2
Morocco	1
Pakistan	1
Syria	6
Turkey	1
Unknown nationality	1
TOTAL	40

Incoming transfers by Member States (in HR):	
MEMBER STATE	2020
Austria	4
Belgium	3
Finland	1
France	2
Germany	22
Netherlands	2
Slovenia	2
Switzerland	4
TOTAL	40

Number of outgoing transfers (from HR) by Member States:	
MEMBER STATE	2020
Belgium	3
Luxembourg	3
Switzerland	1
Spain	1
TOTAL	8

Number of outgoing transfers (from HR) by nationality:	
NATIONALITY	2020
Iran	6
Pakistan	1
Turkey	1
TOTAL	8



Funded by the European Union's Asylum,
Migration and Integration Fund



CROATIAN EMN PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE

Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19

AGENDA

24 June 2020

e-Conference

CONCEPT NOTE

The Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route is one of the main migratory paths into Europe. Despite downward trends on other routes towards the EU, arrivals on the Eastern Mediterranean route have been increasing up until the outbreak of COVID-19. For the past several months COVID-19 has had an impact on all types of migration into the EU. In this context, it is important to gain a better understanding of existing challenges and possible ways forward in managing migration pressure along the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route, while taking into consideration the risks posed by the pandemic.

The aim of the Croatian Presidency EMN e-Conference is to share knowledge, experience and views among representatives from Member States, EU institutions and international organizations on future challenges and solutions for dealing with irregular migration into the EU in the time of COVID-19. The e-conference will concentrate on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route and link it to the challenges of irregular migration and migrant smuggling into the EU in general. The

activities of criminal groups facilitating irregular entries into the EU remains an issue of concern which calls for immediate and responsible action on the side of the EU.

All Member States' and EU activities related to irregular migrants need to be aligned with international and EU standards of fundamental rights protection. With this in mind, the conference will also foster a discussion on the importance for the EU and Member States' authorities to respect migrants' fundamental rights while performing their daily tasks of managing the EU's external borders and performing return procedures. The rising trend in the number of arrivals at the EU borders in the Eastern Mediterranean raises new challenges for the EU as a whole and for frontline Member States in particular. This conference will create a forum to exchange views, explore practical solutions and enhance cooperation and solidarity among Member States, while ensuring the protection of migrants' fundamental rights.

AGENDA

<p>09:00 – 9:20</p>	<p>Welcome speech and introduction – Lidija Pentavec, Head of Section in Division for Illegal Migration, Border Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior, National Coordinator of the European Migration Network in the Republic of Croatia</p> <p>Keynote speakers:</p> <p>Zoran Ničeno, Head of Border Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of Croatia</p> <p>Johannes Luchner, Director of the Strategy and General Affairs Directorate, DG HOME, European Commission</p>
<p>09:20 – 10:20</p>	<p>Panel 1: General Overview of the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route</p> <p>According to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency EBCGA/Frontex data, despite downward trends on other routes towards the EU, the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan route saw growing migratory pressure in the last year. In 2019, there were more than 82 000 irregular migrants detected on the Eastern Mediterranean route, roughly 46% more than in the previous year. Due to its geographical position, the route was exposed to irregular movement both through land and sea borders. Moreover, the Joint Report provided by EBCGA/Frontex, Europol and EASO indicates that “the Western Balkans region is a key transit area for irregular migrants entering the EU via this Route and trying to continue their journey deeper in the EU by land.” Data from this region illustrate that a significant number of irregular crossings were detected at the EU borders on the Western Balkan Route; specifically, 14 000 detections were reported in 2019, an increase of 143% compared to 2018, when 5 844 illegal crossings were recorded. In most cases, irregular migrants had no intention to seek asylum – even those who may have been in need of international</p>

	<p>protection. Instead, they tried to continue their journey towards other EU Member States. Frequently, applications for international protection were made to avoid detention and return, which indicates that the asylum system is often misused. Additionally, the volume of secondary movements of third country nationals who enter irregularly with the help of migrant smugglers, or who stay irregularly upon legal entry, pose a major challenge for the EU as an area of freedom, security and justice.</p> <p>Western Balkan countries face a number of challenges in terms of reception and registration capacities, border management capacities, return capacities and lack of readmission agreements with countries of origin, lack of detention capacities resulting in an insufficient use of detention, amongst others.</p> <p>With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pressure on the Greek-Turkish border decreased, as migrants from the border area were moved to isolation to prevent the spread of the disease. With the end of the pandemic, it is expected that the pressure on the Greek border will continue and probably result in a stronger influx of illegal migrants via the Western Balkan route.</p> <p>Moderator - Goranka Novak Lalić, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of play and foresight on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Route – Carsten Simon, Head of Risk Analysis Unit, FRONTEX • COVID-19 impact on migrants in an irregular situation – A humanitarian perspective - Naile Busemann – Regional Protection Coordinator for the Western Balkans, International Committee of the Red Cross • EUROPEAN COMMISSION – COVID 19 – EU response-Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement – with emphasis on return, Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz, Head of Unit C1, Irregular Migration and Return Policy, European Commission <p>Q&A</p>
<p>10:20-10:35</p>	<p>Break</p>
<p>10:35-11:35</p>	<p>Panel 2: EU Engagement to Prevent and Fight Migrant Smuggling</p> <p>Enhanced border control activities throughout the Western Balkans hinder illegal border crossings and make it more difficult for irregular migrants to leave the region. The limited reception capacities of the countries of the region have put the migration and asylum systems under considerable pressure.</p> <p>Despite considerable support the EU provides to the countries of the region to tackle irregular migration, the smuggling of migrants remains, largely, a low risk – high profit business for smuggling networks. The aim of the panel is to counteract this situation and discuss a cross-cutting, holistic and structured response to turn the smuggling of migrants on the Western Balkan route into a high risk – low profit business. The panel presentations and discussions will try to raise awareness of the current irregular migration situation in the Western Balkans and present a way ahead for a more efficient tackling of migrant</p>

	<p>smuggling, having in mind the effects generated by the pandemic of COVID 19.</p> <p>Moderator - Goranka Novak Lalić, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Modus operandi</i> of migrant smugglers: presentation of Croatian experiences - Dejan Dretar, Head of Organized Crime Unit, Criminal Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of Croatia • Developing and maintaining good cooperation between Member States and third countries – Alvaro Rodrigex Gaya, Head of Strategy and Outreach, EUROPOL (EMSC) • EU policies addressing migrant smuggling - next steps – Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz, Head of Unit C1, Irregular Migration and Return Policy, DG HOME, European Commission <p>Q&A</p>
<p>11:35-11:50</p>	<p>Break</p>
<p>11.50 – 12:50</p>	<p>Panel 3: Protection and Promotion of Fundamental Rights in the Context of Irregular Migration</p> <p>The EU and its Member States are committed to upholding human rights of all migrants, regardless of their status. The EU <i>acquis</i> calls for strong EU external border protection in compliance with human rights law, as enshrined by EU legislation and international instruments. These obligations are transposed in national laws and practices.</p> <p>At operational level, national authorities sometimes face challenges in finding ways to conduct migration management, while at the same time ensuring human rights protection.</p> <p>The panel will identify migrants’ rights that may be affected upon irregular entry at the EU external borders, upon detection within the EU territory and during return operations. The panelists will discuss the EU and national rules and practices in this area and look at relevant case-law of European courts.</p> <p>The discussions will specifically focus on different challenges on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan route and search for solutions to manage migration flows in full compliance with human rights.</p> <p>Moderator - Goranka Novak Lalić, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the connection between the Greek-Turkish border situation, the Western Balkans route and the ECtHR’s judgment in N.D. and N.T.? - Iris Goldner Lang, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb • Controlling land borders in compliance with fundamental rights – practical guidance – Tamas Molnar, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights <p>Q&A</p>

12:50-13:00	Closing remarks Magnus Ovilius , Head of Agencies and Networks Coordination Sector and Chair of the European Migration Network, DG HOME, European Commission
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Format: e-Conference

Event language: English



Funded by the European Union's Asylum,
Migration and Integration Fund



CROATIAN EMN PRESIDENCY E-CONFERENCE REPORT

**Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern
Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-
19**

24 June 2020



Conference background

The Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route is one of the main migratory paths into Europe. Despite downward trends on other routes towards the EU, arrivals on the Eastern Mediterranean route have been increasing up until the outbreak of COVID-19. For the past several months COVID-19 has had an impact on all types of migration into the EU.

The e-Conference “**Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19**” took place as a webinar, and aimed to share knowledge, experience and views among representatives from Member States, EU institutions and international organisations on future challenges and solutions for dealing with irregular migration into the EU in the time of COVID-19. The emphasis was on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route but also on the link to the challenges of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the EU in general.

The event was Chaired by the national coordinator for the European migration network in Croatia, **Ms Lidija Pentavec**, while panel discussions were moderated by **Professor Goranka Novak Lalić**.



***Ms Lidija Pentavec**, Head of Section in Division for Illegal Migration, Border Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior and the EMN Croatia Coordinator*



***Ms Goranka Novak Lalić**, Profesor, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb*

Opening remarks

In his opening remarks, **Mr Zoran Ničeno**, Head of Border Police Directorate, in the Ministry of the Interior, Republic of Croatia, noted that the Eastern Mediterranean - Western Balkan route has for many years been one of the main entry paths into Europe. Migration pressure remained high with large number of migrants travelling through this corridor.



The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had halted the number of entries, but as from May 2020 the migration pressure has intensified again, and increasing numbers of migrants were expected to cross into the EU. Also, the reinforced border control and difficult terrain have led to a growing number of migrants becoming stranded in the region and, as a consequence, a sharp increase for smuggling services is present. The whole migration perspective demands a comprehensive approach to migration and activities related to irregular migrants need to be aligned with international and EU standards of fundamental rights protection.

Mr Zoran Ničeno, born on 1 April 1966 in Split, graduated in 1991 from the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. Since 2017, he has been the Chief of the Border Police Directorate and Assistant to the General Police Director. He started his career in 1992 in the Police Administration Zagreb as a police officer for the criminal police, and continued in the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia as a police officer for the reserve police. From 1994 to 1995 he was the head of the Department of Defense Preparations, and from 1995 to 2001 he was the head of the Maritime and Airport Police Department in the General Police Directorate.

He was Assistant Chief of the Border Police Directorate (2006), Head of the Maritime and Airport Police Department in the General Police Directorate (2006-2008), and Chief of the Police Directorate (2008-2010). From 2010 to 2012, he was the Chief of the Police Academy, and from 2012 to 2017, he was the Assistant Chief of the Border Police Directorate.

Mr Johannes Luchner, Director of the Strategy and General Affairs Directorate, DG HOME, European Commission, reflected that in 2019, Europe had faced fewer arrivals at the EU borders overall, however, the numbers of arrivals from the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes had increased and had accounted for 46% of migrant arrivals in the

EU. The spread of the COVID-19 virus had slowed down asylum, resettlement and return procedures; and had placed additional pressure on reception and detention facilities. On request of the EU Member States, the European Commission was playing a coordination and guidance role. The speaker also noted the work of the EMN in this context, which had been monitoring impacts in order to provide information to policymakers.

Mr Luchner noted that the Commission's new Pact on Migration and Asylum was to be adopted soon. The aim of the Pact was to find a fair and effective way of fostering solidarity amongst Member States, with legal migration as a key priority. There was a need also for a reformed and sustainable common asylum system, with asylum and return procedures needing to operate seamlessly - Member States must provide support for granting asylum plus ensure the return of those whose applications were unfounded. Protection of the EU external borders was also a key priority, and the EU would continue to support those Member States of first entry, thus the interoperability of border systems would be crucial. The Pact envisaged strengthening partnerships with countries of transit and return, increase the fight against human smuggling, foster return and open new legal pathways for migration. The aimed to embed a migration policy in full respect of fundamental rights, human

dignity, freedom and solidarity, which were at the core of EU values and commitments.



Johannes Luchner is an Austrian national who joined the European Commission in 1996. He holds a Master's degree from the University of Vienna and a Ph.D. from Penn State University. Before joining the European Commission, he worked as a free journalist and in the Austrian diplomatic service. He started his career in the Commission as desk officer for development cooperation. Mr. Luchner subsequently worked in the cabinet of Vice-President Kinnock, in DG Industry and Enterprise, the DG for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) as well as a Member of the Task Force for Greece in DG ECFIN. In April 2020, Mr. Luchner joined DG HOME as Director for Strategy and General Affairs.

Panel 1:

General Overview of the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route

The context for the first panel of the e-Conference was the continuing issue of high migration pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans.

Due to its geographical position, the route is exposed to irregular movement both through land and sea borders. Moreover, the Joint Report provided by EBCGA/Frontex, Europol and EASO indicates that “the Western Balkans region is a key transit area for irregular migrants entering the EU via this Route and trying to continue their journey deeper in the EU by land.” In most cases, irregular migrants had no intention to seek asylum – even those who may have been in need of international protection. Instead, they tried to continue their journey towards other EU Member States. Frequently, applications for international protection were made to avoid detention and return, which indicates that the asylum system is often misused. Additionally, the volume of secondary movements of third country nationals who enter irregularly with the help of migrant smugglers, or who stay irregularly upon legal entry, pose a major challenge for the EU as an area of freedom, security and justice.

Western Balkan countries face a number of challenges in terms of reception and registration capacities, border management capacities, return capacities and lack of readmission agreements with countries of origin, lack of detention capacities resulting in an insufficient use of detention, amongst others.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pressure on the Greek-Turkish border decreased, as migrants from the border area were moved to isolation to prevent the spread of the disease. With the end of the pandemic, it is expected that the pressure on the Greek border will continue and probably result in a stronger influx of illegal migrants via the Western Balkan route.

The restrictive measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated difficulties in delivering humanitarian assistance to vulnerable irregular migrants travelling along this route. The European Commission provided guidance on how to ensure unhindered continuation of asylum and return procedures during the health crisis.

Pannelist 1:

State of play and foresight on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Route

Carsten Simon, Head of Risk Analysis Unit, FRONTEX

Mr Carsten Simon highlighted the close links between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans routes. In 2019, some 75 000 migrant arrivals were recorded on the Eastern Mediterranean land and sea routes to Greece and Bulgaria, the majority to the Eastern Aegean Islands; A total of around 79 000 illegal border crossings by non-regional migrants were reported on the



Western Balkans route in 2019. Arrival levels were sustained in the first quarter of 2020. The adoption of restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic considerably reduced migrants' mobility and pressure at the border until mid-May. A re-routing of migrants was observed resulting for instance in an increased number of asylum requests in Kosovo¹. However, Turkey continued to host several millions of people displaced mostly from Syria. While they experienced travel restrictions during the pandemic, it was expected that the pressure to move onwards would soon resume. Increased migration pressure was

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

already recorded at the North Macedonian and Albanian borders, following the lifting of travel restrictions in the second half of May 2020.

Presentation:

Overview of the migratory situation in the Eastern Mediterranean / Western Balkans area 2019-May 2020

Carsten Simon joined Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, as Head of Risk Analysis Unit in 2019. At the agency's headquarters in Warsaw, he manages a team of analysts who assess the risks to EU's border security by building up a picture of trends and patterns in irregular migration and cross-border crime at the external borders.

Mr Simon started his professional career in 1993 at the German Federal Police, where he occupied different post as Commander and in Police Training. From 2010-2012 he was the Head of the Federal Police Inspectorate Offenburg at the German-French Border.

He subsequently gained experience in an international environment while working in the Palestinian Territories between 2013-2016, leading an international team that established the Palestinian Officers Academy and a Leadership Training Course based on international standards. He later became Senior Adviser in Ramallah, supporting the Palestinian Ministry of Interior and the Civil Police in security

matters and developing training courses for local police officers.

Before joining Frontex, Mr. Simon served as Deputy Head of the Strategic Analysis Center on Irregular Migration at the Federal Police Headquarters in Germany, where he was responsible for an area of activities ranging from the analysis of irregular migration towards Europe and Germany, the development of the national integrated border management strategy, through to the creation of new risk analysis products.

Pannellist 2:

COVID-19 impact on migrants in an irregular situation – A humanitarian perspective

Naile Busemann, Regional Protection Coordinator for the Western Balkans, International Committee of the Red Cross



Ms Naile Busemann spotlighted the humanitarian outlook of some of the consequences the COVID19 pandemic and

restrictive measures adopted to limit its spread entailed for migrants in an irregular situation. The pandemic was an example how challenges on the migratory route could exacerbate already existing vulnerabilities

or create new ones. Restrictive measures included the closure of borders, the suspension of the asylum procedures, encampment and movement restrictions in closed settings. In some situations, the measures led to migrants spending longer periods of time in inadequate boats or in overcrowded centres and having reduced access to support services and economic activities. At times, tensions and violence in the centres and camps had increased; this was in part a consequence of a general feeling of uncertainty regarding their future prospects (including legal status), and in part a result of the reduced space and resources which had escalated conflictual relations among different ethnic groups. The ICRC listed some of the measures put in place by MS to mitigate the impact of the adopted restrictions (e.g. online asylum applications, extension of residence permits).

Presentation:

COVID-19 impact on migrants in an irregular situation – a humanitarian perspective

Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since 2007, Naile Busemann has been working in the humanitarian sector for over 15 years, mainly in the field of protection in emergencies, displacement, migration and

detention settings. She is currently holding the position of Regional Protection Coordinator for the Western Balkans based in Belgrade, Serbia, since 2018.

Her previous assignments were in various countries in Asia, Africa, Middle East and Europe.

A lawyer by training, Naile Busemann holds a Masters in Humanitarian Assistance and a post-graduate diploma in Contemporary Diplomacy.

Pannellist 3:

EU response-Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement – with emphasis on return

Francisc Gaztelu Mezquiriz, Head of Unit C1, Irregular Migration and Return Policy, Europea Commission



Mr **Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz** (Head of the Irregular Migration and Return Policy Unit, DG HOME, European Commission) discussed the guidelines published by the

European Commission to support Member States in running asylum and migration procedures during the sanitary crisis. Specifically concerning return, the Commission guidelines had covered all aspects of the return procedure. Return operations would follow specific protocols to ensure safety for the migrants and the personnel involved. In the planning of return flights, cooperation with third countries was recommended. In the pre-return activities, several recommendations were advanced including: the extension of the period for voluntary return; the preferential use of alternative to detention; the respect of specific protocols in detention facilities on social distancing, quarantine, and access to healthcare for detainees.

Mr Mezquiriz stressed the future importance of reinforcing cooperation with third countries through the conclusion of readmission agreements and through cooperation on prevention of irregular migration and dismantle smuggling networks. The return system would also benefit from stronger border return procedures and from increased detention capacities. Mr Mezquiriz also highlighted the critical role of Frontex in improving the effectiveness of return operations.

Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz is an engineer and a microeconomist. He currently serves as the Head of the Irregular Migration and Return Policy Unit at DG Migration and

Home Affairs. His previous posts include Head of Unit for MFF, Budget and Agencies, Assistant to the Director General of Asia Pacific, Deputy Head of Unit of the Middle East and Deputy Head of Cabinet of the Vice president for the internal market, defence and space.

Panel 2:

EU Engagement to Prevent and Fight Migrant Smuggling

Enhanced border control activities throughout the Western Balkans hinder illegal border crossings and make it more difficult for irregular migrants to leave the region. The limited reception capacities of the countries of the region have put the migration and asylum systems under considerable pressure.

The second panel evidenced that the smuggling activities in the Western Balkans were conducted by well organised criminal networks using means that subjected migrants to high risks. This criminal activity was hard to eradicate, as it was a highly profitable with relatively low detection risks. Cooperation with third countries was essential to implement a cross-cutting, holistic and structured response to turn the smuggling of migrants on the Western Balkan route into a high risk – low profit business.

Pannelist 1:

Modus operandi of migrant smugglers: presentation of Croatian experiences

Dejan Dretar, Head of Organized Crime Unit, Criminal Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of Croatia



Mr Dejan Dretar presented statistical data on smuggling, noting that during the first five months of 2020, the reporting of criminal offences had decreased by 24%. Illegal border crossings were usually done on foot or by car. The crossings were extremely dangerous for the migrants, especially when concealed in specially designed hiding places in cars and vans, cargo planes and in sealed containers; the smugglers were less concerned about the well-being of the migrants than about the financial viability of the smuggling activities. Smugglers were ready to constantly adapt and change their approaches to circumvent controls; this made the network difficult to trace. A main challenge to detection victims of smuggling was through identifying their status as economic migrants or as potential assylum

seekers because frequently they were travelling without identity documents.

Presentation:

Migrant Smuggling – Croatian Experiences

Dejan Dretar is a police officer in Criminal Police Directorate for last 9 years working on International and National level regarding investigations on Organized crime and specially smuggling of migrants.

During his work in fighting smuggling of migrants he participated and led numerous number of investigations connected and linked with smuggling of migrants. After finishing Police Academy and Criminology he started his professional career as a police officer in police station, building his way to a position that he is today.

He is Croatian representative in FII EMPACT priority and he was representative in THB EMPACT priority in EU Policy Cycle. For the last 3 years he is the Head of Organized Crime Service on National level in Croatia.

During 2013. he finished International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Budapest in „Law enforcement and leadership development 2 (LELD)“ & „Law enforcement tactical and street survival (LETSS)“, participant and expert in CEPOL courses and he is also an FBI National Academy (FBINA) graduate.

Pannelist 2:

Developing and maintaining good cooperation between Member States and third countries

Alvaro Rodriguez Gaya, Head of Strategy and Outreach, EUROPOL (EMSC)



Mr Alvaro Rodrigez Gaya highlighted that migrant smuggling was in the top three criminal areas (out of 25) according to Europol's

data. Migrant smuggling activities had continued to be reported to Europol during the COVID-19 crisis. The speaker reiterated the point that smuggling was a very profitable business. The benefits were generally reinvested in real estate projects in third countries, therefore strong external actions and cooperation with third countries was essential to tackle the smugglers' networks. To this end, Europol had established cooperation arrangements with Western Balkans countries and sought to develop similar cooperation with African countries too, although some challenges were identified due to limited institutional capacities. At EU level, Frontex and Interpol were the key actors to facilitate links between operations and investigations. Some national activities were also started as the [Western Balkan Task Force](#), which was initiated by Austria. Western Balkan Task Force presents regional initiatives

designed to improve information and intelligence exchange both at strategic and at law enforcement level. Mr Gaya also stressed the importance of meeting both national and EU interests of Member States throughout cooperation and joint action.

Alvaro Rodriguez Gaya has 15 years of professional experience in the law enforcement industry, security-oriented educational background, and is professionally focused in international security, migration and multilateral cooperation. Responsible for the implementation of complex projects at EU level.

He is a Spanish attorney, having Master studies, who have been in charge, as Project Manager, of the Europol's department dealing with Facilitation of Illegal Immigration, 4 years as responsible of the Strategic and Outreach area in the European Migrant Smuggling Center and since 1st June 2020 the Head of the Operational coordination in the EMC. For 6 years being the support manager and co-driver of the EU priority under the EU Policy Cycle (Facilitation of illegal immigration).

Previously he was working for the Spanish Ministry of Interior as Senior Inspector of the SP National Police Force. Also, he worked in the international field as Spanish Liaison Officer at Europol's HQ in The Hague (NL) representing Spain (2009-2015).

He is a teacher in the Alfonso X El Sabio lecturing in two specialized master' studies focused on security in the international context (In EN) and human rights.

Pannelist 3:

EU policies addressing migrant smuggling - next steps

Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz, Head of Unit C1, Irregular Migration and Return Policy, DG HOME, European Commission

Mr **Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz** stressed that the fight against smuggling would be prioritised by the Commission under the new Migration Pact. The EU action plan also had an important focus on anti-smuggling, especially on operational cooperation, exchange of information, and cooperation with third countries. Three key tools were considered critical to the Commission's actions. Firstly, the Common Operational Partnerships (COP) which brought together small teams of law enforcement experts from all partners, including third countries; the COPs so far have focussed on Africa, but they had been opened up to the Western Balkans and other routes. Secondly, prevention and information campaigns which would create counter-narratives to those of the smugglers. Finally, the Immigration Liaisons Officers (ILO), especially in Western Balkans, who were helping to build

stronger relations with national authorities in third countries.



Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz is an engineer and a microeconomist. He currently serves as the Head of the Irregular Migration and Return Policy Unit at DG Migration and Home Affairs.

His previous posts include Head of Unit for MFF, Budget and Agencies, Assistant to the Director General of Asia Pacific, Deputy Head of Unit of the Middle East and Deputy Head of Cabinet of the Vice president for the internal market, defence and space.

Panel 3:

Protection and Promotion of Fundamental Rights in the Context of Irregular Migration

The EU and its Member States are committed to upholding human rights of all migrants, regardless of their status. The EU *acquis* calls for strong EU external border protection in compliance with human rights law, as enshrined by EU legislation and international instruments. These obligations are transposed in national laws and practices.

At operational level, national authorities sometimes face challenges in finding ways to conduct migration management, while at the same time ensuring human rights protection.

The last panel focused on the key fundamental rights at stake in border controls and procedures; these especially related to ensuring protection from *refoulement* and mass expulsion; access to international protection; and the right to life and security. Recent changes in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had opened-up a new understanding of a State's obligations on border procedures especially regarding push-backs. In practice, the enforcement of human rights safeguards fell mostly on border guards, who would benefit from

practical guidance on these issues in their day-to-day work.

Pannelist 1:

What is the connection between the Greek-Turkish border situation, the Western Balkans route and the ECtHR's judgment in N.D. and N.T.?

Iris Goldner Lang, Professor in Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb



Ms Iris Goldner Lang argued that there is a clear link between the political and practical reactions to the attempt of thousands of migrant to cross the Greek-Turkish border in February and March 2020, on the one hand, and the behaviour of the two European courts and the 2015/2016 Western Balkans route, on the other hand. She maintained that the developments at the Greek-Turkish border can only be understood as the result of the interaction of Member States' experience of the 2015/2016 Western Balkans route and their fear of its reoccurrence, Member States' fear of turning into hotspots, the

Luxembourg Court's decisions on the EU-Turkey Statement and the ECHR's decision in N.D. and N.T. In contrast with its previous jurisprudence, in its judgement in [N.D. and N.T. versus Spain](#), the European Court of Human Rights concluded that the expulsion of irregular migrants without an individual assessment of their situation was not in breach of the prohibition of mass expulsion (art. 4, additional Protocol 4 ECHR), if two conditions were met: that the state provided "genuine and effective access to means of legal entry, in particular border procedures for those who have arrived at the border" and that there was an "absence of cogent reasons why the applicant did not make use of official entry procedures, which were based on objective facts for which the respondent state was responsible". In this context, questions were raised regarding future evolutions on the prohibition of push-back at border crossings: would the Strasbourg Court reconfirm this new approach in future judgements, for instance if it were to decide on a case related to the facts at the Turkish-Greek border? What criteria would the Court develop in future decisions to define mass arrivals or to assess the level of security threat? And would the Court of Justice of the European Union follow this same approach if confronted with a similar situation?

Presentation:

[The Greek-Turkish border situation, the Western Balkans Route and N.D.&N.T](#)

Iris Goldner Lang is a Jean Monnet professor of EU law and the holder of the UNESCO Chair on Free Movement of People, Migration and Inter-Cultural Dialogue at the University of Zagreb – Faculty of Law. She works at the Department of European Public Law, which she chaired from 2013 until 2015. She was a John Harvey Gregory Visiting Professor of Law and World Organization and a Fulbright Visiting Researcher at Harvard Law School in 2015/2016. Prof. Goldner Lang was a Visiting Researcher at University College London (summer 2017) and at Harvard Law School (summer 2018), where she held a series lectures at Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic. She was also an invited lecturer at the Court of Justice of the European Union, European Parliament, LSE, University of Stockholm, University of Vienna, Boston University, etc. She is one of the academic coordinators of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence “EU’s Global Leadership in the Rule of Law”. She has been the leader of two Jean Monnet Modules on “EU Migration Law and Policy” and “EU Internal Market Law”. She is the president of the Croatian Society for European Law (FIDE branch), the Croatian representative in the Odysseus Academic Network for Legal Studies on Immigration and Asylum in Europe and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Academy of European Law (ERA). She is the Editor-In-Chief of the Croatian Yearbook of European

Law and Policy and a member of the ERA Forum Advisory Board. She is the editor of three books and the author of numerous articles, chapters in books and an authored book.

Pannelist 2:

Controlling land borders in compliance with fundamental rights – practical guidance

Tamas Molnar, legal research officer at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)



Mr Tamas Molnar highlighted that the practical implementation of human rights obligations fell largely on the officers operating at border crossing

points and along the green borders. Therefore, the FRA prepared a practical guidance entitled “Border control at external land borders and fundamental rights” targeting specifically border-management staff in the European Union. The guidance tool lists ten ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ to support border officials in the implementation of the fundamental rights safeguards of the Schengen Borders Code (Regulation (EU) No. 2016/399) and related EU law instruments in their daily work, when carrying out controls at external land

borders. [The guidance](#) was published at the end of July and later on further translations to other EU official languages might follow.

Presentation:

Controlling land borders in compliance with fundamental rights – FRA practical guidance

Dr Tamás MOLNÁR (1980) studied law in Budapest and Brussels (LLM on EU law), and holds a PhD in public international law (Budapest). He also passed the bar exam in Hungary. Since September 2016, he has been working as a legal research officer on asylum, migration and borders at the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in Vienna. His areas of expertise with respect to the FRA's work include: fundamental rights of irregular migrants; return and readmission; immigration detention; anti-smuggling; EU asylum acquis and visa policy as well as horizontal issues of public international law, including artificial intelligence and international law. Before joining FRA, he worked for a decade in various ministries in Hungary in the fields of international and EU migration law and their domestic implementation (drafting legislation; negotiating in EU Council Working Parties; preparing international agreements). He is also a visiting lecturer on international (migration) law at the

Institute of International Studies at Corvinus University of Budapest and the Faculty of Law at the University of Szeged. He has published widely in the fields of international law, EU migration law and relationship of legal orders, with over 80 journal articles, book chapters and a monograph (see at <https://vm.mtmt.hu//search/slist.php?lang=0&AuthorID=10032231>).

Concluding remarks:

Mr Magnus Ovilius (Head of Agencies and Networks Coordination Sector and Chair of the European Migration Network, DG HOME, European Commission) concluded



by noting that the one key word for migration and for migrants was 'predictability'. If a person comes to Europe, they should have the right to claim asylum; if they come with a job offer, they should expect a residence permit; if they come irregularly, they should expect to be

returned. The outcome should be predictable.

People were still on the move even during the pandemic. Smuggling had not disappeared in the lockdown, and more people would be likely to cross to Europe over summer, from countries where COVID-19 was still prevalent, and where health service were less developed.

Capacity building in the Member States and information exchange, all remained important for the future. The Commission supported better cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans, and other third countries, irrespective of their link to the EU, and the speaker noted that enhanced cooperation could also take place in the future through the engagement of Western Balkans countries in the European Migration Network. It was essential that the EU's values and principles were defended and shared with third countries, whilst tackling irregularity and opening legal pathways. It was also important that the EU and Member States continued to learn from their practises; whilst the new EU Migration Pact would provide the framework for the future, the Member States would still need to apply what they had learned through their past experience.

Magnus Ovilius is Head of Sector Agencies and Networks Coordination in DG HOME, European Commission. DG HOME works with 6 EU de-centralised Agencies

(FRONTEX, eu-LISA, EUROPOL, CEPOL, EASO and EMCDDA) and manages close to 30 EU wide Networks in the area of migration and security. Magnus Ovilius is responsible for the management of the sector including the related internal/external Agency and Networks Communication. He is responsible for horizontal coordination and cooperation in liaising with DG HOME Agencies, Networks, Policy and Resources Units as well as other Commission Services. Magnus Ovilius is also responsible for the management of the European Migration Network (Chair) and the European Migration Forum including finance and human resources. He is responsible for the management of the European Migration Network-Information exchange system (EMN - IES (legal migration, legal residence permits, return, voluntary return, statelessness, ILO Network, migration smuggling, information campaigns etc).

Magnus Ovilius has held various management positions in the private sector and EU Commission ranging from fight against terrorism to irregular migration including having worked as a Diplomat for the EU.

Magnus Ovilius holds a Degree of Master of Laws, LL.M. from the University of Lund, Sweden. He has also served with the military in the Swedish Royal Coastal Artillery as officer achieving the rank of First Lieutenant.

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CROATIAN EMN PRESIDENCY e-CONFERENCE

Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19

24 June 2020

This report summarises discussions from the e-Conference “*Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19*”, organised under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union by the Croatian Contact Point of the European Migration Network (EMN).

Support materials, including the event’s concept note, PowerPoint presentations delivered during the day are available on the [e-Conference webpage](#).

Summary of the event

The e-Conference “**Challenges of Irregular Migration on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19**” took place as a webinar, and aimed to share knowledge, experience and views among representatives from Member States, EU institutions and international organisations on future challenges and solutions for dealing with irregular migration into the EU in the time of COVID-19. The emphasis was on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route but also on the link to the challenges of irregular migration and migrant smuggling in the EU in general.

The event was Chaired by the EMN Croatia Coordinator, **Ms Lidija Pentavec**, while panel discussions were moderated by **Professor Goranka Novak Lalić**.

Outlook of irregular migration on the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan Route in the time of COVID-19

In his opening remarks, **Mr Zoran Ničeno**, noted that the Eastern Mediterranean - Western Balkan route has for many years been one of the main entry paths into Europe. Migration pressure remained high with large number of migrants travelling through this corridor. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had halted the number of entries, but evidence showed that the migration pressure has intensified again, and increasing numbers of migrants were expected to cross into the EU. Also, the reinforced border control and difficult terrain have led to a growing number of migrants becoming stranded in the region and, as a consequence, a sharp increase for smuggling services is present. The whole migration perspective demands a comprehensive approach to migration and activities related to irregular migrants need to be aligned with international and EU standards of fundamental rights protection.

Mr Johannes Luchner, reflected that in 2019, Europe had faced fewer arrivals at the EU borders overall, however, the numbers of arrivals from the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes had increased and had accounted for 46% of migrant arrivals in the EU. The spread of the COVID-19 virus had slowed down asylum, resettlement and return procedures; and had placed additional pressure on reception and detention facilities. On request of the EU Member States, the European Commission was playing a

coordination and guidance role. The speaker also noted the work of the EMN in this context, which had been monitoring impacts in order to provide information to policymakers.

Mr Luchner noted that the Commission's new Pact on Migration and Asylum was to be adopted soon. The aim of the Pact was to find a fair and effective way of fostering solidarity amongst Member States, with legal migration a key priority. There was a need also for a reformed and sustainable common asylum system, with asylum and return procedures needing to operate seamlessly - Member States must provide support for granting asylum plus ensure the return of those whose applications were unfounded. Protection of the EU external borders was also a key priority, and the EU would continue to support those Member States of first entry, thus the interoperability of border systems would be crucial. The Pact envisaged strengthening partnerships with countries of transit and return, increase the fight against human smuggling, foster return and open new legal pathways for migration. The aimed to embed a migration policy in full respect of fundamental rights, human dignity, freedom and solidarity, which were at the core of EU values and commitments.

General overview of the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route

The context for the first panel of the e-Conference was the continuing issue of high migration pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans. The restrictive measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated difficulties in delivering humanitarian assistance to vulnerable irregular migrants travelling along this route. The European Commission provided guidance on how to ensure unhindered continuation of asylum and return procedures during the health crisis.

Mr Carsten Simon (Head of Risk Analysis Unit of FRONTEX) highlighted the close links between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans routes. In 2019, some 75 000 migrant arrivals were recorded on the Eastern Mediterranean land and sea routes to Greece and Bulgaria, the majority to the Eastern Aegean Islands. A total of around 79 000 illegal border crossings by non-regional migrants were reported on the Western Balkans route in 2019. Arrival levels were sustained in the first quarter of 2021. The adoption of restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic considerably reduced migrants' mobility and pressure at the border until mid-May. A re-routing of migrants was observed resulting for instance in an increased number of asylum requests in Kosovo*. However, Turkey continued to host several millions of people displaced mostly from Syria. While they experienced travel restrictions during the pandemic, it was expected that the pressure to move onwards would soon resume. Increased migration pressure was already recorded at the North Macedonian and Albanian borders, following the lifting of travel restrictions in the second half of May 2020.

Ms Naile Busemann (Regional Protection Coordinator for the Western Balkans of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) highlighted the humanitarian perspective of some of the consequences the COVID19 pandemic and restrictive measures adopted to limit its spread entailed for migrants in an irregular situation. The pandemic was an example how challenges on the migratory route could exacerbate already existing vulnerabilities or create new ones. Restrictive measures included the closure of borders, the suspension of the asylum procedures, encampment and movement restrictions in closed settings. In some situations, the measures led to migrants spending longer periods of time in inadequate boats or in overcrowded centres and having reduced access to support services and economic activities. At times, tensions and violence in the centres and camps had increased; this was in part a consequence of a general feeling of uncertainty regarding their future prospects (including legal status), and in part a result of the reduced space and resources which had escalated conflictual relations among different ethnic groups. The ICRC enumerated some of the measures put in place by MS to mitigate the impact of the adopted restrictions (e.g. online asylum applications, extension of residence permits).

In conclusion, the ICRC recalled that even in emergency situations measures needed to comply with international law. They should be regularly reviewed and lifted once their grounds, legal basis or necessity cease. It was recommended to consider specific needs of migrants in national response plans and to ensure access to essential services and reliable information. Immigration detention was to be used only as a measure of last resort and family unity and contact would need to be guaranteed at all times.

Mr **Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz** (Head of the Irregular Migration and Return Policy Unit, DG HOME, European Commission) discussed the guidelines published by the European Commission to support Member

States in running asylum and migration procedures during the sanitary crisis. Specifically concerning return, the Commission guidelines had covered all aspects of the return procedure. Return operations would follow specific protocols to ensure safety for the migrants and the personnel involved. In the planning of return flights, cooperation with third countries was recommended. In the pre-return activities, several recommendations were advanced including: the extension of the period for voluntary return; the preferential use of alternative to detention; the respect of specific protocols in detention facilities on social distancing, quarantine, and access to healthcare for detainees.

Mr Mezquiriz stressed the future importance of reinforcing cooperation with third countries through the conclusion of readmission agreements and through cooperation on prevention of irregular migration and dismantle smuggling networks. The return system would also benefit from stronger border return procedures and from increased detention capacities. Mr Mezquiriz also highlighted the critical role of Frontex in improving the effectiveness of return operations.

EU engagement to prevent and fight migrant smuggling

The second panel evidenced that the smuggling activities in the Western Balkans were conducted by well organised criminal networks using means that subjected migrants to high risks. This criminal activity was hard to eradicate, as it was a highly profitable with relatively low detection risks. Cooperation with third countries was essential to implement a cross-cutting, holistic and structured response to turn the smuggling of migrants on the Western Balkan route into a high risk – low profit business.

Mr Dejan Dretar (Head of Organised Crime Unit, Criminal Police Directorate, Ministry of the Interior, Republic of Croatia), presented statistical data on smuggling, noting that during the first five months of 2020, the reporting of criminal offences had decreased by 24%. Illegal border crossings were usually done on foot or by car. The crossings were extremely dangerous for the migrants, especially when concealed in specially designed hiding places in cars and vans, cargo planes and in sealed containers; the smugglers were less concerned about the well-being of the migrants than about the financial viability of the smuggling activities. Smugglers were ready to constantly adapt and change their approaches to circumvent controls; this made the network difficult to trace. When victims of smuggling were detected a key challenge was to identifying their status as economic migrants or as potential asylum seekers, as often they were travelling without identity documents.

Mr Alvaro Rodriguez Gaya (Head of Strategy and Outreach, EUROPOL (EMSC)) highlighted that migrant smuggling was in the top three criminal areas (out of 25) according to Europol's data. Migrant smuggling activities had continued to be reported to Europol during the COVID-19 crisis. The speaker reiterated the point that smuggling was a very profitable business. The benefits were generally reinvested in real estate projects in third countries, therefore strong external actions and cooperation with third countries was essential to tackle the smugglers' networks. To this end, Europol had established cooperation arrangements with Western Balkans countries and sought to develop similar cooperation with African countries too, although some challenges were identified due to limited institutional capacities. At EU level, Frontex and Interpol were the key actors to facilitate links between operations and investigations. Some national activities were also started as the [Western Balkan Task Force](#), which was initiated by Austria. Western Balkan Task Force presents regional initiatives designed to improve information and intelligence exchange both at strategic and at law enforcement level. Mr Gaya stressed the importance of cooperation between the Western Balkans' law enforcement agencies with EU Member States.

Mr **Francisco Gaztelu Mezquiriz** (Head of Irregular Migration and Return Policy Unit, DG HOME, European Commission) stressed that the fight against smuggling would be prioritised by the Commission under the new Migration Pact. The EU action plan also had an important focus on anti-smuggling, especially on operational cooperation, exchange of information, and cooperation with third countries. Three key tools were considered critical to the Commission's actions. Firstly, the Common Operational Partnerships (COP) which brought together small teams of law enforcement experts from all partners, including third countries; the COPs so far have focussed on Africa, but they had been opened up to the Western Balkans and other routes. Secondly, prevention and information campaigns which would create counter-narratives to those of the smugglers. Finally, the Immigration Liaisons Officers (ILO), especially in Western Balkans, who were helping to build stronger relations with national authorities in third countries.

Protection and promotion of fundamental rights in the context of irregular migration

The last panel focused on the key fundamental rights at stake in border controls and procedures; these especially related to ensuring protection from *refoulement* and mass expulsion; access to international protection; and the right to life and security. Recent changes in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had opened-up a new understanding of States' obligations on border procedures, especially regarding push-backs. In practice, the enforcement of human rights safeguards fell mostly on border guards, who would benefit from practical guidance on these issues in their day-to-day work.

Ms Iris Goldner Lang (Professor in Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb) argued that there is a clear link between the political and practical reactions to the attempt of thousands of migrant to cross the Greek-Turkish border in February and March 2020, on the one hand, and the behavior of the two European courts and the 2015/2016 Western Balkans route, on the other hand. She maintained that the developments at the Greek-Turkish border can only be understood as the result of the interaction of Member States' experience of the 2015/2016 Western Balkans route and their fear of its reoccurrence, Member States' fear of turning into hotspots, the Luxembourg Court's decisions on the EU-Turkey Statement and the ECHR's decision in *N.D. and N.T.* In contrast with its previous jurisprudence, in its judgement in [N.D and N.T versus Spain](#), the European Court of Human Rights concluded that the expulsion of irregular migrants without an individual assessment of their situation was not in breach of the prohibition of mass expulsion (art. 4, additional Protocol 4 ECHR), if two conditions were met: that the state provided "genuine and effective access to means of legal entry, in particular border procedures for those who have arrived at the border" and that there was an "absence of cogent reasons why the applicant did not make use of official entry procedures, which were based on objective facts for which the respondent state was responsible".

In this context, questions were raised regarding future evolutions on the prohibition of push-back at border crossings: would the Strasbourg Court reconfirm this new approach in future judgements, for instance if it were to decide on a case related to the facts at the Turkish-Greek border? What criteria would the Court develop in future decisions to define mass arrivals or to assess the level of security threat? And would the Court of Justice of the European Union follow this same approach if confronted with a similar situation?

Mr Tamas Molnar (legal research officer at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)) highlighted that the practical implementation of human rights obligations fell largely on the officers operating at border crossing points and along the green borders. Therefore, the FRA prepared a practical guidance entitled "Border control at external land borders and fundamental rights" targeting specifically border-management staff in the European Union. The guidance tool list ten 'do-s' and 'don't-s' to support border officials in the implementation of the fundamental rights safeguards of the Schengen Borders Code (Regulation (EU) No. 2016/399) and related EU law instruments in their daily work, when carrying out controls at external land borders. The guidance was published at the end of July (see <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/border-controls-and-fundamental-rights-external-land-borders>) and later on other further translations to other EU official languages might follow.

Concluding remarks

Mr Magnus Ovilius (Head of Agencies and Networks Coordination Sector and Chair of the European Migration Network, DG HOME, European Commission) concluded by noting that the one key word for migration and for migrants was 'predictability'. If a person comes to Europe, they should have the right to claim asylum; if they come with a job offer, they should expect a residence permit; if they come irregularly, they should expect to be returned. The outcome should be predictable.

People were still on the move even during the pandemic. Smuggling had not disappeared in the lockdown, and more people would be likely to cross to Europe over summer, from countries where COVID-19 was still prevalent, and where health service were less developed.

Capacity building in the Member States and information exchange, all remained important for the future. The Commission supported better cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans, and other third countries, irrespective of their link to the EU, and the speaker noted that enhanced cooperation could also take place in the future through the engagement of Western Balkans countries in the European Migration

Network. It was essential that the EU's values and principles were defended and shared with third countries, whilst tackling irregularity and opening legal pathways. It was also important that the EU and Member States continued to learn from their practises; whilst the new EU Migration Pact would provide the framework for the future, the Member States would still need to apply what they had learned through their past experience.



EMN NCP HR

ROUNDTABLE: Challenges of Integration in the Republic of Croatia

Concept note & agenda

Context and aims:

One of the main pillars in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum is supporting effective integration policies. The integration of migrants and their families is a key part of the broader EU agenda to promote social inclusion.

As part of the priority on promoting the European way of life, the Commissions' key actions are adoption of a comprehensive Action Plan on integration and inclusion for 2021-2027 which was presented on 24 November 2020, and represents a strong framework to strengthen and step up integration and inclusion policies across the EU, thus contributing to the broader social inclusion agenda, drawing also on other relevant strategies and actions in the field of education, culture, employment, non-discrimination and equality.

Integration measures should ensure that all individuals who have a right to stay in the EU can fully take part in our societies; and in order to do so, it has to act as two-way process, putting emphasis on importance of host societies, roles and synergies of all relevant actors, but also on migrants who have to take leading role and an active effort to become integrated.

Any approach should take into account that different groups of migrants have specific challenges and needs, and therefore policies should be adapted to the needs of a diverse society. Tailor-made measures are needed because newly arrived migrants often face a number of challenges when integrating into European societies, depending on how they arrived, their skills level, language knowledge and their background. Also, the integration process differs, for example, between men and women. The integration of women into society is more complex and longer lasting than men.

In the Republic of Croatia, vast majority of integration measures and projects are aimed at persons who have been granted international protection, having in mind their particular vulnerability so as to provide assistance and protection so they can more easily overcome their difficult situation during the refugee, humanitarian crisis that has affected not only EU member states, but also our country. Government of Croatia adopted in 2017 the Action plan for integration of persons who have been granted international protection for the period from 2017 to 2019, and currently is in the process of adopting a new Action Plan of integration of persons who have been granted international protection for the period 2020 to 2022.

Regarding the integration of persons with approved international protection in the Croatian society, different projects were carried out or are currently underway.

At the same time, the Republic of Croatia actively participates in the European resettlement program for third-country nationals or stateless persons who meet the conditions for international protection, as a form of solidarity and provides care for the above categories. Based on the decisions of the Government of the Republic of Croatia from 2015 and 2017, it has so far received 251 persons who have been granted international protection. According to the Government decision from 2019, the Republic of Croatia committed to receive 150 third-country nationals or stateless persons more under the resettlement scheme or on grounds of participating in other forms of solidarity with European Union Member States. With this in mind, integration projects were directly related also to the Croatian participation in the European resettlement program.

The integration of the resettled persons poses some challenges, for example, the willingness of the resettled person to integrate in the Croatian society. The Republic of Croatia has so far been mainly a transitional rather than a final destination for refugees so future projects plan to examine the attitudes of persons granted international protection towards their readiness and desire for integration and acceptance of inclusion in Croatian society.

In times of increased migration, the issue of integration is becoming even more important, which is why a proactive approach is needed as well as the promotion of dialogue on this issue. Integration is a long and complex two-way process that depends on partnership and cooperation between all

stakeholders in the process. The roundtable will provide an opportunity for such a dialogue addressing the effectiveness of different projects on integration of resettled persons implemented in Croatia and experiences of different stakeholders included in the process, thus providing a chance to discuss the integration policies and approaches in Croatia in general.

Agenda

10:00-10:05	<p>Welcome speech:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ivana PERLIC GLAMOČAK, Project Assistant, EMN NCP HR
10:05-10:35	<p>Panel 1: Integration policy framework: EU and Croatian Framework</p> <p>Integration is a long and complex two-way process that depends on partnership and cooperation between all stakeholders in the process. In times of increased migration, the presentation of a comprehensive Commission Action Plan on integration and inclusion for 2021-2027 on 24 November 2020 is more than timely.</p> <p>At the same time, due to the complexity of integration process more could be done in order to successfully integrate persons into the whole society. The proposal of new Action Plan of integration of persons who have been granted international protection for the period 2021 to 2023 of the Republic of Croatia should have an active role to address problems occurred in the integration process as well as to implement lessons learned for previous action plan.</p> <p>Opening remarks and moderator: Anita DAKIC, Ministry of the Interior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agnes PAPADIA, Policy Officer, Unit C2 - Legal Pathways and integration, DG HOME, European Commission - Action Plan on integration and inclusion for 2021-2027 - Olivera JOVANOVIĆ, Expert Advisor, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia - presentation of new Action plan for integration of persons who have been granted international protection 2021-2023 / lessons learned from previous action plan <p>Q&A</p>
10:35-10:40	Break
10:40-11:40	<p>Panel 2: Integration of persons under international protection who arrived in the Republic of Croatia through resettlement programs: experiences of stakeholders and challenges</p> <p>The integration of the resettled persons poses different challenges, for example, the willingness of the resettled person to integrate in the</p>

	<p>Croatian society. Presentation of different stakeholders involved in the process of integration of the resettled person in the Republic of Croatia should give an overview of the challenges and provide opportunity to discuss integration policies in Croatia in general.</p> <p>Opening remarks and moderator: Anita DAKIC, Ministry of the Interior</p> <p>Presentations of project implementers – experiences and challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ivan PITESA, Head of the IOM Croatia Office, International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Dijana DAPIC, Integration Associate, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) - Nejra KADIC MESKIC, CEO, Center for the Culture of Dialogue (CCD) <p>Presentation of other stakeholders in the process – experience and challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Darko TOT, Head of Sector for Joint Affairs and Programs, Directorate for Support and Improvement of the Education System, Ministry of Science and Education - Patricija KEZELE, Head of EURES and International Mediation in Employment Department, Croatian Employment Service <p>Q&A</p>
11:40-11:45	Break
11:45-12:25	<p>Panel 3: Integration into Croatian society of persons granted international protection</p> <p>Integration measures should put emphasis on importance of host societies, roles and synergies of all relevant actors, but also on migrants who have to take leading role and an active effort to become integrated.</p> <p>The support of the local community is of great importance for the successful integration so it is important to hear their opinion. At the same time, pros and cons of a project or a system are always best presented by the people who use some kind of service. Presentation of two people who have successfully integrated into Croatian society will give us a valuable insight in the process of integration in the Republic of Croatia.</p> <p>Opening remarks and moderator: Anita DAKIC, Ministry of the Interior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Andreja NAVIJALIC, Deputy Mayor, City of Karlovac - Issam Delwan - Inayatullah Jiskani <p>Q&A</p>

12:25-12:30	Closing remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Anita DAKIC, Ministry of the Interior- short video presentation on successful integration made by CCD

Format: e-Roundtable



ROUNDTABLE ON CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

21 December 2020

Report

The roundtable served as an opportunity to discuss the challenges in the integration of migrants in the Republic of Croatia.

In the first panel, the representative of the European Commission presented the Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027. The plan promotes the inclusion of all people, the recognition of important contributions of migrants to the European Union and the removal of possible obstacles regarding inclusion and participation of persons of migrant origin in the European society.

Croatian Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities presented the work on a new Action Plan for persons granted international protection for the period 2021-2023. The plan formalizes cooperation with local level authorities, establishes a system that monitor the results of the implementation of integration measures and contains educational activities for representatives of public institutions and non-governmental organizations at the local level.

Following, representatives of Croatian public institutions and NGOs exchanged ideas and experiences of integration policies in Croatia. Presentation of different stakeholders involved in the process of integration of the resettled persons in the Republic of Croatia gave an insight of various challenges and provided an opportunity for fruitful discussions.

In the last panel, good practice was presented by the City of Karlovac, which has successfully integrated more than five families through resettlement programs. Also, the participants of the roundtable were two successfully integrated migrants who have been living and working in the Republic of Croatia for many years. They shared with the audience their experience and all the challenges they faced when going through the process of integration into the Croatian society.

At the end of the roundtable, EMN NCP HR premiere played a video presentation of a successful integration made by Centre for the Culture of Dialogue.