

## UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

### - YOUTH -

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**Young people** in the Republic of Croatia are defined as persons belonging to the 15 to 30 years age group. More than 900 000 young people live in Croatia and they constitute 21% of the population. The essential strategic document which lays ground for systematic effort to raise the quality of life of young people in Croatia is the National Programme for Youth 2009-2013. Its various measures address areas of education, informatisation, health, employment, entrepreneurship, social policy, sexual and reproductive health and rights, active youth participation, mobility, culture, informing and counselling. One of the fundamental youth rights is the right to active participation. Although the National Programme contributes to the growth of participation, it lacks measures which tackle basic political literacy, and subsequently fails to lead to more substantial political participation. It also lacks measures which address education for peace and non-violence, human rights and democratic citizenship. In this regard, the National Programme for Youth supplements the National Programme for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship which binds primary and secondary education system to integrate these topics in regular curricula. The problem is that both programmes are not implemented to a satisfactory level and implemented measures are often subject to arbitrary selection. The right to participation is also addressed in the National Programme for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights 2008-2011, and most practically in the Act on Youth Advisory Boards which was adopted in February 2007. The Act defines one of the most important means of youth participation: advising local and regional governments and participating in decision-making processes. Only one third of local and regional governments have set up youth advisory boards despite the provision of the Act which states that youth advisory boards must be set up within six months of the adoption of the Act (September 2007).

Some of the common characteristics of young people in Croatia are: high level of unemployment (34% of youth population is unemployed, mainly at the age between 19 and 25); young women are in an unfavourable position in comparison to young men and they are discriminated against in fields of politics, economy and labour market; young people with fewer opportunities face challenges in education system, labour market and their needs are not adequately addressed by social and health policies; opportunities for youth participation are scarce (4% of young people work in local and regional government bodies, one third of local and regional governments have set up youth advisory boards, 5% of young people volunteer and 7% are active in non-governmental associations and political youth organizations); youth violence (directed at and/or committed by youth) is on the increase. Moreover, there are no major systematic investments in youth centres and clubs (platforms for cultural expression and quality free time). Education for democratic citizenship is not integrated adequately in the education system. The system also lacks standardized and systematic education on sexual and reproductive health and rights. In general, national and local programmes directed at youth do not invest substantial financial means for the implementation of concrete measures. Another important issue is an almost complete disregard of monitoring and evaluation (these processes are not foreseen as integral elements of policy cycle in any youth strategy). We firmly believe that young people are a neglected, if not discriminated against social group, which is not treated as a valuable social resource but at the same time is confronted with high expectations for the future. What follows is an overview of the existing legislation directed at young people with fewer opportunities and young people with behavioural disorders, and the problems they commonly face.

The term '**young people with fewer opportunities**' is used in order to prevent stigmatization which is inherent to the terms like 'at-risk youth', 'disadvantaged', 'disabled'. Young people with fewer opportunities cannot, due to educational, social, economic, mental, physical, cultural or geographical reasons, realize their potentials to the fullest. This group includes, for example, young people with lower mental abilities, young people with physical disabilities, young people living in remote areas, young people in the system of social care, young people facing poverty, school drop-outs, young women with unequal position in the labour market, etc. This group faces greatest risk of social exclusion.

According to the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report for Croatia 'Unplugged: Faces of Social Exclusion in Croatia', the most vulnerable social groups are persons who completed only primary education or have not completed primary education, persons over 65 years of age, women and unemployed youth. This research also indicated that other groups facing social exclusion include: persons with physical disabilities, permanently unemployed, one-parent and large families, families with small children, ethnic minorities (Roma and Serb minorities), persons in institutional care and older persons without pension. Based on this, young people are exposed to multiple, long-term and over-lapping threats (young people without degree have difficulties finding employment; they are therefore poverty-stricken, live in poorer housing conditions, have no access to many cultural institutions...). Due to the complexity of this problem, it is of utmost importance that all social actors be involved in its solution. This comprises actions as diverse as increasing public transport subventions, making higher education accessible, organizing free cultural events for youth, adapting places for wheel-chair access...

There is no national strategy targeting specifically young people with fewer opportunities. However, there are certain measures aiming to improve their position incorporated in other strategies: National Plan of Activities for the Rights and Interests of Children 2006-2012, National Plan for Youth 2009-2013, National Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and National Plan for Roma.

The Croatian Employment Service, through the National Action Plan for Employment, offers co-financing for employing permanently unemployed persons and other groups facing social exclusion. One of the measures is 'Co-financing first employment of young people without work experience', and other interventions aimed at motivating, education and co-financing employment are directed at women aged 25 to 49 with lower or inadequate education level, unemployed people aged 50 and more, employed people facing job loss, school drop-outs, young people without work experience, permanently unemployed, people with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, single parents, former addicts, war veterans and Roma people. This set of measures contributes to removing educational and economic barriers and empowering young people. However, due to economic crisis this set of measure has not been used to the fullest extent.

Several events related to persons with fewer opportunities have caused strong reactions in society: high-school students' protest for cheaper public transport, university students' protest against commercialisation of higher education, segregating Roma students in separate classes... The fact that young people have become active and have chosen to react to the above-mentioned issues is an encouraging indication of their responsible role in society. However, young people with fewer opportunities are still not sufficiently proactive to self-represent their interests nor the society encourages their involvement in decision-making processes.

Regarding the position of **young women** on the labour market (although they find themselves in unfavourable positions in almost all areas in society due to a strong patriarchal culture), they often face gender and age discrimination. According to The Croatian Employment Service, the youth unemployment rate in 2009 amounted to 30,63%. Persons with high-school education (15 to 19 year-olds) contribute the most to the high unemployment numbers and they tend to keep their jobs for relatively short periods of time. Other group of unemployed youth are university graduates, 58% of which are women. According to the Croatian Employment Service, young men tend to keep their jobs longer than young women. Young women face employers' discriminatory policies at selection interviews when they are often asked about their personal plans concerning if and when they wish to get married or have children. Moreover, pregnant women or women on maternity leave tend to get fired more easily and they are often paid less than their male co-workers.

A research done by CESI Association in the framework of the programme of cooperation with women politicians indicates that young women tend to get involved more in charity and socially-responsible work than young men. In 2007 parliamentary election there were 239 women candidates (27,30%). Young women are very interested in active participation in politics but they often face sexist behaviour, stereotyping and age discrimination, and this is particularly evident at local levels.

The basic national document targeting young people with behavioural disorders is the National Strategy for Prevention of Behavioural Disorders in Children and Youth 2009-2012. The Strategy has an all-encompassing approach towards prevention of behavioural disorders in children and youth: from micro level (individual), mezzo level (family) and macro level (local community, region, state). This topic is tackled in several other strategies and legal acts: National Strategy for Prevention of Drug Use 2006-2012, National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence 2008-2010, National Programme of Activities for Prevention of violence in

Children and Youth, National Plan of Activities for the Rights and Interests of Children 2006-2012, National Plan for Youth 2009-2013, Conclusions of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2004), Law on Juvenile Courts, Family Law, and Law on Social Care.

The last decade has seen a step forward in creating activities aiming at prevention and treatment of behavioural disorders and the Government founded the National Committee for the Prevention of Behavioural Disorders. The Committee commended some prevention programmes as examples of good practice but such programmes are underfunded and concentrated in bigger towns.

Based on this, we can say that there is a legislative framework and many examples of good practice in this area. There is also a wide recognition of the importance of coordination and cooperation of all actors which can strengthen preventive factors and diminish the influence of risk factors. However, we face problems in implementation of legislative acts, centralisation and insufficient financial support to programmes targeting children and youth with behavioural disorders.

There is a lack in institutional cooperation as well as other systemic problems in ensuring support to children and youth with behavioural disorders (long legal proceedings, inadequate conditions in institutional care facilities and insufficient funding for non-institutional programmes of support for children and youth with behavioural disorders). Recent research shows that institutional interventions directed at at-risk children and youth are not adequate. They are either ill-timed or not targeting specific risks to which a young person is exposed. Their effectiveness is therefore questionable.

It is also necessary to mention that the level of involvement of children and young people in planning and making strategies is very low. Children and youth with behavioural disorders are merely recipients of measures, and they are extremely rarely involved in creating measures which target them. This is one of the reasons why we do not have a full grasp of the problem and we do not use their potential to the fullest extent.