



## **NRT CROATIA 2019**

### **Report**

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## Context

The key thematic areas addressed by the National Round Table (NRT) in Croatia were the inclusion of refugees/asylum seekers/migrant background children in the educational system, the organization of preparatory and additional classes and the support to refugees/asylum seekers/migrant children as well as the existing school practices and the role of local organisations in supporting schools, teachers and refugees/asylum seekers and migrant children and their families.

Croatia does not have a large number of asylum seekers and refugees. A total of 650 persons with an approved asylum status were registered in October 2018. It is worth noting that, according to the available data, almost 80% of requests for asylum are declined in the country.

The newly published study "Challenges for Integration of Refugees/Asylum seekers into Croatian Society: Attitudes of Citizens and Preparedness of Local Communities" (Ajduković et al., 2019)<sup>1</sup> has shown that local communities mostly consider the Ministry of Science and Education being responsible for organizing language courses and have expressed concerns about the duration of the courses considered to be too short and have demanded more clarity about their funding status. The study also points that language courses are not sufficiently equipped with personnel and logistical capacities to run effectively. Course are offered either in a formalized way or through a volunteering. With regard to the inclusiveness of the education system, most stakeholders identify the slow administration procedures and the lack of qualified teachers as key gaps to address asylum seekers or refugee children's needs. This sums up to the lack of personal documents and the unregulated recognition of certificates and prior learning. The lack of translators and teaching assistants in the coastal and central regions of the country remain a central issue.

On the basis of the findings of the study, the Croatian NRT focused on:

- Policy development at local and national level (Ministry of Education, Education and Teacher Training Agency, local communities)
- School practices (teachers from schools hosting an averagely high number of migrant/refugee children)
- Support from the local community (CSO representatives)

## National Round Table

The National Round Table has been organised in Zagreb, Croatia on 13 September 2019. Participants were invited via an on-line application form a couple of weeks before the NRT and asked to provide basic information about themselves and their organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Ajduković, D et al. (2019), Izazovi integracije izbjeglica u hrvatsko društvo: stavovi građana i pripremljenost lokalnih zajednica, Vlada RH; Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina, Zagreb.  
<https://ljudskaprava.gov.hr/UserDocImages//dokumenti//izazovi%20integracije%20izbjeglica%20u%20hrvatsko%20dru%C5%A1tvo.pdf>



Potential speakers were firstly contacted in May 2019, when the key guiding questions and methodological approach were defined.

The following speakers provided input for the discussion:

- Margareta Gregurević, Institute for migration – she presented the main findings of the recently published study "Challenges for Integration of Refugees/Asylum seekers into Croatian Society: Attitudes of Citizens and Preparedness of Local Communities" (Ajduković et al., 2019)
- Darko Tot, Ministry of Education and Science – he presented the new policy measures that the MoE is planning to implement in the next period such as organizing 270 hours of teaching Croatian as a second language (up to now it is 70 hours); organisation of language courses in 22 cities in Croatia, cooperation with local organizations in the process of integration of children in schools, hiring teaching assistants for children etc.
- Lana Jurko (NEPC), Anamaria Macanović (Are you Syriouse) and Sanja Brajković (Step by step association) showcased good practices and materials aimed at helping students and their families in their integration process, and at supporting teachers in teaching provision.

The aim of the NRT was:

- To present the new data, research, analyses and studies on the education of migrant/refugees/ asylum seekers in Croatia
- To present and discuss the new policies implemented by the MoE
- To present the good practice examples that are implemented in schools
- To discuss key challenges and needs faced by schools

School teachers and principals from schools with an averagely high number of migrant children presented their activities, highlighted the key challenges they face and addressed their concerns to the Ministry of Education and local authorities.

Overall, the NRT brought together a wide range of stakeholders including civil society organisations, international organizations (Jesus rescue service, International migrant organization), schools and higher educational institutions, teachers, principals and public educational bodies – Ministry of Science and Education, Education and Teacher Training Agency, local and regional communities (City of Zagreb, City of Sisak).

### *Inputs and debate points*

The focus of the discussion was initially put on the existing policies, their implementation, research findings regarding concrete challenges that schools, teachers and local communities face, and gaps that should be filled in. Further sessions of the National Round Table covered examples of good practices led by the participating local organisations. They included the enrolment of pupils into schools, tracking their success, assessing their initial



level of knowledge, providing support and communication with their parents as well as collaboration with the local community.

The Teacher Training Agency as well as teachers and representatives of civil society highlighted policy shortcomings, particularly in relation to teachers' preparedness/training to work with refugee / asylum seeking / migrant background students. The collaboration among education stakeholders such as civil society, local communities and public bodies was at the centre of the discussion and the need to reinforce the multistakeholder dialogue in this policy area was emphasised as key for an effective integration of students with refugee/asylum seeking/migrant background.

The last session showcased successful practices implemented in schools and provided the participants with additional information about platforms offering valuable learning resources supporting education stakeholders working with refugee/asylum seeking/migrant background students. A key point in the debate largely shared by civil society representatives, teachers, educators and representatives of public institutions was the need for more information to be exchanged among education stakeholders in the country.

The National Round Table also provided a unique opportunity to share views and network among different stakeholders. It has indeed been so because numerous formal and informal discussions took place and follow up meetings agreed, especially between representatives of schools and public institutions.

## *Conclusions and way forward*

The issues and recommendations that were brought up during the round table discussions by the participants were the following:

- To make learning of the Croatian language as the second language more accessible, and to rely on the local resources (e.g. collaboration with local schools and NGOs)
- To provide professional translators in schools
- To prepare a beginner's textbook of the Croatian language, and translate it into the three most common languages used and understood by asylum seekers: Arabic, Farsi and Kurdish
- To introduce employment opportunities for teaching assistants to work with asylum-seekers
- To provide more hours of the Croatian language courses in schools
- To provide financial support for the specific needs of asylum-seekers (excursions, school supplies, textbooks) in order to facilitate their inclusion into the education system
- To plan procedures for specific situations of inclusion of children in the educational system (e.g. inclusion of children with disabilities)
- To ensure a sufficient number of teachers who are qualified to teach Croatian as a second language
- In the light of the significant differences in the implementation of the existing legislation, more consistency is needed in the implementation of existing public policies



- More thorough involvement of parents to school life. This is particularly relevant for parents of refugee/asylum seeking/migrant background students who, in most cases, do not participate in school life, due to cultural differences. More effort is thus requested to inform them on how the education system in Croatia works.
- Since the collaboration between various educational stakeholders (schools, CSOs, public educational bodies) has proven to be very successful, it is advised to reinforce such multi-stakeholder dialogue.
- Provide additional training to teachers on how to teach students with migrant background
- Increase the number of teachers teaching Croatian as a second language
- Reinforce the connection between schools and local communities and organizations from it. This would lead to stronger social ties and interconnectedness with other stakeholders enabling better and more successful integration of refugee/asylum seeking/migrant background students in school and after school.

Key conclusive outcomes of the debate have been:

Inclusion programs in schools should be built on past experience of working with children from vulnerable groups where the Croatian educational system has developed a consistent experience.

The support to teachers and educators in the process of inclusion of refugee, asylum seeker students and asylum seekers in school and local community should be based on three main levels:

- the level of attitudes toward diversity - the deconstruction of prejudice and the upholding of values that reflect education for social justice;
- the level of acquisition of the competences required to include children in school (e.g. competence to teach children who are not fluent in Croatian language or the competence to work with children who have experienced traumatic experiences);
- the level of reflection and self-reflection during the inclusion process of migrant children

## *Challenges*

The main challenge in the NRT 1 was that we didn't manage to get anyone from the Ministry of Education. In this second-year programme, the we informed the representative of the MoE months before the round table and discussed the importance of his participation. We ensured the participation in the discussion of the MoE who was very open to answer all questions that participants (especially teachers) asked.

The challenge was to find representatives of the organizations led by migrant as well as migrant children to participate and we were not successful in involving them in the round table but all organizations that are working directly with students and their parents participated in the debate.



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### **Participants**

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Name	Organisation/ institution	Position in organisation/ institution
<b>POLICY MAKERS</b>		
Darko Tot	MoE	Head of the unit
Sanja McMurtry	Education and Teacher Training Agency	Expert associate
City of Zagreb	Office for international cooperation	
City of Sisak	Office for education	
<b>MIGRANT-LED ORGANISATIONS</b>		
Jesus rescue service	Working directly with migrant children and their families	
<b>TEACHERS, TEACHER-TRAINERS, SCHOOL-LEADERS OR OTHER SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES</b>		
Elementary school "Braća Bobetko", Sisak		
Maja Lisska	Primary School Fran Galović, Zagreb	School head
Andrea Fajdetic	Primary School Petar Zrinski, Zagreb	Teacher
<b>OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS</b>		
Sanja Brajković	Step by Step Association	Executive Director
Anamaria Macanović	Are You Syrious	Executive Director
Lana Jurko	NEPC	Executive Director
Margareta Gregurević	Institute for Migrations	Researcher