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# European Semester 2021-2022 country fiche on disability equality

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## Croatia

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European Disability Expertise (EDE) provides independent scientific support to the Commission's policy Unit responsible for disability issues. It aims to mainstream disability equality in EU policy processes, including implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This country report has been prepared as input for the European Semester in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the Semester process, see <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-semester/how-european-semester-works/>.

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## **1 Executive summary and recommendations**

### **1.1 Key points and main challenges for Croatia in 2022**

#### **Disability and the labour market**

The employment rate for persons with disabilities is still low 34.3 % , according to Silc 2018 compared to 68.3 % for other persons and approximately -14.3 points below the EU27 average. There were no major changes regarding improved performance of the quota system. Discrimination in the workplace is still a ubiquitous phenomenon. Denial of reasonable accommodation in the workplace is the most common form of discrimination.

#### **Disability, social policies and healthcare**

De-institutionalisation and community living are priorities of social policy. Family homes will be included in the process of deinstitutionalization and transformation. Those family homes that have a small number of beneficiaries and are not establishing an institution will be given the opportunity to engage in foster care. The decision on meeting the minimum working conditions will continue to be made by the units of regional self-government, but under a period of three years with a mandatory one-year control.

#### **Disability, education and skills**

Education policy data consistently indicate disability equality gaps. Youth with disabilities tend to leave school early significantly and more than peers of the same age groups without disabilities. Despite declaratory commitment to inclusive education, significant number of children with disabilities are still attending special schools, due to lack of support and reasonable accommodation. A special problem are the schools damaged by the earthquakes in 2020. The problem of accessibility of replacement schools, availability of broadband connection for online education and appropriate tools for implementation of online education for children with disabilities remains.

#### **Investment priorities for inclusion and accessibility**

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan in several instances mentions investments that will improve the lives of people with disabilities (school infrastructure, capacity building in social work, use of autonomous cars). The implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the objectives of the European Semester related to disability equality are linked to several other national strategies whose adoption is delayed.

## 1.2 Recommendations for Croatia

These recommendations are based on the evidence and analysis presented in the following chapters of our report.

**Recommendation:** Prepare and adopt timely strategies and laws that enable improvements in the quality of life of persons with disabilities (ensuring rights, education through employment, social services)

*Rationale:* All necessary strategies and laws need to be adopted in a timely manner so that the funds planned in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan can be used to enable a better quality of life for persons with disabilities. Organizations of persons with disabilities should definitely be involved in the implementation and monitoring processes. Without the adopted strategies and laws, it is not possible to carry out fundamental reform processes related to persons with disabilities.

**Recommendation:** Analyse the performance of the quota system for employment in the open labour market and draw consequences.

*Rationale:* Quota system is important instrument by which the state seeks to increase the employment of persons with disabilities. There was no major improvement regarding performance of the quota system. Employment obligations are met only by a symbolic number of entrepreneurs. A relatively small number of companies fulfil a quota employment obligation.

**Recommendation:** Implement European Social Fund tenders for organizations providing services for persons with disabilities more efficiently.

*Rationale:* The problem of unequal administrative capacities of organizations of persons with disabilities has been noticed, which has consequences for the timely provision of services financed by EU grants. Problems relate to complicated administrative procedures, slowness in evaluating and contracting projects. It is important to timely and preventively refer to irregularities.

**Recommendation:** Ensure systematic financing of the assistant service so that this service does not depend on individual projects and donations.

*Rationale:* The personal assistance service is still not systematically provided but is implemented through projects. Services of a personal assistant, sign language translator and companion for the blind are financed through projects, leaving a part of the population of people with disabilities without support.

**Recommendation:** Create conditions and implement national regulations which foster the inclusion of children with disabilities in kindergarten.

*Rationale:* Although the regulations provide the priority inclusion of children with disabilities in kindergarten there are still children who could not exercise the right to access pre-school education on an equal basis solely due to the child's developmental difficulties. The issue of assistants in a preschool institution is not legally defined in the regulations on preschool education.

## 2 Mainstreaming disability equality in the Semester documents

Disability is addressed in almost all chapters of the Croatian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP).<sup>2</sup> Disability issues are included in the chapters on innovation, education, employment and social policies. Disability has a significant place in the General Introduction where it is mentioned in connection with the European Semester and employment subsidies (p. 42) and social services (p. 50). It is mentioned in relation to ensuring equality and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities (pp. 52-57), transport (p.54), digital transformation (p. 54), cohesion policy (p. 55).

### 2.1 Recovery and Resilience Plan for Croatia (NRRP)

The following key points highlight where the situation of people with disabilities or disability policies was considered in these plans. We address the most relevant of these and other issues arising from the NRRP in the next chapters.

- Digital transformation and employment - smartworking in the chapter Public administration, judiciary and state property (p. 50, p. 536);
- Persons with disabilities mobility: green transport in the chapter on Green Transition (p. 54), transport benefits in the chapter Economy (p. 271, 272, 451), together with investments in development and use of autonomous vehicles (p. 479. and 815);
- Involvement in the development of tourism, greater participation of persons with disabilities as employees and guests in the chapter Economy / Development of sustainable, innovative and resilient tourism (p. 453);
- Education: development of accessible infrastructure (p.903), greater involvement of children with disabilities in early childhood education (p. 851) in the chapter Education, Science and Research;
- Development of accessible services in public administration in the chapter Public administration, judiciary and state property (p. 815);  
Development of social services: training and inclusion of more experts for non-institutional services (p. 917), harmonization and unification of social benefits (p. 945), introduction of social mentoring services (p. 949), deinstitutionalization (p. 954) in the chapter Labour market and social protection.

The employment of persons with disabilities is linked to several parts of the RRP. Employment is associated with greater involvement in education, ensuring mobility and accessibility, employment in prosperous sectors, it is linked with social services, new hybrid models of work.

The mobility of persons with disabilities is also present in several chapters. It is planned to introduce a single document by which persons with disabilities will exercise all benefits in the field of mobility (p. 54). The introduction of autonomous vehicles is especially interesting. By the end of 2025, fully autonomous electric vehicles would be

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<sup>2</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), Convergence Programme of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2022- 2024, <https://mfin.gov.hr/highlights-2848/croatia-and-the-eu/economic-programs-within-the-eu/convergence-programme/2906>.  
*subsequent mentions:* Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026

built and adapted to the needs of passengers with disabilities. Until then, specialized infrastructure would be built (initially only in Zagreb) for autonomous and electric vehicles. By early 2026, 50 000 free ride vouchers for people with disabilities would be awarded which will be valid for at least 5 years after issuance (p. 480).

In education, the emphasis is on structural and organizational elements (accessibility, reasonable accommodation, universal design) (p. 903). For the most part, activities in regular education, secondary education and higher education are specified, while the issue of adult education is neglected, in which the problems of persons with disabilities are not mentioned separately.

For persons with disabilities, it is important to plan the employment of 400 new experts for the provision of non-institutional services, together with the education and licensing of heads of measures for family and legal protection (p. 917). It is also planned to strengthen the capacity of professionals for provision of services in the community, which would create the conditions for a significant increase in the number of people using services in the community. People with disabilities are listed as one of the priority groups for using these services.

A new Social Mentoring Service is also being launched. Social mentors are also intended for people with disabilities. Through introduction of social mentoring improved individualized approach is being implemented that enables self-activation of long-term unemployed beneficiaries and their inclusion in the community.

In the area of social benefits, the aim is to reduce inequality and administrative complexity and ensure the transparency of the system. The idea is to consolidate the existing social benefits intended for people with disabilities into one benefit with the introduction of indexation as a standard feature of the benefit. (p. 945)

Currently, the Social Welfare Act prescribes several disability benefits (allowance until employment, allowance for assistance and care, personal disability allowance, compensation for vulnerable energy buyers, compensation for transportation costs). Different criteria are prescribed for each of these, and each is decided in a separate procedure, which creates unnecessary administrative costs and burdens both for the system as a whole and for employees and users.

The issue of disability is the least present in the section on Health. The proposals are reduced to the principles of equal opportunities and rights, reconstruction of infrastructure and creation of conditions for information and communication accessibility for people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are not mentioned in the elaboration of these measures.

Plans for activities in the European Semester are clearly indicated in the NRRP and the Convergence Program of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2022-2024.<sup>3</sup> The Convergence Plan plans to combine all social benefits intended for people with disabilities into one benefit (p. 45). Of particular importance is the gradual reduction of disability pensions by 2070. The share of disability pension expenditures should fall

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<sup>3</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Convergence Programme 2022-2024.

from 2 % of GDP in 2020 to 1.4 % by 2030, and to 0.7 % of GDP at the end of the process (2070) (p. 48).

## 2.2 Semester links to CRPD and national disability action plans

Relevant recommendations and issues arising from participation in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are highlighted in each chapter. Semester plans should be aligned with national disability strategy too.

A National Strategy of Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was developed for the period 2017-2020.<sup>4</sup> This planning period has now ended. The National Strategy of Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 is in the process of being drafted and is scheduled to be adopted in the last quarter of 2021.

The implementation of the RRP and the objectives of the European Semester related to disability equality are related to several other national strategies whose adoption is delayed.<sup>5</sup>

The National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the period from 2018 to 2020 also contains the issue of protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The new strategy / plan has not been passed until 2020. In the meantime, the title and reference period of this document have been changed. The new name is the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination for the period from 2021 to 2027.<sup>6</sup> In addition, two implementation operational plans are being prepared: the Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights for the period from 2021 to 2023 and the Action Plan for the Suppression of Discrimination for the period from 2021 to 2023. The Ministry of Health

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<sup>4</sup> Croatian Parliament (2017), National Strategy for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2017 – 2020 (*Nacionalna strategija za izjednačavanje mogućnosti osoba s invaliditetom 2017.-2020.*), [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Croatia\\_National-Strategy-of-Equalization-of-Opportunities-for-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Croatia_National-Strategy-of-Equalization-of-Opportunities-for-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf).

*Subsequent mentions:* Croatian Parliament (2017), National Strategy 2017 – 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), Decision on amendments to the Decision on determining the acts of strategic planning related to the conditions enabling the implementation of European Union funds in period from 2021 to 2027, adoption deadlines and bodies in charge of their making (*Odluka o izmjenama i dopuni Odluke o utvrđivanju akata strateškog planiranja povezanih s uvjetima koji omogućavaju provedbu fondova Europske unije u razdoblju od 2021. do 2027. godine, rokova donošenja i tijela zaduženih za njihovu izradu*), <https://razvoj.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama/zakoni-i-ostali-propisi/uprava-za-stratesko-planiranje-i-koordinaciju-eu-fondova/3097>.

*Subsequent mentions:* Croatian Government (2021), Amendments to the Decision on determining the acts of strategic planning.

<sup>6</sup> Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (2021) National Plan for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination 2021-2027 (*Nacionalni plan zaštite i promicanja ljudskih prava i suzbijanja diskriminacije za razdoblje od 2021. do 2027. godine*), <https://ljudskaprava.gov.hr/o-uredu/9>.

*Subsequent mentions:* Government Office (2021) Plan for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights.

plans to refer to the legislative procedure the Law on the Register of Persons with Disabilities in IV. quarter of 2021.<sup>7</sup>

A strategy for the development of civil society is important for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their associations in the implementation of goals. The 2015 assessment of the UN Committee states that

‘The Committee is concerned that, owing to the lack of a broad network of service providers, organizations of persons with disabilities have been forced to take on the role of service providers at the expense of their advocacy role. ...The Committee is also concerned that organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations do not receive sufficient support from the Government to enable them to participate in national implementation and monitoring.’ (pp. 2, 8)

The role of organizations was also emphasized in the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. List of issues prior to the submission of the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Croatia from 2020.<sup>8</sup>

‘(b) Provide support to ensure that persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations can effectively participate in the monitoring and implementation of the Convention’. (p.8)

The process of drafting the National Strategy for Creating a Stimulating Environment for the Development of Civil Society 2017-2021 began in 2016 and has not been completed although the public consultation ended in 2017.<sup>9</sup> In February 2021, the Government of the Republic of Croatia initiated the development of the National Plan for Creating a Stimulating Environment for the Development of Civil Society from 2021 to 2027.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2020), Legislative Action Plan for 2021 (*Plan zakonodavnih aktivnosti za 2021. godinu*), <https://zakonodavstvo.gov.hr/vijesti/usvojen-plan-zakonodavnih-aktivnosti-za-2021-godinu/476>.

<sup>8</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020), List of issues prior to submission of the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Croatia, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fHRV%2fQPR%2f2-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fHRV%2fQPR%2f2-4&Lang=en) subsequent mentions: UN Committee on RPD (2020), List of issues.

<sup>9</sup> E Consultation (2017), National Strategy for Creating a Stimulating Environment for the Development of Civil Society from 2017 to 2021 (*Nacionalna strategija stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnoga društva od 2017. do 2021. godine*), <https://esavjetovanja.gov.hr/ECon/MainScreen?entityId=5697>.

<sup>10</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), Decree on initiating the procedure of drafting the National Plan for Creating a Stimulating Environment for the Development of Civil Society from 2021 to 2027 (*Odluka o pokretanju postupka izrade Nacionalnog plana stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnoga društva od 2021. do 2027.*) NN 10/2021, [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021\\_02\\_10\\_195.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_02_10_195.html).

### 3 Disability and the labour market - analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2015, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations to Croatia:

[Article 27 UN CRPD](#) addresses work and employment:<sup>11</sup>

'42. The Committee recommends that the State party develop and implement, in cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, a plan of action to increase the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market. It recommends that the quota system is complemented with other incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities. Disincentives to employment for persons with disabilities should be analysed and remedied. Reasonable accommodation, including supported employment with personal assistance, and the accessibility of the workplace, should be regulated and monitored.'

The most recent development is the 2020 List of Issues requesting<sup>12</sup> the following:

'25. Please provide information on the efforts made to eliminate stigma, barriers and discrimination in the recruitment process and the steps undertaken to increase the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market in both the public and private sectors. Please also elaborate on: (a)The status of development of an action plan for the employment of persons with disabilities; (b)Results achieved through the implementation of the new Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Act (2015), including data; (c)The sanctions taken for non-compliance of mandatory quotas and for the denial of reasonable accommodation.'

#### 3.1 Summary of the labour market situation of persons with disabilities

Data from EU-SILC indicate an employment rate for persons with disabilities in Croatia of 37.0 % in 2019, compared to 71.0 % for other persons against a national employment target of 63 % and approximately -14.3 points below the EU27 average. This results in an estimated disability employment gap of approximately 34 percentage points (EU27 average gap 24.2, see Tables 2-4) or an employment chances ratio of 0.5.

The same data indicate unemployment rates of 27.9 % and 13.9 %, respectively in 2019 (see Tables 5-7) and the economic activity rate for persons with disabilities in Croatia was 51.3 %, compared to 82.4 % for other persons (see Tables 8- 10). These indications are broken down by gender and age in the respective tables in Annex. Circumstances of reduced economic activity at the beginning of the COVID-19

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<sup>11</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015), Concluding observations on the initial report of Croatia, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/811107>.  
*subsequent mentions:* UN Committee on RPD (2015), Concluding observations.

<sup>12</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020), List of issues prior to submission of the combined second to fourth reports of Croatia, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fHRV%2fQPR%2f2-4&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fHRV%2fQPR%2f2-4&Lang=en).

pandemic (2020) and economic recovery in 2021 are important for the employment of persons with disabilities.

The RRP states that employment opportunities for people with disabilities have been limited since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> In the conditions of the pandemic, persons with disabilities found themselves in additional difficult circumstances due to the difficult use of medical and social services, the increased frequency of domestic violence and the limited freedom of movement of beneficiaries of social care institutions. (p.53). Despite these circumstances, according to the Register of Employed Persons with Disabilities, there was a slight increase in the number of employees in 2020 (see Table 11). As of 31 December 2020, according to the Institute for Expert Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities (ZOSI),<sup>14</sup> a total of 11 425 were registered, which is an increase in employment of 231 more than on 31 December 2019 (11 194). (p. 169)

Regarding employment through the Croatian Employment Service (CES), after two years of a slight increase in the share of unemployed persons with disabilities in the total population, of all unemployed in the CES records, in 2020 there was again a slight decline of 0.6 % compared to last year.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that young people with disabilities are most often employed, most of them are also registered at CES,<sup>16</sup> so there are 970 persons (15.6 %), aged 20 to 24, followed by persons aged 25 to 29, 758 (12.2 %) and persons aged 40 to 44 (703 or 11.3 %). (p.10)

The situation is improving in 2021 according to CES data.<sup>17</sup> In the period from 1 January to 30 June 2021, a total of 85 430 people were employed through CES, of which 1 529 people with disabilities. They make up 1.8 % of the total population of employed persons from the CES records. The share of men with disabilities is 2.3 %, and women 1.4 %.

<sup>13</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Expert Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities / ZOSI (2020) Annual report for 2020 (*Godišnje izvješće za 2020. godinu*) [https://zosi.hr/docs/godisnje\\_izvjesce\\_o\\_radu\\_zavoda\\_za\\_2020g.pdf](https://zosi.hr/docs/godisnje_izvjesce_o_radu_zavoda_za_2020g.pdf).  
Subsequent mentions: ZOSI (2021) Annual report for 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Persons with disabilities are employed not only through CES, but also in other ways, and ZOSI monitors the total number of employed persons with disabilities entered in the Register of Employed Persons with Disabilities kept by the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute. Therefore, the total number of employed persons with disabilities according to the data from the Register of Employed Persons with Disabilities cannot be identical to the data of CES.

<sup>16</sup> Croatian Employment Service /CES (2021), Report on the Activities of the Croatian Employment Service in the Employment of People with Disabilities in the Period from 01 January to 31 December 2020, (*Izvješće o aktivnostima Hrvatskoga zavoda za zapošljavanje u području zapošljavanja osoba s invaliditetom u razdoblju od 1. siječnja do 31. prosinca 2020. godine*), <https://www.CES.hr/statistika/statistika-zaposljavanja-osobe-s-invaliditetom.php>.  
Subsequent mentions: CES (2021) Report PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2020

<sup>17</sup> Croatian Employment Service/ CES (2021), Report on the Activities of the Croatian Employment Service in the Employment of People with Disabilities in the Period from 01 January to 30 June 2021, (*Izvješće o aktivnostima Hrvatskog zavoda za zapošljavanje u području zapošljavanja osoba s invaliditetom u razdoblju od 1. siječnja do 30. lipnja 2021. godine*), <https://www.CES.hr/statistika/statistika-zaposljavanja-osobe-s-invaliditetom.php>.  
Subsequent mentions: CES (2021) Report PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 1-6/2021.

Comparing the results in employment with the same period last year (when 985 people with disabilities were employed), an increase of 55.2 % is visible. There is also a marginal increase in the total share of persons with disabilities in relation to all employees from the CES records by 0.3 %. In the first six months of 2019, 1 721 persons with disabilities were employed, and although this result was not achieved this year, it is positive that despite the COVID crisis, the number of employed people with disabilities is growing again. Out of the total number of employed, 1 483 (97 %) are employed on the basis of employment contract. As of 30 June 2021, 126 232 unemployed persons were registered in CES, of which 5 985 were persons with disabilities, which represents a share of 4.7 %.<sup>18</sup> Compared to the same period last year (6 309), the number of unemployed persons with disabilities in the CES records decreased by 5.1 %. (p. 8)

The majority of persons with disabilities registered in the CES register are long-term unemployed, i.e. registered in the CES register for more than 12 months (4 374 persons or 73.1 %). The CES records show that the highest number of unemployed persons relates to persons with intellectual disabilities, 1 706 of them, i.e. 28.5 % of the total number of unemployed persons with disabilities. They are followed by persons with multiple, combined disabilities (1 407 or 23.5 %) and persons with physical disabilities (1 087 or 18.2 % of the total number). (p. 11)

In addition to the problem of employment, the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities in the last annual report (2021)<sup>19</sup> warns of discrimination in the workplace, which is often present.

‘Discrimination in the workplace is still a ubiquitous phenomenon. Denial of reasonable accommodation in the workplace is the most common form of discrimination for which persons turn to the Ombudsman. Due to the non-provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace, persons with disabilities are not able to present their work skills and knowledge to the employer, even though they possess all the competencies necessary for the workplace.’ (p. 159)

### 3.2 Analysis of labour market policies relevant to the Semester

The basic policy guidelines for the employment of people with disabilities are in NRRP for Croatia and Convergence programme. National Strategy of Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 should be adopted by the end of 2021.

The employment of persons with disabilities is linked to several parts of the NRRP. It is mentioned in greater inclusion in education (chapter on education), ensuring mobility and accessibility as a prerequisite for coming to work, inclusion in prosperous sectors (tourism). Individualized social services (for example, social mentors) should

<sup>18</sup> CES (2021), Report: Persons with Disabilities 1-6/2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report of the Ombudsman for 2020 (*Izvešće o radu Pravobraniteljice za osobe s invaliditetom za 2020. godinu*), <https://posi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Izvjescje-o-radu-Pravobranitelja-za-osobe-s-invaliditetom-za-2020.-godinu.pdf>.

*Subsequent mentions:* Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020.

contribute to this in helping to get to work and work itself. It is planned to legally regulate hybrid forms of work (from home and online), through which it is planned to increase the number of persons with disabilities employees in public administration.

The NRRP<sup>20</sup> lists the basic forms of job preservation in Croatia during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are 1. financial support for the preservation of jobs in activities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2. financial support for the reduction of working hours and 3. financial support for the preservation of jobs in sheltered workshops, integrative workshops and work units for the employment of persons with disabilities. (p. 42). The NRRP does not elaborate on how quota employment will be further implemented.

The development and introduction of a hybrid model of work (smartworking) is cited as an important form of employment for persons with disabilities. It is elaborated in more detail only for public administration (regarding costs that the state can directly control). It is planned to introduce a model that will enable the work of civil servants remotely with the aim of providing continuous and quality public service available to all and greater motivation of officials.

It is planned to increase the employment of persons with disabilities in the tourism and hospitality sector. This part also mentions the social tourism system, which is focused on the accessibility of tourist services to people with disabilities.

Most of the issues related to persons with disabilities are in the chapter Labour Market and Social Protection. A new social mentoring service is also being launched. Persons with disabilities are listed as important users of social mentoring services. The introduction of social mentoring achieves an improved individualized approach that enables more active involvement of long-term unemployed beneficiaries, their employment and inclusion in the community.

Certain activities in the employment of persons with disabilities are also listed in the Convergence Program 2022-2024.<sup>21</sup> A significant reduction in the number of disability pension beneficiaries is projected by 2070, which is the result of stricter criteria for exercising the right to a disability pension. (p. 46) In order to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion, special attention will be paid to the development and accessibility of social services for particularly vulnerable groups as well as to the implementation of employment measures and the promotion of lifelong learning with the goal of adapting to labour market needs.

### ***Employment subsidies and quotas***

Subsidies and quotas are important instruments by which the state seeks to increase the employment of persons with disabilities, and are implemented by the Institute for Expertise, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (ZOSI). In 2020, ZOSI paid a total of HRK 109 709 968.66 in incentives to employers. In 2020, 476 employers (465 in the open labour market and 11 protective and integrative workshops) used the incentives to employ 1 513 people with disabilities, of

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<sup>20</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>21</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Convergence Programme 2022-2024.

which 974 were in the open labour market and 539 in protective and integrative workshops.<sup>22</sup> Thus, more than half of registered persons with disabilities are employed with the help of incentives in protection and integration workshops, and not in the open labour market. For comparison, in 2019 ZOSI paid employers a total of HRK 48 629 210.11 in incentives, which were used by 400 employers to employ 1 335 people with disabilities (p. 7). In 2020, significantly more funds were paid than in 2019, and the main reason for this is that in 2020 more funds were disbursed under the announced public tenders from 2019. These were public tenders for the allocation of special funds for the development of new technologies and business processes in order to employ and maintain the employment of persons with disabilities in protective and integrative workshops and at employers in the open labour market, including self-employed. There were no public tenders of this kind in 2020.

There were no major changes regarding performance of the quota system.<sup>23</sup> Employment obligations are met only by a symbolic number of entrepreneurs. According to the data of ZOSI,<sup>24</sup> out of a total of 9 289 taxpayers in 2020, only 1 246 (13.41 %) taxpayers fully fulfilled the obligation by employing persons with disabilities. (p. 10). In 2019, out of a total of 9745 such employers, only 13.59 % fully fulfilled the obligation to employ persons with disabilities (see Table 12). It should be noted that in 2020, employers in the textile, clothing, leather, wood and furniture production sectors were exempted from the quota employment of people with disabilities. The reasons for their exclusion are the difficulties that this sector has experienced, so the implementation of the quota system could jeopardize the sustainability of employers in this sector.

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<sup>22</sup> ZOSI (2021), Annual report for 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Employers who are obliged to employ persons with disabilities on the basis of quotas are employers who employ at least 20 workers.

<sup>24</sup> ZOSI (2021), Annual report for 2020.

#### 4 Disability, social policies and healthcare – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2015, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations<sup>25</sup> to Croatia:

[Article 28 UN CRPD](#) addresses adequate standard of living and social protection.

‘44. The Committee recommends that poverty reduction programmes be strengthened. It also recommends that benefits aimed at alleviating increased costs arising from disability should be based on an assessment of the individual’s support needs and should disregard any financial assets test.’

The 2020 List of Issues<sup>26</sup> requested the following:

27. Please elaborate on the measures to combat poverty among persons with disabilities, in particular among persons with disabilities of Roma origin and in rural and remote areas.

28. Please provide information on:

(a) The measures taken to implement the provisions of the Social Benefit Act in order to ensure its full enjoyment by persons with disabilities, irrespective of the cause of their impairment, in all counties and municipalities;

(b) The provisions of the social protection schemes to ensure that all persons with disabilities are provided with support for equipment, such as hearing aids, mobility aids and assistive technologies;

(c) The steps taken by the State party to increase pension, social welfare and other benefits for both civilian and veteran persons with disabilities throughout the country, including for parents of children with disabilities.

[Article 19 UN CRPD](#) addresses living independently in the community.

‘30. The Committee recommends that the process of deinstitutionalization include all residential institutions and foster homes for all persons with disabilities. It recommends that a legal framework be adopted to provide for entitlement to personal assistance services in the community and that a process be initiated to make local communities and mainstream services accessible to persons with disabilities’

The 2020 List of Issues requested:

19. In reference to the Committee’s previous concluding observations (CRPD/C/HRV/CO/1, para. 30), please inform the Committee about:

(a) The personal assistance and community-based services available to persons with disabilities who require them;

(b) The progress made with respect to the operational plan for deinstitutionalization, particularly in the case of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities in 24-hour living spaces, in psychiatric hospitals, those living in family homes for more than 20 persons and those living in adult foster families.

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<sup>25</sup> UN Committee on RPD (2015), Concluding observations.

<sup>26</sup> UN Committee on RPD (2020), List of issues.

20. Please provide information on whether the use of the European Union structural and investment funds is directed to deinstitutionalization and ensuring independent living in the community for persons with disabilities. Please inform the Committee about:

- (a) The provisions made to ensure their active participation in decision-making, including for the exercise of their choice regarding with whom, how and where to live;
- (b) The steps taken to amend the Social Welfare Act to prohibit a guardian from having the authority to place a person in any institution or in any other living arrangement without that person's consent;
- (c) The allocation of personnel, technical and financial means for support services enabling independent life and community inclusion at the national and local level.

[Article 25 UN CRPD](#) addresses health.

'38. The Committee recommends that further efforts be made to ensure that people with disabilities who do not have compulsory health-care insurance have access to health-care facilities. The Committee also recommends that access to mainstream health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, are made accessible to people with disabilities, especially in rural areas. It also recommends that health professionals in mainstream health services are urgently trained in treating persons with disabilities and respecting the rights enshrined in the Convention.'

The 2020 List of Issues requested:

24. Please provide information on:

- (a) The efforts undertaken to provide for persons with disabilities to have access to health insurance and services on an equal basis with others, including public and private health services and equipment that are affordable, accessible and of good quality;
- (b) The measures taken for training health professionals and support personnel to raise awareness of the human rights model of disability;
- (c) Whether mental and psychosocial health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, are accessible for women and girls with disabilities in both urban and rural areas.

#### **4.1 Summary of the social situation of persons with disabilities**

Data from EU-SILC 2019 indicate the poverty risk rate for working age persons with disabilities in Croatia was 25.7 % in 2019, compared to 12.1 % for other persons of similar age - an estimated disability poverty gap of approximately 14 percentage points (see Table 16). For people aged over 65, the disability poverty gap was 14.5 points (34.1 % for older persons with disabilities and 19.6 % for other persons of similar age). The tables in annex also indicate the respective rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion and break these down by gender as well age.

For persons with disabilities of working age in Croatia (age 16-64) the risk of poverty before social transfers was 49.8 % and 25.7 % after transfers. The in-work poverty rate for persons with disabilities aged under 60 was 6.1 %.

The social situation of persons with disabilities is especially aggravated by two factors - non-exercise of rights under current legislation due to failure of relevant authorities and inability to meet basic living needs despite the realized rights. The most vulnerable are pensioners with very low pensions and severely impaired health or with disabilities.<sup>27</sup> An additional challenge, in addition to the epidemic, was created by the consequences of two earthquakes, where persons with disabilities are at particular risk.<sup>28</sup>

The number of persons exercising some rights to claim social welfare benefits on the basis of severe disability is continuously increasing (see table 18 in annex) The number of recipients of the guaranteed minimum allowance is also decreasing (39 628 in 2018, 35 103 in 2019 and 34 004 in 2020)<sup>29</sup> which could be caused by the extremely low income set as a means test for receiving this allowance, provisions which limit the period of receiving the allowance, or the obligation to participate in public works of local / regional self-government units.<sup>30</sup>

With regard to personal disability allowance, Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities noted a significant number of cases where mistakes of the social welfare centre to recognize the right to personal disability benefits were observed, although the severity of the disability indicated the possibility of exercising this right.<sup>31</sup>

There is a visible trend of growth of non-institutional services without which life in the community for people with disabilities is not possible. However, it is still possible to observe the cessation of activities in the process of transformation of social care homes and deinstitutionalization. The effect of previous efforts in these processes, which is emphasized in almost all statements of the competent ministry, always relates to the same six homes that have undergone a certain transformation, and the number of accommodated beneficiaries has not decreased, in fact, that number is even increasing.<sup>32</sup>

Of interest to health policy are the data on self-reported unmet needs for medical examination (too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list). Disability equality gaps are evident here too and, on this basis, the rate for persons with disabilities in Croatia was 3.2 %, compared to 0.5 % for other persons, which is above the EU27 average of 1.7 %.

In the field of health, the biggest problem is the lack of equipment or a qualified person to provide quality care for persons with disabilities. The biggest problem that occurs as results of this is decubitus. It turned out that the largest number of people with

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<sup>27</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2020), Press release on the occasion of the devastating earthquakes that hit the area of Sisak-Moslavina County: Persons with disabilities need targeted assistance (*Priopćenje povodom razornih potresa koji su pogodili područje Sisačko-moslavačke županije: Osobama s invaliditetom potrebna je ciljana pomoć*)  
[https://posi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Priopćenje\\_Pravobraniteljice\\_povodom\\_razornih\\_potresa.docx](https://posi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Priopćenje_Pravobraniteljice_povodom_razornih_potresa.docx).

<sup>29</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020

<sup>30</sup> Social welfare act (*Zakon o socijalnoj skrbi*) (Official Gazette 157/13, 152/14, 99/15, 52/16, 16/17, 130/17, 98/19, 64/20, 138/20, <https://www.zakon.hr/z/222/Zakon-o-socijalnoj-skrbi>).

<sup>31</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020.

progressive decubitus that require surgical interventions and long-term treatment come from social care institutions for long-term care (family homes, foster families). This is especially a problem because in the conditions of the epidemic, strict measures of closing social care institutions and banning visits further aggravate the already difficult conditions of long-term residents. Those living in their own homes face inadequate support, insufficient number and quantity of necessities and difficult access to the health care system.<sup>33</sup>

## 4.2 Analysis of social policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2021 NRRP for Croatia and the National Strategy of Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025.

### ***Disability assessment***

The most important changes in the field of expertise relate to the separation of the expertise of Croatian war veterans from the single expert evaluation procedure, and special medical commissions will be formed for this population, which will be appointed by the minister in charge of war veterans. This represents the opposite step to the hitherto proclaimed trend of unification of expertise, regardless of the system within which the rights based on expertise are exercised.<sup>34</sup>

At the beginning of the epidemic of the COVID-19 disease, examinations in the process of expertise were cancelled and it was determined that the expertise would be carried out on the basis of medical documentation which is an integral part of the request for expertise.<sup>35</sup> However, according to the previous practice, the parties would submit only a small part of the medical documentation with the request for exercising the right, while they submitted the entire documentation to the experts during a personal examination. In accordance with such a practice, the employees of the first-instance bodies to whom the request for the exercise of the right was submitted also instructed the parties to enclose only a part of the documentation with the request, and to take the rest with them for personal examination. However, by cancelling the personal examinations, the parties lost the opportunity to present to the experts, other medical findings than those attached to the request, which resulted in cases where the findings and opinions were incomplete, which resulted in a lower degree of functional impairment being recognized.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Pensions***

There are no significant changes in the area of pension insurance, one of the problems that has arisen is the difficulty in exercising the right to family pensions, where one of

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<sup>33</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Act on Croatian Homeland War Veterans and Members of Their Families (*Zakon o hrvatskim braniteljima iz Domovinskog rata i članovima njihovih obitelji*) (Official Gazette 121/17, 98/19, 84/21), <https://www.zakon.hr/z/973/Zakon-o-hrvatskim-braniteljima-iz-Domovinskog-rata-i-%C4%8Dlanovima-njihovih-obitelji->.

<sup>35</sup> Institute for Expert Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities / ZOSI (2020) Expertise (*Vještačenje*), <https://www.zosi.hr/zavod/vjestacenje/>.

<sup>36</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

the causes of the problem was the ambiguity of the provisions themselves.<sup>37</sup> The RRP in measure C 4.2.<sup>38</sup> Increasing the adequacy of pensions through the continuation of pension reform' deals precisely with family pensions. (p. 941)

The changes would relate to the calculation of the amount of family pension by changing the pension factor, which would increase the pension for one beneficiary from 10 % to 15 % and allow the use of part of the family pension together with personal pension (old-age/ disability). Enabling the simultaneous use of personal (old-age / disability pension) and family pension in a certain percentage by limiting the cumulative pensions to a certain amount / limit, means that this would be exclusively aimed at beneficiaries with lower pension incomes. Also, the level of lowest pension would increase for the beneficiaries of the family pension, which, in addition to the completed length of service, also depends on the pension factor.

The government has passed a decision on the COVID-19 supplement, which entitles all pensioners with lower pensions to a one-time cash benefit to mitigate the consequences caused by the COVID-19 disease epidemic.<sup>39</sup> However, as the condition for assistance was the status of pension recipients, persons with disabilities who receive only disability benefits are not covered by the new measure, although the incomes of many of them are significantly lower than those set as a condition for receiving this supplement.<sup>40</sup>

### **Adequacy of benefits**

The RRP<sup>41</sup> in measure C4.3 Improvement of the social welfare system - Transparency and adequacy of social benefits in the social protection system plans the reform of benefits in the social welfare system. (p. 945) The aim of the reform is initially to increase the adequacy of the main social benefits aimed at the most vulnerable groups in society and to reduce inequality, administrative relief and ensure transparency of the system as well as faster and more efficient realization of benefits by consolidating existing social benefits intended to reduce poverty into one benefit and to consolidate the existing social benefits intended for persons with disabilities into one benefit.

The Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities warned of the inadequacy of guaranteed minimum allowance, in particular believing that it should be increased for persons without working capacity (whether single or not), as well as for children with disabilities. NRRP in measure C4.3 Improvement of the social welfare system - Transparency and adequacy of social benefits plans an increase in the base as well as the increase of the personal factor for certain groups of persons with disabilities.

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<sup>37</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>39</sup> Decision on payment of one-time cash benefits to pension beneficiaries in order to mitigate the consequences caused by the COVID-19 disease epidemic (*Odluka o isplati jednokratnog novčanog primanja korisnicima mirovine radi ublažavanja posljedica uzrokovanih epidemijom bolesti COVID-19*), [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021\\_04\\_39\\_779.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_04_39_779.html). (Official Gazette 39/2021).

<sup>40</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Recommendation for COVID financial supplement for children with disabilities and people with disabilities (*Preporuka za Covid dodatak za djecu s teškoćama u razvoju i osobe s invaliditetom*), <https://posi.hr/covid-dodatak-za-djecu-s-teskocama-u-razvoju-i-osobe-s-invaliditetom/>.

<sup>41</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

Thus, it is planned to increase the base for exercising the right by 25 %, from the current HRK 800 to 1 000, while prescribing the obligation to raise it, which is the initial phase of the implementation of this reform. Namely, depending on the needs of individual groups, changes in the equivalent scale will be regulated, ie increases in personal factors when determining the amount of guaranteed minimum allowance, as well as their differentiation in relation to the child's age and working capacity. Thus, the personal factors for determining the amount of guaranteed minimum allowance for a single person would be - for an able-bodied single person 90 % of the base, and for an person without working capacity 130 % of the base (now it is 115 %). For children from 40 % to 70 % of the base, and for children from single and single-parent families from 55 % to 80 % of the base.

The implementation of this change is expected with the adoption of the new Law on Social Welfare. So far, the proposal of the new Law on Social Welfare has not been published, but the representatives of the Ministry give indications of the new provisions, in accordance with the announcements from the NRRP.<sup>42</sup> Minister of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy also announced the adoption of a new law.<sup>43</sup>

### ***De-institutionalisation and community living***

According to the statement of the State Secretary in the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, solving the problem of family homes is also the subject of the new Law on Social Welfare. According to her family homes will have a period of five years in which they will have to reorganize into an institution within the social welfare system, respecting all defined rules on space and staffing conditions in order to continue operating. Those family homes that have a small number of beneficiaries and are not able to establish an institution will be given the opportunity to engage in foster care in accordance with the Foster Care Act. The decision on meeting the minimum working conditions will continue to be made by the units of regional self-government, but under a period of three years with a mandatory one-year control.<sup>44</sup>

The RRP also deals with the deinstitutionalization process as part of the Development of Community Services measure to prevent institutionalization. NRRP recognizes the above problem, in particular the fact that although the number of beneficiaries of non-institutional forms of care has increased, reduction of the number of users of institutional forms of care has not occurred due to insufficient development of non-institutional social services in certain areas of Croatia.

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<sup>42</sup> Pletikosa, M. (2021), New law, same problem. Interview with Marija Pletikos, State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (*Novi zakon, problem isti. Intervju s državnom tajnicom u Ministarstvu rada, mirovinskog sustava, obitelji i socijalne politike Marijom Pletikosom*). Glas umirovljenika 297, pp. 6-8  
[https://www.suh.hr/images/glasila/suh\\_297.pdf](https://www.suh.hr/images/glasila/suh_297.pdf).  
subsequent mentions: Pletikosa (2021).

<sup>43</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), Amendments to the Reconstruction Act are tasked with making the reconstruction process faster and more efficient (*Izmjene Zakona o obnovi imaju zadatak učiniti proces obnove bržim i učinkovitijim*),  
<https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/aktualno-prijepodne-izmjene-zakona-o-obnovi-imaju-zadatak-uciniti-proces-obnove-brzim-i-ucinkovitijim/32936>.

<sup>44</sup> Pletikosa (2021).

As far as the measures are concerned, it is primarily focused on the adoption of a strategic framework, a series of strategic documents, strengthening the capacity of experts and further development of non-institutional services. The transformation of existing institutions is not mentioned as one of the activities, but in measure C4.3. Construction and equipping of centres for the elderly is planned.<sup>45</sup> The aim is for these centres to provide non-institutional services to the elderly living at home, and exceptionally also accommodation services for the elderly who, even with the application of non-institutional services, cannot meet their needs at home.

In addition, integrated care would be provided in the centres for the elderly, which would be implemented through the functional connection of health care institutions at the primary level with centres for the elderly, and health care at the primary level would be provided in social care centres. The integration of health and social care would also be visible in the model of palliative care and care for people who are completely dependent on other people's help and care (people with disabilities).

The centres would also provide accommodation services for people who are functionally completely dependent on other people's help, in cases when their needs cannot be met even with the application of community services. (p. 970)

The personal assistance service is still not systematically provided but is implemented through projects, where the problem arises because only those users who have already been issued a certificate of an independent expert body or Personal Assistance Committee on meeting the conditions for receiving personal assistance service can be included in the project. Consequently, it is not possible to request an evaluation for new beneficiaries and include them in the project unless they have been previously issued such certificate in which case they can be subsequently included in the project if the current beneficiary withdraws or dies. However, as not all potential users can meet this condition, in cases of beneficiary withdrawal or death, the total number of users potentially decreases.<sup>46</sup>

In the area of Varaždin County, in Varaždinske Toplice, the construction of the National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Diseases and Spinal Cord Injuries of the Special Hospital Varaždinske Toplice is underway. There, all necessary medical care for people with spinal injuries will be provided in one place in order to reduce the consequences of disability to a minimum and enable the person to reach his/her maximum health as soon as possible. Construction of the centre began in March 2021.<sup>47</sup>

A special problem relates to persons with disabilities placed in institutions against their will. It is a common practice of social welfare centres to deprive persons of their legal capacity in order to be placed in an institution, but also to link the return from the institution with the previous return of legal capacity. Deprivation of legal capacity is often carried out precisely in order to place a person in an institution. People with

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<sup>45</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>46</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Varaždinske vijesti (2021), Construction of the Spinal Center has begun (*Započela izgradnja Spinalnog centra*). 2/3/2021; <https://www.varazdinske-vijesti.hr/aktualno/zapocela-izgradnja-spinalnog-centra-bit-ce-jedan-od-najmodernijih-centara-u-ovom-dijelu-europe-45892>.

disabilities often point out in their complaints that the accommodation was decided against their will. Social welfare centres and even the competent ministry deny accommodation without consent. However, the fact is that for persons deprived of legal capacity, the request and consent for accommodation is submitted by their guardians, thus fulfilling the formal condition of 'consent'.<sup>48</sup>

Several tragic events in private family homes marked 2020,<sup>49</sup> which further highlighted the need to abandon the thesis that foster care for adults with disabilities is an alternative form of care within community and showed that family homes need to be included in the process of deinstitutionalization and transformation. The structure of the beneficiaries placed in these homes, the geographical isolation of these homes and the lack of professionals in the field of social work or psychosocial rehabilitation in these institutions is a big problem. Large number of beneficiaries in a single family home does not provide a family atmosphere, and on the other hand the lack of professional staff, quality programs and content turns this form of care into a mere satisfaction of basic existential needs.<sup>50</sup>

### **Caregiver status**

The problem of the right to caregiver status remains. Caregiver parent status can be granted to a parent when a child with disabilities stays less than four hours a day in a preschool, educational or health institution, social care home or other provider. An exception to the above is recognized when a child with disabilities stays four or more hours a day in an institution, under condition that the parent provides the child with assistance and care during the stay.<sup>51</sup> The restriction of the right to a half-day stay of a child whose parent exercises the status of a caregiver parent can have a very negative impact on the realization of the child's best interests. This is clearly seen in the case where parents state that they had to stop using a child's half-day stay.<sup>52</sup>

There is a related problem that the right to the status of a caregiver for an adult in the family cannot be exercised by a family member other than the parents and spouses of the parents or a person with a disability.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021) Report for 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2020), press release on the occasion of the tragic event in the Family Home in Andraševac (*Priopćenje povodom tragičnog događaja u Obiteljskom domu u Andraševcu*) <https://posi.hr/priopcenje-povodom-tragicnog-dogadaja-u-obiteljskom-domu-u-andrasevcu/>.

<sup>50</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Social welfare act (*Zakon o socijalnoj skrbi*) (Official Gazette 157/13, 152/14, 99/15, 52/16, 16/17, 130/17, 98/19, 64/20, 138/20, <https://www.zakon.hr/z/222/Zakon-o-socijalnoj-skrbi>).

<sup>52</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

## 5 Disability, education and skills – analysis of the situation and the effectiveness of policies

In 2015, the UN CRPD Committee made the following recommendations<sup>54</sup> to Croatia:

[Article 24 UN CRPD](#) addresses education.

‘36. The Committee recommends that the State party take immediate steps to ensure that all persons with disabilities have access to inclusive quality primary, secondary and tertiary education and that reasonable accommodation is provided in mainstream education. It also recommends establishing the principle that exclusionary and segregated education is discriminatory. It recommends that teachers and other professionals receive training on inclusive education and that all secondary education facilities be made accessible to persons with disabilities.’

The 2020 List of Issues<sup>55</sup> requested:

‘23. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to inclusive education, in both rural and urban areas, in line with the recommendation in 2012 of the Ombudsperson to ensure conditions for children and youth with disabilities to have quality education in schools throughout the State party. Please also provide information on:

- (a) The number of children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive mainstream schools, in special schools and in other segregated school units at all levels of education, disaggregated by sex, national or ethnic origin, impairment and urban or rural settings and trends since the last review of the State party by the Committee;
- (b) The human, technical and financial resources allocated to providing individualized support to students with disabilities to ensure equal access to the learning environment;
- (c) The steps taken to promote and ensure the training and hiring of teachers with disabilities and the training of teachers in sign language, orientation and mobility skills in mainstream schools.’

### 5.1 Summary of the educational situation of persons with disabilities

The EU-SILC 2019 estimates concerning educational attainment should be treated with additional caution due to relatively wide confidence intervals, but they consistently indicate disability equality gaps (an average of 2-3 years provides a more stable indication). Table 19 indicates early school leaving rates disaggregated by disability status in Croatia. Youth with disabilities (aged 18-24) tend to leave school significantly more than peers of the same age groups without disabilities (and this is reinforced by widening the sample size to age 18-29). Table 20 shows completion rate of tertiary education disaggregated by disability and age group. Persons with disabilities (age 30-34) are less likely to complete tertiary education than their peers (and this is reinforced in the wider age range 30-39).

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<sup>54</sup> UN Committee on RPD (2015), Concluding observations.

<sup>55</sup> UN Committee on RPD (2020), List of issues.

In spite of declaratory commitment to inclusive education, due to lack of support and reasonable accommodation significant number of children with disabilities are still attending special schools. Most of those institutions have still not been integrated into the educational system (for which the Ministry of Science and Education is responsible) but are part of social welfare system (for which the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy is responsible).

In school year 2020/2021 there were altogether 30 713 children with disabilities in primary and secondary education. Out of these 3 043 were attending special schools and 27 670 were attending regular schools (22 042 primary schools and 5 322 secondary schools).<sup>56</sup> For pupils with disabilities attending primary and secondary education the biggest issue is the provision of teaching assistants. Here, the problem is still unsystematic financing (through the project), various working conditions, and there are often cases when a person with appropriate competencies cannot be found in an area.<sup>57</sup>

It is difficult to talk about the exact number of students with disabilities, different institutions have different approaches to keeping records, so the numbers vary. Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities conducted an online survey which showed that most students (34 % of them) have multiple difficulties such as motor difficulties and chronic illness, mental and learning difficulties, mental and health difficulties, visual impairment and hearing impairment and the like. The most numerous are students with motor difficulties, followed by other health and chronic diseases, visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning difficulties. Although only two students with mental health problems completed the survey, six more stated that they also had mental health problems.<sup>58</sup>

The COVID-19 epidemic has produced additional challenges for students with disabilities. During the period of on-line education one of the biggest problems for students with disabilities in terms of their participation in distance learning activities were lack of widespread high-speed internet access at homes in Croatia, especially in rural areas. Also, instructions for implementation of classes and models for implementation of education for students with disabilities were sometimes not clear.

In the field of higher education, according to the feedback of the students themselves, negative and positive effects were identified. The difficulties reported by the students were mainly of a technical nature: problems with the Internet and applications and the unavailability of the necessary aids, too much looking at the screen. They also mentioned problems that showed that the necessary adjustment was missing: they did not manage to take notes or follow lectures, and lectures would not be available online later, there was not enough time for online exams or assignments, materials were not adapted, sign language translators were not available. As a positive in online teaching, they mentioned the possibility of being at home and attending classes in the comfort provided by their own home, less time spent, greater safety for health, fewer encounters with accessibility and transportation problems, and they could determine

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<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (2021), School e-Mine- tool (*ŠeR - Školski e-Rudnik*), <https://mzo.gov.hr/ser-skolski-e-rudnik-3419/3419>.

<sup>57</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

the schedule of lectures and learning, re-listen to the lectures because everything was available to them. They assessed the acquisition of new skills through online teaching as positive, some even said that the professors were more accessible to them and explained the material better.

Regarding the provided adjustments when taking the exams, there are frequent answers that no adjustment was needed or that they had enough time or extended time for assignments and exams. In addition to the above, they also had been provided accommodation in terms of multiple written instead of oral checks or vice versa as needed.<sup>59</sup>

A special problem are the schools damaged by the earthquakes in 2020 (in Zagreb in March and in Petrinja in December). The problem of accessibility of replacement schools, availability of broadband connection for online education and appropriate tools for implementation of online education for children with disabilities remains. Also, with the departure of children with disabilities from the areas affected by earthquakes, they are being separated from their teaching assistants. These data are constantly updated and there is no precise data on students (including those with disabilities), because an increasing number of them are dropping out of schools in this area and temporarily moving to other parts of Croatia.

## 5.2 Analysis of education policies relevant to the Semester

For reference, see also the 2021 NRRP and the National Strategy of Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025.

The RRP<sup>60</sup> refers very little to persons with disabilities in the area of education. It is stated that it is necessary to invest in the reconstruction and construction of schools, taking into account the architectural accessibility for children with disabilities (p.857), and the introduction of full-time classes is planned to strengthen additional work with students with learning difficulties. (p. 862)

It is also said that the principle of equal opportunities will be respected and promoted in a way that makes a positive contribution to the accessibility of physical infrastructure and the creation of conditions for information and communication accessibility for people with disabilities. In addition to infrastructural accessibility, where applicable, investments will ensure that other types of accessibility are respected through following the principles of reasonable accommodation and universal design. (p. 903)

The Ministry of Science and Education has published Guidelines for working with students with disabilities<sup>61</sup> as a framework for planning, implementation and evaluation of the educational process of students with disabilities intended for teachers, professional associates and principals of primary and secondary schools implementing regular curricula.

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<sup>59</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (2021), Guidelines for working with pupils with disabilities (*Smjernice za rad s učenicima s teškoćama*),

<https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/Obrazovanje//Smjernice%20za%20rad%20s%20učenicima%20s%20teskocama.pdf>.

The guidelines for working with students with disabilities include instructions on identifying students with disabilities, the processes of assessing their educational needs and on planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning and teaching process of students with disabilities. Also, the Guidelines describe the roles of different participants in the educational process and appropriate forms of support to students. They are designed to provide teachers and professional associates with basic information on the essential components of the individualized curriculum and refer them to additional sources of learning, while respecting the professional autonomy of each employee involved in the process of education.

Before the beginning of the new school year 2021/2022, the Instructions of the Croatian Public Health Institute for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the school year 2021/2022<sup>62</sup> were published together with Models and recommendations for work in conditions related to the disease COVID-19.<sup>63</sup> Here it is stated that in kindergartens at the time of the coronavirus epidemic it is necessary to give children with disabilities the right to the support of an assistant (third educator) or professional communication mediators or an assistant for care. School principals have to determine the possibility of adhering to the Instructions when conducting special programs for children / students with disabilities. Unlike the parents of other students (except those in the first grade of primary school), the parents of students with disabilities can enter the school premises. All students are obliged to inform the class teachers about the rules and obligations, risks and instructions that must be followed, taking into account the age of students, as well as their specifics, especially in the case of students with disabilities.

For students who cannot attend classes due to major motor difficulties or chronic diseases, and for whom the school has the approval of the Ministry for the organization of home classes, classes can be held in the student's home. It is not recommended that more teachers come to the home during one day. The teacher is obliged to follow the Instructions and is recommended to wear a mask. In case of worsening of the epidemiological situation, home teaching takes place in form of distance learning.

### **Pre-school provision**

In the field of pre-school education, there are still some problems facing children with disabilities. Although the regulations provide the priority inclusion of children with

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<sup>62</sup> Croatian Institute of Public Health and Ministry of science and education (2021), Instructions for the prevention and suppression of the epidemic of COVID-19 disease related to the work of preschool institutions, primary and secondary schools in the school year 2021/2022. (*Upute za sprječavanje i suzbijanje epidemije bolesti COVID-19 vezano uz rad predškolskih ustanova, osnovnih i srednjih škola u školskoj godini 2021./2022.*), <https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Upute-za-sprje%C4%8Davanje-i-suzbijanje-epidemije-bolesti-COVID-19-vezano-uz-rad-pred%C5%A1kolskih-ustanova-osnovnih-i-srednjih-%C5%A1kola-u-%C5%A1kolskoj-godini-2021.-2022.-1.pdf>.  
subsequent mentions: Croatian Institute of Public Health and Ministry of science and education (2021), Instructions.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (2021), *Models and recommendations for work in conditions related to the disease COVID-19* (Modeli i preporuke za rad u uvjetima povezanima s bolesti COVID-19), [https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Modeli%20i%20preporuke%20za%20provedbu%20nastave%20u%202021-2022%20\(1\)\\_31%208.pdf](https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Modeli%20i%20preporuke%20za%20provedbu%20nastave%20u%202021-2022%20(1)_31%208.pdf).

disabilities in kindergarten there are still children who could not exercise the right to access pre-school education on an equal basis solely due to the child's developmental difficulties.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, there were cases of limiting the stay of children in kindergarten due to child's disability (some kindergartens limit the stay for such children after 15 June, although the pedagogical year lasts until 31 August). Preschool institutions usually explain such decisions by a different organization of work during the summer months, where the conditions will be less appropriate to the needs of children with disabilities (different children in the group, change of educators, changes in rooms where educational groups, etc.), and also the need of the child to 'rest from routine during the pedagogical year'<sup>65</sup> Children whose parents exercise the right to part-time work are generally allowed to stay in kindergarten for four hours a day, although this is not prescribed by the provisions of the regulations on the basis of which the parent exercised this right. Because of a shorter stay in the kindergarten of a child with disabilities, parents who are employed part-time fail to pick up the child if he / she is in the kindergarten for only four hours.<sup>66</sup>

The issue of assistants in a preschool institution is not legally regulated in the regulations on preschool education, however, in practice the possibilities provided by the State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education are used - a smaller number of children in a group with a child with disabilities, additional educator, educational rehabilitator for special group if there are more children with disabilities in kindergarten or employment of a care assistant. However, there are frequent cases where the responsibility for providing funding for an assistant is shifted to the parents and they have to find and finance the assistants themselves.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Higher and adult education***

Laws and regulations still do not prescribe the forms and methods of providing accommodation for higher education students with disabilities. In practice, accommodation still depends on the good will of the professor, students do not know what they are or are not entitled to, and both sometimes consider exemption from performing certain tasks as a possible solution - this was pointed out by 30 % of students.<sup>68</sup>

A survey conducted by the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities included information on accommodation models and showed that the range of accommodations for students with disabilities is different in the academic environment. Almost the largest percentage of students answered that they use something that is not accommodation at all, but it turned out that such a practice is widespread: exemption from performing certain tasks. This poses a danger that the learning outcomes for students with disabilities will be reduced instead of finding alternative ways of doing activities with which the learning outcomes will be fully achieved, and academic standards will not be reduced. A significant number of surveyed students believe that they do not need any special accommodation, and the accommodations that they most

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<sup>64</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

often use are accessibility of e-content and digitized teaching literature, which is not surprising given that classes due to the COVID-19 epidemic were conducted mostly online.

None of the surveyed students used a typist and sign language translator, which is expected because most of them have motor difficulties and chronic diseases and other health difficulties. However, when asked about the form of accommodation they think will make it easier for them to study when it could be provided, the typist service and sign language translator received a significant number of answers.<sup>69</sup>

Several organizations of persons with disabilities and parents informed the Ombudsman about a specific problem - additional criteria for enrolment in higher education studies, which one higher education institution published on its website, and which automatically disqualified certain groups of persons with disabilities. Examples of necessary criteria are complete mobility of the lower extremities, or fine motor skills of the hands and fingers, or orderly function on the hands and forearms.<sup>70</sup>

Although a single expert body has been introduced, despite the fact that more and more students with disabilities are being assessed by a single expert body, in order to realize the material rights, they can exercise in the higher education system based on disability such as enrolment in college, obtaining a place in a dormitory, receiving a scholarship or transportation fee they still need to obtain a separate certificate of the percentage of bodily impairment. This creates a problem because many conditions that significantly affect study and require adjustment of the academic environment are not on the list of physical disabilities, so this group of students cannot exercise any rights in the higher education system, although they sometimes face more difficulties than some groups of persons with physical impairment.<sup>71</sup>

Teaching at universities in 2021/2022 will be implemented in accordance with Recommendations for teaching at higher education institutions in the period of the COVID-19 disease pandemic with the application of anti-epidemic measures for the academic year 2021/2022<sup>72</sup> of the Croatian Public Health Institute. However, students with disabilities are not mentioned in these instructions.

New Adult education act has still not been passed. In July 2021, Government has adopted the draft of the proposal of the new Adult education act.<sup>73</sup> There it is stated (Article 22) that for persons with disabilities included in an education or validation program, institutions are obliged to ensure a reasonable adaptation of methods and forms of work. In addition to the mandatory reasonable accommodation, institutions may provide other forms of support for people with disabilities.

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<sup>69</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2021), Report for 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Croatian Institute of Public Health and Ministry of science and education (2021), Instructions

<sup>73</sup> Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), The draft of the proposal of the new Adult

education act (*Nacrt prijedloga zakona o obrazovanju odraslih*), <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2016/Sjednice/2021/srpanj/70%20sjednica%20VRH/70%20-%203.doc>.

## 6 Investment priorities in relation to disability

### 6.1 Updates on use of existing EU funds (up to 2021)

Until 2021, the most common use of EU funds for persons with disabilities was in the area of social services, personal assistance and the deinstitutionalisation process. Within the Call for applications for three-year programs of associations operating in the field of social welfare entitled 'Development and expansion of the network of social services provided by associations', one of the two areas relates to the problems and needs of people with disabilities. In the program for the period 2020 to 2023, 263 programmes of associations engaged in social and humanitarian activities, associations of persons with disabilities and associations working for their benefit have been contracted in the amount of HRK 46 620 000 per year.<sup>74</sup> (p. 50)

Within the ESF call for proposals for the Expansion of the social services network - phase I in 2020, 107 projects worth HRK 148.9 million were contracted. The tender was announced in January 2018, and the first decision was made on 13 March 2020. (more than two years have passed from the call to the contracting). Within this call, a special component refers to activities aimed at adults with disabilities, their family members and professionals working with members of these target groups. These projects relate to the provision of community services for adults with disabilities (e.g. psychosocial support, mobile teams, etc.), the provision of services aimed at family members and foster families, strengthening the capacity of professionals to provide social services. (ESF)<sup>75</sup>

To ensure and increase the availability of non-institutional services in the community to support the deinstitutionalization and transformation process, in the period from May 2020 to April 2021, a total of 27 projects of state social welfare institutions were contracted with a total grant of HRK 262.6 million. Of that, 21 projects with a total value of HRK 213.1 million were contracted from the European Regional Development Fund. Within the European Social Fund, 6 projects worth a total of HRK 49.5 million have been contracted. The continuation of activities is envisaged by the implementation of the RRP reform measure Development of Community Services to prevent institutionalization. (NPOO, 50). In May 2021, another project from the same call was contracted for one centre worth HRK 11 451 703. (RRP, p. 50)

A call Development of a personal assistance service for people with disabilities - phase III funded by the European Social Fund<sup>76</sup> is important. 113 projects were contracted from December 2020 to July 2021.

In May 2021, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy increased the available financial resources for the open permanent Call 'Development of personal assistance services for persons with disabilities - phase III' by HRK

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<sup>74</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

<sup>75</sup> ESF (2020), Expansion of the network of social services in the community-Phase I (*Širenje mreže socijalnih usluga u zajednici-Faza I.*), <http://www.esf.hr/natjecaji/socijalno-ukljucivanje/sirenje-mreze-socijalnih-usluga-u-zajednici-faza-i/>.

<sup>76</sup> Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (2021), Decision on financing (*Odluka o financiranju*), <http://www.esf.hr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/6.-Odluka-o-financiranju.pdf>.

3 687 965 32, which means that the total financial allocation for the Call now amounts to HRK 153 687 965.32.<sup>77</sup> This increase in available financial resources was made by reallocating unspent funds for projects for financing Croatian sign language interpreters / translators for deaf and deafblind people and the services of a visual companions. Additional financial resources will be used to finance project proposals from the reserve list.

There are certain challenges in using EU funds. In 2021, OLAF announced cases of misuse of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance IPA and ESF funds in disability-related projects. It relates to making false documentation in order to cover up the lack of work done. One company (private company Rehabilitation Center from Varaždin) led three projects co-financed through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Their purpose was to provide rehabilitation services to people with mental and physical problems in rural areas with limited access to social services.<sup>78</sup> (Raić Knežević, 2021)

‘OLAF discovered that as little as 7 % of the total cost of the work had been carried out in some of the activities, and that the completion rate was never higher than 50 %, despite the company claims for reimbursement for 100 % of the work.’<sup>79</sup> (OLAF, pp. 16-17)

Domestic analyses show that there are very uneven capacities for the use of ESF funds. The parallel report of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities<sup>80</sup> on the implementation of the UN CRPD from 2020 states

‘Using EU funds – We are witnessing negligible efforts in using EU funds in the previous period. By looking into social welfare homes included in the process of transformation, we noticed that the most EU funds were used by those who also achieved the greatest results in the process of deinstitutionalisation (Ozalj, Osijek, Slobostina, and Stancic). The homes which did not apply for EU funds most often say the reason for failing to use the funds is the lack of capacities and education in writing project plans, i. e. that they need help from the competent Ministry.’ (p. 34).

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<sup>77</sup> European structural and investment funds (2021), Tenders Development of personal assistance services for people with disabilities - phase III (*Natječaj Razvoj usluge osobne asistencije za osobe s invaliditetom – faza III*), <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/en/natjecaji/razvoj-usluge-osobne-asistencije-za-osobe-s-invaliditetom-faza-iii/>.

<sup>78</sup> Raić Knežević Ana (2021) EU traži da poznata poduzetnica vrati milijune. Tvrde da je muljala na projektima za osobe s invaliditetom, Telegram 20/8/2021, <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/telegram-ekskluziv-eu-trazi-da-poznata-poduzetnica-vrati-milijune-tvrde-da-je-muljala-na-projektima-za-osobe-s-invaliditetom/>.

<sup>79</sup> OLAF (2021), The OLAF report 2020. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/sites/default/files/olaf\\_report\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-fraud/sites/default/files/olaf_report_2020_en.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (2020), Briefing on Croatia for the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with List of Issues prior to reporting, 13<sup>th</sup> pre-session, February 2020.

## 6.2 Priorities for future investment (after 2021)

The NRRP<sup>81</sup> in several instances mentions investments that will improve the lives of people with disabilities. Part of these investments has already been mentioned in previous chapters (school infrastructure, capacity building in social work, use of autonomous cars).

One of the most important and publicly visible plans is to invest in autonomous cars that will be run by Rimac company (Component Economy, measure C1.4. R1-I2). People with disabilities will receive vouchers for free car use after the end of 2025 for the next five years. As regards the application of Article 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), it is a matter of financing a project in which the State acts in the exercise of public authority and which therefore does not involve State aid. It is about connecting private initiative, research work, development of innovative products important for the mobility of persons with disabilities and public support for the use of these vehicles. (p. 365).

For future more flexible working conditions for persons with disabilities, investments in the development and introduction of a model for a hybrid approach to the workplace - smartworking is important (Component Public Administration, Judiciary and State Property, Reform Measure C2.2. R2-I2). This way of working is planned in order to ensure greater involvement of people with disabilities in the long run, when institutions do not provide accessibility. In the first phase, the model applies only to public administration and employees in public and state services. (p. 535) The estimated cost of this investment is HRK 74 713 361.

Investing in social services and the capacity of professionals is an important part relating to investments within RRP that helps the quality of life and prevents institutionalization. Persons with disabilities are explicitly listed as one of the priority user groups. It is planned to invest in strengthening the capacity of professionals to provide services in the community (Component Labour Market and Social Protection, measure C4.3. R3-I1). The investment will improve the human resources to provide social services through educational activities and the employment of experts. It is planned to achieve better protection of children and adults with disabilities, equalization of quality and prevention of institutionalization by providing services directly in the home of beneficiaries in cooperation with other stakeholders at the local community level. Institution responsible for implementation is Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, and the beneficiaries are experts of social welfare institutions and socially vulnerable groups. The estimated cost of this investment is HRK 141 500 000. (p 963)

Social mentoring should enable greater inclusion in the community and in the labour market (Component Labour Market and Social Protection, measure C4.3. R2-I1). The social mentoring service is a proven method with the objective of helping long-term unemployed beneficiaries with working capacity, people with disabilities, victims of violence, young people leaving care and people serving a prison sentence in the transition to the workplace. Institution responsible for implementation is Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. The target group are Social

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<sup>81</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026.

Workers, CES counselors for people with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups. (p. 963) The estimated cost of this investment is HRK 99 675 000 HRK. The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, the Managing Authority of the Operational Program Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020, announces the Annual Plan for the publication of calls for proposals of the Operation programme, with the aim of informing the public and enabling timely preparation of project proposals of potential applicants to ESF tenders.

According to the plan and changes to the plan for 2021, there are still some tenders whose results are not finished, and implementation has not started, so they will certainly be implemented after 2021.<sup>82</sup>

Call Provision of teaching assistants and professional communication mediators for students with disabilities in primary and secondary educational institutions, phase IV.<sup>83</sup> is financed from the European Social Fund, within the Operational Program Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020. It is planned that HRK 150 000 000 will be spent. It was closed on 8 July 2021 with the planned start in December 2021. Applicants are local self-government units in cooperation with schools.

The second tender from the annual plan is the call Improving the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market in the tourism and hospitality sector II.<sup>84</sup> The beneficiaries of this call are adult education institutions and professional associations in tourism and hospitality. The goal is for people with disabilities to acquire new competencies, that they become more employable and more competitive in the labour market, and the sector will be further strengthened by well-trained workers in accordance with the needs of the labour market. The end users in this tender are only persons with disabilities, unlike the first phase of this tender where there were also other groups with difficult employment. The amount of HRK 27 655 000.00 is planned for all accepted project proposals. The tender closed in May and the results are expected in late September 2021 (they have not yet been published at the time of writing).

Among other tenders, the Call for Institutional Support to Stabilization and / or Development of Associations of Persons with Disabilities operating at the local level

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<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (2021), Annual publication plan of the Call for Proposals with amendments (*Godišnji plan objave Poziva na dostavu projektnih prijedloga s izmjenama*), <http://www.esf.hr/europski-socijalni-fond/razdoblje-2014-2020/godisnji-plan-objave-operacijaprojekata-esf/>.

<sup>83</sup> European structural and investment funds (2021), Tenders Providing teaching assistants and professional communication mediators for students with disabilities in primary and secondary educational institutions, phase IV. (Natječaji Osiguravanje pomoćnika u nastavi i stručnih komunikacijskih posrednika učenicima s teškoćama u razvoju u osnovnoškolskim i srednjoškolskim odgojno-obrazovnim ustanovama, faza IV.), <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/natjecaji/osiguravanje-pomocnika-u-nastavi-i-strucnih-komunikacijskih-posrednika-ucenicima-s-teskocama-u-razvoju-u-osnovnoskolskim-i-srednjoskolskim-odgojno-obrazovnim-ustanovama-faza-iv/>.

<sup>84</sup> European structural and investment funds (2021), Tenders Improving the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market in the tourism and hospitality sector II. (Natječaji Poboljšanje pristupa ranjivih skupina tržištu rada u sektoru turizma i ugostiteljstva II.), <https://strukturnifondovi.hr/natjecaji/poboljsanje-pristupa-ranjivih-skupina-trzistu-rada-u-sektoru-turizma-i-ugostiteljstva-ii/>.

is important.<sup>85</sup> The tender was announced by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development, and the application deadline is 15 September 2021. It is expected that the implementation of projects will start at the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022. It is planned to award a total of up to 20 grants from HRK 100 000 to 300 000. This support is for a maximum period of 3 years.

The use of these funds should be linked to the adoption of some national strategies. The deadlines are set by the Decision on the establishment of strategic planning acts related to the conditions that enable the implementation of European Union funds in the period from 2021 to 2027, the deadlines for adoption and the bodies in charge of their preparation. The adoption of most strategies related to persons with disabilities is late, so through the changes of the Decision new deadlines were set.<sup>86</sup> For example, the condition for investing in the development of social services in the community is the development of two strategic documents (National Plan for the Development of Social Services for the period 2021 to 2027 and the National Plan for Equalization of Opportunities for persons with disabilities for the period 2021 to 2027) which were not passed by the planned deadlines, so their adoption was extended until the end of 2021. After their adoption, operational plans would be prepared for the implementation of the process of transformation and deinstitutionalization of homes for children and youth, as well as children with disabilities and adults with disabilities founded by the Republic of Croatia.

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<sup>85</sup> The National Foundation for Civil Society Development (2021), Institutional support to the stabilization and / or development of associations of persons with disabilities operating at the local level (Institucionalna podrška stabilizaciji i/ili razvoju udruga osoba s invaliditetom koje djeluju na lokalnoj razini), <https://zaklada.civilnodrustvo.hr/tender/institucionalna-podrska-stabilizaciji-i-ili-razvoju-udruga-osoba-s-invaliditetom-koje-djeluju-na-lokalnoj-razini/2021-08-17>.

<sup>86</sup> Croatian Government (2021), Amendments to the Decision on determining the acts of strategic planning.

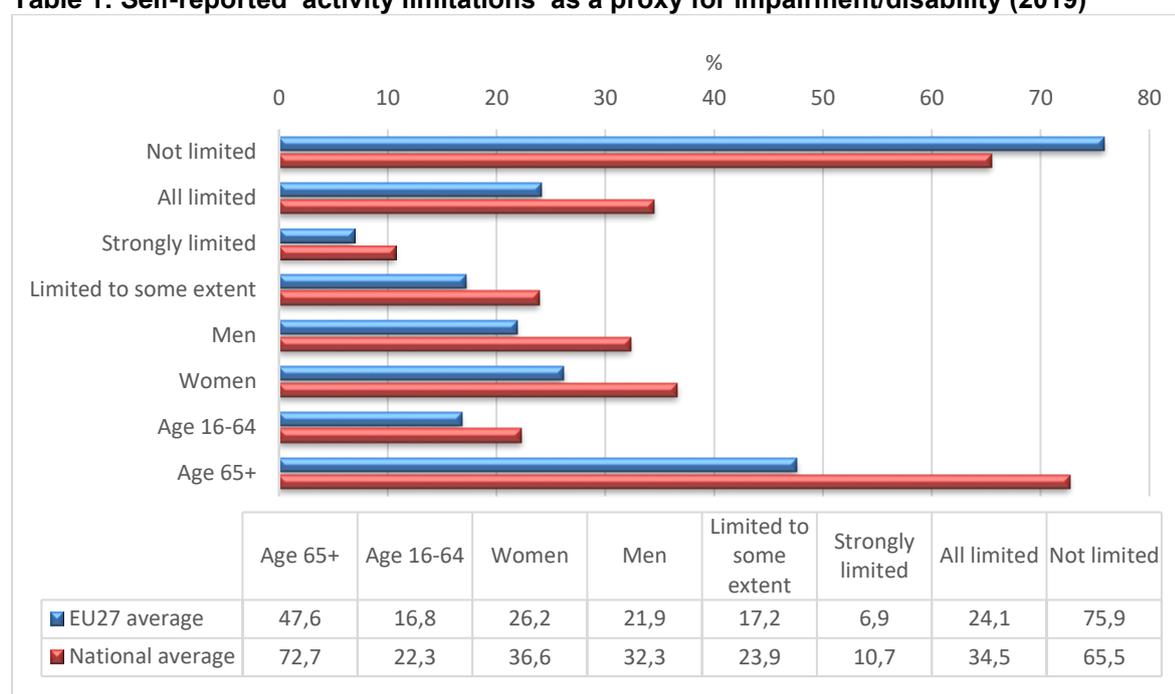
## 7 Annex: disability data relevant to the Semester

See also disability data published in the Eurostat database<sup>87</sup> and statistical reports.<sup>88</sup>

Unless specified, the summary statistics are drawn from the most recent EU-SILC data available to researchers from Eurostat. The EU-SILC sample includes people living in private households and does not include people living in institutions (congregative households). The sampling methods vary somewhat in each country.

The proxy used to identify people with disabilities (impairments) is whether 'for at least the past 6 months' the respondent reports that they have been 'limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do'.<sup>89</sup>

**Table 1: Self-reported 'activity limitations' as a proxy for impairment/disability (2019)**



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1.

In subsequent tables, these data are used to indicate 'disability' equality gaps and trends relevant to the analytical chapters – for the labour market, social policies and healthcare, and education – by comparing outcomes for persons who report and do not report 'activity limitations'.<sup>90</sup> National estimates for Croatia are compared with

<sup>87</sup> Eurostat health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

<sup>88</sup> Eurostat (2019) *Disability Statistics*, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics).

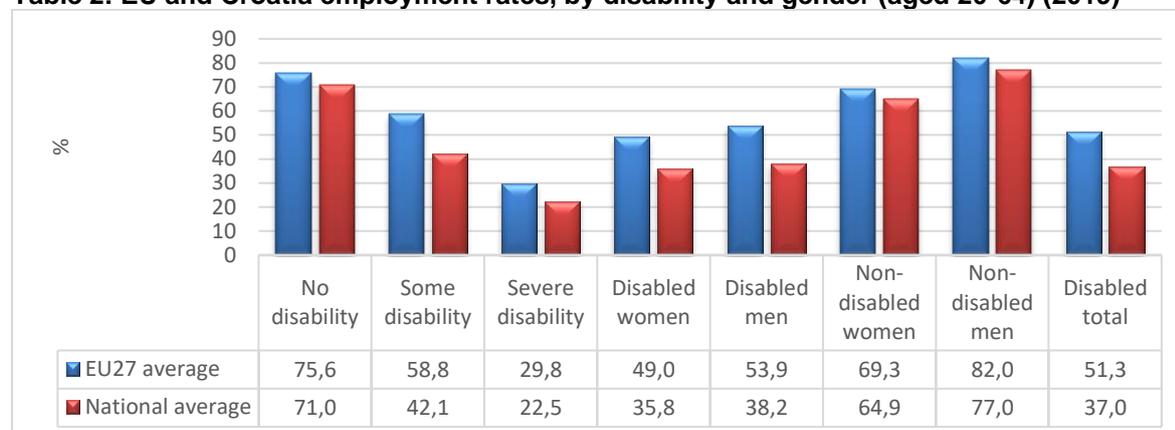
<sup>89</sup> The SILC survey questions are contained in the Minimum European Health Module (MEHM), [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum\\_European\\_Health\\_Module\\_\(MEHM\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Special:WhatLinksHere/Glossary:Minimum_European_Health_Module_(MEHM)).

<sup>90</sup> This methodology was developed in the annual statistical reports of ANED, available at: <http://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>.

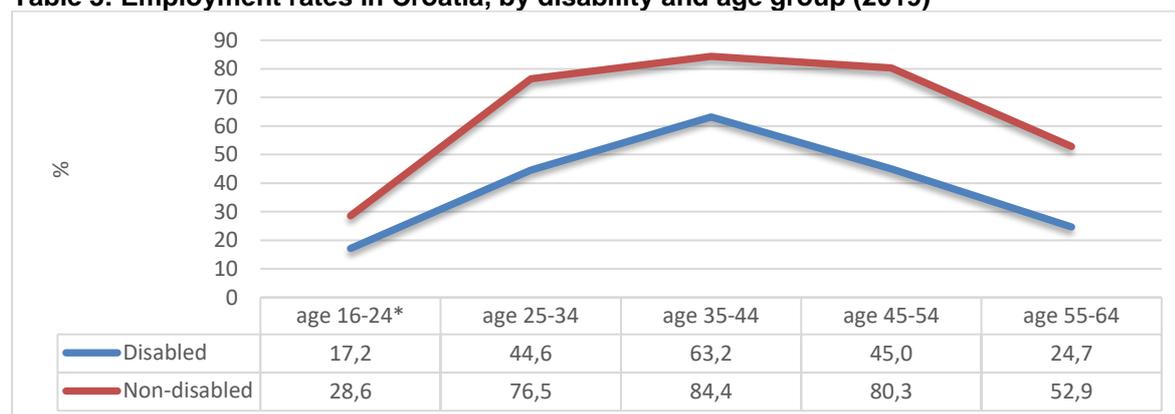
EU27 mean averages for the most recent year.<sup>91</sup> More people reported limitations in the Croatia than the EU average.

## 7.1 Data relevant to disability and the labour market

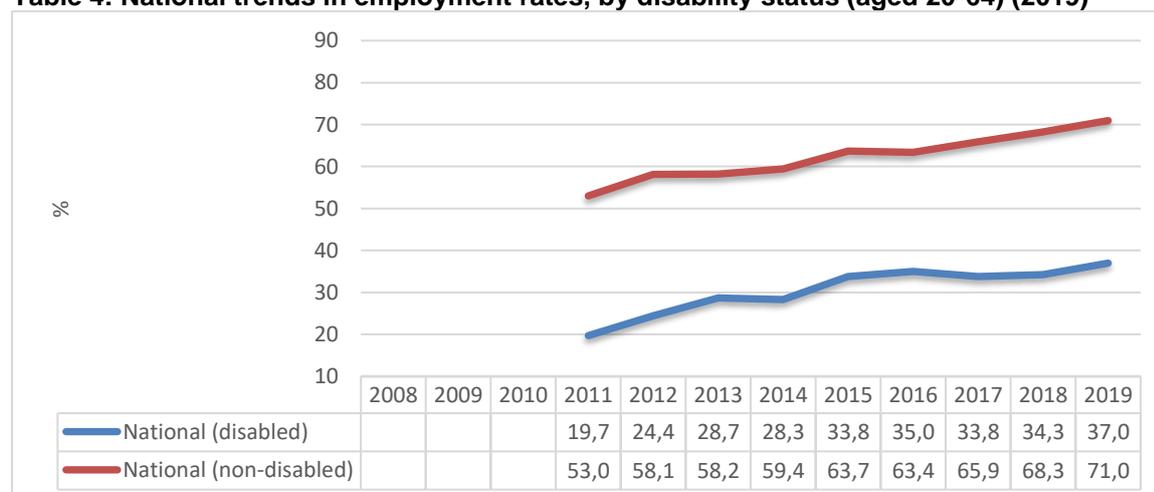
**Table 2: EU and Croatia employment rates, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)**



**Table 3: Employment rates in Croatia, by disability and age group (2019)**



**Table 4: National trends in employment rates, by disability status (aged 20-64) (2019)**

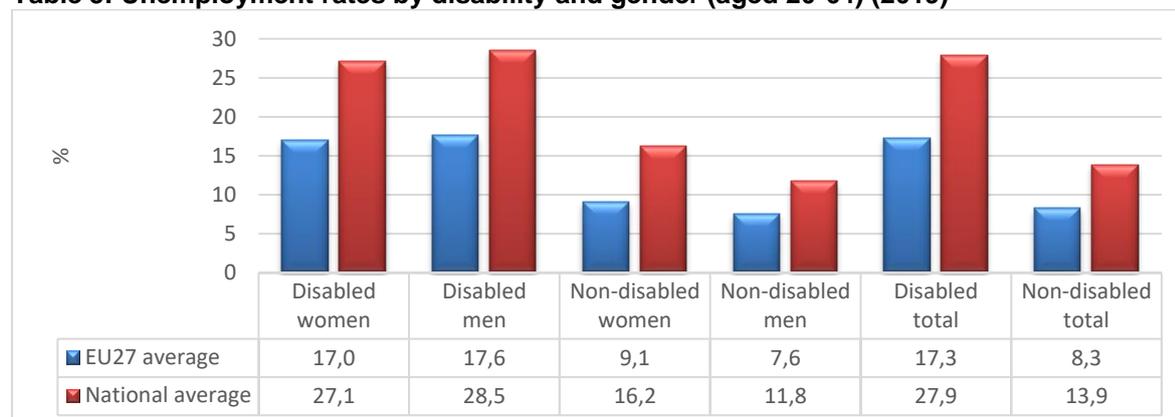


Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

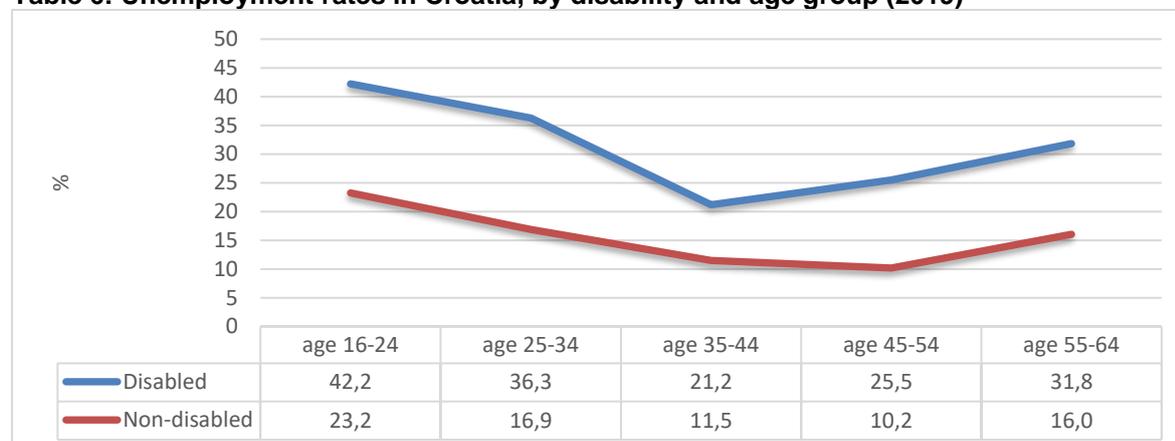
<sup>91</sup> The exit of the United Kingdom from the EU changes the EU average. Averages were also affected in 2015 by a discontinuity in the German disability data due to a definitional change.

## 7.1.1 Unemployment

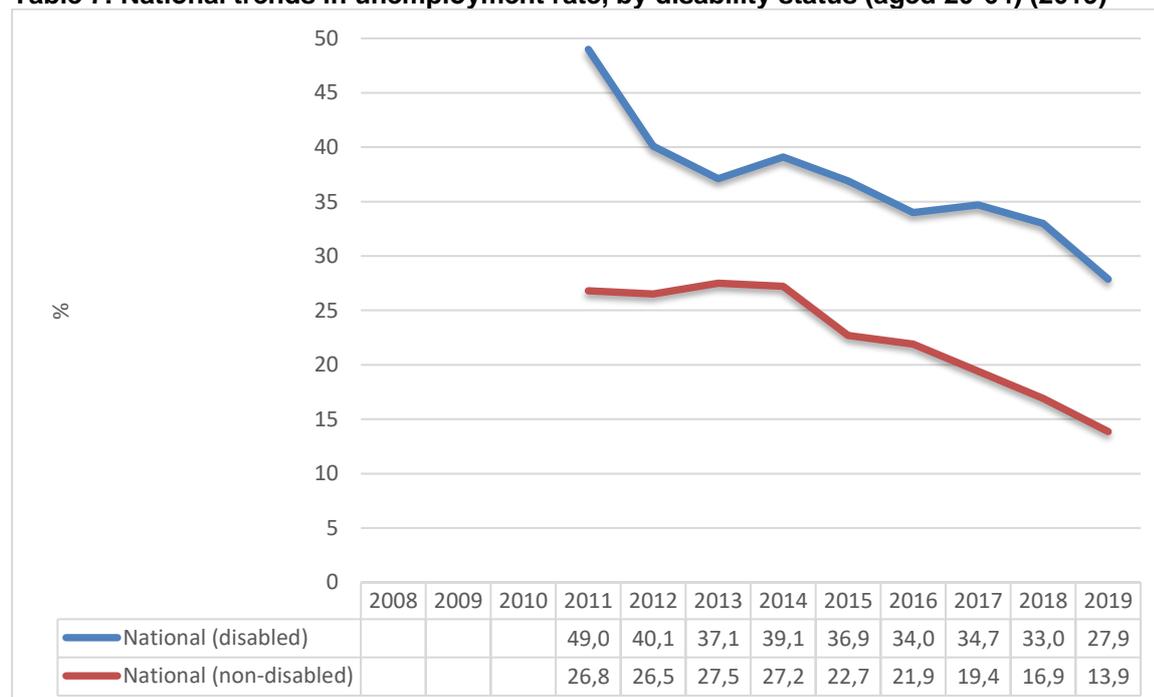
**Table 5: Unemployment rates by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)**



**Table 6: Unemployment rates in Croatia, by disability and age group (2019)**



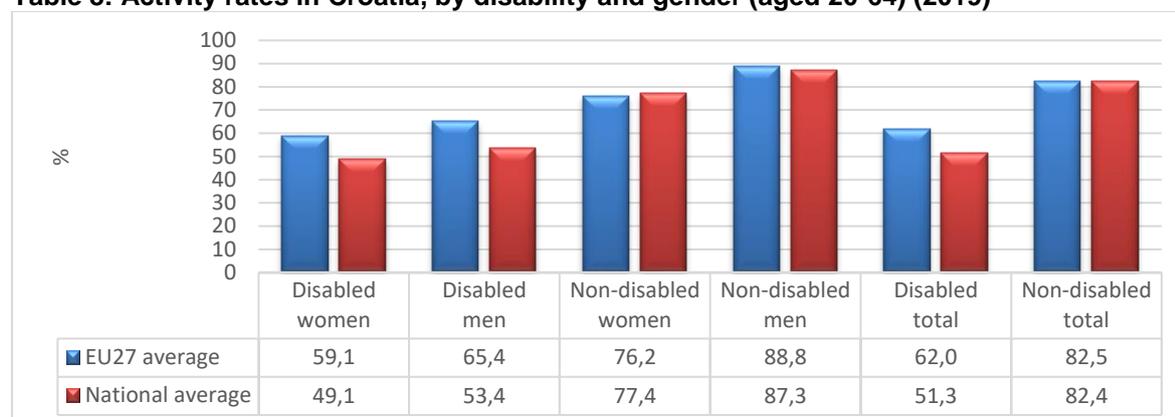
**Table 7: National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64) (2019)**



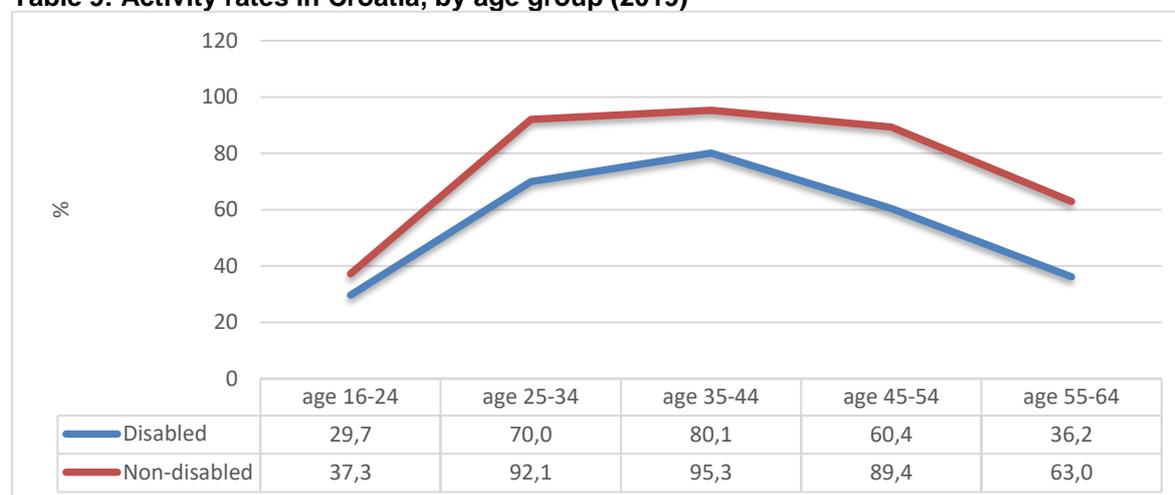
Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

## 7.1.2 Economic activity

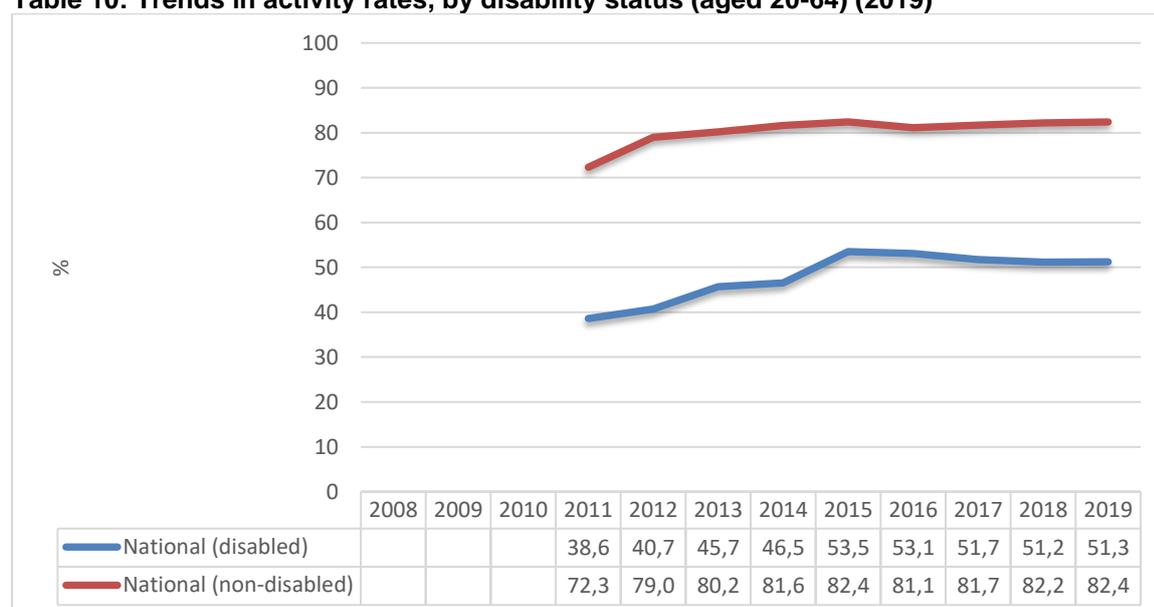
**Table 8: Activity rates in Croatia, by disability and gender (aged 20-64) (2019)**



**Table 9: Activity rates in Croatia, by age group (2019)**



**Table 10: Trends in activity rates, by disability status (aged 20-64) (2019)**



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

### 7.1.3 Alternative sources of labour market data in Croatia

Disability data is not yet available from the core European Labour Force Survey but labour market indicators for Croatia were disaggregated from ad modules conducted in 2001 and 2011. These can be found in the Eurostat disability database.<sup>92</sup>

The Croatian Employment Service (CES) regularly publishes data on persons with disabilities who found employment through their mediation.

**Table 11. Persons with disabilities employed through CES mediation**

Year	Employed until 31. December	Employment index	Unemployed on 31. December	Unemployment index
2010.	1.080	105.1	6,255	100,6
2011.	1.465	135.6	5,992	95,8
2012.	1.421	97.0	6,607	110,3
2013.	1.744	122.5	6,789	102,8
2014.	1.877	107.6	6,783	99,9
2015.	2.613	139.2	7,303	107,7
2016.	2.853	109.2	7,204	98,6
2017.	3.366	118.0	6,497	90,2
2018.	3.231	96.0	5,843	89,9
2019.	2.820	87.3	5,948	101,8
2020.	2.475	87.8	6,231	104,8

Source: Report on the activities of the Croatian Employment Service in the field of employment of persons with disabilities in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020<sup>93</sup>

The results of using the quota system are visible from the data collected by the Institute for Expert Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities

**Table 12: Liable employers and the quota scheme implementation**

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of employers Liable employers for the quota scheme	9,119	9,435	9,745	9,289
Employers meeting the quota (% of total)	1,202 (13.18 %)	1,266 (13.41 %)	1,325 (13.59 %)	1,246 (13,41 %)

Source: Institute for Expert Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of People with Disabilities Annual report for 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.<sup>94</sup>

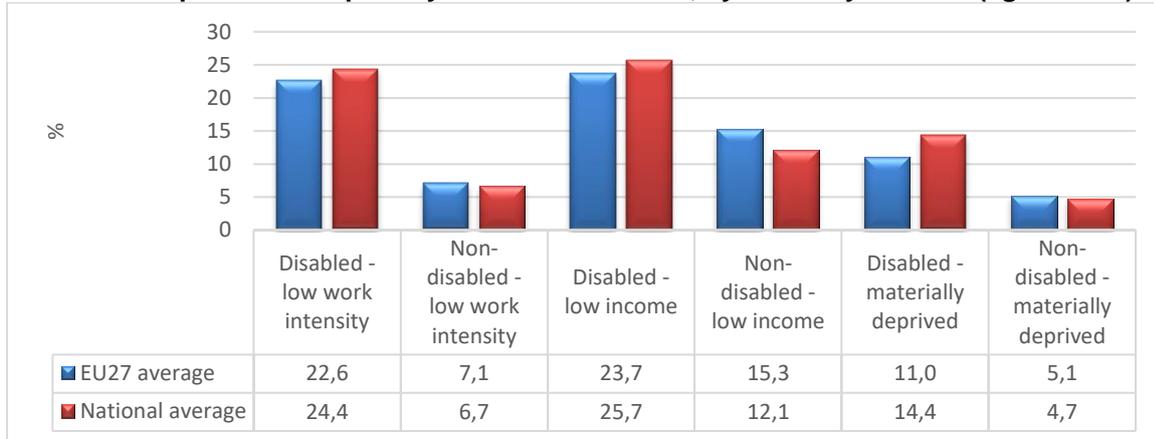
<sup>92</sup> Eurostat Health Database: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.CES.hr/content/stats/statistike-invaliditet/CES-izvjece-zaposljavanje-invaliditet-OSI-01012020-311220.pdf>.

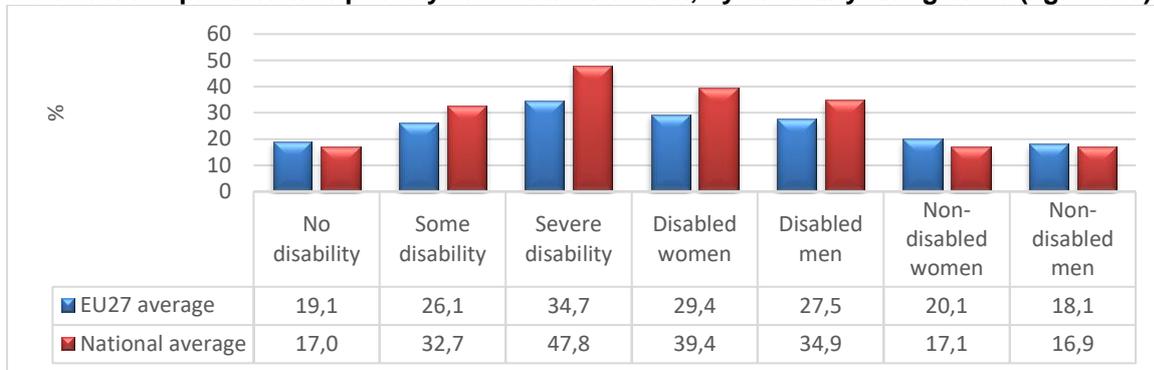
<sup>94</sup> ZOSI (2021) Annual report for 2020.

## 7.2 EU data relevant to disability, social policies and healthcare (2019)

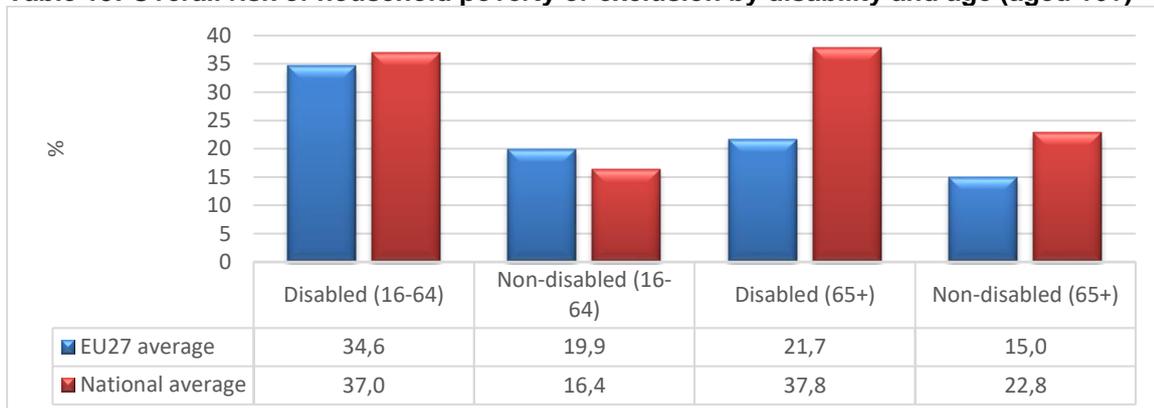
**Table 13: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and risk (aged 16-59)**



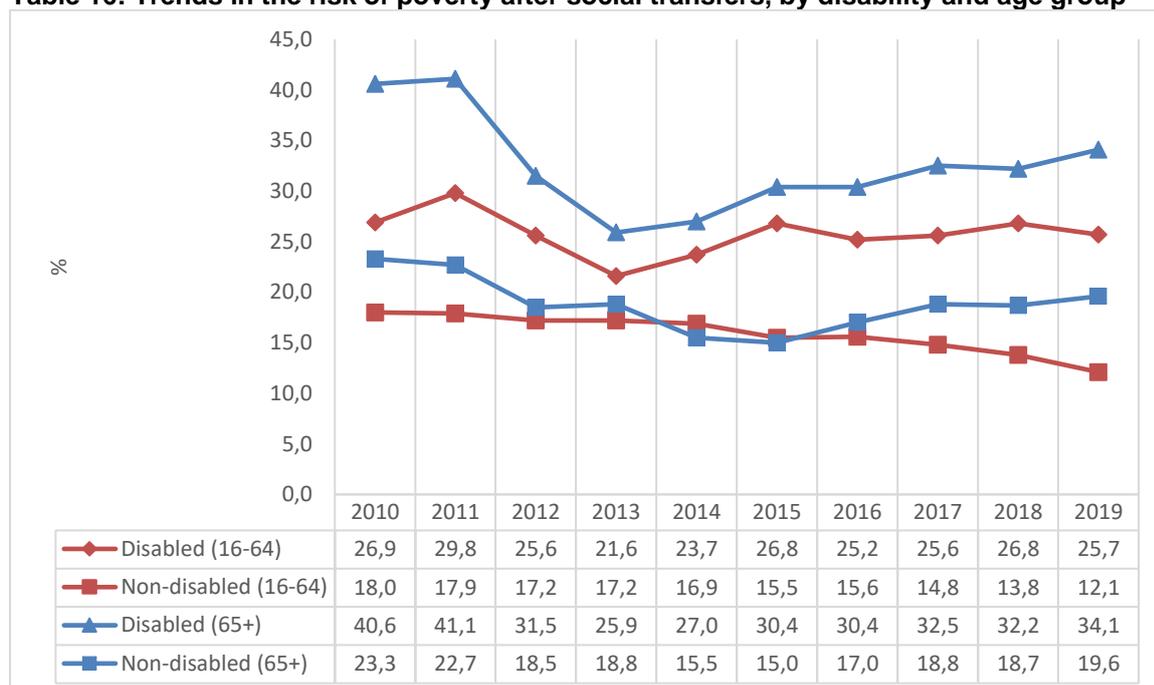
**Table 14: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by disability and gender (aged 16+)**



**Table 15: Overall risk of household poverty or exclusion by disability and age (aged 16+)**

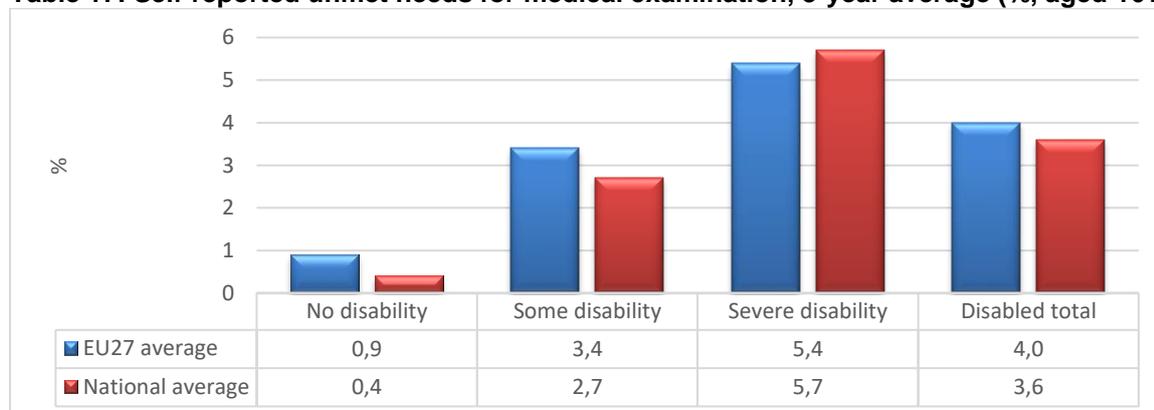


Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and previous UDB).

**Table 16: Trends in the risk of poverty after social transfers, by disability and age group**

Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth\\_dpe020](#)] - People at risk of poverty.

Note: this table shows national trends in financial poverty risk, rather than the general AROPE indicator (which is not as comparable between age groups due to the effect of paid employment); the survey does not distinguish 'activity limitation' for children under 16.

**Table 17: Self-reported unmet needs for medical examination, 3-year average (% , aged 16+)**

Source: Eurostat Health Database [[hlth\\_dh030](#)] – 'Too expensive or too far to travel or waiting list'.

Note: due to large variations an average of three years is indicated. EU mean averages are also skewed by high values in a minority of countries within disability groups but median averages for the total disability and no disability groups in 2019 are consistent with the 3-year mean values.

## 7.2.1 Alternative sources of poverty or health care data in Croatia

The EU-SILC data provides a comprehensive and reliable source concerning poverty or social exclusion rates. In addition to the summary tables presented so far, the Eurostat disability database also contains breakdowns concerning disability and poverty before and after social transfers, as well as in-work-poverty.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Eurostat Health Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/health/data/database>.

**Table 18: Number of PERSONS WITH DISABILITIESs receiving disability allowances**

Year	2018	2019	2020
<b>Number of PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES</b>	30,503	35,145	38,551

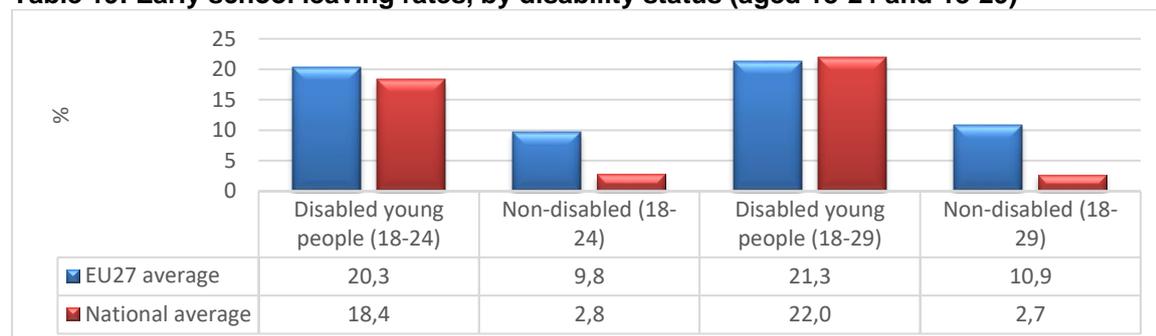
Source: Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy Annual Report for 2020.<sup>96</sup>

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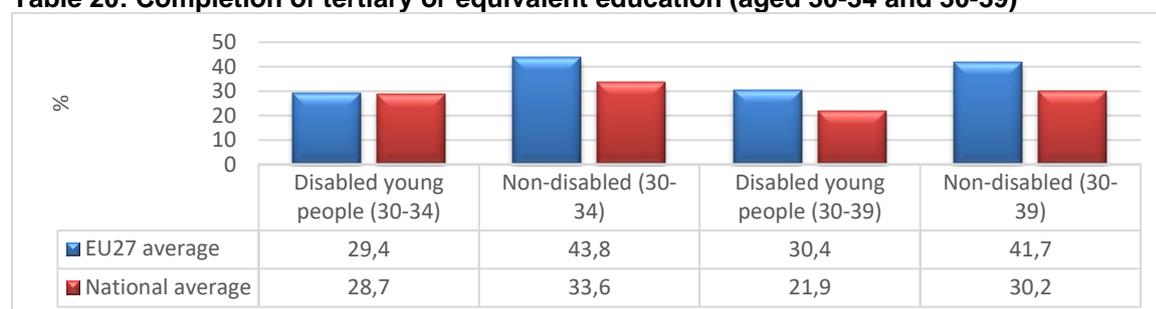
<sup>96</sup> Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, Annual statistical report on applied social welfare rights, legal protection of children, youth, marriage, families and persons deprived of legal capacity, and protection of persons with physical or mental disabilities in the Republic of Croatia in 2020, <https://mrosp.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Socijalna%20politika/Odluke/Godisnje%20statisticko%20izvjesce%20u%20RH%20za%202020.%20godinu.PDF>.

### 7.3 EU data relevant to disability and education

**Table 19: Early school leaving rates, by disability status (aged 18-24 and 18-29)<sup>97</sup>**



**Table 20: Completion of tertiary or equivalent education (aged 30-34 and 30-39)**



Source: EU-SILC 2019 Release 2021 version 1 (and preceding UDBs).

Note: Confidence intervals for the disability group are large and reliability low (due to the small sample size in the target age group). An average of several years may be needed to establish trends or to compare breakdowns by gender.

#### 7.3.1 Alternative sources of education data in Croatia

**Table 21: Students in primary and secondary education**

School year	Number of students with disabilities	Total number of students
2015/2016	21475	510936
2016/2017	25658	501525
2017/2018	29940	493130
2018/2019	29967	485634
2019/2020	30437	482303
2020/2021	30713	479252

Source: Ministry of science and education.<sup>98</sup>

**Table 22: Students with disabilities in primary and secondary education**

School year	Number of students with disabilities in regular schools	Number of students with disabilities in special schools
2015/2016	19241	2234
2016/2017	22728	2930
2017/2018	26889	3051

<sup>97</sup> There was a change from ISCED 1997 to ISCED 2011 qualification definitions in 2014 although some Member States continued to use the older definition after this time.

<sup>98</sup> Statistical data of Ministry of Science and Education, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiZWE3YTE4OWQtOWJmNC00OTJmLWE2MjktYTQ5MWJlNDNlZDQ0liwidCI6IjJMTFJmNjLWI3NjEtNDVhYi1hOWY1LTRhYzc3ZTk0ZTFkNCIsImMiOi99>

2018/2019	26983	2984
2019/2020	27374	3063
2020/2021	27670	3043

Source: Ministry of science and education.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Statistical data of Ministry of Science and Education,  
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiZWE3YTE4OWQtOWJmNC00OTJmLWE2MjktYTQ5MWJlNDNlZDQ0liwidCI6IjJMTFJmNjLWI3NjEtNDVhYi1hOWY1LTRhYzc3ZTk0ZTFkNCIsImMiOjh9.>

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