Gaps, challenges and examples of good practices during COVID-19

-Republic of Croatia-

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Croatia, the Government of Croatia introduced numerous measures to provide answer to rising challenges and ensure the effective enjoyment of human rights.

* **DIGITAL SOCIETY AND RIGHT TO INFORMATION -**

First set of measures and good practices focused on the right to information. In order to provide timely, accurate and verified information about the pandemic, and prevent the spreading of fake news, on March 17, 2020, **the Government established a central website koronavirus.hr.** The page contains daily updated data (national level and county overview), general information about the virus, important phone numbers, list of advices, list of measures and recommendations put in place, as well as latest news related to the situation in Croatia. At the same time**, new social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were launched** in order to provide platform for a two-way communication with the citizens. All communication is coordinated with the competent services - the Croatian Institute of Public Health, the Directorate of Civil Protection of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health.

* **Andrija - digital assistant for collaboration between government and citizens during pandemics -**

In addition, **on April 14, 2020, Croatia also launched its first digital assistant “Andrija”** to advise people how to diagnose and manage suspected Covid-19 infections. The digital assistant is available at https://andrija.ai/ and can be activated on WhatsApp under the name Andrija.

This "virtual doctor", named after Andrija Štampar, a distinguished Croatian doctor and scholar in the field of social medicine and a pioneer of 20th century public health is powered by artificial intelligence. It has been developed by members of CRO AI (Mindsmiths, Infobip, Neos), Croatian IT companies in cooperation with epidemiologists and with some of the world’s leading IT companies such as Oracle.

This voluntary and anonymous application provides help to the healthcare system as it can process tens of thousands of requests on a daily basis, while doctors can handle some 50 calls a day. In fact, in the first 24 hours, the application was used by more than 50,000 citizens and during the peak interest “Andrija” was answering up to 80 questions per second.

 In this way “Andrija” serves as a first line of defence, while his main task is to manage panic and, if needed, connect citizens with relevant health authorities in order to prevent the health system from becoming overburdened.

Within a week since its launch, application “Andrija” has managed to reduce the number of calls to medical professionals across all health centres in Croatia by 25%, while 87% of users said that “Andrija” is helping them.

* “**Stop COVID-19” Application -**

Pursuant to Decision of the Government of Croatia on digital platform and interoperability implementation for the purpose of monitoring and repressing infectious diseases, on July 27, 2020 the Government launched “**Stop COVID-19” Application**. The Application is using completely new technologies and means of data processing, with an aim to enhance health protection and raising citizen awareness of an increased risk of infection by COVID-19 disease.

The Application is available for both Android and Apple devices, and installation and usage are voluntary. Users independently decide whether they will be downloading the Application to their mobile devices, how they will use it and when they will delete it.

Within the first month of usage, approx. 50 thousand citizens of Croatia have downloaded it. All information on application usage is available (in Croatian) at koronavirus.hr. The Application purpose is to notify the Application user that his Application has been in an epidemiologically relevant contact with the Application of the person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive and to allow the person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive to notify other Application users about the possible infection by COVID-19 disease.

The key advantages of the Application are: (1) ease of use because the Application requires minimal user activity; (2) the validity of Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) technology, which is based on the technology within the operating systems issued by Google and Apple to support the fight against COVID-19 disease; (3) collecting a minimum set of data, where personal data of other users are not collected, especially not data on the movement of users; (4) the data access, i.e. the list of anonymous keys of COVID-19 positive users of the Application, is allowed only to national health authorities.

The risks usually associated with the use of mobile technologies, on which the Application is based, are manifested through possible non-transparency in the use of features that may allow intrusion into the private life of users as well as through possible misuse of the system. The authors of the Application applied the principles of privacy by design and privacy by default in such a way as to preserve the privacy of users, thus neutralizing these risks and minimizing them.

The Application is fully compliant with the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/518 of 8 April 2020 on a common Union toolbox for the use of technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis, in particular concerning mobile applications and the use of anonymized mobility data.

The Application has been implemented according to the Common EU Toolbox for Member States “Mobile applications to support contact tracing in the EU’s fight against COVID-19”, version 1.0, from April 15, 2020, published by e-Health Network of the European Commission. The basic principles for the Application are that it is voluntary, approved by the national health authority, privacy-preserving and dismantled as soon as there are not any objective reasons for using the Application.

Furthermore, the application is fully compliant with all guidelines and opinions of the European Data Protection Board on the use of location data and the interoperability of tools for monitoring contacts with infected persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data are collected and processed within the Application exclusively by the user’s explicit consent (Article 6, Paragraph 1(a) of EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)). The consent can be withdrawn in any given moment, and by withdrawing the consent the data processing is stopped.

The data processed within the Application are located on the user's mobile device, exclusively on the Application servers in the Republic of Croatia or another EU Member State. Data are not transferred to third countries.

During the Application installation there is an explicit consent needed by the user for Application to use Bluetooth technology and Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services. The user can refuse to activate Bluetooth and “Exposure Notification” services when turning on the Application or even independently turn on and off the usage of these services any time after the Application installation.

The consent withdrawal shall not affect the lawfulness of the data processing that took place prior to the consent withdrawal. In order to withdraw consent and for the Application not to use Bluetooth and the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services, the usage of these services must be disabled in the operating system of the mobile device.

If the user activates Bluetooth and the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services, the Application via Bluetooth will:

o Collect random keys from mobile devices of other users in proximity defined by the epidemiological parameters (such as proximity, distance and duration of the contact, and the date of the contact), which also have the Application installed and activated,

o Disseminate random keys of a user’s mobile device to other users in proximity, which also have the Application installed and activated.

Random keys collected and disseminated are series of random numbers that are generating multiple times during one hour and they are not in any way enabling the identification of the Application user to other Application user. Random keys are stored on the user’s mobile device for a period of 14 days, after which they are deleted.

The Application will not be able to detect the contacts with other devices in proximity if the user has turned off (deactivated) the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services. The application is not collecting geolocation data in any moment, nor does it collect any other data that may reveal the user’s identity.

The Application user, only if he/she wishes to do so and only when he/she has been confirmed having COVID-19 disease, can send his/her random keys to the Application server so that they become available to other Application users so that their Applications can calculate exposure risks and notify users. In order for the user to be able to send his keys at all, he must first get a positive laboratory test and inform the competent healthcare professional, i.e. the user's family doctor that he/she has the Application, so that the healthcare professional or the family doctor can generate a one-time verification code via the Application's server. The day and duration of the proximity contact will be shared with server, without the possibility of revealing the identity.

The Application users who have been exposed to the infection, in the way that they have been in proximity contact with a COVID-19 positive person in accordance with defined epidemiological parameters, will receive a notification from the Application on the date of contact and recommendation on next steps. It is the sole responsibility of the Application user to send their random keys and thus allow their contacts to be notified anonymously by their Applications of possible exposure to COVID-19 disease.

Only the competent healthcare professional, i.e. the user's family doctor, has the access to the one-time verification code, by which the user confirms a positive test for COVID-19 in the Application itself, in the moment that the Application server generates a verification code. After that, the healthcare professional or family doctor no longer has access to the code. All verification codes are stored in the backend server for 14 days, after which they are deleted.

Random keys shared by people diagnosed with COVID-19 are automatically downloaded daily by all users' Applications and forwarded for processing to the Google/Apple service “Exposure Notification” service on the mobile device itself

The user can remove the collected random keys of proximity contacts at any time through the settings of the mobile device operating system. The Ministry has no possibility to delete random keys from the user's mobile device, as well as from mobile devices of other users with whom the user has exchanged random keys.

Use of the Application is possible for all users with a smartphone, regardless of age, because the Application does not determine or verify this in any way. The use of the Application by a minor is recommended to inform the parents or legal representative.

The Application installation and usage does not require user registration nor request or record any personal data, including data such as name and surname, date of birth, mobile phone number or e-mail address of the user. The Application does not collect geolocation user data at any time.

Random keys, in the case of a confirmed infection with COVID-19 and only if the Application user so wishes, leave the user's mobile device, and it is not possible to connect them in any way with the identity of the user. The data collected by the Application is forwarded for processing to the Google/Apple service “Exposure Notification” on the mobile device itself.

The Application server components communicate with the Application through encrypted and secure channels. The data on the server infrastructure is stored in a database that is implemented as a separate logical unit with enforces security policies of the highest standards.

The Application does not provide health advice nor is it tasked with replacing physicians or other healthcare professionals in the treatment of patients either related to COVID-19 disease or any other illness and infection. Citizens are instructed to contact their family doctor, epidemiologists or other competent healthcare authorities whose contacts are available on the www.koronavirus.hr website, in case they do not understand the instructions or other communication through the Application, or if the system, despite the symptoms which coincide with the symptoms common in the case of coronavirus infection, does not instruct them to report further to health authorities. Citizens are in any case instructed to report to health authorities in case of severe symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pain. Since the task of the Application is not related to diseases and infections other than COVID-19, citizens are instructed to contact the health care authorities in any case of injuries, symptoms of other diseases or infections.

* **EDUCATION -**

The current spreading of COVID-19 around the globe has deeply challenged the way people live. In light of that, humankind was forced to reconsider the way we educate, teach and learn, not just as a short-term response to the immediate danger but also strategically and for the long-term.

* **Distance learning during COVID-19 crisis -**

The distance learning was launched following the Croatian Government decision from 13 March 2020, to close all educational institutions, from primary and secondary schools to higher education. It began on 16 March 2020 in Istra County schools and on 18 March 2020 country-wide.

On 11 March 2020, the Ministry of Science and Education (MZO) has published *Guidelines for distance learning for primary and secondary schools* establishing communication channels, appropriately equipping students of lower socio-economic backgrounds, providing instructions for the age-appropriate use of the prepared content, and monitoring and support. The basic principle of distance education was that the content and the learning both need to be accessible to all students, regardless of their conditions at home and support provided by teachers in the first week of distance education, when students were getting used to the new form of learning. All primary and secondary schools established channels of communication by 16 March 2020 and distributed the appropriate equipment to students according to provided instructions.

For **lower primary students** MZO cooperated with public television, TV channel HRT 3 (School on Channel 3), online classes were available on YouTube and online materials were provided on School for Life website.

The subject content for **upper primary and secondary schools** also aired on TV (SPTV and RTL2), and could be accessed on the Ministry and School for Life website.

In addition to creating online content for all subjects in the final year of secondary education, the Ministry has also prepared additional video materials to prepare students for compulsory exams at the state matura exam (Croatian and English language and Mathematics).

It was recommended to schools to provide backup and use multiple channels for publishing and sharing information (HRT 3, SPTV, RTL2, YouTube) as well as technical solutions (Teams, Yammer, Google classroom, Google Hangouts, gSuite for Education etc.).

All students were expected to fully participate in all online classes and activities. However, teachers have been instructed to abstain from grading in the first two weeks of teaching online, focusing instead on monitoring and encouraging students as well as getting used to the limitations of the technology.

In case a student didn't sign in to an online class, the homeroom teacher first contacted the parents to learn of any obstacles, such as lack of access to the appropriate hardware, no Internet access, illness, or lack of skills, and establish if the student needs professional support.

Teachers were encouraged to provide students with continuous feedback by using different methods of evaluation such as learning and evaluation for learning.

The Ministry determined and published schedule for each day and invited teachers to publish their materials so others can use them.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has launched a portal for online classes. The portal also contains classes for practical subjects, and all vocational teachers are encouraged to develop online classes at home and share them with their colleagues.

**For the current school year (2020./2021.) the Ministry developed three models for the implementation of teaching**: (1) Model A: school teaching, (2) Model B: mixed form of teaching (partly in school partly at distance), (3) Model C: distance learning. The Government of the Republic of Croatia activates all models by a decision, and the school decides on the application of an individual model (A, B and C) in cooperation with the founder and the competent local headquarters.

Also, to support the distance learning process, the Ministry coordinated the development of a document entitled Annual Curriculum Implementation. The document covers the main learning outcomes defined per subjects during one school year that have to be achieved. Annual Curricula Implementation serves as a reference point in the process of video lectures/video lessons preparation.

In addition to the above, students use digital materials in electronic textbooks and digital educational resources. In relation to other countries, Croatia has provided free textbooks to all primary school students (and those who belong to vulnerable groups in secondary schools). Each textbook has a digital part that student uses in the process of self-directed learning and evaluation.

* **Distance learning of national minorities in Croatia –**

Education of members of national minorities is an integral part of the entire system of education in Croatia and distance learning in schools that provide education in the language and script of national minorities takes place from the very beginning of the introduction of this type of teaching, using various sources and digital materials and making and sharing it between teachers and educators.

For the Italian national minority, at the initiative of the Istrian County, distance learning was organized from March 17th on TV Nova from 10:00 to 12:00, via program *Programma didattico in lingua italiana* which was initially intended for primary school students from 1st to 4th grade, from March 30th the offer was extended to the students of classes from the 5th grade. Elementary school up to 4th grade with an effort to cover all subjects, not exclusively Italian. The link of each show is available on web and facebook TV Nova and the portal to Schools for Life.

Also, within the virtual classrooms for Italian mother tongue, a forum was opened where teachers were sharing other materials and links and that part is more related to the Italian language. Materials and TV reports are entirely designed and made by teachers with the help of digital tools available to them.

Students who attended classes in Czech followed classes on Croatian state television on Croatian language and received instructions from teachers via electronic channels for teaching Czech, Czech language and culture and subjects in Czech. Digital materials with textbooks are in Croatian. Also, part of the classes in the Czech Republic was organized through television and YouTube channels, and in this way students in Croatia got involved and received links from teachers to learn and follow the content and curriculum, and students had access to the magazine Dětský koutek in pdf format commonly used in teaching according to model C.

Also, various online groups have been opened for students belonging to the Serbian national minority in cooperation with senior advisors for the Serbian national minority, and by sharing the content, classes run smoothly, and video materials were produced. Also, publishers in the Republic of Serbia have opened their digital content for free use. Students followed the School on the Third for all subjects, and for the elective subject Serbian language and culture (model C) they received assignments and materials from teachers mostly via Viber (1st-4th grade) and Teams (5th-8th grade).

In schools where classes are taught in Hungarian and script (model A), distance learning was in Hungarian for all subjects and students were able to follow classes in Croatian via HRT 3 as a supplement to the teaching process. Students could also watch classes on Hungarian television via the Médiaklikk page. The Ministry of Education in Hungary has provided free access to digital distance learning materials due to the pandemic of virus Covid-19. Teachers who teach according to model C (Hungarian language and culture) also have access to the same educational materials.

For all other national minorities, for students attending Model C, as well as other subjects, teachers prepared teaching units with digital materials, gave instructions and monitored the work of students on a daily basis.

On the official website of the Ministry of Science and Education (https://mzo.gov.hr/vijesti/nastava-na-daljinu-na-jeziku-i-pismu-nacionalnih-manjina/3692) digital teaching materials of national minorities for distance learning and video material on the YouTube channel "Curriculums" made by teachers alone or in conjunction with relevant associations of national minorities are catalogued.

A bigger challenge required addressing the inclusion of vulnerable groups of students in distance learning such as Roma students. Due to the difficult living conditions on the margins of society, an adapted approach was needed: Roma helpers, whose usual task is to help students in teaching, visited students during distance learning and physically brought them teaching materials.

Teachers used various alternative forms of communication with students and parents and made great efforts to establish communication with parents, in order to constantly encourage them to support their children and enable them to watch classes on TV. Due to the fact that it is difficult for members of the Roma national minority to conduct distance learning due to objective circumstances and the conditions in which families live, different communication channels were used. The Roma Child Support Network, with the support of the Ministry of Science and Education, conducted a survey on the involvement of Roma students in distance learning activities with the aim of detecting difficulties. Furthermore, from a UNICEF donation, 100 tablets and 500 SIM cards for Internet access were distributed.

In order to mitigate the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Independent Sector for National Minorities of the Ministry of Science and Education is planning additional activities for members of the Roma national minority related to learning assistance, procurement of necessary IT equipment for Roma helpers. We are planning to organize activities for children of the Roma national minority with the aim of better preparation for inclusion and further education, and for primary school students summer education is being held month before the start of the school year. At the beginning of the school year, we are planning to finance the activities of associations whose work is focused on mentoring children and organizing learning and teaching activities.

* **Distance learning in VET (Vocational Education and Training) -**

Distance learning in VET is organized in several levels. *Virtual classrooms* was set up by each school and for each subject. For *general subjects* it was daily episodes on national TV stations. Also, a video lessons was put online on portal skolazazivot.hr. Regarding VET contents, preparation of digital materials was shaped and run by AVETAE (Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education). Goal is to provide support not replace I-VET and C-VET providers in implementation of distance learning. During the period of distance learning individual work of all student is completely guided and supported by subject teachers.

The challenge was diverseness of VET (app 3000 VET subjects) so AVETAE collaborate and invited all VET schools to send their digital contents to be published. In addition, in cooperation with chambers and employer’s association AVETAE asked companies to send their materials. Thanks to all these steps digital contents on online portal, so far several thousands of different digital materials including video lessons, video/voice over PowerPoint, e courses, webinars, research projects, etc., have been prepared. AVEATE prepared Recommendations for assessment and grading during distance learning in VET (with practical examples). Document was drafted based on contribution received from app 100 VET teachers.

Biggest impact was on implementation of work base learning (WBL) in all its formats. Vocational schools are recommended to plan special possibilities for the realization of practical part of classes and professional practice. Practical classes, regardless of whether they are conducted only on school premises, combined in school premises and in a business entity or only in a business entity (depending on the education program / vocational curriculum), must, above all, enable students to complete the annual prescribed number of teaching hours.

When practical classes are held at the school, classrooms are divided into educational groups with a smaller number of students, as prescribed by the State Pedagogical Standard of Secondary Education, the curriculum for a particular occupation / vocational curriculum for acquiring qualifications and classes can be organized in shifts. All groups of students will take turns coming to school, for example in 1 + 1 week shifts or 2 + 3/3 + 2 day shifts.

When practical classes are conducted in a business entity, it is important to note that there can't be a larger number of students in the same class or even different years of education at the same time, especially if they are smaller workplace/ company. Teachers in charge of monitoring students in practical classes in the business entity must agree on the most appropriate way of monitoring students (personal arrival of teachers in the company with prescribed epidemiological measures, by telephone or electronically).

VET students are in more challenging position than students in general education. Sectors which rely more on ICT technology manage to adapt faster and better to new circumstances. Preparation of digital materials, especially for WBL for VET is a great challenge. The impact on different VET sectors was not the same and teachers and trainers had a crucial role. There is an evidence of need for exchange of ideas and resources on a new level and organizing community of practice.

* **Distance learning in higher education –**

To reflect on the experience of distance learning and teaching during the pandemic, so far several higher education institutions, student organizations, as well as the Agency for Science and Higher Education, have conducted a number of surveys among students and higher education institutions’ employees, and the University Computing Centre of the University of Zagreb organized online meetings for various higher education institutions’ representatives. Based on the results of, for example, *surveys on the implementation of distance learning and teaching at the University of Zagreb* (conducted in April) and the *survey on the challenges in higher education during the pandemic* of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (conducted in June and July), it can be concluded that students and higher education institutions’ employees are aware of both positive and negative aspects of distance learning and teaching, but they pointed out that it cannot replace the classical, contact models of learning and teaching. Some of the challenges of distance learning and teaching are linked to the necessary technical preconditions - the equipment, a stable Internet connection - as well as to the adapted teaching and learning materials and the necessary skills of both students and teachers to work with the required ICT tools. Moreover, there is a challenge linked to the organization of practical classes and exercises, which cannot be conducted remotely, as well as the organization of exams. Furthermore, both teachers and students felt that additional efforts were required in distance learning and teaching, whether to prepare classes or to complete studying obligations. However, students acknowledged the engagement and efforts of their teachers, as well as the support they provided (but also pointed out that the situation is not the same in all the cases). Challenges were also identified in terms of students’ motivation, establishing communication and understanding, as well as the provision of organized psychological support.

* **Psychosocial support –**

Additionally, we consider it important to note that during the COVID 19 pandemic and the earthquake in the city of Zagreb, the Ministry of Science and Education provided psychological support and counselling for students, teachers and parents.

* **Other –**

As regards “ensuring unhindered enforcement of the right to education of children and youth via digital means and the TV channel”, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, **the Police Academy developed and launched its own e-education platform** in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb aimed at providing online classes and professional development for the needs of those within the police system. When the epidemic was declared in the Republic of Croatia and school classes shifted to online teaching in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Science and Education, the e-education platform ensured smooth continuation of education of the participants of the Adult Education Programme for police officers within the framework of Josip Jović Police School, as well as of all undergraduate and graduate students at the Police College. All teaching programmes at Josip Jović Police School (12 teaching subjects - 66 courses) and the content of the Police College courses (over 150 courses) are available on the e-education platform, including a number of specialist training courses within the framework of lifelong education of police officers. This way, the right to continuous education and professional development was ensured for all beneficiaries of educational programmes provided by the Police Academy. The importance of the e-education platform is best illustrated by comparing the number of the system beneficiaries in April 2019 (22,480) and April 2020 (1,400,846), showing the effective growth of 6,231%.

* **Challenges:**

Initially, one of the main challenges in the development of distance learning **was access to equipment and Internet access.**

Therefore, mobile network operators in Croatia have provided free broadband internet and SIM cards to all students of primary and secondary schools, as well as university students with lower socio-economic background. Publishers and proprietors of educational applications have granted free access to educational content.

Moreover, in school year 2019/2020, the Ministry provided and distributed to students more than 90,000 tablets, 26,000 computers were procured for teachers and schools were enabled with additional funds and equipment for students, if needed. The Ministry and CARNET (The Croatian Academic and Research Network) additionally provided equipment for students and teachers for the school year 2020/2021: for primary school students 109,885 tablets and for teachers 26,755 laptops.

In addition, CARNET has successfully provided technical support to primary and secondary schools. Higher education institutions also received guidelines for the transition to distance learning, while University Computing Centre (SRCE) provided software and support through its distance learning centre.

Support and information for teachers of primary and secondary schools, and principals were provided through several channels, which were: virtual classrooms for all principals led by the Ministry, virtual classrooms for subject teachers led by the Ministry, sharing information (Ministry of Science and Education webpage), sharing information (CARNET webpage), Helpdesk Carnet, Helpdesk Ministry of Science and Education. More than 1,200 video lessons for all subjects and all grades were published in the first four weeks. By the end of the school year, this number has tripled. All educational resources are free of charge and publicly available online (OER).

Another challenge was identified in terms of vocational programmes. Namely, vocational schools were facing the problem of the **inability to implement certain parts of vocational programmes in the form of distance education**. The Ministry has created online content for all general subjects taught in secondary schools.

However, **high quality distance learning and vulnerable student group’s underrepresentation remain the greatest challenges** during the pandemic because there is no single uniform approach, and individualization is required.

* **JUDICIARY –**

After the COVID-19 epidemic has been declared in the Republic of Croatia, in accordance with the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the National Civil Protection Headquarters, on March 13, 2020 the Minister of Justice issued recommendations for the work of all judicial bodies in the Republic of Croatia for the duration of epidemic. At that time, all judicial authorities continued to operate, taking only the proceedings and actions prescribed by the regulations as urgent with adequate security controls, while hearings and other non-urgent actions were postponed.

To organize work in new circumstances, the heads of judicial authorities had the authority to allow employees to work from home if it is possible, and the recommendations state that communication in work with parties and all participants of proceedings was carried out electronically wherever possible.

From May 2020, considering the more favorable epidemiological situation, the conditions for normalization of the work of courts have been met, respecting and implementing the health care measures aimed at preventing the spread of disease, including physical distance, hygiene standards, limiting the number of persons indoors, a special schedule for the use of larger courtrooms, etc.

* **Prison system –**

Since the beginning of February 2020, epidemiological indicators on the risk of new coronavirus disease (SARS-CoV-2) have been monitored regularly by the Ministry of Justice and Administration and measures and activities have been undertaken as recommended by the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the National Civil Protection Headquarters, with the purpose of protecting the health of all persons deprived of their liberty and state officials - prison staff. Accordingly, enhanced monitoring of the health of prisoners and juveniles was initiated immediately, and precaution measures were taken, including enhanced hygiene of persons and premises, additional provision of protective equipment to the health departments and the issuance of internal instructions for handling suspected coronavirus infection (for state officials - prison staff, and for prisoners).

With the purpose of protecting health of all persons deprived of their liberty during the corona pandemic, all newly admitted prisoners are housed in separate rooms of the correctional institutions for at least 14 days.

Since the beginning of the corona crisis, there has been a proactive approach towards prison staff. Each officer received two leaflets with the aim of psychologically preventing the fear of infectious diseases, the Psychological Crisis Intervention Team has been on stand-by to provide psychological support to the prison officers.

To protect the health of prisoners, visits and use of the benefits of going out of prisoners are restricted during this period. To preserve family ties, activities are being undertaken to enable the contacts of prisoners and their family members. The possibility of making telephone calls is expanded, and the possibility of making video visits will gradually expand, with attention being paid to maintaining contacts between prisoners and their minor children.

* **CULTURE –**

At the beginning of March, the Ministry of Culture and Media started adopting measures with the aim of effectively responding to the crisis due to the COVID-19 epidemic and protecting cultural values and all stakeholders who act and create in the field of culture. The Ministry has taken measures that cover all artists and cultural workers who have lost the opportunity to work and whose social and economic status was fundamentally endangered. Approximately 6.300.000,00 euros was dedicated for the Crisis Fund to help the cultural and media sector.

As part of the Government's activities and in coordination with other departments, the Ministry developed the first package of measures that entered into force immediately after the announcement of restrictive measures. Among them, we find it necessary to mention *The decision on the postponement of the execution of the contracted programs of public needs in culture and the conditions of payment for approved programs in special circumstances* allowed for a maximum of flexibility for contracted programs within the Ministry of Culture, the Croatian Audiovisual Center and the Foundation “Kultura Nova”. It ensured a recognition of costs for the organization and an adapted structure of costs in order to ensure minimal liquidity in the cultural sector and prevent the collapse of the entire cultural value chain (creation, production, distribution and participation). This Decision ensured the retention of funds within the sector and enabled the payment for independent artists, part-time workers and those without permanent sources of income.

Additionally, the Government on March 17, 2020 adopted the first package of measures that applied to all citizens and legal entities. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Labor and Pension System, in cooperation with the Croatian Employment Bureau, launched a measure to support job preservation which was also intended for entrepreneurs within the cultural and creative industries, including art organizations, as well as self-employed artists and journalists who pay contributions for pension and health insurance.

The Ministry also issued a *Decision suspending the payment of monument rent for natural and legal persons liable to pay monument rent pursuant to Articles 114 and 114a of the Law on the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage*, for the period from 21 May to 21 July 2020.

As a complementary measure to the measure of the Croatian Employment Bureau, the Public call was launched to support artists who professionally perform independent artistic activity and whose contributions are paid from the budget of the Republic of Croatia.

Meanwhile, a special fund was established for independent professionals who do not have a regulated status, are not in the register of taxpayers, do not pay contributions or have not acquired the right to pay contributions from the state budget. From this special fund one-time fees will be paid to artists through artistic associations they are members.

* **Media sector -**

The measure of the Government aimed at preserving jobs also applied to media service providers. The measure was adopted allowing the **Agency for Electronic Media**to carry out disbursements from the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media for 2020, with the possibility of repurposing part of the Fund on the topic of public monitoring of the coronavirus epidemic and to enable the adaptation of the program bases of media service providers to special circumstances. For media workers who were not covered by this measure, the Electronic Media Council conducted a tender for the payment of aid for part-time media workers.

In addition, the Ministry of Culture made a Decision to support part-time media workers whose cooperation was cancelled due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

* **Restarting cultural life –**

Second package of measures have been put in place in order to encourage and restart cultural life, as well as the production and distribution of cultural and artistic content. For instance, on May 18, the Ministry published the call ***Art and Culture Online***, with a total grant of approximately 3.300.000,00 euros. The aim of the call is to finance activities of preparation and implementation of online artistic and cultural activities within the Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014-2020.

Moreover, on May 28, the Ministry launched a call ***Entrepreneurship in Cultural and Creative Industries,*** which is focused on funding activities to adapt business models of production, distribution, availability and access to cultural and artistic content. The call covers the fields of performing arts, literature, publishing and book activities, visual arts and audiovisual activities. The total amount of funds is 1.050.000,00 euros.

Discussions are also in the process on the possible extension of support for those activities that cannot be launched until all restrictions have been lifted, and concern primarily the performing arts and the cinema industry.

In August 2020, based on the cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Media, the Croatian Institute of Public Health issued the *Recommendations for the prevention of COVID-19 disease in multiplex cinema in shopping malls*, enabling **the relaunch of the cinema industry.**
Following this decision, the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC) launched a campaign together with the Croatian Independent Cinemas Network, promoting the return of viewers into cinemas. The campaign entitled*Povratak u kino!*(Back to Cinema!) began in August and took place throughout September through screenings of Croatian hit films from different periods.

In constant consultation with the Croatian Civil Protection and through consultations and exchange of experiences at the European level, the Ministry of Culture continues to monitor the situation and respond to it, providing support to artists in order to preserve the chain of cultural values.

* **VULNERABLE GROUPS –**

Recognizing the situation related to the COVID-19 epidemic and the need for special care for vulnerable social groups, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy has been in constant cooperation with social welfare centres and service providers in the social welfare system, forwarding to them instructions and recommendations by e-mail from the very beginning of the pandemic.

The Ministry publishes updated data and information, as well as preventive and precautionary measures regarding the Coronavirus, and has created a number of recommendations, instructions and Decisions on actions in terms of work organization and provision of social services. In addition, it continuously reminds all social service providers about the need for regular monitoring and compliance with recommendations published on the websites of the Croatian Institute for Public Health, the Ministry of Health, the Directorate of Civil Protection and the competent regional and local civil protection crisis headquarters.

For the purpose of coordinated action, the Ministry has formed a Crisis Headquarters and an e-mail address has been created and published, through which a number of questions and answers from the Ministry's domain are communicated on a daily basis.

A special type of assistance to the citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic was organized by the Croatian Psychological Chamber (CPC), which in cooperation with the Croatian Psychological Society (CPS) established a network of crisis psychological counseling telephone lines covering all counties in Croatia. The network has been established with the aim of alleviating stress reactions, panic and fear in the population, as well as the psychological consequences due to life changes caused by the Coronavirus epidemic and the earthquake that hit Zagreb and the northern counties on 22 March 2020. The first digital assistant Andrija, the official website of the Croatian Institute for Public Health, the City of Zagreb and the websites of other relevant institutions in the fight against Coronavirus also refer to the services of this telephone counselling.

* **Support to victims of domestic violence during pandemic isolation -**

The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy issued a statement on acting in a situation of increased risk of domestic violence and abuse and neglect of children due to increased isolation measures to combat the Covid-19 epidemic. Recommendations and information for potential victims on how to behave in situations of suspected violence have been published (<https://mdomsp.gov.hr/vijesti-8/priopcenje-o-postupanju-u-situaciji-pojacanog-rizika-od-nasilja-u-obitelji-i-zlostavljanja-i-zanemarivanja-djece-zbog-pojacanih-mjera-izolacije-radi-suzbijanja-epidemije-covid-19/12696>). The Ministry also sent a public appeal to all citizens, family members, neighbours, friends in protecting potential victims of violence and reporting suspected violence.

There are 19 shelters for domestic violence victims in the Republic of Croatia and sufficient quantity of places has been provided. The Ministry provides continuous financial support for the shelters and monitors continuously the operation of shelters and the availability of capacities with the aim of urgent care for victims of domestic violence. Protective masks have been provided to shelters for victims of violence and will continue to be procured as needed.

Social welfare centres have formed crisis teams for crisis intervention, which, even in situations where security and life (family violence, abuse and neglect of children) are endangered, report urgently to the field and take all necessary measures in accordance with the powers and rules of the profession. Social welfare centres have provided 24-hour on-call duty to deal with urgent situations such as domestic violence.

Family centres provide counselling and assistance services for victims of domestic violence. Counselling is provided through electronic media and/or telecommunication means (Skype, WhatsApp, Viber, Zoom, etc.) and is conducted by specially trained professionals employed by Family Centres. The Ministry also supports financially the work of counselling centres for victims of domestic violence run by civil society organizations and professional associations. Experts at social care centres carry out on the spot work and perform increased control and monitoring of families at risk. 7 SOS phones in the Republic of Croatia operate 24 hours a day during all 7 days of the week, at which victims can receive all necessary counselling assistance at any time.

In addition, with regard to “support of victims of domestic violence during enforced isolation as a result of the pandemic”, the General Police Directorate delivered instructions to all police administrations regarding the risks which arise under the measures imposed for combating COVID-19. The instructions particularly emphasized that, even under these exceptional circumstances, the actions taken after receiving reports and information related to children who are exposed to physical or sexual abuse, or other threatening behaviour within their family, and reports of on-going domestic violence, are viewed as a prioritised police response which involves taking emergency measures for preventing further abuse of victims and ensuring their protection.

Aiming to raise the awareness of the public, the citizens, but even the victims themselves on the additional risks of victimisation during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of sexual abuse/exploitation of children and other forms of violence against children and family members, the Ministry of the Interior issued statements encouraging citizens to report any potential child abuse and domestic violence cases through information and communication technologies as well, primarily via the online Red Button.

Likewise, the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre and the Degordian Agency, launched a campaign entitled “Iza vrata” (eng. Behind the door) aimed at raising the awareness of citizens and encouraging them to report any form of domestic violence and violence against children. The campaign is aimed at taking preventive action and protecting children from violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventive activities take place on social networks and the media, whereby this modern way of raising awareness is aimed at bringing attention to the issue and risks of child abuse and domestic violence or any other form of threatening behaviour during the health crisis and imposed isolation. The campaign also aims to urge citizens to have courage and for individuals to take personal responsibility for preventing abuse with the aim of ensuring that the system is alerted of such cases in time. Electronic media, radio and TV stations also got involved and transmitted the campaign on its channels.

The campaign was also mentioned by the Croatian Presidency of the European Union (https://eu2020.hr/Home/OneNews?id=275) as well as the European Commission (<https://twitter.com/EUHomeAffairs/status/1252602938146484224>).

The European Crime Prevention Network and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) also expressed their support for the campaign. Europol highlighted the campaign as an example of good practice and published information about it on its Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) website, after which the campaign was picked up by the Slovak Republic. Members of the Lanzarote Committee also shared information on the campaign as an example of good practice.

In addition, as yet another example of good practice, we would like to point out the cooperation among the police, the Croatian Psychological Association, and the Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre who provided education for experts in charge of supporting victims during the COVID-19 pandemic and other crisis situations via digital platforms. The education covered information on the manner, channels and the content of reported suspicion regarding various forms of violence and abuse against children and other vulnerable groups, as well as on the cross-linked response of various sectors in the comprehensive protection and support of victims. Following the education, an online book was also published for experts: “Interconnected: Phone and e-counselling in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences”.

* **Sensitive and marginalized persons -**

Social accommodation service for the elderly and infirm, children with developmental difficulties and adults with disabilities is provided for more than 26 thousand users by 868 service providers.

As stated previously, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy is in continuous contact with relevant stakeholders and creates a number of decisions and recommendations aimed at the best possible protection of all users and employees in the social welfare system.

The tightening or easing of measures has so far depended on the epidemiological situation. Thus, in March 2020, all providers of social accommodation services were instructed to suspend the admission of new beneficiaries until further notice, except in urgent situations with the obligatory isolation of the beneficiaries for 14 days.

Due to the more favourable epidemiological situation, in certain periods there was a relaxation of measures, so in the period from May 29 to June 26, the elderly, children with developmental difficulties and people with disabilities, who were provided with accommodation services, were allowed to go out independently, to go to excursions, to visit their families, etc.

Due to the worsening of the epidemiological situation, new instructions were issued with measures of enhanced epidemiological surveillance, including re-banning visits and temporary restriction of going out from the premises where accommodation is provided, except in medical and justified circumstances, and delivery of food and other necessities by family members / friends was possible only after disinfection or storage for three days.

Aware that being in isolation is a problem for all citizens, especially for the elderly, throughout the period of ban on receiving visits and going out from the premises of service providers, all service providers have been instructed to allow users to make frequent and long calls to their families and friends, to provide the use of video calls or the use of other technologies for remote communication, and to intensify individual work with users and psychosocial support in order to mitigate the consequences of restricted visits to the beneficiaries and to make life easier in the new situation.

At the moment, visits to the beneficiaries are provided in such a way that they take place in the external premises of the provider, i.e. when for objective reasons it is not possible to organize the visit in the external premises of the service provider (for example, immobile beneficiaries), visits are of limited duration and are organized according to a predetermined schedule. Visitors are obliged to wear a mask, disposable robes and disposable socks at all times (this outfit is provided by the visitor) and to adhere to other protective measures.

For the duration of the Coronavirus epidemic, the Homeless Care Plan for the Republic of Croatia and the Homeless Care Plan for Extreme Winter Circumstances for 2019/2020 was applied. A specific organization of public kitchen work, as well as procedures for users of public kitchens, who do not have a place of residence, has been recommended.

When we talk about people with disabilities, it is important to point out that in the Republic of Croatia, the rights in the social welfare system, both entitlement to material and rights to services, have been preserved in full during the pandemic, and the right of caregiver parents to compensation increased from 2,500 HRK (330 €) to 4,000 HRK (528 €) net. Also, the Government of the Republic of Croatia introduced a number of economic measures in order to mitigate the negative impacts of Covid 19 on the economy, but also on other areas of life, as well as to enable the preservation of jobs.

Recognizing the importance and value of numerous volunteer initiatives and activities carried out by the volunteers and their organizations throughout Croatia in the context of the pandemic (and the earthquake that hit Zagreb in March), the Ministry has created a database of volunteer activities which has the purpose of informing citizens about existing volunteer services and raising awareness of the importance and significance of volunteering. This data base was published on the website in April (<https://mdomsp.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/mladi-i-volonterstvo/volonterstvo-9017/krizno-volontiranje-12730/12730>).

* **Refugees, asylum seekers, people under international protection and aliens –**

In the context of the protection of human rights of aliens in the Republic of Croatia during the pandemic, the Ministry of the Interior applies the instruction issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health with regard to COVID-19. When the police interact with illegal migrants and aliens who make an application for international protection, the aliens are checked for COVID-19 symptoms. If the aliens show COVID-19 symptoms, this is reported to the epidemiologist in charge who takes over the case. If the aliens show no symptoms, the police continue to take action, that is, they make decisions regarding return pursuant to the Aliens Act (Official Gazette No 130/11, 74/13, 69/17 and 46/18) or they take note of the international protection applications made by the aliens. If aliens are transported in police vehicles, the vehicles are regularly disinfected and police officers wear appropriate protective equipment. Reception centres remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have been intensified to provide appropriate care to aliens accommodated at the reception centres in Zagreb and Kutina.

Applicants in self-isolation are accommodated in accordance with the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia. They are provided with explanation as to the purpose of self-isolation and their obligations while it is imposed, with the assistance of an interpreter. They are also provided with three meals a day, and if necessary, medications, hygiene supplies, etc. There is a daily presence of a doctor in reception centres and all international protection applicants are under constant supervision of medical staff. Not a single international protection applicant has contracted the coronavirus so far.

Information flyers on conscientious and responsible behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic are available in reception centres for aliens and reception centres for international protection applicants. They were designed by IOM and translated into 26 languages (Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, Bengali, Chinese, Edo, English, Esan-Ishan, French, Fula, Hausa, Igbo, Italian, Kurdish Sorani, Mandinka, Pashto, pidgin English, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Soninke, Spanish, Tigrinya, Urdu, Wolof, and Yoruba). Also available are flyers with the instructions issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health which have been translated into the languages used by aliens. International protection applicants who are accommodated in reception centres in Zagreb and Kutina are under constant medical surveillance.

Moreover, applicants accommodated in reception centres, including those who have been released from detention or those under alternative measures of detention, are constantly warned about the outbreak of the disease and the measures that need to be taken in order to prevent its further spread. According to the recommendations issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health, parts of the reception centre are set up to be used for 14-day quarantine for new applicants who arrive from countries with an increased number of COVID-19 cases. They are supervised by medical staff on a daily basis. In case of any suspicion of COVID-19, they are tested as soon as possible. So far, we have not recorded a single case of COVID-19 among international protection applicants.

Aliens accommodated in reception centres are advised to remain inside, and measures of protection are taken inside the facilities (e.g. floor marking for social distancing, toiletries, medical staff, temperature measuring at the entrance to the restaurant). Face masks are regularly distributed to persons accommodated in reception centres. Likewise, disinfectant dispensers have been placed in the centres. Moreover, increased efforts have been invested in maintaining high hygienic standards aimed at preserving the health of applicants, but also of the staff working in reception centres.

Continuous availability of medical services to international protection applicants in reception centres has been ensured by the project entitled “Prevention of disease, promotion of health and protection of health, psychological support, access to and assistance in health care for international protection applicants - 5P”, which was co-financed under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the implementation of which started in July 2020. This is of particular importance since it ensures increased availability of health care to applicants and reduces the burden on the health system, which is of essential importance, particularly now, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As regards unaccompanied minors, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (the former Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy) has adopted guidelines on procedures to be followed for the protection of unaccompanied minors in situations when they are threatened or there is risk of the epidemic.

Having in mind the suspension of classes in schools, the Ministry of the Interior has taken the necessary actions to provide the minor applicants accommodated in reception centres with access to the learning content, in accordance with the instructions issued by the Ministry of Science and Education. Children are provided with daily access to the learning content via the media and they get help with their learning and school tasks, in cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross that has been implementing the project “Social services and psychosocial support for international protection applicants”.

* **National minorities –**

On the policy level, new National Plan for Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination 2021.-2027 is currently being drafted. The National Plan will include a specific objective aimed at strengthening the capacities of public bodies to tackle the effect of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups and accompanying implementation measures.

It is also important to mention that direct measures related to the Roma national minority have been recorded at the local and regional level, especially emphasizing Međimurje County, in whose territory a large number of Roma live.

* **Challenges –**

The crisis triggered by COVID-19 pandemic can have disproportional effect on vulnerable social groups. Collecting data on the status of (in)equality and the prevalence of discrimination is especially relevant in defining policy responses, especially in regards to vulnerable groups. However on national level, there is often **lack of relevant equality data** needed to assess the impact on these groups. Better regulated, reliable, and comprehensive data is available on grounds of age, disability, ethnic origin & religion/belief.

There is a need for centralized and coordinated collection of equality data in order to quickly and effectively assess implications of the crisis on groups in disadvantaged position and to provide tailor-made solutions. It is especially relevant to look into the accessibility and availability of public services and goods in education, health care, and justice for vulnerable social groups that are disproportionally affected by the COVID-19 crisis (such as ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities, elderly people, people in the institutional setting, homeless people, women and children under the risk of domestic violence etc.)

* **CONSULAR SERVICE -**

The role of consular services, besides its usual task of providing consular assistance to their own citizens, in emergency situations, especially those related to public health becomes greatly emphasized. The provision of consular assistance implies the protection of the rights and interests of citizens and members of their families, of which the following can be crucial:

* timely provision of relevant information
* assistance in repatriation to the home country

The provision of useful information refers to informing Croatian citizens about travel conditions (e.g. restrictive measures in force in other countries) or commercial return opportunities as well as providing information on repatriation flights organized by EU Member States or partner countries.

During the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU, the repatriation process included more than 625,000 EU citizens who, through the joint efforts and cooperation of the consular services of the EU Member States and the European External Action Service, were assisted in returning to the EU.

A number of repatriation flights were organized with the launch of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Croatia did not launch this Mechanism) which proved to be a useful tool whose role will be reviewed in the future as part of the analysis of lessons learned in responding to the COVID crisis.

* **Temporary ban on crossing the borders -**

One of the challenges that the Republic of Croatia faced and continues to face is the temporary ban on crossing the borders of the Republic of Croatia for non-essential travel. On 19 March 2020, during the initial phase, a Decision was adopted on the temporary prohibition or restriction of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia in order to protect the population in the Republic of Croatia from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Exceptions applied only to citizens of EU/Schengen area Member States who were returning to their home country, members of their family, and persons with granted permanent or temporary residence in these countries, as well as Croatian citizens travelling to the country where they work and reside. Certain categories of persons were also exempt from the Decision, regardless of their nationality: healthcare professionals, researchers and associates, senior care professionals; those requiring urgent medical treatment; frontier workers; freight carriers and other transport personnel to the extent necessary; diplomats, police officers in the performance of their duties, civil protection services and teams, personnel of international organisations and international military personnel in the performance of their functions; and transit passengers.

Even though this Decision was adopted in accordance with the circumstances, its implementation was challenging due to increased traffic jams on border crossing points, as all passengers had to be familiarised with the measures and instructions issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health in order to ensure that they comply with them during their stay in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

As we gained more insight into the way that the COVID-19 virus is spread, we gradually expanded the categories of persons who were allowed to cross the border, while at the same time adjusting how we interacted with the persons crossing the border, how we informed them and got their medical history, with a view to facilitating cross-border traffic. Instead of providing data individually to epidemiological staff on border crossing points, we introduced a possibility of providing data beforehand via the following website https://entercroatia.mup.hr/. We also introduced separate lanes for persons who provide the required data to the epidemiological service beforehand.

Moreover, it is worth noting that following individual reactions from each EU/Schengen area Member State to the threat of the COVID-19 outbreak, we soon started considering joint criteria for restricting the freedom of movement for non-essential cross-border travel in order to protect public health.

On 16 March 2020, the European Commission delivered its Communication concerning COVID-19, entitled Temporary Restriction on Non-Essential Travel to the EU. It also issued the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, and the Guidelines for free movement of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. On several occasions later on, the Commission communicated assessments of the application of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU. On 30 June 2020, the Council issued its Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction. Both of these are amended approximately every 15 days. All of these activities have contributed to better harmonisation among Member States as regards the necessary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU/Schengen area.

* **Providing information for citizens during pandemic**

The Republic of Croatia has launched a website https://entercroatia.mup.hr/ through which persons not covered by the Decision on the temporary prohibition of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia, namely the citizens of EU Member States, Schengen Member States and Schengen Associated States, as well as their family members and third-country nationals who are long-term residents pursuant to Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents, and persons who are entitled to residence under other EU directives or national law or who are holders of national long-term visas, can announce their arrival prior to coming to a border crossing point by filling in a form and providing the information essential for the epidemiological service to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and take timely response if it is subsequently established that the person shows symptoms indicating to the possible contraction of the disease. Such prior provision of information is not mandatory, but it certainly facilitates border crossing and reduces the waiting time for border checks. A total of 4,418,747 travel announcements were received from foreign travellers through this application from 27 May to 19 August 2020.

Furthermore, considering the fact that there is an increasing number of exemptions from the Decision on the temporary prohibition of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia, which covers certain categories of professions, as well as other reasons for travelling that might be considered pressing, the e-mail address uzg.covid@mup.hr is now available to all those who have any uncertainties as to whether they can enter the Republic of Croatia, so they can ask questions related to border crossing. Since 10 May 2020 to date, on average, more than 1,000 inquiries have been received on a daily basis and responded to as soon as possible.

It is also important to mention that third-country nationals, who were legally staying in the Republic of Croatia and whose stay expired during the pandemic, were allowed to remain in the Republic of Croatia and regulate their stay for up to 30 days once the pandemic ends.