



**REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**  
**Ombudswoman for persons with disabilities**

Zagreb, 24 September 2010

**Subject:** Human Rights Council resolution 3/11 – 'Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities: national implementation and monitoring and introducing as the theme for 2011 the role of international cooperation in support of national efforts for the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities'

Dear Sir/Madam,

We have been forwarded your request for information that would assist you in preparing a study to enhance awareness of the role played by international cooperation in support of national efforts for the realization of the purpose and objectives of the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

The office of the ombudswoman for persons with disabilities has the following information in response to your queries:

- a) When it comes to key measures adopted at national level to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Republic of Croatia adopted National Strategy of Equalisation of Possibilities for Persons with Disabilities from the Year 2007 till the Year 2015. In that document the Government listed concrete measures, carriers, activities and deadlines as well as required funding to implement the Convention. One of the measures from the National Strategy also involved establishing of an ombudsman office specialised for persons with disabilities as a measure for enhancing legal protection of persons with disabilities. The office was established on 1 July 2008.
- b) The most significant obstacle to the full implementation at national level of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the global economic crisis that Croatia has been hit by and which has slowed down the introduction of positive measures aimed at increasing the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the society in line with the standards adopted by the Convention. The political support for the necessary reforms at a high level has been strong and has in the first place resulted in prompt signing of the Convention on 30 March 2007 and subsequent ratification in the Croatian Parliament on 1 June 2007. This signalled a high level of political commitment to initiating reforms aimed at aligning the status of person with disabilities in Croatia with the standards proclaimed in the Convention. However, the Office regrets to note that the initial strong momentum has been somewhat lost with the onset of the economic crises and lack of commitment to the reforms on the lower level of the Government.

- c) When it comes to the existence, scope and content of guidelines adopted at national level to guide international cooperation in support of the Convention, the Office of the Ombudswoman for persons with disabilities has knowledge of the importance of developing and expanding international cooperation and promoting the exchange of experiences among persons with disabilities and institutions that work on their behalf being recognised in the aforementioned National Strategy of Equalization of Possibilities for persons with disabilities from the Year 2007 till the Year 2015. The measures in the Strategy aim at stimulating 'cooperation among the state administration bodies and civil society organizations on the international level with the purpose of implementation of international documents addressing the issues of persons with disabilities'. Apart from that, the Office of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for Association has been assigned as a carrier of a measure to stimulate and support the international cooperation among associations of persons with disabilities allocating them the necessary funding for that purpose. The office of the ombudswoman for persons with disabilities does not have the information about the amount of funds allocated for that purpose but is a witness to engagement of the associations, both umbrella and national as well as local, in international cooperation in the form of visits to their counterpart associations in other European countries and attending international conferences. The most significant international documents pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities have been translated into Croatian and published in formats accessible to persons with disabilities with sensory impairments. The cooperation with the European Union is especially active and associations of persons with disabilities receive funding from the pre-accession funds with the purpose of facilitating their international cooperation.
- d) International cooperation in the form of visits by established experts in the field of disability, study visits that would facilitate sharing of best practices and international conferences gathering all bodies working on the implementation of the Convention from organisations of persons with disabilities, state bodies, national human rights organisations and all other relevant bodies from different countries would, in our view, be very beneficial in assisting the realization of the Convention at national level.
- e) When speaking of examples of engagement in international cooperation the Office of the ombudswoman for persons with disabilities can only speak of its own activities in the field. The office actively engages in the exchange of experiences regarding the Convention by replying to inquiries of various institutions from abroad concerning Croatian experiences in the Convention implementation, attending international conferences as well as meeting foreign delegations and organising roundtables at which representatives of state institutions and organisations of persons with disabilities can learn about experiences of foreign countries. Since it was established in 2008, the Office has organised roundtables in cooperation with the embassies of the Republic of Austria and the Kingdom of Sweden. It has also met the Delegation of the Republic of Kazakhstan during its visit to the Republic of Croatia. The office is especially interested in establishing a closer cooperation and exchange of experiences with similar institutions in the region the part of whose mandate is the protection of human rights of persons with disabilities. Apart from the contacts established at conferences, the Office plans to organise a roundtable at which representatives of similar institutions would share their experience on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of persons with

disabilities in their respective countries. The impact of such engagements on promoting the realisation of the Convention has indeed been significant in learning from both positive and negative experiences about alternative ways of tackling certain complex issues encountered in the Convention implementation process as well as mobilising key stakeholders in the process and contributing to the awareness raising on the social model of disability.

