**THE OHCHR STUDY ON THE SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE DIGITAL EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND TO ENSURE THEIR PROTECTION FROM ONLINE THREATS**

1. ***What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.***

On 11 March 2020, the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education (MZO) has published Guidelines for distance learning for primary and secondary schools thus establishing distance learning system using information-communication technology. All primary and secondary schools established channels of communication mid-March 2020 and distributed the appropriate equipment to students according to provided instructions. The distance learning was launched following the Croatian Government decision from 13 March 2020, including all educational institutions, from primary and secondary schools to higher education. It began on 16 March 2020 with schools in Istria County and on 18 March 2020 country-wide. In order to create online content for all subjects in the final year of secondary education, the Ministry has also developed additional video materials to prepare students for compulsory exams at the state final exam, so called *matura*, which consisted of Croatian and English language as well as Mathematics.

Challenges in accessing digital education (i.e. primary, secondary and higher) in Croatia are next: i) Inadequate and uneven ability of schools to perform and participate in hybrid forms classes with the aim of encouraging innovation, adequate responses in emergency situations, easier inclusion of vulnerable groups/groups with special needs and more uniform availability of quality curricular and extracurricular programs in primary and secondary schools regardless of regional development. ii): Insufficiently developed digital competences limit the improvement of methods, innovation and successful application of digital technologies in learning and teaching, as well as application management digital technologies in schools in learning and teaching and business processes. iii) schools, educational and administrative staff are burdened with non-automated and unrelated processes that require additional time and effort from them; iv) schools are not sufficiently or uniformly equipped and trained (equal chances are not guaranteed for the application of innovations and digital technologies in learning and teaching) and they do not prepared curricula for teaching and extracurricular activities that develop the necessary skills and direct students to new areas opened by digital technology in order to could correctly understand their significance and prepare them for future work, study or lifelong learning about them (AI, 3D printing, Internet-of-things (IoT) and similar technologies); v) Insufficient research and experimentation in the application of digital technologies in learning and teaching; vi) Insufficient equipment of kindergartens with digital technology, as well as training professional workers for the use of digital technologies

People with visual, hearing, motor or cognitive impairments, elderly people, and injured persons face obstacles every day, not only in the physical but also in the digital world. Digital accessibility is the practice of customizing websites, mobile applications and other digital content and services so that all users can access, use and understand them regardless of visual, auditory, motor or cognitive difficulties (temporary or permanent). Digital accessibility starts with four basic principles that require that all users, regardless of their options, can: perceive the information and components of the user interface (perception capability), manage user interface (operability), understand the information and operating mode of the user interface (comprehensibility), and access content regardless of technology (stability). In Croatia, the principles of digital accessibility are enshrined in the Law on accessibility of websites and software solutions for mobile devices of public sector bodies (Official Gazette No. 17/2019). Croatian public sector bodies are obliged to adapt their digital content to create an inclusive society, giving everyone equal opportunities to receive, transmit and use information in the digital environment.

The situation of women in the IT industry in Croatia is not much different from that of the rest of the EU. In the ICT sector in Croatia, one in seven female employees and one in six in the EU. More specifically, women account for only 14.3 percent of employees in the ICT sector in Croatia. To encourage women's participation in the digital sector, Croatia joined “Declaration on commitment to women in the digital world” on 9 April 2019, following a proposal from the European Commission. The implementation of Declaration in Croatia on commitment to the issue of women in the digital world at the national level is coordinated by the Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society, in cooperation with the Office for Gender Equality. The Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society has designed and organised with partners and sponsors events in the form of a round tables entitled “become YOU too, girl IT” for girls of higher grades of secondary schools to hear firsthand the experiences of women from the IT industry, which would encourage them to opt for the STEM area in the continuation of their education and thus in choosing a profession.

Education of membersof 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. Like all primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia, schools where teaching is conducted in the language and script of national minorities have prepared for distance learning following the instructions and guidelines for using of ICT. 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.

1. ***What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education***.

Croatian Government established “National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030” with specific priority cluster on Green and digital transition. Furthermore it established the “National Education System Development Plan for the period 2022 - 2027”, which defines the implementation of the strategic goal and priority areas of public policies for the education sector. It includes Specific objective 10. to continue the process of informatisation and application of digital technologies in the education system. Then, it finalized “Digital Croatian Strategy for the period 2032”. The Strategy consists of eight chapters which include development needs and potential for digitalization of Croatian society, public administration and economy, strategic goals, indicative financial framework with presentation of financial conditions for implementation of strategic goals, monitoring and evaluation framework, managing the implementation of the Strategy and environmental impact study of the Strategy. The Strategy defined Strategic objective 4: Developed digital competences for working and living in a digital age. Also, there is a “National Policy for Gender Equality for 2022 to 2027”, with a reference and implementation of Declaration on commitment to women in the digital world. Then, Croatia has developed an “Action Plan for combating sexual violence and sexual harassment for the period until 2024” which includes Measure 9. on strengthening the technical and personnel capacities of the police for the prevention and suppression of the criminality of external abuse and exploitation of children committed through communication technology . In addition, there is a “National plan for children’s rights in the Republic of Croatia, for the period 2022-2026 developed by Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, which includes Chapter 4. on Systematic support for children in the digital environment. In addition there is an association through which educational experts exchange their experiences and carry out projects related to the topic: <https://ucitelji.hr/>

From March 2019 to September 2022, the Government Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities (hereinafter: GOHRRNM) implemented the project "Roma Inclusion - Fulfilling Preconditions for Successful Implementation of National Minority Policies – PHASE I" which was co-financed from the European social fund (ESF). Due to the situation with the global coronavirus pandemic and the measures in force at the time, many Roma children were additionally deprived and could not follow classes remotely due to inadequate conditions at home, nor attend preschool institutions. Taking into account the above, a new project activity was introduced to equip the existing playrooms, community homes or spaces intended for children to socialize in 5 Roma settlements with the equipment needed to monitor classes at a distance (television, desktop computer and tablets with headphones) and with pedagogical and didactic materials that will enable the implementation of preschool activities in circumstances when children cannot attend preschool institutions outside the settlement. Through consultations with individual local self-government units where a large number of members of the Roma national minority live, the GOHRRNM determined the following five locations as locations suitable for equipping: Kuršanec, Parag (Nedelišće), Slavonski Brod, Beli Manastir and Jagodnjak. The purchased equipment includes furniture that complies with pedagogical standards, didactic toys and educational materials, as well as televisions, desktop computers and tablets with headphones, which will enable children to better prepare for mastering the material in elementary school and the Croatian language.

1. ***What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?***

There is a growing trend of victims of human trafficking via the Internet in Croatia, especially aimed at children and young people. According to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, in 2022, out of 17 victims of external exploitation, all were exploited exclusively via the Internet, and in the first 6 months, 4 victims were recorded, and all 4 were exploited via the Internet.

Recognizing the dangers of the "online" environment and bearing in mind the statistical data of the Ministry of the Interior, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, as the holder of the new National Plan to combat human trafficking for the period up to 2030, decided to invest additional attention and efforts first of all in the prevention, and then in the education of exactly this form of human trafficking. Namely, within the framework of the new National Plan the specific objective 1. Prevention of human trafficking, which includes a series of activities related to the topics design and organization of a public campaign on various forms of recruitment through of the Internet with a special emphasis on women and children, and the design and implementation of informative workshops for children and young people. Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities designed and directed the aforementioned activities towards the most vulnerable groups, which also represents numerous victims of this criminal act.

The Ministry of the Interior created the online application "Red button" for reporting abused children via the Internet. Via the mentioned application, it is possible to report sexual abuse and exploitation of a child via the Internet, sexual abuse and exploitation of children in direct contact with the perpetrator, but also any other punishable behavior committed to the detriment of the child (family violence, peer violence, physical abuse, neglect, violation of the child's privacy through the Internet). As part of the celebration of the International Day of Missing Children in 2020, at the initiative of EUROPOL, in cooperation with the European Police Professional Network for Missing Persons and AMBER alert Europe, the campaign #DontBeACatch - #NemojPostatiLovina was initiated, which, along with 23 countries from Europe, actively joined by the police of the Republic of Croatia.

1. ***What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.***

The Electronic Media Act entered into force in October 2021, and it introduced provisions that should help the regulatory body to more easily initiate procedures to sanction hate speech and discriminatory speech in the media. The system for combating discrimination and protecting human rights in the Republic of Croatia is ensured through the implementation of the medium-term strategic planning acts until 2027. The National Plan for Gender Equality for the period until 2027 was adopted in March 2023, the National Plan for Roma Integration. For the period from 2021 to 2027 was adopted in June 2021, and the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination for the period until 2027 was adopted in March 2023. The aforementioned strategic planning acts ensure the implementation of the National Development Strategy, i.e. they define concrete policy measures and public investments for the implementation of the long-term goals related to combating discrimination, protecting human rights and the rights of national minorities, and ensuring gender equality.

In order to strategically approach the planning of educational activities on the topic of non-discrimination, with a special emphasis on the topic of hate crimes and hate speech, the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities started mapping educational activities on the topic of non-discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech in the Republic Croatia in the period from 2017 to 2021. The mapping was carried out during 2022 in order to assess the needs for education on the topic of non-discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech in an informed and grounded manner, based on the collected data, to identify complementarities and overlaps between existing educational activities and to define future needs. The Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities within the Action plan for combating discrimination for 2024-2025, plans to carry out a national campaign, for the purpose of preventing hate speech and hate crimes by raising citizens' awareness of these negative phenomena, with an emphasis on hate speech in public space, electronic media and social networks as well as a series of activities aimed at strengthening the mechanisms of action to fight against hate crimes and hate speech. The national campaign will address hate speech based on 6 grounds of discrimination (gender, race/ethnic origin, religion/belief, age, sexual orientation and disability), and will be aimed at two target groups: the general population and young people.

However, through action plans with the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination for the period until 2027, the Ministry of Science and Education Ministry of Science and Education will include the topic of hate crimes and hate speech in the formal education of relevant expert profiles, to include sensitization activities in primary and secondary school education through the cross-curricular topics Personal and Social Development and Civic Education, and especially through the cross-curricular topic Use of Information and Communication Technology, given that is speech hatred is more present in the virtual world than in real life. Furthermore, it is necessary to carry out activities in the field of upbringing and education for social inclusion and general human values; education for peace and non-violent conflict resolution; education for human rights, responsibility and active citizenship; education about the harmfulness of corruption and corruption risks; education on the rights and preservation of the identity of national minorities, and in the field of interculturalism and multiculturalism. The activities will be financed through tenders for the allocation of grants to projects of CSOs in the field of non-institutional upbringing and education of children and youth.

The Ministry of Science and Education provides financial support to NGOs operating in the field of non-institutional education that plan to implement projects that will, among others, promote equality, social inclusion and the preservation of national and local identity, contribute to the development of democratic principles and active citizenship, and increase knowledge about human rights and active citizenship. *The Ministry has so far financed 133 projects in 2022, 142 projects in 2021, 75 projects in 2019, 68 projects in 2018, 97 projects in 2017.*

Also, for the purpose of encouraging preventive programs in the educational system aimed at media literacy, the Ministry will work on raising awareness of the importance of media literacy among children, development of skills necessary for the effective and safe use of modern technologies, consumption of media content, use of internet and digital services and platforms, and active participation in democratic processes. In order to protect children in the digital world, it is necessary to work on developing media literacy skills, which will help children and young people learn to use the media, analyze and critically question media content, find credible sources of information, protect privacy and personal data, recognize potential harmful media content and inappropriate advertising, recognize and protect yourself from any form of electronic harassment, as well as learn empathy in communication in the digital and real world

Regarding the trafficking of children and young people via the Internet, sexual exploitation via the Internet is most often discussed. In this context, it is important to mention the fact that the Republic of Croatia is a party to the Council of Europe's 2007 Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation, and the Republic of Croatia has also implemented it in the Criminal Code and part of the provisions of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating the external abuse and external exploitation of children and child pornography from 2011. These documents oblige member states to criminalize in national legislation the intentional act of an adult who, using information and communication technology, arranges a meeting with a child with the intention of participating in external activities with the child or producing child pornography, provided that the adult undertakes concrete measures for the realization of the meeting. Croatia regulates the aforementioned issues to the greatest extent by the Criminal Code, from Article 106. General definitions of human trafficking, Article 161. Inducing children to satisfy their sexual needs and Article 163. Exploitation of children for pornography.

1. ***What are the main gaps and challenges to young people’s protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on young people’s human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.***

Croatia is putting efforts in systematic approach in the application and development of the national legal framework to take into account the new, cyber dimension of the society. Police officers for cybercrime continuously conduct individual checks via open sources on the Internet in order to identify perpetrators and victims of criminal acts related to human trafficking. When conducting criminal investigations in the domain of sexual abuse and exploitation of children via social networks, and in order to detect the recruitment of victims via social networks, The Cybersecurity Service also acts as a national contact point for the urgent exchange of data on cyberattacks based on the Directive (EU) on attacks on information systems, for the exchange of data on cybercrime and the sending and receiving of data retention requests for the purpose of submitting requests for international legal assistance, for cybercrime for Interpol member states and for obtaining subscriber and traffic data from Internet content providers (Facebook, Twitter, PayPal), and for the purpose of establishing the identity of perpetrators of criminal offenses for all forms of crime, including for crime related to human trafficking. New technologies enable complete concealment of the perpetrator's identity, which makes his identification impossible. Children and young people are often afraid to seek help and are not able to recognize the problem in time. However, in the Republic of Croatia, Departments for juvenile delinquency and crime against youth and families operate at the Ministry of Interior and police administrations has mandated a group of police officers for youth. Each police station has one or more police officers for youth, specialized in adequate access to children and youth. Information on victims' rights can be obtained by calling the toll-free number 116 006 of the National Call Centre for Victims of Crimes and Misdemeanors.