**Croatian contribution to the Call for inputs from the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls for its upcoming report „Human Security of Women and Girls in the Context of Poverty and Inequality“**

Being aware of the increasing negative impact of the world’s global challenges to human security, we welcome the focus of the report on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in the context of poverty and persisting inequality.

As those effects tend to increase annually, an urgent action is needed to avoid further deterioration of human rights, especially the rights of women and vulnerable groups already facing discrimination on multiple grounds.

Special attention should be given to the protection and promotion of rights of women and girls living in poverty, as poor living conditions interrelate with higher risks of exposure to violence, sexual harassment and trafficking. Denial of the rights of those women and girls negatively affects their physical and mental health, and has a detrimental effect to communities and society as a whole.

Croatia’s continuous commitment to comprehensive and gender responsive implementation of the Agenda 2030 resulted in addressing the discrimination in all aspects and spheres of life, both on a policy level and in practise.

On the national level, the framework of the Croatian National Development Strategy until 2030, recognised poverty as one of the biggest challenges of this decade. In addition, our National plan for gender equality and the National plan to combat poverty and social exclusion acknowledge that poverty affects men and women unequally, and that it has a particularly negative impact on the most vulnerable groups in our society – women in particular situations, persons with disabilities, the elderly and Roma. The increased risk of poverty was highlighted for older women, single mothers, particularly those with several minor children, as well as long-term unemployed women.

The Government of Croatia has made the fight against poverty and social exclusion one of its priorities. Through specially designed programmes it strives to put together concrete measures that would ensure better living standards for the most vulnerable part of the population.

To illustrate some of these activities, we would like to present one of our flagship multiannual women employment programme “Make a Wish”.

The target group in this programme represents unemployed women with no more than secondary education from hard-to-reach rural areas and islands, with preference given to the most vulnerable women - such as women over 50, women with disabilities, members of the Roma national minority and victims of domestic violence.

The program was designed to employ women quickly, without the need for prior professional knowledge and special competencies for the job, and simultaneously provide support and care for the elderly and disadvantaged persons in local communities.

However, in order to make women more competitive in the labor market upon completion of the projects´ activities, women can be provided with additional education within the project, for occupations deficient in their local community, which will eventually enable them to become more employable and enhance their future integration in the labor market. Thus, the “Make a Wish” program incorporates employment, social inclusion and education as its three main priorities.

These women provide assistance in food delivery and preparing meals, assistance in maintaining cleanliness of end-users’ homes, assistance in dressing and undressing, assistance in social integration, conversations and socializing, and inclusion in society, among other activities. The type of activities of course depends on the needs of the end users in each individual case. The term end-user refers to an elderly person (a person aged 65 and over) and/or disadvantaged person.

It is considered to be one of the most popular employment programmes in Croatia with the strongest social benefits. So far a total of 293 million euros were allocated and 22 270 women in a disadvantageous position on the labour market were employed. They are paid a salary in the amount of the minimum wage in Croatia which is approximately 560 EUR and provide assistance to almost 129000 end users.

Grants are awarded exclusively through public calls for project proposals. Eligible applicants include units of local and regional self-government and NGOs, together with regional offices of the Croatian Employment Service and Social Welfare Centres.

In conclusion, the “Make a Wish” program positively affects a number of different socioeconomic aspects of individuals and local communities. Namely, it reduces women's unemployment, increases the employability of women upon completion of the project – and simultaneously improves the quality of life of the elderly and/or disadvantaged persons. This way it directly contributes to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion and to the revitalization of rural and underdeveloped areas.

Furthermore, in its foreign policy Croatia remains a strong advocate of improving the status of women and girls and achieving gender empowerment and equality abroad. Our recent development cooperation projects aim towards providing support to women and girls in Syria, Kenya and Tanzania.

Through the “World Food Programme Operations in Syria“ we are providing Syrian women the chance to work and earn steady income by preparing fresh meals for children in schools thus enabling them to become independent and self-reliant. So far, through this project we have provided support worth 370,000 euros.

“WWW – Wonderful World of Women“ is a project worth 40,000 euros and is being conducted in Kenya and Tanzania in cooperation with the Croatian CSO - “Kolajna ljubavi”. The aim of the project is to strengthen the role of women and girls in local communities by providing scholarships to poor girls for the purpose of their personal and professional development, conducting education for people with physical disabilities, organizing workshops on human rights and democratic transitions, forming an IT centre for online education. The scholarship recipients continue to pass on their knowledge and experience, and in this way, the awareness of local communities about the possibilities and needs of economic empowerment of women and girls is being raised.