

Croatia

Country programme document 2012-2016

The draft country programme document for Croatia (E/ICEF/2011/P/L.1) was presented to the Executive Board for discussion and comments at its 2011 annual session (20-23 June 2011).

The document was subsequently revised, and this final version was approved at the 2011 second regular session of the Executive Board on 15 September 2011.

Summary of the situation of children and women

1. Croatia enjoyed relatively strong economic growth and low inflation from 2000 to mid-2008. The average annual rate of growth in gross domestic product was over 4 per cent. This helped the country to achieve notable levels of progress, as measured by social indicators, and to set high expectations for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, with 31 targets likely to be met. However, the global economic crisis contributed to negative growth in 2009 and 2010, bringing increased poverty and unemployment. Fortunately financial assistance to families, notably child allowances and maternity leave benefits, will remain stable. Nevertheless, several groups remain vulnerable to the rising level of poverty. Those most at risk include women, single parents, and households with two or more children.

2. About 10 per cent of children under the age of 14 live in poor households, the most vulnerable among them being Roma. The vulnerability of this group continues in spite of the participation of Croatia in the intergovernmental initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015). Despite the fact that Croatia offers good overall social protection coverage, new policies are needed to strengthen social recovery. The development, analysis and monitoring of such policies are hampered by inadequate data disaggregated by sex, age and social groups, and by insufficient monitoring of child poverty.

3. Negotiations for accession to the European Union (EU), which began in October 2005, are due to be finalized in 2011. In 2007, as part of the EU accession process, the Government initiated comprehensive reforms aimed at achieving social inclusion. Institutional mechanisms for supporting gender equality at central and local government levels have also been established. However, there has been limited progress in the area of social inclusion, as children and young people with developmental difficulties and Roma children are still not sufficiently included in the educational system.

4. The consolidated third and fourth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child were due in October 2008, and their submission is expected in 2011. The Concluding Observations of the Committee on the 2004 periodic report are incorporated into the National Plan of Action 2006-2012. However, key recommendations of the Committee still remain a challenge to address. These include improved data, protection of children from violence, budgeting for children, and better coordination among sectors.

5. In 2010 the Government adopted the National Curriculum Framework covering preschool and primary and secondary education to address the issue of quality of education. Despite national efforts to support the development of a “knowledge society”, performance of Croatian students in reading, mathematics and science falls below the average of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Moreover, student performance declined between 2006 and 2009.

6. Overall preschool enrolment increased from 43 per cent in 2005 to 58 per cent in 2009. However, access to quality preschool enrolment for the poorest boys and girls, the Roma children, and children with disabilities remains very limited. One reason is that kindergartens are still perceived as services for working parents. For preschool and higher levels of schooling, exclusion and stereotyping are still

widespread for children living in poverty and children with disabilities, slowing down the realization of the right to education for these children. About 97 per cent of Roma children do not complete elementary school, and only 2 per cent enter secondary school.

7. Some progress has been made in advancing the inclusion of socially vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities. However, promotion of family-oriented care as an alternative to institutional care has been slow. In 2010, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare decided to prevent institutionalization of children younger than four years of age, demonstrating a clear determination to promote the child's right to care by a family. However, progress is not equal, leaving behind children with disabilities. Out of all children with disabilities placed in the public care, 76 per cent are placed in institutional care and 24 per cent in non-institutional forms of residence. Among all children with disabilities in permanent or weekly public care, 70 per cent are placed in such care because they do not have inclusive education in their local communities and instead attend "special schools" that combine both placement and education. Some 30 per cent of children with disabilities in institutional care are children without proper parental care. The integration of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities in the regular education system continues to be a challenge. Approximately 2,115 children with disabilities (aged 5-14, with 40 per cent of them girls and 60 per cent boys) are referred to special schools because insufficient support is given to education for such children in the form of access, transport and teaching assistants.

8. A large number of measures to reduce domestic violence and improve the status of victims of violence have been systematically implemented. These are based on the National Strategy for the Protection against Domestic Violence and other relevant regulations. However, the measures have not resulted in widespread improvements: the proportion of women who are victims of domestic violence has not significantly changed over the years, and the proportion of children suffering from violence in the family increased by 35 per cent from 2005 to 2009.

9. Significant progress has been made in reducing violence in schools through a national prevention programme. Nevertheless, in several areas, child protection from violence, abuse and neglect is hobbled by shortcomings in the judicial and welfare systems, combined with insufficient coverage and monitoring of programmes for prevention. Violence in institutions, including sexual exploitation, continues to occur. Street violence involving the deaths of teenagers (with their peers or young adults as perpetrators) has increased public attention to the issue of violence. Between 2000 and 2009, juvenile crime rates for children 14-17 years of age increased by more than 34 per cent. The main causes of deaths for children are accidents, including those that occur in and around the home, and traffic accidents.

10. The national monitoring system on the situation of children is still relatively underdeveloped, despite a very active role of the Ombudsperson for Children. The number of cases of infringement of children's rights reported to the Ombudsperson is growing annually by 10 per cent. The cases predominantly involve custody rights and violence against and among children.

11. There is significant progress being made for women and children in Croatia at institutional, legislative and policy levels. However, the benefits of this progress have been unequally distributed, and some of the gains have been reversed due to the economic crisis. Despite the increase in budgetary allocations for the

programmes of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the potential for partnership between the public and NGO sectors for improving the rights of children is not fully recognized and tapped. A main challenge continues to be the dearth of disaggregated data and specific indicators to monitor the impact of policies and reforms and the situation of the most disadvantaged women and children. These gaps correspond to areas pinpointed in the general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC/GC/2003/5). UNICEF will support Croatia to address these areas in the programme of cooperation for 2012-2016.

Key results and lessons learned from previous cooperation, 2007-2011

Key results achieved

12. Significant social change was achieved through the previous programme of cooperation. The largest national programme on prevention of violence among children in schools contributed to an increased knowledge and awareness on bullying and showcased significant reduction of violence (50 per cent) in the schools involved. More than 35 per cent of schools are involved in the programme, endorsing the Government's Protocol on Procedures in Cases of Violence against and among Children and Youth.

13. According to official reports, there is clear evidence on increased identification, documentation, recording and referrals of cases of violence against children. Due to the National Protocol on Procedures in Cases of Violence against and among Children and Youth, in the 2006-2010 period, there was a triple increase in the referral of cases of violence. In the same period, reporting doubled on violence against children by the Ombudsperson for Children.

14. Young child development was fully supported and embraced thanks to the extensive national campaign, "The first three years are the most important". New community-based services for parents of young children were successfully introduced, evaluated and scaled up nationally. These included positive-parenting practices aiming to assure the healthy, safe, stimulating and emotionally stable development of young children within their families. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative contributed to the increased humanization — a more welcoming and nurturing environment — of maternity wards, the majority of which made progress and attained the child-friendly status bestowed through the initiative.

15. The number of children without adequate parental care placed in public institutions has decreased. The data show that the ratio of children without adequate parental care placed in institutions, compared to children placed in foster care, has improved (38 per cent: 62 per cent) although still not reaching the Government's goal of 20:80. Parliament adopted the new Law on Foster Care, for the first time introducing compensation for foster families. The social welfare system has been reformed, focusing on deinstitutionalization of children and transformation of residential institutions, as well as on restructuring social services towards an improved case management system.

16. The country's knowledge base on children and women was strengthened through support given to data collection, research and evaluation within the areas of

young child development and child protection. The system of independent monitoring of child rights was enhanced through support to and cooperation with civil society and the Ombudsperson for Children.

17. The previous programme of cooperation (2007-2011) was designed as a new UNICEF model, with a view to expanding the country's ability to promote and protect rights of children by assisting public and private sectors to address interrelated issues of disparities, social exclusion and violence against children. Since regular resources were not allocated to Croatia when the country programme was prepared, UNICEF successfully transformed its presence through the mobilization of resources from the private sector within the country, raising a total of \$7.94 million, which has supported implementation of UNICEF-assisted programmes both in Croatia and in other countries.

18. The capacity of UNICEF to leverage resources has been further strengthened through integration of public campaigns, fundraising and sales activities, and through the work of National Ambassadors for UNICEF. Improvement was made to the visibility of UNICEF, which the public now ranks as the leading organization for children within Croatia, according to a 2010 national survey. Wide-ranging partnerships have flourished during the country programme, some of them being of strategic importance. UNICEF activities have been successful in generating solidarity among individual donors and volunteers, increasing their willingness to participate in creating conditions for a protective environment for children.

Lessons learned

19. As was emphasized in the midterm review of the country programme, national mass media campaigns raising public awareness on selected child rights issues have been crucial for the development of policy and its successful implementation. These campaigns are complemented by quick and effective programme implementation, evidence-based advocacy and partnerships with practitioners, academia and NGOs. High levels of public support for better standards for children were achieved through the use of emotionally engaging and innovative communication. Such communication also has facilitated demand for new services and a building of a system and network of services responding better to the needs of parents and the rights of children. Communication campaigns will continue to be essential to policy development and implementation, and need to be accompanied by effective programmes, evidenced-based advocacy and partnerships with practitioners, academics and NGOs. The new programme will also place more emphasis on partnerships with donors.

20. In the areas of health, social welfare and education, UNICEF-assisted training and capacity development helped to improve the attitudes of policymakers and professionals towards being better able to perform according to their accountabilities. This improvement in attitude and performance has been recognized. The midterm review emphasized that it made a significant contribution to the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children, 2006-2012. However, more efforts are needed in obtaining reliable, disaggregated data and improving monitoring of current implementation measures. These activities will be crucial for the development of policies to reduce poverty and exclusion and for the formulation of equity-focused interventions.

21. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, with the support of UNICEF, conducted an analysis of the foster care system in Croatia in 2007-2008. This analysis documented the need to improve coordination among all stakeholders involved in public services and to create policies to benefit children and families in order to systematically advance the realization of the best interests of the child. In support of these efforts, the convening role of UNICEF has to be strengthened to encourage intersectoral cooperation in policy development and planning at the national and local levels.

The country programme, 2012-2016

Summary budget table

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Other resources</i> <i>(In thousands of United States dollars)</i>
Alliances for equity and social inclusion of the most vulnerable children	9 674
Cross-sectoral costs	3 762
Total	13 436
Funds raised for UNICEF-assisted programmes in other countries	1 236

Preparation process

22. The CPD was developed through systematic consultation with governmental and civil society counterparts and the private sector, as well as key international partners. In the absence of a United Nations Development Assistance Framework, the CPD was developed in consultation with United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the Delegation of the European Union. The CPD is based on the following inputs: key results and lessons learned that emerged from the midterm review; knowledge generated through the Situation Analysis of children and women; and opinion surveys of children and young persons and of individual donors. These consultations contributed significantly to the effective positioning of UNICEF and to clarifying and defining its roles. They also helped to ensure that the programme is strategic and will complement the goals, initiatives and partnerships of the Government.

Programme and components results and strategies

23. The overall goal of the 2012-2016 country programme of cooperation is to support Croatia to advance appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention on Rights of the Child, especially in accordance with article 4 of the Convention. In pursuing this goal, the partnership will build alliances in support of child rights and mobilize society and government around the interrelated issues of disparities, social exclusion and violence against and among children. The partnership will focus particularly on: children living in poorest families, especially those with three or more dependants; Roma boys and girls; children with disabilities; children not attending preschool; children without parental care, including those living in institutions; and children experiencing violence.

24. The partnership will seek to promote ongoing system reforms driven by requirements for accession to the EU based on international standards and norms on child rights. This will be effected by supporting the Government to complete decentralization of social sector reform and reform of public-care services for children. Support will also be given to the policymaking process through the prioritization of child rights issues. Along with these will be efforts to tackle the interrelated problems of social exclusion, disparities and discrimination in education, health, justice and social systems.

25. In support of the efforts of the Government and civil society, and in partnership with the private sector, including media and general public, the country partnership will contribute to adoption of the general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The activities pursued through the partnership will complement ongoing reforms, so that by 2016 two main results will be achieved. The first result is that national and local authorities ensure that girls and boys from the poorest families, including those with disabilities or developmental risks, and those from the Roma minority benefit from (a) inclusive, community-based preschool services for children and families; (b) family-based early childhood intervention programmes and services; and (c) perinatal care services and better parenting education. The second result is that the country advances the infrastructure for the increased realization of child rights, through (a) increased prevention and intervention for the protection of children from violence, abuse and neglect; (b) the planning, budgeting and monitoring of policies and decisions of national and subnational authorities, which will increasingly address social exclusion of children; and (c) the increased engagement of public and private stakeholders in supporting children's rights.

26. Fundraising activities for other resources (non-core resources) to support national and international UNICEF-assisted programmes will be developed around more tangible goals that have clear emotional appeal. Equity will be introduced as a key theme throughout fundraising appeals, with one goal being to increase and support committed regular giving by individuals. A main goal will be the steady growth in the funds raised for regular (core) resources, which is a priority for country office private fundraising. This focus will ensure steady growth of the funds raised for regular resources, which is a priority of the UNICEF country office private fundraising framework.

27. The partnership will use a combination of strategies, including advocacy, social mobilization, knowledge management, child participation, and innovative interventions focused particularly at the community level, to effectively support the Government and civil society in achieving social inclusion and equity for boys and girls in the areas of young child development and child protection. It will leverage national and international expertise and potential for social mobilization by harnessing the capacities of local communities and the private sector in the creation of public-private partnerships to reduce disparities and improve social inclusion. To ensure that national reforms focus on equity, UNICEF will work with partners that include United Nations agencies and the World Bank.

28. The partnership will contribute to existing national priorities, including the priorities highlighted by the general public and children themselves in regular opinion polls. Amplifying community voices and empowering civil society, community organizations and social networks will further support social inclusion.

Continuous support will be provided to the promotion of national and local networks, convening and engaging relevant stakeholders around prevention of violence, early childhood interventions, positive parenting practices and breastfeeding.

29. The country programme partnership will be actively empowering community and governmental organizations by increasing awareness and knowledge of key issues and by fostering positive attitudes and practices among policymakers so that they can make evidence-based decisions in the best interests of children. This will be done through the combination of public awareness campaigns, innovative models for behaviour change and engaging policymakers in family- and child-oriented system change. The strengthening of the national monitoring and evaluation system with a special focus on disaggregated data will support evidence-based policymaking, management and accountability. Strengthening the capacities and increasing the accountability of service providers will also be emphasized.

30. The country programme partnership will drive the generation and sharing of knowledge and evidence to enable the public and private sectors and civil society to inform policy and practice and achieve change in the best interests of boys and girls. Additionally, the specific contribution of the partnership will be to engage leading national and international experts in the areas of young child development, child protection and social mobilization.

31. Alliances with media and the private sector will be crucial in promoting positive behaviours and combating discrimination, and supporting social change for children. The alliances will equally be crucial in mobilizing private and public resources for achieving change. The forging and strengthening of such alliances will serve as a main strategy of the country programme. To leverage resources, the partnership will rely more extensively on the sustained growth of regular individual giving and the further development of corporate alliances, building on the results already achieved in private sector fundraising. To further build alliances for children, the programme will promote positive business practices benefiting children and corporate social responsibility focused on support for improving the lives of children.

32. The participation of children will be central to, and mainstreamed into, the country programme through the promotion of various platforms through which young people can express their opinions, such as digital engagement, including social media. Communication for development will fully support the partnership goals by promoting attitudes and practices for social change, focused on achieving results with equity.

Relationship to national priorities and the UNDAF

33. The country partnership will support the Government's development strategies and plans, particularly the 2006-2013 Strategic Development Framework as it relates to children, the reduction of poverty, building social cohesion and promoting corporate social responsibility. It will contribute directly to the priorities of the National Plan of Action for the Rights and Interests of Children and the Joint Inclusion Memorandum, in particular in the area of reduction of disparities and mitigating the impact of the economic crisis on boys and girls. It will also contribute to the realization of the following government commitments: the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality; Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion

2005-2015; National Population Policy; National Strategy on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence; and National Strategy for Prevention of Behavioural Disorders for Children and Youth.

Relationship to international priorities

34. The Millennium Development Goals and the priorities of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan, 2006-2013, are integrated into the programme, with a strong focus on equity, social inclusion, gender equality and child protection and young child development. The programme of cooperation will support Croatia to continue to pursue the high standards in achieving the Millennium Development Goals by enabling excluded and marginalized children to benefit from national development and economic prosperity. Continued cooperation with the EU will be further explored, particularly as the Government implements the Joint Inclusion Memorandum and the EU adopts a new Strategy on Child Rights and the Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. Cooperation with the World Bank will be strengthened in the areas of child poverty and social welfare.

Programme components

35. **Alliances for equity and social inclusion of the most vulnerable children.** Disparities and violence have been identified as major challenges to improving the situation of children in Croatia. Despite the high level of legal standards for children, gaps in their implementation still hamper further progress in fulfilling children's rights.

36. The Government is pursuing policies for mitigating the impact of the global economic crisis on the most vulnerable groups and is developing comprehensive reform of the social welfare system. The programme of cooperation will respond to the demand of the Government for the development of highly specialized competencies, and recruitment of staff with such competencies, for addressing disparities and supporting the protection of the most vulnerable children. Improved data gathering and analysis are needed to inform policy choices to efficiently combat exclusion and achieve equity.

37. In the area of **young child development (YCD)**, the rate of preschool enrolment is still too low (59 per cent), as it is seen primarily as a service for working parents. The lack of an interdisciplinary approach to community services for parents and children adds to disparities in child development, especially for Roma children and children with disabilities.

38. The component aims to accelerate implementation of the social system reform agenda and effective implementation of laws and policies, particularly at local level. This, accompanied by the promotion of the gathering and analysis of reliable data on children, will aim to secure greater investment and action promoting equity, inclusion and protection for the most vulnerable boys and girls, including children with disabilities, Roma, children living in poverty, children in the justice system, children without parental care, and child victims of violence, abuse and neglect.

39. Young child development will be enhanced through support to coherent multisectoral YCD planning and standard-setting to strengthen access to community-based services and programmes in health, social welfare, education and

support to families. Within YCD, the following results are to be achieved, by the end of 2016: (a) an increase, by at least 30 per cent, of girls and boys from the Roma minority and children with disabilities taking part in inclusive early childhood education in the selected counties; (b) increased quality of, and access to, family-based early childhood intervention programmes and services for children with disabilities or developmental risks in the selected counties; and (c) improved quality, accountability and access to post-natal care services, ensuring that they meet international standards, in order to reach the most vulnerable boys and girls and support parents to provide adequate care.

40. These results will be achieved by gathering reliable data, and fostering, integrating and exchanging knowledge through the implementation of innovative and community evidence-based approaches. This will be accomplished in partnership with civil society organizations, the private sector and local communities. Emphasis will be placed on stimulating dialogue about the diversity of needs of those who are excluded or marginalized with regard to their achieving access to preschool education, and health and social welfare services. Technical support will be given to the Government to strengthen and scale up affordable interventions and engage with families and local communities.

41. In addition, the component will focus on system-strengthening and capacity development through the provision of assistance in improving procedures and standards; integrating YCD policy elements into the agendas of each sector; building the capacities of health, education and social welfare professionals; and reinforcing multi-disciplinary cooperation among sectors in order to achieve a faster and more effective response to demands for local YCD services, especially for vulnerable children and their families. Special emphasis will be given to embedding social norms promoting equity and inclusion through the use of media campaigns (mass and social media) that promote public awareness and engagement.

42. Within the focus area of **child protection from violence, abuse and neglect**, the programme of cooperation will tackle the existing issues of violence and exclusion. This focus area will support the achievement of the following results: (a) the rights of girls and boys without appropriate parental care will be enhanced by improved legislation, social protection mechanisms and special interventions in areas where there is higher concentration of marginalized children; (b) the ratio of children who are deprived of parental care living in residential institutions to those in foster care is improved to 20:80; (c) the ratio of children with disabilities in residential institutions to those foster care is improved to 60:40; and (d) increased provision of support services to children victims, witnesses and offenders within the child protection system.

43. The partnership goals will be achieved through pursuit of a mix of prevention and intervention strategies. Through the provision of evidence, evaluations and lessons from innovations, both policy and practice at national and local levels will be improved in addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged girls and boys. Through campaigns to promote public awareness and engagement, a positive environment will be created to support the system change that will effectively protect children from violence, abuse and neglect. Furthermore, to support the achievement of the programme component results, the programme will facilitate the strengthening of coordination between the social and justice sectors, building the

capacity of justice, law enforcement and social welfare professionals, and reinforcing multi-disciplinary cooperation among sectors.

44. The comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system has a strategic role in informing the policymaking process. To ensure the achievement of the results by end of 2016, a special focus will be on upgrading the current infrastructure and building national capacity in monitoring children's rights, disparities and exclusion. The improved collection and analysis of reliable data will help to fill data gaps for adequately monitoring the situation of children and women, as well as for planning, budgeting and implementing policies. The partnership will in particular contribute to the dissemination of data, using a communication strategy that will integrate advocacy and social mobilization to promulgate social change for children.

45. The partnership will support the creation of alliances, with a goal of channelling investment in children by private and public sectors, raising sufficient funds for implementation of national programmes, and ensuring adequate contributions to regular resources and other resources. Furthermore, the partnership will promote and support child-oriented corporate social responsibility. The participation of boys and girls and a focus on gender will be mainstreamed throughout the programme implementation.

Major partnerships

46. Partnerships with governmental institutions, Parliament, counties, cities and municipalities, civil society, academic institutions, the media and the private sector, and children will be maintained and strengthened. Major drivers of change will continue to be the particular strength of the UNICEF presence in Croatia and the strong partnership with the private sector and mass media.

47. Major national partners will include the Ministries of Family, Veterans Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity; Health and Social Welfare; Science, Education and Sports; Regional and Local Development; Finance; Interior and Justice. Major national partners will also include Government Offices for National Minorities, Human Rights and Gender Equality; the Education and Teachers Training Agency; and the Ombudspersons for Children and for People with Disabilities.

Monitoring, evaluation and programme management

48. UNICEF will continue to work under the overall coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. The implementation of the cooperation arrangement will be monitored through joint annual meetings, which will include review of annual achievement, and planning of activities for the following year, as well as a midterm review of progress in 2014. Baselines will be established in each area of cooperation. National monitoring systems will provide information on progress and results achieved. Evidence on best practices and evaluations will be used to enhance policy engagement.

49. A Situation Analysis on children and women is being developed and will be further enriched by the data generated from the 2011 National Census and the results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey in 2014. Additional national and local surveys will be undertaken as needed in order to provide more in-depth analysis on key issues.