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Programme

Supporting protection and integration of children and families in migration in Croatia

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Program

Supporting protection and integration of children and families in migration in Croatia

A joint two-year program of the UNICEF Office for Croatia and the State Secretariat for Migration of the Swiss Confederation focused on the protection and integration of the most vulnerable migrant children and families in Croatia, funded by the Second Swiss Contribution to selected EU member states.

Implementation period: December 1, 2023 to November 30, 2025.

The program in Croatia aimed to ensure that children and families in migration, including persons displaced from Ukraine in the Republic of Croatia and unaccompanied children, are integrated into Croatian national systems, that their needs are assessed in a timely manner and met through an effective approach to integrated and high-quality protection, mental health and psychosocial support, integration measures in the school environment, as well as access to community services essential for early childhood development and social benefits within the social welfare system.

Desired program outcomes were that all children, adolescents, and their families in migration have their needs assessed and met through:

- › access to high-quality guardianship, best interest assessment, case management, family and community services, and monitoring
- › access to integrated mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)
- › access to integration measures in school settings and local communities
- › timely and appropriate support for the most vulnerable young children and their caregivers in migration to access inclusive and quality early childhood development services, especially early and preschool education and early childhood intervention services
- › access to appropriate social benefits and services.

Key partners

- › Office of the Ombudsperson for Children
- › Office of the Ombudsperson
- › Ministry of the Interior
- › Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy
- › Ministry of Science, Education and Youth
- › Ministry of Health

Implementing partners

- › Croatian Institute for Social Work
- › The Education and Teacher Training Agency
- › National Centre for External Evaluation of Education
- › Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb
- › Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb
- › CARNET
- › Community Service Centres Zagreb-Dugave, Rijeka, Ivanec, Osijek
- › Agronomy School Zagreb
- › Vukovar Gymnasium
- › Tina Ujević Secondary School, Kutina
- › Nikola Tesla Primary School, Rijeka
- › Šime Budinić Primary School, Zadar
- › RODA – Parents in Action
- › Croatian Association for Early Childhood Intervention
- › MdM – Médecins du Monde
- › Brave Phone
- › Centre for Missing and Exploited Children

Achieved key results:

- › **More than 7,000 children** in migration received timely protection, services, mental health support, and psychosocial assistance
 - › **More than 700 unaccompanied and separated children** identified and provided with individualized support through coordinated services, quality guardianship, and access to inclusive family and community services
 - › **1,984 non-native speaking children** included in integration measures in schools and local communities
 - › **555 non-native speaking children** underwent standardized language testing, enabling schools to provide tailored support to overcome language barriers
 - › **More than 1700 children and families** had access to mental health and psychosocial support, including via multilingual chat.
- › Capacity strengthened for **1,200 professionals** in early childhood development, education, child protection, social welfare, and asylum systems.

Results by intervention areas

Access to integrated and high-quality child protection

- › More than **700 unaccompanied and separated children** identified and included in the child protection and guardianship system.
- › Capacity strengthened for more than **500 professionals** in the field of interculturalism, and protection and strengthening of unaccompanied and separated children from the risk of exploitation and violence, including gender-based violence, smuggling and trafficking.

- › National capacities to generate and use high-quality, disaggregated data and analysis on children in migration in all sectors for policy and program development have been strengthened.
- › The following have been developed:
 - › content and materials for professional of the Croatian Institute for Social Work on call in the first contact with an unaccompanied or separated child with the aim of providing timely information on rights and services and high-quality protection and guardianship,
 - › specialized interventions and materials for strengthening of unaccompanied and separated children in recognizing the risks of further unsafe travel to the destination country and professionals who provide accommodation and care to unaccompanied and separated children in circumstances of short stays in accommodation,
 - › guidelines for establishing organized housing services for children and youth in migration.
- › An intercultural mediator position has been piloted in the social welfare system to work with unaccompanied and separated children.
- › Four centres for community-based services equipped to provide better quality care and accommodation for unaccompanied children.
- › For further development of foster care for unaccompanied and separated children:
 - › Foster care teams in Croatia have been strengthened to provide additional training to foster carers,
 - › awareness has been raised through promotion and a Round Table, where recommendations for the development of foster care for unaccompanied and separated children have been made.

Mental health and psychosocial support

- › More than **1,700 children and families** in migration had access to mental health and psychosocial support, including through a multilingual chat.
- › The capacities of more than 150 professionals on providing mental health and psychosocial support, including in crisis situations, were strengthened.
- › A training program for professionals in the social welfare system, civil protection, education, healthcare and civil society organizations on mental health and psychosocial support in crisis situations was developed and adapted.
- › Access to mental health and psychosocial support for children and families in migration was provided through the Brave Phone chat available in seven foreign languages.

Access to high-quality early childhood development services

- › More than **40,000 unique accesses** to the improved Parenting in Croatia platform, which has been developed in five languages (Croatian, English, French, Arabic and Ukrainian) and offers key information on health, nutrition and childcare to parents and caregivers of children aged 0 to 8.

- › Almost **500 professionals** have improved their skills and knowledge to identify and provide targeted support to early-age children at risk, with developmental difficulties, as well as their caregivers.
- › More than **50 professionals** have been trained to use new forms to perform first health examination, with the aim of early recognition of vulnerabilities and ensuring adequate health support.
- › The following have been created and developed:
 - › Online course on Contemporary Early Intervention: Family-Centred and Culturally Sensitive Practice for Professionals Providing Better and Culturally Adapted Early Intervention Services.
 - › Tools for healthcare professionals to improve the quality, and best practice of initial health screening for migrants, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.
 - › Recommendations for amending the by-law to improve initial health screening and quality healthcare for migrants and international protection seekers.

Access to inclusive and quality early learning and education of children

- › Almost **2,000 foreign-speaking children** are included in integration measures in schools and local communities.
- › **555 foreign language children** passed standardized language testing, which enabled schools to provide tailored support to overcome language barriers.
- › Almost **300 educational workers** completed the PREMISE program for inclusive, supportive and equal education of children of migrant origin, for the application of an intercultural, multilingual and inclusive approach in working with children of migrant origin.
- › The following have been created and developed:
 - › analysis of the needs of educators, teachers, parents and children for integration into the Croatian education system
 - › framework for self-evaluation of schools in the process of integration of foreign speakers and migrants
 - › analysis of school management in the context of inclusion of foreign speakers and migrants
 - › two e-learning programs on inclusive, supportive and equitable education of children of migrant origin have been developed for educators, teachers and teachers in schools
 - › recommendations for better educational inclusion of children of foreign speakers and migrants.

Access to social protection for children and families

- › Analysis "From Policy to Practice: Social Protection of Children and Families in Migration in Croatia" which analysed access to benefits and services for families and children in migration and developed recommendations for improving the social protection system.
- › Advocating recommendations "Analytical Assessment of the Adequacy of Compensation and Leave for Foster Care Workers and Maintenance Allowances for Children in Foster Care",

including the increasing benefits for foster parents who care for unaccompanied and separated children.