



Croatian Experience of the role of an Independent Mechanism for implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

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CROATIA
Full of life



- The youngest member of the EU (2013)
- Croatia is a frequent tourist destination
- Population of Croatia (2021) 3.871.833
- The share of the population aged 0 to 14 is 14.27%, and the share of the population aged 65 and over is 22.45%
- Persons with disabilities in Croatia
=> 657.791

Persons with disabilities in Croatia => 657.791* (about 17% of all the inhabitants)

Multiple impairments	188.182
Locomotor system impairment	177.547
Damage to other organs and organ systems, chromosome pathologies, congenital anomalies and rare diseases	162.135
Mental impairments	153.021
Central nervous system impairment	110.756
Voice and speech communication impairment	51.149
Intellectual impairments	31.291
Visual impairment	20.526
Hearing impairment	17.679
Peripheral nervous system impairment	17.642
Autism spectrum disorders	4.177
Deafblindness	172



*Data from the Croatian Institute of Public Health (HZJZ)



What changed the game??

- Croatia signed CRPD on 30th March 2007 and was the third country in the world to ratify CRPD on 1st June 2007 which indicates the willingness and need of Croatian society to ensure equal opportunities for this particularly vulnerable population
- **However, many more conscious and accessible countries did it later?!?**
- National Strategy of Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with disabilities from 2007-2015 (today the National Plan for the period from 2021 to 2027 was put into effect as the third such document)
- Special institution **Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities** established on 1st July 2008 because of dissatisfaction with the way the rights of persons with disabilities were protected through the institution of the Ombudsman and great contribution of civil society organizations
- Although the rights of persons with disabilities in certain areas are not fully in line with internationally accepted obligations, the CRPD has enabled the situation and access to be improved

How did everything turn out?

- Croatia's experience related to an independent mechanism for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been primarily shaped through the work of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities, which acts as a key pillar of the independent framework for the promotion, protection and monitoring of the implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article 33(2) of the CRPD.
- With the establishment of a specialized, independent Ombudsman's Office in 2008, Croatia developed a recognizable model of institutional protection.

Today



- **The Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities** is an independent state institution whose fundamental task is to protect, monitor and promote the rights and interests of persons with disabilities based on the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, international treaties and laws.
- **Equality body:** Anti-discrimination Act on two grounds of discrimination: disability and health
- Also, the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities **has the status of an independent body for the protection, monitoring and promotion** of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Employs 20 employees who are experts in disability topics

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- Although there is **no formal legal act on this**, the state has recognized the institution of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities as an institution that, in accordance with Article 33(2) of the CRPD, is an independent mechanism for the protection, monitoring and promotion of the Convention.
 - The institution **has also been recognized in such a role also by United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the international community** through participation in meetings and contacts with various international organizations.
 - We are a regular member of Equinet (European Network of Equality Bodies) and a member with observer status of ENNHRI (European Network of Human Rights Institutions).

Civil society organizations



- In Croatia, there are over 300 organizations, alliances, associations and initiatives of persons with disabilities and parents of children with developmental disabilities, which play an extremely important role in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.
- Cooperation with civil society organizations takes place at all levels: movement, alliances, associations, initiatives...
- Consultations with representatives of civil society organizations for the purpose of amending regulations have also continued, as has cooperation at the national and international levels.
- Numerous forms of cooperation include holding meetings, organizing joint events and visiting associations at local and regional levels.

Challenges in reality

- **Implementation of recommendations:** Although the Ombudsman's recommendations are legally based, executive bodies, ministries and local government are sometimes slow to respond to systemic changes suggested by the mechanism.
- **Civil society involvement:** An ongoing challenge remains ensuring the full and meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities themselves and their associations in decision-making processes, which the CRPD strictly requires.
- **Direction of understanding disability:** In public discourse, the term disability is increasingly identified with an illness, diagnosis, or some medical condition. This approach stems from the so-called medical model of disability, while contemporary theory and practice view disability through the prism of the social model.

Conclusions



- The CRPD has made an enormous contribution to understanding persons with disabilities as citizens instead of the perspective of patients, as was prevalent until the adoption of the CRPD
- According to the Croatian experience, the implementation of the CRPD has enabled the establishment of Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities as an independent state institution
- Due to and based on the CRPD, persons with disabilities in our system today have their representatives in all working groups when legal regulations relating to them are being drafted
- And finally, because of the CRPD, people with disabilities today have a better system of protection and exercise of rights than they had before

**Disability
is a matter
of perception.**

*If you can do
just one thing well,
you're needed
by
someone*

- Martina Navratilova

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**Thank you for
your attention**

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