

## **Examples of good practice and challenges faced by Croatian government in ensuring the effective enjoyment of human rights during Covid-19 pandemic**

### **❖ Andrija - digital assistant for collaboration between government and citizens during pandemics**

On April 14<sup>th</sup> 2020, Croatia launched its first digital assistant “*Andrija*” to advise people how to diagnose and manage suspected Covid-19 infections. The digital assistant is available at <https://andrija.ai/> and can be activated on WhatsApp under the name Andrija.

This “*virtual doctor*”, powered by artificial intelligence, has been developed by members of CRO AI (Mindsmiths, Infobip, Neos), Croatian IT companies in cooperation with epidemiologists and with some of the world’s leading IT companies such as Oracle.

Digital assistant Andrija is named after Andrija Štampar, a distinguished Croatian doctor and scholar in the field of social medicine and a pioneer of 20th century public health. From 1931 to 1933, Štampar worked as an expert of the Health Organization of the League of Nations. He also spent time in China, from 1933 to 1936, after the Health Organization sent him as an advisor to help the Chinese health administration in the control of mass infectious diseases that appeared after devastating floods in 1931. In 1946, he was elected the first vice-president of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the chairman of the interim commission that performed the duty on behalf the World Health Organization (WHO) until the ratification of its Constitution. He also presided over the first World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization in Geneva in 1948. In later years he was an envoy for WHO in numerous countries.

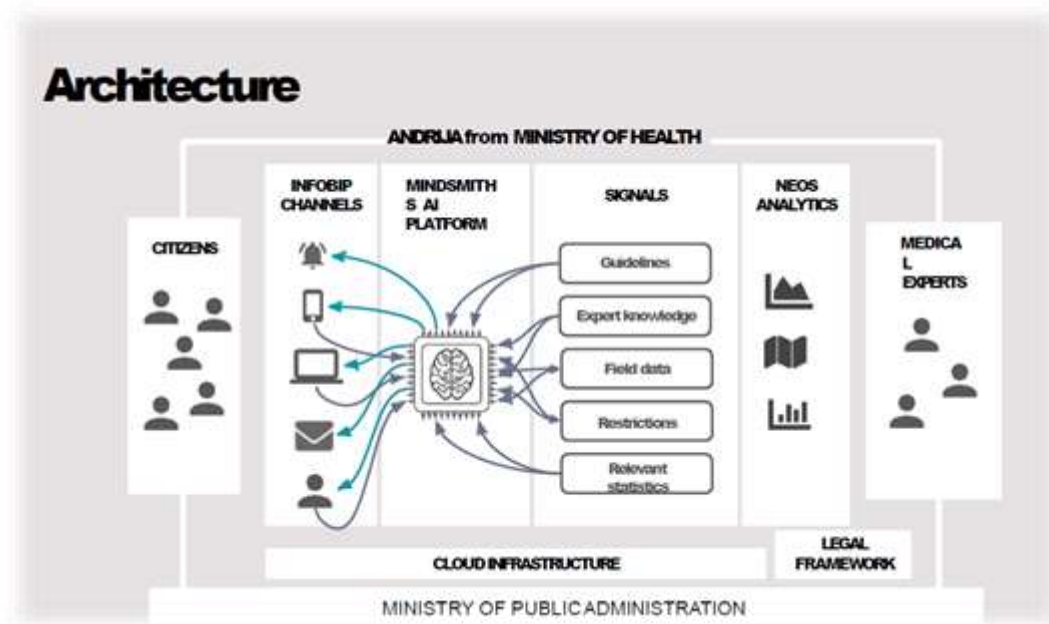
Thanks to the work of Andrija Štampar, Croatia has been setting standards and world initiatives in health for 100 years. Štampar’s public health principles emphasized the need for involving all citizens in public health matters, but came back into the spotlight a hundred years later amidst the coronavirus crisis in Croatia.

This voluntary and anonymous application provides help to the healthcare system as it can process tens of thousands of requests on a daily basis, while doctors can

handle some 50 calls a day. “*Andrija*” serves as a first line of defence, while his main task is to manage panic and connect citizens with relevant health authorities if needed in order to prevent the health system from becoming overburdened.

Within a week since its launch, application “*Andrija*” has managed to reduce the number of calls to medical professionals across all health centres in Croatia by 25%, while 87% of users said that “*Andrija*” is helping them.

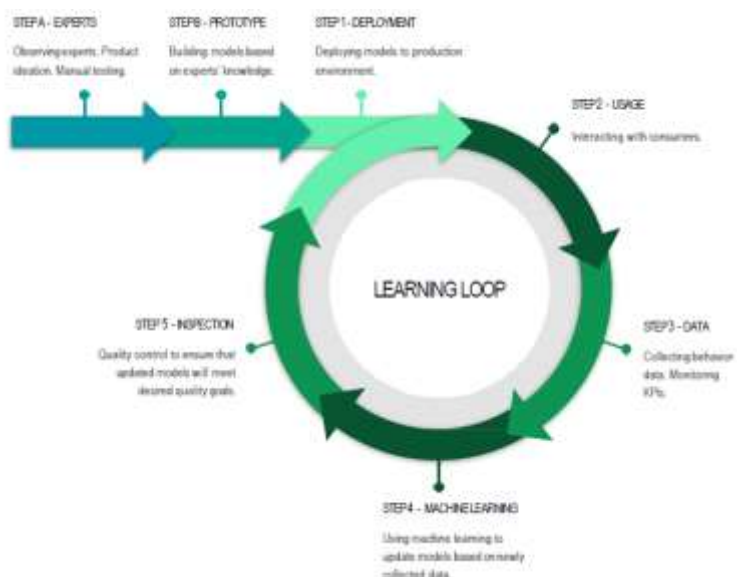
- during peak interest “*Andrija*” was answering up to 80 questions per second
- in the first 24 hours, application was used by more than 50,000 citizens



### Andrija first learns from human experts and then from data.

Mindsmiths methodology ensures that AI products can be built even in situations where there is not enough relevant data to train machine learning algorithms.

Through a process of knowledge elicitation prototype is built based on expert's knowledge. We push the prototype into a production environment and start collecting relevant data. We feed machine learning algorithms with this newly acquired data to update models. This learning loop never stops improving product.



## ❖ “Stop COVID-19” Application, Croatia

The Application is using completely new technologies and means of data processing, with an aim to enhance health protection and raising citizen awareness of an increased risk of infection by COVID-19 disease. It has been implemented by the Ministry according to the Decision of the Government of Croatia on digital platform and interoperability implementation for the purpose of monitoring and repressing infectious diseases, from March 19, 2020.

The Application is available on the following platforms: “Google Play Store” for Android devices and “App Store” for Apple devices. The Application installation and usage is completely voluntary. Users independently decide on downloading the Application to their mobile devices, how they will use it and when they will delete the Application from their mobile devices.

The Application was launched at July 27th, 2020, and in the first month of usage it has been downloaded by approx. 50 thousand citizens of Croatia. All information on application usage is available (in Croatian) at Koronavirus.hr, the Official government website for accurate and verified information on Coronavirus: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/stop-covid-19-723/723>.

The Application purpose is notifying the Application user that his Application has been in an epidemiologically relevant contact with the Application of the person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive and to allow the person confirmed to be COVID-19 positive to notify other Application users about the possible infection by COVID-19 disease.

The key advantages of the Application are: (1) ease of use because the Application requires minimal user activity; (2) the validity of Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) technology, which is based on the technology within the operating systems issued by Google and Apple to support the fight against COVID-19 disease; (3) collecting a minimum set of data, where personal data of other users are not collected, especially not data on the movement of users; (4) the data access, i.e. the list of anonymous keys of COVID-19 positive users of the Application, is allowed only to national health authorities.

Application source code (for Android and iOS) has been freely published on GitHub: <https://github.com/Stop-COVID-19-Croatia>

The risks usually associated with the use of mobile technologies, on which the Application is based, are manifested through possible non-transparency in the use of features that may allow intrusion into the private life of users as well as through possible misuse of the system. The authors of the Application applied the principles of privacy by design and privacy by default in such a way as to preserve the privacy of users, thus neutralizing these risks and minimizing them.

The Application is fully compliant with the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/518 of 8 April 2020 on a common Union toolbox for the use of technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis, in particular concerning mobile applications and the use of anonymized mobility data.

The Application has been implemented according to the Common EU Toolbox for Member States “Mobile applications to support contact tracing in the EU’s fight against COVID-19”, version 1.0, from April 15, 2020, published by e-Health Network of the European Commission. The basic principles for the Application are that it is voluntary, approved by the national health authority, privacy-preserving and dismantled as soon as there are not any objective reasons for using the Application.

The application is fully compliant with all guidelines and opinions of the European Data Protection Board on the use of location data and the interoperability of tools for monitoring contacts with infected persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data are collected and processed within the Application exclusively by the user’s explicit consent (Article 6, Paragraph 1(a) of EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)). The consent can be withdrawn in any given moment, and by withdrawing the consent the data processing is stopped.

The data processed within the Application are located on the user's mobile device, exclusively on the Application servers in the Republic of Croatia or another EU Member State. Data are not transferred to third countries.

During the Application installation there is an explicit consent needed by the user for Application to use Bluetooth technology and Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services. The user can refuse to activate Bluetooth and “Exposure Notification” services when turning on the Application or even independently turn on and off the usage of these services any time after the Application installation.

The consent withdrawal shall not affect the lawfulness of the data processing that took place prior to the consent withdrawal. In order to withdraw consent and for the Application not to use Bluetooth and the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services, the usage of these services must be disabled in the operating system of the mobile device.

If the user activates Bluetooth and the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services, the Application via Bluetooth will:

- Collect random keys from mobile devices of other users in proximity defined by the epidemiological parameters (such as proximity, distance and duration of the contact, and the date of the contact), which also have the Application installed and activated,
- Disseminate random keys of a user’s mobile device to other users in proximity, which also have the Application installed and activated.

Random keys collected and disseminated are series of random numbers that are generating multiple times during one hour and they are not in any way enabling the identification of the Application user to other Application user. Random keys are stored on the user’s mobile device for a period of 14 days, after which they are deleted.

The Application will not be able to detect the contacts with other devices in proximity if the user has turned off (deactivated) the Google/Apple “Exposure Notification” services. The application is not collecting geolocation data in any moment, nor does it collect any other data that may reveal the user’s identity.

The Application user, only if he/she wishes to do so and only when he/she has been confirmed having COVID-19 disease, can send his/her random keys to the Application server so that they become available to other Application users so that their Applications can calculate exposure risks and notify users. In order for the user to be able to send his keys at all, he must first get a positive laboratory test and inform the competent healthcare professional, i.e. the user's family doctor that he/she has the Application, so that the healthcare professional or the family doctor can generate a one-time verification code via the Application's server. The day and duration of the proximity contact will be shared with server, without the possibility of revealing the identity.

The Application users who have been exposed to the infection, in the way that they have been in proximity contact with a COVID-19 positive person in

accordance with defined epidemiological parameters, will receive a notification from the Application on the date of contact and recommendation on next steps. It is the sole responsibility of the Application user to send their random keys and thus allow their contacts to be notified anonymously by their Applications of possible exposure to COVID-19 disease.

Only the competent healthcare professional, i.e. the user's family doctor, has the access to the one-time verification code, by which the user confirms a positive test for COVID-19 in the Application itself, in the moment that the Application server generates a verification code. After that, the healthcare professional or family doctor no longer has access to the code. All verification codes are stored in the backend server for 14 days, after which they are deleted.

Random keys shared by people diagnosed with COVID-19 are automatically downloaded daily by all users' Applications and forwarded for processing to the Google/Apple service "Exposure Notification" service on the mobile device itself

The user can remove the collected random keys of proximity contacts at any time through the settings of the mobile device operating system. The Ministry has no possibility to delete random keys from the user's mobile device, as well as from mobile devices of other users with whom the user has exchanged random keys.

Use of the Application is possible for all users with a smartphone, regardless of age, because the Application does not determine or verify this in any way. The use of the Application by a minor is recommended to inform the parents or legal representative.

The Application installation and usage does not require user registration nor request or record any personal data, including data such as name and surname, date of birth, mobile phone number or e-mail address of the user. The Application does not collect geolocation user data at any time.

Random keys, in the case of a confirmed infection with COVID-19 and only if the Application user so wishes, leave the user's mobile device, and it is not possible to connect them in any way with the identity of the user. The data collected by the Application is forwarded for processing to the Google/Apple service "Exposure Notification" on the mobile device itself.

The Application server components communicate with the Application through encrypted and secure channels. The data on the server infrastructure is stored in a

database that is implemented as a separate logical unit with enforces security policies of the highest standards.

The Application does not provide health advice nor is it tasked with replacing physicians or other healthcare professionals in the treatment of patients either related to COVID-19 disease or any other illness and infection. Citizens are instructed to contact their family doctor, epidemiologists or other competent healthcare authorities whose contacts are available on the [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr) website, in case they do not understand the instructions or other communication through the Application, or if the system, despite the symptoms which coincide with the symptoms common in the case of coronavirus infection, does not instruct them to report further to health authorities. Citizens are in any case instructed to report to health authorities in case of severe symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pain. Since the task of the Application is not related to diseases and infections other than COVID-19, citizens are instructed to contact the health care authorities in any case of injuries, symptoms of other diseases or infections.

### **❖ Croatian Consular Service - Challenges in the Conditions of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The role of consular services, besides its usual task of providing consular assistance to their own citizens, in emergency situations, especially those related to public health becomes greatly emphasized. The provision of consular assistance implies the protection of the rights and interests of citizens and members of their families, of which the following can be crucial:

- timely provision of relevant information
- assistance in repatriation to the home country

The provision of useful information refers to informing Croatian citizens about travel conditions (eg restrictive measures in force in other countries) or commercial return opportunities as well as providing information on repatriation flights organized by EU Member States or partner countries.

During the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU, the repatriation process included more than 625,000 EU citizens who, through the joint efforts and cooperation of the consular services of the EU Member States and the European External Action Service, were assisted in returning to the EU.

A number of repatriation flights were organized with the launch of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Croatia did not launch this Mechanism) which proved to be a useful tool whose role will be reviewed in the future as part of the analysis of lessons learned in responding to the COVID crisis.

### ❖ **Temporary ban on crossing the borders**

One of the challenges that the Republic of Croatia faced and continues to face is the temporary ban on crossing the borders of the Republic of Croatia for non-essential travel. On 19 March 2020, during the initial phase, a Decision was adopted on the temporary prohibition or restriction of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia in order to protect the population in the Republic of Croatia from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Exceptions applied only to citizens of EU/Schengen area Member States who were returning to their home country, members of their family, and persons with granted permanent or temporary residence in these countries, as well as Croatian citizens travelling to the country where they work and reside. Certain categories of persons were also exempt from the Decision, regardless of their nationality: healthcare professionals, researchers and associates, senior care professionals; those requiring urgent medical treatment; frontier workers; freight carriers and other transport personnel to the extent necessary; diplomats, police officers in the performance of their duties, civil protection services and teams, personnel of international organisations and international military personnel in the performance of their functions; and transit passengers.

Even though this Decision was adopted in accordance with the circumstances, its implementation was challenging due to increased traffic jams on border crossing points, as all passengers had to be familiarised with the measures and instructions issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health in order to ensure that they comply with them during their stay in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.



As we gained more insight into the way that the COVID-19 virus is spread, we gradually expanded the categories of persons who were allowed to cross the border, while at the same time adjusting how we interacted with the persons crossing the border, how we informed them and got their medical history, with a view to facilitating cross-border traffic. Instead of providing data individually to epidemiological staff on border crossing points, we introduced a possibility of providing data beforehand via the following website <https://entercroatia.mup.hr/>. We also introduced separate lanes for persons who provide the required data to the epidemiological service beforehand.

Moreover, it is worth noting that following individual reactions from each EU/Schengen area Member State to the threat of the COVID-19 outbreak, we soon started considering joint criteria for restricting the freedom of movement for non-essential cross-border travel in order to protect public health.

On 16 March 2020, the European Commission delivered its Communication concerning COVID-19, entitled Temporary Restriction on Non-Essential Travel to the EU. It also issued the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, and the Guidelines for free movement of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. On several occasions later on, the Commission communicated assessments of the application of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU. On 30 June 2020, the Council issued its Recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction. Both of these are amended approximately every 15 days. All of these activities have contributed to better harmonisation among Member States as regards the necessary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU/Schengen area.

In the context of the protection of human rights of aliens in the Republic of Croatia during the pandemic, the Ministry of the Interior applies the instruction issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health with regard to COVID-19. When the police interact with illegal migrants and aliens who make an application for international protection, the aliens are checked for COVID-19 symptoms. If the aliens show COVID-19 symptoms, this is reported to the epidemiologist in charge who takes over the case. If the aliens show no symptoms, the police continue to take action, that is, they make decisions regarding return pursuant to the Aliens Act (Official Gazette No 130/11, 74/13, 69/17 and 46/18) or they take note of the international protection applications made by the aliens. If aliens are transported in police vehicles, the vehicles are regularly disinfected and police officers wear

appropriate protective equipment. Reception centres remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have been intensified to provide appropriate care to aliens accommodated at the reception centres in Zagreb and Kutina.

Applicants in self-isolation are accommodated in accordance with the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia. They are provided with explanation as to the purpose of self-isolation and their obligations while it is imposed, with the assistance of an interpreter. They are also provided with three meals a day, and if necessary, medications, hygiene supplies, etc. There is a daily presence of a doctor in reception centres and all international protection applicants are under constant supervision of medical staff. Not a single international protection applicant has contracted the coronavirus so far.

#### **❖ Providing information for citizens during pandemic**

The Republic of Croatia has launched a website <https://entercroatia.mup.hr/> through which persons not covered by the Decision on the temporary prohibition of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia, namely the citizens of EU Member States, Schengen Member States and Schengen Associated States, as well as their family members and third-country nationals who are long-term residents pursuant to Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003 concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents, and persons who are entitled to residence under other EU directives or national law or who are holders of national long-term visas, can announce their arrival prior to coming to a border crossing point by filling in a form and providing the information essential for the epidemiological service to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and take timely response if it is subsequently established that the person shows symptoms indicating to the possible contraction of the disease. Such prior provision of information is not mandatory, but it certainly facilitates border crossing and reduces the waiting time for border checks. A total of 4,418,747 travel announcements were received from foreign travellers through this application from 27 May to 19 August 2020.

Furthermore, considering the fact that there is an increasing number of exemptions from the Decision on the temporary prohibition of the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Croatia which covers certain categories of professions, as well as other reasons for travelling that might be considered pressing, the e-mail address [uzg.covid@mup.hr](mailto:uzg.covid@mup.hr) is now available to all those who have any uncertainties as to whether they can enter the Republic of Croatia, so they can ask questions related to border crossing. Since 10 May 2020 to date, on average, more than 1,000 inquiries have been received on a daily basis and responded to as soon as possible.

Information flyers on conscientious and responsible behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic are available in reception centres for aliens and reception centres for international protection applicants. They were designed by IOM and translated into 26 languages (Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, Bengali, Chinese, Edo, English, Esan-Ishan, French, Fula, Hausa, Igbo, Italian, Kurdish Sorani, Mandinka, Pashto, pidgin English, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Soninke, Spanish, Tigrinya, Urdu, Wolof, and Yoruba). Also available are flyers with the instructions issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health which have been translated into the languages used by aliens. International protection applicants who are accommodated in reception centres in Zagreb and Kutina are under constant medical surveillance.

Moreover, applicants accommodated in reception centres, including those who have been released from detention or those under alternative measures of detention, **are constantly warned about the outbreak of the disease and the measures that need to be taken in order to prevent its further spread.** According to the recommendations issued by the Croatian Institute of Public Health, parts of the reception centre are set up to be used for 14-day quarantine for new applicants who arrive from countries with an increased number of COVID-19 cases. They are supervised by medical staff on a daily basis. In case of any suspicion of COVID-19, they are tested as soon as possible. So far, we have not recorded a single case of COVID-19 among international protection applicants.

Aliens accommodated in reception centres are advised to remain inside, and measures of protection are taken inside the facilities (e.g. floor marking for social distancing, toiletries, medical staff, temperature measuring at the entrance to the restaurant). Face masks are regularly distributed to persons accommodated in reception centres. Likewise, disinfectant dispensers have been placed in the

centres. Moreover, increased efforts have been invested in maintaining high hygienic standards aimed at preserving the health of applicants, but also of the staff working in reception centres.

Continuous availability of medical services to international protection applicants in reception centres has been ensured by the project entitled “Prevention of disease, promotion of health and protection of health, psychological support, access to and assistance in health care for international protection applicants - 5P”, which was co-financed under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the implementation of which started in July 2020. This is of particular importance since it ensures increased availability of health care to applicants and reduces the burden on the health system, which is of essential importance, particularly now, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As regards unaccompanied minors, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy (the former Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy) has adopted guidelines on procedures to be followed for the protection of unaccompanied minors in situations when they are threatened or there is risk of the epidemic.

Having in mind the suspension of classes in schools, the Ministry of the Interior has taken the necessary actions to provide the minor applicants accommodated in reception centres with access to the learning content, in accordance with the instructions issued by the Ministry of Science and Education. Children are provided with daily access to the learning content via the media and they get help with their learning and school tasks, in cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross that has been implementing the project “Social services and psychosocial support for international protection applicants”.

Third-country nationals who were legally staying in the Republic of Croatia and whose stay expired during the pandemic were allowed to remain in the Republic of Croatia and regulate their stay for up to 30 days once the pandemic ends.

As regards “ensuring unhindered enforcement of the right to education of children and youth via digital means and the TV channel”, prior to the outbreak of

the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, the Police Academy developed and launched its own e-education platform in cooperation with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb aimed at providing online classes and professional development for the needs of those within the police system. When the epidemic was declared in the Republic of Croatia and school classes shifted

to online teaching in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Science and Education, the e-education platform ensured smooth continuation of education of the participants of the Adult Education Programme for police officers within the framework of Josip Jović Police School, as well as of all undergraduate and graduate students at the Police College. All teaching programmes at Josip Jović Police School (12 teaching subjects - 66 courses) and the content of the Police College courses (over 150 courses) are available on the e-education platform, including a number of specialist training courses within the framework of lifelong education of police officers. This way, the right to continuous education and professional development was ensured for all beneficiaries of educational programmes provided by the Police Academy. The importance of the e-education platform is best illustrated by comparing the number of the system beneficiaries in April 2019 (22,480) and April 2020 (1,400,846), showing the effective growth of 6,231%.

With regard to “support of victims of domestic violence during enforced isolation as a result of the pandemic”, the General Police Directorate delivered instructions to all police administrations regarding the risks which arise under the measures imposed for combating COVID-19. The instructions particularly emphasized that, even under these exceptional circumstances, the actions taken after receiving reports and information related to children who are exposed to physical or sexual abuse, or other threatening behaviour within their family, and reports of on-going domestic violence, are viewed as a prioritised police response which involves taking emergency measures for preventing further abuse of victims and ensuring their protection.

Aiming to raise the awareness of the public, the citizens, but even the victims themselves on the additional risks of victimisation during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of sexual abuse/exploitation of children and other forms of violence against children and family members, the Ministry of the Interior issued statements encouraging citizens to report any potential child abuse and domestic violence cases through information and communication technologies as well, primarily via the online Red Button.

Likewise, the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre and the Degordian Agency, launched a campaign entitled “Iza vrata” (eng. Behind the door) aimed at raising the awareness of citizens and encouraging them to report any form of domestic violence and violence against children. The campaign is aimed at taking preventive action and protecting

children from violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventive activities take place on

social networks and the media, whereby this modern way of raising awareness is aimed at bringing attention to the issue and risks of child abuse and domestic violence or any other form of threatening behaviour during the health crisis and imposed isolation. The campaign also aims to urge citizens to have courage and for individuals to take personal responsibility for preventing abuse with the aim of ensuring that the system is alerted of such cases in time. Electronic media, radio and TV stations also got involved and transmitted the campaign on its channels.

The campaign was also mentioned by the Croatian Presidency of the European Union (<https://eu2020.hr/Home/OneNews?id=275>) as well as the European Commission

(<https://twitter.com/EUHomeAffairs/status/1252602938146484224>).

The European Crime Prevention Network and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) also expressed their support for the campaign. Europol highlighted the campaign as an example of good practice and published information about it on its Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) website, after which the campaign was picked up by the Slovak Republic. Members of the Lanzarote Committee also shared information on the campaign as an example of good practice.

In addition, as yet another example of good practice, we would like to point out the cooperation among the police, the Croatian Psychological Association, and the Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre who provided education for experts in charge of supporting victims during the COVID-19 pandemic and other crisis situations via digital platforms. The education covered information on the manner, channels and the content of reported suspicion regarding various forms of violence and abuse against children and other vulnerable groups, as well as on the cross-linked response of various sectors in the comprehensive protection and support of victims. Following the education, an online book was also published for experts: “Interconnected: Phone and e-counselling in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences”.

## ❖ Distance learning during COVID-19 crisis

The distance learning was launched following the Croatian Government decision from 13 March 2020, to close all educational institutions, from primary and secondary schools to higher education. It began on 16 March 2020 in Istra County schools and on 18 March 2020 country-wide.

On 11 March 2020, the Ministry of Science and Education (MZO) has published *Guidelines for distance learning for primary and secondary schools* thus preparing activities for organizing distance learning using information-communication technology. All primary and secondary schools established channels of communication by 16 March 2020 and distributed the appropriate equipment to students according to provided instructions.

The Ministry published the document *Recommendations for organizing a students work day in distance teaching and learning* which defined age-appropriate workload to help teachers plan as well as *Guidelines for assessment and grading in a virtual environment* including examples and tools to be used in the virtual environment.

For lower primary students Ministry cooperated with public television, TV channel HRT 3 (School on Channel 3), online classes were available on YouTube and online materials were provided on School for Life website.

The subject content for upper primary and secondary schools also aired on TV (SPTV and RTL2), and could be accessed on the Ministry and School for Life website.

In addition to creating online content for all subjects in the final year of secondary education, the Ministry has also prepared additional video materials to prepare students for compulsory exams at the state matura exam (Croatian and English language and Mathematics).

It was recommended to schools to provide backup and use multiple channels for publishing and sharing information (HRT 3, SPTV, RTL2, YouTube) as well as technical solutions (Teams, Yammer, Google classroom, Google Hangouts, gSuite for Education etc.).

All students were expected to fully participate in all online classes and activities. However, teachers have been instructed to abstain from grading in the first two

weeks of teaching online, focusing instead on monitoring and encouraging students as well as getting used to the limitations of the technology.

In case a student didn't sign in to an online class, the homeroom teacher first contacted the parents to learn of any obstacles, such as lack of access to the appropriate hardware, no Internet access, illness, or lack of skills, and establish if the student needs professional support.

Teachers were encouraged to provide students with continuous feedback by using different methods of evaluation such as learning and evaluation for learning.

The Ministry determined and published schedule for each day and invited teachers to publish their materials so others can use them.

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has launched a portal for online classes. The portal also contains classes for practical subjects, and all vocational teachers are encouraged to develop online classes at home and share them with their colleagues.

### ❖ **Distance learning of national minorities in Croatia**

Education of members of 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.

For the Italian national minority, at the initiative of the Istrian County, distance learning was organized from March 17th on TV Nova from 10:00 to 12:00, via program *Programma didattico in lingua italiana* (Educational program in Italian) which was initially intended for primary school students from 1st to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, from March 30th the offer was extended to the students of classes from the 5th grade. Elementary school up to 4th grade with an effort to cover all subjects, not



exclusively Italian. The content of this TV program is based exclusively on articles made by primary and secondary school teachers in the language and script of the Italian national minority. Gradually, other institutions related to the Italian minority were included, such as the Italian Drama, the Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno (Centre for Historical Research in Rovinj), and the Pula Aquarium. The link of each show is available on web and facebook TV Nova and the portal to Schools for Life.

Also, within the virtual classrooms for Italian mother tongue, a forum was opened where teachers were sharing other materials and links and that part is more related to the Italian language.

Materials and TV reports are entirely designed and made by teachers with the help of digital tools available to them. Advisors of the Education Agency for the Italian national minority coordinated these activities and prepare contributions for daily broadcasts.

Students who attended classes in Czech followed classes on Croatian state television on Croatian language and received instructions from teachers via electronic channels for teaching Czech, Czech language and culture and subjects in Czech. Digital materials with textbooks are in Croatian. Also, part of the classes in the Czech Republic was organized through television and YouTube channels, and in this way students in Croatia got involved and received links from teachers to learn and follow the content and curriculum, and students had access to the magazine *Dětský koutek* in pdf format commonly used in teaching according to model C.

Also, various online groups have been opened for students belonging to the Serbian national minority in cooperation with senior advisors for the Serbian national minority, and by sharing the content (worksheets, films and texts), classes run smoothly, and video materials were produced. Also, publishers in the Republic of Serbia have opened their digital content for free use. Students followed the School on the Third for all subjects, and for the elective subject Serbian language and culture (model C) they received assignments and materials from teachers mostly via Viber (1st-4<sup>th</sup> grade) and Teams (5th-8<sup>th</sup> grade).

In schools where classes are taught in Hungarian and script (model A), distance learning was in Hungarian for all subjects and students were able to follow classes in Croatian via HRT 3 as a supplement to the teaching process. Students could also watch classes on Hungarian television via the Médiaklikk page. The Ministry

of Education in Hungary has provided free access to digital distance learning materials due to the pandemic of virus Covid-19. Teachers who teach according to model C (Hungarian language and culture) also have access to the same educational materials.

For all other national minorities, for students attending Model C, as well as other subjects, teachers prepared teaching units with digital materials, gave instructions and monitored the work of students on a daily basis.

On the official website of the Ministry of Science and Education (<https://mzo.gov.hr/vijesti/nastava-na-daljnu-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.

A bigger challenge required addressing the inclusion of vulnerable groups of students in distance learning such as Roma students. Due to the difficult living conditions on the margins of society, an adapted approach was needed: Roma helpers, whose usual task is to help students in teaching, visited students during distance learning and physically brought them teaching materials.

Teachers used various alternative forms of communication with students and parents and made great efforts to establish communication with parents, in order to constantly encourage them to support their children and enable them to watch classes on TV. Due to the fact that it is difficult for members of the Roma national minority to conduct distance learning due to objective circumstances and the conditions in which families live, different communication channels were used. The Roma Child Support Network, with the support of the Ministry of Science and Education, conducted a survey on the involvement of Roma students in distance learning activities with the aim of detecting difficulties. Furthermore, from a UNICEF donation, 100 tablets and 500 SIM cards for Internet access were distributed.

In order to mitigate the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Independent Sector for National Minorities of the Ministry of Science and Education is planning additional activities for members of the Roma national minority related to learning assistance, procurement of necessary IT equipment for Roma helpers. We are planning to organize activities for children of the Roma national minority with the aim of better preparation for inclusion and further

education, and for primary school students summer education is being held month before the start of the school year. At the beginning of the school year, we are planning to finance the activities of associations whose work is focused on mentoring children and organizing learning and teaching activities.

### ❖ **Distance learning in VET (Vocational Education and Training)**

Distance learning in VET was organized in several levels. *Virtual classrooms* was set up by each school and for each subject. For *general subjects* it was daily episodes on national TV stations. Also, a video lessons was put online on portal skolazazivot.hr;

Regarding VET contents, preparation of digital materials was shaped and run by AVETAE (Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education). It set up in 72 hrs an online portal - <https://nastava.asoo.hr> which was launched on 12th March. Goal was to provide support not replace I-VET and C-VET providers in implementation of distance learning. During that period individual work of all student was completely guided and supported by subject teachers.

The challenge was diverseness of VET (app 3000 VET subjects) so AVETAE collaborate and invited all VET schools to send their digital contents to be published. In addition, in cooperation with chambers and employers association AVETAE asked companies to send their materials. Thanks to all these steps digital contents on online portal (so far app 6300 materials) include video lessons, video/voice over PowerPoint, e courses, webinars, research projects, etc. AVEATE prepared *Recommendations for assessment and grading during distance learning in VET* (with practical examples). Document was drafted based on contribution from app 100 VET teachers.

Biggest impact was on implementation of work base learning (WBL) in all its formats. With the national lockdown, students did not have access to school nor company premises and equipment. Provisional measures were taken by schools through various project assignments, use of ICT (virtual environments, simulations, etc.).

In general we have to conclude that regarding VET distant learning VET students are in a special and more challenging position. The impact on different VET

sectors was not the same and teachers and trainers had a crucial role. They had to rapidly adjust from face-to-face to distance teaching. In this specific period there was a need for strengthening digital literacy. Also, there is an evidence of need for exchange of ideas and resources on a new level and organizing community of practice.

Additionally, we consider it important to note that during the COVID 19 pandemic and the earthquake in the city of Zagreb, the Ministry of Science and Education provided psychological support and counseling for students, teachers and parents.

### ❖ **Special care for vulnerable social groups**

Recognizing the situation related to the COVID-19 epidemic and the need for special care for vulnerable social groups, the Ministry has been in constant cooperation with social welfare centers and service providers in the social welfare system, forwarding to them instructions and recommendations by e-mail from the very beginning of the pandemic.

All instructions and recommendations are also publicly available on the website <https://mdomsp.gov.hr>, and on the official website of the Government of the Republic of Croatia [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr) concerning all information on the Coronavirus. With continuous reminders of all social service providers about the need for regular monitoring and compliance with recommendations published on the websites of the Croatian Institute for Public Health, the Ministry of Health, the Directorate of Civil Protection and the competent regional and local civil protection crisis headquarters, the Ministry publishes updated data and information, as well as preventive and precautionary measures regarding the Coronavirus, and has created a number of recommendations, instructions and Decisions on actions in terms of work organization and provision of social services.

For the purpose of coordinated action, the Ministry has formed a Crisis Headquarters and an e-mail address [korona@mdomsp.hr](mailto:korona@mdomsp.hr) has been created and published, through which a number of questions and answers from the Ministry's domain are communicated on a daily basis. The same e-mail address is used by citizens to address the Ministry.

A special type of assistance to the citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic was organized by the Croatian Psychological Chamber (CPC), which in cooperation with the Croatian Psychological Society (CPS) established a network of crisis psychological counseling telephone lines covering all counties in Croatia.

The network has been established with the aim of alleviating stress reactions, panic and fear in the population, as well as the psychological consequences due to life changes caused by the Coronavirus epidemic and the earthquake that hit Zagreb and the northern counties on 22 March 2020. The first digital assistant Andrija, the official website of the Croatian Institute for Public Health, the City of Zagreb and the websites of other relevant institutions in the fight against Coronavirus also refer to the services of this telephone counselling.

#### **❖ Support to victims of domestic violence during pandemic isolation**

The Ministry issued a statement on acting in a situation of increased risk of domestic violence and abuse and neglect of children due to increased isolation measures to combat the Covid-19 epidemic. Recommendations and information for potential victims on how to behave in situations of suspected violence have been published (<https://mdomsp.gov.hr/vijesti-8/priopcenje-o-postupanju-u-situaciji-pojacanog-rizika-od-nasilja-u-obitelji-i-zlostavljanja-i-zanemarivanja-djece-zbog-pojacanijh-mjera-izolacije-radi-suzbijanja-epidemije-covid-19/12696>). The Ministry sent a public appeal to all citizens, family members, neighbours, friends in protecting potential victims of violence and reporting suspected violence. There are 19 shelters for domestic violence victims in the Republic of Croatia and sufficient quantity of places has been provided. The Ministry provides continuous financial support for the shelters and monitors continuously the operation of shelters and the availability of capacities with the aim of urgent care for victims of domestic violence. Protective masks have been provided to shelters for victims of violence and will continue to be procured as needed. Social welfare centres have formed crisis teams for crisis intervention, which, even in situations where security and life (family violence, abuse and neglect of children) are endangered, report urgently to the field and take all necessary measures in accordance with the powers and rules of the profession. Social welfare centres have provided 24-hour on-call duty to deal with urgent

situations such as domestic violence. Family centres provide counselling and assistance services for victims of domestic violence. Counselling is provided through electronic media and/or telecommunication means (Skype, WhatsApp, Viber, Zoom, etc.) and is conducted by specially trained professionals employed by Family Centres. The Ministry also supports financially the work of counselling centres for victims of domestic violence run by civil society organizations and professional associations. Experts at social care centres carry out on the spot work and perform increased control and monitoring of families at risk. 7 SOS phones in the Republic of Croatia operate 24 hours a day during all 7 days of the week, at which victims can receive all necessary counselling assistance at any time.

### ❖ **Sensitive and marginalized persons**

Social accommodation service for the elderly and infirm, children with developmental difficulties and adults with disabilities is provided for more than 26 thousand users by 868 service providers.

As stated in the introduction, the Ministry is in continuous contact with relevant stakeholders and creates a number of decisions and recommendations aimed at the best possible protection of all users and employees in the social welfare system.

The tightening or easing of measures has so far depended on the epidemiological situation. Thus, in March 2020, all providers of social accommodation services were instructed to suspend the admission of new beneficiaries until further notice, except in urgent situations with the obligatory isolation of the beneficiaries for 14 days.

Due to the more favorable epidemiological situation, in certain periods there was a relaxation of measures, so in the period from May 29 to June 26, the elderly, children with developmental difficulties and people with disabilities, who were provided with accommodation services, were allowed to go out independently, to go to excursions, to visit their families, etc.

Due to the worsening of the epidemiological situation, new instructions were issued with measures of enhanced epidemiological surveillance, including re-banning visits and temporary restriction of going out from the premises where

accommodation is provided, except in medical and justified circumstances, and delivery of food and other necessities by family members / friends was possible only after disinfection or storage for three days.

Aware that being in isolation is a problem for all citizens, especially for the elderly, throughout the period of ban on receiving visits and going out from the premises of service providers, all service providers have been instructed to allow users to make frequent and long calls to their families and friends, to provide the use of video calls or the use of other technologies for remote communication, and to intensify individual work with users and psychosocial support in order to mitigate the consequences of restricted visits to the beneficiaries and to make life easier in the new situation.

At the moment, visits to the beneficiaries are provided in such a way that they take place in the external premises of the provider, i.e. when for objective reasons it is not possible to organize the visit in the external premises of the service provider (for example, immobile beneficiaries), visits are of limited duration and are organized according to a predetermined schedule. Visitors are obliged to wear a mask, disposable robes and disposable socks at all times (this outfit is provided by the visitor) and to adhere to other protective measures.

For the duration of the Coronavirus epidemic, the Homeless Care Plan for the Republic of Croatia and the Homeless Care Plan for Extreme Winter Circumstances for 2019/2020 was applied. A specific organization of public kitchen work, as well as procedures for users of public kitchens, who do not have a place of residence, has been recommended.

When we talk about people with disabilities, it is important to point out that in the Republic of Croatia, the rights in the social welfare system, both entitlement to material and rights to services, have been preserved in full during the pandemic, and the right of caregiver parents to compensation increased from 2,500 HRK (330 €) to 4,000 HRK (528 €) net. Also, the Government of the Republic of Croatia introduced a number of economic measures in order to mitigate the negative impacts of Covid 19 on the economy, but also on other areas of life, as well as to enable the preservation of jobs.

Recognizing the importance and value of numerous volunteer initiatives and activities carried out by the volunteers and their organizations throughout Croatia in the context of the pandemic (and the earthquake that hit Zagreb in March), the Ministry has created a database of volunteer activities which has the purpose of

informing citizens about existing volunteer services and raising awareness of the importance and significance of volunteering. This data base was published on the website in April (<https://mdomsp.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/mladi-i-volonterstvo/volonterstvo-9017/krizno-volontiranje-12730/12730>) and is being updated regularly.