

UN Resolutions A/RES/75/161 and A/RES/77/193 on “Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: gender stereotypes and negative social norms”

Contribution of the Republic of Croatia

Strengthening of laws, policies, regulatory frameworks, and accountability

Croatia is a party to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the Istanbul Convention) whereby Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy has been designated as the coordinating body for the implementation of its provisions.

In 2022 the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted **the National Plan for the Suppression of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment for the period until 2027**, and the corresponding Action Plan for the Suppression of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment, which contain measures in the area of prevention of sexual violence and sexual harassment, in the area protection and support for victims and the field of work with perpetrators of sexual violence and sexual harassment. **The National Plan is based on the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023), the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025), the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child for the period 2021-2024** and other relevant documents of the European Union and national laws relating to the rights of victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment.

In May 2022 the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted **the National Plan for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2022 to 2026** and the Action Plan for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2022 to 2024. The purpose of the National Plan is to further promote the rights of the child and improve the protection of children's rights in Croatia, through the implementation of international and national standards in the field of children's rights and through a comprehensive and integrative approach to children's rights. The National Plan is based on the European Union Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2021-2024, through the objectives and related activities defined by the EU Strategy.

Medium-term development needs and potentials and the goal of the National Plan in improving public policies for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, are defined through five specific objectives: combating discrimination and social exclusion of children; protection of children from all forms of violence; children's participation in decision-making at the local, regional and national levels; systematic support for children in the digital environment; effective and efficient justice in proceedings concerning children.

Also, Croatia amended its legislative framework covering the issues of sexual and domestic violence (**Act on protection against domestic violence, Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Act, Protocols on handling cases of domestic violence, on handling cases of sexual violence, integration/reintegration of victims of human trafficking**), thus ensuring faster and more effective legal response to address the criminal/misdemeanour acts of violence and better protection for victims. Also, by introducing the **special crime of femicide**, i.e. aggravated murder of a female person, into its criminal code, Croatia became one of the

countries of the EU with such legislation that takes into account the previous abuse by the perpetrator, usually a partner or a close person.

Expanding services to support survivors and improving access to justice

In June 2019, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted a new protocol which was updated and harmonized with the new legislation regulating this area and stipulating that procedures related to the domestic violence should be carried out urgently, without delay, respecting the rights of victims and with special sensitivity for women and children, people with disabilities and the elderly as victims of domestic violence.

In Croatia, **shelters for victims of violence are available in all districts**, altogether 25 shelters with the capacity of 379 beds. According to the biweekly collected data, capacity occupancy of these shelters does not exceed 67 %. At the same time, the regional availability of accommodation services for victims of domestic violence and violence against women has been ensured. By the end of 2020, 6 new shelters have been established in counties where they did not exist before. The Ministry of Labour, Pension, Family and Social Policy provides funding for a total of 23 shelters, while other two shelters are funded by the City of Zagreb and directly from the state budget of Croatia. The Ministry monitors the occupancy of the shelter on a biweekly basis with the aim of ensuring the availability of accommodation services to all in need.

Free telephone lines in Croatia:

- line 116 006 – National call centre for victims of crimes and misdemeanours, including victims of violence
- line 116 016 - Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, non-governmental organization to help victims of violence against women
- line 116 000 - Telephone for missing and abused children, which receives calls reporting the disappearance of children and forwards them to the police, offers help and support to persons responsible for a missing child, assists in the investigation.
- line 116 111 - Call centre for children to help children who need care and protection and connects them with services and resources. It gives children the opportunity to express their fears, to talk about problems that directly affect them and to be able to turn to someone in the emergency situations.

The National Plan for fighting violence against women and domestic violence is being developed for the period until 2028, which will include measures aimed at preventing gender-based violence, improving assistance and support services for victims of violence, and improving the effectiveness of the intervention system in relation to perpetrators of violence against women.

Since 2019, the Ministry has also been financially supporting the work of counselling centres for victims of domestic violence, and since 2022 also of the counselling centres for victims of sexual violence.

Investing in long term prevention to transform social norms and behaviours

From November 2020 to November 2023 the Ministry implemented the EU project entitled "Stop Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence - There is No Justification for

Violence", in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and Administration and the Victims and Witnesses Support Association.

The project included:

- *free 24-hour telephone line service* - as of November 25, 2020, the operation of the National Call Centre 116 006 - 24 hours a day, seven days a week (24/7) including weekends, holidays and public holidays is ensured.
- *public awareness campaign #emphathynow - there is no justification for violence*, implementation of expert and public events aimed at sensitizing the public about harmfulness and unacceptability of violence.
- *strengthening the capacity of experts and improving interdepartmental cooperation* in the field of prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence, through training of civil servants to sensitize and act according to the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, as well as training of experts from the social welfare system for the provision of psychosocial treatment to prevent violent behaviour.

Establishing global initiatives and partnerships, including with the private sector, technology providers, women's rights organizations, and feminist technology experts

In the State Budget for 2024 and the budget projections for 2025 and 2026, a new budget activity was foreseen to coordinate the work of state bodies in the work related to prevention of domestic and sexual violence. The State Budget allocates certain financial resources for the shelters and counselling centres for victims of domestic/sexual violence, their housing care, employment of victims, as well as for training of employees working with the violence victims. Furthermore, the state provides funding for preventive programs on the harmfulness and unacceptability of violent behaviour and psychosocial support programs for victims carried out by the civil society organizations, as well as for the implementation of media campaigns aimed at raising public awareness on the rights and needs of the victims.

In addition to the funding from the State Budget, corresponding activities are also financed by the local and regional authorities, who also financially support the operation of shelters and counselling centres for victims of violence.

In order to ensure the prerequisites for the creation and wider application of gender budgeting, the new National Plan contains a measure aimed at encouraging local and regional self-government units to introduce gender budgeting primarily through education programs for county representatives.

Significance of women and girls' rights in digital transformation

Recognizing the potential of information and communications technologies, the special focus here is given on the impact of technological change as an opportunity for women and girls who can become experts in ICT in order to reach their full potential.

Having in mind and respecting that digital transformation is deeply present in our everyday lives, it is important to know that the equal participation of women in shaping digital transformation is more and more significant. Digital transformation provides new opportunities for the **empowerment of women and girls contribution to greater gender equality** especially in the professional world - as ICT experts and innovation forces that society and community need.

Noting with concern that in a real-world ICT industry is still being perceived as a "male industry", so still (too) few girls in high school age decide to continue their educational and professional way in ICT for many reasons: due to insufficient information and lack of awareness, or due to imposed gender stereotypes or cultural discouragement or insufficient promotion of successful women with ICT diploma and their interesting, successful careers.

Also, within the Digital Decade 2030 programme delivered by European Commission in 2022 the digital competences/skills and especially women represent a separate goal and target that is being monitored every year in all member states. According to data from the [Digital Decade Country Report 2023](#), within the goal of **digital skills** and **ICT professionals**, Croatia has weaker results in ICT FEMALE EXPERTS than the last year and comparing to the EU average – **in 2021 we had 20.90%** of women from the total number of experts in the ICT sector, in 2022, **it is only 14.5%** comparing to the EU average of 16.90%). So, we are undoubtedly eager, motivated, and ambitious in improving this without waiting. The path to achieving gender equality is long, but it is our obligation as well as our responsibility.

Croatia, as a modern country with a high digital awareness that strongly supports women's rights initiatives has signed the [European Declaration on Commitment on women in digital](#). This initiative is **primarily focused on raising awareness of the importance of women and precisely speaking in increasing the number of women in STEM and ICT profession**. That means the aim is to have more female experts in ICT industry and to stimulate and motivate more high school age girls to choose the ICT oriented universities as their future educational path.

According to the implementation points of the Declaration, one of the focuses is to raise awareness and encourage high school girls to opt for STEM and ICT professions through various campaigns and events.

The Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society, as the implementation of the Declaration, promotes STEM areas through the mini-educational and information campaign "Women in Digital", "Girls in ICT", and encourages interest among girls in continuing their education in STEM areas, especially in ICT direction. With various lectures of pay phones that are business successful women, we break prejudice and stereotypes, and with inspiring stories we encourage young girls to encourage and choose to continue their education in ICT.

During 2023, we held a **two-day event in Zagreb (7-8 December) "Women in Digital – Girls in ICT"** for all graduates of Zagreb schools a set of short interactive lectures with examples of good practice and established, business-successful pay phones with an ICT degree. The aim of their stories was to present and approximate the diversity of occupations offered by such colleges, and ultimately encourage girls to become better acquainted with the ICT world and accept the challenges it offers them.

In 2022, Central State Office for Digital Society Development signed the Cooperation Agreement on the "Women and Media" project as one of the partners. That agreement is intended to maintain the agreements reached between the Parties on cooperation in the design and functioning of an internet portal aimed at promoting and improving women's rights and increasing the visibility of women in the media. The objective of the Parties' cooperation is the content design of the www.zeneimediji.hr web portal, the content and technical comparison of the portal, as well as cooperation on content production, Furthermore, providing material for content within the scope of the Parties, and the promotion of the portal and other activities within the scope of the Parties' activities.

Recognizing the further need to reinforce efforts regarding the raising the awareness and position of women and girls in digital era, the Croatia has set this topic **within the strategic document as follows:**

In 2022, [the Digital Croatia Strategy 2032](#) (hereinafter: the Strategy) was adopted, which sets out guidelines for achieving the targeted transformation of Croatia towards the green and digital way of life as preconditions for future sustainable economic growth and social development. The Strategy defines the vision of digitalisation of the society, public administration, and economy of the Republic of Croatia, then strategic goals and their key impact indicators, and in order to achieve them priority areas of public policy action are proposed.

As part of the strategic goal of **developed digital competences** for life and work in the digital age, Development of digital skills and digital jobs – Strategic goal: The developed digital competences for life and work in the digital age are set target 5. **Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.** This objective will promote the involvement of women and girls in education and careers in the ICT field and encourage greater representation of women among ICT professionals by actively promoting the importance of their equal participation in the sector and encouraging activities aimed at popularising the employment of more women. The estimated budget is EUR 93 m. The mid-term evaluation of the Strategy is planned in 2027, with the aim of finding progress in achieving the goals set, i.e. finding that possible shortcomings in the implementation of the Strategy, and accordingly, in accordance with the knowledge gained from the evaluation, draft any amendments. Since the Strategy is applied until the end of 2032, the post-implementation evaluation is foreseen for 2033 and will summarise its overall impact, i.e. effectiveness and efficiency of the Strategy during its overall implementation. The evaluation procedure shall be carried out by external or internal experts who are functionally independent from the bodies responsible for drawing up and implementing strategic planning acts and shall be initiated by the head of the body responsible for digitisation by deciding on the start of the evaluation procedure, in accordance with the evaluation plan. The responsible Authority for setting up the evaluation Committee is Central State Office for Digital Society Development, as the state authority in charge for implementation of Declaration. Data and analyses on the implementation and results of the evaluation of the Strategy will be publicly available on Central State Office for Digital Society Development's website.

Also, within the EU program Path to Digital Decade, Croatia delivered and adopted the [National Roadmap for Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030](#) which offers measurements on how to reach the 2030 goal in raising the number ICT experts and especially women - objective 2. measure 2.5. Furthermore, in the National Plan for Gender Equality for the period up to 2027, measure 4.2. is describing activities dedicated to animating and encouraging young women to get their further education and professional paths in ICT fields.

It is necessary to highlight, **the upcoming first OECD Forum on Gender Equality in 2024 dedicated to** promote gender equality amid the green, energy and digital transitions. Discussions will highlight gender-based impacts and possible exacerbation of differences, especially for vulnerable groups. Opportunities, innovative strategies, and policies will be explored, including through development cooperation, to enable women to thrive in the digital age and ensure their equal participation in sustainability efforts.

The Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society has been recognized as a body working on promoting gender equality especially in the part of the ICT direction, and based on the work so far, we have received an invitation to attend this forum. By participating in the Forum, we see as an opportunity to position ourselves in the global environment of OECD

where we see great potential for future cooperation between OECD members and all in order to achieve the goals set.

The Central State Office for Digital Society Development will continue to fully and effectively implement the relevant provisions and activities aimed at achieving goals of the Digital Croatia Strategy, National Roadmap, and further implementation of the **EU Declaration of Commitment on women in digital**.

During the coming year (2024), another set of educational information campaign “**Woman in Digital**”, “Become IT girl yourself” will take place in other regions of Croatia with the aim of breaking the stereotypes about IT as a “male” industry, broadening the horizons and good practices to show that the ICT world is not gender-based and that it is equally open to all young talented and valuable people.

Elements that belong to the competence of the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia are covered below, through direct answers on the following questions:

The Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia published the *National plan for gender equality for the period until 2027 and the Action plan for implementation of the National plan for gender equality for the period until 2024*¹ in 2023. It includes measures in seven policy areas, all of which are further divided to key strategic priorities. The measures of policy area #3 “Create conditions for elimination of gender-based violence” are addressing violence against women and girls through 12 priorities, namely:

1. Establish a system of statistical data surveillance on court cases concerning women as victims of gender-based violence
2. Strengthen the competencies of experts working in the area of protection from violence
3. Raise awareness of the public and victims about the reasons and ways of elimination of all types of gender-based violence
4. Strengthen the expertise and awareness of stakeholders in the judiciary system about gender-based violence
5. Strengthen the expertise and awareness of the judiciary system about sexism and stereotypes
6. Strengthen the expertise and awareness of police officers about gender-based violence
7. Ensure adequate institutional treatment in the cases of sexual violence
8. Analysis of legislative framework of protection from domestic violence and violence against women
9. Revise the restrictive measures within the criminal procedural law
10. Revise the rights of victims of domestic violence and violence against women within the criminal procedural law
11. Revise the descriptions of felonies within the criminal law and misdemeanours within the administrative law, as well as the proposed sanctions
12. Predict the licensing of judicial employees for work on the cases of domestic violence; through amendments of the organisational regulations.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators are defined for each of the priority fields:

1. The number of women who are victims of felonies related to gender related violence

¹ Available at:

<http://ravnopravnost.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//dokumenti/NPRS%202027%20APRS%202024//Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20ravnopravnost%20spolova.%20za%20razdoblje%20do%202027..pdf>.

2. The number of experts working in the area of prevention of and protection from violence against women and domestic violence, who have completed educational programmes and acquired additional competencies; the number of experts involved in the supervision with the aim to increase their competencies
3. The number of reports of domestic violence misdemeanours; the number of reports of domestic violence felonies; the number of victims' calls to the National Call Center
4. The number of state attorneys, their deputies, and advisors in judicial bodies educated in gender-based violence; the number of judges educated in gender-based violence; the number of training programmes for the judges on gender sensitive interpretation of UN's *1951 Refugee Convention*
5. The number of state attorneys, their deputies, and advisors in judicial bodies educated in sexism and stereotypes; the number of judges educated in sexism and stereotypes
6. The number of participants of police school educated in gender-based violence; the number of students of the Police Academy educated in gender-based violence; the number of police officers educated in gender-based violence within their specialisation and expert training
7. Creation of the new *Protocol on the Procedure in Cases of Sexual Violence*
8. Analysis and conclusions about the necessary changes and amendments of legislative framework
9. Suggested changes and amendments to the *Code of Criminal Procedure*, related to precautionary measures
10. Suggested changes and amendments to the *Code of Criminal Procedure*, related to precautionary measures, and the rights of victims of violence against women and domestic violence
11. Suggested changes and amendments to the *Criminal Law* and *Act on Protection against Domestic Violence*
12. Suggested changes and amendments to the *Law on Courts* and the *Act on the Public Prosecutor's Office*.

The budget allocated to these measures totals to an amount of € 470,172.00. The implementation of these measures requires a policy mix which is a combination of: statistics on court cases, education of legal and police experts, raising awareness of the public and victims/survivors of gender-based violence, elimination of sexism and stereotypes, and an analysis of legislation and revision of restrictive measures, felonies and misdemeanours.

Lessons learned from the previous cycle have shown that a systematic training of judges and other legal personnel is necessary, along with the changes of judiciary system which will make it more efficient. As for the barriers, it is possible that the stereotypes rooted deep in Croatian society will present an obstacle to implementation of this policy. Another obstacle is the so-called "glass ceiling", and apart from this, there is always room for improvement in the financial field, since the measures often have to be implemented with limited resources.

Q2. Impacts of technological change on all forms of violence against women and girls in online-offline spaces including gaps, trends, and challenges.

In the *National plan for gender equality for the period until 2027 and the Action plan for implementation of the National plan for gender equality for the period until 2024* published by the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia in 2023, one of the seven policy areas deals with advancing the position of women and girls in digital fields. The measures of policy area #4 "Increase sensibility of all the levels of the education system to the matters of

gender equality and non-stereotypical selections of education programmes on all levels” are addressing women and girls in digital world through two priorities, namely:

1. Motivate and encourage the students to select the future educational path and professional orientation unrelated to the gender stereotypes
2. Implement the *Declaration of dedication to the matters of women in the digital world*.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators are defined for each of the priority fields:

1. Percentage of girls enrolled in industrial and craft schools compared to the overall number of girls in high school (16.5% 2023, 21% 2024, 25% 2027); percentage of women enrolled to higher ICT education institutions compared to the overall number of women enrolled in tertiary education (1.8% 2023, 2.1% 2024, 2.5% 2027); the number of teachers in preschools, primary schools, and high schools educated in gender equality (25% increase)
2. The number of participants at events organised with the purpose of promotion of the Declaration of dedication to the matters of women in the digital world (2023 and 2024); the number of media publications about representation of women in the digital world.

The budget allocated to these measures totals to an amount of € 57,387.00. The implementation of these measures requires a policy mix which is a combination of: combating stereotypes and encouraging inclusion of women in the areas of digital work.

The Republic of Croatia signed the *Declaration on dedication to the matters of women in the digital world*, by which it undertook, through the measures proposed, with the aim to encourage the active and important role of women in the digital society and to contribute to the achievement of gender equality in the field of IT through cooperation with the public and private sectors, the scientific community, civil society and the media.

The lessons learned from the previous cycle have shown that it is necessary to invest additional efforts into activities aimed at inclusion of women and girls in education in STEM areas, and men and boys in care-giving areas. Possible barriers may include stereotypes and prejudices against women in IT and STEM, but with well-prepared experts, this measure should be easily fulfilled.

Q3. Measures taken to address the impact of technological change on VAWG, in the following areas:

- a) **Generating data and research**
- b) **Strengthening the laws, policies, regulatory frameworks, and accountability**
- c) **Expanding services to support survivors and improving access to justice**
- d) **Investing in long term prevention to transform social norms and behaviours**
- e) **Investing in innovation and technology to create safe online spaces, prevention, reporting and protection mechanisms**
- f) **Establishing global initiatives and partnerships, including with private sector, technology providers, women's rights organizations, and feminist technology experts.**

The Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia covers the areas mentioned under c) *Expanding services to support survivors and improving access to justice*, which were mentioned earlier, in the reply to Q1 (points 1-3).

Furthermore, the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia is responsible for the areas mentioned under d) *Investing in long term prevention to transform social norms and*

behaviours, which is covered in the *National plan for gender equality for the period until 2027 and the Action plan for implementation of the National plan for gender equality for the period until 2024* within the measures of the policy area #1: “Increase public awareness on gender equality and multiple discrimination”. It consists of five measures:

1. Organise public events with the aim to increase knowledge and awareness on gender equality
2. Systematically combat sexism and stereotypes in the media; improve the position of women in rural areas; advance the position of women in the labour market
3. Advance the reproductive care;
4. Advance the position of women in rural areas
5. Increase awareness of police employees on methods of struggle against discrimination.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators are defined for each of the priority fields:

1. Percentage of informants who are not interested in matters of gender equality (17% 2023, 15% 2024, 10% 2027); public perception that the state is efficient in combating all forms of discrimination (2% 2023, 5% 2024, 8% 2027)
2. The number of media companies collaborating on the creation of Guidelines for gender sensitive media reporting
3. The number of gynaecological teams (a 5% increase is expected)
4. The number of women who are owners of family farms (30%) is expected to increase after a dozen workshops
5. The number of police officers who have completed the course “Basic rights in the work of border police” and the percentage of final test grades; the number of police officers who are educated in the area of “International protection” and “International legal standards of protection of asylum seekers and refugees”.

The budget allocated to these measures totals to an amount of € 752,120.00. The implementation of these measures requires a policy mix which is a combination of: raising awareness in the public and among police officers and combating stereotypes, reproductive and medical care, improvement of life conditions in rural areas. Each national plan for gender equality builds on the experiences of the previous one, thus each new iteration is an expansion of past experiences. Greater attention has been given to the intersectionality.