

“Zagreb leads, the country follows”?

**Evaluation of City of Zagreb’s Integration Measures
(EU UNITES)**

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SUMMARY

Based on the public procurement offer and purchase order of the City of Zagreb client no. 2023-18537, the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMIN) conducted an external evaluation of the integration measures implemented by the City of Zagreb, for the UNITES EU project. The main aim of the study was to evaluate the implementation of integration measures of the City of Zagreb: 1) Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022; 2) Humanitarian station for persons on the move in the centre of Zagreb; and 3) Capacities for collective accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine provided by the City of Zagreb.

The participatory research design was employed including all relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries of analysed integration measures. The study was conducted in the period from December 2023 to April 2024 and it included desk research, i.e., the analysis of documentation and reports on the implementation of individual measures and their indicators, and qualitative research, i.e., focus groups and semi-structured interviews with 30 participants divided into two subsamples. The first subsample included 12 representatives of 10 civil society organisations (CSO). They were identified as the most relevant associates in integration measures implementation and as a proxy for unreachable target group of persons on the move (beneficiaries of humanitarian station) and local residents. The second subsample included end users of integration measures – beneficiaries of international protection (8 + 2 international students) and beneficiaries of temporary protection (8). The research participants (beneficiaries of integration measures) were reimbursed for participation with 40€ gift vouchers from the national convenient store. The gender composition of subsamples is as follows: 9 females and 3 males representing CSOs, 4 females and 6 males representing international protection beneficiaries, and 8 females representing temporary protection beneficiaries. In total 2 focus groups (one per subsample) and 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Themes covered by interview protocols included experiences of collaboration with the City of Zagreb, advantages and shortcomings of the implemented measures, experiences and challenges of integration, recommendations, and emergencies. Qualitative thematic analysis, using MAXQDA software, was employed with the aim of identifying main themes and tendencies (patterns) in research participants' answers. The analytical scheme for coding transcripts combined deductive and inductive approaches. Representatives of CSOs and beneficiaries of integration measures have been included in all stages of the evaluation study. Representatives of CSOs acted as contributors to focus groups and interview protocol development, informants (about their CSO activities, but also about

migrants in transit we were unable to reach, and the local community), contacts with beneficiaries, mediators, and contributors to the final report (providing internal reports). The beneficiaries of integration measures acted as contributors to protocol development, informants, contacts with other beneficiaries, mediators (in focus groups), and contributors to the final report.

The Action Plan (adopted in January 2022) is the first document that provides guidelines for comprehensive work on the integration of asylum seekers and persons who have been granted international protection and who reside in the City of Zagreb. The effects of its implementation have been evaluated by representatives of CSOs and beneficiaries of international protection (IPB). From the CSO perspective, the main positive aspects are good communication with the City of Zagreb and its respect for the expertise of other organisations, the possibility of collaboration between different CSOs in implementing measures due to insufficient individually allocated funds, and the possibility of negotiations regarding funds and their purpose. Positive aspects also included the benefits for the persons granted international protection, choice of location for sensibilisation activities, and the feedback from the local community and institutions. Negative aspects assessed by the CSO representatives included the lack of knowledge about migration on the part of the City of Zagreb, difficult communication as a result of a lack of organisation (when organising specific events), limited funds and limited hourly rates, unrealistic circumstances for the implementation of certain measures and insufficient involvement of the local population. The shortcomings of the implementation of this Action Plan have been addressed and corrected in the newly adopted Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024. From the beneficiaries' perspective, they are aware of their rights and integration measures, but do not relate them to the Action Plan itself. They have been using most of the measures offered by both Action Plans: scholarships/grants for pupils and students, involvement in a Coordination team for integration, social welfare support and, most of all, sensibilisation activities. These activities were identified as a source of income for some of the IPBs, as necessary activities but only possible in cooperation with different organisations, as positive but insufficient, and not reaching the local community to the full extent (if at all).

The humanitarian station for persons on the move in the centre of Zagreb was open for 66 days (from November 22, 2022, to January 26, 2023) and accommodated a total of 3,493 persons in transit (3,475 men, 11 women and 7 minors). The shelter was composed of two 30 m² prefabricated tents which have been set up in the fenced space, were heated and had tables and benches for rest, as well as electrical power sockets for charging

mobile phones. In addition to tents, people in transit were also offered a heated sanitary container in which basic physiological needs could be met, and it was also possible to shower with hot water, etc. Cooked meals, bottled drinking water, shower towels and basic hygiene items were distributed daily. The foremost advantage of the humanitarian station recognised by the representatives of CSOs was the cooperation of various civil society organisations and good communication of all involved stakeholders, including the positive response of the city authorities and the general support of the City of Zagreb. Advantages for station users mostly included the warm welcome and opportunity to rest, to get cleaned and to have a meal, resulting in their gratitude, and not insisting on the possession of documents by the station staff. Negative aspects identified from the CSO perspective included the limitation of the organisational capacities of CSOs, inadequate (or non-existent) support from the state, different (discriminatory) approach of the state (in comparison to displaced persons from Ukraine); inertia of city and state companies; inefficiency of city companies; inadequate space for the station and insufficient finances. Negative aspects estimated for the users of the humanitarian station included the inability to stay overnight, insufficient advertising of the station and the limitation of available health care to emergencies. Police presence was estimated as both positive (for the safety of volunteers and employees, and preventing potential conflicts with the local community) and negative (causing distrust of potential users).

Evaluation of capacities for collective accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine included two locations provided by the City of Zagreb: Motel Plitvice and Grad mladih. Motel Plitvice in Zagreb, which was subsequently converted into collective accommodation, was mobilised on February 26, 2022, initially as a reception centre. Collective accommodation at Motel Plitvice was suspended at the end of 2023, and most of the 140 users were relocated elsewhere. The Grad mladih, initially accommodating 45 people in 3 pavilions, currently accommodates around 50 persons in 5 pavilions. The identified advantages of accommodation in Motel Plitvice are a warm welcome and good organisation of reception of displaced persons from Ukraine. Also, users positively estimated the provision of safe and secure place for persons traumatised and stressed by the war, availability of psychological support and medical teams. Negative aspects referred to the inappropriate location of Motel Plitvice in terms of great distance from the city, poor local public transport connectivity, and proximity of the highway and airport. No privacy and later closure of facilities have also been assessed as negative. Grad mladih was positively evaluated for its favourable location and green surrounding, helpful staff and management, availability of a medical team and overall benefits for persons living in the Ukrainian community. Negative aspects mostly pertain to sharing living space with

strangers, and insecurity and fear about possible new roommates. Cessation of doctor's availability and restaurant working hours have also been identified as the source of discontent. Different type of served food that Ukrainians are not used to was evaluated negatively leading to possible gastrointestinal problems. Finally, separation from the locals affected slower learning of the Croatian language because there is no need to use Croatian among other Ukrainians, especially for elderly people.

In conclusion, the role of the City of Zagreb is overall positively evaluated by the CSO representatives, however, expectations and recommendations are that it should do even more. CSOs feel as recognised and important actors (and partners) in all situations related to migration, however, some improvements should be introduced at the organisational level. The initiative and efforts of the City of Zagreb are assessed as highly important due to the absence of national-level plans and activities. However, CSOs stress the large discrepancy between the implementation of integration measures for persons granted temporary protection and persons granted international protection (and other migrants) in favour of persons granted temporary protection, reflected also on a local level. Response in crisis situations (both related to increased transit migration and reception of persons from Ukraine) is evaluated as positive but lacking management capacity at the level of engaging municipal companies. Further on, to the persons granted international protection, the role of the City of Zagreb is practically invisible. The Action Plans are perceived as any other document. The pace of the implementation of integration measures is estimated as too slow, however, the City is perceived as the bridge connecting local and national levels of integration measures implementation. According to persons granted international protection, the City of Zagreb should serve as an information platform employing different modes of information dissemination (website/brochure/one-stop-shop) and especially in addressing the major priorities related to the lack of Croatian language courses, access to healthcare, and social integration, all being transferable to other categories of migrants. Finally, the persons displaced from Ukraine (with the experience of) living in collective accommodation feel more protected than people who are in private housing because they do not have to worry about most of the things necessary for everyday life (accommodation, food, household repairs), and due to constant social contacts, they feel less lonely and isolated. Negative aspects of collective accommodation are related to the increased use of Ukrainian language and lower interest and need for learning Croatian language (and socialising with Croats), especially in the case of the elderly. Future focus should be placed on the empowerment of collective accommodation residents to become more independent.

Despite its limitations, the participatory design of the evaluation study, i.e. the inclusion of the CSO representatives involved directly in the implementation of integration measures and the beneficiaries of integration measures in the entire process of evaluation, and in-depth insight into their views on the success or failure of the available integration mechanisms, contributes to a concrete understanding of their experiences and needs and, ultimately, to a more adequate implementation of the results and recommendations of this study.

INTRODUCTION

For the last ten years, Croatia has been going through a migration transition marked by increased emigration, but also increased immigration, which resulted in a positive migration balance in 2022, i.e. a higher number of immigrants (57,972) compared to emigrants (46,287) (DZS, 2023). Croatian citizens continue to (re)immigrate to Croatia to a large extent, but this number is declining. Citizens of Asian countries (20.5%), citizens of EU member states (9%) or other European countries (primarily Ukraine) (50%) stand out among the immigrants in a more significant share. Among these groups of migrants, we find labour migrants, but also forced migrants (mainly people displaced from Ukraine) who, according to the statistics provided, were granted 19,440 temporary protection statuses in Croatia in 2022 (HPC, 2023). Another category of migrants coming to Croatia are persons seeking international protection. Since 2003, Croatia has been developing a legislative and institutional framework for the recognition of international protection. Since the beginning of the implementation of this system, in the period from 2004 to 2023, a total of 1,091 statuses of international or subsidiary protection have been approved.¹ It is estimated that there are currently around a third of persons granted international protection (asylum) in Croatia (cf. Gregurović, 2023). In addition, in the last two years, there has been a significant increase in requests for international protection, which is attributed to the mechanism for regulating illegal border crossings (in 2022, 50,624 illegal crossings were recorded, which is an increase of 191% compared to 2021).² The issuance of documents regulating transit through Croatia (the so-called seven-day paper), i.e. the resolution to voluntarily leave the European Economic Area, has also increased. Although

¹ Data provided by the Ministry of Interior, available at: <https://mup.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-16/statistika-228/statistika-trazitelji-medjunarodne-zastite/283234>

² Data provided by the Ministry of Interior, available at: <https://mup.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-16/statistika-228/statistika-mup-a-i-bilteni-o-sigurnosti-cestovnog-prometa/283233>

no statistical data are currently available, a significant number of migrants in transit passed through Zagreb in 2022 and 2023.

The mechanisms of integration of different groups of migrants in Croatia are regulated by the Act on Aliens (*Official Gazette*, 133/20, 114/22, 151/22) and the Act on International and Temporary Protection (*Official Gazette*, 70/15, 127/17, 33/23). The Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals 2017-2019, developed at the national level, is no longer in force, nor has a new one been adopted. The City of Zagreb fills this gap with its own Action Plan for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022, even though, as the local self-government body with the most experience in integration, it recognised persons granted international protection as one of the target groups in Social plan of the City of Zagreb 2014-2020. (*Official Gazette of the City of Zagreb*, 17/14, 23/16 and 4/21). For persons displaced from Ukraine after the activation of the Directive on Temporary Protection, the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022 is also applied. The City of Zagreb has been involved in various ways of providing support to different (vulnerable) groups of migrants and provided funds for the implementation of the integration measures considered in this evaluation study.

Based on the public procurement offer and purchase order of the City of Zagreb client no. 2023-18537, the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMIN) conducted an external evaluation of the integration measures implemented by the City of Zagreb, for the needs of the EU UNITES project.

STUDY AIMS

The main aim of this research was to evaluate the integration measures of asylum seekers, persons granted international protection, persons granted temporary protection and persons in transit implemented by the City of Zagreb, which specifically refer to:

- 1) Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022,
- 2) Humanitarian station for persons on the move in the centre of Zagreb,
- 3) Capacities for collective accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine provided by the City of Zagreb.

METHODS

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH DESIGN

The research project was designed to bring together different stakeholders and users of the evaluated integration measures. Therefore, participatory research design (community-based participatory research, co-design) was applied. It is considered an effective research paradigm that tries to "make research a more inclusive and democratic process by fostering the development of partnerships between communities and academics to address community-relevant research priorities" (Flicker et al., 2007: 478). Therefore, the preparations for the implementation of qualitative research included the establishment of a project team, where the client's request was to include asylum seekers, persons granted international protection, persons granted temporary protection and persons in transit in the research in such a way that they are included in the entire evaluation process (from the very creation of the questions/protocols, through the implementation of the research, to the writing of the evaluation report). Along with scientists from the Institute, Dr Margareta Gregurović (project leader), Dr Snježana Gregurović and Dr Simona Kuti (collaborators on the project), as collaborators on the project are also included Mr Salam Ibrahim Kadhim Al-Nidawi, who has many years of experience as a person granted international protection in Croatia and is employed as a cultural mediator and translator at the Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma in Zagreb, Ms Natalija Lumezi, a cultural mediator in the Jesuit Refugee Service and Mr Hüseyin Semih Adigüzel, also with significant experience in the implementation of integration measures for persons granted international protection and active participation in finding solutions and implementation of individual measures.

In addition to persons granted international protection and former asylum seekers and persons granted temporary protection who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the measures defined in the Action Plan from 2022, representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs)

were included as additional sources of information and assessment as they were partners in the implementation of these measures or volunteers in some cases, e.g. in the context of the establishment of a humanitarian station for migrants in transit. In addition, representatives of civil society organisations were also a source of information about the measures targeting migrants in transit, and about possible attitudes about the implemented measures among the local population, since the evaluation capacities did not enable a wider quantitative survey of public opinion, and migrants in transit who stayed at the humanitarian station in Zagreb no longer reside on the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

CSO representatives and end users of integration measures were included in all phases of the evaluation study: CSO representatives acted as collaborators in the development of protocols for conducting interviews and focus groups, informants (on CSO activities, migrants in transit and attitudes of local communities), contacts with users of integration measures, mediators and collaborators in the creation of the final report (by providing insight into their internal reports). The beneficiaries of the integration measures acted as collaborators in the development of the protocols, informants, contacts with other potential participants in the research, mediators (in focus groups) and collaborators in the creation of the final report.

The limitations of the research are related to the narrow time frame for conducting the evaluation, which influenced the deviation from the initial plan of the study (period of New Year's holidays, impossibility of gathering a large number of participants in focus groups). Also, the application of participatory research design has certain ethical implications due to the multiple roles of some of the participants leading to possible violation of the principle of anonymity, as well as the effect on the balance in the presentation of results between the objectivity of the scientific approach and stigmatisation from the position of research participants belonging to vulnerable groups (Flicker et al., 2007).

PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Along with the establishment of the project team, the initial phase of the evaluation included desk research, i.e. the analysis of documentation and reports on the implementation of individual measures and their indicators, which relate to all three analysed groups of measures: Action Plan from 2022, humanitarian station and capacities for collective accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine. The results of this analysis were used to detect potential participants in the qualitative research and as one of the foundations for creating protocols for focus groups and interviews.

The qualitative research brought together different stakeholders and users of the evaluated integration measures. In addition to persons granted international protection and former asylum seekers, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the measures defined in the Action Plan from 2022, representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) that were partners in the implementation of these measures or who participated as volunteers were included as an additional source of information and assessment, e.g. in the context of the establishment of a humanitarian station for migrants in transit. In addition, representatives of civil society organisations were also a source of information about the measures intended for migrants in transit and about attitudes on the implemented measures among the local population.

In addition to the initially planned focus groups, qualitative research was also conducted using the method of semi-structured interviews. Two protocols have been prepared, one intended for representatives of CSOs and one for beneficiaries of integration measures. Within each group, the same protocol was used in focus groups and interviews to ensure the comparability of results. The topics included in the protocols related to experiences of cooperation with the City of Zagreb, advantages and disadvantages of implemented measures, experiences and challenges of integration, emergencies and their adequate addressing, and recommendations for further actions.

Since this is a research in which data was collected in personal contact with the participants, it was necessary to adhere to specific and precise procedures by the rules of ethical conduct in research with people, which are specified in various ethical codes, including the Code of Ethics of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies.

Participants in interviews and focus groups with representatives of civil society organisations were not completely anonymous in some cases due to the specificity of their function. However, this information was clearly presented to the participants, and the confidentiality of the data was additionally protected by reporting at the group level. Information about the identity of the participants is available only to researchers. The data of persons granted international and temporary protection are fully protected: transcripts of focus groups and interviews are completely anonymised, with a careful presentation of sociodemographic data that does not allow the identification of a person.

Before conducting each interview and focus group, the voluntariness of participation was verified and the interlocutors were once again informed in detail about the purpose and aims of the research. It was also clearly emphasised that their participation in the research is completely voluntary and anonymous, and that they can withdraw from the research at any time. Their continued participation in the focus group or interview was considered as a consent to participate in the research. As an incentive or reimbursement for research participation, participants with the status of international or temporary protection were given 40€ gift vouchers from the national convenient store.

Research information prepared in Croatian was translated to English and Ukrainian. Researchers communicated with persons granted international and temporary protection in Croatian or in English, and in some cases with the help of a mediator/translator. To preserve the relationship of confidentiality with the researchers, and because asylum seekers and persons under temporary protection are a particularly sensitive group of participants, they were not asked to sign an informed consent document, because asking for a signature can cause suspicion and unwillingness to further cooperation, as demonstrated in research with other vulnerable groups (e.g. Wiles et al. 2005; Čorkalo Biruški, 2014). In this regard, the European Commission warns of special caution in its Guidelines for research with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.³

Based on a detailed research design, the Ethics Committee of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies gave a positive review of the ethical aspects of the implementation of

³ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/guide_research-refugees-migrants_en.pdf

the project "Evaluation of the Integration Measures of the City of Zagreb" and approved its implementation.

The field research was conducted from February 15 to March 31, 2024, with a total of 30 participants in focus groups and interviews (12 representatives of CSOs and 18 beneficiaries of integration measures). Representatives of some organisations, although they were not involved in the actual implementation of the analysed measures, were included as an indirect source of data for the assessment of the end users of the measures – persons granted international protection, persons granted temporary protection and migrants in transit. Likewise, representatives of some organisations ensured contact with persons under international or temporary protection, and helped to organise further focus groups and interviews.

In total, two focus groups (one per subsample) and 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, two interviews were conducted by telephone and two online (via Google Meet and Zoom platforms). Most of the interviews with beneficiaries of international and temporary protection were conducted in Croatian, sometimes with the intervention of mediators or with the help of English language. Three interviews were conducted in English and one in Russian with the help of a translator.

At the same time as the interviews and focus groups were conducted, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

PARTICIPANTS

One focus group and six semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of civil society organisations (CSO). A total of 12 participants presented the experiences of 10 organisations. Ten women and three men participated. Representatives of CSOs played a significant role in the research as so-called "gatekeepers" (cf. Bloor and Wood, 2006) in securing access to the users of integration measures since the activities of the surveyed organisations are aimed precisely at these categories of users. They provided valuable contacts for further research, as well as information for possible adaptation of the research approach and questions.

One focus group and 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the users of integration measures. Beneficiaries of integration measures are divided into two groups: persons granted international protection (with asylum seeker experience) and persons granted temporary protection. Eight persons with approved international protection participated in the research, of which four were female and four were male. Two international students are also included in this group, at the suggestion of beneficiaries of international protection. The participants in the research came from different Middle Eastern and African countries and came to Croatia in different periods, but before the Action Plan for 2022 came into force. The beneficiaries of temporary protection (all female) included in the research came from different Ukrainian cities, and the prerequisite for their participation in the research was that they were placed (or still are) in one of the evaluated collective accommodations made available by the City of Zagreb. At the suggestion of one of the CSO representatives, a user of one of the collective accommodations in Velika Gorica was also interviewed to enable a comparison with Zagreb.

The selection of interlocutors in both subsamples was in some cases through personal acquaintances of the researchers, other collaborators on the project or official contacts with organisations. The researchers also independently searched for other contacts, i.e. potential interlocutors, unrelated to representatives of relevant organisations, to avoid potential sampling bias. Applied sampling in the further stages of the research combined the snowball method with the principle of maximum variation (cf. Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this way, an attempt was made to achieve representation of the different experiences of the interlocutors according to gender, age, and country of origin (in the case of persons granted international protection), considering that the goal of qualitative research is not to represent the distribution of certain characteristics in the population, but to determine the typical characteristics of the research subject, to ensure the transferability of claims (Merkens, 2004: 167).

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Data collected through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, i.e. transcripts of conducted interviews, were analysed with the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software package. The approach to qualitative data analysis combined the recommendations from Dey (1993) and Miles and Huberman (1994) to identify the main themes and tendencies (patterns) in the answers of the interlocutors.

An analytical scheme was developed for coding the transcripts, which combined deductive and inductive approaches. A deductive approach was used in the first stages of the analysis, and an inductive one in the later stages to a greater extent – for example, when breaking down the codes from several assigned text segments into sub-codes by the observed main themes or tendencies in the responses of the interlocutors. The size of the text segments assigned to individual codes varied from a few sentences to entire paragraphs, depending on the content. Codes were mostly assigned sequentially, not selectively (Dey, 1993: 127). Several codes were assigned to a certain text segment if it was in line with the content of the text. Such a coding strategy ensured the verifiability of coding consistency because, given the larger number of assigned codes, a single text segment appeared more than once in the analysis. This also enabled a greater degree of familiarity with the collected empirical material and facilitated its interpretation.

When analysing text segments included in individual analytical codes (and broader categories), MAXQDA displays the selected segments in the original context of the transcript, which further facilitates interpretation. During the analysis of text segments, corroborating and contrasting examples were sought, and when extracting the content for display, care was taken to represent different interlocutors and extract typical examples – responses or experiences.

It is important to point out some methodological limitations of the research. First of all, due to the limited time frame of the research, the simultaneity and circularity of the qualitative research could not be fully respected (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Although the interviews were conducted in parallel with the transcription, where analytical ideas were used for developing protocols for further interviews, the bulk of the analysis was performed after the completion of the field research.

RESULTS

ACTION PLAN OF THE CITY OF ZAGREB FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND PERSONS GRANTED INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION FOR 2022

The evaluation of the implementation of integration measures aimed at asylum seekers and persons granted international protection in Croatia, i.e. in the City of Zagreb, apart from the collected qualitative data, is based on the analysis of available documents on the achievement of the goals and measures defined in the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for the year 2022.

The Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for the year 2022 was adopted at the 7th session of the City Assembly of the City of Zagreb on January 27, 2022, to encourage and implement the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection in the area of the City of Zagreb and to contribute to the development of the entire migration policy in the City of Zagreb and beyond. With the arrival of displaced persons from Ukraine who were granted temporary protection, the implementation of the Action Plan was expanded and included in its activities persons under temporary protection by the Act on International and Temporary Protection (Official Gazette, 70/15, 127/17 and 33/23).

The action plan defines 13 specific goals in six thematic areas of activities: social protection, health care, language learning and education, work and employment, strengthening of local integration capacities, and inter-city and international cooperation. Achieving the goals is planned through 46 measures that include various stakeholders of the integration process, and to a significant degree civil society organisations that are included as co-leaders of the implementation of a substantial number of measures (Measures 1.2.1, 1.2.2., 1.2.3., 2.2.1., 2.2.2., 3.1.1., 3.2.7., 3.2.8., 3.2.9., 3.3.1., 4.2.1., 4.2.2., 4.2.3., 5.2.1, 5.2.3., 5.3.2.).

Civil society organisations (CSO) that participated in the implementation of the Action Plan were selected through a Public Call for Expressions of Interest of CSOs to participate in the implementation of the CONNECTION – CONNEcting Cities Towards Integration actiON project. The selection criteria referred to years of experience in implementing projects related to the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection, especially EU projects, and sufficient organisational capacity to carry out integration activities. The City of Zagreb has signed cooperation agreements with civil society organisations within the aforementioned project, which contains specific activities and financial amounts for their implementation.⁴

The external evaluation was carried out as one of the measures in the Action Plan and resulted in a Report on the implementation of measures and activities from the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022. The report contains quantitative and qualitative data on the implementation of activities and the amounts of funds spent from the Budget of the City of Zagreb for 2022 and from the CONNECTION project in 2022. During the preparation of the report, data on implementation obtained from city administrative bodies and civil society organisations as bearers/co-bearers of the measures were also used. The conducted evaluation shows the successful implementation of the first city action plan for integration: of the 46 measures in the Action Plan, 41 were implemented (89%), 2 were partially implemented (4%), and 3 were not implemented (7%). Quantitative and qualitative indicators of this evaluation were taken into account when creating new documents, specifically when creating the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the implementation of the Charter of Integrating Cities for 2023 and 2024, which is confirmed in other analyses (cf. Guzić, 2023), but also in the results of this evaluation project.

Since in this study the implementation of the Action Plan for 2022 was evaluated separately by representatives of CSOs and users of integration measures, the results for each subgroup were also analysed separately. In the following part of the report, the main topics that emerged from the discussions with representatives of CSOs are presented first,

⁴ Report on the implementation of measures and activities from the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection for 2022 (in Croatian).

followed by main topics from the interviews with persons who have been granted international protection. The positive and negative aspects of the implementation of the Action Plan are indicated, with accompanying corroboration including the original statements of the research participants.

Civil society organisations representatives' perspective

The participants of the conducted qualitative research – representatives of CSOs – point out numerous advantages of the implemented Action Plan for 2022 and indicate the importance of adopting such strategies at the level of local self-government bodies. Several participants highlighted the participation of their organisations in measures to inform and sensitise the public, as well as education for officials and employees who perform tasks related to integration. They were also involved in the implementation of Croatian language teaching measures and accompanying migrants during visits to health care facilities or other institutions.

As a significant advantage of cooperation with the City of Zagreb in the implementation of the Action Plan, they point out the formation of a network of civil society organisations and the coordination of the City of Zagreb in the implementation of integration measures, although some of the participants believe that during the implementation of the measures defined in the Action Plan for 2022, there was an overlap in the implementation of activities with an unclear communication about what is expected from which organisation:

As for this second measure in which we participated, informing and sensitising the public, that means organising, participating with other organisations and with the City of Zagreb and the Ribnjak Youth Centre in the organisation of two events. An event in June on the occasion of the World Refugee Day and in the December on the occasion of the International Day of Migrants. Somehow we all joined together and created this common plan and program. (CSO 2, F)

I think that, as far as the distribution of measures between organisations is concerned, I think that what we perhaps lacked in the beginning was the overview of which of the civil society organisations implements which measure. I think that this is what was missing a lot because there were no partner meetings or meetings of organisations that are involved in the implementation of the measures, so that everyone would know where to direct people in terms of what kind of support they need. Of course through informal channels, and given the fact that there are not many organisations so we all know each other, we all got

this information. But I think it would be easier for everyone if we knew right from the start who is implementing which measures, who got which budget and actually how much they can do with it. Because in fact, some measures were distributed among, several organisations received the same measure, so then it would be good if we knew at what moment we could direct people to other organisations. (CSO 6, F)

Many participants had difficulty distinguishing between the two action plans and pointed out that a lot of time had passed since the implementation of the Action Plan for 2022. However, they recognised the effects and experiences transferred to the new Action Plan for 2023/2024 and additional improvements of that Action Plan since the City of Zagreb considers the feedback it receives from users and partners:

... I am sorry that this evaluation was not done earlier, maybe even before the implementation of the new action plan, but what is visible, now in the capacity of NGO 1, what I can say, is that good coordination and cooperation that was, say, in 2022, was significantly improved in 2023, and this is also visible in, in my opinion, the kind of success of some events that were organised later, and were much more attended. And regarding the same level of involvement with regard to the new action plan, I think that there was also a different approach that was much more open, I think, it was really given space to make some proposals, both within the working body itself, and outside, but well, now we're talking about this one... (CSO 1, M)

Do you see any changes in comparison to the 2022 in this action plan 2023/2024? Was something perhaps taken into account and improved already in that action plan? Yes, yes. *We are now also implementing some measures, and for example, the hourly rate is no longer limited, so we can see that this feedback has actually reached them. And I mean, it's clear to me that it was the first such action plan and that actually it was simply because we didn't have enough feedback to be able to make it adapted to the needs of the users and the needs of the organisations. So I think it's important to have these kinds of conversations and actually for the City to get feedback, because I think it's actually going to change and adjust a lot of things. (CSO 6, F)*

For me, it is good that through the action plan, the implementation of the first one, we learned what should perhaps be added to the second one, so let's say that in the first one women are not empowered at all, as some particularly vulnerable group, while in the second one we already have a measure that only deals with working with women, their integration and the like, let's say it is, somehow, the monitoring of the implementation of this first action plan was done well, so we have results that are already visible in the second. (CSO 2, F)

An additional comparison of the two Action Plans (more in Guzić, 2023) found that in addition to formal differences in belonging to different projects and provided funds, duration and bodies that participated in the implementation of these strategic documents, as well as somewhat different target groups of migrants, there are certain similarities. The first similarity is that civil society organisations were treated as partners and their cooperation was encouraged, which is reflected in the fact that in both plans CSOs are often the bearers of the implementation of measures through different activities. The second similarity refers to the common general goal in both plans, while the specific goals are somewhat similar, but with certain differences, changes and additions to activities (Guzić, 2023).

Good communication was repeatedly emphasised as a positive aspect, and CSOs are particularly satisfied with the experience that the City of Zagreb respected their area of expertise:

All the proposals really, when there was a consultation, really everything they [the City of Zagreb] could accept was accepted, really, they didn't say – ok, now we are initiating it, we are working, we are in charge, but they were really aware of it – ok, there are organisations that know about it much more than us, let's gather absolutely as many actors and as much information as possible, to make it as high quality as possible. (CSO 3, F)

Good communication proved to be important during the organisation of certain events since it was clearly established which organisation was in charge of which activity to make everything as efficient and successful as possible:

I liked the option, for example, that we could agree with them whether they would call or we would call, because then we could discuss what was more effective and what was more successful [...] it was good that we could also then combine one memo with all the logos in cooperation with [those and those],... (CSO 2, F)

The possibility of association of different organisations in the implementation of activities due to individually allocated small financial amounts and negotiation related to the funds and their purpose was positively evaluated.

The research participants emphasised the organisation of the event on the occasion of the International Day of Migrants and World Refugee Day. World Refugee Day on June 25, 2022, was celebrated in Park Ribnjak with a day-long program organised by the City of Zagreb and the Ribnjak Youth Centre, which consisted of various workshops for children and adults, through reading stories, language learning, sports activities and a music programme, all aimed to raise awareness of diversity and the importance of integration for all citizens. A significant number of CSOs were engaged, and they estimate that these events had multiple positive effects for persons under international protection and for the local population. They also consider the choice of location adequate due to the safety of the participants, although it is also associated with certain disadvantages since a larger number of local residents would come to a more frequent location:

...the first time, we had to go carefully to see how the local community would react, maybe it was a good thing that we were there because we were not in a very frequent place, but to get a feel for it, yes, because of course we would not want any excess to have occurred. (CSO 2, F)

For the CSO representatives, positive effects of the Action Plan's measures on their users are not questionable. Participation in sensitisation activities, but also the use of other measures such as mediation and translation during visits to different institutions, is evaluated in a particularly positive light:

So they didn't even have to say how it was for them, it was very visible, and I think that the fact that they are given the opportunity, the place, the time, to show that the legal status they have in Croatia is not the only characteristic that they have. That they have so many different identities and so many contents that they can offer and enrich this society of ours, and that was an opportunity for that. And it was in a safe environment because it was mostly associations that were already sensitised to it, there were people who were familiar with the topic, who came specifically because they saw the poster, because some association invited them, and there were people who were really just passing by and wondering what was going on there. (CSO 2, F)

And as for the persons under international protection, I think some families really used this measure of translation and mediation a lot, so I think that for those who are still in the early stages of integration, it was very useful and in fact they saw the advantages and they always let us know when they needed such a measure of translation. (CSO 6, F)

Feedback from the local community was evaluated based on feedback received from the institutions involved in the measures, which mostly gave positive comments to CSO representatives and encouraged CSOs to continue implementation of certain measures even after the end of the funded activity:

I mean, we don't really have feedback from the local community, we have this kind of feedback from people who work in institutions, I mean, that is the same thing as the local community. I think that it was actually for them, those with whom we worked, they were very happy to finally have someone who enables them to communicate with the patient, especially during specialist examinations, because then it is very important that the person knows what, what it is all about, and also that he/she can give his informed consent about some interventions, which was often a problem if the person does not speak Croatian sufficiently. So, as far as, for example, communication is concerned, especially with health care institutions, I always highlight that because it is somehow the biggest problem in integration, because it is important that a person understands what is being discussed when they see a doctor or a specialist, so that we received a lot of positive feedback, and when that measure ended, when the project ended, we also provided translations from our own resources when necessary. (CSO 6, F)

As the biggest shortcoming in the implementation of the Action Plan for 2022, research participants emphasise limited transferred financial resources and a certain predefined inflexibility in the implementation of measures. This was primarily reflected in the (in)ability to provide Croatian language courses to asylum seekers, because the use of this measure was not possible for everyone, even though there was interest:

But I think that if we had either received more funds or if the hourly rate had not been defined in that way, we might have had more options for hiring an adequate person, and also, of course, the hourly rates had been defined for all other measures, for example, in the case of translation this used to be an obstacle because quite a few translators, if not many, for some languages have their own trades and already have defined hourly rates, and then it was actually difficult to somehow balance between their defined hourly rate and what we can offer in the contract. (CSO 6, F)

In addition, the City of Zagreb's partial lack of familiarity with who is involved and deals with certain aspects of migration and the feasibility of the implementation of certain measures, since some measures do not function even for other citizens of Zagreb (e.g. insufficient number of places in kindergartens or access to health services), were assessed as negative. Research participants also negatively assess the ineffective communication

during organisation of certain activities, although they conclude that this did not affect the overall success of (particular) measure implementation:

I think it's all very nicely written, but if things happen in practice that, I don't know now, it's quite complicated to find a place in a kindergarten. There are not enough kindergartens. It is also difficult for people in Zagreb to find [...]. Then let's say the same about health care, so of course it's all nicely written, asylum seekers have the right to healthcare. Great. The moment they ask for their doctor, the doctors turn them away and that's what happens, we now have a pregnant woman who got sick and couldn't get health care at all. So, they tell me – we don't have any room. (CSO 5_2, F)

However, I know that the organisation of that World Refugee Day in 2022 was somehow more chaotic because some information was missing until the last moment, it was about the stands, about what technical and logistical support would be for the organisation of some kind of events, which I mean, these are some typical problems when organising something [...] we also had some communication deficiencies, but it really went in the direction that we all started looking at how we would communicate what was needed by whom, in order to organise some events. I know that there was training for the participants, it was not clear who would invite the participants, whether it would be invited by NGO 1 or will the City of Zagreb invite them. And I say nothing of this is a significant shortcoming that would now threaten the effect of the measure itself which we think, which ultimately came to be. (CSO 1, M)

The role of the City of Zagreb from the perspective of CSOs representatives was overall positively evaluated due to the inclusiveness and gathering of various associations:

What I would say was an advantage in the implementation of this measure is the involvement of the City of Zagreb in the implementation of this measure. The City of Zagreb was an institution that brought together all the associations operating in this area, that is, the area of integration, and somehow jointly created that plan and programme, from logistical to content dimensions, we defined it together at meetings via Zoom and face-to-face. I think that this is also a nice dimension that additionally binds non-governmental organisations. For me, this inclusiveness is a great advantage of the City of Zagreb. (CSO 2, F)

In some segments, representatives of CSOs assessed that the participation of the City of Zagreb was absent, even when this participation was not perceived as necessary since it was about integration measures of persons granted temporary protection for which activities were planned and coordinated at the national level. In other measures, primarily

in sensitisation measures, CSO representatives pointed out that the role of the City was not visible in comparison with the role of CSOs.

Nevertheless, the role of the City of Zagreb was overall positively assessed due to the creation of a new platform for communication on integration issues, and the City of Zagreb is considered responsible for positive changes compared to the previous situation and the previous city administration. In the future, according to the CSO representatives, the capacities of integration measures should be increased and adequate health care should be provided for all categories of foreign citizens. As concrete recommendations, they single out: avoiding overlapping (or better coordination) of several organisations in the implementation of the same measures; educating employees of relevant institutions; better advertising of activities and events; ensuring space for sports activities; providing Croatian language courses and more translators; encouraging the local community to participate in certain activities; and the need for improved information providing about relevant rights.

International protection beneficiaries' perspective

The research participants who were granted international protection came to Croatia in the period before the implementation of the Action Plan of the City of Zagreb for 2022. They pointed out that when they arrived in Croatia, they were not sufficiently informed about their rights and opportunities, and they still face a lack of information today. To a large extent, many civil society organisations helped them, but they also singled out situations when they could not (or did not want to) provide help. Research participants also reported on situations in which persons with granted international protection (while they were still in the status of asylum seekers) encountered certain challenges for the first time and came up with solutions themselves, which were later established as a good practice. They are aware of legal changes that have taken place since their arrival and recognise the progress in ensuring the rights of persons granted international protection and asylum seekers, but they also emphasise the persistently inadequate resolution of the issue of Croatian language courses and access to healthcare. They are also familiar with their rights and existing integration measures but do not link them to the Action Plan. For them, the action plan is just another document, as they also point to the overly complex

administration and bureaucratisation, which results in each procedure taking an extremely long time:

We have too many papers, we are not like you, we are not Croats, we are Arabs, and if we don't have that paper at the same time, we will lose our jobs, we will lose our school, we will lose everything... It is too much [...] I don't have a problem with Croatia, I have a problem with the papers. (Asylum 4, F)

This also stems from their statements about the integration measures they use, since they largely refer to scholarships and grants from the City of Zagreb for students and pupils with approved international protection, which were only included in the new Action Plan for 2023/2024, which some of the research participants were able to use.

What I had as an opportunity, they opened as a call for support for students with refugee status, with asylum status, and we have been fighting for such a right at the City level for a long time, because the City of Zagreb has a call for scholarships every year, but only for citizens of the Republic of Croatia. I also advocated and am still an advocate that changes should be made in the tender and the addition of a group of people who were granted asylum, but in the end they went the other way and opened a new tender in addition to all five tenders they already have, now it is the 6th tender for asylum seekers, there is a special fund, but it is not called a scholarship, but a support, because it does not exactly belong to the category of monthly scholarships, but one-time aid payments. (Asylum 3, M)

Others state that the scholarships were made available too late because the children had already left the education system, while some gave up on applying because of the complex administration:

Before, when my son was [in school], the City of Zagreb said no, only those people who have citizenship. He was very sad. Why do friends have [scholarships] and he doesn't have... (FG-Asylum, P2, F)

Among the measures of integration, research participants also point out participation in the Coordination for Integration and its advantages, and the possibility of using the social allowance, which has been assessed as insufficient.

But that's what the city of Zagreb offered, I'm a member of the coordination for integration, but I haven't been at the meeting yet because they held the first meeting this year while I was outside, outside of Croatia. But I think that this coordination is also very good for us to discuss the possibilities of improving integration in Croatia. (Asylum 3, M)

When my husband sat there at home, we have salary from social. Not enough. Because of that my husband must, he must work [...]. It's not enough from social. (Asylum 5, F)

Almost all research participants stated that they participated in sensitisation activities. For some, participation in such activities represents an additional source of income, while for others it is a place for socialising and getting to know each other:

This NGO I talk about, they introduced us with the 'Grad Zagreb', one of their activities regarding painting, and I got that invitation, and I intentionally sent my daughter to that activity so that she should have some company, some new numbers, telephone numbers to try get help, are some volunteers, whatever. And at least she can earn something like honorary job and she did that. [...] So, this was the only site from the 'Grad Zagreb'. (Asylum 1, M)

...I hold workshops or hold alternative classes with different associations or the City of Zagreb. I don't know where my projects came from, but I just, when someone calls me: XX are you interested? I say okay, I don't know at all who leads the project, who approved it, where it was financed. But, this is perhaps the biggest income in the last 3 years that I have achieved, because I don't have a permanent job, so I always have to do something. But I can't rely on projects, because projects, you never know if someone will call you or not, or how much. They didn't pay me anything in the beginning, but then after a while it became a rule that people with experience are paid something or share some costs and all. (Asylum 3, M)

Yes, we go there every year. Even... actually there is one in Park Ribnjak, it's an initiative, I didn't know about it, I just knew that we organise it in Park Ribnjak. It is there, those associations we already know CMS, Are You Syrious, Borders None, Living Studio, they were all there. Yes, we celebrated together. [...] There is even a project in schools now. I was involved. I was there for a bit. Then I met Park Ribnjak. Yes, we were there. (Asylum 2, M)

In general, sensitisation activities are perceived as something positive for persons with granted international protection, but also for other foreigners, however, these activities must necessarily be organised in cooperation with other organisations.

Yes, yes, of course, I think that is the goal, to not only talk about our cultures but how we live here in Croatia and what are our problems and what we think would be better for a solution and such things. The same as socialising and having fun

and as a view of culture, as a foreign culture, another view, I don't know either music or food. I think it's very, very important, yes. (FG-Asylum, P3, M)

I mean, it is very important to involve people, especially if they are invisible, and it is very important when someone feels that they are visible [...] and then we will have the opportunity as people to try as hard as we can in life. If they were involved as a society or in, I don't know, ideas and plans and laws or just conversation. But if you are left out, left aside and then they become reserved, you know, so you don't know how much they can contribute in a conversation, you don't know how much input they can give in a particular topic or idea, because they've been left aside. (FG-Asylum, P3, M)

I mean, I would say that nothing works by itself. So there must be cooperation between the City of Zagreb and individuals or cultural centres and so on. Organisations... I mean, I see a lot of potential for the libraries of the City of Zagreb. (FG-Asylum, P4, M)

Nevertheless, although they consider the organisation of sensitisation activities to be positive, the research participants believe that such activities and events are too rare. This can also be reflected in the insufficient participation (or lack of interest) of the local community in participating in such events.

...in my opinion, it's very good that the City of Zagreb is doing this day [International Migrant Day], but we need more, it's not just this day of migrants that people are there, because we need, we really need to do something like this three or four times a year, because it is for integration, and we know that it is two-way, very good for the country and the people there, both for the local and for the migrants. [...] Then I think this is very important, it's really one of the best ways for people to.... like being close to each other, through food and through music and because of this thing. It's great what it's doing, but we need more than once, and it's not just the day of migrants or international refugee day... (FG-Asylum, P1, M)

And if you feel, people make you feel important and included I think that's very, very important. You can also see if they are interested, that's also one thing. You can still invite people and nobody would show up. And then you don't have a choice. In that case you would go and do whatever you want to do, but then inviting them I think that's enough, and making them feel like they've been part or involved or included. (FG-Asylum, P3, M)

The expectations from the City of Zagreb among beneficiaries of international protection are quite specific. First of all, the role and activities of the City of Zagreb are not visible to them. They believe that there is a lot of potential and that things are moving in a positive direction, but that everything is evolving too slowly and that the City of Zagreb gives the impression that it is doing a lot, but that is not really visible. They also point to other cities that they believe have more successful models of migrant integration.

... we feel, the City, they think they do a lot, but we, we don't see it's invisible, their work is invisible. I don't know, then it's best if we think of some way to deliver this work of theirs, whatever they want to do, because people really don't know what to look for, where to look for information, that's very important. If you don't know, it doesn't exist. (FG-Asylum, P1, M)

Yes, actually the City of Zagreb has been quite active lately, I hear that. Given that we have somewhat completed our integration process [...] I think that the City of Zagreb is... it might be possible to organise cultural events for the presentation of culture. Even for organisation in schools. As far as I know, the City of Zagreb is included, or? Such things, for example, would be very useful. And to be, to... to open a space, to create a space where foreigners, asylum seekers and nationals and citizens can be together, to share something, to actually create a possible space. That would be useful, yes. (Asylum 2, M)

... but I also see a lot of potential that has not been used, so I hope that we will work on it, and I think that Zagreb is going in the right direction, only very, very slowly, in small steps. That we need to speed up the pace a bit, we can pick up some programmes and ideas from other cities that have a slightly better integration system. I don't know like Ljubljana,... there are wonderful stories in Italy... (FG-Asylum, P4, M)

In addition, the research participants believe that the City of Zagreb should be the primary place for providing information on the rights and opportunities not only to beneficiaries of international protection but also to the increased number of foreign workers. Models of information provision, according to them, can be diverse, from a website available in several languages, through a brochure, to a One-Stop-Shop that they heard about. They also believe that organising informal meetings of different categories of migrants could contribute to a more successful integration and provide the migrants themselves with the opportunity to actively get involved and help others based on their own experiences. They

see the City of Zagreb as a bridge between the national level of ensuring rights and the beneficiaries of rights and integration measures.

It can make a website... these people speak English, but at the same time I know it's not necessary to translate this page for asylum in 7000 languages, but it has languages as many people as we need in this... and now mostly like English, French, Farsi and now the workers we have from the Philippines or what language do they speak those from Nepal... and that's what they need. The law is very difficult. [...] I read the law in Arabic, I need to sometimes go and translate, what does that mean? It's difficult for us reading the law in another language and figuring out what it is, what it means. A brochure is the same, it's a very simple thing, you make a brochure, yes. (FG-Asylum, P1, M)

Now what they are thinking of doing, the one stop shop for asylum seekers is very good because a lot of information is missing. The City of Zagreb can be a bridge between citizens and the state [...] The City of Zagreb could refer to that right and how to exercise it. And cities in most Western European countries also play a big role in the first meeting, not like that on the 2nd, 3rd level, but right at the beginning you go to the city, ask for all your rights and the city should not refuse, and that is not part of our competences, but, well, you are a citizen here after all, if the state offers something, you as a city can be a bridge between citizens and asylum seekers and the state and know in advance what rights and duties are offered by the state and respond in that way. I think that it should have the main role, not only for the City of Zagreb, but also for other cities. (Asylum 3, M)

I think there is also one way, to have meetings. Yes, we as foreigners, ok? I don't want to say coordination, that will be more complicated, but look, we know best, we know what's missing because that's where our life is right here. If this information is missing for you, then we can sit together at the same table, share the same language, and then talk about this topic. It doesn't need to be every day, it needs to be like twice a year. But if you do it like this, there are many people who have this experience and they want to share. And then all people can, it doesn't matter what their origin is, asylum seekers and students, or a worker, you make a group of 5 to 10 people who want to talk about problems or not only about problems, what else is missing, and what we can do better together. We don't only need to talk about problems, we don't talk about problems, when we talk about problems we are looking for something that, how to... a solution to the problem we have, ok? (FG-Asylum, P1, M)

HUMANITARIAN STATION FOR PERSONS ON THE MOVE IN THE CENTRE OF ZAGREB

The City of Zagreb, i.e. the City Administration in cooperation with other city services and the City Red Cross Society Zagreb, the Zagreb Police Department, the Directorate of Civil Protection and other humanitarian associations established a shelter for persons in transit in the area of the Paromlin complex. In reporting on this complex, terms such as shelter, humanitarian station or reception centre for persons on the move/migrants in transit, whose number has visibly increased in the reference period, are most often used. The humanitarian station was open for a total of 66 days in the period from November 22, 2022, to January 26, 2023. According to the report of the City Red Cross Society,⁵ the area was fenced off so that the people in the humanitarian station (especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly, mothers with children, and people with disabilities) were as safe as possible. Two prefabricated tents measuring 30 m² have been set up, the tents were heated and had tables and benches for rest, as well as electrical sockets for charging mobile phones. In addition to tents, people in transit were also offered a heated sanitary container in which basic physiological needs could be taken care of, and it was also possible to shower with hot water, etc. Hot cooked meals, bottled drinking water, shower towels and basic hygiene items such as shower gels, toilet paper, soaps, etc. were distributed daily. Care was also taken to ensure that the served food did not contain pork, given that most people in transit came from countries where pork is not consumed for religious reasons. For people who had health issues, primary health care was provided in the nearby health centre. According to the aforementioned report, a total of 3,493 people in transit passed through the reception centre, of which 3,475 were men, 11 women and 7 minor children. 24 professional employees of the City Red Cross Society Zagreb participated in the work of the reception centre, with 768 hours of regular work and 664 extra hours. A total of 4,550 cooked meals and 400 dry meals were prepared (70% success rate of distributed meals). The total cost (without the electricity bill) was slightly above €50,500.00.

⁵ Report on the support and care for people on the move in the area of the City of Zagreb, CRC, City Red Cross Society Zagreb, documentation collected as part of the research.

Although the implementation of the humanitarian station measure was discussed exclusively with representatives of civil society organisations, the emerging themes were focused on the experience of the organisation itself, but also on the estimated experiences of the users of the humanitarian station, therefore the results are presented separately for these two perspectives.

Civil society organisations representatives' perspective

The participants in the research emphasise both positive and negative aspects of the establishment of the humanitarian station. Although not all CSO representatives were directly involved in the implementation of activities in the humanitarian station, they participated in thematic meetings that were organised with all interested stakeholders before, during and after the establishment of the humanitarian station. The cooperation of various CSOs was evaluated very positively, together with the good communication of all involved stakeholders during the operation of the humanitarian station.

I think that this situation triggered much more than what was actually happening and it was great that after all that the City of Zagreb invited us to hear us, to hear some experiences, to hear proposals and it seems to me that they really heard what we had to say, and that it is important for them that the people who were involved in it say their opinion, to simply state the obstacles and what was good. It meant a lot to me personally because it showed some kind of willingness [of local authorities] to hear, to listen and to cooperate regardless of the lack of capacity, lack of money [...] What we think is important to them because they consider us relevant people with whom they need to cooperate (CSO 1, F)

So I would definitely say that the initiative was positive, or the recognition of the very need to organise and better connect the non-governmental organisations themselves (CSO 9, F)

It was actually great to see that cooperation. Cooperation between all of us, as much as we could, when we could [...] I think that we have all shown that we can, and that there is definitely some space for us to work together, to respond together to a crisis situation. (CSO 1, F)

Also, they generally rate the support of the City of Zagreb as very positive, but also the reaction of the new city government in comparison with the previous government, and

also in comparison with the reaction of the state, since the situation with the passage of a large number of people through Zagreb and Croatia, in general, was treated as a kind of crisis.

As far as we are concerned and the cooperation with the City, we can really say that it is very good, especially now for the last few years and especially when it comes to these things [migration]. I don't think that in previous years we ever had meetings and reflections on this topic, and we did not [get the chance to] give any ideas. (CSO 4, M)

I think it is very important here how the local community positioned itself because there was no national response to such situations. And then the city of Zagreb, just as it has now decided on those action plans for the integration of migrant workers because there is no national plan, nor a migration policy, nor an integration policy for foreign workers... Likewise, in that situation there was no national solution and it was then left to [local authorities], it is great that the city of Zagreb recognised that and took some action even though it basically had no support from the state. (CSO 3, F)

CSO representatives point out deviation and disproportion in the treatment at the national level as inappropriate, since the operation of the humanitarian station did not receive support at the national level, especially in comparison with the treatment of displaced people from Ukraine, which indicates a discriminatory approach of the state:

And then another thing I remember when we were at that meeting of the City of Zagreb, people from NGOs protested, and with reason, that there was some kind of container at the Main Bus Station, a heated container for overnight accommodation. However, it was always empty, but only for people of Ukrainian origin, only for them. So if a person came, I don't know, anyone, an Afghan, regardless of whether it was empty, he couldn't use that space at all, which is really awful. (CSO 8, F)

Furthermore, through conversations with the participants of the qualitative research, it was established that, despite the good initiative by the City of Zagreb regarding the establishment of this station, the biggest problem was in securing funds for the operation of the station and for its establishment, which took longer than expected, although, as it stands out, the City could have coordinated its components more adequately.

So, the City of Zagreb allocated funds to us and we settled [the invoices], which is basically very funny to me, since there is one big apparatus, I don't know,

Zagreb Holding is owned by the City of Zagreb, so they couldn't come to dig a hole and connect it, and water supply/system and drainage is owned by the City as well. They sent us an invoice, so that we would then pay them. So the works have costed us, only the works for the companies within the City of Zagreb, costed around HRK 80,000 [around 10,600 EUR]. That could have been done differently, and I understand that there should be some kind of sequence of events, some kind of request, but I think that it can be done much faster and much more efficiently. (CSO 4, M)

At the same time, it was pointed out that there was an unjustified long wait for the solution of technical problems which, according to the participants' assessment, could have been solved in less than one day. In particular, the issue was in connecting the pipes to which the showers were connected to the city's water supply, for which they had to wait two weeks. These problems can also be described as the inertia of city and state companies, which manifests itself through the difficulty of establishing the necessary infrastructure, but also the inefficiency of city companies (bureaucratic inertia).

Ultimately, the very location of the humanitarian station was assessed as extremely inadequate, as was the prolonged period to find a location at all.

We were basically just looking for space for a month and a half, two months, I was searching with people from the City where we could start it [the humanitarian station]. In the end, when the water came up to the neck, it was started next to Paromlin, where the space is totally inadequate [...] When the journalists came and when they were filming there, it looked like we were in Kabul, like we were on a battlefield, so it was really a disaster. (CSO 4, M)

From the perspective of civil society organisations involved in the operation of the humanitarian station, the problems of their own organisational capacities and problems with the organisation and coordination of volunteers are additionally highlighted:

But the problem was with these capacities, the capacities of the NGOs, because of all these NGOs, I don't know, there were really quite a few of us at the meeting. But they simply didn't have people who could..., someone could be there for two hours, someone half an hour, someone couldn't be there at all, that was the biggest challenge. (CSO 4, M)

The employees there did not coordinate us, but we came and actually did what we wanted, what we thought was necessary at that moment. (CSO 6, F)

There was one common sheet by the City of Zagreb and then it was filled out. I think that something was wrong with the organisation in that sheet itself. That no matter what was filled in there, that they then overlapped with some other volunteers, and then there were too many volunteers unnecessarily. So it wasn't really super organised. But I don't blame anyone, those are ad-hoc things, and when you work with a bunch of NGOs, everyone says something different. Quite often people in NGOs float around and are not even realistic, so I understand that too. (CSO 8, F)

Perspective of persons in transit

Access to persons in transit who used the humanitarian station was not possible since they had left the territory of Croatia. The comments and answers of CSO representatives who volunteered at the humanitarian station were taken as a source of assessment of migrants' experiences in the humanitarian station. According to the assessments of the research participants, the migrants themselves positively evaluated the help provided to them and were grateful for everything provided in the humanitarian station.

Well, the advantage is already that someone welcomes them who wishes them well, that's already a good thing. Another thing, the toilet really means a lot. Thirdly, they also get that hot meal, that is, a meal. It [humanitarian station] is somehow one point where they can get information. And when they are in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, NGOs can also help them. They stayed for a short time, they were in transit, they also received the seven-day paper, but that's it. (CSO 8, F)

They were very grateful for everything [...] For some, through the story [with them], it was the first hot meal after a month [...]. They were very grateful, they were grateful for those showers that were organised, they were very happy because some say that they didn't even manage to take a shower for 2 months [...] Some have been traveling for half a year, and they have crossed various borders, and all sorts of things. So their feedback was, they were really grateful, they were grateful. (CSO 4, M)

I think that at that moment it [the humanitarian station] was of course necessary and I think that for people to rest, to sit somewhere, the opportunity to charge their mobile phones, that it meant everything to them, of course, because I think that some of our expectations about how it should function, and maybe their expectations are a little different. So they were actually satisfied with a little that existed there because there was nothing before. (CSO 6, F)

Most representatives of CSOs referred to the exceptional cooperation with the nearby health centre, which received people who needed health care. However, insufficient financial resources to cover the engagement of healthcare professionals, as well as the limitation to providing only emergency care, were again highlighted as a problem.

What was a good thing, and I think it should be highlighted, was the coordination between the humanitarian point and the health centre, because there was an opportunity for people who need medical help can go to the health centre and get some basic medical help. I think this is something that was necessary and crucial at that time because for these people who are on their way it is quite often impossible to get any medical help and I think it was a very good practice that there was a place where people could get medical help. (CSO 6, F)

Special attention was paid to the preparation of food by religious principles, since most of the people in transit are from Muslim countries. Therefore, dishes with pork were not prepared. There were certain controversies surrounding the serving of hot meals, which members of some CSOs felt were not appropriate in the case of long-term improper and insufficient nutrition of persons in transit.

And it was really taken care that it wasn't pork, that was really taken care of, even though some used to say that since they hadn't eaten for a long time, that it wasn't a [problem] for them, but we took care that it wouldn't present a cultural and religious [problem], that we do not underestimate them, that we do not insult them in that way, that was also really taken care of. (CSO 4, M)

And then the Red Cross told us, look, we can't give them a hot meal. Why can't we give them? Because they will get diarrhoea. So, these are things that people don't even think about. Because they are on the way for I don't know how long and they don't eat that way at all, they don't eat warm liquid food, they eat dry food. And then when they come here, if they eat a hot meal, that can happen. That was purely their professional thinking, given their experience. It means that potentially greater damage can occur as a result. (CSO 8, F)

The first mentioned negative aspect of the humanitarian station was that it did not offer the possibility of overnight stays, but it had two auxiliary beds ready for emergencies. It was designed as a location for refreshment and a short rest intended for people who had a Return Decision document issued by the Ministry of the Interior, but research

participants state that the documents were not checked in practice and that the station received everyone, including the local homeless, which was overall positively evaluated.

We weren't really asking [for documents], originally it was like intended that we would be asking for the 7 days paper. [...] But then we said that it doesn't make sense, it doesn't mean anything to me anyway, and from the experience of working with them since 2015, I think you can see when someone is a migrant [...] That paper doesn't mean anything to me, so we distributed [food] to everyone [including the homeless]. (CSO 4, M)

Furthermore, the representatives of some CSOs pointed out that very often the station was empty and that they attribute this to insufficient advertising of the humanitarian station, i.e. lack of information about its existence.

It is possible that there is a problem that actually these people could not find that tent. I really don't think it was advertised enough. In the correct way. It's as if it was put there just so. That's how it seemed. I'm not saying that they didn't have good intentions, but how much it served, that tent in that place, I don't know. Because we have also sent volunteers and there were no people [there]. [...] Maybe that's how things worked out in those exact periods, but again we sent them continuously. They were available. (CSO 8, F)

CSO representatives who volunteered at the humanitarian station also state that in terms of organisation, certain problems were encountered based on insufficient thinking through and preparation of all aspects of care (for example, related to the lack of clean towels and the fact that there were cases of scabies among the users). However, they point out that after a warning and drawing attention to the problem, the deficiencies were quickly and positively resolved by the Croatian Red Cross employees who managed the tent.

...they didn't have a lot of information about the whole situation in general, and that also led to some practical problems. For example, mobile showers were installed where people could take a shower, but there were no clothes in which they could change and also after showering they were given towels, but the employees did not actually distribute towels to people and then all the people used the same towels that were in that container. Then we actually intervened and said that since some people have scabies, which is contagious disease that is transmitted by touch, fabric and so on, they should in fact always hand out a new towel, to each person. In general to use the same towel is terrible, but also because of these health reasons it is simply impossible, to which they said yes, but no one asked us for a towel, but of course people didn't know that towels even

existed because it doesn't say that anywhere, so I think it was not some kind of an evil act, but they were simply not informed about the whole situation and maybe the way to deal with to people... (CSO 6, F)

Some of the research participants pointed out that the station was insufficiently adapted, for example to women due to the inadequate space for showering, which was also evident in the extremely small number of female users, although in the mentioned period a significant proportion of women and children could also be observed among migrants in transit.

The next issue that was pointed out was the presence of police officers in the humanitarian station. This caused some discomfort to the migrants, possibly due to the (non)possession of documents or Return Decisions, or due to the situation at the borders at the time when violent acts of the police towards migrants have been recorded (cf. ECRE/AIDA 2022 update⁶). However, research participants state that the presence of the police helped in isolated incidents that occurred among migrants of different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups.

...our experience was, regarding the cooperation with the MUP [Ministry of Interior], I think it was quite well organised at the time because they really tried to... let's say they respected what the City of Zagreb advised, which is not to stand directly in front of the tent because we know that people who were in transit at that time were quite afraid of the police because of all the things that happened at the border, so, as far as that is concerned, we did not see any incident or any inappropriate behaviour of the police officers.. (CSO 6, F)

And how do you assess the experiences of the local community there, neighbours? They were not enthusiastic, but there was the police present, it is as good as it is bad. So as soon as the police were there, no one from the local population dared to come and say – what are you doing here? They didn't dare because they saw that the police were there all the time. So, as much as it is good in terms of our safety because of the local population, it is bad because of this part, so a balance must be found. I believe that it was much more useful because they were there, because everything has gone smoothly, but I think that if the police had not been there, there would have been a lot of larger clashes with the local population, I am convinced. I'm convinced because the neighbours didn't

⁶ <https://ecre.org/2022-update-aida-country-report-croatia/#:~:text=According%20to%20official%20data%2C%20between,of%20January%202023%20we re%2019%2C390.>

really like that situation, but the police were there, so they didn't really dare to come there and ask a lot of questions. (CSO 4, M)

Other relevant sources (see e.g. Pozniak, 2023; <https://e-erim.ief.hr/pojam/p-paromlin-p?locale=hr>) criticise the belated reaction of the city administration to the establishment of a humanitarian station right before the opening of the Advent Zagreb 2022 event. Furthermore, the inadequacy of the space under the ruined Paromlin structure stands out. Although, according to the research participants, it was statically checked and verified, it did not create a sense of security. In addition, research participants also emphasise the inadequacy of tent structures and suggest that in the future similar crisis solutions should be provided in "firm structures", including careful planning of financial expenditures for the maintenance of such infrastructure, as well as possible application for other users. They believe that better coordination and education of all stakeholders and the establishment of a website with all the necessary information for migrants (in transit) would be necessary for better future efficiency in the implementation of such measures.

CAPACITIES FOR COLLECTIVE ACCOMMODATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS FROM UKRAINE

According to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, Croatia has accepted more than 24,500 refugees from Ukraine by mid-October 2023, of which 50% are women and 33% are children. Since February 2022, Croatia has provided refugees from Ukraine with unimpeded access to its territory and organised reception centres throughout the country (UNHCR, 2023). According to official statistics, about 81% of refugees from Ukraine live in private accommodation, 12% in private accommodation subsidised by the state, and the remaining 7% live in collective accommodation managed by the Directorate of Civil Protection in cooperation with local and regional authorities. The City of Zagreb has made three locations available for collective accommodation: Motel Plitvice, Hostel Rakitje and Grad mladih. Collective accommodation is defined as a more permanent form of accommodation in which persons under temporary protection are provided accommodation, food and internet access. Employees of the Directorate of Civil Protection and the Croatian Red Cross visit and coordinate all activities daily at the mentioned

locations. The emphasis in this evaluation is on the accommodation facilities in Motel Plitvice and in Grad mladih, given that medical teams and teams providing psychological assistance were on duty at these locations for persons granted temporary protection. Representatives of civil society organisations and the users of these accommodations evaluated the adequacy, advantages and disadvantages of collective accommodation provided by the City of Zagreb. The data was analysed collectively, but the results will be presented separately for each location to emphasise their specificities.

Motel Plitvice

Motel Plitvice in Zagreb, which was subsequently converted into collective accommodation, was mobilised on February 26, 2022. Collective accommodation in Motel Plitvice was suspended at the end of 2023, and most of the 140 users were relocated to other locations (for example, collective accommodation in Jastrebarsko, Velika Gorica or Karlovac). In addition to Karlovac, the accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine is planned primarily in the area of Velika Gorica and Jastrebarsko, where public transport, schools and kindergartens will be more accessible. The Ministry of the Interior considers these preconditions essential for the quality of life, aiming to help displaced persons from Ukraine who have found their refuge in the Republic of Croatia.

The identified advantages of accommodation in Motel Plitvice are primarily associated with the good organisation of the reception of displaced persons from Ukraine immediately after the start of the conflict, and with the fact that everything is organised within one facility. This is recognised by CSO representatives and the users themselves, who emphasise the warm welcome and access to a safe and protected location after the traumatic war experience:

They came in the first wave, they came completely disoriented, it was the first wave of migrants who didn't know about themselves and needed the first time to regain some kind of mental state and a realistic assessment of the situation around them. The accommodation was good, the organisation of the civil protection duty was very good, because the crisis headquarters was located there, initially positioned, civil protection, the MoI came and initially collected papers for registration and for temporary protection there, the Red Cross and the most important duty of the medical team. That medical team was made up of volunteers, that was the problem. The medical team was also established in Grad mladih, which was a great advantage of Grad mladih, because more

refugees who were accommodated there, immediately had medical at least first aid. And that service lasted for quite a long time. (CSO 5_1, F)

...that's how we came to Motel Plitvice, they received us very well, the Red Cross was there, they gave us everything we needed for first aid. They put us in one room, every day there was lunch, all what was needed. For the children, they organised an outdoor area, a park, everything for the children was organised. There were people there playing with the children, which would have gotten the children used to the other side [the other environment]. They worked very well from the Red Cross. They listened to everything we needed and helped us. (UKR 5, F)

However, everything was stressful, everything was stressful due to the fact that I left my country, the war, the fact that I don't know anyone, myself and two children, I don't know the language, unfortunately I don't even know the English language. I didn't know anyone and I cried every day. And I waited for the war to end the next day and for me to return to Ukraine... my things were in bags, I just waited and didn't understand anything... it was a lot of stress, but thank God that I didn't have to live outside and I had a roof, walls, bed, food. And it also helped that they were working there from the Red Cross in the hotel, there were also translators, so who understood the Ukrainian language. (UKR 2, F)

The availability of doctors and psychological support teams are also highlighted as an important aspect of accommodation in Motel Plitvice (as well as in other locations). Medical assistance was limited to minor injuries, which presented additional challenges to users with more serious illnesses. On the other hand, given that, according to one of the beneficiaries, most of the people housed in these facilities arrived in Croatia in a bad psychological state caused by stressful and traumatic war experiences, psychological support was extremely necessary.

Some medical help came there twice a week, yes, but they couldn't help but only write what we needed. They couldn't do anything. ... If my son hit his finger, they helped him, gave him ointment and everything, everything, everything, but my daughter has a different disease. (UKR 2, F)

There was a woman, a psychologist who worked a lot with Ukrainians. She came two or three times a week. She worked with children and mothers of children, with people who needed help. (UKR 4, F)

On the other hand, Motel Plitvice is characterised as a relatively unsafe place in terms of its position next to the highway, which is in no way adapted to a large number of children accommodated in these capacities. The inadequate position of Motel Plitvice next to the airport was also highlighted, where every passing plane caused a stress reaction, given that the sound was reminiscent of rockets (note from interview UKR 5, F). In addition, the location where the truck drivers are staying is also not assessed as a suitable location for a large number of women.

Totally inadequate space. Yes, totally inadequate space. Yes. From the fact that it is located, it means that mostly mothers with minor children came there, the Plitvice Motel. So it was about the area that is located on the highway, next to the big gas station where all kinds of truckers stop, that motel is also known as a place where people come [for prostitution]..., so I think that place is famous and you can't imagine those people there. Totally disconnected to the city, that means you have to pass, to get to the first bus there that runs in Lučko, you have to go over the fence, through the fence, that is, through some sort of forest, yes, for children, for a mother with two 2 minor children at 8 hours in the evening to pass there, it is not comfortable for me as a man, let alone for her to be comfortable passing there. And then, after a lot of effort, we managed to combine with the City that there would be transport, that ZET [Zagreb public transport] would run directly from here, from the location of the Motel Plitvice. (CSO 4, M)

Another problem that is often mentioned is the initial poor public transport connection of the Motel Plitvice with the city centre, and the use of alternative unmarked paths, which has been changed to a certain extent over time by the introduction of additional bus lines.

The minus was that it was dislocated from the city, and regardless of the fact that Grad mladih was dislocated, it has transportation. But Lučko [Motel Plitvice] had absolutely inadequate transportation for people who did not know the language at that time. It was very dangerous for children, because it is right next to the road. For adults, it was very difficult to get to the workplace if it was in the city, because you had to walk through the old neglected barracks to the first bus stop. Later, the City of Zagreb came meet this need. It organised an additional bus line that came twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, but that did not solve the problem. (CSO 5_1, F)

It was additionally pointed out that, as a collective accommodation, Motel Plitvice could not ensure the privacy of the people staying there. Open doors, socialising in the corridors and thin walls narrowed the users' private space.

I think it is difficult for people to live in a collective accommodation because you have many neighbours and you live not personally, privately, but together. Yes, and every time you leave the room you see people, and they see you. And some women told me that when you talk on the phone in the room, some people in the other room can hear it. (UKR 3, F)

During the closing of the collective accommodation in Motel Plitvice, the users who were sent to other locations expressed their dissatisfaction because they had adapted to this accommodation and had found satisfactory mechanisms of everyday life there.

However, after some time they got used to life in Motel Plitvice because some of them found jobs, their children started school and they did not want to move out of that area. (CSO 5_1, F)

A lot of people started seeing general practitioners after the on-call medical team was abolished. The general practitioner in Lučko. Later, this resulted in a problem because it was very difficult to find... first coming to Lučko after they moved somewhere else. It was very difficult to find a general practitioner in the city of Zagreb even today. (CSO 5_1, F)

Grad mladih

Accommodation in the Grad mladih was provided as an alternative collective accommodation in the case of a full capacity in Motel Plitvice. Initially, it was possible to accommodate 45 people in the three pavilions of the Grad mladih. Capacities were additionally limited due to damage caused by the earthquake in 2020 and the placement of the mandatory city quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, five pavilions are used for accommodation in the Grad mladih, where about fifty people are settled since the pavilion where the medical team was housed was repurposed to accommodate displaced persons from Ukraine after the medical team stopped coming. Although the significant distance from the city centre is also mentioned in the case of this location, the location itself was assessed as satisfactory with the added advantage of a green environment. One of the users believes that it is an advantage that everyone got to know each other and that they are all together, and she considers the environment much more humane and highlights the advantages of greenery and the fact that they are not in a hotel (note from interview UKR 1, F).

Grad mladih, the space provided by the City of Zagreb, is excellent, the only problem was that some pavilions could not be used due to the earthquake, because they were still destroyed by the earthquake and there was a city quarantine for COVID because then it was still ongoing, we had to have a city quarantine still..., even though COVID was not so current then, there were not so many users of that quarantine, again there was a problem where we lost accommodation for 20 people..., the accommodation is adequate and is still ongoing, and really they are small pavilions where families are separated, where families live together, there are schools, public transport, food nearby, so everything is available to them, and they are then quite independent. (CSO 4, M)

[Grad mladih] is a very good place to live, the environment. Because it has a very good effect on their psychological state, really. (CSO 5_1, F)

The users of this collective accommodation emphasise the cordiality and openness of the management and staff of the hostel, who are always at their disposal. They are also grateful to the director who engaged in finding work for the accommodation users. A large number of Ukrainian women living in the Grad mladih works in the student restaurant of the Faculty of Agriculture, which is located nearby. They also praise the janitors who come whenever some minor repairs are needed.

... and this director who is here, he will always help you if you have a problem, if you are looking for a job. Everyone who works here in the student centre got a job thanks to him [...]. Or I asked for something, that I had to print out the papers for the course, print out the contract, sign, scan and send it immediately, we have a reception there, they work there [names of employees] they always help you. (UKR 6, F)

All participants consider the availability of an emergency medical team extremely important, however, they express dissatisfaction with the cancellation of these services. It is considered positive that with the help of these doctors, they got the medical insurance registration numbers, but the satisfaction with the medical services provided varied depending on the team that was on shift. The possibility of issuing prescriptions and referrals for specialist medical examinations was assessed as very positive, although the users expressed great dissatisfaction with the waiting period for examinations, comparing them with Ukraine, where the waiting time is much shorter and the examinations themselves are cheaper. The research participants are aware that waiting is not related to their status, and that Croatian citizens also face the same challenges. Since

the cessation of the arrival of medical teams in collective accommodation, most people granted temporary protection have found a family doctor (at least those who are employed), but CSO representatives believe that it was good that doctors were still available, especially for specialist examinations.

There was a doctor here. When we came to this doctor... we got this MBO number [medical insurance number], a medical number that the doctor can use to make prescriptions for you to come to the pharmacy, and they see it by this number. Yes, she did that to all of us, and she was there twice a week, but that was a long, long time ago. (UKR 6, F)

Living in a community with other Ukrainians is considered as very important by the users of this collective accommodation since they have the opportunity to socialise, discuss and jointly solve the problems and challenges they face. They also believe that, compared to those who live in private accommodation, they are better informed and less depressed (note from interview UKR 1, F), while people in private accommodation feel isolated and disconnected from the Ukrainian community. The negative side of life in a collective accommodation is that they do not need to socialise with Croats, nor to use the Croatian language, which in the long run can be an obstacle to successful integration. Adults are more prone to this separation, while their children fit in well at school and have friends who are not exclusively Ukrainian.

And here we do not communicate with Croats as much, a little less, I don't have that much communication. We hang out with Ukrainians more... I have Ukrainians, I don't really have that... the need or I don't know... I don't have the need to socialise and to hang out with Croats... no. My son has more of that. (UKR 6, F)

Although in rare situations there is a possibility of special accommodation for members of one family, the most negative side of accommodation in the Grad mladih is sharing accommodation (rooms, bathrooms) with strangers. In addition, changes and arrivals of new people in collective accommodation represent a certain source of stress due to the uncertainty of whether the new users will be moved into their rooms. This would require a renewed period of adjustment if it were even possible due to different lifestyle habits and family composition (for example, families with small children who have special rhythms and needs).

There is a very good place to live, the environment. Because it has a very good effect on their psychological state, really. But the fact that the rooms were intended for a completely different purpose and only a few of them can be with their families, especially when they are small families, has its big minuses. A lot of them have to share a room. This is unsustainable in the long term. Shared bathrooms, toilets, that's already a minor problem... You yourself understand that for a long period these are not families, these are not people who have been together from the beginning. (CSO 5_1, F)

And we came there, they said that the room was already taken, someone else had moved in. We can stay in this house (points to the house where she currently lives). There was a grandmother with her grandson in the room where we live now. Ok, she has a 13-year-old grandson, I have a 14-year-old son. I couldn't do anything if I wanted something else... what we have, then we have it... I was very happy that I didn't have to pay. (UKR 6, F)

The only thing that is not good is that you have to live with others you don't know. Yes, I'm a bit used to my roommate now, but it was difficult [...] a little different, she has her own schedule, I have my own schedule. She goes to work at 6:10 she already leaves. When she gets ready, I always wake up too. I'm already awake at 6:00, and so... I come late, because of that, because I have classes now, I can come around 11 o'clock, she's already asleep, I'm bothering her... Yes, it's so little... and when my son comes... so you know... It would be good if the rooms were a little smaller or something. In some houses, it's so beautiful. Every woman with her child in one room and ok, great. (UKR 6, F)

When you see that someone has come to the reception, you think: Not in my room! I had a lot of other people coming and one girl lived with us, and this one with grandmother, so there is always someone, you expect someone else to come. As they have their own schedule, they have their own smell, [...] it's all so slightly different and complicated. It just bothers you that you don't always have your own space like that. And everything else is great – we have laundry, we have food. (UKR 6, F)

The next major challenge for displaced persons from Ukraine in the Grad mladih (and also in collective accommodation in general) is served food that they are not used to. The menu offered in the collective accommodation restaurant does not suit most people because it mostly contains dry, overly spicy or greasy food. There is too much meat on the menu (sausages, kebabs, fillets...) which they don't like, and for dinner dough dishes (dumplings, gnocchi, etc.) are served. According to the statements of the research participants, fish and lighter food are more often on the menu in Ukraine. Many users (especially the

elderly) have problems with the digestive tract and complain of stomach and intestinal pain, for which they sometimes need to seek medical help.

The food, how can I say it, I can't be dissatisfied, because we don't pay for it, I'm glad we have some food at all. But the food is a little different than what we are used to in Ukraine and that's a little, I don't know how to say it, something is very nice, it's great, but then, some food is a disaster, I don't know how they cook it... but you eat it! I see that people come to the restaurant, he said you can order something like tripe, and you have this food, how do you say it – dumplings – I don't understand how to eat it at all, and we will still have it for dinner... Eat a lot of dough for dinner, I don't know, I don't... Gnocchi as well, I don't know how, so it's not for us... we're not used to this kind of food, something a little different... (UKR 6, F)

Let's say, very often in collective accommodation, in any, if you ask a refugee what is your problem, why the food is not good for you, they will say that salami, hot, sausages or something like that is being pushed non-stop in the most unexpected situations. A lot of spices, probably to suppress the smell or something, people get sick. People have bad irregular stool. It just seems that maybe it is not that important, but believe me, for older people, it later leads to haemorrhoids, it leads to inflammation of the intestines, infections or serious problems with the stomach and intestines, all of which are impossible to solve later with our health system. (CSO 5_1, F)

The time when the restaurant serves lunch or dinner, which is too short and lasts only half an hour - from 13:30 to 14:00 and from 18:00 to 18:30 is also mentioned as a certain drawback. If a person does not arrive to lunch or dinner at that time, they will not get a meal. However, there is a possibility that food in containers can be taken out of the restaurant and consumed in the pavilion, i.e. in the room. There are also refrigerators in the rooms, so food can be preserved (note from interview UKR 6, F) although users cannot prepare food on their own, which would be a better option for some of them.

We have that food, we all go to the restaurant. Every day is breakfast, lunch, dinner. We have food. There [in the house] we don't have a place to prepare it, we only have a kettle, a microwave oven, you can make something simple for yourself. (UKR 6, F)

From the conversations with representatives of CSOs, a significant difference in the quality of the accommodation facilities of Motel Plitvice and Grad mladih is visible.

Although none of the listed locations is considered ideal, the Grad mladih offers better conditions.

The assessment of the satisfaction of users of collective accommodation capacities varies, which is confirmed by the statements of representatives of CSOs and the users themselves. Although great gratitude for the provision of accommodation is emphasised, complaints are often made about the greater distance from the city centre (both locations), served food (Grad mladih), accommodation of several different families in the same rooms (Grad mladih), inability to use the kitchen (Grad mladih), inadequate capacities of hotel accommodation (for example, the inability to do laundry in the Motel Plitvice). Nevertheless, the participants of the qualitative research point out the high desire of users to stay in collective accommodation facilities, even though they are encouraged to leave, i.e. transfer to private accommodation (which can be subsidised) at the moment when they join the labour market and become financially independent.

Yes, those collective centres, I actually think yes for the first time, but no longer for later. It was a long-term no. [...] I really think that this is not the most natural thing to do on integration, they will stay there in the long run. (CSO 10_1, F)

Through this kind of psychosocial support, we are now trying to do the same for them, to get started, get a job, don't [...] that means try to be as little dependent on the system as possible because that is not good, we went in the wrong direction with them. I say, it's good to help someone for the first year, ok, get used to it [new environment], find a job, accommodation, settle down, someone has lived through trauma, they've lost people, some died, we understand all that and we'll always help, but I say now two years have passed and we can clearly see that they started to take all these things from our, what I call 'professional social-aid users', they started to take advantage of everything. It means taking advantage of everything, they all know all their rights already [...] and kudos to some, some of them really are, there's quite a large number of them who thanked us, they said – no, we managed, I have a job, I'm working, give it to someone who needs it, there are really things like that. (CSO 4, M)

Although the majority of persons granted temporary protection in Croatia hope to return to Ukraine (56%), a significant proportion plan to stay in Croatia, at least for the next three months (UHNCR, 2023). On the other hand, what causes anxiety among the participants of our research is that, although they have decided to settle permanently in Croatia, they will be called (mobilised) for the reconstruction of Ukraine as soon as the conflict stops.

The specific position and status of persons granted temporary protection in the context of the engagement of national authorities are assessed in two ways. The research participants attribute the immediate reaction regarding the acceptance and accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine to the involvement of national authorities, which contributed to the accelerated resolution of current issues and offered significant financial support, which was absent in the case of the acceptance of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection. Representatives of some CSOs consider this engagement uneven and politicised. On the other hand, representatives of some CSOs, although they praise the initiatives related to the integration of Ukrainian citizens in Croatia, believe that persons granted temporary protection still do not have all the conditions for successful integration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Zagreb, and Croatia in general, has recently been going through a phase of great migration. First, it referred to large waves of migrants – asylum seekers, and more recently foreign workers. It is clear that the system/institutions, as well as the people (locals and migrants), who experience this kind of change for the first time, will have various challenges when synthesising Integration. The City of Zagreb has successfully implemented activities and programmes related to integration. One of them, after a long wait, is a free Croatian language course and a free exam – a test of knowledge of the Croatian language. As far as that is concerned, the State tried to organise it on several occasions, but it turned out best that the Croatian language course should be organised at the local level because the City is closer to the citizens than the State. Activities, workshops, and education for citizens are very important at this time, and the City of Zagreb has successfully implemented some projects related to raising awareness and promoting the topic of integration. One of them is Alternative teaching in primary and secondary schools, which allows students to get to know migrants. There is still a great need for such activities, at least in the next few years, in order to break down prejudices and achieve a common understanding of migrants.

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According to the testimony of persons granted international protection, "Croatia is a highly centralised country and the question of integration of migrants is regulated by the highest level of the state institutions. However, the local authorities' importance is not to be underestimated/neglected. With its Action plan on Integration, the City of Zagreb plans to introduce new projects, filling in the shoes where the state has shown to be insufficient. The local community plays the most important role in regulating and implementing the regulations for integration. According to the City of Zagreb, from next year on the students with refugee status will be able to apply for city scholarships, and hopefully, other cities in which the refugees are settled will follow the example of the City of Zagreb" (Jobe et al., 2023: 20-21). However, for some (the majority of participants in this research), the role of the City of Zagreb is almost invisible, and the Action Plan is just another document. The pace of implementation of integration measures is assessed as too slow, but the City is perceived as a bridge that connects the local and national levels of implementation of integration measures.

I1: Are you even aware that the City of Zagreb has an action plan for integration?

P1 (M): It has a plan, yes... it has a plan, yes.

P4 (M): There hasn't been [a plan] for a very long time... again I hope there will be...

I1: The city of Zagreb has its own plan, but the one at the state level – there is no such plan yet...

P3 (M): Zagreb leads, the country follows! (FG-Asylum)

According to the participants of this research, the City of Zagreb should serve as an information platform using different ways of disseminating information through a website translated into relevant languages (including the languages of foreign workers who come in increasing numbers), brochures and one-stop shops. The main priorities continue to be the Croatian language courses and access to health care, as well as opportunities for socialisation (with the local population). They consider the establishment of health centres aimed at migrants (with the possibility of employing migrants themselves) one of the possible solutions for easier access to health care. Research participants consider these priorities important for all categories of migrants in

the City of Zagreb. They are also ready to contribute and help solve integration challenges with their own involvement since they personally went through this process.

Displaced persons from Ukraine with the experience of living in collective housing feel more protected than persons living in private housing because they do not have to worry about most things necessary for daily life (accommodation, food, household repairs), and they feel less lonely and isolated because of constant social contacts. However, the negative aspects of life in collective accommodation are related to sharing living space practically with foreigners, as well as increased use of the Ukrainian language and less interest and need for learning the Croatian language (and socialising with Croats), especially among the elderly. With the entry into the third (last?) year of temporary protection, there is a sense of uncertainty in maintaining collective accommodation where users would still like to stay. Moving to new locations, which has already happened to users of Motel Plitvice, can be considered a kind of interruption of integration, because after they have established life in one environment, i.e. found a job, a doctor, enrolled their children in school, they have to do it again in a new location. Therefore, one of the imperatives that should be (started) to be dealt with at the local level is the empowerment of people in collective accommodation and their increased independence.

Representatives of civil society organisations in general positively evaluate the role of the City of Zagreb, but expectations and recommendations are that it is necessary to do even more. They feel like recognised and important stakeholders (and partners) in all situations related to migration, but it is necessary to introduce some improvements at the organisational level, especially in the coordination of activities with multiple stakeholders. What stands out, in particular, is the initiative of the City of Zagreb at a time when there was no plan and no activities at the national level. On the other hand, there is a great difference between the implementation of integration measures for persons granted temporary protection and persons granted international protection (and other migrants) in favour of persons granted temporary protection, which should also be taken into account when addressing challenges in the integration of foreign workers.

And I also think that just as [the City of Zagreb] has reacted to the situation of people on the move and where the state did not react properly, now we have a situation with foreign workers, we need measures to protect the most vulnerable foreign workers. So, those who are the poorest and positionally the weakest, not

all of them, but those 10 or 15 % of the people who come to us, because there are now terrible violations of rights taking place in the area of Zagreb, which are somehow tolerated and normalised, but [an institutional] body is missing which would clearly and unequivocally take some kind of measures and create measures, and there I now see some room to go further a little more intensively because this concerning the people on the move, it was very visible to all of us, while this concerning foreign workers is most often in some neighbourhoods of Zagreb that are simply not around the Central Station, and that's where the difference is. (CSO 1, M)

The response of the City of Zagreb in crises (and related to increased transit migration and the reception of people from Ukraine) is assessed as positive, but there is a lack of management capacity at the level of engagement of municipal companies of the City. The future reception centre for crises should be established in such a way that it is suitable for several categories of users, with more funds available, an appropriate structure and an adequate surrounding.

The research participants believe that it is necessary to continue educating and sensitising all stakeholders involved in the integration process, but also that it is necessary to accept the help and support offered by the migrants themselves. Finally, it is necessary to increase the visibility of the City of Zagreb as one of the (most) relevant stakeholders since the integration takes place at the local level.

According to the analysed materials and collected data, the engagement of the City of Zagreb is generally positively assessed and the implemented measures are considered a good start and an opportunity for the formation of a system of successful integration of different categories of migrants (from those seeking international protection, through persons granted international or temporary protection, to an increasingly significant number of foreign workers from the third countries). What stands out to the greatest extent as a limitation are the insufficient financial resources that prevent the inclusion of a larger number of end users, as well as resorting to *ad hoc* measures instead of systematic solutions to crises. Initiatives at the level of local and regional self-governments are considered necessary by the research participants and they hope that other local communities will take similar initiatives that would contribute to a more successful integration of migrants in the Republic of Croatia. Participatory design of the evaluation project, i.e. the inclusion of the users of integration measures in the entire process of

carrying out the evaluation, and in-depth insight into their views on the (failure) of the available integration mechanisms contributes to gaining concrete knowledge about their experiences and needs and, ultimately, to a more adequate implementation of the results and recommendations of this study.

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