

Zagreb's Action Plan for the integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection

Zagreb, Croatia

Lead Agency

City of Zagreb

Context & rationale

In Croatia there was a National Action Plan for Integration of Persons Granted International Protection implemented between 2017-2019. Zagreb was invited to join the working group to develop the new national plan for 2021-2023. While there is no legal obligation for Croatian cities to adopt their own plan for integration, Zagreb wanted to develop a plan for the implementation of the National Plan. The National plan was delayed and so Zagreb decided to proceed with their own local strategy.

Recent migration context: In 2015 people displaced from war affected areas in the Middle East and Africa were arriving in Croatia, via the 'Balkan route', mostly transiting to other European countries. When the borders closed in 2016 some of those seeking

international protection stayed in Croatia and its capital. Many of the civic initiatives that had sprung up in 2015 to respond to humanitarian need in transit camps also started to provide integration support for people claiming asylum in Croatia. Zagreb municipality had not been able to build a clear picture of migration and integration in the city because these policy areas were managed by the state. In 2019 the city was for the first time invited to participate in the development of the national integration plan. The City wanted to develop a strategic approach to integration and better understand migration on the city level in order to encourage people to stay in Zagreb.

Target groups: The action plan, following the national plan, aims to support the integration of those granted international protection, but beyond the national framework also includes asylum seekers in several measures.

Aims

Inform persons granted IP (+ asylum seekers and persons granted temporary protection) about rights and available services provided by the City and to provide support in the access and exercise their rights (interpretation and mediation).

Provide integration support: language learning, learning about culture and tradition, adult education and employment support, extra-curricular and social activities, including those specifically provided for women

Raise awareness about migration and integration and promote inclusion in the local community

Strengthen competencies of city officials and employees of services run by the city in integration field.

Description

The development of the action plan began in 2020. The plan was adopted by the City Assembly in January 2022.

What was in place:

- Zagreb could build on the measures in the National Action Plan (the 2017-2019 plan and the draft of the plan 2021-23 plan not yet adopted) but could also go beyond this framework.
- Political Will: Change in leadership in the City Assembly in May 2021 to Green Left Coalition who have a commitment to integration and developing better policies.
- Involvement in Connection Project: Access to transnational learning and grant.

Main activities

- Creation of a website [integracija.zagreb.hr] and printing of leaflets providing information in Croatian, English, Arabic and Farsi, Ukrainian, to persons granted IP (or Temporary Protection) on rights and services.
- Creating a register of interpreters
- Provision of support so that persons granted IP can exercise rights
- Distribution of food and hygiene supplies
- Organising workshops and sessions to learn Croatian language and culture
- Organising artistic and IT workshops for migrant women
- Organising public events and thematic forums to raise awareness about integration and build inclusive and welcoming culture
- Organise training on integration for employees of the city who provide social and health services
- Develop programmes for adult education and access to employment for persons granted IP
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- These activities are delivered by the relevant City departments (City Office for Culture, International Relations and Civil Society, City Office for Education, Sport and Youth, City Office for Social Protection, Health, War Veterans and People with Disabilities) and partner NGOs.
- Integration and developing better policies.
- Involvement in Connection Project: Access to transnational learning and grant.



Resources Needed

Employees of the City of Zagreb

The Committee for the Development and monitoring of the Action Plan was set up, made up of city offices and one NGO (Jesuit Refugee Service).

8 civil society organisations have signed partnership agreements with the city to fulfil the implementation of the plan

€50,000 implementation grant from Connection Project for the implementation of measures of the Action Plan.

Co-financing of legal aid through an agreement between the city of Zagreb and the Law Faculty of the University of Zagreb.

There is also scope for NGOs to apply for tenders to provide services and projects financed through the City of Zagreb Budget 2022 (on themes such as integration, equality and anti-discrimination)



Results

In less than 6 months since being adopted there are already positive outcomes:

A public call for expression of interest for NGOs to participate in the implementation of the Connection project has resulted in partnership agreements with 8 organisations who are implementing activities.

The action plan has been extended to persons granted temporary protection due to the Ukrainian crisis

World Refugee Day 2022 event in Ribnjak Park organised by the City of Zagreb in cooperation with Center for youth Ribnjak. 5 NGOs participated in the all day programme with various activities like workshops for children and adults, musical workshops, exposition of ceramics and glass, sport activities, storytelling and traditional delicacies. Media was present through all programme.



Successful Factors

Pre-conditions for success

Carrying out a public consultation both improved the draft action plan, for eg. an amendment to include asylum seekers in as many measures as possible and increased commitment and cooperation from NGOs and the migrant communities they work with.

What has worked well

- The Action Plan has initiated strong communication and cooperation between city departments and with NGOs.
- Integration has been more present in public communication and the media with the help of web site, leaflets and celebration of the World Refugee Day.

Risks & Challenges

Working within a restrictive national immigration policy context: focusing the plan on areas where city has control, such as social protection, healthcare and employment, not on areas such as housing which is a national competency.

Addressing areas that are not in the jurisdiction of the City:

- Employment: to work around this the City is providing information and add in the access to employment.
- Housing: housing is under the jurisdiction of the state, and the City is currently not able to provide housing to migrants: The city is looking at scope to improve housing for migrants in the next city action plan.

Other challenges where the city would like to address in the future: scholarships for pupils and students granted international protection

Risks

- Losing political support for the plan within the city assembly.
- Change in national policy

Top Recommendations

- ✓ Focus on implementing existing and specific measures well and widen the scope of activities if possible
- ✓ Cooperate with other city offices who didn't so far deal with integration activities
- ✓ involve religious communities into integration and inclusion because of their strong impact on their communities

Do's

Carry out a public consultation, specifically consulting migrant communities and the organisations that work closely with these groups

Do involve people with migration experience in the coordination of the [action plan?] ideally those with different immigration statuses.

Make the plan as future-proof as possible, for example, making it possible to extend measures to include other groups of migrants, such as Ukrainian's with Temporary Protection or third country nationals coming to work in Croatia (a group which Zagreb is considering how to incorporate in the next phase of their plan).

Review the expertise and resources already existing in the city – expertise among NGOs, participation in national and international networks, institutions such as Universities.

Consider possible crises (Pandemics, war in neighbouring countries, earthquakes or other disasters that may require resources etc) in the development of the plan – build in flexibility

Precondition for success

The Municipality must support a strategic approach to integration

Good cooperation between the city offices and NGOs

Dont's

Don't depend on the national strategic documents

Don't exclude the organisation of certain activities just because the City itself does not have the experience with their implementation



Jana Radić, Head of the municipal Department for the Promotion of Human Rights and Civil Society in the City office for Culture, International Relations & Civil Society



[Zagreb's Webpage on integration developed as part of the Action Plan](#)