



**HRVATSKA
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SIROMAŠTVA**

**CROATIAN
ANTIPOVERTY
NETWORK**

HMPS.hr

Teslina 13
10 000 Zagreb
Hrvatska/Croatia

info@hmps.hr

The Croatian Anti-Poverty Network (CAPN) is the central national organization founded to combat poverty and social exclusion in Croatia. CAPN is dedicated to combating poverty by representing the interests of people with experience of poverty, organizing and participating in public and political debates, highlighting the problem of a disrupted system of social values, supporting initiatives and projects addressing the care of vulnerable and socially excluded groups of citizens.

Special emphasis has been put on creating partnerships with people with direct experience of poverty. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to provide an expert overview of statistical indicators and research results, as well as to consolidate the interests of different vulnerable groups of people. In addition, this report aims to encourage people living in poverty to partake as self-helpers and to participate in decision making process.

Martina, a person with direct experience of poverty, declares: *“poverty is a situation in which a person does not have enough resources to achieve basic living conditions or owns a low wage which barely cover his/her basic needs. I personally experienced life in poverty. I grew up with my parents and three elder brothers in a wooden house of 32 square meters. For many years we had lived on social welfare, and my parents could not find a job.”*

Statistical data on the movement of the poverty rate in Croatia are alarming. The poverty risk and social exclusion rate according Croatian Bureau of Statistics in 2016 was 28.5, indicating that 31.7% of people live in households that are extremely poor; 9.5% of people live in households that cannot afford adequate heating in the coldest months; 25.7% of people live in households that have been late in paying utility bills due to the financial difficulties in the last 12 months; 62.0% of people live in households where total housing costs have a considerable financial burden.

Comparing the position of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union, the findings indicate that Croatia ranks significantly below the EU average as regards employment, higher education and the combat against poverty. Speaking of strategies to combat poverty, Croatia is still concerned with the problem of so-called „traditional poverty”. However, among the poor, there is a growing proportion of households in which live active workers (employed or unemployed), children and educated persons.

During the process of the European semester there has been a progress, since Croatia for the few times have had a specific section on poverty reduction in CSR-s. As a result, in the National Reform Program the Government stands out within new objectives where one of the objectives is aimed to reform the social benefits system, among others. But if we analyze the plans and procedures of the Government in terms of the reform of the social security system it is evident that reform efforts still focus exclusively on reducing costs, promoting economic growth and promoting of an approach of economic reforms.

For EAPN Croatia, it is important that the CSR and the NRP recognize the problem of the lack of consistency and coordination among different public institution or lack of indicators when detecting vulnerable groups and how little has been achieved in addressing vulnerable groups.

On this formal level the Government has confirmed an affirmative approach towards the social welfare area, pin pointing its determination to reduce poverty and to support employability of vulnerable social groups.

However, the Network points out:

- social support and protection systems still do not sufficiently recognize the needs and rights of the most vulnerable people living in poverty (young unemployed, credit-borne household members) who are not in the public focus and the strategy of addressing poverty
- there is a need to revise past measures and policies to combat and prevent poverty (for example, "guaranteed minimum benefits which has significant problems in defining the amount given the number of household members)
- the system of social protection and active employment policies show poor performance in the alleviation and prevention of poverty, primarily due to the inadequate or extremely low social benefits, low coverage of the poor in remuneration from these systems and the relatively low benefits that are below the poverty line
- there are clear indications that people in poverty are faced with financial problems, often there is a lack of basic necessities (food, clothing, fever) and there is lack of quality family and social relationships
- it is important to stop the feeling of helplessness among people living in poverty by developing different initiatives from different sectors, but also by their interconnection, while at the same time affecting decision-makers
- the media should present poverty in accordance with real indicators, not based on common stereotypes and prejudice or individual cases

Suzana Gumbas, member of EUISG

Zdenko Babić, Ph.D, member of CAPN's Board

Martina Litanj, person with experience of poverty