

An update on developments regarding civic space in the EU and an overview of the possibilities for human rights defenders to enter EU territory

Croatia

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1. Civic space developments in 2022

1.1. Process of EU funds programming - designing the Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021-2027

Area	Participation and cooperation with authorities
Topic	Access to consultations / participation in decision-making Civil dialogue (dialogue/cooperation between authorities and civil society organisations) Public participation (citizen participation)
Impact	Major

The process of programming EU funds for the new financial perspective and designing the Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021-2027¹ by the Government of the Republic of Croatia was problematic from the point of public participation, access to information, timely and quality information of the public and transparency, according to several civil society organizations.² The Programme, along with the Programme for Competitiveness and Cohesion 2021-2027 and Integrated Territorial Programme 2021-2027, has only been accessible for public consultations for 15 days.³ According to the Right to Access to Information Law,⁴ public consultations must be open for at least 30 days and can only be shorter in extenuating circumstances where the reason must clearly be noted in the consultation document, or if another legal document prescribes

¹ Croatia, Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021 - 2027 ([Program Učinkoviti ljudski potencijali 2021.- 2027.](#)).

² Croatia, Consultations on Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021 - 2027 (Savjetovanje o Programu Učinkoviti ljudski potencijali 2021. - 2027.).

³ Croatia, Consultations on Programme Efficient Human Resources 2021 - 2027 ([Savjetovanje o Programu Učinkoviti ljudski potencijali 2021. - 2027.](#)).

⁴ Croatia, Right to Access to Information Law ([Zakon o pravu na pristup informacijama](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 25/2013, 85/2015, 69/2022.

a different amount of time. The Information Commissioner officially demanded more information about the reason for this from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy upon the request of several organisations.⁵ The official answer given by the ministry was that public bodies shortened the consultations, so as to meet the delivery deadline for the Programme. The ministry also emphasised that the Programme needed to be delivered to the European Commission by 15 July, and that the shortened period of consultations was approved by the Office of the President of the Government.⁶ The official response of the Commissioner was that being late in finishing the final draft due to omissions in planning is not a valid reason to shorten the consultation period.⁷ Furthermore, since the deadline for sending the Programmes to the European Commission was 15 July, and the public consultation was open until 9 July, there was room for doubt that any real consideration of the feedback from the public was given in only six days between the end of the consultation and the deadline for submission, which made the consultation process only *pro forma*. For civil society organisations this public consultation was the only chance for participation in designing the Programme. Representatives of civil society organisations were only included in working groups for drafting the Programme Documents late in the process.⁸ The representatives in the Working Group Solidary Croatia (responsible for drafting the Programme) complained to the Council for Civil Society Development that the process was unclear and that their proposals were not taken into account.⁹

⁵ Information obtained from the Information Commissioner (*Povjerenik za informiranje*), email correspondence with the Centre for Peace Studies, 30 June 2022.

⁶ Information obtained from the Information Commissioner (*Povjerenik za informiranje*), email correspondence with the Centre for Peace Studies, 30 June 2022.

⁷ Information obtained from the Information Commissioner (*Povjerenik za informiranje*), email correspondence with the Centre for Peace Studies, 30 June 2022.

⁸ Information obtained from the Government Council for Civil Society Development (*Savjet za razvoj civilnoga društva Vlade Republike Hrvatske*), 20 July 2021.

⁹ Information obtained from the Government Council for Civil Society Development (*Savjet za razvoj civilnoga društva Vlade Republike Hrvatske*), 20 July 2021.

1.2. Participation of civil society in decision-making

Area	Participation and cooperation with authorities
Topic	Public participation (citizen participation) Access to consultations / participation in decision-making
Impact	Major

Improving the conditions for work of HRD and CSOs has not been among the Government's priority for years, which is evident, among others, from the fact that Croatia still has not adopted¹⁰ a national policy in the area of civil society, ever since the last one expired in 2016.¹¹ According to the Government's Office for Cooperation with NGOs, the adoption of the civil society-related policy is planned for May 2023, more than two years since the Government initiated¹² the drafting process and more than a year since the working group was appointed.¹³ The length of the drafting, together with complaints from some working group members stating noticeable resistance and lack of

¹⁰ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), [Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2021](#), April 2022.

¹¹ Croatia, National strategy for creating an enabling environment for civil society development from 2012 to 2016 ([Nacionalna strategija stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnoga društva od 2012. do 2016. godine](#)), June 2012.

¹² Croatia, Government of the Republic of Croatia (*Vlada Republike Hrvatske*), Decision on initiating the process of drafting the National plan for creating an enabling environment for civil society development from 2021 to 2027 ([Odluka o pokretanju postupka izrade Nacionalnog plana stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnoga društva od 2021. do 2027.](#)), February 2021.

¹³ Croatia, Croatian Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs (Vladin Ured za udruge), Decision on the appointment of members of the Working Group for the preparation of the National plan for creating an enabling environment for civil society development from 2021 to 2027 ([Odluka o imenovanju članova Radne skupine za izradu Nacionalnog plana stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnoga društva od 2021. do 2027.](#)), January 2022.

will from the institutional stakeholders - questioning the need to have a national policy on civil society¹⁴ - hinders the overall quality of the process.

According to a recent report by Human Rights House Zagreb, HRDs and CSOs in Croatia face shrinking civic space, which negatively impacts exercising their right to public participation.¹⁵ Inadequate and deteriorating institutional culture regarding civic participation and dialogue with civil society, together with a weak normative framework that regulates CSOs' participation in decision-making processes based solely on government ordinances instead of legislative-based regulation, are the core issues that impede the full exercise of the rights to public participation.

Processes of appointing CSO representatives as members of public bodies, such as working groups or committees, are often non-transparent and not based on selecting the most qualified candidates. CSOs state that, in many cases, participation in the work of those bodies is reduced to a formality without any real possibility for interaction and argumentative dialogue to find the best solutions for social issues.¹⁶

One of the most demonstrative examples of the deteriorating cross-sectoral collaboration and dialogue in Croatia is the functioning of the Government's Council for Civil Society Development, which almost completely ceased to be a place of consultation and dialogue and is thus less and less fulfilling its role in fostering inter-sectoral cooperation. Marginalisation of the Council, which was once regarded as a body of prime importance for cooperation and dialogue, negativity affects the overall standard of other bodies in which CSOs representatives participate.¹⁷

Regarding citizen participation in decision-making, online consultations became the primary and almost only form of consultations with citizens regarding legislative and policy changes. Although E-counselling (E-savjetovanja) - a central portal for online consultations - is a well-known and frequently used tool, the solely online consultations

¹⁴ Webpage Udruga.org, article "After thirty years, are we still in the phase of creating an enabling environment for the development of civil society?" (Zar smo nakon trideset godina još u fazi stvaranja poticajnog okruženja za razvoj civilnog društva?), 15 November 2022.

¹⁵ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022.

¹⁶ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022, page 16.

¹⁷ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022, page 20.

without an opportunity for the representatives of the institutions and CSO to meet and consult in person hinder the possibility of an argumentative discussion, exchange and genuine dialogue which is a prerequisite for better-tailored policies and legislation that responds to the social needs and challenges.¹⁸

Although CSOs and HRDs experience the same or similar problems across specific sectors in which they work, the unavailability of public information and the reluctance of the state institutions to cooperate with civil society are particularly concerning problems CSOs working on the rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, as well as on environmental protection face.¹⁹

1.3. Criminalisation of and SLAPPS against activists

Area	Safe space and protection
Topic	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPS) Criminalisation of humanitarian or human rights work Legal harassment
Impact	Major

In Croatia, the criminalisation of the work of NGOs is particularly felt by organisations and activists working in the field of protection of the human rights of refugees and other migrants.

¹⁸ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022, pages 21-22.

¹⁹ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022, pages 23.

Omer Essa Mahdi is a refugee whose asylum status was revoked after he rejected the offer to be “an informant” for the secret services.²⁰ ²¹ It is important to mention that he is also the partner of migrant rights defender Tajana Tadić.²² Mahdi’s refugee status was revoked based on the Intelligence Service Agency’s assessment that he represents a threat to national security. This arbitrarily issued decision was marked with a level of secrecy, which means that neither Mahdi nor his lawyer were able to access the information based on which he was accused of being a threat to public security. To his knowledge, Mahdi had not committed anything that could bring about such an assessment, and he was unable to defend himself against accusations that he did not know the content of. The decision to revoke Mahdi’s refugee status was made by the Security and Intelligence Agency and the Ministry of the Interior with full knowledge of the nature of his relationship with Tadić. Therefore, said decision was perceived as an attack on Tadić’s activities as a human rights defender and an attempt to silence and intimidate her.²³ As stated, neither Mahdi nor his attorney were given access to the part of the file classified as “secret”. Therefore, Mahdi could not submit a review of the documents, including numerous international expert opinions which substantiated his claims. The Ministry of the Interior also objected to hearing the witnesses suggested by the defence. On 12 January 2021, the Administrative Court of Croatia dismissed the appeal against the decision of the Ministry of Interior to revoke Mahdi’s refugee status. Furthermore, he was instructed to voluntarily leave the European Economic Area (EEA) within 30 days of the decision, or face forced removal. Fearing deportation to Iraq, Mahdi had no choice but to leave Croatia. Consequently, Tadić left as well. The second-

²⁰ Liberties, [Rule of Law Report 2022](#), Chapter on Croatia, page 133.

²¹ Croatia. Centre for Peace Studies and Human Rights House Zagreb (*Centar za mirovne studije and Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), [Rule 9.2. Communication](#). In accordance with the Rules of the Committee of Ministers regarding the supervision of the execution of judgments and of terms of friendly settlements in the Case of M.H. and Others v. Croatia No. 15670/18 and 43115/18 (G. measures aimed at protecting and empowering human rights defenders), 22 September 2022.

²² Intimidation and pressure were particularly directed toward the human rights defender Tajana Tadić, the former AYS employee. Since 2018, she vocally and publicly demanded justice for M.H. and Hussiny family, as well as for the rights of refugees and other migrants in Croatia, and publicly criticised the unlawful police conduct. For that, she was questioned by the police, police officers were sent to her parent’s address at night, and officers who were regularly entering the premises of AYS without identification were asking her inappropriate questions about her ethnicity in front of her work colleagues and beneficiaries.

²³ Frontline Defenders, Article “[Pressure on family member of migrant rights defender Tajana Tadić](#)”, 21 July 2021.

instance verdict of the High Administrative Court, delivered to Mahdi and Tadić in September 2022, was passed on an almost identical principle. In October 2022, Mahdi's lawyer, Sanja Bezbradica Jelavić, filed a Constitutional appeal, and the couple is ready to proceed to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary.²⁴

1.4. SLAPPs against environmental organisations and activists

Area	Safe space and protection
Topic	Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)
Impact	Major

Environmental organisations in Croatia continue to face SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation) lawsuits aimed to intimidate, censor and silence the work of human rights defenders in the field of environmental protection. Legal proceedings against environmental organization Green Action - Friends of the Earth Croatia initiated by private investors back in 2017 are still ongoing. The process was initiated in relation to the planned construction of a golf resort on Srđ mountain above Dubrovnik. In criminal proceedings for defamation and civil proceedings for damages, the investor is claiming over HRK 200,000 from the Green Action. At the same time, the investor requested the commercial court to adopt a temporary measure that would prohibit the Green Action's activist engagement and the right to freedom of expression during the realisation of the project on Srđ mountain. Negative consequences of the duration and delays in the proceedings are reflected in the financial burden, consumption of the organization's time and capacities, as well as the general public's negative perception of the Green Action - Friends of the Earth Croatia.²⁵²⁶

²⁴ Portal Novosti, Article Omer against the state ([Omer protiv Države](#)), 29 October 2022.

²⁵ Croatia, Human Rights House Zagreb (*Kuća ljudskih prava Zagreb*), Human Rights Defenders in Croatia - Challenges and Obstacles ([Branitelji ljudskih prava - izazovi i prepreke](#)), December 2022.

A SLAPP lawsuit was filed in November 2022 against three Croatian activists by the company Hotel Valkane. Nataša Turković, Aleksej Orel, and Boris Stermotić, from the referendum initiative For the Pula Lungomare will be tried for speaking against the construction of a luxury hotel on „the last piece of the coast that was intended for the leisure of Pula's citizens, the Pula Lungomare“.²⁷ The three local activists were accused of damaging the company's reputation by criticising the planned construction in a session of the Pula City Council, held in June 2022, and on a radio show that aired in May of the same year.²⁸

Hotel Valkane d.o.o. is a company led by Stevan Muidža, a highly positioned politician and the director of multiple companies founded for the purpose of managing land property acquired in the dubious privatisation process after the breakup of Yugoslavia which was criticised by some for “being opaque and benefitting a small group of politically well-connected people who were sold important enterprises at below-market prices.”²⁹³⁰

Despite 88% of votes on the referendum organised by the initiative being against the hotel construction, it failed due to low turnout. The referendum was attended by 23% of registered voters and the law requires 50% plus one voter for the result to be valid.³¹

It is visible from the process that it is aimed at intimidating the activists and making their activities difficult. After receiving notice of the SLAPP lawsuit, the initiative published a plea for donations from the public to cover their court expenses which resulted in payments from more than 80 citizens, allowing the Initiative to collect 25 000 HRK (3 324 Euros) in a couple of days. Members of the initiative claim that their goal is to

²⁷ Croatia, portal Glas Istre, article “The investor sued three citizens from the Lungomare Initiative. They are now asking the people of Pula to donate money for court costs” ([Investitor tužio troje građana iz Inicijative za Lungomare. Oni sada traže od Puležana da im doniraju novac za sudske troškove](#)), 23 November 2022.

²⁸ Croatia, portal Novi list, article “Sued members of the referendum initiative for Lungomare collected HRK 25,000” ([Tuženi članovi referendumске inicijative za Lungomare skupili 25 tisuća kuna](#)), 26 November 2022.

²⁹ OECD (2021), OECD Review of the Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises: Croatia, page 32.

³⁰ Croatia, portal Lupiga, article “ACTIVISTS ARE FILLED WITH LAWSUITS: “This is like a fight between David and Goliath”” ([AKTIVISTI ZASUTI TUŽBAMA: „Ovo je kao borba Davida protiv Golijata“](#)), 24 November 2022.

³¹ Croatia, portal Lupiga, article “ACTIVISTS ARE FILLED WITH LAWSUITS: “This is like a fight between David and Goliath”” ([AKTIVISTI ZASUTI TUŽBAMA: „Ovo je kao borba Davida protiv Golijata“](#)), 24 November 2022.

organise a large international campaign in January 2023 in order to collect funds for starting a foundation which will offer financial aid to people facing SLAPP lawsuits.³²

³² Croatia, portal Glas Istre, article “The investor of the hotel in Valkana sued the members of the referendum initiative for Lungomare, and they collected HRK 25,000 from the citizens for the defense” ([*Investitor hotela na Valkanama tužio članove referendumske inicijative za Lungomare, a oni od građana prikupili 25 tisuća kuna za obranu*](#)), 27 November 2022.

2. Promising practice in 2022

2.1. Campaigning and crowdfunding for activists in risk of criminalisation

In Croatia, the Foreigners Act³³ does not clearly differentiate between acts of solidarity for humanitarian reasons and the smuggling of migrants, which gives the authorities a wide margin of interpretation and was used on several occasions to criminalise persons who, for humanitarian reasons and without any personal gain or interest, helped a refugee or migrant.

In November 2021, Dragan Umičević, a volunteer with the NGO Are You Syrious? (AYS), active in the protection of the rights of refugees and other migrants, was convicted and fined for helping the family of Madina Hussiny³⁴ illegally enter Croatia. Although Umičević did not have direct contact with the family and his sole intent was to make sure that the Croatian police followed the law on allowing the Hussiny family to seek asylum, the police pressed charges against him. The final ruling of the High Administrative Court fined him 60,000 HRK (7,970 EUR) in a misdemeanour proceeding. This ruling happened shortly after a European Court of Human Rights ruling which confirmed that the criminal investigation and pressure to which the Hussiny family's lawyer was subjected were aimed at discouraging them from taking their case to Strasbourg. In a public statement, Are You Syrious? wrote: *“This is a man who acted in accordance with law and morality, and the show trial against him, besides being in direct contravention of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and the verdict of the European Court of Human Rights, is a continuation of intimidation that we as a society must not agree to. By the verdict of the authorities, he now has to pay a fine of 60.000,00 HRK (7982.60 EUR) (which is a precedent in our judiciary) and 1.300,00 HRK (173 EUR) in court costs. The court knew for certain that Dragan was a retired Croatian veteran,*

³³ Croatia, Foreigners Act ([Zakon o strancima](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 133/2020.

³⁴ European Court of Human Rights, M.H. and others v. Croatia (Applications nos. [15670/18](#) and [43115/18](#)), judgment of 18 November 2021, and [final judgment](#) of 4 April 2022. The Court found violations of five rights guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights.

whose monthly income is 5,000 HRK (665 EUR), and who has no way to cover this enormous amount.”³⁵

AYS organised a successful crowdfunding campaign in which they managed to collect enough money to cover the fine and the court costs in less than 24 hours, and are planning to continue the legal proceedings in this matter. This crowdfunding campaign indicated that the criminalisation of solidarity is not accepted by Croatian society.

Another promising practice is the crowdfunding campaign for Nikola Tesla. Nikola Tesla, a namesake of a famous scientist, is an authorised guide in the Velebit Nature Park and a seasonal guide in the Paklenica National Park, a trainee speleologist. The 15-year-long environmentalist battle of Nikola Tesla began in March 2007, when the Municipality of Starigrad allocated a plot of land right next to his house to a local utility company for waste management. The land, located between Nikola's house and a protected forest, was backfilled by the waste company with various construction and other waste and used to park and wash garbage trucks. Apart from the fact that heavy machinery was constantly passing by the house and under the windows of the Tesla family, they also destroyed two thousand square meters of forest and dumped eight and a half thousand cubic meters of various waste. Throughout that period, the Tesla family's life turned into daily harassment and abuse by local officials - from the inability to get a job due to the criminal proceedings initiated by the municipality against him to insults by employees of the municipal utility company. Since 2009, he has been addressing various institutions - the Police, the Environmental Inspectorate, the Ministry of Administration, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the Croatian Forests Company. Even when he managed to prove that the environmentally harmful waste is being dumped illegally and right next to his house, and when the competent institutions ordered a return of the site to the previous state, nothing happened, which is why in 2012 Nikola sought judicial protection through the institute of free legal aid and sued the municipality. Although the site was never restored to its original condition, it was rehabilitated and the utility company no longer uses it for its heavy machinery. However, Nikola lost the court proceedings and was obliged to pay immense and ever-growing court costs - 86.000,00 HRK (approx. 11.500 EUR).³⁶

The charity action for Nikola Tesla raised a total of 9.370 EUR (70.548,06 HRK). The target amount was 11.500 EUR (HRK 86.000), which was the amount of the current court costs with interest. The funds were raised through the official bank account of the charity

³⁵ Are You Syrious?, [AYS News Digest 14–15/12/2021: Volunteer convicted in Croatia for preventing pushback](#), published on 16 December 2022.

³⁶ Green Action / Friends of the Earth Croatia (*Zelena akcija*), [Donate for Nikola Tesla - environmental defender](#), 25 May 2022.

action of Green Action / Friends of the Earth Croatia and a benefit party held at the end of the campaign.³⁷

³⁷ Green Action / Friends of the Earth Croatia (*Zelena akcija*), [9.370 EUR collected for Nikola Tesla! Many thanks to everyone!](#), 29 June 2022.

3. Visa for human rights defenders

3.1. Entry and stay for human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk

Dedicated visa scheme for HRDs at risk available in your country	No
Other type of visa or alternative legal entitlement or derogation clause applied to HRDs	No

Croatian national legislation does not specifically define or refer to human rights defenders even though the term HRDs is being used in practice by some institutions. When it comes to independent human rights institutions, the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia introduced a separate chapter titled “Human rights defenders” in her annual report for the first time in 2022.³⁸

The definition used by Croatian CSOs and human rights defenders reflects the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders³⁹ and the definition in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.⁴⁰

There are no specific provisions regarding entry and stay for human rights defenders at risk in Croatia. Therefore, general visa provisions valid for entry of foreigners in Croatia should apply to HRDs as well.

As of 1 July 2013, the Republic of Croatia, as an EU Member State, has been applying the common visa policy of the European Union relating to the common visa regime. The procedures and conditions for issuing visas for intended short stays (i.e. 90 days per 180 days’ period) on the territory of the Member States, as set out in the EU Visa Code, do

³⁸ Croatia, Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia (*Pučka pravobraniteljica*), Report for 2021 (*Izvešće o radu za 2021. godinu*), March 2022.

³⁹ UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), 9 December 1998, A/RES/53/144, 8 March 1999.

⁴⁰ [EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders 2008](#), Council doc. 16332/2/08 REV 2, 10 June 2009.

not distinguish between categories of applicants on the basis of their profession, activities or travel purpose.

The Croatian Foreigners Act⁴¹ prescribes the conditions for the entry, movement and stay, and work of third-country nationals. Regarding the stay in Croatia, third-country nationals may stay in the Republic of Croatia: up to 90 days in any 180-day period (short-term stay); up to a year – (temporary stay); and indefinitely (permanent stay and long-term residence).

A short-term stay is a stay of third-country nationals defined by Article 6 of the Schengen Borders Code (Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of 9 March 2016). Temporary stay may be granted to third-country nationals who intend to stay or who are staying in the Republic of Croatia on humanitarian grounds or for family reunification, among other basis. Temporary stay for the purpose of work is granted as a stay and work permit.

Article 48(1) of the Aliens Act grants entry in Croatia on the basis of special circumstances for a third-country national who does not meet the entry conditions laid down in the Schengen Borders Code if this is required on serious humanitarian grounds, by international obligations or interests of the Republic of Croatia. However, those grounds are not explicitly listed, so they remain under state discretion.

Visa serves as an approval for transit through the territory of the Republic of Croatia or stay in the territory of the Republic of Croatia for a maximum period of 90 days in any 180-day period, or transit through the international area of an airport. Types of visas are: airport transit visa (A visa) and short-term visa (C visa). A visa does not grant a third-country national the right to work in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. It is issued for one, two, or multiple entries for the purpose of transit, tourism, business, private or other purposes. Its validity period depends on the circumstances of the visitors' travel to Croatia and may not exceed five years.⁴²

Visas are issued by the Croatian diplomatic mission or a consular post. In exceptional cases, visas may be issued by a police station responsible for cross-border checks in cases when third-country nationals are not able to apply for visas in advance at a Croatian diplomatic mission or a consular post. In such cases, third-country nationals have to provide supporting documents proving the unexpected and imperative reasons for their entry into the Republic of Croatia.⁴³

⁴¹ Croatia, Foreigners Act ([Zakon o strancima](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 133/2020.

⁴² Croatia, Foreigners Act ([Zakon o strancima](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 133/2020.

⁴³ Croatia, Foreigners Act ([Zakon o strancima](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 133/2020.

The validity period of a visa and/or the duration of stay granted on the basis of the issued visa may be extended if the Ministry considers that the visa holder has delivered proof of: force majeure or humanitarian reasons that have prevented him or her from leaving the territory of the Republic of Croatia prior to the visa expiry or the expiry of the duration of stay granted on the basis of the said visa; and serious personal reasons that justify the extension of the visa validity period or the duration of stay.⁴⁴

With regards to eligibility criteria and vetting process, holding a visa does not guarantee entry into Croatia. Other requirements for entry of foreigners prescribed by the Foreigners Act also have to be met.

⁴⁴ Croatia, Foreigners Act ([Zakon o strancima](#)), Official Gazette (*Narodne novine*) Nos. 133/2020.