

Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights Implications

Country: Croatia

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1 Measures taken by government/public authorities impacting on specific freedoms

1.1 Emergency laws/states of emergency

Summary March-July 2020:

As mentioned during previous reporting periods, Croatian Government did not declare a state of emergency but it declared a coronavirus pandemic on 11 March 2020, when the broad powers of the Minister of Health enumerated in the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases entered into force. Civil protection system in Croatia is governed by the Law on Civil Protection System, and the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia was established by the Croatian Government on 20 February with the purpose to coordinate all services in the event of the occurrence of COVID-19 in Croatia. Amendments introduced to the Law on Civil Protection System in March were publicly criticized from various legal experts in a way that newly added Article 22a of the Law on Civil Protection System substantially matches the definition of disaster that already existed in the Law, and that it seems that the governing majority in parliament deliberately avoids applying constitutional and legal norms in order to enable them to manage the crisis by passing the laws by simple majority and not by two-third of majority of the parliamentarian which is needed if the state declared state of emergency or if extraordinary circumstances occurred.

Public debate did not only challenge why the Government didn't declare a state of emergency, but also the legality of measures ordered by the Civil Protection Headquarters because the legal basis for delivering such decisions were in newly added Article 22a of the Law on the Civil Protection System. In addition, amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases were initiated in an urgent procedure in order to give legality to measures by the Civil Protection Headquarters in a way that special security measures could be ordered not only by the Minister of Health but also by the Civil Protection Headquarters.

September-October 2020:

Following the public debate that challenged why the Government didn't declare a state of emergency, including the legality of measures ordered by the Civil Protection Headquarters, the Constitutional Court received a number of submissions for constitutional review and constitutional claims that question the legislative and other measures adopted as a response to COVID-19 crisis.¹

Several submissions related to the constitutional review of laws related to the coronavirus pandemic - the amended Law on Civil Protection System and the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases. Considering the interrelation of the questioned provisions of these two acts (Law on Civil Protection System and Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases) as well as the fact that several submissions concerned the same subject matter, the Constitutional Court led a unique constitutional procedure in relation to the both questioned pieces of legislation.² Some

¹ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Summary Statement/Press Release on decisions adopted by the Constitutional Court in relation to applications concerning constitutionality of legislation and measures adopted in the frame of COVID-19 epidemic, available at: [https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/\\$FILE/SA%c5%bdETAK%20-%20COVID-19.pdf](https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/$FILE/SA%c5%bdETAK%20-%20COVID-19.pdf)

² Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Decision No: U-I-1372/2020, U-I-1999/2020, U-I-2075/2020, U-I-2233/2020, U-I-2161/2020, U-I-2234/2020, 14 September 2020, available at: [https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/\\$FILE/U-I-1372-2020%20i%20dr.pdf](https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/$FILE/U-I-1372-2020%20i%20dr.pdf)

of the most relevant issues and questions raised by the applicants concerned the following: the newly added Article 22.a of the Law on the Civil Protection Headquarters transferred the authorities to the Civil Protection Headquarters which are inherent exclusively to the Croatian Parliament considering that they concern measures restricting human rights and freedoms; following the emergence of COVID-19 epidemic, according to some applicants the Croatian Parliament should have declared a state of emergency and “activate” the Article 17 of the Constitution according to which all decisions concerning restrictions of human rights and freedoms shall be brought by a two-thirds majority of all the MPs; question of the legality of the decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters and application of Article 18 of the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases which gave the legality to those decisions; the fact that the Civil Protection Headquarters as an executive body is not entitled to independently adopt decisions on restrictions of certain human rights and freedoms, as well as that the Civil Protection Headquarters’ measures don’t have a legitimate goal, it is not possible to check their necessity and proportionality, their duration is unlimited and they are not subject to legislative or judicial control.³

The Constitutional Court decided that the decision on whether certain measures to combat the COVID-19 epidemic will be made in application of Article 16 or Article 17 of the Constitution is in the exclusive domain of the Croatian Parliament as a legislative body and hence the Constitutional Court is not authorized to order the Croatian Parliament which of the two constitutional options for restricting human rights and fundamental freedoms to choose. Therefore, according to the Constitutional Court the fact that the disputed laws (and measures) were not enacted on the basis of Article 17 of the Constitution does not make those laws unconstitutional.⁴

In relation to the authority of the Civil Protection Headquarters for adopting measures/decisions restricting certain human rights and freedoms, the Constitutional Court decided that the Civil Protection Headquarters did have and still does have legal entitlement to adopt measures according to the Article 47 of the Law on Protection of Population from Infectious Diseases and Article 10 of the Law on the Amendments of the Law on Protection of Population from Infectious Diseases relating to the adoption of safety measures for the protection of population from infectious diseases. However, the Constitutional Court pointed out that this does not mean that the decisions of the Headquarters are not subject to the control of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. It stated that there are no obstacles for the Croatian Parliament to request a report from the Government on the implementation of measures and work of the Headquarters if it deems necessary. The Constitutional Court assessed that the Croatian Parliament remained within the limits of its powers prescribed by the Constitution when it enacted the amendments to the law which, inter alia, prescribe (envisage) measures restricting fundamental human rights and freedoms with the purpose of preventing the spread of the epidemic of infectious disease to protect human life and health.⁵

As previously mentioned, amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases were initiated in urgent procedure in order to give legality to measures by the Civil Protection Headquarters in a way that special security measures could be ordered not only by the Minister of Health but also by the Civil Protection Headquarters. Considering that this law sought to regulate cases that have already occurred, certain applicants questioned whether this issue represented a matter of retroactive application of the law which is generally prohibited by Article 90 of the Constitution. According to the views expressed by the governing parliamentary majority, there is no

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

retroactivity since the amendments concern ongoing legal situations and apply to existing relations that continue in the future. The Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases has no retroactive effect since all decisions of the Headquarters would be valid and will be valid in the forthcoming period for which it is not possible to know with certainty how long it will last so according to them the Law introduced the so called "false", "apparent" or "quasi" retroactivity. However, the Constitutional Court assessed that the amendment in question did not establish the legal authority of the Civil Protection Headquarters to make decisions and measures as it had already been established on the basis of Article 22a of the Law on the Civil Protection System. It decided that this was not a question of retroactivity or subsequent legalization of the measures of the Headquarters, but rather that it defined the legal nature of the Civil Protection Headquarters' measures in a way that these measures are considered security measures as defined by the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases.⁶

Based on the argumentation above, the Constitutional Court decided not to accept the proposals to initiate procedures for constitutional review of disputed articles of the Law on Civil Protection System and the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Protection of Population from Infectious Diseases. Such a decision was adopted by the majority of 10 constitutional judges, whereas the remaining 3 constitutional judges who were against it published separate opinions expressing their strong disagreement with the decision and elaborating their views on the constitutional issues in question.⁷ Some of their arguments were already expressed during public debate of constitutional legal experts on these issues which was initiated as soon as the amendments were adopted this spring.⁸

Other applications for assessment of constitutionality were related to measures such as the imposed obligation of wearing face protection masks, the obligation of self-isolation and a temporary ban of work on Sundays. The Constitutional Court rejected all proposals for constitutional review related to decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters apart from one, in relation to which it determined that the prohibition of work on Sundays at the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic was not in line with the Constitution. The rest of the measures were hence assessed as constitutional.⁹

Furthermore, Rules of Procedure of the Croatian Parliament was amended in April 2020 in a way that new Article 293.a was added to the Rules of Procedure¹⁰ in relation to the work of the Croatian Parliament in case of proclamation of epidemic of infectious disease or danger of epidemic of infectious disease as well as pandemic of infectious disease. It introduced "epidemiological" changes in the work of the Croatian Parliament such as the possibility of shortening time for discussion, shortening time for breaks, limitation of representatives present at the session and suspension of the right to reply. In September, 35 representatives of the opposition appealed to the Constitutional Courts and requested the assessment of the constitutionality of the Rules of Procedure claiming that

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ More details on the debate are available in Croatia's country research for the FRA Bulletin 2 on Coronavirus pandemic in the EU from 4 May 2020, available at:

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/hr_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_may_2020.pdf

⁹ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Summary Statement/Press Release on decisions adopted by the Constitutional Court in relation to applications concerning constitutionality of legislation and measures adopted in the frame of COVID-19 epidemic, available at:

[https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/\\$FILE/SA%c5%bdETAK%20-%20COVID-19.pdf](https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12585E7002A7E7C/$FILE/SA%c5%bdETAK%20-%20COVID-19.pdf)

¹⁰ Croatian Parliament, Rules of Procedure on the amendments of the Rules of Procedure of the Croatian Parliament (OJ 53/2020), available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_04_53_1061.html

its amendments limited their right to discussion granted by the Constitution. The Constitutional Court assessed that the newly introduced measures had a legitimate cause which is the protection of life and health of the representatives. However, the applicants argued that those measures are too excessive since they prevent representatives to participate in the work of the Parliament in full capacity, especially in relation to the right to express their viewpoints, including the right to reply to the legislation proponents. The applicants were of the opinion that the legitimate aim can be achieved through different measures which don't restrict the representatives in performance of their functions.¹¹

The Constitutional Court concluded that the legitimacy of the Parliament derives from the given trust of the people, and that it exercises its function primarily by participating in Parliament sessions and discussing and voting on certain issues on the agenda. The Constitutional Court also noted that following the amendments the attendance at the Parliament sessions and participation in the discussion are limited due to the limitation of number of MPs present in the Parliament session hall and the duration of the session. However, all MPs are enabled to vote on concluded agenda items at the same time, regardless of whether they are physically in the Parliament, electronically and/or by raising their hand in one or more rooms outside the session hall in the Parliament building. In other words, it noted that there are obviously technical possibilities for a different way of organizing the work of the Parliament in generally known circumstances, which do not limit the rights and duties of MPs. Finally, the Constitutional Court concluded that any restriction on the exercise of the rights and duties of the representatives must be objectively and reasonably justified, which is not the case in the circumstances of this case. The Constitutional Court therefore repealed the newly added Article 293.a of the Croatian Parliament's Rules of Procedure.¹²

1.2 Freedom of assembly

The latest Decision introducing necessary measures during the declared epidemic of COVID-19 disease for the organization of gatherings attended by more than hundred participants was adopted on 10 July 2020 by the Civil Protection Headquarters.¹³ Following the worsening of the epidemic situation, the respective Decision was amended in October 2020 in a way that it reduced the number of participants that specific measures refer to from 100 to 50.^{14 15}

Hence, since mid-October 2020 organizers of gatherings who are expecting more than 50 participants are obliged to submit a notification to the territorially competent civil protection service of the Civil Protection Directorate via e-mail of the 112 (emergency) county center, no later than 48 hours before

¹¹ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Decision No. U-I-4208/2020, 20 October 2020, available at: [https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12586080035A65C/\\$FILE/U-I-4208-2020.pdf](https://sljeme.usud.hr/usud/praksaw.nsf/C12570D30061CE54C12586080035A65C/$FILE/U-I-4208-2020.pdf)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision on necessary measures for organizations of gatherings attended by more than 100 participants within the duration of the declared epidemic of COVID-19 disease (OJ 80/20), 10 July 2020, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_07_80_1507.html

¹⁴ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision amending the Decision on necessary measures for organizations of gatherings attended by more than 100 participants within the duration of the declared epidemic of COVID-19 disease (OJ 111/20), 12 October 2020, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_10_111_2205.html

¹⁵ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision amending the Decision on necessary measures for organizations of gatherings attended by more than 50 participants within the duration of the declared epidemic of COVID-19 disease (OJ 113/20), 15 October 2020, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_10_113_2235.html

the planned start of the gathering. The notification must contain: the purpose, place, day and time of the gathering, information about the contact person and the expected number of participants. Organizers who have registered the gathering in accordance with the Law on Public Assemblies are not obliged to submit a notification to the Civil Protection Directorate.

Organizers of gatherings attended by more than 50 participants are required to keep written records of participants in accordance with the instructions and recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health and those records must be kept for at least 14 days. All participants are obliged to adhere to general anti-epidemic measures and special recommendations and instructions of the Croatian Institute of Public Health. If it is found that one of the participants of the gathering is infected with the coronavirus, the organizer of the gathering is obliged to submit the participants' records to the territorially competent civil protection service of the Civil Protection Directorate via e-mail of the 112 county center.

Control of the implementation of this Decision and control of compliance with the recommendations and instructions of the Croatian Institute of Public Health will be carried out by teams consisting of one inspector of the Directorate of Civil Protection and one police officer. The teams are coordinated by the heads of regional civil protection offices.

In addition to this amendment, the Civil Protection Headquarters adopted another decision on 12 October 2020 relating to the restrictions of social gatherings which applied to some types of social gatherings.¹⁶ The Decision introduced the necessary epidemiological measure of restricting social gatherings in closed and open spaces to which is invited or expected more than 50 persons, such as fairs, private and corporate gatherings, promotions, counselings, symposia etc. Organizers of such gatherings must request consent of competent county headquarters through email of the county 112 (emergency) center, no later than 5 days before the gathering. The gathering is not allowed to take place if the consent was not granted or if the request for consent was not submitted. However, this Decision excludes certain types of gatherings from its application i.e. the request for consent is not necessary for the following gatherings: professional artistic performances and programs, amateur cultural-artistic performances and programs, cinema screenings, sports competitions, gatherings during wedding ceremonies, funerals, urn placement ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and exhibitions in museum, gallery and other exhibition spaces.

An Instruction to county services on application of decisions regulating the ways of organizing and restricting gatherings was adopted in addition to these decisions.¹⁷

Considering the severity of the epidemiological situation, the described decisions were repealed and more strict measures relating to gatherings were introduced on 25 October 2020 by the Decision on necessary measures restricting gatherings¹⁸ according to which all persons in the Republic of Croatia are obliged to adhere to strict measures of physical distancing, all prescribed epidemiological

¹⁶ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision on restrictions of social gatherings (OJ 111/20), 12 October 2020, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_10_111_2204.html

¹⁷ Instruction to county services on application of decisions regulating the ways of organizing and restricting gatherings, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Uputa%20za%20primjenu%20odluka%20sto%C5%B4era%20kojima%20se%20ure%C4%91uju%20dru%C5%A1tvena%20i%20javna%20okupljanja.pdf>

¹⁸ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision on necessary measures restricting gatherings and introducing other necessary epidemiological measures and recommendations for prevention of transmission of COVID-19 disease through gatherings (OJ 117/20), 25 October 2020, available at: https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/PDF_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20-%20okupljanja.pdf

measures, special recommendations and instructions of the Croatian Institute of Public Health and necessary epidemiological measures prescribed by this Decision. First of all, a strict measure of physical distancing requires the avoidance of close personal contact at a distance of less than 2 meters indoors and 1.5 meters outdoors. The necessary epidemiological measures prescribed by the Decision are as follows: ban on holding of all public events and gatherings with more than 50 people in one place; a maximum of 30 people may be present at wedding ceremonies; a maximum of 30 people may be present at funerals and urn placement ceremonies; a maximum of 15 people may be present at other private ceremonies; sports competitions can only be held without spectators; public events as well as gatherings and ceremonies of all kinds may take place until 22:00h, except for wedding ceremonies which may last until 00:00h; gatherings and ceremonies held in cafes and restaurants may last until the end of their working hours as determined by the decision of the Civil Protection Headquarters which temporarily regulates the work and limits the working hours of hospitality and catering establishments and service providers.¹⁹

The Decision imposes the obligation to submit notifications to the competent civil protection service of the Civil Protection Directorate about holding of public events, gatherings and ceremonies at which more than 30 persons are expected. The notification shall be delivered by e-mail to the county 112 (emergency) center no later than 48 hours before the public event or gathering, and must contain the purpose, place, day and time of the event, information on contact person and indication of the expected number of participants. It also imposes the obligation to keep written records of participants in all public events, gatherings and ceremonies attended by more than 15 people which the organizers are obliged to keep for at least 14 days. If found that some of the participants of the gathering is infected with the coronavirus, the organizer of the gathering is obliged to submit as early as possible the participants' records to the territorially competent civil protection service of the Civil Protection Directorate via e-mail of the 112 (emergency) county center. Other restrictions include the ban on sale of alcoholic beverages between 00:00h and 6:00h; mandatory use of face masks or medical masks in the open when it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 1.5 meters; and mandatory use of face masks or medical masks when entering and staying in cemeteries. The described necessary epidemiologic measures imposed by this Decision are prescribed for the period of 14 days and the Decision excludes from its application the following gatherings: professional artistic performances and programs, cinema screenings, religious ceremonies and exhibitions in museum, gallery and other exhibition spaces.²⁰

Moreover, according to the Decision, employers are required to prohibit workers from coming to work if they have a fever and respiratory problems, especially dry cough and shortness of breath. Recommendations given to employers include: reducing physical contact between employees whenever possible; introducing work from home when possible given the nature of the work; introducing sliding working hours where possible; organizing work in shifts where possible; and reducing the number of physical meetings to a minimum.²¹

Control over the implementation of the Decision and over compliance with the recommendations and instructions of the Croatian Institute of Public Health will be carried out by officers of the Civil Protection Directorate, inspectors of the State Inspectorate, police officers and civil protection headquarters.²²

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The adopted Decision was publicly questioned and criticized by constitutional experts. The measure relating to a maximum of 15 people that may be present at private ceremonies was found particularly concerning by Đorđe Gardašević, Constitutional law professor from the University of Zagreb. Namely, according to his expressed views, this measure is not explicitly prescribed by the law and it also severely enters into the constitutionally guaranteed right to privacy. According to him, this is particularly problematic considering that the control of the implementation of the Decision is carried out, among others, by the police. With that regard, he added that public authorities do not have the power to prescribe prohibitions for private spaces.²³

As mentioned above, the restrictions adopted by the Decision do not apply to certain types of gatherings, including religious gatherings. Religious gathering shall be organized in line with the specific set of recommendations published by the Croatian Institute of Public Health in April 2020 specifically for religious gatherings. Croatian Institute of Public Health regularly publishes and updates recommendations on prevention of spreading of the COVID-19 virus in relation to different categories of public and social life. Specific set of recommendations was published for social gatherings, religious gatherings, holding of art performances, culture programs and manifestations, organization of work of bars and restaurants etc.²⁴

On 15 October, Chief State Inspector Mr. Andrija Mikulić was a guest on Nova TV daily news where he stated that since March this year, inspectors of the State Inspectorate performed about 9000 inspections related to compliance with the Decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters. Considering that the new decision of the Headquarters on the necessary measure of mandatory use of face masks came into force on 12 October, he pointed out that in the last 48 hours almost 500 inspections were carried out in catering facilities and business premises and that irregularities were detected in only three cases (not wearing masks, lack of disinfectants and non-compliance with the prescribed working hours). Of those three offenses, two were corrected immediately and one was prosecuted with a fine given that it was repeated several times. The Chief State Inspector stressed that imposing sanctions is not their priority and that warnings are issued instead of imposing fines whenever possible.²⁵

1.3 Freedom of movement

On 30 June 2020, the Civil Protection Headquarters adopted the Decision on temporary ban on crossing the border crossings of the Republic of Croatia²⁶ which refers to all Croatian border crossings. The Decision was adopted in order to protect the population of the Republic of Croatia from COVID-19 and it was subsequently amended several times. The amendments mostly referred to prolongation

²³ Telegram.hr, Headquarters' Decision entitles the police to check how many people are present in your apartment. Constitutional expert elaborates why this is problematic (*Odlukom Stožera policija može ispitati koliko ljudi imate u stanu. Ustavni stručnjak tumači u čemu je problem*), 29 October 2020, available at: <https://www.telegram.hr/price/odlukom-stozera-policija-moze-provjeravati-koliko-ljudi-imate-u-stanu-ustavni-strucnjak-objasnjava-u-cemu-je-problem/>

²⁴ Croatian Institute of Public Health, Coronavirus - newest recommendations, available at: <https://www.hzjz.hr/sluzba-epidemiologija-zarazne-bolesti/koronavirus-najnovije-preporuke/#vjerska>

²⁵ State Inspectorate, 'I understand the caterers, but only with a synergistic approach we can reduce these worrying figures!', 16 October 2020, available at: <https://dirh.gov.hr/vijesti/razumijem-ugostitelje-no-samo-sinerzijskim-pristupom-mozemo-smanjiti-ove-zabrinjavajuce-brojke/396>

²⁶ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decision on temporary ban on crossing the border crossings of the Republic of Croatia (OJ 74/20), 30 June 2020, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2020_06_74_1439.html

of measures determined by the Decision from June for an additional two-weeks period.²⁷ The last amendment adopted on 29 October 2020 prolonged the duration of measures until 19 November 2020. The imposed ban does not apply to citizens of EU Member States, Schengen Member States and states associated with the Schengen area as well as members of their families, and third-country nationals who are long-term residents. Exceptions to the application of the Decision refer to third-country nationals with valid work-related, educational, tourist and other urgent personal reasons.

Foreign citizens entering Croatia are advised to announce their entry into the Republic of Croatia through the “enter Croatia” application available here: <https://entercroatia.mup.hr/>. The website was initially launched by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Tourism in May 2020 to facilitate entry into Croatia for foreign citizens. The website contains a questionnaire regarding entry into Croatia in order to help shorten waiting times at border crossings. The website is available in Croatian, English and 9 other European languages. Citizens who announce their arrival via the website receive an e-mail confirming receipt of their announcement and containing all the necessary information regarding instructions and recommendations from the Institute for Public Health.²⁸

In addition, twenty permanent border crossing points for local border traffic between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia which were temporarily closed in early April to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus reopened on 15 October due to the start of the new school year and performing economic and agricultural activities in the border areas of both countries.²⁹

2 Implications of Covid-19 and measures to contain it on specific social rights

2.1 Health care

In regards to health care, the following social rights were impacted: access to preventive health care, including COVID-19 testing, and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices.

Mid-October, with the constant increase of the number of infected people, the burden of the epidemic in Croatia has become too great for 103 epidemiologists dealing with infectious diseases. Epidemiologists, especially those in county institutes, haven't been able to process all newly infected people, let alone identify and record every contact. Therefore, epidemiologists were instructed to inform infected patients to contact their close contacts on their own and tell them that they need to be in self-isolation and for how long, and pass the epidemiologist's phone number for additional questions. If there are people working with vulnerable groups among the contacts, the epidemiologist

²⁷ Civil Protection Headquarters, Decisions amending Decision on temporary ban on crossing the border crossings of the Republic of Croatia (OJ 74/2020, 80/2020, 81/2020, 90/2020, 92/2020, 98/2020, 102/2020, 106/2020, 112/2020, 119/2020), available at: <https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/search.aspx?upit=Odluka+o+privremenoj+zabrani+prelaska+preko+grani%c4%8dnh+prijelaza+Republike+Hrvatske&naslovi=da&sortiraj=1&kategorija=1&rpp=10&qtype=3&pretraga=da>

²⁸ Ministry of Tourism and Sport, New website launched to facilitate entry into Croatia for foreign citizens, 28 May 2020, available at: <https://mint.gov.hr/news-11455/new-web-site-launched-to-facilitate-entry-into-croatia-for-foreign-citizens/21288>

²⁹ Koronavirus.hr, Border crossings reopen for border traffic between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia, 14 October 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/ponovo-se-otvaraju-granicni-prijelazi-za-pogranicni-promet-izmedju-bosne-i-hercegovine-i-republike-hrvatske/830>

should contact them further. The new temporary recommendations were first communicated to epidemiologists on 13 October³⁰, and then published at the Croatian Institute of Public Health's website on 28 October³¹. Head of the Infectious Diseases Epidemiology Service of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, Bernard Kaić, emphasised that these recommendations are temporary and that with the possible improvement of the epidemiological situation, epidemiologists will again try to reach every contact of the infected person directly by phone. The end of systemic tracking of the number of infected persons, as the crucial point in controlling the spread of disease, may further accelerate the spread of the virus.

On 26 October, the media published a letter of an anonymous doctor from the Clinical Hospital Centre Dubrava in Zagreb, arguing that the facility lacks medicaments and food for the patients. According to the doctor's letter, her patients in the respiratory centre of CHC Dubrava do not receive regular meals, and complain about the lack of therapy. Furthermore, she receives complaints daily about inadequate patient hygiene, lack of soap, hand towels, showers and toilets. Probably her most disturbing description is that of the 84-year-old patient who was brought from the nursing home in pyjamas, which were removed from her after a few days, and the patient spent 72 hours naked in a room with three other patients and exposed to constant glances. The bed of the said patient has been located next to the door of the room and during two days, the patient was constantly exposed to the outside temperature due to construction of a new door next to that door. The anonymous doctor claims she made over 20 calls for the patient to be provided with clothes and a blanket, but the patient received it only on the fourth day. The doctor concluded the letter by claiming her Constitutional right to conscientious objection, as, in accordance with the Hippocratic Oath, she believes that due to the technical conditions in which she works, she does not provide patients with the necessary medical care and is therefore not responsible for potentially undesirable treatment outcomes.³²

Director of the CHC Dubrava, Srećko Marušić pointed out that the CHC Dubrava provides complete medical care for all patients. However, he confirmed that, due to a rising number of patients and workload of health professionals, additional medical staff from other hospitals will be temporarily relocated to CHC Dubrava. Following the anonymous letter, the Minister of Health Vili Beroš stated that the preliminary data of the supervision of the health inspection showed no significant omissions.³³

Support for the doctors in their efforts to ensure quality standards of treatment for patients with Covid-19 in that hospital was expressed by the Croatian Medical Chamber, which asked the hospital management to start solving the problems stated in the letter. Croatian Medical Chamber announced

³⁰ Jutarnji list, Complete breakdown of the self-isolation register: Patients will send their contacts to quarantine themselves (*Potpuni sloj registra samoizolacije: Oboljeli će svoje kontakte sami slati u karantenu*), 13 October 2020, available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/potpuni-sloj-registra-samoizolacije-oboljeli-će-svoje-kontakte-sami-slati-u-karantenu-15025031>

³¹ Croatian Institute of Public Health, What to do if you are positive for coronavirus or a close contact? (*Što učiniti ako ste pozitivni na koronavirus ili ste bliski kontakt?*), 28 October 2020, available at: <https://www.hzjz.hr/sluzba-epidemiologija-zarazne-bolesti/kratke-upute-sto-uciniti-ako-ste-pozitivni-na-koronavirus>

³² Jutarnji list, Shocking letter from CHC Dubrava: There is no food nor medicaments, one patient lay naked for three days (*Potresno pismo iz KB Dubrava: Nema ni hrane ni lijekova, jedna pacijentica tri dana ležala je gola*), 26 October 2020, available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/potresno-pismo-iz-kb-dubrava-nema-ni-hrane-ni-lijekova-jedna-pacijentica-tri-dana-lezala-je-gola-15027826>

³³ Jutarnji list, New blow for CHC Dubrava: Corona entered two wards, reassuring message sent from the hospital (*Novi udarac za KB Dubrava: Korona ušla na dva odjela, iz bolnice poslali umirujuću poruku*), 28 October 2020, available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/novi-udarac-za-kb-dubrava-korona-usla-na-dva-odjela-iz-bolnice-poslali-umirujucu-poruku-15028487>

that it is extremely unacceptable for the administration to intend to investigate doctors who, warning of serious problems in providing health care to patients, act in accordance with the Code of Medical Ethics and the Hippocratic Oath.³⁴ Based on the letter, the Ombudsperson's Office initiated an investigation and asked the Ministry of Health to inform them of the established facts or, if the allegations are indeed confirmed, what they did to ensure adequate quality of treatment, nutrition, hygiene standards and preserving the dignity of patients in CHC Dubrava. Furthermore, after new letters and statements of doctors were published in the media, confirming the extremely difficult situation in this hospital, the Ombudsperson's office expressed special concern and required objective supervision, in order to urgently correct the observed irregularities and prevent similar situations in the future.³⁵

On 1 November, the President of the Management Board of CHC Dubrava, Silvio Bašić, announced that the Clinical Health Centre Dubrava becomes a hospital exclusively for Covid-19 patients. Consequently, all other patients will be redirected to other hospitals.³⁶ The question remains if the other, non-covid patients will be able to get timely healthcare.

The Minister of Health Vili Beroš announced that due to the penetration of the coronavirus into the health system and a large number of patients, the cold drive in some hospitals is being reduced, and capacities in intensive care and respiratory centers are being increased. The director of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, Krunoslav Capak, reported that the Ministry of Health had asked for help from epidemiologists among public health experts and sanitary engineers. He stated that more than 100 approval permits for employment in public health institutes related to the epidemiological and microbiological profession have been signed. It was agreed that primary care physicians would assist epidemiologists in enrolling and seeking contacts when it comes to their patients, and it was concluded that rapid antigen tests were insufficiently sensitive for diagnosis and should be confirmed by PCR.³⁷

Additionally, on 1 November 2020, the Institute of Public Health Andrija Štampar in Zagreb started validating new antigen covid tests that will allow quicker testing of broader public.³⁸

³⁴ Croatian Medical Chamber, CMC gives strong support to the doctors of the Respiration Center in CHC Dubrava (HLK daje snažnu podršku liječnicima Respiracijskog centra u KB-u Dubrava), 28 October 2020, available at: <https://www.hlk.hr/hlk-daje-snaznu-podrsku-lijecnicima-respiracijskog-centra-u-kb-u-dubrava.aspx>

³⁵ Croatia, Ombudsperson's Office, Investigation initiated into the allegations in an anonymous letter from CHC Dubrava (*Pokrenut ispitni postupak o navodima u anonimnom pismu iz KB Dubrava*), 30 October 2020, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/pokrenut-ispitni-postupak-o-navodima-u-anonimnom-pismu-iz-kb-dubrava>

³⁶ Croatian National Television HRT, CHC Dubrava from tomorrow covid hospital, non-covid patients will be taken care of in other hospitals (*KB Dubrava od sutra covid bolnica, ne-covid pacijenti zbrinut će se u drugim bolnicama*), 1 November 2020, available at: <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/672780/kb-dubrava-postaje-covid-bolnica-ne-covid-pacijenti-moraju-se-zbrinuti-u-drugim-bolnicama>

³⁷ Croatia, Ministry of Health, Cold drive reduced and intensive capacities in hospitals increased (*Reducira se hladni pogon i povećavaju intenzivistički kapaciteti u bolnicama*), 20 October 2020, available at: <https://zdravlje.gov.hr/vijesti/reducira-se-hladni-pogon-i-povecavaju-intenzivisticki-kapaciteti-u-bolnicama/5308>

³⁸ RTL News, RTL reveals: Validation of fast tests for coronavirus has started at the 'Andrija Štampar' Institute! (*RTL otkriva: U Zavodu 'Andrija Štampar' započela validacija brzih testova na koronavirus!*), 1 November 2020, available at: <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/korona/3917020/rtl-otkriva-u-zavodu-andrija-stampar-zapocela-validacija-brzih-testova-na-koronavirus>

On 6 November, the price of the fast antigen covid test was established by the Croatian Institute of Public Health. The price of a single test is 103,74 HRK (approximately 14 EUR).³⁹ The price of the PCR test ranges from 501,49 HRK to 1507,00 HRK (67-203 EUR approximately).⁴⁰ Testing is performed on the basis of a referral from a family doctor, epidemiologist or a referral from a specialist doctor, and is then free of charge.⁴¹

2.2 Work

Social rights related to employment and working conditions were impacted, particularly the right to fair and just working conditions, which respect the health, safety and dignity of workers; and the right to limitation of maximum working hours.

On 31 October, an audio recording of the doctors' meeting in CHC Dubrava was published, revealing a large discrepancy between the reasoning of doctors who spend days and nights with patients on respirators and the hospital's director dr. Lukšić. According to the recording, doctors have been warning for six months about the lack of respirators in the hospitals, and are now pushed in a situation where they don't have enough respirators for patients in need even though there was enough time to do something about it.⁴²

Back in March, the Ministry of Health passed a *Decision on mobilization measures, organization and scheduling of work* that applies to all health workers, including private health workers in the public health service network. The constant readiness of epidemiology specialists who are employed within the health care network of the Republic of Croatia, regardless of the place of work and the employer, has also been introduced - health workers had to reckon with changes in the organization of work almost every day.⁴³

However, the ban on employment in the healthcare system hasn't been lifted since the beginning of the pandemic. Therefore, on 29 October, on the occasion of the Global Day of Action for Health and Social Welfare, the Independent Trade Union of Health and Social Welfare of Croatia sent a request to the Minister of Health for an emergency meeting, urging him to peacefully resolve the problems related to lifting the employment ban in healthcare system, incentive payments, concluding an

³⁹ Koronavirus.hr, Fast antigen tests (Brzi antigenski testovi), 6 November 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/brzi-antigenski-testovi/852>

⁴⁰ Koronavirus.hr, All test centers in the Republic of Croatia (Svi testni centri u Republici Hrvatskoj), available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/svi-testni-centri-u-republici-hrvatskoj/763>

⁴¹ Croatian Institute of Public Health, Testing for SARS-COV-2 at the Croatian Institute of Public Health (Testiranje na SARS-COV-2 u Hrvatskom zavodu za javno zdravstvo), 2 November 2020, available at: <https://www.hzjz.hr/sluzba-mikrobiologija/ambulanta-za-uzimanje-i-zaprimanje-uzoraka/testiranje-na-sars-cov-2/>

⁴² Telegram, Exclusive. Audio recording from a doctor's meeting at CHC Dubrava: 'It has been known for 6 months that we do not have a respirator. What were we waiting for?' (*Ekskluziv. Audio snimka sa sastanka liječnika u KB Dubrava: '6 mjeseci se zna da nemamo respiratora. Što se čekalo?'*), 31 October 2020, available at: <https://www.telegram.hr/zivot/ekskluziv-audio-snimka-sa-sastanka-lijecnika-u-kb-dubrava-sest-mjeseci-se-zna-da-nemamo-respiratora-sto-se-cekalo/>

⁴³ Radnička prava, Unlimited state of emergency - personnel planning in health care (*Neograničeno izvanredno stanje - kadrovsko planiranje u zdravstvu*), 14 September 2020, available at: <http://radnickaprava.org/tekstovi/clanci/snezana-ivcic-neograniceno-izvanredno-stanje-kadrovsko-planiranje-u-zdravstvu>

agreement on the payment of overtime work, etc.⁴⁴ According to the Union, there is a shortage of nearly 4,000 nurses in healthcare system, as well as doctors and other profiles of medical and non-medical staff. Also, there are not enough social workers, nurses, carers nor support service workers in the social welfare system. A number of employees in both systems are underpaid, and support staff work for a salary lower than the minimum gross salary in Croatia and lower than the compensation for preserving jobs due to the corona crisis.⁴⁵

The Ombudsperson's office also warned about the position of biologists who are placed in an unequal position in relation to other health workers due to the level of salary, after receiving a complaint from the representatives of the Croatian Society of Health Biologists and the Croatian Society of Medical Physics. Namely, in a similar situation are some other professions such as highly educated midwives, physiotherapists, radiological technologists, as well as laboratory workers who perform complex and demanding professional jobs, and are paid as if they have not completed higher education, while the jobs of nurses and technicians of higher education are not even mentioned in the Regulation⁴⁶. In order to correct this, the Ombudsperson's Office warned the Ministry of Health, the calculation of salaries of health biologists, as well as other professionals who have acquired the status of health workers, needs to be corrected and provided with equal pay for equal work.⁴⁷

Due to the significant deterioration of the epidemiological situation related to the disease COVID-19 during this reporting period, the Minister of Health Vili Beroš requested from the Croatian Medical Chamber to provide the Ministry of Health with data on retired doctors who are willing to re-engage professionally in health care institutions during the epidemic, in accordance with their specializations.⁴⁸

An additional worrying issue in the area of work are the announced amendments of the Labour Act. According to the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, at the end of September, consultative meetings of trade union centres, employers' associations and the Government on amendments to the Labour Act began. The government initiated the process, claiming that the Labour Act was obsolete and needed to be changed in order to be more flexible and enable economic growth with optimally protected workers' rights. Employers came out with their list of workers' rights they want to reduce. It was agreed that consultations would take place on Fridays, one topic at a time will be opened, and

⁴⁴ Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, Fight for health and care even after the pandemic (*Borba za zdravlje i skrb i nakon pandemije*), 29 October 2020, available at: <http://www.sssh.hr/hr/vise/0-0/borba-za-zdravlje-i-skrb-i-nakon-pandemije-4575> and http://sssh.hr/upload_data/ckeditor/SSZSSH%20zahtjev%20za%20sastankom%20s%20resornim%20ministrom.pdf

⁴⁵ Nacional, Union is demanding the lifting of the ban on employment in health and social care (Sindikat traži ukidanje zabrane zapošljavanja u zdravstvu i socijalnoj skrbi), 19 October 2020, available at: <https://www.nacional.hr/sindikat-trazi-ukidanje-zabrane-zaposljavanja-u-zdravstvu-i-socijalnoj-skrbi>

⁴⁶ Decree on job titles and job complexity coefficients in public services (*Uredba o nazivima radnih mjesta i koeficijentima složenosti poslova u javnim službama*), Official Gazette 119/2019, available at: https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2019_12_119_2360.html

⁴⁷ Croatia, Ombudsperson's Office, Work of equal value must be paid equally (*Rad jednake vrijednosti mora biti jednako plaćen*), 15 September 2020, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/rad-jednake-vrijednosti-mora-biti-jednako-placen>

⁴⁸ Croatian Medical Chamber, Invitation to retired doctors - members of CMC (*Poziv umirovljenim liječnicima i liječnicama - članovima HLK-a*), 24 October 2020, available at: <https://www.hlk.hr/poziv-umirovljenim-lijecnicima-i-lijecnicama-clanovima-hlk-a.aspx>

all issues proposed by all three parties will be discussed. The process is expected to last for several months.⁴⁹

The ongoing issue of women's workers rights in the scope of the pandemic are further tackled in the following paragraph.

3 Negative impact on social rights for vulnerable groups including measures to address this

3.1 Older people

On 4 September, *Decision on the necessary measure of enhanced control of the implementation of the Guidelines for the Prevention and Suppression of the COVID-19 Epidemic for Social Service Providers in the Social Welfare System* was published⁵⁰. This Decision's implementation started on 7 September 2020. According to the Decision, the teams to control the implementation of instructions are established and they control homes for the elderly and infirm to eliminate omissions and shortcomings in individual institutions. The teams consist of the county head or his deputy in charge of health and/or social welfare, a social worker appointed by the director of the competent social welfare center in each county, sanitary inspector and an officer from the Directorate of Civil Protection.

On 28 September, *Guidelines for the prevention and control of the COVID-19 epidemic for social service providers in the social welfare*⁵¹ system were published. Guidelines include the organization of work for social service providers such as measuring temperature and monitoring the occurrence of symptoms in employees, physical distance, wearing a face mask, shoe covers and maintaining space hygiene.

For older people, *Recommendations for the elderly and people with chronic non-contagious diseases*⁵² published by the Croatian Institute for Public Health on 24 April are still in force.

On 1 October, Croatian Psychological Society published basic recommendations related to the well-being and psychological risks for the elderly during COVID-19 virus pandemic. They noted how the coronavirus pandemic is accompanied by unprecedented social exclusion of the elderly, occasionally accompanied by a resurgence of prejudices about aging and the elderly, in many European countries, which at the same time increases the health risks of the elderly not directly related to the pandemic. The elderly are considered the most vulnerable population age group due to the effects of COVID-19

⁴⁹ Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia, Amendments to the Labour Act: What we do and how to get involved? (*Izmjene ZOR-a: Što radimo i kako se uključiti?*), available at: <http://www.sssh.hr/hr/vise/nacionalne-aktivnosti-72/izmjene-zor-a-sto-radimo-i-kako-se-ukljuciti-4545>

⁵⁰ Croatia, Ministry of the Interior, Civil Protection Headquarters, published on 4 September, available at: [https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/Odluka%20-%20kontrola%20provo%C4%91enja%20Upute%20\(sustav%20socijalne%20skrbi\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/Odluka%20-%20kontrola%20provo%C4%91enja%20Upute%20(sustav%20socijalne%20skrbi)%20(1).pdf)

⁵¹ Croatia, Croatian Institute for Public Health, published on 28 September, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/vladine-mjere/ministarstvo-za-demografiju-obitelji-mlade-i-socijalnu-politiku/upute-za-sprjecavanje-i-suzbijanje-epidemije-covid-19-za-pruzatelje-socijalnih-usluga-u-sustavu-socijalne-skrbi/589>

⁵² Croatia, Croatian Institute for Public Health, published on 24 April, available at: <https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Preporuke-za-osobe-starije-%C5%BEivotne-dobi-i-osobe-s-kroni%C4%8Dnim-nezaraznim-bolestima-u-okviru-postupnog-ubla%C5%BEavanja-restrikcija-vezanih-uz-COVID-19.pdf>

virus infection on their health - as many also have chronic diseases, as well as due to the consequences of social distancing - especially those living alone. The combination of all these risks can negatively affect the mental health of an individual, due to the experienced stress, fear, anxiety and loneliness, can increase the health problems of the elderly and impair their quality of life and well-being. Although restrictions on movement and socializing and other protective measures apply to individuals of all ages, the elderly stand out in particular as a risk group in need of special protection. However, such a general message can contribute to social exclusion, loss of independence and social isolation of older people. Increased awareness of the particular susceptibility of older people to the consequences of COVID-19 infection can help strengthen their personal sources of protection, such as social support and social networks, especially those who feel lonely in the face of circumstances. Therefore, the elderly should not be viewed as a passive and homogeneous group. In fact, most older people actively confronted and helped others during this crisis situation. Given their rich life experience, older individuals may possess some special sources of support and strength that are worth supporting and empowering⁵³.

The negative impact of the pandemic on the social rights of the elderly is particularly pronounced among the elderly living in rural areas, who have difficulty accessing basic necessities such as food, medication, hygiene supplies and health care. Isolation is also a big problem which affects them both mentally and physically⁵⁴.

Poverty of pensioners is another problem older people face, namely the average pension is HRK 2,525, and the new poverty line is HRK 2,710, according to a survey by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics⁵⁵. This means that every third 65+ person is below the poverty line. The Croatian Pensioners' Association and the Croatian Pensioners' Union sent an open invitation to the Government of the Republic of Croatia to urgently organize a session of the National Council for Pensioners and the Elderly after receiving those alarming statistics. Their request is for the Government to realistically assess the situation of pensioners and give possible solutions to improve their material and social position⁵⁶. To this day their request remains unanswered. Poverty of pensioners is generally a problem in Croatia and older people are additionally vulnerable during a pandemic because they are unable to afford adequate protection in the form of health care and assistance due to their low income which puts them at a disadvantage compared to employed people.

On 21 October, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy launched a campaign to combat coronavirus spread among the elderly population⁵⁷. The campaign is called "Odgovorni

⁵³ Croatia, Croatian Psychological Society, published on 1 October, available at:

<http://www.psihologija.hr/strucne-sekcije/sekcija-za-psihologiju-starenja/clanak/dobrobit-stariji-osoba-u-pandemiji-covid-19-uz-medunarodni-san-starijih-osoba-2020.html>

⁵⁴ Croatia, Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, published on 20 October, available at:

<https://www.prs.hr/index.php/suradnja/druga-suradnje/2994-sudjelovanje-u-raspravi-utjecaj-koronavirusa-na-najranjivije-kako-zastititi-socijalna-prava>

⁵⁵ Croatia, Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Indicators of poverty and social exclusion, available at:

<https://www.dzs.hr/>

⁵⁶ Croatia, online portal mirovina.hr, published on 24 August, available at:

<https://www.mirovina.hr/novosti/matica-i-sindikati-pozivaju-vladu-vise-od-703-tisuce-umirovljenika-su-sluzbeno-siromasi/>

⁵⁷ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 21 October, available at:

<https://www.koronavirus.hr/ministarstvo-rada-mirovinskoga-sustava-obitelji-i-socijalne-politike-pokrenulo-kampanju-o-suzbijanju-sirenja-koronavirusa-medju-starijom-populacijom/836>

ostajemo bliski” (Staying close by being responsible) and its goals are educating and raising awareness of the general public about responsible behaviour and adhering to the recommended guidelines for combating the spread of the COVID-19 virus in order to protect senior citizens and people from other vulnerable groups. The campaign aims to raise the level of responsibility of the entire public in preserving public health and the health care system by adhering to preventive measures such as physical distance, wearing masks, regular hygiene and hand disinfection. As part of this campaign, three leaflets have been published. First one, *Tips for nursing home residents*⁵⁸, include advice on adhering to measures to prevent the spread of infection inside the nursing homes. The second one, *Health advice for the elderly*⁵⁹, also offers advice on adhering to measures and tips on how to stay connected to family and friends during these difficult times. The third one, *Instructions for nursing home visitors*⁶⁰, concentrates on keeping the residents safe during family and friends’ visitations at nursing home premises. A short video⁶¹ was also released calling for the protection of the elderly as the most vulnerable group.

Women

In Croatia, new awareness-raising activities pertaining to the increased risk of domestic violence for women during the COVID-19 pandemic corresponded with the annual National Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which took place on 22 September⁶². The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy organized a webinar titled „Combating domestic violence in the time of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19)“ on 23 September, with the purpose of raising expert awareness about the gendered consequences of isolation measures, improving collaboration between sectors and building an integrated system of protection for victims of domestic violence⁶³.

On 24 September, the non-governmental organization Roda – Parents in Action and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality presented the results of their research on the accessibility of healthcare for women during the COVID-19 pandemic⁶⁴, indicating that the reproductive rights and health of women in Croatia have been negatively affected by the pandemic. According to this research, restrictions related to COVID-19 resulted in significant difficulties regarding access to maternity care,

⁵⁸ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 21 October, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Knji%C5%BEica%20za%20korisnike%20domova.pdf>

⁵⁹ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 21 October, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Knji%C5%BEica%20za%20za%C5%A1titu%20starijih%20osoba.pdf>

⁶⁰ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 21 October, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Knji%C5%BEica%20za%20posjetitelje%20institucija.pdf>

⁶¹ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 21 October, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iYgkpHaRW4&feature=youtu.be>

⁶² Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 22 September, available at: <https://mrosp.gov.hr/vijesti/nacionalni-dan-borbe-protiv-nasilja-nad-zenama-22-rujna/11931>

⁶³ Croatia, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, published on 23 September, available at: <https://mrosp.gov.hr/vijesti/odrzan-webinar-sprjecavanje-nasilja-u-obitelji-u-vrijeme-epidemije-koronavirusa-covid-19/11932>

⁶⁴ Croatia, Ombudsperson for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia, published on 24 September, available at: <https://www.prs.hr/index.php/suradnja/ocd/2969-odrzana-konferencija-o-dostupnosti-zdravstvene-skrbi-za-zene-tijekom-pandemije-covid-19>

pregnancy courses, childbirth companionship and medically assisted reproduction⁶⁵. Out of 1485 women who took part in the research, 31% reports negative experiences regarding access to maternity care. Likewise, 78% of research participants were denied the right to childbirth companionship, 56% of them did not attend a pregnancy course since it was not offered, 37% were unable to undergo recommended medical examinations, 50% of them had to buy protective equipment and 30% of them were forced to wear a mask during childbirth.

On 20 October, the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia organized an online discussion about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the social rights of vulnerable groups⁶⁶, during which Kristijan Kevešević, a representative of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, reported that their office has received a number of complaints from women who were unable to obtain access to childcare services due to the public health crisis and that such obstacles have negatively impacted women's employment across Europe⁶⁷. Olja Družić Ljubotina, from the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, referred to women as a group which was placed at the frontline of the pandemic, making up the majority of the workforce in schools, shops and care facilities, while Sunčica Brnardić from the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia emphasized that young people and women are particularly influenced by rising insecurities on the labour market. The Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia, Lora Vidović, concluded that investments in the advancement of social rights of vulnerable groups are a long-term investment in the reduction of material and social deprivation exacerbated by the pandemic.

⁶⁵ Croatia, Roda, published on 21 September, available at: <https://www.roda.hr/udruga/projekti/zagovaranje-za-zdravstvenu-skrb-zena-temeljenu-na-dokazima-u-doba-pandemije-covid-19/trudnoca-porod-i-dojenje-u-vrijeme-lockdowna-infografike.html>

⁶⁶ Croatia, Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia, published on 20 October, available at: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/podrska-najranjivijima-nije-trosak-vec-ulaganje/>

⁶⁷ Croatia, Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, published on 20 October, available at: <https://www.prs.hr/index.php/suradnja/druge-suradnje/2994-sudjelovanje-u-raspravi-utjecaj-koronavirusa-na-najranjivije-kako-zastititi-socijalna-prava>