

# **Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU**

## **Fundamental Rights Implications**

**Country:** Croatia

**Contractor's name:** Centre for Peace Studies

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# 1. Measures taken by government/public authorities

- Freedom of movement e.g. quarantine, travel bans (internal as well as between MSs), curfews– if possible please also consider the impact of quarantine on overcrowded areas, including refugee camps and prisons ;

On 1 February 2020, Crisis Headquarters of the Ministry of Health raised preparedness for the coronavirus epidemic to be ready for all scenarios.

On 3 February 2020, the Government decided to implement health surveillance measures for persons who have resided in mainland China for the past 14 days.

On 21 February 2020, the Government decided to establish a quarantine<sup>1</sup> relating to persons identified or suspected to have been in direct contact with coronavirus patients while on board ships.

On 5 March 2020, the Minister of Health made the decision to declare the danger of an epidemic of an infectious disease with a coronavirus - an administrative measure that does not indicate the degree of threat, but allows the Minister to mobilize all resources in the healthcare system, relocate infectologists and other healthcare professionals and equipment as needed, which enables better management of the healthcare system.<sup>2</sup>

On 9 March 2020, the Civil Protection of the MoI introduced an enhanced package of measures. All foreign nationals entering the Republic of Croatia from areas of focus of infection will be informed about the mandatory quarantine accommodation measure for 14 days, before entering Croatia. All citizens were advised to consider postponing travels that are not necessary in all countries and regions that are more affected by the new coronavirus. Furthermore, it was recommended to further postpone any gatherings and organized gatherings attended by more than 1000 people; and all organizers of the gatherings were obliged to ensure the highest hygienic standards.<sup>3</sup>

On 16 March 2020, in accordance with recommended measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19), the Ministry of Justice informed the parties that they may send their inquiries, requests and applications to the Ministry of Justice during regular office hours by electronic mail, telephone and postal service providers.<sup>4</sup> On 20 March 2020, the President of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia has sent a letter to the Presidents of the High and County Courts, which contains recommendations for the organization of work in the courts during the implementation of infection protection measures: in cases requiring a meeting or hearing, all precautionary measures imposed by the health authorities should be taken; in cases where judges can make decisions as individual judges or in which the hearing is not required, it is first of all necessary to make and make decisions from work from home, and then arrange for their dispatch; in each

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<sup>1</sup> Infectious Diseases Clinic "Dr. Fran Mihaljević"

<sup>2</sup> Croatia, Government measures, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/vladine-mjere/101>

<sup>3</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection of the Ministry of Interior, statement published on 9 March 2020, available at: <https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/vijesti/vijesti/priopcenje-za-medijske-stozera-civilne-zastite-republike-hrvatske-od-9-ozujka-2020/2237>

<sup>4</sup> Croatia, Ministry of Justice, notice published on 16 March 2020, available at: <https://pravosudje.gov.hr/vijesti/obavijest-strankama-o-nacinu-upucivanja-zahtjeva-upita-i-molbi-ministarstvu-pravosudja/21711>

situation, the technical means of distance communication available to judges and courts, including within the court (email, video link, etc.), should be used.<sup>5</sup>

On 19 March 2020, the Civil Protection Headquarters adopted the decision on measures to limit social gatherings, work in commerce, services and the holding of sports and cultural events for the next 30 days. The measures include: suspension of social gatherings for more than 5 persons; suspension of all cultural activities; suspension of the work of cafes, bars and restaurants (except delivery), as well as of services that include direct contact with clients (hairdressers, beauticians, barbers, pedicures, massage parlours, saunas, swimming pools); suspension of all organised sports activities and contests; suspension of all workshops and courses; suspension of religious gatherings. Furthermore, only stores with food, hygiene, construction materials, selling orthopedic and other aids; markets and pharmacies remain open but with special hygienic and distance instructions. Employers are obliged to: organize work from home where possible, cancel meetings or organize teleconferences and use other technologies to hold remote meetings; cancel business trips outside the country unless absolutely necessary; prohibit entry into workplaces of workers who have fever and respiratory distress, especially dry cough and shortness of breath.<sup>6</sup>

With the above-stated measure, the citizens were advised to stay at home and limit their movement to the necessary extent. Civic protection, in cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross, provides aid to elderly and other people in need, as well as volunteers organised in a Facebook group “Jedni za druge”. The fees for people violating the measure of self-isolation range between 8,000 and 120, 000 HRK. The National Civil Protection Headquarters has warned of an increased number of violations of self-isolation, which could result in more rigorous protection measures.<sup>7</sup> As for the above-mentioned suspension of religious gatherings, the Catholic Church remains open for individual prayers of healthy individuals, max 10 persons are allowed to be in a church with a distance of 2m among each other, open door and measures of enhanced hygiene and daily cleaning<sup>8</sup>; the Orthodox Church remains open for prayer in accordance with the measures<sup>9</sup>; the mosques are closed and Muslims are advised to pray at home<sup>10</sup>; the Jewish community also postponed all the programs<sup>11</sup>, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> Croatia, Decision on preventive measures and procedures for the work of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia of 19 March 2020, available at: <http://www.vsrh.hr/EasyWeb.asp?pcpid=560>

<sup>6</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters published on 19 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-mjerama-ogranicavanja-drustvenih-okupljanja-rada-u-trgovini-usluznih-djelatnosti-i-odrzavanja-sportskih-i-kulturnih-dogadjanja/180>

<sup>7</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection statement published on 20 March 2020, available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/poostavanje-epidemioloskih-mjera-ako-se-osobe-kojima-je-odredjena-samoizolacija-nastave-neodgovorno-ponasati/29049>

<sup>8</sup> Croatia, Provisions of the Bishop of the Croatian Bishops' Conference regarding the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, published on 19 March 2020, available at: <http://www.zg-nadbiskupija.hr/dokumenti/aktualnosti/odredbe-biskupa-hrvatske-biskupske-konferencije-u-vezi-sa-sprjecavanjem-sirenja-bolesti-covid-19>

<sup>9</sup> Croatia, Provisions of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia, published on 19 March 2020, available at: [http://mitropolija-zagrebicka.org/saopstenje\\_eparhija\\_srpske\\_pravoslavne\\_crkve\\_u\\_republici\\_hrvatskoj/](http://mitropolija-zagrebicka.org/saopstenje_eparhija_srpske_pravoslavne_crkve_u_republici_hrvatskoj/)

<sup>10</sup> Croatia, Provisions of the Islamic Community in Croatia, published on 11 March 2020, available at: <https://www.islamska-zajednica.hr/index.php/izdvojeno/nove-upute-o-ponasanju-u-dzamijamamesdzidima-obustava-aktivnosti>

<sup>11</sup> Croatia, Provisions of the Jewish Community of Zagreb, published on 12 March 2020, available at: [http://www.zoz.hr/home.php?id\\_kat=80&subkat=novosti&content=novosti&vijest=1773](http://www.zoz.hr/home.php?id_kat=80&subkat=novosti&content=novosti&vijest=1773)

From 20 March 2020, for the next 30 days, weddings and funerals are conducted exclusively among healthy close family members, respecting the Government's measures.<sup>12</sup>

By the decision from 21 March, on 22 March 2020, the public transportation in Croatia was suspended, and train and bus stations were closed for 30 days.<sup>13</sup>

On 21 March 2020, the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia adopted a Decision on the measure of strict restriction of retention in the streets and other public places. Given the accelerated spread and increased risk of Coronavirus transmission, an anti-epidemic measure of severe restriction of retention in the streets and other public places lasts for 30 days from the date of the Decision.<sup>14</sup> In order to protect employees in shops, working hours in shops are set from 8:00 to 17:00.<sup>15</sup> On 22 March, the measures include the closure of all open markets.<sup>16</sup>

In the morning of 22 March 2020, Zagreb was hit by two strong earthquakes (5,3-magnitude and 5-magnitude), followed by ongoing tremors<sup>17</sup>. The damage is severe, especially in the centre of Zagreb and in the epicentre (NE part of Zagreb), many people lost their homes, one 15-year-old child died, and approximately 30 persons are hurt. The Government took quick measures to ensure the safety of all citizens and respect of previously published measures in order to avoid the spread of Coronavirus<sup>18</sup>.

On 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister and the Ministers held a press conference, outlining the progress of the implementation of 63 Government measures, which were adopted at last week's session to assist the economy at the time of the coronavirus epidemic. On 24 March, a new measure comes into effect from the Ministry of Finance, and in the implementation of the Tax Administration, which relates to the deferral of payment of certain tax benefits, such as income tax or corporate income tax, as well as health and pension contributions, and then interest-free installment repayment of these benefits for 24 months.<sup>19</sup>

The Civil Protection Headquarters decision from 19 March 2020 temporarily prohibits or restricts the crossing of persons across all border crossings. Croatian citizens will be allowed to return to Croatia, that is, to go to the country in which they work and reside, following the instructions and measures of the Croatian Institute of Public Health. Return to the countries of origin will be granted to nationals of Member States of the EU, i.e. Member States of the Schengen area and countries associated with the Schengen area, as well as members of their families, and third-country nationals who are long-term residents. The exceptions to this Decision are: health professionals, health researchers and associate professionals in the care of the elderly and persons requiring urgent medical treatment; cross-border

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<sup>12</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, Decisions published on 20 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-mjerama-prilikom-sklapanja-braka-i-zivotnog-partnerstva/243> and <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-nacinu-odrzavanja-pogreba-254/254>

<sup>13</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters decision on suspension of public transport, published on 21 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-privremenoj-obustavi-javnog-prometa/258>

<sup>14</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters decision on the measures for severe restriction of retention in the streets and other public places, published on 21 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-mjeri-strogog-ogranicavanja-zadrzavanja-na-ulicama-i-drugim-javnim-mjestima/260>

<sup>15</sup> Croatia, Decision on store opening hours made on 21 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-radnom-vremenu-trgovina/264>

<sup>16</sup> Croatia, Measure on suspension of all open markets, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-obustavi-rada-trznica/273>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/22/croatia-earthquake-causes-widespread-damage-zagreb>

<sup>18</sup> <https://mup.gov.hr/vijesti/na-otvorenom-drzite-potrebni-razmak/286113>

<sup>19</sup> Croatia, information on economic measures from 23 March 2020, available at:

<https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/od-danas-krecu-nove-gospodarske-mjere-u-borbi-protiv-epidemije-koronavirusa/293>

workers; freight carriers and other transport personnel to the extent necessary; diplomats, police officers in the performance of their duties, civil protection services and teams, personnel of international organizations and international military personnel in the performance of their functions; passengers in transit.<sup>20</sup>

Reception centres for Seekers of International Protection in Zagreb and Kutina have temporarily restricted access to the facilities. The Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia has restricted access to Reception centres for Seekers of International Protection in Zagreb and Kutina for all persons who are not necessary for the normal functioning of these facilities. Persons seeking international protection who reside in the Zagreb and Kutina shelters are under constant medical supervision. In addition, Seekers of International Protection located in Reception centres have been warned about the occurrence of the disease and the measures that need to be taken to prevent its further spread. A doctor is present at the Reception Centres every day and all international protection seekers are constantly monitored by healthcare staff.<sup>21</sup> People accommodated in the Reception Centres are advised to stay inside, and measures are taken inside the facilities to protect them (i.e. markings on the floor for distance, hygienic supplies, medical staff).

From 20 March 2020, for the next 30 days, weddings and funerals are conducted exclusively among healthy close family members, respecting the Government's measures.<sup>22</sup>

The Government regularly updates the information on the website [koronavirus.hr](http://koronavirus.hr) in Croatian, and partly in English. All information is shared on television and on social media with subtitles and by sign language translators.

- **Disruption of education and work (schools as well as business closure) and their impact on fundamental rights, including workers' rights and the disproportional impact on women**

The Government brought a decision to suspend school classes for two weeks in primary and secondary schools from Monday, 16 March 2020. The same regime will apply to kindergartens and universities, but the decision regarding working of kindergartens shall be formally brought by local self-government units. School classes will be held through special broadcasts on the public television as well as online. However, teachers will continue to come to schools and children who are not able to stay at home will also be able to attend schools and kindergartens. This refers to all children who are not able to stay at home irrespective of the reason e.g. when both parents are working in professions that demand presence at the work place.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to kids who don't have computers and internet at home, schools were instructed to provide students with lower income status with devices from school reserves or from first-graders from the School of Life who do not participate in online teaching (but through TV program HRT 3).

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<sup>20</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters published on 19 March 2020, available at:

<https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-privremenoj-zabrani-prelaska-granicnih-prijelaza-republike-hrvatske/177>

<sup>21</sup> Croatia, Ministry of Interior's formal statement published on 18 March 2020, available at:

<https://www.koronavirus.hr/trazitelji-medjunarodne-zastite-nisu-zarazeni-koronavirusom/171>

<sup>22</sup> Croatia, Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, Decisions published on 20 March 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-mjerama-prilikom-sklapanja-braka-i-zivotnog-partnerstva/243> and <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/odluka-o-nacinu-odrzavanja-pogreba-254/254>

<sup>23</sup> Croatia, Government statement, *Obustava nastave na dva tjedna; odgoda plaćanja poreza na dohodak i dobit te doprinosa za poduzetnike*, available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/obustava-nastave-na-dva-tjedna-odgoda-placanja-poreza-na-dohodak-i-dobit-te-doprinosi-za-poduzetnike/28984>

The Ministry sent four million HRK to the secondary schools to buy them. For students who do not have internet at home, schools will provide free SIM cards for unlimited internet use, as agreed by the Ministry of Education and telephone operators. Minister Divjak says that, according to some studies, more than 90 percent of students have their own equipment. If they do not have their own computer or smartphone, or they have not received a tablet at school and do not have a television, the minister urged municipalities and cities to respond to such issues.<sup>24</sup>

- The impact of measures on the self-employed, for example with respect to non-paid leave/sick leave etc.

In relation to measures to fight the coronavirus outbreak, the Government announced that it will help the economy sector in countering the coronavirus outbreak by relaxing the approach to tax and contribution collection and the Prime Minister stressed that wages and pensions will continue to be paid regularly as well as that Government will do all in their power to preserve jobs and liquidity and to relax the approach to tax and contribution collection by deferring payments and taking a more flexible approach to the dynamic of payments.<sup>25</sup>

On 17 March 2020 the Government has adopted a package of 63 measures to help the economy with regards to the coronavirus epidemic. The measures refer to almost all economic sectors of the Government with the aim to preserve working places and payments of salaries, e.g. postponing of payment of public levies like income tax and profit tax etc.<sup>26</sup>

Due to the spread of coronavirus in Croatia and neighboring countries and the possible effects of the new situation on the domestic economy, the Croatian Chamber of Commerce has launched a webpage with the latest recommendations for entrepreneurs. It has also introduced an online form for comments with respect to COVID-19 related business difficulties which will be forwarded to the National Civil Protection Headquarters and the responses which might be of interest to a larger number of entrepreneurs will be published anonymously.

Croatian Institute of Public Health issued a Recommendation to employers and workers in transport who repeatedly go to the areas affected by the COVID-19.<sup>27</sup> The recommendation was issued on 3 March 2020 and it states that procedures for checking travellers entering Croatia are defined in a way to ensure the greatest possible protection of health of citizens and travellers with minimum disruption of international traffic. Health surveillance shall be done for persons who due to transit business arrive to Croatia for circulation of goods and leave the county on the same day, as well as for Croatian citizens who have multiply visited affected areas due to transit business and who have within last 14 days been in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Iran, Singapore, South Korea or arrived to Croatia from the

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<sup>24</sup> Jutarnji list newspaper, The most detailed guide through online and TV classes (*NAJDETALJNIJI VODIČ KROZ ONLINE I TV NASTAVU*), 14.03.2020., available at:

<https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/najdetaljnjiji-vodic-kroz-online-i-tv-nastavu-otkrivamo-kako-ce-od-ponedjeljka-izgledati-svakodnevnica-nasih-ucenika-i-odgovaramo-na-najvaznija-pitanja/10090105/>

<sup>25</sup> Croatia, Government statement, *Citizens health safety most important; wages and pensions guaranteed*, available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/news/citizens-health-safety-most-important-wages-and-pensions-guaranteed/28972>

<sup>26</sup> Croatia, The Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts, Government adopts a package of 63 measures to help the economy with regards to the coronavirus epidemic (*Vlada prihvatila paket od 63 mjera za pomoć gospodarstvu uslijed epidemije koronavirusa*), 18 March 2020, available at: <https://www.mingo.hr/page/vlada-prihvatila-paket-od-63-mjera-za-pomoc-gospodarstvu-uslijed-epidemije-koronavirusa>

<sup>27</sup> Croatian Institute of Public Health, Recommendation to employers and workers in transport who repeatedly go to the areas affected by the COVID-19 (*Preporuka postupanja poslodavcima i radnicima koji zbog obavljanja prijevozničke djelatnosti višekratno odlaze u područja zahvaćena epidemijom COVID-19*), available at: <https://www.hgk.hr/documents/preporuka-prijevoznici-finalno-35e5e7b0d5e8af.pdf>



affected Italian regions. Health surveillance is done through a sanitary inspector at the border crossing may issue a confirmation about medical surveillance which the respective person needs to bring to an epidemiologist. The epidemiologist will contact the person in question in case that he/she fails to do so. Health surveillance of those persons is not time limited i.e. lasts for the entire time when the area where the person goes to or arrives from is considered an affected area. Media reported on the case of a truck driver losing his job after refusing to drive to affected areas in Italy.<sup>28</sup>

Persons temporarily unable to work due to being placed in the quarantine or self-isolation at home after having contact with infected persons or arriving from the affected areas have the right to compensation of their salary by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund in the amount prescribed by the Obligatory Health Insurance Act which amounts to 4.257,28 HRK (budgetary base + 28%).<sup>29</sup> Independent Trade Unions of Croatia have appealed to the Government to initiate urgent amendments of the legislation in order to increase the amount of salary compensation to the full salary amount for days in self isolation which would motivate people exposed to coronavirus to report themselves to the respective services.<sup>30</sup>

The Croatian Agency for SMEs, Innovations and Investments (HAMAG-BICRO) in cooperation with the Ministry of economy, entrepreneurship and craft, Ministry of regional development and EU funds and Ministry of agriculture, has introduced eight new measures for micro, small and medium sized entrepreneurs following the coronavirus pandemic. They include measures like moratorium on all ESIF micro and small loans for rural development, prolongation of the deadline for loans, lower interest rates, establishment of new financial instrument like “COVID-19” credits/loans for working capital for small and medium entrepreneurs etc.<sup>31</sup>

Aid to preserve jobs in coronavirus-affected industries will also cover craftsmen who meet the conditions prescribed by the Croatian Employment Service. This is the result of a strong commitment of the Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, which in the proposal of its measures to the Government of the Republic of Croatia, as a priority requested that the payment of a minimum wage of HRK 3250 should also be provided to craftsmen. Namely, when a temporary closure of the craft occurs, not only does the craftsman no longer have their livelihood, but the measures adopted for his workers no longer have any effect.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Večernji list newspaper, *Šibenčanin završio na ulici jer nije htio ići u žarište koronavirusa: 'Šef mi je kazao da sam p\*\*\*a'*, available at: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/sibencanin-završio-na-ulici-je-nije-htio-ici-u-zariste-koronavirusa-sef-mi-je-kazao-da-sam-p-a-1384808>

<sup>29</sup> Croatia, Croatian Health Insurance Fund, Rights of insured persons to temporary inability to work due to coronavirus outbreak (*Prava osiguranika na privremenu nesposobnost za rad zbog pojave koronavirusa (2019nCov)*), available at: <https://www.hzzo.hr/en/prava-osiguranika-na-privremenu-nesposobnost-za-rad-zbog-pojave-koronavirusa-2019ncov/>

<sup>30</sup> Croatian News Agency (HINA), *Sever traži hitno povećanje naknade za razdoblje samoizolacije*, available at: <https://www.hina.hr/vijest/10312619>

<sup>31</sup> Croatia, Government official webpage on coronavirus news, HAMAG-BICRO uvodi nove mjere ESIF zajmova za obrtna sredstva, Available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/vladine-mjere/hamag-bicro-uvodi-nove-mjere-esif-zajmova-za-obrtna-sredstva/277>

<sup>32</sup> Croatia, Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts, CCTC protects craftsmen: enabled minimum salary for craftsmen (HOK zaštito obrtnike: omogućena isplata minimalne plaće za obrtnike), available at: <https://www.hok.hr/koronavirus-novosti/hok-zastitio-obrtnike-omogućena-isplata-minimalne-place-za-obrtnike>

- The impact of measures on people on low incomes, who are less able to self-isolate due to – for example – high density/crowded housing conditions (for example, putting them in institutional isolation).

The Ministry of Health has issued a Recommendation on procedures in social security institutions<sup>33</sup> to the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, stating that the ban of visits to social securities institutions providing accommodation services to children, youth and elderly persons is justified. It has instructed that social security service providers shall be notified accordingly. The Croatian Institute for Public Health has issued a Recommendation on procedures in social security institutions in relation to rules of self-isolation measures for persons arriving from the affected areas.

For the duration of the coronavirus epidemic, the Homeless Care Plan for the Republic of Croatia and the Homeless Care Plan for Extreme Winter Circumstances for 2019/2020 shall be implemented. It was suggested that the organization of public kitchen work is conducted in the following ways: persons who can prepare meals on their own are advised to have groceries delivered in front of the home door so that they can prepare the meal on their own (e.g. users of granted minimum compensation who are eligible to work); users who are unable to prepare the meal on their own (for health reasons, old age or inadequate space conditions) are advised that persons under special care and hygiene measures deliver the prepared meal to their home address while reducing physical contact. Finally, users of public kitchens who do not have a place of residence (shelter users, homeless persons) consume food in public kitchens during the day, following hygiene measures, adhering to the standards of cleaning the premises and other measures issued by the Croatian Institute for Public Health (respecting spatial distance, limited number of persons present in the space at the same time...)<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, in order to preserve jobs at employers' whose economic activity has been disrupted by the coronavirus epidemic, the Government has made a decision on grants per employee for a maximum period of three months from the beginning of March. Target groups of employers include employers in the accommodation and food and beverage sector; transportation and storage; manufacturing industries (textiles, clothing, footwear, leather, wood and furniture); employers who, because of the decisions of the Civil Protection, are unable to carry on their business; and other employers who can demonstrate the impact of special circumstances on their business.<sup>35</sup>

#### - Access to health and medical supplies

Health Minister Vili Beroš confirmed that the hospital treatment for all coronavirus patients in Croatia will be free of charge. The costs of treatment for all persons with health insurance will be covered by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund (CHIF), while the costs of treatment for persons without health insurance will be paid from the state budget. All costs of treatment from Covid-19 for foreign nationals coming from European Union (EU) countries, European Economic Area (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) countries, Switzerland and countries having international agreements with the Republic of Croatia, if paid by the Croatian Health Insurance Institute will be ultimately collected from their foreign health insurance. The costs of Covid-19 treatment for foreign nationals from other, non-

<sup>33</sup> <https://mdomsp.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Vijesti2020/MDOMSP%20okruznic%20MIZ%2027.02.2020.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Croatia, Government webpage on coronavirus news, Taking care of homeless people during coronavirus epidemic and organization of work of public kitchens (Zbrinjavanje beskućnika za vrijeme trajanja epidemije koronavirusa i organizacija rada pučkih kuhinja), available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/najnovije/zbrinjavanje-beskućnika-za-vrijeme-trajanja-epidemije-koronavirusa-i-organizacija-rada-pučkih-kuhinja/280>

<sup>35</sup> Croatia, Government webpage on coronavirus news, Government subsidies to preserve working places (Vladine potpore za očuvanje radnih mjesta), available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/vladine-potpore-za-ocuvanje-radnih-mjesta/253>



European countries are paid by patients and subsequently reimbursed in their countries, depending on what travel or agency insurance they may have arranged before traveling.<sup>36</sup>

On 14 March 2020 the Government adopted a Decision on Exceptional Price Control Measures for Certain Products<sup>37</sup>, which was adopted to prevent the negative effects of changes in individual product prices and to prevent monopolistic pricing of products in relation to the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. The decision determines the following products to which the price control measure applies: flour, milk and milk powder, eggs, sugar, salt, rice, pasta, fresh meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, canned meat, canned fish, edible oil, baby food, baby diapers, drinking water, laundry detergent, dishes detergent, soap, water, space and hand sanitizers (including concentrated alcohol), protective overalls and other protective and medical clothing and footwear, goggles and visors, safety gloves, shoe covers, masks - surgical, FFP2, FFP3, respirators/transport ventilators, medicines and medical products, and the healthcare system clothes. The decision applies to entities engaged in the registered activity of production and trade in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. In accordance with the Exceptional Price Control Act, the highest price is considered to be the price of a product as on 30 January 2020, when the World Health Organization declared the infectious disease COVID-19 a public health threat of international importance.

At the Government session on 20 March 2020, it was decided to get a larger quantity of protective face masks worth 19 million HRK from a private company in Croatia, but the decision was taken back after receiving the donation of 11 and a half tones of protective equipment from the United Arab Emirates.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Impact of the outbreak on certain national or ethnic communities

During the reporting period, media articles and social media showed an increase in discrimination of certain nationals. The cases are explained below. It is interesting to see how xenophobic articles and behaviour towards Chinese nationals were registered in January and February, while the xenophobic articles and comments towards refugees were recorded in March. The Ministry of Interior reacted stating that the seekers of international protection in Croatia are not infected by Coronavirus in order to prevent cases of discrimination toward international protection seekers. The Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) was informed by two volunteers, Italian citizens, that they were banned from entering Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though they weren't previously in areas of focus of

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<sup>36</sup> Croatia, Health Minister's statement for Faktograf (media portal, member of the International Fact Checking Network) published on 13 March 2020, available at: <https://faktograf.hr/2020/03/13/lijecenje-od-koronavirusa-covid-19-je-besplatno-za-sve-zarazene>

<sup>37</sup> Croatia, Government Decision on Exceptional Price Control Measures for Certain Products (*Odluka o iznimnim mjerama kontrole cijena za određene proizvode*), 14 March 2020, available at: [https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2016/Sjednice/2020/O%C5%BEujak/213%20\(telefonska\)%20sjednica%20VRH/1%20-%20213..pdf](https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2016/Sjednice/2020/O%C5%BEujak/213%20(telefonska)%20sjednica%20VRH/1%20-%20213..pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Tportal news, Government cancels the purchase of million masks, donation of 11,5 tones of protective equipment received, we found out who the donator is (Vlada odustala od kupnje milijuna maski, stigla donacija od 11,5 tona zaštitne opreme, doznali smo tko je donator), Available at: <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/vlada-odustala-od-kupnji-milijuna-maski-stigla-donacija-pod-11-5-tona-zastitne-opreme-foto-20200320>

infection.<sup>39</sup> In Rijeka, a woman reported that her tourist guests, Chinese citizens, were thrown rocks at and were insulted by the local population.<sup>40</sup> Also, several xenophobic articles<sup>41</sup> were published regarding a tourist bus that arrived in Croatia from Wuhan, China.

### 3. Impact on privacy and spread of disinformation

With respect to personal data breach in the media, names of one deceased person positive on coronavirus and of a state secretary positive on coronavirus were made public. Regarding other cases, there were unnecessary information about their places of work, occupations and family details published by the media.

Croatian Journalists' Association has organized an event called "Information or panic - responsible reporting on coronavirus"<sup>42</sup> which gathered medical and journalist experts with the aim to improve the quality of reporting on coronavirus and other health topics of public interest.

The Electronic Media Council has published an announcement<sup>43</sup> on 26 February 2020 regarding the reporting on coronavirus and called on all electronic media in Croatia to ensure that the reporting about coronavirus is responsible, accurate and careful. It emphasized that unconfirmed reports that have recently appeared on certain Croatian web portals may favor the spread of fear, which can ultimately lead to panic. Therefore it invited electronic media providers to consider in their reporting that a system of public information on the coronavirus has been established through the National Civil Protection Headquarters and invited them to monitor official sources.

The Electronic Media Council reminded that journalists are obliged to convey accurate information by referring to credible and verified sources, as well as not to use inaccurate terms such as "many dead", "many", "hundreds", "thousands" etc. unless editorially justified. It further instructed not to use the names "Wuhan virus", "Chinese virus" or other similar terms that might appear in local contexts since the World Health Organization has issued guidelines recommending that geographical names shall not be used when naming diseases as this can stigmatize people living there. In addition, the use of photographs and recordings of people wearing masks should be justified by appropriate context.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Croatia, Centre for Peace Studies (*Centar za mirovne studije*), in-person interview held on 13 March 2020

<sup>40</sup> Croatia, *Slobodna Dalmacija* newspaper, "VLASNICA APARTMANA ŠOKIRANA INCIDENTOM U RIJECI: Moje kineske goste gadali su kamenjem, vikali su za njima 'korona, korona'. Dušu sam isplakala...", published on 26 February 2020, available at: <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/vlasnica-apartmana-na-jadranu-sokirana-incidentom-u-svom-gradu-moje-kineske-goste-gadalisu-kamenjem-vikali-su-za-njima-korona-korona-1005868>

<sup>41</sup> Articles available at: <https://epodravina.hr/epidemija-koronavirusa-u-hrvatsku-stigao-autobus-pun-kineza-iz-grada-iz-kojeg-je-krenula-smrtonosna-bolest> and <https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/iz-wuhana-u-hrvatsku-stigao-autobus-pun-kineza-zarista-koronavirusa-usli-su-preko-bregane-navodno-nitko-nije-bolestan>

<sup>42</sup> Croatia, Croatian Institute of Emergency Medicine, Panel discussion "Information or panic - responsible reporting on coronavirus" (*Održana tribina "Informacija ili panika - odgovorno izvještavanje o koronavirusu"*), available at: <https://www.hzhm.hr/aktualno/novosti/odrzana-tribina-informacija-ili-panika-odgovorno-izvjestavanje-o-koronavirusu>

<sup>43</sup> Croatia, Electronic Media Agency, Announcement of the Electronic Media Council on reporting about coronavirus (*Priopćenje Vijeća za elektroničke medije u vezi izvještavanja o korona virusu*), 26 February 2020, available at: <https://www.aem.hr/vijesti/priopcenje-vijeca-za-elektronicke-medije-u-vezi-izvjestavanja-o-korona-virusu/>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

On 24 March 2020 Agency for Electronic Media issued a warning regarding publishing of commercial communication which warned all electronic media providers in Croatia to publish audiovisual commercial communication in a way which would not compromise measures prescribed by the Civil protection headquarters. It also appealed that commercial messages have visual or audio incitement to foster responsible behaviour with respect to coronavirus pandemic. Advertisers were invited to continue commercial activities, but not to bring the citizens in potential conflict with anti epidemic measures.<sup>45</sup>

Citizens are constantly being warned about the issue of fake news on coronavirus which spread misinformation and panic among citizens. For example, on 11 March 2020 the Government of Croatia warned the citizens on its website about the fake recording going round on social media about Zagreb being placed in quarantine. According to the audio recording, it will be announced within 48 hours that Zagreb has been placed in quarantine, and that the true number of people infected with the virus is being kept from the public.<sup>46</sup>

The Government of Croatia has launched an official website for timely and accurate information on coronavirus available under the following link: [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr). The website provides information on coronavirus, adopted government measures and initiatives to tackle the crisis, instructions for citizens as well as warnings about certain cases of misinformation present in the public and on social networks e.g. warning about the inefficiency of home-made hands sanitizers or false “recipes” to cure coronavirus.<sup>47</sup>

Faktograf.hr, a Croatian media specialized for fact checking has published an overview of false news about coronavirus that has been present lately in the public space, such as inaccurate information on costs of treatment for persons infected by coronavirus and the most common myths present on the internet about prevention and self-diagnosing of the illness.<sup>48</sup>

Faktograf.hr has also recently launched a live blog with disinformation on coronavirus.<sup>49</sup>

Following the strong earthquake in Zagreb on 22 March 2020, the authorities have warned the citizens about fake news with regards to more earthquakes to follow which largely spreads panic among citizens who out of fear leave their homes and therefore endanger the respecting of social distancing measures with respect to coronavirus.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Agency for Electronic Media, Warning about publication of commercial communication, available at: [https://www.aem.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AEM-Upozorenje-pru%C5%BEateljima-medijskih-usluga\\_Upute-kriznog-sto%C5%BEera\\_CORONA-virus-1.pdf](https://www.aem.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AEM-Upozorenje-pru%C5%BEateljima-medijskih-usluga_Upute-kriznog-sto%C5%BEera_CORONA-virus-1.pdf) and Notification to media service providers regarding commercial communication, available at: <https://www.aem.hr/vijesti/obavijest-pruzateljima-medijskih-usluga-vezano-uz-komercijalne-komunikacije/>

<sup>46</sup> Croatia, Government statement, Fake recording going round on social media about Zagreb being placed in quarantine, available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/news/fake-recording-going-round-on-social-media-about-zagreb-being-placed-in-quarantine/28970>

<sup>47</sup> Croatia, Government official website for timely and accurate information on coronavirus, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/>

<sup>48</sup> Faktograf.hr, Untruths about COVID-19 that marked the week (*Neistine o COVID-19 koje su obilježile tjedan*), 15 March 2020, available at: <https://faktograf.hr/2020/03/15/neistine-o-covid-19-koje-su-obiljezile-tjedan/>

<sup>49</sup> Faktograf.hr, LIVE BLOG: Desinformation on coronavirus (LIVE BLOG: Dezinformacije o korona virusu), available at: <https://faktograf.hr/2020/03/24/live-blog-dezinformacije-o-koronavirusu/>

<sup>50</sup> RTL.HR news portal, Croatian leadership: “Listen to the instruction and don’t panic. Coronavirus is a bigger threat than earthquake” (*Državni vrh: 'Slušajte upute Stožera i bez panike. Koronavirus je veća ugroza od potresa'*), available at: <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/3668217/uzivo-plenkovic-ovo-je-najjaci-potres-u-zadnjih-140-godina-pozivamo-sve-gradjane-na-oprez/>

On 13 March 2020 the Electronic Media Council warned all electronic media in Croatia, as well as electronic media established in the territory of another EU Member State which address to the public on the territory of Croatia, that it is prohibited to provide all audiovisual media services, including those via the Internet, which publish or spread misinformation, especially those related to public health issues. The Electronic Media Council announced that it will strictly sanction such occurrences in accordance with its competences, taking into account the principle of proportionality and the protection of public interest.<sup>51</sup>

The Croatian Data Protection Agency has published a statement regarding the processing of personal health data in the context of the extraordinary situation caused by COVID-19 virus after receiving inquiries about employers' processing of personal health data of workers. It named the provisions of the GDPR which represent legal grounds for data processing in possible scenarios related to the current situation and emphasized that according to the GDPR itself it is clear that processing of personal data should be designed to serve mankind. It further states that the right to protection of personal data is not an absolute right and that it should be considered in relation to its social function and equalized with other fundamental rights in accordance with the principle of proportionality. In that sense, it stressed that processing of personal health data should be necessary and proportionate, and personal data in question adequate, relevant and limited to the amount necessary for the processing purpose, in accordance with the principle prescribed in Article 5 of the GDPR.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Croatia, Electronic Media Council, Warning of the Electronic Media Council to all electronic media in the Republic of Croatia, 13 March 2020, available at: <https://www.aem.hr/nekategorizirano/upozorenje-vijeca-za-elektronicke-medije-svim-elektronickim-medijima-u-republici-hrvatskoj/>

<sup>52</sup> Croatia, Agency for the Protection of Personal Data (AZOP), Processing of personal health data in the context of the extraordinary situation caused by COVID-19 virus (*Obrada osobnih podataka o zdravlju u kontekstu izvanredne situacije izazvane COVID-19 virusom*), available at: <https://azop.hr/aktualno/detaljnije/obrada-osobnih-podataka-o-zdravlju-u-kontekstu-izvanredne-situacije-izazvan>