



HE. Ms. Michelle Bachelet,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 GENEVA 10,
Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner,

Please find below a submission from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Prins Willem-Alexanderhof 5, 2595 BE, The Hague, The Netherlands, www.ifla.org) for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in Croatia.

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, founded in 1927, at present with over 1500 members in around 150 countries. IFLA works to represent the interests of library and information services and their users, and is committed to promoting the principles of universal and equitable access to information and freedom of expression as drivers of development and well-being.

Overview

1. As of 2019, there are 210 public libraries in Croatia, and libraries throughout the country receive approximately 7.6 million visits per year. All public libraries in the country offer internet access; and educational activities at public libraries have attracted approximately 577,000 attendees.¹
2. The role of libraries in Croatia in ensuring free access to information for all citizens is reflected in a series of key documents of the Croatian Library Association. The CLA Committee for Free Access to Information and Freedom of Speech has organized annual roundtables on International Human Rights Day, which cover a broad range of subjects from free access to information, freedom of speech and censorship to intellectual freedom and education.
3. Recognising the role of the library sector in promoting such fundamental human rights, libraries in Croatia have carried out work which addresses several recommendations made in the second review cycle. These efforts focused on promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, members of minorities (in particular the Roma community), and the right to education of children in vulnerable situations.

Access to information and the right to education of persons with disabilities

4. Recommendations 99.47 and 99.134 issued in the previous review cycle cover, inter alia, the right to access to information of persons with disabilities, e.g. as codified in Article 21 of the CRPD. Several developments in the library sector in Croatia contribute to the implementation of these recommendations:
5. Following the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled in 2018, a national law in Croatia is under discussion as of August 2019. The interpretation of the Treaty allows libraries to use Marrakesh rights without paying remuneration for either books or ebooks; without additional obligations to register, keep records or check commercial availability.

6. This wider interpretation of the Treaty removes significant barriers to providing equitable access to information for people with visual disabilities. It also allows these rights to be invoked by libraries to serve people with dyslexia. As such, the progress made on the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty will allow libraries to better serve people with print disabilities and offer a much wider selection of materials in such accessible formats as Braille, large print or adapted audiobook formats.

RECOMMENDATION: We strongly recommend that the final law maintains this state of affairs, in order to avoid creating needless barriers to the work of libraries to provide access to information for persons with disabilities.

7. This would also be consistent with the 2018 amendment of the Copyright Act and Related Rights Act, which includes a clause permitting non-commercial use of in-copyright works for the benefit of people with disabilities in defined circumstances. At present, Croatian libraries can therefore make books and other standard print materials accessible to people with disabilities without remuneration, and can exchange, loan or distribute these exclusively for the benefit of persons with print disabilities.
8. The Croatian Library for the Blind plays a key role in providing accessible materials – it is currently the largest producer of books in accessible formats in the country, alongside several smaller organizations. Various other non-specialised libraries are also working to ensure better access to information for users with print disabilities. There are public, university and school libraries which adapt their services to better meet the needs of these users, working to provide dedicated collections sections, accessible computer equipment and/or more accessible user spaces.
9. One example of such efforts is the longstanding collaboration between the “Fran Galović” public library in Koprivnica and the County Association of the Blind. They have carried out several joint projects and programs since 2006. These projects focused on providing better access to knowledge and information for these users and promote their equal participation in society. Some of these projects have also involved collaborations with schools and kindergartens, therefore working directly with formal educational institutions.²

RECOMMENDATION: Acknowledging the existing library initiatives to provide better access to information and knowledge for people with disabilities, we encourage wider adoption of such practices and further development of an enabling policy environment to help more libraries better serve persons with disabilities.

In relation to recommendations addressing the right to education of children in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations

10. Recommendation 99.140 invited further measures to guarantee “inclusive education for children and girls with disabilities”. To meet the needs of children with print-disabilities in general, the Croatian library for the Blind offers them membership and access to their collections and services free of charge.
11. Similarly, Zagreb city libraries offer free use of their services for children with disabilities – as well as children from lower-income families. This also addresses recommendation 99.127, which highlights access to education for children vulnerable and disadvantaged situations.
12. In addition, several library initiatives promote inclusion, access to information and education for Roma children. In particular, the “Fran Galović” Public Library has initiated various projects and programmes for the inclusion of Roma children and youth and access to learning opportunities since

2000. Some have been carried out jointly with schools, kindergartens, social workers and Croatian Employment Service representatives.³

13. One of the latest initiatives organised by the library is the “Support to Roma Population” project in 2017, which focused on both formal and informal education for Roma children and youth. The project included, inter alia, basic computer and information literacy training for elementary school students and Roma young adults enrolled in the local Open University.⁴

RECOMMENDATION: Based on the existing examples of good practices, we invite further cooperation between the library sector and other relevant authorities to ensure the availability of both formal and informal learning opportunities for Roma children and youth.

14. To help ensure better access to information and learning opportunities for children in rural areas (99.140), several mobile libraries and bibliobuses within Croatia provide mobile services to small rural schools, often in areas without school or municipal libraries.⁵

RECOMMENDATION: Based on the existing examples of good practices, we invite further library initiatives to ensure better access to information for children and youth in rural areas.

Social inclusion for minority groups and other vulnerable populations

15. More broadly, the library sector in Croatia works to promote the rights to education and access to information for ethnic and linguistic minorities, as well as their cultural rights. There are 10 central libraries for national minorities in Croatia – Hungarian, Czech, Italian, Albanian, Austrian, Slovenian, Russian and Ukrainian, Serb, Bosnian and Slovak. Their work reflected in the 2019 Council of Europe Croatian report on the Protection of National Minorities.

16. These libraries work to support the preservation of minority languages and cultural identities by building collections in the respective minority languages, as well as collecting publications on their cultures, languages and traditions in Croatian and English. The “Regional collection”, maintained by the network of minority language libraries, also collects publications by minority associations and publications regarding minorities in Croatia.

17. A public library for the Roma community is planned in Zagreb, set to be the 11th minority library in the country.

RECOMMENDATION: We invite the report to examine the role of central minority libraries in promoting the social inclusion and the cultural rights of ethnic and linguistic minorities in Croatia.

18. Other initiatives within the library sector in Croatia focus on offering help to different vulnerable populations within the country. These include, for instance, Zagreb City Libraries Network’s ICT training program for homeless people and a “65plus” project which covers both IT skills and information literacy training for senior citizens.⁶ Such activities help ensure that marginalized groups and vulnerable populations have better access to information, participation in society and enjoyment of cultural rights.

¹ Public Libraries 2030, the 2019 Library Factsheet for Croatia, <https://publiclibraries2030.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Croatia-2019.pdf>

² Sabolović-Krajina, 2016, “Participatory projects in public libraries—a tool for visibility and social betterment in local community”, <http://library.ifla.org/1338/1/079-sabolovic-en.pdf>

³ Sabolović-Krajina, 2016, as well as Sabolović-Krajina, 2013, “In-house library training program supporting Roma people – the power of networking in local community”, <http://library.ifla.org/96/>

⁴ <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/archive/stocktaking/Project/Details?projectId=1514551436>

⁵ 13th Round Table on Mobile Libraries in the Republic of Croatia and the 7th Festival of Croatian Mobile Libraries – summary, https://www.hkdrustvo.hr/hr/strucna_tijela/37/publikacija/386/

⁶ Meic, Maras & Pipp, 2019, “Embracing the digital era: the case of Zagreb City Libraries”, <http://library.ifla.org/2599/1/s05-2019-meic-en.pdf>