

# A Critical Analysis of the Plan for Integration of Persons under International Protection in the Republic of Croatia

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**UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB**  
**FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**  
**MASTER OF EUROPEAN STUDIES**

**Aymen Ameen Abd Ali Al-Mimar**

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAN FOR  
INTEGRATION OF PERSONS UNDER  
INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN THE REPUBLIC  
OF CROATIA**

**GRADUATE THESIS**

**Zagreb, 2021.**

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**GRADUATE THESIS**

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**Zagreb**

**September, 2021.**

## **Authorship statement**

I declare that I have written my graduate thesis *Critical analysis of the Plan for integration of persons under international protection in the Republic of Croatia* I submitted to my mentor izv. prof. dr. sc. Enes Kulenović for evaluation, independently and that it is entirely in my authorship. I also declare that the paper in question has not been published or used to fulfil teaching obligations at this or any other institution of higher learning, and that I did not obtain ECTS credits based on it. Furthermore, I declare that I have respected the ethical rules of scientific and academic work, particularly Articles 16-19 of the Code of Ethics of the University of Zagreb.

Aymen Ameen Abd Ali Al-Mimar

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

More than 65 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced from their countries. The refugee crisis in Europe in 2015 has pushed many people to forcibly migrate from their own countries which is a very difficult decision.

One of the results of the crisis, among many others, is to integrate in the completely different and new society and culture, during which people face many obstacles. There are many countries that have to host many refugees for the first time, especially the countries situated on the Balkan route, as Croatia. Since Croatia is a member of the European Union, they have the obligation to participate in the quotas system and host adequately a specific number of refugees.

In response to the increased number of requests for international protection (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2017) and to create an integration process that is gracious for all its individuals, Croatia adopted the “Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the Period from 2017 to 2019”. However, the results of the plan in reality faced many obstacles that will be explained in the thesis.

Thus, the main goal of this paper is to analyze the experience of the process of integration of persons under international protection into Croatian society. This paper focuses on the integration of persons under international protection in Croatian society.

This paper analyzes perception on several integration dimensions in Croatian society and those are: Experience of the Process of integration of Persons Under the International Protection, Challenges in the Integration Process, Advantages in the Integration Process and Information on the Integration Process.

## 2. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT

Many authors that work in the field of migration and international research state a clear distinction between the term's "refugee" and "immigrant". In the media discourse and other fields of studies, the terms refugee and migrant are often used, but both terms have a different meaning from the other and the difference between the two terms.

*Refugee:* A person who flees because of armed conflict or because of persecution. This forces them to leave their countries in search of safe havens in other countries, thus they have an internationally recognized right, as well as the right to obtain assistance from states and United Nations organizations. The 1951 Convention defines who is a refugee and what are the basic rights granted to refugees in countries of asylum, among the most important of those principles stipulated in international law, " Refugees should not be expelled or returned to situations where their lives and freedom would be under threat"<sup>1</sup>. Granting protection to refugees includes safety, fair asylum procedures, guaranteeing to live in dignity and respect for human rights, and the countries of asylum are responsible for protecting these rights.

*Immigrant:* "the act of someone coming to live in a different country"<sup>2</sup> a person chooses to move for the purpose of either looking for work to improve his life, for study, family reunification, or any other reasons. A migrant does not face any danger or hindrance if he decides to return to his country, so it is important that states and governments deal with immigrants according to immigration laws. To deal with the refugees through international asylum rules and laws, the two terms must be understood in their correct sense because confusion may lead to serious consequences that may threaten the lives refugees. In the end, both categories need to be treated as human beings who deserve to live with respect and dignity.

Most people migrate outside their countries for several reasons, which may be political reasons, persecution, conflicts, and wars, or natural disasters.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html> (Accessed 07.06.2021)

<sup>2</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/immigration> (Accessed : 07.06.2021)



The definition of migration, in general, is the movement of an individual from one place to another, permanently or temporarily, and this definition is based on the definition of international law “to move from one country, place or locality to another”<sup>3</sup>.

The decision to leave the country of origin is one of the most difficult decisions that a person makes in his life, as people leave in search of a safer life. They afford the risks of the trip, including exploitation (human trafficking ... etc.), are exposed and the risks of crossing the sea in order to live in dignity and safety and start a new life., and according to UNHCR the last statistic, on June 18, 2021, the number of refugees in the world reached approximately 82.4 million refugees. based on those statistics 68% of refugees came from the following five countries: Syria (6.7 M), Venezuela (4.0 M), Afghanistan(2.6 M), South Sudan (2.2 M), and Myanmar (1.1 M)<sup>4</sup>.

According to Amnesty International 85% of refugees are being hosted in developing countries. However, lower- and middle-income countries are hosting more than double number of refugees than high-income countries, meaning that there is a so-called "global solidarity crisis"<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. DEFINITION OF THE INTEGRATION & INCLUSION**

Although there is no clear definition of the meaning of integration and inclusion, we can define these two terms as:

*Integration:* A mutual, “two-way process” through which the refugee and the community work together to create cohesive communities. Therefore, the integration of the refugee into society is the enhancement of capabilities and participation in economic, social, cultural, and even political life in accordance with the principles of human rights in freedom, equality, and respect for human dignity.

*Inclusion* Staying in a country for a long time makes an individual feel that he belongs to that community and this feeling stems from the fact that the individual will have the same

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/migrate> (Accessed:25.06.2021)

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, figures at a Glance, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (Accessed:28.06.2021)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/> (Accessed: 27.06.2021)

obligations and have the same rights as the citizens (*Carens, 2013: 159-160*) Carens' arguments is that belonging to any society can only be achieved by acceptance, and life must continue and be live in dignity in that country, and even children who are born in those countries where their parents live have the right to obtain citizenship in the country in which they lives.

Carens argues that there is no difference between natives and those legally entitled to international protection, that countries considered democratic should lift some restrictions on citizenship law, and that democratic countries should tighten laws that prohibit racial discrimination against refugees and immigrants. Diversity in cultures and customs, whether social or religious, should be accepted.

Carens mentions in the field of employment and the rights of refugees to engage the labor market that employers are not obligated to hire or accept the employment of any refugee or immigrant, but he must not exclude any of them for religious or ethnic reasons, as it is incompatible with respect for freedom and human dignity.

Carens states that one of the motivations that refugees face is the incentive to learn the language of the new community, which is one aspect of socio-cultural integration, and this motivation is often spontaneous, as the book indicates. Parents and then to the children, which creates a greater incentive to learn the language voluntarily, but the question raised by Carens: How do such policies fit with democratic principles? Some argue, as the book states, that “multiculturalism” has created an incentive for refugees to live in the new communities separately from the local community, but for the purpose of eliminating discrimination and removing all distinctions between new refugees and local citizens, public policies should act in a way that creates incentives for refugees and immigrants to participate in the different areas and that these policies contribute to strengthening collective ties and enhancing the sense of belonging.

The author also argues that “Democratic states can and should build a firewall between the enforcement of immigration law, on the one hand, and the protection of general human rights”. (*Ibid :133*) Carens' argument about the firewall rests primarily on the fact that refugees or migrants can obtain the rights granted to them by states, and in return, those states guarantee their access to those rights.

### 3.1. INTEGRATION AND DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

The integration process has multiple dimensions in addition to being multiple and complex, and based on the findings of researchers (*Penninx et al., 2016; Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003*) in determining the dimensions of integration that make up the integration process in local communities, it can focus on three dimensions of integration:

*First:* The social and economic dimension is represented in the participation of refugees in the areas of social and economic life through their access to job opportunities. Do they get the same opportunities as their peers from local citizens? Can they hold the same qualifications, access to housing, education and health care opportunities?

*Second:* The legal and political dimension is represented by the participation of people (refugees) in political life after they become citizens of the country in which they reside. The political dimension is their enjoyment of the right of residence in the country that granted them protection and the right of residence, and this count has become clear in these years.

*Third:* The cultural and religious dimension. In this dimension, the behavior of the refugees, the reactions of the host society and their view becomes clear, meaning how does the hosting society view this cultural and religious diversity? Is it a view of acceptance or marginalization? If domicile society accepts diversity, the refugees will enjoy their right to cultural and religious expression. However, if they are not accepted in the host society and are seen as (strangers) with different cultural and religious background, the refugees are required to integrate into a mono-cultural and religious society, so the matter depends on the extent of acceptance and how to deal in accordance with freedom, justice and equality.

In addition to these three dimensions according to (*PENNINX, Rinus i Blanca GARCÉS-MASCAREÑAS. 2016a*), there is another important dimension that must be added as a *fourth* dimension, which is the acceptance of new persons under international protection by the community, meaning that the person who has obtained international protection feels that he has become part of the host community and that he is an “accepted member” (*Penninx, 2007: 10*).

In November 2004, the Council of the European Union adopted the basic and common concepts related to integration policy, and in 2014 they were confirmed by the European

Council and representatives of member states. It was also pointed out that integration requires refugees to respect the values of the European Union.

Working or entering the labor market was the main key in the integration process, the effective contribution that refugees make to the new society that hosts them, and this was noted through the interviews conducted, out of the 16 interviews conducted. It employed 12 people and only two were unemployed (Male/master's in accounting) and (Female/Lawyer). Work is the basis for integration with the new society.

Once integration policies are defined, it is the responsibility of the responsible authorities and stakeholders to implement those policies in accordance with a mechanism that works to ensure that all rights are equally accessible members of society.

If the goal of integration is to create a more inclusive society through the participation of all, then integration is basically equal treatment without regard to backgrounds, which means that the treatment is based on the principle of justice and equality and not on the basis of their special treatment, meaning that each person has rights and obligations and can participate in all aspects of life in the new society, and this requires the participation of everyone and that the responsibility is not only on governments, but on all parties (people, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, and others), "If people feel that they have a voice then they will be encouraged to include themselves"<sup>6</sup>.

Governments must define their goals from the integration process (rights and obligations, justice and equality, diversity, social contract, sense of belonging.etc.)<sup>7</sup>.

Migration is an important factor and an enabling tool for sustainable development and contributes significantly to the economic, social, etc. fields of the host societies. In order for migration to be effective in the host communities, the responsible authorities must make every effort to ensure the successful integration of refugees into the communities, through access to work, education, and overcoming obstacles to language learning.

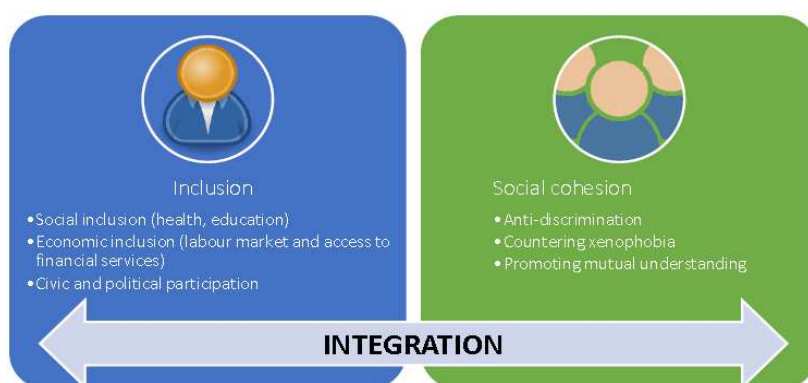
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<sup>6</sup> DESA, (2009) Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration (p:33)

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, "Our Shared Future" (2007)  
<http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Education/documents/2007/06/14/oursharedfuture.pdf> ,(Accessed: 05.07.2021)

### 3.2. THE STANDARD DOMAIN OF INTEGRATION

For the purpose of improving the integration process of migrants, states undertook in the New York Declaration to take all measures in support of education, health, justice, equality, and language. In the Universal Human Rights Declaration (1948) discrimination is prohibited on the grounds of color, gender, religious belief, political orientation, race, or nationality. This means that integration is not an achievement as much as it is an approach that varies according to the policy of integration between „the poles of assimilation and multiculturalism”<sup>8</sup>. There are several factors that affect integration, including the economic and social status of migrants or refugees, or the political orientations of the host countries towards refugees and migrants, based on the reasons for leaving their countries and migration. Accordingly, migrants and refugees may face several obstacles that certainly affect their psychological, health, and social status. It is very important to take into account the differences between men and women, because these differences may be a reason that hinders the integration process due to the expectation of those coming to the society of the host country, and xenophobia (and discrimination) by the host society is also an obstacle to the integration process.



*Scheme 1: Components of integration, Source: Global Compact Thematic Paper Integration and Social Cohesion (p:3)*

<sup>8</sup> Global Compact Thematic Paper | Integration and Social Cohesion, INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION: KEY ELEMENTS FOR REAPING THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION, (IOM),Pdf. (p:3)

## **4. INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

### **4.1. GLANCE OF HISTORY OF ASYLUM AND MIGRATION LAW IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

The Asylum Law of the Republic of Croatia states that the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for giving all public information about the rights and obligations contained in the Asylum Law (79/7) to persons under international protection and subsidiary protection at home. Persons who gained status of asylum have the right of residence in Republic of Croatia for 5 years and persons who gained status of subsidiary protection have to right of residence for three years but have the same rights and obligations as the first category. Eight days from the date of the decision to grant international or subsidiary protection persons who gained it have to register and fulfill all the obligations stated by the Asylum Law. The Ministry of Interior provided them with a booklet containing an explanation of all those rights and obligations. The brochure also contains all the addresses and websites of relevant institutions and contact information. The brochure is available in 7 languages (Croatian, Arabic, English, Persian, French, Ukrainian and Urdu).

Under this law: the individual has the right to reside, is granted a residence permit and has freedom of movement and travel, but he has an obligation to inform the Ministry of the Interior of his travel outside the Republic of Croatia, which has the right to cancel his residence if he continues to live outside of Croatia for a period exceeding six months, the individual granted international protection or subsidiary protection in family reunification and housing for a period of two years from the date of the issuance of the asylum decision in accordance with the law.

On February 22, the Croatian Parliament adopted the document regulating the migration policy and the movement of migrants to the Republic of Croatia, the main objective being to ensure the contribution of these migrants to serve the interest of the Republic of Croatia in the economic, political, social, and cultural fields like the rest of its counterparts in the member states.

As the Republic of Croatia is a member of the European Program for the Resettlement of Third Country Nationalities, relocation and Stateless Persons who fulfilled the conditions for obtaining international protection, and as part of this program, 78 persons have been received

out of the total number of 1583 persons whom the Republic of Croatia has undertaken to accept, and as part of the Repatriation Program Resettlement: 16 Eritreans and 2 Yemenis who were in Italy and within the same program, 60 people who were in Greece were hosted.

Croatia is not a famous destination for immigrants, therefore the community of foreigners under international protection is relatively small, so the integration policy of the Republic of Croatia focuses on teaching the language, culture, and history of the country.

During the Migration crisis and the opening of the borders between 2015 and 2016, the Republic of Croatia acted responsibly as a member state of the European Union.

In the light of that crisis and as part of the integration policy between the countries of the Union and its institutions, a framework has been developed for the purpose of developing a common migration policy, specifically the asylum policy. The aim of developing the asylum and immigration policy in the European Union is to enhance the capabilities of building a common policy among the member states, and solidarity is one of the principles that were developed for the immigration policy and stipulated in (*Article 80 of TFEU*) and this became clear during the asylum crisis of 2015/ 2016 in accordance with Articles 79<sup>9</sup> and 80<sup>10</sup> of the Lisbon Treaty, which established the legal basis for migration policy in the European Union.

## **5. ACTION PLAN OF PERSONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION PERIOD 2017-2019**

### **5.1. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INTEGRATION**

Although Croatia hasn't been one of the desired destinations for refugees since 2015, the number of international protection status has been increased after the start of the refugee crisis. Today, there is a relatively small number of persons under the international protection (9) refugees status (0) subsidiary protection (30.06.2021)<sup>11</sup> in Croatia but there is still the need to enable integration to those who will stay in Croatia longterm. The action plan of

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<sup>9</sup> European Union law -directive 2011/95/EU <https://eur-lex.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A1206E079>

<sup>10</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016E080>

<sup>11</sup> [https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna\\_zastita/Statisticki-pokazatelji-osoba-kojima-je-odobrena-medjunarodna-zastita-20-2021.pdf](https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/statistika/2021/Medjunarodna_zastita/Statisticki-pokazatelji-osoba-kojima-je-odobrena-medjunarodna-zastita-20-2021.pdf)

integration adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the period from 2017-2019, which focused mainly on the rights of persons under international protection and subsidiary protection in the aspects of language, housing, and work, and in return focus on their obligations and duties, which are to contribute to the development of the economy by entering the labor market and contributing In the cultural and social life of the Croatian society and with the support of the relevant authorities, this plan is an extension of the previous action plan for the year (2013-2015), and because the people who will receive international protection and subsidiary protection will be given their places in the country and the society to which they have sought refuge by having their places in the society in which they have moved to live in by obtaining housing, work, education, health care...etc.

In accordance with the Law on International Protection and Subsidiary Protection in the Republic of Croatia for the year 2015, the action plan was drawn up and was in line with international criteria of human rights and minority rights.

There are several types of international protection in the Republic of Croatia:

1. Refugee status
2. Subsidiary protection and
3. Temporary protection

If a person is persecuted because of their political affiliation, race, gender, or religious belief, and this is a reason for the person to leave their country, the person will receive international protection and be granted refugee status.

If a person leaves his country due to armed conflicts or due to the threat of any inhumane punishments that threaten the life of the individual, he is granted the so-called subsidiary protection.

And the third type, there is no decision regarding this type either by the government of the Republic of Croatia nor by the European Union members, if a person fulfills any of the above according to each type of protection, the Ministry of Interior is responsible for issuing the decision.

The Law on International Protection and Subsidiary Protection includes regulating the rights and obligations of beneficiaries of international protection and subsidiary protection and



based on the directive (2011/95) Article No. 2 issued by the European Union countries, including the Republic of Croatia, in which it specified the conditions for the qualification of persons under international and subsidiary protection and stateless persons, as well as third-country nationals (TCNs). Article No. 34 of the same directive, concerns the process of assisting persons who have obtained international and subsidiary protection to integrate into society. The aforementioned article also specifies the tasks of institutions, ministries, non-governmental organizations, and all other bodies that support and contribute to assisting persons under protection International and subsidiaries for integration into society.

## **6. THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF PERSONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION**

The rights of the persons who granted asylum or subsidiary protection:

According to the article 64 of the directive (70/15, 127/17) all persons under international and subsidiary protection have following rights in the Republic of Croatia:

1. Residence in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.
2. Family reunification.
3. A housing.
4. Participate in labor market.
5. Medical care.
6. Education.
7. Freedom of religious belief.
8. Free legal assistance; (CLC)<sup>12</sup>
9. Financial support from social welfare.
10. The action to help to integrate into society.
11. Possession of real property pursuant to the 1951 Convention; and
12. procuration of Croatian citizenship according to the regulations.

The obligations of persons who granted asylum or subsidiary protection:

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<sup>12</sup> Croatia law Center (CLC): The Croatian law Center assists in providing legal advice and information regarding persons granted international protection, in addition to communicating with these beneficiaries when they need to inquire or request legal advice through the integration department of the Croatian Red Cross. <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/croatia/content-international-protection/>

1. Observance of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and respect all laws and regulations.
2. Record the place of residence within fifteen days from the date of obtaining the decision to obtain international protection.
3. Article 75 of the act (*NN 127/17*) on have their residence permit and permit persons authorized by law to check it.
4. learning Croatian language, knowledge of culture, and the history of the Republic of Croatia.

During the period between 2017-2019, the right of international protection was granted to (632) people in the Republic of Croatia, where asylum was granted to (579) people and subsidiary protection to (53) people.

In 2017, the Republic of Croatia granted international protection to 210 people, with a noticeable increase over previous years since 2006-2016. The ages of persons granted international protection since 2017-2019 ranged between the age group (18-34), reaching (174) people. And then the age group (0-13) was followed by (116) people, and the age group (35-64) reached (80) people.

## **7. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE**

### **7.1. ANALYSIS OF EFFICIENCY OF THE INTEGRATION PROCESS**

Interviews were conducted with (16) beneficiaries of international protection using a semi-structured interview. The ages of the beneficiaries interviewed ranged between (26-59) years, some of them live in the Republic of Croatia alone, and some with their families. The number of female participants was 4, while the number of male participants was 12. The total number of married and single (10 married and 6 single); long their stay in the Republic of Croatia ranging between (40-92) months, mother tongue:(Persian, Urdu, and Arabic) language, Despite attempts to make the number equal between the sexes so that there is a display of their experiences both sexes it was not accessible because the number of persons under international protection is male compared to the number of females and most of them refused to participate in the interview. All of the participants were of different educational stages from the primary stage to the university stage, that is, those who studied until the primary

stage or did not complete it, and those who reached the master's stage. Each of those interviewed worked in different professions and fields of work: dentist, master's in finance and Accounting, programmer, lawyer, cook, auto body repairer, salesman, translator, welder, baker, (PVC) doors and windows fitters.

Participants are originally from different countries: Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq and each of them had their own unique experience of living in their country of origin and sometimes in the Republic of Croatia, although some experiences of integration were similar. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English or according to the beneficiary's desire to use the language they wish to speak. Through the interviews, we can say that integration depends not only on the persons who have obtained international protection, as much as on the process of society's acceptance of these persons. The following questions were posed to the beneficiaries, which also represent the main research questions (annex 1: interview questions in English): a) What are the shortcomings of the integration process in practice? b) What are the advantages of the integration process in practice? c) What helps people under international protection in better integration? d) Which participants participate in the integration process? e) How are persons under international protection informed about their rights and obligations in Croatia? The aforementioned thematic sessions were analyzed through interview questions that examined several integration dimensions (see Scheme 1 below): employment, housing, education, health, social bridges, social bonds, social links, etc. For visual representation (*see Scheme No.2*) below those shows the findings of Ager and Strang from 2008 and 2004, in defining the theoretical framework for the integration of refugees which includes ten basic areas with different fields. The first group includes work, housing, education, and health care and it was titled "Meaning and markers". The second group included social bridges, social bonds, and social links and it's called "Social connections". The third group entitled "Facilitators" included language and cultural knowledge, safety, and stability. The fourth group "Foundation" included rights and citizenship.

### A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration



Scheme 2: The Suggested framework indicators for integration assessment, source: Ager & Strang 2004:5

## 8. RESULTS

After listing each thematic units, before analyzing the results, it is necessary to show what was exactly examined in each thematic unit.

### 1. Experience of the Process of integration of Persons Under the International Protection

The aim of this thematic unit was to determine how the participants perceive the integration process in Croatia and what integration into Croatian society means for them. In this unit, the participants mostly explained integration as an introduction to customs and traditions. Also, participants perceived the integration through learning the language of the host country as a priority, then participating in the labor market, learning Croatian laws and community traditions through the formation of friendships with Croatian citizens. Those relationships are mentioned as significant for building a new life in a new society. As one of the participants mentioned:

*“Learning the language of the host country is one of the most important priorities for achieving the process of social and practical integration” (N, 31)*

The 9 of 16 participants stated that the integration isn't hard if the society of destination (Croatian society) has an open approach towards the new citizens, for example at cultural or social events or in everyday life. 7 participants stated that the host society isn't always open and does not accept strangers, even though most of the participants 11 of 16 have learned the Croatian language and try to get familiar with the new culture.

13 of 16 of the participants have learned the Croatian language by engaging in the labor market and through everyday conversations with co-workers. Some of them stated they participated in informal courses run by some humanitarian organizations due to the lack of official courses offered in Croatia.

In addition, participants have obtained their rights on accommodation during the legal period stated in Asylum law.

## **2.Challenges in the Integration Process**

With the integration challenges, we wanted to see what the participants experience as the greatest difficulties and challenges in integration. It was especially interesting to hear what made it difficult for the participants to find accommodation in Croatia, learn the Croatian language and participate in the health and education system.

One of the biggest challenges for people under international protection is the difficulty of finding housing after the expiry of the two-year period, which is their right of accommodation in accordance with the Asylum (*Article 67 (NN 127/17)*). Landlords do not rent their real estate to strangers unless guarantee payment by showing a work contract and that they have a monthly income that enables them to pay the monthly rent or pay two or three months in advance, and there are some landlords who refuse to do so. Some of them do not accept the idea that renting a place is for strangers - because the family has children, or for fear that these recipients of international protection are not able to pay the monthly housing costs, in general. Through the interviews conducted, the main reason was the lack of acceptance by the Croatian society of the idea of renting the place to foreigners. One of the challenges facing participants with children, especially those with bigger families is the problem with landlords who aren't willing to rent their apartments to them.

*“We wish the government to support the issue of housing, especially for families who came to the Republic of Croatia according to the resettlement program, as there are*

*families who have between 5 and 7 children, and therefore it is difficult to obtain housing” (B,43)*

Furthermore, one participant perceived integration as difficult because of the lack of financial and psychological support that they didn't get.

Another challenge is the poor government support for Croatian language courses, as most of the participants still have this problem, even though most learned the language through engagement in the labor market (as mentioned earlier) and through co-workers. Another reason for poor language knowledge is the lack of free time since some participants have to work full time to support their families, which doesn't leave any time for participating in the language courses.

In the aspect of health and treatment, interviews show that there are a number of medical staff working in medical centers who do not have knowledge of the asylum law and don't know the difference between the category of foreigners and persons under international protection. The participants stated there is a problem in communicating with the family doctor because of the language and the person's inability to explain his condition to the doctor. That led to the deterioration of his health, in addition to the misunderstanding that occurs due to language as explained by one of the participants:

*“Does not know what information they should enter into the Croatian medical computer system (We need to create a network between the Red Cross office and the doctor so that the members of the Red Cross can explain the status and eligibility of the medical insurance granted to us”.* (N, 31)

In addition to all of the above, the interviews show that there are those who suffer greatly from the difficulty of learning the language because of their age, as there are 2 participants who are over 50 years old and have difficulty learning the language. Another reason for difficulties is the fact that 70 hours is not enough for people who speak only their mother tongue since levels of language courses are not organized according to the educational level of each person and languages they already use.

### 3. Advantages in the Integration Process

This thematic unit identifies the benefits of the integration process as well as what helps the participants in better integration. With the advantages of integration, it was planned to examine what especially helps participants in finding accommodation, learning the Croatian language, and participating in the health and education system.

Regarding housing, the results showed that 7 of the refugees had known the owners of the properties they lived in during the two years, and thus were able to stay in the same property after the end of the legal period. Therefore, they were able to solve their problem of difficulty in finding housing. 1 of participant mentioned that paying two or three months in advance could be a solution for finding or keeping the place. To convince real estate owners to rent their homes to refugees, 6 of the participants who succeeded in finding a home got the help of friends and co-workers, while 1 of participant stated that they could find housing only if the owner is of Arab origins. An interesting result is that one participant was able to rent a house due to their child who goes to the kindergarten, and through acquaintance between their family and the Croatian family whose child is in the same kindergarten as stated below:

*“Children are the key to integration” (Sh,31)*

As for work, the results show that engaging in the labor market greatly contributed to getting to know more about society and forming relationships with co-workers. The results also show that most employers treat the participants on an equal footing with their peers from Croatia. Even more than that, 5 of them confirmed that they received support and assistance from employers in particular.

Regarding health care, the results show that it's easier when going to the family doctor or medical center for treatment for those who participate in the labor market and have health insurance. On the other hand, for those who are unemployed, the results proved that there is a lack of understanding of the rights of refugees in the medical care of the extent of medical staff and nurses', as most of them do not know how to deal with the electronic system, and others do not differentiate between the Asylum law (for persons under the international protection) and the Foreigners law. For those reasons, the participants need to communicate with one of the humanitarian organizations (Croatian Red Cross) in order for the organization to communicate with the family doctor or the medical center to explain the legal rights for

people who have obtained international protection. One of them mentioned that if no one, such as the Croatian Red Cross, intervened, the matter would seem difficult to solve.

The results of learning the local language of the country showed that it was participation in the labor market that contributed greatly to learning the language, getting to know the community more, forming friendships with members of the community, and getting to know more about labor laws and the requirements for obtaining a job. 6 of them engaged in education by enrolling in a vocational course at the Open School in Zagreb and then obtaining a professional certificate that allows working in an appropriate job according to the specialization. The results show that educational institutions aren't informed about the rights of the persons under international protection in engaging in education within educational institutions. 5 of the participants recognize the problem with educational institutions during enrollment in the universities or other institutions, where the staff isn't familiar with the rights of persons under the international protection that are the same as the ones of Croatian citizens in terms of education. 1 of the participants mentioned:

*“Society is still not ready, and still not welcoming newcomers” (I,49)*

#### **4. Information on the Integration Process**

The last thematic union determines which participants participate in the integration process as well as determines how persons under international protection are informed about the integration process. The participants were discussed their opinion on who in general participates in the integration process after receiving protection in Croatia, how they communicated and cooperated with the participants in the integration process, and how they are informed about various information, especially finding accommodation, rights, and obligations in Croatia, doubts related to rights and obligations and a better understanding of rights and obligations.

The results show that 12 of 16 of the participants who obtained the right of residence in the Republic of Croatia had received all the information about their rights and obligations from the Integration Department of the Ministry of Interior at the Refugee Reception Center after receiving the decision to obtain international protection, where most of them received a brochure containing an explanation of each right and all obligations of those granted international protection. Also, the Croatian Red Cross provided an info session at the



refugee reception center. In addition, the Red Cross, in cooperation with the Croatian law center, assists individuals who have obtained residence in providing free legal advice by coordinating monthly meetings based on the requests of refugees in person. The research results show that there are shortcomings in clarifying some rights, such as family reunification six of the participants mentioned that, and the right to own real estate in the Republic of Croatia. As for the right to medical care, one of the participants mentioned that he was not aware that he had the right to free medical care except by finding a job, as well as the right of residence and the right to health insurance for children. One of the participants stated:

*“What is not clear: How can I not apply for a job because I am not a Croatian citizen?” (I,24)*

Last, the organizations that contribute to the support and provision of assistance to refugees and according to the results of interviews are (JRS - *Jesuit Refugee Service*, RCT - *Rehabilitation center for stress and trauma*, CPS -*Centre for Peace Studies (Croatian abbreviation: CMS)* and the CRC-*Croatian Red Cross*). Despite all the above, there are those participants who do not know what their rights and obligations are, and they are not satisfied with the performance of some humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, and they perceive that organizations do not provide any assistance.

## **9. DISCUSSION**

The Action plan and all the measures have been taken are with the aim of assisting persons granted international protection in overcoming all the challenges and difficulties they face during integration process in Croatia.

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (*MIPEX*) in Croatia, it indicates a rise and fall over the past five years compared to 2014, in which refugees have gained basic rights in the area of access to employment opportunities, protection of discrimination, and improvement of health. On the contrary, there are still deficiencies in support of family reunification as well as access to employment opportunities in the government sector and language learning. There are many challenges facing refugees in several aspects, including health, education, and housing. In other words, those who have obtained asylum in the

Republic of Croatia have the same rights as Croatian citizens, except for the right to vote and participate in elections.

Since integration is a two-way process, as mentioned, the main parties to the integration process are the refugees with their culture, characteristics, abilities to integrate and adapt to the host society, while on the other side is the host society who has to accept the newcomers in order to have the full integration.

There are four areas that have been focused on (education, language, work, housing, health). These four areas are an indication of the extent of the success of the integration through which success can be achieved. (*Ager & Starng 2004*).

According to Article 50 of the Asylum Act (*Official Gazette 79/2007, 88/2010, and 143/2013*), a program has been devoted to learning the Croatian language, the history and culture of Croatia with the aim of integrating into the local community, and the conditions and mechanism for implementing the program have been defined with the aim of enabling persons under the international protection to communicate with the new society in order to enable them to live and find work. The duration of the program is from six to nine months, depending on the number of weekly hours, with a total number of 280 hours, an average of 30 hours per month. According to the results from the research, there is no government support in this aspect. For the persons under international protection, 70 hours is inadequate if we compare it to a German-language learning system for refugees. There are 700 hours, including 600 hours to learn the language and 100 hours to learn the law, culture, and history of the country. If compared with German special language courses for women, youth, and parents, as well as for people with literacy needs or so-called "new alphabet students", consisting of 1000 hours of study (900 hours for learning language and 100 hours for law, culture, and history of the country) then we can see the real deficiencies in the Croatian system of language and culture learning. Although paragraph *No. 74* of the Asylum Law obliges persons with international and subsidiary protection to attend courses for learning the Croatian language, culture, and history for the purpose of integrating into the local community. In the event of non-compliance with attendance, people will bear the costs of these Courses whose costs are paid from the budget of the Republic of Croatia to the Ministry of Education, but there is no mechanism to activate this legal paragraph, meaning that the persons who are obligated to attend these courses are not obligated to attend and are not obligated to pay the costs of this course, although the participants were conducted with

persons who have obtained international and subsidiary protection. It showed that the Croatian language courses are not held regularly and periodically, and if these courses are available, the course hours do not exceed 70 hours, even though the law limits language hours to 280 hours, at a rate of 30 hours per month. This is also showed by the research results since the participants mostly learned the Croatian language through informal communication. The local (*Ager & Strang 2004*) and the number of hours available to learn the Croatian language is not enough because it is not an easy language to learn.

Based on the Law on International and subsidiary protection, persons granted international and subsidiary protection have the right to reside in the Republic of Croatia, the right to education, to attend educational institutions, and to receive lessons in the Croatian language and Croatian culture and history, the right to work, the right to free legal assistance and advice, housing, social care and medical education, the right to family reunification, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of ownership in accordance with the 1951 Convention, the right to naturalization and the right to assistance with integration (*according to Article 76) NN 127/17) of the International and Temporary Protection Act (NN 70/15, 127/17)*, which indicates that persons with international or subsidiary protection have the right to assist in the integration into society for a period not exceeding three years from the date of granting international or subsidiary protection.

In return, they have to fulfill several obligations: respect for the law and legislation of the Republic of Croatia and the obligation to attend courses of the Croatian language, culture, and history.

However, there are difficulties that people who have obtained international and subsidiary protection face in obtaining some of these rights, such as the right to education and joining educational institutions, as mentioned in the results. The workers in educational and academic institutions do not know the difference between Foreigners' law and Asylum law, and therefore the persons under the international protections are required to pay tuition fees as foreigners and not as refugees. On the other hand, there are those who do not know that they have the right to enroll in educational or academic institutions to complete their studies without fees, the same as the local citizens. However, one of the positive aspects that were noticed in the research is what most of the participants mentioned about the recognition of education (Academic or vocational) based on Article (70). Compared to other countries of asylum in Europe, Croatia has a relatively organized recognition system.

Furthermore, work is one of the most important areas that can contribute significantly to the integration process according to Ecre (1999) as it contributes to learning the language of the country and developing the language. All participants commented the extent of support and assistance they have received from employers. The result can be connected to Carens's theory where no one shouldn't be excluded or suffered from discrimination on the basis of race or religion. In addition to providing an opportunity to create a relationship of acquaintance with the local community and independence in the financial aspect through self-dependence. In our research, the same results showed during the interviews.

In addition to the foregoing, there are some interviewees who have enrolled in vocational courses at the Open School in Zagreb for the purpose of education and vocational training. This vocational training after which people acquire a profession that qualifies them to obtain a suitable job is one of the important aspects of the integration process as also mentioned by Ager and Strang (2008).

The problem of using computers systems in government institutions can be considered a "tool" (*Jurkovic 2021: 83*) that hinders the possibility of people who have obtained international and subsidiary protection from obtaining their rights. The refugee receives medical care and treatment, and in most cases, they ask them to pay the costs of treatment. Other challenge is that the people who do not work and do not have health insurance through the Croatian Health Insurance Office the problem is that they are not registered in the computer system despite the fact that The Ministry of Health has sent its instructions to all health institutions. According to Carens, employees of professional institutions such as doctors treat people professionally and not as law enforcement personnel and follow instructions sent by the Ministry of Health. Through interviews with participants, they mentioned that they are contacting a humanitarian organization (the Croatian Red Cross) to help explain the legal status of people granted international and subsidiary protection. In sum, modern technology stands as an obstacle in government institutions between it and people exercising their rights.

Therefore, all of what was mentioned are experiences of people who were unable to access their rights to education, health, language learning, and to obtain a suitable job opportunity. This indicates that there are shortcomings in the migration policy adopted by the Republic of Croatia with persons granted international and subsidiary protection, and these procedures depend on political changes (*Jurković, 2021*). Action Plan 2017-2019 has not been

implemented so far which indicates that people who have obtained international and subsidiary protection live in the Republic of Croatia as “marginalized” people. This leads us to conclude that integration of persons under the international and subsidiary protection are classified as “equal in rights” as Croatian citizens only on paper, but not in the reality.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

This paper provides the theoretical distinction between the terms of refugee and immigrant as well as integration and inclusion as an important starting point for further analysis of research results.

According to Carens (2013), integration is a “two-way process” through which the refugee and the community work together to create cohesion in the society. The author states that the integration into society is the enhancement of capabilities and participation in economic, social, cultural, and political life in accordance with the principles of human rights in freedom, equality, and respect for human dignity.

On the other hand, inclusion is, according to Carens the process of adopting the elements of a new society while keeping the main aspects of a person's original culture, religion, etc. (*Carens, 2013: 159-160*).

Furthermore, the difference between a refugee and an immigrant is also crucial for understanding this paper. A refugee is a person who forcibly flees to find safety in another country because of armed conflict or because of persecution. On the other hand, an immigrant is a person who chooses to migrate for several different reasons, either looking for a job, study, or other willing reasons.

The other part of the paper presents the research analysis of the experience of the process of integration of persons under international protection into Croatian society. The goal of the research was obtained by the qualitative research conducted through the interviews.

Results were analyzed through four main aspects: Experience of the Process of integration of Persons Under the International Protection, Challenges in the Integration Process, Advantages in the Integration Process, and Information on the Integration Process.

Results show that learning the elements of tradition, culture and language are crucial for the integration process into Croatian society as well as finding a job where persons under the protection can make new relations and practices the Croatian language. The main challenges for integration perceived by the participants are Croatian language courses that are insufficient and aren't regular; modern technologies that represent an obstacle in the Croatian health system since the persons under protection aren't registered in the information system and lastly the housing since many owners won't rent their homes to the foreigners. Participants as the main advantage mentioned good relationships with their employers and co-workers who helped them to learn the language. Last, the participants mostly gain information about their rights and obligations through the Ministry of Interior, Croatian Law Center, and different NGOs.

To conclude, there are many useful strategies and goals of “Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the Period from 2017 to 2019” but there are many more obstacles that have to be overcome in the reality of the integration process such as sticking to the laws and policies that are stated and defined by the Action plan.

The policy solutions that may make the process of integrating refugees into Croatian society more successful:

- Holding Croatian language courses periodically and regularly on the basis of (educational background, marital status, age, knowledge of English language)
- Holding courses to teach the Croatian language to illiterate people under international protection.
- Development of programs for Croatian language education and language training via the Internet.
- Training and guiding workers in institutions related to laws and their implementation mechanisms.
- Employers are one of the contributors to the professional and linguistic development of workers who are granted asylum and subsidiary protection.

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## ANNEX 1: Interview protocol

**Interviewer by: Aymen Ameen Abd Ali Al-Mimar (Author)**

**Personal interview with (16) persons under international protection in the Republic of Croatia**

**General goal of the research:** To analyse the experience of the process of integration of persons under international protection into Croatian society

**Age (years):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Gender (circle):**

Male

Female

**Marital status (circle):**

a) Married

b) Single

c) Widower

d) Divorced

e) Other:

**Your country of origin:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**How long have you been in Croatia?**

\_\_\_\_\_ (Months)

**Mother tongue:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Education Level (years):**

1. To determine the experience of the integration process of persons under international protection in Croatia?

- How would you describe integration into society? What does this mean for you?

- Describe how the process of your inclusion in society took place after obtaining international protection (obtaining accommodation, education, looking for a job, acquiring acquaintances)?

## 2. Identify the shortcomings of the integration process

- What made it especially difficult for you to find accommodation?
- What made learning the Croatian language especially difficult for you?
- What made it especially difficult for you to go to the doctor?
- What made it especially difficult for you to get involved in education?

## 3. Identify the benefits of the integration process

- What made it especially easy for you to find accommodation?
- What made it especially easy for you to learn the Croatian language?
- What made it especially easy for you to go to the doctor?
- What made it especially easy for you to get involved in education?

## 4. Identify what helps in better integration

- Can you describe some events or situations that made you feel part of Croatian society?
- What especially helped you to get involved in Croatian society (participation in the labor market, education, cultural and social events...)

5. Determine which participants participate in the integration process

- Who helped you the most after receiving protection in inclusion in society (individuals, organizations...)
- How did you communicate and cooperate with these people or organizations?

6. Determine how persons under international protection are informed about the integration process

- How did you find out who you can turn to for help finding accommodation or a job?
- How did you find out about your rights and obligations in Croatia?
- 
- What helped you to better understand your rights and obligations?

**Title:** A Critical analysis of the plan for integration of persons under international protection in the republic of Croatia

## **ABSTRACT:**

In 2017, the Government of the Republic of Croatia published the “Action Plan for the Integration of Persons Granted International Protection for the Period from 2017 to 2019” in response to the increased number of requests for international protection (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2017). Although Croatia does not have an immigration tradition, and thus no detailed strategy for the integration of new citizens, this term has become frequently used in public space and media. This paper focuses on the integration of persons under international protection in Croatian society. Therefore, it is important to begin by defining the term integration itself. There are different definitions of integration, depending on the area of analysis, so some authors like Carens (2013) separate the terms integration and inclusion. For example, Parekh (2000) defines integration as a process of inclusion in society, where both new citizens and the domicile population need to adapt, while Carens (2013) views inclusion as a process in which migrants and refugees retain their cultural roots while adaptation to the host country. Nevertheless, Carens notes that “full inclusion requires the mutual adjustment of both parties, citizens of immigrant origin and citizens who do not have an immigrant origin” (Carens, 2013: 14). It is also important to distinguish the term "migrant" from the term "refugee". According to Carens (2013), refugees are those who are forced to leave their countries for a variety of reasons, from political to environmental reasons. On the other hand, the term “migrants” is often used in the context of those who have independently decided to leave their country of origin in search of a better life. Thus, Carens associates this category with temporary workers (Carens, 2013: 10). This paper is closely related to refugees who have received international protection in Croatia. The main goal of this paper is to analyze the experience of the process of integration of persons under international protection into Croatian society. By applying a qualitative methodology, the technique of semi-structured interview will answer the following research questions: a) What are the shortcomings of the integration process in practice ?, b) What are the advantages of the integration process in practice ?, c) What helps people under international protection in better integration? ?, d) Which participants participate in the integration process ?, e) How are persons under international protection informed about their rights and obligations in Croatia? After the collected data, an attempt will be made to determine how effective the integration process is for the research interlocutors, which social participants contribute the most to the efficiency of the

integration process and whether these experiences correspond to the main objectives of the Integration Action Plan in Croatia.

**KEY WORDS:** integration process, persons under the international protection, Action plan in Croatia