

Information Legal Centre
(IPC) Slavonski Brod,
Croatia

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About IPC

- ◉ IPC was registered as local civil society organization (CSO) on 12 June 2002 and has been operating since in the regions of Western Slavonia (Croatia) and Bosanska Posavina (Bosnia–Herzegovina).
- ◉ Prior to 2002, IPC acted as the Legal Centre of the International Rescue Committee (from 1998).
- ◉ Through its program “*Access to Justice Through Free Court Representations*” IPC has provided legal services to over 30,000 war-affected individuals, which positively influenced the reintegration processes.

About IPC

- ◉ IPC is a well-established CSO with specific modus operandi: 3 attorneys at law represent IPC clients free of charge in housing, protection and status issues.
- ◉ With its main office in Slavonski Brod and sub-office in Pakrac, IPC is providing free legal assistance in Central and Eastern Croatia.
- ◉ Over 3,000 beneficiaries per year receive free legal assistance, including court representations before Croatian courts and European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg (27 procedures).

About IPC

- ▶ UNHCR has been supporting IPC since its beginnings. The valuable experience that IPC and UNHCR have accumulated during implementation of a number of important initiatives have led to sustainable integration and re-integration of minority refugees and returnees through promotion and protection of their human rights.

Free legal assistance to Roma

- ◉ In June 2011 IPC has started the project “*Free Legal Assistance to Roma in Civil Registration in Croatia*”, which continues in 2012 with UNHCR support.
- ◉ For project purposes, two mobile teams were formed, with the focus on mapping the current situation through outreach activities aiming at verifying the number of stateless persons, the causes and the scope of unregulated citizenship, residence, civil status and lack of ID documents.
- ◉ Legal Advisers and Roma Liaison Assistants form part of each team.

Free legal assistance to Roma

IPC mobile teams achievements:

- established contacts with the representatives of Roma community;
- preliminary information on project implementation was provided;
- information was gathered on the status issues of Roma in their residence;
- concrete instructions regarding possibilities to resolve the concrete cases were given;
- assistance was provided in obtaining relevant documents from other countries necessary in regulation of procedures of stay or obtaining Croatian citizenship.

Free legal assistance to Roma

- The stateless population in Croatia cannot be precisely determined due to the lack of comprehensive mechanism to identify statelessness.
- Civil society and UNHCR estimate that 500 Roma are *de jure* stateless and 1,000 persons at risk of statelessness.
- IPC and UNHCR have been leading a concerted effort to increase awareness of Roma and other relevant stakeholders on the need for civil registration and documentation.

Law on Free Legal Aid

- ◉ The current framework of the Law on Free Legal Aid (2009) is not supportive to beneficiaries nor to CSOs, mainly because of complexity and extensive bureaucracy involved.
- ◉ The role of CSOs in providing legal assistance is greatly minimized and limited since CSOs can provide legal assistance only before the administrative offices (primary legal aid), while the Law forbids any assistance before courts (secondary legal aid) where most of decisions regarding different civil matters and protection of human rights in wider sense are brought.
- ◉ The lack of functionality of the system is clearly illustrated by the facts that, in 2010, over 20 registered providers of legal aid received in total only about 1.500 € from the legal aid system, and that over 99,5 % of legal advice cases of those providers were neither recognized nor supported.

Law on Free Legal Aid

- ◉ Primary legal aid has a preventive function, contributes to legal certainty, decreases the number of unnecessary legal proceedings and relieves the burden from courts and administrative bodies. Therefore, as such, primary legal aid deserves state support within the system of legal aid and assistance.
- ◉ The Amendments to the Law from 2011 do not promise that the situation in the area of primary legal aid will improve. These Amendments have additionally reduced the availability of state support for all forms of legal advice and have practically excluded from the system any legal assistance outside of court proceedings, administrative proceedings and administrative suits.

Law on Free Legal Aid

- ▶ Need for free legal aid in Croatia is constantly increasing, due to several reasons: huge crisis the Croatian society is facing, growing unemployment of Croatian population, the fact that almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of Croatian citizens are considered to be very poor, but also due to the fact that citizens are becoming more and more aware of their rights.

Civil society in Croatia

- ▶ The structure of civil society in Croatia is fairly stable and moderately developed.
- ▶ The strongest dimension of civil society in Croatia: its level of organization.
- ▶ The weakest dimension of civil society in Croatia: low levels of citizens' participation.

Civil society in Croatia

Recommendations for strengthening civil society in Croatia:

- to encourage CSOs to develop sustainable programs for volunteers,
- to push regional and local governments to establish transparent funding criteria, based on local development priorities,
- civil society should be more proactive in promoting and advocating core values to the public, by working with the media as a partner.

Civil society in Croatia

Key objective for civil society in the years ahead:

- Cementing its position as an important policy actor and building partnerships with the state and other stakeholders.