

## **EU Twinning – Establishing a comprehensive system for anti-discrimination protection (HR 09 IB JH 01)**

The overall objective of this Twinning project is to establish an efficient and effective system for combating discrimination, thus raising the level of protection against discrimination in the Republic of Croatia. Discrimination is a phenomenon which occurs in all societies all over the world. It is experienced amongst others by a 50-year old woman who cannot get a job in spite of her above-average qualification, by a man in a wheel chair who is prevented from doing business with his bank because there is no ramp or by Roma youths who are denied admission to a disco to which their “Croatian” friends are admitted without any problems. In order to be able to effectively combat such kinds of discrimination, institutions supporting individual victims of discrimination are a necessity. The **Office of the Ombudsman** as the central body responsible for combating discrimination and the **Office for Human Rights** as the state body most directly involved in combating discrimination are the most relevant institutions within the Croatian system for combating discrimination. They are the beneficiaries of the project which gives them the opportunity to strengthen especially the following capacities: supporting victims of discrimination in gaining access to justice, handling individual complaints, monitoring reported and prosecuted cases of discrimination and collecting equality data.

The Twinning project consists of **three** different but complementary **components** strengthening the three most important pillars in an efficient and effective system for combating discrimination – raising awareness for discrimination among the key stakeholders in the area of anti-discrimination, collecting data on individual complaints and overall developments in the area of equal treatment and improving institutional structures supporting victims of discrimination in search for adequate access to the justice system. The activities within the three components do not only strengthen the capacity of the beneficiary institutions but also give other relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Anti-discrimination Act and anti-discrimination policies the opportunity to strengthen their capacities and promote their cooperation with the two beneficiary institutions. Among these stakeholders are the Ombud for Gender Equality, the Ombud for Children’s Rights and the Ombud for Persons with Disabilities, judges, state attorneys, civil servants, social partner organisations and NGOs.

Within the **first component** experts will prepare and conduct trainings tailored to the needs of different key actors in the institutional set up responsible for the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation. The development of the training programs will always be based on a needs analysis among the target groups. Experience has shown that trainings in the field of anti-discrimination are not only about learning facts but also about changing one’s individual perspective and behaviour regarding the roles and stereotypes associated with various groups in society. The trainings targeting judges, state attorneys and other relevant stakeholders in the field of anti-discrimination will focus on Croatian anti-discrimination legislation in force and the EU legal framework for protection against discrimination. The staff of the Office of the Ombudsman and the specialized ombuds responsible for gender equality, children’s rights and persons with disabilities will further develop their mediation and discrimination complaints handling skills. Furthermore, NGOs and social partner organizations will together with the Office of the Ombudsman and the specialized ombuds improve their capacities as regards their roles as interveners and potential joint legal action. By enhancing the capacities of a broad range of stakeholders all the institutions involved can maximise their resources in combating and preventing discrimination.

In the frame of the **second component** a comprehensive system of data collection will be implemented, which sheds light on the handling of complaints, the kind of discriminatory incidents taken to court and on what kind of data should be collected in order to monitor general developments in the field of anti-discrimination. EU Member State experts together with employees of the Office of the Ombudsman and

the Office for Human Rights will draft recommendations for the development of software/databases for collecting data and monitoring complaints on discrimination, court cases on discrimination and equality data. The experts will first of all explore the needs of the two beneficiary institutions, prepare guidelines for the development of a software tailored to the needs of the users and conduct trainings on the usage of the software/databases. The development of the software will also be informed by good practice examples from various EU Member States and the new systems established will be in line with legislation on data protection. This component also reaches out to other important stakeholders by improving templates already in use by the Office of the Ombudsman for collecting data on cases of discrimination from the three specialized ombuds as well as NGOs. Furthermore, a handbook on how to collect equality data will be developed targeting a broad range of public institutions including the federal, regional and local level.

Finally, the **third component** focuses on victim support and enhances the capacities of both the Office of the Ombudsman and NGOs in identifying and supporting potential victims of discrimination and in handling their complaints. Activities within this component aim at establishing a telephone assistance service within the Office of the Ombudsman providing potential victims of discrimination with initial information and support, improve the system for handling individual discrimination complaints. Enhancement of the accessibility of services provided by the Office of the Ombudsman will be achieved by developing information material on the availability of telephone assistance targeting potential victims and relevant stakeholders and by improving the cooperation between the Office and relevant NGOs. This outreach work targeting NGOs and other relevant stakeholders strengthens the resources of the Office of the Ombudsman and heightens its visibility also at the regional level.

The immediate outcomes of the project will contribute to raising the level of protection against discrimination in the Republic of Croatia, they include:

- Enhancing the skills of 240 civil servants and other key actors in identifying and dealing with cases of discrimination,
- Developing training programs that can be used in the future to enhance the skills of further relevant stakeholders,
- Establish an enhanced system of assistance for persons affected by discrimination within the Office of the Ombudsman,
- Establish systems appropriate to collect data on discrimination complaints and on equality,
- Enhancing the cooperation between the Office of the Ombudsman, the specialized ombuds and NGOs.

These improvements will ideally result in an increase in the number of complaints filed by individuals affected by discrimination, an upsurge in the cases resolved as well as cases taken to court, developments which are indicative of an effective and efficient system of combating discrimination. We have so far started with the implementation of the first component and are currently preparing training programs for a broad range of target groups. We have been able to gain very useful information from interviews done among these target groups, which will help us in developing trainings meeting the current needs of the target groups. I am very much looking forward to continuing the fruitful cooperation with the beneficiary institutions and other stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Act in improving access to justice for individuals who have experienced discrimination.