

# Croatia – draft of the country review on parental participation in schools

## 1. Legal framework and state provisions

Croatian educational system is basically centralised. Curriculum (*Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju – Nacionalni kurikulum, nastavni planovi i programi, te oblici rada*, <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2194>) is planned by the **Ministry of Science Education and Sports** and local communities or schools do not intervene much in the program although they are supposed to offer financial support to school-based programs. Altogether the influence of the outside participants and local community is rather weak. Parents are mostly involved in home-based activities supporting to learning and are invited to attend individual consultations with teachers or parental meetings.

In the new *Law on education in primary and secondary schools (Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi, Narodne novine br. 87, 2008.)* there are legal opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education. The document has 167 articles. **Three** of them regulate rights and obligations of parents regarding school attendance. Article 135. and 136. regulate parental **obligation** of enrolment to school and child's regular presence and the **right** of the parent to „participate in child's education and be regularly informed about its achievements“. Article 137. talks about Parents' Council. Parents in each class nominate their representative and his deputy. Parents' Council is advisory body which gives opinion about school curriculum proposal, school years' plan and work program, discusses about principal's reports on realisation of school curriculum and plan and work program, discusses parents' complains concerning educational work, recommends improvements of educational work, suggests their member of School Council and does other issues compatible with the school statute“. (Article 137. point 4). Principal is obliged the inform Parents' Council about meters important for school and consider Parents Council suggestions. Parents' Council delegate one member for the School Board.

**Ministry of Health and Social Welfare** and its organizations „step in“ to protect children's rights (mostly when children's rights are violated). They have less preventive activities, more

controlling of parental care – for example, when school reports some misbehaviour of the child etc. The parents' role in child's education is also mentioned in the Family law (*Obiteljski zakon* (Narodne novine, br. 116/2003, 17/2004)) which states in the article 96. that parents are obliged to take care about regular schooling of children and to attend, (when invited) the meetings concerning their child's education.

Croatia has signed UNICEF Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1991.

(<http://www.unicef.hr/upload/dfile/162/81439/FILENAME/Konvencija%20o%20pravima%20odjeteta.pdf>). In 2003 the institution of **the Ombudsperson for Children** was established. It was the first specialised institution of its kind in the Republic of Croatia, with the aim of protecting and promoting the rights and interests of children ([www.dijete.hr](http://www.dijete.hr)). Statistics show that in 2007 out of 847 processed cases the violation of children's educational rights made 16,8 percent. Most often it is child's parents who bring violation of children's rights to the attention of the Ombudsperson. (*Ombudsperson office report for 2007*). Once again, children are protected by law, but what about practice?

UNICEF – Office for Croatia initiates some school programs which involve parents also, like Schools without violence (<http://skolebeznasilja.unicef.hr/show.jsp>). Through such programs parents are educated about the problem, but also invited to ask, give answers, put some information on the special web-site etc.

**Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity** supports some community actions empowering parents to be more influential in school decision making. Within communities Family centres are formed which develop some programmes promoting successful parenting. Their service is free of charge for the participants. There is proposed procedure about conditions Family centre has to fulfil to get a permission for work (*Pravilnik o uvjetima glede prostora, opreme i potrebnih stručnih i drugih radnika obiteljskog centra i podružnica obiteljskog centra te uvjetima i načinu pružanja usluga, Narodne novine, 2006/93*). Their basic mission is counselling, encouraging responsible parenting and developing community programs which are supportive for parents ([www.savjetovalište-karlovac.hr](http://www.savjetovalište-karlovac.hr)). Family centres often cooperate with schools in their surroundings.

**Local municipalities** might include some family oriented programs in their action plans, like *Friday for family* which includes two-hour counselling workshop for parents where issues regarding school issues are discussed as well ([www.cekate.hr/precko/DK-Precko/85](http://www.cekate.hr/precko/DK-Precko/85)).

## 2. Nongovernmental organizations and their initiatives

There are several NGOs which offer some programs for parents regarding family counselling and support for school based initiatives (Vodič za roditelje, Koren Mrazović, M, Koller Trbović, N, Žižek, A. (2000) Ministarstvo rada i socijalne skrbi i UNICEF – Ured za Hrvatsku). Among them the biggest and most active in this area are the following NGOs: Society Our Children – Croatia (<http://www.savez-dnd.hr/>), Sunflower ([www.suncokret.hr](http://www.suncokret.hr)), MIRTA (<http://www.pujanke.hr/mirta/index.htm>) BLUE PHONE, BRAVE PHONE etc.

They are dominantly child-oriented and parents are welcome in that context.

Parent orientation is specially visible in the work of STEP BY STEP educational association which works in collaboration with the Parental association STEP BY STEP

(<http://www.udrugaroditeljapk.hr/udruga/>).

In 2007 they have initiated the joint project *School opened to parents*. Within this project a survey was carried out examining school/parent cooperation in 10 schools across Croatia (covering 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school, 673 parents and 295 teachers). They came up with following conclusions:

1. High percentage of both teachers and parents is content with the mutual cooperation in present (current) activities.
2. Two most common ways of cooperation between parents and school are: parents' meetings and individual information for parents.
3. Parent's meetings are useful for both groups, but there is a need for more educational workshops, because parents are mostly passive, receiving information about formal and organizational aspects of school life and their child's progress.
4. Other, but not very often ways of exchanging information are:
  - written information about the child,
  - phone conversation
  - presence at school performances and sport competitions with their child included.
5. Other (rare) forms of cooperation:
  - accompanying class at school excursions
  - participation at school-classes as helpers
  - helping in school environment decoration
  - participation in school decisions.

6. Parents and teachers disagree in estimation of the possibility of parents to participate in major school decision. Teachers think that parents have enough influence, while parents think their influence is minor.
7. Parents express their will to participate in various activities, but school rarely initiates them. Teachers answer is that they encourage parents to volunteer, but most of them have not asked parents for help during last year!
8. Some parents would like to have better, more active cooperation with school, but they do not know how to do it.