

Country Profile

CROATIA¹

Children in care in Croatia

- There are about 3,260 children in alternative care.
- On average, each social worker is responsible for about 200 children.

'We have heard reports from children that they haven't seen their social workers for more than five years, and some of them never, especially if the social workers changed at some point.'

National expert

Overview of care arrangements

The process of de-institutionalisation in Croatia began in 2010. Currently work is being done to reform Children's homes into Centres from providing social services to families at risk in local communities. The aim is to prevent the separation of children from their biological families. Foster care has been promoted as the best alternative care option, and the only alternative care option for children from 0-7 years of age. The transformation plans of state Children's homes have been made and the same is expected to happen for non-state homes in 2017.

At the present time **Children's homes** (institutional care arrangement) care for approximately 850 children divided between 14 state homes. **Non-state founded homes**, which are registered legally as institutional care include: SOS Children's Villages Croatia, Caritas homes care for approximately 205 children. **Foster care** can be divided into kinship care and traditional foster care. Currently there are around 800 foster families in Croatia caring for approximately 2200 children. **Small group homes** presently care for 70 children in Croatia (10 children per home).

Formal inclusion of children's rights

Children's rights are explicitly mentioned in the 2014-2020 National strategy for the rights of children. There is a specific section on implementing measures to strengthen children's rights in alternative care. Children's rights in alternative care are also mentioned in the Social Welfare Act. The Office of the Ombudsman is responsible for monitoring children's rights in alternative care. However, this monitoring is judged to be "not entirely sufficient" as "resources are limited" and the Ombudsman "does not have the legal mandate to sanction the care provider". The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth is responsible for the regular inspection of alternative care providers. These inspections are primarily focused on inspecting how legal standards are upheld and does not monitor children's rights.

Child Care Service Workforce

Social workers and professionals giving specialized support to children are required by law to have a university degree. Social workers attend a five year university programme where child rights are given attention through some of the courses, but the education of professionals giving specialised support to children does not include any special focus on child rights. Caregivers in residential care are required to complete at least three years of university studies, but this is believed to be upheld in only "half of the cases". There is no special focused part on child rights in educational curricula. All

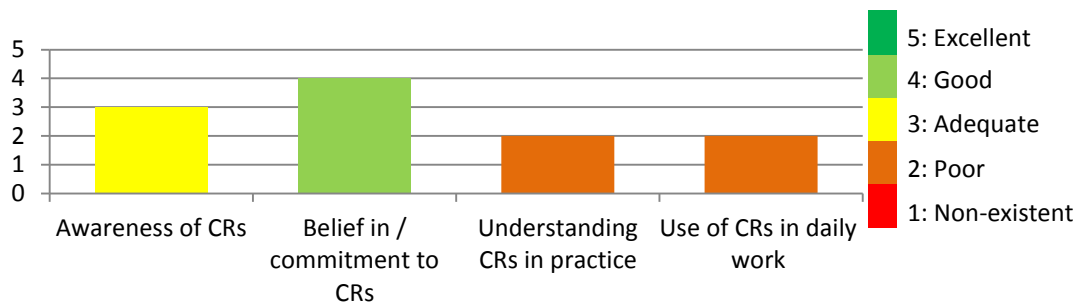
¹ The information in this country profile was drawn from the responses to three surveys which were answered by one national expert.

three of the professions above require follow-up training, but it is important to note that these do not contain any substantial part on child rights. Foster parents are required to complete 20 hours of foster parent training, no further training is necessary.

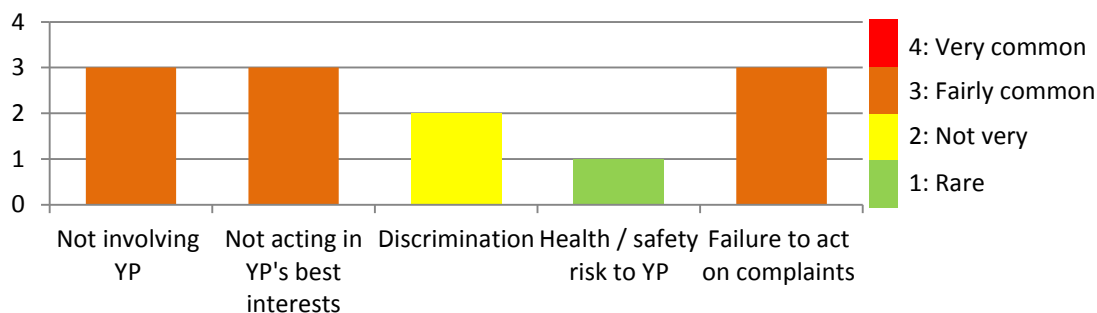
Assessing the state of children's rights

Respondents were asked to give their personal assessment with regards to care professionals and children's rights. The results are shown in the charts below.

Your assessment: care professionals and children's rights



Your assessment: how common are the following?



Key challenges

- There is a lack of basic information and low general awareness of children's rights.
- For care professionals who have many years of experience, there may be an over-confident attitude: the professional may assume that they know what is best for children. The real abilities of children – and their real needs are often under-estimated.
- Some professionals believe themselves to be 'experts' in children's rights but their knowledge is often based solely on the official wording in core documents (e.g. the CRC). This leaves a great deal to their (mis)interpretation, if it is not supported by other means.
- The working conditions of care professionals often create difficulties in implementing children's rights in practice: the social welfare system is over-burdened; social workers have far too many cases to be able to devote sufficient time to each child. It is particularly difficult to build in proper possibilities for children to participate and be involved in their own decision-making processes.
- Continuous education and capacity building is non-existent. There are "virtually no opportunities for structured and continuous education and training on child rights. There is also no organisation or relevant authority who is giving attention to the topic of child rights, except for the Ombudsman for children's office who occasionally organises trainings for professionals who are directly asking them to do".