



International Federation of Social Workers

Fédération Internationale des Travailleurs Sociaux Federación Internacional de Trabajadores sociales

Wednesday, 24 November 2021

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) supports the below statement of Croatian Chamber of Social Workers and the Croatian Association of Social Workers:

We invite policy makers in the Republic of Croatia to take adequate measures to protect the rights of users and social workers in the social welfare system, as obliged by the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and other national and international regulations.

Social work as a practically based profession promotes social change and development, and social workers in Europe protect the rights of their beneficiaries, advocate for changes, plan and monitor effects with the aim of improving and comprehensively protecting the most vulnerable groups (persons at risk of poverty, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, asylum seekers, etc.)

The activities of social workers in the Republic of Croatia are mostly represented in the social welfare system, in which they form the majority and basic profession, and the social welfare system in each country is considered one of the key to the successful functioning of society and the state.

Due to the current high level of centralization, the social welfare system of the Republic of Croatia shows numerous weaknesses in the ability to respond to the problems and challenges that users at the local level are facing. This is especially evident in the functioning of social welfare centers as central social welfare institutions, as they are organized, managed, financed and supervised by the central state (line ministry) and thus local authorities do not consider them as natural partner in creating and implementing local social plans and programs.

Therefore, as an international organization that brings together 146 professional associations of social workers and more than five million social workers worldwide, and has a formal advisory status in the UN and other global bodies, we believe that:

1. It is unacceptable to insist on the adoption of a legislative proposal for the reform of the social welfare system that does not have the support of key stakeholders from the professional public.

The reform proposal is arguably opposed by professional chambers, associations, academic community, trade unions, practitioners and others, because the imposed proposals are opposite with professional principles in a hypercentralized system in which the emphasis is on control and not on the quality of work of experts and the quality of services provided, although the implementation of the reform depends primarily on practitioners.

2. Any further centralization of the system is professionally unjustified and inadmissible.

The reform proposal is contrary to the EU's regional development strategy, as social welfare systems in all EU member states and beyond, are decentralized, and social policies are

aligned with the needs of the local population. People's way of life and needs differ significantly, so the response to these differences must be appropriate and diverse, not uniform and standardized.

3. It is necessary to design a new, modern scheme of social services and leave their management to lower levels of public authorities.

It is necessary to provide a modern social welfare system that will be able to respond to the diverse needs of the population in local communities while encouraging the development of partnerships with other providers from the civil and private sector, and which relies heavily on feedback from users of various services to successfully develop specific programs and work methodologies used by experts. Such a "user perspective" through the involvement of users in all phases of the planning process, implementation and evaluation of services is necessary to improve the system, while providing lifelong learning programs for professionals that will build on their acquired competencies.

4. It is necessary to urgently improve the standard of social work in social care centers.

Instead of hypercentralization of the system, it is necessary to take appropriate measures to improve the standards of social work in social care centers, because too many competencies of this public institution and too many users directly adversely affect the performance and quality of services provided, exposing social workers to permanent risk of professional omission and errors as well as violations of the Code of Ethics of the profession.

Therefore, we believe that it is justified to ask the line minister and the ministry he manages to reconsider all the proposals that are made, to study very carefully the reactions and comments of the expert and general public, and then to open a new cycle of consultations that would make such major mistakes in reform proposal rectified and offered solutions that are professionally justified.

We believe that the previous appeals of professional organizations of social workers addressed to policy makers, as well as the support of the EU umbrella organization of social workers, will contribute to removing obstacles to successful impact of social workers in the Republic of Croatia and recognizing experts as partners in reform processes, primarily to protect the most vulnerable groups of citizens in society.

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