**UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment – the environment and the rights of the child**

The ***Family Act***, inter alia, regulates relationships among parents and children, as well as measures to protect the rights and well-being of the child. One of the fundamental principles of this Act is the principle of the primary protection of welfare and the rights of the child.  There is a number of provisions directly related to the realization of the fundamental rights of the child (children's personal rights, the right of the child to express opinions, the right of the child to initiate proceedings, informed consent of the child to medical procedures). Furthermore, this Act regulates parental care, its notion and basic content, health, protection, care and personal development of the child, child education and training, personal relations with the child, determination of the child's place of residence, management and restriction of the child's property rights, representation of a child, representation in connection with the essential personal rights of the child, representation in relation to the most valuable property or the property rights of the child.

Provisions of the Act define the child's personal rights to:

- care for life and health;
- security and upbringing in the family appropriate to their physical, psychological and other developmental needs;
- life with their parents, and if parents are separated, children have the right to parental care of both parents;
- realization of personal relations with parents and other close persons with whom the child does not live and the right to accurate information about the relevant circumstances in relation to those persons;
- the choice of education and occupation and the right to employment in accordance with their abilities and well-being.

Also, in accordance with the Family Act, parents should not punish a child physically, act humiliating towards him or apply psychological coercion and are obliged to protect him from such treatment of other persons. Parents and other caretakers are obliged to respect the child's opinion in accordance with his age and maturity. In all the proceedings in which a child's right or interest is decided, the child has the right to find out the important circumstances of the case in a convenient way, to obtain advice and to express his / her opinion and to be informed of the possible consequences of his / her opinion. Furthermore, a child who has reached the age of fourteen has the right to initiate proceedings independently before the competent authorities regarding the exercise of his or her rights and interests. Likewise, in order to protect certain personal and property interests and the rights of the child, the child has the

right to a special guardian.

The ***Social Welfare Act*** defines rights (fees and services), beneficiaries who exercise the rights and conditions necessary for their realization. Social care has two categories of beneficiaries:

1. poor people who do not have their own income or are below the prescribed censuses, or insufficient to meet basic living needs,

2. persons receiving social welfare in order to meet specific needs, arising mainly from disability, age, mental illness, addiction, etc.

By Article 21 of the Act, particularly emphasized beneficiaries of rights are: children without parents or without adequate parental care, young adult, child victim of family, peer or other violence, child victim of child trafficking, child with developmental difficulties, child and young adult with behavioral problems, a non-escorted child who is found outside his place of residence without supervision of a parent or other adult responsible for taking care of him or her and a child a foreign national who is found in the territory of the Republic of Croatia without supervision of a parent or other adult responsible for him or her, which points to the special care that is being devoted to them as the most sensitive members of society. Based on the Social Welfare Act, the rights to which children are entitled directly / indirectly are: guaranteed minimal benefit, user's personal allowance, one-off fees, education related fees, personal disability benefit, carer status or carer status and other social services.

Since 1991, the Republic of Croatia has been a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Childas an international document prescribing the rights of children all over the world, including, among other things, children's rights to quality health care, clean water, healthy food and clean environment. In the light of its objectives Croatia adopted the ***National Strategy for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2014-2020***, as the fundamental document promoting the integrated and integrative access to children's rights (hereinafter: the Strategy).

The Strategy focuses on four strategic areas: Improving the System and Providing Child-Friendly Services, Eliminating All Forms of Violence against Children, Ensuring Children's Rights in Vulnerable Situations, and Ensuring Active Participation of Children. Specific measures of the Strategy relate to the improvement of the conditions in which children live and to prevention of the poverty of children with a view to ensuring quality growth and child

development in a safe environment.

Also, relevant children's rights experts have developed **Child Welfare Indicators** which define child welfare indicators or "markers" based on assessing the situation and needs of children and the implementation of public policies.  Indicators monitor the welfare of children by parameters - health, education, family relations, subjective and psychological wellbeing, material well-being and poverty, relationships with peers and risk behavior, participation, child safety and vulnerable groups of children. In order to cover the full population of children and young people in the social environment, the document also lists the subjective health and wellbeing indicators, health behaviors, accessibility of health care, and indicators related to the environmental impact on health.

Furthermore, the ***Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion of the Republic of Croatia (2014-2020)*** contains an overview of the current state of poverty and social exclusion, their cause, and social and economic projection as a basis for action. The main goals of the Strategy are: to combat poverty and social exclusion and to reduce inequalities in society, to prevent the emergence of new categories of the poor, to reduce the number of poor and socially excluded persons, and to establish a coordinated support system for groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Through the Strategy, the most vulnerable groups of society exposed to poverty and social exclusion have been defined by causes, with particular emphasis being placed on four categories of population that are largely exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion: children and young people, elderly people and pensioners, unemployed persons and people with disabilities. When talking about the poverty of children, one of the key elements to reduce the number of poor and socially excluded children is to ensure quality and accessible services for children (preschools, free activities, elementary and secondary education) and provide incentives for higher education and lifelong learning. Namely, the data so far have shown that the rate of risk of child poverty is related to the level of parent education and therefore it is necessary to pay special attention to the early stages of education where social inequalities begin. For this reason, a series of measures within the main strategic activity Education and Lifelong Learning has been defined in the Program for the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which aims to advance the early stages of education where social inequalities begin and ensure inclusion of all children in the education system and programs of preschool upbringing.

Concerning the specific examples of good practices in the realization of individual rights of children, we also point out the existence of the **Children's Council**, the coordinating body of the Government at the national level, which has the role of harmonizing the work of state and other bodies in monitoring the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national legislation and programs. Along with prominent experts, representatives of relevant ministries and relevant institutions and civil society organizations, as members of the Children's Council there are also representatives of the children themselves and a representative of the National Council of Students, which also enables children to participate

directly in policy shaping and policy making procedures.

Also, the state administration bodies are continually supporting civil society organizations projects which carry out a number of activities aimed at promoting and protecting children's rights in all areas, as well as encouraging the creation of a safe environment for children.