



PROJEKT GRAĐANSKIH PRAVA
Civil Rights Project
SISAK

STATELESSNESS IN CROATIA

with a focuss on Roma

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Source: CRP Sisak, client B.D. with the Convention's passport issued the second time



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▪ CITIZENSHIP

As of 1 January 2022, Amendments to the Law on Croatian Citizenship (Official Gazette 138/21) came into effect, extending the two-year deadline for submitting citizenship applications by an additional year. This extension applies to deadline prescribed by Articles 5 and 30 of the Law on Croatian Citizenship (hereinafter: the Law), which expired on 31 December 2024. CRP believes that this deadline should be extended further, and preferably left open-ended, as the number of potential citizenship applicants is neither unlimited nor exceptionally large. It would be beneficial for the country to allow the regulation of citizenship for its potential citizens. This is especially true since many of these individuals reside outside Croatia, making it difficult for them to receive information, and they need more time to access and realize their rights. This especially applies to members of the Roma national minority (RNM).

The Amendments to the Law have retained the provision of Article 5, paragraph 2, which has caused numerous dilemmas both for us, providers of free legal aid, and for the individuals themselves. According to the Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter: Mol), this “disputed” article applies only and solely to individuals born after 8 October 1991, i.e., after the country’s independence was gained.

Such an interpretation by the Mol has caused a lot of opposing interpretations because the Law does not refer to the date of 8 October 1991. Instead, the Law refers to an individual born abroad which was granted an additional year until the last year for submitting an application under the new Law. The Mol, a sponsor of the Law and the contentious provision itself, interprets that Croatian citizenship by descent, based on Articles 4 and 5 of the Law, can only be granted to children born after 8 October 1991, when the Law on Citizenship came into force, if one or both parents were Croatian citizens at the time of their birth. They argue that this follows logically, as any other interpretation would undermine the principle of continuity of Croatian citizenship set forth in Article 30, paragraph 1, which stipulates that a person who acquired Croatian citizenship under laws in force before the Law came into effect on 8 October 1991 is considered a Croatian citizen.

In 2025, the CRP Sisak office handled 35 cases related to acquiring Croatian citizenship through naturalisation, subsequent registration in the Croatian citizenship books, or based on other legal grounds, of which 20 are members of the RNM.

Notably, most of the CRP Sisak cases involve individuals born before 8 October 1991. Those individuals, born between 8 January 1977 and 8 October 1991, often have one parent who was a citizen of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. Consequently, their cases could not be resolved as there are no legal grounds referring to their situation.

CRP wishes to emphasize that the Law on Foreigners remains problematic in parts particularly concerning the regulation of temporary and permanent residence, as there is significant inconsistency in the criteria for regulating these two types of residence. For instance, an individual can reside in Croatia on a temporary basis for many years and still be unable to



obtain permanent residence (e.g. our client D.R., has held temporary residence for over 10 years, owns property, receives a Croatian pension, is a returnee, yet does not have permanent residence, let alone citizenship which he deserves merely by a fact that he has been living for so long in Croatia). Thus, it is questionable whether it is justified to grant so many short-term temporary residences, as the term "temporary" implies that such residence is not intended for long-term stays.

While there have been some positive developments in resolving individual cases (CRP cases: **S.B. 10914, S.N. 27634, F.V. 24832**), where people without citizenship or at risk of statelessness have been granted an extension to remain in Croatia, the process still does not lead to adequate resolution of the issue.

Additionally, a small but positive development has occurred with the cancellation of health insurance debt, which is a condition for residence regulation (**CRP clients: V.O. 23341, A.M. 25347**).

▪ STATELESSNESS

As an implementation partner of UNHCR and a member of the European Network on Statelessness (ENS), CRP Sisak has been providing free legal assistance to stateless persons and those at risk of losing their citizenship across the Republic of Croatia through the main office in Sisak and its contact points since 1 January 2017 (<http://www.crpsisak.hr/>).

During 2025, the CRP Sisak worked with **134 clients, including members of the RNM**, which refer to the issue of statelessness. The CRP Sisak recorded and acted on **210 legal cases of stateless persons**, as well as those at risk of losing citizenship, within which legal assistance was provided in the form of legal advice (**317**), representation, writing various submissions (**130 submissions**), contacting and coordinating with various state bodies and institutions, obtaining various documents (**125 documents**).

105 cases were successfully completed, and they mainly relate to obtaining personal documents, most often birth certificates and various certificates, as well as resolving various simpler administrative procedures in the Republic of Croatia.

During 2025, the CRP worked with a total of **449** Roma who had as many as **291** legal problems, which related to status issues, social welfare, health insurance, housing care and the like. In all cases, the CRP provided **485** legal advices. **87** members of the RNM had problems related to the issue of statelessness. Among them, we can mention the following clients:

In the category of stateless persons, we can again highlight the negative example of the client **F.V. (CRP 20475, 24832, 290769)**. As can be seen, the very fact that the client already has three files opened in the CRP Sisak office speaks of the complexity and long-term nature of the case: the CRP has been working on the case for almost 10 years, since 2016. During that period, the CRP has conducted numerous administrative procedures and disputes, but



unfortunately, the client still does not even have a temporary residence permit or any personal document.

In the category of persons at risk of statelessness, we can mention the client **S.N. (CRP 7375, 20591, 27634)**, who also has three files in the CRP. CRP has been working on the client's case(s) for 20 years. The client has lived in the Republic of Croatia almost his entire life, but still does not have an adequately regulated status in the Republic of Croatia. He has no connection with his home country of BiH. Considering that he is already an elderly person, the problem is that he is ill and still does not have health insurance (HI).



Source: CRP Sisak; client S.N. in front of the CRP Sisak office with daughter R.N. who was a stateless person almost her entire life, which is why, among other things, she died in 2024 at the age of 40. S.N. is now 66 years old, seriously ill and has no social security.

For example, the case of B.D. (CRP 23104, 27119), a member of the RNM, a stateless person from Darda, represents positive example of the reissuance of a passport for stateless persons under the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which influenced the further resolution of the case

The first procedure for issuing a passport for stateless persons lasted four years. The client is a stateless person from Darda in Slavonia, Croatia. Namely, on January 13, 2021, CRP received a negative decision from the second-instance body and filed an administrative complaint. CRP believed that the arguments that the client should resolve her statelessness case in Italy, where she was only allegedly born, without having any connection to Italy (she possessed two certificates from Italy that she was not born or registered in any way in Italy), were not good arguments for the stateless person not to resolve it in Croatia. Moreover, the client had temporary residence and a family, a husband and seven children who are all Croatian citizens. The Administrative Court dismissed the complaint, and CRP filed an appeal with the High Administrative Court of the Republic of Croatia. In June 2022, the CRP received a positive decision from the High Administrative Court (No. Usž-2840/21-4), dated April 29, 2022, which accepted the plaintiff's appeal, annulled the negative decision of the Administrative Court from 2021, as well as two decisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from 2019 and 2020, and



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returned the case to the first instance for a new decision. Thus, in 2023, the client finally received a passport for the first time in her life.

Subsequently, during 2024, CRP handled administrative proceeding regarding the write-off of the client's health insurance debt, which the client could not settle. As the case was resolved positively, an application for admission to Croatian citizenship was submitted.

The second passport for stateless persons to our client B.D. was issued on 19 September 2025. Interestingly, the first time it took four (4) years for her to obtain a passport under the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, with a validity period of two years. It expired on 24 April 2025. In April 2025, the CRP helped the client submit a new passport application. So, this time it took four (4) months to obtain a passport. CRP Sisak considers this a very positive progress in solving the problem of statelessness in Croatia.

The above-mentioned passport for stateless persons is the fifth in a series of 1954 Convention passports that the CRP has provided to its clients. The CRP considers this to be very positive, as there are no procedures for determining the status of stateless persons, which makes it difficult to issue a Convention passport.

During the reporting period, the PGP has three new applications for Convention passports for stateless persons, which are awaiting resolution by the Ministry of the Interior.

It is important to continue working on statelessness cases, as these are the most difficult cases and take a very long time. For example, the client **S.B. (PGP 10912)** was born in 1985 in the Republic of Croatia and has a temporary residence permit, but has not managed to achieve anything more than that. The most tragic fact is that the client is the father of six (6) children, but has not been registered as the father of any of them. CRP assisted the client in applying for a Convention passport on 30 October 2024. In December 2025, the client received a special passport for foreigners under subsidiary protection. Furthermore, the document is valid from 4 December 2025 to 20 April 2026, which is only about four (4) months, which is contrary to all laws that CRP could have considered. CRP will review the status of the case and try to determine how it was possible to change the basis of the application (The 1954 Convention passport for stateless persons to a travel document under subsidiary protection...) and initiate proceedings accordingly.

<https://www.crpsisak.hr/2026/02/pravno-nevidljivi-osobe-bez-drzavljanstva/>

D.K. (PGP 23410) was born on 14 June 1994 in Zagreb, Croatia. He is registered in the birth registry in the Maksimir registry. He lives in Rijeka, without regulated residence and without a travel document. Considering that the CRP Sisak has been working on the client's administrative procedure for years during which several administrative disputes have been conducted, it is important to point out that the Administrative Court in Zagreb, in the administrative dispute Usl-268/21-8, accepted the client's claim and annulled the decision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Police Administration of the Primorsko Goranska County, the 1st Police Station Rijeka, Number: 511-09-23-UP/I-91/2021 of 13 January 2021. In the judgment, the court stated that the contested decision is unlawful because it directly depends on the question of whether the plaintiff has a foreign citizenship. The court considers the client to be a stateless person. Therefore, pursuant to Art. 58, paragraph 1 of the Law on Administrative Disputes it annulled the decision of the Ministry of the Interior, and ruled that



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police bodies would not be able to issue new decisions on the expulsion of the plaintiff from the Republic of Croatia until it is unequivocally established that the plaintiff possesses citizenship or at least a travel document of a foreign country. As can be seen from the above and from the entire case, the Ministry of the Interior does not respect the decisions of the Administrative Court. On 28 April 2023, the Administrative Court in Rijeka rejected the lawsuit against the Ministry of the Interior for temporary residence in the Republic of Croatia. The CRP filed an appeal against this decision with the High Administrative Court on 2 June 2023. On 17 July 2024, the High Administrative Court of the Republic of Croatia rejected the appeal and confirmed the judgment of the Rijeka Administrative Court. On December 2024, the CRP Sisak filed a constitutional complaint, which has not yet been resolved. **In conclusion, the client has been living in the Republic of Croatia for over 30 years, where he was born, but does not have a regulated status in the Republic of Croatia. This is not permissible according to all positive regulations, both in the Republic of Croatia and of the EU. The Convention on the Legal Status of Stateless Persons, among other things, in Art. 32 on naturalization states that the contracting states, which the Republic of Croatia is, should facilitate as much as possible the assimilation and naturalization of stateless persons and that they should make a great effort to speed up the process of granting citizenship and reduce the fees and costs of that process as much as possible.**

<https://www.crpsisak.hr/2025/03/predmet-bezdrzavljanstva-pripadnika-romske-nacionalne-manjine-u-rh/>

▪ ACTIVITIES

The CRP has also contributed to positive developments in the primary legal aid system through its work on **the Commission for Free Legal Aid of the Ministry of Justice**, as a representative of all providers of free legal aid. The mandate of the Commission, which expired in 2024, was finally re-established in 2025 after several urgent requests from the CRP. The CRP Sisak appointed its representative, Danijela Žmukić, as a representative of all associations of free legal aid providers.

CRP continues to advocate for **stateless persons to be included among the beneficiaries of the free legal aid system in the Republic of Croatia**, which is currently not the case. Stateless persons remain the most vulnerable group in society in the Republic of Croatia that is not covered by the free legal aid system and thus remains without the right to legal aid, which they need, especially given the withdrawal of UNHCR from the Republic of Croatia.

CRP emphasizes that free legal aid is extremely important for members of the RNM in the Republic of Croatia because they are still insufficiently educated and need assistance in exercising their civil and human rights. This is the case especially since administrative procedures in the Republic of Croatia are still very demanding and too complex, sometimes even for free legal aid providers, and take too long to be adequately monitored.

- **Cooperation with the Legal Clinic of the University of Zagreb Faculty of Law**
During this period, 14 students visited the association, participating in seven visits, where they observed consultations with clients alongside our lawyers and associated



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law firm. CRP has closely cooperated with the Legal Clinic since the establishment of the Free Legal Aid Act in 2008, to improve the system of free legal assistance in Croatia.

- **Field Visits and Monitoring of Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers**
Throughout 2025, CRP was in contact with police authorities and conducted at least 10 field visits to Roma settlements across Croatia. Additionally, CRP Sisak maintained communication with the directors of the Asylum Reception Centre in Zagreb and the Foreigners Reception Centre in Ježevo. Among asylum seekers and refugees, there were no stateless persons requiring legal aid during this period. This is stated like this because there were several stateless persons (coming from Palestine and Syria), but they received international protection.
- **European Network on Statelessness (ENS)**
CRP Sisak was active within ENS and its Litigation Group during 2025. CRP participated:
 - ✓ **On 19 February 2025** at a webinar on the state of statelessness in Europe, where the statelessness index and trends were assessed and discussed
 - ✓ **On 3 July 2025** in the ENS Litigation Group meeting on strategic litigation in statelessness
- **Initiatives for Amendments to Laws and Regulations**
The CRP participated in the e-consultation and provided comments on the proposal for the Law on Amendments to the Law on Foreigners and Rulebook on Amendments to the Rulebook on the Residence of Third-Country Nationals in the Republic of Croatia.

The CRP repeated its initiative to the Public Notary Chamber (PNC) to recognize residence permits/residence cards of foreigners as identity cards, so that those foreigners, including members of the RNM which come from other countries, would not have to seek and bring two witnesses when verifying signatures at notaries for the purpose of establishing identity, given that they have residence permits issued by competent institutions in the Republic of Croatia. The CRP first initiated this initiative in 2018, when the PNC accepted the CRP's opinion and forwarded instructions to its members. However, after several years of following this instruction, notaries again began, especially in Zagreb, not to accept residence permits as identification documents. Given that the aforementioned procedures cause additional problems for foreigners, some of whom are at risk of statelessness, as well as additional financial costs, the CRP relaunched the initiative, but as of the date of writing this report, there has been no response. The CRP continues to write urgent letters and monitor this issue, especially since it also applies to persons under international protection.

The CRP will continue to work on resolving **the issue of determining the identity of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia when regulating their status in the Republic of Croatia** as the CRP has been addressing this issue for years. This initiative has also been joined by the Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia and the Ombudsman from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as associations from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The issue largely relates to members of the RNM in the Republic of Croatia, because many originate



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from the republics of the former Yugoslavia and for these reasons are either stateless or at risk of becoming stateless.

Finally, despite the fact that UNHCR practically closed its office in the Republic of Croatia and stopped dealing with the issue of statelessness and stopped funding the CRP, the CRP, as the only registered legal aid provider in the Republic of Croatia (especially in the Sisak-Moslavina and Karlovac counties as well as the City of Zagreb where there are numerous members of the RNM) that deals with the issue of statelessness, will continue to monitor cases and trends in society in the Republic of Croatia. The CRP will continue to launch initiatives and activities to improve the position of stateless persons in the Republic of Croatia and further prevent statelessness, with an emphasis on amending the legislative framework and improving the position of the RNM members in society.

Sisak, 20 March 2026


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