



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
OMBUDSMAN

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European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO)

e-mail: ebco-report@ebco-beoc.org

Subject: Annual Report European Bureau for Conscientious Objectors

Dear Madams/Sirs,

the Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia received the EBCO's call for inputs for the Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe.

First of all, we note that the Defence Act (Official Gazette No. 73/13, 75/15, 27/16, 110/17, 30/18, 70/19, 155/23, 136/25) was amended in 2025, with the amendments entering into force on 13 November 2025 (https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2025_11_136_2011.html). Among the most significant changes is the reintroduction of compulsory military service and the suspension of the Civil Service Act (Official Gazette No. 25/03). As a result, the Defence Act now constitutes the primary legislative framework governing civilian service.

The amendments provide for the possibility of claiming the right to conscientious objection; however, individuals who seek to exercise this right are required to "demonstrate the credibility" of their religious or moral convictions. The Ombudswoman warned that the requirement to "demonstrate credibility" is not further defined or explained in the legislation, and it remains unclear how individuals are expected to substantiate their religious or other convictions. This lack of clarity leaves the provision open to different interpretations and inconsistent implementation and, due to its abstract nature, may have a potentially deterrent effect on individuals seeking to apply for civilian service.



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In light of the very recent reintroduction of compulsory military service, the Ombudswoman has not yet received specific complaints from citizens, and no feedback is yet available regarding the practical implementation of the Defence Act in its amended form.

Pursuant to the Defence Act, civil service may be performed in the authority competent for civil protection for a duration of three months, and, exceptionally, in units of local self-government for a duration of four months. However, the Ombudswoman warned that the criteria on the basis of which conscripts will be assigned to civil service under the first or second modality are not clearly defined, either in the provisions of the proposed secondary legislation or in the accompanying explanatory notes. In addition, the adopted Rulebook on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of the Medical Fitness of Recruits and Conscripts does not regulate this matter.

During the public consultation process with interested stakeholders, the Ombudswoman submitted opinions and proposals concerning specific provisions of the aforementioned secondary legislation currently undergoing the adoption procedure. Inter alia, we pointed out that the prescribed levels of remuneration, which is EUR 250.00 per month for civil service performed in the authority competent for civil protection, and EUR 100.00 per month for civil service performed in units of local self-government, may have a discouraging effect on persons of disadvantaged financial status. We also highlighted the general lack of clarity regarding the distinction between circumstances under which a civil service conscript is to perform service in the authority competent for civil protection or, alternatively, in a unit of local self-government.

The full opinion of the Ombudswoman submitted within the e-consultation process on the proposed secondary legislation is available here:

<https://esavjetovanja.gov.hr/ECon/MainScreen?entityId=32249>

<https://esavjetovanja.gov.hr/ECon/MainScreen?entityId=32251>

<https://esavjetovanja.gov.hr/ECon/MainScreen?entityId=32253>

Taking into account the current situation, namely the recent introduction of mandatory military service and the recent commencement of its implementation, as well as the fact that, due to its recent introduction, we have not yet received any complaints due to this matter, we suggest that you contact the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia and/ or consult their official website for further information on these matters (<https://www.morh.hr/veliki-vodic-kroz-temeljno-vojno-osposobljavanje-tvo/>).

The Office of the Ombudswoman will be monitoring the implementation of the above mentioned legislation regarding the right to conscientious objection.

We wish to thank you for the opportunity to share our national experiences on the topic at hand and hope the information shared will prove useful in the process of the drafting of the Report.

Sincerely,



OMBUDSWOMAN

mr.sc. Tena Šimonović Einwalter, MJur