On 31 March 2026, the Office of the Ombudsperson published the "Report of the Ombudsperson for 2025" (*Izvješće pučke pravobraniteljice za 2025*). In its section devoted to international protection, the report highlighted ongoing preparations in Croatia throughout 2025 for the **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**. It acknowledged the adoption of the 2030 Migration and Asylum Management Plan and the 2025-2027 Action Plan, while noting the absence of specific measures to safeguard migrants' fundamental rights within these frameworks.

A significant proportion of applications were made at border crossings, and most cases were subsequently suspended due to absconding. In 2025, only 25 applicants were granted international protection in Croatia. Although the number of applications decreased compared to 2023 and 2024, it remained significantly higher than pre-2023 levels. The report noted that reception capacity had not increased sufficiently to meet demand. It also raised concerns about restricted access for civil society organisations to reception centres, finding this contrary to Article 20 of Directive (EU) 2024/1346.

Regarding **legislation on international protection**, the report noted that amendments had been proposed to both the Asylum Act and the Law on Foreigners to align with the EU Pact. Concerns were raised in particular about detention during screening, examination of applications, and return procedures. With respect to the design of the independent fundamental rights monitoring mechanism, the Ombudsperson observed that key elements such as its mode of operation, financing, selection of implementers, powers, tasks, and training were not defined in the draft law and were left to be regulated by secondary legislation instead. To ensure the highest level of independence, the Ombudsperson recommended that these elements be incorporated directly into the law.

The report also builds on **investigations launched by the Office of the Ombudsperson in 2025** addressing reception conditions, procedural delays, and access to asylum procedures. Most issues regarding the first matter, including those related to hygiene and food quality, were resolved following intervention.

Serious concerns were raised regarding alleged **ill-treatment** and misconduct in reception centres, including cases initiated in previous years. One such case involved an applicant whose asylum claim was rejected and who was subsequently convicted and placed in migratory detention for 3 months after publishing videos on conditions in a reception centre. The detention measure was ultimately overturned by the High Administrative Court, but proceedings

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regarding the denial of the asylum claim were still ongoing. The case was communicated to the UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders, Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, as well as to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Deprivation of Liberty.

Complaints submitted to the Ombudsperson also raised concerns about safety in reception centres. These included allegations of a physical attack by a security guard against an applicant, which could not be verified due to the authorities' failure to provide video evidence; a reported rape of an applicant by a security guard in a reception centre; and a case of police abuse, also occurring within a reception centre. The Ombudsperson recommended that authorities provide full access to all relevant information and documentation to allow addressing such complaints in the future.

Additional complaints concerned the **duration of procedures for international protection**: due to a lack of Somali language interpreters, 2 Somali applicants experienced protracted proceedings exceeding the 21-month statutory limit. The Ministry of Interior informed applicants that waiting periods of 9-12 months for an interview were considered normal.

The Ombudsperson also received complaints that applicants and their lawyers were denied **access to the international protection procedure** at border crossing points and migrant detention centres. Following intervention by the Ombudsperson, some applicants were granted access to the procedure, while others were subject to refoulement. In this context, the report highlighted the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case *Y.K. v. Croatia* (No. 38776/21), which became final on 17 October 2025, where the applicant had been denied access to apply for international protection. The ECtHR found violations of Articles 3 and 13 of ECHR.

The report further noted the ongoing execution of the ECtHR judgment in *M.H. and Others v. Croatia* (No. 15670/18), which remained under enhanced supervision by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, with partial closure of supervision in areas where reforms had been effective. The Office of the Ombudsperson submitted an opinion on the draft action plan for execution of the judgment, proposing general measures to prevent future violations of Article 3, Article 5 (right to liberty and security), and Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 (prohibition of collective expulsion of aliens).

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In 2025, the European Court of Human Rights examined 5 requests for interim measures against Croatia and rejected 4 of them, primarily in extradition cases following rejected asylum applications.

Lastly, with regard to **detention**, in 2025 the Ombudsperson, acting in its capacity as the National Preventive Mechanism against torture and ill-treatment, visited the Ježevo Reception Centre for Foreigners, the Tovarnik Transit Reception Centre for Foreigners, the Trilj Transit Reception Centre for Foreigners, the Centre for the Registration of Applicants for International Protection in Dugi Dol, and the Trilj Border Police Station. The Ombudsperson found that several recommendations issued in the previous report had not yet been implemented. These included the need to conduct vulnerability assessments and to ensure the availability of data on the start and end times of detention in the Dugi Dol facility. Detention in this facility should not exceed 24 hours, as it was not equipped for extended stays and material reception conditions remained inadequate, potentially amounting to a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR if detention was prolonged beyond that.

With regard to the Trilj, Tovarnik, and Ježevo centres, reception conditions had been improved throughout the year with funding from the AMIF. However, challenges persisted in areas including the provision of information, complaint mechanisms, communication with lawyers, visiting rights, access to outdoor spaces, healthcare, and vulnerability assessments.

Source(s)

- Ombudsperson | Pučki pravobranitelj (8 April, 2026), Rekordan broj pritužbi pučkoj pravobraniteljici, problemi dugogodišnji [Record number of complaints to the Ombudsman, long-standing problems], https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/rekordan-broj-prituzbi-puckoj-pravobraniteljici-problemi-dugogodisnji/

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