The Ombudsperson for Children publishes its 2025 report

The Ombudsperson for Children published its 2025 report, providing an overview of the Office's work and findings. It addresses issues concerning applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection in Sections 4.8 (children on the move) and 8.6 (institutions where migrant and unaccompanied children reside), and issues the following recommendations:

- Ensure early Croatian language learning with increased hours.
- Integrate migrant children into the education system promptly.
- Provide sufficient teaching assistants and support teacher training.
- Improve data sharing and maintain updated records on unaccompanied children.
- Train and monitor guardians, institutional staff, and foster carers on the needs of unaccompanied children.
- Expand accommodation capacity and professional staffing in reception facilities.
- Provide specialized accommodation and care for unaccompanied children through a centralized institution where all such children are registered, their needs assessed, and services coordinated.
- Ensure access to mental health support services.

The report highlights that **legislative changes** introduced under the Pact on Migration and Asylum are expected to shorten deadlines for appointing guardians and strengthen standards for their training, qualifications, and supervision. Under the new provisions, age assessments will require a multidisciplinary approach, detention safeguards will be strengthened, and access to education and healthcare improved. Amendments introduced in 2025 to the Asylum Act have strengthened the **role of guardians**, which are now appointed immediately and must promptly take steps to locate family members and facilitate reunification.

In 2025, 1,248 decisions appointing special guardians were issued, fewer than in 2024. In most cases (1,232), guardians were professional staff from social welfare offices; in others, they were relatives or other persons. This corresponds with a decrease in the number of unaccompanied minors applying for international protection (1,229 in 2025, compared with 1,980 in 2024). The number of unaccompanied children placed in social welfare institutions also decreased, from

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487 in 2024 to 427 in 2025.

Regarding **family unity**, the report indicates that under the Dublin framework Croatia accepted responsibility for 56 minors on family reunification grounds in 2025 and carried out five outgoing transfers to other EU Member States on the same basis. Croatia also granted 3 temporary residence permits to children under 14 to reunite with a parent. These procedures remain lengthy and complex, often due to difficulties in obtaining documentation. The Ombudsperson welcomed 2025 amendments to the Law on Foreigners that streamline residence permit procedures for children whose parents already reside in Croatia.

With regards to **reception**, unaccompanied children in 2025 were accommodated in crisis situations by social service providers. Most were placed in Zagreb (125) and Split (94), followed by Ivanec (89) and Osijek (59), with 49 placed in institutions for children without adequate parental care. The report notes that many unaccompanied children are placed in social welfare institutions for children with behavioural difficulties, where they face risks of violence and overcrowding, contrary to international recommendations. The Ombudsperson welcomed efforts to place seven children with foster families, in line with EU standards favouring family-based care, but noted ongoing challenges such as children’s vulnerability, language barriers, and lack of interpreters.

The report further highlights the shortage of interpreters and difficulties in age assessment due to missing documentation, which can result in children being treated as adults and placed in inappropriate facilities. A specialized reception facility for unaccompanied children would improve record-keeping, individualized care, psychosocial support, and overall quality of care. The Ombudsperson also stresses the need to update the 2018 Protocol on the Treatment of Unaccompanied Children to reflect legislative changes. Under the current Protocol, children over 16 seeking international protection may be placed in reception centres in Zagreb and Kutina with guardian approval. Due to limited capacity, many are accommodated alongside adults, exposing them to risks such as exploitation and abuse.

The report identifies the need for centralized **data collection**, as data held by the Ministry of the Interior and the social welfare system are neither unified nor comparable. A centralized database would provide accurate information on the number, status, accommodation, education, and guardianship of unaccompanied children.

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Regarding **healthcare**, the report stresses that unaccompanied children often face difficulties accessing services and medication despite being entitled to the same care as insured persons. This issue is particularly evident in Dublin returns, where children are sometimes returned without medical documentation. The Ombudsperson calls for strengthened healthcare provision and specialized psychosocial support programs.

In **education**, the Ombudsperson found that children aged 15 are often directed to adult education programmes that are not developmentally appropriate and lack language support. Teachers report systemic challenges and insufficient institutional support, with children frequently placed in lower grades. For children with trauma, support is typically limited to school psychologists who may not speak the child's language.

Finally, the report addresses **detention**. The Ombudsperson for Children emphasizes that detention of children is never in their best interests and should be avoided. In 2025, the Ombudsperson's staff visited the Reception Centre for Migrants in Dugi Dol, the Ježevo Reception Centre for Foreigners, and the Transit Reception Centre for Foreigners in Trilj. At Dugi Dol, records on children are incomplete and material conditions inadequate. At Ježevo, although children are not meant to be held for long, staff should nonetheless receive training in child protection and communication, and additional professional staff (e.g. psychologists and social workers) are needed. At Trilj, the report recommends improving material conditions and adapting the environment to children's needs.

Source(s)

- Ombudsperson for Children | Pravobraniteljice za Djecu (1 April, 2026), Izvješće o radu pravobraniteljice za djecu 2025.: Dječja prava nisu skup normi nego životne okolnosti u kojima djeca odrastaju – preporuke i upozorenja poziv su na akciju i promjene [Report on the Work of the Ombudsperson for Children 2025: Children's rights are not a set of norms, but life circumstances in which children grow up – recommendations and warnings are a call to action and change], https://dijete.hr/hr/izvjesce-o-radu-pravobraniteljice-za-djecu-2025-djecja-prava-nisu-skup-normi-nego-zivotne-okolnosti-u-kojima-djeca-odrastaju-preporuke-i-upozorenja-poziv-su-na-akciju-i-promjene/

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