



**REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN**

**CONFERENCE ON PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN TRAFFIC
– WHERE DO WE STAND AND WHAT DO WE STILL HAVE LEFT TO DO?
(held on 26 October 2023, at the Polytechnic in Rijeka)**

INFORMATION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children, in cooperation with the Polytechnic in Rijeka, held the *Conference on Protection of the Rights of Children in Traffic - Where do we stand and what do we still have left to do?*, on the occasion of the National Road Safety Day. At the conference, various experts and representatives of important institutions and organizations from Croatia gathered (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Science and Education, Croatian Auto Club, Faculty of Transport and Traffic Sciences of the University of Zagreb, Children's Hospital Zagreb, association Parents in Action - RODA, Croatian Institute for Social Work, Croatian Psychological Association, Hrvatske ceste d.o.o., Center for Vehicles of Croatia, Faculty of Civil Engineering of the University of Rijeka and the Polytechnic in Rijeka), as well as from abroad (European Transport Safety Council - ETSC), in order to discuss the situation of safety of children in traffic in Croatia and further possibilities of joint action in the protection of their rights and interests.

The conference was attended by pupils and students, as well as the representatives of various education institutions, the City of Rijeka, Hrvatske ceste d.o.o., the Clinical Hospital Center Rijeka, the Police Departments of the Ministry of the Interior, the Teaching Institute for Public Health, the Family Center, the Municipal Court in Rijeka, the Office of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities and the Ombudsman, the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, Rijeka plus d.o.o., the Institute for Emergency Medicine, county road administrations, social welfare institutions, The Rijeka Auto Club, the Rijeka Youth Center and associations.

The conference, in addition to bringing together numerous respected practitioners and experts, also showed synergy and the great desire of those interested to continue thinking about this topic and contribute to the improvement of the position of children as participants in traffic.

In particular, the participation of representatives of the Network of Young Advisers to the Ombudsman for Children (NYA) and their reflections on this topic was noted at the conference, whose views were addressed by several presenters at the conference, confirming that the children recognized the key problems that adults have to deal with.

The experts' presentations were stimulating and many of them pointed out in one place the worrying data, phenomena, practices and behaviour of adults in road traffic and in the

organization of transport in relation to children, as well as additional needs and opportunities to improve the state of road safety.

During the presentations and in the discussion of the speakers and participants, numerous aspects of road traffic safety were discussed, related to the life and health of children and the interventions of the relevant systems, education for traffic safety and road infrastructure, vehicle safety and safety management, and the conclusions were made for these areas, as follows:

CONCLUSIONS

LIFE AND HEALTH OF CHILDREN and INTERVENTIONS OF COMPETENT SYSTEMS

1. It is necessary to raise awareness that traffic injuries are the leading cause of death and disability among children.
2. Caring for a child victim of a traffic accident requires a quick and professional approach, thus it is necessary to invest in improving emergency medical care for children injured in traffic accidents.
3. It is necessary to sanction offenders more strongly and more frequently for the "four traffic killers": failure to wear seat belts, speeding, drunk driving and mobile phones use, especially when it comes to transporting children.
4. It is necessary to raise awareness of the duty to report and cooperate in order to protect the child by notifying the competent social work institute about violations of traffic regulations to the detriment of the child, in order to take measures to protect the personal rights and well-being of children.
5. Promote movement through health campaigns: walking and cycling with the prerequisite of safe road infrastructure.

EDUCATION FOR SAFETY IN TRAFFIC

For children

1. Traffic safety on the roads depends primarily on the behaviour of road users – upbringing, education and the application of traffic education **from an early age** are the basis for achieving the goal.

For parents

1. The obligation to participate in traffic prevention activities significantly affects their effectiveness.
2. It is necessary to educate **parents** because children learn from them and imitate their habits and actions, and to make parents aware of their multiple role and importance in protecting children in traffic.
3. Strengthen preventive activities with **parents** at courses for pregnant women, through visiting nurses, in kindergartens and schools, on the safe transportation of children and young people in vehicles, the acquisition and use of safety equipment (car seats, stands, helmets, lights, vests, etc.), the importance of developing the child's bicycle and scooter driving skills, legal restrictions and obligations related to driving vehicles (bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, cars and other vehicles) and parental responsibility.

Media

1. Conduct national public campaigns in **the media** to raise the awareness of parents and other adults about sources of risks for children in traffic, with an emphasis on their vulnerability and inexperience.

Education institutions

1. Inform **education institutions** about available preventive programs and projects in the field of traffic safety and enable them to implement these programs and projects.

2. Strengthen traffic prevention activities and programs in **education institutions** with the aim of comprehensively reaching all children, continuously every year in every group/class from preschool to high school age.

3. Encourage **education institutions** to necessarily introduce preventive traffic programs in their curriculum, which will include all children and their parents.

4. Strengthen the implementation of the ***Bicycle Training Program*** in schools with the introduction of the obligation to include all pupils from 5th to 8th grade in the program.

5. Introduce and strengthen **first aid programs in schools**.

6. Basic education of kindergarten teachers and school teachers on children's rights, and the aspect of children's rights to protection in traffic should be improved at **Faculties of Teacher Education**.

7. Introduce a **course related to traffic prevention** in the curriculum of early and preschool education and teacher studies conducted at Faculties of Teacher Education.

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Raise awareness that the inclusion of children in active mobility has a lot of positive effects on their health and the development of traffic culture, but in order to achieve this, it is first of all necessary to have a **safe infrastructure** that respects the specifics of children - pedestrians and/or cyclists.

2. **Improve the road infrastructure throughout Croatia** in order to protect children, pedestrians, cyclists, drivers of electric scooters and similar vehicles.

3. Improve **cycling infrastructure**.

4. It is necessary to adapt the planning and design of transport infrastructure to the needs of children, for which the first step is to analyse the behaviour of this group of users in real conditions.

5. Encourage the institutions responsible for the management of public and unclassified roads and traffic safety to require designers to apply the measures of *the National Road Traffic Safety*

Plan for the design of a safe traffic system that relate to the design of traffic-technical elements, in such a way as to prevent the development of high speeds (especially in urban areas) and to act preventively to increase safety.

6. Research and development of *Guidelines for the design of safe transport infrastructure* is supported, especially for safe design in areas of schools or large concentrations of children (kindergartens, playgrounds, halls, etc.), which ensures the application of identical and safe solutions with regard to the expected users of the traffic, spatial and other conditions.

7. It is necessary to encourage education institutions to engage in the preparation of **safe traffic routes** for children pedestrians and cyclists to kindergartens and schools, the preparation of **safe places for bringing children** by private cars, the **provision of parking lots** for bicycles for children and monitoring that children have the conditions and safe equipment for independent and safe participation in traffic.

8. Inform principals, teachers and parents to report all **irregularities on the road**, such as damaged road or pavement, poor visibility, the need to calm traffic near schools and kindergartens, and about the possibility of involving the Road Safety Inspection Service of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and infrastructure in the monitoring of signalling to calm traffic in the zones of kindergartens and schools, as well as on the pedestrian corridors leading to these institutions.

VEHICLE SAFETY AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT

1. When announcing tenders for the transportation of children, bind the commissioner of the service to the standard of transportation with quality buses, including in relation to the age of the bus. In contracts for the transportation of children, it is mandatory to introduce a clause on the termination of the contract and compensation for damages in the event that the carriers are found to be in violation of the regulations on the transportation of children.

2. Introduce a **protocol** between education institutions and the police on the mandatory implementation of an extraordinary inspection of buses used to transport children before going on excursions and other outdoor activities, at the invitation of the principal.

3. It is recommended that principals, teachers and parents monitor what kind of buses children are transported by and report any suspicion of improper **organized and public transportation of children** to the Traffic Inspection of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport, Infrastructure and the Ministry of the Interior.

4. Through legislative changes, raise the level of technical requirements for the approval of buses for the organized transportation of children.

5. Increase the number of inspections for buses for the organized transportation of children.

6. It is necessary to support and strengthen **the cooperation** of all public bodies at the state, regional and local level, interest groups, the private sector and the media in the field of road traffic safety in the Republic of Croatia, thereby contributing to strengthening the importance and effectiveness of measures and activities in the plan or implementation.

2. Facilitate the purchase of equipment for the safe transportation of children (including seats for children in taxis, rent-a-cars and the purchase of adapted car seats for children with developmental disabilities) through price and tax relief.