

Program Zagreb – Healthy Home: Improving Conditions for Health Preservation and Integration of Foreign Workers in Zagreb

The City of Zagreb is continuously growing, along with the number of incoming workers from developing countries. To ensure their well-being and health, the staff of the Andrija Štampar Teaching Institute of Public Health, with strong support from the City of Zagreb and the City Office for Social Protection, Health, Veterans, and Persons with Disabilities, launched the innovative **Program Zagreb – Healthy Home**. This program focuses on assessing and addressing the health and social needs of foreign workers, reducing stigmatization, and supporting their integration into the local community.

Why is this program important?

Between 2021 and spring 2024, the number of foreign workers in the Republic of Croatia approximately tripled. Unlike in previous years, when foreign workers mostly came from neighboring countries and had no major cultural or language adaptation difficulties, in the last two years, the largest share among new arrivals has been from distant countries such as Nepal, India, the Philippines, and Bangladesh.

This migration process intensified significantly in 2024, with the Ministry of the Interior issuing **63,204 residence and work permits for new employment between January and May 2024**. Among workers from more distant countries in this period, the highest numbers came from Nepal (15,922), India (8,504), the Philippines (6,232), Bangladesh (5,338), Uzbekistan (2,361), and Egypt (2,270). According to available data, the current number of workers from these countries in the City of Zagreb is estimated at **20,000 to 30,000**.

Based on media reports and direct contact with foreign workers, recurring issues include withheld wages, threats linked to withdrawal of residence and work permits, lack of compliance with workplace safety regulations, inadequate housing conditions, and limited access to basic healthcare, despite having mandatory health insurance coverage.

Thus, Zagreb's migrant population is becoming increasingly diverse, and their challenges often remain unrecognized and inadequately addressed. It is therefore essential to develop tailored public health interventions that support their well-being and integration. The program will enable the collection of relevant data, the development of educational resources, and the implementation of preventive and educational activities.

Throughout September, a field survey will be conducted among foreign workers to better understand their health and social needs, as well as their living and working conditions. Surveys will be available in their native languages.

Key goals:

- Assessing the health and social needs of migrants
- Developing healthcare workers' capacity for culturally sensitive care
- Destigmatizing migrants through media and educational initiatives

- Preventing infectious diseases and improving access to healthcare (are they even aware of their rights?)

Desired outcomes:

- Increased availability and accessibility of healthcare services for migrants/foreign workers
- Reduced stigmatization and greater public awareness of cultural diversity
- Establishing a network of contacts between healthcare workers and migrants
- Effective implementation of preventive measures against the spread of infectious diseases

How can you participate?

We invite all citizens, healthcare professionals, media representatives, and foreign workers themselves to follow and support these activities. Information and educational materials will be available on the Institute's website, and after the project concludes, a press conference will be held to present the main results.

The City of Zagreb recognizes the importance of integration and the health of its migrant community. Through this program, we aim to build the foundation for a safer, healthier, and more inclusive community for all its residents