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ASSOCIATION FOR PROMOTING INCLUSION

The full text of this report is available at <http://www.eumap.org/reports/2005> and at <http://www.inkluzija.hr>

For further information please contact Ljiljana Pintarić Mlinar ljiljana@erf.hr in Croatia, tel. 098628611 or Miriam Anati at OSI Budapest, manati@osieurope.org, + 36 30 2748533.

Croatians with intellectual disabilities not included into society

Zagreb and Budapest – 18 November 2005. Croatian legislation addressing the needs of people with intellectual disabilities (people whose learning ability is significantly lower than average) is not in line with international standards. This is a finding of the monitoring report ***Rights of people with intellectual disabilities: access to education and employment in Croatia***, released today. The report was produced by the Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Croatian Association for the Promotion of Inclusion.

Contrary to internationally recognised best practice, in Croatia only children with mild intellectual disabilities are given the right to be educated in mainstream schools. Children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities are instead directed to “special” schools or institutions. In practice, however, even the inclusion of children with mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools is very limited, and the level of support in most schools is inadequate.

“In Croatia, too much depends upon teachers’ individual personality and attitudes. Parents should not have to take their chances on finding a teacher who will work with their child” said Ljiljana Pintarić Mlinar from the Zagreb Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, author of the OSI report.

The OSI report urges the Croatian Government to adopt and implement new inclusive legislation, mainstreaming education for children of all disability levels, and allowing them to be full members of society right from the start. It also calls on the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports to ensure sufficient resources and support to enable children with all levels of intellectual disabilities to access mainstream schools, throughout the country.

Very few people with intellectual disabilities in Croatia have any job at all. The Croatian Labour Law explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of physical or mental disability, but does not specifically require employers to make “reasonable accommodation” for people with disabilities. Croatia therefore does not yet comply with the requirements of the EU’s Employment Directive (2000/78/EC), which will be a condition for entry to the EU.

Croatian Law does not provide specific regulations implementing supported employment — internationally recognised as the best way of helping people with intellectual disabilities work on the open market, by helping them manage day-to-day working issues. The Croatian Association for Promoting Inclusion does offer supported employment services for 40 people. The report released today calls on the Croatian Government to incorporate supported employment into general labour legislation and implement it throughout the country.

According to Borka Teodorovic, President of the Croatian Association for Promoting Inclusion: “employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities because they are concerned about increased costs and lower efficiency. The Croatian Government however has not yet engaged in any campaign addressed at making employers aware of the potential people with intellectual disabilities have. To help people with intellectual disability finding jobs, the Ministry of the

Economy, Labour, and Entrepreneurship should also extend incentive programmes, currently available only for full-time positions, to include part-time work, which is better suited to many people with intellectual disabilities”.

While much remains to be done to improve access to education and employment for people with intellectual disabilities in Croatia, there are models of good practice. Building on these experiences, many of the obstacles can be overcome, and real, lasting improvements can be made. The OSI report offers a list of recommendations addressed at improving the living conditions of people with intellectual disabilities in Croatia.

Note to editors

This report is part of a series of 14 country monitoring reports monitoring “Access to Education and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities” throughout Europe. The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with MHI, OSI’s Mental Health Initiative. All reports are available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at <http://www.soros.org>. For further information on the Croatian Association for the Promotion of Inclusion, see <http://www.inkluzija.hr>.