



# Local Government in Croatia

## Responses to Urban-Rural Challenges

edited by

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NALAS - Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe  
with the support of the Association of Cities in the Republic of Croatia





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The H2020-MSCA-RISE-2018 project aims to provide solutions for local governments that address the fundamental challenges resulting from urbanisation. To address these complex issues, 18 partners from 17 countries and six continents share their expertise and knowledge in the realms of public law, political science, and public administration. LoGov identifies, evaluates, compares, and shares innovative practices that cope with the impact of changing urban-rural relations in major local government areas (WP 1-5).

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## Local Responsibilities and Public Services



## 2.2. Firefighting

Dario Runtic, *NALAS Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe*

### Relevance of the Practice

One of the significant challenges for Croatia is ensuring adequate fire protection to its businesses, residents and tourists. According to the Croatian Firefighting Association, five-year average of fire incidence is 6,868 fire outbreaks in the open, 3,361 fires in buildings and 720 fires of vehicles.

Croatia is a tourism-dependent economy and an efficient firefighting service has tremendous importance not only for protection of lives and property of residents, but also for safety of tourists and protection of nature and environment. Most of tourism activities take place in the Adriatic region, the capital city and national parks. More specifically, tourism activities are evenly spread across urban and rural local governments in these areas. Rural local governments in general have lower fiscal capacity and fewer inhabitants than urban local governments, making it more difficult for rural local governments to provide an equally efficient firefighting service.

The organization of fire protection in Croatia is an interesting practice of urban-rural interplay which involves all levels of government, provides for inter-municipal cooperation, and integrates public, private and non-profit volunteer entities in the delivery of public service. Funding for the service is a mix of own source revenues, central government earmarked grants, incentives and private funding. Therefore, this public service cuts across all report sections – financial arrangements, the structure of local governments, inter-municipal relations and even citizen participation in public service delivery (not just decision-making).

### Description of the Practice

#### Structure of the Firefighting Service at Local Level

Rural local governments establish and fund voluntary firefighting associations (VFA) – non-profit organizations that generally rely on trained individuals who are required to respond to fire outbreaks, but are not employed by the firefighting association. When such individuals respond to fire outbreaks during his/her working hours, the municipality compensates the individual's employer for the time an individual spent responding to the fire. In case an individual responded to fire outbreak outside the working hours, the compensation is paid to the individual.



Small urban local governments also frequently use VFAs as a means of fire protection.

Urban local governments establish and fund Public Firefighting Brigades (PFB). PFBs are registered as institutions - local government budgetary users – which employ professional firefighters. In addition to PFBs there are also VFAs active in the urban areas as a support to PFBs.

Certain industrial facilities or infrastructure operators, due to the fire risks, are required to establish their own professional or voluntary fire brigade or outsource fire service to VFA or PFB should these have sufficient capacities for such a service.

Due to over 150 years of firefighting tradition, local governments in general have one or more firefighting entities in their territory. In order to streamline and coordinate decision-making, and simplify funding arrangements for VFAs in local governments with several firefighting entities, all firefighting entities are members of a local government Firefighting Union.

### **Inter-Municipal Cooperation in Fire Protection Services**

Urban local governments (ULGs) and rural local governments (RLGs) can establish an inter-municipal Firefighting Union and all VFAs and PFBs from their territories are members of such a Union. Also, ULGs and RLGs can establish joint PFBs to provide professional firefighting service to an inter-municipal area. RLGs generally do not have fiscal capacities to establish and operate a PFB, but by joining forces with ULG, additional funding becomes available for funding inter-municipal service in a form of additional 1 per cent of the personal income tax (PIT) collected in the area of RLG.

### **Firefighting Funding Arrangements at Local Level**

Local governments are required to pass Fire Risk Assessments and Fire Protection Plans. The Assessment and the Plan are prepared by outsourced expert planners. Fire Risk Assessment is a document outlining the current situation, a numerical analysis of fire risks and proposed measures for mitigation of fire risks. Fire protection plans are strategic plans which lay out requirements for the organization of fire protection services in accordance with fire risk assessments, including required number of firefighters and equipment. Therefore, the Fire Protection Plan indirectly sets the funding level for firefighting service.

VFA funding – all local governments, urban or rural, are required to provide specific percentage of budgetary revenues to VFAs through the Firefighting Union. Local governments with budget up to approx. EUR 650,000 provide 5 per cent of revenues to VFAs and the percentage diminishes as revenues grow in variable steps. No local government can provide less than 1 per cent except the City of Zagreb which provides 0.35 per cent of the budget. It is worth noting that the funding levels are not directly related to the incidence of fire outbreaks, but the size of the budget. The Law on Fire Protection does stipulate that in case of insufficient funding, local governments must provide additional funds, but does not provide grounds for local





government to reduce spending in case of overfunding. This area calls for further analysis of funding levels, fire incidence and outcomes of intervention. Furthermore, such financial arrangements may not be in line with the constitutional autonomy of local governments which is currently under review at the Constitutional Court.

PFB funding – Until 2003 professional firefighting was central government function carried out by the Ministry of Interior and funded through the state budget. As of 2003 the function and funding was decentralized to 55 local governments. Funding is carried through a combination of own-source revenue and earmarked central government grant limited to 2003 government funding levels and annually adjusted under so called ‘minimal fiscal standards for fire protection’. Local governments are entitled to 1 per cent of personal income tax collected at its territory for funding PFBs. Should 1 per cent of PIT yield less than minimal fiscal standard, the remaining funding up to the minimal fiscal standard is provided by the state budget in a form of earmarked grant to the local government. Generally, minimal fiscal standards suffice for professional firefighters’ payroll and the remaining costs of firefighting services are covered by other sources of local government budget. Should ULG and RLG jointly establish a PFB, RLG is entitled to 1 per cent of PIT collected at its territory, however, the government grant does not increase.

An industrial/infrastructure operator is required by the Law on Firefighting to establish a fire brigade. Such fire brigades are funded at the expense of the operator.

### **Structure of Firefighting Service at the Regional Level**

Regional governments can establish regional Firefighting Union and regional Fire Brigade within a Firefighting Union. The regional Firefighting Union has a coordinative, planning and oversight role over local Firefighting Unions. The regional Fire brigade is comprised from existing local PFBs and VFAs established in the territory of the regional government. The regional fire brigade acts at the regional fire chief’s order if so requested by the local fire chief in case of fire outbreak which a local fire brigade cannot successfully handle.

### **Firefighting Funding Arrangements at Regional Level**

Regional governments are required to provide specific percentage of budgetary revenues to the regional Firefighting Union. Regional governments with budget up to approx. EUR 650,000 provide 5 per cent of revenues to the Firefighting Union and the percentage diminishes as revenues grow in variable steps. No regional government can provide less than 1 per cent.

### **Structure of Firefighting Service at the National Level**

The national government’s firefighting body is the Croatian Firefighting Association (CFA). It is in charge of policy affairs at national level, firefighting training and firefighting response in case of a fire outbreak that cannot be contained by regional Firefighting Union brigade.





## Firefighting Funding Arrangements at National Level

CFA is a budgetary user of the state budget and funding is allocated in the regular budgeting cycle.

## Assessment of the Practice

The firefighting service is organized in a standard hierarchical structure and it seems to contain fire outbreaks rather efficiently. However, it remains unclear whether fire services and other relevant actors should devote additional resources in fire prevention activities, other than raising awareness campaigns.

The legislative framework does provide flexibility in terms of organization of the service through various actors and leverages public and private resources in doing so. It is one of the few well developed inter-municipal service provision models in Croatia.

However, the system is comprised of an excessive number of hierarchically parallel entities from local to national level engaged in fragmented advocacy, planning, reporting and coordination which indicates there is a room for process streamlining and increased efficiency of administrative structures.

Also, the financial arrangements imposed by the central government onto subnational level call for further analysis of funding gaps or overspending issues. There are no publicly available records of ongoing or completed research projects related to these issues. Current financial mechanisms are not appropriately aligned with fire risks and incidence or outcomes of intervention.

## References to Scientific and Non-Scientific Publications

### Legal Documents:

Law no 92/2010 on Fire Protection (*Zakon o zaštiti od požara*)

Law no 125/2019 on Firefighting (*Zakon o vatrogastvu*)

Decree no 2/2019 on Minimal Financial Standards for Decentralized Funding of Public Firefighting Brigades

### Scientific and Non-Scientific Publications:

Group of authors, '140 years of Croatian Firefighting Association 1866-2016' (Croatian Firefighting Association 2006)



Croatian Firefighting Association, 'Report on Implementation of Program of Activity of Special Measures of Fire Protection of Interest for the Republic of Croatia' (2019)  
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