

## NATIONAL REPORT CROATIA

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### 1. Collective Agreement in Healthcare – Ongoing Negotiations

After a one-year pause, negotiations for a new Collective Agreement in the healthcare sector have resumed.

The existing collective agreement is not aligned with certain legal provisions of the Republic of Croatia nor with the EU Directive on working time (EWTD – Directive 2003/88/EC).

Achieving compliance with these frameworks is one of the key priorities in the current negotiation process.

The Croatian Medical Trade Union (HLS) places particular emphasis on the need for clear and precise regulation of working hours, the method of calculating standby duty, allowances for difficult working conditions, the number of days of annual leave.

A central issue is the regulation and valuation of standby duty. HLS demands are grounded in the ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union in case C-373/24, which provides a binding interpretation of Article 2 of Directive 2003/88/EC.

The Court reaffirmed the following principles:

- “working time” and “rest time” are mutually exclusive concepts
- the intensity of work and the employee’s performance are not relevant criteria in determining working time

In Croatia, this standby is currently compensated as a percentage of base salary (4% weekdays; 7% weekends/holidays), time spent on standby is not counted as working time, while any work performed upon call from standby is remunerated as overtime.

This model is contrary to the practice and interpretation of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The problem is further aggravated by the shortage of doctors, the reduction in the number of on-call duty doctors in favor of increasing the number of doctors on standby.

In a context where doctors already exceed the maximum overtime limits prescribed by the EWTD, frequent standby duty further increases workload and contributes to physician exhaustion.

### 2. Hourly Wage Calculation Discrepancies

The issue of unequal hourly wage calculation, previously raised by HLS, remains unresolved.

The current system results in varying hourly wage rates depending on the number of working days in each month. This creates a structural inconsistency: in months with more days (e.g. January, March,...- 31 days), where total working hours are higher, the effective hourly wage is lower. On the contrary, in shorter months (e.g. February), where total working hours are lower, the effective hourly wage is higher.

Relevant ministries (Health and Labour) have been formally notified of these discrepancies. However, no corrective measures have been taken and the Government has not demonstrated willingness to address the issue.

As a result, HLS is forced to prepare further action, including the initiation of legal proceedings.

### **3. Salary Base Negotiations in Public Services (2026)**

At the beginning of 2026, negotiations were held regarding an increase in the salary base in public services.

An agreement between the Government and the public service unions was not reached.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia proposed a 1% increase in the salary base on three occasions throughout the year. Public service unions considered this proposal insufficient, especially in the context of rising inflation.

Despite the absence of agreement, the Government adopted a unilateral decision, based on applicable legal provisions, stipulating that the salary base in public services would be aligned with the base agreed upon by unions representing state officials and civil servants.

According to the adopted decision, the salary base increases as follows:

by 1% from April 1, 2026

by 1% from August 1, 2026

by 1% from December 1, 2026

#### *Conclusion*

The developments outlined above reflect ongoing structural and legal challenges in the regulation of working conditions and remuneration in the Croatian healthcare and public service sectors. Key concerns remain related to compliance with EU law, fair compensation models, and the sustainability of workforce conditions, particularly in light of staffing shortages and increasing workload pressures.