

Four years ago today in the Republic of Croatia and throughout the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation (General Data Protection Regulation, best known under the acronym GDPR) began to be applied directly in its entirety. The Law on the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation, which entered into force on May 25, 2018, ensures the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation.

The news about the start of the full application of the General Data Protection Regulation, which aims to protect individuals' personal data, as one of the fundamental human rights, aroused great interest among the entire public and completely occupied the media space that day, mostly due to the announcement of the rigorous penalties prescribed by the GDPR, and at one point it "crashed" the website of the Personal Data Protection Agency.

The Agency for the Protection of Personal Data, as an independent state body, which according to the previous national law took care of the protection of personal data of Croatian citizens, according to the Law on the Implementation of the General Regulation on Data Protection, was given the responsibility of supervising the implementation of the GDPR in the Republic of Croatia. The advisory, investigative and corrective powers that the Agency received with the entry into force of the GDPR are really significant, and the penalties that the GDPR prescribes for the most serious violations can be called draconian, amounting to up to 20 million euros.

Where are we after 4 years since the start of application?

What we must continue to work on is raising the AWARENESS of our citizens about the protection of their personal data, as well as about being careful not to endanger other people's personal data. Many citizens think that personal data is name, surname, OIB, but personal data is much more than that. Date of birth, home address, e-mail address, IP address, ID card number, health information, such as information about your dioptr, fingerprint, car license plate, your photo and many other data - ALL THIS IS YOUR PERSONAL DATA and you decide how and when you will use them.

Of course, other persons or business entities can at certain times dispose of your personal data, but only if they have an appropriate legal basis and are obliged to process your data legally and transparently. It is not for nothing that we say that our personal data is our most valuable asset - in case of misuse of personal data, an individual can suffer serious financial and reputational damage. It is precisely for this reason that we always advise citizens to behave in a self-protective manner. This would primarily mean that each person must take care of the protection of their own personal data, not share it lightly, and special caution is needed when publishing personal data on social networks and online shopping.

Business entities and institutions that process personal data of Croatian citizens must be aware of their responsibility and take all technical and organizational measures to adequately protect personal data from misuse. Also, what we especially want to point out on the 4th anniversary of the GDPR: everyone who processes personal data of Croatian citizens must be familiar with the rights of individuals regarding the processing of their personal data and enable them to exercise their rights.

Furthermore, we point out the key role in the personal data protection system played by data protection officers, who are often the weakest link. Officials must have a good knowledge of the business processes of the organization in which they work and continuously work on their own education in the field of personal data protection, and at the same time educate employees in the organization in which they act as officials.

The Agency for the Protection of Personal Data, aware of the complex economic circumstances caused primarily by the COVID19 pandemic, has organized over the past two years dozens of free workshops for several thousand micro, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs within the framework of the European ARC project. As the most affected by the crisis, we provided them with concrete support in complying with the GDPR. We also held trainings for officials in the public sector, and we will continue to work on improving educational activities.

What intrigued the public the most in the beginning, and then was no longer mentioned in Croatia, were administrative fines. In the first two years of application, one fine, but a very high one, was imposed precisely because of preventing individuals from exercising their right guaranteed by the GDPR. In the last two years, the picture has changed drastically; administrative fines are imposed more and more often as the most effective way of deterring violations of the provisions of the GDPR. Day-to-day supervision of AZOP officers in all parts of Croatia is increasing, and we are announcing an additional strengthening of supervision activities in the next period.

The key message that we want to send to all business entities and individuals today: the goal of the GDPR is not to create an additional administrative burden, but to protect the personal data of European Union citizens. What everyone who collects and in any way uses the personal data of individuals must know is for what purpose they need this data and whether they really need it, and any processing of personal data must be legal and transparent.

We encourage citizens to inform themselves about their rights through informative brochures created by the Agency <https://azop.hr/promotivni-materijali/>.

Without citizens who know their rights and actively work to realize and protect them, the regulation of fundamental rights by

itself will not ensure a free, safe and advanced society at a time when technology accelerates and initiates social changes in a completely new direction.