

Natalija Princi Duhović and Split Port Authority

Statement on Initial Assessment Results
September 2026

The aim of the initial assessment proceedings under the Implementation Procedures of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct is to determine whether the issues raised in the specific instance merit further examination.

Contents

- NCP and its Role
- Summary
- Content of Submission (Allegations) and Response of Split Port Authority
- NCP Proceedings to Date
- NCP Initial Assessment
- Conclusion
- Next Steps
- General Recommendations

NCP and its Role

The Croatian National Contact Point for Responsible Business Conduct (NCP) has been established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia in accordance with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct (OECD Guidelines), to which Croatia adhered in 2019. The NCP is responsible for promoting awareness of the OECD Guidelines and contributing to the resolution of issues arising from their application through specific instances. The OECD Guidelines are recommendations jointly addressed by governments to multinational enterprises operating in or from Adherents; concerning responsible conduct in areas such as human rights, employment and industrial relations, the environment, combating corruption and disclosure of information. The NCP serves as a non-judicial grievance mechanism, offering good offices to the parties to resolve issues related to the application of the OECD Guidelines. The NCP cannot impose sanctions, directly provide compensation, or compel the parties to participate in the proceedings. All parties are expected to engage in the process in good faith. The NCP consists of two bodies: the Secretariat and the External Body. The NCP's External Body conducts an initial assessment and, where justified, offers good offices to assist the parties in resolving the issues raised.

Summary

This initial assessment concerns a specific instance submitted by Ms. Natalija Princi Duhović, an employee of the Split Port Authority, regarding an alleged violation of the OECD Guidelines by the Split Port Authority. Ms. Princi Duhović's submission alleges a prolonged course of discriminatory

treatment and workplace harassment (mobbing), professional marginalisation, and reprisal following her candidacy for the position of Director of the Split Port Authority in 2008.

Ms. Princi Duhović also states that, after filing a series of formal complaints, there was—in her opinion—a lack of effective protection of employee rights through the Split Port Authority’s internal mechanisms.

The issues raised potentially relate to Chapters II (General Policies), III (Disclosure), IV (Human Rights), and V (Employment and Industrial Relations) of the OECD Guidelines.

The Split Port Authority was notified of the submission and submitted a response through its legal representatives, contesting the applicability of the Guidelines and the merit of the submission.

Following the initial assessment, the NCP concluded that the issues raised in this specific instance do not merit offering good offices at this stage. Accordingly, this initial assessment constitutes the NCP’s final statement on the matter.

Content of Submission (Allegations) and Response of Split Port Authority

Submitter and Split Port Authority

Submitter: Ms. Natalija Princi Duhović, a Croatian and Italian national employed by the Split Port Authority since 1997. Ms. Princi Duhović filed a submission to the Croatian National Contact Point (NCP) in August 2025.

Entity concerned: The Split Port Authority, a public institution established under Croatian law¹ for the construction, management and operation of the Port of Split, an open public port of international significance.

Issues Raised by Submitter

Ms. Princi Duhović’s submission outlines a long-standing pattern of mobbing, professional marginalisation, and reprisal spanning approximately 18 years (2008–2026), as well as the absence of effective internal mechanisms for employee protection. The issues raised relate primarily to:

Chapter II – General Policies (Point 9 and Commentary 14), regarding the obligation to refrain from reprisal, disciplinary action, or other measures against workers who, make bona fide reports on adverse impacts linked to company activities or practices that contravene the law, the Guidelines, or company policies. This includes protection against reprisal such as threats, harassment, intimidation, surveillance, and attempts to criminalize lawful activities;

Chapter III – Disclosure (Point 2.e), regarding company policies on information disclosure, including information on the qualifications and selection process for board members;

Chapter IV – Human Rights (Preamble, Point 5 and Commentary 51), regarding the need for legitimate and accessible operational-level grievance mechanisms concerning adverse impacts

¹ Pursuant to the Regulation on the establishment of the Split Port Authority, the founder of the port authority is the Republic of Croatia, while founding rights on behalf of the Republic of Croatia are executed by the Croatian Government.

of company activities, and the conduct of appropriate due diligence to prevent and mitigate negative impacts on human rights;

Chapter V – Employment and Industrial Relations (Points 1.e and 3), regarding the principles of equality of treatment and non-discrimination, with reference to relevant international conventions.

Background and Context

Summary of Submission

In 2008, Ms. Princi Duhović applied for the vacant position of Director of the Split Port Authority. In her application, she described herself as a qualified and apolitical candidate with 11 years of work experience at the Split Port Authority, during which time—by her own account—she had been engaged in tasks related to the development of cruise operations. She states that, in order to ensure the legitimacy of the selection process, she had previously notified the Government of the Republic of Croatia of her candidacy—which forwarded her letter of intent to the competent Ministry—and that the appointment of the new director was carried out under the 'Miscellaneous' agenda item of the Management Board meeting held on 4 July 2008, without transparent consideration. The submitter states that her written complaints addressed to the Split Port Authority Management Board and Ministry officials went unanswered.

The submitter further states that, following the appointment of the new director, she was subjected to systematic professional marginalisation, which she considers to be reprisal for her objections regarding the selection process. According to her account, this involved the removal of work tasks associated with her formal role, leaving her without any actual professional role for approximately four years—a situation she describes as “empty desk syndrome”. She states that she alerted the director to this situation in writing in September 2008, but received neither response, nor was informed of internal mechanisms for the protection of employee rights. The Split Port Authority Management Board and the relevant ministry were likewise informed of the situation.

The submitter claims that the treatment in question continued even after 2012, namely, beyond the period she describes as “empty desk syndrome”. She states that she continued to be denied equal treatment and opportunities for professional development and that, instead of tasks corresponding to her qualifications and past professional contributions, she was assigned administrative duties classified as “other tasks”. She believes this environment was intended to compel her to leave the institution voluntarily.

In March 2025, the submitter requested a meeting with the director regarding the work tasks assigned to her, which she did not deem fitting considering her qualifications and experience. She states that during that meeting, in the presence of her superior, she was promised a resolution regarding her employment status and a managerial position. Subsequently, she formally requested appointment to the position of Deputy Director for Market Development and Research. The request was denied.

Following denial of her request, the submitter attempted to protect her position by invoking two internal employee protection mechanisms provided for under Croatian labor legislation and the Statute of the Split Port Authority. She makes the following allegations regarding these procedures:

- The person authorised to receive and handle complaints concerning the protection of dignity in the workplace (the Deputy Director for Legal and General Affairs) recused herself from the submitter's case on personal grounds. Subsequently, the Director appointed another person to handle the case without first obtaining consent from the trade union representative. Due to the manner in which this appointment was handled, the State Inspectorate initiated misdemeanor proceedings before the competent court against the employer (as a legal entity) and the responsible person within that entity; these proceedings are still ongoing.
- The Governing Council appointed a three-member committee to rule on the submitter's objection in accordance with Article 19 of the Statute of the Split Port Authority (Commission for Deciding on Workers' Objections Regarding Violations of Employment Rights); however, all three members were subordinate to the Deputy Director for Legal and General Affairs.

The submitter considers that the arrangement whereby objections are decided by individuals within the same institution—who stand in a direct hierarchical, professional, and personal relationship with the parties to the proceedings—significantly undermines the credibility of the entire process and discourages workers from utilizing available internal mechanisms for the protection of their rights.

The submitter therefore proposes an audit of the aforementioned internal regulations and the establishment of an independent body to decide on employee complaints, accompanied by a verification of the members' genuine autonomy, including their institutional and political autonomy and the absence of conflict of interest.

Furthermore, the submitter proposes an urgent audit of the internal regulations of the Split Port Authority, including the Ordinance on internal organisation and job classification. She believes this ordinance allows for the assignment of tasks which do not correspond to employees' qualifications—without clearly defined criteria or written justification—thereby creating, in her view, opportunity for arbitrary conduct, professional degradation and employee discrimination.

The submitter further states that, following the initiation of proceedings before the Supervisory Board and the Governing Council of the Split Port Authority, the employer undertook the following measure, which she considers to be an act of reprisal:

- In November 2025 the Director of the Split Port Authority retroactively challenged the time logs for the months of September and October 2025, which had been approved by the immediate supervisor and served as the basis for payment of her wages for that period, citing the data obtained via video surveillance, among other things. Allegedly the video surveillance system was used selectively (applying only to the submitter and one other employee), without appropriate internal regulations and without notifying employees of the existence or purpose of surveillance.

A report was filed with the State Inspectorate regarding alleged irregularities involving violations of the Labour Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. A report was also filed with the Personal Data Protection Agency (AZOP).

The submitter states that the cumulative stress resulting from the described events led to multiple medical diagnoses.

Submitter's Expectations Regarding the Outcome of the Specific Instance

The submitter seeks the good offices of the Croatian National Contact Point (NCP) to initiate a structured dialogue with the Split Port Authority, with the aim of: ceasing all forms of

discriminatory treatment by the employer; securing an appropriate position and/or compensation for the professional, financial, health-related, and psychological harm suffered; conducting a full independent audit of the employer's conduct over the preceding period; ensuring compliance with internal and statutory mechanisms for the protection of workers' rights; and implementing a systemic reform of management practices at the Split Port Authority to prevent recurrence.

Response from Split Port Authority

The Split Port Authority, represented by its external legal representatives, submitted two statements: the first in November 2025 regarding its willingness to cooperate with the NCP, and an additional statement dated 9 March 2026, following the hearing before the NCP on 27 February 2026. The party's response highlights two main categories of objections:

First, the party disputes the applicability of the Guidelines, supporting this position with an opinion by a legal expert it engaged from the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb. The legal expert concludes that the Split Port Authority is a public institution and a public government body; that it does not constitute an enterprise within the meaning of Croatian private law; that it does not engage in trade; that its activities are not commercial in nature; and that it possesses no element of multinationality.

Second, the party disputes the merit of the submission, arguing the following: Ms. Princi Duhović did not meet the qualification requirements for the position for which she applied; the issues raised by the submitter represent her personal impression rather than systemic institutional failures that would violate fundamental principles of responsible business conduct; the tasks which the submitter claims do not align with her qualifications—and which she refuses to perform—had previously been carried out by individuals with higher education qualifications; internal mechanisms were duly activated; and the issues raised, insofar as they may be real, are matters of individual labor law falling within the jurisdiction of ordinary courts.

NCP Proceedings to Date

Since receiving the submission, the NCP has taken the following actions:

Date	Action Taken
12 August 2025	Ms. Natalija Princi Duhović's submission was received via the NCP submission form, along with accompanying documentation.
24 October 2025	The NCP Secretariat met with Ms. Princi Duhović to explain in detail the role, composition and rules of procedure of the NCP.
28 October 2025	The NCP Secretariat formally notified the Split Port Authority of the specific instance and asked for a written response.
13 November 2025	A written response was received from the Split Port Authority of Split via its legal representatives.
November 2025 – January 2026	Supplementary submissions by Ms. Princi Duhović were received regarding alleged retaliatory measures taken by the employer following the filing of the submission with the NCP.
10 December 2025	A meeting of the NCP External Body was held to review the instance.

9 February 2026	A meeting of the NCP External Body was held to review the instance.
25 February 2026	Ms. Princi Duhović was heard before the NCP External Body.
27 February 2026	The Split Port Authority was heard before the NCP External Body.
2 March 2026	The NCP Secretariat sent an email to both parties noting that the procedure is at the stage of assessing whether the instance warrants further examination, and requesting additional information on the activities of the Split Port Authority relevant to the criteria under consideration, so that the External Body could conduct a complete and informed initial assessment.
9 March 2026	The Split Port Authority submitted an additional written statement through its legal representatives, including a legal opinion commissioned from an external legal expert as an attachment.
15 May 2026	A meeting of the NCP External Body was held to conduct an initial assessment based on all submissions received.
29 July 2026	The draft Statement on Initial Assessment Results was submitted to the parties for comment.
11 September 2026	The Statement on Initial Assessment Results was adopted.

NCP Initial Assessment

The NCP has decided not to accept this specific instance. This decision was made after the NCP assessed whether the issues raised merited further examination. To this end, the NCP considered the following six criteria:

What is the identity of the party concerned and its interest in the matter?

The submitter, Ms. Natalija Princi Duhović, is a current employee of the Split Port Authority and is directly affected by the conduct of the Split Port Authority described in the submission. As a person whose employment relationship, working conditions, professional status, salary, health, and dignity are at the heart of the issues raised, Ms. Princi Duhović has a clear and direct interest in the instance.

Are the issues raised material and substantiated?

The submission raises issues that are material in the sense that they relate to specific provisions of the Guidelines concerning the treatment of workers, the protection of employees against workplace harassment and reprisal, non-discrimination in promotion and professional development, and access to effective grievance mechanisms—all of which fall within the scope of Chapters II, III, IV, and V of the Guidelines.

Regarding substantiation, the NCP notes that the submitter has provided extensive documentation covering the period between 2008 and 2026. The NCP notes that some of the allegations stem from the submitter's own correspondence and statements, while others are substantiated by documents from other bodies or official records. At this stage, the NCP does not assess the ultimate validity of specific allegations nor does it establish the facts of the instance;

rather, it evaluates solely whether the issues raised are credible and linked to the application of the OECD Guidelines.

Is the enterprise covered by the Guidelines?

This is the central contested criterion in the instance at hand. The Split Port Authority, supported by the opinion of a legal expert it engaged, maintains that it is a public institution and a public government body established under the Maritime Domain and Seaports Act to perform a public service; therefore, it does not constitute a multinational enterprise (referred to as 'enterprise' in the Guidelines) for the purposes of the OECD Guidelines. The Split Port Authority further argues that the OECD Guidelines—as interpreted through the OECD Guidelines on Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises—are addressed primarily to commercial entities, and that the Split Port Authority does not have the commercial form, purpose, or activities that would bring it within the scope of the OECD Guidelines. Instead, the Split Port Authority manages infrastructure of strategic importance for international transport and trade and generates revenue from concession fees and fees for special use of the maritime public domain, as well as from port charges paid by vessels, including those under foreign ownership.

The NCP notes that this involves a complex interpretation on which competent legal experts have reached differing conclusions. However, the NCP has carefully examined all available evidence and submissions regarding the question of whether the Split Port Authority falls within the scope of the Guidelines. The NCP acknowledges the relevant legal and factual arguments presented by both parties—including the legal opinion submitted by the Split Port Authority—and has accorded appropriate weight to each of these arguments in its deliberations. As part of its overall assessment of the specific instance, the NCP took into account all available information, including the functional characteristics of the Split Port Authority, its legal structure under Croatian law, its revenue sources, its business relationships with international market stakeholders, and the broader interpretive framework of the OECD Guidelines as applied by other NCPs.

Is there a link between the enterprise's activities and the issues raised?

There is a clear and direct link between the activities of the Split Port Authority and the issues raised. The Split Port Authority, as the submitter's employer, is the entity alleged to have caused or contributed to the alleged adverse impacts on her working conditions, health, and rights.

Do applicable law and/or parallel proceedings limit the NCP's ability to contribute to the resolution of the issues and/or the implementation of the Guidelines?

In its deliberations, the NCP identified and took into account the following relevant proceedings involving the same or closely related issues:

- Misdemeanor proceedings before the competent misdemeanor court, initiated by the State Inspectorate against the Split Port Authority and its responsible official regarding the appointment of a designated person for the protection of workers' dignity without trade union consent. These proceedings are ongoing.
- Complaint filed with the Personal Data Protection Agency regarding the use of video surveillance without legal basis. These proceedings are ongoing.

- Complaint filed with the State Inspectorate regarding the retroactive challenging of time and attendance logs and other alleged irregularities involving violations of the Labor Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Ongoing.
- Internal appeals procedure (Article 19 of the Split Port Authority Statute) resulting in a decision by the committee dated 10 July 2025. The procedure has been concluded.

Would examination of the issues contribute to the purposes and effectiveness of the Guidelines?

The NCP considered whether examining the issues raised could contribute to the objectives and effectiveness of the Guidelines. The shared goal of the countries that have adhered to the Guidelines is to encourage enterprises to make a positive contribution to economic, environmental and social progress and to minimize adverse impacts associated with their operations. Regarding effectiveness, the NCP's role is to contribute to resolving issues arising from the application of the Guidelines; such a contribution may relate to the future application of the Guidelines and/or to addressing adverse impacts in a manner consistent with the Guidelines.

In assessing this criterion, the NCP took into account the nature and content of the issues raised, the documentation and submissions provided by the parties, and the overall circumstances of the instance. The NCP specifically took into account the fact that the specific alleged breaches raised in the submission are already being examined by competent domestic authorities, in addition to examining the extent to which offering good offices at this stage could contribute to resolving the issues in a way that goes beyond that which is achievable within those proceedings.

Conclusion

The NCP has carefully considered all the issues raised in this specific instance and has analysed the relevant circumstances, the submitted documentation and the statements of both parties as part of the initial assessment. After comprehensive review, the NCP has concluded that the issues presented at this stage do not justify providing good offices. Accordingly, this initial assessment represents the NKT's final statement in this instance. This decision does not contain an assessment of whether the Split Port Authority acted in accordance with the OECD Guidelines.

Next Steps

The NCP does not accept this instance for further examination. This Initial Assessment concludes the NCP's proceedings regarding this submission under the OECD Guidelines. The NCP will inform the OECD Secretariat, and this final Statement will be entered into the OECD Secretariat's Database of Specific Instances and published on the Croatian NCP's website.

General Recommendations

Regardless of the outcome of the Initial Assessment in this specific instance, the NCP considers that the issues raised have shed light on a number of aspects of labour relations management that may be relevant to a wider range of entities. Therefore, as part of its mandate to promote the OECD Guidelines, the NCP considers it useful to draw attention to the following expectations regarding good practice, addressed to entities in general rather than to any specific party in these proceedings.

1. Entities should maintain clear, accessible, and operationally independent internal mechanisms for resolving labour disputes, designed and equipped to ensure that employees can raise concerns without fear of negative consequences.

2. Entities should ensure that human resource management practices—including advancement and access to management positions—are governed by objective criteria applied consistently and based solely on professional merit, in accordance with the principles of equal treatment.

3. Entities should ensure that any surveillance of employees is proportionate, has a clear legal basis, and is carried out in full compliance with applicable data protection requirements.

The NCP encourages all entities operating in Croatia to review their internal policies and management frameworks in light of the above recommendations. The NCP is available to provide guidance to entities seeking to align their practices with the expectations set out in the OECD Guidelines.