

# **STATEMENT OF INTEREST**

## **Irena Zakarija-Grkovic**

I was born in Croatia but spent most of my life in Australia, moving back to Croatia in 2004. In Australia I was a member of several lay and professional breastfeeding organisations, and have maintained contact with my Australian colleagues.

In Croatia I realised that professional breastfeeding support was scarce, so I accepted the role of International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners' Coordinator for Croatia (2004-'10) and, together with my Slovenian colleagues, put together an 80-hour breastfeeding course (based on the *Core Curriculum for Lactation Consultant Practice*). The course has been held annually since 2007. In collaboration with IBLCE and colleagues at the Medical School in Split, I arranged for the exam to be translated into Croatian and held locally. Currently there are 28 IBCLCs in Croatia. I provide support to my IBCLC colleagues in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, the way my Slovenian colleagues supported me.

In 2009, I co-founded the Croatian Association of Lactation Consultants (CALC), of which I became president. We publish an annual newsletter, maintain a website and organise an annual breastfeeding symposium. Since 2006 I've been mobilizing speakers from around the world to visit Croatia during World Breastfeeding Week. In 2014, as president of CALC, I participated in writing the IBFAN alternative 'Report on the situation of infant and young child feeding in Croatia'. Since 2011, CALC has been an official endorser of WABA.

This year I was nominated 'Woman of the Year' in Split for my breastfeeding activities. Every month I conduct free breastfeeding workshops for expectant couples, and work, after hours, as a breastfeeding specialist in a paediatric clinic.

Since 2006 I've been actively involved with implementing the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative in Croatia, both on a national and regional level. I have conducted research in this area and spoken extensively on this topic. Currently, we are helping hospitals renew their designation. Together with UNICEF, we have introduced the *Ten Steps* to the primary health care setting and are now in the process of training neonatal staff in supporting breastfeeding. In 2014/15 I was involved in a UNICEF project aimed at training community nurses throughout Croatia, who are in charge of breastfeeding support groups.

I collaborate with La Leche League Leaders in Croatia, and have assisted them in editing parent handouts. I am an active member of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, a global physician breastfeeding organisation.

I am a founding member of the Croatian National Breastfeeding Committee, which is supported by the Ministry of Health (MoH). At our biannual meetings we plan promotional and educational activities, monitor Code compliance, and provide opinions for the MoH. We have a National Breastfeeding Program. Code compliance is an ongoing challenge in Croatia but something I'm very aware of and support.

In addition to my various breastfeeding activities, I have gained an international perspective through my work as Co-Director of Cochrane Croatia. This involves running the Croatian Branch in Split, securing funding, organising an annual symposium, attending business meetings, promoting evidence-based medicine and conducting systematic reviews.

I hope to use my skills, energy and experience to further the cause of WABA globally, and regionally as the Steering Committee member for Europe.