



**Marina Herceg Pendelić**

University North,  
Varaždin, Croatia

Email: mahercegpendelic@unin.hr

ORCID 0000-0000-0000-0000

**Stručni rad / Professional paper**

**Article info:**

Received: 19.02.2026.

Accepted: 04.05.2026.

UDC: 334.72(497.521.2):332.122

DOI: 10.38190/ope.16.1.7

## THE IMPACT OF THE OPENING OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS, CENTERS AND AGENCIES ON THE OPENING OF NEW COMPANIES IN ZAGREB COUNTY

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to consider and show how the opening of business incubators, centers and agencies affects the opening of new companies in Zagreb County, comparing the period since their establishment with the previous period. The paper is based on the research of publicly available data, interviews with employees of business centers and the analysis of the collected information. The topics of the research are publicly available values of total business infrastructure services and the annual number of newly established companies in Zagreb County. The aim of the research is to determine the correlation between total business infrastructure services and the opening of new companies in Zagreb County. Data processing was carried out using qualitative correlation analysis. The information obtained from the research and interviews provides insight into the impact of business incubators, centers and agencies on the establishment of new companies in Zagreb County, offering a conclusion on how these institutions function and their impact on entrepreneurship in the Zagreb County region.*

**Keywords:** *Zagreb County; entrepreneurial center; business incubator; Development Agency; Enterprises*

**JEL classification:** *C13; C81; D2; G23*

### 1. Introduction

This paper presents the impact of the establishment of business incubators, centers and agencies on the establishment of new companies within Zagreb County. The research aims to connect the total services provided by entrepreneurial infrastructure with the number of newly opened companies in Zagreb County, looking at whether entrepreneurial infrastructure significantly affects the emergence of new companies in this area. Business incubators, centers and agencies represent an increasingly present form of support for new and existing entrepreneurs. This research is conducted by observing their effectiveness and the extent to which their services are used during the process of starting new companies in Zagreb County.

### 2. Business Incubators, Centers and Agencies

Business incubators, entrepreneurship centers and development agencies are organizations designed to support the creation of new businesses, with the aim of encouraging a positive impact on entrepreneurship within their regions.

In Zagreb County, the Zagreb County Entrepreneurship Center serves as a resource for both ambitious and established entrepreneurs, especially in terms of the use of EU funds. Founded in 2004 as the Regional Development Agency of the Zagreb District Ltd., its key activities include:

**Project management:** Providing consulting services for grant applications, preparing business plans for EU and national funds, and securing credit lines.

**Loan guarantees:** Issuing guarantees as collateral for business entities seeking loans from commercial banks.

**Investment zones:** Helping investors find optimal locations by maintaining a database of entrepreneurial zones throughout the county.

**County Chronicle (County Chronicle):** A magazine published by the center, which brings news about the economy, tourism, culture, education and local self-government in order to ensure transparency and inform the business community and the general public. The Center supports entrepreneurs by identifying potential sources of co-financing, as there are many opportunities to finance development projects and ideas. The Centre addresses challenges in finding future sources of funding and



carries out eligibility checks for both applicants and project ideas, as not all projects are eligible for every funding source.

In addition, the Centre assists in the adaptation and timely submission of projects for relevant calls and takes care of the preparation of project and application documents, ensuring compliance with certain rules and conditions. High-quality project preparation significantly increases the likelihood of securing funds.

Furthermore, the Center provides support in implementation through all phases of the project. After approval of financing, the Center supervises, assists and advises entrepreneurs until the project is successfully completed.

### 2.1. Business Incubator

A business incubator is an organization that provides support to new and small businesses, start-ups and craftsmen, especially those in the early stages of development. Their primary purpose is to facilitate the launch and growth of businesses through a variety of services and resources. Business incubators are designed as a development incentive and assistance to young entrepreneurs starting a business, providing office space, consulting, administrative support and other solutions to common challenges, allowing them to overcome obstacles faster and easier.

### 2.2. Development Agency

The Regional Development Agency of Zagreb County was established as a key holder and executor for the planning and implementation of all significant public development activities within Zagreb County, both at the county and local level. As such, it is a key actor and promoter in the management of county and regional development within the public sector.

Since its establishment, the Agency has contributed to Zagreb County becoming the leading economic region. Its development is based on a knowledge-based society, recognizable and preserved cultural and natural heritage, and attractiveness as a place to work and live, all while preserving a harmonious connection with the development of the City of Zagreb.

Development agencies are the primary way of supporting entrepreneurs in overcoming business challenges. Through development activities at the county, city or municipal level, they provide guidance and assistance through various forms of

incentives, whether financial or advisory, which significantly contributes to the overall development of local self-government units.

### 2.3. Entrepreneurship Center

The Zagreb County Entrepreneurship Center is a business support institution dedicated to creating a high-quality, user-oriented entrepreneurial environment within Zagreb County. Established as a limited liability company, the Center follows the best practices of regional development agencies in the European Union in order to optimize the development goals of the county during the alignment of Croatia with regional structures and EU programs.

The mission and vision of the Center is to serve as a key stakeholder and executor in the planning and implementation of all major development activities throughout the district and its local administrative units. It acts as a key agent and promoter of regional development management, supporting the improvement of living standards and job creation. This is achieved through the design and implementation of high-quality projects aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing, agriculture and tourism sectors. The center's activities include identifying potential sources of funding, as there are many opportunities to co-finance development projects and ideas.

Furthermore, the center provides implementation support through all phases of the project. After approval of the financing, the center supervises, assists and advises entrepreneurs until the project is successfully completed. Through these efforts, the center fosters entrepreneurial success and strengthens the local economy.

### 2.4. Zagreb County

Zagreb County is located in the northwest of Croatia and is unique in that it completely surrounds the city of Zagreb. Although the city serves as its administrative center, it is not part of the county itself. That is why the county is often referred to as the 'Zagreb Ring' (Figure 1). All important institutions for Zagreb County, such as ministries, etc. most of them are located in the city of Zagreb itself, which is surrounded by the county. Zagreb County is well connected with the rest of the Republic of Croatia precisely because it surrounds the City of Zagreb and this contributes to the positive development of the county itself in economic terms.



Figure 1. Zagreb County

### 3. Methodology of Analysis of the Impact on the Opening of New Businesses

This paper uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Secondary data were collected from scientific articles, reports of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics as well as from the annual reports of the Entrepreneurship Center of Zagreb County, in order to obtain information related to this case study and to be able to analyze the impact of entrepreneurial infrastructure on the opening of new companies in the observed area. The basic characteristics of business incubators, centers and agencies include providing support for starting new companies, assistance in the work of existing companies and facilitating the withdrawal of EU funds through public tenders. This study examines their operational factors and practices while exploring and analyzing the service offerings they provide to users. The topics of this research are publicly available values of total entrepreneurial infrastructure services and the number of newly opened companies in Zagreb County by years that are observed. The aim of the research is to determine the correlation between the total services of entrepreneurial infrastructure and the number of newly opened companies in Zagreb County. Data processing is carried out using qualitative correlation analysis and a description of the information obtained. During the research, the questions to which the analysis should be answered, and the impact of the opening of business incubators, centers and agencies on the opening of new companies in Zagreb County in the observed period will be explained.

The impact of the opening of entrepreneurial centers, incubators and agencies on the opening of new businesses is shown through tables and graphs covering the period from 1994 to 2024. The data show that after the establish-

ment of these centers and development agencies in Zagreb County, the number of newly opened companies showed a steady growth, which can be seen in the graphic.

In addition to these support institutions, the development of digital technology has played a crucial role in enabling faster execution of business tasks. Entrepreneurship has transformed significantly over the past few decades; Today, it is inseparable from digital technology—from the initial registration process to everyday business and quick access to data. Entrepreneurship centers, incubators and agencies further support this by providing publicly available data that serves as a valuable resource for the business of any company.

The establishment and development of the Zagreb County Entrepreneurship Center, which today acts as an umbrella institution for these activities within the observed local self-government unit, is presented chronologically from its establishment in 2004 to 2024.

2004 – Zagreb County and its eight cities—Dugo Selo, Ivanić-Grad, Jastrebarsko, Samobor, Sveti Ivan Zelina, Velika Gorica, Vrbovec and Zaprešić—established the Regional Development Agency of Zagreb County Ltd. to promote regional development.

2012 – The Guarantee Agency for the Development of Small Enterprises of Zagreb County Ltd. merged with the Agency, which enabled it to start issuing guarantees as instruments of investment security.

2014 – The Agency published a brochure on the occasion of 10 years of work.

2018 – New legislation led to a reorganisation; The public institution “Regional Development Agency of Zagreb County” was separated in order to take over all activities related to public institutions and local self-government units.

2020 – At the end of the year, the Agency changes its name to the Entrepreneurship Center of Zagreb District in order to promote and develop entrepreneurship, continuing its activities in the economic sector.

2021 – Since the beginning of the year, the Entrepreneurship Center has been operating under a new name and visual identity.

The area of Zagreb County is well connected with the rest of Croatia and the City of Zagreb, where important institutions are located. This high level of accessibility makes the region an attractive destination for entrepreneurs from other areas looking to relocate their business ventures.



The opening of business centers, incubators and agencies facilitates the use of EU funds by providing entrepreneurs with consulting services, guarantees and support in attracting foreign investments. These activities stimulate the regional economy and encourage healthy competition, motivating entrepreneurs to optimize their resources and achieve greater success. Foreign investments also contribute to the development of the economy in the area and are desirable and the county invests in infrastructure to attract them.

The Entrepreneurship Center operates in approximately twenty entrepreneurial zones within Zagreb County, located in an area favorable for starting new businesses or relocating existing ones, as they form a ring around the capital. With the information obtained, it is learned that there are plans to increase the total number of entrepreneurial zones in the area to fifty, which would be the optimal number for that area, while currently there are about twenty of them located in most cities, in some even more. (Table 1)

Looking at the number of enterprises established since the establishment of the entrepreneurship center compared to the previous period, as shown in the tables and graphs, it can be concluded that

the center partially contributes to the creation of new enterprises. This contribution varies from year to year and depends on other factors such as recession, pandemic and foreign investment inflows, as shown in the attached table and graph.

In recent times, the rise of e-commerce has transformed the way these organizations operate. Activities such as meetings, consultations and signing documents are increasingly taking place online. The use of digital signatures has eliminated the need for physical presence, significantly speeding up business processes.

Entrepreneurial support institutions such as Development Agencies and Entrepreneurial Centers are located in only some places in Zagreb County, and are thus more accessible to entrepreneurs in the region, which can affect the use of such institutions to help entrepreneurs. (Table 3)

Taking into account the good location connection with the rest of the Republic of Croatia and the location next to the capital, the area is becoming more and more interesting for companies from other regions because of the easier solution of administrative problems because not everything is yet fully digitized, although efforts are being made to do so.

Table 1. Overview of entrepreneurial zones

City of Dugo Selo	Puhovec Business Zone
City of Dugo Selo	Črnovčak Business Zone
City of Ivanić-Grad	Entrepreneurial Zone Ivanić-Grad Jug - Zone 3
City of Ivanić-Grad	Entrepreneurial Zone Ivanić-Grad North - Zone 6
The City of Sveta Nedelja	Kerestinec Entrepreneurial Zone - Production and R&D Campus
The City of Sveta Nedelja	Work Zone Rakitje
The City of Sveta Nedelja	Sveta Nedelja Work Zone
The City of Sveta Nedelja	Novaki Work Zone
City of Velika Gorica	Rakitovec Work Zone
City of Velika Gorica	Economic Zone Kušanec-East
City of Zaprešić	Falečnjak Entrepreneurial Zone
Municipality of Pisarovina	Pisarovina Business Zone
Municipality of Stupnik	Stupnik Business Zone
Municipality of Jakovlje	North - 1
Municipality of Križ	Entrepreneurial Zone Križ 1
Municipality of Križ	Križ 2 Business Zone
Municipality of Rugvica	Rugvica East Business Zone
Municipality of Rugvica	Rugvica South Business Zone
Municipality of Rugvica	Rugvica North Work Zone

**Table 2. Impact on New Business Creation: An Overview**

Year	New companies	New companies /100	Consulting services	Foreign investment	Warranties issued	Employees
2004	361	36,1	0	0	0	0
2005	408	40,8	0	0	0	0
2006	529	52,9	0	0	0	0
2007	571	57,1	0	0	0	0
2008	603	60,3	0	0	0	0
2009	523	52,3	0	0	0	0
2010	449	44,9	0	0	0	0
2011	501	50,1	0	0	0	0
2012	410	41,0	0	0	0	0
2013	381	38,1	0	0	1	2
2014	343	34,3	26	1	13	12
2015	368	36,8	55	21	13	14
2016	390	39,0	43	15	14	16
2017	472	47,2	82	21	9	14
2018	444	44,4	43	17	15	12
2019	468	46,8	15	6	1	2
2020	376	37,6	27	15	2	3
2021	542	54,2	12	18	0	3
2022	574	57,4	15	15	1	4
2023	581	58,1	4	27	1	3
2024	654	65,4	26	0	0	2

**Table 3. Overview of entrepreneurial support institutions**

Founder	Telugu	Type of PPI
City of Ivanić - City	Development Agency IGRA d.o.o. for transport and services	Local Development Agency
City of Samobor	ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER SAMOBOR limited liability company for services of encouraging entrepreneurship and providing travel agency services	Entrepreneurship Center
City of Velika Gorica	Development Agency of the City of Velika Gorica - VE-GO-RA	Local Development Agency
City of Velika Gorica	VG Entrepreneurship Center limited liability company for the development and encouragement of entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurship Center
City of Vrbovec	DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CITY OF VRBOVEC	Local Development Agency
Lasić Branka	FORES, a limited liability company for services	Entrepreneurship Center

The opening of entrepreneurial support institutions enables an easier start of business for new entrepreneurs, as well as assistance to existing companies to improve their business and thus contribute to economic development, according

to the Zagreb County. Most entrepreneurial support institutions are located in the entrepreneurial zones themselves or in their immediate vicinity, which contributes to easier use of them to help entrepreneurs, whether they are beginners

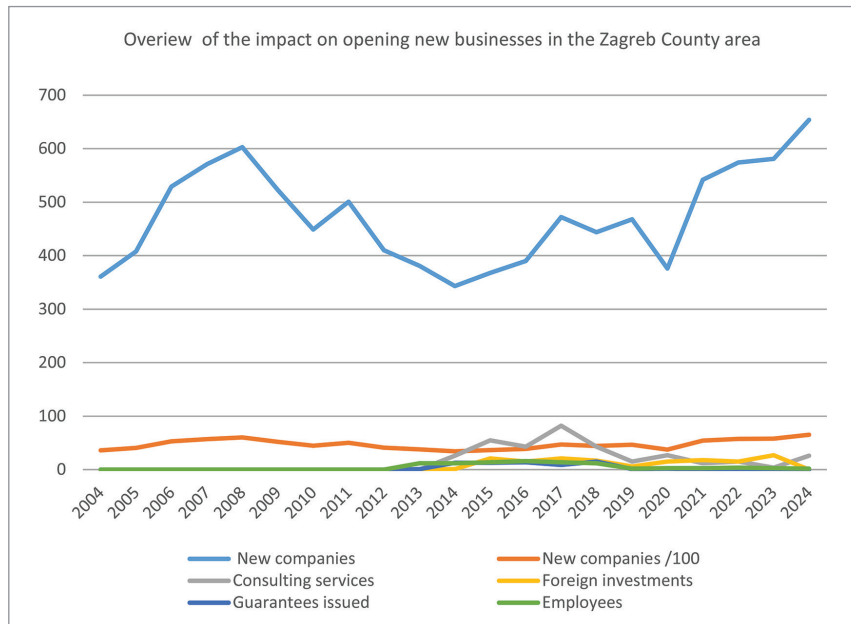


Chart 1: Impact on the establishment of new enterprises in Zagreb County

or existing ones who want further advancement and development of their companies. Entrepreneurial zones are located in most cities of Zagreb County, thus contributing to greater coverage and greater accessibility for entrepreneurs (Table 1).

Zagreb County is an area with a great possibility of opening additional entrepreneurial zones, given the great interest of entrepreneurs in doing business in this area due to various benefits, and it is to be expected that additional entrepreneurial zones and support institutions will be opened in the area. The opening of entrepreneurial support institutions and entrepreneurial zones contributes to the development of the area where they are located, and therefore it is in the interest of the parish to achieve this in its area. Zagreb County has recognized the favorable impact of opening new companies in its area and invests significant funds to contribute to this, and thus ultimately achieve additional economic development from revenues in the form of taxes and surtaxes, which it can further invest and thus prosper.

Furthermore, the paper aims to determine the primary business goals and sources of financing, as well as to analyze the success of business incubators and agencies in Zagreb County. Observation can lead to information that from 2024, the impact on entrepreneurs is increasing because more is invested in them. Looking at last year and this year, we can see an increasing use of available funds for the improvement of entrepreneurship in the Zagreb County.

Looking at the years since the establishment of the entrepreneurial infrastructure in the area of

Zagreb County and the number of employees in the entrepreneurship center itself, it can be seen that when there is a larger number of employees working on providing assistance to entrepreneurs, there is a greater number of newly foreign investments, issued guarantees and more consulting services are used, which certainly helps especially new entrepreneurs, and it could be said that more employees in the entrepreneurial center contribute to a greater use of the services offered by the center. entrepreneurs and thus enhances entrepreneurial activities. This can correlate the number of employees in the Entrepreneurship Center with the use of services for entrepreneurs. By reviewing the available information, more and more investments have recently been made in the infrastructure of support institutions and entrepreneurial zones in order to increase the number of companies in the area of Zagreb County, and thus achieve economic profit. The opening of entrepreneurial centers, incubators and agencies in Zagreb County has an extremely positive impact on the establishment of new companies, which is confirmed by the fact that in 2024 the county was second in Croatia in terms of total income of entrepreneurs. These institutions act as a key supporting infrastructure that reduces initial risks and costs for new entrepreneurs. Investing in entrepreneurship through grants is a significant contribution to entrepreneurship itself, and for this year 2026, three million euros of non-refundable support has been approved for entrepreneurs from the area of Zagreb County, which will be awarded through three tenders, the first of which has already been announced.



The announced tender refers to start-up entrepreneurs and it is to be expected that this could have a significant impact on the opening of new companies in Zagreb County. More such investments through grants would certainly contribute to the opening of new companies and new opportunities for start-up entrepreneurs, and thus contribute to the additional development of the economy in Zagreb County.

The value of the announced tender is four hundred euros of grants for start-up entrepreneurs, while the remaining amount of two million and one hundred thousand euros is intended for production and non-production activities, and five hundred and fifty thousand for the installation of photovoltaic cells in order to reduce environmental pollution with various energy sources and use electricity more, which is less harmful to the environment, is renewable and helps in the economic and environmental development of the Zagreb County itself.

By awarding grants, especially if they are non-refundable, we primarily help start-up entrepreneurs, because they usually do not have significant funds for business at first, but also for the development of already existing entrepreneurs in order to do better business and positively contribute to the development of the economy in Zagreb County, but also in the entire Republic of Croatia, which is certainly desirable and should be strived for both at the county and state level.

#### 4. Conclusion

Qualitative analysis has determined that there is a correlation between entrepreneurial infrastructure and the opening of new companies in the area of Zagreb County during the observed period, especially in the ratio of the number of employees in the entrepreneurial center and the use of services for entrepreneurs, and in the future the number of employees in entrepreneurial infrastructure should be increased in order to make services more accessible to entrepreneurs and thus facilitate the opening of new companies, which is in the interest of Zagreb County itself. Investing through grants also contributes to the creation of new companies and there should be more such activities because they ultimately contribute to the overall economy.

Although the establishment of Business Centers, Incubators and Agencies certainly contributes to the creation of new companies in Zagreb County, it does so in a percentage that is not significant enough to be considered a decisive factor. How-

ever, these institutions improve the operations of existing companies through consulting, issuing guarantees and providing assistance in the application and implementation of EU-funded projects. Attracting foreign investment boosts the regional economy and has a positive impact on entrepreneurs by fostering healthy competition, which in turn leads to greater success. The onset of the pandemic and the closure of certain business sectors accelerated the global adoption of e-commerce. This change has spread to all business segments; Consequently, applications for EU funds are now submitted digitally, which has proven to be faster and simpler than the previous practice of collecting and sending physical documentation by post or in person. This way of doing business requires continuous learning because changes happen quickly. Quick and efficient adaptation is key, which is much easier for the younger population who, as it turned out, primarily use the digital services of entrepreneurial centers, incubators and agencies in general in all regions.

E-business is currently present in most operations, and it is expected to take an even larger share in the future for any company that wants to remain competitive. Consequently, centers and incubators must keep pace by adapting their services to help entrepreneurs, thereby encouraging the creation of new businesses and contributing to the economy.

While these institutions do not currently have a significant impact on the number of new startups, certain operational changes could allow them to play a more important role.

The investment of the Zagreb County itself in its entrepreneurs helps to open new companies in the area, thus improving the county's economy, which then generates income for the county. The investment of Zagreb County and local self-government units (cities and municipalities) in the infrastructure of entrepreneurial support institutions, as well as investment in entrepreneurs themselves in the form of grants, would encourage more entrepreneurs to use their services, helping them to more easily overcome obstacles during the startup and initial growth phases. It can be concluded that investing in new entrepreneurs in the form of grants and enabling the use of entrepreneurial support institutions is an investment in the economic development of the area.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Ms. Dina Erceg and Mr. Marko Ignjatić from the Entrepreneurship Center of Zagreb County for their valuable contribution and information.



## References

- Bačun, D. (2017). According to the self-aligning business process model Administration, DIEM: Dubrovnik International Economic Meeting, 3(1), 393-405. Database of the Croatian Chamber of Economy
- Bošnjak, S. (2011). Business incubators as generators of entrepreneurship Development, Practical Management: A Professional Journal for Theory and Practice Management, 2(2), 51-56.
- Cizmadija, I., & Stanković, D. (2011). Business Incubators in Entrepreneurship Education, Learning for Entrepreneurship, 1(1), 129-139.  
<https://www.cepor.hr/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SME-REPORT-2019-HR-WEB.pdf> [Accessed January 2026]
- Matić, L. (23/09/2019). The Role of Entrepreneurial Support Institutions in the Development of Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Croatia [Master's thesis]. University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business.
- Medić, I. (2004). Institutional support for start-up entrepreneurial ventures in the city of Osijek – the case of the Osijek Business Incubator. Osijek, Croatia: Josip Strossmayer University, Faculty of Economics, <https://doi.org/10.24869/psihei.2020.276> [Accessed January 2026]
- Obadić, A., Ravšelj, D. and Aristovnik, A. (2020). Administrative barriers in the field of employment in the EU: Empirical evidence from Croatia and Slovenia. International Journal of Economics and Business Administration, 8(2), 533–553. doi.org/10.35808/ijeba/480
- Ministry of Economy. (2025). Improving the Business Climate. Available at: <https://mingo.gov.hr/o-ministry-1065/scope/>  
 Directorate-for-Internationalization-6087/Competitiveness/Business-Climate Improvement/7577 [Accessed March 2026]  
<https://www.pcz.hr/> [Accessed March 2026]  
<https://dzs.gov.hr/> [Accessed March 2026]  
<https://www.zagrebacka-zupanija.hr/> [Accessed March 2026]  
<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/453429> [Accessed February 2026]  
<https://zir.nsk.hr/object/vsmti:947> [Accessed February 2026]  
<https://www.poslovni.hr/domace/jednostavno-je-i-brzo-e-racun-uklopiti-u-svako-poslovanje-a-benefiti-sudugorocni-4305435> [Accessed February 2026]  
<https://www.pravo.unizg.hr/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Plan-oporavka-i-otpornosti-srpanj-2021.pdf> [Accessed January 2026]  
<https://start.gov.hr/st/o-obveznim-naknadama.html> [Accessed January 2026]  
[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2427233](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2427233) [Accessed February 2026]  
<https://razz.hr/o-nama/> [Accessed January 2026]  
<https://www.hitro.hr/kako-otvoriti-d.o.o.-j.d.o.o./> [Accessed January 2026]  
<https://www.hgk.hr/documents/kako-zapoceti-poduzetnicku-djelatnost20205ef5eebf1e53c.pdf> [Accessed January 2026]  
<https://vegora.hr/otvoren-javni-natjecaj-zagrebacke-zupanije-za-potpore-za-pocetak-poslovanja-u-2026-godini/> Retrieved April 2026]  
<https://podaci.dzs.hr/hr/podaci/poduzeca/> [Accessed April 2026]  
<https://www.teb.hr/novosti/2025/zakljucivanje-i-cuvanje-poslovnih-knjiga-i-knjigovodstvenih-isprava/> [Accessed February 2026]  
<https://www.zagrebacka-zupanija.hr/vijesti/8330/zagrebacka-zupanija-za-poduzetnike-osigurala-bespo> [Accessed April 2026]