



# COUNTRY STUDY

## CROATIA

# Country Monitoring Report

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The high and increasing number of NEETs remains a challenge in Croatia and more needs to be done to fight educational poverty. Especially the educational achievements of 15 year-old students have worsened and remain below the EU average. Furthermore, the quality of provision and labour market relevance of vocational education and training are problematic and Croatia needs to continue to implement substantial reforms in the field of education.

### Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive law on education creating a basic framework for education from elementary school to higher education (and/or to the labour market)
- Develop a national, coherent scheme for validation of NFIL
- Reform VET to improve the transition from school to the labour market
- Implement the NEETs tracking system
- Develop a systematically implemented civic education curricula in schools





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#### 1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

With 2.9% in 2013, Croatia has one of the lowest levels of adult participation in LLL in the EU (EU average is 10.5%). According to our Croatian members, there is a lack of cooperation between the different educational sectors. Hence, the absence of a comprehensive law on education creating a basic framework for education from elementary school to higher education (and/or to the labour market) reflects the lack of the overall vision for education. Furthermore, Croatia also needs to deal with a cooperation lack between decision-makers in the field of education and the sector of civil society which is composed of organizations involved in formal and non-formal education aiming at promoting and

developing the idea of lifelong learning. Even though the idea of creating a vision for the entire educational process is partially implemented by the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology, through measures tackling curricula reform, it doesn't seem to deliver the required comprehensive framework that clearly sets out the process that takes young people through the different stages of education and into the labour market.

The Commission stresses that incentives for employers are in place to promote participation in LLL. However, their uptake by companies is low, partly because of a lack of awareness and partly because of the complexity of the administrative procedures involved. According to a recent opinion poll, opportunities to acquire job-specific and specialised skills outside of formal education are perceived as very limited. Besides tax incentives to promote LLL, the Croatian government has planned the introduction of a system for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning to be developed in early 2015 as part of the work on the qualifications framework<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2. Vocational Education and Training

According to the Commission, Croatia is currently tackling deep rooted weaknesses in its vocational education system and further reforms are in the making in tertiary education. Even though Croatia's level of participation in vocational education and training (VET) at upper secondary level is one of the highest in the EU (71.3% compared to an EU average of 50.4%), young graduates are confronted to difficult transitions from school to the labour market. As a matter of fact, the employment rate for recent upper secondary graduates is significantly below the EU average (49% compared to 69.4 %, in 2013). This is mainly the result of a skills mismatch and only fewer than half of VET graduates end up employed in a job

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Croatia*.



that matches their field of study<sup>2</sup>.

The SOLIDAR EU Strategy Group in Croatia acknowledges that the quality of provision and labour market relevance of vocational education and training are problematic, highlighting the Croatian need to invest in developing an overall vision for the shape and role of the education system. However, our Croatian members highlight also another structural barrier, which concerns the transition towards higher education for graduates of three-year VET programmes. This transition is conditioned by the successful completion of an additional year and subsequently, the state school-leaving examination (which is a pre-condition for higher education).

However, this additional year seems to be infeasible and unpractical solution for several reasons. One of these reasons are that no participation fees are to be charged for the additional year, but since schools are usually not being adequately compensated for its implementation, the motivation of schools' staff and faculty to promote the measure among pupils is consequently influenced. Moreover, our Croatian members doubt that this additional year represents an adequate preparation for the state school-leaving examination, which is primarily geared towards the standard of grammar schools (gymnasiums).

### 3. Validation of NFIL

Croatia is still in the process of developing a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The national institutional framework is being set up and will be defined with further official national documents, based on the Croatians Qualifications Framework Act (CROQF Act) that came into force in 2013. The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning is a substantial part of the Act.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Croatia*.

However, despite the absence of a national validation framework, there is a tradition of certain sectoral validation approaches developed as the answer to the sectoral needs for ensuring quality assurance in performing certain types of jobs. The current developments in setting up and defining a national qualifications framework, including approaches, methods and procedures for validation and valorisation of non-formal and informal learning are new and are not directly linked to these existing sectoral practices in validation<sup>3</sup>.

### 4. Early-school Leaving

The proportion of early school leavers in Croatia has been increasing since 2008 and reached 4.5 % in 2013. Even though Croatia remains one of the EU Member states with the lowest rates in ESL and well below the EU target of 10%, it is moving away from the national target of 4%.

However, more needs to be done to fight educational poverty and to reach the national and European 2020 target of educational outcomes. Especially the educational achievements of 15 year-old students have worsened and remain below the EU average. These low educational outcomes at primary and secondary level raise the question of the quality of compulsory education in Croatia. In addition, Croatia's early childhood education rate is low compared to the EU average (71,7% compared to 93.9%). New legislation was adopted in 2013, prescribing a compulsory pre-school programme for all children in the year prior to enrolling in primary school, starting from the 2014/15 school year. In April 2013, legislation regulating home-based education provision was also passed<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report Croatia*.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Croatia*.



## 5. NEETs

According to documents from the European Commission, young people are particularly vulnerable on the Croatian labour market. Whereas youth unemployment has been increasing since 2008 and reached its peak with 50 % in 2013, it seems that young Croatians have started to gain hold in the labour market. As a matter of fact, youth employment increased to 21.3 % resulting in youth unemployment falling substantially to 41.4 % in Q3-2014.

This could be partially explained by the positive effects of stronger active labour market policies (ALMP) measures targeting young people in recent years (in 2014, young people represented 67 % of all new ALMP participants). In 2012 and during most of 2013, the government mostly focused its efforts on expanding traineeship schemes. Furthermore, in the second half of 2013, Croatia began investing considerably in developing its own Youth Guarantee scheme.

Nevertheless, the high and increasing number of NEETs remains a challenge in Croatia (22.3 % in 2013 as compared with an EU average of 15.9 %). There are plans, however, to develop a NEETs tracking system in 2015 to address the increasing number of NEETs. Additional measures are also necessary regarding matching skills and education to labour market needs, promoting apprenticeships, strengthening CES capacities and better outreach to non-registered NEETs, in line with the objectives of the Youth Guarantee<sup>5</sup>.

## 6. Citizenship education

Croatia began to implement citizenship education in the 2014/15 school year as a cross-curricular and interdisciplinary topic in primary and secondary schools and as an experimental optional subject for eighth graders (14/15-year-olds) in 34 schools. Its approach was based on the results of the experimental implementation over two years of

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Croatia 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.*

citizenship education in 12 schools and a public consultation on the draft curriculum in 2014. A gradual roll-out of citizenship education is expected in the coming years.

As a matter of fact, the Croatian EU Strategy Group of SOLIDAR underlines that the country lacked a systematically implemented civic education curricula in schools over the last years. They also stress that research projects undertaken by civil society organisations and research institutes consistently showed worrying trends in Croatian society. For example, among primary and high school students, the level of political and media literacy has been poor, acceptance of and dealing with cultural diversity has been very problematic, social skills (including communication, cooperation, and conflict transformation) have been mediocre, and violence among children and youth has been fairly high. Another worrying trend has been the political apathy, not just within the young population but in the whole of Croatian society. Even more worrying have been tendencies among the Croatian youth to look favourably towards establishing authoritarian political system and looking to a one- person leadership as a solution for current problems.

Nonetheless, there was a number of civil society initiatives that attempted to counter these worrying trends. In response to the lack of a systematically implemented civic education curriculum in schools, the Centre for Peace Studies and a few other NGOs in 2009 initiated 'GOOD – Initiative for Quality Implementation of Education for Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship into the Croatian Schooling System'. The initiative has been growing since 2009, gathered public support and managed to have a partial impact on formal schooling system. However, after receiving EU funding and successfully developing a pilot project<sup>6</sup> in tandem with the Ministry of

<sup>6</sup> The pilot project was supposed to introduce a civic education curricula into 12 schools. Six of the schools were supported by EU funds whereas the remaining six were funded by the Ministry of Education. An evaluation of the results of six schools showed a step forward in terms of school democratization as well as a more sensitive approach to youth



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Education, the plan to introduce an obligatory civic education curriculum was ultimately scrapped by the Ministry and replaced by a much less ambitious curriculum, which were undergoing experimental implementation. Overall, our Croatian members highlight the importance of a formal introduction of civic education in Croatian schools.

## 7. Council recommendations

The Council has stressed during the last years that the outreach of the Croatian ALMP remain insufficient as regards, among others, young people not in education, employment or training. Important challenges include outreach to non-registered youth and mobilisation of the private sector to offer more apprenticeships, in line with the objectives of a youth guarantee. Moreover, the Council highlights that the tertiary education rate is one of the lowest in the Union. Skills mismatches and weaknesses in the education and training system act as deterrents for higher education attainment.

The government needs to implement measures to improve labour-market relevance and the quality of education by modernising the VET systems, setting up work-based learning and career guidance and implementing the Croatian Qualifications Framework and the Strategy on Education, Science and Technology<sup>7</sup>.

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with special needs and an improvement of relationships among pupils and teachers.

<sup>7</sup> European Council (2014). *Council Recommendation of 8 July 2014 on the 2014 National Reform Programme of Croatia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2014 Convergence Programme of Croatia*. European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Croatia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Croatia*.

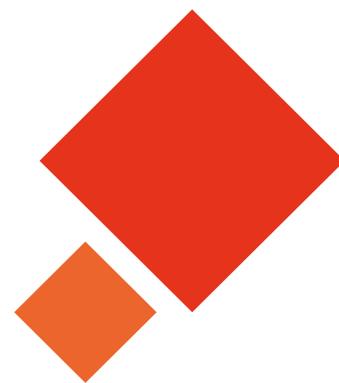






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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

