



COUNTRY STUDY

CROATIA

Country monitoring report 2016

The Croatian approach to validation would centre around learning outcomes. This will be followed by the development of occupational standards, qualifications standards and programmes for the evaluation of non-formal and informal learning in priority sectors in accordance with the list of scarce professions and data derived from projections of movements on the labour market. The objective is to adopt a Strategic Plan for the development of the validation of non-formal and informal learning system, and subsequently Rules on Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in March 2017 in accordance to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act, by which the legal framework requires for the implementation of this measure to be established.



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Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

Only 3.1% of Croatians have participated in Lifelong Learning (LLL) in 2015, compared to an average of 10.7% in the EU. There is a pressing need to improve the situation, and to roll out programs to improve adults' education due to overall low levels of educational attainment of people over 15 years old. Moreover there is an overall low-skills level amongst the unemployed, who are in general far from education and more difficult to engage in Lifelong Learning. The overarching challenge for the Croatian government is how to manage and promote Lifelong Learning policies and engage people in learning.

SOLIDAR Foundation's Croatian member organisation comments on the lack of cooperation between the different educational sectors. 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 an overall vision for education. Furthermore, Croatia also needs to overcome a lack of cooperation 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 in the country. 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. However, 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.

There are incentives offered to employers to promote participation in Lifelong Learning, and to offer training to workers. This is done through tax incentives, and led to a rise of employers' commitment nearly up to 50% in 2014 while a year before it was 32%. Yet, those steps are not enough to deliver an appropriate policy response and to address the actual challenge. There is an expectation that the strategy for Lifelong Learning and career guidance, adopted in October 2015, should help improve career guidance and participation in Lifelong Learning.

The normative framework for the implementation of these measures was supposed to be regulated by the Adult Education Act, whose adoption procedure was planned for September 2016.¹ Work in this area was planned to be implemented in 2016-2017 to make the strategy operational, launch the pilot projects to support adults' learning, as well as Lifelong Learning guidance and career guidance etc. It was expected that these measures would bring about an increase of participation in Lifelong Learning of adult learners and participants with pre-tertiary and tertiary education by allocating funds to adult education institutions.

However, in June 2016 the nation-wide protests against educational reform presented by the government took place. Croatia has long planned to carry out reform of its education system in order to bring it in line with the EU standards but little progress has been made since 2013 when it joined the EU. The resignation of a governmental official in charge of an expert team on education, which was caused by pressure from the conservative government, indirectly fuelled the protest. Croatians went to the streets believing that education is essential for the future of their children and the country as a whole and that they didn't want to be hostages of the incompetent and irresponsible political elite. The initiative "Croatia

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/nrp2016_croatia_en.pdf



Can Do Better" gathered more than 300 civil society organisations (CSOs) and unions calling for better reform of their educational system. Croatian CSOs believe that the new government will only propose conservative alterations, leaving the proposal less progressive than originally planned. This will result in an education system that is "staying conservative" – both in the ideological as the practical sense, which is not in line with the latest trends in education, where the focus lies on developing skills rather than absorbing facts. 2017 will show if there will be any progress made to change the educational system in Croatia. Definitely, further steps are needed to make Lifelong Learning accessible, high in quality and responsive to the needs of the economy.

Vocational Education and Training

Croatia can demonstrate one of the highest levels of participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (at upper secondary level) with a rate of 71,3%, while the EU average is set on 48,3%. In contrary to the employment rate of VET graduates, which is set at the very bottom with 46,1% while the the average among the EU Member States is set at 73%.

SOLIDAR Foundation members in Croatia report on the fact that the courses offered to students in VET schools often show a divergence between both knowledge and competences and the actual needs on the labour market. This leads to a difficult transition from education to employment for youth, and is predominantly caused by the outdated teaching curricula, limited opportunities for quality apprenticeships and work-based learning. Therefore there is a need to invest in the re-development of the VET system in Croatia that focuses on learning outcomes and their relevance to the market needs and counteracting skills mismatch. Another aspect of improving the Croatian VET is investment in teachers training, and enhancing the mobility of students.

An additional challenge raised by our Croatian members touches upon another structural barrier, which concerns *VET permeability* - 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 an infeasible and unpractical solution for several reasons. One of these reasons is 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 negatively influenced. Moreover, our Croatian members doubt that this additional year represents an adequate preparation for the state's school-leaving examination, which is primarily geared towards the standard of grammar schools (gymnasiums).

Validation of NFIL

Croatia is still in the process of developing a national system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL). The national institutional framework is being set up and will be defined with further official national documents, based on the Croatian 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. Having this system in place means for Croatia to use it as a pathway to employment for those who are furthest removed from the labour market and education. Moreover, the introduction of a system for recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning could open up possibilities for upskilling in the long run. However, implementation of these measures is still pending.

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around learning outcomes. This will be followed by the development of occupational standards, qualifications standards and programmes for the evaluation of non-formal and informal learning in priority sectors in accordance with the list of scarce professions and data derived from projections of movements on the labour market.² The objective is to adopt a Strategic Plan for the development of the validation of non-formal and informal learning system, and subsequently Rules on Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in March 2017 in accordance to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act, by which the legal framework requires for the implementation of this measure to be established.

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 the existing sectoral practices in validation.³

Early-school Leaving

Croatia has the lowest rate of early school leavers in the EU – 2,8% (while the EU average is 11%). This means that the Europe2020 national target of maximum 4% of school drop outs was reached by Croatia, already back in 2013 despite of slight fluctuations in the past few years.

NEETs

Young people are particularly vulnerable in the Croatian labour market. Whereas youth

² http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2016/nrp2016_croatia_en.pdf

³ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

unemployment has been increasing since 2008 and reached its peak with 50% in 2013, it seems that young Croatians have started to find their place in the labour market. As a matter of fact, youth unemployment rates halted at 34.8%. This could be partially explained by the positive effects of stronger active labour market policies (ALMP) containing measures targeting young people in recent years (in 2014, young people represented 67% of all new ALMP participants), and government efforts on expanding traineeship schemes.

Nevertheless, the high number of 21.8% NEETs remains a challenge in Croatia (in comparison to an EU average of 15.3 %). This group is for 70% composed out of short- and long-term unemployed youngsters, where 74.6% is registered with employment services.

Since 2015 we can observe an overall decrease in unemployment. The government has launched a set of measures to support youth i.e. by established career guidance centres (CISOKs) to provide free-of-charge tailor made services, including counselling and support in life-long career guidance, focusing particularly on young people, including those not in education, employment or training (NEETs). Significant efforts have been made to develop user-friendly online services, including self-assessment, job search and e-counselling tools. Yet more efforts need to be made to reach out to NEETs, who are not registered, to offer them tailored measures of support.

Citizenship education

Citizenship education is still not a standalone subject in the educational curricula. Currently elements of citizenship education are spread over 11 subjects⁴ and six cross-circular subjects, where the learning outcomes could be identified. Yet the non-obligatory cross-curricular citizenship education program has only been adopted in some schools and there has been no monitoring of this implementation nor

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-hr_en.pdf



any evaluation results. It was expected that the controversial education reform could lead to the implementation of citizenship education, however it remains a very weak proposal, lacking a European dimension and was negatively evaluated by external experts. It is important to mention that Croatia received EU funding and successfully developed a pilot project⁵ in tandem with the Ministry of Education, nevertheless the plan to introduce an obligatory civic education curriculum was ultimately scrapped by the Ministry and replaced by a much less ambitious curriculum, which was in trial implementation phase and did not receive a positive evaluation and became one of the debated issues during the June protests.

The introduction of civic education is highly important. As SOLIDAR Foundation's Croatian members stress that research projects undertaken by civil society organisations and research institutes consistently show worrying trends in Croatian society. For example, among primary and high school students, the level of political and media literacy is poor, acceptance of and dealing with cultural diversity is very problematic, social skills (including communication, cooperation, and conflict transformation) are mediocre, and violence among children and youth is fairly high. Another worrying trend is the political apathy, not just among the young population but among the entire Croatian society. Even more worrying are tendencies among the Croatian youth to look favourably towards the establishment of an authoritarian political system and a one-person leadership as a solution for the current problems. Overall, our Croatian members highlight the importance of a formal introduction of civic education in Croatian schools.

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⁵ 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 with special needs and an improvement of relationships among pupils and teachers.

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Council recommendations

“Youth unemployment remains a key concern, pointing to weaknesses in the education system, and there is still room to improve the effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation of the Youth Guarantee. Long-term unemployment rates have fallen recently but are still about twice the EU average. Participation in lifelong learning remains very low, due to an underdeveloped adult education system.”

[Source: EUR-Lex, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0096.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC]

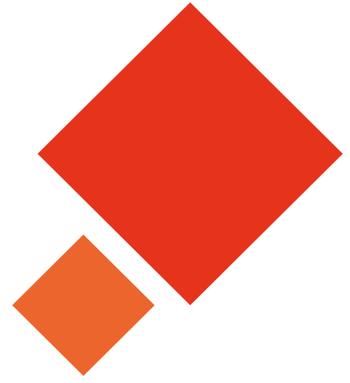


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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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