



CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2021

CROATIA

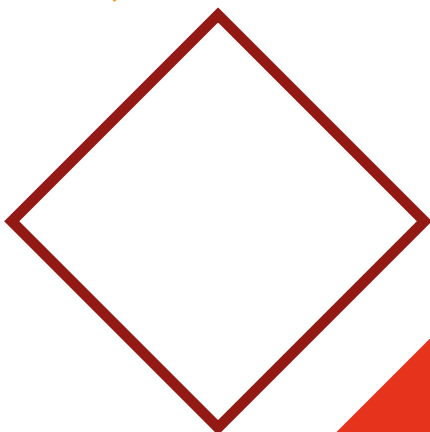
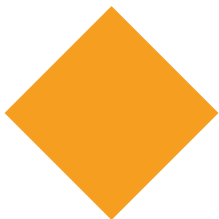
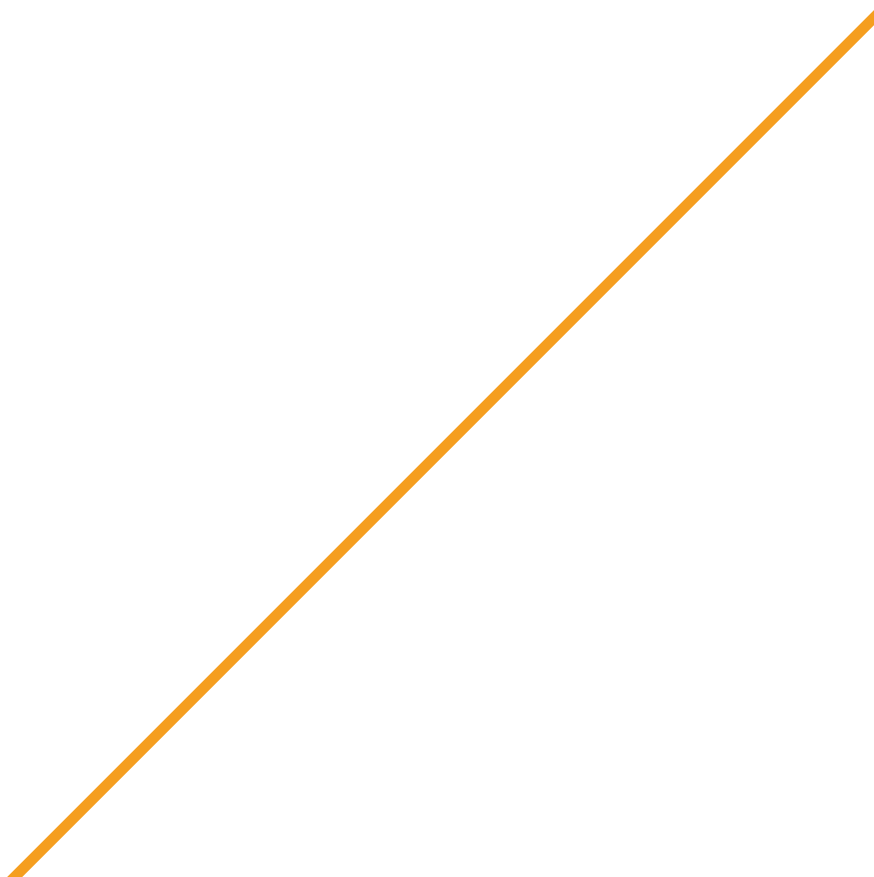




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ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eleven national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2021. The purpose of this publication is to report on the policy developments at European and national level in terms of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and lifelong learning policies and their linkages with the state of the civic space in the country. The Croatian report is focused on two main topics: Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) in the frame of GCE, and the shrinking civic space and the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) response to counter such shrinking. The report considers the inclusion of EES and ESD in formal education via the most recent curricular reform of 2019, while also reflecting on the possibility to change the teaching and learning paradigm in spite of the existent structural issues in the Croatian education systems. Challenges such as teaching in shifts due to infrastructure gaps, short compulsory education cycles, low achievement of basic skills among Croatian learners are just some of the structural barriers that prevent a complete overhaul of the way education is provided to ensure the inclusion of EES. At the same time, the report identifies low participation rates in adult education and an overburdened non-formal and

informal education systems that ad-hoc has to provide learning opportunities to close EES gaps. The current situation is made even more worrisome in light of the shrinking civic space, which limits the possibility of citizens and of informal and non-formal education providers to advocate for the mainstreaming of EES and ESD. The shrinking civic space has been a trend prior to the pandemic, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 restrictions, being reflected through the criminalisation of CSOs working on migration topics, the reduction of financing during the pandemic, attacks from public officials directed at CSOs and the administrative barriers in relation to the funding of CSOs. The weakening of institutions tasked with supporting CSOs has also been occurring in the past years. In this context, the implementation of EES and the actualisation of green competences by all learners becomes difficult, even as they are supported by the informal and non-formal education providers which have been struggling to close the gaps. The report contains case studies on the efforts of CSOs to provide these learning opportunities and concludes with recommendations on addressing the barriers to adapting all learners to the 21st century society.



INTRODUCTION

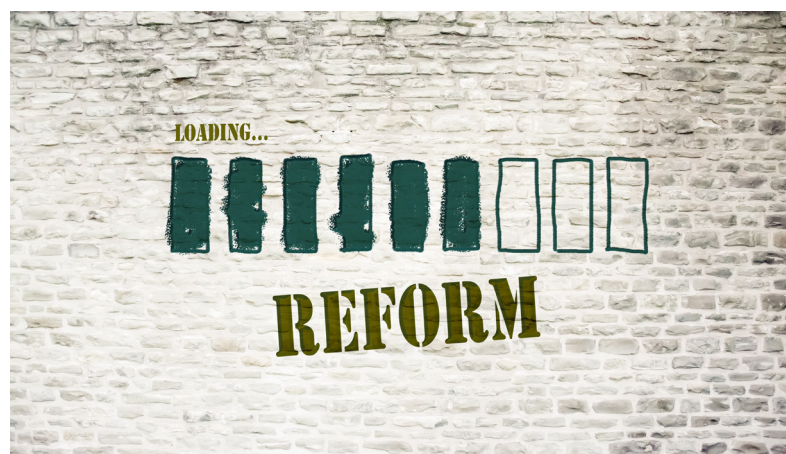
The report begins by analysing the provision of Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) outlining the landscape of education providers working on the topic and the challenges encountered in updating formal education to develop the skills needed for the twin transition. It will assess reforms in formal education, while also looking at examples of informal and non-formal education initiatives that support in closing gaps from formal education on EES. Then, the report will delve into the issue of the shrinking civic space, which has progressively narrowed in Croatia, resulting in coordinated attacks in the past years against CSOs. The situation of the civic space is connected with the implementation of EES, considering how the green competences need to be mainstreamed and actualised on a day-to-day basis by active citizens. To this end, a narrowed civic space does not provide room for

demanding that public authorities mainstream the topic but also does not provide room to exert civic rights in a manner that is consistent with sustainability and the planetary boundaries. To counter such shrinking, Croatian civil society has focused on cooperating with civil society networks, both at national and European level, to protest the government's undermining of civil society, while it has also followed different avenues to protest the restrictions imposed by the public authorities. The Monitor will present case studies related to the work done by informal and non-formal education providers in relation to the mainstreaming of EES and the shrinking of the civic space, presenting good practices on these while concluding with a set of recommendations to address any shortcomings on EES provision and a healthy civic space based on the findings presented.

reform has been implemented on all education institutions as of the academic year 2020-2021, after a year of piloting⁶. The outcomes of its implementation remain hard to assess especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way education was delivered and has shed a light on the unpreparedness of the education system from a digital perspective. Independent of the logistical and monitoring issues, SOLIDAR Foundation member, Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), has been praising the content of the curriculum in relation to ESD for being prepared by a quality expert group led by dr. sc. Dražen Šimleša. CPS representatives have appreciated the new curriculum as connecting activism with learning by linking civic education with ESD and with GCE.

The School for Life reform is welcomed, but it must be mentioned that though ESD is a cross-curricular element of it and represents an essential topic for the coming years, based on the European Commission's evaluation of Croatia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), there is little to no reference to EES or ESD. This undermines the long term planning that the Croatian authorities need to undertake for the implementation of EES and ESD, but it might also represent a symptom of a greater challenge to the Croatian education system. While the efforts to integrate ESD in formal education are positive steps, the skills needed for Croatian learners to adapt to global challenges cannot be developed without a stronger commitment to making ESD and EES a core element of formal education curricula. This commitment is difficult to be made considering that structural issues leave Croatian students scoring below the EU average in the PISA results for basic competences⁷. Changes in curriculum are not enough to address

structural issues such as low annual teaching time in primary and lower secondary education (275 and 240 hours less than the EU averages), schools operating in shifts due to infrastructure shortages, compulsory schooling cycle of only 8 years⁸. The NRRP for Croatia directs substantial investment towards bringing all learners in a one-shift education system, investment towards boosting education institutions' infrastructure, while ensuring that these changes would also comply with environmental sustainability standards. Investment is also aimed at increasing the number of years that form the compulsory schooling cycle, while investing into the teaching profession to ensure that it is well equipped to work under these structural changes⁹. One of the biggest structural changes foreseen in the NRRP, which will also be co-financed with a recently agreed upon loan of 25 million EUR from the World Bank, is the Whole Day School system for primary schools. The project combines better teacher training, with infrastructural investment and an increased instruction time to tackle from the root the issue of underachievement in basic competences for Croatian pupils but also the issue of participation in education for disadvantaged learners. The aim is to provide



6 Eurydice (2022). *Croatia: National reforms in school education*. Available at : https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-11_en. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

7 European Commission (2020). *Country Report Croatia 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU)*. P.41. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0510&from=EN>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

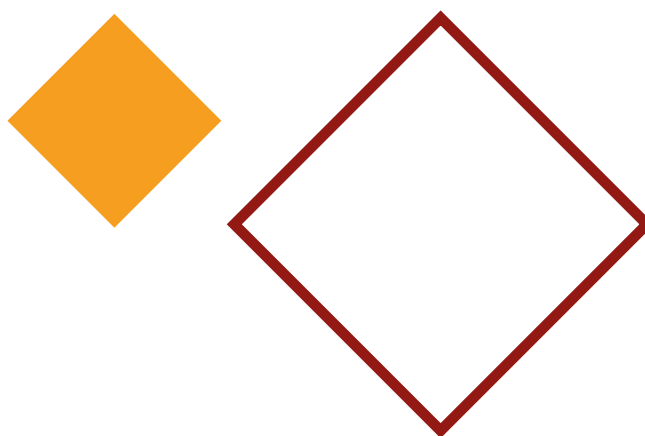
8 European Commission (2020). *Education and Training Monitor 2020*. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2020/countries/croatia.html>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

9 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Croatia*. Pp.10, 59.

a support system for learners that would see them being helped with extra educational needs and with their homework directly in the education institution, relieving some of the burden from the parents. This complex education reform will be piloted on 50 education institutions¹⁰. The planned reforms show a promising outlook for Croatia, but they do highlight an education system that has been operating under below par circumstances, contributing to the impossibility to plan in the long-run for the implementation of EES and ESD. Without robust investment to ensure the basic needs of learners and education professionals, it is increasingly difficult to be able to reform learning and bring a global outlook that can address global challenges. The state in which the Croatian education system is as of now creates many hurdles in the face of urgently changing the education paradigm and preparing learners to fight against climate change.

There are, however, ad-hoc initiatives on environmental issues which are present in the Croatian formal education system. An example,

which was presented in the previous edition of the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor, is the development of [Eco-Schools](#) and thus, part of the international network started by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). Eco-Schools facilitate the integration of environmental education in all segments of the educational system and the daily life of students and employees¹¹ and more on this case study can be found in SOLIDAR Foundation's last year's national report on Croatia.¹² However, it must be insisted upon the fact that such an academic approach is exactly what is needed to ensure that green competences permeate the entire educational process and that the education institutions and learners adapt to the 21st century society, with its global challenges. Similar ad-hoc approaches are also promoted by CSOs which work in cooperation with formal education institutions. The case study below accounts for such an initiative, underlining the usefulness of collaborations across all education stakeholders in ensuring an adequate provision of EES and ESD.



10 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Croatia*. Pp. 3, 34-35.; The World Bank (2021). *World Bank Supports Croatia in Transforming Its Primary Education and Creating Better Learning Opportunities*. Available at : <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/12/16/world-bank-supports-croatia-in-transforming-its-primary-education-and-creating-better-learning-opportunities>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

11 For further information see <https://www.eko.ljepa-nasa.hr/>.

12 Frank, Andrei (2020). *Citizenship and Lifelong learning Monitor 2020: Croatia National Report*. P.7.



**Interreg
Europe**



European Union | European Regional Development Fund

CASE STUDY

The project "[Innovative minds for smart schools](#)" represents a best practice in cooperation among education stakeholders for the provision of EES. The project was funded through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance funding, specifically through the [Interreg IPA cross-border cooperation](#) for Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro and was implemented by project partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina ([Centre for Development and Support](#) and [Tuzla Canton](#)) and Croatia (Green Action, [Brod-Posavina County](#)), being coordinated by [Green Action](#), and lasting from June 2017 until August 2019. The project tackled common cross-border problems of low renewable energy share, energy inefficient public buildings, limited green jobs in the economy and coal dominance in Bosnia and Herzegovina's energy sector which causes

pollution in the cross-border area. The project aimed to address not only the challenges but also the root causes of the aforementioned environmental issues through education and training. The project's main objective was to contribute to sustainable growth in the area by implementing activities that support energy savings, promote investments through renewable energy sources and encourage the population and all stakeholders to use sustainable energy solutions. Through the project, a cross-border youth camp for renewable energy innovators was organised in Brod-Posavina County. Aspiring innovators improved their energy efficient prototypes and learned renewable energy principles. Other project outputs included 7 energy renovated schools and new biomass-heating, 2 School Solar Labs and 20 prototypes made by student innovators.

The situation concerning EES in formal education is problematic considering the many structural challenges that the Croatian public authorities must tackle before being able to focus on reviewing how the learning process will change in accordance with the inclusion of green competences. However, more worrisome is the fact that the efforts to mainstream the topic are minimal even on policy level considering the urgency of the climate crisis while ad-hoc initiatives seem to flourish, which, though welcome, risk exposing learners to an unequal access to EES at the time when it is crucial for all to be prepared to exert an awareness towards sustainability.

EES IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The current environmental crisis requires a comprehensive response that must expand outside of the classroom and support all people to become learners and to put in practice their green competences on a daily basis. For this purpose, informal and non-formal education provision becomes essential due to how it can reach learners in their own communities, but also because it can reach learners of all ages, making sure that everyone can urgently address their paradigm in relation to human-environment interaction. Adult education can be facilitated in this and is important due to the crisis that requires a quick update in the competences of all citizens. In Croatia, adult education is enshrined in the [Adult Education Act](#) (2007) and the [Strategy for Education, Science and Technology](#) (2014). In the country, adult education is mostly financed by the learners themselves with minor funding offered through programmes financed by employers and the Government, carried out on the basis of applications for grants or public procurement, therefore not representing a stable source of

financing¹³. Significant support is provided by grants under the [European Social Fund](#) calls for institutional strengthening, development of new programmes and inclusion of marginalised groups. The economic burden of adult education represents the biggest challenge to participation in education, in fact, according to a survey conducted in 2017 by the Croatian [Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education](#), 30% of respondents consider that the prices are the reason for not participating in adult education¹⁴. As a consequence, in the country, the participation of adults in education is low, in fact, according to [Eurostat data](#) from 2021, only 3.5% of adults participate in one of the education programmes, a considerably lower rate than the EU average.¹⁵ Such low numbers beg the question of whether the Croatian society is prepared to adapt to the green transition and to act in a sustainable manner. **To address this crisis of participation in education at such a crucial turning point given the climate change concerns, investment in adult education is crucial to support people in adapting to the future world by developing the skills needed for learners to adapt to the green transition.** To this end, the Croatian authorities must ensure adequate, long-term funding for adult education in order to make it accessible and inclusive for all, particularly, focusing on those who are not normally reached by formal education such as marginalised groups, while also to ensure adequate guidance and an inclusion in most education programmes of elements linked to green competences.

In Croatia, non-formal and informal ESD is provided by CSOs mainly supported financially by public administration bodies. Informal learning of any kind is not validated by authorities, thus hindering the provision of the EES in regard to adult education. While cooperation and exchange between formal, non-formal and

13 Eurydice (2022). *Croatia: Adult Education and Training*. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-14_en. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

14 Croatian Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (2017). *Adult education in Croatia 2017 - survey results*. Available at: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/asoo_istrazivanje.pdf. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

15 Eurydice (2022). *Croatia: Adult Education and Training*.

informal sectors of education is pivotal, such cooperation should not lead to the outsourcing of education by authorities, through the shifting of the exclusive responsibility for the provision of sustainability education, towards civil society as it happened notably with the [Green Phone Network](#) initiative, or seminars on waste management conducted through CSOs rather than local or regional authorities and their waste management branches. The Green Phone is a telephone line where citizens can report problems in the environment or to make suggestions that are reported to the competent institutions, with the aim to encourage citizens to actively participate in environmental protection and encourage the competent institutions to solve environmental problems more efficiently. The initiative was launched by the [Green Action Network](#) in 1992 and now counts a network of 10 environmental organisations managing it. An evaluation¹⁶ of the cooperation behind the project has shown that the majority of competent institutions and services to whom the civil society refers to have insufficient financial, material and human resources, and this hinders them in their effective daily work. This initiative was aimed to boost a civic responsibility but also to serve as an informal education spirit, while citizens would have supported public authorities in the co-creation of green initiatives. However, this learning experience cannot be brought to fruition without adequate support from public authorities and without them understanding the need for a constant cooperation with all stakeholders.

Education can also become a more direct tool for the protection of the environment by raising public awareness on complex environmental and climate phenomena, inspiring



and motivating people to participate in society and recognise the environmental changes. To this end, campaigning can further serve as a tool to promote informal learning and education. SOLIDAR Foundation member [Centre for Peace Studies](#) (CPS) offers support to grassroots environmental and climate campaigners, by providing activists from environmental/climate grassroots movements opportunities to present their work in various seminars. CPS' latest manual on ESD includes interviews with 10 environmental activists with the idea to introduce educators and students to activism in the field of sustainable development, showing different ways one can contribute to a better future for all. Activist stories are intended for use in the classroom and for youth work. This brings to the forefront the importance of cooperation among education stakeholders for achieving the provision of EES and ESD. Such examples capture the important role of CSOs in maintaining the topic alive in various communities and empowering people to actualise their green competences. The importance of this is even greater when considering how formal, informal and non-formal education providers can collaborate to deliver a mixed type of learning that ensures that EES becomes a staple in people's lives. The case study below reflects exactly on this type of cooperation.

16 Partnerstva za okoliš (2016). *Izveštaj o suradnji Mreže Zelenih telefona i javnih službi i državnih tijela u ocuvanju okoliša i prirode*. Available at: https://ia600204.us.archive.org/15/items/PartnerstvaZaOkolisBook23012016/Partnerstva%20za%20okolis_book-23012016.pdf. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member [Centre for Peace Studies](#) (CPS) coordinated the 2-year project "[Znanje za održivo djelovanje](#)" ("Knowledge for sustainable action") in which they partnered with the environmental CSO [Green Istria](#) and six schools with the aim of introducing additional sustainable development content into formal education. The project was funded through the Swiss-Croatian Cooperation Programme on education for sustainable development for the improvement of economic and social cohesion, with co-funding from the Croatian government as well. It lasted from April 2019 until April 2021, and, through the project, teachers were trained to include SDGs in teaching, then school teams, in cooperation with CSOs implemented education programs for SDGs in schools. Participatory learning methods were used to develop competencies and motivate students to act

and understand the role of their own engagement in positive social change. 2655 learners and 24 education professionals were reached by the project. The SDGs were addressed in each school through regular classes by integrating Sustainable Development into different subjects, through extracurricular activities and through school projects. The focus was on student action involving parents and the community, and special attention was paid to student volunteering in the community. In cooperation with teachers, a manual for the practical implementation of teaching in the field of Sustainable Development was developed. This [publication](#) describes the key principles of ESD as envisioned by the project, describes the work done in partner schools, and also includes interviews with key Croatian activists, professionals, and volunteers working on Sustainable Development.



Source: [Znanje za održivo djelovanje](#)

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN PANDEMIC TIMES

The social, educational and cultural activities that take place in a free civic space are important venues for fostering active citizenship and thus for the development of competences that enable the understanding of global phenomena. A healthy and thriving civic space enables citizens to organise, participate and express their views to influence and shape the political, economic and social life of their societies, including on aspects linked to the climate crisis and the green transition. The narrowing of the civic space is even more worrying in times of emergency, such as the current public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or the current environmental crisis. Amid the pandemic, the Croatian government introduced measures which limited freedom of movement and prevented large numbers of people gathering in public spaces, affecting the right to assembly and protest¹⁷. Particularly the decline in the freedom of expression has been highlighted as one of the main elements of concern for civil society in Croatia. However, the COVID-19 restrictions were amplified by the public authorities progressively attacking fundamental rights through organised actions against civil society. The attacks on the freedom of expression manifested themselves in verbal attacks against journalists, notably President Zoran Milanovic publicly insulting HRT reporters, accusing them of being “tricksters, mercenaries and an embarrassment to the country”¹⁸. Additionally, on 30 May 2021, the Prime Minister Andrej Plenković publicly **made** verbal attacks and accusations



against media and journalists after the second round of local elections.¹⁹ Such actions taken by the public authorities do not seem to be limited only to the pandemic as they seem to reflect a general antagonistic attitude towards CSOs. The shrinking civic space in Croatia has manifested itself through a continuous undermining of the institutional support for civil society, and the criminalisation of CSOs in the public sphere. The European Commission’s Rule of Law report for 2020 reported on the shrinking civic space in Croatia and referred to the **CLVICUS** rating on the narrowed civic space in Croatia.²⁰ SOLIDAR Foundation member, **CPS** is the contractor for Croatia within the FRANET of the **Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union**. As contractor, CPS conducts research and provides relevant data to FRA on fundamental rights issues and facilitates FRA’s comparative analyses. Thus, **CPS** is given the chance to inter alia, also provide relevant data on the situation of civic space in Croatia to the

17 International Center for Not-For-Profit Law (2022). *COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker: Croatia*. Available at: <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?location=29&issue=&date=&type=>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

18 Vladisavljevic, Anja (2021). *Croatian President Condemned for Rant Against HRT Reporters*. Balkan Insight. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/06/croatian-president-condemned-for-rant-against-hrt-reporters/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

19 European Federation of Journalists (2021). *Croatia: Prime Minister Plenković attacked media after local elections*. Available at: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/06/01/croatia-prime-minister-plenkovic-attacked-media-after-local-elections/>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.; Wiseman, Jamie (2021). *Croatia: Prime Minister Plenković attacks media after local elections*. In Mapping Media Freedom. Available at: <https://mappingmediafreedom.ushahidi.io/posts/24067>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

20 European Commission (2021). *2021 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Croatia*. P.22. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2021_rolr_country_chapter_croatia_en.pdf. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

EU's FRA²¹. In this position, CPS identified on numerous occasions the fact that CSOs have been excluded from decisionmaking and that civil dialogue was functioning in a faulty manner. This has been further experienced during the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions as the CSOs have not been consulted on decisions which have impacted the freedom of expression, assembly, and, in general, the capacity of CSOs to operate²². Financing for CSOs was also cut or abolished by various local administration units as the pandemic has hit²³, yet again showing the fragile position that CSOs have in relation to the public authorities considering that collaboration with them has not been properly institutionalised.

The undermining of civil society has also taken a structural and systematic turn through the steady marginalisation and weakening of the [Council for Civil Society Development](#), the key advisory body bringing together civil society and national administration representatives. As part of this structural turn, the change in procedural rules, which took place in May 2020, tilted the voting power in favour of state representatives on the Council as they now outnumber their civil society counterparts. Another example of undermining of civil society has been seen in last year's round of nominations for the Croatian delegation candidates for the European Economic and Social Committee, elected without any consultation and despite the opposition of CSOs representatives.²⁴ The weakening of civil society as a stakeholder has further

been evidenced by the lack of adoption of a new National Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, which is a precondition for accessing European Social Fund funds for CSOs.²⁵ The previous [National Strategy](#) (2012-2016) was jointly drafted in a participatory process by representatives of institutions and civil society.²⁶ In the period of Croatia's intense preparations for joining the European Union, the National Strategy gave guidelines for the creation of an enabling environment for civil society development until 2016. The latest development reported is that on 4 February 2021, the Government adopted a decision to start a process of drafting the 2021-2027 National Plan, and the Head of the Government office was given 30 days to appoint an expert working group for the drafting process.²⁷ In July 2021, the working group members were named, and the drafting process should have been underway.²⁸ At the time of writing, the delay in the continuation of the Strategy could be a signifier of an insufficient cooperation of Croatian authorities with civil society.

SPOTLIGHT: THE CRIMINALISATION AND DEFUNDING OF CIVIL SOCIETY



The criminalisation of civil society has manifested through the criminalisation of humanitarian work and human rights defenders²⁹. SOLIDAR Foundation member [Centre for Peace Studies](#)

21 More information at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/franet>

22 Lalić, Sara and Horvat, Klara (2021). *Legal environment and space of civil society organisations in supporting fundamental rights: Croatia*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Pp.3-4. Available at : https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/franet_croatia_civic_space_2021.pdf. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

23 Ibid. P.6.

24 CROSOL (2020). *Election of members of the European Economic and Social Committee in Croatia: Civil Society representatives without voices from civil society*. Available at: <https://crosol.hr/en/election-of-members-of-the-european-economic-and-social-committee-in-croatia-civil-society-representatives-without-voices-from-civil-society/>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

25 Jasic, Suzana (2020). *Government Attacks on Civil Society in Croatia*. GONG. P.7. Available at: https://www.gong.hr/media/uploads/government_attacks_on_civil_society_in_croatia_eng.pdf. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.; Lalić, Sara and Horvat, Klara (2021). *Legal environment and space of civil society organisations in supporting fundamental rights: Croatia*. P.3.

26 Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021). *Press release from the closed part of the 49th session*. Available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/priopcenje-sa-zatvorenoga-dijela-49-sjednice-vlade/31697>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

27 Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021). *42. sjednica Vlade Republike Hrvatske*. Available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/sjednice/42-sjednica-vlade-republike-hrvatske-31445/31445>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

28 For further information: <https://udruga.gov.hr/vijesti/5350>

29 Lalić, Sara and Horvat, Klara (2021). *Legal environment and space of civil society organisations in supporting fundamental rights: Croatia*. P.9.



reports being approached with requests for assistance by several individuals who had been accused of ‘facilitating illegal migration’ as a result of driving refugees and other migrants on the territory of Croatia. In some cases, judgements were issued in which the suspects were found guilty on the grounds of unconscious negligence or judgement. The judgements stipulated that the persons convicted should have assumed that the person they were driving does not stay legally in Croatia and that they will try to cross the border illegally. One of the rulings states that according to the way the person looked, they should have let the convicted person assume that the person they are driving was an “illegal migrant.”³⁰ Furthermore, cases of intimidation, harassment and disciplining of human rights defenders active in organisations who provide help and support refugees and other migrants have been a reality in Croatia for the past few years³¹.

The reduction of financial support for NGOs has been another tool employed by Croatian authorities to shrink the civic space and has manifested itself through the reduction of public calls for NGOs and the shortening of application time for public calls for funding. Several cities and municipalities stopped or put on hold the financing of civil society, and the Government did not envisage any measures for mitigating the consequences of the pandemic on the work of the civil society. The call to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs was in fact announced in April 2020 but was published only in December 2020. Such procedure posed several problems due to the unfair conditions that do not contribute to awarding the highest quality applications, but those that are uploaded the fastest, even if they score only minimum points. The annulment of long-announced public tenders combined with insufficient or inadequate public measures for preserving employment in CSOs and mitigating social consequences of the pandemic and earthquakes caused financial shortages for civil society. Such shortages had severe effects on the work of CSOs resulting in job losses and a drop in offered public services.³² To counter such measures, in December 2020, several Croatian CSOs, including [CPS](#), sent an open letter to the Minister of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, the Head of the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs, and the Director of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development requesting a change in the opening date for the call for proposals “Strengthening CSOs’ capacity to

30 Đaković, Tina and Novosel, Ivan (2021). *Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2020 (Ljudska prava u Hrvatskoj. Pregled stanja za 2020)*. Kuće ljudskih prava. P.23. Available at: https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KLJP_GI2020_FIN_1904.pdf. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

31 Centre for Peace Studies (2020). *Criminal complaint against Croatian policemen for inhumane treatment of refugees*. Available at: <https://www.cms.hr/en/azil-i-integracijske-politike/cms-predao-kaznenu-prijavu-dorh-u-sustavno-mucenje-i-ponizavanje-izbjeglica-je-kazneno-djelo>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.; Gurney, Kyra (2021). *Protecting migrant and refugee children in Croatia*. Available at: <https://globalfundforchildren.org/story/protecting-migrant-and-refugee-children-in-croatia/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.; Prtorić, Jelena (2021). *Along the Balkan route, refugees and volunteers face growing hostility*. Equal Times. Available at: <https://www.equaltimes.org/along-the-balkan-route-refugees#.Yd2Ylf6ZNPY>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.; Tondo, Lorenzo (2020). *Croatian police accused of ‘sickening’ assaults on migrants on Balkans trail*. The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/oct/21/croatian-police-accused-of-sickening-assaults-on-migrants-on-balkans-trail-bosnia>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

32 Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2021). *EU2020: Demanding on Democracy - Country & Trend Reports on Democratic Records by Civil Liberties Organisations Across the European Union*. P.64. Available at: <https://www.liberties.eu/f/AuYJXv?locale=en>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

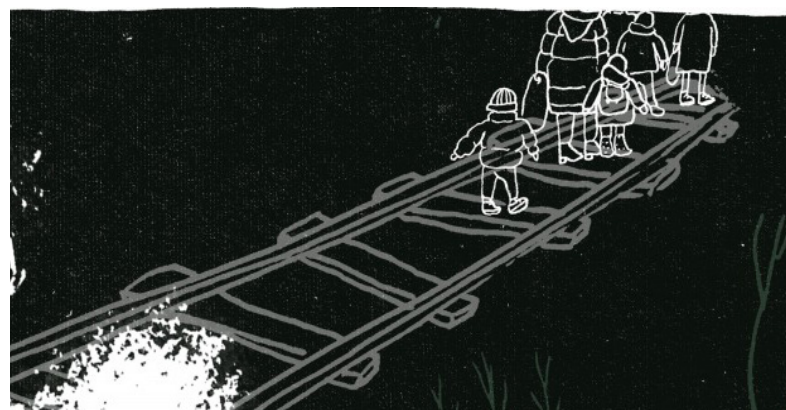
respond to the needs of the local community” and to change the administrative procedure of the call³³.

CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

To counter such shrinking, cooperation among CSOs has proved to be pivotal to create support nets and improve the response to the limitations imposed by authorities. Solidarity mechanisms have been paramount to overcome the challenges imposed by the pandemic and to build back better. The strengthening of civil society and the capacity building activities have been at the core of the pandemic recovery for many organisations. Cross-border cooperation particularly, plays a key role for the effective operation of CSOs, as it enhances mutual learning and knowledge sharing among CSOs with various levels of expertise. Furthermore, it allows CSOs to understand different contexts in which CSOs in other countries operate and to jointly create solutions that will be adaptable to different contexts, for policy advocacy and funding. During the pandemic, both on the national and international level, CSOs quickly adapted to the online mode of communication and implementation of activities, as well as cooperating in order to respond to the emergencies provoked by the pandemic (and by the earthquakes), and to offer support to the most vulnerable groups in the society. This situation was best illustrated by the emergence of the Community Potential initiative, under the coordination of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development, which brought together various stakeholders from local communities, especially CSOs, to work together in mitigating the impacts of the pandemic and the earthquake that occurred in Croatia in 2020. The

aim of the initiative was to mobilise the potential of the CSOs in building up comprehensive responses, based on experiences from the ground, which could then be upscaled by the local authorities³⁴. This proactive approach and commitment towards the inhabitants of the local communities in the face of the recent disasters that hit Croatia make the case for a vibrant civil society which has clearly understood its responsibility and stepped up.

SOLIDAR Foundation member [Centre for Peace Studies](#) (CPS) reports that the integration of solidarity in their educational programmes was considered one of the issues that were really crucial during the pandemic. CPS facilitated learning on this topic by including it in discussions on the effects of COVID-19 on the gender gap in employment and the position of women in the workplace, on inequalities in education deepened during distance learning and on the concept of solidarity within times of crisis. More importantly, however, has been the way CSOs rose up against the abuses of public authorities during these months. CPS has been referring numerous instances of police brutality and abuse over migrants and refugees to the European Court of Human Rights, a process which has culminated in a



Source: Centre for Peace Studies

33 Centre for Peace Studies (2020). *Otvoreno pismo organizacija civilnog društva: Natjecaji vrijedni 100 milijuna kuna koje udruge iščekuju devet mjeseci izlaze s rokom za prijavu od 10 dana po metodi "najbrži prst"!*. Available at: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/novosti/otvoreno-pismo-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-natjecaji-vrijedni-100-milijuna-kuna-koje-udruge-iscekuju-devet-mjeseci-izlaze-s-rokom-za-prijavu-od-10-dana-po-metodi-najbrzi-prst>. Last accessed: 28 February 2022.

34 National Foundation for Civil Society Development (2021). *Mobilizing Community Potential for a Post-COVID-19 Period*. Available at: <https://zaklada.civilnodrustvo.hr/en/mobilizing-community-potential-for-a-post-covid-19-period>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.; Plavska-Matic, Cvjetana (2020). *A Letter from the Frontline – Croatian civil society faces a double crisis*. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/opinion/a-letter-from-the-frontline-croatian-civil-society-faces-a-double-crisis/>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

decision in November 2021 in favour of CPS, with regards to the police's role in the wrongful death of Madina Hussiny in 2017. The lengthy legal fight and its conclusion served as an example of what CSOs can achieve but also towards how difficult the fight against public authorities' abuses is in Croatia. At the moment, CPS is calling for the dismissal of the Minister of Interior as well as of general and deputy police directors³⁵. At the same time, in spite of the

antagonistic position taken by public authorities with regards to the migrants and refugees, CSOs have been implementing a multitude of projects to facilitate the migrants' and refugees' integration in Croatia and to support them through their difficult transition. The below case study captures such a project which represent a different tactic that CSOs have taken beyond the legal procedure approach presented above.



CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member [Centre for Peace Studies](#) is implementing the project "[Democratic Heritage - Memorials and Heritage Museums engaging migrants in developing resilient democracies](#)" (henceforth DH). The project is financed by the Erasmus+ programme alongside partners from Finland (The Falstad Centre), Norway (Vihreä Sivistysliitto Ry), Belgium (Art 27), Spain (Universidad de Murcia) and Sweden (World Value Survey and Filipstads Kommun). The main objective of the project is to share and develop innovative participatory methodologies connected to adults, migrants, refugees and newcomers' learning, and seeing how they correspond to the learning requirements detailed in the Council of Europe's democratic competencies. This will be ensured through the committing to a series of transnational best practice workshops and the production of a

handbook, serving as intellectual outputs co-produced by all project partners, translated to 7 languages. A further objective of DH is to collate and collect the data from the activities to help generate more information on the effect that this methodology can have on refugees, migrants and newcomers, relating to the European Council Democratic Competencies. This will be ensured through the development of a survey by the World Value Survey which serves as a second intellectual output and will allow the collection of underrepresented data from migrant, refugee and newcomer populations. The project ultimately aims to develop a cross-European forum where experiences, techniques and methodologies in working with migrants, refugees and newcomer education can be shared, developed and tested in the field is one of the primary objectives that this project's activities will contribute to.

35 Centre for Peace Studies (2021). *On the ECtHR Judgement Confirming That the Croatian Police are Guilty of Madina's Death - Prime Minister Plenković must dismiss the top of the Ministry of the Interior and the police*. Available at : <https://www.cms.hr/en/azil-i-integracijske-politike/europski-sud-za-ljudska-prava-potvrdio-da-je-hrvatska-policija-kriva-za-smrt-djevojvice-plenkovic-mora-smijeniti-vrh-mup-a-i-policije>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

The active and commitment engagement of the CSOs are positive signs for many avenues for citizens to be empowered to take part in the civic space and exert their rights as well as to pressure public authorities in relation to decisions linked to the political, social, economic life of their societies. In such a context, citizens

can also exert their green competences and flourish as active citizens that contribute to the green transition. However, the clear opposition of the public authorities to a truly widened and open civic space in Croatia remains a barrier that needs to be overcome.

CONCLUSION

The Croatian context enjoys the existence of strong CSOs who have taken action regarding both the implementation of EES for the purpose of facilitating the green transition but also regarding the shrinking of the civic space. EES is largely absent from formal education, being introduced as part of ESD as a cross-curricular topic in the most recent educational reform. Its implementation is still complicated to assess, but the structural problems plaguing formal education, from infrastructural gaps to reduced instruction time, to low achievement in basic competences and to learning in shifts, continue to make difficult to significantly reform the education system in Croatia. New policy decisions, including Croatia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, point towards efforts to address these structural issues, but such initiatives have been prioritised with almost no mention to EES, revealing an incapacity of the public authorities to see the longer term implications of not addressing the climate crisis. In this context, CSOs have been provided ad-hoc responses in the form of non-formal and informal education to close gaps caused by the formal education sector, but they confront with limited support from public authorities, with an incapacity to extend their educational offer to all learners and in general to a country in which

adult participation in education is exceptionally low, which does not bode well for the efforts to adapt all learners to the 21st century society and the green transition. At the same time, the civic space could be an option to be used to pressure public authorities to focus more on EES, but at the moment Croatia is confronting with a shrinking of the civic space. Outright attacks by public officials on CSOs are coupled with reduced funding and administrative barriers towards accessing funds, all while the COVID-19 restrictions have been used to diminish the capacity of CSOs to operate adequately in the past years. It is encouraging to see the solidarity existent across CSOs, as they continued to support learners even in the aftermath of the pandemic and the earthquakes that hit Croatia, and they have also continued their fight against the public authorities' criminalisation of the solidarity shown by CSOs towards the migrants and refugees arriving on the Balkan route. The Monitor captures this situation, revealing the missing building blocks for ensuring that learners receive an education that can make them active citizens that actualise their green competences, while also providing a set of recommendations on how these challenges can be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Promote partnerships among non-formal, informal and formal education providers, ensuring that extracurricular components are a permanent fixture of the provision of formal education and accessible to all
- ◆ Upscale the monitoring of the implementation of the new curricular reform
- ◆ Rebalance the focus on educational reforms to ensure that the teaching and learning methods for the new cross-curricular methods are adequately developed and implemented at the same pace of the logistical and infrastructure reforms
- ◆ Upscale the eco-schools initiatives and better connect the work of CSOs and community stakeholders on ESD and EES with the formal education system
- ◆ Increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession and provide good quality initial teacher training and continuous professional development in light of the significant structural changes foreseen in the following years in formal education
- ◆ Boost adult participation in education by incentivising their participation and by providing guidance and financial support in accessing training opportunities, while ensuring that the training offers allow the possibility to develop green competences associated with EES and ESD
- ◆ Support CSOs working on the ground to bridge the gap between formal, non-formal and informal education providers and ensure they are recognised as key partners
- ◆ Ensure the protection of civil society and the EU institution to encourage the Croatian authorities to respect and promote cooperation by ensuring an enabling environment for civil society
- ◆ Revert back to the sources of funding accessible prior to the pandemic while also providing new means of financial support for CSOs that have been hit by the pandemic
- ◆ Increase the timeframe for applying for public calls while also communicate in due-time and thoroughly about the application and evaluation process in connection to grant allocation
- ◆ Rebalance the voting rights within the Council for Civil Society Development, ensuring also its functioning in a way that support the civic space and civil society
- ◆ Speed up the process of drafting the new National Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, while drafting it in close collaboration with civil society representatives
- ◆ Increase efforts to integrate the protection of freedom of expression, of assembly and the Rule of Law

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