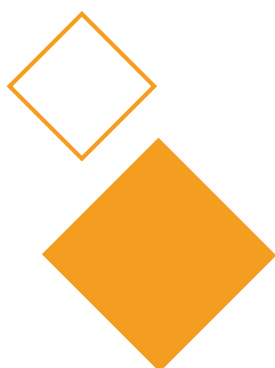


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# CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2020

## CROATIA





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Terminology . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The absence of GCE in formal education . . . . .</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The GCE paradox . . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>GCE and the whole-school approach . . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Education and COVID-19 . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Shrinking civic space in times of crisis . . . . .</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The digital skills gap . . . . .</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR</b>	
<b>PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES . . . . .</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Societal polarization and the possibility of partnerships . . . . .</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>FUNDING . . . . .</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .</b>	<b>18</b>

# ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of nine national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020. The purpose of the Monitor is to take stock of the developments at European and national level in terms of citizenship education policies and lifelong learning policies. The Croatian report is focused on the general three main themes: global citizenship education, digital citizenship, and community partnerships for interculturality. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. In a year in which learning has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more apparent how essential global citizenship education is for the development of competences that prepare learners for global challenges and that prepare them to act responsible towards their fellows beyond any national border. Global citizenship education is missing from Croatia's formal education system, while public funding for the topic is reduced. However, the civil society has

been working closely with formal education institutions to support global learning while the learners show impressive global competences despite the limited opportunities to exert them in formal education. The pandemic has shone a new light on the limited digital skills that the Croatian population has while also opening ways for the Government to restrict the civic space and use technology for surveillance purposes. These weak spots revealed by the pandemic are reinforced also by increased polarization within communities across Croatia, which have led to far-right extremism. The efforts of a vibrant civil society have mitigated the abuses of power while have also provided respite for the population, by offering them opportunities to upskill and reskill in non-formal and informal learning processes that have empowered them during the pandemic. The public authorities must increase the cooperation with the civil society actors and understand that learning is no longer limited to the formal classrooms, especially given the context of 2020.

# INTRODUCTION

Croatia is lagging behind in terms of the digital and green transition, as global citizenship education (GCE) is completely absent from the list of governmental priorities, prompting a lack of funding for the topic, a lack of clear defining of the topic, and a complete absence of the topic from any formal education structure. The Croatian citizens are missing the transversal skills needed to adapt to the globalized world, including certain adaptability competences that would allow them to better weather changes. Such an example is represented by the very low proportion of citizens (aged 16-74) with basic digital skills and the lack of

digital resources that have proved problematic for digital learning. On top of this, as societies are becoming more globalized and open, there is a surge in far-right sentiments across Croatia, which has been exacerbated by the 2015 migration crisis. However, Croatia enjoys the existence of a robust and well-organised civil society sector which has managed many times to prevent public abuses of power, even in the context of the pandemic. It is on this civil society that more reliance needs to be put in order to ensure that the Croatian citizens are skilled for the upcoming challenges and tasks in the 21st century society.

# GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

## TERMINOLOGY

The customary approach when discussing GCE is understanding the wide range of conceptualizations it takes, each emphasizing one or another topic within this vision of education. Therefore, for each country it is important to understand what such terminology is used by the actors to be able to continue any further research. Unfortunately, as revealed by our members in Croatia, it is highly difficult to discuss about a term that is not used by the local or national authorities. GCE has not been conceptualized in any education-related policy initiative, and it is not on the agenda of the government, which is clearly a damning development given the current climate emergency and the need for transversal, global competences. The authorities are, however, focusing on the SDGs and Agenda 2030<sup>1</sup>, therefore, potentially the idea of Education for Sustainable Development would be a way in which they indirectly refer to education.

Our members do not employ a specific definition of GCE either, as they approach their work more from the perspective of citizenship education. However, **CONCORD**'s member in Croatia conceptualizes GCE with a focus on the global-local nexus and education for youth, to enable them to “become responsible and active members of society.” This reveals that the CSOs are engaged in the topic and are trying to build up support for a paradigmatic shift that would define the education system based on the requirements of the 21st century society<sup>2</sup>.

## THE ABSENCE OF GCE IN FORMAL EDUCATION

GCE, as expected, is minimally approached in formal education in Croatia. In our previous Monitor edition we have highlighted the national focus of the curriculum, explaining how the European dimension is very little discussed and only at the end of the educational cycle. This has a significant impact over GCE as well, since a place foreseen for this topic within the national curriculum does not exist apart from the civic education classes. Therefore, the global perspective does not feature in the way future generations are prepared in Croatia, at a time when the world is hyper-globalised. Civic education is performed as a cross-curricular topic, one of 7 such topics. Moreover, one other such topic is Sustainable Development, which also boasts a cross-curricular approach<sup>3</sup>. Though encouraging to see



1 Government of the Republic of Croatia (2019). Council adopts voluntary national review on UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Government of the Republic of Croatia [online]. Available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/news/council-adopts-voluntary-national-review-on-un-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/26300>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

2 Saleniece, Ilze (2018). Global Citizenship Education in Europe: How Much Do We Care?. CONCORD Europe. p.49. Available at: [https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CONCORD\\_GCE\\_FundingReport\\_2018\\_online.pdf](https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CONCORD_GCE_FundingReport_2018_online.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

3 National Coordinating Body for Developing the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology (2014). New Colours of Knowledge: Strategy for Education, Science and Technology. Ministry of Education and Research of Croatia. Available at: <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/Strategy%20for%20Education,%20Science%20and%20Technology.pdf>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

these, supposedly, streamlined in education, our members clarify that this is not the case in practice. The cross-curricular topics are not properly implemented, usually fall between the cracks, and as the mandatory curriculum is not adapted to include them already within, they are forgotten in face of other educational targets that the curriculum has to meet. The process of curricular reform from 2012<sup>4</sup> saw CSOs, such as SOLIDAR Foundation member Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), involved in the process. At that point, civic education was supposed to become a stand-alone topic that focused on sustainable development, economy, Human Rights, political literacy, interculturalism and social skills. That did not happen, and the current cross-curricular approach is watered down to universal rights and democracy, essential topics in themselves but insufficient for the development of well-rounded

individuals that think critically about their place in the global environment.

The current mismanagement of the development of skills for the future in education is reflected in Croatian pupils scoring below the EU average in the PISA results for basic competences<sup>5</sup>, while also experiencing the shortest period of compulsory education in the EU: 8 years<sup>6</sup>. Research reveals the importance of longer time spent in education to develop basic skills<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the teaching profession is underpaid and in need of further training<sup>8</sup> to readapt the educational system to the current needs of the learners. Therefore, more burdens on the teachers, such as leaving the implementation of cross-curricular topics to their discretion, without increased support for them, will not reach any meaningful results.



## THE GCE PARADOX

The most dramatic element for Croatia is represented by the exceptional potential of its student body that manage to boost impressive global competences despite the adversity of an educational system that does not promote them. Based on the latest PISA results, Croatian pupils are scoring above the OECD average in terms of their capacity to evaluate events of local and global significance<sup>9</sup>. The discrepancy between socio-economically advantaged pupils and their disadvantaged peers when it comes to global competences is also

4 Ministry of Science and Education of Croatia (2019). Civic education: Cross-subject curriculum for primary and secondary schools. Available at : [https://skolazivot.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GOO\\_kurikulum.pdf](https://skolazivot.hr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GOO_kurikulum.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

5 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) No 1176/2011. p.41. Available at : <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0510&from=EN>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

6 European Commission (2020). Equity in school education in Europe. Eurydice report. p.201. Available at : [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/equity_2020_0.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

7 Di Pietro, Giorgio; Biagi, Federico; Dinis Mota Da Costa, Patricia; Karpinski, Zbigniew and Mazza, Jacopo (2020). The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets. Joint Research Centre Technical Report. Available at : [https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121071/jrc121071.pdf?mc\\_cid=ecbb7c6ba9&mc\\_eid=26e959399a](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121071/jrc121071.pdf?mc_cid=ecbb7c6ba9&mc_eid=26e959399a). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

8 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019: Croatia. Pp.4-5. Available at : [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-croatia\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-croatia_en.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021; Di Pietro et al. (2020) The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets. P.22.

9 OECD (2020). PISA 2018 Results Volume VI - Are Students Ready to Thrive in an Interconnected World?. P.11. Available at : <https://www.slideshare.net/OECD/edu/pisa-2018-results-volume-vi-are-students-ready-to-thrive-in-an-interconnected-world>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

far lower than the OECD average, while a high number of native pupils have an awareness of global issues, highlighting how the topic is not limited only to those impacted more strikingly by it. Only 6 OECD countries boast a higher percentage of pupils capable to understand the perspectives of others, making Croatia an exceptional case in which its pupils are showing great promise to adapt to a globalized society but the educational system is not providing them with sufficient support<sup>10</sup>.

In the absence of a comprehensive academic support mandated in public education, learners have to rely on the innovative approach taken by some education institutions and by CSOs which provide programmes, activities and tools that boost the curiosity of learners and help them acquire the transversal competences needed to adapt to the green transition.

### **CASE STUDIES: SDGS CALENDAR FOR SCHOOLS; INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS ACTIVISM**

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [CPS](#), has created a calendar to match the school year calendar for 2020/2021 with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. Teachers can access this, together with many resources associated with it, and find creative ways in which they can work SDGs into their classroom. This provides the much needed guidance and structural response to the overworked and overwhelmed teaching professionals that do not have the time to organize themselves and design a learning approach that considers the entire complexity of the SDGs. The calendar can be accessed [here](#) and reflects yet again how simple and elegant solutions such as this would facilitate GCE in Croatia. Public authorities must acknowledge the work of CSOs on such topics and mainstream their work given how beneficial it is for the functioning of formal education and for ensuring that

learners acquire competences outside the formal system.

Another example is of education institutions that managed to promote GCE activities. Sračinec primary school is one of them, which in the previous academic year implemented a [project](#) focused on seedbeds, and on teaching pupils about growth and agriculture, while focusing on developing their knowledge about the traditional seeds in their local community, fostering a sense of belonging linked with the environment. Such programmes provide a different perspective on culture, identity and familiarity which challenges the current model, but also adapts learners to view the environment as a living eco-system that shapes who they are as people. GCE promotion through such activities should be mainstreamed across Croatia, taking note of this best practice example.

10 Ibid. Pp.15-16, 25.



## GCE AND THE WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

A visible element regarding how to successfully implement a global perspective education, attuned with the current climate emergency, is illustrated by the whole-school approach. Our previous Monitor edition has advocated for the whole-school approach, a tool for inclusion, given how this process is putting the learner at the centre of the educational process and is involving all education stakeholders in developing a climate supporting the learning. However, this approach is highly useful in the context of GCE as well given how GCE requires eliminating any silos-based way

of dealing with education, and in fact ensuring that all education stakeholders are on the same page, sharing their diverse experiences, ensuring that GCE can underpin the entire educational process. Our members in Croatia report that the whole-school is not institutionalized by the public authorities, but they insist on the fact that individual schools and NGOs are leading a process of cooperation in which more and more GCE-related projects are developed ad-hoc. This bottom-up approach is much appreciated, but now it needs to be capitalized upon and upscaled, ensuring that all learners can benefit from this process to avoid creating inequality in access to educational opportunities.

### CASE STUDY

The whole-school approach can be used to empower learners to participate in the design of the educational process, and when this is linked with the GCE, they would be already developing their transversal competences by participating in the school's effort for change. Such an example can be seen at the Pula Gymnasium, in Croatia's Istria region. [The school is certified as an Eco-School since 2001, being even certified internationally as such in 2011.](#) This entails the existence of an Eco-board which develops environmentally friendly activities around the general curriculum. The board is composed of 56 pupils, underlining the point that change must come from within and pupils must be empowered to be actors of change to be active citizens later. The rest of the board is composed of teachers helping the pupils with this planning, and ensuring that their planning would affect different courses and not just the generic civic education one.

The school's ethos is built around the idea of incorporating environmental education into all segments of the educational system, while doing so through daily activities that increase awareness about the ecological crisis, waste management, water saving and energy, biodiversity conservation, animal protection, healthy living, among others. A recent project organized by the school was opening a new green walkway/promenade they created in a large neglected area in their town - Pragrande. Within their school eco-board, they decided to do this small project for their citizens in order to raise awareness on neglected public good, promote community activism and healthy lifestyles. The Eco-board ensures that environmentalism is treated across curricula but it also reflects the privileged space that GCE takes in these pupils' education, as it must be a goal to which the entire educational process is geared for.

Reflecting upon the space outside of formal education and outside the remit of the government, there can be observed more instances in which the CSOs are leading the charge on GCE and on readapting the societies in a way attuned to the 21st century. Therefore, SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, has been

cooperating with the [North-South Centre of the Council of Europe](#) on the implementation of the [Global Education Week](#). CPS is the coordinator of this event in Croatia and you can read more about what this entails and how it is organized in the case study below.



### CASE STUDY

As mentioned above, CPS coordinates the activities that CSOs organize during the Global Education Week (GEW) in Croatia. The event occurs in November of every year and adopts a central theme. In 2018 the motto of the GEW was [‘The world is changing, what about us?’](#) and in 2019 it was [‘Wake Up! This is the final call for climate’](#). In the preparation of the Week, CPS opened calls to relevant organizations and schools to propose their activities for the Week and provided smaller funding for the

organization of activities. They were then promoted in unison on CPS’s webpage and on social media (2018, 2019). GEW 2020 will take place November 16 – 20. Through these activities, CPS links itself with the organization of GEW in all countries promoting this event, marking an international awareness raising event that showcases the great work that has been done on the ground by practitioners and that can be upscaled to become the norm on all countries in order to fight the climate crisis.



# DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

## EDUCATION AND COVID-19

On 16 March 2020, as in most of the world's countries, Croatia suspended in-person education due to the pandemic. However, the closure of education institutions was not as extreme in other countries, as those pupils who could not remain at home for various reasons were allowed to come in schools, and, with proper sanitation procedures in place, they were supported by the teachers in the educational process. All other learners benefited from broadcasted lessons on national TV channels, while the 10% of the learners reported as not having access to digital devices were supported by the government with free SIM cards, that provided unlimited data monthly to access the internet, with digital equipment loaned from the school or with additional funding for schools to acquire the digital equipment needed by the disadvantaged learners<sup>11</sup>. Though these measures have been significantly more positive than in other countries, the delayed process of digitalization in education has took its toll on Croatia as well, as many teachers experienced barriers to continuing their job due to the lack of proper internet connection across the country or due to missing digital equipment. The government released guidelines on assessment online, as well as on individualized support measures in case of online learning. The School for Life webpage was used a platform for educational resources while lessons were uploaded on YouTube, even ones adapted for pupils with hearing impairments or ones in minority languages<sup>12</sup>.

An issue identified during this time, but also as education institutions reopened in September 2020, was the lack of long-term planning and adequate communications of decisions during the pandemic. The reopening of institutions occurred at the end of the previous academic year with the education staff members being insufficiently consulted and lacking clear guidelines on how to ensure every learner is safe while in class. The guidance for the reopening of the new academic year was released 8 days before the actual start, prompting the CSOs group GOOD Initiative to publish a press release in which it criticized the short notice under which schools would have to readapt their facilities<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, no guidelines were released on how to approach the teaching of learners with disabilities or of learners for which Croatian was not the mother tongue. Therefore, the hybrid system was leaving behind those learners which needed special support<sup>14</sup>.



11 Centre for Peace Studies (2020). Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU Fundamental Rights Implications: Croatia. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Pp.5-6. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/croatia-report-covid-19-april-2020\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/croatia-report-covid-19-april-2020_en.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

12 Human Rights House Zagreb; Centre for Peace Studies; Be active. Be emancipated (2020a). Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights Implications: Croatia. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Pp.7-8. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/hr\\_report\\_on\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_may\\_2020.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/hr_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_may_2020.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.; Human Rights House Zagreb; Centre for Peace Studies; Be active. Be emancipated (2020b). Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights Implications: Croatia. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Pp.4-5. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/hr\\_report\\_on\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/hr_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_june_2020.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

13 GOOD Initiative (2020). NOVA ŠKOLSKA GODINA, STARI PROBLEMI – I u uvjetima epidemije nužno svima osigurati dostupno i kvalitetno obrazovanje. Available at: <http://goo.hr/nova-skolska-godina-stari-problemi-i-u-uvjetima-epidemije-nuzno-svi-ma-osigurati-dostupno-i-kvalitetno-obrazovanje/>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

14 Ibid.

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Ignoring the priorities discussed above, the government was quick in proposing amendments to the Electronic Communications Act which would have provided them with the capacity to monitor the location of every mobile phone in Croatia. The action was supposedly taken limiting the impact of the pandemic, but it revealed a flagrant violation of the right to privacy and revealed a strategy to shrink the civic space by making use of the health crisis<sup>15</sup>, has successfully advocated together with other CSOs in Croatia launching a social media campaign which has prevented the government from passing the said amendments. **The efforts of the CSOs during these times of crisis are essential for maintaining the integrity of a society in which all citizens can actively participate without having their universal rights violated.** CPS, has successfully advocated together with other CSOs in Croatia launching a social media campaign which has prevented the government from passing the said amendments. **The efforts of the CSOs during these times of crisis are essential**

**for maintaining the integrity of a society in which all citizens can actively participate without having their universal rights violated.**

## THE DIGITAL SKILLS GAP

As presented in our previous Monitor edition, the e-Schools pilot and the School for Life curricular reform have contributed to the implementation of broadband internet connection in some elementary schools, while building up digital classrooms, and expanding ICT classes in the compulsory education curriculum<sup>16</sup>. These measures were welcome, but the pandemic revealed how efforts must be intensified. The curricular reform is still too recent to determine its impact, but initial monitoring reveals that learners had, in fact, more negative attitudes towards school after the implementation of the reform than before<sup>17</sup>. The e-Schools pilot targeted only elementary schools missing out on many educational institutions that lack these basic tools to engage in online learning<sup>18</sup>. Croatia risks lagging behind within the digital transition as before the pandemic only 41% of its citizens (aged 16-74) reported having basic digital skills<sup>19</sup>. As all of the population had to engage with digital tools in one way or another during the pandemic they were clearly not prepared to actively participate in society, they were isolated by this and they were subjected to digital threats.

In this context, the non-formal and informal education providers yet again emerge as invaluable support for the low-skilled population. Our members report sufficient digital skills to organize digital learning for others and to continue their work online. Given their capacities



15 Centre for Peace Studies (2020). [REAKCIJA 44 UDRUGE] Praćenje svakog mobitela u zemlji nije mjera zaštite od koronavirusa nego nepotrebno kršenje ljudskih prava!. Available at: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/izjave-za-javnost/reakcija-44-udruga-pracenje-svakog-mobitela-u-zemlji-nije-mjera-zastite-od-koronavirusa-nego-nepotrebno-krsenje-ljudskih-prava>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.; Centre for Peace Studies (2020). #Ostanidoma i piši Saboru. Available at: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/ljudska-sigurnost/ostanidoma-i-pisi-saboru>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

16 European Commission (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. Eurydice report. Pp.56, 85. Available at: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/digital-education-school-europe\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/digital-education-school-europe_en). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

17 Skola za život (2019). Comparison of Initial and Final Assessment of the Implementation of the School for Life reform. Available at: <https://skolazazivot.hr/usporedba-rezultata-u-inicijalnom-i-finalnom-mjerenju/>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

18 European Commission (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp. 56, 85.

19 European Commission (2020). Country Report Croatia 2020. P.43.

and given the flexibility in which non-formal and informal education providers can operate, the Croatian authorities should better support them to ensure a lifelong and lifewide approach to digital skills development. The CSOs have

been successfully adapting their work online and could provide comprehensive solutions to ensure that all people are prepared go through the digital transitions that public authorities already acknowledged as imminent<sup>20</sup>.

### CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, has been impacted by the pandemic as well. As a result, they had to re-adapt many of their activities online. Such an example is the job shadowing programme. This six-month pilot programme represented a process of mentored and paid work for ten interns from the Roma communities. They worked in host CSOs in their local communities, which were picked by CPS based on the interests and needs of the interns. Individual mentorship and guidance to the interns was provided during this period to support them in the best possible way. However, due to lockdown restrictions caused by the pandemic, many of these activities moved online through video conferencing tools. The interns continued to receive tailored advice and support, revealing how CPS, as a result of the technical capacity of its staff members, managed to successfully continue its programme even under

these circumstances. As the Croatian population boasts very low achievement regarding basic digital skills, the expertise of CPS and other like-minded CSOs can prove invaluable to readapt all learners during this period when digital learning is becoming more frequent. Public authorities should capitalize on the capacity of CSOs, and should provide better recognition of the digital skills developed in informal settings.

Moreover, CPS promoted a significant amount of learning resources in the online environment during the pandemic, developing podcasts, audio conversations and infographics, while also continuing to organize its conferences online. Its legal team continued to provide advice through e-mail and telephone to any person in need of their support during the daunting moments of the pandemic.

20 Government of the Republic of Croatia (2020). Digitalna (R)Evolucija i u Hrvatskoj, ali treba se ubrzati i u te procese više investirati. Available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/digitalna-r-evolucija-i-u-hrvatskoj-ali-treba-se-ubrzati-i-u-te-procese-vise-investirati/28728>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

The [previous Monitor edition](#) evaluated intercultural dialogue from the perspective of formal education, but this form of education is insufficient to develop intercultural dialogue competences in all learners. There needs to be an acknowledgement to the lifelong and lifewide learning approach needed, and also to consider how much the population is learning from their daily lives in their own communities. As a result, this year's edition will look more into the way community partnerships across various stakeholders are formed to ensure that all the Croatian population is supported to develop empathy towards their peers and engage in a process of socialization in which multicultural collaboration becomes the norm.

SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, is engaged in a number of platforms for the promotion of inclusion. Together with other Croatian CSOs they have set up Coordination for Integration<sup>21</sup>, an informal network that is providing further support to refugees, to fill in the gaps from the governmental support. The main task of this network is to organize the Refugee Week<sup>22</sup>, which takes a similar dimension as the Global Education Week, which was presented in the sections above. The general objective is to raise awareness on what is being done to support refugees, highlighting what CSOs are providing to those most vulnerable in society. All of the organisations joining are sharing best practices amongst each other on the integration of refugees and are providing a much-needed platform for a group to have a

voice and participate in society.

CPS joined also governmental taskforces such as the Working group to the permanent committee for integration of foreigners in Croatian society<sup>23</sup>, which is preparing proposals for national strategies and plans regarding the integration of asylum seekers. It also ensures the operational implementation of planned tasks. Their policy recommendations are relevant for the right to work, adequate housing, education, security and all other related rights for refugees. The taskforce uses a whole-government model, in which various agencies, ministries and other governmental bodies are collaborating together to deliver a comprehensive approach that would address all rights related to the integration of refugees. A limited number of CSOs and NGOs are present in this taskforce given their expertise on the ground related to the needs of refugees. These organisations are: Croatian Red Cross, Croatian Law Centre, Centre for Peace Studies, Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, Jesuit Refugee Service and UNHCR.

Such structures are essential for creating channels of communication through which organisations operating on the ground can better coordinate to meet the needs of migrants and refugees but also to collaborate in promoting intercultural dialogue perspectives that are also educating the native population and preparing them to live in a multicultural world.

21 Nacional (2016). Koordinacija za integraciju: Izbjeglicama je svaki dan najteži. Available at : <https://www.nacional.hr/koordinacija-za-integraciju-izbjeglicama-je-svaki-dan-najtezi/>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

22 Centre for Peace Studies (2019). KOORDINACIJA ZA INTEGRACIJU POVODOM 6. TJEDANA IZBJEGLICAMA! : Upoznajmo se, promijenimo perspektivu!. Available at: <https://www.cms.hr/hr/azil-i-integracijske-politike/koordinacija-za-integraciju-povodom-6-tjedana-izbjeglicama-upoznajmo-se-promijenimo-perspektivu>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

23 Croatian Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (2015). Integracija stranaca u hrvatsko društvo. Available at : <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/integracija-stranaca-u-hrvatsko-drustvo/643>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.



## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, has launched the [Welcome Initiative](#), together with other Croatian CSOs. The aim is to support refugees on the ground, but also to make political pressure on the Croatian and EU institutions to change restrictive migration policies. The Initiative gathers more than 60 civil society organizations, one football club and more than 400 volunteers who give support to the refugees on the ground on an every-day basis – from humanitarian support and coordination with local organizations to providing information to refugees about current procedures regarding entering and leaving Croatia. Its

website displays news from the ground and publishes useful information for refugees, for example transport timetables or dictionaries.

An organized body such as this provides an impressive network on the ground that helps those most vulnerable, while also having sufficient capacity to raise awareness on the situation of refugees, indirectly educating the native population. It is essential to build such partnerships to best serve the people in local communities and develop the status needed to effect change on policy-making.

## SOCIETAL POLARIZATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PARTNERSHIPS

Though these reveal the existence of a healthy civil society which strives at improving the way multiculturalism is approached in Croatia, polarization has been occurring in the country with far-right perspectives being more often shared among the population. The tensions erupted on 12 October 2020 when a lone gunman targeted the government's headquarters.

He wounded a police officer and then committed suicide<sup>24</sup>, with the authorities uncovering the fact that he was a supporter of far-right views, exhibiting xenophobic tendencies and frequently spewing hate towards the Serbian community<sup>25</sup>. Such reprehensible acts are to be condemned, but also analysed to understand what fuels them. SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, has engaged into a research initiative in 2017 which revealed that the attitudes of the Croatian population towards foreigners and

24 CroatiaWeek (2020). St. Mark's Square in Zagreb sealed off, police investigation underway after shooting. Available at: <https://www.croatiaweek.com/st-marks-square-in-zagreb-sealed-off-police-investigation-underway-after-shooting/>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

25 Net Hrvatska (2020). ŠTO JE NAPADAČ S MARKOVOG TRGA OBJAVLJIVAO NA SVOM FEJSU? 'Da sam barem jedan od njih, da skidam Srbe'... pisao i o 'nepravdi u Haagu'. Available at: <https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/sto-napadac-s-markovog-trga-objavljuje-na-svom-fejsu-da-sam-barem-jedan-od-njih-da-skidam-srbe-pisao-i-o-nepravdi-u-haagu/>. Last accessed: 5 January 2021.





other cultures have become more negative<sup>26</sup>. Clearly, there is a need to better engage with the communities and prepare them for a world in which multiculturalism is the norm. For this reason, community projects are essential and CPS has been adequately planning its activities in this regard. Their activities are promoting an intercultural and open society but they are also empowering citizens to act for social change. They are organizing their work based on subgoals directed at networking and cooperation for the protection of human rights and for the promotion of non-violence (fight against militarization, securitization, injustice and fascism), strengthening existing and creating new “pockets” of resistance and empowering individuals, groups and organizations in their work

and collaboration for social change. CPS is strengthening and structuring the database of already existing networks of support for change agents in education (teachers, principals and other educators and people in institutions). They are increasing cooperation amongst change agents in education with the promotion of and support to examples of good practice in the area of combating discrimination, hatred motivated violence and hate speech, combating socio-economic inequalities and protection of rights and solidarity with refugees, migrants and foreigners. It is essential to prepare all citizens to be active participants in society and to have the needed skills to peacefully coexist with their peers.

26 Centre for Peace Studies (2017). Research report - Representation and indicators discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes in the Republic of Croatia in 2017. Available at: [https://www.cms.hr/system/publication/pdf/98/Zastupljenost\\_i\\_indikatori\\_diskriminacije\\_i\\_ksenofobi\\_nihstavova\\_u\\_Republici\\_Hrvatskoj\\_u\\_2017..pdf](https://www.cms.hr/system/publication/pdf/98/Zastupljenost_i_indikatori_diskriminacije_i_ksenofobi_nihstavova_u_Republici_Hrvatskoj_u_2017..pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

## CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member's, CPS, flagship programme is titled [Peace Studies](#) and has been running for the past 22 years. It is a 6-months long non-formal education program for 'restless' citizens who want be committed to non-violent social change by developing critical thinking, understanding and transforming conflicts in society, dealing with structural violence, promoting human rights, diversity and anti-discrimination policies. The program connects theory and practice, combines lectures, workshops, mentored work - various methods with the aim of understanding and deconstructing causes of social injustice, developing critical thinking skills and approaches to resist direct and structural violence, oppression and exclusion. Course-leaders and guest-lecturers are both from academia and practice, all of them active for social change and experienced in different methods of participatory learning.

The courses are structured in 3 clusters: Cooperation skills: Nonviolent communication and conflict transformation; Social change: Approaches and Analyses; Practices for social change and Taking Action. Themes such as Human rights, War and antiwar movement legacy, Human security and migration, Global society and economic justice, Feminism, gender, sexuality are approached, providing an exceptionally well-rounded approach to the transversal skills needed to adapt to and thrive in the 21st century societies. 600 participants have graduated from this course, and the essential aspect is that the course is preparing them to become activists and to engage further in their communities, building up a grassroots movements that serves to educate the Croatian population about societal developments. This course

provides amazing resources to deal with the climate emergency, to develop a mindset guided by intercultural dialogue and to be open to constant learning which can only serve as a tool for adapting to the digital transition or any other upcoming transition in the current societies.

Self-reflection is part of this course, as it is important to ensure that people are genuinely making use of the skills developed. Based on its latest impact assessment of 2018, 97% of respondents attested that they are using the skills developed by the PS programme. 67% of respondents claimed that they joined activities related to the principles and concepts of PS after attending the course with testimonies such as this one: 'During and after completing the program, I began to participate more actively in protests, public initiatives and to speak out in situations in which I had remained silent before. I became more aware of my (civic) responsibility, but I also got rid of feelings of powerlessness and pervasive apathy, and increasingly felt the need to act'

Community-based projects must empower local individuals who need to claim ownership over these projects if their aim is to be met. Educating the local community through the principles of PS is the foundation for molding active citizens, and such non-formal courses are testament to the importance of CSOs in European communities, and through their forward-looking approach regarding the digital and green transition but also regarding democratic participation. It is time for these actors to be provided with a seat at the policymaking table, relying on their expertise when strategizing about combatting the current societal crises.



An unfortunate aspect in the midst of this polarization is the fact that recent research reveals that the young people do not have sufficient knowledge of volunteering and campaigning for a goal<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, very few of them engage in extra-curricular activities linked to multiculturalism. CPS has been working towards increasing the participation of youth in volunteering activities, and they report an overwhelmingly positive response, but clearly there is a need for more financial and logistical support to be provided to CSOs to ensure that they can target all young people and they can build up a culture of participation. This reveals the role that non-formal and informal education providers have in preparing citizens for the current societies, as volunteering and participation cannot be taught only in formal education, and of course is occurring outside of the formal educational institutions. For these reasons the community partnerships should be encouraged by local and national authorities, using up all accessible resources to combat current challenges such as societal polarization.

27 European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor 2018: Croatia. P.6. Available at : [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-croatia\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-croatia_en.pdf). Last accessed: 5 January 2021.

## FUNDING

This section will account for public funding in education as a percentage of GDP, but also for specific funding on GCE and digital education. Public expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been decreasing in the recent years in Croatia, reaching 4.7% in the past year<sup>28</sup>. The sum is still slightly above the EU average of 4.6%<sup>29</sup>, but points out towards underinvestment in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and especially considering the current challenges which the educational system is experiencing.

The specific funding related to GCE is minimal, with most NGOs and CSOs pursuing the option of EU funding to meet their needs<sup>30</sup>. However, our members explain that the EU funding calls on the topic of GCE are designed for larger scale organisations, and that most Croatian CSOs experience difficulties in applying for and managing such funding. This brings up the question of designing calls for funding suitable also for smaller scale organisations or simplifying the procedures for application. However, the first port of call for funding should be the national authorities rather than the EU funding. The lack of national funding on this topic is not surprising given that GCE is not on the governmental agenda, but this

reveals how unprepared the educational system is to deal with the green transition and with developing the needed competencies in a globalized society.

The infrastructure gaps linked to digital education are high, and the process of equipping all elementary schools with basic infrastructure was insufficient. The issue is that infrastructure issues are not only linked with digital education, but with the entire system, as Croatian pupils have to go to education institutions in shifts due to the limited amount of classroom space<sup>31</sup>. As a result, the investment priorities are many which raises the question on when exactly will the digital needs be met. Due to COVID-19, the Croatia government provided approximately 500.000 EUR to schools to buy further equipment to provide learners with the chance to engage in distance education<sup>32</sup>. Yet again the EU funding proves to not only fill in gaps, but to be the main source of funding in Croatia for digital infrastructure development. The [Connecting Europe Facility](#) programme allocated 3.9 million EUR for Croatia to boost up its digital infrastructure. Given the significant needs in terms of digital skills development, more structural investment is needed on this from the side of the Croatian government.

28 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019: Croatia. P.3.

29 Ibid.

30 Saleniece, Ilze (2018). Global Citizenship Education in Europe: How Much Do We Care?. P.22.

31 European Commission (2020). Country Report Croatia 2020. P.41.

32 Centre for Peace Studies; Be active. Be emancipated (2020b). Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights Implications: Croatia. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. Pp.4-5.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Develop a GCE strategy and expand the Education Ministry's remit over the topic
- ◆ Ensure a curricular review under which the cross-curricular topics are adequately implemented in the classroom, providing clear guidance and training to teachers on how to ensure this
- ◆ Dedicate specific funding to GCE to support grassroots projects on the topic that would encourage a lifelong and lifewide perspective to it
- ◆ Ensure the participation of CSOs, NGOs and the academia in curricular reforms and in decision making over GCE
- ◆ 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
- ◆ Increase investment in closing the digital infrastructure gaps
- ◆ Provide clearer guidance on the support offered to learners with special education needs, making sure that they are supported to participate in education regardless of circumstances
- ◆ Expand the e-Schools pilot to all education institutions insuring that all of them have the basic digital tools and educators the basic digital skills needed to use them
- ◆ Promote partnerships across formal, informal and non-formal education providers in the development of digital skills given the benefits of developing such skills in various contexts in one's life and facilitating the adaptation to the digital transition
- ◆ Increase the representation of CSOs and NGOs on inclusion task-force to provide a better overview of the localized needs
- ◆ Increase financial and logistical support to community-based projects that engage in education for active societal participation, in intercultural education and in dissipating xenophobic tendencies
- ◆ Develop educational programmes to boost volunteering, linking formal, non-formal and informal education providers in their efforts to develop the skills needed to participate in a globalized, multicultural, fast-paced and digitalized society.



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