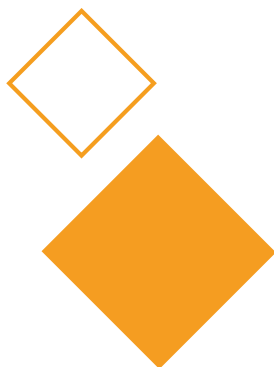


**CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG
LEARNING MONITOR 2019**

CROATIA





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ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eight national case studies feeding into the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019. 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: digital citizenship, citizenship education and intercultural dialogue. It accounts for challenges, governmental approaches to them, and civil society approaches to them for each of the three themes. Croatia is seriously lagging behind in terms of digitalization, as only 41% of its population has basic digital skills, as over a quarter of the teachers are not prepared to include ICT in the classroom and as the digital infrastructure is outdated. Its national initiatives are encouraging but very poorly implemented. The most recent School for Life reform cannot be assessed yet, but

its expansion has been done with insufficient monitoring of the pilot phase. Such chaotic approaches highlight also the approach to citizenship education, as the topic is left to the discretion of schools, but the contents of it are narrowed down and impacted by nationalist and clerical tendencies. Intercultural education is not on the agenda due to a rather homogenous population, further pointing out an approach that does not prepare citizens for a global society but that tackles topics based on how much tension they create or based on emergencies. The lack of planning is problematic, but it is encouraging to see the involvement of CSOs that act as watchdogs and as providers of citizenship and digital education to close the gaps left open by the government. Further cooperation among the civil society and governmental actors must be set in order to provide a more comprehensive approach to the delivery of citizenship and digital education.

INTRODUCTION

Croatia, the newest EU member state, joining in 2013, is going through a transitional period with a large amount of reforms, including educational ones, being passed to close gaps with other EU member states. However, the country is lagging behind on digitalisation, as its citizens are some of the least digitally skilled within the EU while the schools' digital

infrastructure is outdated and the introduction of digital skills in schools is being piloted on a very little amount of schools. The country is grappling with reforms related to citizenship education, as SOLIDAR Foundation members report a nationalistic focus and a reduction in the topics covered by citizenship education.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Croatia developed a comprehensive eGovernance system, mainly through the implementation of the [eCroatia 2020 Strategy](#), adopted with its adjacent Action Plan, in May 2017¹. Each ministry provides services through the eGovernance platform. For example, in the last academic school year, registration in primary schools has been done via the online platform². However, all these tools build contacts among citizens and public administration online without first engaging in making citizens understand what it means to be digital citizens. There is no national level digital citizenship definition used while SOLIDAR Foundation members report that older citizens or citizens living in remote parts of the country are not accessing the eGovernance system and are not encouraged or supported to do so. **The level of digital skills is abysmal,**

with Croatia finding itself in a Critical situation³, with only 41% of its citizens (ages 16-74) reporting basic or above basic digital skills in 2017, below the 57% EU average. Moreover, only 73% of the population reports frequently using the internet, again a number well below the EU average of 83%⁴. In the absence of a digital skills development strategy, Croatia will have difficulties in ensuring that citizens adapt to digital realities. A digital development strategy was supposed to be launched this year but SOLIDAR Foundation members report that there is no further information on this topic.

As digitalization permeates the agenda of the Croatian government, incremental changes in the education sector start to be observed, though a systematic overhaul is needed. As of



1 European Commission (2019). *Digital Government Factsheet 2019: Croatia*. P.7. Available at: https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Digital_Government_Factsheets_Croatia_2019.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

2 Ministry of Public Administration of Croatia (2017). *eCroatia 2020 Strategy*. P.29. Available at: <https://uprava.gov.hr/UserDoc-sImages/Istaknute%20 teme/e-Hrvatska/e-Croatia%202020%20Strategy%20-final.pdf>. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

3 European Commission (2019). *Country Report Croatia 2019. Accompanying the document 2019 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://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-croatia_en.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

4 European Commission (2019). *Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2019*. P.7. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-croatia_en.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

the academic year 2018/2019, digital competence was not part of the education curriculum for the primary level, though this is to be addressed in the following academic year⁵. However, the term digital wisdom is enshrined in the secondary education curriculum, referring to the capacity to choose and apply appropriate technology. References to collaborative online environments and virtual communities are made, while e-hate speech and health issues caused by technology, such as addiction, are condemned⁶. These are initial steps in understanding what digital citizenship is for Croatian authorities and in preparing the citizens for a safe, responsible and active use of digital resources and technologies. Teachers benefit from a digital competence framework, which has a progression model that aids teachers in identifying their skills and competences related to digital matters⁷. However, this framework is not mandatory for the development of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Croatia⁸, clearly exhibited by the fact that only 47.3% of Croatia's teachers received 'use of ICT in class-

room' training during their ITE courses. 26.2% of Croatian teachers report the need to receive training in ICT to use it in the classroom, which represents one of the highest rates in the EU⁹.

The pilot e-Schools programme (2015-2018) improved digital infrastructure in Croatian schools. A new, broader stage of this governmental initiative will last until 2022¹⁰, expanding the reforms to new schools. The pilot phase ensured that all elementary schools had LAN and two digital classrooms, highlighting the archaic digital infrastructure that Croatia had up until that point¹¹. Though the existence of LAN in schools is essential, there is already a need for WLAN. This initiative has ensured that teachers from 10% of all educational units received training on digital competences. All these actions were designed to assist targeted schools in becoming digitally mature by 2018¹², a target which has not been met, based on the [implementation report](#) drafted by the Ministry of Science and Education. Funded via European structural and investment funds



5 European Commission (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. *Eurydice report*. P.28. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/en_digital_education_n.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid. P.11, 47-49.

8 Ibid. P.51.

9 European Commission (2019). Education and Training Monitor 2019. P.88. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-1-2019-education-and-training-monitor.pdf>. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

10 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp.83, 91.

11 European Commission. Country report 2019 Croatia. P.16.

12 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. P.48.

(ESIF)¹³, the initiative shows the willingness of the Croatian authorities to catch up with other EU member states and to address the low attainment of digital skills. However, more needs to be done to offset the lagging behind that Croatia confronted with so far.

A curricular reform, *School for Life*, was piloted for the academic year 2018/2019, and will be implemented nationally in the following academic year. 74 schools participated in the reform¹⁴ which adopted a ‘learning outcomes’ approach¹⁵, as SOLIDAR Foundation members reported that the curriculum across all subjects became more flexible and adaptable, while the administrative workload of teachers was reduced, and they received more peer support, quality training and mentorship¹⁶. Informatics was introduced as a separate subject in 48 primary schools to complement the cross-curricular approach to it¹⁷. However, SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the reform neglected cross-curricular topics, focusing disproportionately on subject-specific curriculum. **They raise concerns about the fact that the curriculum is set to be expanded nationally** even though the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot programme was insufficient and unsystematic. Currently, cross-curricular topics linked to digital skills refer to the functional and responsible use of information and communication technology, communication and collaboration in digital surroundings, research and critical evaluation

in the digital environment, creativity and innovation in the digital environment. In addition, there is a cross-curricular thematic area called “Learning to learn” including digital competences and media literacy acquisition, as well as other literacy forms – information, linguistic, technical and mathematical. For these 21st century skills, as branded in the curriculum, and the other changes, 81 virtual classrooms were set for 42724 teachers to collaborate, communicate and understand how to implement changes¹⁸. These efforts done by the government cover only 6-10% of the school population and teachers, since many educational units experience problems with digital infrastructure and inclusion of digitalization in the curriculum. This, coupled with low levels of digital skills for Croatians, reveals that more must be done by the government to achieve digitally mature schools and to connect with responsible digital citizens via its e-government services. Meanwhile, CSOs take initiative by recognizing the risks of digitalization and providing direct aid to citizens. SOLIDAR Foundation members report that even CSOs must do more to catch up with digitalization.

13 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. P.48.

14 European Commission. Country Report 2019 Croatia. Pp. 41, 44.

15 Ibid. P.41.

16 European Commission. Country Report 2019 Croatia. P.44.

17 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. P.30

18 European Commission. Digital Education at School in Europe. Pp. 56, 117.

CASE STUDY

SOLIDAR Foundation member, [Center for Peace Studies \(CPS\)](#) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization promoting non-violence and social change through education, research and activism. It operates since 1996, working on: Asylum, Integration and Human Security, Peace Education and Non-violence Affirmation, and Combating Inequalities. In partnership with [Human Rights House Zagreb](#), it maintains the [Enough with the Hatred webpage](#), a user friendly tool employed by citizens to report hate speech instances offline and online. The webpage is accompanied by a mobile app, collecting reports from citizens, which then are sent forward by moderators to local authorities, attorneys, and relevant parties. The tool

is also used to provide digital education for people on online hate speech.

CPS joined other CSOs in their efforts to monitor the implementation of the [Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online](#). The European Commission signed this Code of Conduct together with digital giants such as Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter in 2016, with more pledging to abide by it since, to ensure that the companies are supervising the conduct on their platforms and are eliminating illegal hate speech. CPS joined 3/4 monitoring sessions in Croatia, as CSOs take responsibility and hold corporations accountable for the insufficient regulations on their management of the online space.



CASE STUDY

UNICEF and the [Agency for Electronic Media](#) have partnered to set up www.medijskapismenost.hr, an online platform which educates about media literacy, facilitates communication among education practitioners, parents of students, and other stakeholders on the topic of media literacy,

and disseminates projects run by different public and private actors in Croatia on media literacy. The platform facilitates conversations about safe use of technologies and acts as a portal that provides immediate contacts on and information about media literacy, filling in gaps left by the government.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Citizenship education is provided mostly as a cross-curricular topic in Croatia, with the exception of a one-year compulsory module during secondary level education. Even with this compulsory component, Croatia, together with Portugal, represent the countries that dedicate the least curricular time for citizenship education¹⁹. Furthermore, SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the subject is taught using a civics education approach, focusing greatly on the transfer of knowledge related to the country's history, geography, constitution and governance and less about the development of skills. This reveals how the topic is not prioritized in Croatia, being even left in the hands of motivated teachers or at municipal level. **This informal way of organizing the subject leads to neglect, as teachers report not feeling valued – with only 10% feeling valued, which is one of the lowest shares in the EU²⁰** – and having an overwhelming workload, which are not conducive to spending more resources on integrating citizenship education in their workload. Teachers are insufficiently prepared to deal with this, as there are not even semi-specialist teachers on citizenship education in Croatia²¹, while ITE inadequately covers the topic. CSOs are shouldering the burden by providing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses, as reported by SOLIDAR Foundation members, especially since most courses offered by the National Teacher Training Agency are focused on specific subjects and neglect cross-curricular topics and interdisciplinary approaches. Initial teacher education is extremely lacking in opportunities for future teachers to develop their civic competences and pedagogical skills^{22 23}. More compulsory subjects focusing

on these areas should be provided to future teachers. The [Institute for Social Research Zagreb](#) research revealed that though teachers show interest in Global Citizenship Education and value it, teachers have insufficient capacity for this, the administrative burden is too high, organizational challenges exist, and there is insufficient monitoring from public authorities for the implementation of citizenship education²⁴.

SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the European dimension is introduced in a cross-curricular manner, being present in Languages, Arts and Music as well as Social Sciences classes. However, it is not designed in a way that helps students understand their rights and obligations, the landscape of European bodies or contemporary challenges in Europe. The absence of these elements is conducive to an increase in the apathy of the youth towards the EU, especially in a context of increased nationalism in the country.

Media literacy is part of the curriculum for primary and secondary level in a cross-curricular fashion, especially within Croatian language classes. The themes covered are media and critical understanding of media content, positive and negative influence of the media, advantages and dangers of the Internet, Internet safety, resilience and critical understanding of media content. In secondary schools, as part of the Politics and economy class, students are taught about public/private opinion, censorship, print, radio, and TV²⁵.

The School for Life reform, mentioned above, impacted citizenship education as well. As

19 European Commission (2018). Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2018. P.6. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2018-croatia_en.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

20 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019. P.41.

21 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2018. P.6.

22 Ibid.

23 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2019. P.10.

24 Kovacic, Marko and Baketa, Nikola (2018). *Papir sve trpi – perspektiva nastavnika o (me upredmetnoj) provedbi GOO-a*.

25 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2019). Media literacy and safe use of new media – Croatia [online].

Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/68-media-literacy-and-safe-use-new-media-croatia>. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

reported by SOLIDAR Foundation members, being mostly a cross-curricular topic, it is neglected. Our members report the lack of involvement of CSOs or citizenship education experts on this curriculum. Experts from the Universities of Zagreb and of Rijeka, and from the Institute for Social Research Zagreb, among others, were involved until 2016 in the design of the curricular reform. However, SOLIDAR Foundation members report that the government ceased to collaborate with them in 2016, and report uncertainty over the people involved in finalizing the drafting of the curriculum, though there seems to have been influences from the religious community. This influence is felt across the society, as in 2013 a referendum approved constitutional changes to the definition of marriage²⁶, ensuring that it is only between a woman and a man, and as a significant part of the population gathered signatures to oppose the Croatian government signing the 2018 Istanbul convention²⁷. **Such actions are damaging for citizenship education, revealing how from the school level, but across life afterwards, Croatian citizens experience a climate**

not open to democratic values, to values of equal rights and of non-discrimination. The polarizing climate runs the risk of inhibiting the development of citizens who coexist in a peaceful, multicultural environment.

Our members report poor implementation of curricular reforms, and a constant change in the content of the reforms. They also highlight the constrained focus of the new curriculum, which sets as main themes human rights, democracy and community, with no justification for the choices, while eliminating topics in the present curriculum, such as sustainable development and the intercultural dimension. **Topics such as political participation are narrowed down to participation in political associations while solidarity is reduced to humanitarian aid.** SOLIDAR Foundation members are displeased with the narrow understanding of citizenship education that their government takes and are worried by the lack of vision, especially since it is unclear what definition of citizenship was used and why certain choices were made.



Source: BBC.com

26 BBC (2013). *Same-sex marriage ban referendum in Croatia*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-25180548/same-sex-marriage-ban-referendum-in-croatia>. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

27 BBC (2018). *Croatia rally: Traditionalists reject European gender treaty*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43528212>. Last accessed 29 November 2019.

Municipalities are frequently obliged to take action and provide a more robust citizenship education themselves.



CASE STUDY

The municipality of Rijeka integrated citizenship education in extra-curricular activities in primary schools in 2017. The measured success of this initiative led to an expansion to 11 other municipalities, including the 3rd and 4th largest cities in Croatia. CSOs, including SOLIDAR Foundation member CPS, have been collaborating with schools on the provision of citizenship education in this manner. Teachers include these extracurricular activities in their working time and are paid, which facilitates their participation. The schools involved are developing manuals and materials for teaching citizenship education and they disseminate them across the community. The municipalities are funding this initiative, while CSOs assist with training and mentorship for teachers to teach citizenship education.

The project is implemented and expanded in other municipalities through the efforts of the [GOOD initiative](#) (Initiative for systematic and quality introduction of civic educa-

tion in schools). Since 2008, civil society organizations dealing with non-formal education and human rights have been brought together under the umbrella of the GOOD initiative and have been providing concerted actions to promote citizenship education. Out of the 50 member organisations, some have a research background, using their work to set the priorities and agenda of GOOD. CPS, together with NGOs GOND and Freedom Education Forum, is coordinating the GOOD initiative and its efforts in providing training and mentoring on citizenship education, organizing demonstrations, and raising awareness about the need of citizenship education in schools. The solidarity among CSOs and their methodical approach to their goal, boosted by facts-based research, is welcome as a counterbalance to the lethargy of the central government. CSOs must be considered an equal partner, especially as their cooperation increases their strength and legitimacy to be part of negotiations on curricular reforms.

Though citizenship education falls through the cracks and is not offered due attention, paradoxically, Croatian pupils score above average on their level of civic knowledge. 40% of Croatian pupils were above the average of countries participating in an [IEA](#) study. The students also

express low levels of trust in politicians, government, parliament, political parties and the media, compared to other countries²⁸. This encouragingly reinforces the idea that pupils need more contact with citizenship education and require a more expanded curriculum for this topic.

28 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2018. P.6.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Croatia is a best performer in Europe regarding the early leaving from education and training (ELET) rate, as in 2009 it experienced a rate of 5.2%, way below the EU average of that time, 14.2%, and it even reached 3.3% in 2018 compared to the EU average of 10.6%²⁹. Though this can reveal an attention paid to pupils' well-being by ensuring that they receive education, it is worth considering the quality of the education received, considering what was previously mentioned in relation to digital and civic skills. Inclusive education and the whole-school approach are also lacking as teachers are not receiving training on interdisciplinarity and as Croatia confronts itself with a serious shortage of teachers capable to teach students with special needs, even if they improved the shortage in the past 5 years³⁰. The impact of this is striking as Croatia's gap between early school leaving for people with or without disability is higher than the EU average, at 15.7%³¹.

The population in Croatia is relatively homogenous in terms of the demographic composition and it has not felt the impacts of the migration crisis in the same manner as other EU states³². This can also explain the absence of interculturalism in the citizenship education curriculum. Part of the investment in education is dedicated to integrating migrants in society, with preparatory classes being set up for them, and with additional support being provided during their integration into mainstream education³³. However, this demographic composition leads to few initiatives on the integration of migrants in society. Moreover, the tar-

geted support for migrants is the same as the one offered to native pupils³⁴. Normally, this would be a positive aspect, as it is important to not create gaps among students and to ensure that each benefits from equal access to opportunities to progress in education. However, for Croatia, this is dangerous given how small the migrant population is and how specific their needs are, but also given that intercultural dialogue or multiculturalism are not prioritized in the education that native pupils receive. One example that clearly shows the defectiveness of this system is the fact that Croatia provides no psycho-social support for migrant pupils³⁵. This is clearly something that native pupils need as well, but even more so the migrant students who experience tremendous changes in their life when arriving in a new country.

SOLIDAR Foundation members, in partnership with Croatian CSOs have been taking up responsibilities in educating people on peaceful coexistence and on combatting stereotypes related to migrant populations. SOLIDAR Foundation member, CPS, provides training and workshops for pupils and students on topics such as migration, stereotypes, tolerance, solidarity, human rights, while producing didactic and educational materials that schools can use. CPS also partnered with actors and illustrators on a tour in schools with the award-winning graphic novel about a young Syrian refugee entitled 'Zenobia'. The Danish novel is translated and accompanied by live performances and by discussions on forced migration moderated by CPS.

29 Data from Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2018 and Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2019.

30 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019. P.22.

31 European Commission. Country report Croatia 2019. P.44.

32 European Commission. Education and Training Monitor 2019. P.25.

33 European Commission (2019). Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures. Eurydice report. Available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/integrating_students_from_migrant_backgrounds_into_schools_in_europe_national_policies_and_measures.pdf. Last accessed: 29 November 2019.

34 Ibid. P.103.

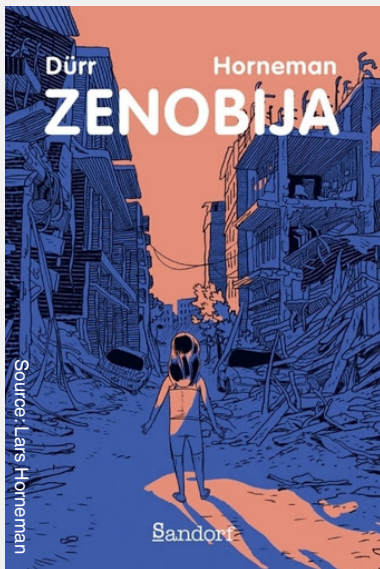
35 Ibid. P.111.



CASE STUDY

CPS is part of an Erasmus+ funded project in partnership with organisations from Spain, Italy, France, Slovenia and Poland that will run for 3 years, entitled *Let's play the fraternity card*. 18 Croatian primary and secondary schools are involved in the project, with CPS coordinating the project activities within the schools. The project promotes the importance of coexistence of various ideas, religions, races, cultures through the action of sending solidarity messages from school students to people in their communities. The

messages appear on post-cards containing photographs chosen or made by the pupils which promote topics of inter-cultural, peaceful coexistence, celebrations of differences among people. Identical activities are organized in each of the countries of the project partners. Before creating postcards, pupils are trained by teachers on critical thinking and photo analysis in relation to discrimination, migration, poverty, volunteering among others. Approximately 150000 pupils will participate in the 2017/2018 cycle of the project.



FUNDING

Croatia is investing in education an amount consistent with the EU average, totaling between 4.7 and 4.9% of the GDP for the period 2009-2018³⁶. Given teacher shortages, and the outdated digital infrastructure, funding clearly needs to be boosted in Croatia. It is encouraging to observe the ability to access ESIF, especially since the e-Schools initiative

has been mostly financed in this way. SOLIDAR Foundation members report a decrease in the funding allotted to CSOs in 2018, but a significant increase in 2019. However, they highlight the fact that a large amount is coming from EU funding, raising questions about the sustainability of the model and of the government's support for CSOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

- ◆ Establish appropriate monitoring mechanisms for reforms related to digitalization of education;
- ◆ Speed up the development of the Digital Skills Development Strategy;
- ◆ Provide more ICT training to teachers, ensuring that it becomes a mandatory component of ITE;



CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

- ◆ Include citizenship education as separate curricular topic, make the content of the curriculum more comprehensive and increase the time dedicated to the topic in schools;
- ◆ Improve collaboration among National Teacher Training Agency and CSOs on the development of CPD;
- ◆ Involve CSOs in decision-making related to citizenship education and curricular reforms



INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

- ◆ Collaborate more with CSOs on intercultural dialogue given their already established efforts on this;
- ◆ Ensure a secular approach in all the reforms;



GENERAL

- ◆ Improve the recognition of teachers, ensuring that they feel valued within the profession.

36 Data from Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2018 and Education and Training Monitor Croatia 2019.

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