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# Education and Training Monitor 2017

# Croatia

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

# **Education and Training Monitor 2017**

Croatia

*Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2017 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2016. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.*

*Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country's education and training system. Section 3 focuses on drivers of inequalities in education and measures to promote inclusion, building in particular on evidence from the OECD's 2015 Programme for International Skills Assessment (PISA), as well as recent developments in early school leaving and early childhood education and care. Section 4 looks at investment in education and training. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education, covering, inter alia, the teaching profession, digital and language skills. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and adult learning.*

*The manuscript was completed on 15 September 2017.*

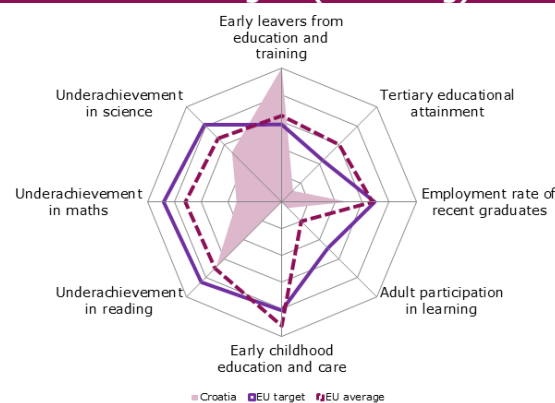
*Additional contextual data can be found online ([ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor))*

## 1. Key indicators

		Croatia		EU average		
		2013	2016	2013	2016	
<b>ET 2020 benchmarks</b>						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Total	4.5%	2.8% <sup>u</sup>	11.9%	10.7%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Total	25.6%	29.5%	37.1%	39.1%	
Early childhood education and care (ECEC) (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		71.7% <sup>12</sup>	73.8% <sup>15</sup>	93.9% <sup>12</sup>	94.8% <sup>15</sup>	
Proportion of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	18.7% <sup>12</sup>	19.9% <sup>15</sup>	17.8% <sup>12</sup>	19.7% <sup>15</sup>	
	Maths	29.9% <sup>12</sup>	32.0% <sup>15</sup>	22.1% <sup>12</sup>	22.2% <sup>15</sup>	
	Science	17.3% <sup>12</sup>	24.6% <sup>15</sup>	16.6% <sup>12</sup>	20.6% <sup>15</sup>	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	53.8%	72.5%	75.4%	78.2%	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	3.1%	3.0%	10.7%	10.8%	
<b>Other contextual indicators</b>						
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	5.1% <sup>p</sup>	4.7% <sup>15,p</sup>	5.0%	4.9% <sup>15</sup>	
	Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€3 350	€3 487 <sup>14</sup>	:	: <sup>14</sup>
		ISCED 3-4	€3 196	€3 334 <sup>14</sup>	:	: <sup>14</sup>
		ISCED 5-8	:	€7 979 <sup>14</sup>	:	: <sup>14</sup>
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	4.0%	2.7% <sup>u</sup>	11.0%	9.8%	
	Foreign-born	11.5% <sup>u</sup>	:	21.9%	19.7%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Native-born	25.9%	30.3%	37.8%	39.9%	
	Foreign-born	22.2% <sup>u</sup>	21.0% <sup>u</sup>	33.4%	35.3%	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	50.8%	70.0%	69.4%	72.6%	
	ISCED 5-8	56.4%	74.7%	80.7%	82.8%	
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)	0.2%	0.2% <sup>15</sup>	5.5%	6.0% <sup>15</sup>	
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)	0.5%	0.3% <sup>15</sup>	13.6%	15.1% <sup>15</sup>	

Sources: Eurostat (see section 9 for more details); OECD (PISA). Notes: data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different numbers of Member States depending on the source; b = break in time series, d = definition differs, e = estimated, p = provisional, u = low reliability, 12 = 2012, 14 = 2014, 15 = 2015. On learning mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC based on available country data in all years. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 ([ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)).

**Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)**



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

## 2. Highlights

- The very low early school leaving rate – lowest in the EU – is among the main strengths of Croatia's education system.
- Basic skills have declined and are below the EU average. There are differences in performance linked to socioeconomic status, but the quality of curricula and teaching appear to be the main driver of Croatia's poor performance.
- Participation rates in early childhood education and care and in adult education are among the lowest compared to other EU countries.
- Despite recent robust economic growth and a more promising labour market situation, low skill levels need to be addressed. The same applies to the relevance of skills acquired in vocational and higher education.
- A number of reforms have been prepared in the context of the Strategy for Education, Science and Technology and the associated curricular reform. However, progress in 2017 has been limited.

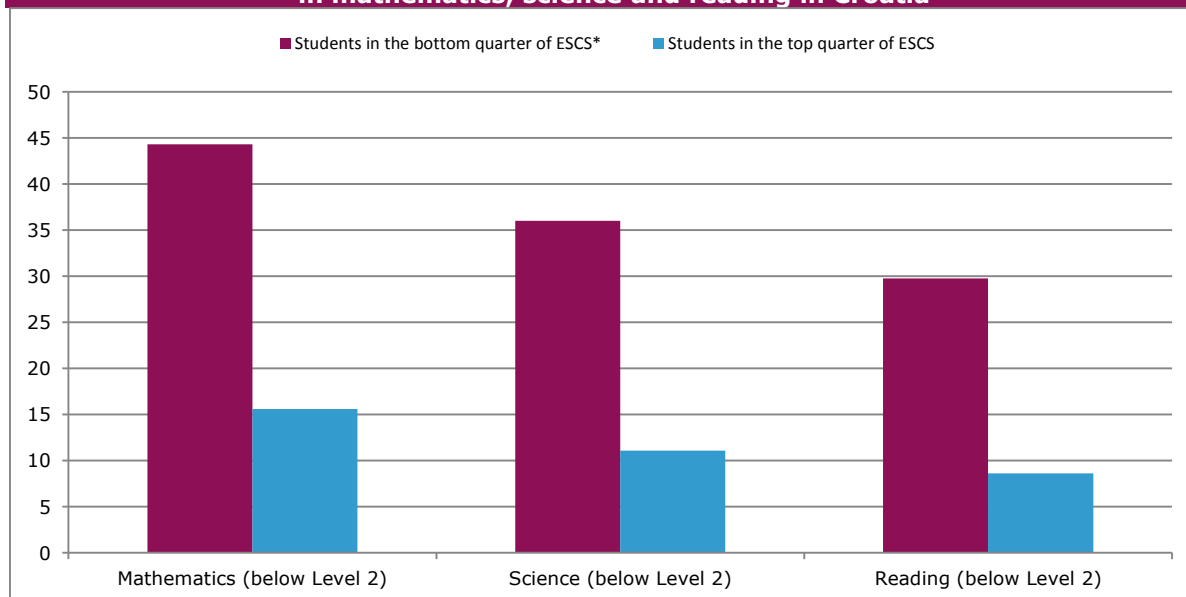
## 3. Tackling inequalities and promoting inclusion

**A large number of pupils have inadequate maths and science skills.** In the 2015 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey of 15 year-olds, Croatia recorded one of the worst results in the EU in science and mathematics. Compared to 2012, the proportion of low achievers increased in both fields, undoing the progress made in the 2009-2012 period (OECD, 2016). Every fourth student lacks a basic level of proficiency in science (24.6 %), compared to the EU average of one in five (20.5 %). In reading, the situation is better: underachievement is around the EU average (19.9 %), but reading skills among boys are significantly lower than among girls (25 % of boys underachieve, against 15.1 % of girls). The gender gap in reading underachievement decreased by 7 %, which is largely a result of a 5.7 % increase in underachievement among girls. The gender gap in science and maths is not significant. The proportion of top-performing students is below 5 %, which may suggest a lack of focus on identifying and supporting talented students.

**The use of mathematical skills is a particularly weak point among Croatian students.** The PISA survey reveals that approximately every third pupil at age 15 (first year of upper secondary education) has got poor mathematics skills (32 % compared to the EU average of 22.1 %). This is a significantly worse outcome than in reading or science, where the underachievement rate is respectively 19.9 % and 24.6 %. The shortcomings in mathematics also point to later imbalances in the choice of subjects in tertiary education (see section 6).

**Inequality is evident in educational outcomes – the knowledge, skills and abilities that pupils acquire – but it is not the main driver of low achievement.** Nearly 45 % of pupils from the lowest socioeconomic quartile fail to achieve the basic level of proficiency in mathematics, compared to only 15 % from the top quartile. A similar performance gap is seen in science and reading skills (Figure 2). However, there is little evidence of socioeconomic segregation between schools. Most of the variation in scores comes from variation within the same schools. To significantly improve the overall skills performance, raising the performance of the low achievers from low socioeconomic backgrounds will need to be accompanied by improvements in the general quality of education.

**Figure 2. Proportion of underachievement in PISA 2015 for the bottom and top quartile in mathematics, science and reading in Croatia**



\* ESCS refers to the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status.

Source: OECD (PISA 2015). Online data codes: Table 1.6.6a, table 1.6.6b, Table 1.6.6c

**Despite a steady increase over the last decade, the proportion of children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is one of the lowest in the EU.** The latest available data from 2015 show that only 73.8 % of pupils aged between 4 and 6 attended early childhood education. This is well below the EU average of 94.8 %. National data show an increase of 3.2 % in the number of children of any age attending regular ECEC between 2015 and 2016, due to a steady increase in the number of institutions offering places (National Statistics Office, 2017). The 2017 action plan for the implementation of the 2014 Strategy for Education, Science and Technology aims to increase participation in ECEC to 95 % by 2020. This would require further heavy investment in expanding capacity.

**Reforms of ECEC are planned but await implementation.** A proposal for a new national framework curriculum for pre-school education was developed in 2016 as part of the wider curricular reform, but like the reform itself its adoption has been delayed. The proposal is more detailed than the 2010 national ECEC framework it will replace,<sup>1</sup> especially in specifying the competences which children are expected to develop during the compulsory pre-school year. Most complaints received by the Children's Ombudsman in Croatia in the ECEC field, according to its 2016 report, concern three areas:

- the terms and conditions for enrolling children in ECEC;
- the different rules and ways of co-financing ECEC and inequalities of treatment depending on the authority (local or regional) responsible; and
- the inability of parents to enrol children in pre-school education programmes.

**Croatia has the lowest early school leaving rate in the EU.** Among 18- to 24-year-olds, the rate was 2.8 % in 2016, well below the EU average of 10.7 %. There is a small gender gap of 1.5 %, with boys more likely to leave school without a qualification.

<sup>1</sup> [http://mzos.hr/datoteke/Nacionalni\\_okvirni\\_kurikulum.pdf](http://mzos.hr/datoteke/Nacionalni_okvirni_kurikulum.pdf).



### Box 1: Croatian curricular reform at a crossroads

*After nearly 3 years of planning the reform of the education system, it is widely accepted that school curricula and teaching methods in Croatia need to be modernised. Declining results in international surveys such as PISA have confirmed this assessment.*

*A major initiative to address this is the curricular reform launched by the government in 2015. Since then, however, it has remained in the preparatory phase. The reform's objective is to enable pupils and students to learn skills besides facts, and so become better citizens and be more competitive on the labour market.*

*To this end 52 new curricula proposals and 3 methodological handbooks were drafted in order to bring together all previously disconnected aspects of education reform in one coherent whole based on agreed education outcomes. Transversal skills such as learning to learn, entrepreneurship, personal and social development, health, sustainable development, use of information and communication technologies and citizenship education were elaborated in more detail.*

*However, the political situation since 2015 has contributed to a very difficult context for continuing with the reform. From the outset, the lack of clarity about the timeline and budget for implementation, and uncertainty about the level of commitment to the reform, has led to a loss of momentum which may be difficult to regain.*

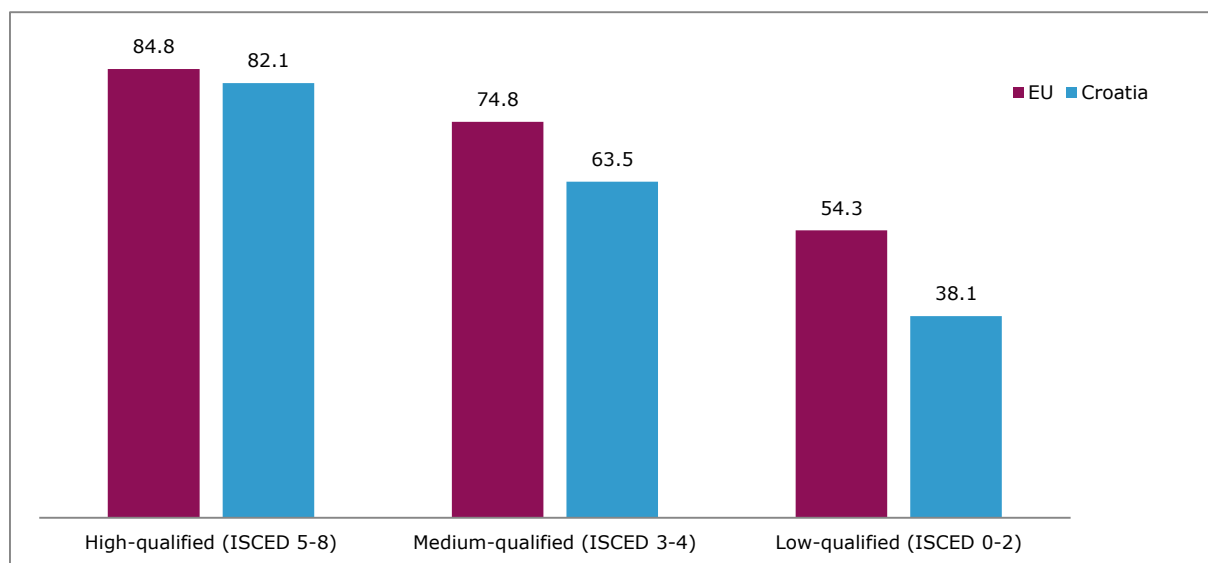
*As a result, the Council of the European Union made the following assessment in the 2017 European Semester process: 'After ambivalent stakeholder reactions, the curricular reform was revised, and implementation has been significantly delayed. The process now needs to continue in line with the original objectives'. The Council issued a country-specific recommendation to 'Accelerate the reform of the education system' (Council of the European Union, 2017).*

## 4. Investing in education and training

**The economy is growing again but Croatia still has very poor skills composition.** In 2015 and 2016 Croatia's GDP expanded, marking the end of one of the longest and deepest recessions in the EU. Improving labour market conditions have reduced unemployment, although this also reflects a shrinking workforce (through emigration and retirement) and many new temporary jobs. In 2016, 82.1 % of highly educated people aged 25-64 were employed, compared to only 63.5 % of people with at most upper secondary education. The most striking difference with the EU average is for the lower educated: only 38.1 % are employed in Croatia, against the EU average of 54.3 % (Figure 3). The case is strong for investing in and reforming education and training, including adult education, in order to raise the skills levels and make qualifications more relevant to finding employment.



**Figure 3. Employment rates by educational attainment level for 25-64-year-olds (2016)**



Source: Eurostat (LFS 2016). Online data code: [lfsa\\_ergaed](#)

**Expenditure on education in Croatia increased in real terms in line with GDP growth in 2015.** Croatia is in the bottom 10 EU Member States for general government expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP. Education spending was stable between 2014 and 2015 (at 4.7 % of GDP) but the overall trend since 2010 has been downwards (-0.4 pp.). In real terms, public spending increased by 1.6 % between 2014 and 2015, but is 7.5 % below the 2010 level. Education's share of total general government expenditure, at 10.1 %, was close to the EU average of 10.3 % in 2015. Expenditure per pupil in basic education (ISCED 1 and 2) and in upper secondary education (ISCED 3 and 4) is one of the lowest in the EU in terms of purchasing power parity. More positively, expenditure per student in tertiary education is among the highest in the EU in terms of GDP per capita.<sup>2</sup>

**The increase in the 2017 state budget reflects strategic priorities, but there is a risk of funding not being used due to delays in implementing the curricular reform.** The state budget for education for 2017 has been increased sharply, by 14 % in absolute terms, compared to 2016. The budget for implementing the curricular reform has been doubled. The funding for each school that will be involved in the experimental implementation of the reform is now approximately EUR 300 000. The budget for the national teacher training agency has also increased, by 25 %, so that it can train teachers to prepare for and implement the curricular reform. However, due to delays in implementing the reform, these budgets are currently not being used.

## 5. Modernising school education

**Teaching qualifications are currently a major focus.** Adopting a national qualification standard for teachers in primary and secondary schools from February 2016 (National Council for Education, 2016) is now one of four priorities on the education reform agenda. The framework is drafted in line with the methodology of the Croatian Qualification Framework and identifies eight units of learning outcomes that apply to all primary and secondary teachers, regardless of their academic specialisation.<sup>3</sup> Another expert working group drafted a set of occupational and qualification

<sup>2</sup> Annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on full-time equivalent, by education level and programme orientation [educ\_uae\_fini04].

<sup>3</sup> The eight units are: proficiency in the academic discipline; child-centred pedagogical and teaching competences; assessment and evaluation competences; organisation of the learning environment; effective collaboration with school, family and community; awareness of the education context (education and school system, laws); communication and social skills; and lifelong learning and continuous professional development.

standards for school headmasters and developed a model for regularly evaluating and relicensing school leaders to keep their skills up to date. The timetable for implementing the two models has yet to be decided.

### Box 2: Croatian e-Schools — a model for digitalising schools on a national scale

*The e-Schools project (2014-2022) has a budget of EUR 180 million. 85 % of its funding comes from EU funds (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) and 15 % from national and local budgets. The project's goal is to increase the level of 'digital maturity'<sup>4</sup> in 60 % of Croatian primary and secondary schools by 2022.*

*The project's pilot phase, running from autumn 2015 to February 2018, includes implementing ICT in the teaching and administrative processes of 10 % of all primary and secondary schools. This aims to address a relatively low level of digital maturity of Croatian schools: an initial evaluation in the pilot found that 80 % of schools were 'digital beginners'. Participating schools receive support to achieve digital maturity and to prepare the strategic documents, plans and policies for systematically integrating ICT into their work. Based on the pilot, a strategy for national roll-out between 2019 and 2022 is being developed.*

*Achievements so far have included:*

- *developing the framework for digital competences;*
- *evaluating levels of digital maturity in pilot schools;*
- *publishing criteria and recommendations for developing material for required reading in schools (e-Lektire):*
- *training staff and teachers in 151 pilot schools, starting September 2016;*
- *equipping around 7 000 staff with tablets or laptops by end-2016;*
- *launching field support teams in January 2017 to help schools in their transition;*
- *publishing 170 out of 240 learning scenarios by September 2017. These are a type of lesson preparation through which teachers can acquire the skills to integrate digital educational materials, digital tools and new learning methods into their educational practices;*
- *signing a contract for the supply of network equipment and development of local IT networks in pilot schools; and*
- *signing a contract for the supply of digital educational content.*

*The project is progressing on schedule and changing the pilot schools significantly. It is also having a spillover effect on the behaviour of publishers who are now exploring ways of publishing books in a digital and more interactive format. Furthermore, the project is stimulating the development of digital educational content. Another positive consequence is the creation of new teacher training courses at the national teacher training agency.*

*<https://www.e-skole.hr/en/>*

## 6. Modernising higher education

**The growth in tertiary graduates has slowed, and the employment rates of recent graduates have not recovered to pre-crisis levels.** Tertiary educational attainment in Croatia has been on an upward trend for the last decade but started levelling off in 2014. The proportion of 30- to 34-year-olds with tertiary education in 2016 was 29.5 %, significantly below the EU average of 39.1 % and Croatia's national 2020 target of 35 %. In 2008, 86.3 % of people who had finished tertiary education within the previous 1-3 years found employment, but in 2016 this share was significantly lower at 74.7 %. It was also well below the EU average of 82.8 %. The unemployment rate of tertiary graduates has dropped from its 2013 peak of 11.3 % to 7.8 % in 2016 but it is still the fourth highest rate in the EU for this group after Spain, Cyprus and Portugal. However, tertiary

<sup>4</sup> Digitally mature schools are defined in Croatia as having 'a systematic approach to the use of ICT and digital educational content in teaching, in a supportive environment with adequate resources' [https://www.carnet.hr/e-schools/digital\\_maturity\\_of\\_schools](https://www.carnet.hr/e-schools/digital_maturity_of_schools).

graduates enjoy a significant premium over non-tertiary graduates in terms of lower risk of unemployment (Eurostat, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

**Significant efforts are being made to improve the relevance of higher education, but the effects are still limited.** The Croatian qualifications framework (CROQF) continues to be the principal instrument for aligning higher education with the needs of the labour market. Of 25 planned sectoral councils representing social partners and stakeholders from the same number of economic sectors, nearly all had been appointed by July 2017. Eight had started work, 14 will start meeting in autumn 2017, while the remaining three are yet to be established. Evaluations of 147 new standards of occupation and 174 standards of qualifications developed by consortia of higher education institutions are expected. After evaluation they will be entered into the CROQF Register and serve as models for updating the content of study programmes. Two major calls for proposals financed by the European Social Fund – on the next phase of the CROQF project and on internationalising higher education programmes – will support future improvements.

**The development of professional higher education studies may be hampered by the latest legislative developments.** Following a ruling by Croatia's Constitutional Court, the CROQF's legal basis had to be changed to address universities' criticisms that professional degrees' are classified on the same level (level 7) as academic degrees. The national policy is that professional degrees should confer high-level skills through a practice-oriented form of applied studies. In practice, however, there have been concerns over the quality of some professional degrees. Draft amendments to the CROQF Act that offered two alternative possibilities for relating professional to academic qualifications were put on public consultation, attracting a very large number of responses (1850) with divided opinions. A final proposal, based on the consultation, was issued by the Ministry of Education in September 2017 and while it limits the professional studies' access to doctoral programmes, they are kept at the same level.

## 7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

**The high but declining number of students will affect the VET landscape in Croatia.** The proportion of upper secondary students (ISCED 3) in Croatia in vocational education and training (VET) fell slightly in 2015 to 70.4 %, which is still well above the EU average of 47.3 %. Over two thirds of all upper secondary students enrolled in VET at the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year (SEECEL, 2017). The significant and sustained drop in overall enrolment in the context of demographic decline has primarily affected industrial and crafts schools; if this trend continues it could threaten the sustainability of the 3-year VET track. Croatia topped the EU-28 in the increase of the employment rate of recent VET graduates in 2016 at 70.3 % (up from 45.7 % in 2015), but this was still below the EU average of 75 %.

**The strategy for developing VET has been adopted, but implementation is difficult.** The 2016-2020 programme and action plan for developing the VET system, adopted by the government in 2016, set out a number of priorities. These include improving the overall quality of VET by promoting and improving models of work-based learning; developing the system of quality assurance; improving the professional development of teachers; and increasing the mobility and employability of students; and supporting internationalisation and the mobility of students and teachers. The programme should also lead to the development of new vocational curricula. In addition, the agency for VET and adult education is participating in an Erasmus+ project (2016) aiming at creating support mechanisms for quality assurance in VET and developing a self-evaluation model for schools. Implementation of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) 2016-2017 Strategic Plan is part of the project.

**On the sidelines of the VET reform, there is experimentation with introducing a dual VET system<sup>6</sup>.** Research into the attitudes of vocational schools and companies to introducing a dual

<sup>5</sup> Unemployment rate among upper secondary graduates is 14.6 % and among primary/lower secondary graduates is 17.4 %.

<sup>6</sup> The reform is building upon the 2004 experience of JMO - Jedinstveni model obrazovanja (JMO) - (Integrated educational model) for regulated craft vocational courses.

education system (SEECEL, 2017) showed a high level of readiness (schools 72.3 %, companies 79.7 %) to participate in such a scheme. Both schools and companies have expressed a clear need for mentor training. Under Croatia's bilateral cooperation with Switzerland, started in June 2015, support will be provided for VET schools and for promoting work-based learning.

**Adult learning is the weakest link in the Croatian education system, but a planned new law should introduce improvements.** Average monthly adult participation in learning remained low at 3.0 % in 2016, well below the EU average of 10.8 %. In digital skills Croatia remains below the EU average, with 27.9 % of individuals having no digital skills, 17.4 % low skills, 21.3 % basic skills and 33.3 % above-basic skills (European Commission, 2017). This led the Council of the EU to make a recommendation to Croatia under the 2017 European Semester to 'Improve adult education, in particular of older workers, the low-skilled, and the long-term unemployed' (Council of the European Union, 2017). A draft new law on adult education, aiming to address these challenges, was developed in August 2016, but progress in its adoption has since stalled. The new law has two objectives for adults: to develop key competences for lifelong learning and to obtain qualifications by acquiring new skills. The 2016-2020 lifelong career guidance strategy aims among other things at raising participation in adult learning through guidance, counselling and offering upskilling opportunities, particularly to the unemployed. Under an Erasmus+ project the Education Ministry is developing a new basic adult education curriculum based on the key competences concept.

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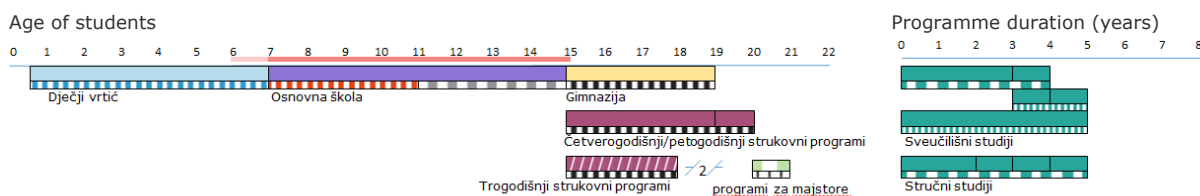
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## 9. Annex I. Key indicator sources

Indicator	Eurostat online data code
Early leavers from education and training	edat_lfse_02 + edat_lfse_14
Tertiary educational attainment	edat_lfse_03 + edat_lfs_9912
Early childhood education and care	educ_uoe_enra10
Employment rate of recent graduates	edat_lfse_24
Adult participation in learning	trng_lfse_03
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	gov_10a_exp
Expenditure on public and private institutions per student	educ_uoe_fini04
Learning mobility	edu_uoe_mobg03

## 10. Annex II. Structure of the education system



Note: Start of primary education (ISCED 1) depends on child's birthday. Children born between January and April start primary school in calendar year in which they turn 6, those born from April to December when they are 7 years old.



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2016/17: Schematic Diagrams*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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