



LITERACY IN CROATIA

COUNTRY REPORT
SHORT VERSION

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Croatia is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries¹. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012². All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"³.

The Country Reports are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG's literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity⁴).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate **Long Reports** for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published **Short Reports** covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the **European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels**; both are to be found in the section "Good Practice"⁵.

¹ For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.

² In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf.

³ See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/>.

⁴ "Equity" was added by ELINET.

⁵ See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/>.

2 General Information on the Croatian Education System

Croatia, officially known as the Republic of Croatia (Republika Hrvatska) is a parliamentary democracy situated in Southeast Europe. The country's population, estimated at 4.5 million in 2010, consists of various minorities, including Serbians, Bosnians, Hungarians, Slovenes, Czechs, Roma and Italians. Croatia is a full member of the European Union since July 2013. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports is responsible for designing education strategies and policies. It determines what is taught and is responsible for relevant financial policy.

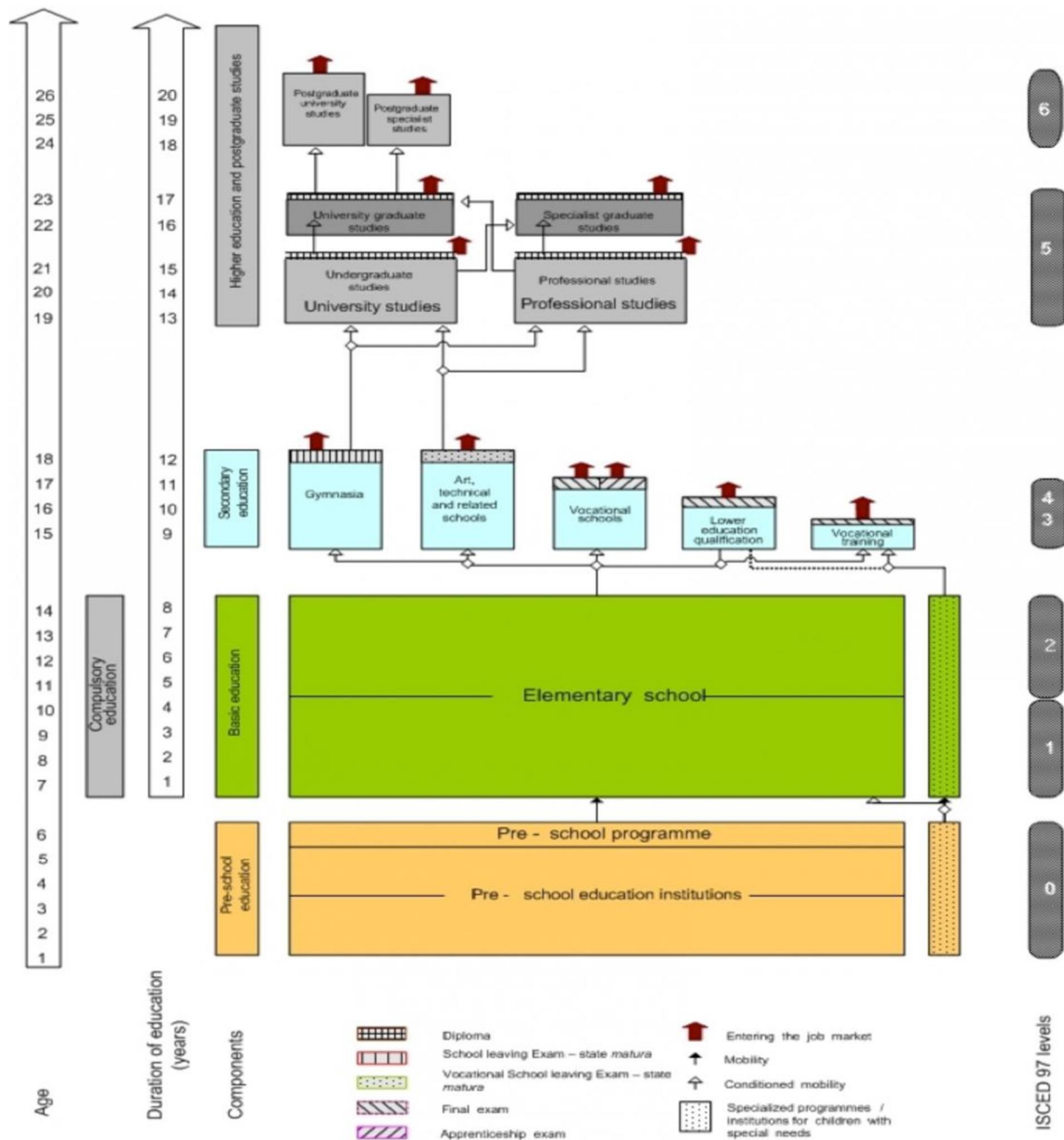
Education in Croatia is a constitutional right in terms of which primary education is free and all other education is available to all. Preschool education lasts according to parents' needs – children can enter preschool education at the age of 6 months, but this is not compulsory. The compulsory preschool programme starts one year before elementary education and it is compulsory for all children. Children who enter preschool education before the compulsory preschool programme do not have to change their kindergartens or groups, they continue their regular group programme and this is valid as compulsory preschool programme.

Elementary education in Croatia is free and compulsory for all pupils from the age of 6 to 15 years, with the exception of primary education for students with extensive developmental disabilities which can last until the age of twenty-one (European Agency). First four years of primary education are characterised by unitary class teachers who teach all subjects except language classes and physical education, which are taught by specialist teachers. Most teachers involved in the first four years of primary education are usually taught at the Teacher Education Faculties, with the exception of some physical education teachers. Subjects taught are Croatian language, Mathematics, Visual art, Nature and society, Physical education, Music education and at least one foreign language, which is compulsory from 1st grade. Religious education is an elective subject.

After the first four years of primary education in Croatia, the curriculum widens to include specialist teachers and additional scientific subjects. Children are taught the following subjects: Croatian language, Foreign language, Mathematics, Visual art, Physical education, Music education, History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, IT, Religious education, Ethics and in addition to 1st foreign language, often a second language (usually German, French or Italian). All subjects are taught from 5th grade except Chemistry and Physics, which are added to the curriculum in the 7th grade. All subjects are compulsory except Religious education and Ethics between which children have to choose in 5th grade and attend until the end of their primary schooling.

Upon completion of primary schooling, secondary education gives everyone, under equal conditions and based on individual abilities, the opportunity to acquire knowledge and the competence needed to enter the work force and to continue with further education. Children can enrol in different school types, but their success depends on their grades in the last two years of primary school. They can either enrol in general, classic, language or math grammar school (gimnazija) or vocational schools, which last either three or four years.

Figure 1: Detailed structure of the Croatia School System⁶



In the area of higher education, all students, including young people from disadvantaged groups, are guaranteed the right to education, good quality study programmes and educational processes, as well as the equality of all applicants during admission to Croatian higher education institutions. In Croatia, there is a binary higher education system, with higher professional education programmes offered by polytechnics and schools for higher professional education, on the one hand, and academic programmes offered by universities, on the other. Most of Croatia's higher education institutions are public institutions. The language of education is Croatian. However, under the influence of the Bologna Process, the number of higher education programmes being offered in English is growing slowly but surely.

⁶ See: <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/croatia/national-overview/complete-national-overview>

3 Literacy Performance Data

Croatia participated in IEA's PIRLS (4th graders reading comprehension) in 2011, and in OECD's PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) in 2009 and 2012. This means it is possible to describe the change over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, only for 15 years-old students, and to compare relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups. Croatia took part in PIRLS 2011 only, no trends can be reported for 4th graders.

In PISA 2012, Croatia performed just below the EU average (485 vs 489 EU average), a somewhat higher performance than at the previous cycle (+ 9 points).

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers was close to the EU average (18.7% vs 19.7%). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low-performing readers has decreased between 2009 and 2011 (by almost 3%). The proportion of top-performing readers was 4.4%, lower than in EU countries on average (7%).

In PISA 2009, the gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was lower than the EU average (73 vs 89 on average). The gap between native students and students with a migrant background was higher than in EU countries on average (18 vs 38 EU-average), although the distribution was nearly equivalent. The mean score difference between those who always spoke the test language and those who spoke another language was just below the EU-26 on average (52 vs 54). It should be underlined that the number of students who spoke another language was 1.5% in Croatia (vs 13.3 % on EU average).

In Croatia, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was higher than the corresponding EU average difference (51 vs 44 on EU average), namely more than one year of schooling. It remained nearly unchanged between 2009 and 2012: the girls' performance increasing by 6 score points, boys' by 9.

In conclusion, Croatia has slightly increased its performance in reading between 2009 and 2012 among 15 year-olds. Nevertheless, it remains just below the EU average. Croatia has a proportion of low-performing readers close to the EU countries on average. The data point to a low percentage of top performers, below the EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is lower than in the EU on average. The gap according to the gender is higher than on EU average in both studies. The gap according to socioeconomic status is very much higher in PIRLS and very much higher in PISA. The gap according to migration or language spoken at home was lower than in EU on average at both levels.

In PIRLS 2011, Croatia performed above the EU's average (553 vs 535) and the proportion of low-performing readers was limited (10% only vs 20% in EU). The spread in achievement between top and low performers was lower than the EU-24 average difference (154 vs 177). The gender gap with 14 points difference was higher than the EU average with 12. In Croatia, fewer students had parents whose highest level of educational attainment was university or higher (18%) than on average across the EU-21 (30%), while fewer had parents whose highest level was lower secondary or below (Croatia: 7%; EU-24: 18%). Pupils in Croatia whose parents attained a University degree or higher had a mean score (590) some 69 points higher than students whose parents completed lower secondary or below (521). The average difference across the EU-24 countries was 76, indicating a slightly weaker

relationship between parent's educational achievement and students' reading achievement in Croatia, which is coherent with what was observed among 15 year-olds. The educational system seems somewhat more equitable in Croatia than in European countries on average.

The causes of PISA and PIRLS results were never openly discussed in public in Croatia, but they however encouraged the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia to draft the National Strategy for the promotion of reading. The Strategy was developed in 2015 but has not yet been accepted by the Government.

There is a need for programmes for raising awareness among all parents that literacy is a key to learning and it gives more opportunities and more secure jobs. In Croatia, there have been several national campaigns and programmes for raising literacy awareness (national campaign Read to me!, Croatian Book Month, Books for Babies, photo-contest Smile... While Reading, Owl(letter) party, Reach for the Stars through Reading, Interliber...).

Croatia did not take part in the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and information about literacy among adults is provided by The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia, The Croatian Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, and The Croatian Bureau of Statistics. In Croatia, primary education is compulsory and free. However, 62,092 citizens aged 15 or older did not finish primary school, 3% of whom did not have any education.

4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)

4.1 Creating a Literate Environment

4.1.1 Pre-Primary Years

Parents play a central role in children's emergent literacy development. They are the first teachers, and shape children's language and communication abilities and attitudes to reading by being good reading role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child. Compared to the European average, many pupils in Croatia have parents with positive attitudes towards reading, as PIRLS 2011 data show. Parents engage often or at least sometimes in literacy related activities with their children. Since reading to the child is a predictor of future literacy achievement it is a matter of concern that 23% of parents of six-month-old children in Croatia do not read or look at picture-books with their babies, and that reading together does not count among the daily habits of 9 % of the parents of one-year-old children, 7 % of the parents of three-year-old children and 14 % of the parents of six-year-old children. (UNICEF, 2012.)

Strengthen and support libraries: The most successful programs and projects are perceived by librarians and implemented in the libraries such as *Read to me!*, the first Croatian national campaign promoting reading aloud to children from the earliest age (National campaign "Read to me!", 2013), or projects such as *Books for Babies* by the Public library of Koprivnica "Fran Galović", which comprises of packages given to every newborn in Koprivnica hospital (Knjižnica i čitaonica "Fran Galović" Koprivnica. Knjige za bebe). But a great obstacle to accessing reading and literacy programmes in public libraries is the annual membership fee. There is a need for free public libraries in Croatia so that libraries are available to all.

More family literacy programs needed: There is a need for programmes to raise awareness of all parents that literacy is a key to learning. In Croatia, there are a number of projects that serve as examples of "best practices" but they are often isolated and rarely have positive, systemic effects on literacy.

4.1.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries, offering a wide variety of books and other reading material in different genres, providing sheltered and comfortable spaces for individual reading activities.

Providing a literate environment in school: Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS 2011 shows that 51.2% of students in Croatia are in classrooms which have class libraries – below the corresponding EU-24 average of 73%. In Croatia, 9.6% of students are in classrooms whose teachers report that the students use computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly, compared to the EU-average of 33%.

Supporting reading motivation and reduce gaps in literacy: In all PISA studies, 15-year-old girls outperformed boys in reading in all the European countries, and boys are frequently overrepresented

among the low performers. Not only children from culturally disadvantaged families are "at risk" in their literacy development but also those with "special educational needs".

Strengthening the role of public libraries in reading promotion: There are Croatian libraries with excellent infrastructure and innovative services currently supported by the latest technology, but there are also libraries that do not have even the most basic equipment for their core operations. Croatian libraries in poorer places are not systematically funded, which results in insufficient infrastructure and reduced services.

Take advantage of opportunities of school libraries and librarians: In the Croatian educational system, the school library has highly educated school librarians with, in many cases, the widest and the longest education from all of the employees in their school. At this moment Croatian school libraries have the strongest potential for the change of educational system, although they are still inadequately recognised.

Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples: Programmes such as *The Croatian Book Month* and *Book Night* are organised at national level and they are already very popular among children and adolescents. *Ow(l)etter party* is a national campaign to popularise reading with primary and secondary school pupils, help pupils to develop a positive attitude towards reading, and raise their self-esteem (Hrvatska udruga školskih knjižničara. Tulum slova [project]). Many schools have developed projects in cooperation as *CARNet - Croatian Academic and Research Network* provides cheaper Internet access in school, but also at home, by providing pupils with an AAI@Edu.hr electronic identity. With their AAI@Edu.hr electronic identity, pupils can ensure cheaper Internet access at home and can also use it to access digital databases such as *eReadings* (CARNet. eLektire).

4.1.3 Adults

Croatia did not take part in the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) but data can be obtained from different sources: The Croatian Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Official Gazette.

According to the law, a person is adult at the age of 15. The education of adults in Croatia is accepted as an integral part of a unique educational system according to the Law on educating Adults which was passed in 2007 as a precaution according to The Strategy for Adult Education from the year 2004.

Participation of adults in learning is low in Croatia but positive developments are visible. In 2003, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted a ten-year project on literacy for adults "For a Literate Croatia a Path to a Desirable Future", in accordance with the framework of the UN Resolution "Decade of Literacy 2003-2012". The Government allocated considerable funds for primary adult education.

Fostering literacy provision for adults: Although the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2003 adopted a ten-year project on literacy for adults "For a Literate Croatia a Path to a Desirable Future", there is still need to correct the implementation of the project:

- lack of campaign that would provide necessary information to the public
- modified curriculum, textbooks and other learning materials, teachers with an andragogic knowledge or skills for adult education

4.2 Improving the Quality of Teaching

4.2.1 Pre-Primary Years

Investing more money in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): According to Eurostat (2014, Figure D3), the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in Croatia is 0.5% (the range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark).

Raising the professional qualification level of staff in ECEC: In many European countries, teachers in kindergarten have a lower level of qualification regarding the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher. In Croatia, the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5), length of study is 3 years.

Introducing comprehensive literacy curricula in pre-primary schools: In preschool, children can be prepared for formal instruction in school. In Croatia, one of the particular goals that the curriculum sets for preschool education refers to children's involvement in educational activities that motivate and help children to use various means of communication and expression (speech, vocabulary enrichment, visual arts expression, musical expression) (Vican, Rakić, & Milanović Litre, 2007 p. 16).

4.2.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

Ensuring adequate time for language and literacy instruction in primary and secondary schools: According to PIRLS 2011, in Croatia, students spend 46 instructional hours per year on reading as part of language, compared with an EU-24 average of 68, though the EU-24 average is itself low. Teachers in Croatia report allocating less time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (116 instructional hours per year) than on average across EU-24 countries (147 hours).

Building a stronger focus on literacy into curricula: Croatia does not have a separate curriculum for reading and writing (Mullis et al. 2012, Vol.1, exhibit 5, p. 31). Reading is a part of the national language curriculum that also includes writing and other communication skills. There is a need to mainstream reading / writing literacy across the curriculum and integrate literacy skills across subjects.

Ensuring screenings to identify struggling readers: While Croatia is identified as having goals and standards in the curriculum for each grade at primary level, it is not clear how these inform assessment of student performance or the identification of reading difficulties (Mullis et al. (Exhibit 7, 2012). There is a need to establish minimal standards of literacy achievement (benchmarks) for each grade, and to administer regular tests based on these standards, to allow for identification of struggling readers/writers and learners in order to systematically support them, allocating attention and resources accordingly, targeting low performing schools - in need of additional funding and resources - as well as low performing students within schools. Assessments therefore need to be closely linked with support programmes and adequate qualifications of teachers and specialists.

Supporting struggling literacy learners: Schools should provide *support systems* (additional instruction time, additional experts like reading experts, psychologists, speech therapists) for students falling behind in reading.

Improving the quality of teacher training: PIRLS 2011 provides information about additional staff and availability of support persons for reading. Based on teacher responses, 22% of students in Croatia are in classes where there is always access to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25%. Nineteen percent of students in Croatia

are in classrooms where there is access to a teacher aide with the same frequency, while 7% are in classrooms where there is access to an adult/parent volunteer. Corresponding EU-24 averages are 13% and 3%. Hence, teachers in Croatia have marginally less access to specialised professionals, somewhat greater access to teacher aides, and adult volunteers as on average across the EU-24, where full availability is concerned. There are no compulsory courses for teachers, but all teachers have to attend certain number of courses organised by the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency during one school year, and some of the offered courses focus on literacy development.

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: Programmes, initiatives and examples: As a result of ongoing reforms, Croatian policy makers have taken promising steps to strengthen literacy performance. Namely, in 2015, an expert group for implementing Comprehensive Curricular Reform for early and pre-school, primary and secondary education started their work (Cjelovita kurikularna reforma, 2015). The curricular reform will focus on increasing functional literacy levels of students. The reform includes drafting curricular documents, establishing a system for evaluation, assessment and reporting, training of teachers and other staff and preparing new manuals, textbooks, auxiliary teaching resources and digital content. The results of research carried out in Croatian schools has shown that our school children aged 6-10 achieved above-average results, but later as teenagers, they achieved below-average results at all three levels of literacy (natural, mathematical, reading) according to the PISA studies. Statistically, Croatian average 15 years old students know how to count in different mathematical operations, but it seems to be difficult for them to apply those operations to tasks that simulate life situations. This school reform, comprehensive and highly professional, will focus on developing basic competences for lifelong learning.

4.2.3 Adults

Improving the curricula for adult literacy: The national curricula for adult literacy consists of six terms, each lasting 18 weeks. Within the project on literacy for adults "For a Literate Croatia a Path to a Desirable Future", apart from being given an opportunity to finish primary school, the participants will also be given an opportunity to complete vocational training, required for less complicated jobs in the labour market.

It is not possible to identify an explicit focus on literacy in VET provision. It is possible that there are different literacy elements in VET teaching practices; however, this content is dependent on the individual provider and trainer. Adult literacy provision in Croatia has a focus on addressing literacy needs in the workplace.

Improving the qualification and status of teachers of adult literacy: In Croatia, it is not possible to report on adult literacy teachers as a profession. Adult education teachers usually come from regular schools so their qualifications are the same as those in the regular system. They are paid by the hour and the amount depends on the agreement with the employer. It is necessary to start and develop a professional adult literacy workforce.

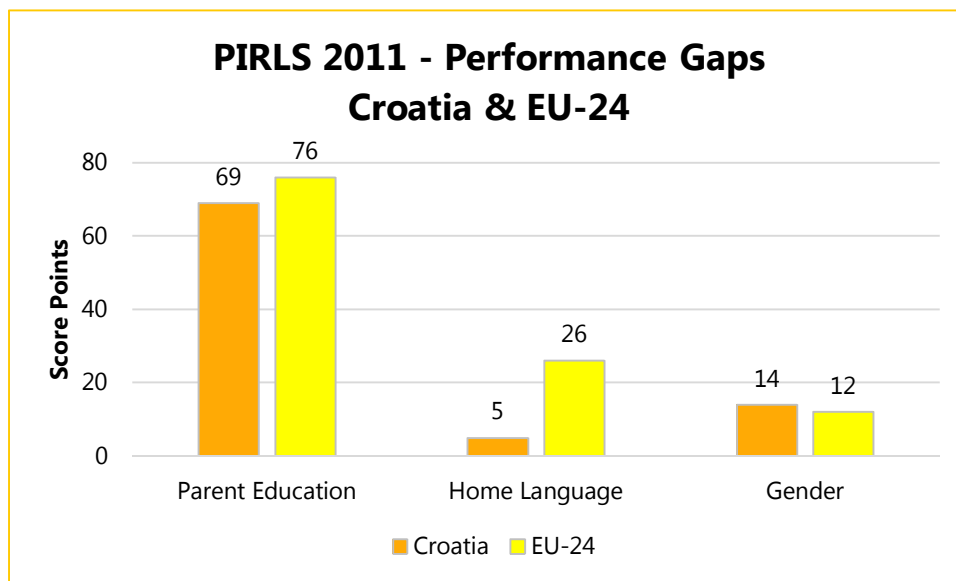
4.3 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy drew attention to persistent gaps in literacy, namely the gender gap, the socio-economic gap, and the migrant gap (HLG Final report 2012, pp. 46–50). These gaps derive from the reading literacy studies that repeatedly show unequal distribution of results among groups of children and adolescents (PIRLS, PISA).

Performance gaps in Croatia and on average across the EU-24 are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Students in Croatia whose parent completed University or Higher achieved a mean score (590) that was some 69 points higher than students whose parents completed Lower Secondary or below (521). The average difference across the EU-24 is 76 points, indicating a broadly similar relationship between parents' educational level and performance in Croatia. In Croatia, the gap in reading performance according to the students' socioeconomic background is lower than in the EU countries on average. Girls in Croatia achieved a mean score on overall reading (560) that was higher than boys' (546) by 14 points in 2011. This was about the same as the EU-24 average difference of 12 points. The gap in performance between students who always speak the language of the PIRLS test at home and those that hardly ever or never do so is small in Croatia.

Figure 2: Performance Gaps – Gender, Parent Education and Language Spoken at Home



Gender: girls – boys Education: University vs. Lower Secondary/Primary education; Language: Student speaks language of the tests at home always vs. sometimes/never.

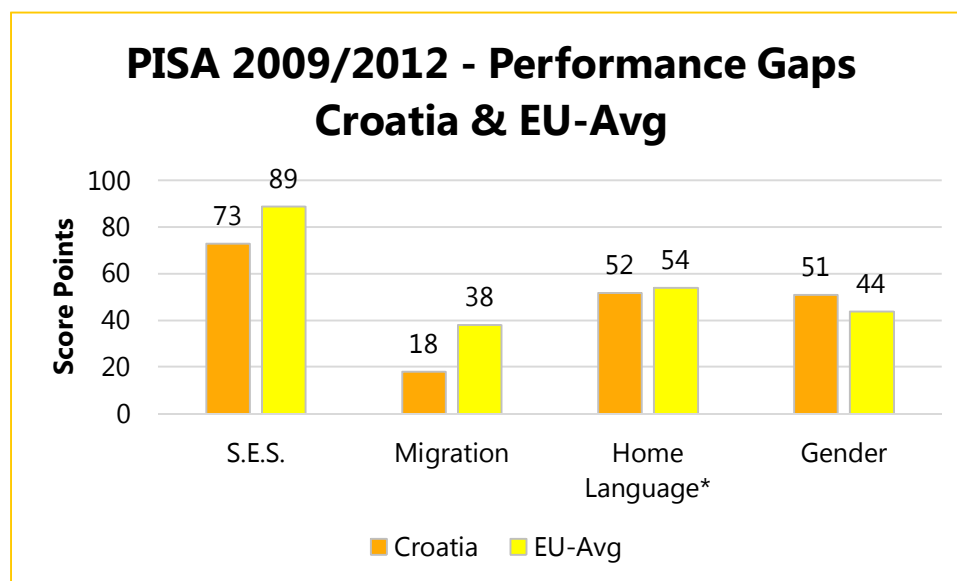
The performance in reading among Croatian students increased by 9 points between 2009 and 2012, though the increase was not statistically significant. In Croatia, the gap in reading performance according to the students' socioeconomic background is lower than in the EU countries on average. The gap between native students and those with an immigrant background is much smaller in Croatia than in EU countries on average.

The gap between students speaking the test language at home and those who do not (1.5 % of the students) is close to (52 score points) the EU's average. It is equivalent to more than a year of schooling.

However, the percentage of students who do not speak the test language at home (1.5%) is so low that this result has to be taken with a lot of caution.

In Croatia, between 2009 and 2012, the girls' performance increased by 6 score points while the boys' increased by 9 (Table 17). The trend is similar to the EU countries on average in the same period: the girls' and boys' performance increased respectively by 4 score points.

Figure 3: Performance Gaps in Croatia and on Average across EU Countries - Post-Primary Level



SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

4.3.1 Pre-Primary Years

Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors: About 10 per cent of children under the age of 14 live in poor households, the most vulnerable among them being Roma. The vulnerability of this group continues in spite of the participation of Croatia in the intergovernmental initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015). Despite the fact that Croatia offers good overall social protection coverage, new policies are needed to strengthen social recovery. The development, analysis and monitoring of such policies are hampered by inadequate data disaggregated by sex, age and social groups, and by insufficient monitoring of child poverty. (UNICEF 2011. Country programme document 2012 -2016 for Croatia).

Increasing pre-school attendance of disadvantaged children: According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 is 70.6%. Croatia does not yet reach the European benchmark of at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC. The benefit of preschool attendance in Croatia is proven by the fact that there is a significant difference in reading competence at grade 4: the reading score of pupils who attended pre-primary education for 3 years and more was 27 points higher than that of pupils who did not attend at all.

No child should be excluded from preschool because parents cannot afford to send their children to preschool/kindergarten institutions if they have to pay. While in half of the European countries the entire period of ECEC is free, in Croatia pre-primary education is not always free. In most - but not all – cases, parents participate in the costs of pre-primary education through fees (EURYDICE, 2013).

The Republic of Croatia has a regulated education system for children with developmental difficulties from an early, pre-school age, which is important for early intervention and inclusion in the suitable pre-school and rehabilitation programmes. But still, UNICEF reports that integration of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities in the regular education system continues to be a challenge

because insufficient support is given to education for such children in the form of access, transport and teaching assistants (UNICEF 2011. Country programme document 2012 -2016 for Croatia).

4.3.2 Primary Children and Adolescents

In Croatia, fewer students had parents whose highest level of educational attainment was university or higher (18%) than on average across the EU-21 (30%), while fewer had parents whose highest level was lower secondary or below (Croatia: 7%; EU-24: 18%). Pupils in Croatia whose parents attained a university degree or higher had a mean score (590) some 69 points higher than students whose parents completed lower secondary or below (521). The average difference across the EU-24 countries was 76, indicating a slightly weaker relationship between parents' educational achievement and students' reading achievement in Croatia, which is coherent with what was observed among 15 year-olds.

Preventing early school leaving: The provision of secondary education for all adolescents and the prevention of early school leaving may serve as indicators for the opportunities of adolescents to improve their literacy performance, especially related to basic functional literacy. According to Eurostat, in Croatia, the rate of early school leavers was 3.7 % in 2013. The target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate set for 2020 is 4.0% (European Commission, 2013). According to Eurostat, in 2011, the percentage of 18-year olds in education was 66.9%, which situated Croatia well under the EU-27 average (80.7%). By 2012, this indicator increased to 68.1%.

According to the National Reform Programme of the Republic of Croatia, adopted on 24th April 2014, in order to prevent early school leaving, a number of measures have been envisaged, such as (co)funding of textbooks for elementary and high school students who live in poor socio-economic conditions, (co-)funding of textbooks for blind high school students, (co-)funding of transportation for elementary and high school students who live in poor socio-economic conditions, and funding of continuing education for students who have completed the two-year and three-year vocational programmes to ensure vertical mobility (National Reform Programme, 2014). There are plans to extend compulsory education beyond the elementary school, but for now, this has not happened.

Devolve responsibility/decision making to schools: All Croatian policy/strategy papers promote the idea of decentralisation and deregulation as such, but do not explicitly and consistently deal with these processes, leaving the issue of decision-making largely undefined. A direct top-down control still prevails in the government-school relations, especially in the area of curriculum development. It is necessary to stress the importance of defining relations between the national (framework) and the school-based (applied) curriculum.

4.3.3 Adults

According to national law, migrants have the right to learn the Croatian Language for free. Provision is the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, and providers are adult education institutions.

Although there are no national programmes to support adults in acquiring digital skills, many public libraries provide free courses. Public libraries also have a role in organising family reading programmes which often include all members, from all ages. Public libraries in Croatia play a vital part in bridging the gap between formal and informal education, providing different programmes promoting reading and literacy, but it is not enough and it is not continuous, and there is no coherent structure in those

programmes to fulfill all needs of adults in Croatia. Croatian libraries, especially Zagreb City Libraries (ZCL), are very successful in organising library services and providing programmes for homeless people in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb. The number of homeless people is steadily growing every day with a very small number of quality social inclusion programmes intended for them.

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