

NATIONAL YOUTH

PROGRAMME

for the period
2023 to 2025



SREDIŠNJI DRŽAVNI URED
ZA DEMOGRAFIJU I MLADE

NATIONAL YOUTH

PROGRAMME



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IMPRESSUM

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PREFACE



Andrej Plenković
Prime minister

Dear youth,

After gaining the trust of Croatian citizens, including many young people, in the 2016 elections for the Croatian Parliament, to take on the responsibility of leading the Croatian Government, one of our goals was to improve the quality of your life in Croatia in all aspects.

Today, the Government is your sincere partner, and with numerous measures, we strive to help you achieve economic independence, provide safer working conditions, and ensure equal opportunities in all parts of Croatia. The National Youth Programme until 2025 contributes to these goals. It complements our previous measures and investments in youth, exceeding 2.4 billion euros and will continue to develop a stimulating environment for all of you with your active involvement in contributing to a more successful Croatia.

The achievement of strategic national goals, such as Croatia's entry into the eurozone and the Schengen Zone, as well as Croatia's economic growth, especially in wages and employment, contributes to your improved quality of life. Additionally, Croatia is no longer an emerging market economy since last year; it has been included for the first time among advanced economies, a group comprising only 38 countries worldwide, which is particularly important for your future. Simultaneously, we are preserving our natural resources for future generations, as evidenced by Croatia's high ranking of 12th place in the world among 193 countries in fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Also, thanks to our 8th place in the European Union regarding the share of renewable energy sources in total consumption and the fact that two-thirds of our electricity comes from renewable sources, Croatia makes an above-average

contribution to the fight against climate change. At the same time, we are achieving the goals of the European Green Deal to make our continent climate-neutral by 2050.

We have increased investments in education, doubled the amount of the minimum student hourly wage, and invested in fourteen student dormitories in Croatia. We continuously strengthen scholarship policies and create conditions for innovations and careers in Croatia. Over the past seven years, we have engaged over 100 thousand young people in self-employment measures, resulting in an increase of 71 thousand (58%) young people in permanent employment, from 122 thousand to 194 thousand.

Seven years ago, every fourth young person was unemployed. We have significantly increased youth employment, and today, every seventh young person is unemployed (13.7%), bringing us in line with the European average. We continue with measures that encourage the employment of young people, especially indefinite employment. For the third consecutive year, we have ensured that 180 thousand young people are eligible for tax refunds, averaging 611 euros per person.

We assist young families in meeting their housing needs. Subsidised housing loans have been approved for 34 thousand young families, and over a thousand families have resolved their housing issue through the Socially Stimulated Housing Programme. A new National Housing Policy Plan until 2030 is also in development.

I invite you to contribute to launching quality changes in the environments where you live with your fresh perspectives and new ideas. Be the bearers of the development of a successful Croatia, aware of its identity and oriented towards the future!

PREFACE



Željka Josić, MD
State Secretary of the Central State
Office for Demography and Youth

Dear readers, dear youth,

Since its establishment, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth has recognised the importance of creating a supportive environment for the development of the potential of young people and improving their quality of life. In collaboration with representatives from state administration bodies, the academic community, and civil society organisations in the youth sector, it has developed a new National Youth Programme for the period from 2023 to 2025, which is now presented to you.

The identified priority areas and measures of the National Youth Programme will contribute to young people in Croatia developing and making the best use of life skills necessary to respond constructively to the challenges they face. Additionally, it aims to create conditions for equal opportunities for all youth, with a particular focus on those in rural areas.

It is important for us to continue making our reforms in collaboration with young people in Croatia, as well as other key stakeholders in the youth sector. Only through this collaborative approach, together can we create a framework for better lives for them. With an affirmative approach towards young people, we aim to contribute to perceiving youth as a valuable resource in this society and as important partners in shaping a common and better future.

Observing young people through the demographic aspect, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth will continue to proactively work towards creating a positive, comprehensive, and inclusive youth policy, in line with the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for 2020-2024. In order to create a framework for a better quality of life for young people in collaboration with youth and youth organisations, we will encourage the active involvement of young individuals in improving Croatian youth policies. Furthermore, we aim to promote their continued participation in the development of European youth policies.

In conclusion,
a better future for
youth means a better
future for the entire
Croatia.

At the Central State Office
for Demography and Youth,
we will continue to support
young people daily and c
ollaborate with decision-makers
regarding youth-related matters.

Together,
we all have the
responsibility to provide
young people with the
conditions, opportunities,
and experiences that
enable them to thrive and
contribute to positive
social changes.

01 INTRODUCTION

Young people in Croatia are individuals aged 15 to 30, constituting a heterogeneous but extremely significant societal group, making up 15.8% of the total population.¹ They are marked by specific dynamics of diversity that unite them in efforts to be active, responsible, and full-fledged members of the society they live in. Young people face numerous and rapid changes and challenges in contemporary society.

Society's responsibility is to ensure support and resources that will enable and facilitate the integration of young people into society. It involves understanding and co-creating their own roles in the community where they live and contribute to its development and progress. In this regard, timely recognition of global trends, as well as self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, are crucial to transform challenges and new opportunities into developmental opportunities. It is also essential for strengthening the resilience of young people and their readiness to face potential obstacles to realising their aspirations.

To adapt to these challenges and harness all potential, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth began developing the National Youth Programme for the period 2023 to 2025 (hereinafter: the National Programme). This programme is considered a comprehensive act of strategic planning guiding youth policies.

The National Programme is based on recognised potential, needs, and aspirations of young people, as well as identified developmental challenges at the local, national, and European levels. It is the result of inclusive and constructive dialogues with key stakeholders in the field of youth policies.

In the process of creating the National Programme and recognising the importance of intersectoral collaboration in the youth sector, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth established a Working Group, consisting of representatives from state administration bodies, scientific and/or professional institutions, as well as youth associations.

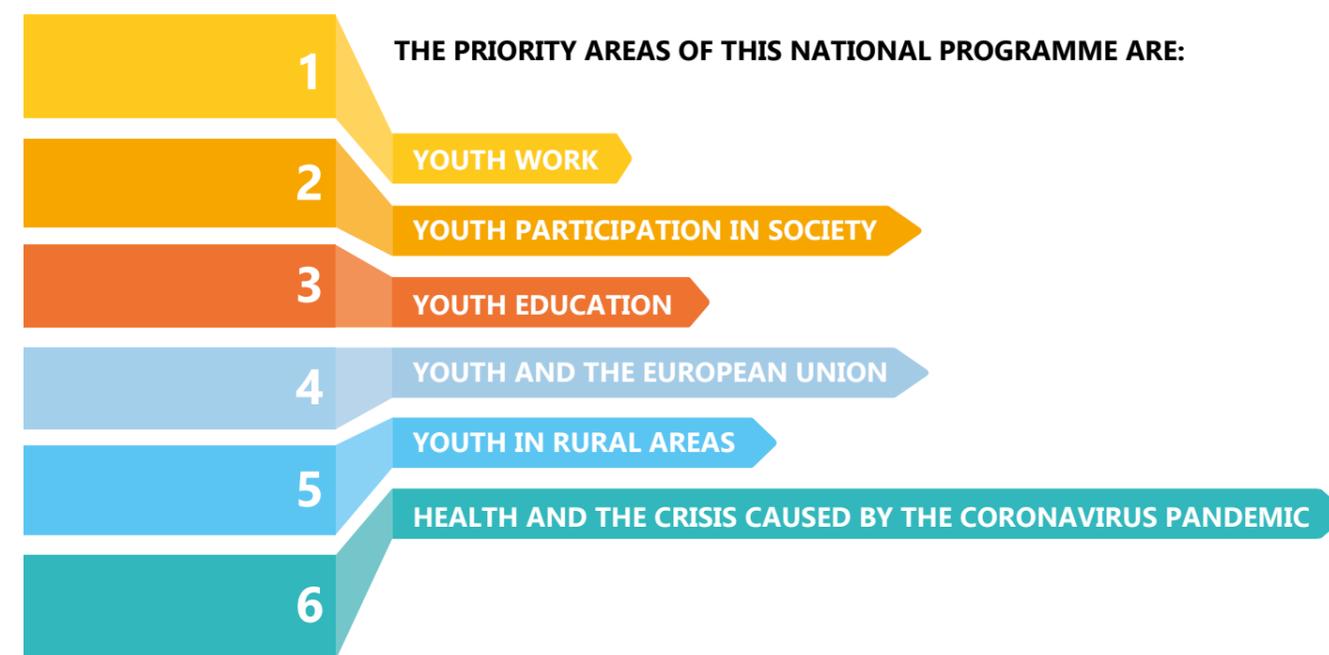
Key stakeholders and partners in the process of creating the National Programme, alongside the Central State Office for Demography and Youth, include the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction, and State Assets, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Agency for Mobility and EU

Programmes, UNICEF Office in Croatia, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science, ICC Association, Association for the Promotion of Informatics, Culture, and Coexistence, World Youth Alliance Croatia, and the Coordination of County Youth Advisory Boards of the Republic of Croatia.

According to the Act on the Systems of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia and considering that measures related to young people are implemented at the national level, the proposed measures in the National Programme are exclusively those not covered by existing strategic documents. The selected measures that are already under implementation are listed in the Annex to the National Programme.

Certain measures for young people will also be included in other strategic planning documents that support the implementation of the strategic framework of the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030.²

The National Programme contains 6 priority areas with 28 measures, with 5 state administration bodies mandated for its implementation. The proposed measures and tasks within each area are preceded by an analytical framework as the starting point for their conception.



¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics, according to the last census (aged 15 to 29)

² Annex 4 of the 2030 National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia



02

VISION AND MISSION OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME

The National Programme is based on the results of the Analysis of the Situation in the Youth Sector in the Republic of Croatia conducted in December 2021.³ The analysis included a review of existing literature based on key concepts from scientific and professional research on young people, public databases on young people, and documents on public policies for young people. It covered priority areas related to employment, housing, young people in tourism (support for deficit occupations), and financial literacy of young people. Many measures are already being implemented in these areas and are represented in strategic documents of government bodies or are included in drafts of strategic documents in the process of development and adoption. Based on the analysis, needs were identified, and new measures were devised, as included in this national programme.

The National Programme is a short-term strategic document of very high focus and operational level. Its areas are aligned with the goals of the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030, the Government Programme of the Republic of Croatia for 2020-2024, as well as the principles and guidelines of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027). Additionally, some measures will be achieved through the implementation of reforms and investments within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026 which have demographic effects, including the position and quality of life of young people.

The European Youth Goals, which are part of the EU Youth Strategy itself (2019-2027) and cover eleven topics of importance for young people recognised by young people themselves at the European level, were also taken into account during the drafting process.

To achieve all measures, it is important to place young people at the centre. All key stakeholders in society, including local and regional self-government units (LRSKU), will work together to achieve a vision for young people in Croatia by 2025. The National Programme is complementary to measures for young people implemented based on youth programmes at the level of municipalities, cities, and counties.

The desired but achievable future for young people in Croatia is depicted as a guiding thread, providing a foundation and motivation for all young individuals:



Young people in Croatia are empowered to navigate the challenges of modern society, actively and responsibly participate in its development, and cultivate their own potential for self-realisation and engagement in social activities.

Guided by the vision for youth, all key stakeholders in society will act purposefully to ensure an environment in Croatia where quality work with young people is carried out. They will engage them in activities that strengthen their power to bring about change in society and enhance social participation.

³ The analysis of the youth sector conducted by the Institute for Social Research covers a review of literature and research from the period of 2013 to 2018, mostly related to the implementation period of the previous National Youth Programme for the period from 2014 to 2017.



03

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS OF YOUTH

THE COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES IN THE

6

PRIORITY AREAS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING THE VISION AND MISSION.

The definition of these priority areas has been influenced by crises caused by the coronavirus pandemic, earthquakes, and the consequences of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. These events collectively had a significant impact on all segments of society, particularly on young people.

The identified priority areas aim to enable young people in Croatia to develop and make the most of their potential, build resilience and the life skills necessary for a constructive response to the challenges they face. The goal is to also create conditions for equal opportunities for all young people, especially those in rural areas and those with fewer opportunities, such as young people with disabilities and those at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In a period of simultaneous crises, it is essential to equip young people with knowledge and skills and encourage their economic independence from their families. This includes providing favourable conditions for career development and ensuring greater financial stability (creditworthiness) for young people to address housing issues and to start their own families.

The youth policy and priorities established by the National Programme will be implemented with the aim of further promoting equality and equal opportunities. This involves creating a supportive environment for the development of young people's potential and improving their quality of life. Through complementary efforts to empower young people, they will be enabled to become agents of sustainable development in Croatia.

As young people grow up, they face many challenges that go together with the process of taking on lasting social roles. The successful assumption of social roles depends on one hand, on young people, their values, potential, and aspirations, and, on the other hand, on the society in which they live.

The transition of young people to adulthood is shaped by societal expectations that young people successfully adopt social values and behaviours contributing to social stability and continuity, as well as enhancing the developmental and other capacities of society. Often, socially determined circumstances are those that determine the speed and quality of integration into the adult world.

Young people in Croatia have been affected by the consequences of the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, some young people and their families live and work in earthquake-affected areas, affecting the quality of life for youth.

Despite numerous challenges caused by global crises, thanks to various horizontal measures easing coping with the consequences of crises for young people, Croatia has a severe material and social deprivation rate among young people below 3%, compared to the EU average of 7%, continuing the decreasing trend (2022).⁴ This places Croatia among the EU member states with the lowest severe material and social deprivation rate among young people. In addition to creating equal opportunities for young people and effectively combating poverty, the Government prioritises taking targeted measures to improve the quality of life of all young people, in synergy with municipalities, cities and counties.⁵

Dynamic changes characteristic of all modern societies, including Croatia, are conducive to

the creation of new challenges for optimal social inclusion. These social changes leave a strong mark, especially on the population in the process of learning and mastering ways to navigate and achieve personal goals in the competitive world of adults.

According to research, family and individual resources are recognised as the most reliable support for young people facing challenges, with greater and higher-quality engagement expected from societal stakeholders whose task is to ensure adequate conditions for a successful transition of young people to adulthood.



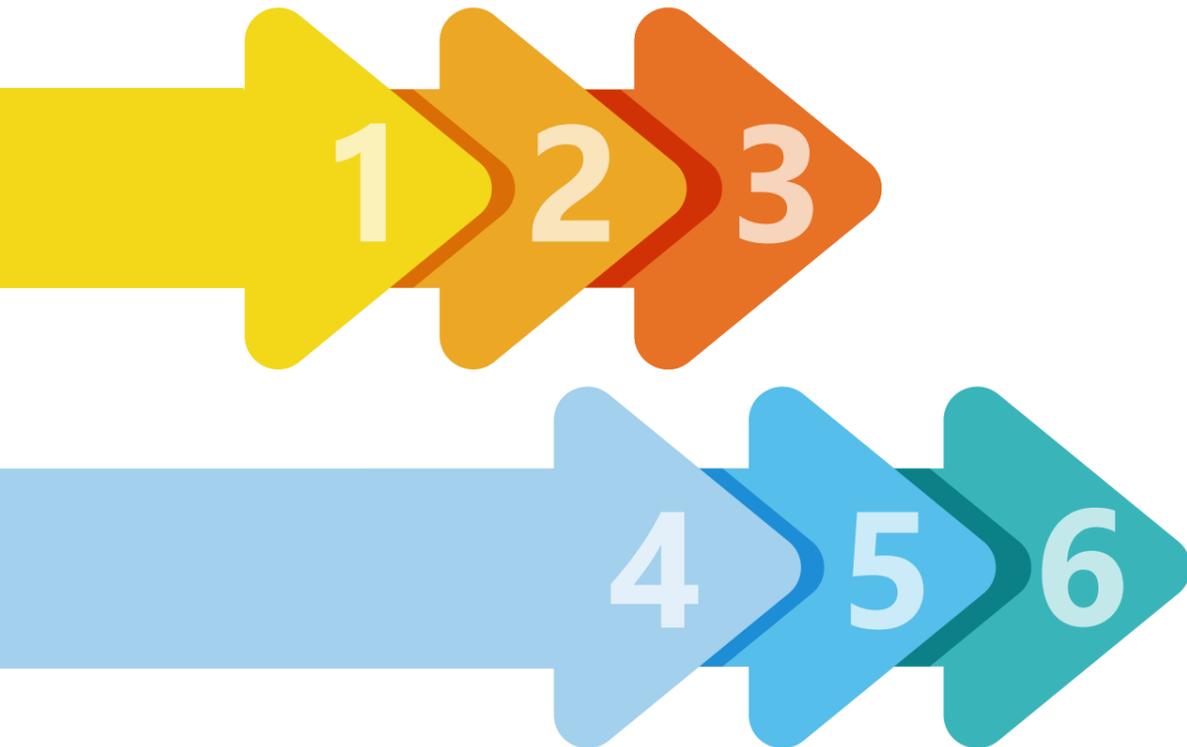
Previous research has shown that young people are a heterogeneous group, and it is especially important to focus on their education, which often influences their position in society, as well as behaviour patterns, values, and attitudes. The transition of young people into adulthood is marked by key events, such as completing education, employment, and starting their own families, depending on life circumstances. According to some studies, most young people have yet to experience key life transition events, in line with the phenomenon of prolonged youth. In order to systematically analyse the situation and needs of young people, within the

⁴ Youths: 7% severely materially and socially deprived – Products Eurostat News (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20220210-1>)
⁵ Within the framework of the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion for the period 2021-2027, children and youth are identified as vulnerable groups.

international demographic survey, it is important to note that Croatia is part of the Generations & Gender Programme (GGP), a longitudinal study designed to monitor individuals throughout their entire lives or for an extended period. The contribution of the GGP will be particularly visible in research areas of very low fertility, the transition of young people into adulthood, family dynamics, gender roles, mobility, and migration. The implementation of such a large European demographic study that emphasises the younger population, and the reproductive-age population (18-59) is of particular importance for about fifteen EU member states facing demographic challenges, including Croatia.

Taking into account numerous measures for youth implemented from 2016 to the present in state administration bodies, this national programme covers key areas for improving the position and quality of life of young people in Croatia, regardless of their age, gender, place of birth and residence, professional, or family status.

Based on analysis and research, **six key areas** have been identified as important for youth.



3.1. YOUTH WORK

Despite the practice of youth work in Croatia, there is no official and widely accepted definition of this field or activity. Youth work is a broad concept encompassing a wide range of social, cultural, educational, ecological, and/or political activities carried out with and for young people, either in groups or individually⁶. Youth workers may be paid or volunteers, and their work is based on informal and non-formal learning processes directed towards young people and voluntary participation. Youth work is a social practice that involves working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating their active participation, community involvement, and decision-making.

Results in youth work are achieved by empowering and involving young people in the active development, preparation, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives and activities that express their needs, interests, ideas, and experiences. Through the processes of informal and non-formal learning, young people acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for a successful life.

Youth work is one of the three main domains of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)⁷ placing it as a high priority in European youth policy to empower young people. By Council Resolution, the European Union, and its member states, responsible for youth work, have defined the priority of creating a conducive environment for its quality implementation.

The results of the project "Support for the Development and Expansion of Youth Work in Croatia"⁸ in 2020 show that there is a relatively high level of quality in youth work in Croatia. However, there is a need to further inform young people about opportunities to participate in related activities. The results point to challenges in the working and volunteering conditions of persons carrying out activities with young people, highlighting the issues of financing, the state of physical infrastructure, the availability of education programmes, training of persons working with young people and the improvement

of youth work. Regarding infrastructure for youth work activities, this includes premises, youth organisations, state and public bodies dealing with youth work, and documents addressing the same.

Youth work in Croatia is mostly carried out by associations of and for youth. They differ based on their governance structure, where associations for youth implement programmes aimed at young people, and youth organisations must have more than half of their governance body (50%) be young people under 30 years old. Young people in Croatia mostly participate in sports and recreational activities as a form of youth work, which is understandable given the prevalence of sports clubs, the most numerous type of civil society organisations alongside cultural and artistic associations, present in all counties.



In addition to sports activities, young people also participate in structured leisure activities and in various forms of civil and/or political activism. Various mechanisms involve young people, such as student councils, student assemblies, student associations, and organisations for young people, youth organisations, as well as a growing number of youth projects and for youth funded by national and European funds.

⁶ Recommendation CM/Rec (2017) 4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted on 31 May 2017.

⁷ The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218(01)&from=EN)

⁸ <https://demografijaimladi.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Dokumenti/Analiza%20postojeceg%20stanja%20rada%20s%20mladima%20u%20RH%20te%20izrada%20preporuka%20i%20smjernica%20za%20njegov%20razvoj.pdf>

Youth clubs and centres, as well as youth organisations, are the starting point for youth work in Croatia. These are physical spaces or programmes of organisations for and by young people where the active participation of young people in creating content is crucial. All content is community-based, free to end users, and open to all interested parties. In terms of content, these are mostly leisure activities. For a youth club to meet its narrow definition, it is necessary to have its own premises specifically intended for the activities of the youth club.

A Youth Centre is a broader concept than a youth club as it includes more services. The programme is based on research and local needs, open to all young people, and maintains a professional approach to the work of all employees.

Since the youth clubs and centres are mostly located in more urban areas following established youth organisations, efforts should be made to establish them more evenly geographically, along with associations of and for youth.

The Youth Information Centre is a programme carried out by associations of and for youth, providing information and counselling services for young people on various areas of interest. In Croatia, the Youth Information Centres' Community in Croatia plays the role of the umbrella organisation of information centres.

The Central State Office for Demography and Youth is the national body for youth policy in Croatia, conducting administrative and expert tasks related to improving and enhancing the quality of life of young people and building a comprehensive, cross-sectoral youth policy.

In the context of youth work, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth finances youth organisations and organisations for youth. From 2016 to 2022, more than EUR 8.2 million were



The Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, as an accredited tender provider under the EU Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps, provides significant financial support for youth work in Croatia. In 2020, the total budget for the Erasmus+ programme in the youth field in Croatia was over EUR 2.4 million, while the total available funds for Erasmus+ in the youth field in 2021 were almost EUR 4.5 million.

Non-formal education of youth workers is carried out as part of the activities of youth organisations and organisations for youth and is part of educational programmes within projects.

3.1.1. Measures for youth empowerment

Working with young people brings unique benefits to young people as they enter the adult world, providing them with a safe environment for gaining self-confidence and learning in a non-formal way. Youth work is characterised by acquiring key personal, professional, and entrepreneurial competencies and skills such as teamwork, leadership, intercultural competencies, project management, problem-solving, and critical thinking. In some cases, youth work serves as a link to education, training, or employment, thereby influencing their social inclusion.

In a world of unpredictable social changes, quality youth work can be a driving force for the resilience of both young individuals and communities. Young people face various challenges, and to address these challenges and empower them, collaborative efforts are needed to improve youth policies that improve the lives of youth. Empowering young people means encouraging them to take control of their lives. This requires the necessary resources and tools and entails an environment willing to appreciate the views of young people⁹. In this context, youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for their empowerment.

Youth work, in its various forms, takes place in Croatia through programmes and projects of youth organisations and organisations for youth. It also occurs in educational institutions, which strive to strengthen their capacities to reach as many young people as possible through their activities.

Research indicates that youth organisations and organisations for youth are primarily located in larger urban areas, and young people from rural and/or island areas do not have equal opportunities to participate in youth work. The reasons for this are numerous, ranging from the fact that funding for youth work is focused on projects rather than programmes, to the lack of a sustainable way to implement youth work that does not rely on sporadic national and European funding.



National youth work policy is a horizontal, cross-sectoral topic, especially in the context of defining priorities crucial for the further development of youth work and providing structured support to youth workers.

Research shows that one key way to increase the quality and coverage of youth work is stable programme funding and training. Although it is non-formal (or informal) learning, more resources need to be invested to create a conducive environment for the design and implementation of such programmes.

MEASURE	3.1.1. Development of national priorities for youth work development and implementation of complementary activities aimed at youth work development within youth policies In the implementation of this measure, national priorities for youth work will be defined based on the results of monitoring national needs related to the European Youth Work Agenda. The defined national priorities will be accompanied by complementary activities aimed at developing youth work within youth policies.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Established national priorities for the development of youth work Implemented activities aimed at developing youth work within youth policies
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes 2023 – EUR 3,657 2024 – EUR 13,431 2025 – EUR 3,585 A818043, A818058, A818063, A818065

MEASURE	3.1.2. Improving the quality standards for the operation of centres, clubs, and information centres for youth In the implementation of this measure, data on the activities and management of youth centres, clubs, and information centres will be collected. In a participatory process, new quality standards for their operation will be defined.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Collected data and established quality standards for the operation
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	N/A

MEASURE	3.1.3. Strengthening the capacity of youth organisations and organisations for youth for youth work For implementation of this measure, annual public calls will be issued, and financial support will be allocated to associations of and for youth for the implementation of activities in youth centres, clubs, and info centres. Activities will be adapted to minimise negative impacts on climate and the environment, with a particular focus on raising awareness of the consequences of climate change on the environment and society.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of allocated financial grants for the implementation of activities in youth centres, youth clubs, and youth info centres
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	Central State Office for Demography and Youth 2023 – EUR 265,445 2024 – EUR 265,445 2025 – EUR 265,445 A558047 Youth Policy

3.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

Youth participation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon often discussed in the context of the relationship between youth and politics, commonly utilising a theoretical approach to political culture. The maintenance and development of a democratic system are based on participatory political culture, implying politically active, interested, responsible, equal, and competent citizens.

Thus, creating and implementing public policies to empower and encourage young people for active participation in society has two important implications: providing young people with the space to pursue their interests using democratic principles and practices, contributing to the overall development of democracy in Croatia.

The transition of young people to adulthood is marked by social inclusion, reflected in the assumption of lasting social roles, including public engagement. One of the key processes for assuming the role of a citizen is political socialisation, indicating the level of political interest among young people.

Previous research has shown that young people in Croatia generally shy away from politics.¹⁰ Approximately 12% express interest in politics, while 16% show some degree of interest in political events.¹¹

Political discussions are not common among young people and their close circles, with 58% of respondents stating that they rarely or never discuss politics with friends and family.¹²

Despite the absence of political discussions in their close circles, most young people attribute an important role to primary groups (family and friends) in encouraging active participation in society. In addition to the influence of friends (61%) and family (58%), most young people consider internet forums and social networks (56%) as important actors in encouraging participation, along with youth organisations (55%).¹³ Every second young respondent attributes mobilisation potential to the education system, and two-fifths attribute it to the media (newspapers, portals, TV).

Young people are inclined to participate in the electoral process, with 41% having voted in the previous elections, 30% not having the right to vote, and only a quarter not wanting to participate in the elections. Older youth (25-29 years) and those with higher education and higher social status are significantly more inclined to institutional or formal political participation.

Young people participate in the activities of civil society through membership in various associations and groups. Most of them, nearly a quarter, are members of sports clubs, just over a tenth are members of political parties, and volunteer associations.

Cultural and artistic groups attract nearly a tenth of young people, while other organisations, such as youth associations, religious, and humanitarian associations, attract between 5% and 7% of young people. Young people opt for membership in other groups and organisations to a significantly lesser extent (from 1 to 3%).

A more recent Eurobarometer survey referring to 2017 only, is in line with previous data. In Croatia, 15% of young people participated in the activities of a sports club, 10% in the work of a political party, 9% in the work of a youth association, and 8% in a local community aimed at improving life in the local community.¹⁴

The key framework for youth involvement in society is the Act on Youth Advisory Boards, which for more than a decade has provided young people with the opportunity to participate in processes at the local and regional levels through the work and activities of municipal, city, and county Youth Advisory Boards. The Central State Office for Demography and Youth, as the body responsible for youth, monitors the implementation of the Act on Youth Advisory Boards by collecting data from local and regional self-government units.

At the same time, youth representatives—eight representatives from associations of and for youth, the Croatian youth UN delegate,

¹⁰ Gvozdanović et al., 2019; Ilišin et al. 2013; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017a
¹¹ Gvozdanović et al., 2019
¹² Gvozdanović et al., 2019; Ilišin et al., 2013
¹³ Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017a
¹⁴ European Commission, 2018

and representatives of the National Council of Students and the Croatian Student Council—are part of the Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, an interdepartmental advisory body that includes representatives of state administrative bodies, the Croatian County Association, the Croatian Municipalities Association, and the Association of Cities, all contributing to shaping youth policies.

From 2018 to 2022, the Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia organised activities to encourage youth participation, including two Annual Youth Advisory Boards Conferences to promote youth empowerment, exchange best practices in the work of Youth Advisory Boards, and increase the visibility of the role and work of Youth Advisory Boards in Croatia.

Various studies conducted in European countries show that young people are generally inclined towards non-formal forms of participation¹⁵. In 2017, 23% of young people in Croatia engaged in organised volunteer activities, which is less than the European average of 31%.¹⁶ Volunteer activities of young people in Croatia were mostly focused on change within the local community (79%) and at the national level (40%), while the least amount of activity was focused on other European countries (5%) and other parts of the world (1%) (European Commission, 2018). The total number of volunteers in 2021 was 59,161, with the age group of 15-30 years accounting for about half of all volunteers (Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family, and Social Policy records, 2021).

Recognising the volunteer contribution of young people during the pandemic and earthquakes,

the Volunteering Act was improved in 2021. The National Volunteering Development Programme for the period 2023-2026 is also in the process of adoption, aiming to further develop the culture of youth volunteering, their active participation in society, and the appreciation of their contribution.

Continuously since 2013, the EU Youth Dialogue has been conducted as a form of structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers, especially on topics of interest to young people. The priority is to involve young people in topics related to innovation and sustainable community development, particularly to achieve low-carbon development, effective waste management, environmental protection, and the fight against climate change. These priorities are reflected in the improved national energy and climate legislation until 2030, where young people are recognised as agents of change towards a more sustainable development model for Croatia.

One of the key public policies that affects young people is housing policy, especially in the current circumstances of geopolitical uncertainties, energy crises, and associated inflationary pressures manifested in real estate prices. It is necessary to ensure the participation of young people in the development of a housing policy strategy and individual measures that will, like the previous measures of the Socially Stimulated Housing Programme and subsidised housing loans, enable the adequate addressing of housing issues for young people and young families.



3.2.1. Enhancing involvement of youth in decision-making

Given the level of political literacy, the unfavourable level of internal political efficiency among young people, and the low level of (non-formal) participation, there is evident room for progress that can be achieved through systematic political socialisation, information, support, empowerment, and encouragement for democratic participation. In this regard, institutions need to support young people and ensure more effective involvement of youth in the decision-making process.

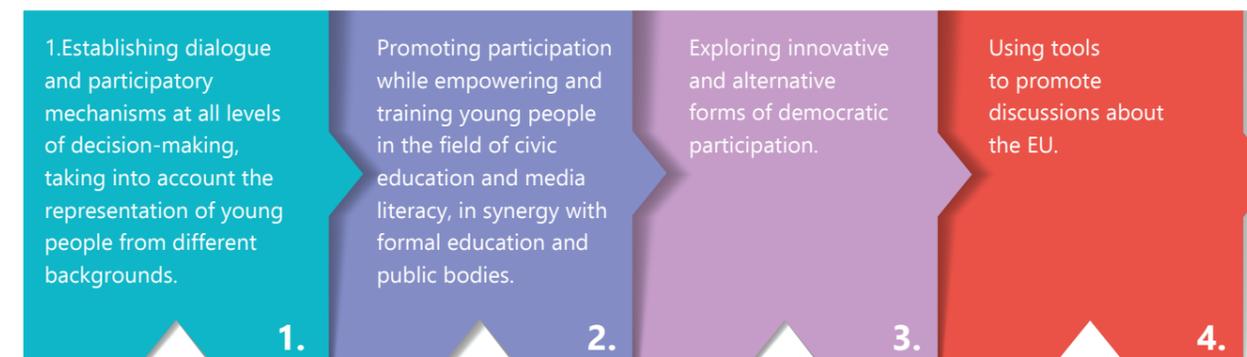
There is a need for new research in the field of youth studies to gain a comprehensive insight into the political participation of young people.

Insights into non-formal forms of participation among young people in Croatia, including new patterns of digital political engagement, are lacking. Generally, there is a lack of scientific research and monitoring of the distribution, intensity, and dynamics of different types of participation, as well as political behaviour, given the characteristics of young people that should be recognised as a priority of youth policy.

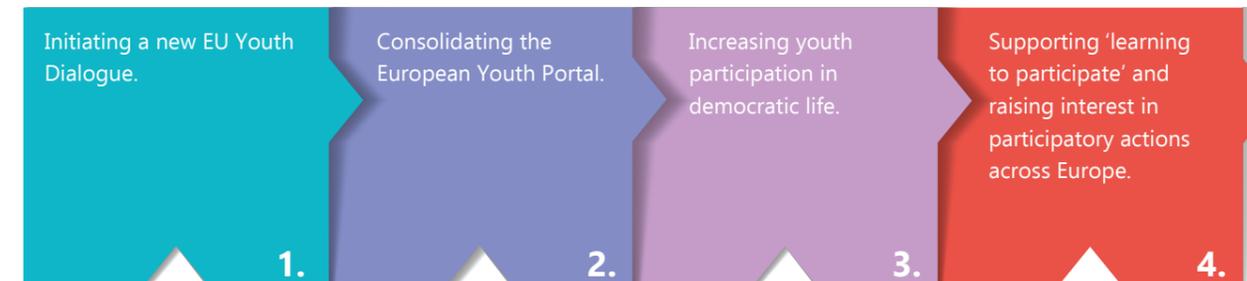
Knowledge about youth participation during the pandemic and earthquakes that affected Zagreb and Central Croatia is lacking. There is also a lack of understanding of the impact of these crises on youth participation, as well as the impact of the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the related energy crises and inflationary pressures.

Good practices from the EU in the field of youth participation (Borkowska-Waszak et al., 2020) complement the identified imbalances suggested by previous research on youth in Croatia. These practices primarily focus on raising the level of political influence (political efficiency) through active involvement of young people in decision-making processes, implementation, and evaluation of decisions and policies that concern youth.

The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) seeks, inter alia, to encourage young people to become active citizens, bearers of solidarity, and positive agents of change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and the European identity. Within one of the three main areas of action related to EU-level involvement, the European Commission encourages member states to focus on four main objectives:



In the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), the emphasis of cooperation at the EU level is also on four objectives related to:



MEASURE	3.2.1. Increased active youth participation in society As part of the measure's implementation, financial support will be allocated to youth organisations and organisations for young people through a public call for the implementation of projects aimed at active youth participation in society. Project activities will focus on increasing the level of youth political competence and empowerment for participation, at the national and European levels. Project activities will focus on increasing the level of political competence among young people and empowering them for participation, at both the national and European levels. Special attention will be given to raising political awareness and competencies among young people with fewer opportunities, as well as increasing awareness of the importance of youth participation in the civil and political spheres. This includes issues directly or indirectly affecting the lives of young people. Activities will be adapted to minimise negative impacts on climate and the environment with a particular focus on raising awareness of the consequences of climate change on the environment and society.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 92,905 2024 – EUR 92,905 2025 – EUR 92,905 A558047 Youth Policy
MEASURE	3.2.2. Creating a stimulating environment for the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue For the purpose of implementing the measure, the implementation of project activities of the EU Youth Dialogue in Croatia will be co-financed. The focus will be on encouraging its implementation at the local level to ensure that the voices of young people are heard and to identify their needs, interests, and problems in a timely manner.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of youth involved in the EU Youth Dialogue process in Croatia
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 6,636 2024 – EUR 6,636 2025 – EUR 6,636 A558047 Youth Policy
MEASURE	3.2.3. Improvement of local and regional youth policy For implementing the measure, financial grants will be provided for the development of local and regional (regional) youth programmes. The project activities will enable youth to participate in the process of designing measures and activities that concern them, with a special emphasis on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities. Project activities will specifically focus on designing measures to mitigate the effects of climate change on the environment and society.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded for the development of local and regional youth programmes
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 26,544 2024 – EUR 26,544 2025 – EUR 26,544 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.4. Empowering youth for involvement in Youth Advisory Boards U svrhu provedbe mjere i povećanja broja savjeta mladih putem medijskih alata podizat će se svijest mladih o važnosti sudjelovanja u radu savjeta mladih te sudjelovanja u procesu odlučivanja o pitanjima od interesa za mlade na lokalnoj i područnoj (regionalnoj) razini, kao i sudjelovanja u izradi lokalnih programa za mlade. Ujedno će se unaprijediti sustav praćenja osnovanih i aktivnih savjeta mladih uz potporu digitalnih alata.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Youth Advisory Boards
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of created and distributed videos Number of schools where the video was distributed Developed an application for monitoring the number of established and active Youth Advisory Boards
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 21,235 2024 – EUR 21,235 2025 – EUR 21,235 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.5. Ensuring conditions for improving the work of Youth Advisory Boards To implement the measure, conditions will be provided to familiarise Youth Advisory Boards with their scope of work and other issues relevant to the operation of Youth Advisory Boards.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Developed digital educational programme intended for Youth Advisory Boards
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q2/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 13,272 2024 – EUR 13,272 2025 – EUR 13,272 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.6. Promoting sustainable community development To implement the measure, financial support will be provided through a public call for the development and implementation of youth activities aimed at empowering and encouraging young people to promote and achieve the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Activities will be adapted to minimise their negative impact on climate and the environment, particularly focusing on raising awareness of the consequences of climate change and devising measures to mitigate its effects.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 26,544 2024 – EUR 26,544 2025 – EUR 26,544 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.7. Encouraging youth for environmental protection To implement the measure, awards will be granted through a public call for the creation of video materials created by young people to influence raising awareness about the importance of reducing negative environmental impact.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of awards granted
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 02,654 2024 – EUR 02,654 2025 – EUR 2,654 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.8. Creative and artistic expression of youth To implement the measure, financial grants will be provided through a public call for the implementation of the "Croatia Through the Eyes of the Youth" (Hrvatska očima mladih) activity.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of grants awarded
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q2/ 2024Q2/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 2,654 2024 – EUR 02,654 2025 – EUR 2,654 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.9. Ensuring support for the work of the UN youth delegate To implement the measure, a UN youth delegate will be appointed, and support will be provided for their work. The youth delegate will represent the interests of Croatian youth and participate in decision-making and political solutions on issues relevant to young people at the international level. The appointed youth delegate will participate in the work of the United Nations General Assembly, in particular in the work of the Third Committee dealing with social, cultural, and humanitarian issues, and, if necessary, in the work of other bodies in the field of youth policies.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, members of the Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, representatives of associations of and for youth
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Young delegate appointed and support in the work provided Number of activities carried out by the delegate
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4 /2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 3,981 2024 – EUR 3,981 2025 – EUR 3,981 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.2.10. Ensuring support in the exchange of experiences and connecting Youth Advisory Boards at the national level To implement the measure, support will be provided for the organisation of the Annual Youth Advisory Boards Conference.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of representatives of Youth Advisory Boards, conference participants Number of representatives of LRSUGs/decision makers, conference participants
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q2/ 2024Q2/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 1,327 2024 – EUR 1,327 2025 – EUR 1,327 A558047 Youth Policy

3.3. YOUTH EDUCATION

A quality education system that equips young people with the basic competencies, knowledge, and skills to navigate a dynamic living environment serves as a foundation for their personal and professional development. In addition to preparing young people for the jobs of the future, a competitive and modern education system also reinforces values, develops all forms of youth literacy, and systematically encourages creativity, excellence, and equality of opportunity for all. A developed and modern education system also means the continuous development of a knowledge society that strengthens its scientific and research capacities and infrastructure, with an emphasis on the inclusion of youth as bearers of new trends, green and digital transitions.

In the education sector, the crucial aspect is the development of an educational system contributing to the competitiveness and resilience of the economy, human resources development, and the promotion of lifelong learning. Accordingly, existing measures stipulated by legislative acts and strategic documents related to the science and education system will be implemented in the upcoming period. Additionally, national and European funds will be directed towards investments and reforms aimed at modernising the education system and ensuring equal opportunities for all, especially for students with developmental difficulties and young people with disabilities.

Complementary social efforts for a more promising future for youth, through the education system at all levels, will contribute to better learning, studying, career development and improved standard of living for youth. This will create a supportive environment for young parents and families by strengthening early and preschool education and care.



Vocational education and skills

Apart from strengthening the visibility of vocational education and profession, there is a focus on encouraging students to engage in vocational and deficit occupations. To achieve this, the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the period up to 2027 has been adopted.

A complementary measure aimed at youth, contributing to the improvement of the regular vocational education system, will ensure a higher level of employability for individuals with qualifications by enhancing the quality and relevance of vocational education and training. Additionally, measures for the development and transformation of financial support systems for pupils and support for strengthening work-based learning will be incorporated into the National Plan for Industrial Development and Entrepreneurship for the period from 2021 to 2027.

3.3.1. Measures for youth competencies and skills

The study conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, titled "National Monitoring of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education System in the Republic of Croatia," indicates that professional associates in primary and secondary schools observe a higher (44.7%) or significantly higher (13.8%) prevalence of peer violence in the virtual environment compared to pre-pandemic time. Several national representative studies on the exposure of children and youth to risky behaviour and content were conducted prior to the pandemic. The Child and Youth Protection Centre of Zagreb, in collaboration with the City Office for Health of the City of Zagreb and the Society for Communication and Media Culture, conducted a national survey project titled "Social Online Experiences and Mental Health of Youth" (N=1772). Pupils from the first and third grades of secondary schools in Osijek, Zagreb, Rijeka, Split, and Dubrovnik participated. The survey showed that 46.2% of adolescents received sexually explicit content through social media, and almost every fifth adolescent sent messages of such content under pressure or coercion.

Media literacy

The development and promotion of media, especially digital literacy, are essential to prepare children and young people for thoughtful and responsible participation in the media and digital media environment, making them aware of the dangers and risks associated with the media.

In relation to exposure to media content, research conducted over the last six years has measured the level of media literacy among children, youth, and their parents and guardians. According to one of the studies, after completing primary school, children possess only an intermediate level of critical evaluation and creation of media content.

It is clear that a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to media literacy is also necessary. There is a need for systematic and coordinated empowerment of young people and the development of their media literacy competencies, primarily achieved by empowering teachers and professional associates who will implement media literacy programmes in primary and secondary schools. Additionally, it is necessary to conduct multi-year research on the level of media literacy among secondary school pupils and university students. Finally, in accordance with the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on media literacy in a constantly changing world (2020/C193/06), it is necessary to establish a cross-sectoral body of all public institutions implementing media literacy programmes for children and young people.

In addition to raising the financial literacy of youth, which is an important priority of the Action Plan for the Improvement of Consumer Financial Literacy for 2023 and 2024, it is crucial to ensure quality education for young people, which is the

starting point for future jobs and professions, especially in the period of accelerated green transition and digital transformation. In this regard, a significant contribution comes from measures such as training, improvement, (self) employment, and entrepreneurship for young people, which are continuously implemented through the Croatian Employment Service.

The Digital Croatia Strategy until 2032 considers fundamental knowledge in natural subjects such as mathematics and physics as one of the key parameters for the successful completion of the initial years of computer science and information technology studies and obtaining a degree after three or five years of study. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to enrol as many young people as possible with sufficient prior knowledge in general subjects, which will directly affect the increased number of ICT professionals. To achieve the Strategic Goal "Educated and Employed People," a priority in the implementation of policies in the labour market and employment sector is the development of human potential through professional guidance, with an emphasis on entrepreneurial and digital competencies. By awarding STEM and ICT scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students, efforts will be made to further increase the number of experts in the ICT field, and by establishing a new framework for the advancement and career development of researchers in STEM and ICT areas, the retention of young scientists from Croatia, i.e., the reduction of the "brain drain" trend, is facilitated. Through formal and informal education programmes, developed using the instruments of the Croatian Qualifications Framework and by providing vouchers for lifelong learning, the acquisition of digital competencies needed for work will be ensured for employed and unemployed individuals, with particular benefits for vulnerable groups such as youth or long-term unemployed persons.

The Digital Croatia Strategy until 2032 aims, inter alia, to implement a comprehensive Digital Transition to support the development of the educational and research system. In this sense, one of the goals of measures related to the structural reform of the education system is to empower the acquisition of fundamental competencies that form the basis for lifelong learning and the upgrading of competencies in line with changes in society, technological development, and the needs of the economy. Integral competencies for the safe use of ICT are an important part of basic competencies, protecting children and young people from the unwanted consequences of technology, such as: i) the impact of dependence on the use of smartphones, tablets, etc., ii) excessive use of social networks and their impact on the confidence of young people, iii) online hate speech and peer violence, iv) lack of physical activity and time spent indoors, etc. The connection of information, media, and digital literacy is also present in Croatian curricula for subjects such as Croatian Language and Computer Science in primary schools and secondary schools.

An important contribution to the development of young people comes from the system of science and higher education, which has been further improved by the adoption of a new Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity and will promote the scientific and research capacities of institutions and young researchers. Through scholarship policies, especially through socio-economic scholarships and scholarships in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), excellence is encouraged, as well as equal opportunities for young people throughout the country. All of this forms the basis for a higher quality of life for young people and for the competitiveness and resilience of Croatia in a competitive European and global environment.

MEASURE	3.3.1. Strengthening a culture of non-violence with an emphasis on combating peer and digital violence For the implementation of this measure, financial support will be provided to youth associations and organisations for youth through a public call for projects aimed at preventing violence among young people, preventing violence in youth romantic relationships, and preventing digital violence against and among young people.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	UNICEF Office for Croatia, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 265,445 2024 – EUR 265,445 2025 – EUR 265,445 A792009 Prevention of Violence against and among Youth
MEASURE	3.3.2. Empowerment of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (Youth in NEET) To implement this measure, financial support will be provided to associations of and for youth through a public call for projects aimed at increasing knowledge and skills, employability, and competitiveness in the labour market, as well as promoting the social inclusion of youth (working with youth in NEET).
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 53,089 2024 – EUR 53,089 2025 – EUR 53,089 A558047 Youth Policy
MEASURE	3.3.3. Coordination of cross-sectoral approach to media literacy development (in accordance with the Council Conclusions on media literacy in an ever-changing world (2020/C193/06) For the implementation of this measure, the following activities will be carried out: - Establishment of a cross-sectoral coordination body consisting of all public institutions implementing media literacy programmes for children and youth. - Coordination and evaluation of existing media literacy programmes (co)financed by public funds (national and local levels). - Development of guidelines for implementing media literacy programmes. - Development of a repository of completed activities to exchange knowledge and facilitate dissemination. - Development of short-term and long-term guidelines for activity implementers.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Agency for Electronic Media, Faculty of Political Sciences, UNICEF Office for Croatia
OUTCOME INDICATOR	- Cross-sectoral and interdepartmental body established - Rules of Procedure adopted - All data on funded media literacy programmes in the last five years (2017-2022) collected - Guidelines and recommendations for the implementation of media literacy programmes developed - Development of depository of implemented media literacy programmes initiated
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 6,636 2024 – EUR 6,636 2025 – EUR 6,636 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.3.4. Enhancement of media literacy through empowerment of teachers, professional associates, librarians, and principals for implementing media literacy programmes For the implementation of this measure, the following activities will be carried out: - Organisation of national, inter-county, and county-level professional conferences on media literacy.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Education and Teacher Training Agency, Electronic Media Agency, Academic Community, Faculty of Political Sciences, teachers
OUTCOME INDICATOR	- A national gathering on media literacy in the digital age was held - At least 5 inter-county and 10 county meetings on media literacy were held
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 5,972 2024 – EUR 5,972 2025 – EUR 5,972 A558047 Youth Policy
MEASURE	3.3.5. Long-term measurement of media literacy levels among secondary school pupils and university students For the implementation of this measure, the following activities will be carried out: - Establishment of a research team to measure the level of media literacy and media habits of children and youth. - Definition of project activities. - Annual data collection, data processing, and public reporting. - Preparation of expert reports. - Preparation of policy recommendations.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Agency for Electronic Media, Academic Community, Faculty of Political Sciences
OUTCOME INDICATOR	- Measurement team appointed. - Rules of Procedure of the measurement team adopted. - At least two national representative surveys (2023 and 2025) designed and conducted. - Funds to conduct at least two nationally representative surveys provided. - At least two expert reports completed and published. - At least two public presentations of results organised. - Recommendations for policy makers at national and local level developed.
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 7,963 2024 - Not specified 2025 – EUR 10,617 A558047 Youth Policy

3.4. YOUTH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013 and its participation in international bodies and organisations have had an impact on the lives and professional development of youth. It is crucial to involve young people in European political and economic processes to ensure their active participation and build a sense of belonging to the European project. This was especially evident during the European Year of Youth 2022 and during the Conference on the Future of Europe when many young people engaged in discussions.

In the context of the European Union, youth mobility is seen through the lens of developing educational and career opportunities for young people, with an emphasis on applying the knowledge and skills gained in Croatia. Following Croatia's entry into the Eurozone and the Schengen Area in January 2023, new developmental and project opportunities have opened up, especially for young people in all parts of Croatia.

Asked about the positive effects of Croatia's accession to the European Union, 80% of respondents among secondary school students in Zagreb singled out improved employment opportunities, 23% believed that Croatia would be able to utilise EU funds, and 9% that the Croatian economy could compete with the rest of Europe.¹⁷ When asked about the effects of EU membership, most acknowledged positive changes on the political and socio-cultural levels. They emphasised that membership allowed for more travel and the formation of friendships (80%), better understanding of the cultures and religions of other nations (76%), and improved protection of human and minority rights in Croatia (63%). Some young people (46%) believed that integration limited Croatia's economic development, while 48% emphasised that it contributed to a higher standard of living for citizens. A survey conducted among secondary school students in Zagreb¹⁸ showed that 65% of respondents believed that Croatia had benefited from joining the European Union, and 59% thought that their voice had an impact



in the European Union, placing young people in Croatia above the European average in this regard.

The survey indicates an increase in political participation among young people in Croatia, with a 5% increase¹⁹ in the turnout of young people in the European Parliament elections in 2019 compared to previous elections, in line with the trend in other EU member states. According to data from the European Commission in 2013, 78% of young people in Croatia who intended to vote considered the European elections important.²⁰ In terms of political literacy about the EU, the majority of young people in Croatia (61%) knew that members of the European Parliament are elected directly, whereas on average in the EU27, every second youth respondent knew this fact.

Apart from young people, representatives of youth organisations, organisations for youth, Croatian institutions, participate in various EU-level bodies and initiatives, which was emphasised in the previous National Youth Programme for the 2014-2017 period, highlighting the importance of their participation for youth.

Compared to the previous survey, there has been a decrease in young people's desire to emigrate, with 63% expressing no desire to move abroad. However, a third of young people expressed varying degrees of desire to leave Croatia, with one-fifth planning to do so in the next two years and 22% within the next five years.²¹

Among those most willing to leave forever are unemployed young people (8.7%).²² Nevertheless, despite the opportunities in EU countries due to the openness of European borders, the number of unemployed young people considering leaving the country remains low. Employment status also influences the decision to stay or leave, and the data show that the employment rate of young people aged 15 to 29 in 2021 in the EU was 47.4%, while in Croatia, it was 41.6%. Additionally, the youth unemployment rate decreased to 16.6%, with the EU average at 13%.

According to data in 2017, research also indicated a growing trend of young people choosing to study abroad, although the numbers were still relatively low. Only 5.8% of young people utilised the student mobility opportunities, with the main sources of funding for young people staying abroad being their parents (57.4%) and the European student exchange programme (22.9%).

The primary reason for not utilising the opportunity to study abroad is the lack of financial resources to cover the costs of living, cited by 25.7% of young people. Another 23.9% stated that they were not interested in studying at a foreign university.

3.4.1. Measures for youth information, projects, and mobility

In the previous National Youth Programme for the period from 2014 to 2017, the focus was on youth participation and the involvement of youth sector stakeholders and relevant institutions in shaping youth policies at the European and global levels. The earlier National Youth Programmes had a focus on youth mobility, which included educational, cultural, and tourist mobility, as well as participation in international exchanges or collaborations at the national, European, and global levels. Special attention was given to young people with fewer opportunities and ways to include this group in travel and tourism services.

Within the framework of the EU Youth Strategy (2018), there are two goals relating to youth and the European Union. Goal 1 concerns connecting the EU with young people and Goal 11 concerns youth organisations and EU youth programmes. Objective 1 includes ensuring meaningful youth participation and dialogue with them in all phases of decision-making in the European Union by improving existing and creating new participatory mechanisms; ensuring equal access to quality, unbiased, and youth-adapted information about the functioning of the European Union and how to get involved, as well as the opportunities it offers; introducing and enhancing education about Europe and the European Union in formal and informal settings;

guaranteeing fair representation of all member states in the political and administrative bodies of the European Union in accordance with the principle of equal citizenship; increasing the budget and effectiveness of EU youth programmes; building trust among young people in the European Union project by reducing the democratic deficit and improving transparency and visibility; institutionalising the assessment of European Union policies in terms of their suitability for youth and their impact.

Goal 11 is related to ensuring visibility and provision of quality information with regard to youth organisations and European programmes for all young people; ensuring sufficient funding from the European Union for programmes for youth organisations to develop projects and access structural support for their activities; ensuring better connectivity between youth organisations and European youth programmes with the education systems and recognising youth programmes as factors that promote life skills and active citizenship; increasing the accessibility of European youth programmes, ensuring youth-friendly administrative procedures and providing support and quality information to all participants and applicants; reaching out to marginalised youth and supporting their activities in youth organisations and groups and in EU youth programmes; increasing resources and widening

¹⁷ Gvozdanović et al., 2019

¹⁸ Pitarović et al., 2021

¹⁹ European elections: Record turnout driven by young people/News

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190923IPR61602/2019-european-elections-record-turnout-driven-by-young-people>

²⁰ European Commission, 2013

²¹ Gvozdanović et al., 2018

²² Potočnik and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017

²³ <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/medjunarodni-dan-mladih/1229>

²⁴ Spajić Vrkaš and Potočnik, 2017

the range of grants and the diversity of initiatives available to youth organisations and groups; ensuring youth participation in the governance processes of European youth programmes.

At the European Union level, priorities are set to develop positive attitudes, trust, and awareness of the EU among young people, as well as to improve their participation in European processes that affect or concern them. The views of young people in Croatia on the EU are diverse. The majority of youth believe that there have been positive developments since Croatia joined the EU, especially in terms of travel opportunities and building friendships. However, some data suggest that some young people have a negative view of the EU, and there is also a lack of knowledge about the EU and the opportunities it offers. Given these observations, it is clear that there is a need to inform young people about the European Union. Regarding political

participation, a systematic scientific assessment is necessary to clearly identify the trends and the overall picture of youth and their participation at the EU level. Likewise, research points to the need to empower and encourage greater participation. Mobility within the EU, especially in the context of education, has been experienced by only a small number of young people, both due to lack of funds and lack of interest. Therefore, it is important to focus on young people with fewer opportunities and provide additional information about the options available to them.

An important priority is the creation of preconditions for the return of Croatian emigrants in the youth population, which is supported by the implementation of the National Plan for the Development of Relations of the Republic of Croatia with Croats Abroad until 2027 and its accompanying Action Plan.

MEASURE	3.4.1. Strengthening international youth mobility To implement this measure, information on the opportunities for youth mobility and participation in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes will be provided to youth associations, young people, and all other stakeholders.
LEAD	Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Central State Office for Demography and Youth, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of informed persons
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 4,343 2024 – EUR 27,569 2025 – EUR 7,015 A818043, A818058, A818063, A818065

MEASURE	3.4.2. Implementation of European youth policies To implement this measure and improve access to information on national youth policies, national co-financing for the Youth Wiki programme will be provided in accordance with the European Commission's agreement and the national contact point.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Financial support for the implementation of the Youth Wiki programme has been granted
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2024
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 7,963 2024 – EUR 7,963 A934004 International cooperation

MEASURE	3.4.3. Empowering civil society organisations to inform youth about the European Union and encourage their active participation To implement this measure, financial support will be provided through a public call to civil society organisations to inform youth about the European Union, its topics and policies communicated in EU institutions, rights and obligations, the advantages provided, decisions affecting the daily lives and quality of life of Croatian citizens, and to encourage young people to utilise the opportunities offered by the European Union, including their active participation.
LEAD	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Central State Office for Demography and Youth, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 132,722 2024 – EUR 92,905 2025 – EUR 86,269 A777045 Information about the EU

3.5. YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

Youth in rural areas represent a particularly vulnerable group, and the challenges they face are not only unique to Croatia, but also prevalent across European Union.²⁵

Youth migration to cities or abroad, as well as the ageing of the population, hinders the development of rural areas and presents a demographic challenge faced by about fifteen EU member states.

It is important to note that for many young people in rural areas, leaving is not their primary choice. Many of them are interested and willing to invest their time and effort in the development of Croatian villages, especially those based on agrotourism and ecological food production. This presents an opportunity for Croatia, which recognised the priority of improving the quality of life for young people in rural areas back in 2020 when it included it in the National Reform Programme.²⁶

During its first presidency of the Council of the European Union, Croatia set the creation of opportunities for young people in rural areas as an important priority.²⁷

In 2020, around 42.4% of the population in Croatia lived in rural areas, which is above the European average of 25%.²⁸ The proportion of young rural population aged 15 to 24²⁹ years out of the total number of young people in Croatia in 2020 was 41.5%, with 48.9% being female and 51.1% male.

Until 2018, Croatian villages were affected by increased migration of younger populations to cities or abroad.

Youth in rural areas are more frequently unemployed, with 17.6% of rural youth not in education or employment compared to 8.5% of urban youth.

Young people in rural areas are often in weaker financial situations, as 29.7% of them live in households with an income lower than EUR 663.61, compared to 16.6% in Zagreb or 17.7% in regional centres.

It is essential to note that the total number of youth and holders of family farms (OPG) in Croatia, according to the latest data, is as high as 21,995.³⁰

²⁵ McEldowney, 2021

²⁶ National Reform Programme 2020, April 2020

<https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2016/Sjednice/2020/Travanj/227%20sjednica%20VRH/Novi%20direktorij/227%20-%201.pdf>

²⁷ EU 2020 HR, 2019

²⁸ World Bank, 2021

²⁹ The definition of youth in the text includes, unless otherwise indicated, the age group from 15 to 29 years. Considering the issue of rural population migration, which is particularly intense between the ages of 20 and 44, the mentioned proportion of 41.5% is not entirely accurate because it refers to youth up to 24 years of age. In other words, it is expected that the proportion of rural youth aged 15 to 29 in the total number of youth in Croatia will be smaller.

³⁰ Ministry of Agriculture, 2021

Regarding education, young people in rural areas are at a higher risk of leaving school early (4.9% in 2019). Young people in rural Croatia, especially on the islands and the coast, have limited opportunities to choose professions, mainly limited to agriculture and service jobs related to tourism development.

A study from 2014 pointed out differences in the educational aspirations of young people in rural and urban areas. Urban students were more inclined to obtain higher education, while rural students were more inclined to acquire a profession and make decisions not to pursue further education.³¹

Comparing young people according to socio-demographic characteristics, the socio-cultural status of families, gender, and urbanisation of the place in which they live no longer significantly differentiates young people.³² In other words, there is a loss of traditional differences between rural and urban youth, which is a consequence of the fact that in some segments the living conditions, and consequently the accompanying problems and needs of youth in rural and urban areas have become very similar.

Three-quarters of the respondents believed that every larger place in Croatia should have a multipurpose youth centre. The activities of these centres would include providing information on education, employment, mobility, various forms of counselling for young people, accommodation for young people, computer/Internet workshops, holding discussions on current topics/problems of society and young people, and more. It was noted that young people from rural areas were least interested in advisory and informative content.

When asked about their interests, young people from rural and urban areas equally expressed interest in friendships and acquaintances, love, family life, marriage, children, work and employment, travel, education and training, and entertainment and leisure.³³

After an extended financial crisis that significantly affected young people, from 2008 to 2013, and after Croatia's accession to the European Union, the country faced demographic challenges that threatened the social and pension systems and the labour market. While 2017 saw the highest number of emigrants, in the past three years, especially in 2021, there has been a reversal in the trend, with more young people aged 15 to 29 immigrating to Croatia than those who emigrated abroad.

Negative attitudes towards rural life and agriculture, the perception that life and work in the city (or abroad) are easier, and the belief that various aspirations and job aspirations cannot be realised in rural areas contribute to migration decisions.³⁴ As a result of migration and reduced birth rates, the proportion of young rural people to the overall population of young people is gradually decreasing.

To address these trends, Croatia has been investing in the balanced development of the country since 2016, with the help of national and European funds, to create quality opportunities for education, employment, starting families, and improving the quality of life. Projects like Slavonia, Baranja, and Srijem, Project North, as well as investments in Dalmatian hinterland, Gorski Kotar, Lika, Banovina, islands, and Croatian villages contribute to this effort. In this decade, new European funds within the Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU from 2021 to 2027 will further support these initiatives. For instance, thanks to the Slavonia, Baranja, and Srijem Project, annual scholarships are provided for all students from the second to the fifth year of agricultural programmes at universities in five Slavonian counties.



3.5.1. Measures for equal opportunities for youth in all parts of Croatia

Youth in rural areas are one of the recent priorities of European policies. Among the more important strategic documents, the EU Youth Strategy (2018) should be singled out, which defines Goal 6 to develop the potential of young, rural residents. The EU Youth Strategy (2018) includes, among other things, ensuring social infrastructure and sustainable and quality jobs, decentralising activities to facilitate the inclusion of young people in the local community, providing access to higher education, protecting rural traditions, and building a positive image of rural areas.

Also, the European Common Agricultural Policy (European Commission, 2021) contains a range of measures aimed at youth in agriculture and beyond, relating to income support, assistance in establishment of start-ups and assistance in the establishment of basic services and rural area revitalisation. From the perspective of the modern crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU Recovery Instrument (Council of the European Union, 2020) is of great importance, providing financial support to young farmers.

National strategic documents that directly or indirectly concern youth in rural areas include the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 (2021), which sets as its goals the revitalisation of rural areas and the improvement of the quality of life of rural area inhabitants, encompassing accelerating the transition to a smart and green rural economy, creating more and better jobs in rural areas, reducing poverty in rural areas, and developing the bioeconomy.

The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 (2021) also defines the funding of education programmes and programmes for the development of health and social services for rural areas, investment in better housing and care by building apartments and improving community services and solving the problem of land fragmentation, and thus the development of rural areas by adopting a new Act on Agricultural Land Consolidation.

Young farmers are the focus of several different policies, recognised as an integral part of the Agriculture Strategy from 2020 to 2030 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2020). This strategy introduces the redistribution of income support to small and medium-sized producers and young farmers, as well as support for starting and developing agricultural farms and businesses with an emphasis on young people. The Agriculture Act (OG 118/2018) includes young farmers in the direct payment programme and gives them priority in the use of national reserves.

The Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 outlined a range of measures for young farmers. These measures included additional educational programmes and counselling to encourage young people to enter agriculture. They also encompassed assistance in acquiring agricultural land, the construction of social infrastructure and public services to improve the lives of rural families and support for entrepreneurial activities. This programme was initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2014.



³¹ Ministry of Agriculture, 2021

³² Klepač, 2021

³³ Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš, 2017a

³⁴ Ilišin and Gvozdanović, 2017

³⁵ Žutinić and Bokan, 2008; Klepač, 2021

The lack of research on youth in rural areas, which would encompass their lives, needs, and differences among them, introduces certain limitations in analysing the gap between the desired and the existing state. However, in recent years, research has been conducted, often on small and diverse samples, from which certain conclusions can be drawn.

Taking into account the described issues and barriers faced by young people in rural areas, it has been recognised that significant efforts need to be made to equalise opportunities for rural and urban youth. This involves, on one hand, developing mechanisms to work with young people in rural areas, and on the other hand, encouraging their participation in the community and in the creation of policies at the local, national, and European levels. It also implies the development of networks of social services and cultural/artistic/sports activities, as well as investment in programmes for information, lifelong education, and training.

An approach to rural youth should be based on continuous and comprehensive research of young people in rural areas, taking into account their specific geographical differences (considering variations in continental, coastal, island, and mountainous areas) and other distinctions. Moreover, all research and framework measures should be based on an integrated approach that encompasses a wide range of important aspects of rural youth life, including quality of life, education, leisure time, mobility, employment, social policies, housing, and more.

Through the Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 and a transitional period of 2021 and 2022, several measures were implemented to stimulate demographic revitalisation.

Investment in improved housing for young people is the foundation for empowering young individuals as responsible adults who contribute fully to the society in which they live. Encouraging people to stay and settle in less densely populated or less developed areas, such as rural, remote, and underdeveloped regions, contributes to demographic, economic, social, and cultural development in those areas.

The Act on the Management of State Property has recognised the importance of demographic policies. Article 45 of the Act specifies that one of the purposes for which properties owned by the Republic of Croatia can be donated to local and regional self-government units is to implement the demographic development of the Republic of Croatia and realise projects for housing and socially encouraging construction.

Promoting regular and organised physical activity for secondary school students in rural areas is the primary goal of the programme that the Croatian School Sports Association will implement in cooperation with county school sports associations and secondary schools in rural areas.

MEASURE	3.5.1. Ensuring the development and implementation of youth-oriented activities in rural areas To implement the measure, financial support will be provided through a public call to associations of and for youth for the implementation of projects aimed at young people from rural areas and which contribute to the revitalisation of rural areas with the aim of retaining young people in their local communities.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of financial grants awarded
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 291,990 2024 – EUR 291,990 2025 – EUR 291,990 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.5.2. Establishment of multifunctional youth centres To implement the measure, activities will be undertaken to establish multifunctional centres to provide activities, professional support and services that will contribute to better participation and personal and professional development of youth in rural areas.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Local and regional self-government units, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Activities for the establishment of multifunctional youth centres in rural areas initiated
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 132,722 2024 – EUR 132,722 2025 – EUR 132,722 A558047 Youth Policy

MEASURE	3.5.3. Ensuring better housing for youth For the purpose of implementing the measure, co-financing and/or subsidising housing costs to young people in local and/or regional self-government units will be undertaken in order to ensure better living conditions for youth. Also, as part of this measure, a comprehensive programme of improving access to housing for young people will be implemented.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, local and/or regional self-government units
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of subsidies granted
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 785,719 2024 – EUR 1,094,963 2025 – EUR 1,194,505 A934006 Support and Resilience Projects and Programmes

MEASURE	3.5.4. Inclusion of youth in the secondary education system in sports programmes of health-focused physical exercise in rural areas To implement this measure, financial support will be provided for the implementation of extracurricular sports programmes containing various sports activities for secondary school students in rural areas.
LEAD	Central State Office for Demography and Youth
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Croatian School Sports Federation
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of secondary school students involved in rural areas
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q3/2023/ Q3/2024/ Q3/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 66,361 2024 – EUR 92,905 2025 – EUR 132,722 A558047 Youth Policy

3.6. HEALTH AND THE CRISIS CAUSED BY THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



From its first appearance in 2019 until the declaration of the pandemic in 2020, the coronavirus has brought significant changes and affected all aspects of life. The scientific community, as well as national and supranational decision-makers, have been dealing with the consequences of the crisis in various ways. For young people, and especially youth who are at risk, the COVID-19 crisis has serious consequences in various areas, including education, employment, disposable income, and mental health (OECD, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic's effects on young people, as is evident from research, cover areas such as mental and physical health, physical activity, education, employment, rights, and online activities.

The crisis caused by the emergence of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the mental health of the global population, particularly young people who have proven to be one of the most severely affected groups of society. The pandemic also revealed that no system globally was prepared for the increased need of the population for psychological support. Simultaneously, following the onset of the crisis, an unprecedented awareness campaign about mental health was carried out, and individuals who were already in the psychological support

system showed a high level of resilience to the crisis. The conditions of life in pandemic times led to further deterioration of the mental health of younger age groups. Meta-analytical studies published during the pandemic showed a twofold increase in the incidence of mental disorders among children and young people. All of the above highlights the need for community care to prevent the development of more severe mental illnesses. Experts are concerned about the further increase in the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health in the European Union, especially among young people, for whom suicide is the second leading cause of death. They emphasise the need for the development of social infrastructure necessary to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and reintegrate young people into society. In addition to mental health, it is essential to consider other aspects of health because health ultimately represents a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.

Croatia has a long and successful organisation of healthcare for schoolchildren, students, and young people. The foundations for improving the quality of healthcare for young people in the future are based on appropriate norms and standards, the development of multidisciplinary teams, professional work, education, and the alignment of measures for students and young people's needs, as well as continuous professional work, professional development, and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Furthermore, the consequences of the pandemic on young people shown in research cover areas such as mental and physical health, education, employment, rights, and online activities. The pandemic has affected all aspects of health and the overall quality of life of young people.

International research points to several negative consequences of the pandemic and addresses various topics, such as deterioration of mental health of young people, young people who are at risk or marginalised, various consequences on the physical health of young people, reduced participation in sports, increased online activities and negative impacts on education, rights, and employment.

Several studies have been conducted on this topic, examining the needs and challenges of pupils, graduates, and students.³⁵ The project *Kako smo? Život u Hrvatskoj u doba korone* (How Are We? Living in Croatia during the Coronavirus (Jokić Begić et al., 2020) provides results based on a sample of at least 3,500 persons 18 years old or older. The part related to students shows an image of impaired mental health of young people, with a third believing they will need psychological help, 30% expressing mild depression, 23% severe or very severe depression, 17% showing significant anxiety and worry, and 20% experiencing very intense stress; 10% of young people have significantly impaired mental health, especially those students who are more concerned about their studies.

The results of the research conducted among secondary and primary school pupils show the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Most secondary school graduates (59,2%) have marked this impact as extremely negative or negative, as well as 46% of pupils in other grades of secondary school and 37.6% of eighth-grade primary school pupils. Eighth-grade pupils felt the most negative impact on extracurricular activities and hobbies, physical activity and sports, and mental health. Secondary school graduates marked mental health, engagement in extracurricular activities and hobbies, and participation in physical activities and sports as the areas most affected by the pandemic. When asked about the consequences on mental health, 77.4% of them noticed more or significantly more symptoms of depression (77.4%), anxiety disorders (87%), phobias and fears (75.8%), and peer violence in the virtual environment (58.5%).

Monitoring indicators of depressive symptoms in young people aged 15-16 is an integral part of international research - the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) conducted by the Croatian Institute of Public Health. From 1999 to 2011, there were no changes in the prevention of depressive symptoms difficulties in the previous 7 days, and in the last round of research in 2019, there was a significant increase compared to 2011. The next round of research to be conducted in 2024 will provide insight into the trend in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A survey on the physical activity of secondary school graduates conducted on 4,749 respondents showed that motivation for physical activity significantly decreased due to social isolation.

3.6.1. Measures for youth health

The COVID-19 crisis is a new phenomenon for which there is still no clear policy in the context of the youth population. However, there are some recommendations from international organisations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) recommends the following measures to governments:

1. Predict the distributional effects of rule-making and allocation of public resources among different age groups by applying impact assessments and establishing or strengthening institutions to monitor the consequences of the pandemic on current and future generations of young people.
2. Encourage the immediate mobilisation of youth to mitigate the crisis using existing mechanisms, tools, and platforms (e.g., digital tools and data) to build resilience in society against future shocks and disasters.
3. Align short-term emergency responses with investments in long-term economic, social, and environmental goals to ensure the well-being of future generations.
4. Provide targeted policies and services for the most vulnerable young populations, including youth not in education, employment, or training, young migrants; young homeless people; young women, adolescents and children facing increased risks of domestic violence.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020) recommends the following to all its members:

1. Ensure universal health coverage that includes all young people and ensure that health systems effectively meet the needs of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the recovery phase, including public health promotion, testing and treatment, and the provision of mental health services.
2. Promote accurate public health information through various communication tools and empower young people to make evidence-based decisions about their health while proactively contributing to the prevention and mitigation of the pandemic's effects.
3. Strengthen national capacities for collecting, analysing, and disseminating data disaggregated by age, gender, and other demographic characteristics, particularly to address the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of young people during and after the pandemic.
4. Involve young people in public consultations and in the development of health, economic and social interventions in response to COVID-19 and pandemic recovery.
5. Promote youth innovation in preventing and treating COVID-19 and managing the associated socio-economic impacts.

At the moment, the biggest problem is the lack of research conducted on a representative sample of young people to gain a comprehensive understanding of the state of this population in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences. Taking into account existing foreign and domestic research, it seems that it is extremely important to gain insight into the Croatian context on the one hand, while on the other, research points to numerous serious consequences left by the pandemic on young people.

Epidemiological measures such as gathering restrictions, physical distancing, mask-wearing, quarantine, and isolation can negatively impact

mental health, including issues related to addiction, physical activity, dietary habits, and obesity, thus affecting the overall development and well-being of young people. The experience of the pandemic raises questions related to infectious disease control, including vaccination.



According to UNICEF's 2021 State of the World's Children report, 11.5% (about 44,000) of adolescents aged 10 to 19 in Croatia have mental health problems. Research from the National Monitoring of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education System in the Republic of Croatia, conducted by the Institute for Social Research on 2,023 students and 4,796 teachers from 161 primary and secondary schools across Croatia in 2021, showed that the pandemic had an extremely negative impact on most students. Specifically, 52% of secondary school graduates reported that the pandemic had a negative or extremely negative impact on their mental health (an increase in symptoms of depressive and anxious states, phobias and fears, anger, and peer online bullying were recorded).

Even before the pandemic, the mental health of children and young people was a public health challenge. The circumstances of the pandemic have placed an additional burden on an already strained mental health protection system, making the need to empower those in regular contact with children and young people an additional imperative.

MEASURE	3.6.1. Protection and improvement of youth health during and after the pandemic Conducting research and collecting data are crucial for managing risks and assessing the impact of various factors on youth health.
LEAD	Croatian Institute of Public Health
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Ministry of Health, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of educational materials aimed at health professionals and employees in the educational system and civil society organisations the topic of improving youth health during the pandemic and after the pandemic. Number of international research studies on youth health (HBSC, ESPAD and GPS) conducted.
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 37,726 2024 – EUR 39,989 2025 – EUR 41,189 A884001 Improving and preserving the health of the population through public health activities
MEASURE	3.6.2. Enhancement of mental health literacy for all relevant stakeholders working with youth To implement the measure, a programme called "Help YES" (PoMoZi Da) will be improved and implemented to provide individuals working with youth with a set of knowledge and skills that facilitate the recognition of youth mental health problems.
LEAD	Croatian Institute of Public Health
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Ministry of Health, Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, UNICEF Office Croatia, Carnet, county public health institutes, civil society organisations
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of educational materials aimed at individuals working with young people on the topic of improving youth mental health during the pandemic and after the pandemic. Number of training sessions held in the field of mental health literacy for individuals working with youth Number of participants within the created training programmes
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023 / Q4/2024/ Q4/2025
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 – EUR 103,304 2024 – EUR 109,503 2025 – EUR 112,788 A88401 Activities contributing to the fight against drug abuse and all other forms of addiction and activities in the field of social and humanitarian activities with an emphasis on psychosocial assistance and support and activities in the promotion of sports development T884003 Operational Programme "Effective Human Resources" - Implementation of the "Living Healthy" project – EUR 54,364
MEASURE	3.6.3. Obesity prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles Given that obesity is a major public health challenge and given the impact of obesity on quality and length of life, the Obesity Prevention Action Plan 2023-2026 is adopted to take measures aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing risk factors. It also aims to strengthen activities related to the identification, monitoring, and treatment of obesity. Some measures of the Action Plan are specifically aimed at young people, including educating them in educational institutions, monitoring the nutrition and habits of young people, and providing support in the treatment of young people with obesity.
LEAD	Ministry of Health
COLLABORATORS IN IMPLEMENTATION	Bodies responsible for implementing the measures of the Action Plan
OUTCOME INDICATOR	Number of adopted strategic documents
DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	Q4/2023
BUDGET ALLOCATED FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY IN SB	2023 - financial resources are provided in the State Budget of the Republic of Croatia for 2023 for regular activities

COMPLIANCE WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA UNTIL 2030 AND THE PROGRAMME OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA 2020-2024



The identified priority areas are aligned with the objectives of the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 and the objectives of the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia 2020 -2024. The priority areas outlined in the National Youth Programme contribute to the achievement of:

- Development Direction 2. Strengthening Resilience to Crisis, Strategic Goal 6. Demographic Revitalization and Improved Family Position, and Priority Area 1. Mitigating Negative Demographic Trends and Building a Supportive Environment for Youth and Families, as established in the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030,
- Priority 2. Prospective Future – Competitive, Vital and Educated Croatia and Goal 2.3. Demographic Revitalization and Improved Family Position, as outlined in the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia 2020-2024.

In November 2018, the Council of the EU adopted a Resolution on the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), which aims to encourage young people to participate in democratic life, to engage in social and active civic activities. According to the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), young people should be empowered to shape their own destinies, become resilient, and acquire life skills to keep pace with a changing world. As a fundamental basis for achieving these objectives of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) emphasises a cross-sectoral approach and emphasises three core themes –Engage/Connect/Empower. This refers to the involvement of young people in youth policy-making, connecting young people to share experiences and cooperate, particularly through youth development programmes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, and emphasises the need for youth empowerment, mainly through youth work. The European Youth Goals are part of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) and cover eleven topics of importance for young people recognised at the European level.³⁶

The National Programme was developed following the principles and guidelines contained in the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), and the European Youth Goals were also taken into account when drafting them.

Likewise, it aligns with the United Nations 2030 Agenda adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015, i.e., its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this sense, the National Programme integrates international initiatives and activities, as well as recommendations and guidelines from other European and international documents. Taking care of young people, nurturing their potential, creating opportunities for their expression and development are the foundations of investing in young people. The full effects and results of youth policy can be expected only in synergy with other policies, especially in the areas of education, science, lifelong learning, employment, housing, health, sports, culture, and other policies, which will create conditions for improving the quality of life for young people.

KEY INDICATORS WITH TARGETED VALUES



A total of 6 priority areas have been defined to contribute to the achievement of:

- strategic goal 6. Demographic Revitalization and Improved Family Position, and priority area 1 Mitigating Negative Demographic Trends and Building a Supportive Environment for Youth and Families, as established in the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030,
- of goal 2.3. Demographic Revitalization and Improved Family Position, as outlined in the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Croatia 2020-2024

PRIORITY: 3.1. YOUTH WORK

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.1.1. Development of national priorities for youth work development and implementation of complementary activities aimed at youth work development within youth policies	Established national priorities for the development of youth work Implemented activities aimed at developing youth work within youth policies	0	3 N/A
3.1.2 Improving the quality standards for the operation of centres, clubs, and information centres for youth	Collected data and established quality standards for the operation	0	3
3.1.3. Strengthening the capacity of youth organisations and organisations for youth for youth work	Number of allocated financial grants for the implementation of activities in youth centres, youth clubs, and youth info centres	19	25

PRIORITY: 3.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.2.1. Increased active youth participation in society	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects of associations of and for youth	8	16
3.2.2. Creating a stimulating environment for the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue	Number of youth involved in the EU Youth Dialogue process in Croatia	3000	5000
3.2.3. Improvement of local and regional youth policy	Number of financial grants awarded for the development of local and regional youth programmes	0	10
3.2.4. Empowering youth for involvement in Youth Advisory Boards	Number of created and distributed videos Number of schools where the video was distributed An application for monitoring the number of established and active Youth Advisory Boards	0	1 500 1
3.2.5. Ensuring conditions for improving the work of Youth Advisory Boards	A digital educational programme intended for Youth Advisory Boards developed	0	1
3.2.6. Promoting sustainable community development	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects	5	10
3.2.7. Encouraging youth for environmental protection	Number of awards granted	0	3
3.2.8. Creative and artistic expression of youth	Number of grants awarded	3	12
3.2.9. Ensuring support for the work of the UN youth delegate	Youth Delegate appointed and support in the work provided Number of activities carried out by the delegate	0	6 N/A
3.2.10. Ensuring support in the exchange of experiences and connecting Youth Advisory Boards at the national level	Number of representatives of Youth Advisory Boards, conference participants Number of representatives of LRSGUs /decision makers, conference participants	100 15	100 50

PRIORITY: 3.3. YOUTH EDUCATION

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.3.1. Strengthening a culture of non-violence with an emphasis on combating peer and digital violence	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects	22	30
3.3.2. Empowerment of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (Youth in NEET)	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects	4	10
3.3.3. Coordination of cross-sectoral approach to media literacy development	Cross-sectoral and interdepartmental body established	0	1
	Rules of Procedure adopted		1
	All data on financed media literacy programmes in the last five years (2017-2022) collected		N/A
	Guidelines and recommendations for the implementation of media literacy programmes developed		1
3.3.4. Enhancement of media literacy through empowerment of teachers, professional associates, librarians, and principals for implementing media literacy programmes	Development of depository of implemented media literacy programmes initiated		N/A
	A national gathering on media literacy in the digital area held	0	1
3.3.5. Long-Term measurement of media literacy levels among secondary school pupils and university students	Inter-county and county meetings on media literacy held		15
	Measurement team appointed	0	1
3.3.5. Long-Term measurement of media literacy levels among secondary school pupils and university students	Rules of Procedure of the measurement team adopted		1
	At least two national representative surveys (2023 and 2025) designed and conducted		2
	Funds to conduct at least two nationally representative surveys provided		2
	At least two expert reports completed and published		2
	At least two public presentations of results organised		2
	Recommendations for policy makers at national and local level developed		1

PRIORITY: 3.4. YOUTH AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.4.1. Strengthening international youth mobility	Number of informed persons	1.500	2.000
3.4.2. Implementation of European youth policies	Financial support for the implementation of the Youth Wiki programme granted	1	3
3.4.3. Empowering civil society organisations to inform youth about the European union and encourage their active participation	Number of financial grants awarded	20	60

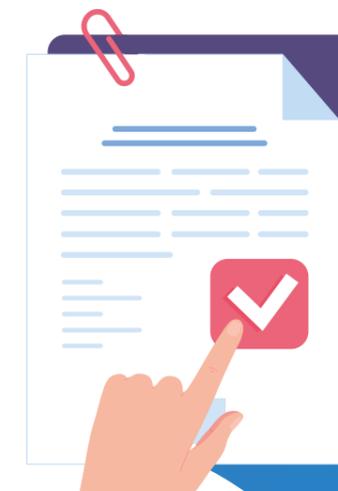
PRIORITY: 3.5. YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.5.1. Ensuring the development and implementation of youth-oriented activities in rural areas	Number of financial grants awarded for the implementation of projects	23	33
3.5.2. Establishment of multifunctional youth centres	Activities for the establishment of multifunctional youth centres in rural areas initiated	0	3
3.5.3. Ensuring better housing for youth	Number of subsidies granted	0	N/A
3.5.4. Inclusion of Youth in the secondary education system in sports programmes of health-focused physical exercise in rural areas	Number of secondary school students involved in rural areas	0	3000

MEASURE	OUTCOME INDICATOR	INITIAL VALUE	TARGET VALUE 2025
3.6.1. Protection and improvement of youth health during and after the pandemic	Number of educational materials aimed at health professionals and employees in the educational system and civil society organisations on the topic of improving youth health during the pandemic and after the pandemic	0	1
	Number of international research studies on youth health (HBSC, ESPAD and GPS) conducted.		N/A
3.6.2. Enhancement of mental health literacy for all relevant stakeholders working with youth	Number of educational materials intended for people who work with youth on the topic of improving the mental health of youth during and after the pandemic.	2	4
	Number of training sessions held in the field of mental health literacy for individuals working with youth	36	64
	Number of participants within the created training programmes	633	1137
3.6.3. Obesity prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles	Number of adopted strategic documents	0	1

06 DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

In accordance with the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth, as the entity responsible for drafting, will establish mechanisms to monitor the National Youth Programme based on the provisions of the Regulations on Deadlines and Procedures for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of Strategic Planning Acts of National Significance and Importance to Local and Regional Self-Government Units. The Central State Office for Demography and Youth will continuously monitor the success of implementing measures for achieving the set goals.



To monitor the progress of implementing the measures, data on achieving the Outcome indicators from the National Programme will be collected.

The entity responsible for drafting the National Programme will prepare annual progress reports on the implementation of the measures. All bodies responsible for implementing measures within the National Programme are obliged to submit reports on the implementation of measures under their jurisdiction for the previous year to the Central State Office for Demography and Youth by 31 January of the current year. The entity responsible for drafting the National Programme will prepare a consolidated annual report on the implementation of measures and the achievement of Outcome indicators from the National Programme for the previous year.

For the purpose of a systematic process of data collection, analysis, and processing, as well as providing timely and relevant information for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of strategic planning acts, the entity responsible for drafting the National Programme will establish a working group that will include the entities and collaborators in the implementation of measures and activities.

To ensure public access to data on the implementation of strategic planning acts, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth will publish data and annual reports on the implementation of the National Programme on its official website.



07

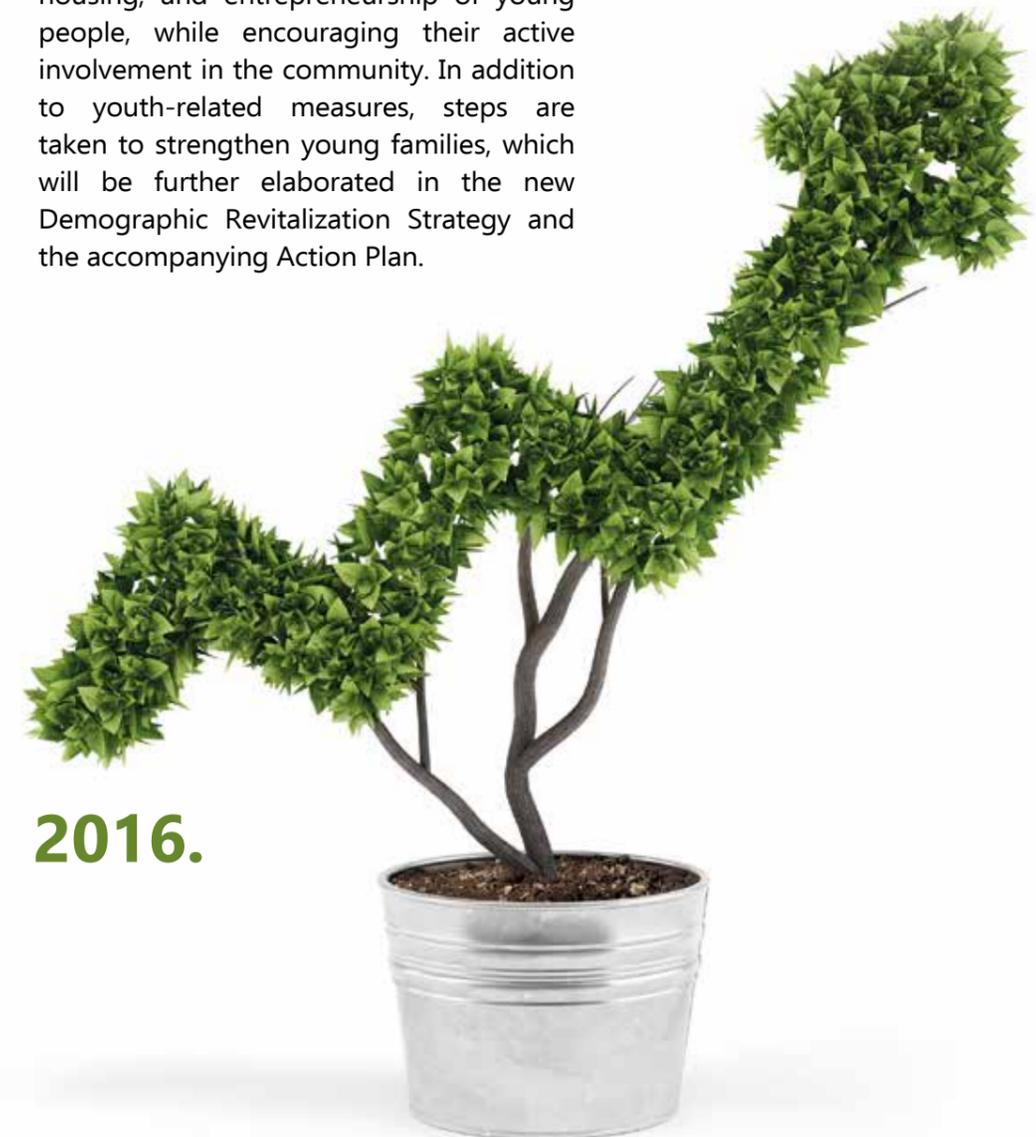
ANNEX – EXISTING MEASURES FOR YOUTH OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA SINCE 2016

Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Croatia, in a session held on 11 March 2021, adopted a new decision to establish the Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, increasing the number of representatives from youth organisations and organisations for youth in this advisory body. The Advisory Board was established based on the Decision on the Establishment of the Advisory Board for Youth adopted in 2012, the Decision on Amendments to the Decision on the Establishment of the Advisory Board for Youth adopted in 2015, and the Decision on Amendments to the Decision on the Establishment of the Advisory Board for Youth adopted in 2017.

The Advisory Board for Youth of the Government of the Republic of Croatia is an interdepartmental advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Croatia with the task of participating in the development of public policies for youth. The Advisory Board comprises 33 members, including representatives from state administration bodies and government offices of the Republic of Croatia, the Association of Cities in the Republic of Croatia, the Croatian Association of Municipalities, and the Croatian Association of Counties, representatives of scientific and educational institutions, as well as representatives from the Croatian Student Council and the National Council of Students of the Republic of Croatia. Representatives of associations of and for youth are appointed based on the proposal of the Central State Office for Demography and Youth, following a selection process, in accordance with the Criteria for Membership in the Advisory Board for Youth.

Essentially, in achieving its task, the Advisory Board actively participates in the continuous monitoring and analysis of public policies that relate to or affect young people in the Republic of Croatia.

In addition to the measures, we are adopting in the National Youth Programme worth almost EUR 8 million, numerous sectoral measures have been devised and continuously implemented since 2016, aiming to improve the quality of life, health, education, employment, housing, and entrepreneurship of young people, while encouraging their active involvement in the community. In addition to youth-related measures, steps are taken to strengthen young families, which will be further elaborated in the new Demographic Revitalization Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan.



2016.

1. YOUTH WORK AND

EMPLOYMENT

Active employment policy measures

In the period from 2017 to 2021, a total of 75,066³⁷ young people (aged 15-29) were included in active employment policy measures.

The active employment policy measures implemented during this period included:

1. Employment grants
2. Internship grants (introduced in 2018)
3. Self-employment grants
4. Training grants
5. Education and training
6. Vocational training without establishing employment relationship (measure abolished in 2020)
7. Public work
8. Support for reduced working hours
9. Permanent seasonal employment

UFrom the beginning of 2017 to the end of 2021, HRK 1.1 billion (EUR 151 million) of grants were contracted.

It is important to emphasise that the measure of vocational training for work without establishing an employment relationship was abolished in 2020, while the measures of internship and (self-)employment of young people were strengthened.

Funds are provided for the employment of young people in specific strategic fields, from specialisations in healthcare to support for the employment of young scientists for the development of the Croatian science and

education system.

Development of a mapping system for youth in NEET

As part of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, in 2018, a project was conducted called "Establishment of a NEET Person Monitoring System," which developed a data exchange system between the Croatian Employment Service, databases of students and beneficiaries of student rights of the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Croatian Institute for Pension Insurance database.

This data exchange enables the mapping of individuals in the so-called NEET status. This way, it is possible to determine from which educational programmes young people are more likely to become inactive and to work on developing preventive measures and measures to reach inactive young people, with the aim of integrating them into the employment support system or providing assistance for returning to education.

Implementation of youth information and outreach measures

With the aim of informing young people about the Youth Guarantee and the measures available by registering with the Croatian Employment Service at the national level, the implementation of the "National Youth Guarantee Campaign" project began in December 2019.

Within this project, activities were carried out to raise the awareness of young people about the Youth Guarantee and about the rights and obligations related to access to the labour market, returning to education, and other available support measures.

In 2021, the implementation of a campaign was contracted, and in 2022, the media campaign was implemented. A new website for the Youth Guarantee was developed, along with a video encouraging young people to actively seek employment.

On 10 July 2020, an open and ongoing call for project proposals titled "Find Me! (Pronađi

me!) - Implementation of activities of outreach and education of youth in NEET status" was published. The call "Find me! refers to the implementation of activities of outreach and education of inactive youth in NEET status" (young people aged 15-29 not in employment, education, or training, and are not registered in the register of unemployed persons of the Croatian Employment Service).

Within this call, activities for young inactive NEET individuals are funded for the first time, aiming to facilitate their entry into the labour market through a more comprehensive approach and to encourage their participation in existing measures available to young people or further education and training. This will contribute to increasing their employability and improving their skills, enabling them to become active participants in the labour market and contribute to the development of the community and the economy at the local and national levels.

Through a total of 31 contracts, with a total value of HRK 49.7 million (EUR 6.6 million), the involvement of 740 young individuals is planned, and the outcomes of these projects will only be determined upon their completion. The estimated duration of the project implementation is from 12 to 24 months. Since 2017, Operational Programmes for National Minorities have been implemented³⁸, to enhance the rights of national minorities and promote the work and activities of associations that bring together young members of national minorities in Croatia, in line with the Government's Programme. Furthermore, the work of associations is encouraged through the Council for National Minorities, and through the Office for Cooperation with NGOs of the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

Aligning education with labour market needs by strengthening the Implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework

2In 2019, the implementation of the project "Implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) and the Development of Tools for Linking Education and the Labour

Market" began. The goal was to align all educational programmes with the actual needs of employers in the labour market and to develop the Labour Market Portal as a central platform for career choice and development information. Since the beginning of this project until May 2022, nearly 300 occupation standards have been entered in the CROQF register, forming the basis for the development of qualification standards, which, in turn, are used to create educational programmes that align with the actual needs of employers.

Enhancing the Provision of Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development Services

From 2017 to 2020, the project "Enhancing the Provision of Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development Services by Strengthening the Role of the Forum for Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development in Croatia" was carried out.

This project funded activities such as the education of Forum members (thematic sessions, seminars, regional workshops, and the establishment of a web platform for e-learning with informative and educational content for Forum members). The purpose of the Forum's work is to ensure the efficient coordination of stakeholders in the provision of lifelong career guidance services, given the identified fragmentation of the career guidance services system, overlapping activities, insufficiently clear areas of responsibility, and insufficient coordination of actions by various stakeholders in the education and employment system.

One of the tasks of the Forum was to develop and monitor the implementation of the Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development in the Republic of Croatia (2016-2020). The continuation of the implementation of activities related to the establishment of a system for the provision of lifelong career guidance and career development services is envisaged to be funded through the ESF+.

Funding of youth programmes/projects from national sources

From 2017 to 2022, 280 programmes/projects related to youth were funded from national sources, with a total value of HRK 24.7 million (EUR 3.3 million). These programmes/projects covered various areas, including:

- development and expansion of the network of social services provided by associations;
- local volunteer centres;
- prevention of violence against and among children and young people;
- reduction and prevention of social exclusion, social inclusion, and integration of socially vulnerable groups
- projects by associations aimed at supporting families and promoting and protecting children's rights
- projects by associations in the field of preventing violence against and among children and youth
- projects by associations providing counselling services for victims of domestic violence
- the "Living Healthy" project aimed at promoting physical health (physical activity and proper nutrition, mental health, and sexually responsible behaviour).

Improving Labour Act provisions, skills development, and the labour market

In addition to funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026, vouchers for education have been established for both unemployed and employed individuals, including young people, to acquire green and digital skills, with a value of HRK 10,000 (EUR 1,327).

The Labour Act was further improved at the beginning of the year. This included changes related to working on Sundays, remote work, and additional work, as well as the conclusion of fixed-term employment contracts. The Labour Act also introduced, for the first time, the principle of unavailability of workers for professional communication during breaks and leave.

Under Development Direction 1. Sustainable Economy and Society within the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030, a goal has been set to reach the EU average regarding the share of temporarily employed individuals among all employees (fixed-term contracts). This is particularly important for young people because permanent employment is crucial for their personal and professional goals and in combating precarious youth work. Adaptations to legislation in 2021 also allowed for visas for digital nomads, valid for one year, as defined by the Aliens Act.

Social welfare

Within the National Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion for the period 2021-2027, measures have been implemented to improve living conditions, with available services and programmes for specific groups of young people who belong to vulnerable groups of society, including young people at risk of poverty, young people in less developed areas, and young people with disabilities. Personal disability allowance was increased to HRK 1,750 (EUR 232).

2. YOUTH TAX INCENTIVES

Tax empowerment of youth and incentives for employers

To retain highly educated workforce and strengthen youth support, a series of measures were implemented, including a reduction in income tax rates and an increase in the personal deduction, which has resulted in an increased disposable income.

A significant change introduced in 2020, particularly relevant to young people, was a demographic measure that reduced the annual income tax obligation on salary up to a base of HRK 360,000 (EUR 47,780.28): by 100% for young people up to 25 years of age and by 50% for those aged 26 to 30.

As a result of this measure, over 140,000 young people receive an annual tax refund. Changes related to income tax, which have had an impact on improving the quality of

life, include an increase in the basic deduction from HRK 2,600 (EUR 345.08) to HRK 3,800 (EUR 504.35), ultimately reaching HRK 4,000 (EUR 530.90).

Only two income tax rates of 24% and 36% were introduced, which were reduced from 24% to 20% and from 36% to 30% as of 1 January 2021.

Also, the amount of income a natural person can receive while still being considered a dependent family member was increased from HRK 13,000 (EUR 1,725.40) to HRK 15,000 (EUR 1,990.84) and ultimately to HRK 24,000 (EUR 3,185.40) in 2022.

Starting from 1 January 2020, it was specified that when determining the right to a personal deduction for dependent family members, the following shall not be taken into account:

- awards to students during practical work and apprenticeships and dual education,
- scholarships regardless of the payer
- awards for pupil and student excellence and non-repayable funds for education and professional development, as well as child support for education up to 15 years of age or until the completion of primary education, which an employer pays to the child of a deceased worker or to the child of a former worker who has completely lost their working capacity.

Employers were also given the option to make tax-free payments for the regular childcare costs in preschool institutions (kindergartens). The non-taxable amount for newborn support has been increased from a single budget basis to HRK 10,000 (EUR 1,327.24).

In addition to these measures, several rounds of tax relief were implemented, which involved a reduction in the value-added tax (VAT) from 25% to 13% and from 5% on certain food products, as well as a reduction of the VAT rate to 5% for e-books, textbooks, and other publications. The real estate transfer tax was also reduced from 5% to 3%.

3. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Development of the education and science system from 2016 to the present

Over the past six years, reform processes have been initiated in the education and science system, and significant investments have been made in science and education, with additional national and European funds provided, including those from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026 and the European Solidarity Fund for earthquake mitigation. The implementation of the reform of primary and secondary education is being carried out and evaluated continuously. Over forty new curricula have been introduced, including cross-curricular topics that promote fundamental competencies in youth, such as Civic Education, Information and Communication Technology Usage, Sustainable Development, Personal and Social Development, Entrepreneurship, Learning to Learn, and Health. Guidelines for working with gifted students and students with developmental difficulties have also been introduced. Furthermore, the material well-being of educational professionals has been improved, and salaries have increased by over 25%.

Social dimensions of education

The social dimension of education and inclusion at all levels is taken into account. The scholarship policy contributes to the development of pupils' and students' full potential. Significant efforts have been made in the development of vocational education, particularly in deficit occupations. The number of student scholarships in deficit occupations has increased from 350 scholarships in 2015 to over 15,000 annually. Over 50,000 socio-economic student scholarships and 17,000 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) scholarships have been provided, with monthly scholarship amounts increased to HRK 1,506.90 (EUR 200) for socio-economic scholarships, HRK 2,260.35

(EUR 300) for STEM study programmes, and HRK 4,520.70 (EUR 600) for teacher STEM study programmes. More than 6,000 teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries supporting pupils with developmental difficulties were financed through European funds and the state budget, and projects of civil society organisations that play an important role in this regard, with their projects being financially supported. In addition, pupils with developmental difficulties receive assistance in covering the cost of adapted transportation, transportation for escorts, co-financing of teaching aids and materials, and meals.

To make it easier for parents to educate their children, the number of places in kindergartens is increased through continuous investments in infrastructure and capacity. In addition to HRK 1,996,642,500.00 (EUR 265 million) already invested in more than 500 kindergartens, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026 plans an additional HRK 1,619,917,500.00 (EUR 215 million) in investments, ensuring over 22,500 new kindergarten spots. As of the first semester of 2023, all primary school pupils were provided with funds for school meals (HRK 10 (EUR 1.33 per day and per pupil). Since the 2019/2020 school year all primary school pupils have received free textbooks. Special groups of pupils also receive financial support for other educational materials, and secondary school students are provided with textbooks. By increasing the number of kindergarten spots and investing in the extension, construction, and modernisation of primary schools, as prerequisites for single-shift work and full-day school, young parents will be enabled to organise childcare while entering the labour market.

Improving student living standards and strengthening the position of students

Efforts are continuously made to alleviate the tax burden on students and increase the minimum student hourly wage, which is currently at record levels and amounts to HRK 33 (EUR 4.38) and will continue to rise in

line with the minimum wage in Croatia. The tax limit for students has been increased from HRK 15,000 (EUR 1,990.84) to HRK 24,000 (EUR 3,185.35), and part-time students are allowed to work through the student service. Significant funds have been allocated to maintain the cost of student meals, with the student menu still priced at HRK 6.48 (EUR 0.86). The amount of financial support for full-time students with disabilities has been increased to HRK 1,883.63 (EUR 250) per month.

More than HRK 1,280,865,000.00 (EUR 170 million) has been invested in student dormitories and infrastructure in a dozen cities in Croatia, improving the studying and research conditions in the country, including in Pula, Rijeka, Zadar, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik, Varaždin, Čakovec, Virovitica, Požega, Vukovar, Osijek and Zagreb.

The Ordinance on Conditions and Manner of Exercising the Right of Full-Time Students to Subsidised Accommodation awards an additional 500 points for each child to full-time students who are mothers or fathers of a minor child. The Ordinance on the Conditions and Manner of Exercising the Right to a State Scholarship Based on Socio-Economic Status awards an additional 300 points per child to student parents for each child. The Ordinance on the Conditions and Manner of Exercising the Right to a State Scholarship for Special Groups of Students, one of the seven categories applies exclusively to student parents.

Funding projects

In the field of non-institutional education of children and youth, associations are awarded grants in accordance with the conducted annual tender (awarded HRK 15 million (EUR 2 million in the school year 2022/2023)) for their projects. Grants are provided for extracurricular activities in primary and secondary schools as well as student dormitories. This includes programmes to promote science, and a programme for returning scientists.

Investments and reforms

By means of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026, investments are directed, and reforms are implemented at all levels of the educational system, in higher education and science, significantly improving infrastructure and conditions for children, youth, students, scientists, and researchers. A new Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity was adopted, as well as the Act on Amendments to the Act on Vocational Education and Training, and the systematic work is being done to modernise the system of vocational education and training, with an emphasis on developing the vocational curricula.

The National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period until 2027 was also adopted, ensuring the continued provision of state scholarships for students with lower socio-economic status, students in STEM fields, and those pursuing programmes in deficit occupations. The plan also includes the development and enhancement of student accommodation infrastructure for students facing unfavourable conditions. Further professional support for parents to monitor the psychophysical development of students with disabilities is envisaged, as well as the establishment of forms of support and procedures for exercising the rights of students with disabilities at higher education institutions. Additionally, efforts will be made to ensure access to early and preschool education, primary and secondary education for children from family returnees of Croatian emigrants and families of descendants of Croatian emigrants upon their return from abroad. Educational materials for primary pupils and textbooks for secondary school students will continue to be funded. Measures for the education of national minorities and the deepening of support for gifted and potentially gifted children and youth will be further defined. The Plan also includes activities related to professional and career counselling and guidance of students, the development and implementation of a system of financial support to students to engage in curriculum sectors of strategic importance,

including those falling under the category of deficit programmes, as well as strengthening work-based learning, are included.

By the end of 2023, the plan is to digitise teaching and administrative processes in all schools in Croatia. Investments will be made in scientific infrastructure, and new programmes will be launched for young researchers, including initiatives to enhance, attract, and retain researchers, develop skills in STEM and ICT fields, promote mobility, foster the growth of start-ups, and establish independent research careers.

Responding to unexpected crises

The Croatian educational system has promptly responded to the need to include children, pupils, students, and refugees from Ukraine in the education and scientific system. To mitigate the effects of earthquakes and the pandemic, distance learning was organised through digital platforms, and the "School on the Third Channel" (Škola na Trećem) programme was initiated for all primary and secondary school students. Financial assistance has been provided to pupils and students in dormitories, and all costs of accommodation in pupil and student dormitories have been fully covered for individuals residing in cities declared as disaster areas following the December 2020 earthquake. For secondary school students from earthquake-affected areas in the Sisak-Moslavina County, costs of accommodation and meals in pupil dormitories have been ensured.

In response to inflationary pressures, significant price increases of food in student centres have been prevented, and the amount and number of socio-economic scholarships have been increased. In addition to co-financing the transport of pupils until 2024, the transport of full-time students in Croatia continues to be co-financed, which opens the possibility of unlimited use of railway transport. This measure covers approximately 113 thousand students who can buy monthly tickets at a price of HRK 75 (EUR 9.95).

Investments and reforms

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Amendments to the Vocational Education and Training Act have been adopted and systematic efforts are being made to modernise the vocational education and training system, with an emphasis on the development of vocational curricula. The Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activities was also adopted.

The National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the Period until 2027 and the related Action Plan until 2023 were also adopted, which includes professional and career counselling and guidance of students, development and application of the system of financial support to pupils for inclusion in priority sector vocational curricula that fall into the category of deficit programmes and strengthening work-based learning. Within this plan, state scholarships for students with lower socio-economic status and those studying in STEM fields and deficit occupations will continue to be provided. The development and enhancement of student accommodation infrastructure for students facing unfavourable conditions is also planned. Further professional support for parents to monitor the psychophysical development of students with disabilities is envisaged, as well as the establishment of forms of support and procedures for exercising the rights of students with disabilities at higher education institutions. Additionally, efforts will be made to ensure access to early and preschool education, primary and secondary education for children from family returnees of Croatian emigrants and families of descendants of Croatian emigrants upon their return from abroad. Educational materials for primary pupils and textbooks for secondary school students will continue to be funded. Measures for the education of national minorities and the deepening of support for gifted and

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By the end of 2023, the plan is to digitise teaching and administrative processes in all schools in Croatia. Investments will be made in scientific infrastructure, and new programmes will be launched for young researchers, including initiatives to enhance, attract, and retain researchers, develop skills in STEM and ICT fields, promote mobility, foster the growth of start-ups, and establish independent research careers.

Scholarship policy

Through various sectors, scholarships have been provided for maritime, tourism, hospitality, sports, deficit, military, and other professions.

4. ECONOMY

Scholarships for deficit craft professions

Project "Promoting Education for Vocational Training-Based Craft Professions"

Since 2017, over HRK 303,600,000.00 (EUR 40,294,644.63) have been allocated to scholarships for pupils pursuing deficit craft professions and support for craftsmen and entrepreneurs who take on students for apprenticeships through Phase I and Phase II of the programme.

Project "Scholarships Programme for Pupils in Craft Professions"

Through this scholarship programme, pupils have been encouraged to pursue education in professions with high demand in the labour market, with the aim of acquiring the skills for independent work within these professions and developing social and entrepreneurial competencies.

Since 2021, almost 15,500 scholarships have been awarded to students who are educated for deficient craft professions in the total amount of HRK 217 million (EUR 29 million). Since 2021, nearly 15,500 scholarships have

been awarded to students studying deficit craft professions, totalling HRK 217 million (EUR 29 million).

It should be noted that in the period 2019-2020, the amount of annual pupil scholarships increased from HRK 9,000.00 (EUR 1,194.51) to HRK 18,000.00 (EUR 2,389.01).

Project "Apprenticeship for Craft Professions"

During the implementation period, grants were awarded to small business entities providing apprenticeships. The grant co-financed 80% of the costs of pupils' compensation during apprenticeships, the cost of work of mentors teaching pupils and the procurement of equipment necessary for the performance of apprenticeships.

From 2016 to 2018, 1,316 grants were awarded to business entities for the implementation of apprenticeships in the total amount of HRK 87 million (EUR 11.6 million).

In addition, in 2019 and 2020, a national campaign was conducted using funds from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, primarily through TV and radio spots to promote the importance of vocational education.

5. EQUAL DEVELOPMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Generational renewal of Croatian agriculture

"Grant for young farmers"

The grant applies to beneficiaries between 18 and 40 years of age (until the day before they reach the age of 41), who possess the appropriate professional knowledge and skills and who are, for the first time, taking on the role of a farm owner.

A young farmer can be the (future) owner or responsible person in a family farm, for a

trade registered for agricultural activities, or a company registered for agricultural activities, provided they own at least 50% of the share capital at the time of applying for the grant and for at least five years after the final payment of support. The grant for young farmers amounts to EUR 50,000 for beneficiaries who are required to remain as farm owners for five years after the final payment and be employed full-time on that farm for which the grant is awarded.

In total, there were four contracted grant packages for 1,501 young farmers with a total grant amount of HRK 516 million (EUR 68 million).

Payments have been made to 1,450 young farmers with a grant amount of HRK 475 million (EUR 63 million).

"Grant for investments in farms"

In addition to direct grants to young farmers to take over the farm, beneficiaries can also earn additional points if they fall into the category of "young farmer".

As part of the tender, grants were allocated to 774 beneficiaries who are under 40 years of age, with an approved grant of HRK 1.5 billion (EUR 204 million) and an investment value of HRK 2.3 million (EUR 304 million).

"Basic services and village renewal in rural areas"

Under Measure 7, "basic services and village renewal in rural areas" of the Rural Development Programme of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2014-2020, the reconstruction and construction of small infrastructure in rural areas have been carried out. This sets the stage for promoting socio-economic growth, halting negative depopulation trends in rural areas, and enhancing living conditions in rural communities.

The objective of projects under Measure 7 is to improve living conditions in rural areas, enhance the appeal of villages and their development potential for other activities,

and encourage growth and socio-economic sustainability.

So far, three calls for tenders have been made, leading to a total of 208 projects for kindergartens, with an approved grant amount of HRK 1 billion (EUR 144 million).

Financial instruments

Financial instruments of the Programme refer to repayable funds, i.e., advantageous loans, loans and guarantees.

These are provided for investments in the restructuring, modernisation, and increased competitiveness of farms, utilisation of renewable energy sources, increased added value to agricultural products, development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, and modernisation of technologies, machinery, tools, and equipment in wood production and forestry operations, as well as for working capital.

An additional benefit for young farmers in the Rural Development Individual Guarantees programme is a maximum guarantee rate of 80%, while it is 70% for other beneficiaries. Out of a total of 10 guarantees issued in the amount of HRK 16.6 million (EUR 2.2 million), as many as 8 guarantees were issued for young farmers in the total amount of HRK 13.6 million (EUR 1.8 million).

Under the financial instruments of the Programme, the following was paid to young farmers by 31 March 2022:

- 61 Micro-loans for rural development totalling HRK 9.1 million (EUR 1.2 million)
- 30 Micro-loans for working capital for rural development totalling HRK 3.6 million (EUR 474 thousand)
- 201 Small loan for rural development totalling HRK 745 million (EUR 9.9 million)
- 8 Individual guarantees for rural development totalling HRK 13.6 million (EUR 1.8 million)
- 1 Investment loan for rural development totalling HRK 1.3 million (EUR 170 thousand)

- 25 Working capital loans for rural development totalling HRK 16.4 million (EUR 2.2 million)

Young farmers have received a total of HRK 119 million (EUR 16 million) through 326 approved applications, representing 21.5% of the total amounts paid under the framework of the Programme's financial instruments.

"Payment for young farmers" (EU programme)

The "payment for young farmers" measure was allocated a maximum of 2% of the annual direct payment envelope, and the total for the period 2015-2020 approved for payment for young farmers HRK 305 million (EUR 40 million).

Young farmers receive this grant for a maximum of five years after they have established or taken over a farm. Payment is granted for the first 50 hectares in the form of an additional support amount per hectare (basic, green, and redistributive payments), which is 25% of the average payment per hectare.

Since 2018, the additional payment for young farmers can range from 25% to 50% of the average payment per hectare.

Demographic measures

More than 500 kindergartens have been constructed, renovated, or extended, along with 400 schools. This enables double-shifts in about a hundred kindergartens, making it easier for young parents to balance their work and private responsibilities.

To reduce the cost of living for families, including young families, the Government of the Republic of Croatia continuously funds transportation and textbooks for pupils. Starting from 1 January this year, free school meals have been provided for all primary school pupils in Croatia (311,000 pupils).

Maternity and parental benefits are continuously increasing. Parental leave allowance has been raised for the second six months, from HRK 2,600 (EUR 345) to up to HRK 7,500 (EUR 995).

Implementation of the National Island Development Plan 2021-2027 contributes to a better position and quality of life of young people on the islands. Additionally, free public road transportation on the islands has been provided for children up to eight years old, pupils, students, young people with disabilities. Many European projects for social and economic infrastructure have been implemented or are still underway throughout Croatia, with many directed towards improving the quality of life for young people.

The process of developing the Demographic Revitalization Strategy of the Republic of Croatia by 2033 is ongoing, with young people and young families being a significant priority.

6. HOUSING

Starting from the basic premise of the need for secure housing, it is essential to focus on and make the necessary efforts to find solutions to make it easier for young people to address their housing needs. When we refer to young people, we mean two different age groups: those who are still in school or pursuing higher education and those who are already employed and want to become independent, start a family, and live on their own.

The Act on Act on State-Subsidised Housing Construction ("Official Gazette" no: 109/01, 82/04, 76/07, 38/09, 86/12, 7/13, 26/15, 57/18, 66/19, 58/21) regulates systematically organised housing construction subsidised by public funds, in order to meet housing needs and improve the quality of living for as wide a range of citizens as possible. The Agency for Transactions and Mediation in Immovable Properties (hereinafter: APN) is responsible for the developer's activities.

According to the provisions of the Act on State-Subsidised Housing Construction, the Programme of State-Subsidised Housing Construction is implemented, including several sub-programmes: Family House Construction Programme (Programme B), Building Material Financing Programme (Programme C), POST Programme and Rental Housing Programme.

Since the beginning of the implementation of the POS Programme, i.e., since 2001, APN has constructed a total of 7,524 apartments in 231 buildings.

As for the current implementation of the POS Programme in cities and municipalities across the Republic of Croatia, 427 apartments are currently under construction, namely in Umag (84 apartments), Šibenik (127 apartments), Zadar (100 apartments), Rovinj (28 apartments), Kutina (27 apartments), Sveti Filip i Jakov (24 apartments), Solin (17 apartments), and Prelog (20 apartments). As part of the POS Programme implementation, all local government units take into account the needs of young people. When determining the criteria for purchasing an apartment through the POS Programme, young people (usually aged 25-35) receive more points, giving them an advantage to secure housing solutions.

Considering the significant interest expressed by many local government units in offering apartments from the POS Programme for rent, APN, in cooperation with the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction, and State Assets, will consider the possibility of amending the Act on State-subsidised Housing Construction within the available APN funds for subsidised housing.

Furthermore, the Act on Housing Loan Subsidies ("Official Gazette" No. 65/2017, 61/2018, 66/2019 and 146/2020) allows citizens to address their housing needs under more favourable loan terms to encourage demographic renewal and reduce the emigration of young families. This is achieved by subsidising the monthly instalment or annuity amount for loans used to purchase an apartment or house or build a house for a minimum of five years.

This programme has been implemented in accordance with the Act on Housing Loan Subsidies since 2017. Since the beginning of its implementation, seven application cycles have been completed, during which a total of 28,633 applications were received, while 27,492 approved (active) loans were granted to as many young families.

Families using the subsidy are provided with additional benefits and additional subsidies are approved for housing loans with a duration of more than four or five years for over 7,200 children born or adopted, i.e., 17,017 minors under 18 years of age (effective since 2019).

Given the fact that the duration of the programme in question under the applicable Act on Housing Loan Subsidies is until 31 December 2023, it is necessary to conduct additional research during this year to determine whether it is necessary to extend the Act or devise an alternative solution to address the housing needs of young people.

To establish an appropriate housing model, the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets will establish a working group who is tasked with designing a suitable housing support model for young people.

On 6 April 2023, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the Decision on Initiating the Procedure for the Development of the National Housing Policy Plan of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Housing Policy Plan 2023-2024. The National Plan will include detailed measures, including those related to youth housing.

By the end of the current term of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, with the help of subsidised loans and POS Programme, 20,000 young families will secure their homes.

Energy renovation of educational buildings

Since 2015, the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets as Intermediate Authority 1 has published four calls for energy renovation of buildings, with eligible applicants being institutions involved in education activities.

To date, approximately 570 Grant Agreements have been concluded for the energy renovation of kindergartens, primary and secondary

schools, and faculties. The total value of projects is over HRK 1.9 billion (EUR 252 million), with the total value of grants provided by the European Regional Development Fund being over HRK 913 million (EUR 121 million).

One of the main criteria for the calls is achieving at least a 50% reduction in energy consumption for heating or cooling (QH, nd) compared to the annual energy consumption. This reduction is achieved through measures to increase thermal protection, mechanical and electrical measures, and the introduction of renewable energy sources. By implementing the projects, kindergartens, schools, faculties, and other educational institutions will contribute not only to the European Union's set goals but will also provide a more comfortable environment for learning and activities for their users, including children and staff.

7. SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF YOUTH

Ministry of the Interior

Campaigns are being carried out to enhance the safety and protection of young people on the internet and social media, protect personal data, combat hate speech, and address all forms of violence and addiction.

There have also been improvements to the Croatian Citizenship Act, making it easier for descendants of the Croatian diaspora to acquire Croatian citizenship.

Ministry of Croatian Veterans

Through public calls, grants for self-employment are granted to children of deceased or missing Croatian veterans, children of volunteers from the Homeland War and children of Croatian war veterans with disabilities from the Homeland War.

8. TENDERS FOR ASSOCIATIONS OF AND FOR YOUTH AND YOUTH COUNCILS

The Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth, and Social Policy, in accordance with its responsibilities, conducted calls for projects aimed at youth in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

- In 2016, a total of HRK 4,300,000.00 (EUR 570,708.08) was spent on project funding, supporting a total of 50 projects
- In 2017, a total of HRK 3,767,944.00 (EUR 500,092.11) was spent on project funding, supporting a total of 43 projects
- In 2018 HRK 5,237,000.00 (EUR 695,069.35) for a total of 72 projects
- In 2019, a total of HRK 8,134,000.00 (EUR 1,079,567.32), was spent supporting a total of 110 projects
- In 2021, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth issued a call for associations of and for youth with a total available amount of HRK 10,000,000.00 (EUR 1,327,228.08). Associations were supported for 105 projects, with a total of HRK 9,976,372.40 (EUR 1,324,092.16).
- In 2022, the Central State Office for Demography and Youth issued a call for associations of and for youth with a total available amount of HRK 11,000,000.00 (EUR 1,459,950.89). A total of 117 projects were financially supported and all the planned funds were spent.

Overview of the activities of Youth Advisory Boards in 2021

By the end of July 2022, twenty Croatian counties and the City of Zagreb had submitted reports on the activities of Youth Advisory Boards in their respective regions to the Central State Office for Demography and Youth. The collected reports indicated that, in 2021, 73 out of the 127 established Youth Advisory Boards were active in the Republic of Croatia. These Youth Advisory Boards were active in the City of Zagreb, 12 Croatian counties, 38 cities, and 22 municipalities.

According to data gathered from the county reports, Youth Advisory Boards held a total of 338 sessions and 235 meetings with representative and/or executive bodies in 2021. Furthermore, 89 Youth Advisory Boards adopted a work programme, and 66 Advisory Boards achieved tangible results through collaboration with local and regional government units. These results included increased budgets for youth-related activities, higher scholarship amounts for pupils and students, transportation subsidies, and the introduction of new scholarships.

The adoption of Amendments to the Act on Youth Advisory Boards is underway, which will strengthen the participation of young people in the work of municipal, city and county Youth Advisory Boards and in their local community. As part of these amendments, a coordinating body for youth at the national level, the Youth Advisory Board of the Republic of Croatia, is planned to be established. This body will coordinate the work of all Youth Advisory Boards, monitor, and promote youth interests at the national level, and manage activities in international cooperation.

9. CULTURE

1. "Backpack (Full) of Culture" (Ruksak (pun) kulture) – Arts and Culture in Kindergartens and Schools in 2022

The Ministry of Culture and Media allocated HRK 2,000,000.00 (EUR 265,445.62) for the implementation of the programme entitled "Backpack (Full) of Culture - Arts and Culture in Kindergartens and Schools 2022" (hereinafter: "Backpack (Full) of Culture"). This programme was conducted in over 130 educational institutions, which were selected based on applications received through the public call extended to preschools, primary, and secondary schools, and educational centres, showing an interest in participating in this programme. A total of 5,291 children and young people participated.

In 2022, with the implementation of the regular "Backpack (Full) of Culture", three complementary programmes were implemented:

1. "Island Backpack (Full) of Culture" (Otočki ruksak (pun) kulture) – carried out with the co-financing and support of the Ministry of Regional Development and European Union funds. It was implemented in 71 educational institutions, involving 646 preschool children, 559 primary school pupils, and 574 secondary school students, with the participation of all secondary schools on Croatian islands.
2. "Backpack (Full) of Culture for Young People" (Ruksak (pun) kulture za mlade) – carried out with the co-financing and support of the Central State Office for Demography and Youth. It was carried out in 34 educational institutions, and it included 1,815 young people from the entire Republic of Croatia.
3. "Backpack (Full) of Culture for Children and Young People" (Ruksak (pun) kulture za djecu i mlade) in the areas affected by the earthquake in Sisak-Moslavina County – carried out in cooperation with

the Central State Office for Demography and Youth. The programme was implemented from April to June at the Topusko Health Resort. It included 2,358 pupils from grade 6 to 8 from 23 primary schools. Additionally, 38 students of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb volunteered in its implementation.

In educational institutions, the "Backpack (Full) of Culture - Arts and Culture in Kindergartens and Schools in 2022" - realised guest appearances planned for 2022, spanning from April to December 2022. More than 300 guest appearances were successfully carried out, with the participation of over 11,200 children and young people.

2. Programmes encouraging audience development in culture in 2022

The Ministry of Culture and Media issued a public call for proposals aimed at promoting audience development in culture in the Republic of Croatia for 2022. A total of 555 applications were received, out of which 93 programmes were approved (15 programmes for theatre, 13 for film, 11 for dance, 12 for literature, 13 for music, 9 for visual arts, 8 for cultural heritage and 12 interdisciplinary programmes). The assessment of programmes considered factors such as programme quality, originality, innovation, promotion of intercultural dialogue, professional grounding, and cost-effectiveness. In addition to the above criteria, regional distribution was considered, programmes aimed at promotion of reading and developing young audiences were supported. Of the 93 programmes, 44 were intended for children and young people, and HRK 1,018,251.19 (EUR 135,145.16) was allocated.

3. The Reading Promotion Strategy (2017-2022) aimed to contribute to the development of a reading culture and ensure enjoyable and comprehensive reading for a wide range of individuals in Croatian society. The strategy was particularly significant for children and young people who were yet to become avid readers. It obligated entities that influence

reading promotion, such as schools, teachers, and ministries, to take measures to promote reading.

Video book preview – student works

In September 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Media issued a second public call for pupils in primary and secondary schools to create video book previews as part of the Action Plan of the National Reading Promotion Strategy. This initiative aimed to contribute to the development of a reading culture. The Call, which lasted until 1 December 2021, received 257 applications from all over Croatia, demonstrating students' interest in literature and film medium. Thus, from a total of 77 cities 27 were received in the category from grades 1 to 4, 124 in the category from grades 5 to 8, 106, and in the category of secondary school students. The first prize-winning works included "The Grand Word Factory," (Velika tvornica riječi) a video preview by students from Josip Račić Primary School in Zagreb, "This Time Dad's Guilty," (Ovaj put je kriv tata) a video preview by students from Vladimir Nazor Primary School in Potpićan, and "The Stranger," (Stranac) a video preview by students from the Prince Branimir Secondary school in Benkovac. A cultural and artistic visit to the Museum of Apoxyomenos in Mali Lošinj was organised for the awarded pupils.

4. Public call "Reading for an Inclusive Society"

This call contributes to achieving the goals of the National Reading Promotion Strategy, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Croatia in 2017 for the period until 2022. The call is implemented within the framework of the Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources" 2014 – 2020, with a focus on increasing the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including children and young people up to 25 years old, through the development of reading literacy.

The call funds activities for the preparation and implementation of participatory reading promotion and the development of reading competencies for members of the target groups, as well as activities aimed at raising public

awareness of the importance of reading for personal development and social integration. The total available financial resources under this call for project proposal amount to HRK 41,000,000.00 (EUR 5,441,635.15). The funding for individual projects covers 100% of eligible costs, with 85% coming from the European Social Fund and a mandatory 15% national co-financing provided by the Ministry of Culture and Media. On 27 August 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Media adopted the Decision on financing 12 project proposals within the group of activities A, with a total grant value of HRK 35,000,000.00 (EUR 4,645,298.30).

In 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Media adopted the Decision on financing 12 project proposals within Group B, with a total grant value of HRK 4,806,859.57 (EUR 637,979.90).

The implementation of projects under Groups A and B is currently in progress.

5. Call "Arts and Culture Online"

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the cultural sector, the Ministry of Culture and Media issued an open (permanent) call for project proposals under the title "Art and Culture Online" on 18 May 2020. This call is part of the Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources" 2014 – 2020. The total amount of grants allocated through the call is HRK 35,000,000.00 (EUR 4,645,298.30). This funding includes 85% from the European Social Fund, with mandatory national co-financing of 15% provided by the Ministry of Culture and Media. The projects supported by this call aim to enhance the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including individuals under 25, through their participation in cultural and artistic activities via the internet.

By July 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Media adopted eight Funding Decisions supporting the implementation of 77 projects, with a total value of grants amounting to HRK 32,183,796.40 (EUR 4,271,523.84). Implementation is underway for 37 projects, while 40 projects have already been completed.

6. Call for proposals for programmes enabling access and availability of cultural content for persons with disabilities and children and youth with developmental difficulties in Croatia in 2022

In 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Media conducted a call for proposals for programmes aimed at providing access and availability of cultural content for persons with disabilities and children and youth with developmental difficulties in Croatia. Eligible programme activities are those that focus on adapting artistic and cultural content for individuals with one or more types of disabilities and children and youth with one or more developmental difficulties, enhancing the visibility of adapted and accessible programmes for persons with disabilities and children and youth with developmental difficulties, and promoting and strengthening the value of equal access and availability of culture. In 2022, 33 programmes were approved in the total funding amount of HRK 2,043,600.00 (EUR 271,232.31).

7. Support for the production of films for children and youth

In 2022, the Croatian Audiovisual Centre approved co-financing for four short films and one feature-length film intended for children and youth through a public call for the promotion of audiovisual activities and creativity. The total granted amount was HRK 5,610,000.00 (EUR 744,575.00).

8. Support for the development of film literacy

At the end of 2021, the Croatian Audiovisual Council adopted a Decision on the adoption of a proposal on the conclusion of a Cooperation Agreement with the Croatian Film Association (HFA), which obliges the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC) to support the work of film groups in primary and secondary schools in the production of audiovisual works in the amount of HRK 300,000.00 (EUR 39,816.84). During the first public call, 30 school film groups received the mentioned funds, which

were used for the purchase of audiovisual and computer equipment to support their work. HAVC and HFA have designed a programme to encourage the work of school film groups, with co-financing by HAVC and the Croatian Association of Technical Culture, in cooperation with the Education and Teacher Training Agency. More than 200 film and video groups and similar media groups operate in Croatian schools, producing over 200 films of various genres each year, along with other media content. This work involves more than 3,000 students and 200 teachers. Pupils gain additional knowledge about film literacy, get acquainted with the structural elements of animated, documentary, feature, and experimental film, and the role of audiovisual media in everyday communication.

9. The Ministry of Culture and Media continues to support programmes to strengthen media literacy among young people. Media literacy is a critical skill in contemporary society, focusing on a better understanding of new technologies and the influx of information that individuals encounter daily, especially in terms of combating disinformation and fake news. Young people, as the most active users of social media and digital platforms, are particularly affected. In 2021 and 2022, within a public call for co-financing projects related to promoting media literacy, conducted by the Agency for Electronic Media, 45 programmes were approved with a total funding of HRK 700,000.00 (EUR 92,905.97).

10. TOURISM AND SPORTS

Tourism Programme for encouraging education in hospitality and tourism Scholarships have been awarded since 2008, and starting from the school year 2021/2022, eligible partners include businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector. The maximum amount for scholarships was increased to HRK 2,0002000 (EUR 265.45) per month.

A public call is announced every year in October with the aim of motivating young

people to pursue careers in hospitality and tourism by raising educational standards:

- Providing scholarships during education for hospitality and tourism careers, with an amount of up to HRK 2,000 (EUR 265.45) per month for ten months (September to June)
- Improving the quality of professional practice
- Employment for a minimum of 12 months after completing education for up to two seasons.

The end beneficiaries are pupils and students who are pursuing education in hospitality and tourism careers, as well as related occupations needed in the tourism sector, based on the labour market's demands.

From 2017 through the 2021/22 school year, 1,394 tripartite contracts have been concluded, and during this period, a total of HRK 14,916,000 (EUR 1,979,693.41) has been paid from the state budget. From the very beginning of the Programme for Encouraging Education in Hospitality and Tourism until today, 2,351 contracts have been concluded.

Promotion and strengthening of competencies in tourism vocational professions - CAREER PROMOTION

This programme has been in effect since 2009 and is designed for all secondary vocational and art schools.

The amount of the requested funds may not exceed HRK 25,000 (EUR 3,318.07), for a single applicant (school), or HRK 50,000 (EUR 6,636.14) if two or more applicants (partners) apply together.

The public call for the development of projects in tourism and for tourism aims to influence the strengthening of competencies and raising the quality of human resources in pupils of secondary vocational schools by motivating young people to work in tourism and raising awareness among pupils and teachers about tourism as a multisectoral field.

The funds are intended for projects that include elements of innovation for the sake of sustainable tourism development in line with new trends in tourism. The projects should focus on creating a tourism product that provides a local experience and the application of IT technology in designing destination tourism products.

After completion, the three best projects are selected, and the schools whose projects are chosen receive certificates of commendation and a reward in the form of a study trip in collaboration with a hotel company.

From 2017 to 2021, 156 school projects were funded, with HRK 2.8 million (EUR 367,000) paid from the State Budget.

Sport Scholarship subsidies for athletes

Scholarships are awarded based on a call for subsidies to medallists at the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, and the Deaflympics, as well as to former and current top athletes.

These scholarships aim to promote the dual career of athletes, encouraging young athletes to be involved in the education system alongside their sports careers. This investment in education prepares them to be competitive in the job market after their sporting careers come to an end.

Between 2017 and 2021, a total of 369 scholarships were awarded, amounting to HRK 3.8 million (EUR 504 thousand).

Construction, constructing modifications, and equipping of sports facilities

Since 2018, co-financing has been available for the construction of new sports facilities, construction modifications to existing sports facilities, as well as their equipment. By encouraging local and regional self-government units to invest in the development of sports infrastructure, this initiative creates equal opportunities for young people and contributes to the popularisation of sports and improving the quality of life. It also

aims to provide equal conditions, which is of great importance for building a more demographically vital society in Croatia.

During the period of 2018 to 2021, a total of 93 projects on sports facilities were completed, with financial resources amounting to HRK 45.9 million (EUR 6 million).

U razdoblju od 2018. do 2021. ukupno su realizirana 93 projekata na sportskim građevinama te su utrošena financijska sredstva u iznosu od 45,9 milijuna kuna (6 milijuna eura).

Sports at universities/polytechnics

The Croatian Academic Sports Federation (HASS) is the umbrella organisation for university sports, promoting and caring for sports at higher education institutions while representing it on an international level. The goal is to encourage as many young students as possible to combine sports with their academic experiences and provide them the opportunity to compete at the highest university level.

More than 20,000 students are involved in sports programmes at universities and polytechnics implemented by the Croatian Academic Sports Federation: UniSport national and university championships, FISU and EUSA international university sports competitions, UniSport Health – recreation and health-oriented physical exercise, and Sports and Educational Programme and fostering dual careers.

HRK 18.5 million (EUR 2.5 million) was spent on public needs programmes in state-level sports implemented by HASS in the period of 2016 to 2021.

11. DIGITALISATION

Digital technologies enable progress in all aspects of life, and youth are the primary drivers of this development and digital transformation.

At the end of 2022, the Digital Croatia Strategy for the period until 2032 was adopted, and its development and implementation are under

the authority of the Central State Office for the Development of Digital Society. The Digital Croatia Strategy for the period until 2032 is a long-term strategic act. Its vision is: "Croatia improved by digital transformation". The strategy defines four strategic goals: a developed and innovative digital economy, digitised public administration, developed, accessible, and utilised high-capacity networks, and developed digital competencies for life and work in the digital age. There is a special emphasis on lifelong learning and the digitisation of all key public services that address comprehensive life situations, with a focus on raising digital competencies within Croatian society, where youth play a crucial role.

Within the e-Citizens system, new services are continuously made available to specific groups of citizens. Notably, the "e-Enrolments" project has been developed, which is an information system for applying and enrolling in educational institutions. This project has fully digitised all the processes related to enrolling children in kindergartens and schools throughout the country.

When enrolling children in kindergartens or schools, parents no longer need to provide various certificates, such as birth certificates or employment certificates, as the system automatically retrieves this information from relevant registers of government bodies that previously issued certificates to citizens at their offices. This has significantly reduced administrative burdens for citizens, decreased congestion at enrolment locations, simplified the enrolment process, and improved the efficiency of government offices, which now have access to up-to-date and accurate data directly from competent authorities.

(Throughout the 2022/23 academic year, the system was used for enrolments in kindergartens, secondary schools, and pupil dormitories, resulting in the following outcomes:

Kindergartens - a total of 22,335 enrolment requests were submitted, and 13,075 children were enrolled in early childhood education and care programmes.

Secondary schools – a total of 193,997 programme applications were submitted in a total of 441 secondary schools (each student could apply for up to 6 different enrolment programmes), and 40,848 students were enrolled.

Student dormitories – a total of 2,120 requests were submitted to 61 student dormitories, and 1,754 students were granted the right to enrol.)

Within the activities of the Central State Office for the Development of Digital Society, training for civil servants is conducted in the areas of digitalisation and cybersecurity in collaboration with the State School of Public Administration. The aim of the training is to provide professional knowledge and improvement for public sector officials in the field of cybersecurity. The training increases participants' knowledge and awareness of the dangers in the cyber space, focusing on recognising and dealing with various attack vectors. Through practical examples and case studies of different attacks, participants are made aware so they can identify typical techniques and tactics used by attackers in their daily work.

The Central State Office for the Development of the Digital Society, in cooperation with the Croatian Academic and Research Network and the Collaborative Learning Association and other stakeholders, participates in expert lectures on cybersecurity at the Safer Internet Day conferences. These lectures are intended for pupils, teachers, and all interested citizens and aim to create a safer internet environment for children and young people.

Furthermore, the Central State Office for the Development of Digital Society, as the sectoral authority for Digital Infrastructure and Business Services for state bodies, in accordance with the Act on Cybersecurity for Operators of Key Services and Providers of Digital Services, takes proactive and preventive measures to enhance the security of key digital services in Croatia. These services are accessible to all citizens. Through these activities, the office ensures the safe use of digital services and strengthens citizens' trust, particularly among

youth, in the secure digital environment of state administration.

12. YOUTH HEALTH

Various campaigns are carried out to improve the health of young people (vaccination against HPV infection, prevention of addiction, provision of psychological support and counselling).

In order to ensure better protection of the health of young people, with a special emphasis on the protection of mental health, significant steps have been taken in the healthcare sector. There is an appropriate and extensive infrastructure and resources in place that provide comprehensive services in mental health protection, prevention and treatment of addiction which operates through the network of mental health protection, and prevention and outpatient addiction treatment services of county public health institutes. Since the beginning of the pandemic, psychological counselling has been provided through open telephone lines in case of need related to the pandemic, earthquakes, or any other psychological need.

The introduction of mental health risk screening for students during systematic check-ups began with a pilot project in early 2020. This screening has been included in the plan and programme of health care measures and is carried out during systematic check-ups in grades 5 and 8 of primary school, grade 1 of secondary school, and for first-year university students.

As of 2022, along with 21 European countries, Croatia is participating in the EU Joint Action ImpleMENTAL project, which aims to implement good European practices in the organisation of community mental health and suicide prevention. Croatia has committed to implementing good practices based on the Belgian model of organising mobile teams and providing community interventions and the Austrian SUPRA model of suicide prevention with the aim of reducing the availability of means for suicide, empowering the population, especially young people, strengthening social

and emotional competencies, early detection of risk factors for mental disorders, and increasing the availability of counselling and treatment.

In November 2022, the Strategic Framework for the Development of Mental Health until 2030 (hereinafter: the Strategic Framework) was adopted, within which measures are also aimed at the youth population. These measures aim to educate professionals to increase mental health literacy, including early identification of emotional problems in children and young people, and training of educational staff in order to develop children's communication and socio-emotional skills and reduce peer violence. An Action Plan for the Protection of the Mental Health of Children and Youth is being developed, which includes strengthening specific activities for children and young people and enhancing the capacity of child psychiatrists. Additionally, an Action Plan for the Implementation of Community Mental Health Protection Services is in progress, with a focus on improving the availability of mental health protection services to all citizens.

To protect the mental health of young people in the context of addiction prevention, continuous preventive interventions are carried out at universal, selective, and indicated levels, as well as environmental strategies. Efforts have been made to improve the quality of and develop scientifically-based prevention programmes. There are around 300 addiction prevention programmes carried out annually, with most of them taking place within the educational system. Continuous implementation of prevention programmes has been ensured by introducing Minimal Standards for Addiction Prevention for children and youth in the educational system since 2017. A number of trainings were organised for the needs of health care workers, social welfare, the probation system, representatives of associations, therapeutic communities, parents and young people (e.g. Development of programmes in the field of addiction, "I Have an Attitude – Unplugged", (Imam stav - Unplugged), a pilot project for addiction

prevention aimed at children and young Roma in Međimurje County, workshops on planning, monitoring and evaluation of psychosocial treatment of addiction, etc.).

Measures for addiction prevention in the coming period are planned within the new National Strategy for Action in the Field of Addictions for the period up to 2030. These measures will focus on developing guidelines for working with at-risk groups of young people, developing prevention programmes aimed at empowering families and improving parenting skills, as well as addressing young people with behavioural problems and enhancing the knowledge and skills of professionals involved in the prevention system.

In the coming period, a series of research studies are planned, including the Study on Smoking, Alcohol Consumption, and other health behaviours of students (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, HBSC), the Global Youth Tobacco Survey – GYTS, as well as the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD).

To promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health of young people from 2023 to 2025, there are plans to strengthen the roles of existing youth counselling centres and sexual health promotion centres, as well as improve existing services for promoting responsible sexual behaviour at public health institutes.

Health education for children and young people, in addition to facts about health acquired during the educational process, includes empowering health literacy, directing children and young people toward adopting healthy lifestyles, and raising awareness of the importance of preserving physical health. Obesity among young people is a significant public health challenge, given the impact of obesity on the quality and length of life. An Action Plan for the Prevention of Obesity for the period 2023-2026 is being developed. Some of the contained measures will be directed toward young people, including educating them in educational institutions,

monitoring the nutrition and lifestyle habits of young people, and providing support in the treatment of young people with obesity.

In 2021, the Croatian Institute of Public Health (HZJZ) issued a "Recommendation for Schools on Recommended Food Products in Vending Machines" to improve the content of vending machines, which are often present in secondary schools without organised school meals.

As before, there are plans to carry out a series of promotional and educational activities, involve new schools in project activities within the Network of Health-Promoting Schools, continue the Health Literacy Programme for education professionals in the field of mental health, and a variety of other activities as part of the National Healthy Living Programme.

13. CARING FOR CROATS

ABROAD

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

Most activities are focused on systematic work to promote and protect the human rights of young people in the external dimension, namely through foreign policy activities.

All initiatives that focus on the protection and promotion of the rights of young people, including those related to youth, peace, and security, are actively supported. Another aspect of the activities involves creating opportunities for the involvement of young representatives in gatherings and discussions related to topics important to youth.

The issue of youth has been identified as one of the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Youth is promoted as a topic within the framework of the Working Group on the 2030 Agenda, where attention is given to young people as key partners in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. At the initiative of the Government of the Republic of

Croatia, during the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Council conclusions on Youth in External Action were adopted.

Cooperation was established with the Central State Office for Demography and Youth regarding the involvement of the youth UN delegate in foreign policy activities envisaged for his participation.

SDG Youth Ambassadors are regularly involved in activities, and during the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU, a project was carried out in cooperation with UNICEF. Eleven youth ambassadors for children's and youth rights, aged 13 to 17, from various parts of Croatia were selected, with the aim of increasing their participation in decision-making processes at the national and EU levels, including raising awareness about policies designed for children and young people.

An important aspect of the work involves the implementation of development projects in third countries with the aim of empowering young people and enabling their active and full participation in society. Special attention is given to young people and women and girls as key drivers of sustainable development.

Since 2017, an annual call for project proposals from associations in the field of "Information on the EU" has been issued with the goal of informing the general public, with a focus on the younger population, about the European Union. This includes communicating EU institutions, EU topics and policies, as well as rights and obligations and the benefits they provide, and decisions that affect the daily lives and quality of life of Croatian citizens through the organisation and implementation of lectures, education, conferences, workshops, and similar activities.

The UN Academy, organised by the Croatian Society for the United Nations in cooperation with the Diplomatic Academy for over a decade, focuses on providing educational programmes to introduce participants to the United Nations system and its work. Around 30 young people attend this programme annually.

Croats abroad Measures, programmes, and projects aimed at young Croats worldwide

Croatian Language Learning Programme

The Croatian Language Learning Programme includes university courses for learning the Croatian language in the Republic of Croatia (levels: A1 to C2) and online Croatian language learning. Scholarships for these courses are awarded by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, as well as free online Croatian language courses at levels A1 and A2.

In total, there were 16,595 users enrolled in the courses, out of which 14,375 users participated in the free e-course.

- University Croatian Language Learning Courses in the Republic of Croatia
- Online Distance Learning Croatian Language Courses - HIT-1
- Free Online Courses A1 and A2

Special Enrolment Quota at Croatian Universities for Members of the Croatian National Minority and Croatian Diaspora

A special quota is reserved for members of the Croatian national minority in 12 European countries and Croatian emigrants in overseas and European countries and their descendants. Through the joint efforts of the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, the University of Zagreb, and the Ministry of Science and Education, a special enrolment quota for study programmes at the University of Zagreb was provided for the first time in the academic year 2018/2019. To date, 102 students have been enrolled.

Scholarship Programme for Students of Croatian Descent Abroad

Every year, the Central State Office for Croats Abroad conducts a public tender for scholarships for students of Croatian descent abroad. From the academic year 2016/2017 to the academic year 2020/2021, financial resources were provided and awarded annually to sponsor 500 students (100 students of Croatian descent studying in the Republic of Croatia and 400 students of Croatian

descent residing and studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina). This aims to encourage the retention of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and contribute to strengthening the university and academic capacities of the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For the academic year 2022/2023, the Central State Office for Croats Abroad has significantly increased the number and amount of scholarships. It will award 1,150,150 scholarships for the academic year 2022/2023, including 300 scholarships for studying in the Republic of Croatia (200 for members of the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 60 for members of the Croatian national minority, and 40 for members of the Croatian diaspora) and 850 scholarships for studying in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Scholarships are awarded to students for one academic year once, i.e., for a period of 10 months in the monthly amount of EUR 150. Tender processing is in progress.

"Roots" Project (Korijeni)

The project is aimed at strengthening the Croatian national identity and raising awareness of belonging to one, indivisible Croatian people. It does so through networking primary schools from the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with schools of the Croatian national minority in European countries and the Croatian diaspora.

Project Summer School "Homeland" (Domovina)

The "Homeland" Summer School is an experiential project designed for younger members of the Croatian diaspora aged 18 to 30, based on the expressed needs of Croatian communities abroad. Through specialised educational and tourist content focused on Croatian history, culture, customs, and contemporary issues facing the Republic of Croatia, participants have the opportunity to get to know their ancestors' homeland and, thus, their own homeland. After a break due to the pandemic, the "Homeland" Summer School is scheduled to continue from 10 August to 24 August 2023.

Leadership, a graduate university study in English - the commencement of the programme is expected.





NATIONAL YOUTH

PROGRAMME

for the period 2023 to 2025



SREDIŠNJI DRŽAVNI URED
ZA DEMOGRAFIJU I MLADE