



**LIFELONG LEARNING
FOR ALL NETWORK**

Enhancing equity and inclusion in adult education in Croatia: analysis and policy recommendations

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2024



The project was co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund



Title: Enhancing equity and inclusion in adult education in Croatia: analysis and policy recommendations

Original title (in Croatian): *Unaprjeđenje pravičnosti i uključenosti obrazovanja odraslih u Hrvatskoj: analiza i preporuke za javne politike* (original date of publication: 2023)

Publisher: Institute for the Development of Education, Prilaz Gjure Deželića 30, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

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Acknowledgements: The Network would like to thank the representatives of organisations and institutions and other experts who engaged in consultations on these recommendations.

Translation from Croatian: Mnemosyne j.d.o.o.



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Please cite as: Žiljak, T., Matković, T., Jaklin, K., Farnell, T., Novoselec, I. (2024). *Enhancing equity and inclusion in adult education in Croatia: analysis and policy recommendations*. Zagreb: Institute for the Development of Education

This publication is a result of the project Thematic Network for Lifelong Learning Available to All, project coordinator: Institute for the Development of Education (Prilaz Gjure Deželića 30, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia, +385 1 4555151, iro@iro.hr). The project is funded by the European Social Fund (399.684,75 EUR; 3.011.424,74 HRK) and national co-financing is provided from the State Budget of the Croatia (70.532,60 EUR; 531.427,90 HRK). The total project cost is 470,217.35 EUR (3,542,852.64 HRK). The project implementation period is 29 October 2020 to 29 October 2023.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Policy context

According to the Adult Education Act (Article 3, paragraph 2), adult education in Croatia is based on the principles of lifelong learning, the right to education, free choice of type and method of education, as well as inclusiveness and accessibility. The Adult Education Act and other regulations constitute a crucial public policy and normative framework for the implementation of formal adult education in Croatia. However, data indicate the persistence of educational inequalities in access to adult education, with the lowest participation of disadvantaged groups (persons with lower qualifications, from rural areas, in long-term unemployment, as well as elderly persons, Roma and persons with disabilities).

This publication provides an analysis of educational inequality challenges at the adult education level in Croatia and proposes possible solutions in the form of policy recommendations. The analysis and recommendations were prepared by a working group of the Lifelong Learning for All Network, which brings together experts, researchers and civil society organisations dealing with the issue of educational inequalities in Croatia in a lifelong learning context, from the level of early and preschool education to higher education and adult education. The analysis and recommendations presented in this publication were developed in late 2022 and early 2023, at the same time when a new overarching national education policy document was drafted and adopted: the ***National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027*** (hereafter: NPDES). The Network sees the analysis and recommendations as complementary to the NPDES, as the plan also identified educational inequalities as a key challenge of the Croatian educational system and the mid-term vision of the plan is for the education and upbringing system to be "inclusive, quality-driven and equitable." A specific goal of the NPDES relates to increasing the participation of the adult population in lifelong learning processes.

The Network participated in the Government's public consultation on the NPDES, and the majority of the Network's proposals for strengthening the emphasis on equity and inclusion in the document were accepted. We believe that many of the recommendations presented in this document are complementary to the NPDES and can be implemented alongside the already planned measures. The longer-term measures proposed in the document are seen as actions that could be incorporated into future action plans and strategic documents to be adopted at the national level.

About the Lifelong Learning for All Network

The Lifelong Learning for All Network was launched in October 2020 through the project "Thematic Network for Lifelong Learning Available to All", co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund and coordinated by the Institute for the Development of Education. The Network comprises 60 experts from 22 institutions (see Appendix 2. List of Network Members). The Network views the topic of educational inequalities through the prism of lifelong learning, which encompasses the following levels:

- early childhood education and care
- primary education
- secondary education (gymnasiums, vocational schools and art schools)
- higher education
- adult education (from primary to higher education, as well as non-formal education).

The Lifelong Learning for All Network advocates for an equitable and inclusive educational system in Croatia. Equity and inclusion in the context of education are closely related terms that address

various forms of educational inequalities. The Network defines these terms and their interrelation in accordance with definitions provided by UNESCO (2017):

- **Equity** in the context of education refers to the *principle* of ensuring that "all learners are considered equally important." The principle implies that learners are diverse and that many learners may be disadvantaged compared to others during the learning process due to their personal characteristics and external circumstances. The principle of equity seeks to ensure that all learners successfully participate in education and achieve educational outcomes, regardless of such characteristics and circumstances.
- **Inclusion** in the context of education refers to the *process* of removing barriers to access, participation, and successful completion of education. The process involves implementing measures at the level of educational institutions and the educational system aimed at equalising opportunities among learners. In this sense, the inclusivity of the educational system is the foundation for achieving equity in education.

From 2020 to 2023, the Network conducted **six research studies on educational inequalities** at all levels of education in Croatia, resulting in 14 journal articles and book chapters. The research carried out by the project's thematic working groups was the following:

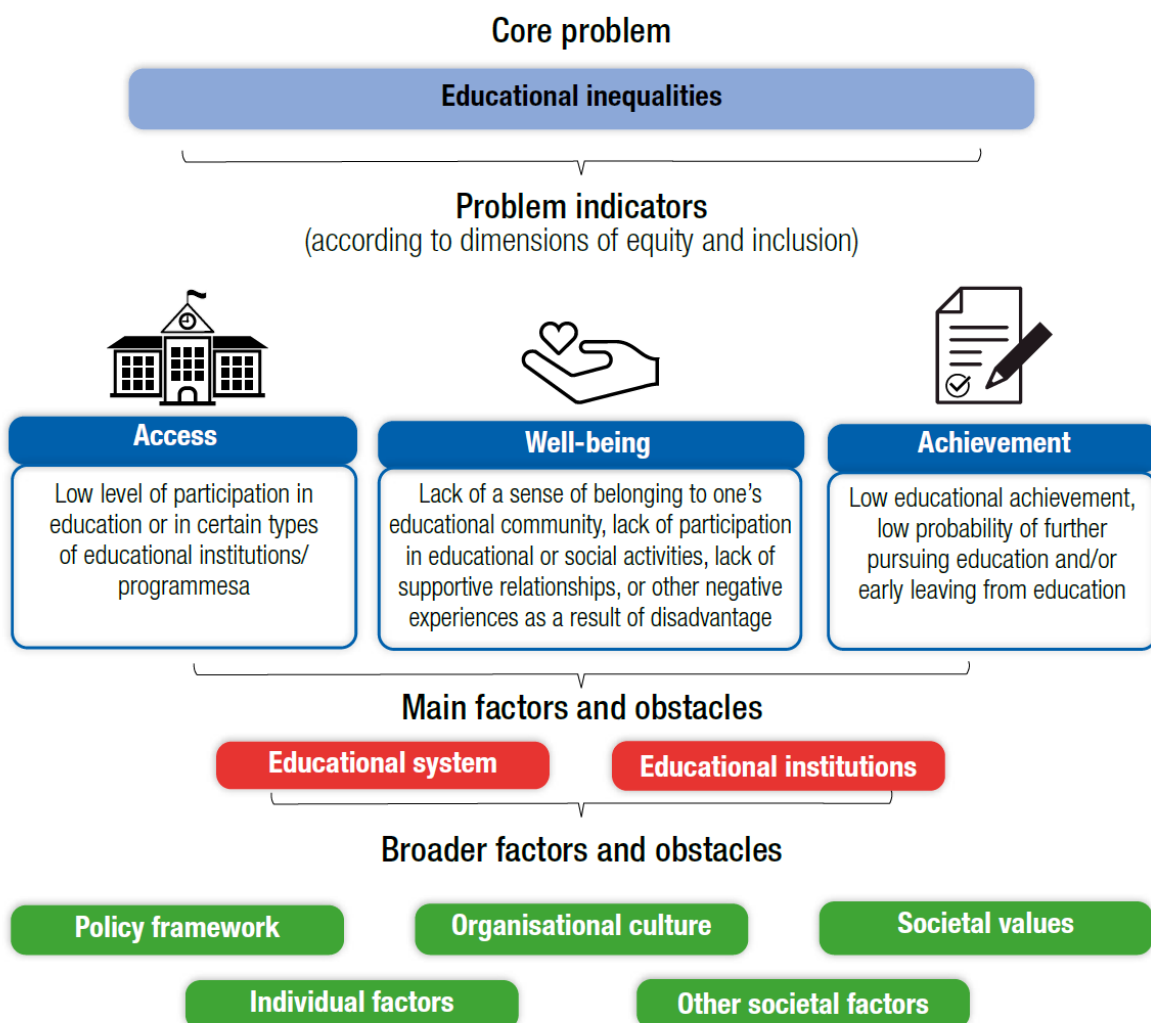
- study on the attitudes of policymakers, educational institutions and other stakeholders about educational inequalities **at every educational level** (Farnell [ed.], 2022)
- study on the experiences of teaching staff and professional staff related to educational inequalities **in early childhood education and care and primary education** (Bouillet and Brajković, 2023.a; Bouillet and Brajković, 2023.b)
- study on the experiences of teachers and students related to educational inequalities **in secondary education** (Puzić et al., 2023)
- study on dropout in **higher education** (Odak et al., 2023; Matković, 2023.a)
- study on educational inequalities in **adult education** (Matković and Jaklin, 2021; Matković and Jaklin, 2023; Matković, 2023.b)
- study of the framing of **educational inequalities in strategic documents of the Croatian government** (Šćukanec Schmidt et al., 2023)

Based on the results of this newly conducted research, as well as on insights from previous studies, the Network's working groups prepared an in-depth analysis and synthesis of educational inequality challenges at each level of the educational system in Croatia. Each working group then formulated policy recommendations for enhancing equity and inclusion, as well as horizontal recommendations for the educational system as a whole. Drafts of all recommendations were subject to structured dialogues in the form of roundtable discussions and "e-consultations" (gathering feedback through virtual channels) held during 2023.


This publication presents the results of the entire process in the field of adult education, with separate sections on strengths (highlighting good practices in the educational system for addressing equity and inclusion), challenges (identifying existing educational inequalities) and policy recommendations (with proposals of overall policy objectives, specific objectives and specific measures). The target groups of this publication are national institutions in Croatia in the field of adult education, local and regional authorities and educational institutions that can incorporate these recommendations into their current and future educational reforms. The publication will also be of value to all other local and international stakeholders in the field of education in Croatia (including researchers, educational experts, civil society organisations, media representatives, and learners and their families themselves) to raise awareness of various possible ways to mitigate and, in the long run, prevent educational inequalities in Croatia.

2. METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendations presented in this publication are based on an in-depth analysis of educational inequalities at the level of adult education in Croatia. The data sources referenced in this analysis include both results of research conducted in the project by members of the Lifelong Learning for All Network, as well as previously available research, national documents and statistical data. In this analysis, the “problem tree method” was applied, which categorises identified problems in a hierarchy of cause-and-effect relations. Due to the complexity of the problem of educational inequalities, the Network’s members created a specially adapted problem-tree structure, as presented in the diagram below, and linked the research findings to different parts of the problem tree:



The first part of the Network's analytical framework is based on defining three **dimensions of equity and inclusion in education** and formulating indicators of educational inequality related to each dimension. Based on this framework, each problem identified by the Network through its research is then categorised into one of the dimensions.

Dimensions	Definition	Problem indicator
 Access	<p>This dimension relates to ensuring the conditions and removing barriers for individuals to access educational institutions or programmes that match their needs or educational objectives.</p> <p>The dimension requires the educational system to ensure availability, physical access and affordability of educational institutions/programmes. It also relates to ensuring equitable and inclusive admission procedures and encouraging the enrolment of learners from disadvantaged groups.</p>	Low level of participation in education or in certain types of educational institutions/programmes
 Well-being	<p>This dimension relates to ensuring an optimal experience for all learners in the educational system, leading to a comprehensive and balanced development of each individual's potential. In defining the concept of well-being, the Network has adopted the European Commission's definition of the concept of "well-being at school" in the context of the European Education Area (European Commission, n.d.), slightly adapting it in the context of lifelong learning. According to the adapted definition, well-being in the lifelong learning context means that all learners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feel safe, appreciated and respected; • actively and purposefully engage in educational and social activities; • possess self-confidence and the feeling of autonomy and self-efficacy; • have supportive relationships with other learners and teaching staff; • feel that they belong to their educational community and are content with their experience in the educational process. <p>In the context of equity and inclusion, this dimension implies that the educational system fosters an equitable and inclusive environment in educational institutions, that equitable and inclusive teaching methods are applied and that appropriate material conditions are ensured for learners, especially those from disadvantaged groups.</p>	Lack of a sense of belonging to one's educational community, lack of participation in educational or social activities, lack of supportive relationships, or negative experiences due to their disadvantaged status
 Achievement	<p>This dimension relates to reducing the differences in educational achievements among different groups of learners, preventing early school leaving and stimulating further education after completing a programme.</p> <p>The dimension implies that the educational system entices recognising difficulties which some learners have in the educational process and providing adequate academic and social support in the educational process, especially for disadvantaged groups.</p>	Low educational achievement, low probability of further pursuing education and/or early leaving from education

Educational inequalities primarily stem from broader societal inequalities and their interaction with educational institutions and the educational system, which is why these two categories are listed as the **main factors and obstacles**. However, considering the complexity of educational inequalities and the need for a holistic understanding of how to prevent them, the analysis encompasses **broader factors and obstacles** which (directly or indirectly) may have a negative impact on equity and inclusion in education. The following categories of the broader factors are identified based on inductive analysis of stakeholders' attitudes on educational inequalities and analyses of other studies and documents.

Broader factors and obstacles	Types of challenges
Policy framework	Challenges in educational policies or other areas of public policy that directly or indirectly negatively impact equity and inclusion in education.
Organisational culture	Challenges related to norms, practices, management and networking among key institutions in the system (national/local authorities, educational institutions, etc.).
Societal values	Challenges related to the extent to which education, equity and inclusion are valued in society.
Individual factors	Challenges related to motivation, competences and educational choices of individuals. These factors are manifested in the context of broader societal factors (see below).
Other societal factors	Challenges related to broader socioeconomic and sociocultural factors and unequal distribution of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital.

The value of the Network's analytical framework is that it enables a comprehensive overview of a highly complex problem. The resulting "problem trees" present an innovative way to show connections between various factors and obstacles in a structured and simple way. More importantly, this framework clearly states that, although certain obstacles may be removed in the short- or medium term with specific measures, it is difficult to influence the broader factors, which require long-term, thorough changes not only in public policy, but also at a societal and individual level.

3. STRENGTHS AND GOOD PRACTICES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Before focusing on problems and policy recommendations, it is important to acknowledge and recognise positive policies and practices in the system and to assess the potential of new and upcoming initiatives for enhancing equity and inclusion in adult education. In this section, we provide a summary of the strengths identified in the system and remarks on further options for improvement. The following sections will present the problem analysis and policy recommendations.

- **According to the latest data (Eurostat, 2023; Matković and Jaklin, 2023), the rate of participation in adult education in Croatia has increased.**
- **Studies have shown that adult education benefits participants in Croatia and that participants are satisfied with the experience of attending adult education programmes.** Overall, the majority of participants in adult education have positive attendance experiences, consider the acquired skills useful and applicable, and report positive cognitive and psychosocial effects of training (AVETAE, 2017, Matković, 2023). Adult education has a positive influence on older adults (Čurin, 2012; Zovko and Zloković, n.d). On an overall level, for a significant number of attendees, the training has also had an effect on their career opportunities and the ability of finding a job (AVETAE, 2017; Hrabar et al., 2021 for ESF vouchers, Matković, 2023). For the ESF intervention in education introducing vouchers for persons without a higher education qualification (*Supporting the education of adult learners by including them in priority education programmes, aimed at improving the skills and competences of participants in order to increase employability 3.2.3.02*), a counterfactual impact evaluation determined a slight positive effect on the employment of participants (3 percentage points), regardless of initial employment status (Hrabar et al. 2021: 220-235).

The value of training in improving employability is greater for the unemployed and participants without higher education, but without major differences in outcomes with regard to gender, age, urbanisation, level of income and education of the participants (Matković, 2023). An earlier evaluation (Matković et al., 2011, p.320) established a slight positive effect of education only for the unemployed with less than four years of secondary education, those under 50 and people who entered unemployment through inactivity. An earlier analysis of the effect of participation in employer-financed professional training for business purposes (based on the survey on adult education from 2007) established a strong effect in Croatia - on average, a little more than half of the workers who participated moved to a higher quintile income after training compared to similar workers who did not participate in training (Vogtenhuber, 2015).

- **The new Adult Education Act from 2021 includes new measures to improve the quality of adult education. A new quality assurance system for adult education institutions is also being developed.** Two new national plans for the period until 2027 - the National Plan for the Development of the Education System and the National Plan for Labour, Safety at Work and Employment - place significant emphasis on improving education and training for adults. It is of great significance that the plans prioritise increasing participation in adult education, emphasising that the main problem of adult education is that the groups that need it the most, i.e. disadvantaged groups, participate the least.

Despite these improvements, there is insufficient horizontal coordination between various stakeholders at the system level, e.g. the Ministry of Science and Education and the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. Employers should also be more actively involved in defining and meeting needs in adult education.

Overall, new policies in the field of adult education should put a greater emphasis on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

- **In the National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027, a special measure refers to increasing the share of adults in lifelong learning relying on the aforementioned elements of ensuring equity and equal opportunities.**
- **Measures to improve the availability of adult education are being implemented:** A new system of vouchers for adult education has been introduced. 30,000 vouchers have been planned as part of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience, with more than a third allocated to disadvantaged groups. A proportionate number of vouchers will be used under the ESF programme with the expected participation of a large number of educational institutions and other organisations. Training is already an integral part of the interventions carried out within the framework of ESF projects, e.g. training of persons with disabilities to work in the tourism industry and the "Make a Wish" programme (*Zaželi*). A considerable number of beneficiaries of education vouchers are not in education, employment or training (NEET), a group difficult to identify and include in educational programmes, which is a major success.

Despite this progress, there are several challenges associated with these measures. First, even with the recently secured funding for the continuation of the voucher programme, the funds are not sufficient considering current ambitions and needs – 30,000 under NPRR and 75,000 under ESF over a seven-year period. Likewise, vouchers are neither the only nor a sufficient source of funds and mechanisms for including adults in the education system. Finally, if the measures are to be financed exclusively on a project basis, the sustainability of the adult education financing system might come into question. The challenge is the efficient and effective development of adult education programmes and the training of implementing organisations for the entire process of programme development and verification.

- **National promotion of lifelong learning has been present for a long time.** The Lifelong Learning Week is a national educational campaign organised by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training for the last 17 years with the goal of raising awareness of the importance of learning and education.

Due to the low participation of disadvantaged groups in education (low-skilled, elderly, rural and long-term unemployed population, as well as Roma and people with disabilities), promotional activities should be specifically targeted at those groups.

- **The national system for collecting data on adult education has improved.** In addition to Croatian participation in the international survey on adult skills (PIAAC), Croatia has also improved the national system for collecting data on the number of participants in adult education and training.

The new national system will provide valuable data, but it still covers only formal education and training for adults, which is only a smaller part of the system.

- **The introduction of a system of micro-qualifications and a programme of assessment of prior learning** is opening space for more significant inclusion of people with fewer educational opportunities, especially in combination with the voucher system.
- **Strengthening the competences of adult educators through an andragogy curriculum that has included elements of equity and inclusiveness in adult education.**
- **Internationalisation of adult education and training.** For example, the Erasmus programme defined the inclusion of disadvantaged groups as a priority, which is included in the National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027.

4. CHALLENGES: ANALYSING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

This chapter presents a table summarising the educational inequalities identified at the level of adult education. The analysis is followed by recommended objectives and measures to address these problems.

1. CENTRAL PROBLEM	
Educational inequalities at the level of adult education	
2. PROBLEM INDICATORS	
<i>Access</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low rate of participation in adult education in Croatia (5.1%) compared to the EU average in 2021 (10.8%) and the EU target (15%). <i>Source:</i> Eurostat (2022) • Although there are inequalities in accessing adult education in all EU countries, these inequalities are more pronounced in Croatia. <i>Source:</i> Matković and Jaklin (2021) • According to Eurostat research, certain groups participate significantly less in adult education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ elderly persons (50-64 years old) ○ persons with a lower level of education (fewer than four years of secondary education) ○ mid- and lower-ranking employees ○ unemployed persons ○ residents of rural and less populated areas ○ persons employed in certain sectors (highest participation in the public sector and the IT and financial sectors). <i>Source:</i> Matković and Jaklin (2021) • Other groups not included in the above-mentioned surveys that have a lower participation rate, including persons with disabilities and Roma. <i>Sources:</i> Benjak ([ed.] 2022); Potočnik et al. (2020) • Temporary migrant workers in Croatia: there is no data on their inclusion in adult education, nor clear public instruments for adult education except for asylum seekers.
<i>Well-being</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicability of skills (actual and potential) was estimated lower by participants who were unemployed, while the most favourable outcomes were predicted by participants with a four-year vocational education. <i>Source:</i> Matković (2023) In the case of the unemployed referred to education by the CES (2010-2013), the programme did not often meet the perceived needs of the participants, that is, the participants were often selected for the programme against their own wishes (25%), especially the long-term unemployed. A third of the participants would not participate again, and 40% of the participants rated such participation as not at all or slightly useful. A quarter attended a programme they did not want (Bejaković et al., 2016: 51-54). The results of the survey evaluating education measures for long-term unemployed young people between 2014 and 2020 are almost identical. (Taylor et al., 2021:95-98) Their expectations upon entering the programme were mostly conservative and, in the end, fulfilled. • Adult educators notice that persons with lower basic skills who are included in adult education programmes have a harder time following the programmes. <i>Source:</i> MSE (2019)

3. MAIN FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

Educational system

Access

- **Financial burden of adult education.** Finances are one of the two main barriers to accessing adult education. Financial obstacles are a problem for a larger share of participants in Croatia than in other member countries (46.2 vs 32.3%), especially in households with below-average incomes. Data on the effect of the latest measures addressing this problem (the introduction of a voucher system for adult education) are not yet available.
Source: Matković and Jaklin (2021), Matković (2023)
- **Directly related: Levels of public funding for adult education are low, geographically unbalanced and unclearly targeted, as well as predominantly project-based.**
Sources: Bejaković et al (2016); Mousios et al. (2021)
- **Directly related: Levels of participation in both self-financed and publicly-financed adult education programmes are low,** with most participation related to employer-financed adult education. In the case of publicly funded programmes, there is a higher participation rate among higher-educated persons.
Source: Matković and Jaklin (2021)
- **Limited types of instruments used to encourage greater participation in adult education.**
Source: CEDEFOP (2020), Žiljak (2018).
- **Insufficient and uneven public awareness on the importance of adult education.** Although differences in interest in attending training are small, there is a significant difference in access to information. The long-term unemployed, inactive persons and persons living outside densely populated areas are less often informed, while the reach of information increases with the level of education and in the highest income group, regardless of whether those persons specifically intend to search for adult education opportunities. Employers focus on their more productive employees and adult education institutions follow this pattern (targeting age, education level and income) and the measures of the Croatian Employment Service do not sufficiently compensate for this imbalance.
Source: Matković (2023)
- **Fewer programmes available in smaller/less populated/rural areas:** Although participation is not lower (Matković and Jaklin, 2023), awareness of education possibilities is lower. Distance is a frequent barrier to access for persons from sparsely populated rural areas (24%, compared to 3% in cities), however, the lack of suitable programmes is not a barrier (2%). There are minor regional differences in participation in non-formal education (AVETAE, 2017: 25) and programme availability (Christiansen et al., 2019).
- **Rigidity of adult primary school education for non-traditional students, due to the discrepancy with the needs and opportunities of adults.**
- **The Croatian qualification framework limits the necessary flexibility in the design of programmes.** The prescribed minimum number of hours for providing adult primary education and the fifth level of CQF is too high - it makes it difficult for adult participants to attend the programme.
- **There is still no system or mechanism in adult education for the recognition of prior learning.**
- **Insufficient involvement of employers in adult education:** In terms of employer involvement in adult education, Croatia is at the very bottom of the scale compared to other EU member states. Yet, the majority of employers do not consider that there are limiting factors for their participation in adult education, nor that there are any unmet needs for the training of workers.
Source: Matković and Jaklin (2021)

3. MAIN FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

<p><i>Well-being; Achievement</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trained adult educators. • An underdeveloped advisory function in the adult education system. • Low quality of procedures in employment training programmes. Programmes for the unemployed have so far been financed through public procurement and inadequate procedures, which negatively affects the quality of the programmes. • Insufficient data adult education participants. Croatia did not participate in the assessment on adult competences (PIAAC). The National Information System of Adult Education is not yet active, the results of the programme have not been monitored/published. • Slow process of changing the concept of the recognition of prior learning. Source: Žiljak and Matković (2022)
<p>Educational institutions</p>	
<p><i>Access</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficiently developed network of institutions and programmes for the elderly. • Insufficient dissemination of information for potential participants on available programmes and the importance of adult education. Source: Žiljak and Matković (2022)
<p><i>Well-being; Achievement</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient acknowledgement prior experience and prior learning of adult learners. • Insufficient acknowledgement of the interests and expectations of the adult learners. • Adult educators have numerous roles (motivation, teaching, promotion), but few standardised support programmes and uneven competence. Source: Pavić (ed.). (2017) • Management capabilities of public institution administrations are not being developed systematically and are not at the same level. • Lack of internal quality assurance systems in adult education institutions (e.g. student evaluation) – practices vary widely between institutions. • Complexity of the wide variety of adult education programmes results in complex communication needs with diverse participants. Source: Žiljak and Matković (2022)

4. BROADER FACTORS AND OBSTACLES

<p>Public policy framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low prioritisation of adult education in the field of education policies. E.g. the Adult Education Act took more than six years to be adopted. • The responsibility for adult education is divided among various actors. Responsible institutions include ministries responsible for education, for labour or for other numerous sectors covered by adult education, as well as among numerous stakeholders (chambers, employers). (Eurydice, 2023) • Local competence for publicly funded adult education (as founders, funders and creators of strategies and programmes) leads to regional differences, uneven supply and unequal opportunities for participation. Nevertheless, the positive influence (and/or pressure) of European policies and EU financial support is visible. (Eurydice, 2023).
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4. BROADER FACTORS AND OBSTACLES	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the European context, extremely low public funding of adult education as an instrument of flexicurity. There is a scarcity of publicly funded training (Matković and Jaklin, 2023), either through the Croatian Employment Service active employment policies (Matković, 2019), or through the department of education or local communities.
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust and cooperation among different institutions in the field of adult education. • Public open universities perform very different activities, which represents an administrative obstacle to harmonising the implementation of various cultural and educational activities. <u>Source:</u> Kultura Nova (2015) • Widespread practices of external numerical flexibility in companies, though frequent temporary employment, use of agencies and outsourcing, which does not encourage investments in the education of temporary employees or outsourced staff. <u>Source:</u> Adolffsson et al. (2022); Eurostat (2023a)
Individual factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak motivation for adult education: in Croatia in 2016, 54% of adult respondents did not participate in any form of education, nor did they want to (EU 27:45%). <u>Source:</u> Matković and Jaklin (2021) • Lower tendency for search for information about adult education is linked to age, level of education and status on the labour market. <u>Source:</u> Matković (2023) • Elderly persons with a lower level of education and out of employment are less likely to seek information on training opportunities, although they do not differ greatly from other groups in terms of their self-assessed needs for training. <u>Source:</u> Matković (2023) • Family obligations are the third most cited obstacle (28%) to participation in adult education (AVETA, 2017). This obstacle is common among all groups, but more common among the unemployed (33%) and women with younger children (62%). <u>Source:</u> Matković (2023) • Work organisation and lack of systematic support from employers are obstacles to training. Employees most often cite overlapping schedules as an obstacle to participation (64%, 45%), and those who did not participate often cited a lack of support (16%). <u>Source:</u> Matković (2023)
Other social factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of the labour market, with a large representation of sectors and occupations with low requirements for qualifications and training. <u>Source:</u> Matković and Jaklin (2023); Wotschack (2020) • High proportion of pensioners in the general population. There is thus a smaller share of people on the labour market, and perhaps less motivation for further education. <u>Source:</u> Eurostat (2023c) • High proportion of elderly persons in the general population. <u>Source:</u> Eurostat (2023b) • Low level of union density and collective agreement coverage in Croatia, which in other countries is associated with lower rates of participation in adult education. <u>Source:</u> Daemrlich et al. (2014); Adolffsson et al. (2022); OECD (2021)

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: OBJECTIVES



In this section we propose recommendations in the form of overall and specific objectives of future public policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities in adult education in Croatia. The specific objectives are grouped into six thematic areas, based on a structure developed by the Lifelong Learning for All Network and which is applied to all educational levels (from early childhood education and care to higher education and adult education). In the next section we present recommendations of concrete policy measures to achieve those policy objectives.



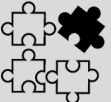

The recommendations are complementary with the **National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027**, as the Plan also identified educational inequalities as the key challenge to the educational system in Croatia. The mid-term vision of the plan is to make the educational system “inclusive, high-quality and equitable”. The recommendations can serve as an important resource in planning and implementing the measures for adult education suggested in the Plan.

Overall policy objectives

1. **Increasing the overall rate of participation in adult education in Croatia compared to the EU average and the EU target**
2. **Increase the proportion of adult learners from disadvantaged groups, especially learners from the most vulnerable social groups**
3. **Enhance support for learners lacking basic skills in order for them to be able to follow and successfully complete adult education programmes**
4. **Increase the quality and relevance of adult education programmes, especially for the unemployed**

Specific policy objectives

Thematic area	Specific objectives
 <p>1. Policy framework</p>	<p><i>The working group has no specific recommendations for additions to the overall policy framework for adult education, but supports the Network’s horizontal recommendations for enhancing policy coherence between different levels of education, in a lifelong perspective.</i></p>
 <p>2. Accessibility</p>	<p>2.1. Improve the geographical availability of adult education programmes (especially in smaller/less populated/rural areas)</p> <p>2.2. Provide support mechanisms to reduce barriers to adult education related to geographic distance and family obligations</p> <p>2.3. Improve the legal framework in the field of labour to incentivise adult education</p> <p>2.4. Increase the reach of public information on the importance of adult education, with an emphasis on disadvantaged groups</p> <p>2.5. Increase the flexibility of adult primary education and basic skill programmes, in accordance with the needs and capabilities of adults</p>

 <p>3. Financial support</p>	<p>3.1. Ensure greater affordability of adult education through systematic public financing, especially for the participation of adults from disadvantaged groups</p>
 <p>4. Support for learners</p>	<p>4.1. Enhance advisory support in the adult education system and expand its reach</p>
 <p>5. Support for teaching staff</p>	<p>5.1. Strengthen the competences of the teaching staff of adult education institutions for working with disadvantaged groups</p>
 <p>6. Inclusive institutions</p>	<p>6.1. Develop institutional strategies for better communication with diverse participants (given the diversity of programmes)</p> <p>6.2. Enhance the flexibility, relevance and availability of adult education programmes</p>

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: MEASURES



1. Policy framework

The working group for adult education has no recommendations for the public policy framework, since it believes that the umbrella legal and strategic framework for adult education is adequate and that it can accommodate the recommendations proposed hereinafter.

It should be noted that these policy recommendations do not imply that the public policy framework amounts exclusively to the implementation of national education strategies and laws. A significant role is also played by initiatives of participants and implementing organisations, which can use the support and strategic strongholds that are closest to them, which are acceptable in terms of content and provide the best results. The public policy framework is sufficiently inclusive to accommodate all the changes proposed in this document that affect the priorities of ensuring equity in adult education. Therefore, any minor changes that go beyond the framework of the aforementioned strategic documents should be considered and provided for.



2. Accessibility

Specific objective 2.1.	Improve the geographical availability of adult education programmes (especially in smaller/less populated/rural areas)
Measures ¹ (short-term/ Medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a more stimulating financial framework for the implementation of adult education programmes in smaller/less populated/rural areas, e.g. as part of ESF projects, in such a way that the financing structure is not based on the number of participants, but on the actual cost* • Encourage geographical accessibility of adult education through awarding additional points and/or additional funding for programmes that are carried out in smaller/less populated/rural areas (e.g. under ESF projects) • Develop online or hybrid programmes for adult education for participants in smaller/less populated/rural areas, taking care to ensure adequate space and IT equipment for participants with such requirements • Improve the network of programmes for the elderly
Measures (long-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a national framework for strengthening the position of adult education and training programmes within the activities of regional competence centres such as hubs for adult education • Encourage local and regional government to greater financing of adult education programmes (including cooperation with local educational institutions)
Stakeholders	Implementing bodies for ESF projects, MSE, AVETAE, local and regional government
Additional notes	<i>* The real cost of conducting adult education programmes in smaller/less populated/rural areas can be more expensive for several reasons: there are higher costs for transport (both for participants from surrounding areas and for adult educators) and for covering the real cost of educators and educational materials. If the funding structure is based only on the number of participants, running the programme in such areas is not feasible. In order to ensure inclusiveness and equity, it is necessary to provide sufficient funds for the implementation of programmes for disadvantaged groups using a different funding methodology.</i>
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.1. (programme development) and 4.6. (financial incentives)</i>

¹ Short-term/medium-term measures refer to measures that could be adopted over a period of 2 to 4 years. Long-term measures refer to measures that could be adopted over a period of 5 to 10 years.

Specific objective 2.2.	Provide support mechanisms to reduce barriers to adult education related to geographic distance and family obligations
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a national guide for institutions at the local level (e.g. adult education institutions, libraries, youth centres, etc.) on possible mechanisms for providing childcare services (e.g. playgrounds within adult education institutions or other institutions) • Inform local government on the need for ensuring support mechanisms for the provision of childcare services in institutions under their jurisdiction, or in cooperation with NGOs • Expand the document "<i>Methodology for the Development of Adult Education Programmes for the Acquisition of Micro-qualifications, Partial Qualifications and Complete Qualifications Financed Through Vouchers and Other Sources of Financing</i>" to accommodate changes to schedules and implementation modalities with the intent of mitigating the barriers of distance and family obligations, similar to measures that have previously been taken to improve learning experiences for learners with disabilities
Stakeholders	MSE, MLPSFSP, AVETAЕ
NPDES reference	<i>There are no related measures in NPDES. We propose adding these measures to new priorities and/or addressing them through other public policy mechanisms.</i>

Specific objective 2.3.	Improve the legal framework in the field of labour to incentivise adult education
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish the right of all workers to minimum training within the scope of their employment through the Labour Act • Ensure, through collective agreements and other regulations, adequate rights to paid leave for the purposes of training or education during working hours
Stakeholders	Trade unions, employers (Croatian Employers Association), MLPSFSP
NPDES reference	<i>There are no related measures in NPDES. We propose adding these measures to new priorities and/or addressing them through other public policy mechanisms.</i>

Specific objective 2.4.	Increase the reach of public information on the importance of adult education, with an emphasis on disadvantaged groups
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the implementation of the "Lifelong Learning Week" information campaign with a stronger emphasis on informing and advising disadvantaged groups (low-skilled, elderly, rural and long-term unemployed population, as well as Roma and persons with disabilities) • Encourage the implementation of the strategic framework for the promotion of adult education created by AVETAE
Stakeholders	AVETAE
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.5. (promotion of lifelong learning)</i>

Specific objective 2.5.	Increase the flexibility of adult primary education and basic skill programmes, in accordance with the needs and capabilities of adults
Measures (short term) medium term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the newly created programme for primary education of adults • Implement the curriculum for strengthening the basic skills of adults as part of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Education
Stakeholders	MSE, AVETAE
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.1. (programme development)</i>



3. Financial support

Specific objective 3.1.	Ensure greater affordability of adult education through systematic public financing, especially for the participation of adults from disadvantaged groups
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the achievement of the goal of including disadvantaged groups through the vouchers scheme by checking correspondence with the planned indicators • If necessary, strengthen the targeted information campaign for greater inclusion of disadvantaged groups
Measures (long-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a sustainable system of individual learning accounts for all citizens after compulsory education, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups • Ensure sustainable public financing of the measure of individual learning accounts through the state budget
Stakeholders	MLPSFSP, MSE
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.6. (financial incentives)</i>



4. Support for learners

Specific objective 4.1.	Enhance advisory support in the adult education system and expand its reach
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide counselling and support services for potential participants, especially for disadvantaged groups, in accordance with the implementation of the concept of lifelong professional guidance • Strengthen the role of andragogic counsellors as key persons for counselling and support to learners • Include adequate time and resources for counselling and support of potential and existing participants with a lack of basic knowledge and skills* in the proposals of publicly-funded adult education programmes
Stakeholders	Institutions for adult education, CES, MSE
Additional notes	<i>* Publicly funded adult education programmes currently do not include an element of counselling and support for participants as a separate part of the prescribed duties of adult educators and/or other staff of the adult education institution. If this work were to be included in regular duties, it would have to be reflected in the financial plan of the programme (e.g. a certain programme would include 30 hours of teaching and 2 hours of counselling)</i>
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.4. (self-assessment/assessment skills and professional guidance)</i>



5. Support for teaching staff

Specific objective 5.1.	Strengthen the competences of the teaching staff of adult education institutions for working with disadvantaged groups
Measures (short-term/ medium-term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the implementation of the developed adult educator training programme, which includes elements on equity and inclusion in adult education, with an emphasis on the acquisition of competences for inclusive teaching methods in working with disadvantaged groups • Use the potential of the Erasmus+ programme to strengthen competences of staff working with disadvantaged groups through international collaboration
Stakeholders	AVETAE, AMEUP, institutions for adult education
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.3. (strengthening the capacities of adult educators and measure 4.7. (internationalisation)</i>



6. Inclusive institutions

Specific objective 6.1.	Develop institutional strategies for better communication with diverse participants (given the diversity of programmes)
Measures (short term) medium term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop training programmes for non-teaching staff to work with disadvantaged groups (non-discriminatory environment, communication) • Use the potential of the Erasmus+ programme to strengthen the competences of non-teaching staff in working with disadvantaged groups through international cooperation
Stakeholders	AVETAE, AMEUP, institutions for adult education
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.3. (strengthening the capacities of adult educators and measure 4.7. (internationalisation)</i>

Specific objective 6.2.	Enhance the flexibility, relevance and availability of adult education programmes
Measures (short term) medium term)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce of a system of micro-qualifications that opens up space for greater inclusion of persons with fewer educational opportunities, especially in combination with the voucher system • Implement a programme assessing of prior learning, which would open space for greater inclusion of persons with fewer educational opportunities
Stakeholders	MSE, MLPSFSP, AVETAE, institutions for adult education
NPDES reference	<i>Connect with NPDES measure 4.1. (programme development)</i>

APPENDIX: DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

The Lifelong Learning for All Network advocates for ensuring **every individual's** right to high-quality education throughout their entire life, resulting in a positive learning experience, a sense of well-being within their educational community, and ultimately educational outcomes that match each person's capacities.

The Network is particularly committed to providing individualised support to persons from **disadvantaged groups**. The Network defines disadvantaged groups as those at greater risk of unequal access to education, lower well-being during the educational process, and lower educational achievements due to circumstances or characteristics beyond their control. Examples of such circumstances and characteristics in a lifelong learning perspective (from early to adult age) are presented in the table below.

Circumstances and characteristics of disadvantaged groups in the context of lifelong learning (from early to adult age)

Social and family circumstances:	Individual characteristics:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic status (low SES and poverty) • Place of residence (in rural, remote and isolated areas) • Membership of ethnic, linguistic and/or religious minorities • Status of refugee, migrant, or asylum-seeker; unaccompanied children; economic migrants • Challenging family circumstances (single-parent families; conflictual family relationships; parental deviant behaviour; familial abuse or neglect; etc.) • Children in alternative care • Exposure to exceptional circumstances such as natural disasters, wars, pandemics, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental risks and delays • Behavioural and/or mental health problems • Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD) • Developmental difficulties and disabilities (e.g. sensory impairments, intellectual disabilities, motor disorders, autism) • Chronic illnesses • Traumatic experiences (e.g. death of a parent) • Giftedness • LGBTIQ+ identity • Gender (which can result in unequal outcomes due to stereotypical gender roles)

Many circumstances and individual characteristics may intersect and, consequently, result in multiple dimensions of disadvantage (e.g. lower socioeconomic status, remote geographical location and challenging family circumstances).

The Network recommends terminological consistency in policy documents by using the term "disadvantaged groups" and by defining the term through a broad definition that considers exposure to various social circumstances and individual characteristics resulting in educational inequalities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMEUP– Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes

AVETAE – Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education

CES – Croatian Employment Service

EU – European Union

MLPSFSP – Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

MSE – Ministry of Science and Education

NPDES – National Plan for the Development of the Education System until 2027

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22. Ambidexter Club: Martina Horvat
23. Roma Resource Centre: Elizabet Takač; Jovana Petrović; Natalija Gašić
24. Individual members: Karin Doolan; Margareta Gregurović; Lelia Kiš-Glavaš; Dalida Rittossa; Ivana Dobrotić; Olja Družić Ljubotina; Tino Vodanović