Country Report

10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy, Auckland, New Zealand, November 2026

Country name

Republic of Croatia

This country report has been prepared for discussion and information purposes in connection with the 10th International Symposium on Career Development and Public Policy. It draws on an online questionnaire on the Symposium themes, which national teams were invited to complete in advance.

ICCDPP: Navigating new horizons - Country perspectives survey

Introduction

Q1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

Yes

Q2. I confirm that I am providing a response on behalf of my country.

Yes

Q3. I confirm that I am happy for the responses to this survey to be shared publicly.

Yes

Q4. Is your country going to participate in the 2026 ICCDPP symposium in New Zealand?

Don't know yet

Q5. Who have you consulted with before completing this survey?

Career development researchers Toni Babarović and Iva Šverko from Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences.

About you

Q6. What is your name?

Irena Bačelić

Q7. What organisation do you work for?

Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

Q8. What is your job title?

Head of Sector for Labour Market Development

Q9. What is your email address?

irena.bacelic@mrosp.hr

Q10. Are you happy for your contact details to be published on the ICCDPP website/ relevant documents as part of the publication of this data?

Yes

About your country

Q11. What is the name of your country?

Republic of Croatia

Q12. Which groups can access career development services in your country?

	Accessible and free to everyone	Accessible and free to some groups	Accessible to those who can pay	Not accessible
Indigenous people				
Young people in schools	X			
Young people in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	X			
Young people in university or higher education	X			
Young people not in education or work (e.g. NEETs)	X			
Adults in education	X			
Adults in work	X			
Adults not in education or work (e.g. unemployed workers and the economic inactive)	X			
Migrants	X			
People in the criminal justice system	X			
Employers/businesses	X			

Q13. Are there any other groups in your country, not listed in Question 12 above, that can access career development services?

Retirees working part time
Persons with disabilities
Croatian emigrants aiming to return

About your country

Q14. How far do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The career development policies, programmes and services in my country are meeting the career needs of the population.			X		
School leavers in my country are well			X		

Q14. How far do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The career development policies, programmes and services in my country are meeting the career needs of the population.			X		
prepared for successful transitions to work or further learning.					
There is a strong evidence base to support the provision of career development services in my country.		X			
AI is having a major impact on the education system in my country.			X		
AI is having a major impact on labour market in my country.			X		
AI is having a major impact on the provision of career development services in my country.				X	

Q15. Are indigenous groups involved in the design of career development services in your country?

Not relevant

About your country

Q16. Please provide a short summary of your country's career development system. [Up to 300 words]

Croatia's career development system is based on a lifelong guidance approach that supports individuals in making informed education, training, and employment decisions throughout their lives. The system is designed to improve employability, support economic development, promote social inclusion, and strengthen the alignment between workforce skills and labour market needs.
Career development services are coordinated across the education, employment, and training sectors. Policy direction has been shaped by the national Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development, which established a framework for cooperation among ministries, educational institutions, employment services, and social partners. The system is also linked to the Croatian Qualifications Framework, which helps connect qualifications, learning pathways, and labour market requirements.
Career guidance is provided in schools, higher education institutions, and through public employment services. Students receive support in understanding their interests, abilities, and career options, helping them make informed choices about further education and vocational pathways. Guidance services continue throughout adulthood, recognising that career development is an ongoing process rather than a one-time decision.
A central component of the system is the network of Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK). These centres provide free career counselling, skills assessments, labour market information, job-search assistance, and advice on education and training opportunities. Services are available to students, unemployed individuals, employed workers seeking career changes, and adults pursuing lifelong learning.
The Croatian Employment Service (CES) plays an important role by integrating career guidance with active labour market measures, vocational training, and employment support programmes. Career development services are particularly focused on supporting vulnerable groups, including young people, long-term unemployed individuals, low-skilled adults, and those at risk of labour market exclusion.
Overall, Croatia's career development system seeks to build career management skills, encourage lifelong learning, reduce skills mismatches, and support successful transitions between education, training, and employment. By combining guidance, labour market information, and access to learning opportunities, the system contributes to workforce development, economic productivity, and social inclusion.

Q16. Please provide a short summary of your country's career development system. [Up to 300 words]

Q17. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide insights into your country's career development policies and systems. [Up to 300 words]

The following link gives an overview of Lifelong Guidance System in Croatia: https://euroguidance.eu/guidance-systems-and-practice/national-guidance-systems/guidance-system-in-croatia

The following link gives information on Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK): https://cisok.hzz.hr/
The following OECD report on Education and Skills in Croatia also provides information on career guidance services in Croatia: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-and-skills-in-croatia_bace00c4-en.html?_ga=2.117778432.888599055.1782300645-777954644.1782300645

Q18. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about the way in which your country organises its career development services? [Up to 300 words]

In addition to the nationwide network of Career Information and Counselling Centres, an important recent innovation is Put karijere, a free online career guidance platform designed to support users across all life stages. Developed through research funded by the Croatian Science Foundation, the platform provides validated psychological questionnaires, personalised feedback, career development advice, structured school based programmes, and resources for parents and professionals. Its evidence based tools help individuals better understand their interests, values, vocational identity, career motivation, adaptability, and other personal resources essential for effective career management. By offering scientifically supported instruments tailored to the Croatian population, Put karijere enhances the quality and consistency of guidance services and expands access to career support beyond traditional institutional settings.
One of the most prominent activities within Croatia's career development system is the voucher-based adult education scheme, which has become a central mechanism for supporting lifelong learning and workforce adaptability. Implemented through the CES, the voucher system enables adults to access high-quality training programmes that facilitate upskilling and reskilling, particularly in sectors undergoing rapid technological and economic change. By reducing financial barriers to participation, vouchers significantly expand opportunities for adults to acquire new competencies and strengthen their labour market position. Career advisers within CES and CISOK centres play a crucial role in helping individuals identify suitable training options and make effective use of vouchers, ensuring that financial support is closely aligned with personalised career guidance.

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q19. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services contribute to economic growth.	X				
Career development services contribute to workforce productivity.	X				
Career development services deliver a positive return on investment on public spending.	X				

Q19. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services contribute to economic growth.	X				
Career development services support entrepreneurialism.	X				
Career development services help to address employers' skills and labour needs.	X				
Career development services can be accessed by small and medium sized businesses (SMEs).	X				
Career development services improve levels of job satisfaction.	X				
Career development services contribute to decent work (jobs with access to training, a living wage and other benefits).	X				
Career development services support equality of access to learning and work opportunities.	X				
Career development services contribute to the green transition.	X				

Productivity and the inclusive economy

Q20. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support productivity. [Up to 300 words]

Croatia's career development policies and services contribute to productivity by helping individuals make informed education, training, and employment decisions that better align with labour market needs. A central element of this approach is the national Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development (incorporated in the National Plan for Labour, Health and Safety at Work and Employment), which promotes lifelong learning, workforce adaptability, and improved matching between skills supply and employer demand.
Career development services are delivered through a coordinated network involving schools, higher education institutions, employment services, and Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK). These services provide career counselling, labour market information, skills assessments, and guidance on education and training opportunities. By helping individuals choose pathways that reflect current and emerging labour market requirements, career guidance reduces skills mismatches and supports more efficient allocation of human resources.
Croatia has also strengthened the connection between career guidance and labour market intelligence. Data provided by the Labour Market Portal on employment trends, occupational demand, and skills shortages are used to inform guidance services and educational planning. This enables students, jobseekers, and workers to make evidence-based decisions about career transitions and upskilling opportunities. As a result, employers are more likely to access workers with relevant skills, which enhances organisational performance and economic productivity.
The country's emphasis on lifelong learning further supports productivity by encouraging continuous skills development throughout working life. One of the most significant instruments in this area is the voucher system for adult education, which enables individuals to access accredited training programmes that support upskilling and reskilling. By reducing financial barriers and directing public investment toward priority skill areas, the voucher system helps workers respond to technological change, economic restructuring, and evolving workplace requirements. This mechanism is particularly important in sectors experiencing digital transformation and shifting skill demands, as it allows adults to acquire competencies

Q20. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support productivity. [Up to 300 words]

aligned with emerging labour market needs. Career development services play a central role in guiding individuals toward appropriate voucher-funded programmes, ensuring that training choices are informed, relevant, and strategically connected to both personal career goals and national productivity objectives. In addition, targeted guidance services support vulnerable groups, including unemployed individuals, young people, and adults seeking career changes. By improving employability and facilitating labour market participation, these services help reduce unemployment and increase workforce utilisation. Overall, Croatia's career development policies support productivity by improving skills matching, encouraging lifelong learning, enhancing workforce adaptability, and helping citizens make informed career decisions that contribute to both individual success and national economic growth.

Q21. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support an inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

Croatia's career development policies and services play an important role in supporting an inclusive economy by helping people from diverse backgrounds access education, training, and employment opportunities. The country's lifelong career guidance framework is based on the principle that all citizens should be able to make informed career decisions throughout their lives, regardless of age, employment status, educational attainment, or social circumstances.

A key mechanism for promoting inclusion is the nationwide network of Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK), which provides free career guidance services to students, unemployed individuals, employed workers seeking career changes, and people at risk of labour market exclusion. These services reduce barriers to information and support equal access to career planning resources. Individuals receive assistance with career exploration, skills assessment, job-search strategies, and identifying suitable education and training pathways.

Croatia's career development system also supports young people during key educational transitions. Guidance services in schools help students understand their strengths, explore occupations, and make informed decisions about further education and employment. This contributes to reducing early school leaving, improving educational outcomes, and supporting smoother transitions into the labour market.

Attention is given to vulnerable groups, including long-term unemployed individuals, people living in disadvantaged regions, low-skilled adults, and those facing social exclusion. Career guidance is often linked with active labour market programmes, retraining initiatives, and adult learning opportunities that improve employability and labour market participation. These interventions help individuals gain relevant skills and increase their chances of securing sustainable employment.

Furthermore, Croatia's policies encourage lifelong learning and career adaptability, enabling workers to respond to economic change and technological developments. A central instrument in this area is the voucher system for adult education, which plays a significant role in widening access to training and strengthening workforce resilience. The voucher scheme is designed to enhance employability and adaptability, activate inactive individuals, support job retention, and facilitate worker mobility by enabling adults to acquire new competencies or upgrade existing ones in line with labour market needs. By reducing financial barriers and directing public investment toward priority skill areas, vouchers help individuals participate in high-quality upskilling and reskilling programmes, particularly in sectors undergoing digital transformation. Career development services guide users in selecting appropriate voucher-funded training, ensuring that learning pathways are aligned with both personal career goals and evolving labour market demands. Through this integrated approach, Croatia helps prevent workers from becoming marginalised and supports their full participation in an inclusive and dynamic economy.

An important element of Croatia's inclusive approach is the provision of Croatian language courses for migrant workers, which are increasingly relevant given the growing number of migrants entering the labour market. These courses help foreign workers acquire essential linguistic competencies that enable them to participate more fully in education, training, and employment. By improving communication skills, language training reduces barriers to workplace integration, enhances job performance, and supports safer and more effective collaboration with colleagues and employers. It also strengthens social inclusion by enabling foreign workers to engage more confidently with public services, local communities, and everyday life in Croatia. When combined with career development services and voucher-funded training opportunities, Croatian language courses play a vital role in ensuring that migrant workers can access learning pathways, understand labour market information, and pursue sustainable employment, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and cohesive economy.

Overall, Croatia's career development policies contribute to a more inclusive economy by widening access to opportunity, supporting disadvantaged populations, promoting lifelong learning, and helping all citizens participate more fully in economic and social life. Through these measures, career guidance serves as

Q21. Provide further information about the way in which policies and practices for career development services in your country support an inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

both a workforce development tool and a mechanism for social inclusion.

Q22. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the relationship in your country between policies for career development, and policies for productivity and the inclusive economy. [Up to 300 words]

The following link gives access to the Labour Market Portal:
https://trzisterada.gov.hr/

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q23. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services support people to develop skills	X				
Career development services support people to access training	X				
Career development services support the uptake of TVET pathways	X				
Career development services support lifelong learning	X				

Q24. What are the biggest challenges for participation in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system in your country? [Please tick all that apply.]

School leavers do not see TVET pathways as attractive
Parents do not see TVET pathways as attractive for their children
The practice of compulsory assignment of students with academic challenges to TVET programmes
Lack of ongoing career development support for learners studying TVET pathways
The influence of gender stereotyping on TVET choices
Poor alignment between TVET provision and employers' needs

Enhancing skills and developing technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

Q25. At what age do young people generally move onto a TVET pathway if that is the path they take?

Young people in Croatia generally move onto a TVET pathway at around age 15, when they complete elementary school and enrol in secondary education. This transition typically occurs at the start of upper-secondary schooling, where students choose between general education (gymnasiums), vocational programmes, or art schools.

Q26. Does the age of pathway selection cause challenges for your TVET system?

Yes

Q27. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the age of pathway selection? [Up to 300 words]

In Croatia, young people typically select their educational pathway, including TVET options, at around age 15, when transitioning from elementary to upper secondary education. While this age aligns with common European practice, it raises several important considerations for the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the TVET system. At 15, many students are still developing their interests, values, and self concept, which can make long term career decisions challenging. Early pathway selection may therefore limit flexibility for students who later discover new strengths or aspirations, particularly in rapidly changing labour market conditions.

Another challenge relates to the uneven maturity and readiness of students at this age. Some young people benefit from structured guidance and clear vocational pathways, while others require more time, exploration, and support before committing to a specific educational trajectory. This highlights the importance of high quality career education in primary and lower secondary schools, including access to career information, counselling, and tools such as Put karijere, which help students better understand their interests and competencies before making key decisions.

The age of pathway selection also has implications for equity. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have less access to information, parental support, or exposure to different occupations, which can influence their choices and limit their opportunities. Strengthening early career guidance, improving cooperation between schools and employers, and ensuring that TVET pathways are presented as attractive, modern, and future oriented options can help mitigate these disparities.

Finally, given the increasing need for adaptability in the labour market, it is important that pathway selection at age 15 does not lock students into narrow options. Ensuring permeability between vocational and general education, expanding opportunities for progression to higher education, and integrating lifelong learning mechanisms—such as the voucher system for adult education—can help maintain flexibility and support successful long term career development.

Q28. Provide further information on the ways in which policies for career development services in your country enhance policies for skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning. [Up to 300 words]

Croatia’s career development policies strengthen skills development, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and lifelong learning by helping individuals make informed decisions about education, training, and employment throughout their lives. Career guidance is viewed as a strategic tool for improving human capital and ensuring that skills development systems respond effectively to labour market needs.

A central feature of Croatia’s approach is the integration of career guidance within education, employment, and training systems. Through the national Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Career Development and the Croatian Qualifications Framework, career services provide information on occupations, qualifications, and labour market trends. This helps students and workers identify educational pathways that lead to in-demand skills and employment opportunities.

Career development services also support the effectiveness of TVET. Guidance provided in schools assists young people in understanding vocational pathways and the employment prospects associated with different occupations. By promoting informed educational choices, career guidance helps reduce mismatches between learners’ interests, training participation, and labour market demand. This contributes to stronger enrolment in vocational programmes aligned with economic priorities.

The nationwide network of Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK) plays a significant role in connecting individuals with training and upskilling opportunities. Career advisers help users assess their competencies, identify skills gaps, and access vocational training, adult education, and reskilling programmes. These services are particularly important for unemployed adults and workers facing changing job requirements due to technological and economic transformation.

Career development policies further support lifelong learning by encouraging individuals to view learning as a continuous process rather than a one-time educational experience. Guidance services promote career management skills such as self-assessment, opportunity awareness, decision-making, and transition planning. These competencies enable individuals to adapt to changing labour market conditions and engage in ongoing learning throughout their careers.

Overall, Croatia’s career development policies enhance skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning by linking guidance services with education and training systems, supporting evidence-based career choices,

Q28. Provide further information on the ways in which policies for career development services in your country enhance policies for skills development, TVET, and lifelong learning. [Up to 300 words]

encouraging continuous skills development, and helping citizens acquire the competencies needed for sustainable employment and economic resilience.

Q29. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights about how career development services can enhance skills and support TVET. [Up to 300 words]

The following link gives an overview of guidance and counselling in Croatia within a lifelong learning approach:
https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/croatia/guidance-and-counselling-lifelong-learning-approach?utm_source=copilot.com
The following link gives access to the National Education System Development Plan up to 2027, including reforms related to VET:
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/47757?utm_source=copilot.com
The following link gives an overview of Croatia's lifelong learning strategy and related policy measures:
https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/croatia/lifelong-learning-strategy?utm_source=copilot.com
The following link gives access to CEDEFOP's thematic perspective on implementing European priorities in VET in Croatia:
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/implementing_eu_priorities_croatia_2024.pdf?utm_source=copilot.com

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q30. To what extent do policies for education, training, and employment in your country reflect the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Career development services help vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to thrive.	X				
Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups can access career development services.	X				
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access decent work.	X				
Career development services support vulnerable groups to access the education and training system.	X				
There is adequate funding for career development services targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.	X				
Policies for social inclusion intersect with policies for education, training, and employment.	X				

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	Government has	Provided with bespoke or targeted

Q31. Which disadvantaged and vulnerable groups does your government have policies to support and which are provided with bespoke or targeted career development services. [Tick all that apply]

	policies to support	career development services
Indigenous people		
Women and girls		
Men and boys		
Ethnic minorities		
Religious minorities		
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people		
People from low-socio-economic backgrounds		
People with low skill levels		
Migrants		
People with disabilities	X	X
People with health and mental health challenges	X	X
Younger people		
Older people		
Other		

Ensuring disadvantaged and vulnerable groups can thrive

Q32. Can you provide any further information about the way in which policies for career development in your country support vulnerable and disadvantaged people? [Up to 300 words]

Croatia's career development policies support vulnerable and disadvantaged people by promoting equal access to career guidance, education, training, and employment opportunities. The country's lifelong career guidance framework recognises that certain groups face greater barriers to labour market participation and therefore require targeted support to achieve sustainable employment and social inclusion.

A key mechanism is the network of Career Information and Counselling Centres (CISOK), which provides free career guidance services throughout the country. These centres are accessible to unemployed individuals, low-skilled adults, young people not in employment or education, persons returning to the workforce, and those facing career transitions. Services include career counselling, skills assessment, labour market information, job-search support, and referrals to education and training programmes. By removing financial barriers to guidance services, Croatia helps ensure that disadvantaged groups can access professional career support.

Career development policies are closely linked to active labour market measures delivered through the Croatian Employment Service. Individuals who experience long-term unemployment receive personalised guidance and support in identifying suitable occupations, training opportunities, and pathways back into employment. Career advisers help clients recognise transferable skills, build career management competencies, and develop realistic employment plans.

Young people are another important target group. Career guidance in schools supports students who may be at risk of educational disengagement or early school leaving. Guidance professionals help students explore career options, understand labour market opportunities, and make informed decisions about vocational and higher education pathways. These services contribute to smoother transitions from education to employment and reduce the risk of long-term labour market exclusion.

Croatia also promotes inclusion through adult learning and reskilling initiatives such as voucher system. Career guidance helps workers with outdated qualifications, people in declining industries, and those living in economically disadvantaged regions identify opportunities for retraining and lifelong learning. This support improves employability and adaptability in a changing labour market.Persons with disabilities are

Q32. Can you provide any further information about the way in which policies for career development in your country support vulnerable and disadvantaged people? [Up to 300 words]

provided specific assistance through services of Institute for expert assessment, professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities (ZOSI).
Overall, Croatia’s career development policies support vulnerable populations by improving access to guidance, strengthening employability, facilitating participation in education and training, and reducing barriers to labour market inclusion. In doing so, career development services contribute to both social equity and economic participation.

Q33. Please provide links to any key reports, articles or websites that provide further insights into the way that your country's career development system supports vulnerable and disadvantaged people. [Up to 300 words]

The following link gives information on Institute for expert assessment, professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities (ZOSI): https://zosi.hr/


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