

Seeking a better workforce: Croatia revises vocational educational policy

CARDS 2001

Vocational Education and Training

Country

Croatia

Implementation period

2003-2004

Funding

€600,000

Results

Create new policy framework for vocational education and training, develop modern, flexible, high-quality systems in line with labour market and societal needs

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Supporting vocational education and training restructuring

Having a viable and effective system of vocational education and training (VET) is essential if Croatia is to maintain a workforce whose skills can contribute to the development of its economy. It is also an important stepping-stone for the country towards one day joining the European Union and underpinning the country's social cohesion.

This CARDS-funded VET project has been launched to improve the practical professional skills of Croatians through providing better vocational educational services and opportunities. But a number of hurdles impede progress, most notably the fragmentation of the current system and poor coordination of activities.

Urgent change to the country's VET system has therefore been needed. So the EU stepped in with over half a million euros to back restructuring activities aimed at creating a new policy framework for VET which modernises and improves the outdated vocational education and training system in order that it more closely fits with market demands.

Who benefited?

The main beneficiary of this project, which ran from March 2003 until the end of December 2004, was the Croatian Ministry of Education and Sports and the Institute of Education.

Other actors who showed varying degree of interest in the scheme include schools throughout the country, local authorities, employers' associations, trade unions, and politicians who see VET as an important social issue to champion. Ultimately, an improved VET policy also translates into benefits for those Croatians who are seeking employment in a vocational profession.

What needed to be done?

At the outset of the project, a number of priorities which badly needed to be tackled were identified. These included creating proposals for basic restructuring and setting up VET institutions, and drafting a roadmap which would inform an eventual Green Paper on the subject and that would help to reorganise the old system. It also envisaged the development of a 'train the trainers' curriculum exposing 25 candidates to EU best practices, as well as studying how to upgrade the teaching profession and make it a more attractive career option.

To do this, the main project partners from Denmark and Finland divided the workload into four main packages which were carried out in parallel. These were:

- Institutional policy development;
- Creation of an education management information system;
- Curriculum development and quality assurance schemes;
- Management training for teachers and schools, and a redefinition of the mentoring profession.

Good results

By September 2003, the project had already made some progress but faced delays due to the novelty of the venture in Croatia. Examples of effective VET restructuring in neighbouring countries have been taken onboard to guide the Croatian scheme.

Nearing the end of 2004, it had completed the activities referred to in the terms of reference and, with help from the European Training Foundation (ETF), the first projects in the field of VET and social cohesion were rolled out. The ETF was also involved in a regional project aimed at providing a multinational framework to harmonise teachers' qualifications, although this does not presently include Croatia.

Further effort has been invested – workshops, websites, EU visits – in raising awareness not only about the project but also about the eventual gains to be made through improved VET.

The Ministry of European Integration was on the steering committee for the project and has monitored progress through its monthly meetings and providing practical assistance where necessary.