

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

National Statement of Commitment

Address by

H.E. Andrej Plenković

Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

At the Transforming Education Summit “Leaders’ Day”

19 September 2022

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Education and training can shape the future of humanity and its role is transformational for both individuals and society.

By investing in the teachers, we are investing in the future of all their learners.

In the past years, Croatia has been systematically improving the status of employees in the education system through salary growth, recognition, rewarding and promotion of the most successful educational workers, as well as ensuring an appropriate and safe work environment. Despite the pandemic, teachers' salaries in Croatia have cumulatively increased since 2017 by 27%.

We started comprehensive education reform in 2016 in order to provide students with a more meaningful education, aligned with their developmental age and interests, and closer to daily life; education that will equip them for modern life, world of work and continuation of education. Financial resources, legislative basis and implementation mechanisms have been secured, and all new curricula for primary and secondary education have been adopted, and introduced frontally in 2021 in all classes in primary and secondary schools.

During the Covid-19 pandemic and recent earthquakes that hit Croatia in 2020 and 2021, the Ministry of Science and Education provided psychological support and counselling for students, teachers and parents. Moreover, our Team for Psychological Crisis Interventions in the Education System continuously provides psychosocial support to schools and organizes professional trainings on topics related to the mental health of children and young people.

We are focusing on well-being and resilience in education and training. This is also addressed in cross-curricular topics Personal and social development (mostly addressing violence prevention and anti-bullying) and Health (including mental health) that are implemented frontally in all primary and secondary schools. The school climate is good and Croatian students report high overall happiness.

Covid-19 crisis has showed us that although our education and training systems might have responded quickly and efficiently, they were not equally accessible for everyone.

Croatia is often given as an example of swiftly moving to distance and online learning during the Covid-19 crisis. This is because we started our education reform and launched major projects in this regard back in 2015. We equipped most schools, educated teachers and worked for years on developing digitally mature schools.

Opening and closing of schools in Croatia for the last two school years has been based on local epidemiological situations, right down to school level, with coordination across the country. According to UN data on education in the pandemic - of all EU countries, Croatia had the shortest closed schools.

However, the online learning during the COVID-19 crisis has shown that the level of digital maturity of higher education institutions at the national level is not always uniform. It prevents access to quality education for students of lower socio-economic background as well as students in less-developed regions.

This aspect needs to be addressed in order to prepare for future crisis, and Croatia will use the entire allocation for higher education in the Resilience and Recovery Plan for levelling the digital maturity of higher education institutions to the same standards. And most importantly, we will take into special consideration representatives of vulnerable groups.

Still, we do not have all the answers, we are on a journey and continually learning about what it takes to transform systems.

In today's time of digital and green transition, it is important to enable all people to continuously acquire skills, regardless of their age, gender or origin. We want our citizens to be engaged and lead the change.

Therefore, in the coming time, the right to quality and affordable education for all under equal conditions is of utmost importance for building a stable and successful economy and society as a whole.

Croatian Government, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, continuously encourage the process of building Croatia as a knowledge and innovation-oriented country, emphasizing the importance of education and science as development priorities that enable long-term social stability and economic progress.

Thank you