

Reformed model of skills competitions

POLICY DEVELOPMENT**PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE** CROATIA

Timeline

**ID number 28792**

Background

The VET system development programme 2016-20 identifies student skills competitions as an important instrument for VET promotion and calls for a reform of such competitions to increase their relevance and promotional potential.

Objectives

To promote the attractiveness and the excellence of VET, this policy development aims to reform the model of VET student competitions with a strong focus on skills' demonstration, visibility and the involvement of companies and key stakeholders in VET. This is expected to improve the reputation of VET as a desirable and high-quality education option for Croatian students and introduce students to excellence, professional skills at an advanced level, high professional standards, contemporary business practices and state-of-the-art technologies.

Description

In January 2017, an initiative on Promoting student competences and VET through skills competitions and fairs was launched to modernise VET student skills competitions in Croatia and encourage participation in national and international skills competitions. In its initial stage in 2018, the project analysed the existing national and international VET student skills competitions and fairs and developed a new model of competitions in Croatia consistent with major international competitions such as WorldSkills and EuroSkills. In preparation for the implementation of the new model, the programme and rules of competitions were developed at sectoral level, along with test books and assessment criteria for each discipline in national skills competitions. Throughout the project, AVETAE supported VET schools, student mentors and students in the introduction of the new model of competitions, organisation of annual national skills competitions, and in preparation for and participation in international WorldSkills and EuroSkills competitions.

In 2018, the new model of skills competitions in VET was prepared and presented. It addressed the relevance of disciplines and task design, competitor assessment, visibility,

low involvement of businesses, as well as the potential for career guidance, job recruitment and VET promotion. First, it streamlined the number of disciplines so that they reflected all sectors in VET evenly, as well as full qualifications in VET. For the first time, competing disciplines for students with disabilities were introduced, in addition to cross-sector disciplines in technologically progressive industries such as robotics and mechatronics. Based on employer input, technical description and model task were developed for each discipline, which are now more closely aligned to vocational curricula taught in schools, as well as the latest industry standards. As the principal shift from the previous design, the new model of competition placed practical skills in the spotlight by eliminating all theoretical examinations and encouraging teamwork. Finally, the new model enhanced the transparency of competition through reformed assessment and clearer separation of responsibilities.

Stakeholders are also involved in the process of developing the competition model. VET schools contribute to the development and implementation of the new model of student skills competitions in Croatia, and also participate in international skills competitions. Different stakeholders are asked to contribute to the project implementation by nominating prospective competitors and evaluators or potential partners from the business sector.

2017 Design

2018 Design

2019 Implementation

Linking Croatia to the global skills movement, the Agency for VET and Adult Education (ASOO) organised the first WorldSkills Croatia competition in March 2019, which launched the reformed model of VET student competitions with:

- (a) 44 disciplines and 3 fairs in 13 VET sectors in 15 000 square meters of exhibition space;
- (b) 568 competitors;
- (c) 436 mentors;
- (d) 220 assessment committee members;
- (e) 10 000 visitors in two days;
- (f) 34 VET schools hosting disciplines and fairs;
- (g) 260 participating VET schools out of a total of 299 VET schools in Croatia;
- (h) 24 companies as partners, supporting the competition with over EUR 65 000 (estimated) of donations, equipment and financial contributions.

The WorldSkills Croatia 2019 competition ensured strong stakeholder endorsement from VET schools and companies, the ministry responsible for education, the public employment service (HZZ) and the chamber of crafts (HOK). It was visited by the President of the Republic of Croatia and raised significant media attention with nationwide coverage. Primary school students from the entire country participated in career guidance and try-a-skill activities during the competition. The event has already produced positive short-term effects, such as closer cooperation between VET providers and companies, employment opportunities offered to competitors, and a strong commitment of employers to support similar events in the future.

After the WorldSkills Croatia 2019 competition, nationwide campaigns for the promotion of VET ensued, in parallel with the main enrolment period in secondary education. The central message of ASOO campaign, Skills surround us. Choose vocational education! highlighted the importance of vocational skills for the modern-day economy, as well as attractive education opportunities and favourable employment outlook for VET graduates. Enrolment in 2019/20 indicated an increased share of students in initial VET; detailed enrolment data showed that VET was becoming the first choice of Croatian students, including high-achievers. Significantly, higher enrolment was also recorded in VET programmes for shortage occupations.

2020 Implementation

WorldSkills Croatia competition was planned in 2020, but cancelled in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021 Implementation

In May 2021, WorldSkills Croatia 2021 was organised under strict health and safety measures in consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The VET learners' competitions were held in:

- (a) 43 skills in 13 VET sectors in 16 000 square meters of exhibition space;
- (b) 303 competitors;
- (c) 296 mentors;
- (d) 156 assessment committee members;
- (e) 29 VET schools hosting skills;
- (f) 30 companies as partners, supporting the competition with over EUR 43 000 (estimated) of donations, equipment and financial contributions.

The project activities successfully adapted to the challenges caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, and largely shifted to a virtual environment. Project activities were recognised as an important mechanism for promoting VET excellence and attractiveness.

2022 Implementation

From May 10 to 12 2022 a national skills competition WorldSkills Croatia 2022 was held on more than 15.000 square meters of exhibition space. Due to the improvement of the epidemiological situation, compared to the 2021 model of the competition, the competition was opened to visitors.

WorldSkills Croatia 2022 was held in:

- (a) 40 Skills in 13 VET sectors;
- (b) 357 competitors;
- (c) 336 mentors;
- (d) 157 assessment committee members;
- (e) 27 VET school hosting skills;
- (f) 43 companies as partners, supporting the competition;
- (g) Organised buses for finishing grades of primary school students;
- (h) More than 6000 visitors;
- (i) 9 foreign experts and competitors competing in 3 Skills as guest competitors.

An addendum to the contract was signed in July 2022, extending the duration of the project until the end of September 2023 and providing additional funds to organise project activities in 2023.

2023 Implementation

The WorldSkills Croatia competitions were organised for the fourth time in 2023, marking the European Year of Skills. As the largest skills showcase in the country, the event involved over 400 VET teachers and trainers, 405 IVET learners and 46 skills competitions. Two-thirds of all IVET providers in Croatia participated in the competition, with 28 schools hosting competition skills. A nationwide campaign to promote VET accompanied the competition. As a result, more than 5,000 people attended the event, including 1,100 primary school pupils from across the country. In 2023, over 40 companies supported the event through in-kind donations and hosting skills competitions, contributing to sustainability. In the EuroSkills Gdansk competition in 2023, the Croatian team won a bronze medal in fashion design and technology and a medal of excellence in hotel reception.

2024 Implementation

Organised for the fifth time in 2024, the WorldSkills Croatia competition involved over 350 VET teachers and trainers, 400 competitors, and 42 skills competitions. Two-thirds of all VET schools in Croatia participated in the competition, with 31 VET schools hosting specific competition skills. More than 6 000 visitors attended the event, including pupils from around 100 primary schools nationwide. Try-your-skill and

guidance activities were available, enabling visitors to explore VET pathways. The competition specifically encouraged company investment in training, improved employability of VET graduates, and accountability for learning outcomes in VET. In 2024, over 50 companies supported the event through in-kind donations of equipment, consumables, and awards for competitors. The international dimension of the WorldSkills competition was underpinned by international competitors from Austria, Finland and Montenegro, alongside visiting delegations from North Macedonia, Poland, Montenegro, Slovenia, Japan, Austria, and ReferNet national partners from across Europe. Croatia also participated in the WorldSkills global competition in Lyon in September 2024, winning a medal of excellence in health and social care. Future WorldSkills Croatia competitions will continue to promote VET attractiveness, supported by EUR 13.5 million from the ESF+, through the project, Support for Excellence, Innovation, and Visibility of VET, which started in January 2024 to last until December 2029.

Bodies responsible

- Agency for VET and Adult Education (ASOO)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Education professionals

Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

Companies

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

Lifelong guidance

European and international dimensions of VET

EU and international skills competitions

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

VET promoting equality of opportunities

Osnabrück Declaration

European Education and Training Area and international
VET

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

Agency for VET and Adult Education (2018). New model of VET student competitions. [Novi model natjecanja učenika strukovnih škola]

ESF project description Promoting student competences and VET through skills competitions and fairs

[Worldskills Croatia website](#)

Related policy developments

2024 Implementation

National Education System Development Plan for the period up to 2027

In response to the challenges affecting VET, the National Education System Development Plan for the period up to 2027 proposes a number of measures, building on key reform initiatives from the previous strategic period. The specific measures related to VET (Area 3 of the Plan) include:

 CROATIA

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

VET system development programme 2016-20

The VET system development programme 2016-20 provides the strategic framework for VET development and reform. The programme was adopted by the Croatian Government in September 2016 and a related action plan was adopted two months later by the ministry responsible for education.

 CROATIA

Type of development

Strategy/Action

plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). Reformed model of skills competitions: Croatia. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2025). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2024 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28792>