Croatian education system provides education services at pre-school, primary school, high-school and higher education levels, as well as for adult education, so as to enable every user to develop his/her potential optimally, aiming at their personal development and entry into the labour market, including their preparedness for lifelong learning.

Education in Croatia is available to all, under equal conditions, in line with their capabilities. Compulsory education is free of charge, as stipulated by law, while private schools and colleges/polytechnics can be established in accordance with the relevant legal framework. Universities are guaranteed autonomy and they can independently decide on their structure, organisation and operation (Articles 66 and 67 of the Croatian Constitution).

Croatian education system is centrally managed by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES) [1]. Besides MSES, other national public bodies involved in the regulation, development and quality control of the educational sector in Croatia are Education and Teacher Training Agency [2], Agency for Vocational Education and Training [3], Agency for Science and Higher Education [4], Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes [5] and National Center for External Evaluation of Education [6].

In line with the aforementioned, Croatian education system consists of the following levels: early childhood and pre-school education, elementary education, high school education and higher education.

**Pre-school education**

Pre-school education in Croatia includes education and care about pre-school children. It is carried out through programmes of care, education, healthcare, meals and social care for children aged from 6 months to school age children.

Early Childhood and Pre-school Education constitutes the first level of the educational system and, except for the pre-school educational program for children in the year prior to 1st grade of primary school, it is not compulsory for all pre-school children. It is divided into three educational cycles, based on the age of children: (1) from 6 months to one year of age, (2) from 1 to 3 years, (3) from 3 years of age to the start of primary education.

Early education and child care is financed and managed by local authorities, while MSES provides central guidance, accreditation and control over the educational programmes which are implemented in organizations providing early education and child care.
**Elementary (Single-Structure Primary and Lower Secondary) Education**

Elementary education includes primary and lower secondary levels organised as a single structure system, beginning at the age of 6 and consisting of eight years of compulsory schooling. In elementary education segment, special care is dedicated to the possibilities for education of students of national minorities in their mother tongue. Besides the regular schools which provide tuition in Croatian, a number of schools – almost fifty - provide tuition in Serbian, Italian, Czech and Hungarian languages. Just as national minority students can, according to their own decision, enroll into regular schools providing tuition in Croatian, students of Croatian nationality can – and quite a few of them indeed do - enroll into schools providing tuition in some of the minority languages.

The founders of elementary schools are: the Republic of Croatia, counties (20 counties) and the City of Zagreb, municipalities, towns, as well as legal and physical persons. Primary schools can be regular ones, with a general education program, special ones, with programs for children with developmental disabilities, art schools (dance and ballet), and schools in the language and writing of national minorities.

**High school (Upper Secondary) Education**

High school education is not compulsory in Croatia but almost all students do enroll into the general or vocational upper secondary courses upon completing elementary school. Following the completion of single structure education, secondary education (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education) enables everyone, under equal conditions and in accordance with individual capabilities, to acquire knowledge and competencies to work and/or continue education.

High schools, depending on their program, are grammar schools, vocational schools or art schools. High school education enables students to acquire knowledge and competences for work and for continuation of education. Secondary education in grammar school programs is completed by taking the State Matura exam. In vocational and art education programs, lasting a minimum of 4 years, it is completed once a final paper is completed, submitted and defended, in a procedure organized and carried out by the school. If a student of art and vocational programs, lasting a minimum of 4 years, wishes to continue education at a higher education institution, he/she is obliged to take the State Matura exam.

**Home education**

Compulsory education can be provided at home in exceptional circumstances (because of health reasons). Teaching activity can be organized at home or in a health institution for students who cannot attend school because of severe motor disorders or chronic illnesses for a longer period of time. Ministry has to approve that the teaching activity is organized at home for specific students. Also, it is possible for students to write exams and the teaching activity can be organized as distance learning with the use of digital technology. Home education/distance learning and education in a health institution are defined by Regulations on primary and secondary education of students with developmental disabilities (**Pravilnik o osnovnoškolskom i srednjoškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju učenika s teškoćama u razvoju**, Official Gazette 24/2015) which refers to education of students with developmental disabilities and students with health issues.
Ministry of Science and Education needs to give permission to the school to organize education at home or in a health institution for students who are suffering from chronic illnesses or severe motor disorders. Home education is allowed only for the students in question and only top level authority can give permission.

Qualified teachers who are teaching at school are also teaching the students at home. For children in lower and upper secondary education, grades five to eight, home education is provided by their school teachers, but for children who are in one of the first four grades often a new teacher is employed working only with the child educating at home. If the latter is the case, education is provided in less instruction time than prescribed. The required level of education for teachers is ISCED 7 in the appropriate field and their professional competency needs to be confirmed after completion of ITE. The requirements are the same as for teachers in schools.

There are no top level regulations defining specifically educational supervision/monitoring and assessment of the child’s progress and frequency of exams in education at home, but in practice education at home or in a health institution is similar or the same with the one provided in school. The same educational supervision, monitoring and assessment of the child’s progress as for children in school is in place, because the students after the period of education provided at home or in a health institution return to the school. Students do not lose their continuity of study, they do not have to compensate for the lessons learned at home and they do not have to write exams in school afterwards. Schools need to provide the conditions for students who are educating at home to write exams. Students who are healthy enough and able to take exams their knowledge is assessed in accordance with the curriculum. In order for the students to be transferred to the next class, their knowledge needs to be assessed and positively graded at the end of the school year.

Higher education

The higher education system is twofold and comprises of university and professional study programmes of different duration.

University study programs prepare students for scientific or professional careers in public and private sector. Professional study programs provide students with an appropriate level of knowledge and skills enabling them to work professionally and become directly involved in the working process.

Higher education is provided by the universities - most of them public - whose organizational autonomy and academic freedom in teaching and research is guaranteed by the Croatian Constitution. Great majority of funding for higher education is provided by the state, covering such items as salaries for academic staff, capital investment and running costs for academic institutions, research funds, student subsistence and tuition fees and other.

Adult education

Adult education system is also an integral part of the Croatian education system. Adult education practices in Croatia, in many of its integral parts and characteristics, are aligned with those of the developed countries. Croatia has a network of institutions for adult education throughout its territory,
as well as a large number of various institutions which, apart from their regular activities, carry out adult education program. The range of the programs, especially in non-formal education, is very wide and, as a rule, was created in response to the educational needs of citizens and legal entities.

**Art education**

Croatia has a well-developed system of art education, which is carried out in accordance with the Art Education Act and Primary and Secondary Education Act. Art schools are the music, dance, visual arts schools and other schools which carry out art education programs. Art education is available to everyone under equal conditions, regardless of race, sex, language, religious, political or other orientation, national or social background, property, birth, social position, disability, sexual preference or age, according to individual capability. The children of citizens of European Union member states are entitled to access art education under the same conditions as Croatian citizens, and enroll into Croatian art education institutions under the same conditions as Croatian citizens. The children of Croatian citizens that received education in one of the EU member states but want to continue their education in Croatia are entitled to art education in Croatia under the same conditions as Croatian citizens who attend art education institutions in Croatia.

**Education for pupils with learning difficulties**

Education for pupils with learning difficulties is carried out in regular schools with complete or partial integration, depending on the type and degree of the difficulty, following regular, individualized or special programs or, exceptionally, if the pupils need additional health or social care, in special education institutions.

The primary schools, the secondary schools, the high-school student dormitories and other public institutions carry out classes and other forms of educational activity in Croatian language and in Latin alphabet. Single structure and secondary education of the children of the members of national minorities is carried out according to the stipulations of the Act on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities, the stipulations of the Act on Primary and Secondary Education and other legislation. Apart from classes in Croatian, primary and secondary schools can carry out classes in some of the subjects and contents in a foreign language, following an approval by the ministry responsible for education.

**Management of Education System in Croatia**

The national body responsible for the education system in Croatia is the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES). The Ministry is the relevant implementation body which, through its structure, activities and capacities ensures the basic conditions for sustainable development of the human potential in the education system. As part of its regular activity, the Ministry provides all the necessary support, professionally, materially and financially, to the system users and stakeholders. The MSES’ vision is to establish a globally competitive, quality, accessible and sustainable educational system, synchronized with the labor market needs, and the needs of the society as a whole. The Ministry’s mission is to develop programs and projects which ensure equal access to all levels of education during entire lifetime, to develop programs, contents and strategies which contribute to the development of educated individuals with adaptable competences, to build an education system that
is transparent, and based on information technology and modern research.

In view of this, the Ministry’s goals, hitherto and in the forthcoming period, are the following: to ensure and improve quality, to increase accessibility, efficiency and relevance of education system at all levels, to develop an efficient network of education institutions and qualifications/programs/curricula aimed at developing human potential and harmonized with the needs of the society and of the labor market, to develop quality assurance system at all levels of education, to improve vocational education and adult education, and to stimulate inclusive education.

The Ministry realizes the aforementioned goals through coordinated and responsible consideration and through the action of all partner stakeholders in the educational activity, including the specialized institutions such as Education and Teacher Training Agency, Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education, Agency for Science and Higher Education and the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education. The development, monitoring and assessment of education system was assigned to specialized institutions in order to professionalize system management and to clearly distribute responsibilities between the ministry, as a state body charged primarily with system development strategy, and independent institutions, whose task is to professionally and administratively support the implementation of the adopted education policies.