
CEDEFOP OPINION SURVEY
ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

CROATIA



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Introduction

Interpretation of results derived from the first general population opinion survey on vocational education and training (hereafter: VET) conducted in Croatia merits at least three general caveats, also useful for understating key features of the contemporary Croatian VET system.

The first caveat emerges from the legacy of the socialist era. A substantial part of the sample participating in this survey attended secondary education in the 1975-1991 period which saw the Vocation-oriented education reform that considerably blurred distinction between the general and vocational education. It had explicit objective to: ‘...abolish secondary education of the general, liberal-arts (‘gymnasium’) type, which normally led to further university education, and thus make all education ‘vocation oriented’ This means that the entire secondary education was transformed to include two years of joint foundations, constituting a general introduction, after which students were educated for specific jobs.’ (Bačević, 2016: 78-9). This in practice means that for survey participants aged between 40 and 56, at the time of their initial secondary education, all education was vocational, at least in name. Consequently, results of this survey have to be considered in this context, particularly those related to participants’ understanding of secondary education programmes they attended.

Secondly, data provided by this survey fails to account for heterogeneity of VET programmes in Croatia, both between four and three-year VET programmes and within two subtypes of three-year programmes. Those tracks are different with respect to important features such as duration, organization of work-based learning, occupational specificity, level of standardization and linkages to the labour market and tertiary education (more in: Matković, et al., 2013: 9-13), and it is safe to say that experience of those attending different tracks largely differs in degree of ‘vocationalness’. Therefore, joint interpretation of results risks obscuring substantive differences within the VET.

Third, while throughout the EU ‘the likelihood of finding a job’ is strongly associated with choosing VET and ‘the possibility of continuing to higher education’ with general education (Cedefop, forthcoming: 33); one should consider limits of this dichotomy in the Croatian context. With offer of general education placements stagnant at about 12 000 per year, and about 35 thousand students enrolling in tertiary education annually, one should note that four year VET programmes in Croatia often serve as a secondary route to higher education. This is particularly the case for technical courses in engineering, electrical engineering, tourism and civic engineering, where more than two thirds

of pupils make direct transition to tertiary education (Jokić and Ristić Dedić, 2014: 66-67). Although entailing a less general curricula, in formal sense they represent a route to higher education equivalent to grammar schools. This is not the case with three year VET programmes, whose graduates face substantial obstacles to vertical mobility. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that at least part of four year VET participants did not see their educational choice at the secondary level as 'preparation for specific occupation' but as an alternative route to higher education.

Having this in mind, analysis within this article will focus on two key dimensions. Firstly, comparison between Croatian respondents with experience of VET and general education will be systematically reflected upon in this article. This will hopefully contribute to better understanding of VET/general education divide in the Croatian context, including the role of VET in reproducing social inequalities (Doolan, Lukić and Buković, 2016).

The second dimension relates to analysing Croatian VET in a broader comparative context, such accounts being extremely rare (Bartlett, Cino Pagliarello and Millio, 2014). In hope of sharpening the comparative outlook, Croatian results will be compared to Austrian, Slovenian and Italian ones. These cases were chosen as a point of reference due to territorial proximity and historical congeniality, with the Austrian corporatist tradition exerting influence in initial formation of VET system in other respective countries in late 19th century. Furthermore, an additional insight into the Austrian case, being in many ways one of the frontrunners in VET quality, may be particularly salient in the context of recent debate on possible introduction of dual system in Croatia (SEECCEL, 2017). Comparison between Croatian and Italian cases is interesting because they share similar models of education to labour market transitions, with general education usually seen as a more prestigious (Matković, 2011: 63-65). Finally, Croatia and Slovenia shared the same institutional context for most of their respective modern histories, their developmental trajectories considerably diverging particularly after the break-up from Yugoslavia (Boduszynski, 2010).

The article proceeds by reviewing results of survey findings, starting with section on awareness and knowledge, followed by those on attractiveness and access; experience and satisfaction; and outcomes and effectiveness. Each section consists of two subsections. The first compares Croatian figures to EU average and details any interesting differences in perspective between general education (hereafter: GE) and VET participants. The second subsection compares Croatian with respective Austrian, Italian and Slovenian data. Key findings and proposals for future research are detailed in the concluding section.

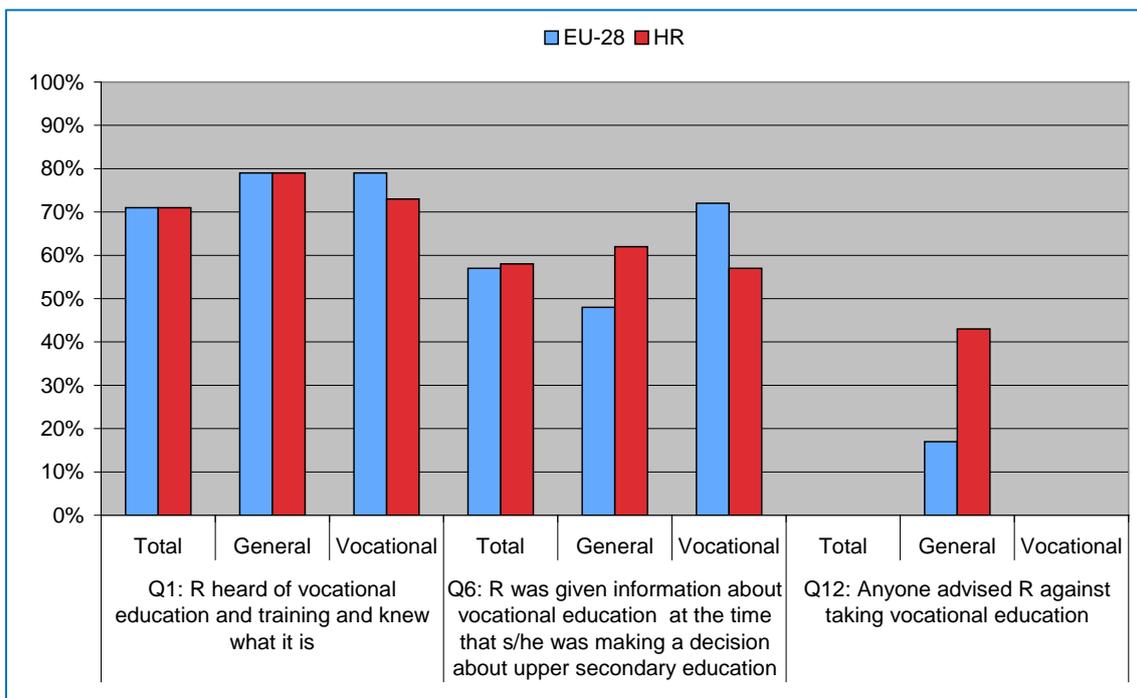
CHAPTER 1.

Awareness and knowledge

Between-track differences and distance to EU average

General recognisability of the term 'vocational education and training' among Croatian respondents equals the EU average (71%). However, research report identifies Croatia as something of a 'deviant case' in terms of correlation between likelihood of participants being familiar with the term and presence of VET profiles in the general population (Cedefop, forthcoming: 30). This is due to lower incidence of knowledge about the concept among VET participants themselves (73% vs 79%). Here is worth reminding that for significant part of Croatian participants (those aged 40-56, i.e. who entered secondary education 1974-1989 period) difference between GE and VET may carry little importance in cognitive terms.

Figure 1. Information about VET among GE and VET participants



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

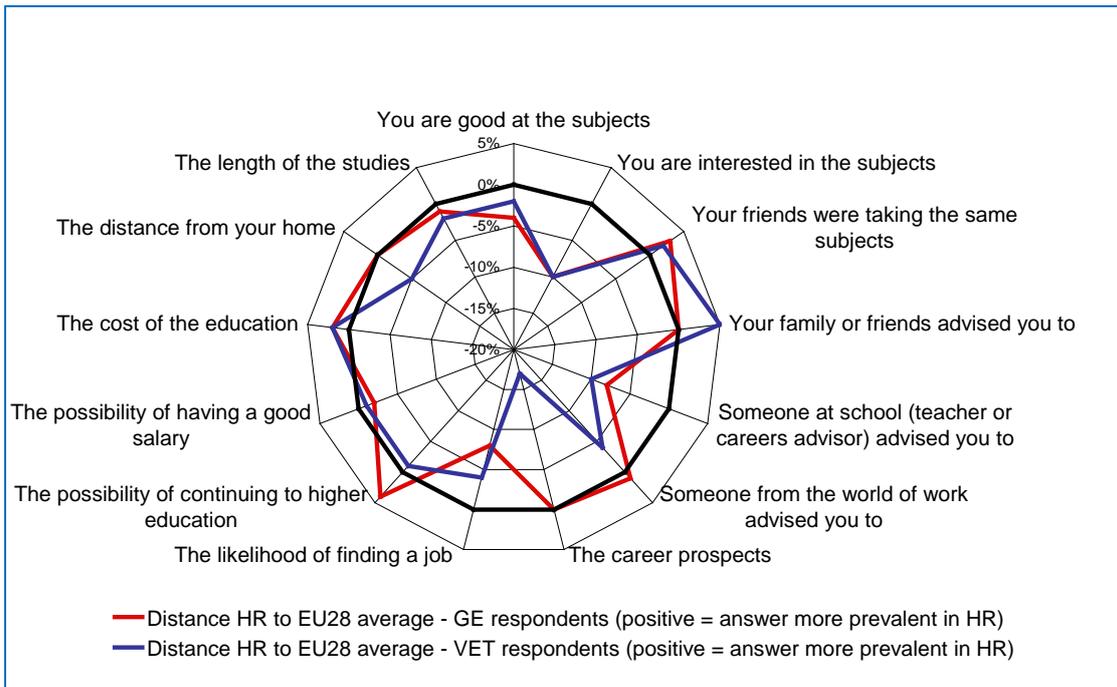
When assessing certain claims about functions of VET, participants did so in reference to national realities. Therefore, Croatian results are consistent with the structure of the national vocational education system. Compared to EU average,

respondents are more likely to place VET implementation in school environment (78 to 75% respectively) and corollary, less likely to place it in work environment (67 to 75% respectively). Frequency of responses to claims that VET takes place in higher education and that it prepares students for specific occupation are close to EU average (43 to 45% and 87 to 88% respectively). They are however slightly less inclined to link VET to manual labour (64 to 70% respectively), the most likely intervening factor being the economic structure strongly geared towards services, primarily in tourism.

With respect to participants having received any information on VET when making their secondary education choice, Croatia stands around the EU average, yet there seems to be an asymmetry once educational pathways are taken into account. Namely, compared to EU average Croatian participants that eventually went to GE were more likely to receive information on VET prior to making secondary education choice. However, those who eventually went to VET were less likely to be informed compared to their EU peers. Respective differentials between Croatian result and EU average are 14% in favour of Croatian GE participants (62 to 48% respectively) and 15% in favour of EU VET participants (72 to 57% respectively). This finding is consistent with lower familiarity with VET among vocational education graduates in Croatia, raising important questions on quality and access to career guidance and indirectly, link between educational and social stratification.

However, respondents who chose GE were considerably more likely to be advised against enrolling in VET (43% HR vs 25% EU), with role of friends (HR 12% vs EU 5%) and family in particular being considerably more prevalent (HR 36% vs 17% EU). This could be viewed as troublesome finding in terms of stratification and propensity to social reproduction and segregation.

Figure 2. Factors which had played role in choosing the upper secondary education track: distance from EU-28 average



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

The role of family was also more accentuated in listing of factors contributing to enrolment among the Croatian VET students than their EU peers (36 to 31%). With respect to most other factors, Croatian participants are less likely than EU average to stress them as instrumental in their secondary education choice; with patterns being shared by GE and VET participants for the most part. However, among Croatian VET participants, career prospects were mentioned considerably less often than among their European counterparts (33 to 16% respectively), while those who went to GE were more likely to stress possibility of proceeding to higher education as contributing to enrolling than their EU counterparts. This finding is also in line with perception of VET as an inferior educational choice.

Croatia and peer countries

What can be made of this element of the Croatian data set when placed in a comparative context of three proximate EU member states?

Croatian participants are less inclined to state familiarity with the term 'vocational education and training' compared to Slovenian peers (71 to 80% respectively), considerably more inclined than Italian ones (71 to 51% respectively) and equally so as Austrian participants. These results at first may be somewhat difficult to interpret, but other respective country findings may be

somewhat helpful. When asked if they received any information on VET prior to making their secondary education choice, Croatian respondents trail Austrian ones by 10% (68 to 58% respectively) and Slovenian by no less than 24% (68 to 82% respectively), while being well ahead of Italian peers (58 to 43% respectively). It seems that Croatian result case stands at equidistance from Slovenian and Austrian on one; and Italian on the other side. This is not the only situation when comparison of these four cases yields similar distribution; with respect to likelihood of secondary education entrants being advised against enrolling VET; Croatia (43%) is positioned on equal distance between Slovenian (31%), Austrian (35%) and Italian (47%) result.

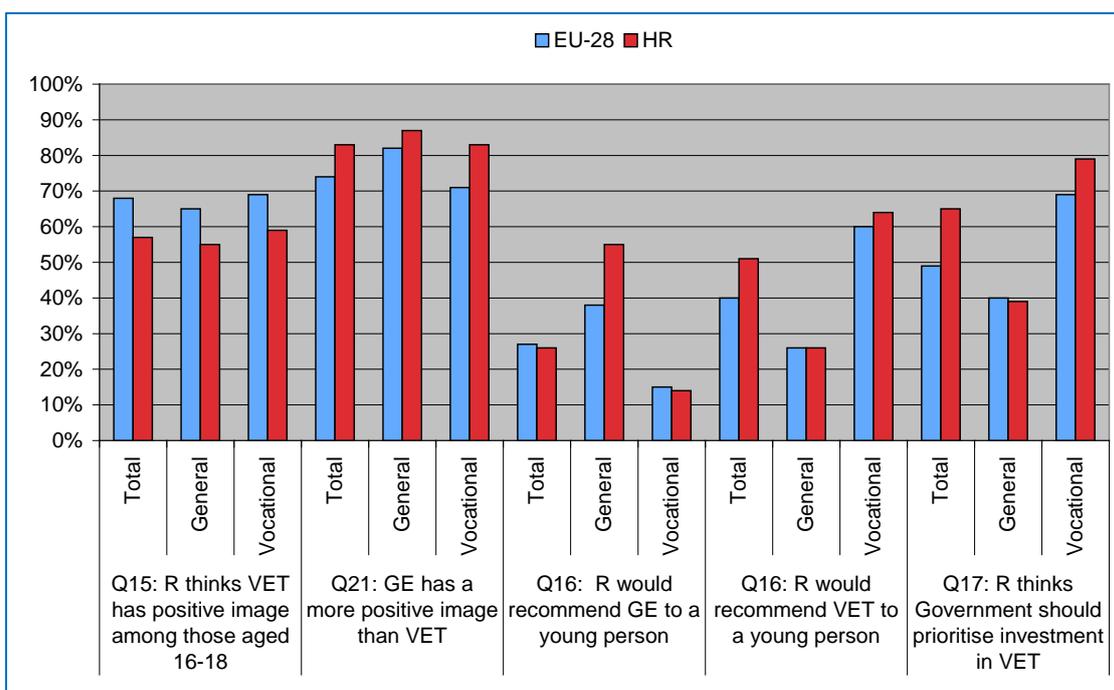
CHAPTER 2.

Attractiveness and access

Between-track differences and distance to EU average

Slightly more than half of Croatian respondents (57%) consider the image of vocational education to be positive. This is substantially less favourable perception than EU average (68%), and holds root both among those who participated in vocational education and those who did not. Consistently, there is a greater level of agreement with thesis that general education has a more positive image than vocational education (83% HR vs 74% EU), which Croatian VET participants in particular are more likely to acknowledge than their peers in other EU countries (83% HR-VET vs 71% EU-VET). However, when asked about recommending the course for upper secondary education, Croatian respondents are more likely to provide categorical answer than EU average, and more likely to recommend VET (51% HR vs 40% in EU). This pattern is pointing at high level of social reproduction, as respondents who have completed GE are considerably more likely to recommend general education than their EU counterparts (55% vs 38%), while respondents who have completed VET are somewhat more likely to recommend VET than their EU counterparts (64% vs 60%).

Figure 3. Assessment of VET attractiveness and support among GE and VET participants

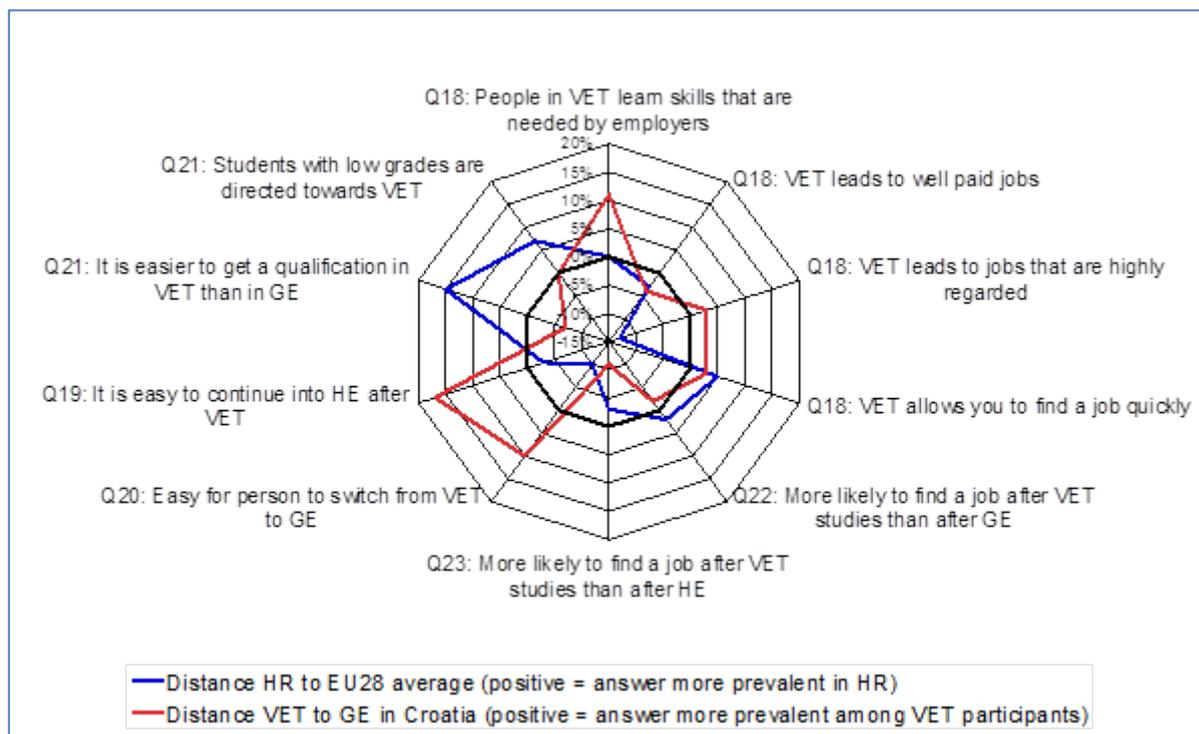


Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

With respect to attractiveness of VET in terms of perceived labour market relevance, Croatian respondents are likely to see it as a trade-off: being more inclined to stress it as instrumental to finding a job quickly (72% HR vs 67% EU), while being less enthusiastic about the level of prestige of those jobs (47% HR vs 60% EU). As for within-country between-tracks gap analysis ⁽¹⁾ of differences in perception of VET labour market relevance, opinions of VET and GE graduates diverge on only two issues. First, respondents with VET background are overwhelmingly (90%) likely to agree with the statement that people in VET acquire skills needed by employers, while participants with general education are not as univocal (79%). Second, VET participants are less likely (35%) than GE participants (46%) to perceive job prospects of VET graduates as more favourable than prospects of higher education graduates, whereas it is a common pattern in EU that VET graduates provide a more favourable VET-HE assessment (44%) than GE graduates (40%).

⁽¹⁾ Concept of gap analysis as used in this paper is based on an assumption that differences in educational objectives, content and methodology between VET/GE courses will induce differences in their participants' perception of certain educational features covered in this survey. Its primary analytical function is to explore whether differences/gaps in perception between different groups of participants follow logical/expected patterns that ought to emerge from specifics of VET and GE tracks.

Figure 4. Assessment of labour market relevance (right-side items) and VET access issues (left-hand side): gap analysis



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

With respect to perception of access, greater share of respondents in Croatia compared to EU average have agreed with statements that students with low grades are directed towards VET and that it is easier to get a qualification from VET than GE. However, when assessing ease of transition into higher education for VET students, Croatian respondents do not deviate from the EU average. Between-tracks gap analysis indicates that Croatian respondents who have participated in VET are as likely as their GE peers to perceive streaming of low-grade students towards VET, yet they are ‘defending their team colours’ by being less likely to agree that it is easier to get a qualification in VET and by having more favourable perception of possibility of continuing into HE after VET and switching from VET to GE course.

Croatian respondents are more likely to support government prioritising the vocational education (65% vs 49%). Again, this comparatively high level of support is being primarily driven by numerous respondents who have completed

VET themselves out of whom 80% support such a prioritisation (compared to EU average of 69%).

Croatia and peer countries

When asked to assess VET image in their countries, the highest share of Italian respondents (75%) are inclined to view it positively, followed by Austrians (73%); with Croatians (57%) and Slovenians (54%) significantly trailing their counterparts⁽²⁾. Interestingly, below the EU average results for both Slovenia and Croatia indicate similar challenges in making VET attractive in eyes of the broader public. Similarly, only 12% of Croatian and 14% of Slovenian respondents disagree with the statement that GE has a more positive image in their country compared to VET, a share somewhat lower than Italy (18%) and considerably lower than Austria (25%). Potential influence of common institutional legacy comes to mind in this particular case, again pointing to value of a detailed comparative analysis between the Croatian and Slovenian case.

Slovenians and Croatians (75 and 65% respectively) are considerably more willing to prioritize public VET investments compared to Austrians and Italians (53% and 44% respectively). This undoubtedly indicates an opening for reform-oriented policy makers in Slovenia and Croatia. Austrian result could be understood in terms of relatively grounded satisfaction with quality of VET. Italian result indicates substantial challenges to reforms in VET sector, with public generally assessing VET positively (and differently from VET learners), with below-average support for prioritizing investment vis-a-vis GE.

Responses to group of statements relating to different aspects of labour market outcomes/quality of jobs pertaining VET qualification have Austrian participants consistently viewing VET outcomes most positively, trailed by Croatian, Italian and Slovenian counterparts. The most interesting finding here is the difference in perception between Croatian and Slovenian respondents. Although Slovenian VET participants are more content than their Croatian counterparts with regards to their educational experience, VET is assessed more favourably in terms of labour market outcomes in Croatia compared to Slovenia.

⁽²⁾ High rating for Italy is rather peculiar, considering low satisfaction of Italian VET participants with their secondary level experience. A relatively low share of VET participants in the Italian sample (Cedefop, forthcoming: 30) may account for this, meaning that result could be fuelled primarily by perceptions of GE participants lacking ground in experience.

When assessing relative ease of access to HE for VET graduates only Italian respondents exceed EU average (57 to 54% of agreeing respondents), while in remaining three countries (Austria, Croatia and Slovenia) assessment of this dimension is lower and comparatively similar (51 to 45%)

Finally, a series of results pertaining to access also indicate higher level of stratification in Croatia compared to peer countries. Thus comparatively high share of Croatian respondents (82%) perceives VET as destination of students with low grades; a result similar to Slovenian (83%), but higher than Austrian (75%) and Italian (72%). A similar stratification pattern applies to responses pertaining to easier access to VET diploma compared to GE (HR 78%, SI 74%, IT 72%, AT 64% of agreeing respondents) and perception of students with low grades being streamed towards VET (HR 82%, SI 83%, AT 75%, IT 72%). Also, as many as 60% of Croatian respondents view possibility of switch from VET to GE at secondary level as difficult; a share notably higher compared to Austria (45%), Italy (40%) and Slovenia (48%).

CHAPTER 3.

Experience and satisfaction

Between-track differences and distance to EU average

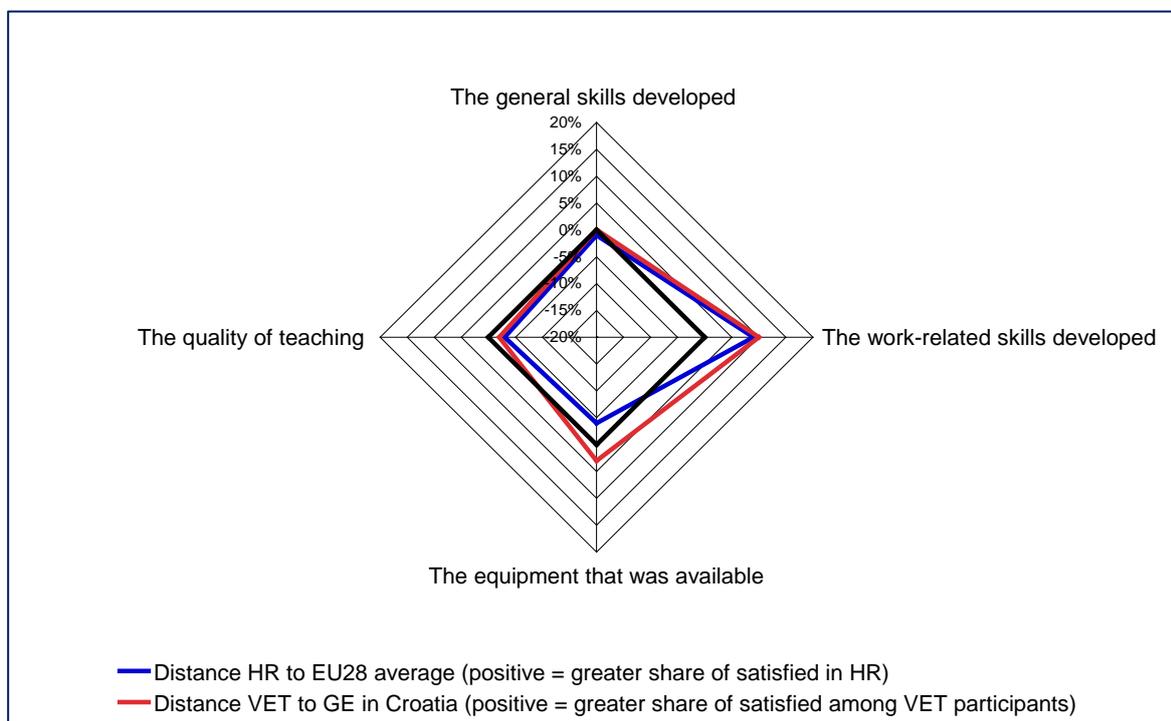
A considerably lower share of Croatian VET participants compared to EU average reported their secondary education to be exclusively school-based: 29 to 43% respectively. This points to significant incidence of low-intensity work-based learning within the VET system - primarily in form of two annual weeks of 'firm-based practice' within four-year technical VET education. Furthermore, a notably high share of Croatian GE participants (12%) claims their secondary education entailed at least some work-based learning content. This is to be understood as a legacy of the socialist era, difference between GE and VET being of little consequence to Croatian respondents attending secondary education during the 'vocation-oriented' period. In other words, it is plausible that some participants identifying their secondary educational choice as 'GE' actually attended a VET track during this period, usually entailing some level of work-based learning.

Yet with respect to high-intensity workplace training, only about 23% of Croatian VET participants reported spending half or more of their secondary education in the workplace, significantly trailing behind EU average of 32%. Those 23% are likely to pertain to intensive work-based learning in the three-year track, particularly those preparing for occupations in trades and crafts.

Participants were also asked to assess different aspects of their learning experience at the secondary level. Total share of Croatian VET participants claiming they procured general skills during their secondary education is around the EU average (88 to 90% respectively); same being the case for acquisition of work-related skills (85 to 87% respectively). However, assessments of Croatian VET participants trails the EU average considerably when it comes to availability of equipment (72 to 81% respectively) and, to lesser extent, the quality of teaching (84 to 89% respectively). Both of these findings are consistent with earlier research (Matković et al., 2013: 11; 22) which established strong fluctuations in financing of secondary education (reflected primarily in availability and quality of equipment for VET programmes) and inadequacy of teacher training (particularly for teachers of vocational subjects) as critical variables influencing quality of VET delivery in Croatia. Application of the gap analysis between GE and VET participants as presented below yields another interesting finding: although satisfaction of Croatian VET participants with acquisition of work-related skills is comparable to EU average, their advantage in comparison

with GE participants is considerably smaller compared to EU (10% compared to 25% respectively). This finding could also be accounted for by a significant share of 'misclassified' VET learners from the socialist period; an assumption also requiring further verification.

Figure 5. Satisfaction with learning experience in upper secondary education: gap analysis



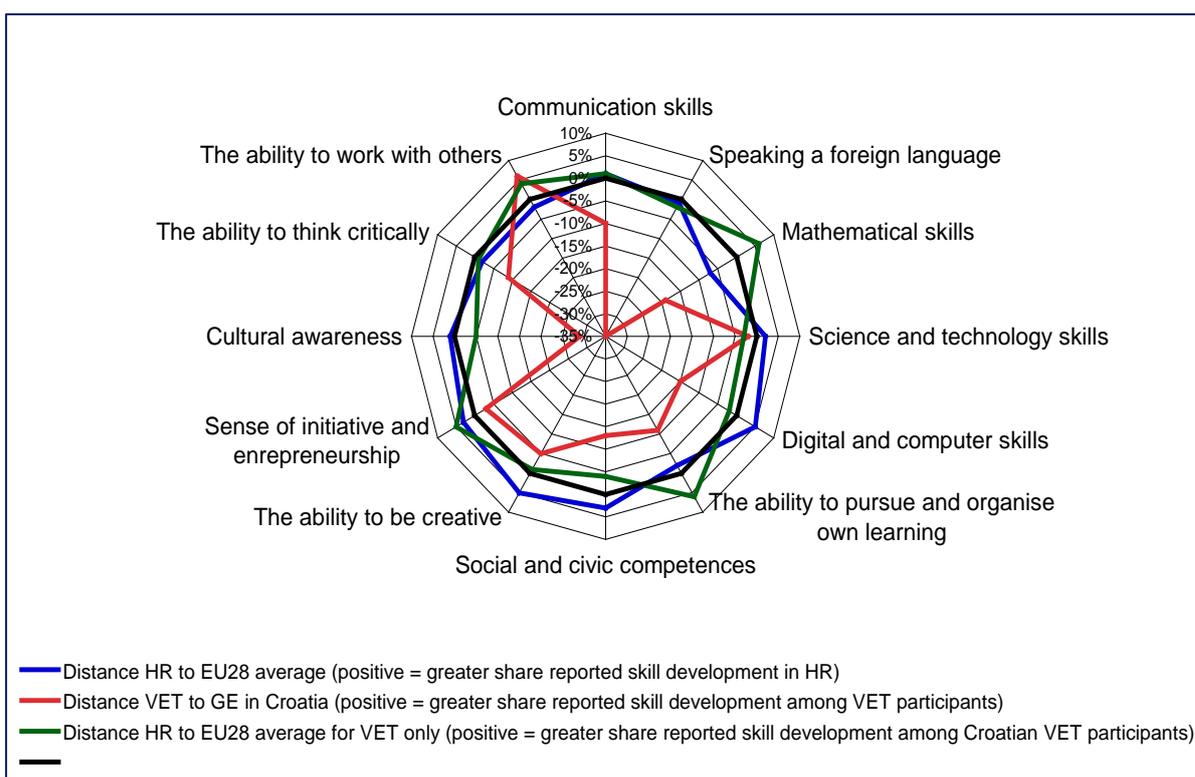
Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

Finally, respondents were asked to assess whether their secondary education helped them procure a number of skills, such as ability to speak a foreign language, mathematical skills or cultural awareness. Croatian results generally do not deviate significantly from the EU average, but again gap analysis between results of VET and GE participants provides several intriguing analytical clues. Although being present at the EU level as well with VET graduates trailing behind, gap differential ⁽³⁾ in Croatia is wider for a number of important skills. Namely, it is notably present when it comes to communication skills (-10% HR to -1% EU-28), command of foreign language (-35% HR to -23% EU-28), mathematical skills (-19% HR to -11% EU-28) and ability to pursue and

⁽³⁾ Gap differential is calculated by subtracting percentage of GE participants which were satisfied with a specific feature of their secondary-educational experience from the percentage of VET participants with identical responses.

organize learning (-11% HR to -1% EU-28). Particularly troublesome is gap differential on sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, yielding negative result of -3% for VET participants in Croatia, compared to 12% advantage in EU-28. This indicates that unlike throughout the EU, Croatian VET participants assess their acquisition of skills essential for starting a business worse than GE participants. Even after accounting for previously elaborated disclaimers pertaining to specific features and history of Croatian secondary education system, this set of results should be considered highly relevant and instructive for designated policy-makers.

Figure 6. Assessment of skill development in upper secondary education: gap analysis



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

Croatia and peer countries

Comparative analysis of responses provided by Croatian VET graduates with regards to acquisition of general skills indicates similarity to Austrian, Italian and Slovenian VET graduates (88% of satisfied respondents compared to 91%, 85% and 90% respectively). Croatian VET graduates (85%) seem to be somewhat less satisfied with their level of work-related skills compared to Austrian (92%)

and Slovenian peers (89%); with Italian respondents again trailing all three (80%). Satisfaction with availability of equipment follows the same pattern: the greatest share of Austrian participants expressing satisfaction (81%), followed by Slovenian (80%), Croatian (72%) and Italian (69%) peers. Comparatively largest share of Slovenian VET participants is/was satisfied with quality of teaching (90%), followed by Croatia and Austria (84%), Italy (80%) again lagging slightly behind. These results are generally in line with the pattern established in section on 'Awareness and knowledge', placing Croatian case between Austrian and Slovenian on one, and Italian on the other side.

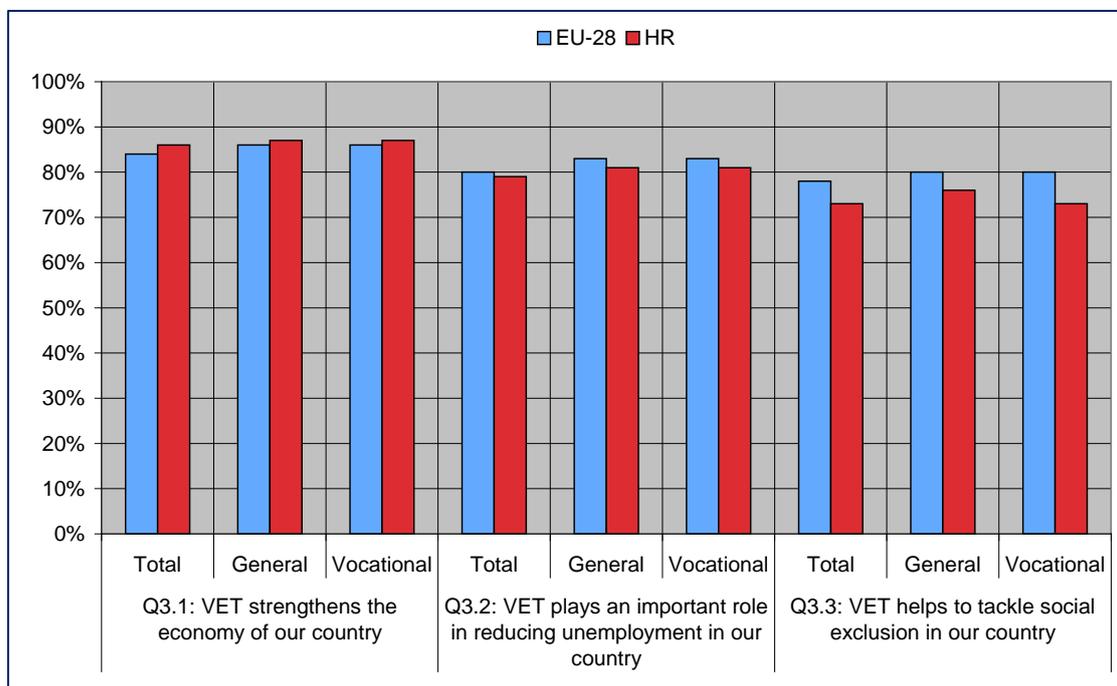
CHAPTER 4.

Outcomes and effectiveness

Between-track differences and distance to EU average

Perception of VET contribution at the societal level among Croatian respondents is prevalingly affirmative in all three dimensions, and closely follows the EU average with respect to contribution to economy and unemployment reduction. With respect to role of VET combating social exclusion, level of agreement is slightly lower than EU average, primarily due to less favourable assessment of Croatian respondents who have experienced VET themselves. This finding is consistent with results of prior study of policy practices aimed at fostering social inclusion and cohesion in the Croatian VET sector (Matković et al., 2013).

Figure 7. Assessment of VET effectiveness

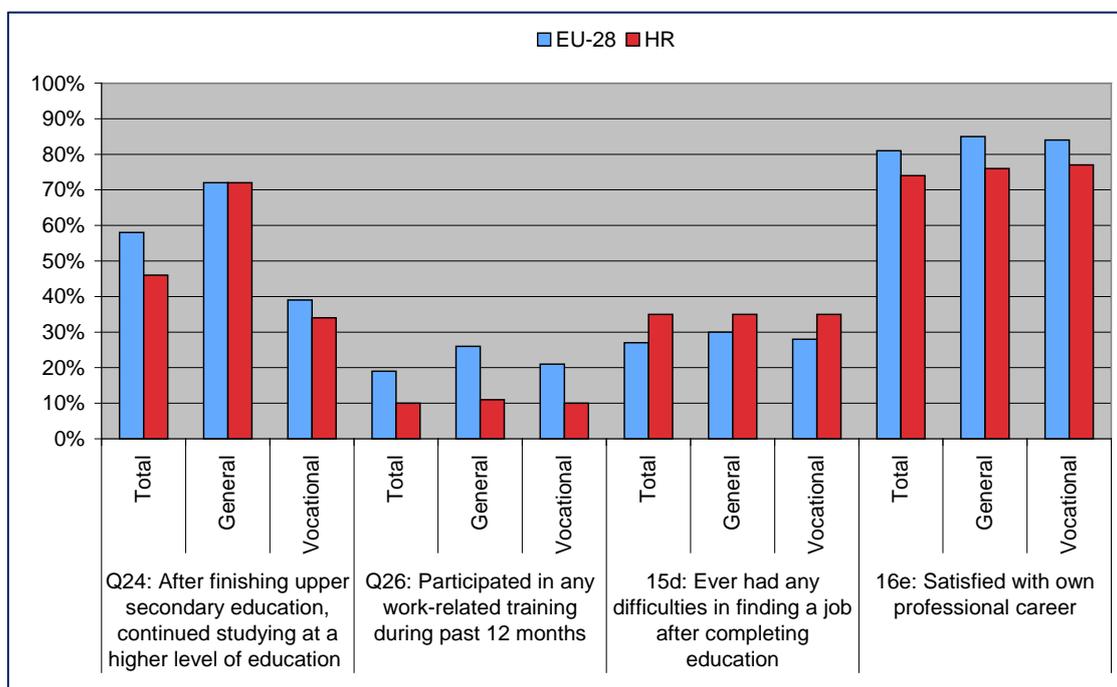


Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

At the personal level, with respect to continuation towards tertiary education, about one third of those who completed VET in Croatia continued towards tertiary education. However, this is actually slightly lower transition rate than EU average (34% to 39% respectively). In line with the Labour Force Survey and European Working Conditions Survey results, participation of Croatian respondents in work-

related training in Croatia is meagre, with one tenth reporting participating in such a training during the previous year, two times less than EU average. However while in EU respondents with VET background were somewhat less likely than their GE peers to participate in work-related training (21% vs 26%), in Croatia such a disadvantage is not evident.

Figure 8. Assessment of personal outcomes



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017)

There are no differences in career satisfaction or reporting difficulties in finding a job between Croatian VET and GE graduates, conforming to EU patterns. However, Croatian respondents were somewhat more likely to report problems in finding a job after completing education (35%) and being unsatisfied with their career (23%), compared to EU average (27% and 16% respectively)

Croatia and peer countries

Available data for this section allow comparison only on question of VET contribution to reducing unemployment. Croatians are somewhat less inclined to positively assess VET contribution in this regard compared to Austrians (79% to 83 respectively), but considerably more favourable compared to Slovenians (70%) and Italians (71%). Croatian result is relatively expected, particularly vis-à-vis Austrian and Italian. Slovenian respondents again assess VET contribution to

(un)employment issues somewhat negatively, an issue worthy of additional analytical pursuit.

CHAPTER 5.

Main conclusions and further research needs

Findings of section on 'Awareness and knowledge' dimension are generally in line with expectations when considering institutional framework of Croatian secondary education, as detailed in the introduction. However, findings on varying access to information on VET between participants from different educational background, as well as those relating to considerably more prominent role of family and friends in favour (or against) choice of VET are indicative of its role in social stratification. In terms of comparison with peer countries, it seems that in context of awareness of knowledge on VET Croatian results can be generally placed in equidistance between Austrian and Slovenian on one, and Italian ones on the other side.

Overview of Croatian results on 'Attractiveness and access' dimension point towards a potential paradox: respondents tend to view VET as inferior educational choice more often compared to EU average; while at the same time demonstrating widespread readiness to direct young people towards VET tracks. This puzzle may be understood more easily when viewed linked with two other findings. First, this result obscures a deep gap between two groups of Croatian respondents: those participating in VET and those participating in GE; with prior strongly supporting VET enrolment and access, while latter being more sceptical of its quality and opportunities for educational mobility. Again, we may be seeing indicators of socially reproductive patterns, meriting attention of both researchers and policy makers. Second, high support for prioritizing public investment in VET, again fuelled primarily by VET participants, may indicate that for many of them 'loyalty to the banner' is not decoupled from expectations to enhance quality of those programmes, particularly considering their quality is assessed quite negatively across number of dimensions. However, there is no such gap between GE and VET graduates when assessing labour market relevance of VET, where respondents are more likely than their EU peers to claim that VET leads to faster job acquisition, but in jobs that are less well regarded. Comparative analysis within this section fails to ascertain a visible pattern, with countries in seemingly randomized fashion being positioned on bottom, middle and top positions of the provisional ranking. The exception here are set of questions related to labour market outcomes pertaining to VET qualifications, those being perceived most positively by Austrians, followed by Croatians, Italians and Slovenians.

Results of section 'Experience and satisfaction' seemingly demonstrate that effect of institutional features of the Croatian secondary (VET) educational system needs to be kept in mind when interpreting results related to exposure to work-based learning and assessment of different elements of the educational process. Furthermore, they support findings of earlier research indicating salience of issues such as availability of necessary equipment, adequacy of teacher training, while also pointing to new critical issues, such as quality of entrepreneurial learning within VET tracks. In terms of comparison with peer countries, results within this section for the most part reproduce pattern detected in the section on

'Awareness and knowledge', placing Croatian case between Austrian and Slovenian on one, and Italian on the other side.

With respect to 'Outcomes and effectiveness', VET contribution to reducing key societal objectives of economic development, and unemployment reduction is well recognized by Croatian respondents, although (only) Austrian respondents had better outlook on VET contribution to unemployment reduction. However, Croatian VET participants are less likely to view VET as a relevant contribution to combating social exclusion than their EU peers, echoing finding of previous research on social inclusion in VET. Findings on participation of VET graduates in HE and recent participation in work-related training demonstrates that Croatia lags behind EU average in these dimensions. Although Croatian GE and VET participants similarly assess satisfaction with different aspects of their career, they generally lag behind their EU peers, yet this is more likely to be a result of economic development than the setup of educational system.

Findings of this analysis point towards several strengths of Croatian VET system in the public eye: support for investment, high level of ownership among VET participants and graduates, widespread (if not extensive) experience of workplace training, as well as perception of relevance and quality that is not deviating from EU average. However, VET in Croatia is hardly seen by citizens as an attractive or prestigious choice, and is perceived as lacking in terms of social inclusion and mobility. Results also indicate strong selectivity and social stratification between GE and VET tracks. The fact that such views are shared by many who experienced Croatian VET system makes the matter even more salient. This is an issue worth addressing, via inclusion/mobility policies, but those need more sound evidence base.

To start with, we suggest additional secondary analysis of current survey data for Croatia, based on microdata, in order to identify differences between cohorts (in particular to account for those who were in VET prior to transition); and between those for whom VET was final educational destination and those who went on complete tertiary education. As well, due to the fact that majority of respondents have completed their education (VET or other) decades ago, we suggest replicating this research with recent school leavers and current upper secondary education students (those are too small a subsample to produce meaningful conclusion in the current research), and thus better understand outlook that young people currently have on the secondary education. We consider this a critical evidence brick for building of a more inclusive and attractive VET system, in particular having in mind ongoing demographic changes.

Furthermore, results of limited comparative analysis employed in this study seem to justify a more focused research entailing Croatian and Slovenian case. Some comparisons indicate strong diverging trends, difficult to elaborate exclusively by differences in developmental trajectories. While in categories of 'Awareness and knowledge' and 'Experience and satisfaction' Slovenian results lean towards Austrian, findings within 'Attractiveness and access' indicate that Slovenian respondents also perceive their secondary education system as strongly stratified (to detriment of VET programmes), even more so than their Croatian counterparts. Well-crafted research design may yield results beneficial for mutual policy-learning and exchange, hopefully advancing agenda on number of issues relevant for development of respective VET sectors.

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Annex

Ranking of peer countries across available comparisons

Austria	Croatia	Italy	Slovenia
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Category	Question	Country ranking				Comment
		1.	2.	3.	4.	
Awareness and knowledge	1. Heard of VET before the interview?	SI	AT	HR	IT	HR and AT identical scores.
	6. Given info on VET when enrolling secondary education	SI	AT	HR	IT	
	12. Advised against taking VET?	AT	SI	HR	IT	From lowest share to highest.
Attractiveness and access	15. Positive image of VET in your country?	IT	AT	HR	SI	Austrian and Italian results close on one, Croatian and Slovenian on the other hand.
	17. Prioritizing investment in VET over GE?	SI	HR	AT	IT	
	18.1. VET teaches skills needed by employers?	AT	HR	IT	SI	
	18.2. VET leads to well paid jobs?	AT	HR	IT	SI	
	18.3. VET leads to highly regarded jobs	AT	HR	IT	SI	Almost identical results for HR, IT and SI.
	18.4. VET allows you find job quickly?	AT	HR	IT	SI	
	19.1. Easy to continue to HE after VET?	IT	HR	AT	SI	
	20. Easy to switch from VET to GE?	IT	AT	SI	HR	
	21.1. Easier to get qualification in VET than GE?	HR	SI	IT	AT	
	21.2. Low grades students directed towards VET?	IT	AT	HR	SI	Croatian and Slovenian results close on one, Austrian and Italian on the other hand. From lowest to highest share of agreeing respondents.
	21.3. General education has a more positive image than VET?	AT	IT	SI	HR	Disagreeing respondents, from highest to lowest.
Experience and satisfaction	13. Quality of learning?	Only VET participants				
	General skills	AT	SI	HR	IT	
	Work related skills	AT	SI	HR	IT	
	Equipment	AT	SI	HR	IT	
	Quality of teaching	SI	AT	HR	IT	HR and AT identical scores.
Outcomes and effectiveness	3. Important role of VET in reducing unemployment?	AT	HR	IT	SI	Marginal difference between IT and SI.