



# **Introducing RPL in Croatia: why and how**

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# **The challenges Croatia wants to tackle through RPL**



# Low graduation rate

- Before the introduction of the 3 Bologna cycles in 2005/06, graduation rate was below 50%, and today it is at 60%
- This means that there is a large cohort of people who took some HE, even up to 4 years, but never graduated – and now possibly work in a field connected to their studies without formal qualifications – which is an issue on the heavily regulated Croatian labour market



# Demographic trends

- Croatia has a negative population growth, and the capacities of HE are sufficient to admit almost 100% of students who graduate from secondary school each year
- As not everyone continues to HE, many HEIs are failing to admit a sustainable number of students
- At the same time, HEIs are not well adapted to non-traditional students – e.g., Croatia has a low number of people who enter HE after the age of 30 (1.4% according to Eurostudent) and underrepresented groups in HE include people from rural areas, people from low socio-economic background, employed people and those who have completed vocational education



# Skills mismatch

- While we are just starting to collect comprehensive data on graduates' career paths, surveys show that a number of people work in a profession unrelated to their field of study
- According to the Eurostudent survey, Croatian students spend less-than-average time on practical work, and less often than average work during studying
- Those from the underrepresented groups are most likely to work, which then contributes to their higher than average drop-out rate



# Why do we think RPL would help?



# Shorter studying

- Right to shorten one's studying is already in the Croatian law – but used by best students, rather than those who could get exemptions due to previous study and/or work experience
- As studying is expensive and time-consuming, RPL opportunities could significantly decrease costs and increase attractiveness of HE



# Openness of HE

- RPL opportunities could send a message to underrepresented groups that HE is, after all, something for them, a place where their competences are valued
- HE can use RPL to establish itself as a venue for upskilling, reskilling and career change – now exclusively reserved for adult education institutions





# How are we introducing RPL?



# Phase 1: through legislation

- From 2011 to 2018, the idea was to regulate RPL at the national level, with nationally prescribed methods and a centralised database
- The main idea was to ensure full transparency, but the concept made HEIs reluctant to use their autonomy and introduce RPL



# Phase 2: a softer approach

- It became obvious that hyper-regulation creates more problems than it solves and the only way forward is to rely on the existing trust towards HEIs
- The Ministry focused on incentives to HEIs such as calls for project proposals that include RPL
- European Commission support, including this and the parallel SIDERAL project, was valuable in supporting and streamlining the Ministry's efforts
- Rather than ordinances and formal bodies, the focus was put on guidelines, workshops and peer groups
- Success is already visible: University of Rijeka and Algebra College have implemented their first procedures and a number of other HEIs have adopted the necessary procedural documents



# Open questions

- The current legislation only allows RPL for admission and does not allow institutions to award degrees based solely on RPL, or admit a person to a higher level program without a lower level degree. Should this be changed?
- RPL is costly and potentially leads to reduction in study fees: will this be sustainable for HEIs in the long term?
- A change in the organisational culture may be needed to implement RPL – while not every single teacher needs to subscribe to its principles, it is important that the management and the competent persons do – can this be assured in the long run?



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