

CROATIA

National Action Plan 2024-2027

Please identify here for your country the current situation and challenges (if relevant) in the respective key commitments. In addition, you may list other commitments of the Tirana or previous communiqués and your priorities in their implementation.

The data in this Action Plan come from “The European Higher Education Area in 2024 - Bologna Process Implementation Report” (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2024. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; hereinafter: the Bologna Implementation Report) unless stated otherwise.

	Current situation	Key challenges
ECTS Qualifications Frameworks	<p>and The charts in the Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 52-70) show that Croatia has implemented the majority of the accepted commitments, including adding micro-credentials as well as short-cycle programmes to its QF. Diploma supplements are available automatically, in English, and free of charge. NQF is self-certified. Micro-credentials have not been introduced into the regulations on higher education under this name, but they are a part of lifelong learning and delivered by higher education institutions.</p>	<p>As challenges in this regard, the Bologna Implementation Report lists as follows. Croatia has more than 10% of students in integrated bachelor-master programmes (p. 57), more than 10% of programmes which do not comply with the agreed ECTS structure (bachelors that have neither 180, 210 nor 240 ECTS; pp. 52-55), and programmes outside of the Bologna structure (p. 59) - master-after- master programmes that do not lead to PhDs (sveučilišni specijalistički studiji – 342 such programmes).</p>
Recognition	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 70- 77) shows that Croatia has implemented the Lisbon Recognition Convention in its legislation, including automatic recognition (in academic recognition for EHEA qualifications) and use of specific tools for refugees’ qualifications; implementation of Article VII of the Convention, which requires refugees’ qualifications to be</p>	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report (p. 74) notes that the tools for refugees’ qualifications - the European Qualification Passport for Refugees and the ENIC-NARIC toolkit – are used occasionally rather than systematically. However, the Ministry finds that tools are always used in such cases, but the number of applications is very low. In the current period, the Ministry finds it necessary to focus on upgrading the system- level automatic recognition of</p>

	assessed even without documentary evidence, is legally binding.	degrees for academic purposes at the national level by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (Central Application Office).
Quality Assurance	As evidenced by the Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 77-89), Croatia has implemented the majority of accepted commitments; the national QA agency which has accredited all programmes and institutions is EQAR-listed, with students as members of all panels and governance bodies, and the European approach to the quality assurance of joint programmes is implemented.	The Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 84- 87) finds two remaining issues with Croatian implementation of commitments related to QA. First, international experts are currently not part of the QA agency governance bodies, or the follow-up expert panel. Second, Croatia allows its higher education institutions to choose international EQAR- registered agencies for trans-national joint programmes, and the national QA agency is implementing all other external QA procedures. HEIs established in Croatia and their national programmes cannot be evaluated by quality assurance agencies from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance.
Social Dimension of HE	The Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 119 – 156) notes that there is a national strategy, adopted following a social dialogue, on the social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of students and staff. QA agency is required to monitor HEI SD strategies and policies. RPL can contribute to the fulfilment of first- cycle programmes. Top-level coordination structures exist between different levels of education, with a mandate including questions related to diversity, equity and inclusion. There are public institutions for conflict resolution and mediation (student ombudsmen), and QA agency monitors psychological counselling and other guidance services. Need-based grants are provided for between 10 and 30% of students, and there is financial support for indirect costs of study. There is a top-level recommendation to provide training to staff, as well as within initial training of teachers, on equity, inclusion and diversity. There is	The Bologna Implementation Report (p. 126) notes that it is not possible to access the first cycle based on RPL. Additionally, HEIs are required to submit study programmes to initial accreditation before they start delivering them fully online. For these two reasons, the Bologna Implementation Report notes (p. 127) that top-level regulations do not fully allow higher education institutions to offer flexible pathways like part-time studies, blended and distance learning programmes. There are no legal requirements for free psychological counselling, academic and careers guidance in higher education institutions (even though majority of HEIs do provide them; p. 136). Part-time students are not eligible for the same direct or indirect financial support as full-time students, and public funding is not attributed to higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, in particular in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (p. 141). There is no financial support or requirements for staff training regarding diversity, equity and

	<p>financial support to HEIS to make their infrastructure accessible, and top-level support for academic mobility of vulnerable and disadvantaged students. HEIs are able to use general funding for community engagement activities.</p>	<p>inclusion (p. 131 and pp. 142-144). While the Ministry does not plan any legal changes in the following period, a number of actions are planned to tackle these challenges in practice. Furthermore, the Bologna Implementation Report notes several challenges that can be tackled in the following period. Student characteristics other than age and gender are monitored at entry only; completion rates are not monitored (p. 133). There is no monitoring of the participation and experiences of beneficiaries in all types of international mobility programmes, including their background characteristics; no top-level mobility policy focused on vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of staff, and no top-level support to higher education institutions to foster blended learning mobility and/or internationalisation at home (pp. 145-148). There is no additional funding or external QA for community engagement activities (pp. 150-151). There are no HEI staff organisations represented in the national body implementing the Social Dimension Principles and Guidelines (p.154).</p>
<p>Other Bologna Process Commitments</p>		
<p>Fundamental Values</p>	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 93- 118) notes that academic freedom and institutional autonomy are in the legal framework, including the Constitution, and academic freedom is externally evaluated. Academic integrity is defined by the legislation and appropriate guidelines are being developed. Students and staff participate in HEI governing and internal bodies, as do local governments. Civil society is habitually included in national HE policy-making, as is the QA agency and employers; other ministries and the public need to be consulted when adopting new legislation.</p>	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report notes that there is no legislative requirement to evaluate academic integrity (p. 103) (however, this is evaluated in practice by the national QA agency, just not noted in the Report) and there is no data collection on academic misconduct (p. 104). Croatia ranks low in financial and staffing autonomy (p. 106) according to the 2023 EUA University Autonomy Scorecard. There is no legal requirement for student associations and staff organisations (trade unions) to participate in national HE policy-making (p. 115). While no legal changes are planned, a number of actions are planned to tackle these issues at a practical level.</p>

Teaching and Learning	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report (pp. 157 – 184) shows that Croatia has a top-level strategy on education which references T&L in HE, but not a specific one, and staff unions are not regularly involved in defining it. These strategies mention SCL. Croatia has a system-level project to increase digital maturity of HEIs. There is external QA of T&L, including SCL. Learning outcomes are implemented. There are top-level requirements or recommendations specifying criteria that should be considered within the recruitment and promotion of academic staff, and they take teaching performance into account.</p>	<p>The Bologna Implementation Report shows as possible challenges the following. Croatia does not have a top-level body dedicated to supporting learning and teaching in higher education institutions (p. 162). SCL is not defined in strategic documents (p. 167). There are (p. 172) legal restrictions regarding the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL cannot be used to access the first cycle, and no full qualification can be achieved solely through RPL) as well as regarding the use of online, blended or distance learning (because a significant change in programme delivery requires external accreditation). Academics are not required to receive training in teaching (p. 174). Less than 50% of Croatian students have stated in the Eurostudent survey that their lecturers “are extremely good at explaining things”, “give helpful feedback” and “motivate me to do my best work” (less than 40% for the latter two; p. 178). Again as above, while no legal changes are planned, a number of actions are planned to tackle these issues at a practical level.</p>
Internationalisation	<p>A total of 6% of Croatian graduates in the academic year 2020/21 were outwardly mobile – from 5% at ISCED level 6 (bachelor) to 14.3% at level 8 (doctoral studies), compared to the EHEA average of 8.4% and the 20% target. In the same year, about 2.4% of Croatian students were coming from abroad, as compared to the 2.9% EHEA average – again, most, 6.4%, at the doctoral level. As much as 48% of the inwardly mobile students were coming from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it was the top destination for outward mobility as well, followed by the United Kingdom and Germany. Students remain eligible for Croatian public grants during credit mobility, but not degree mobility.</p>	<p>EUROSTUDENT survey (see data on https://www.eurostudent.eu/) showed in 2016 that issues with credit recognition were the main obstacle for mobility in Croatia (comparative report available at https://ecsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/EV_IB_mobility_obstacles.pdf); the current data shows that this is no longer the case and the leading obstacles are financial, followed by the unwillingness to be separated from one’s friends and family, and risk of losing work (data available (data available on this link)).</p>

Please summarise here (in a few bullet points) the main progress to be achieved by 2027 in your country, based on the detailed action plans below, including issues such as key regulatory changes or significant new policies foreseen to support the implementation of the Bologna Process commitments.

The planned progress for Croatia can be summarized as follows:

- Regarding ECTS and Qualifications frameworks, the current situation is assessed as positive and the current activities will continue with no new plans or policy initiatives.
- In recognition, a system of automatic recognition for academic purposes established by the Central Applications Office (Agency for Science and Higher Education) will be fully aligned with the Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition.
- The national quality assurance agency will complete the digitalisation of its processes.
- Regarding the social dimension, there will be several activities fostering data collection and monitoring, increasing completion and guidance, supporting RPL and inclusive mobility, as well as training and better involving academic staff.
- Increase the outward credit mobility rate of graduates (ISCED level 5-8) in order to decrease the gap towards the EHEA average rate by encouraging automatic recognition of ECTS obtained during mobility.
- The remaining activities include support to fundamental values and combating academic misconduct, establishing the national body for T&L in HE, and increasing the number of joint programmes.

Please list in the bellow table the concrete actions you want to undertake to achieve the commitments and how you want to tackle the challenge you have mentioned above (e.g. regulatory/legal change, data collection and analysis, (national) peer support, events, publication of support materials.) Please use a separate table for each of the listed (key) commitments and add lines to the tables as needed.

1) Recognition

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
Centralised system- level automatic recognition of degrees for academic purposes established at the national level by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (Central Application Office)	Achieving uniform automatic recognition at the system level within the procedure for access to the programme of further study in the next level without any additional procedures in HEIs	Full alignment with the Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition	Academic year 2026/2027		

2) Quality Assurance

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
Digitalisation of QA processes (AZVO/ASHE) - Development of a portal to be used in external evaluation procedures in higher education. This will ensure the enhancement and further digitalization of procedures conducted by AZVO (ASHE).	The action will contribute to easier international participation in the Croatian quality assurance system.	New user portal to be used in conducting external evaluation procedures by AZVO (ASHE) staff, members of AZVO (ASHE) expert bodies, international and Croatian reviewers, and higher education institutions.	In line with the implementation of the ESF+ project		

3) Social Dimension

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
EC Technical Assistance TSI project GOAL	The project lasting from September 2025 to 2028 is meant to provide expert support to the Ministry and HEIs in monitoring completion rates, as well as support inter-institutional provision of career guidance at all levels.	1.Ministry regularly monitoring completion rates for the first and the second cycle, including student characteristics 2.Primary and secondary schools provide career guidance to students, including support for access to HE for disadvantaged groups 3.Cooperation established between experts for career guidance at all levels of education	1. By 2027 2. By 2028 3. By 2027		
Establishment of an RPL network coordinated by the Ministry.	An ESF+ project (direct grant to the Ministry) is planned to fund the re-establishment and expansion of a national RPL network which is supposed to gather stakeholders in encouraging RPL in higher education, providing trainings and support to HEIs.	Number of HEIs implementing RPL increased.	By 2027		
Training for HEI staff	An ESF+ project is planned (direct grant to the Ministry) to provide funding for trainings (train the trainers) for HEI staff to better support social dimension in HE. The TSI project will also provide support to HEIs in improving completion, which will include training for SD.	HEI staff trained to implement relevant SD measures	By 2028		
Regular cooperation established among HEIs,	Croatian HEIs (Rectors' Conference and Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences) have established a working group to work on social dimension issues. In parallel, the national Erasmus agency is supporting	1.Establish monitoring of experiences of beneficiaries in international mobility.	1. By 2027 2. By 2028 3. By 2027		

<p>the Ministry and the national Erasmus agency on social dimension issues.</p>	<p>appointment of inclusion officers at HEIs and has established the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre for Inclusion and Diversity in Education and Training whose team of expert will work on providing support/guidance/training for HEIs on how to strengthen the inclusive dimension of their educational practices, as well as in the process of establishment of inclusion and diversity officers at HEIs. All of this should support Croatia in introducing what has been missing in this aspect.</p>	<p>2. Top-level mobility policy focused on vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of staff. 3. Top-level support to HEIs to foster blended learning mobility and/or internationalisation at home.</p>			
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4) Other Bologna Process commitments: Fundamental Values

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
<p>An ESF+ project (direct grant to the Ministry) to be implemented by the Ministry is planned to: a) support academic integrity at Croatian HEIs by procuring a report on reinforcing academic integrity standards. The activities connected to the production of the report will include developing recommendations for HEIs and if needed, other stakeholders and the quality assurance agency.</p> <p>b) the development of data collection for academic misconduct.</p>	<p>Improvement of the external monitoring of academic integrity.</p> <p>Introduction of data collection for Academic misconduct.</p>	<p>Improvement of the external monitoring of academic integrity.</p> <p>Data on academic misconduct collected.</p>	<p>By 2027</p> <p>By 2027</p>		

5) Other Bologna Process commitments: Learning and Teaching

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
Establishment of – the National Forum for T&L	Teaching and Learning: strengthening of higher education institutions' and system's capacity to enhance T&L	System-level national coordination to enhance T&L in cooperation with the national quality assurance agency	2027		

6) Other Bologna Process commitments: Internationalisation

Action	Contribution of the action to the implementation of the commitment	Expected outcome(s)	Timeline	Achieved in 2027	Provide short explanation
Increase the number of joint study programmes carried out by alliances of European universities and other HEIs.	Increase inward degree mobility rate (ISCED level 5-8)	Increase the number of accredited joint programmes from current 15 to at least 18.	2027		
Raise awareness among HEIs to introduce automatic recognition of ECTS obtained during mobility in line with the conclusions of the Rectors' Conference of Sept 2025	Increase the outward credit mobility rate of graduates (ISCED level 5-8) in order to decrease the gap towards the EHEA average rate of 6.1%	Increased outward credit mobility rate, in line with the available Erasmus+ funding.	2027		