



Croatia

Dr. Dragan Primorac
Minister of Science, Education and Sports



Dragan Primorac serves his second term as Minister of Science, Education and Sports, a post he assumed in 2003 and which also includes authority over the systems of technology and information society. Dr. Primorac is also pursuing a successful scientific career in the fields of pediatrics, genetics and forensic sciences. He earned his doctoral degree in 1997 from the University of Zagreb. Much of his professional career took place in the United States, where he was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Connecticut Department of Pediatrics (1991-1994) and undertook a number of professional development programs at eminent institutions. Since 1994 Dr. Primorac has served as lecturer at American and Croatian institutions of higher education, reaching the title of Associate Professor at the University of Osijek School of Medicine in 2006. He is currently mentoring 3 master's and 6 doctoral thesis. Dr. Primorac was invited lecturer at 43 international and domestic scientific congresses. He has authored 68 scientific publications, 70 congress press releases, and is author or co-author of 10 books. So far his scientific papers have been cited 868 times (source: Scopus). He is recipient of numerous awards (2002 Life Time Achievement Award – University of New Haven, Forensic Science Institute, 2007 Veneto Region Award for special achievements and promotion of science in the European Union, etc.) and member of science organizations (American Academy of Forensic Sciences, American Society for Human Genetics, etc.). Dr. Primorac is also founder and co-chairman of the International Society for Applied Biological Sciences – ISABS.

Inclusion and widening access – Croatian strategies and experiences

The principles of inclusive and accessible education have long been an integral part of Croatian education policies, but their transfer to the center of policy focus was marked by the educational strategy *Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010*. Efforts aimed at designing a framework for more equitable education with enhanced quality mechanisms were underpinned by similar international processes, among which the UNESCO *Education for All* initiative assumes a pivotal position. Ensuring quality education, equal opportunity and inclusion for all students are the fundamental principles of our 2007 *Strategy for the Development of the National Curriculum for Preschool, General Compulsory and Secondary Education*. These strategies led to the creation of a new legislative framework - the *Primary and Secondary School Education Act*, and the *National Pedagogic Standard*, which translate strategic principles into clear measures. The policy process has been supported by an unprecedented increase in the Ministry's budget between 2003 and 2008 amounting to 50.48%.

In view of our main strategic goals, efforts are underway to increase overall inclusion and completion rates at primary and secondary school levels, supported by the *National Program of Measures for the Implementation of Compulsory Secondary Education - "Secondary Education for All,"* which ensured the provision of free textbooks, transportation and accommodation in dormitories for students in the first two grades of secondary school, as well as the provision of free textbooks for all primary school students. Another goal that of increasing the total



number of tertiary education graduates by 30% between 2005 and 2010, has been fostered by hiring additional lecturers, constructing new university campuses and dormitories, and developing professional study programs. These measures are accompanied by special privileges for ensuring access to quality education to vulnerable groups, such as national minorities, migrant and Roma students and students with special educational needs. They include additional entry quotas, teaching support, scholarships, architectural adaptation of schools, and the provision of teaching at home or in health-care institutions.

Processes and projects which I have outlined have been carried out in partnership with, and with the invaluable support of, students, parents, teachers and expert communities. Although the challenge to integrate competing needs of developing a knowledge-based as well as inclusive society is great, the first results of these efforts are encouraging. As a result of the implementation of the "*Secondary Education for All*", the number of students enrolled in the first grade of secondary school in the academic year 2007/2008 was by 2.5% higher than the year before, despite a negative demographic trend. Also, in the last five years, Croatia has experienced a propulsive growth in provision of tertiary education, with an increase from 137,076 enrolled students in 2003 to 170,404 students in the current academic year (24% increase). This will help Croatia achieve its goal of increasing the number of persons with higher education in the working-age population from today's 16% to over 27% in 2018. Finally, according to data from 2008, Croatian schools fully integrate a total of 75% of children with special needs in regular classrooms, exceeding the world average of 56% by far.

As a small country, Croatia values people as its greatest resource. In a time of deep and rapid social, economic, information technology changes and scientific achievements, our vision of creating a knowledge-based society is guided first and foremost by the principle that knowledge as a social and cultural value must be accessible to all.