



SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS CROATIA

2026

Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

Recent employment developments

Croatia's unemployment rate in 2023 was on par with the EU average (6 %). While the unemployment rates for people with low- and high-level qualifications in 2023 matched the EU average (12 % for low-level and 4 % for high-level qualifications), the unemployment rate for people with medium-level qualifications was slightly higher than the EU average (7 % versus 6 %). In 2023, Croatia's long-term unemployment rate was just below the EU average (34 % compared with 35 % in the EU-27).

In 2023, manufacturing accounted for 17 % of employment ⁽¹⁾ (15 % in the EU-27) and remained a significant part of the economy. Three occupational categories jointly represented over half of employment: professionals (21 %), service and sales workers (19 %), and associate professionals (14 %). Among these, the employment share of service and sales workers was above the EU average (18 % compared with 16 % in the EU-27). The employment shares of trade workers (12 % compared with 11 % in the EU-27) and operators and assemblers (10 % compared with 7 % in the EU-27) mirror the prominent role of manufacturing in the economy. However, the share of high-tech occupations in manufacturing employment was noticeably below the EU average (14 % compared

with 18 % in the EU-27).

The 2023 distribution of employment by gender broadly followed the EU average, with male employment (53 % compared with 54 % in the EU-27) exceeding female employment. Women dominate clerical jobs (72 % compared with 66 % in the EU-27), and jobs for professionals (62 % compared with 54 %). While men are still much more likely to be employed as operators and assemblers (76 % compared with 82 % in the EU-27), the proportion of women in these occupations is also significantly above the EU average (24 % versus 18 %). The proportion of women in the wholesale and retail trade sector is higher than the EU average (60 % versus 49 %).

Signs of an ageing population and labour force are visible, with 29 % of the employed population aged between 50 and 64 in 2023 (32 % in EU-27). Notably, the younger age group of 15- to 24-year-olds also represents a below-EU-average share of the employed population (6 % compared with 8 % in the EU-27). In 2023, 10 % of 15- to 24-year-olds were not in employment, education or training (NEET). While this share is just above the EU average of 9 %, Croatia has made significant progress in reducing NEETs in this age group, halving the share over the past decade, from 20 % in 2013.

Recent skills and learning developments

Almost 2 in 3 workers held medium-level qualifications in 2023 (61 % compared with 46 % in the EU-27). One-third held high-level qualifications (33 % versus 37 %), and the share with low-level qualifications was significantly below the EU average (6 % versus 16 %). Croatia's overqualification rate for tertiary graduates aged 25 to 34 is lower than the EU average (20 % versus 23 %).

According to [Cedefop's analysis of online job advertisements](#) (OJAs), in 2023 the overwhelming majority of OJAs were for jobs in the accommodation and food services sector (54 %). OJAs for ICT (11 %), administrative

⁽¹⁾ To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see [Annex 2 of Cedefop's skills forecast methodological framework](#) (April 2023).

services (6 %), and professional services (5 %) show an increasing demand for highly skilled workers. The most requested skills were monitoring, inspecting, and testing (12 %), accessing and analysing digital data (7 %), liaising and networking (7 %), and using digital tools (6 %). Monitoring, inspecting, and testing were most often demanded in job advertisements for care workers (22 %), construction workers (20 %), and across multiple manufacturing-related roles.

According to Cedefop's [European Skills Index](#) (ESI), Croatia's skills system was very close to the European average in 2024 (ranking 14th out of 31 countries). Over the past seven years, the country moved up four places, showing positive trends in skills development, activation, and matching. The country performed strongest in the skills matching pillar (ranking ninth), most notably because of favourable scores for skills utilisation of underemployed part-time workers and skills mismatch for low-wage workers.

The share of younger workers (aged 25 to 34) with above-basic digital skills exceeds the EU average (47 % compared with 39 % in the EU-27). While this is a positive sign given the growing demand for digital skills reflected in online job advertisements, the country is somewhat behind the EU average when considering the share of the whole population with above-basic digital skills (25 % versus 27 %).

Croatia's employed population was only half as likely to engage in education and training in 2023 as in the EU-27 (7 % versus 14 %). However, the country made significant progress between 2020 and 2023, doubling the share of employed people engaged in education or training.

Future employment trends

According to [Cedefop's Skills Forecast](#), future employment growth over the period 2022 to 2035 is expected to match the EU-27 average (3 %). Employment growth is projected to be highest in business and other services, far outstripping every other sector, with forecast employment growth of 19 % between 2022 and 2035 (10 % in the EU-27). In contrast, the employment shares of non-

marketed services, manufacturing, construction, and distribution and transport in total employment are projected to remain stable over this period. At the same time, the primary sector and utilities are expected to shrink annually by -1 % between 2022 and 2035, compared with a -2 % annual decline in the EU-27. The top three sectors in terms of expected employment growth are ICT (49 % compared with 20 % in the EU-27), real estate, professional, scientific and technical activities (25 % versus 16 %), and electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply (19 % versus 20 %). The top three occupations with the largest employment gains between 2022 and 2035 are forecast to be food preparation assistants, legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals, and ICT professionals.

Jobs for people with medium-level qualifications are expected to account for over half of total job openings between 2022 and 2035 (54 % compared with 40 % in the EU-27), while jobs for people with high-level qualifications will account for 45 % of job openings (60 % in the EU-27). This leaves practically no demand for jobs requiring low-level qualifications. The share of the labour force with medium-level qualifications is forecast to shrink by almost -1 % annually. Conversely, the share of high-level qualifications in the workforce is projected to grow by 2 % annually.

Changes in the labour force composition between 2022 and 2035 are expected to be driven by population ageing. The growing participation rates of people aged 45 and above mean that this group will represent almost half of the labour force in 2035 (48 %), up from 42 % in 2022. Over the same period, the total labour force is projected to grow by 1 % annually, but women's labour market participation (also at 1 %) will grow twice as fast as men's.

Future skills and learning trends

By 2035, people with medium-level qualifications will dominate employment across almost all occupations. Demand for professionals will almost exclusively concern high-level qualifications (98 % compared with 88 % in the EU-27). For associate

professionals, the demand for medium- and high-level qualifications will be almost equal (51 % and 49 % respectively, versus 42 % and 54 % in the EU-27). In line with upgrading trends, demand for low-level qualifications will shrink across all occupations. While this pattern is similar to the EU averages across occupations, the employment shares of low-level qualifications are still well below the EU averages (e.g. for associate professionals, 0.1 % in Croatia versus 4 % in the EU-27).

Employment in high-tech professional services is significantly higher than the EU average (34 % compared with 22 % in the EU-27). In contrast, while employment growth and demand for highly skilled workers are expected in the ICT sector, forecast employment for high-tech workers in ICT by 2035 will remain below the EU average (46 % versus 58 %), leaving Croatia room to grow. While sectoral employment in agriculture, forestry, and fishing is expected to shrink by 20 % between 2022 and 2035, employment growth in [high-tech agriculture](#) significantly outpaces the EU average (15 % versus 6 %). Mirroring a steadily ageing population, the employment share in high-tech health and social care is three times the EU average (5 % versus 2 %).

Expected skill shortages

[Cedefop's Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#)

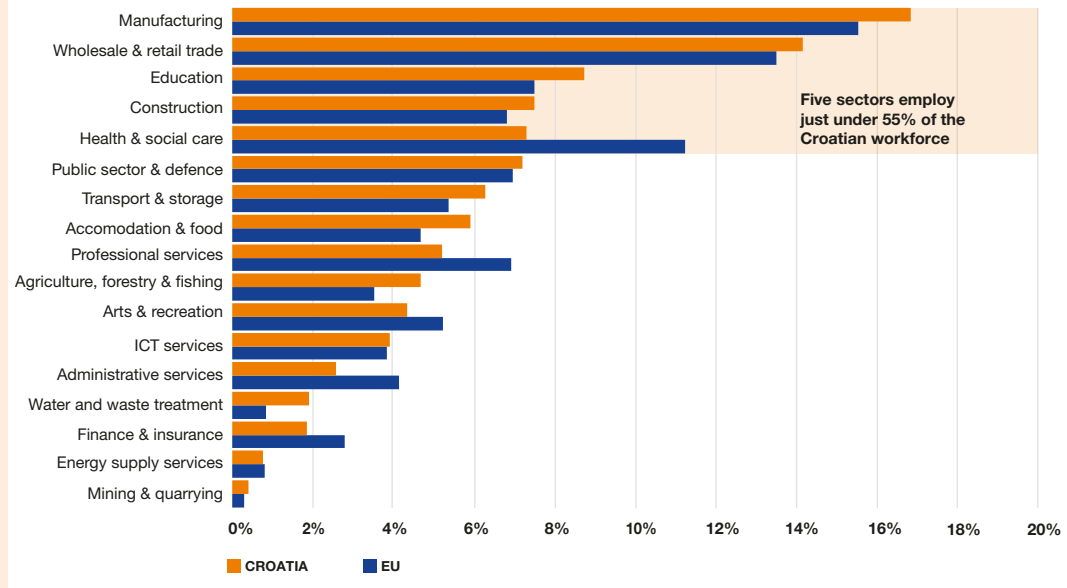
signals the highest shortages for plant and machine operators and assemblers, where expected employment growth and high replacement demand will amplify existing supply-demand imbalances. For service workers and craft and related workers, shortages are high mainly because of large current imbalances. For highly skilled workers, employers are expected to face the most pressing shortages for professionals. A similar but somewhat less severe shortage is visible for technicians and associate professionals, as the supply-demand imbalance is less pronounced thanks to a relatively steady supply of medium-skilled workers.



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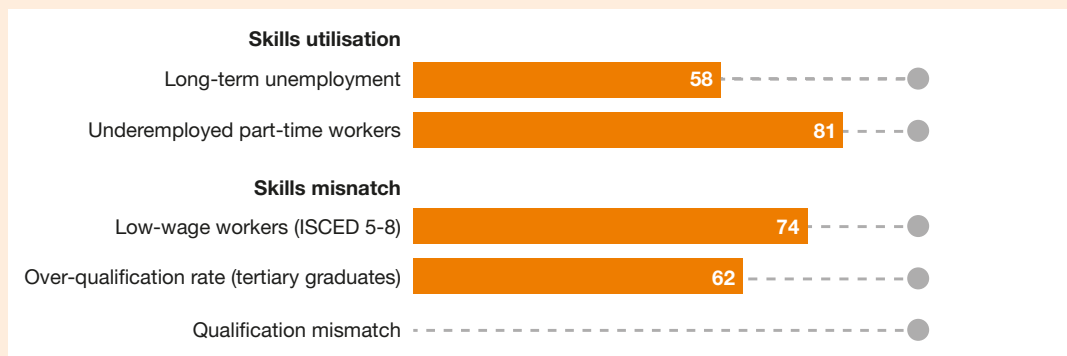
Jobs and skills in figures

Distribution of employment across sectors in Croatia and the EU, 2023, (%)



Source: [Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool](#).

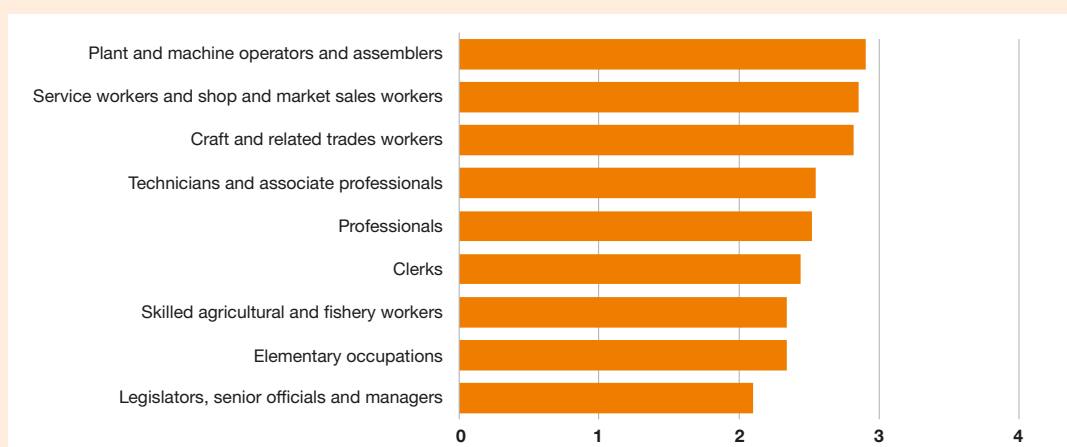
ESI skills matching pillar in Croatia, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of 7 years. The ideal performance is scaled to be 100 and the scores of all countries are then computed and compared to that. To illustrate, an index (or pillar, sub-pillar, etc.) score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65 % of the ideal performance. Thus, there is still 35 % (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: [Cedefop ESI](#).

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, Croatia



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (FIOD). With 4 indicating a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quartiles of the occupation (here for the entire EU-27).

Source: [Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#).



Further information

- Agency for VET and Adult Education. (2024). *Implementing European priorities in VET: making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality assured: Croatia*. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives.
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- Cedefop. (2023). *Skills forecast methodological framework*.
- Cedefop. (2024). *Evolution of European skills systems: performance 2015 to 2022*. Publications Office of the European Union.
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- Cedefop. (2025). *Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024 – Croatia*. National VET policy developments 2023-24.

Cedefop Skills intelligence tool

Cedefop Skills forecast

Cedefop Skills OVATE

Cedefop European Skills Index

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index

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