



The Child Health Care System of Croatia

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The Republic of Croatia is a Parliamentary Republic with a population of 4.2 million people that sits on the Adriatic coast within Central Europe. Gross domestic product is approximately 60% of the European Union average, which in turn, limits health service spending. The health system is funded through universal health insurance administered by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund based on the principles of social solidarity and reciprocity. The children of Croatia are guaranteed access to universal primary, hospital, and specialist care provided by a network of health institutions. Pediatricians and school medicine specialists provide comprehensive preventive health care for both preschool and school-aged children. Despite the Croatian War of Independence in the late 20th century, indicators of child health and measures of health service delivery to children and families are steadily improving. However, similar to many European countries, Croatia is experiencing a rise in the “new morbidities” and is responding to these new challenges through a whole society approach to promote healthy lifestyles and insure good quality of life for children. (*J Pediatr* 2016;177S:S48-55).

Pediatric health care in Croatia has a long tradition dating back more than 110 years to the establishment of the first pediatric department. The values behind health care in Croatia adhere to the principles published in 1919 by Professor Andrija Štampar, the first secretary of the World Health Organization¹ who stated that health care for children should be the highest priority for public health and that their well-being should be the direct responsibility of the government.¹ In practice, child health care in Croatia is regulated by law to be accessible, equitable, and comprehensive.² The resources invested in child health care are provided by the state national insurance budget.³ They are guaranteed by measures within the network of the health institutions and services of the Republic of Croatia.^{2,4}

Geography and History

Croatia (Hrvatska) is an Adriatic and a Central European country that covers an area of 56 542 km² with a coastline length of 5835 km. Zagreb is the capital and the largest city with approximately 800 000 inhabitants. Regional and local government is organized on 2 levels: 20 counties plus the City of Zagreb and then 128 towns with 428 municipalities. Counties are regional territorial units, each governed by a county assembly and a county head. County and municipality representatives are chosen through regional elections every 4 years.

The Croats settled in the territory of present-day Croatia in the seventh century. From the ninth century, the first rulers of Croatia were a domestic dynasty called the Trpimirovic. This dynasty died out and in 1102 Croatia became the integral part of Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom until 1526, when the Croatian nobility elected Austrian archduke as their ruler so Croatia became part of Habsburg Monarchy, with the coastal part under the Venice Republic. At the end of the First World War, Croatia gained independence and united to form the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which then disintegrated in 1941 with the beginning of the Second World War. After the Second World War, Croatia became one of the 6 Republics within the federation of the Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1991, Croatia claimed independence; this was followed by the Croatian War of Independence between 1991 and 1995 to defend this independence. In 2013, Croatia became a fully pledged member of the European Union (EU).

Demography

According to the 2011 Census, the Republic of Croatia had 4.3 million inhabitants with a density of 77.5 inhabitants per square km and about 60% of the population living in urban areas.⁵ Demographic data are shown in the **Table**. The average age of the population is 41.7 years, which places Croatia among one of the oldest aged nations in Europe.⁵ During the past 50 years, the average age has increased by

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CPD	Croatian Pediatric Society
EU	European Union
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

almost 10 years (from 32.5 years in 1961 to 41.7 years in 2011) because of the combined effects of a long-term fertility decrease and the increase in life expectancy. In the 2011 Census, the number of people over age 65 years (17.7%) outnumbered the number of population aged less than 15 years (15.2%).⁶ The average age of women at first childbirth was 27.9 years in 2011. Birthrate, mortality, general fertility, and total fertility rates are 9.8/1000, 12.1/1000, 4.3/1000 women age 15-44, and 1.52, respectively,⁷ with life expectancy at birth of 80.1 years for women and 73.9 years for men.⁵ The mortality of children in Croatia does not differ significantly from the average mortality in the other EU countries. Perinatal mortality is 4.6/1000 for infants weighing \geq 1000 g, whereas the mortality for all live born infants is 4.5/1000.⁷ Sixty-two percent of deaths during infancy are from perinatal origins, whereas in children older than 1 year, the main cause of death is injury.⁷

Economy, Income, and Poverty

At-risk-of-poverty rate in Croatia was 19.5% in 2013, which was higher than EU-28 (the European Union comprising of 28 member states, including Croatia) average of 16.7%.⁸ The highest at-risk-of-poverty rate was 23.4% for people aged over 65 years, and for children 0-17 years, it was 20.3%.⁸

Education

Progression to secondary school was 99% in 2009, which places Croatia in 27th position out of 177 countries.⁹ In 2011/2012, primary schools were attended by 340 116 students, secondary schools were attended by 183 807 students,¹⁰ and universities were attended by 112 848 students.¹¹ Adult literacy rate was 98.83% in 2010.

Employment

According to Central Bureau of Statistics, 1 364 000 people were employed in Croatia in 2013.¹² Most employment is concentrated in the service sector, followed by the industrial and agricultural sectors. In 2013, there were 318 000 unemployed in Croatia, giving an unemployment rate of 17.3%.¹² Unemployment remains one of the biggest problems within the economy. This is especially true for Croatia's

young people, aged 15-24 years, where unemployment rates (50.0%) have been very high both in comparison with overall national unemployment rates and average rates for young people in the EU.

Political Context

Croatia is a parliamentary democracy established by the Constitution. The May 1991 referendum voted in favor of independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Croatia officially declared independence on October 8, 1991. Power is organized on the principle of distributional responsibility within 3 branches: legislative (Croatian Parliament), executive (President of the Republic and the Government), and judicial, with Constitutional Court as an independent body protecting constitutionality and legality. The head of state is the President who is elected for a 5-year term and may be re-elected for a further single term. The government consists of the Prime Minister, 2 Vice Prime Ministers, and 13 Ministries. The President appoints the Prime Minister and Cabinet members with the consent of the Parliament. The parliament (Sabor in Croatian) contains the House of Representatives and members are elected by popular vote to serve 4-year terms. The Government of the Republic exercises executive powers within the framework of the Constitution and national legislation. Its internal organization, operational procedures, and decision-making processes are defined by the Law on Government and the Rules of Procedure of the Government. The government passes decrees, introduces legislation, proposes the state budget, and implements laws and other regulations enacted by the Parliament. The Constitutional Court ensures that laws passed by the Parliament conform to the constitution. Judges are elected for 8-year terms by the Judicial Council of the Republic of Croatia.

History of Croatian Pediatrics and School Medicine

The first pediatrician in Croatia was Radovan Marković who founded the first Children's Department in Zagreb in 1904. The first Pediatric Department of the Medical School in Zagreb was founded in 1923, and the first Head was Professor

Table. Demographic data of population of Croatia

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2011	2012
Total population	4 778 007	4 776 012	4 404 989	4 441 900	4 284 889	4 267 600
Population 0-14 y	948 711	921 186	867 785	707 800	652 428	640 088
Population 15-24 y	657 401	655 951	594 913	584 000	505 835	502 280
Population over 65 y	555 453	589 157	548 137	784 000	758 634	769 091
Annual growth rate of population	0.7	-0.1	-1.5	-2.1	-2.2	-2.3
Population density	84.6			79.4	78.5	77.5
Average family size	3.1			2.99		2.8
Average age of woman at first childbirth	24.3	25	25.6	26.5	27.9	28.3
Fertility rate	1.69	1.58	1.39	1.42	1.41	1.52
Birth rate (per 1000 people)	11.6	11.2	10	9.6	9.4	9.8
Death rate (per 1000 people)	10.9	11.3	11.5	11.7	11.6	12.3
Age dependency	28.98	28.21	29.26	23.7	22.7	22.4
Ratios: child dependency ratio population 0-14 y:15-64 y (population 0-14 + y > 65 y:15-64 y)	45.73	46.25	47.75	48.75	49.1	45.42
Distribution of population (rural/urban)	54.2			55.8		57.8

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