



The Island of Vis

Split-Dalmatia County, Croatia

General overview

Split-Dalmatia, the largest Croatian county, covers a total area of 14 106.40 km²; 4523.64 km² of this area is on land (8% of the Republic of Croatia) and 9576.40 km² is covered by sea (30.8% of the sea surface of the Republic of Croatia). Most of the land area consists of the hinterland (59.88%), while the islands make up a smaller proportion (19%) (1). Geographically, the Split-Dalmatia County is located in the central part of the Adriatic coast, stretching from Vrlika in the north to the furthest Croatian island of Palagruza in the south, and from Marina in the west to Vrgorac in the east (1). It has 39 municipalities (1). According to the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2021, the County's population of 423 407 comprises 48.48% men and 51.52% women (2). The average age of the population is 39.8 years; 21.8% are over 65 years (2). The gross domestic product per

capita is € 10 586,67. Life expectancy at birth per 100 000 population is 75.9 years for men and 82.5 years for women (2018) (2).

The Split-Dalmatia County borders with the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the north and the Dubrovnik-Neretva County to the east, and extends to the Croatian territorial waters in the south. It is divided into three geographical subunits: the hinterland; the coastal area; and the islands. The hinterland in the continental part of the County is crisscrossed by mountains that run parallel to the coastline. The area is sparsely populated and economically poor. The coastal area forms a narrow strip between the mountain ranges and the sea; it is highly urbanized and economically developed compared to the hinterland. The islands, of which there are 74,

are sparsely populated and economically more developed than the hinterland (1).

The highest governance bodies are the County Council and the County Prefect. The main industry (income) of region is tourism.

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work



Moving towards UHC

The organization of Croatia's health-care system dates back to the early 1990s. Financing services delivery is centralized and its organization is based on social-health-insurance principles. The Croatian Health Insurance Fund (HZZO) is the single purchaser of health services, all publicly financed individual health services being delivered through both public and private providers. The Ministry of Health is responsible for health policy, including the regulation and governance of health-care providers, health-system financing and, ultimately, the delivery of services to the population. Its primary agenda is the provision of accessible, high-quality services to patients.

The central Government provides some funding through the Ministry of Health for the administration of national institutes (including those dealing with emergency medicine, telemedicine and public health), the implementation of several public health programmes (for example, cancer screening) that are not delivered through HZZO-provider contracts, and capital investments in all public institutions (these are not covered through payments for services).

Local (county) governments are responsible for the maintenance of infrastructure and capital investments in primary-health-care centres and minor local public health programmes.

Primary care is organized according to the family-medicine model. All citizens must register with a doctor of their choice (whom it is their prerogative to change). The family-medicine specialist acts as a gatekeeper for almost all citizens. For children, however, primary-care pediatricians are the doctors of choice, as are gynecologists for pregnant women. Dentists and laboratory services are also available at the primary level.



Promoting health and well-being

The motto of the Split-Dalmatia County Development Plan for 2022–2027 is “a county for all – a place of quality, safe and pleasant living for all residents, which enables balanced economic and social development, respecting the principles of sustainability and social inclusion”.

“Healthy living”, a national programme co-financed by the European Social Fund, promotes walking as an exceptionally healthy and efficient form of physical exercise and aims to raise awareness about, and motivate physically inactive people to adopt, healthy lifestyles, thus protecting their health. The programme

has five components: health education; health and physical activity; health and food; health and the workplace; and health and the environment.

Various early-detection programmes are being implemented in Croatia for cervical, colorectal, breast and lung cancer. These include the National Breast Cancer Screening Programme, the National Colorectal Screening Programme, the National Screening Programme for Cervical Cancer and the National Lung Cancer Screening Programme – the first national lung-cancer-screening programme in Europe. The main promoter of these programmes is the Ministry of Health; in the Split-Dalmatia County they are implemented by the Teaching Institute for Public Health.



Protecting against health emergencies

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for clearly defined command-and-control emergency-response mechanisms and structures, as well as cooperation and solidarity in dealing with the crisis. The County's response involved the use of all its resources and the formation of the Split-Dalmatia County Civil Protection Headquarters. Currently, the County is working to provide protection against health emergencies caused by climate change, zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance. It is also endeavouring to set up health-insurance services for people with, for example, noncommunicable diseases, and HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis and other communicable diseases, and to provide coverage of mental-health and psychosocial support, immunization, sexual and reproductive health care, and health promotion and disease prevention activities.

The SARI project in the Split-Dalmatia County

In 2020, the Croatian Institute of Public Health, with the support of the Ministry of Health, joined the EU Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) project (3) with the aim of improving the SARI monitoring system in the Republic of Croatia. The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control is organizing and coordinating the project in cooperation with the nongovernmental organization (NGO), EPICONCEPT (4). In addition to Croatia, 14 other European countries are involved in the project the goal of which is to establish epidemiological surveillance of trends in the incidence of SARI, describe SARI cases (intensity and severity), and identify and monitor population groups at risk of a severe form of the disease.

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Some of the measures included in Priority 4 of the Strategic Development Plan of Split-Dalmatia County (2022–2027) – “Healthy, active and

quality life for citizens of Split-Dalmatia County” – lean towards the priorities of the EPW (5).

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

Activities include:

- the development of the Mental Health Service;
- work to eliminate stigma and discrimination by increasing mental-health literacy;
- support to individuals and their families compounded by stigma, discrimination, violation of human rights and social exclusion;
- prevention programmes;
- addiction treatment.

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

The following activities are underway:

- development of primary health care through digital health care in rural areas and on the islands of the region;
- further implementation of the telemedicine project, "ICT County";
- participation in the INTERREG V-B Adriatic-Ionian ADRION Programme (6), the main objective being to contribute to the creation of an effective transnational ecosystem for the application of social innovation in integrated health-care services for the ageing population across ADRION countries.

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

Activities include:

- administering mandatory and recommended vaccinations (including those for influenza and Covid-19, all vaccinations recommended to travellers, HPV vaccinations);
- counselling on vaccinations;
- campaigns about vaccinations.

Initiatives relative to healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insight

Activities include the Split-Dalmatia County of Active Elderly Citizens project, which aims to increase the involvement of older people in organized forms of physical activity to enhance

their overall health status, strengthen their self-confidence and independence and, ultimately, their contribution to the community.

Initiatives specific to Split-Dalmatia

Split-Dalmatia County's unique linkage-to-care model

The Croatian Society for the Liver Diseases "Hepatos" is an NGO that partners with the Teaching Institute for Public Health of the Split-Dalmatia County and the University Hospital of Split in providing patients with liver problems

specialized care through a mobile clinic, namely, the Mobile InfoHep Centre (MIHC).

Through this unique linkage-to-care services model, which aims to provide equality in care, Hepatos

– together with epidemiologists and treating physicians (specialists in infectious diseases, hepatology and gastroenterology), offers testing for viral hepatitis C and HIV, liver examinations

(Fibroscan®), counselling, information and linkage-to-care services in at-risk communities and isolated rural areas.

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. health care of older people (exchange of experience; development of educational programmes);
2. exchange of good practice in increasing physical activity;
3. mental-health care, including addiction.

Main partners and collaborators

These include:

the Government of the Republic of Croatia;

Split-Dalmatia County and governmental agencies (dealing with the health-care system, the education system, employment and social work);

the Ministry of Health;

NGOs;

the WHO Country Office in Croatia;

international networks (for example, the WHO Regions for Health Network).

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¹ All URLs accessed 25 October 2023.