



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Ministry of Science
and Education



Croatian Presidency of the
Council of the European Union

Croatian National Plan for the ENHANCEMENT of Social Dimension of Higher Education (2019-2021)

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Background

- September 2015: Ministry of Science and Education *National Working Group for Social Dimension of Higher Education (NWG)*
- NWG was to pass action plans, proposals and analyses for carrying out goals contained in Strategy for Education, Science and Technology
- Instead NWG shifted towards creating a more comprehensive [National Plan for the Enhancement of Social Dimension](#)
- National Plan was *finally* adopted in January 2019.
- Simultaneously, the Ministry applied and received a (E+ K3) grant for its implementation - [SIDERAL](#).

Vulnerable or underrepresented groups

Identification of vulnerable and/or underrepresented groups of students

- First phase of the work on the National Plan -> need for empirical evidence about underrepresentation (simple) or vulnerability (more complicated)
- EUROSTUDENT research was the main source of data and evidence for detection of vulnerable groups of students, due to a limited amount of national research
- Official document [Underrepresented and vulnerable groups in higher education of the Republic of Croatia](#) was adopted in September 2016

Vulnerable or underrepresented groups

FIRST GENERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ROMA STUDENTS

STUDENTS OF LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

STUDENTS FROM ALTERNATIVE CARE

HOMELESS STUDENTS (OR AT RISK)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR CHALLENGES

CHILDREN OF WAR

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

STUDENTS STUDYING OUTSIDE OF THEIR DOMICILE REGION

STUDENTS FROM RURAL AREAS AND ISLANDS

LGBT+ STUDENTS

FEMALE STUDENTS IN TECHNICAL FIELD, MALE STUDENTS IN HUMANITIES&ED.

STUDENTS WITH CHILDREN

STUDENTS WHO WORK

OLDER STUDENTS

PART-TIME STUDENTS

STUDENTS OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

GRADUATES FROM VOCATIONAL SECONDARY EDUCATION



National plan

Divided into 6 overarching goals, each with a separate set of activities:

- 1) Systematically gather, analyse and use data related to social dimension of higher education
- 2) Increase accessibility of higher education and remove barriers
- 3) Provide equal opportunities to all and support to vulnerable groups during studying
- 4) Increase completion and employment rates of underrepresented and vulnerable groups
- 5) Improve the system of student financial support
- 6) Include standards related to social dimension in quality assurance system(s)

Knowing what is needed – GOAL 1.

- **1.3. Conduct analyses and research on educational experiences of vulnerable groups of students on which there is a lack of empirical data**
 - on some groups of students which were identified as vulnerable there is no direct data about their educational experience (conclusion of their vulnerability was based on indirect inferences)
 - target groups: Roma, refugees, LGBT+, children of war, children without parents, students in gender stereotypical professions/programmes
- **1.6. Develop a standardized methodology of following educational and professional pathways of students with regard to their social and economic status**
 - collection of existing good practices at Croatian HEI
 - strong need for data gathering and analysis for the purpose of detection, research and reaction to vulnerability of certain groups of students
- **1.8. Evaluate effectiveness of current activities on social dimension of HE**
 - many sources of direct (student grants) or indirect (food, housing subsidies) student support, but no overall data on how effective these measures are for different vulnerable groups of students

Goal 2 Challenges of connecting sectors

- **2.1. Connect all levels of education in activities on social dimension**
 - potential target groups: students of low socio-economic status, students without higher education background, students from rural areas, Roma students
- **2.2. Increase interest for higher education among most vulnerable and underrepresented groups**
 - outreach programmes, direct work with high school students and their parents...
 - target groups: Roma students, students without higher education background, students from rural areas
- **3.1. Remove early barriers in studying and introducing** programmes for competences compensation at HEI
- **3.2. Establish non-material support system for pupils and students**
- **3.5. Establish professional development for working with vulnerable groups of students**
- **All the measures for which HEIs are responsible**

Overrarching top down goals (3-5) in HE policy

- **3.3. Flexibilisation of study programmes and RPL through national policy**
- **3.6. Improve the system of part-time studying**
- **5.5. Implement social dimension indicators in performance agreements for higher education institution – University of Rijeka was the first to put social dimension as their strategic goal.**
- **6.3. Include standards and criteria related to social dimension in Croatian external quality assurance**



National plan – what will it take to succeed?

- **Strong role of the Ministry and the whole Government (taking this document seriously as a strategic plan)**
- **Synergy between different stakeholders (HEIs, Ministry – different departments, students, employers, government agencies, local government units etc.)**
- **Activities for strengthening the social dimension at all levels of education**
- **Continuous assessment of progress and reaction to challenges in implementation**

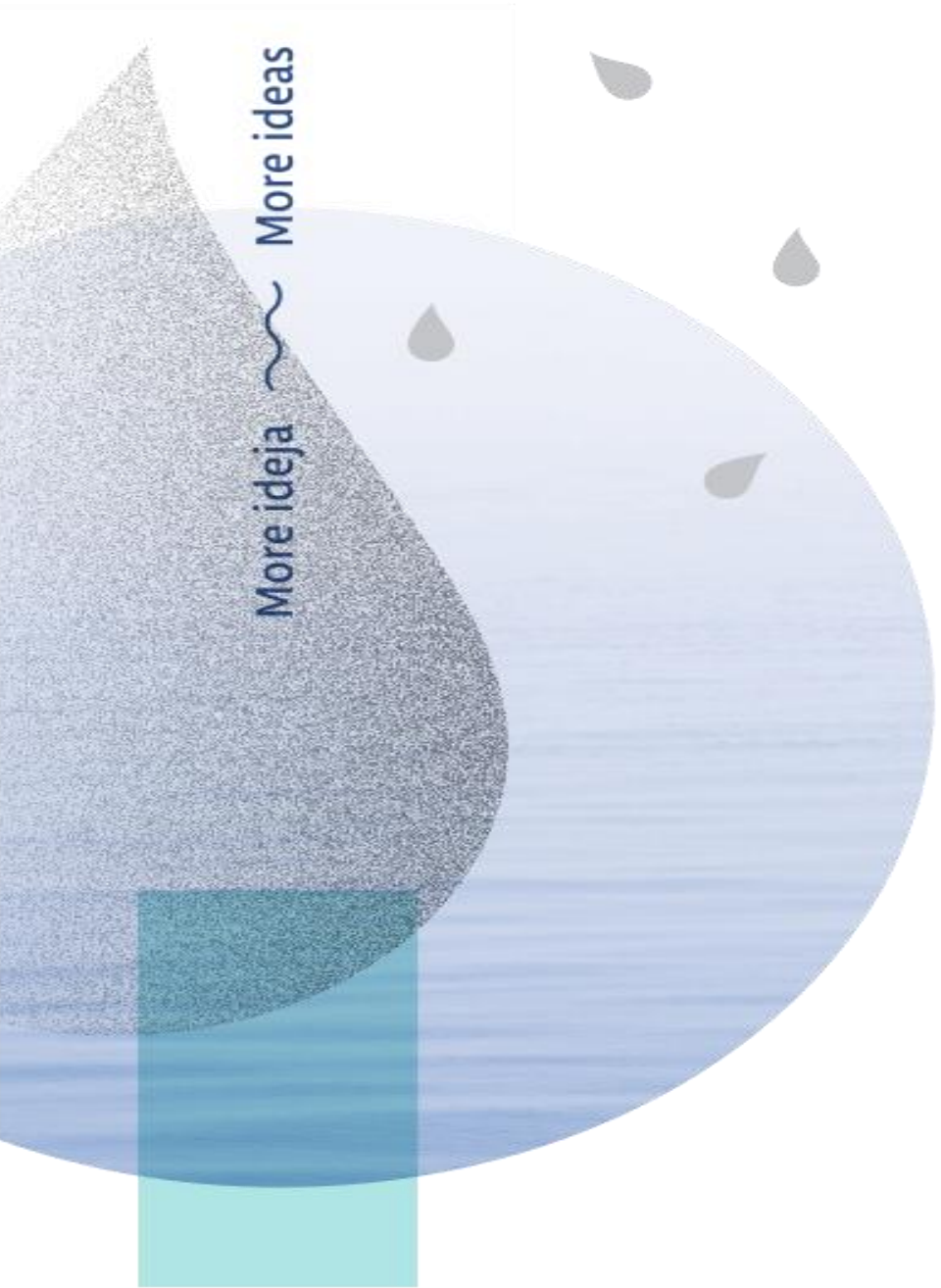
What have we done in 2019/2020

- Contracted a **study** on the experiences of vulnerable students, June 2020 (**SIDERAL**).
- Mapping the system of HEI support through a **survey** , March 2020 (**SIDERAL**).
- Ordinance on **Data Collection** in HE & grant for a national database, April/May 2020
- Bologna Follow up Group - Advisory Group for Social Dimension: **European Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education** - 20/June 2020 Ministerial Conference in Rome
- 2019 **Scholarships** for special groups of students (Roma, disability, with children, war children, economic, refugees, gender underrep.), accommodation (**dormitory**) and subsidies.
- E + mobility additional fee (200 Euros) for all vulnerable groups of students.
- **Guidelines for validation** of previous ed.&knowledge for refugees without papers (EPER E+)
- Covering the **costs of recognition** (translations ect.), Croatian language lessons (Fund for Asylum).
- **RPL Guidelines** (SIDERAL) – UNIRI
- **Student health professionals** – protocols for special educational needs and health/mental support - UNIRI)
- 2020-2030 overarching goals for HE: flexibilisation and social dimension (grants for HEIs).

What have we learned?

- **Money is not everything. Information is central in supporting students and HEIs efforts.**
- **Money is very important. Especially to students (and UNIs :).**
- Often, simple and smart policies are needed in tackling biggest challenges (and not only overarching national strategies).
- Overarching societal support (complementary policies for different sectors) is necessary – most of us can not understand what the vulnerable students are going through in HE ('tunnel vision' of institutions).
- Networking and sharing is crucial (from schools and UNIs to institutions, teachers to students, ministries and other social institutions).
- **For governments : there is no alternative to inclusion and equity** (if we avoid it in ed.& particularly in HE, it will hit back in labour, soc.care, security).





University of Rijeka

Practices in promoting social dimension

UNIRI





Strategic framework

- Part of the University of Rijeka (UNIRI) identity as a socially sensitive and socially responsible university
- UNIRI Strategy:
„[...]removing barriers to successful study resulting from previously acquired competencies, motivation, socio-economic reasons, and/or belonging to a vulnerable group”
- UNIRI Rector’s Plan of Work:
„[...] removing barriers which might influence successful studying and completion for underrepresented groups”



Vulnerable and/or underrepresented groups

University of Rijeka strategic and policy documents on social dimension target the following groups of students:

- students of lower socioeconomic status
- students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- mature students
- students with children
- students without higher education family background (first academic generation in their family)

Measures and activities

- **Material support**
 - grants for students of lower socio-economic status
 - accommodation subsidies for students of lower socio-economic status
 - additional Erasmus mobility grants for vulnerable students
 - Students' Council financing projects for vulnerable or underrepresented groups
 - some faculties/departments offering exemptions from tuition fees
- **Non-material support**
 - student counselling service
 - preparatory courses before the first year targeting students from vocational high schools
 - learning materials adaptation
 - recognition of prior (informal and non-formal) learning
- **Combined material and non-material support**
 - exemptions from study progression rules
 - removal of physical barriers and physical assistance for students with disabilities





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Thank you!

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