

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY POLICY

Croatia



Policy Frameworks

Does equity with regard to supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education feature in any government produced policy documents? If so, which government policy document(s) are these and can you provide website link(s) to them?

- National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021
(<https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazovanja/SIDERAL/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20unaprije%C4%91enje%20socijalne%20dimenzije%20visokog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj%202019.%20-%202021..pdf>)
- The strategy of education, science and technology (https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/full/2014_10_124_2364.html)

What policies and actions are described in these government policy documents in terms of supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education?

- The National Plan, made by National Group for the improvement of the social dimension of higher education, is a proposal for the operationalization of the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology in the part related to the social dimension of higher education, namely a proposal of specific goals, sub-goals and activities undertaken primarily by institutions and bodies in higher education, but also other relevant stakeholders in the education system. In addition, the National Plan proposes measurable indicators for monitoring the achievement of strategic goals and sub-goals.
- The making of the National Plan was preceded by the making of two documents that support the National Plan: Underrepresented and vulnerable groups in higher education in Croatia and Guidelines for improving the support system for students with disabilities in higher education in the Republic of Croatia. The first document, based on empirical data and insights, lists underrepresented and / or vulnerable groups in higher education in Croatia and briefly explains the factors that contribute to their underrepresentation and / or vulnerability. Underrepresentation in higher education is defined in the document as a lower share of a certain group of students in the higher education system in relation to population data, i.e. in relation to the situation in other European countries. Vulnerable groups of students include those who have a higher risk of exposure to difficulties in the form of academic or social integration and who have fewer opportunities for some aspects of study such as international mobility.
- The second document, Guidelines for Improving the Support System for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia, was prepared based on insights into the regulations governing this area and the results of scientific research related to various aspects of academic life of students with disabilities in Croatia. Additional data were collected by a questionnaire sent by the then Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Directorate for Higher Education, to all higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia, regarding possible adjustments and rights in the academic environment and support services for students with disabilities. The draft document was then sent for discussion to all professional support services for students with disabilities at those higher education institutions where they exist. After receiving the feedback and making corrections, the final version of this document was made (National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021).

Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education? If so, which document(s) is/are these? Can you provide a link(s)?

As already mentioned, National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021

(<https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazov>

[anja/SIDERAL/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20unaprje%C4%91enje%20socijalne%20dimenzije%20visokog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj%202019.%20-%202021..pdf](https://www.sideral.hr/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20unaprje%C4%91enje%20socijalne%20dimenzije%20visokog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj%202019.%20-%202021..pdf)

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents? (Please choose as many groups as apply in your own country)

- Low-income or lower socio-economic background students
- Gender groups
- Older or mature learners
- People from rural backgrounds
- Students with disability
- Members of the LGBT community
- Refugees of all kinds (internally and externally displaced; deported)
- Children of people affected by historical violence
- Students with care experience, orphans, youth without parental care
- Other: students whose parents have a lower level of education, female students in the technical field and male students in the humanities, students with children, students belonging to the Roma minority, students from vocational high schools, students working during study in a significant workload, students who travel (long distance) to study, homeless students

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups in higher education?

It has general goals aimed at underrepresented and vulnerable groups of students (National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021):

1. Achieve systematic collection and processing of data that are relevant to improving the social dimension of higher education and use them for this purpose.
2. Improve access to higher education for underrepresented and vulnerable groups and remove barriers to entry.
3. Provide equal opportunities to all students during their studying.
4. Raise the completion rate and employment of underrepresented and vulnerable groups after graduation.
5. Improve the system of financial assistance to members of underrepresented and vulnerable groups.
6. Incorporate standards related to the improvement of the social dimension of higher education into the quality assurance system.
7. There are specific goal for students with disabilities presented in The strategy of education, science and technology
8. Ensure minimum standards of accessibility of higher education institutions to students with disabilities.

Which agency has responsibility for policies related to equity in student participation/success in higher education?

Ministry of Science and Education, Directorate of Higher Education.

Which stakeholder groups are consulted during the equity policy formulation? (Please choose all the stakeholders that are invited to the consultation process in your own country)

Higher Education Institutions' Associations
 Civil society organisations
 International Organisations
 Student Organisations/Association

Achieving Policy Targets

Are there any non-monetary instruments such as outreach work between schools and universities, reforms to university admission etc. used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

→ The social dimension finds its expression in the Croatian higher education system through several important measures primarily related to the financing of higher education institutions and the scholarship system. In terms of funding, in order to include as many students as possible in the new model of tuition subsidies and direct funding based on results in achieving agreed strategic and program goals, in 2012 a new model of three-year program funding in higher education was launched. Among the strategic goals of the pilot program agreements concluded between public universities, polytechnics and colleges on the one hand and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports on the other, for a three-year period, from the academic year 2012/2013 until 2015/2016, three of the five agreed general objectives contained the social dimension of higher education:

1. Acquisition of qualifications in the period envisaged by the study program;
2. Facilitating access to study and study support for students of lower socio-economic status and students with disabilities;
3. Facilitating access and ensuring the quality of studies for students over 25 years of age.

The analysis of the implementation of the pilot program agreements showed that the first general objective was chosen by four of the seven public universities and nine of the fourteen public polytechnics, i.e. the second general objective was chosen by four of the seven public universities and four of the fourteen public polytechnics and colleges. The third of these general objectives was chosen by four of the seven public universities and two of the fourteen public polytechnics and colleges, respectively.

→ Further changes in the policy of financing tuition subsidies for full-time students ensure continuity and further encourage sensitivity to the social dimension of higher education in the three-year period following the completion of pilot program contracts. In contracts on co-financing the costs of studying full-time students and material costs in the academic years 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 concluded by public universities, polytechnics and colleges with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, two of the three strategic goals contain the social dimension of higher education: 1. Ensuring equal access to higher education for all full-time students in the Republic of Croatia; 2. Encouraging the completion of higher education (National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021).

→ The universities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek, Dubrovnik, Split and Zadar provide candidates with disabilities the right to priority in enrolment in the way that in competitions for enrolment of students in the first year of university undergraduate, integrated undergraduate and graduate and professional studies, states that candidates who have a determined percentage of physical impairment of 60% or more, they may enrol in the study provided that they cross the classification threshold and pass any special exam test that also includes individualized adjustments. If they are not ranked within the approved quota, they are entered outside the quota. Candidates with disabilities also have an advantage in enrolment at some polytechnics and colleges (Guidelines for Improving the Support System for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia).

→ Within the TEMPUS project EduQuality the process of educating teachers and professional and administrative staff at Croatian universities on working with students with disabilities and ways to adapt the academic environment to their abilities has begun. For conducting educational workshops educated are 22 people from all Croatian universities (6 from the University of Zagreb, three from the universities of Rijeka, Zadar, Osijek and Split and two from the universities of Dubrovnik and Pula). Persons involved in the work of university support services for students with disabilities and persons dealing with issues and topics of persons with disabilities have been educated and are interested in conducting workshops. Educated persons in the academic year 2011/2012 started conducting two-day workshops for teaching staff and one-day workshops for professional and administrative university staff at their university. The plan is for the educated persons to continue conducting workshops within the work of support services for students with disabilities, which was realized at the

University of Zagreb. To date, the University of Zagreb has educated 75 teachers from 26 faculties, mostly coordinators for students with disabilities, vice deans for teaching, coordinators for student support, heads of departments, as well as members of committees and quality committees. 99 professional and administrative staff from 24 faculties were also trained, as well as from the University Rectorate and the Student Center, most often heads and associates of student services, libraries and offices for international cooperation, and ISVU coordinators, administrative and IT officers and department secretaries.

- Also, within the TEMPUS project EduQuality, educational manuals were created and printed and distributed to all faculties of all universities in the Republic of Croatia (set of 8 manuals: General guidelines, Spatial accessibility, Access to information and services, Teaching and learning outcomes, Mentoring and consultations, International Student Mobility, Leisure and Psychosocial Needs of Students) intended for teaching, professional and administrative staff which, among other things, contain a number of practical and concrete guidelines on working with students with disabilities and opportunities for academic adaptation (Guidelines for Improving the Support System for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia).
- An important form of support for students with disabilities in teaching is provided by the university course "Peer support for students with disabilities", which was introduced as part of the Tempus project EduQuality as an elective course at the universities of Zagreb, Rijeka and Pula. The University of Zagreb first started its implementation in the academic year 2011/2012 and to date it has been attended and passed by 60 students. The course is available for enrolment to students from all components of the university and at all levels of study (undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate). With this course, students with disabilities can get the support of peer assistants, which, depending on the type of difficulties / disabilities, they need in the academic environment (support when coming to college and moving around the room, lecture halls, offices, libraries, student canteens, etc.; support in solving some administrative procedures; support in "capturing" lecture notes; verbal descriptions of visually presented content; support in various social situations such as mediation in communication, personal support as needed such as support in using toilets, etc.) (Guidelines for Improving the Support System for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia).
- Pursuant to the Decision of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports on the criteria for the allocation of places in student dormitories of student centres in the Republic of Croatia and on the basis of the Ordinance on the conditions and manner of exercising the right of full-time students to subsidized housing in the Republic of Croatia issued annually by the Ministry, students with disabilities from 1st to 5th disability category (above 50% of physical disability), including students with disabilities at postgraduate university study, are entitled to a direct place in the dormitory. Students with disabilities from 6th to 10th category of disability (up to 50% of physical impairment) earn extra points (Guidelines for Improving the Support System for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia).

Are there any financial instruments such as bursaries, scholarships and loans used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

- In order to increase access to higher education and graduation rates, complementary to the funding of tuition subsidies to full-time students, work has been ongoing in recent years to increase investment in student scholarships. In the Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020 a total of 22,000 scholarships were provided for students of lower socio-economic status and 15,000 scholarships for students enrolled in scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical (STEM) areas and in the information and communication area and other priority areas defined by smart specialization, national economic development strategies and key development technologies identified in the Industrial Strategy 2014-2020. This means that on an annual basis, with the beginning of the academic year 2017/2018 award 13,000 scholarships, which includes 5,000 state scholarships that are provided annually in the State Budget of the Republic of Croatia.

According to the Ministry of Science and Education, an average of 5,400 students receive a state scholarship per year, which is 4.5% of the total student population. However, annually, an average of 11,500 students apply for state scholarships for students of lower socio-economic status, among

which 10,000 students meet the criteria for state scholarships, which are income per family member less than 65% of the budget base, at least 45 ECTS credits in the previous academic year and 40 ECTS credits on average in all years. Due to lack of funds, a total of 4,600 students who meet the prescribed criteria do not qualify for a state scholarship. These are students who are at the highest potential risk of dropping out.

In addition, in 2017, the Ministry of Science and Education increased the amount of financial support to cover part of the transport costs for full-time students with disabilities for the academic year 2016/2017 from HRK 1,000.00 per month to HRK 1,500.00 per month (National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021).

Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education?

Ministry of Science and Education and National Group for the improvement of the social dimension of higher education

What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation?

By monitoring the indicators of the implementation of certain activities of the National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021.

What kind of autonomy do higher education institutions enjoy in reaching the policy targets set by government?

High autonomy in providing goals of the National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019 - 2021.

How do you see the role of inter-governmental/international organisations in supporting higher education equity policies? In which areas would be their contribution the most valuable? (1= most valuable contribution 4=least valuable contribution)

1. Technical assistance and capacity building
2. Facilitating peer learning, exchange of experience among countries
3. Policy setting
4. Financial assistance (grants, loan financing, scholarships)

COVID-19 and Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education

How, if at all, has Covid-19 affected the existence and implementation of policies designed to encourage greater access and success on higher education of those from low-income/marginalized groups?

There is no impact as of yet.

Sources

This country brief was prepared as part of the [“ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education”](#) report, a collaboration between the [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) and the [National Education Opportunities Network \(NEON\)](#). The report was launched at the [8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education \(ARC8\)](#) on *“Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe”* on 10 September 2021.

All information in this country brief was provided by the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Department of Inclusive Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb, Croatia, as of 24 October 2020.