

# **International Student Mobility**

## **Authors:**

**Vesna Čavić**

**Thomas Farnell**

**Martina Ferić Šlehan**

**Nataša Pavlović**

**Darija Vučijević**

## **Editor:**

**Martina Ferić Šlehan**

## **Translators:**

This handbook was translated from Croatian into English by the following graduate students of translation in the English Department of the University of Zagreb: Tanja Vohalski, Vedrana Vučković and Ana Žilić. The translation was revised by their teacher, Dr. Nataša Pavlović.

## Contents

### Foreword

### About this handbook

### Introduction

#### The importance of international student mobility

What is academic mobility?

Academic mobility as a political goal of the European Union

The importance of academic mobility for individuals, institutions and society in general

Some general obstacles to student mobility

Reducing inequalities in academic mobility

#### International mobility: An overview of existing documents/initiatives in the Republic of Croatia

What are the possibilities for international mobility in the Republic of Croatia?

#### International student mobility

Publishing of information on mobility at Croatian universities

Persons and bodies in charge of international mobility

Types of support for outgoing students with disabilities at Croatian universities

Experiences to date with incoming mobility of students with disabilities

Cooperation with the community

#### Useful tips

Housing of students with disabilities

Medical assistance

Medication

Using guide dogs

Air travel and airports

Visual impairment (blindness and partial sight)

Hearing impairment

Motor impairment

Specific learning difficulties

Mental health problems

Other health problems

### Conclusion

### Glossary

## Foreword

This handbook is one in a series of handbooks entitled *Students with Disabilities* created as part of the TEMPUS project Education for Equal Opportunities at Croatian Universities – EduQuality (Nr: 158757-TEMPUS-1-2009-1-HR-TEMPUS-JPGR) led by the University of Zagreb.

The series aims at equalizing the opportunities of students with disabilities to access higher education by informing, training and raising awareness of the academic and non-academic staff at Croatian universities and their constituents with regard to the specific needs of such students within Croatia's higher education system.

We consider students with disabilities to include students with vision and hearing impairments, motor impairment, chronic disease and learning difficulties such as dyslexia and ADHD, as well as students with mental disturbances and disorders. By categorizing these students as students with disabilities our intention is by no means to stigmatize or brand them, but rather to emphasize the need for accommodation of academic content to such students, as well as to present some examples of good practice.

The handbooks were written by members of all partner institutions in the project: the academic and non-academic staff of the University of Zagreb, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek and the Universities of Rijeka, Zadar, Split and Dubrovnik; students with and without disabilities; and a representative of Croatia's Institute for the Development of Education. Particularly invaluable was the help we received from our colleagues from partner institutions abroad (the University of Århus, Masaryk University, the University of Strathclyde and the University of Gothenburg), who offered concrete advice and guidelines based on their vast experience in supporting students with disabilities.

Each handbook covers an important aspect of students' academic life, defining it and explaining its importance with regard to the acquisition of necessary professional competences. At the same time, the handbooks point to some obstacles that can exist with regard to accessibility, in an attempt to identify the preconditions for overcoming such obstacles without compromising the defined academic standards. By emphasizing the rights of all students to equal access to higher education and by proposing measures that can equalize opportunities, often in a simple way and at no additional cost, these handbooks aim at contributing to the definition of clear accessibility standards for students with disabilities at the national level.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all the contributors who took part, either directly or indirectly, in the creation of these handbooks. I am particularly grateful to former, current and future students with disabilities who have used and will continue to use their perseverance, courage, patience and great motivation to build the much-needed support system for students with disabilities in Croatia's higher education by pointing out their specific needs and simple ways in which these needs can be met. However, their efforts would continue to be in vain if it had not been for a large number of academic and non-academic staff members who have provided support to students with disabilities in practice, often without the existence of clear guidelines and relying only on their empathy and wish to improve the situation. I believe that these handbooks will provide them with clear and systematic guidelines that will facilitate their future work.

Dr. Lelia Kiš-Glavaš, Project Leader



## About this handbook

This handbook tries to answer some questions related to student mobility, in particular to mobility of students with disabilities.

The Introduction outlines the place of academic mobility in contemporary society.

The chapter that follows highlights the importance of international student mobility and describes academic mobility as a political goal of the European Union. It also stresses the importance of academic mobility for individuals, institutions and society as a whole, raising some issues related to obstacles to academic mobility and the possibilities of removal of inequalities.

The chapter entitled International mobility: An overview of existing documents/initiatives in the Republic of Croatia deals with the efforts invested so far at the national level with a view to enabling international mobility, as well as the efforts made by Croatian universities. An overview of international mobility in Croatia is also presented.

The chapter with the same title as the handbook – International student mobility – presents the ways in which outgoing and incoming mobility is regulated at Croatian universities, the ways in which information is published, and the ways in which outgoing and incoming students can get help and support. The persons and bodies in charge of international mobility at Croatian universities are listed. An experience of the University of Zagreb with incoming mobility of a student with a disability – the only such experience to date – is described. The ways in which Croatian universities cooperate with resources in the community as partners in supporting students with disabilities are also presented.

The final chapter offers some useful tips for receiving students with disabilities and for helping outgoing students with disabilities to prepare for exchange visits.

I would like to express my gratitude to students Marin Kraljević, Sunčica Frković and Nina Zavašnik for sharing their personal experiences of international mobility, and also to student Roman Baštijan for conducting the interview with Nina Zavašnik. I am also grateful to Mirjana Zubak for making available the information about the University of Zagreb and providing feedback on the draft version of the handbook, and to project coordinators at the Universities of Rijeka, Split, Zadar, Dubrovnik and the J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, as well as the Office for International Cooperation of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula.

Hoping that this handbook will be useful in working with students with disabilities,

Martina Ferić Šlehan, the Editor

## Introduction

Academic mobility has become an increasingly important policy of the European Union in the last few decades. Encouraging the internationalization of higher education in general, and the international mobility of students and teachers in particular, has also become an important element of the national higher education policies and of policies of higher education institutions (Kelo et al. 2006). Moreover, academic mobility has been set as one of the fundamental elements of the Bologna Process<sup>1</sup> and as the basis for establishing the European Higher Education Area (Berlin Communiqué 2003; Leuven Communiqué 2009).

On the global level, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by a dramatic increase in the number of internationally mobile students: in 2007, 3 million university students studied abroad, which, in comparison with 1.74 million in 1999, represents an increase of 72.4%. The US is at the forefront in the field of international education because it attracts 20% of all mobile students in the world. It is followed by the UK with 12%, Germany with 9%, France with 8% and Australia with 7% of international students (OECD 2009).

However, when it comes to Europe, the total percentage of students enrolled in higher education institutions abroad is low (2.7% of the European students studied abroad in 2007), although in certain countries of Europe this percentage is much higher (Iceland: 16%; Ireland: 10%; Norway: 6%; Switzerland: 5%) (UNESCO, 2009).

In the Republic of Croatia, the data gathered in a survey carried out by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in January 2010 suggest that there will be a total of 1036 outgoing mobile students<sup>2</sup> from Croatian higher education institutions in the academic year 2011/2012. The data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics show that a total of 175,739 students were enrolled in institutions of higher education in the Republic of Croatia in the academic year 2009/2010. This means that the planned outgoing student mobility is 0.6% of the total number of students,<sup>3</sup> which is far from the general goal of the signatory countries of the Bologna Process. As far as incoming student mobility is concerned, the data gathered by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in June 2010 predict that the Croatian higher education institutions will receive 320 foreign students in the academic year 2011/2012, most of whom will take part in the ERASMUS Program<sup>4</sup>.

Due to the low mobility rate, one of the goals of the signatory countries of the Bologna Process is for 20% of all European students to have spent some time studying abroad by the year 2020 (Leuven Communiqué, 2009).

---

<sup>1</sup> Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services;
- for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorization of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights (the Bologna Declaration, 1999) <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05\\_1299770565\\_Akcijski\\_plan\\_mzos.pdf](http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1299770565_Akcijski_plan_mzos.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/publication/2010/08-01-07\\_01\\_2010.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2010/08-01-07_01_2010.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05\\_1299770565\\_Akcijski\\_plan\\_mzos.pdf](http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1299770565_Akcijski_plan_mzos.pdf)

## The importance of international student mobility

### What is academic mobility?

The term 'academic mobility' refers to study visits by students or teachers from one institution of higher education at another. The term primarily refers to international mobility (a stay at an institution of higher education outside one's home country), but it can also refer to a period of studying at another institution in one's home country. The term can refer to either short-term exchange programs (i.e. to a period of one semester or one academic year which is then recognized at the home university) or to complete study programs which end with a degree (i.e. degree programs) (Institute for the Development of Education 2011).

When it comes to 'youth mobility' in the context of the European Union, the term 'academic mobility' can also be defined in a context which is much wider than study visits: it can also refer to a stay in another country for work placements, community work or additional training in the context of lifelong learning (EU Recommendation 2006). In addition to physical mobility, there is also the so-called virtual mobility, i.e. using the information and communication technology to establish partnerships and 'distance exchange' as part of education projects, especially in the context of primary and secondary schools (ibid.).

### Academic mobility as a political goal of the European Union

In the European Union, academic mobility is not only important in the context of the right to free movement, to which all European members are entitled, but it also contributes to the achievement of the goals of the European Union, such as fostering the sense of belonging to Europe among its citizens, promoting social and professional integration, and ensuring competitiveness of the European economy in a globalized environment (EU Conclusions 2008).

According to the European Quality Charter for Mobility (EU Recommendation 2006), developing a 'European Knowledge Area' is a priority for the European Union, since it is precisely through education that Europeans can acquire common cultural references, which will be the basis of European citizenship and political integration. The Charter also emphasizes that, in the context of a knowledge-based international economy, the openness towards foreign cultures and the ability to work and receive education in a multilingual environment are necessary for the competitiveness of the EU economy. The precondition of these abilities is the mutual exploration of diversity among the European countries, stronger mutual contacts and the exchange of knowledge and experiences among the citizens of Europe.

The Charter sets as its long-term goal having all young people from Europe go on study visits to other European countries. In order to achieve that goal, the Charter points out how necessary it is for all member states of the EU to introduce measures to encourage the mobility of school and university students, researchers, youth in general and others who are involved in the education process (including teachers). More specifically, in the field of higher education, the Charter recommends that all member states of the EU should provide every student with a chance to spend a certain period of

their higher education studying abroad through student exchange programs, training programs or work placements. Higher education institutions are responsible for ensuring that such periods of mobility should become an integral part of their study programs (EU Recommendation 2006).

This importance of mobility is the main reason the European program for academic mobility – ERASMUS – was initiated. The program was launched in 1987 and has since become the largest EU program dealing with higher education through which 200,000 European students study abroad every year. Since it was launched, more than 2.2 million European students have participated in ERASMUS, and since 1997, 250,000 teachers and administrative staff have also participated in the exchange programs. With the annual budget of 450 million euros, more than 4,000 institutions of higher education from 33 European countries participate in the ERASMUS program (European Commission 2011.a).

### **The importance of academic mobility for individuals, institutions and society in general**

In addition to the political importance of academic mobility in the European Union, student mobility is a driving force for change on individual, institutional and societal levels (ESIB 2007).

Among all the positive results of mobility on the individual level, the most emphasized one is that the experience of staying in another country can increase employability, that is, opportunities for employment on the international labor market (EU Conclusions, 2008; ESIB, 2007). The changes on the labor market, but also in all other areas of society, which occur due to the process of globalization, mean that students have to acquire new types of knowledge in order to participate successfully in the present-day society after they graduate. These skills are best acquired in an environment in which the teachers, students and administrative staff are aware of international trends and are ready to participate in international exchange programs and discussions (ESIB, 2007).

When it comes to other positive results of mobility on the individual level, exposure to other cultures and languages also enhances mutual (or intercultural) understanding, promotes solidarity, exchange of ideas and better knowledge of different cultures (EU Recommendation, 2006). Furthermore, student mobility offers a different environment and study experience, which promotes the development of new cultural, social and academic values, as well as personal development. The development of these competences is also important for the whole society, since it increases the level of tolerance and awareness of the necessity of fighting against all forms of discrimination (ESIB, 2007).

In addition to being valuable for individuals, academic mobility directly contributes to the development of higher education. Mobile students and teachers are the holders of new ideas and contacts, which enables them to increase international cooperation among higher education institutions. They also enable the exchange of scientific experiences and discoveries, which creates favorable circumstances for the development of innovations and for the introduction of new content and methods into the teaching programs and learning processes. The experience gained through academic mobility programs leads to reevaluation of traditional practices at higher education institutions and offers the opportunity of comparison among institutions and systems, thereby improving the quality of higher education and research (ESIB, 2007).

### Personal experience of the student Marin Kraljević

Marin, a student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his undergraduate study program in Business Economics (Management track), describes his exchange semester spent at Karl-Franzens University in Graz (Austria)

To write 'something' about the ERASMUS program and the time spent at another university, in another city, among other people, other cultures, in a different environment is very difficult. This 'something' cannot be written, put on paper or explained to anyone, this 'something' needs to be experienced, seen and felt. But as an expression of gratitude towards those who made this experience possible to me and for the benefit of my colleagues, I will try to put at least a part of my experience on paper.

All the problems you have encountered until the arrival to the desired place of study, all the red tape you have struggled with and all of your frustrations disappear after entering your new world. Your only task is to make the most of the time you will have at your disposal in every sense. First contacts are generally very difficult, but my first contact with the University of Graz wasn't like that at all, quite the contrary. A whole small army of academic staff is in charge of making everything available, intelligible, and usable to the student. My first impression... well, I asked myself: 'Can something really function that well?' It later turned out that it can, and does. Is there any point in describing everything in detail and trying to explain it? I don't think there is. And not only would it take too long to describe all the steps of getting to know the life at the University, but it would also be unfair to those who will visit the University at some point. I simply do not want to spoil this kind of positive experience for you. And for those who are about to visit the University of Graz, they have my word that everything will go well, which also includes studying, of course. 😊

The life in Graz can be illustrated with the fact that the city has more than 300,000 inhabitants, and over 50,000 students. This means that certain things are guaranteed: fun, diversity of attractions, sports and events. In practice, this means that you can choose between spending your Saturday night staying out until the morning, going to a concert or the opera, or just hanging out at a friend's house. Shopping, cafés, walks and other such things need not be mentioned; I believe that these things go without saying. The one thing which is perhaps slightly unusual for our culture, at least for the coastal way of life, is hanging out and spending afternoons in parks. In any case, you definitely won't be bored.

OK, so you're in Graz, you have a free weekend, and you would like to go on a trip to one of the Austrian towns? No problem. An excellent railroad network and reasonable prices make such trips easy to organize. There is another thing I mustn't forget to mention, and this is the ERASMUS Network – a student organization which also organizes trips, travel and all sorts of similar events for international students. It is something you definitely shouldn't skip. The more you see, the more complete your experience will be.

Illustrated in figures, in the summer semester of 2009/2010 Graz International looked like this: 498 students from 48 countries and 4 continents.

To live, work, study and be a part of these figures is, as I wrote at the beginning, indescribable and invaluable. It offers you countless possibilities, teaches you to be tolerant and respectful, shows you different perspectives on the world and its problems and teaches you how to solve them. It exposes you to different cultures, and different ways of life. It teaches you to respect the differences and communicate better, and to be a better, more complete person.

And in the end, when I read the above lines, they seem to me like well-paid propaganda, or advertising. But, the best 'ad' was made by the people of Graz, the University, my colleagues and the unforgettable experiences and memories which every ERASMUS student gladly recalls, and so do I.

### **Some general obstacles to student mobility**

Although academic mobility has become a priority in Europe (on the level of the European Union, but also on the level of national governments and higher education institutions), youth mobility in Europe too often remains an exception, and this particularly applies to university students, only a small number of whom go abroad for the purpose of studying or work placements (EU Recommendation, 2006). As it was already mentioned in the Introduction, the statistics for 2007 (UNESCO, 2009) show that only 2.7% of the European students participated in mobility programs, which is far from the aim of the Bologna Process, according to which 20% of all European students should have spent a study period abroad by the year 2020.

The European Commission has recognized that mobility is still unevenly distributed among different types of studies and in different countries, often as a result of lack of information, funding problems and insufficient recognition by home universities of study periods spent abroad (EU Conclusions, 2008). In the 2007 Communiqué of the Bologna Process (London Communiqué, 2007), the ministers of education from entire Europe stated that the most significant obstacles to mobility were related to visas, recognition of qualifications, insufficient funding and inflexible pension insurance systems (in case of teacher and researcher mobility). With the aim of further encouragement of the mobility of academic and other university staff, as well as students, the recommendation is increasing the number of mobility programs, creating flexible curricula, and urging the institutions of higher education to take more responsibility for mobility of the academic and other university staff and students.

The problem of funding study visits abroad is one of the main obstacles to international mobility. Life expenses (housing, food, transport), the cost of learning materials and administrative expenses can be a big burden for students. An additional problem may be caused by the difference between the life standard of the home country and the receiving country.

### **An example of good practice**

#### **Poland: university grants for the mobility of students with disabilities**

The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Poland has initiated a special program for additional grants aimed at encouraging the mobility of students with disabilities. The University offers additional ERASMUS grants in the amount of €200 or €100 per month for students with a low or medium

degree of disability. (Students with a high degree of disability are required to register with the national agency which is in charge of the ERASMUS program, since there are special national grants for this category of students). Students with disabilities may also be awarded Rector's grants for travel expenses, which are intended for all outgoing students and whose sum depends on the place of residence and the duration of stay abroad.

Derkowska-Rybicka & Wiśniewska (2010)

### **Reducing inequalities in academic mobility**

In addition to the insufficient number of mobile students in Europe, another problem which occurs is that not all students have the same chances of participating in mobility programs. In the opinion of the European Students' Union, the groups of students which are more likely to be excluded from student mobility programs are the same groups which usually face obstacles or difficulties during their study at home institutions. These are in particular students with physical disabilities or chronic diseases, students with children and students of a lower socioeconomic status (ESIB, 2007).

With regard to the problem of social status, a 2008 study on the profile of students who participate in the ERASMUS program found that a stronger emphasis should be put on encouraging the participation of those students who are not able to participate due to financial reasons. At the same time, the study points out that the obstacles to the participation in the program are not economic (i.e. a lack of funds), but rather socioeconomic. This means that the measures aimed at solving this problem cannot merely focus on increasing the sum of ERASMUS grants or directing the grants towards the vulnerable groups, but also on better presentation of both the advantages and the importance of mobility among the students of lower socioeconomic status (Souto-Otero & McCoshan, 2006).

Although a study on the academic mobility of students with disabilities in Europe has not been conducted, a similar approach is necessary to encourage academic mobility of students with disabilities. This approach would integrate a strong and targeted financial support with better access to information regarding the possibilities and advantages of mobility.

Fortunately, the European Union has recognized the importance of including students with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in academic mobility. The European Quality Charter for Mobility highlights the necessity of adjustment to the needs of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, while the 'Youth on the Move' document (EU Recommendation, 2008), emphasizes that 'particular attention should be given to students who, given their socio-economic background or special needs, require additional financial support'. Moreover, the European Students' Union points out that the students with disabilities should be provided with full and reliable information on living conditions at the potential partner universities abroad, taking into consideration the specific needs of blind students, students who use wheelchairs etc. (ESU, 2008).

The principles outlined above have been applied by the European Commission in the ERASMUS program. In order to ensure that students or staff with disabilities can take full advantage of the opportunities for European mobility, the ERASMUS program pays particular attention to such needs

as counseling and guidance, the reception of students and teachers with disabilities, physical accessibility, pedagogical and technical support, and the funding of additional costs. With regard to funding, ERASMUS offers persons with disabilities a larger grant in order to help them cover the costs for specific difficulties they may encounter (such as physical accessibility and the organization and the content of classes) (European Commission, 2011.b).

\* \* \* \* \*

Academic mobility is not only a positive experience for personal development. The results of academic mobility can also be seen on the institutional level, due to the experience of good practices which can contribute to the development of higher education institutions, and also on the social level: mobility contributes to the employability of students, to the development of international cooperation between individuals and institutions and to creating a sense of belonging to Europe among its citizens.

Although the European Commission has become aware of the obstacles faced by students with disabilities and has recommended the measures aimed reducing them, the responsibility for encouraging and supporting the mobility of students with disabilities should also be assumed by the higher education institutions. Such institutions can set aside their own funds for student grants and provide the services of informing and counseling to these students (see the example of good practice from Poland - Derkowska-Rybicka & Wiśniewska (2010)). Only by providing equal opportunities in all segments of higher education, which also includes international mobility, can the social dimension of higher education emphasized by the Bologna process be ensured (Leuven Communiqué, 2009), preventing the further deepening of inequalities experienced by the already vulnerable groups of students.

## International mobility: An overview of existing documents/initiatives in the Republic of Croatia

As was already mentioned, one of the priorities of the Bologna Declaration is mobility on the level of higher education, which is why this type of mobility has also been adopted as the strategic priority in the development of the system of higher education in Croatia. Thus the 'Education System Development Plan for 2005-2010'<sup>5</sup> states that ***promoting mobility and overcoming obstacles to free movement of students and teachers*** is one of the main aims of the development of education in Croatia.

Within the program for the development of mobility, in October 2007, Croatia established the national Agency for Mobility and EU Programs<sup>6</sup> (AMPEU) based in Zagreb. AMPEU is a public institution dealing with mobility, promotion and implementation of EU programs which involve education and youth. The agency implements the Lifelong Learning Program, Youth in Action program and Euraxess program (a program for the mobility of researchers in Europe). It also promotes Europass program (a set of documents with the purpose of transparency of qualifications) and Erasmus Mundus (the establishment of international joint graduate and postgraduate study programs).

AMPEU's mission is to provide opportunities for studying abroad for as many Croatian citizens as possible in any period of their lives, promoting the idea of lifelong learning as the key moving force of progress. AMPEU conducts the following activities<sup>7</sup>:

- Invites applications for participation in the programs;
- Informs the public about the activities of the programs;
- Provides support during exchange visits;
- Provides guidance to potential beneficiaries of the programs;
- Selects applications for the programs;
- Grants funds for the implementation of selected projects;
- Monitors the implementation of projects;
- Monitors that the allocated funds are spent in an appropriate manner;
- Cooperates with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Ministry of the Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity, the European Commission, and other institutions which deal with lifelong learning, youth and mobility of researchers.

In June 2009, in order to fulfill the strategic goal of increasing international incoming and outgoing mobility, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports set up the Working Group for Removing

<sup>5</sup> Education System Development Plan for 2005-2010, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, September 2005, available at [http://www.national-observatory.org/docs/85-05a\\_WB\\_Program\\_for\\_education.pdf](http://www.national-observatory.org/docs/85-05a_WB_Program_for_education.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mobilnost.hr/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mobilnost.hr/index.php?id=270>

Obstacles and Enhancing International Mobility in Education. The Working Group consists of representatives from the following institutions:

- Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MZOŠ),
- Ministry of the Interior (MUP),
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MVPEI),
- Ministry of Finance (MFIN),
- Tax Administration (PU),
- Croatian Institute for Health Insurance (HZZO),
- Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU),
- Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO),
- Universities,
- Council of Public and Private Polytechnics and Schools of Professional Higher Education,
- Institute for the Development of Education (IRO),
- Croatian Student Council.

The Working Group was designed as a platform for dialogue between the beneficiaries – participants in international projects of which mobility is a constituent part – and representatives of government bodies which have the authority over the legislation and procedures related to international mobility.

The activities of the Working Group resulted in a document entitled 'The Action Plan for Removing Obstacles and Enhancing International Learning Mobility for the Period 2010 – 2012'<sup>8</sup>. In the form of an Action Plan for the period of several years, the document proposes the following activities:

1. Increasing financial resources for international mobility in education,
2. Improvement of the national legislation referring to the income tax, (non)taxation of scholarships and financial grants for education and training abroad,
3. Setting up an optimal and most economical manner of bearing costs and accounting treatment of exchange rate changes related to payments of funds from EU programs,
4. The alignment of foreign students' entitlements with those of Croatian students,
5. Regulating residence of foreign citizens in the education system,
6. Tuning the health insurance procedure,
7. Promoting recognition of international cooperation and mobility as a strategic priority of institutional development,
8. Enhancing capacities related to competences of education institutions and individuals in the vertical line of the education system,
9. Increasing the number of courses held in foreign languages at higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia,
10. Increasing availability of information on residence in the Republic of Croatia for the purpose of study,
11. Designing the national database on international student mobility,
12. Enhancing recognition and acknowledgement of the mobility period and acquired knowledge and skills during the mobility period for the purpose of the continuation of study and joining the labour market.<sup>i</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, September 2010, available at [public.mzos.hr/fjgs.axd?id=17373](http://public.mzos.hr/fjgs.axd?id=17373)

The proposed amendments to the legislation should provide stronger support to international mobility in education and simplify certain procedures related to it. The proposed activities should contribute to enhancing international mobility.

Regarding the alignment of opportunities for international mobility for all students, some of the proposed activities represent a step forward. This is particularly true of the issue of funding, the alignment of foreign students' entitlements with those of Croatian students (the entitlement to subsidized food, accommodation and jobs through the student service centre) and tuning of health insurance procedure. A step forward is also visible in the attempt aimed at solving another important issue, which is often an obstacle to international mobility, and that is the recognition of the mobility period and of the acquired knowledge/skills with the view of continuing study programs and joining the labor market.

If we focus on the level of Croatian universities, we can see that some institutions of higher education have also highlighted international cooperation and mobility as a strategic priority in their strategic documents.

Two documents were adopted at **the University of Zagreb** in the early 2000s: 'Iskorak 2001'<sup>9</sup> and 'International Mission and Policy 2002'<sup>10</sup>. Based on the guidelines from the two documents, and at the proposal of the International Cooperation Committee, in May 2005, the Senate of the University of Zagreb adopted the 'Strategic Plan for the Internationalization of Studies at the University of Zagreb for the Period 2005 – 2010'<sup>11</sup>, which sets the goals of internationalization in the stated period. In May 2007, the Senate of the University of Zagreb accepted the 'Declaration on Encouraging Participation in International Exchange Programs'<sup>12</sup>, bearing in mind the long-term needs of the Croatian society, and the overall system of higher education. In June 2007, the Senate of the University of Zagreb adopted the 'Plan of Activities and Measures for Encouraging International Exchange'<sup>13</sup>, which defines the tasks and task holders. When it comes to the implementation of measures, two regulations were adopted: 'Regulations for International Dual Doctorates'<sup>14</sup> (2009) and 'Ordinance Regulating International Mobility'<sup>15</sup> (2010).

The **University of Rijeka** has adopted the 'University of Rijeka Strategy 2007 – 2013'<sup>16</sup>, in which document the chapter entitled 'Integration into the European Union, Openness towards the World and mobility' states that the University's fifth strategic goal is to become 'a dynamic University actively involved in the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area, which systematically and in an organized manner fosters internal and external scientist and student mobility'<sup>ii</sup>. It sets a goal related to the topic of this handbook to include at least 3% of the teachers

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unizg.hr/znanost-i-tehnologija/dokumenti/iskorak-2001/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://international.unizg.hr/images/50000959/mission%20and%20policy.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>

[http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/medjunarodna\\_suradnja/strateski\\_plan\\_internacionalizacije\\_studija.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/medjunarodna_suradnja/strateski_plan_internacionalizacije_studija.pdf)

<sup>12</sup>

[http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/medjunarodna\\_suradnja/strateski\\_plan\\_internacionalizacije\\_studija.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/medjunarodna_suradnja/strateski_plan_internacionalizacije_studija.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://international.unizg.hr/images/50000959/Akcijski%20plan-final.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [http://doktorski.unizg.hr/download/repository/pravilnik\\_o\\_medjunarodnim\\_dvojnim\\_doktoratima\\_SuZ.pdf](http://doktorski.unizg.hr/download/repository/pravilnik_o_medjunarodnim_dvojnim_doktoratima_SuZ.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik\\_o\\_mobilnosti\\_SuZ.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik_o_mobilnosti_SuZ.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.uniri.hr/files/staticki\\_dio/strategija/University\\_of\\_Rijeka\\_Strategy\\_2007\\_2013\\_English.pdf](http://www.uniri.hr/files/staticki_dio/strategija/University_of_Rijeka_Strategy_2007_2013_English.pdf)

and 3% of the students at the University in the exchange and mobility programs at European universities.

'The Guidelines for the Development of the University of Zadar for the period 2006 – 2010'<sup>17</sup> were adopted at the session of the Senate on October 17<sup>th</sup> 2005, and they state the following: 'The University of Zadar, as a constituent part of the academic community of the Republic of Croatia, has, among its priorities, particularly emphasized the openness towards all forms of international cooperation and international alliance in order to join the integration processes, especially the European ones, as soon as possible, based on the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations...' (p. 24). The document also states that 'student and teacher exchange will be encouraged, as well as the exchange of experiences and joining the common projects' (p. 23).

The 'Research Strategy at the University of Dubrovnik for the Period 2009 – 2015'<sup>18</sup> shows that this University also includes international cooperation and mobility among its priorities: '...with this Strategy, the University becomes a part of the European network of universities and contributes to the fulfillment of EU goal aimed at reaching the number of 3 million mobile students within the ERASMUS program, enhancing cooperation between the economic and education sectors, enhancing cooperation between the EU institutions of higher education and increasing the transfer of innovations' (p. 10).

In the document 'Scientific Strategy of the University of Split 2009 – 2014'<sup>19</sup>, the chapter dealing with the vision of **the University of Split** points out that the university will '...stimulate and encourage the mobility of students and the teaching staff with the view to expanding the base of knowledge and enabling the development of varied careers of all the employees at the university of Split'. Describing the University's mission, the document says that 'the University ensures and implements mechanisms for the mobility of both students and teaching staff, rational use of human and material resources with permanent supervision of quality, competitiveness and international presence of scientific, teaching, artistic and professional work.'<sup>20</sup>

### **What are the possibilities for international mobility in the Republic of Croatia?**

On the level of the European Union, a lot of programs have been organized intended for students, teaching and non-teaching staff. The cooperation between Croatian and other European universities varies in intensity and tradition from one higher education institution to another.

For an institution of higher education to acquire the right to participate in EU mobility programs (for example: bilateral exchange, CEEPUS, ERASMUS etc.), it has to meet the basic requirements set by each of these programs. For example, in order to enter the ERASMUS mobility program, the university has to get an 'ERASMUS University Charter based on the quality of resources and working system'<sup>20</sup>. Each of the mobility programs has some specific conditions with regard to its goal and mission, which the university has to meet and demonstrate.

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unizd.hr/Portals/0/pdf/Strategija.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.unidu.hr/datoteke/17izb/Strategija-istrzivanja-na-sveucilistu-u-dubrovniku-2009-2015.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.unist.hr/Portals/5/docs/science/Strategija\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unist.hr/Portals/5/docs/science/Strategija_eng.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mobilnost.hr/index.php?id=292>

The basic requirements for mobility are the existence of<sup>21</sup>:

1. European programs,
2. International agreements,
3. University agreements,
4. Faculty agreements,
5. Joint study programs,
6. Joint research programs, and
7. Activities of student organizations.

The most important program implemented by the Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU)<sup>22</sup>, and intended for student mobility in higher education is the ERASMUS program. Within the framework of this program, students can spend a period of their study at an institution of higher education or carry out their professional training abroad, which significantly contributes to their independence, cultural enrichment, knowledge of foreign languages and ability to work in a multicultural environment.

The aims of the ERASMUS program are:

- To strengthen the European Higher Education Area;
- To strengthen the role of higher education and professional training in the process of innovations;
- To enhance the mobility of students and teachers, with the aim of reaching the number of 3 million mobile students within the ERASMUS program and its predecessors by the year 2013;
- To enhance the opportunities for the development of higher education and transfer of innovations;
- To strengthen cooperation between the institutions of higher education in Europe;
- To strengthen cooperation between the economic and education sectors;
- To enhance the levels of transparency and compatibility of qualifications in higher and vocational education;
- To develop innovative content based on information and communication technology; to develop services, pedagogical principles and practices necessary for lifelong learning.

The participants in the ERASMUS program can be students, teaching and non-teaching staff, higher education institutions and employees of higher education institutions which have been granted the ERASMUS University Charter, consortia for the organization of ERASMUS professional training programs and companies which plan to found a consortium for organizing ERASMUS professional training programs.

The activities within the framework of the ERASMUS sub-programs are:

- Student mobility – study period abroad lasting from 3 to 12 months;
- Student mobility – professional training lasting from 3 to 12 months;
- Organization of classes lasting from 1 day to 6 weeks;
- Professional training lasting from 5 days to 6 weeks;
- Intensive programs lasting from 2 to 6 weeks;
- Preparatory visits lasting from 1 to 5 days.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.projekti.hr/eportfolio/rhorvatek/files/-1/56/Mobilnost%2Bstudentata-2.ppt>

<sup>22</sup> [www.mobilnost.hr](http://www.mobilnost.hr)

## **ERASMUS Student Mobility<sup>23</sup>**

### **Goals**

#### **Study visit:**

- To enable students to gain new experiences in the field of education, language and culture;
- To promote cooperation between institutions of higher education, and their internationalization;
- To develop highly skilled professionals with international experience in education;
- To simplify the process of recognition of mobility periods and the transfer of credits using the ECTS credit system.

#### **Professional training:**

- To adjust to the specific requirements of the labor markets of individual member states of the European Union;
- To acquire specific skills;
- To gain better understanding of the economy and society of the member state through work experience.

#### **Basic conditions:**

- The study visit or professional training can last from 3 to 12 months;
- The applicant must be a Croatian citizen or a person with permanent residency in Croatia; or a citizen of another participating country (EU member states, EFTA and Turkey), or have a refugee status, the status of a person without citizenship;
- At the time of departure on a mobility program, the student must be enrolled at least in the second year of the undergraduate study program;
- Mobility can be carried out at institutions of higher education in 27 EU member states;
- Higher education institutions may not charge the ERASMUS students tuition fees or any other fees which their home students do not have to pay.

#### **Obligations before departure:**

Before departure, students sign the Funding Agreement with their home institution, which determines mutual rights and obligations. The agreement includes two addenda:

- The Learning/Training Agreement, which determines the particulars about the curriculum or the professional training program;
- ERASMUS Student Charter, which states the students' rights and obligations related to their study visit abroad.

#### **Obligations upon return:**

Upon return from the host institution the students are obliged to deliver the following documents to their home institution:

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.mobilnost.hr/index.php?id=129>

- A final report (in the form required by the home institution);
- A grade transcript;
- A certificate from the host institution stating the duration of the study visit.

**Funding:**

Each student participating in international exchange within the ERASMUS program may be granted a monthly financial support which covers the costs of living, transport, accommodation and insurance.

**Application procedure for students**

Applications are submitted to and candidates selected by the home university. For more detailed information on the application procedure, students can contact the Office for International Cooperation at their home university or their ERASMUS coordinator<sup>24</sup>.

Other programs enabling student mobility are also available. Besides the ERASMUS program, most students go on international exchange visits through bilateral agreements between universities. The information on available programs/scholarships is published on a number of websites, such as [www.stipendije.info](http://www.stipendije.info), the website of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports<sup>25</sup> and on the websites of individual universities (see also the chapter entitled 'Publishing of information on mobility at Croatian universities').

---

<sup>24</sup> The list of coordinators at universities is available at <http://www.mobilnost.hr/index.php?id=129>

<sup>25</sup> <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2120>

## International student mobility

Student mobility refers to studying at the host university, after which the student returns to the home university and finishes the enrolled study program. Student mobility includes study visits or professional training within regular undergraduate, graduate and (doctoral or specialist) postgraduate study programs at the host institution.

Mobility is organized as outgoing mobility (students leave their home institution in Croatia to study at another institution abroad) and incoming mobility (students come to a Croatian institution from a home institution abroad). Each of these two kinds of mobility is organized and realized in its own way. Mobility is implemented and organized by means of various types of regulations on both the national level and the level of each university.

At the Croatian universities international mobility is formally regulated in a similar way.

Thus the **University of Zagreb** has the 'Ordinance Regulating International Mobility'<sup>26</sup>, which determines the basic principles of incoming and outgoing mobility of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the types and duration of mobility, application procedure, basic documents, the rights and obligations of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the role of ECTS coordinators at the University and its constituents, as well as other issues related to the implementation of mobility programs.

**The University of Dubrovnik** also has its 'Ordinance Regulating International Mobility'<sup>27</sup>. The Ordinance determines the basic principles of incoming and outgoing mobility of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the types and duration of mobility, application procedure, basic documents, the rights and obligations of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the role of ECTS/ERASMUS coordinators at the University and its constituents, as well as other issues related to the implementation of mobility programs.

The Senate of the **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek** has adopted the 'Ordinance Regulating the ERASMUS Program of International Mobility'<sup>28</sup>, which closely defines the implementation of the ERASMUS program of international mobility, as well as the basic principles of incoming and outgoing mobility of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the rights and obligations of students, researchers and teaching and non-teaching staff, the rights and obligations of the University Commission for Mobility Programs, the rights and obligations of ERASMUS coordinators at the University constituents and other issues important for the implementation of mobility programs.

---

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik\\_o\\_mobilnosti\\_SuZ.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik_o_mobilnosti_SuZ.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.unidu.hr/datoteke/49izb/Pravilnik-o-medjunarodnoj-mobilnosti.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [www.unios.hr/mobilnost-studenti-2011](http://www.unios.hr/mobilnost-studenti-2011)

**The University of Split** does not have a special ordinance regulating international mobility, but acts according to the 'Regulations on Studying and the System of Higher Education'<sup>29</sup>, the instructions in the 'Handbook for the ERASMUS Program – the Mobility of Students and (Non-)Teaching Staff'<sup>30</sup> and the 'Instructions for ERASMUS Students Selected for Mobility Programs' which are composed by their Office for International Cooperation.

**The University of Zadar** uses its 'Regulations on Studying'<sup>31</sup>, and another document entitled 'Rules of Procedure for the Departments – Implementation of Mobility and Recognition of Study Periods Spent Abroad, ECTS Credits and Grades'<sup>32</sup>, which refers to outgoing students.

**The University of Rijeka** acts according to the guidelines presented in the 'Handbook for the ERASMUS Program – the Mobility of Students and (Non-)Teaching Staff'<sup>33</sup> and in the 'Instructions on Mobility for University Constituents, ERASMUS Coordinators and Students of the University of Rijeka'<sup>34</sup>. The Instructions recommend to the University constituents the introduction of graduate study programs in English in order for the University to adjust to hosting incoming students.

**The Juraj Dobrila University of Pula** has its 'Ordinance Regulating International Mobility'<sup>35</sup>, which determines the basic principles of incoming and outgoing mobility of students, researchers, artists and teaching and non-teaching staff, the types and duration of mobility, application procedure, basic documents, the rights and obligations of students, researchers, resident artists and teaching and non-teaching staff, the role of ECTS coordinators at the University and ECTS coordinators at the University constituents, as well as other issues related to the implementation of mobility programs.

None of the documents mentioned above, with an exception of the 'Handbook for the ERASMUS Program – the Mobility of Students and (Non-)Teaching Staff' issued by the Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU)<sup>36</sup>, explicitly mentions the mobility of students with disabilities. The Handbook highlights students with disabilities in the context of receiving a larger amount of funds, to which these students are entitled because of potentially bigger costs which can occur during the exchange visits. The Handbook stipulates that students with disabilities should apply to their home institution of higher education within regular deadlines for obtaining funding, in order to enter the quota of students approved by AMPEU. After the internal competitions have taken place, the higher education institutions must apply to AMPEU in order to obtain additional funding for students with disabilities by filling out a special application form which is available on AMPEU's website. In addition

<sup>29</sup>

[http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/394/Files/792/Pravilnik%20o%20studijima%20i%20sustavu%20studiranja\\_27112008.pdf](http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/394/Files/792/Pravilnik%20o%20studijima%20i%20sustavu%20studiranja_27112008.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU),

[http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05\\_1271945397\\_Erasmus\\_prirucnik\\_za\\_mobilnost\\_22\\_04\\_2010\\_clean\\_version.pdf](http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1271945397_Erasmus_prirucnik_za_mobilnost_22_04_2010_clean_version.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.unizd.hr/Portals/0/pdf/Pravilnik\\_o\\_studiranju.pdf](http://www.unizd.hr/Portals/0/pdf/Pravilnik_o_studiranju.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.unizd.hr/Me%C4%91unarodnasuradnja/Mobilnoststudenata/tabid/3102/Default.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU),

[http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05\\_1271945397\\_Erasmus\\_prirucnik\\_za\\_mobilnost\\_22\\_04\\_2010\\_clean\\_version.pdf](http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1271945397_Erasmus_prirucnik_za_mobilnost_22_04_2010_clean_version.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna\\_suradnja/erasmus/9%20Naputak%20o%20mobilnosti.pdf](http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna_suradnja/erasmus/9%20Naputak%20o%20mobilnosti.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.unipu.hr/index.php?id=89>

<sup>36</sup>

[http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05\\_1271945397\\_Erasmus\\_prirucnik\\_za\\_mobilnost\\_22\\_04\\_2010\\_clean\\_version.pdf](http://www.mobilnost.hr/prilozi/05_1271945397_Erasmus_prirucnik_za_mobilnost_22_04_2010_clean_version.pdf)

to this form, the institutions are required to enclose a recent certificate showing the student's degree of disability. Information on other sources of funding which the given student is already receiving must also be provided. On the basis of all this documentation, AMPEU decides on the final amount of financial support for each person individually.

### **Publishing of information on mobility at Croatian universities**

Croatian universities publish information on international mobility in several ways. All the universities have web pages dedicated to international exchange (see the list of links related to the mobility in the Republic of Croatia). The information on international mobility is also sent via e-mail to the coordinators at the University constituents, who in turn forward it to students and teaching, administrative and other staff. The universities also send printed materials, such as leaflets, brochures, posters, etc. to their constituents, where they are put on notice boards. In addition to that, the information is distributed at info days, and at meetings with students who have applied for or have obtained an international scholarship.

#### **Links related to mobility in the Republic of Croatia**

Agency for Mobility and EU Programs (AMPEU):

<http://www.mobilnost.hr/>

[http://www.mobilnost.hr/index\\_en.php](http://www.mobilnost.hr/index_en.php)

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek:

<http://www.unios.hr/beta2/index.php?g=5&i=10>

<http://www.unios.hr/medjunarodna.php>

<http://www.unios.hr/erasmus-uvod.php>

[www.unios.hr/mobilnost-studenti-2011](http://www.unios.hr/mobilnost-studenti-2011)

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula:

<http://www.unipu.hr/index.php?id=887>

<http://www.unipu.hr/index.php?id=89>

University of Dubrovnik:

[http://www.unidu.hr/medjunarodna\\_eng.php?clanak\\_id=1602](http://www.unidu.hr/medjunarodna_eng.php?clanak_id=1602)

[http://www.unidu.hr/medjunarodna/tekst\\_medj.php?clanak\\_id=1536](http://www.unidu.hr/medjunarodna/tekst_medj.php?clanak_id=1536)

[http://cms.unidu.hr/upload/1298479862\\_604\\_mala\\_Pravilnik%20o%20medjunarodnoj%20mobilnosti%20-%20UNIDU.pdf](http://cms.unidu.hr/upload/1298479862_604_mala_Pravilnik%20o%20medjunarodnoj%20mobilnosti%20-%20UNIDU.pdf)

<http://www.unidu.hr/datoteke/49izb/Pravilnik-o-medjunarodnoj-mobilnosti.pdf>

University of Rijeka:

[http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna\\_suradnja/erasmus/Erasmus%20Policy%20Statement%20web%20pdf.pdf](http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna_suradnja/erasmus/Erasmus%20Policy%20Statement%20web%20pdf.pdf)

[http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna\\_suradnja/erasmus/9%20Naputak%20o%20mobilnosti.pdf](http://www.uniri.hr/files/medjunarodna_suradnja/erasmus/9%20Naputak%20o%20mobilnosti.pdf)

[http://www.uniri.hr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=132&lang=hr](http://www.uniri.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=132&lang=hr)

[http://www.uniri.hr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=132&lang=en](http://www.uniri.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=132&lang=en)

University of Split:

<http://www.unist.hr/Me%C4%91unarodnasuradnja/Uredzame%C4%91unarodnusunradnju/tabid/192/Default.aspx>

<http://www.unist.hr/InternationalRelations/InternationalRelationsOffice/tabid/415/Default.aspx>

[http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/385/Files/40/Pravilnik%20o%20studijima%20i%20sustavu%20studiranja\\_27112008.pdf](http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/385/Files/40/Pravilnik%20o%20studijima%20i%20sustavu%20studiranja_27112008.pdf)

[http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/docs/medjunarodna/Upute%20Erasmus%20studentima%202010\\_2011.pdf](http://www.unist.hr/Portals/0/docs/medjunarodna/Upute%20Erasmus%20studentima%202010_2011.pdf)

University of Zadar:

<http://www.unizd.hr/InternationalStudentGuide/tabid/3135/Default.aspx>

<http://www.unizd.hr/Me%C4%91unarodnasuradnja/Uredzame%C4%91unarodnusunradnju/tabid/239/Default.aspx>

<http://www.unizd.hr/Me%C4%91unarodnasuradnja/Mobilnoststudenata/tabid/3102/Default.aspx>

[http://www.unizd.hr/Portals/0/pdf/Pravilnik\\_o\\_studiranju.pdf](http://www.unizd.hr/Portals/0/pdf/Pravilnik_o_studiranju.pdf)

<http://www.unizd.hr/Me%C4%91unarodnasuradnja/Mobilnoststudenata/tabid/3102/Default.aspx>

University of Zagreb:

[http://international.unizg.hr/international\\_students/guest\\_students](http://international.unizg.hr/international_students/guest_students)

<http://international.unizg.hr/relations>

[http://international.unizg.hr/international\\_students/coursesprogrammes\\_in\\_english](http://international.unizg.hr/international_students/coursesprogrammes_in_english)

[http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik\\_o\\_mobilnosti\\_SuZ.pdf](http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/dokumenti/novosti2010/Pravilnik_o_mobilnosti_SuZ.pdf)

<http://www.unizg.hr/uredssi/index.php/lang-en>

It is important to make sure that all the information is in fact accessible to all students, especially to students with disabilities (see the handbook entitled **Access to Information**). It is also important to check whether or not all information packages contain specific information intended for students with disabilities.

### **Persons and bodies in charge of international mobility**

All Croatian universities have an Office/Service for International Cooperation, as well as a Vice-Rector for International Cooperation. The University constituents (except those of the University of Dubrovnik) have coordinators for international mobility, and some constituents even have their own Offices and Vice-Deans for International Cooperation. At the University of Dubrovnik, international

mobility is handled by the Service for International Cooperation. In addition, all universities have their ERASMUS coordinators<sup>37</sup>.

Students with disabilities interested in incoming mobility at Croatian universities can obtain information in the way described in the previous section. The University of Zagreb and the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek also have an Office for Students with Disabilities<sup>38</sup>, which students can contact. The University of Zagreb has also appointed coordinators for students with disabilities at every University constituent (the list of coordinators is available on the website of the Office for Students with Disabilities<sup>39</sup>). The University of Dubrovnik has also appointed a contact person for students with disabilities. Some university constituents, such as the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, also have student clubs whose aim is to welcome incoming students, and which are also prepared to welcome incoming students with disabilities.

### **Personal experience of the student Sunčica Frković**

#### **Sunčica, a student of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences of the University of Zagreb, spent one semester at the University of Graz (Austria)**

1. How did you prepare for international mobility (what kind of information was necessary/important to you, where did you seek/find the information, who helped you the most in providing the information/support at your home/host university)?

When I found out that I had got a grant from the University of Graz, I was very excited. I was interested in everything. Since I got a grant for the winter semester of 2009/2010 I had only a couple of months over the summer to prepare, both mentally and in practical terms. I had been in contact with the Office for International Relations of the University of Graz since I had applied for the grant. At the beginning I needed to select carefully the courses which I was to take so that they matched the courses held at my home university in Zagreb. It took several weeks for the Faculty's ECTS coordinator and myself just to plan everything and get support from the Faculty staff so that everything would turn out well and, above all, to make it an interesting experience for me personally. Since I was granted a scholarship in a German-speaking area, I was a bit nervous because my knowledge of German was pretty limited when compared to my knowledge of English, which is my first foreign language. But since the University of Graz has had a long experience in receiving international students, the choice of courses which they offered was more than acceptable, and I managed to pass the courses held in German, as well as those held in English, with high grades. During the whole process I was guided by a lady from the Office for International Relations of the University of Graz, who gave me all the

<sup>37</sup> list available at <http://www.mobilnost.hr/index.php?id=129>

<sup>38</sup> The University of Zagreb, <http://www.unizg.hr/uredssi/>

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, <http://3stos.unios.hr/index.php?g=1&i=21>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.unizg.hr/uredssi/images/datoteke/koordinatorissi.pdf>

information necessary for each step, from the very beginning of the process when I needed to fill out my application documents, to my application for student accommodation in Graz and throughout the semester I spent there. I e-mailed every question I needed answered (and, believe me, there were quite a lot of them) to the coordinator from the Office for International Relations. What meant a lot to me was their patience and understanding, and the ease with which we solved all the problems together. Although I spent that semester studying in Graz as their student, I was always in contact with the home University in Zagreb, that is, with the Faculty's ECTS coordinator, about all the documents and certificates which I needed to bring with me so that my home Faculty would be able to recognize all the courses which I took there and approve my enrolment into the next and final semester. Therefore, in most cases, all communication took place between the Office for International Relations of the University of Graz, the ECTS coordinator at my home Faculty and me.

2. What was your experience with mobility, considering the support you needed? What kind of support did you get, and what kind did you not get or did you encounter problems with?

As I have already mentioned, thanks to the generous help of the University of Graz, as well as the help of my home Faculty in Zagreb, that is, the help of the Faculty's ECTS coordinator, I didn't experience any problems. I honestly think that we were a good team, the ECTS coordinator of my home Faculty and myself, when it comes to issues related to the Faculty in Zagreb, as well as my cooperation with the Office for International Relations of the University of Graz when it comes to issues related to studying at their University. The most important thing in the whole process was that I should get more than I would lose, or might have lost. I believe that both the professors and the administrative staff of my home Faculty in Zagreb agreed to offer their help, recommendations and support for this experience. I also consider my own commitment in the whole process to have been of great importance. What I mean is that if I myself hadn't been interested in making sure everything worked out all right, in order to gain as much as I could from this opportunity, all the effort and support by the Faculty's ECTS coordinator the Office for International Relations at the University of Graz wouldn't have had such a positive outcome.

3. In your experience, what else (what kind of information or support) should be provided by host universities and home universities in order to facilitate international mobility as much as possible?

Although this question is very specific, it is hard to provide a specific answer. It is this precisely the kind of support that we have been talking about which is the most important to a young person when they are leaving or preparing to leave home to go on an international exchange visit for one semester. I believe I needn't mention that the support of my family played a significant role in the whole process. Also, some people may not be ready to go through all of this by themselves, and it is important for them to

have someone who can guide them through the whole process, someone they can rely on. I was lucky to have an ECTS coordinator at my home Faculty who helped me from the very beginning until now, and who was primarily my friend in the whole process. I believe that information on international mobility is very well presented, both in the media and in the universities throughout Croatia, and young people know that. But I also believe that students need to be encouraged more strongly to embark on such a wonderful journey, which contributes to their development as future degree holders. Therefore, a stronger commitment on the part of the teachers, assistants and other staff would certainly enhance this kind of cooperation between faculties throughout the world, and would definitely bring more benefit to both students and their home universities.

### **Types of support for outgoing students with disabilities at Croatian universities**

With regard to the organizational system aimed at informing students with disabilities about outgoing mobility, the information can be:

- *Prepared in advance.* This includes acquainting students with the terms and conditions for the receiving of students with disabilities already at the disposal to offices/services for international cooperation. This refers to the universities with which a university in Croatia has previously established a mobility program.
- *Prepared subsequently.* This refers to situations when the terms and conditions for the reception of students with disabilities are not known due to the fact that the student him/herself has chosen a new university with which offices/services for international cooperation are not familiar. In this case, the student with a disability can make inquiries him/herself, but the office/service for international cooperation must also gather the necessary information for the student.

Usually, a university has developed better relations with some foreign universities in terms of student and teaching staff exchange than with others. In this case, the information flow develops over time and students with disabilities can be better acquainted with the situation upon their arrival. Previous participation of students in exchange programs is a good source of information that can help students with disabilities. It is important to inquire about housing conditions, access to university facilities, access to the campus, accessibility of public transport for students with disabilities etc.

### **Examples of good practice**

The University of Plymouth has lifts in all lecture theatres that take students with mobility impairments to their seats. Some universities have special clinics located at the university campus that take care of students with disabilities on a daily basis.

The system that enables students with disabilities to stay and work at European and world universities is supported by various international associations, about which offices/services for international cooperation must make inquiries in advance. This is at the same time an opportunity for students with disabilities, but also for offices/services for international cooperation, to establish contacts with such associations and obtain necessary information on behalf of the students with disabilities and in their interest.

Although universities in western countries of the European Union are relatively well equipped – usually better than universities in counties in transition – outgoing students with disabilities should become acquainted with each particular situation in order to meet their needs.

Taking into consideration the needs of students with disabilities, the help of student assistants is often required. This includes assistance to students with disabilities on an individual basis. A developed system of student assistants is the best form of individual support for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities need different kinds of help through personal assistance, which in Europe still represents a higher level of support. For example, for students with hearing impairments, the support of sign language interpreters is particularly important because it enables them to efficiently communicate with the community in which they live<sup>40</sup>.

For this reason offices/services for international cooperation should inquire whether there are student assistants available at the university to which a student with a disability is going. Since the availability of student assistants represents a high level of organization with regard to reception of students with disabilities, special attention should be paid to such assistants.

Based on the experience so far, there are two basic issues important for students with disabilities about which offices/services for international cooperation should be informed<sup>41</sup>:

1. The accessibility of public transport for students with mobility impairments;
2. The accommodations regarding educational materials at the host university.

### **Physical accessibility assessment**

In addition to assessing the accessibility of the applicant's housing, the accessibility of the working environment, university or organization should also be assessed. The following should be taken into account:

- Is the ground rugged and uneven? Is the site inaccessible for persons with disabilities? Is there an alternate route to the university?
- Is there an area within the university where persons sensitive to heat or cold could rest? What information should be provided to persons with respiratory organ problems?

---

<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that sign language is not universal, i.e., it is not the same in the whole world (see p. 42)

<sup>41</sup> For more information on the support of an office/service for international cooperation in facilitating outgoing mobility for students with disabilities see chapter entitled **Useful Tips**.

- Will the organizer present the instructions orally or in the written form? Will persons with hearing impairments or blind and visually impaired persons be provided with interpreters or assistants?
  - Do the areas in which the applicant will be staying have an accessible restroom? If not, is it possible to mount portable toilet booths?
  - Are electrical outlets and light switches easily accessible at all places where the applicant will be staying?
  - Is there a refrigerator available in case the applicant takes medication or special food?
- (Sygall & Lewis, 2006)

The system of information is important because it provides students with disabilities with conditions necessary for a successful achievement of their educational and life goals at the host university. For this reason it represents one of the main responsibilities of a university office/service for international cooperation.

#### **Student association Zagreb Exchange Committee (ZEC) at the University of Zagreb<sup>42</sup>**

Who are we?

ZEC is a non-profit student association based on the 'students help students' principle.

What do we offer?

Are you a foreign student on an exchange program in Zagreb or a Croatian student who wants to participate in a student exchange program? In either case, we offer all the information you need.

Where are we based?

Room 308c

Zvonimirova 8, 10000 Zagreb

zec.unizg@gmail.com

#### **Forms of support for incoming students with disabilities at Croatian universities**

During they stay at Croatian universities, all students participating in student exchange programs, including students with disabilities, have the right to live in a dormitory and use a student identity card to eat in student cafeterias.

Furthermore, universities provide students with disabilities with additional forms of support.

**The Office for Students with Disabilities<sup>43</sup> of the University of Zagreb** is available to all students with disabilities at any level of study. Since some of the special rights granted to students with disabilities are limited by citizenship, the services of the Office can also be limited. In such cases the Office

<sup>42</sup> Source: the association's leaflet.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.unizg.hr/uredssi/index.php/lang-en>

strives to provide support through cooperation with associations that offer various kinds of services (personal assistance, sign language interpreting etc.). Most activities that the Office for Students with Disabilities cannot carry out due to the lack of resources are done in cooperation with such associations. With regard to physical accessibility, at the moment of writing this handbook only four University constituents are accessible (the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, the Faculty of Economics and Business and the Faculty of Kinesiology). Other constituents are partially accessible or even completely inaccessible.

### **The Office for Students with Disabilities of the University of Zagreb**

<http://www.unizg.hr/uredssi/index.php/lang-en>

Of more than 65,000 students studying at the University of Zagreb, there are around 200 students with disabilities, which amounts to around 3 per mille. In order to ensure that all potential students with disabilities who want to study at the University of Zagreb achieve their aim, conditions for successful studying should be provided for all existing, but also for all future students with disabilities. With this aim, the University of Zagreb has founded the Office for Students with Disabilities as a reference centre where students can obtain information, either on the spot or via telephone, e-mail, leaflets and brochures. The Office offers direct support to students in resolving specific problems that can arise during their studies, and as such represents a mechanism for ensuring equal opportunities.

#### **The Office is aimed at students with:**

- Sight impairments;
- Hearing impairments;
- Physical disabilities;
- Multiple impairments;
- Chronic diseases;
- Psychological disorders;
- Learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia etc.);
- Other medical conditions or difficulties that can affect the course of studies.

#### **The Office for Students with Disabilities of the University of Zagreb is managed and run by:**

- The Vice-Rector for Students and Studying;
- The Head of the Office;
- The Commission for Students with Disabilities of the University of Zagreb.

#### **An important role in the activities of the Office is played by:**

- The Coordination for Students with Disabilities of the University of Zagreb:  
The Coordination for Students with Disabilities consists of one representative of students with disabilities from each constituent of the University of Zagreb. The Coordination is appointed by the Rector of the University of Zagreb with the task of expressing needs, suggesting activities and evaluating the work that has been done.

- Coordinators for students with disabilities at the constituents:

Coordinators for students with disabilities are a link between students with disabilities, teachers and administrative staff at an individual constituent and the Office for Students with Disabilities of the University of Zagreb. They are trained through lectures and workshops and regularly informed of all activities and procedures for the purpose of ensuring minimal standards of accessibility for students with disabilities at all constituents of the University of Zagreb. The coordinator is at the same time the contact person at the faculty/academy whom students with disabilities can turn to in order to exercise their rights with regard to teaching and exam accommodations, and for any other questions in connection with their rights.

**Contact:**

Savska cesta 25 (Student Centre)

01/4564-210

01/4593-578

099/4593-578

[uredssi@unizg.hr](mailto:uredssi@unizg.hr)

**The Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek** also offers support to students with disabilities via **the Office for Students with Disabilities**<sup>44</sup>. The Office strives to devote individual attention to each student with a disability with regard to his/her specific needs. Via the Office for Students with Disabilities, incoming students can get alternative forms of help and support available at the level of associations, local self-government etc. The constituents are mostly physically accessible or will become accessible upon their relocation to the University Campus (e.g., the Faculty of Agriculture, the Department of Biology and the Department of Chemistry). There is a student cafeteria within the campus that is fully accessible to students with disabilities.

**Office for Students with Disabilities of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek**

<http://www.unios.hr/?english&i=1004>

The Office for Students with Disabilities of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek launched its activities in the academic year 2009/2010. It was founded by a decision of the University's Senate at a session held on May 26, 2008.

The Office for Students with Disabilities is run and coordinated by:  
Professor Dr. Drago Žagar, Vice-Rector for Education and Students;  
Damir Španić, BA, associate for student affairs and students with disabilities.

---

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.unios.hr/?english&i=1004>



The Office is situated on the University Campus in a building at the corner of Hadrijanova and Svačićeva Streets, which it shares with the Student Council of the J.J. Strossmayer University.

The Office for Students with Disabilities functions primarily as an integrated university office that offers students with disabilities information and support on the Office premises and tries to meet specific needs of students with disabilities. Information is also provided to all those interested in studying but unsure about

their rights and possibilities at the faculty they have chosen.

*(Caption: The photograph shows the building where the Office for Students with Disabilities of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek is situated)*

Students can obtain information on the spot or via e-mail, telephone, leaflets or brochures. The Office for Students with Disabilities of the J.J. Strossmayer University strives to ensure high quality access to higher education by meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities and by striving to increase their number.

The Office guarantees confidentiality of all the information disclosed during consultations.

**Office hours:**

Monday to Friday 9.00 am – 12.00 am

dspanic@unios.hr

At **the University of Split**, activities are under way through the personal support system of student volunteers ('buddy program'). Most constituent buildings (the University Library, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture) are accessible to students with mobility impairments. The buildings under construction, such as the Faculty of Maritime Studies, the Faculty of Chemistry and Technology and the Faculty of Science will additionally provide audible signals for visually impaired persons and light signals for persons with hearing impairments. The exact date when these devices will become available is not known at the moment.

**The University of Dubrovnik**, whose buildings are all physically accessible, also offers peer support aimed at helping students with disabilities to adjust to the new environment. The activities are carried out in partnership with state administration bodies, as well as with institutions, organizations and associations aimed at helping persons with disabilities.

**Experiences to date with incoming mobility of students with disabilities**

At the moment of writing this handbook, only **the University of Zagreb** has had some experience with receiving students with severe disabilities.

A student with visual impairment came to Zagreb from the University of Ljubljana to study Croatian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences via the CEEPUS program during the summer term of the academic year 2008/2009. Prior to her arrival, she had asked the Office for Students with Disabilities to help her arrange personal assistance or mobility training.

The Office sent a query regarding the possibilities of getting an additional grant to the Office for International Cooperation, which referred the query to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MZOŠ). The reply of the competent person from the Ministry was vague, referring to rights granted to all students participating in the CEEPUS program.

In the end, the student was provided with mobility training in cooperation with the Guide Dog and Mobility Association. The service was provided free of charge, even though she was not a Croatian citizen, following a request from the Office for Students with Disabilities.

During her study visit at the University of Zagreb, the student also needed the accommodation of educational materials, which was provided by associations involved in such projects. The student's feedback on her stay at our University was extremely positive because of the support provided by the Office for Students with Disabilities and the associations.

Other Croatian universities have not yet had any experience with international mobility of students with disabilities.

### **Personal experience of the student Nina Zavašnik**

#### **Student exchange, Zagreb, February 9 – June 2, 2009**

My name is Nina Zavašnik and during the student exchange program at the University of Zagreb I was in my final year at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana (Slovenia), majoring in German Language and Literature and Croatian, Serbian and Macedonian Languages and Literatures. As I wanted to become an interpreter, I wanted to spend a term in one of the countries whose language I was studying, which is almost imperative for language students today. But my obstacle is that I cannot see, which is why I have lost many opportunities (scholarships, summer schools...) despite the fact that I was even willing to share the expenses.

At the end of May 2008, like every year, the Department of Slavic Studies, announced a competition for CEEPUS scholarships for the academic year 2008/2009. There was only one grant available for the University of Zagreb for a period of two months, and at my Department Zagreb had always been the most popular destination. Before I applied, I'd asked my colleague in Zagreb about the study conditions for persons with disabilities (of all the universities of the former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria that were on the list, the University of Zagreb seemed to have the best conditions for students with disabilities). I didn't have any concrete information, but I decided to apply nevertheless. Since my mom was still running a self-help group for parents of blind and visually impaired children, the information reached us that at the University of Zagreb the conditions for persons with disabilities were rapidly changing. Maybe this was the encouragement I needed.

The fact that I had regularly passed my exams, my high grade average and my motivation letter resulted in a response from the coordinator that said: "The grant for Zagreb is yours". I really hadn't

expected this. But now I needed to start making arrangements. First, I had to determine the time of my departure. I decided to go in February 2009, in order to have enough time for planning if things didn't go smoothly. At first, I used the information I'd got from my colleague. I contacted a gentleman at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports who was in charge of international student exchange. I explained my situation and requested to be housed at the Cvjetno Naselje student dormitory, recommended to me by the colleague because it was the closest one to the Faculty. I also contacted the Office for Students with Disabilities (within our university there is no such thing, so this was another suggestion from my colleague). I faced another big, maybe the biggest, challenge – physical mobility. If I wanted to attend classes at the Faculty and actively experience my stay in Zagreb, I needed to become acquainted with certain routes. In that I was helped by Mirjana Zubak from the Office for Students with Disabilities. She arranged mobility training for me at the Guide Dog and Mobility Association and sent me all the necessary contacts so that I could arrange everything else. I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that nobody complicated the situation, but rather tried to find the best solution for each problem. It seemed that people were familiar with the problems of persons with disabilities and nobody gave me the impression that my stay in Croatia would deprive Croatian students with disabilities of anything. So, things were resolved very quickly and I didn't need that much extra time after all. Since at home we assumed that things in Zagreb would be on the same level as in Ljubljana or maybe a bit below that level, my parents told me not to worry, if I needed anything, they could reach me in two and a half hours, and in the worst case I could return my scholarship and go back home. As it turned out, this was not necessary.

In spite of all the information I had gathered in advance, when the program started and I came to Zagreb, not everything went smoothly. Problems arose with Internet access and with getting a tram pass. At first it seemed that my problems would never end, but two days later I managed to work everything out with the help of my friend Martina. Mobility training started on my second day in Zagreb, and until I learned how to get to the Faculty, the friend escorted me to the classes. After I had been in Zagreb for two weeks, and the materials for scanning had started piling up, I contacted the Zamisli association, whose contact information I had got from the Office for Students with Disabilities. By the end of my stay they had scanned several books, dictionaries and other learning materials for me. Since I was an exchange student, at first I felt I shouldn't become too involved in the association's activities – I had brought that feeling with me. I was pleasantly surprised that people in these associations considered persons with disabilities as their equals and that their aim was to help them study successfully and live independently, without making them feel like helpless persons who should be forever grateful for scraps of care and help, not of what they need, but of what someone is willing to give. I was also surprised by the openness of the people in the streets – they seemed to have received proper training.

The help of my parents turned out to be unnecessary, and I extended my stay to another two months. At the Guide Dog and Mobility Association I had an opportunity to get acquainted with guide dogs (at the moment I am being aided by one such dog that has been trained in Maribor) and at the Zamisli association they scanned the books I needed during my studies in Ljubljana, but which I hadn't had time to scan (in Slovenia students with disabilities have to take care of everything by themselves). In fact, during my study visit to Zagreb I had more support and thus more independence (mobility), and the education was also more accessible (digitalization of educational materials) than at my home university. I would like this good practice to become accepted as soon as possible at my home university as well.

At the moment I am a doctoral student at the Karl-Franzens Universität of Graz, Austria, which has implemented even more good practices for work with persons with disabilities. If I may compare the experiences from Croatia and from Austria and if dare make predictions, Croatia is well on its way to becoming as accessible to persons with disabilities as Austria.

In the end, I would like to suggest a few things that are, in my opinion, necessary for ensuring an even better stay in Croatia for students with disabilities:

- It would be a good idea to introduce student tutors who would get in touch with incoming students with disabilities before their arrival in Croatia, and meet them at the station and help them deal with the paperwork (going to the Ministry of Education to obtain a student identity card, sorting things out at the Faculty...) once they arrived. In my case, this wasn't a problem because I hadn't come from afar and I knew Croatian fairly well; I assume that not everybody will come with an escort. If necessary, the student tutor could help students with disabilities to integrate in social activities;
- In case of wheelchair users, there should be someone who will provide them with necessary care and help in the dormitory;
- The decision should be made about who will bear the costs of care for wheelchair users, as well as the costs of mobility training for the blind and interpretation into sign language for the deaf, in cases when the scholarship doesn't include additional funds for the needs of persons with disabilities (e.g. CEEPUS scholarship);
- Escort should be organized for blind or visually impaired students to certain locations that are not part of their academic obligations (e.g. to the train station, to the clinic, the shops...), especially if the student is participating in a shorter exchange visit and hasn't had the time to learn all the routes.

I would like to thank the Guide Dog and Mobility Association for the free mobility training.

### **Cooperation with the community**

For the purposes of this handbook, all Croatian universities, that is, the coordinators of this project at the universities<sup>45</sup>, were asked to report on their cooperation with other resources in the community that could provide alternative forms of help and support to incoming students with disabilities. It is common practice in some countries to use resources in the community such as associations, agencies or local self-government in order to provide the necessary help and support to students with disabilities, in case their resources are not sufficient.

**The University of Zagreb** has reported that cooperation is close and that most activities that the Office for Students with Disabilities cannot undertake on its own due to the lack of resources are carried out in cooperation with associations. Cooperation is achieved through the organization of

---

<sup>45</sup> The exception is the University of Pula, which has not taken part in the project, but whose Office for International Cooperation has provided the information.

different forms of assistance, sign language interpreting, personal assistance or mobility trainings, educational materials available in alternate formats etc.

**The Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek** has reported that cooperation is achieved via the Office for Students with Disabilities, in particular with associations working with young people with disabilities, but also with associations whose activities are directed towards humanitarian work, as well as with local self-government. Cooperation is effective and communication channels are permanently open. The University is open to all kinds of cooperation and there are no obstacles preventing foreign students with disabilities participating in the international mobility programs from obtaining all alternative forms of help and support available at the level of associations and local self-government via the Office for Students with Disabilities.

**The University of Split** has reported that so far they have not had students with disabilities in international exchange programs, but that in the future, they will focus more closely on cooperation with associations in order to provide necessary help and support to students with disabilities.

**The University of Dubrovnik** has reported that there are several associations in the city that provide help and support to persons with disabilities and that the city of Dubrovnik is continuously implementing measures through its social program aimed at helping persons with disabilities. The goal is to establish an effective and reliable system of complete care for persons with disabilities through measures and activities carried out in partnership with state administration bodies, institutions, organizations and associations that operate exclusively for the benefit of persons with disabilities.

The coordinators of this project at other universities have not mentioned using resources in the community, or they have reported that the cooperation, to their knowledge, is poor.

As can be seen, cooperation with resources in the community is better at some universities, poorer at others. It is impossible not to notice that the two universities that have offices for students with disabilities have reported having close cooperation with the resources in the local community. This is probably due to the fact that the offices focus on resolving problems of students with disabilities in general, which process often requires cooperation with other resources in the community. It would be advisable to establish stronger ties between universities and associations, agencies and local self-government in the community in order to ensure equal higher education opportunities for all students, as well as to enable the incoming international mobility of students with disabilities at Croatian universities.

## Useful tips

This chapter offers some tips and/or creative ideas that could be useful to persons with disabilities while participating in international student exchange programs. This overview of useful information contains advice for students with disabilities as well as other students, coordinators for international cooperation, staff involved in exchange programs, and all other persons interested in student mobility.

It should be pointed out that some tips listed here refer to outgoing students, that is, students going abroad on international exchange programs, while others have to do with ensuring adequate conditions for incoming students with disabilities, that is, those students coming to Croatian universities. Therefore, this information should be approached in two ways:

- From the perspective of the home institution that provides help and support to students with disabilities in order to properly prepare them for going on an international mobility program;
- From the perspective of the host institution at which students with disabilities want to spend a period of study visit as part of an international mobility program (e.g. what questions can be expected, what accommodations will be necessary, etc.).

When planning to go on a student exchange visit, it is important to bear in mind the following:

- Plan ahead. It is impossible to anticipate everything, but a detailed plan will make the journey considerably easier. It is important to gather all the necessary information prior to the departure and get in touch with the staff at the host institution in order to find out all the necessary information on housing and accommodation options;
- Be flexible. Going on a study visit abroad requires adaptability of persons with and without disabilities alike. Living in a new culture brings new challenges, as well as different standards and possibilities;
- It is important to inform the appropriate office and staff about the medical condition of an incoming student with a disability in order to ensure the necessary help and support.

When considering and arranging international exchange of students with disabilities it is important to obtain as much information as possible from the host institution, both regarding the conditions at the host university and in the host country. What follows is a list of some general questions that can be useful for gathering information and that should be given some thought<sup>46</sup>:

<sup>46</sup> <http://oregonstate.edu/international/studyabroad/students/disabilities#process>, Hershey, 2005

- Is the technology the student uses in his/her environment available in the country s/he wants to visit? If so, is it accessible? If not, what other options are available to ensure everything that is necessary?
- What documentation should the student have in order to ensure everything that is necessary?
- If there is a need for a study assistant or additional accommodations, who will fund this?
- Is there a contact person available who is acquainted with the needs of students with disabilities?
- Who can the student turn to in case s/he is denied help or in case the accommodations that were promised are not fully provided?
- Does the host institution have a professional service for students with disabilities or an informal kind of support for exchange students?
- If there is a need for mental health support, what forms of help and support are available in the community where the University is located and/or as a part of the program in which the student wants to participate?
- What is the attitude towards persons with disabilities in the country/culture the student wants to go to? Will the student be subject to discrimination? How will the student cope with possible discrimination or social difficulties s/he may encounter?

\* \* \* \* \*

The following sections address issues that are important to all students with disabilities: housing, the use of health services, medication, the use of guide dogs and air travel.

### **Housing of students with disabilities**

It goes without saying that housing for persons with disabilities will be individualized and adjusted to each person and his/her needs. Meeting the needs of each individual is specific and unique, so the same rules and conditions cannot apply in all cases. Nevertheless, people who have experience in working with students with disabilities have defined some key guidelines that can help to ensure the quality of life and education in a foreign country. These are some of their tips (Sygall & Lewis, 2006):

- It is important to get to know each person individually. Students with disabilities have different goals, different ways of satisfying their needs and desires. Some students with disabilities do not need any special accommodations. It is inefficient, and also illegal, to decide on behalf of somebody else or to draw conclusions about somebody else's needs based on the assumptions about their challenges;
- Planning ahead is essential for the success of an international exchange visit and for the adjustment to a new environment. For some types of disabilities the accommodations can take several months, while for others accommodations can be made very quickly. This is why it is important to start planning as soon as possible;

- Communication between an office or coordinator from the home country and an office or coordinator from the host country is crucial. It is important to know what kind of conditions the students have in their country and to try to provide the same or similar conditions if possible;
- It is a good idea to advise students with disabilities to make a detailed list of everyday activities and indicate how their disabilities affect particular activities. For example, if in their country they have a personal assistant who helps them, what are his/her obligations and will another person take charge of these tasks in the foreign country? Students should have all the necessary documentation about their condition if they decide to require accessible housing;
- Before the arrival of the exchange student, it is advisable that the coordinator should get personally acquainted with the area where the student will be housed in order to assess if the area is adequate and to be able to respond more appropriately in case further accommodations are required. S/he can ask a person with similar difficulties for help during the assessment because this will ensure a better insight;
- It is necessary to plan contacts/visits to students with disabilities during the exchange visit in order to assess the housing adequacy (whether the changes have been made and whether the accommodations are satisfactory).

In addition, and depending on the nature of the disability, attention should also be paid to the following:

- Is there an elevator, lift or ramp close to the area that will be used by the student with a disability?
- Is the ground between the public transport station and the site where the student will be housed steep or uneven?
- Are public transport vehicles accessible to persons with disabilities?

It is advisable to contact public transport service providers and make inquiries about options offered to persons with disabilities. It is necessary to instruct and inform blind persons about the daily routes of public transport (bus, tram, etc.). In case public transport is not available, it is advisable to check if there are any resources in the community (e.g. associations) that can help with the transport or if there is a possibility of using student volunteers.

### **Medical assistance**

If medical assistance is required during the student's stay in the foreign country, it is advisable to check in advance with the consultant/coordinator at the host institution to see what medical and health services are available. If possible, it would be a good idea to advise the student to get in touch with an available physician prior to the arrival in order to obtain as much information as possible about the services and payment method.

## **Health insurance**

Insurance terms and conditions vary from country to country, so it is important to gather as much information as possible before the departure. Some of the questions frequently asked before traveling to another country are the following:

### **Does the physician in the host country have access to the medical data of the student with a disability and can s/he, if necessary, contact the student's primary health care physician?**

For persons with health problems such as epilepsy, lupus, diabetes or allergies some websites enable the uploading of one's medical record with all the necessary data, so that any authorized person can access the data at any time. It is necessary to check the options available in the host country.

### **What health insurance options are available to students who apply directly to the foreign university?**

Students who apply directly to the foreign university should make inquiries at the host university about the covering of the insurance costs. They may have the right to the same medical services as local students, but for some services they might have to pay extra. Students with disabilities should make thorough inquiries in advance because regulations can differ significantly.

Sygall & Lewis, 2006

Since health insurance regulations are complex, it is important to contact the service/office for international cooperation at the host university and/or institution and make inquiries about the existing requirements regarding health insurance within the framework of each individual international student mobility program.

## **Medication**

Students who take medications should inquire whether a particular medication is legal and available in the host country and whether they may bring a supply of medication that will last until the end of their stay in that country. It is advisable to contact the consulate or embassy of one's home country in the host country and inquire about the status of the required medication, as well as about the procedure for bringing the medication into the host country.

Students who take medication should obtain as much information as possible in the early stages of the process about the physicians and the availability of medication and health care in the host country. These are some questions that should be taken into consideration (Sygall & Lewis, 2006):

1. What is the generic name of the medication? (This is important because the same medication can be available on the market under different names.)

2. Is it a prescription medication?
3. Is the medication available in the same dose as in the home country? Are the units of measurement the same? (If not, the student should find out which dose is required in the host country's units of measurement.)
4. Is there a backup plan if the student should lose or run out of the medication?
5. If the medication is not permitted in the host country, is the student acquainted with an alternative medication?
6. What documentation is required in order to carry the medication across the border?
7. Who can translate the prescription into the host country's language using the correct medical terminology?
8. Do local pharmacies accept prescriptions issued by foreign physicians?
9. What is the cost of the medication in the host country? Does the insurance cover the costs of buying the medication?
10. If it is necessary to keep the medication in a dry and cool place, is refrigeration available on board the airplane or at the place where the student will be housed?

### **Using guide dogs**

Persons with disabilities use animals for assistance in different situations and for different purposes: assistance in navigating (persons with visual and motor impairments), support (persons with mental disabilities) or help with auditory stimuli (hearing impaired persons). Guide dogs are used by some blind and visually impaired persons for assistance in navigating and travel.

The following tips can help students with disabilities who use guide dogs prepare for the exchange (Sygall & Lewis, 2006):

- Students should contact the consulate or embassy of their home country in the host country and enquire about the regulations which apply to travelling with service animals; some countries have strict quarantine policies, but there may be exceptions for service animals;
- Students should contact guide dog organizations or associations in the host country, and enquire about cultural differences and attitudes towards guide dogs, as well as the laws and regulations of the host country;
- Students should enquire about the documents required in the host country; they should be advised to carry an official document proving that their dogs are trained guide dogs in good health and up to date on all vaccinations (the document has to be signed by a veterinarian, and the date of signing should be as recent as possible); in some countries these documents need to be certified at the consulate prior to travel or the veterinarian needs to be on their list of professionals approved to provide such documentation;
- Students should put a sticker or a label on the dog's equipment, for example: GUIDE DOG, written clearly and visibly;

- Students are advised to learn a few words in the language of the host country in order to be able to explain why they need guide dogs;
- Finally, students should be advised to show understanding when travelling to places where people are not used to guide dogs, and to bear in mind that guide dogs need time to adjust to the new environment, different obstacles on the sidewalk, different language, scents, water, food, etc.

### Student visa

Students are required to apply for a visa for the purpose of studying abroad. Students should send their visa application, together with all other documents required by the consulate, to the host country's consulate in the Republic of Croatia after receiving the acceptance letter from the host university. The list of diplomatic missions and consulates in the Republic of Croatia is available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration<sup>47</sup>.

### Air travel and airports

Laws and regulations related to air transport include information on the travel of persons with disabilities, and guarantee the same conditions which apply to all other passengers. The European Common Aviation Area<sup>48</sup> (ECAA), of which the Republic of Croatia is a member country, adopted in 2003 the European Civil Aviation Handbook<sup>49</sup>. Article 5 of the Handbook, under the title "Facilitation of the transport of persons with reduced mobility", states the following: "Certain passengers on account of their physical, mental or medical condition require special facilities in relation to airport infrastructure, ground and air transport, and adequate assistance from airlines and airport operators in application of the principle of equal right to unimpeded access for all air transport users."<sup>iv</sup>

Numerous laws and regulations govern the rights of persons with disabilities during their travel. Here are some of them:

- Persons with visual and hearing impairments will be given priority at the check-in counter;
- While waiting for passenger check-in, an officer should escort the passenger to the airport reception service and ground staff;
- Persons with mobility impairments, as well as passengers on stretchers, will be given priority at check-in and provided with an escort to the gate, where they will be enabled to embark the aircraft by ambulift;
- All international airports and airlines are required to provide necessary assistive technology and adequate assistance;
- Wheelchair users can choose whether they want to use their own wheelchair to get as far as the entrance to the aircraft and leave it there, or whether they prefer to check it in as baggage and use another wheelchair on board the aircraft;
- The ECAA advises its member countries and airlines to permit guide dogs to enter and stay on board the aircraft under conditions determined by these countries and airlines.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.mvpei.hr>

<sup>48</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air/international\\_aviation/country\\_index/ecaa\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air/international_aviation/country_index/ecaa_en.htm)

<sup>49</sup> European Civil Aviation Handbook, [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air/handbook/handbook\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air/handbook/handbook_en.htm)

### Preparing for air travel

It is advisable to buy the ticket in advance and inform travel agents and airline representatives of the following:

- The type of disability and equipment/aids such as a white or assistive cane, crutches or a wheelchair (manually or electric-powered);
- Special dietary requirements or need for assistance at meals (cabin staff are not required to assist with eating, but can assist with opening food containers);
- Whether a nurse or personal assistant will be accompanying the disabled passenger.

Students with disabilities are subject to the same security measures as all other passengers. If an assistive device can be passed through the security screener without setting it off, it need not be subject to further screening. Airport personnel can inspect an assistive device if they suspect that it could contain a weapon or other prohibited items.

When travelling by air students with mobility impairments often encounter problems related to physical accessibility, in particular due to a lack of space. Aircraft staff will help move a person with a mobility impairment from the wheelchair to the seat. Such passengers can instruct the staff on how to help them.



*(Caption: The photograph shows a student with a mobility impairment and his personal assistant during the passenger check-in at the airport. Most airports give priority to persons with disabilities during the check-in, as well as assistance during the boarding<sup>50</sup>.)*

### Packing

The last step in the preparation for going on student exchange is packing, which should be a thorough process. It is always necessary to secure sufficient amounts of medications, and other necessities and items that students with disabilities use. It is important to put the essential medications and/or medical supplies (e.g. inhaler, syringes) in hand baggage in order for the student to have them in case of lost baggage.

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.zagreb-airport.hr/hr/putnici\\_s\\_posebnim\\_potrebama](http://www.zagreb-airport.hr/hr/putnici_s_posebnim_potrebama)

The following list is based on the advice and information provided by persons with disabilities who travelled abroad for longer periods of time, and can be useful for trip planning. Students are advised to take with them:

- Replacement parts for wheelchairs or other equipment/aids used;
- Tools for maintenance and repair of wheelchairs or other equipment/aids used;
- Batteries for hearing aids or other equipment used;
- A folding chair for rooms unadjusted to persons with disabilities, or in case the student has to stand for an extended period of time;
- Paper or plastic mask for protection against dust or viruses;
- Medical documentation or doctor's letter translated into the language of the host country;
- A sufficient amount of medications that are taken on a regular basis: the regular quantity and an additional supply in case a higher dose is needed or the medication is lost;
- Prescriptions for medications and emergency medications;
- A list of medications and their generic names (physicians in other countries might not recognize the names used in other markets);
- Electric power adapters or extension cords for electronic equipment used;
- A dictionary of the sign language or language of the host country.

Sygal&Lewis, 2006

\* \* \* \*

As it was already mentioned, it is important to provide and get as much information as possible prior to going abroad, as this will help students with disabilities as well as exchange program organizers to make all the necessary arrangements in time. Depending on the type of disability or impairment, there are some particular issues that need to be considered before going to the host institution.

### **Visual impairment (blindness and partial sight)**

Blind and partially sighted persons use a specific assistive technology. Depending on their needs, blind students can use electronic devices (computers for the blind) or various software solutions (voice-recognition software). Partially sighted students most often choose various software programs (voice-recognition software or screen magnifier software).

It is important to protect visually impaired students' privacy and data confidentiality. They are advised to choose a trustworthy person who will help them in completing the forms, taking notes, etc. It is desirable for the organizer to arrange and ensure the presence of a trustworthy person, such as a paid assistant, volunteer or a member of staff whose tasks are not associated with the exchange program.

### **Communicating with blind and partially sighted persons**

- Introduce yourself immediately at the beginning of the conversation, and if necessary, explain your function;
- All the persons present should introduce themselves so that the visually impaired person could match the names to their corresponding voices;
- Use the person's name every time you address that person in order to facilitate the conversation;
- Let the blind or visually impaired person know when you are leaving the room, moving to the other part of the room or ending the conversation;
- Offer to help with orientation in an unfamiliar area; explain where a table, a chair or another object that might be needed are located;
- Use everyday, spoken language;
- Do not touch guide dogs, feed them, talk to them or play with them while they are performing their tasks.

Syggall & Lewis, 2006

Visually impaired persons sometimes need help with navigating or with access to information. Some persons have sighted guides to help them navigate, and someone to help them with reading written materials which are not adapted to their needs. If necessary, associations for blind and visually impaired persons in the host country can help students adapt to the new environment. Depending on the resources of the host country, persons with visual impairments can get different assistive devices or trained volunteers for free.

In some countries, for instance in the United States, the usual practice is for a sighted guide to offer his/her arm to a blind or partially sighted person, who in turn takes hold of the upper part of the guide's arm while walking. This enables the blind or visually impaired person to follow the guide, without being pushed. If the visually impaired person is using a white cane or a guide dog, the sighted guide should offer him/her the arm that is closest to the visually impaired person's free hand. The guide should describe the room (especially if the person is not familiar with it or if there have been some changes in the room), the objects and their arrangement. While describing, the guide should use tactile and auditory elements, and enable the person to touch objects if he or she feels the need (for more details see the handbook **General Guidelines**).

#### Questions to ask before going abroad on an exchange program<sup>51</sup>

- Are study materials available in alternate formats (electronic versions of textbooks, textbooks in Braille, e-text, scanned texts, recorded video material etc.)?
- Will the help of a mobility assistant be needed?
- Is there Braille signage on buildings, elevators, classroom, ATMs, etc.?
- Will the student have access to computer software that will help him or her with assignments and/or assigned reading?
- Who will cover extra expenses associated with accessible housing?

<sup>51</sup> <http://oregonstate.edu/international/studyabroad/students/disabilities#process>

## Hearing impairment

Although hearing impaired persons use various means of communication, many of them employ sign language interpreters. Organizers of the program should be informed in advance about the means of communication the exchange student is using and provide interpreting services.

Exchange students, especially if they are staying in the host country for a longer period of time, can learn the sign language of the host country and employ local interpreters if they have enough time for quality learning. Students and staff should decide together whether interpreting in the sign language of the host country is an effective solution.

For official activities such as meetings, seminars or academic activities, the organizer is required to hire a certified sign language interpreter. On informal occasions, a less formal means of communication can be used where students or other persons who know the sign language act as interpreters.

### Communicating with hearing impaired persons

- Ask the hearing impaired person which means of communicating s/he prefers;
- Do not shout;
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace;
- Avoid noisy background situations;
- Do not cover your mouth, do not chew or smoke during the conversation;
- Use facial expressions and gestures;
- Rephrase parts of sentences if the hearing impaired person has not understood you;
- Ask the hearing impaired person to repeat or rephrase the question if you do not understand him/her.

Syggall & Lewis, 2006

### The most common myths

#### ***The same sign language is used all over the world.***

Fact: There is no universal sign language. Even in the countries which use the same spoken and written language sign languages can be completely different. For instance, the United States and the United Kingdom use different sign languages<sup>52</sup>.

#### ***Hearing impaired persons can hear by means of hearing aids.***

---

<sup>52</sup> The United States of America – ASL (American Sign Language), the United Kingdom – BSL (British Sign Language)

Fact: A hearing aid can help persons with a particular type of hearing impairment and only in certain situations, but cannot help everybody and in all situations. Using a hearing aid is a personal decision which depends on various circumstances and factors.

***Hearing impaired persons can read lips.***

Fact: Lip reading is a very complex skill that is not easy to master. Hearing impaired persons that can read lips well have a high level of linguistic competence in the spoken language.

Adapted from Sygall & Lewis, 2006

During lectures someone can assist the hearing impaired student by taking notes, as it is difficult to take notes and watch the sign language interpreter at the same time. In order to establish better and easier communication for hearing impaired persons, international mobility coordinators or offices/services for international cooperation should take some of the following suggestions into consideration:

- If the circumstances allow, an interpreter who uses the same sign language as the student can be sent on the exchange program with the student, instead of searching for a suitable interpreter in the host country;
- If the student plans to use the sign language of the host country, s/he should be advised to find a sign language dictionary in order to familiarize themselves with the language;
- If possible, it would be useful for the exchange student to go to the host country earlier than planned and take a course in the country's sign language before official academic activities start.

**Questions to ask before going abroad on an exchange program<sup>53</sup>**

- Will a sign language interpreter be needed? Who will cover the expenses?
- Where and how to find an interpreter?
- What is the hourly rate for interpreters in the host country (costs can vary widely from country to country and even within the same country)?
- Will the student need help with taking notes at lectures?
- Is video recording allowed?
- Who will cover all the additional expenses?

**Motor impairment**

Persons with mobility impairments can use various assistive devices such as canes, crutches, walkers or prostheses. Wheelchairs are an important part of equipment for persons with physical disabilities.

---

<sup>53</sup> <http://oregonstate.edu/international/studyabroad/students/disabilities#process>

Students who use wheelchairs should find the nearest wheelchair repair shop in case of a flat tire or other malfunctions. Prior arrangements about who will cover the repair expenses should be made.

Electric-powered wheelchairs must be recharged every one to two days depending on use. Some batteries need to be recharged more frequently; therefore, students should know in advance where at the university this can be done; it would also be useful to have spare batteries at hand. It is important to be well informed and prepared even before going abroad.

Some people prefer renting electric-powered wheelchairs in the host country in order to avoid procedures at airports, worrying about repairs, outlet adapters etc. During transportation, in some cases the person does not have to move from the wheelchair, but instead, the seat in the vehicle moves or adjusts, or the wheelchair is folded and transported in the trunk or on the back seat.

As for the adapters, electrical energy converters, and electrical power transformers, the student should keep in mind that most countries use electricity at approximately 220 volts/50hz, while North America uses 110 volts/60hz. Persons traveling with electric-powered assistive equipment may need to take with them various adapters and converters in order to ensure that their equipment is compatible with the electrical current in the destination country. It is important to emphasize that adapters do not change voltage, but only the shape of the plug.

#### Questions to ask before going abroad on an exchange program<sup>54</sup>

- Will the student take one or two wheelchairs? Electric- or manually powered?
- Is a plug adapter necessary?
- How will the wheelchair be shipped abroad?
- What is the accessibility of the host university and city?
- Can the wheelchair be repaired in the host country in case of a malfunction?
- Are the streets and sidewalks wheelchair accessible?
- Will the student need help with taking notes at lectures?
- Will the student be able to go on field trips and outdoor practical exercises, and what is the accessibility in these cases?
- Are lab or library assistants available in the host country?
- Does the student need extended time for assignments or exams?
- Who will cover all the additional expenses?

In some cases (e.g. cerebral palsy), physical disabilities may be accompanied by other disorders such as speech disorders. Here are some tips for persons with speech disorders and their interlocutors (Sygall & Lewis, 2006):

- Try to collect as much information as possible before going abroad;
- If you do not understand what the person with a speech disorder is saying, you can ask him/her to repeat or rephrase it;
- Be patient and do not shout when talking to a person with a speech disorder;

<sup>54</sup> <http://oregonstate.edu/international/studyabroad/students/disabilities#process>

- Some persons with speech disorders can also have hearing impairments;
- Unless asked to speak louder, speak in a normal tone and at a moderate pace;
- In case verbal communication is not effective, try using written communication.

### **Specific learning difficulties**

Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) are not equally recognized in all countries; thus, the students who have these difficulties may not have access to all the services and technology they use in their home countries. This is why it is necessary for both students with specific learning difficulties and their host institutions to answer some questions (depending on the type of disorder or difficulty) and consider the options:

- Does the student need help with taking notes at lectures?
- What is the policy of the university/faculty/study program regarding the time needed to write an exam and can it be extended?
- Can a laptop computer be used during lectures/exams?
- Is there a need for a special room for taking exams?
- Is there an option of additional lessons and what is the cost?
- In case the student needs psychological help/counseling during the stay, is it available and where?
- In case the student needs to record lectures, will it be possible and does s/he need permission?
- Are the reading materials for classes/exercises available in alternate formats (for instance, on a CD) and is it possible to get them in advance?
- Who will cover all the additional expenses?

### **Mental health problems**

Today there is a growing number of students with diagnosed mental health problems; therefore, more attention should be devoted to mental health in the context of international student mobility. Several studies (McCabe, 2005) show that an increasing number of students are faced with problems such as depression, anxiety, addictions, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, schizophrenia, posttraumatic stress disorder, agoraphobia, etc.

It is well known that studying at a university can be stressful. Experience shows that studying abroad adds another level of stress that can exacerbate existing mental health problems. Stress and additional strain that students studying abroad need to cope with can lead to a combination of factors that affect mental health. This can cause minor problems – which were not evident when students were studying in familiar surroundings – to become evident and begin to undermine their mental health during their study abroad. Although there are few studies that could answer what causes this additional stress, experience shows that the following situations pose a challenge for students studying abroad (MacCab, 2005, Lindenman, 2006):

- Separation: For many students, going abroad on an exchange program is the first real separation from their families and friends; going to a university in a different city is different from going to a university in a foreign country; once students become aware that their families and friends are far away, feelings of loss and anxiety may appear;
- Culture shock: The process of assimilation into a new culture can cause difficulties, especially if the student is faced with misunderstanding and/or rejection;
- Adjusting to local conditions: While culture shock can have different forms and can be the strongest factor affecting mental health, adjusting to local conditions can also have a strong impact; conditions in which students may find themselves can be significantly different from those they are accustomed to; different living conditions accompanied by the demands that the study program imposes (often not in the student's native language) can create considerable stress, which can in turn affect the student's mental health;
- Social pressure: Many feelings that students experience at the beginning of their studies at a university reappear when they go to study abroad; students are under pressure to conform and make contacts with other students; in addition, studying abroad can intensify the feelings related to their identity, the pressure to succeed in their education and the uncertainties about social and sexual relationships that develop in this period of life as part of students' social and emotional development;
- Failing to disclose mental health problems: Some students avoid disclosing their mental condition to the host institution for fear that their application will be rejected or that they will face other forms of discrimination; for one thing, this leaves the coordinator at the host institution unaware of a potential crisis situation, and for another, students fail to create a support network during their stay at a foreign university, which has proven to be very important,
- Change in medication treatment: Students sometimes misinterpret the excitement and euphoria that they feel in their early days abroad as a sign of health and decide to stop taking their medications; the consequences soon become evident (often in the form of a crisis) and sometimes require hospitalization and return home;
- Unforeseen events: All students studying abroad are sensitive to bad news, both to those coming from home (e.g. death or an illness in the family, divorce, the end of a long relationship) and those related to the host country (terrorist attacks, political violence, natural disasters); coping with bad news from home can be difficult for a student who does not have a support system; the feelings of helplessness, isolation and frustration may appear; such a situation can lead to depression, anxiety, and can exacerbate existing mental health problems; if these unforeseen events happen in the current place of study, they can overwhelm the student and affect his/her decision about staying on the exchange program (e.g. whether to return home, stay, wait, etc.); coping with bad news is a challenge for every student, and although it can cause temporary feelings of anxiety and/or depression in a healthy student, it can be a serious risk factor for a student with a mental health problem.

#### **Tips for exchange students with mental health problems**

- Learn to tell the difference: home sickness, anxiety about not knowing the foreign language, loneliness, fear of the unknown, etc. are not necessarily associated with a mental illness;
- Learn the vocabulary associated with your condition in the language of the host country;

- Connect with international mental health-related associations and organizations to learn about the attitudes of the society towards individuals with mental health problems in the host country and to ensure the necessary support.

Sygal & Lewis, 2006

As mentioned earlier, some students with mental health problems decide not to disclose their medical condition to the international mobility coordinator or office/service for international cooperation at the home and/or host university. The reason for this could be the fear of discrimination, stigmatization, and stereotypical ideas. Also, the student may be convinced that s/he does not need any help or support. However, experiences of students with mental health problems show that setting up a support system in advance is very important, even when it seems unnecessary<sup>55</sup>.

Students with mental health problems should disclose their medical condition to the host institution. That is one way to ensure help and support that they might need. Students should also:

- Inform the international mobility coordinator or office/service for international cooperation about the arrangements in case their condition deteriorates; some may choose a legal route with an advance directive, which is a document that establishes who is empowered to make treatment decisions in case of deteriorated health condition;
- Enquire about the procedure for maintaining data confidentiality or ensure that the document about the arrangements in case of deteriorated health conditions stays confidential.

Finally, it is important to remember that the decision on whether the student will disclose his/her medical condition is entirely up to the student. If s/he decides to disclose it, it is important to provide all the help and support necessary to prepare for student exchange.

### **Other health problems**

Participants in and organizers of student exchange programs should agree on all the details related to students' medical conditions and needs, and make a plan of action for particular types of situations. They should also provide students with all the information that is important for their medical conditions. For example (Sygal & Lewis, 2006):

- Participants with asthma may need information about air quality in the host country;
- Participants with health-related food requirements or restrictions will need information about available foods and food preparation systems to plan strategies to meet those needs;

---

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/mentalhealth#health-and-medical-services>

- Persons suffering from chronic fatigue (who require to rest more frequently) will need information about the program, daily schedule, and academic and social activities in order to plan strategies to meet their needs for rest;
- Persons who use inhalers may need information about the availability of oxygen supplies or equipment they need.

Students who have these or similar health problems should take into account the cultural differences and the differences in attitudes that they may encounter. For instance, the need for additional rest and sleep could be interpreted as laziness, or there might be unfounded and irrational fear of contamination from certain conditions, such as diabetes. In these cases, students should learn to explain their condition and needs in the language of the host country in order to overcome all problems caused by the cultural differences.

### **IMPORTANT!**

Students who have any kind of health problems should always carry a document certified by their physician and translated into the language of the host country containing the information on their medical condition and treatment, especially in emergency cases.

In case students need to miss lectures, leave lectures early or change their schedules in some other way due to their health problems, they should look into their options for compensating for absence from lectures, and enquire whether they need permission to leave. If students have to leave the exchange program earlier than planned, they should seek the following information:

- If they leave earlier than planned, will they get the same number of ECTS credits?
- Will this departure require any additional funding?
- Will they need to do any additional assignments, and what kind?

### **Questions to ask before going abroad on an exchange program in case the student has a chronic disease<sup>56</sup>**

- In case the student has respiratory problems or severe allergies, what is the quality of the air and environment in the host city?
- In case the student's condition is affected by temperatures, what is the climate in the host country?
- Are there any special instructions the host institution should be aware of, in case of a sudden deterioration in the student's health?
- Will the student need extended time for assignments?
- Are there any special requirements with regard to nutrition?
- If there are additional expenses associated with special accommodations, who will cover them?

<sup>56</sup> <http://oregonstate.edu/international/studyabroad/students/disabilities#process>

## Conclusion

As was mentioned at the beginning, international mobility is a priority both for the European Union and for the Republic of Croatia. It is evident that Croatia has taken all the steps necessary to create conditions for international mobility and that the Croatian universities are following suit. Considerable effort has been invested in seeking solutions for removing the obstacles to academic mobility, such as the issues of funding, recognition of qualifications, regulating incoming students' rights, etc. In addition, the universities have adopted various ordinances and decisions regulating the area of international mobility.

Nevertheless, there is a need for greater flexibility (and creativity) in addressing the issues concerning international student mobility. This is particularly true when it comes to the international mobility of students with disabilities. Besides challenges all students who want to participate in student exchange programs usually face, students with disabilities face many additional challenges. Responding to these challenges is sometimes easy and adjustments are fast, especially if the university has resources, both material and human, and can respond effectively to the student's needs. However, sometimes these adjustments require more time and resources, but also require of the universities to devote more effort to finding alternative solutions. This may mean connecting with resources in the community that can help students with disabilities meet their needs and achieve international mobility, or it may require flexibility and creativity from both students and international mobility coordinators.

One of the aims of this handbook has been to highlight the questions that need to be asked or answered when dealing with the international mobility of students with disabilities. While it is important to ask the host university the 'right' questions during the organization of international mobility for our students, it is just as important for the Croatian universities to ensure the conditions for effective international mobility for incoming students with disabilities. Some answers to the question of how this can be done are offered in the remaining handbooks of the *Students with Disabilities* series entitled 'General Guidelines', 'Physical Accessibility', 'Teaching and Outcome Monitoring and Evaluation', 'Leisure Time', 'Access to Information' and 'Students' Psychosocial Needs'.

Finally, we should emphasize the importance of all stakeholders making an effort and taking their share of the responsibility to provide students with disabilities with equal opportunities in higher education, in their everyday academic lives, as well as in the area of international mobility.

**Academic mobility:** The term 'academic mobility' refers to study visits by university students or teachers at another institution of higher education. The term primarily refers to international mobility (a stay at an institution of higher education outside the home country), but it can also refer to a period of stay at any institution of higher education in the home country. In addition to this, the term can refer to short-term exchange programs (e.g. a period of one semester or one academic year which is then recognized by the home institution), or to complete study programs which end with a degree (degree programs) (Institute for the Development of Education, 2011).

**Home institution:** An institution of higher education where students are enrolled and which employs teaching, nonteaching and research staff.

**Home university:** see Home institution.

**Host institution:** An institution of higher education that participates in international mobility programs.

**Host university:** see Host institution.

**Incoming student or guest student:** A student on a student exchange program at a university that is not his/her home university.

**Mobility:** Refers to being in motion. In the context of visually impaired persons the concept combines orientation and navigation. See also Student mobility.

**Outgoing student:** A student of the home university on a student exchange program at the host institution (outgoing mobility).

**Student mobility:** Refers to studying at a host institution, after which the student returns to the home institution, and completes the course s/he is enrolled in. Student mobility includes a period of study or training as part of regular undergraduate, graduate and (doctoral or specialist) postgraduate programs at the host institution.

---

<sup>i</sup> Taken from the already existing translation of the 'Action Plan for Removing Obstacles and Enhancing International Learning Mobility for the Period 2010-2012', available at [public.mzos.hr/fgs.axd?id=17373](http://public.mzos.hr/fgs.axd?id=17373)

<sup>ii</sup> Taken from an existing translation. The whole document is available at [http://www.uniri.hr/files/staticki\\_dio/strategija/University\\_of\\_Rijeka\\_Strategy\\_2007\\_2013\\_English.pdf](http://www.uniri.hr/files/staticki_dio/strategija/University_of_Rijeka_Strategy_2007_2013_English.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> The English version of the text is available at [http://www.unist.hr/Portals/5/docs/science/Strategija\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unist.hr/Portals/5/docs/science/Strategija_eng.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> The quotation was taken from the ECAC Policy Statement in the Field of Civil Aviation Facilitation [http://www.trasportiaccessibili.org/ita/pdf/ECAC%20DOC30%20dic\\_2006%20Eng.pdf](http://www.trasportiaccessibili.org/ita/pdf/ECAC%20DOC30%20dic_2006%20Eng.pdf).