

# Students with Disabilities in Higher Education – The University Professors’ Perspective

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## ABSTRACT.

Higher education plays a pivotal role in preparing students for the labour market, as well as for professional and science careers in their field, through education and competence development at universities. EU member states, including Croatia, invest in higher education through different operational programmes in order to increase access to education for all citizens. Moreover, equal access to higher education for all is at the core of EU education policies for inclusion. In particular, the education policy importance rises on the European agenda as the concept of the knowledge society becomes central to European competitiveness on the global market. The aim of this paper was to examine the support structures for students with disabilities at the University of Zagreb, the largest university in Croatia, including structural weaknesses and the disability coordinators’ appraisal on the access to higher education for students with disabilities. The qualitative research from 2019 involved semi-structured interviews, while data processing relied on thematic analysis. Research participants involved disability coordinators, representing university professors with at least three years of professional experience. The professors were appointed as the coordinators of support services for students with disabilities at the corresponding units of the University of Zagreb. While research results indicated significant advancements in inclusion in higher education, the research also identified challenges that need to be addressed in line with contemporary inclusive practices in Europe based on human rights.

**Keywords:** coordinators, disabilities; higher education; support; university