

Inequality in Higher Education: Accessibility and services for people with disabilities at the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, -Skopje

Aleksandra Zhivkovikj

Researcher

Youth Educational Forum

E-mail: Aleksandra.zivkovik@gmail.com

Sanja Bozhovikj

Coordinator of the program for Research, analysis and creation of youth and educational policies

Youth Educational Forum

E-mail: sanja.bozovik@mof.org.mk

Abstract

Education significantly improves disadvantaged individuals' employability. Education, if accompanied with the right services, can decrease the inequality that occurs on the labor market and contribute towards better quality of life for this category of people. Inclusion of people with disabilities in the higher education process is a topic that gains a spotlight in the past 10 years. Following the financial crisis, the universities in Europe excessively introduce more open policies regarding the enrollment of students. Apart from introducing programs like lifelong learning and lower tuition fees, the higher education institutions started developing policies for attracting more students with disabilities.

Macedonian legislature provides free higher education for disadvantaged categories. Yet, despite the declarative efforts, the number of disadvantaged people which are included in the tertiary education remains low. This paper focuses on the status quo at the biggest and oldest university in Macedonia, the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius. The authors elaborate on few aspects of the problem. Namely, the number of people with disabilities enrolled at each faculty, physical conditions and accessibility, special tailored services provided by the university or faculties, strategic approach and planning, employment rates. Also, the paper examines if and what kind of collaboration there is between the state institutions and the university in improving the position of disabled people. The data is obtained via using the right to free access to information, by gathering information from 23 faculties, the university itself and the institutions who work in the field of social policies. Qualitative analysis of strategic documents on a national and university level is also included.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education is often responsible for improving one's potential, career prospects, and long term quality of life. This is even more significant for people with physical and sensory disabilities, whose range of employment is limited to jobs that require fewer physical abilities and skills (Kendall & Terry; McGeary, Mayer, Gatchel, Anagnostis & Proctor).

Postsecondary students with disabilities, in particular, often have significant difficulties adjusting to university life. The demand from the educational institution, both from academically and independent perspective, can be more challenging for students with disabilities rather than the ones without disabilities (Field, Sarver & Shaw). Once the students enroll in university they must learn to make decisions and advocate for themselves, often for the first time. They must develop special set of skills which are necessary for successful finishing of the studies. For example, organizational and study skills, or social skills which will allow them to efficiently communicate with professors, colleagues, roommates etc. As a result of challenges, presented by disabilities and the nature of and demands of university life, many students with disabilities are at risk for poor student life and adjustment (Smedema et al).

Low enrolment and high dropout in higher education are present among this category of students. Some of the causes involve inadequate accessibility of higher education institutions, lack of support, adverse social attitudes and social isolation, as well as low financial capacity (Foreman et al.,2001; Jung, 2003; Johnson, 2006; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Mpofu & Wilson, 2004). On this point, research data obtained by RANLHE in 2011¹, shows that university staff considered that social status has to be taken in consideration when observing the problem of students with disabilities drop outs. Namely, students with disabilities who come from higher socio-economic classes tend to have bigger support from their families during their studies and are less likely to leave education. On the contrary, students with disabilities who come from nontraditional backgrounds or face other pressures such as being a single parent are less likely to complete their studies². Therefore, students with disabilities face economic and social barriers too.

Among the supporting factors, studies have shown the importance of faculty's attitudes towards students with disabilities, their awareness of these student needs and their knowledge of the reasonable accommodations available. These attitudes influence success or failure of students with disabilities and affect inclusion in higher education (Rao, 2004)³. HE institutions must adjust and support accessing the curricula and social spaces at the university. Even more, attitudinal changes which encourage staff and fellow students to focus on abilities of the student and the commonalities they have with them are strong factor which influences the area⁴.

Focusing on the local context, in Macedonia majority of people with disabilities stay economically inactive. The reasons vary between inadequate legislation, lack of accurate information, fear and distrust in employers, lack of motivation, inadequate professional and vocational services on the

¹ More at: <http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/index.html>

² Jocey Quinn, "Drop-out and Completion in Higher Education in Europe among students from under-represented groups", An independent report authored for the European Commission, October 2013

³ Cited by Sachs & Schreuer in "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Performance and participation in student's expectations", Disability Studies Quarterly

⁴ Jocey Quinn, "Drop-out and Completion in Higher Education in Europe among students from under-represented groups", An independent report authored for the European Commission, October 2013

ground. Historically, the Macedonian approach towards people with specific needs is based on segregation especially in the educational sphere, and menial employment for disabled adults⁵.

EU CONTEXT

Legal framework

Higher education is high on the agenda of the European Union when it comes to improving the employment, social justice and economic progress. Increasing the number of young people that have obtained higher education diploma is one of the major goals of the **European 2020 Strategy**. According to this document, the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree by 2020. This target requires increased participation in this level of education, including disadvantaged people.

According to the new priorities in **Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training**: “Effective action to respond to diversity in all its forms and to provide inclusive education and training for all learners is needed, focusing on disadvantaged groups such as learners with special needs, newly arrived migrants, people with a migrant background and Roma.”⁶.

Education is also one of the key areas in the **European Disability Strategy 2010-2020**. In this document, it is explicitly stated that even though the curricula and organization of the educational systems are not in EU’s jurisdiction, the union will support inclusive, quality education and training. Moreover, it will help in increasing the mobility of disabled students by facilitating participation in the Lifelong Learning Program⁷. Support for implementation of the strategy is provided by pan-European academic network-Academic Network of European Disability Experts. This platform is created by the European Commission.

Within the Bologna process, widening the participation and improving the facilitation of completing the studies especially for the students from disadvantaged groups was highlighted in the *Leuven Communiqué* in 2009. Namely, the document stated that: “Access into higher education should be widened by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups and by providing adequate conditions for the competition of the studies,,. *Bucharest Communiqué* in 2012, specifically highlights the efforts for adequate student support services, flexible learning paths and access routes, and guidance and counseling⁸.

Earlier Communiqués also included recommendations regarding the social dimension in tertiary education. Namely, the *London Communiqué* from 2007 suggests that “students should be able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background,,.

⁵ Zvonko Shavreski, Elena Kochoska, “European Semester 2015/2016 shadow fiche on disability FYR Macedonia,, Academic Network of European Disability experts, 2016

⁶ “2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) New priorities for European cooperation in education and training,, Official Journal of the European Union. Available at: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)&from=EN](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)&from=EN)

⁷ “European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe,, European Commission, 2010. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF>

⁸ Jocey Quinn, “Drop-out and Completion in Higher Education in Europe among students from under-represented groups,, An independent report authored for the European Commission, October 2013

The abovementioned strategies and recommendations mean that the states and the educational institutions, should be adapted towards nontraditional groups of students (such as individuals from lower social classes, minorities, people with disabilities), and provide broader and supportive environment which will encourage people with disabilities to enter higher education, but also stay and obtain qualifications which will be valued on the labor market in the future. It's a fact that higher educational institutions on European level in the past 20 years are reaching out to more diverse student body then before⁹.

Data

In EU, people with disabilities' rate of poverty is 70% higher than the average, partly due to limited access to employment¹⁰. It is notable that 30,7 % of people with disabilities¹¹, aged between 15 and 34, in 2011 were neither in education nor in employment. Comparatively, 15% of non-disabled peers were in the same situation.

When it comes to attending higher education, in 2011, around 24% of people with disabilities on the age between 30 and 34 have completed this stage of education. Comparatively, 36% of non-disabled people between 30 and 34 attained tertiary education. In some of the EU countries the rates are significantly higher. For example, more than 36% of people with disabilities obtained university diploma in Finland and Luxembourg, followed by Spain (35%) and France (33%). On the contrary, the lowest rates are noted in Turkey (7%) and Italy (11%)¹².

Yet, one of the main differences in this level of education compared to the others, is that Universities do have autonomy in regulating and introducing policies which will attract more students with disabilities. Therefore, policies on a national and university level must be followed with equal attention.

According to Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities report, 36% of universities in Europe declared increasing of number of students with disabilities who enroll at their institutions while 38% stated that there were no changes. Only 2% of higher education institutions reported decreasing of number of students with disabilities.

Moreover, 49% of the higher education institutions said that have targeted strategies for students with disabilities, compared to 37% who didn't. This shows positive attitudes from the institutions which will probably develop even more in the future.

This report also maps the types of services enabled by the universities, which can be beneficial and helpful for the students with disabilities too. For example, 81% of the universities offer psychological counselling services, 90% have academic advising, 83% offer mentoring/tutoring and 70% provide special support for first year students. Also, most of the European universities provide additional services for students such as courses on enchainning specific disciplinary knowledge and skills (72%),

⁹ Andree Sursock, "Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities,,, European University Association, 2015

¹⁰ EU Statistic on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2004

¹¹ Here referring to definition provided by EUSILC which considers that people with disabilities are individuals who have a basic activity difficulty (such as sight, hearing, walking, communicating). EUSILC also uses another definition which is related to people limited to work inactivity due longstanding health problem and basic inactivity (LHPAD)

¹² "Disability statistics - access to education and training,,, Eurostat. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics_-_access_to_education_and_training

courses on presentation and communication techniques (70%), courses on study skills (60%), courses for developing autonomous learning skills (53%) etc.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Legislation

Law on Higher Education contains articles and provisions regarding persons with disabilities, but these are not comprehensive articles that are solving all needs and necessities of these students. According to this, in the Law on Higher Education can be found provisions that facilitate the study of students with disabilities or anti-discrimination provisions and provisions for financial facilitation for these students. However the provisions of this law don't assure great commitment of the universities and the state regarding promotion of access to higher education for students with disabilities. Overall the Law on Higher education, enables to the accredited universities to continue further with regulations on encouraging and promoting young people with disabilities to continue their education at tertiary level.

Co-funding and participation fees for studies

Article 87

„....The higher education institution shall not charge participation fee to:

- children without parents,*
- persons with a first and second degree disability,*
- war invalids, and*
- persons grown up in orphanages.*

The funds for the participation fee of these persons shall be covered by the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia.....“

Conditions and manner of enrolling in studies

Article 108

„.... The university, that is, the independent school of higher professional education shall determine the procedure for selection of candidates for admission in the manner that guarantees the quality of all candidates regardless of race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other belief, ethnic, national or social origin, wealth, birth, social status, disability, sexual orientation and age.....“

Rights and obligations of the student

Article 150

„....use the library and the databases, the facilities, the equipment (teaching aids), the software and the other scientific and professional infrastructure of the university and its units, that is, the independent higher education institution...

The students of all levels of the higher education that are without parents, blind, deaf, invalids of first and second group, mothers with children under age six, and hospitalized students shall have the right to special benefits determined by the statute of the higher education institution.....“

Analyzing the before mentioned articles it can be concluded that students with disabilities who enroll in higher education will not cover the tuition fees in terms of participation on their own, but their full study participation will be covered from the budget of the Republic of Macedonia.

According to this must be noted that this exemption is specified only for participation fee, but not for other costs and fees during the study. Law on Higher Education in article 108 promotes antidiscrimination policy that should be adopted by all higher education institutions during the enrollment process of students with disabilities. What is particularly interesting in Article 150 is the opportunity for all students to use libraries, databases, and other equipment during their studies. This paper also specifically examined these opportunities for students with disabilities at the faculties at UKIM, because if all of these devices are not enabled then this 'no acting' directly violates the Law on Higher Education.

The Law on Higher Education uses outdated and offensive terminology, and should be updated.

The rights of students with disabilities are also guaranteed by the **Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination**. This law protects students with disabilities from any kind of discrimination or disabling of access to education in Macedonia, „*Discrimination of persons with mental and physical impediment shall refer to intentional disabling or hindered access to health protection, i.e. restriction of the rights to health protection, regular medical treatment and medicinal products, rehabilitation means and measures in accordance with their needs, restriction of the right to marry and to create a family, and other marriage and family relations rights, restriction of the right to education, work and labor relation rights. Discrimination of persons with mental and physical impediment shall also occur in case of failure to undertake measures for removal of the obstacles, i.e. for adjustment of the infrastructure and the space, use of publicly available resources or participation in the public and social life*“.

In order for students to fully implement their right to higher education, it is necessary for the higher education institutions to provide necessary infrastructure opportunities within their buildings, as well as other facilities associated with education of these students. So with the **Construction Law and Rulebook on providing access, movement, residence and employment of persons with disabilities to and within buildings**, it is abiding to provide full access and movement primarily in facilities for pre-school and primary education, and facilities for cultural exchange in cultural institutions. This regulation also abiding obligations of the institutions for infrastructure for smooth access and movement of persons with disabilities in student dormitories in Macedonia.

Consequently of the provisions regarding the student dormitories, the **Law on Student Standard** establishes protection of the rights of students with disabilities in terms of their placement and movement in the public student dormitories.

However, despite all of the abovementioned regulation, it can be concluded that all legal provisions are too general to regulate all the issues and challenges which students with disabilities face with. This type of articles and provisions are difficult to apply in practice, firstly because of their extensiveness. In order to be implemented it is necessary for them to be included in more specific documents that can be directly implemented.

Apart from all law and legal provisions in Macedonia, there is also a **National Strategy for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2018)**¹³, as strategic document that guarantees the right to all levels of education of the persons with disabilities in Macedonia.

¹³National Strategy for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities,
<http://mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/FINALNA%20Revidirana%20Nacionalna%20Strategija.pdf>

Republic of Macedonia ratified the UN **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** in 2011, in which the right to education in each country is guaranteed. In Article 24, this Convention governs the right to higher education for persons with disabilities:

- States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning and
- States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community, Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education and access to general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.¹⁴

Despite such specific commitments of the Convention, as are presented above, students in Macedonia are facing a series of barriers that disturb their accessibility in higher education.

Statute of the University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, in article 219 promotes equal treatment of all students, including students with disabilities, regarding enrollment.

In Article 322, the University shows particular sensitivity towards students with disabilities. According to this, the University provides additional testing deadlines for students with disabilities. This article lists the groups of students which can use this right, and omits students with learning difficulties or other types of disabilities. The Statute also uses outdated and offensive terminology.

Data

Although legislation and strategic documents exist, in practice persons with disabilities have lower levels of participation in all phases of the educational process, especially in secondary and higher education. People with learning disabilities are those who usually do not continue their education at higher level. Low levels of enrollment in the educational process is partly due to the lack of sufficient support systems and support, physical inaccessibility and the existence of numerous prejudices about these people in the society.¹⁵

Regarding the available data on students with disabilities who have completed education in Macedonia, the data is segregated and depends on the commitment of every University or faculty to gather their own information. There is no official information on the total number of students with disabilities in Macedonia enrolled at public and private universities.

In addition to this document is presented data on persons with disabilities who have completed some level of education, but they are also job seekers and registered in the system for employment of the country, according to the Agency for employment of Republic of Macedonia.

Year	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Students with completed	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
		262	103	275	102	277	110	289	124	291	120	350

secondary education												
---------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Table 1: Students with disabilities who finished secondary education and are job seekers

Year	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Students with completed graduate studies	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
	25	13	30	19	35	22	51	34	40	25	49	30

Table 2: Students with disabilities who finished bachelor studies and are job seekers

Year	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
Students with completed master studies	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women
	/	/	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	2	5	1

Table 3: Students with disabilities who finished master studies and are job seekers ¹⁶

Yet these numbers don't show the exact status quo, since not all the people with disabilities actively seek for work after their studies.

Even more, there are no official statistic on the number of people with disabilities on national level. Some information can be obtained by the survey made by the Statistical Office of Republic of Macedonia on income and living conditions in 2015. According to the survey, which only includes people who live in households not in institutions, 13.1% of the people stated that they were strongly limited or limited in their lives at least in the past 6 months as result of health problems. It is interesting to note that no individual in the age group between 16 and 24 reported such limitations¹⁷.

METHODOLOGY

The authors focused on the work of the biggest and oldest university in Macedonia, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, -Skopje.

Data was obtained by using the right to freedom of information. In total, 302 requests for free access to public information were sent. Twenty three faculties, one university and three state institutions¹⁸ were targeted. Out of 27 institutions, two didn't deliver the required information in the timeframe provided by the legislature.

The data was collected in March and April 2017.

As main obstacles that the authors faced were lack of public data and developed academic approach towards the local context.

¹⁴Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>.

¹⁵Daniela Stojanovska-Djingovska, Biljana Manevska, Iffraim Ljuta, "Holistic report on people with disabilities in Macedonia,,", 2015

¹⁶The data is available on the web site of the Agency for employment of Republic of Macedonia, <http://www.avrm.gov.mk/lica-so-posebni-potrebi.nsp>

¹⁷ Survey on income and living conditions, Statistical Office of Republic of Macedonia, 2015 <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.16.15.pdf>

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Agency for Employment of Republic of Macedonia

RESULTS

Strategic planning

Statute of the University recognizes students with disabilities as category of students with specific needs, yet with too wide and too extensive definitions. Analyzing the legal acts presented above it can be concluded that it is necessary to have a special and specific approach from the academic and administrative staff of the University regarding these students. That is why one of the main areas of interest in this research was to examine how much the faculties which are members of University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, encourage these students to enroll, as well as their efforts to help and support these students during their studies.

One of the questions sent to all faculties asked if the higher educational institution has a strategy for students with disabilities. All received responses by the faculties were negative. Therefore, no faculty at UKIM who has targeted strategy for students with disabilities. In fact some universities even have noted that this is not an obligation under the legal provisions of Law on Higher Education, and consequently there is no strategy at their faculty.

This approach by the faculties at the biggest university in Macedonia, actually shows the conclusions noted above, that too broad and too extensive provisions are not applicable in practice and therefore there is lack of the support of the students with disabilities. Lack of strategy by the faculties indicates that students with disabilities are seen as isolated cases, not as a serious need for a strategic approach for their education on higher level.

Because the university has no strategic approach to students with disabilities, it was necessary to consider how many students have been enrolled at the university and if there is taken necessary measures to increase this number. That is why to the faculties was send a request for free access to public information with the question "How many students with disabilities enrolled at your faculty in the past 5 years?". So from the answers of 22 faculties can be concluded that the total number of enrolled students with disabilities in the last 5 years is 71. The largest number of enrolled students with disabilities have the Faculty of Philosophy (23), then the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering (around 10), followed by the Faculty of Philology with 6 students, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies and Faculty of Pharmacy with 4 students.

According to this, only 0,17% of students who enrolled at UKIM between 2012 and 2017 are people with disabilities.

To be able to make a conclusion regarding the dropout rates the authors also examined how many students with disabilities finished their studies in the in the past 5 years. So far, only 8 students with disabilities completed their education at some of the faculties at UKIM between 2012 and 2017.

Following all this information previously explained, according to information obtained in this research from the Agency for employment, there is a total of 1,490 unemployed people with disabilities, including 42 people with disabilities who have completed higher education. Furthermore, 37 of the 42 people have bachelor degree, and 5 of them have gathered master degree. Analyzing the areas of studies, 21 people completed their studies at some of the social sciences faculties, while 16 people completed their education at faculties that offer technical sciences education or education in natural sciences.

In the terms of the 5 people with disabilities who have completed master's degree, 2 people completed their MA at Law, 1 person holds MA in Sculpture, 1 person has an MA in Pharmacy and 1 person holds an MA in Philology.

The Agency for employment in accordance with our requirements and request for free access to public information, sent responses about the largest number of vacancies regarding different professions in the past three years. Based on the advertised requirements for workers by employers in the past three years, the largest number of vacancies were for workers in occupations: salesman, waiter, tailor worker for production line, workers in hygiene service, tailor textile providers, bartender, receptionist, driver and accountant. But also there were continually proclaimed advertisements for constructors, mechanical developers, civil engineers, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, economists, lawyers and other professions.

According to the previously presented data, it can be concluded that for most of the professions that are demanded on the labor market in Macedonia, higher education degree is not necessary. However, the Agency didn't explain whether this information is only for the people – job seekers with disabilities or for the labor market in whole.

Another very important issue for students with disabilities is the cooperation between the higher institutions and the state institutions. Although UKIM has autonomy of matters for higher education issues, in order to stimulate and support students with disabilities there must be continuous cooperation with state authorities. The authors examined if the faculties cooperated with state institutions in order to improve the status quo of students with disabilities in the past 5 years. Of all the responses obtained from the faculties, it is notable that no strategy and cooperation with state institutions for students with disabilities exists. Regarding this question, only one faculty, the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering, has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and also cooperates with other state institutions regarding education issues for children with autism. Also this faculty created software for speech synthesis for deaf persons on the initiative by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration.

This faculty also stands out in terms of having a special register for students with disabilities. Only this faculty claims that it gather records and data of students with disabilities who can attend higher education without participation fee, while other faculties replied that they don't have registers or records of students with disabilities. Some faculties claimed that this is due the low number of students (1 student), while a large number of the faculties have not submitted an adequate response on why they not keep records or registry for students with disabilities.

To be able to make a conclusions about the university's commitment to the needs and challenges of people with disabilities, it was necessary to examine whether the university has special body or person who is responsible for developing policies, giving the necessary support and so for these students. All responses by the faculties were negative. Despite this responses, many faculties answered that there is no obstacle for students to ask for help at Dean's office or any professor and assistant in order to get support or help during their studies. However this is a serious indication that there is need for hiring people who will support students with disabilities during their studies. In this way, students will know exactly which person is responsible for communication within the institution, and this approach increase the trust between students and the institution.

Physical infrastructure

Architectural environment of the higher education institution significantly affects students' experiences. Initially, it's important when evaluating the accessibility of the buildings or the campus itself. Furthermore, it affects students' class and exams attendance, extracurricular engagement, independent consultations with academic staff, full filling administrative procedures etc. Since the range of disabilities is wide, the institutions must take care of the different physical aspects. For

example, specific width of entrances, exists, passages or corridors, slope of the climbing, passing over different levels and grooves, installation of handrail to support the body weight at the critical places, finishes of floor surface with non-slip floor material should be implemented for wheelchairs users or persons with impaired walking. Installation of information board in braille and audible announcements, or removal of any protruding objects and sufficient walking space for safe walking is highly recommendable for spaces which are adapted for persons with impaired vision. Provision of illuminated signs and layout diagrams can help the persons with hearing disabilities to easily reach the desired place¹⁹.

The physical environment also involves spaces for recreation, classrooms and dorm accommodations and toilets. Therefore, this question should not be restrictively interpreted, but rather approached in wider context of providing connectivity as much as possible.

Observing the status quo at UKIM, ten out of twenty three faculties don't have any infrastructural adjustments for students with disabilities. Seven faculties have elevators within the building, and additionally ten faculties have ramps. Faculty of Law also reported having colored navigation for visually impaired people, while the Faculty of Design and Technologies of Furniture and Interior has only specific pathway (even though it's not identified what kind of pathway). The Faculty of Dramatic Art is the only one that described low level of the faculty building, which makes it easily approachable for people with wheelchair users or people with impaired walking. Apart from this, none of the faculties provided information regarding other buildings' adjustments.

The university building also has a ramp and elevator, but the campus itself is not adjusted for people with physical requirements. It is interesting to note that even though information requests regarding university's accessibility were sent, UKIM answered that the questions related to students with disabilities are not in its jurisdiction.

Also, it was also examined if the faculties are having appliances such as assistive technology or devices, graphic machinery, mobility aid etc. None of them reported such equipment.

Services for students with disabilities

Providing services for students with specific requirements is crucial for improving their capacities and aiding them to overcome academic challenges. For example, they are at greater risk for poorer academic achievement and increased failure, and are less likely than their peers without disabilities to graduate. Studies show that students with disabilities have lower grades and report poorer study habits and skills, and test-taking strategies²⁰.

Many students with disabilities need more time to accomplish tasks during their studies, and invest more time outside of their classroom on full filling academic responsibilities. Also, data shows that these students participate less in interpersonal and social activities beyond students' role in the classroom because of their self-perception and social stigma²¹.

¹⁹ "Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier Free Built Environment For Disabled and Elderly Persons,,, Centrar Public Works Department, Ministry of Urban Affairs & Employment of India, 1998
<http://cpwd.gov.in/publication/aged&disabled.PDF>

²⁰ Susan Miller Smedema et al., "The Relationship of Core Self-Evaluations and Life Satisfaction in College Students with Disabilities: Evaluation of a Mediator Model,,, Journal of Postsecondary education and Disability 28(3)

²¹ Dalia Sachs, Naomi Schreuer, "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Performance and participation in student's expectations,,, Disability Studies Quarterly

It is important to highlight the hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities and mental health needs who pose unique implications for students with disabilities, and often involve stereotypical labels. A student might take considerable effort to keep the hidden disability private due anxiety and fear of anticipated attitudes from its peers, professors, university staff etc.²² Even more, some students with disabilities express desire to be independent and don't report their hidden disabilities. Therefore it is important for the higher institution to have mechanisms for detecting these attitudes and adequately approach them.

None of the faculties reported specific tailored services for students with disabilities. Only Faculty of Economic reported collaboration with foreign business organization, regarding providing internships for this category during their studies.

College counselors are valuable position to help students with disabilities achieve their highest potential by understanding the situations of these students as they encounter barriers unique to this population. Councilors play a critical role in helping students identifying their unique needs and developing the appropriate coping skills, assertiveness skills, and self-advocacy skills²³. Trained mentors are needed because not always the faculty staff has expertise in completely addressing psychological and social requirements. Factors which influence faculty attitudes include faculty member age, academic discipline, experience teaching students with learning disabilities, years of teaching experience and professional rank.

On this point, none of the universities offers mentorship for student with disabilities. Ten out of twenty three faculties reported mentorship for any student that inquires, but no special educators are available for students with specific needs or requirements. Moreover, some of the faculties report that guidance is offered only if the student with disabilities officially asks for it. One of the medical sciences faculties answered that help is presented by cadres from the near clinics on a solidary base. Only Faculty of Pharmacy explained that there is a possibility of providing materials in electronic format.

The authors also examined if the higher institutions offer any exemptions or benefits for students with disabilities. Almost all of the faculties reported free studies for the categories of students which are recognized by Law on Higher Education or the Statute of the university. However, as one of the faculties highlighted, this financial exemption is only allowed if the student asks for it and it's decided on an individual basis. The faculties don't use integrated system with the state organs which will directly transfer information on candidates' disability or specific need. Four faculties don't offer financial exemption despite the legal regulations on national and university level²⁴. None of the faculties offer additional financial support for this category of students, nor expands the basis on which some candidates can study without payment.

²² Adrienne L. Johnson, "Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: Barriers to Success and Implications for Professionals,,, American Counseling Association

²³ Ibid

²⁴ This might be indicator that these faculties are not familiar with the legal acts that promote free studies for some categories of students with disabilities, rather than not respecting legal obligations

CONCLUSIONS

- All documents, acts and provisions too generally govern the area of people with disabilities and higher education. All these documents promote equality and antidiscrimination for these students. Yet there is lack of provisions that will contribute to the promotion and encouragement of students with disabilities to enter and finish their studies
- Students with disabilities of the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, can meet the following rights according to the legal regulations: equality, equity, basic infrastructure access to the buildings of the University, exemption from fee payment, as well as providing additional testing deadlines
- Some of the legal acts still consist outdated and offensive terminology
- The university itself shows no special interest in the question, referring that the questions regarding this topic are in faculties' jurisdiction. The university doesn't provide any information regarding number of students with disabilities, efforts in improving the status quo, policies and strategies on the matter
- The number of students with disabilities of the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, who have enrolled is low
- There is big dropout rate of the students with disabilities at the biggest and oldest university in Macedonia
- University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, and its faculty members don't have developed strategy regarding enrollment, participation, evaluation and following the studying progress of the students with disabilities
- University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, and half of its faculty members provide only infrastructure which allows accessibility for one category of students with disabilities, while all of the faculties lack architectural adjustments for other categories of people with specific needs
- University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,, and its faculty members don't have bodies or persons whose responsibility is developing and updating policies for students with disabilities
- None of the faculties offers mentorship by trained lecturers. Some of the faculties reported mentorship for each student that inquires, which it's decided on independent basis
- There are no specific tailored services for students with disabilities at any of the faculties at University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius,,
- Ministry of Education doesn't approach the area with the required attention. No data collection, collaboration or policy promotion was done, according to the information provided by this institution

LITERATURE

Adrienne L. Johnson, "Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: Barriers to Success and Implications for Professionals,,," American Counseling Association

Andree Sursock, "Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities,,," European University Association, 2015

Dalia Sachs, Naomi Schreuer, "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Performance and participation in student's expectations,,," Disability Studies Quarterly

Daniela Stojanovska-Djingovska, Biljana Manevska, Iffraim Ljuta, Holistic report on people with disabilities in Macedonia, 2015

Jocey Quinn, "Drop-out and Completion in Higher Education in Europe among students from under-represented groups,,," An independent report authored for the European Commission, October 2013

Susan Miller Smedema et al., "The Relationship of Core Self-Evaluations and Life Satisfaction in College Students with Disabilities: Evaluation of a Mediator Model,,," Journal of Postsecondary education and Disability 28(3)

Zvonko Shavreski, Elena Kochoska, "European Semester 2015/2016 shadow fiche on disability FYR Macedonia,,," Academic Network of European Disability experts, 2016

2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) New priorities for European cooperation in education and training,,," Official Journal of the European Union

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Disability statistics - access to education and training,,," Eurostat

EU Statistic on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), 2004

European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe,,," European Commission, 2010

Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier Free Built Environment For Disabled and Elderly Persons,,," Centrar Public Works Department, Ministry of Urban Affairs & Employment of India, 1998

National Strategy for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Survey on income and living conditions, Statistical Office of Republic of Macedonia, 2015