

Inclusive EHEA

Psychological Services and Resources for Vulnerable Students

Best Practice Examples

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ARACIS

Inclusive European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

promote access, acceptance, participation and success for all learners

(regardless of disability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, migration status, religion or learning profile).

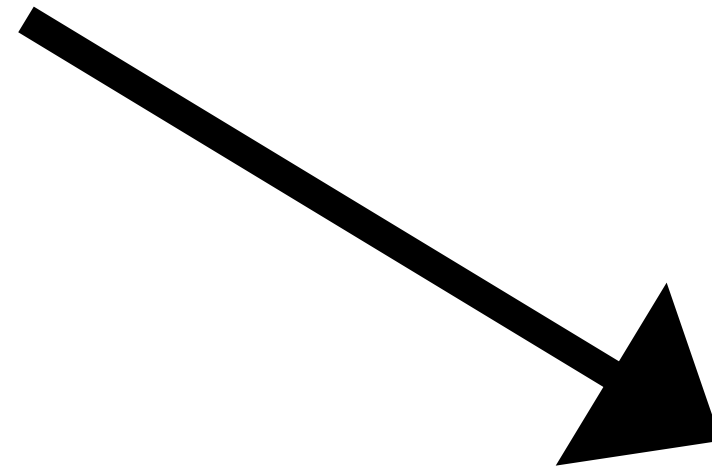
Priority actions for Inclusive EHEA

- Policy & governance: adopt explicit EHEA inclusion policy, appoint inclusion lead.
- Data & accountability: collect/disaggregate data (access, retention, outcomes), publish dashboards and improvement plans.
- **Teaching & assessment**: flexible delivery and multiple assessment routes; train staff.
- **Support services**: scale accessible student support (disability, language, financial, mental health).
- External QA: include inclusion indicators and mandatory evidence of impact for accreditation.

Vulnerable students

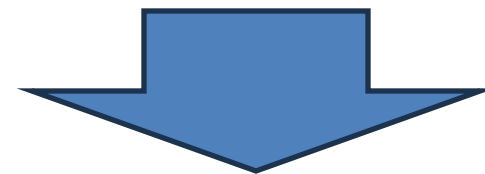
Students who, due to
specific characteristics:

- personal
- social
- economic
- contextual



are exposed to:

- higher risks of academic failure
- mental health issues
- social exclusion
- limited access to university resources



Category	Subcategory
Students with Disabilities and Neurodivergent Students	Physical/ sensory/ cognitive disabilities students with different neurological functioning, cognitive processes and learning styles.
Immigrant, Refugee, and International Students	language barriers / trauma / acculturation
Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds	low income / lack of financial support
Students from minority groups	Ethnic/ religious/ and sexual minorities
Trauma-exposed students	Abuse/ violence/ and forced migration
Students with mental health challenges	Acute / Chronic

Summary

A. Literature review (vulnerable students)

A1. Psychological Needs and Intervention Strategies

A2. Common psychological needs of vulnerable students

A3. *Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students*

A4. Specific Needs by Category

A5. Concrete psychological intervention strategies

B. The situation in Romania

B1. Legislative framework

B2. Examples of good practices in Romania

C. Conclusions

D. Detailed activities of UBB centers

A. Literature review

A1. Psychological Needs and Intervention Strategies

1. Students with Disabilities and Neurodivergent Students

- **Psychological Needs:** Social isolation and the lack of curricular adaptations cause chronic distress (Wilson & Spencer, 2022).
- **Intervention:** Structured university programs (such as coaching and adapted CBT) along with group sports activities significantly reduce emotional difficulties, thereby supporting social integration and academic retention (Farhangi & Hemati Alamdarloo, 2015).

2. International, Immigrant, and Refugee Students

- **Psychological Needs:** Acculturative stress, language barriers, and the loss of support networks lead to high levels of isolation and increased risks for clinical disorders (Minutillo et al., 2020).
- **Intervention:** Group psychological interventions and multimodal programs are essential for developing effective coping strategies and facilitating campus adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2014).

3. Students from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds

- **Psychological needs:** reducing financial stress (comprehensive package of resources), coaching for resource management, access to technology, academic flexibility.
- **Intervention:** Psychological counselling services only become effective when integrated with concrete social measures (such as financial aid and vouchers) that directly alleviate material distress (Broton et al., 2022).

4. Sexual Minorities

- **Psychological Needs:** Exposure to discrimination and a hostile climate generates chronic "minority stress," which is a direct cause of severe depression among young college students (Bissonette & Szymanski, 2019),
- **Intervention:** Implementing affirmative therapy and transdiagnostic counselling programs on campus significantly reduces anxiety and unhealthy coping mechanisms (Pachankis et al., 2020).

5. Students with a History of Trauma (Abuse, Violence, Migration)

- **Psychological Needs:** Trauma directly affects concentration and the capacity to build relationships based on trust.
- **Intervention:** Psychotherapy and trauma-informed pedagogy applied in the classroom help rebuild psychological resilience (Bryce et al., 2026).

A2. Common psychological needs of vulnerable students

Main dimensions of transversal needs:

- **Access and adaptation**: Easy access to services, flexible scheduling, and tele-counseling.
- **Psychological safety and confidentiality**: Non-judgmental spaces, data protection, and anti-discrimination policies.
- **Emotional and therapeutic support**: Individual counseling, specialized therapy (trauma-informed), and support groups.
- **Stigma reduction and inclusion**: Anti-stigmatization campaigns and peer support.

Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2024.

START Project

Social Inclusion, **T**olerance, **A**cceptance and **R**ealization for all s**T**udents

- A. Development of indicators for assessment of the quality of higher education, related to the:
 - a. - access for students from vulnerable groups, with a focus on migrants (and students with disabilities) in the context of social inclusion;
 - . b. quality of the learning process for students from vulnerable groups, with a focus on migrants and students with disabilities - including e-learning

- B. . Preparation of Guidelines and Policy paper (recommendations) for social inclusion of all students, especially for those from vulnerable

A3. Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students

The Difficulty	Concret aspects
Increased anxiety	Fear of failure, social anxiety, negative performance anticipation, and anxiety over access to resources
Depressive mood	Sadness, loss of motivation, anhedonia, and demoralization due to persistent barriers

Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students

The Difficulty	Concret aspects
Chronic stress and stress reactivity	High levels of subjective cortisol, emotional dysregulation difficulties
Decreased self-esteem and self-efficacy	Doubts regarding academic competence and chances of success

Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students

The Difficulty	Concret aspects
Social isolation and withdrawal	Reduction of support networks, and a sense of exclusion or non-belonging
Shame and internalized stigma	Avoidance of help-seeking due to fear of labeling or shame

Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students

The Difficulty	Concret aspects
Cognitive/executive regulation difficulties	Difficulties in concentration, reduced working memory, and impaired planning (heightened by financial stress or neurodivergence)
Somatic and psychosomatic symptoms	Fatigue, pain, sleep disturbances, and physical manifestations of distress

Common Psychological Challenges of Vulnerable Students

The Difficulty	Concret aspects
Vulnerability to trauma	Hypervigilance, avoidance, and high emotional reactivity
Trust and relationship issues	Fatigue, pain, sleep disturbances, and physical manifestations of distress

A4. Specific Needs by Category

Vulnerable students category	Specific needs
Students with disabilities (physical, sensory, cognitive) and neurodivergent students	Sensory/cognitive adaptations, self-regulation strategies (note-taking, assistive technologies)
Immigrant /refugee/ international students	Language support, trauma-informed therapy (for refugees)

Vulnerable students category	Specific needs
Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds	Financial stress reduction (resource bundle), coaching for resource management,
Students from minority groups (ethnic, religious, sexual)	Protection against discrimination, identity recognition, support for minority stress.

Vulnerable students category	Specific needs
Students with chronic mental health issues	Continuity of treatment, accommodation plans during acute periods,
Students who have experienced trauma (abuse, violence, forced migration)	Trauma-informed interventions, strict confidentiality, specialized therapy.

A5. Concrete psychological intervention strategies

**7 Transversal strategies
(applicable to all vulnerable students)**

1.Screening and routing

Implement a brief screening at admission and periodically (short scales for stress, depression, suicidal risk, trauma) and specialized services (psychological and psychiatric).

2.Flexible access to counseling

Flexible scheduling, secure tele-counseling, a menu of brief support sessions and long sessions (therapy).

3.Trauma-informed care & confidentiality

All services operated according to trauma-informed principles; strict confidentiality policies and non-judgmental spaces.

4.Integrated individual plans

Personalized support files (academic + psychological + social).

5.Training and supervision

Mandatory training for counselors, administrative staff, and faculty:.

6.Peer support and student involvement

Mentorship programs, peer counselor training, co-design of services by representatives of vulnerable groups.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Service utilization, retention, wellbeing scores, satisfaction; continuous feedback and program adjustment.

Conclusion

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1. Regardless of the specific vulnerability, **perceived social support and a sense of belonging** constitute the most powerful structural protective factors against the deterioration of mental health.
2. **Structured physical activity** functions as an essential bio-psychosocial buffer within the university environment by developing **resilience** and facilitating **social integration**.

B. The situation in Romania

B1. Legislative framework

1. Higher Education Law no. 199/2023

Art. 3 para. (2) lit. (2) - **Equity** - ensuring equal educational opportunities for young people, regardless of their background or other risk factors;

Art. 121 para. (8) **Support and funding for Psy. Counseling** and Career Guidance Centers in order to monitor and implement actions to combat university dropout;

Art. 126 - a) - The principle of **non-discrimination**

ART 193 (1) The state ensures **free access to counseling services** (psychological, educational, vocational) and career guidance for all pupils, students, and job seekers.

2. Min of Educ. ORDER No. 4042/2024 , March 22.

- *Methodology on the organization and functioning* of counseling and career guidance centers (CCOC) within higher education institutions
- CCOCs provide career counseling activities for personal optimization and free psychological counseling services.

3. ARACIS Standards – regarding Implementing ORDER No. 4042/2024

B2. Examples of good practices in Romania

B2.1. Intervention and support at national level

1. Romania Secondary Education Project (ROSE)

MEN Project financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2000 million EUR) - implemented 2015-2022.

Project Purpose: reducing **school/univ. dropout** in secondary and tertiary education

!! Vulnerable students

Its main **objectives** include:

Dropout reduction: Decreasing the early leaving rate in high schools and university.

Transition to tertiary education: Supporting students to successfully transition from high school to university.

University retention: Increasing the retention rate of students during their first year of college.

Academic performance: Improving learning outcomes and passing rates.



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI



ROSE - Resources for vulnerable students Educational guides – see

<http://umpfe.edu.ro/dezvoltarea-sociala-si-emotionala-ghid-pentru-universitati/>

GHID | CLASELE IX - XII



UNITATEA DE MANAGEMENT AL PROIECTELOR CU FINANȚARE EXTERNĂ

DEZVOLTARE SOCIALĂ ȘI EMOȚIONALĂ

BUCUREȘTI 2020



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI



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DEZVOLTARE PERSONALĂ ȘI COACHING

BUCUREȘTI 2020



B2.2. Examples of good practices in Romanian universities

B2.2.1. Integrated services (in CCOC/CCGC)

Universities that have successfully integrated psychological and educational services with vocational ones within the Counseling and Career Guidance Centers (CCOC)

Examples

Politehnica University of Bucharest

Victor Babeş University of Medicine and Pharmacy Timișoara - The first UMF accredited by COPSI (Romanian College of Psychologists)

Romanian-American University Bucharest

University of Oradea, etc

B2.2.2. Intreconnected Specialized Centers and Services

1.University of Bucharest (UniBuc)

UniBuc has created a unique department named the **Service for Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity (SIED)**.

Target population: neurodivergent students, those from the LGBTQIA2S+ community, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and those dealing with various addictions.

It offers mentorship, psychological counseling, and integration services into the university community through the **Clinic for Psychological and Educational Assistance and Intervention (CAIPE)**

- Official link: [UniBuc - Disability and Inclusion Support](#)
- Example of program: [UniBuc - Neurodiversity in University Life Workshop](#)

2. West University of Timișoara (UVT)

Integrating sports, well-being, and proactive screening

UVT stands out for its holistic approach to the concept of "university well-being."

Psychological screening services with open, inclusive physical activities, offering personalized support including for students with mobility or sensory disabilities.

- **Official service:** [UVT Counseling and Career Guidance Center \(CCOC\)](#)

3. Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (UAIC) Iași

Integrated psycho-pedagogical support

UAIC - offers personalized assistance - psychological counseling for students with disabilities and those in social or familial at-risk situations.

Official service: [Student and Alumni Support Service](#)

4. Babeş-Bolyai University (UBB) Cluj-Napoca

UBB. possesses a much more complex integrated infrastructures for clinical and academic support through its specialized Centers.

UBB Centers offer specific accommodations, evidence-based therapy, and mentorship for all categories of vulnerable students.

- Center for Students with Disabilities - UBB | Cluj-Napoca
- "Student Expert" Psychological Counseling Center of the Babeş-Bolyai University
<https://www.facebook.com/ConsiliereStuden>
- Advanced clinical support: PsyTech UBB University Clinic
- **Career, Professional Guidance and Alumni Center**
<https://ccopa.centre.ubbcluj.ro/>
- Volunteer Program at UBB

1. Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)

- **Target:** Students with physical, sensory, cognitive, or chronic health conditions.
- **Academic Adaptations:** Tailored exam and learning accommodations.
- **Autonomy Training:** Workshops on campus navigation, cooking, and soft skills.
- **Individual psycho-pedagogical counseling**
- **Integration:** Career support and networking with inclusive associations.

2. "Student Expert" Counseling Center

- **Target:** General and vulnerable student bodies seeking personal development & help
- **Career Guidance:** Individual counseling for career exploration and goal-setting.
- **Employability Prep:** CV/LinkedIn optimization and interview simulations.
- **Development:** Workshops on time management and academic motivation.

3. PsyTech University Clinic

- Target:** Students experiencing acute or chronic psychological challenges.
- Clinical Therapy:** free individual sessions of evidence-based CBT.
- Digital Intervention:** Guided e-mental health software and coaching.
- Support Groups:** Weekly sessions targeting academic burnout and exam stress.

4. UBB Volunteer Program

- Target:** Students wanting to support peers and develop social skills.
- Peer Accompaniment:** Hands-on daily assistance for students with disabilities.
- Community Projects:** Student-led initiatives for diversity and social inclusion.
- Certified Training:** Formal volunteering contracts recognized as work experience.

C. Conclusions

1. Inclusion in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) is an essential dimension of HEI because it ensures equitable access, quality, and relevance of university education for all.
2. 2. Vulnerable students need, beyond institutional equity, diversity, inclusion strategies and dedicated budgets, a personalized offer of psychological services.
3. Romania provides unambiguous evidence that it addresses psychological needs of all categories of vulnerable students (legislatively and concrete in practice)

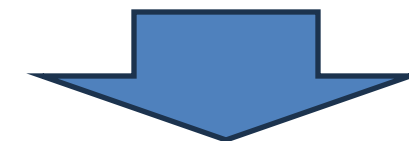
D. Detailed activities of UBB centers

D1. Center for Students with Disabilities - UBB | Cluj-Napoca

CSD-UBB offers an integrated portfolio of services addressed to students with disabilities and special educational needs (CES), organized into 5 main directions.

All services are free of charge for the beneficiaries.

- 1. Academic and reasonable accommodation services**
- 2. Accessibility of educational materials and resources**
- 3. Accessibility of physical infrastructure**
- 4. Awareness, training, and advocacy**
- 5. Psycho-pedagogical support and counseling**



5. Psycho-pedagogical support and counseling

- Individual psycho-pedagogical counseling addressed to students with disabilities
 - Short-term and long-term counseling, depending on educational needs and the academic context
- Referral of students to other specialized structures of UBB (CCSE, PsyTech Clinic) for clinical psychological or psychotherapeutic interventions
- Individual psychological counseling - free annual sessions through the "Student Expert" Counseling Center (CCSE)
- Clinical psychological interventions - "Babeş-Bolyai PsyTech" University Psychological Clinic (free program of individual sessions for UBB students and employees)

Data collected from the research conducted within the VIDO project

Within the VIDO project - Inclusive Vision:

Opening Academic Horizons for Students with Disabilities (CNFIS-FDI-2024-F-0292), a needs analysis was conducted on a sample of 140 UBB students and alumni.

The data provides an updated snapshot of the beneficiaries' perception regarding university inclusion services.

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	Female: 82 (59%) / Male: 58 (41%)
Level of study	Bachelor's: 100 (71%) / Master's: 35 (25%) / PhD: 5 (4%)
Form of education	Full-time: 117 (84%) / Distance learning: 23 (16%)
County of residence (Top 3)	Cluj (46) / Bistrița-Năsăud (12) / Alba and Maramureș (8 each)
Current status	Students: 72 / Full-time employees: 33 / Job seekers: 12
Access to a personal computer	97% have access
First-generation students	54% are the first in their family to pursue higher education

Distribution by degree of disability:

- severe: 50 (36%)
- accentuated: 49 (35%)
- medium: 19 (14%)
- mild: 4 (3%)
- unclassified: 18 (13%)

Motivation for choosing UBB

Factors that determined the choice of UBB by students with disabilities (multiple response, n=140):

- Recommendation of UBB for its staff well-trained in interacting with students with disabilities: 26 (19%)
- The existing inclusive environment for students with various disabilities: N=25 (18%)
- The non-discriminatory environment: N=22 (16%).

Conclusion: the reputation of **UBB as an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment** is an attraction factor for approximately one out of four to five students with disabilities.

Frequently identified psychological needs and difficulties

- Stress and anxiety related to the accessibility of spaces, materials, and social integration
- Feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, fear of discrimination and labeling
- Fatigue and burnout caused by insufficient accommodations or the effort required for individual adaptation
- Increased risk of university dropout (nationally, over 30% of students with disabilities face retention issues)
- Integration difficulties in the first year, frequently reported in the VIDO analysis

Evaluation of Accessibility Services

General evaluation of the accessibility services provided by the university:

- Very satisfactory + satisfactory: N=100 responses (72%);

Evaluation of the support provided by CSD

- Very satisfactory + satisfactory: N=78 (56%);

CSD Awareness: N=76 respondents (54%) were aware of the structure, while N=64 (46%) were not aware of its existence.

This indicator signals the need to continue awareness and promotional campaigns for these services.

"Student Expert" Counseling Center of the Babeş-Bolyai University

<https://www.facebook.com/ConsiliereStuden>

Identification of cognitive and emotional mechanisms of exclusion (stigmatization, discrimination, isolation)

During counseling sessions, the following indicators for social isolation were identified:

- Reduced participation in academic and extracurricular activities;
- Difficulties in developing social relationships and support networks;
- Reduced sense of belonging to the university community;
- Social withdrawal and avoidance of group interactions;
- Social anxiety and relational insecurity;
- Increased level of perceived loneliness;
- Decrease in academic engagement and motivation;
- Low level of confidence in one's own social resources and skills;
- Increased vulnerability to psychological stress and acculturative stress.

Training for users/ beneficiaries

- series of workshops and personal development programs offered free of charge to UBB students, targeting the following aspects: well-being; stress management; relaxation techniques; self-confidence. Access to these programs is free of charge.

Training for teaching staff working with vulnerable students

Within the project "**Increasing Inclusion Capacity through Integrated Support Measures**", a guide was developed titled *Inclusive Education and Mental Health in the University. Preventing Dropout through Emotional Support: A Practical Guide for University Teaching Staff*:

- Checklist: Inclusive Teaching Strategies;
- Identification of unhealthy beliefs that can negatively affect the creation of an inclusive climate in the academic environment;
- Cognitive regulation of biases;
- Inclusive language;
- Exercise for empathetic reflection and self-compassion.

Anti-discrimination training for teaching staff

- to reduce negative attitudes and increase the use of adaptive teaching practices

Training for students with social needs

Series of workshops and personal development programs offered free of charge to UBB students, targeting aspects such as: personal growth and inclusion in the academic community; well-being and adaptation to student life

Conclusions

Conclusions

1. Inclusion in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) is an essential dimension because it ensures equitable access, quality, and relevance of higher education for all.
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3. Romania provides unambiguous evidence that it addresses these needs legislatively and concrete in practice for the psychological needs of all categories of vulnerable students.

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