

THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MURCIA

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Abstract

In order to achieve SDG 4, University education should not be a privilege or a meritocracy focused institution. Also, because of higher education potential to foster social mobility, it could also contribute to SDG 10.

The difficulties vulnerable students suffer in order to have an efficient academic performance are not only confined to economic issues, but also affected by factors such as: mental illness, addictions, disability, access difficulties due to residing in a rural environment, being a member of ethnic minorities, domestic violence, discrimination based on ethnicity, race or religion, etc.

Thirteen months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of Murcia conducted research addressing university students social and economic situation and needs. Some of the critical findings are as follows: a) 14.6% of students has at least once not enrolled in one or more courses due to social and economic difficulties, b) 6,7% has, at least once, given up their degrees for social reasons, c) 13,7% is currently considering giving up for economic or social reasons.

These data warn of the need to implement measures that prevent the most vulnerable students from completing their studies. In view of the results, the University of Murcia decided to take action by designing and implementing a Social Assistance Office. This administrative unit promotes social inclusiveness and initiate actions guided by egalitarianism, providing students with counseling and attention services by a social worker, organizing awareness raising campaigns or developing grant programmes. In this paper, the actions undertaken by this office in the academic year 2020/2021 are showed.

Keywords: *Equity, social work, higher education, social exclusion.*
