

**POLIS UNIVERSITY POLICY  
ON STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES**

## **POLICY ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

This Policy document on Students with Disabilities (SwD) has been prepared by a working team appointed by the Rector's Office on the framework of the Erasmus CBHE Project "Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAikanS – IDEA"

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# CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION ..... 4
- Definitions ..... 5
- POLICY STATEMENT ..... 6
- DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF POLIS UNIVERSITY ..... 7
- 1.1 Inclusion of dedicated ‘Curricular Adaptation Programs’ ..... 7
- 1.2 Construction of an institutional culture of recognition of disability ..... 7
- 1.3 Available and accessible information and disclosure on disability ..... 8
- 1.4 Access, permanence and preparation for groups with disabilities ..... 8
- 1.5 Architectural and symbolic accessibility ..... 9
- 1.6 Networking to achieve greater incidence in the University ..... 9
- RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ..... 10

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Policy document on Students with Disabilities (SwD) of POLIS University is one of the institution's strategic documents which aims to promote the culture of respect, the fight against disability discrimination and the promotion of effective inclusion of SwD through a series of actions that are coherent internally and pursued over the time span of the five-year period 2022-2026.

This document has also been compiled in accordance with the 4<sup>th</sup> policy of the National Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025, which focuses on "Ensuring quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning for persons with disabilities".

Regarding the right to having access to comprehensive education for youth/students with disabilities, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has recommended that the Albanian state should: "i) amend the laws to recognize inclusive education as a right and to give all students with disabilities, regardless of their individual characteristics, the right to access inclusive learning opportunities in the traditional education system with individualized support, according to requirements; ii) ensure the possibility of using school environments in accordance with the Convention, through the provision of specific measures, such as: accessible and adapted materials and comprehensive curricula, providing support and individualized adaptation; iii) include comprehensive education training in university programs for prospective teachers and mandatory training programs for current teaching staff, with an appropriate budget; iv) improve data collection on the implementation of laws and policies on inclusive education and the accessibility of school infrastructure, information and communication, including information and communication technologies, to inform inclusive education policies."

*It should be noted that POLIS University has already in place a number of safeguards for inclusive and non-discriminative practices for Students with Disabilities, as fundamental values shared by the entire Polis community. This document intends to serve as an integrated and unified document so that these practices become known, transparent and accessible to all relevant stakeholders*

## Definitions

1. *Disabled person:* According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disabled individuals are those "individuals with permanent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may prevent their full and effective participation in society just like the rest of society.
2. *Person with deficiency or disabling condition:* "Those individuals with a deficiency or disabling condition, who present a decrease or temporary suppression of any of their physical, sensory or intellectual capacities, in the terms established by the Law, and who, even being subjected to clinical or surgical treatments, their evolution and prognosis is foreseeably unfavorable in a period greater than one (1) year of evolution, without becoming permanent.
3. *Disability:* Generic name that encompasses all components below:
  - Deficiencies at the physical/body level;
  - Limitations in activity at the individual level.
  - Restrictions on participation at the social level.
4. These are three different dimensions that interact with each other with contextual factors, environmental and personal factors.
5. *Educational inclusion:* Inclusive education, in its conceptual document, is seen as the process of identifying and responding to the diversity of needs of all students through greater participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing the exclusion in education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that includes all the actors in society and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate each one of them.
6. *Curriculum Adaptation:* Adaptation of these elements of the curriculum to the special needs of a specific student.
7. *General Certification:* Curriculum program adapted to the needs of candidates

who are considered as SwD, and directed and proposed by academic staff of the POLIS University, under the direction of the Dean of Students.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

The living conditions of persons with disabilities are often perceived as issues that should be included only in the field of social affairs or health care. In addition, one of the factors that traditionally has mostly influenced the social exclusion of these individuals has been their low degree of access to training and education, especially for those aiming to join HEIs.

Therefore, integration of students with disabilities, or special educational needs, is an inalienable requirement for any university, which by its very nature must be inclusive and with a vocation for universality. In this context, POLIS University is committed to;

1. Promote equal opportunities in access to higher education for students with disabilities or learning difficulties.
2. Improve the care of students with disabilities, providing them with all the necessary adaptations they need.
3. Contribute to the elimination of barriers and prejudices regarding the real abilities and needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties.
4. Provide academic staff with general and specific information on disability, its most frequent types in the university environment, as well as the difficulties and needs that these students have, both personal and academic.
5. Provide academic staff with the tools and skills so that the teaching-learning process is carried out under the premise of design for all.
6. Ensure quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning for students with disabilities (SwD) or learning difficulties.

# **DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF POLIS UNIVERSITY**

## **1.1 Inclusion of dedicated ‘Curricular Adaptation Programs’**

Knowing that youth with disabilities and special educational needs belong to a social group that receives priority attention for educational services, POLIS University aims to incorporate Curriculum Adaptations for students with disabilities or those who have particular education needs into its academic offer. *Curricular Adaptation Programs* are considered those programs which correspond to the adequacy of the teaching-learning process; in one or several subjects, depending on the individual possibilities of students with disabilities; that do not affect the basic content of the minimum required knowledge, without causing modifications to the academic content that affect the demand for mastery of skills and abilities, to obtain a university degree.

## **1.2 Construction of an institutional culture of recognition of disability**

Recognizing disability implies transcending the way of relating to said social phenomenon and to people with disabilities. Reviewing the conceptions that are held and mobilizing new forms of understanding may only be possible through various mechanisms that allow information, interaction with said reality to reconstitute the concept of "that other" whose difference is valued from the deficit. For this, POLIS University aims to open permanent spaces for interaction involving different actors of the university community. In particular, POLIS aims to have its academic staff trained in such processes which would support them to move toward the pedagogical and didactic dimension with a creative and acknowledging attitude of the various ways of learning and teaching.

Being said in other words, *POLIS University aims to train all its academic staff/professionals on recognizing differences and valuing them, as well as having the ability to identify social inequities, to which society expects them to contribute from their professional role.*

### **1.3 Available and accessible information and disclosure on disability**

Making informed decisions to reduce inequities in the university environment is possible if there is reliable and permanent information on the situations experienced by people with disabilities in everyday life at the university.

- Therefore, POLIS University aims to put more efforts for the *constitution of an institutional mechanism that ensures the availability of all necessary information as support to understand the reality of the members of the university community with disabilities and respond appropriately to reduce inequity from the framework of the recognition of rights.*

### **1.4 Access, permanence and preparation for groups with disabilities**

This commitment is entirely dedicated to students with disabilities, who live permanently exposed to the violation of their rights. From the conviction of the performance and development capacity that each person with disability has, as well as the recognition of the rupture that occurs in their autonomous participation due to the characteristics of the environments that have been designed under a conception of "normality", it is raised the need to move towards the design of accompaniment programs that inform, guide and manage conditions of equity in the admission process, during the years of permanence in the institution, as well as in the process of graduating from this stage of life.

- *This commitment, in relation to all students with disabilities, implies touching on the didactics, the pedagogical model, the forms of evaluation, as well as the mediations that can be proposed to favor the academic development of these students.*
- *POLIS University also aims on having a particular quota policy for disadvantaged groups, with a dedicated focus on students with disabilities/learning difficulties.*

## **1.5 Architectural and symbolic accessibility**

Free and autonomous access to the different architectural and social spaces is a basic need to participate in university life. Therefore, POLIS University aims to make all common areas, as well as the various means of information and communication, increasingly accessible. This means POLIS full engagement without denying the importance of promoting the use of assistive technology to make specific adaptations that are required by some people with disabilities. This commitment calls for thinking in particular about the diverse functions that human beings have that lead them to do everything that any subject does, but in a different way: *move with the help of a device, write with the help of a stylus or a prompter, reading with auditory support or in braille; communicate through another language, present evaluations in oral formats, among others.*

## **1.6 Networking to achieve greater incidence in the University**

POLIS University has a complex structure to respond to the needs of its academic units, instances and levels. In this context, the university community is made up of students, graduates and administrative and academic staff who converge in interaction spaces where the institutional footprint is built.

Therefore, a sense of a 'standardized networking' aims to be one of the main priorities of POLIS University in order to foster the articulation of the different actors and instances to face problems that could not be adequately appreciated from each subject or instance in isolation, especially for those related to the proper inclusion of students with disabilities or particular learning difficulties.

## **RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR LERANING DIFFICULTIES**

- a) Right to accessibility under equal conditions as other students, that includes, adaptation of the infrastructure, as long as it is viable. Regarding the physical space, parking, information technologies, equipment, in the shared use areas there are facilities and materials accessible to these students, taking into account the economic availability and the security that each student requires.
- b) Be evaluated in order to establish their individual needs and the curricular adaptations or support they require to guarantee their permanence in POLIS University.
- c) Inclusion through physical, information and communication accessibility.
- d) Ease in the teaching-learning process; through curricular adaptations.
- e) Participation in dedicated programs, according to their needs.
- f) Scholarships and financial aid.
- g) Equal opportunities and their integration into university life.
- h) Specific tutorials based on students' needs.
- i) Integration to awareness workshops.
- j) Academic, psychosocial and psychoeducational support.
- k) According to the student's disability, alternatives will be offered to take elective sports subjects.
- l) Additional rights established in the Statute, Academic Regulations and other internal regulations of POLIS University.

*This document constitutes the approved POLICY DOCUMENT ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES by the main decision bodies of POLIS UNIVERSITY. It is produced in English language and may be subject of upcoming updates.*