

PRESS RELEASE

Ljubljana, Zagreb, 25. 5. 2021

Virtual round table to celebrate European Diversity Month

»Diversity and Inclusion in Education«

25th of May: "DIVERSITY and INCLUSION in EDUCATION"



Co-funded by the European Union



EU
DIVERSITY
MONTH
United in Diversity

To celebrate the European Diversity Month, the Charter of Diversity Slovenia, in cooperation with the Croatian Diversity Charter, organized a round table on the 25 May 2021 entitled "Diversity and Inclusion in Education". The round table was one of a series of celebration events supported by the European Commission, the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers.

Event was attended by over 50 participants in Zoom. We also streamed the event through YouTube, where more than 35 people participated.

The virtual event was officially opened by the state secretaries of both countries. **Damir Orehovec, State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport**, said at the opening speech, that "the vision of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has been implemented for several years in support of forming class communities of empathetic and responsible individuals to develop a learning community." He added that the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports is aware of its co-responsibility and their role in the development of critical thinking and tolerant individuals.



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tomislav Paljak, State Secretary at the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, said that the time of the pandemic had exposed many inequalities in the education system, both in Croatia and throughout Europe. Seemingly developed education systems have found it much harder to cope with a pandemic. But for the future, it is necessary to remember that in order to transform the education system, in addition to upgrading the infrastructure, it is also necessary to introduce innovations from the pedagogical profession and take into account social changes. At the same time, we cannot ignore the need for a digital transformation of the education system.

The event was moderated by **dr. Sonja Merljak Zdovc, editor of the children's online newspaper Časoris and ambassador of the Charter of Diversity Slovenia.**

Marko Strle, director of the Center for Communication, Hearing and Speech Portorož, emphasized that inclusion is a constant process of creating equal opportunities. He added that he could not imagine an inclusive society without at the same time creating special conditions and adapting the requirements to those in need. He pointed out that an inclusive education system is not only good for children with special needs. By introducing changes in the education system intended primarily for children with special needs, we are also contributing to the improvement of education for all others. Knowledge of adapting the process to children helps us to adapt education to each student, which is one of the basic pedagogical principles. He pointed out that all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents) gained more power to adapt to each other during the pandemic. "We developed online education for students, provided the necessary technology and tools for work, brought lunch to all children at home and opened kindergartens in front of everyone else. But the most important gain for employees and students is awareness of the importance and power of flexibility as a key ability to overcome such situations." said Strle.

Marjan Smonig from the Faculty of Economics presented the diversity at EF, which is attended by 25 % of students (1000 students) from abroad. They also have many students with special needs status, students with children, and they take other diversity into account. Involvement in EF means that the facts of student diversity in college are never forgotten and taken into account in decisions. Their slogan when admitting new students is "There is no room for violence and exclusion at EF", thus building a culture of inclusion upon the entry of new students, which is the basis for student empowerment. He introduced 4 pillars over which students were helped during the pandemic. After the second wave, the evaluation showed that students need even more support, so they, through one of the support pillars t. i. "SEB PERSONAL", employed two clinical psychologists who offer psychological assistance to Slovenian-speaking students and foreigners. He also pointed out the current problem of students at the opening of faculties, namely the fact that 80 % of students cannot come to classrooms at the moment because they do not have a place to live in Ljubljana.



Co-funded by
the European Union



Goran Popović, the principal of Livada Primary School, said that his personal migrant experience helps to run a school where 18 different languages are spoken. He emphasized that 90% of children at this school do not have Slovenian parents. He pointed out that his students have similar problems as he had when he came to Slovenia. At their school, it is easier for children mainly due to the fact that most children are economic migrants, and also due to so many migrants, they feel more equal to each other. He added that his goal is to prepare students for integration in the Slovenian social system without losing their own identity. He said he had spent many years trying to change his teachers' opinions about migrants. The epidemic and online teaching, however, helped teachers gain insight into families and thus a better understanding of their students. If before the epidemic, the principal was the one who forced them into change, during the epidemic, the main driver of change was teachers who felt the need to adapt to students.

Gregor Deleja, the principal of the Celje - Center grammar school, expressed that t. i. "story telling" is the best way to educate about diversity. It is an interweaving of experiences with first-hand knowledge of diversity, which has a much greater impact on knowledge than learning from books. This way of learning benefits everyone, both the class, the school and the teachers. He pointed out that during the pandemic we forgot about talented children, because in the first wave we responded urgently and rescued those who did not have the technical equipment, or they had no support at home. At their school, there was a lot of activity in the first wave aimed at building community between parents, teachers and students, which was crucial for later success. They regularly conducted evaluations and talked a lot with all stakeholders. This was the key to better preparedness after the second wave, when they supplemented the technological equipment, organized psychological support, activities for parents, teachers and students in the form of webinars. The recommendation for the future transformation of education is to place greater emphasis on mentoring, specifically on the transfer of experiences from older to younger, which is crucial for the development of young people.

Goran Luburić from the Zagreb School of Business said that professors were among the vulnerable groups, as some had no experience with digital technology. Some had children at home who needed to be taken care of. The professors had a number of needs that needed to be addressed. Initially, the challenge was to reduce the resistance to digital technologies of professors and teach them new ways to interact with students, and »you have to be much more creative than in classical teaching«, he said. He says most professors today feel much more confident in the field.

Boris Jokić, director of the Institute for Social Research, Croatia, pointed to a new vulnerable group that emerged during the pandemic, namely girls who go to more demanding high schools and are prone to perfectionism. These are prone to greater vulnerability in Croatia today. On the other hand, the boys, who had poorer grades in the past, they found themselves better in this times. Nonetheless, he stressed that the pandemic only shed light on vulnerabilities that had existed before. Despite the fact that we humans are generally very resilient and adaptable, it is necessary to be aware that there has been a major setback to learning behaviour, for example in a decrease in motivation and a decline in work habits. In the future, we should work to strengthen children's resilience and offer help to those who need it and in areas where they need it. We will also have to touch on the problem of distance assessment. He believes the future of education lies in combining traditional ways with digital methods. Finally, he added that the recent survey in Croatia showed, that most Croatian children prefer school to home. Also, Croatian high school graduates, who have been assigned recently to



Co-funded by
the European Union



distance learning for the last two days, even went to school to protest this decision. This shows the desire of young people to attend school, which is a center of socializing, development of social skills and spiritual development and not just a center of knowledge.

A clip of the event can be viewed here: [Diversity and Inclusion in Education-YouTube](#)



Co-funded by
the European Union

