

# Introduction

The annual report within the framework of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) at the University of Zadar for the academic year 2023/2024 presents the main activities aimed at promoting a healthy research culture and environment at the University of Zadar. Developing an inclusive research culture requires strong support for researchers, and over the past year, the University of Zadar has continued its efforts to support members of the research community in their professional development and long-term career goals.

The HRS4R action plan at the University of Zadar primarily aims to create an encouraging environment in which researchers feel welcome, respected, supported and valued. Key activities include improved access to support and guidance for researchers and their mentors in relation to onboarding, professional development, research careers, mentoring, wellbeing and numerous networking opportunities.

Thanks to the dedicated support and commitment of the entire research community, progress has been made throughout the year. This document highlights the key achievements of the past year.

## Researcher Careers

With the aim of improving the research culture, the topic of research careers is one of the main activities in the HRS4R Action Plan of the University of Zadar. The European Framework for Research Careers, adopted by the ministers of the EU Member States in 2023, brings many important advances to make research careers in Europe more attractive and sustainable. The University of Zadar supports this framework through a number of activities, which are described in the following sections.

## Recruitment and Selection of Staff

The University of Zadar consistently implements its recruitment and selection policy, which includes the OTM-R (Open, Transparent and Merit-based Recruitment of Researchers) practise, which includes the following:

- mandatory training for all members of selection committees, focusing on unconscious bias and discrimination on grounds defined in national legislation,
- respect for gender equality in the appointment of selection committees.

The recruitment process is based on thorough annual planning that precedes the advertising of vacancies and ensures transparency and merit-based selection. An electronic application form was used during all recruitment cycles last year.

## Researcher Wellbeing

Research shows time and again that the work of researchers can be fulfilling, but at the same time stressful and isolating. Through a series of workshops, seminars and social activities, we have endeavoured to educate staff on the importance of self-care and wellbeing.

### Workshops

The workshops offered were short, informal and interactive and were designed to provide timely and targeted information on topics that are important for personal and professional development. They included skills and goal development, guest lecturers from within the University and beyond, and external stakeholders, and were open to all members of the research community.

To support students with disabilities more effectively, the Office for Quality Assurance, the University of Zadar Student Counselling Centre, the Stjepan Matičević Centre and the Alumni Club organised a workshop for academic and administrative staff entitled Supporting Students with Disabilities.

Workshops entitled "Inclusion in higher education and the role of stakeholders" and "Ethical issues in dealing with students with disabilities" were also organised. These workshops were attended by numerous teachers from the University of Zadar, members of departmental committees for students with disabilities, interested lecturers, staff and students. Using practical examples and role plays, the participants were able to gain valuable insights for their daily work.

### Horizon Europe "WIDERA Enables"

In March 2024, the University of Zadar took part in the kick-off meeting of the WIDERA Enables project as part of the Horizon 2020 programme in Bucharest, where all consortium members met for the first time. The aim of the project is to broaden participation and strengthen the European Research Area within Horizon Europe. The University of Zadar presented activities related to open science that will be carried out over the next five years.

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## Social Connectedness and Wellbeing

We continued the social events through a series of workshops – nature walks, coffee mornings – to strengthen the community within the research environment in an informal setting. Spending time in nature has been proven to have a restorative effect, and members of the University of Zadar Psychology Department organised several activities using ecotherapy techniques such as forest bathing, meditation in nature, connecting with nature through art (drawing/stories), gratitude scavenger hunt, etc. to show

how we can take advantage of our natural landscapes for our well-being and strengthen our senses and minds.

The University of Zadar also offers special psychological support through the Employee Assistance Programme and the Student Counselling Centre. The University continuously promotes awareness of these services.

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## Value and Recognition

In March 2024, awards for research excellence at the University of Zadar were celebrated, recognizing outstanding achievements. The Rector's annual award for academic staff was given to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mate Parica, Assist. Prof. Dr. Marija Ljubičić, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Gabrijele Vidić, while the Rector's award for non-teaching staff was awarded to Ljerka Morović.

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## Achievements in 2023/2024

### 1.1. Amendments to existing regulations and manuals

- **Indicator 1.1.1.** Adopted amendments to manuals and regulations  
In 2023, amendments were adopted to key documents defining the evaluation of project proposals and the selection process for scientific projects. This result is an important step towards standardizing internal procedures and aligning with European standards (HRS4R principles). The adoption of these changes ensures greater transparency and fairness in the allocation of funds, while also fostering a research culture at the University. This increases researcher trust, strengthens international recognition, and competitiveness in project applications.
- **Indicator 1.1.2.** Number of successful project applications to competitive funding sources
  - **Achieved:36**  
The number of successful applications shows that the changes in regulations and training have contributed to tangible results in strengthening staff project capacities. Successful applications to competitive calls (e.g., national funds, EU programmes) directly contribute to the financial stability and visibility of the University. This activity enables the increase of research budgets, laboratory equipment, and the inclusion of young researchers.

### 1.2. New calls for institutional projects

- **Indicator 1.2.1.** Call for institutional projects implemented

- **Achieved:1**  
By launching and implementing calls for funding institutional projects, the University actively recognizes and supports internal initiatives, fosters interdisciplinary work, and strengthens the capacity for smaller pilot research projects that can serve as the basis for larger projects. This strengthens internal research networks and motivates scientists to apply for larger external projects.
- **Indicator 1.2.2.** Number of funded projects over a two-year period
  - **Achieved:59**  
This number indicates active research implementation and a significant scope of scientific work. A high number of funded projects contributes to greater overall scientific output and enables the development of new research directions, enhancing the University's reputation as an active research centre.
- **Indicator 1.2.3.** Number of researchers from different scientific fields involved in projects
  - **Achieved:95**  
The number of participating researchers shows successful integration of different departments and interdisciplinarity, which is particularly important for strengthening internal collaboration and producing joint publications. Knowledge exchange, diversity of approaches, and innovation in solving research questions are encouraged.
- **Indicator 1.2.4.** Number of scientific papers based on funded projects
  - **Achieved:36**  
Funded projects resulted in published papers that contribute to the international visibility of the University. This demonstrates concrete scientific productivity, strengthens the University's position on the scientific map, and contributes to better rankings.

### 1.3. Promotion and education on professional and scientific projects

- **Indicator 1.3.1.** Number of meetings and trainings held
  - **Achieved: 90**
- **Indicator 1.3.2.** Number of staff members who participated
  - **Achieved: 250**
- **Indicator 1.3.3.** Number of successful project applications to competitive calls
  - **Achieved: 36**

The University strongly supports continuous professional development by organizing educational activities such as workshops on project proposal writing, project management, dissemination of results, and similar topics. This strengthens researchers' competencies and increases the success of future applications.

## 1.4. Strengthening international cooperation through the EU-CONEXUS alliance

- **Indicator 1.4.1.** Joint researcher database established – **Achieved: Yes**
- **Indicator 1.4.2.** Number of promotional events related to the database – **Achieved: 9**
- **Indicator 1.4.3.** Number of promotional events on joint research institutes – **Achieved: 2**
- **Indicator 1.4.5.** Number of promotional events on mobility opportunities – **Achieved: 35**
- **Indicator 1.4.6.** Number of participants in mobility-related promotional events – **Achieved: 900**
- **Indicator 1.4.8.** Number of mobilities and study visits carried out – **Achieved: 25**

### Goals for 2024/2025

Based on the above achievements, for 2024/2025 it is recommended to:

- define target figures more precisely for each indicator (especially those currently missing),
- maintain continuity in the number of training sessions and increase staff participation,
- increase the number of mobilities (above 25), number of published papers (above 36), and further motivate interdisciplinary collaborations,
- expand the researcher database and intensify promotion within the EU-CONEXUS network.

In 2023/2024, the University of Zadar improved legal acts, strengthened its project portfolio, supported lifelong learning for employees, and encouraged stronger internationalization. These results provide a solid foundation for more ambitious goals in the new academic year, which should be clearly quantified to enable precise progress monitoring and further motivate staff.

## General Conclusion

This report provides an overview of a wide range of activities aimed at improving the research culture at the University of Zadar. The next HRS4R Action Plan will reinforce the University's commitment to the principles of the EU Charter and Code and ensure alignment with the new Framework for Research Careers and the Charter for Researchers adopted by the European Council in December 2023.

Future priorities will focus on diversity, networking, resilience and engagement.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of the HRS4R Executive and Monitoring Group and all those involved in the collection of relevant data for their commitment and sharing of their expertise, which will further enhance the quality and relevance of this work.