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Provision of educational resources for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages

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Introduction

According to a study by OECD, 99.5 per cent of students with disabilities are fully included in mainstream education in Italy; very few countries in the world have such high inclusion rates (OECD, 2004). The reasons for such practices are multiple and lie in the understanding that human, material and financial resources need to be allocated to the education of students with disabilities to meet their special educational needs in order to promote equity in curriculum access and outcomes. Over the past 40 years, the educational community in Italy has come to understand that, for students with disabilities, quality education means accessing a form of schooling in which they are included in learning settings that have traditionally served their mainstream peers alone. Cultural, political and societal changes have taken place at many levels. The following are some of the features of the Italian education system which provide a unique experience for students with disabilities.

1) Inclusive education is provided from crèche to university, with considerable investments in human and material resources to support it.
2) Curricular agreements exist among public institutions such as schools, local health authorities and local public authorities.
3) Specialised teachers work to support inclusive education in regular classroom settings.
4) An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is written for each student with disabilities.
5) Focus is placed on the guidance of an interdisciplinary group of experts.
6) Support measures are provided on transition from school to work and/or community living.

These features will be addressed here briefly. The main purpose of this paper is to summarise findings based on the internationally comparable framework promoted by OECD and subsequently used for a CRELL research study. The first part of the paper will provide a brief overview of the Italian education system that promoted full inclusion of students with disabilities as well as the number of students with disabilities educated in the various levels of the education system, and student-teacher ratios. The second part of the paper will provide internationally comparable quantitative information on students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages based on the OECD tripartite categorisation system. The paper will conclude with a look towards future trends. [1]

[1] The author would like to acknowledge Peter Evans and Philippe Hervé, former colleagues at OECD, who contributed to an earlier version of this paper.

Part one

Educational provision in Italy

Provision in mainstream settings. Educational provision is granted for students with disabilities in all phases of education (i.e. right of access from crèche to university). In 2005/2006, education was compulsory for nine years and covered the six to fifteen age spectrum. However, all students have the formal right to continue their studies via general or vocational pathways until the age of 18/19, including students with disabilities. All students with disabilities aged between six and eighteen are educated in regular-education buildings and the vast majority of these students are in regular-education classrooms (for provision in separate settings see end of section). Education for students with disabilities beyond the age of 18/19 continues upon specific request of the family (Law 104/1992).

Children with disabilities aged three years and under have access to municipal crèches. According to the law, children with disabilities have priority access to crèche enrolment. In 2005/06, enrolment rates for children with disabilities were 1.1 per cent (17,235) of the total number of children in pre-primary education. Pre-primary education (provided for children aged between three and five or six years old) is regarded as especially important for students with disabilities. Early identification and intervention for children who have difficulties accessing the curriculum is essential. Research has shown that participation in free, high-quality pre-primary education can have long-lasting benefits in student achievements and socialisation because it can facilitate later learning. Studies have shown that early intervention programmes can produce positive socio-economic returns which persist well into adulthood (European Commission, 2008).

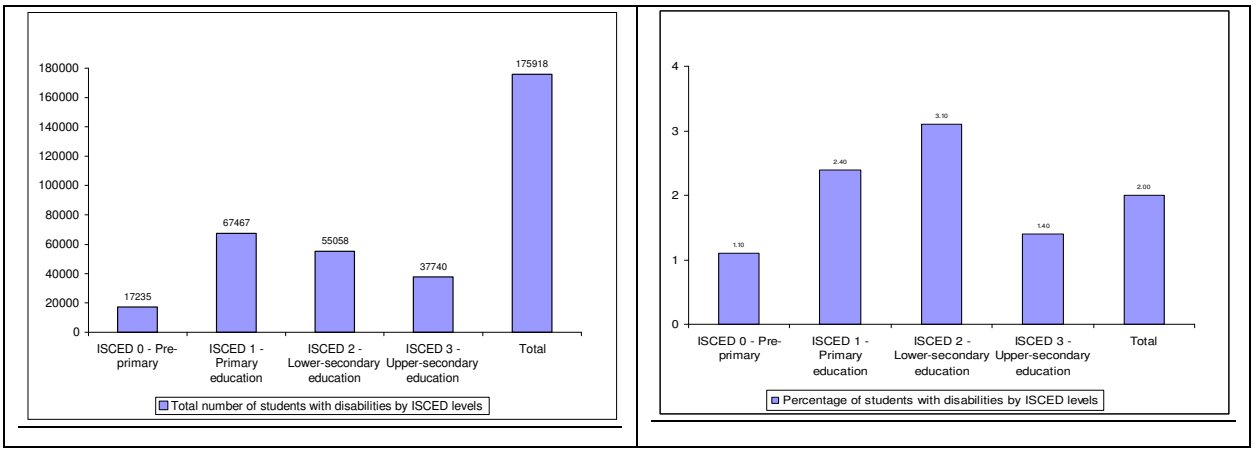
Primary education caters for students aged five or six to eleven and in 2005/06 66,467 students with disabilities were enrolled in this phase of education, 2.4 per cent of the total number of students in primary education. The education of students with disabilities is based on their IEPs as established by Law 104/1992. Having an IEP allows pupils with disabilities to benefit from a more complex educational aid and teaching support from schools. Furthermore, for a small number of students with extremely serious disabilities, qualified intervention and differentiated teaching are provided with the support of rehabilitation therapists. There is strong collaboration between schools, specialists, local social and health services and structures and the wider community.

Lower-secondary education includes students who are in the 11 to 14 age range. In 2005/06, 55,058 students with disabilities were enrolled in this level of education, 3.1 per cent of the total number of students in lower-secondary education. Educational and curricular planning at this level provides both for individualised paths aimed at tackling learning difficulties and for support activities to facilitate the inclusion of disabled pupils through specialised teaching and other means provided for by law.

Enrolment rates for students with disabilities in upper-secondary education (aged 14 to 18/19) have progressively increased over time, despite the difficulties linked with subject teaching. Recent changes to a modular curriculum have improved the planning and coordination initiatives for inclusion. In 2005/06, the total number of students with disabilities in this phase of education was 37,158 – 1.4 per cent of the total number of students in this level of education.

The right to educational provision for students with disabilities extends to higher education. The number of students with disabilities attending university programmes in 2005/06 was 10,126, with an increase of 110 per cent compared to 2000/01, when the number of students with disabilities was just 4,813.

Chart 1.1. Number of students with disabilities in mainstream-education/regular-classroom settings by levels of education, and as a percentage of the total number of students in each level of education, 2005/06



(Source: MIUR, 2006)

In 1999-2001 students with disabilities were ascertained based on the national categories listed below. National categories of disability changed over time and in 2005/2006 three main disability categories were identified for the purpose of gathering statistics: Visual impairment, hearing impairment and mental and physical handicaps combined. Specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia have been addressed by ministerial guidelines since 2004. However data on these students were not gathered in 2005-2006.

Table 1.1. Number and total percentage of students with disabilities in mainstream-education/regular-classroom settings, and as a percentage of the total number of students in all phases of education

Disability Category	Number of Students with Disabilities, 1999	Number of Students with Disabilities, 2001	Number of Students with Disabilities, 2005/06
Visual impairment	2505	3579	4153
Hearing impairment	5711	5185	6386
Moderate mental handicap	54746		
Severe mental handicap	47285		
Mild physical handicap	4624		
Severe physical handicap	5646		
Mental and physical handicaps combined			165379
Multiple handicap		127 411	
Total	120 517 (1.5 per cent)	136 175 (1.7 per cent)	175 918 (2 per cent)

(Source: OECD, 2007 and MIUR)

Provision in separate specialised settings. Even though there is full inclusion into mainstream-education/regular-classroom settings in Italy, a very small percentage (0.5 per cent) (OECD, 2004) of students with disabilities are educated in separate specialised settings. The provision of education in separate settings is a residual practice for a small

number of blind and partially sighted students, deaf and partially hearing students and most severe cases of students with intellectual disabilities. In fact, residual highly specialised centres have developed methods of inclusion and teaching laboratories and act as resource centres and as bridges to mainstream/inclusive education.

Table 1.2. Numbers of students with disabilities in separate specialised settings in 1999, 2001 and 2005 by levels of education and by disability categories

Disability Category	Number of Students with Disabilities in Separate Specialised Settings, 1999			
	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary
Visual impairment	3	4	10	46
Hearing impairment	14	61	106	267
Moderate mental handicap	49	171	1	0
Severe mental handicap	20	449	0	8
Mild physical handicap	0	1	0	0
Severe physical handicap	12	26	0	0
Multiple handicap	97	773	61	5
Total	195	1 485	178	326

Disability Category	Number of Students with Disabilities in Separate Specialised Settings, 2001			
	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary
Visual impairment	2	22	48	118
Hearing impairment	11	23	54	191
Moderate mental handicap	33	140	9	0
Severe mental handicap	57	419	30	1
Mild physical handicap	1	19	0	0
Severe physical handicap	17	42	1	0
Multiple handicap	33	521	5	6
Total	154	1 186	147	316

(Source: OECD, 2004, OECD, 2005)

Disability Category	Number of Students with Disabilities in Separate Specialised Settings, 2005			
	Pre-primary	Primary	Lower-secondary	Upper-secondary
Visual impairment	17	20	16	158
Hearing impairment	25	87	57	414
Mental and physical handicaps combined	204	1181	113	10
Total	246	1288	186	582

(Source: MIUR)

A 1999 study by the OECD found that it is no more expensive to provide a supported mainstream place for a student with disabilities than to educate him or her in a special school (OECD, 1999). The study also concluded that it is far more expensive to operate a dual system of regular and special education than it is to run a properly resourced fully inclusive single system.

The table 1.2 shows the numbers of students with disabilities in separate specialised settings in 1999 (OECD, 2004), in 2001 (OECD, 2005), and in 2005/2006, by level of education and by disability category. A decrease in the number of students with disabilities being educated in separate specialised settings between 1999 and 2001 and an increase in 2005/2006 are clear.

Teachers. In 2005/06, approximately 840,000 teachers were employed in Italy, 83,761 of whom were specialised support teachers in pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education (MIUR, 2006). All teachers are civil servants. Often classroom assistants – i.e. assistants *ad personam* – are allocated with municipal funds. Most assistants have university degrees. While the specialised support teacher is co-titular in the classroom and therefore responsible for the whole class, the assistant *ad personam* is a support measure allocated to the student with disabilities only.

The number of support-teacher posts is established by law and is based on the total number of students enrolled (one teacher post for every 138 students). It is, however, possible to employ additional support teachers under temporary contracts. The number of support teachers established at national level is subdivided at regional level by the Ministry of Education and further subdivided at school level, taking into consideration the actual numbers of students with disabilities in schools.

According to an OECD comparative study (OECD, 2005), teaching and other staff are some of the most important resources available to support the education of students with disabilities. In Italy, student–teacher ratios have consolidated over the years and have typically hardly been above 2 : 1 at all phases of education. The table below shows trends over time by levels of education. It is clear that support teachers with specialised training are allocated to schools at the rate of one teacher for every two students ascertained as needing support.

Table 1.3. Number of students with disabilities per teacher in mainstream-education/regular-classroom settings by levels of education, 1997–2004

School Year	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Pre-primary education	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
Primary education	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0
Lower-secondary education	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.0
Upper-secondary education	1.9	1.8	3.0	2.9	2.5	2.0	2.1

(Source: Disabilità in cifre - www.handicapincifre.it)

Part two

The goal of inclusive education has been part of the EU agenda in the field of equity in education for several years. The signing of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the EC in 2007 (UN, 2006), actions on behalf of the European Parliament, the contents of the Lisbon Strategy (EC, 2000) all indicate a strong and growing concern that the international community adhere to both the principles and practice of equality of educational opportunity. These international agreements require that special educational needs is fully included in the wider global agenda that has also been pursued by UNESCO through its work on developing Education for All (UNESCO, 2006) and via the Millennium Development Goals. Recently, Council Conclusions on a Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training identified strategic objectives for the period 2010-2020 by emphasising the need "to ensure that all learners – including those …with special needs…- complete their education" (Council, May 2009).

Indeed, it is clear that there is a growing international understanding that special educational needs is a topic on which more research and information must be gathered if appropriate policies, such as those aimed at inclusion, are to be promoted and monitored *vis-à-vis* the education for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages.

Concerns about equity in education, the declining numbers of children and increased demands of the labour market are forcing education systems to take more interest in the educational progress of students who would otherwise under-achieve by offering considerable extra resources to help them learn more effectively. Over the past thirty years, an increasing number of countries have established educational policies that target extra money and resources to students whom, for various reasons, are unable to access school curricula as easily as some of their peers. Students receiving these extra resources have come to be formally categorised by the international community as having disabilities, learning difficulties, and disadvantages. These three descriptors are purposefully broad and intended to capture various types of students, from those who have physical and cognitive disabilities to those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

This approach was taken and promoted by OECD because of difficulties encountered in making meaningful international comparisons when different countries have very different national definitions of special educational needs, and it has distinctive features: 1) it is compatible with a social model of disability; 2) it is based on the ISCED 97 definition of special needs education (UNESCO, 1997); 3) it has introduced the notion that extra resources are needed to assist schools in helping students with difficulties access the curriculum more effectively. Such resource-based approach brings together a heterogeneous group of students which was further subdivided into a tripartite taxonomy based on perceived causes of educational failure and thus the adoption of the tripartite taxonomy A, Disabilities, B Difficulties, C Disadvantages (OECD, 2007).

Developing an internationally comparative framework

One of the key elements to achieving an equitable education for all is to develop policies and effective monitoring systems that can provide accountability for the education being offered to all children and can communicate progress in the context of national and international comparisons.

In pursuant of these goals, the OECD has been a source for statistics and indicators on special education needs through the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) since the mid 90s. With support, since the outset,

from the EC, OECD has developed an international comparative framework based on the definition of special education needs in ISCED 97 (UNESCO, 1997).

ISCED 97 and the resource-based definitions

ISCED 97 provides the following definition of special education: "Special needs education – Educational intervention and support designed to address special educational needs. The term 'special needs education' has come into use as a replacement for the term 'special education'. The older term was mainly understood to refer to the education of children with disabilities that takes place in special schools or institutions distinct from, and outside of, the institutions of the regular school and university system. In many countries today a large proportion of disabled children are in fact educated in institutions of the regular system. Moreover, the concept of 'children with special educational needs' extends beyond those who may be included in handicapped categories to cover those who are failing in school for a wide variety of other reasons that are known to be likely to impede a child's optimal progress. Whether or not this more broadly defined group of children are in need of additional support depends on the extent to which schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching and organisation and/or to provide additional human or material resources so as to stimulate efficient and effective learning for these pupils".

Applying this definition means that a much wider range of students, in all types of schools, are brought into the framework. In addition, the notion that extra resourcing may be needed to assist schools to help students access the curriculum more effectively is included in the new description. It was accepted that many OECD member countries made additional resources of various kinds available to students who had particular difficulties for a variety of reasons in accessing the regular curriculum whether or not this came within a national definition of special educational needs. This has become the first step in identifying students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages, i.e. those included are those being given additional resources to help them access the curriculum. Thus, the operational definition of special needs education is as follows: "*those with special educational needs are defined by the additional public and/or private resources provided to support their education*".

Additional resources are those made available over and above the resources generally available to students where no consideration is given to needs of students likely to have particular difficulties in accessing the regular curriculum. Resources can be of many different kinds including personnel resources (e.g. additional teachers), material resources (e.g. hearing aids, Braille, or modifications to classrooms) and financial resources (e.g. favourable funding formulae) (OECD 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2007).

Operational definitions of cross-national categories

As noted, such a resource-based approach brings together a miscellaneous group of students reflecting different national definitions and policy concerns. This approach was taken because of difficulties encountered in making meaningful international comparisons when different countries have very different national definitions of special education needs. Some definitions are limited to purely organic, physical and sensory disabilities, while other countries include socially and economically disadvantaged students. However, it was accepted that many OECD member countries made additional resources of various kinds available to students who had particular difficulties for a variety of reasons in accessing the regular curriculum whether or not this came within a national definition of special educational needs. A further complication is that, while a large proportion of countries had national categories of need, the actual categories

employed varied widely (ranging from 2 to 19). Hence, in addition to adopting a resource-based definition, it was agreed to divide this group into a tripartite taxonomy based on perceived causes of educational failure. These three agreed broad cross-national categories are referred to as A, B and C – students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages respectively.

Students in cross-national category A (the 'disabilities' category) have clear organic bases for their difficulties in education. Students with disabilities or impairments viewed in medical terms as organic disorders attributable to organic pathologies (e.g. in relation to sensory, motor or neurological defects). The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems attributable to these disabilities. The educational need for students in this broad category refers to substantial normative agreement, such as blind and partially sighted, deaf and partially hearing, severe and profound mental disability, autism, multiple disabilities. Typically, adequate measuring instruments and agreed criteria are available.

Students in cross-national category B (the 'difficulties' category) have emotional and behaviour difficulties, or specific difficulties in learning and the educational need arises from problems in interaction between the student and the educational context. Students in this broad category have emotional and behaviour difficulties or specific learning disabilities that interfere with typical academic learning, such as dyslexia/speech and language disorders, or are in need of remedial education in reading, writing and/or numeracy.

Students in cross-national category C (the 'disadvantages' category) are in need of additional educational resources to compensate for problems due to aspects of their socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic background (OECD 1998-2007). Typically, there is some form of disadvantaged or atypical background for which education seeks to compensate.

Students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages are therefore a heterogeneous group which in some countries comprise only students with organic, physical and sensory disabilities, while in other countries it includes other groups such as socially and economically disadvantaged students and/or gifted and talented students.
By focusing on additional resources, the difficulties faced by students in accessing the curriculum for whatever reason are linked to the ability of schools to provide all students with the same chance to make progress in the education system and to achieve successfully in an appropriate learning environment (Ebersold and Evans, 2008).

This approach/classification is innovative because allows for internationally valid comparisons that overcome the different meanings of special education needs in different countries. It provides internationally comparable data that is easily understood and widely applicable.

The OECD conceptual framework was described in depth in various OECD publications as well as in the 2007, 2008, 2009 editions of the Progress Report towards achieving the Lisbon objectives in Education and Training (EC, 2008, 2009, 2010). Thanks to the collaboration between OECD and the European Commission (CRELL), data were collected for those EU countries which were not yet included in the OECD study (i.e. Malta, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Croatia). This section will present internationally comparable data for school-year 2005-6 on these groups of students in OECD/EU countries. Data will be presented broken down by cross-national category (A/Disabilities, B/Difficulties and C/Disadvantages), across educational settings (special schools, special classes, regular classes) over the period of compulsory education. In all charts, countries are ranked in ascending order either in terms of overall percentages or descending order in terms of their distribution in regular classes. EU and OECD means and medians are presented. The amount of information which countries were able to provide varied widely from country to country. Typically there are more sound and reliable data for students with disabilities than for

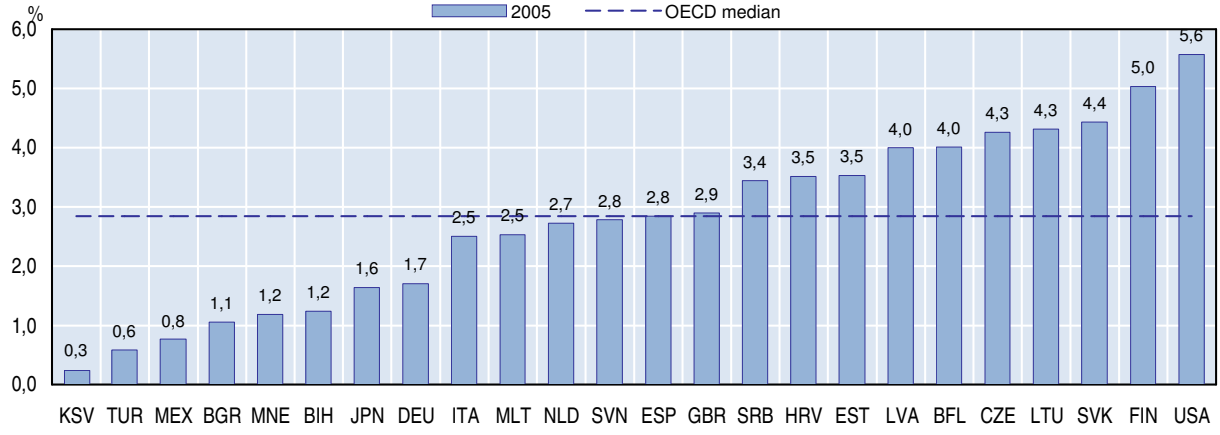
those with learning difficulties or disadvantage. The most reliable data are to be found for students receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education.

Cross-national category A / Disabilities

Cross-national category A, as discussed in OECD 2007, roughly corresponds to needs arising from impairing conditions. All countries using categorical systems for special educational needs have national categories which they consider to fall within cross-national category A, although the number of such categories varies widely from country to country.

Chart 2.1 shows the number of students receiving additional resources for disabilities as a percentage of all students in compulsory education. Values range from 0.3% in Kosovo and 5.6% in the USA. Italy's value is 2.5% and this is in line with the international disability rate (2.5 %) (UNICEF, 2004)[2]. The OECD mean is 2.8%. Further work would be needed at both national and international levels to understand these differences more fully and to determine whether some countries are unnecessarily over-identifying children while others may be under-identifying them.

Chart 2.1: Number of students with disabilities (cross-national category A) receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education as a percentage of all students in compulsory education (2005)



Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Additional notes: Countries are ranked in ascending order of percentage of students

Although countries provide considerable additional resources for these students which may be seen as positive discrimination aiding the goal of greater equity, there are great disparities among OECD/EU countries in the allocation of additional resources for students with disabilities. Countries differ in the proportions of students with disabilities who receive additional resources and they also differ substantially in both the number and type of programmes included in the disabilities category. Since it is unlikely that the 'organic' bases of disability differ greatly among countries, it seems most likely that the different proportions in Chart 1 reflect national differences in the conceptualisation of disability, identification procedures, educational practices, comprehensiveness of provision, and policy priorities. Such

[2] UNICEF (2004) Innocenti Insight, Children and Disability in Transition in CEE/CIS and the Baltic States (The European Academy of Childhood Disabilities considers a disabled children rate of at least 2.5 per cent to be the 'norm' (with 1 per cent having serious conditions). These average figures exclude chronic illnesses like diabetes - Martin Bax, Chairman of the European Academy for Childhood Disabilities.

variation suggests that there are differences between countries in the ways in which they try to overcome the effects of disabilities, and this could have an impact on the outcomes for different types of students (OECD, 2007; OECD/EC, 2009).

Table 2.1 - Comparison of numbers of children with disabilities receiving additional resources in pre-primary and compulsory education as a percentage of all children in that phase of education, 2005

	A / Pre-primary	A / Compulsory
Kosovo	0.08	0.25
Japan	0.10	1.64
Turkey	0.16	0.58
Mexico	0.49	0.76
Korea	0.50	0.56
Bulgaria	0.84	1.06
Finland	0.94	5.04
Serbia	0.94	3.44
Italy	1.06	2.51
Slovenia	1.11	2.78
Belgium (Fl.)	1.15	4.01
Montenegro	1.16	1.19
United Kingdom	1.34	2.90
Spain	1.74	2.85
Slovak Republic	1.77	4.43
Malta	1.89	2.53
Croatia	3.63	3.51
Lithuania	3.75	4.31
Czech Republic	3.82	4.26
USA	7.86	5.57

Source : OECD SENDDD Database

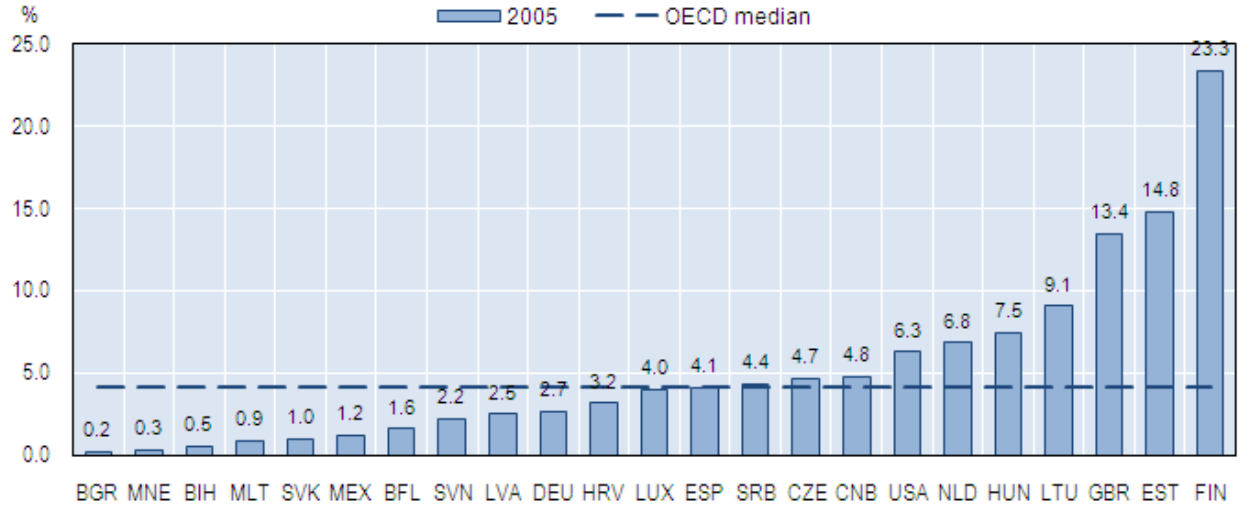
Table 2.1 shows that the numbers of students receiving additional resources for disabilities as a percentage of all students in pre-primary are typically smaller than the corresponding percentages in compulsory education. Median values are 1.13% in pre-primary and 2.82% in compulsory education. Further work would be needed at both national and international levels to understand these differences more fully. One possible explanation for this finding is that it is difficult for some of these children to be identified as having a disability before they start compulsory education. It is also clear from Table 1 that countries show consistency of provision across the two phases, i.e. those with higher percentages at pre-primary tend to have a high percentage in compulsory education. Those countries that are able to identify them provide substantial amounts of resources, i.e. USA. As far as people with severe disabilities are concerned, inclusion is easier to implement in pre-primary education and in the first years of primary education than in later years.

Cross-national category B / Difficulties

Cross-national category B, as discussed and defined in OECD 2007, refers to students with behavioural and emotional disorders, or specific difficulties in learning. The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems in the interaction between the student and the educational context. Chart 2.2 shows that the number of students receiving additional resources for learning difficulties (category B) as a percentage of all students in compulsory education in 2005 varies from 0.2% in Bulgaria to 23.3% in Finland. The OECD median number of category B students as a

percentage of all students in compulsory education is 4.13%. The inter-quartile range from 2.1% to 7.9% indicates an amount of variability substantially greater than that found in the corresponding data for students with disabilities (2.8% to 4.2%). Several countries have percentages of students with learning or behaviour difficulties greatly in excess of those with disabilities. It appears that when such categories are recognised in national systems the numbers of students receiving additional resources can be considerable.

Chart 2.2: Number of students with learning difficulties (cross-national category B) receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education as a percentage of all students in compulsory education (2005)



Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Additional notes: Countries are ranked in ascending order of percentage of students

Table 2.2 - Comparison of numbers of children with learning difficulties receiving additional resources in pre-primary and compulsory education as a percentage of all children in that phase of education, 2005

	B / Pre-primary	B / Compulsory
Belgium (Fl.)	0.08	1.62
Bulgaria	0.12	0.21
Croatia	3.42	3.19
Czech Republic	0.12	4.66
Finland	1.93	23.32
Germany	0.34	2.71
Lithuania	24.32	9.08
Malta	0.16	0.90
Mexico	0.73	1.21
Montenegro	0.24	0.33
Slovak Republic	0.12	0.98
Slovenia	0.07	2.23
Spain	1.38	4.13
United Kingdom	2.57	13.44
USA	0.25	6.30

Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Table 2.2 shows that the numbers of students receiving additional resources for learning difficulties as a percentage of all students in pre-primary are typically smaller than the corresponding percentages in compulsory education. Median values are 0.25% in pre-primary and 4.06% in compulsory education. Further work would be needed at both national and international levels to understand these differences more fully. One possible explanation for this finding is that it is difficult for some of these children to be identified as having a learning difficulty before they start compulsory education. On the other hand, those countries that are able to identify them provide substantial amounts of resources, i.e. Lithuania.

Location of education

There is great variation in the amount of resources provided to students with disabilities and difficulties. Perhaps the most important resource to consider is the environment, or setting, in which they are located. Whereas in some countries mainstreaming students with disabilities and difficulties (or educating them with the majority of the student population) is a relatively common practice, in other countries segregated schools and classrooms are the norm.Charts 2.3 shows the variation in the distribution of students with disabilities (category A) and learning difficulties (category B) educated in special schools, special classes, and regular classes in 2005.

There is substantial variation between countries in the extent to which students in both of these categories are included in regular schools. There are also some very big differences within countries with regard to students in category A and category B. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that if category A and category B were added together under the general heading of special needs, then false conclusions could be drawn for some countries with regard to how students are served and treated.

Chart 2.3: Distribution of students with disabilities (Category A) and students with learning difficulties (category B) receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education, by location (2005)

Source : OECD (SENDDD Database)

Additional notes for category A:

Special classes: Not applicable: Belgium (Fl.), Italy, Netherlands
Included in special schools: Germany, Spain
Included in regular classes: Finland, United Kingdom

Additional notes for category B:

Special classes: Not applicable: Spain

Special classes: included in regular classes in Finland, United Kingdom

Special classes: included in special schools in Germany

Special schools: Not applicable: Spain

Differences exist between countries because of their national policies; inclusion policies may be influenced by characteristics of regular schools and their curriculum, and training and attitudes of teachers. Different cultural and societal norms may determine whether parents and educators place students in mainstream or special schools. Reviews of the preparation of professionals are called for to serve as a budget neutral preventive mechanism. Consideration should be given to the organisation of schools, teaching methods, teacher preparation as well as identification and outcomes for students with disabilities (OECD, 2007; OECD/EC, 2009).

The differences Chart 2.3 reflects reveal potential inequities of provision within and among some countries that could result in different and/or inequitable educational and social experiences for some students with disabilities and difficulties. It is clear that the same type of disabled student may be included in regular classes in one country, but in special schools in another. It is inevitable that the educational and social experiences of special schools and regular

schools will be different, and this could well be inequitable in terms of students' access to post-compulsory education, the labour market and the wider society. Indeed, there is a growing consensus that equity considerations require that, wherever possible, students with disabilities and difficulties be educated in regular, mainstream schools rather than in separate institutions.

Overall, all countries that make extensive use of special schooling need to continually monitor how children are referred to special schools and to evaluate the nature and consequences of the provisions made in such schools once children have been admitted. Additionally, countries that place a strong emphasis on inclusive education in regular schools should be subject to ongoing assessments to ensure that objectives are being achieved (OECD, 2007).

What is currently lacking is implementation on the ground where attitudes need to be addressed and changed and skills need to be developed to allow more students to stay in school and access the curriculum. What is also lacking is a system change that would allow schools to become learning organisations through a process of adaptation to a more diverse set of student needs, including those with severe disabilities. The resultant flexible provision can provide additional support to all students in the school. Evidence has shown how non-disabled students also benefit from this extra support (OECD, 1999).

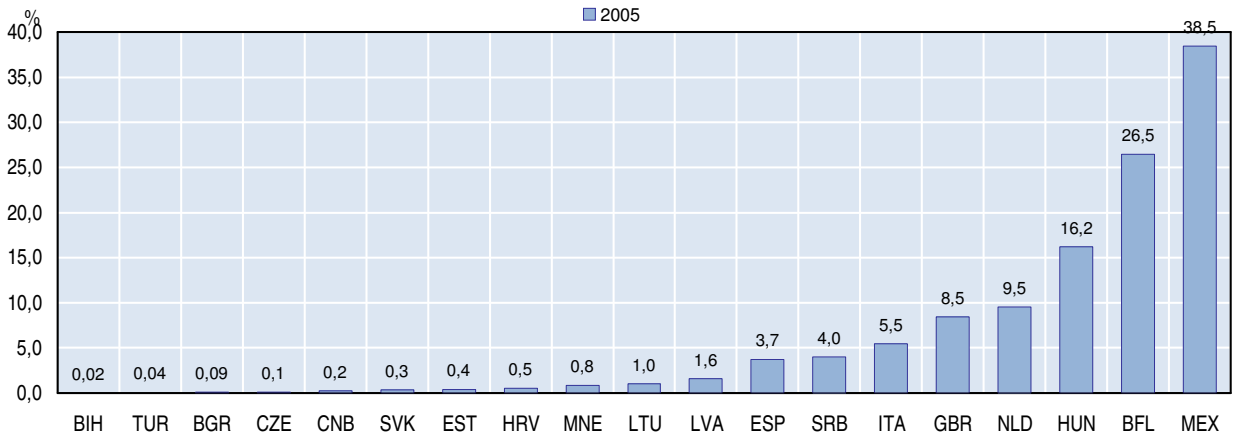
Cross-national category C / Disadvantages

Extra resources are often allocated to students with social and socioeconomic disadvantages; importantly, however, countries provide for these students to varying degrees. When additional resources are provided to students with social disadvantages—those belonging to OECD category C—they are usually addressed to ethnic minorities and migrants and consist of special courses for language learning and preparation for compulsory schooling (preparatory classes before primary education). In some countries these provisions fall under the definition of special education needs. In other countries, this is not the case (OECD, 2007; OECD/EC, 2009).

In fact, it is evident from OECD data (SENDDD database) that there is great variation among countries with regard to the number of categories of disadvantage employed and the ways in which those categories are labelled and defined. Furthermore, there are great differences among countries when it comes to the number of migrant students who require additional resources to learn a second language; such numbers are of course dependent upon immigration rates.

If analysis is limited to the period of compulsory education, figures indicate that when categories of students with disadvantages are included in national systems, the numbers of students receiving additional resources are substantial. This is particularly true in Hungary (16.2%) and Belgium (26.5%). However, the amount and degree of provisions in those countries are lower than in Mexico (38.5%).

Chart 2.4: Number of disadvantaged students (category C) receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education as a percentage of all students in compulsory education, 2005

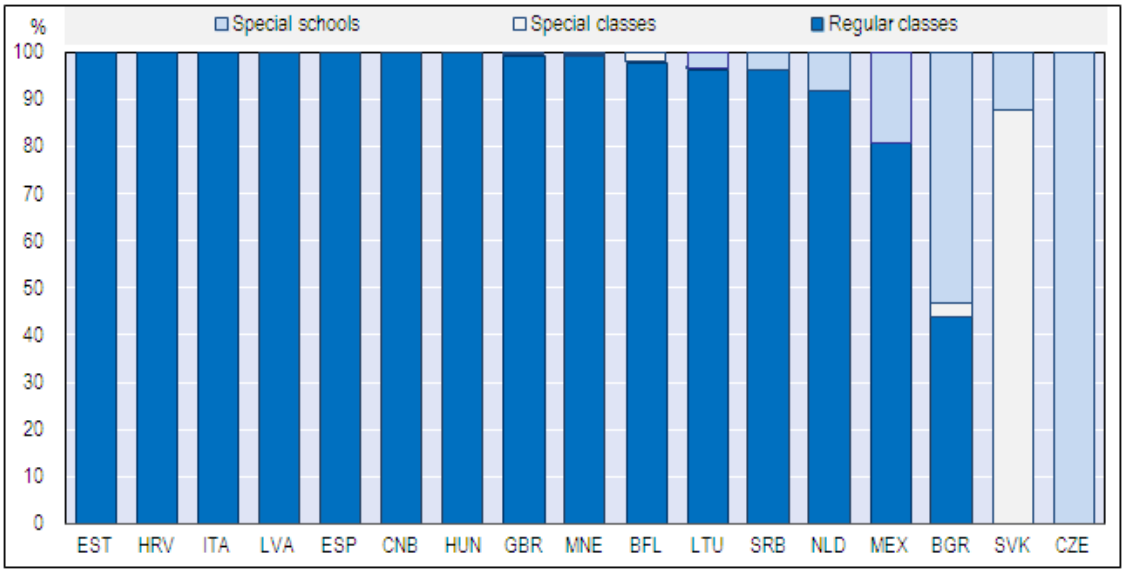


Source : OECD (SENDDD Database)

Additional notes: Countries are ranked in ascending order of percentage of students

The chart above also shows that fewer countries are able to identify how and when additional resources allocated for the support of students with disadvantages are made available for the educational provision of this group of students who are at risk because of disadvantage of their socio-economic background. This does not, however, mean that those countries do not identify and support this group of at-risk students.

Chart 5: Distribution of disadvantaged students (category C) receiving additional resources over the period of compulsory education, by location (2005)



Source : OECD (SENDDD Database

The majority of countries providing data for the period of compulsory schooling educate students with disadvantages in inclusive settings. However, data for the Slovak Republic depict a different picture, with the majority of disadvantaged students attending preparatory classes in special classes. All such students are educated in special schools in the Czech Republic.

Table 2.3 - Comparison of numbers of children with disadvantages receiving additional resources in pre-primary and compulsory education as a percentage of all children in that phase of education, 2005

	C / Pre-primary	C / Compulsory
Canada (NB)	a	0.22
Estonia	n	0.40
Latvia	a	1.61
Turkey	0.02	0.04
Serbia	0.09	3.99
Bulgaria	0.14	0.09
Croatia	0.24	0.52
Montenegro	0.52	0.84
Lithuania	0.61	1.01
Czech Republic	0.62	0.10
Slovak Republic	1.31	0.34
Spain	1.86	3.70
United Kingdom	4.96	8.50
Italy	5.08	5.46
Belgium (Fl.)	6.03	26.46
Hungary	17.38	16.19
Mexico	19.53	38.49

Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Table 2.3 shows that the numbers of students receiving additional resources for disadvantages as a percentage of all students in pre-primary are typically smaller than the corresponding percentages in compulsory education. Median values are 0.62% in pre-primary and 1.01% in compulsory education. Further work would be needed at both national and international levels to understand these differences more fully. It is also clear from the table that countries show consistency of provision across the two phases, i.e. those with higher percentages at pre-primary tend to have a high percentage in compulsory education. Those countries that are able to identify them at an early stage provide substantial amounts of resources, i.e. Italy, Hungary, and Mexico.

Data by gender

A consistent finding reported in previous OECD/EC work on the educational provision for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages was the preponderance of numbers of boys over girls in a wide range of analyses (educational setting, cross-national or national category, age of student, or phase of education, etc.). This split was typically around 60% boys and 40% girls with disabilities and closer to 50/50 vis-à-vis students with disadvantages. However, the proportions concerning students with difficulties were even greater, e.g. 70% boys and 30% girls (OECD, 2007).

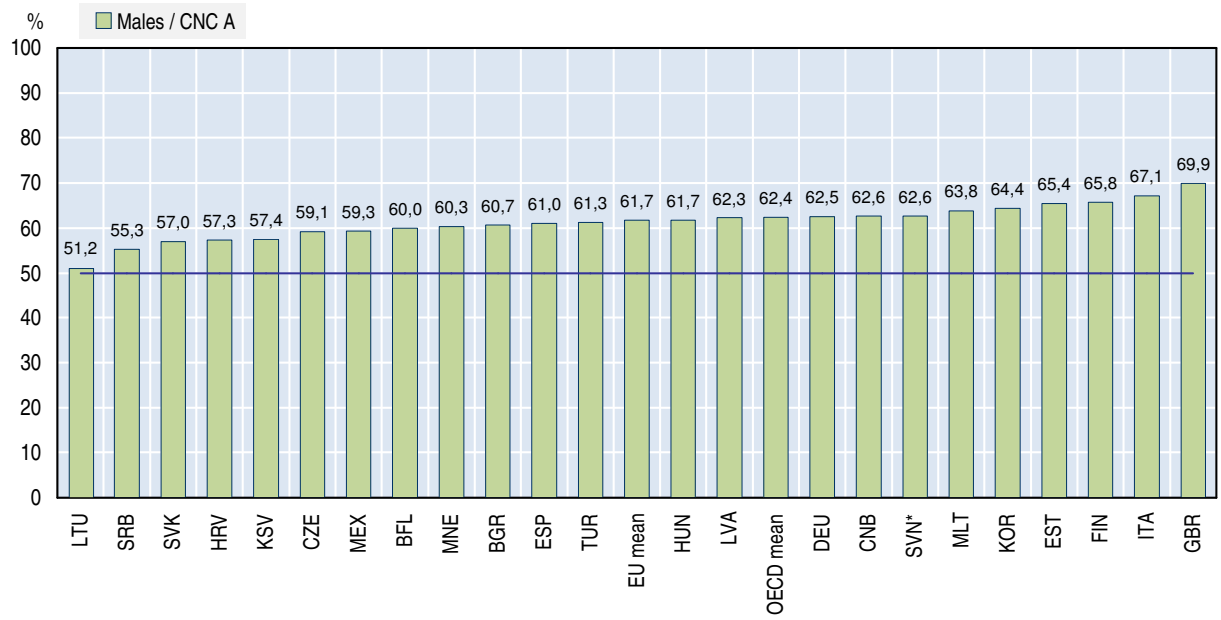
These findings are fully replicated with 2005 data (OECD/EC, 2009). Particularly, there are approximately 60% of boys in category A, 65% in category B and between 50% and 60% in category C. The section at the end of the paper will explain them more fully. In the following analysis the data are broken down by gender and by cross-national categories A, B and C.

Cross-national category A / Disabilities

There is evidence that boys are over-represented in numbers of students with disabilities in separate specialised settings in Italy. In fact, the ratio of males to females with disabilities across all levels of education is about 60 : 40 (Evans and Deluca, 2004). Several possible reasons have been identified, including biological and behavioural factors, and each may play some role (OECD, 2004, 2007).

Chart 2.6 shows the distribution of boys (and girls) receiving additional resources for disabilities during the period of compulsory education. The EU mean for the countries and economies presented in the chart is 61.7%, the OECD mean is 62.4%. Boys outnumber girls in all economies with a ratio of approximately 3:2. Only Lithuania (51.2%) and the UK (69.9%) stand outside the range of 55%-65%.

Chart 2.6. Percentages of boys with disabilities (CNC A) over the period of compulsory education, 2005

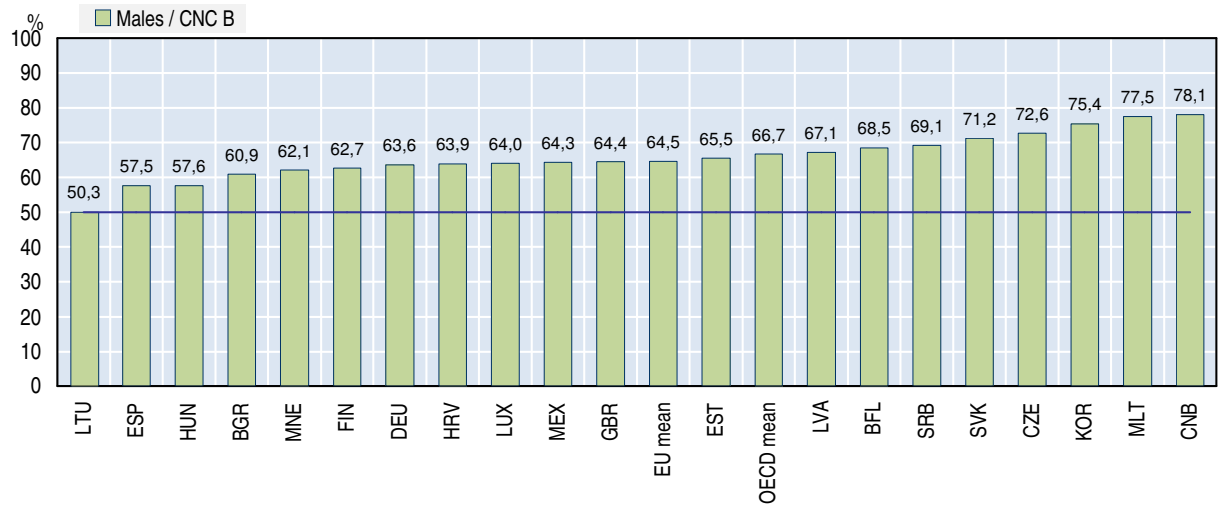


Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Cross-national category B / Difficulties

Chart 2.7 shows the distribution of boys (and girls) receiving additional resources for difficulties during the period of compulsory education. Boys outnumber girls in all countries with a higher ratio than for students with disabilities as shown in Chart 2.6. The EU mean for the countries presented in the chart below is 64.5, the OECD mean is 66.7. Again, Lithuania is a notable exception. There is a clear difference between the scores for students with disabilities and students with difficulties.

Chart 2.7. Percentages of boys with difficulties over the period of compulsory education, 2005

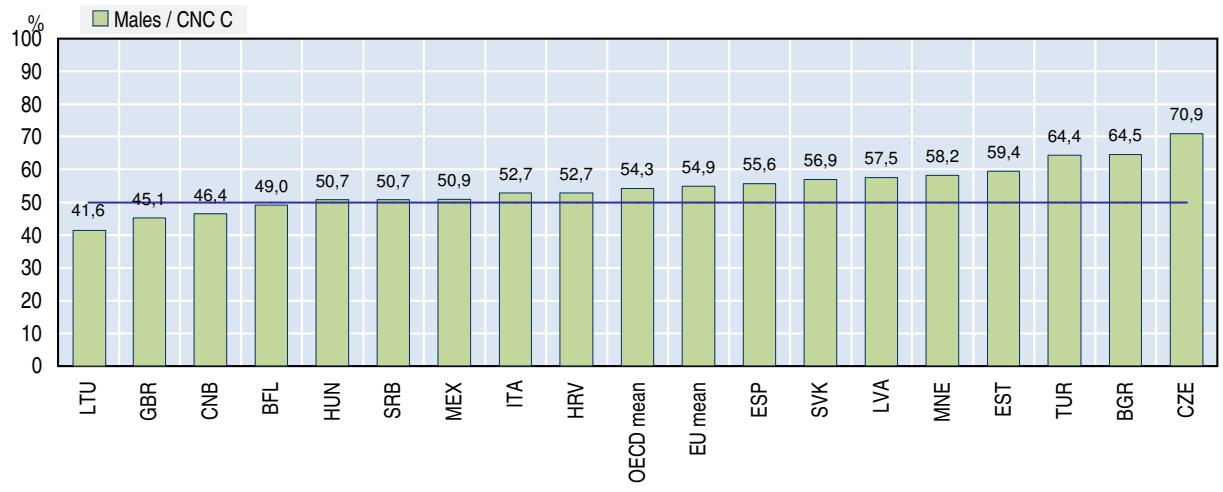


Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Cross-national category C / Disadvantages

Chart 2.8 shows the distribution of boys (and girls) receiving additional resources for disadvantages during the period of compulsory education. The OECD mean for the countries presented in the chart is 54.3%, the EU mean is 54.9%. Boys outnumber girls in almost all countries except Lithuania where the situation is reversed (41.6%). Inspection of the data shows a ratio closer to 50% than for students receiving additional resources for disabilities and difficulties.

Chart 2.8. Percentages of disadvantaged boys over the period of compulsory education, 2005



Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Table 2.4 shows the mean distribution of boys receiving additional resources for disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages during the period of compulsory education. Percentages for disabilities cluster closely around the 60/40 boy/girl mean; percentages for students with learning difficulties are more variable but the mean ratio is near two boys for one girl, which also corresponds to the OECD mean. Finally, percentages for students with disadvantages are typically lower than the previous ones. These patterns are in line with OECD means.

Table 2.4. Percentages of boys over the period of compulsory education, by cross-national category

Percentage of males	Cross-national category		
	A	B	C
EU Mean	61.7	64.5	54.9
OECD mean	62.4	66.7	54.3

With only an isolated exception there are more boys than girls receiving additional resources in all three cross-national categories during the period of compulsory education. The exception is represented by Lithuania.

A number of possible reasons have been identified to account for the relative numbers of boys receiving more additional resources than girls, including factors such as biology and behaviour, and each may play some role (for a fuller discussion see OECD, 2007). These include evidence that:

1) *Males are more vulnerable than females*. Boys seem more prone than girls to illness and trauma throughout the developmental years. The higher incidence of males with disabilities could be attributable to genetic or biological differences between the sexes and therefore might require extra resources in their schooling. This outcome would be seen as equitable since males objectively need more support.

2) *In some societies the education of males is given greater social priority than that of females*. The greater value placed in some societies on the education of males could play out a bias toward the giving additional resources to males rather than females from disadvantages backgrounds, or the possible greater likelyhood of exclusion of disadvantaged girls from the educational system. If this is the case, the failure or low performance of males in school is less acceptable than for females and hence greater support is provided to lessen the effects and maximise performance. This outcome would be inequitable for girls.

3) *Males adopt more noticeably deviant behaviours than females thus becoming identified and labelled.* There is evidence that males and females are react differently to behaviour difficulties in schools. Males more often experience failure and frustration when such basic subjects are taught and show more disruptive and aggressive behaviour in such situations. Their externalising reactions to failure make boys more visible to teachers and hence more likely to be identified. Girls are reported as being more cooperative and conscientious in the classroom, with behaviour patterns which match more closely the expectations of teachers than boys. So it appears that the over-representation of boys is a complex function of actual differences in behaviour and teachers' social and cultural expectations or preferences resulting in teacher/pupil interactions (OECD, 2007).

4) *Schooling is becoming increasingly "feminised"*. The greater proportion of female teachers in schools especially during the primary years has been observed (OECD, 2002).

Whether the disproportionality reflects actual differences between male and female students or is a result of procedures and practices which are biased or discriminatory was also discussed in OECD 2007. What features of school functioning and decision making may exacerbate problems thus bringing them to the attention of authorities were

identified as having policy action implications as well as whether distribution of resources is equitable or rather should more support be given to girls.

Since the observed overabundance of boys has substantial implications for equity of any educational system further work is needed to understand these differences that should focus on outcomes linked to the impact of the additional resources that are invested.

The gender differences in provision for students with disabilities are sufficiently marked for this to be a priority focus. This is particularly clear when countries examine the basis by which students are identified for different educational programmes, and the long-term consequences of participation in those programmes.

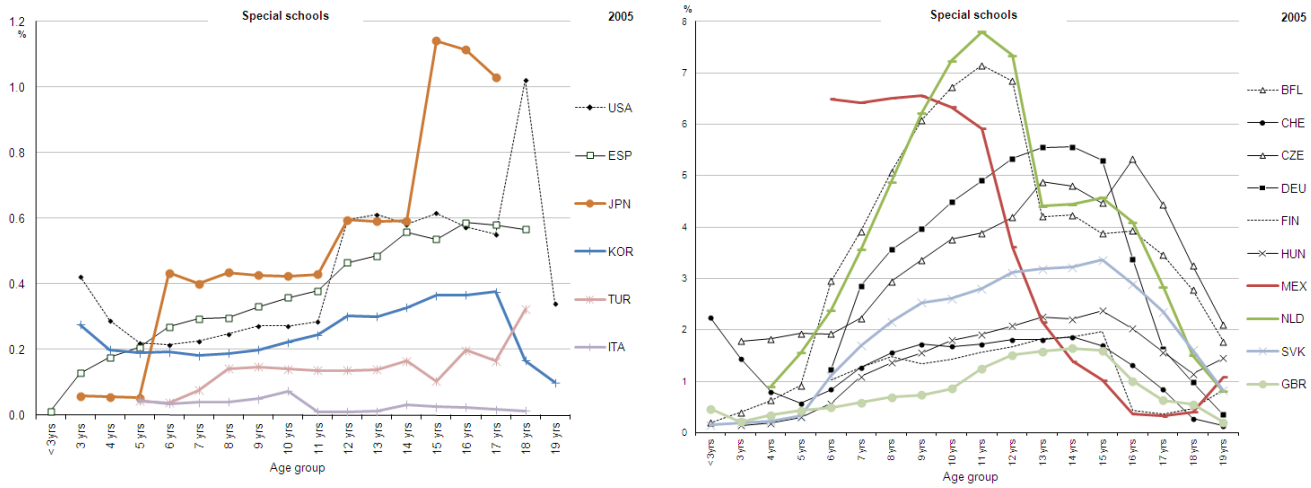
Data by age

Charts 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11 show the age distributions in special schools, special classes and regular classes respectively. These figures also show gender breakdowns, where gender data are available, and the overall sum of males and females. Cohort size has been taken into account so the figures presented here are percentages of students in each age group. Close inspection of data revealed some inconsistencies. Some countries provided data by age which was not including the whole population concerned. It is also worth noting that there are unknown numbers of children with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages who are out of the school system. This phenomenon varies considerably from country to country. The percentages in this section are based on students in school only. Therefore, the following analyses must bear this point in mind.

Special schools

Chart 2.9 shows the numbers of students receiving additional resources in special schools by age from ages <3 to 19. It shows that in general only small percentages of 5-6 year-olds are in special schools in most countries. Most countries show an increase in the proportion of students in special schools from ages 5-6 up to about age 15, with a rapid decline afterwards. These increases presumably reflect the movement of students out of regular schools and special classes into special schools. The decline beyond around age 15 most likely reflects the fact that most students do not continue their education beyond the compulsory years of schooling, a conclusion generally supported by the data on individual categories of disabilities (OECD, 2007; OECD/EC, 2009).

Chart 2.9. Numbers of students receiving additional resources in special schools by age (2005)

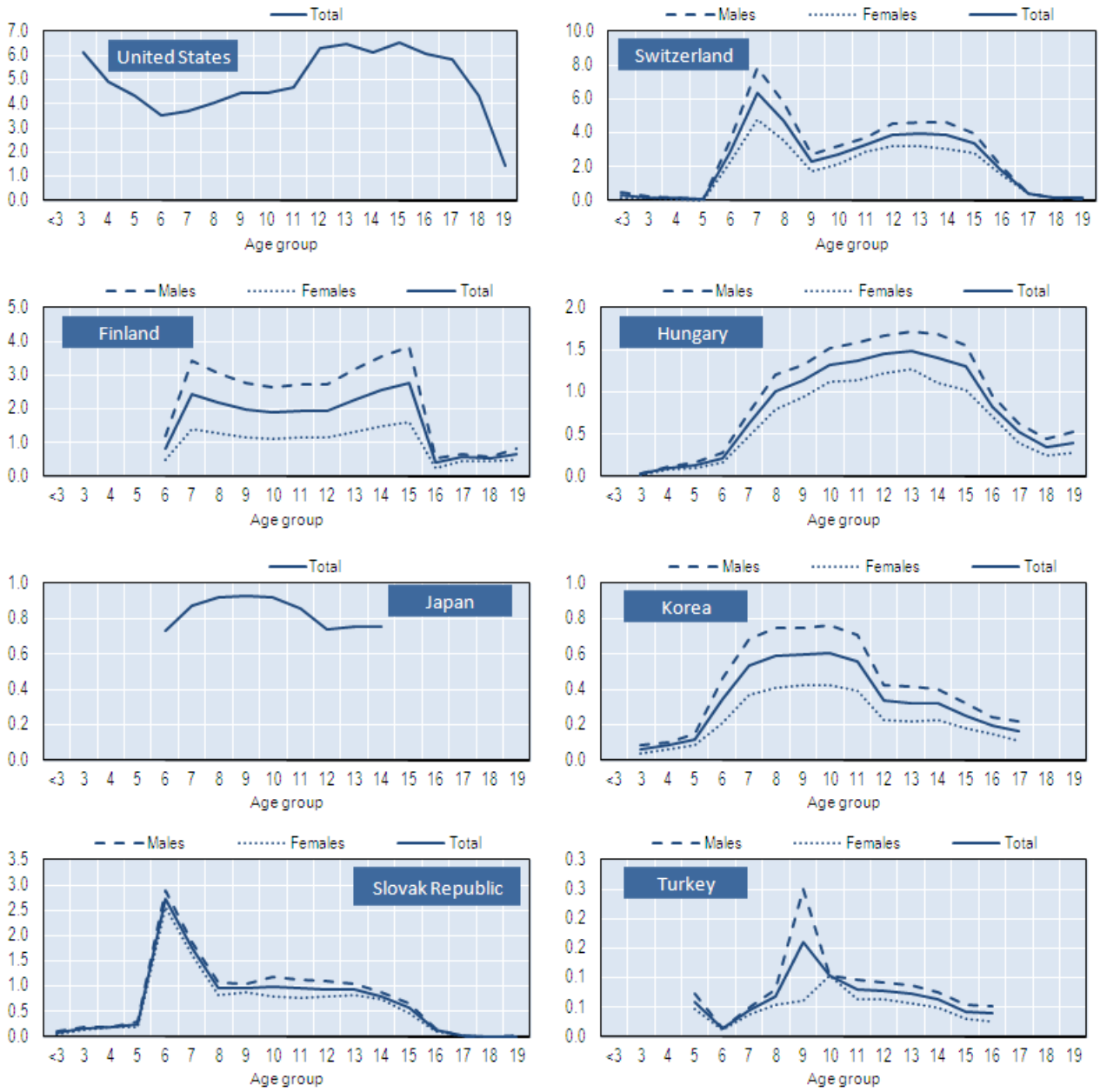


Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Special classes

Chart 2.10 shows the numbers of students receiving additional resources in special classes by age and gender from ages <3 to 19. The pattern for special classes is more difficult to categorise. Broadly speaking, there is a tendency for lower proportions to be found at both the youngest and oldest age ranges. These lower proportions tend to produce fluctuations and rather hectic pictures. It can be noted that the Slovak Republic and Turkey make use of special classes mostly at the primary level. The chart also shows the higher preponderance of males than females across the age range (OECD, 2007, OECD/EC, 2009)

Chart 2.10 Numbers of students receiving additional resources in special classes by age and gender

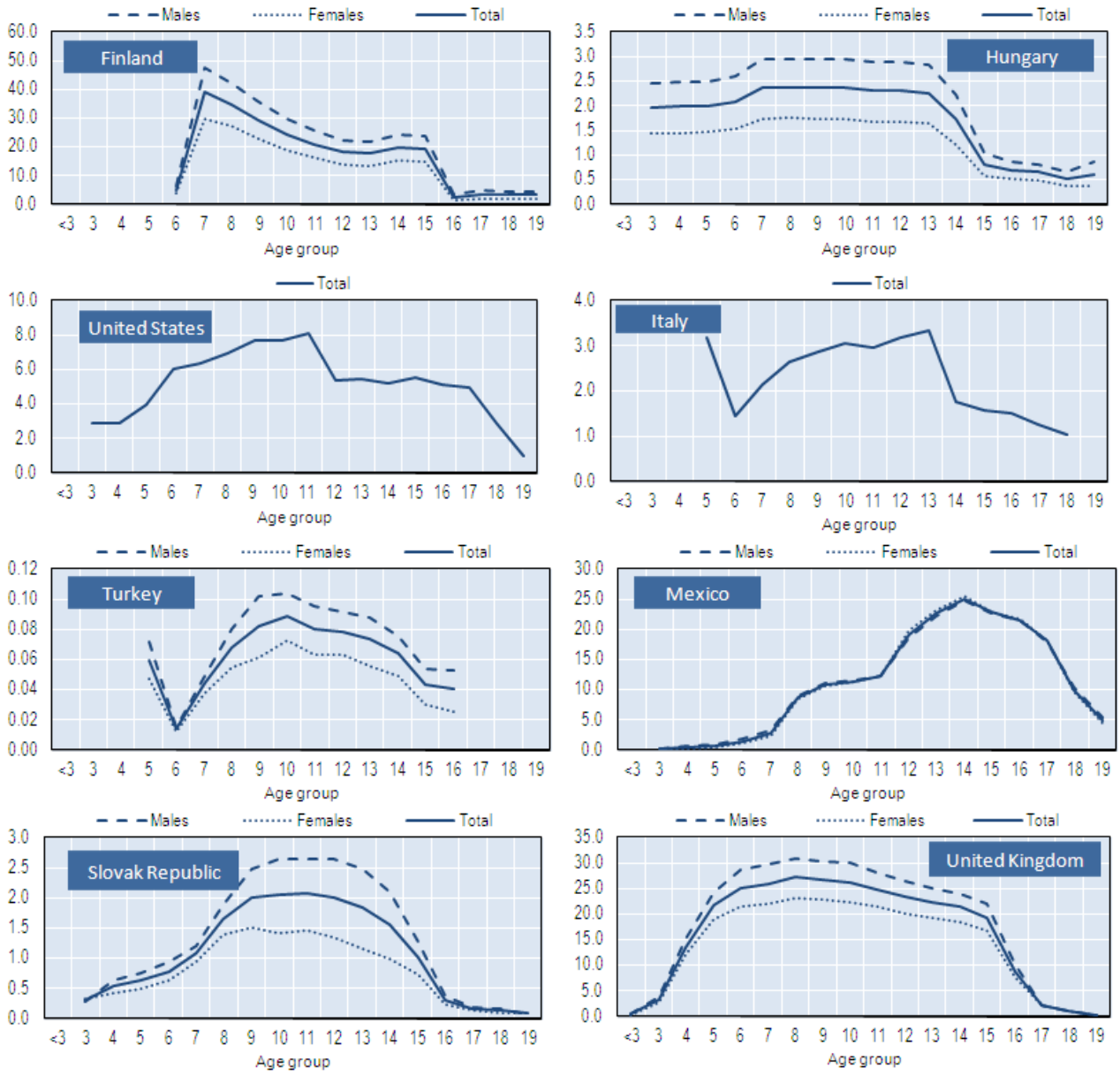


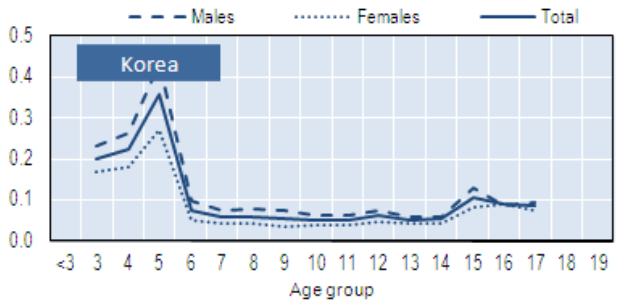
Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Regular classes

Chart 2.11 shows the numbers of students receiving additional resources in regular classes by age and gender from ages <3 to 19. It reveals more availability of data for students receiving additional resources in the age range from 6 to 19. The majority of countries show a peak in numbers during primary education followed by a gradual decrease in the last years of schooling. The chart also shows the higher preponderance of males than females across the age range (OECD, 2007; OECD/EC, 2009).

Chart 2.11.Numbers of students receiving additional resources in regular classes by age and gender (2005)





Source : OECD SENDDD Database

Summary and future trends

The paper summarised findings based on the internationally comparable framework promoted by OECD and subsequently used for a CRELL research study. The first part of the paper provided a brief overview of the Italian education system with the number of students with disabilities educated in the various levels of the education system, and student-teacher ratios. The second part of the paper provided internationally comparable quantitative information on students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages based on the OECD tripartite categorisation system.

Data were presented broken down by cross-national category (A/Disabilities, B/Difficulties and C/Disadvantages), across educational settings (special schools, special classes, regular classes), by gender and by age, over the period of compulsory education. The amount of information which countries were able to provide varied widely from country to country. Typically there are more sound and reliable data for students with disabilities than for those with learning difficulties or disadvantage. There are more sound and reliable data for students in segregated settings than in inclusive settings.

Main findings

National systems of education have developed procedures and practices for defining, identifying and resourcing students who have difficulties in accessing the curriculum. This is determined mainly by reference to national concepts and understanding based in cultural history and law making. International comparisons provide contrasts against which these assumptions can be re-analysed and re-conceptualised. The work carried out has shown that the general message obtained is of very wide country to country variability.

- The classification of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages varies among participating economies; some use 3 categories while others use 19.
- The numbers of students included vary widely, within comparable categories of disability. For instance, some countries identify and provide additional educational resources for ten times as many blind and partially sighted students as other countries.
- The place of education also varies substantially with some countries educating all students with disabilities in regular schools while others educate almost all of them in special schools. In some countries virtually all children of whatever disability or difficulty are educated in inclusive settings (e.g. Italy and the New Brunswick province of Canada), in others almost all students with disabilities are in special schools (e.g. Switzerland, Czech Republic). In some countries, children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are educated in segregated settings in contradistinction to most EU and OECD countries. Equity considerations lead to the position that students with disadvantages be educated in regular, mainstream schools rather than in separate institutions. The educational and social experiences of special schools and regular schools are different, and this could be inequitable in terms of students' access to post-compulsory education and the labour market.
- Further research on the place of education shows substantial variation both in the proportions of students identified as well as in the place of education. For Category A the proportions identified are close to the OECD

averages. However, for Category B there are substantial differences with fewer students being supported especially in upper secondary education. This is an unsatisfactory outcome and the reasons need to be identified and rectified. More investment may well be necessary at least in the short to medium terms to support these students more effectively and to provide teachers and schools with the necessary skills to help to keep them in school. More access to vocational training may well form part of the solution.

- There is a high degree of consistency in gender distribution with 60/40 male/female split for different categories and cross-national categories. The gender differences are marked with the ratio of boys to girls identified for different programmes and given additional resources being in the order of 3 to 2. This study shows consistent findings concerning the preponderance of numbers of boys over girls in a wide range of analyses. There are typically more male students receiving additional resources than females, regardless of whether data are analysed by educational setting, cross-national or national category, age of student, or phase of education. These differences should become a priority when countries examine the basis by which students are identified for different programmes, and examine the long-term consequences of participation in those programmes when they are provided in segregated facilities. With the exception of Lithuania, many more boys than girls are provided with additional resources to help them access the curriculum. It is unclear why. If boys genuinely need more help because education systems provide them with inherently more challenges then providing them with more resources is equitable. On the other hand, if the provision made available, e.g. special schools/ special classes, merely serves to lead to a greater likelihood of social exclusion then it is not equitable. The conclusion would be that these resources should be put into renewing regular education to prevent the systematic exclusion of many students from it as they get older as the data presented in this report reveals.

All of these factors raise questions about the educational practices of any one particular country and have policy implications, especially concerning the efficient and equitable use of funds. Thus the comparative context provides real added value by challenging national assumptions through evidence and data and in the context of global agreements. Furthermore, the appropriate education of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages is a key factor in creating social cohesion and inclusion through the efficient use of education provision.

The signing of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, actions on behalf of the European Parliament, the European Directives and the contents of the 2000 Lisbon Strategy indicate a strong and growing concern that the international community adhere to both the principles and practice of equality of educational opportunity. These moves also indicate that the domain of special educational needs is part of a wider global agenda. Indeed, as promoted by the Lisbon strategy and the 2009 Council Conclusions on a Strategic framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training, it is clear that there is a growing international understanding that provision for students with special educational needs is a topic on which more research and information must be gathered if appropriate policies, such as those aimed at inclusion, are to be monitored. This is the case in Italy too, where there is a need to continuously evaluate and assess the impact of such policies.

In recent decades, Italy especially has made some notable steps in the area of including students with disabilities into regular-classroom settings. However, questions remain as to whether quality forms of inclusive education can be provided for all children without better means of gathering data on academic-achievement outcomes for all students, including students with special educational needs, and a consistent international approach to data collection and interpretation that uses information about academic-achievement outcomes to drive the creation and

sound implementation of policies meant to serve young people with special needs. In this sense, inclusion practices must extend beyond classrooms and into the realm of evaluation and assessment.

With regard to the monitoring of policies for students with disabilities, the time has come to move beyond mere descriptions of the issues. The Italian research community must find a way to make valid, quantifiable and meaningful comparisons about the achievement and life outcomes of students with disabilities if it is to live up to its promises of equality of educational opportunity for all.

A Need for Further Research

Descriptive statistics and outlines of policy frameworks, such as those presented here, provide a useful lens for understanding the diverse ways in which the international community conceives of, categories, and serves students with special needs. The work of the OECD, the EC (CRELL) and others in these areas is invaluable and should continue to shed light on these issues.

Perhaps most importantly, if data such as that presented in the second part of this work is collected and distributed in a manner that is both transparent and intended to foster dialogue, it is possible that the information and lessons it imparts could lead countries that currently struggle to properly serve special needs students to look to others that are currently 'models' in the field.

Moreover, there is a pressing need to continue and augment data collection focused on mainstreaming and inclusion practices specific to children with special needs.

Internationally, the education community has made great strides in determining that educational access is important for all children, regardless of background or ability; it is now time to look beyond an idea of education for all that only emphasizes access and look to a model that emphasizes the provision of a quality education for all students.

Educational communities in many countries are coming to understand that for students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and disadvantages, accessing a quality education often means accessing a form of education in which they are included in learning settings that have traditionally served only their peers that do not have special needs.

As anticipated in the previous section, questions remain as to whether quality forms of inclusive education can be provided for all children without 1) better means of gathering data on academic achievement outcomes for all students, including students with special needs and 2) a consistent international approach to data collection and interpretation that uses information about academic achievement outcomes to drive the creation and sound implementation of policies meant to serve youth with special needs. In this sense, inclusion and mainstreaming practices must extend beyond classrooms and into evaluation and assessment.

Moreover, countries should be held accountable to fair, agreed-upon standards for including all students, not just those who are comparatively high performing or easy to educate, in national and international examinations. Indeed, much of the data presented in this report would be more useful to the international educational community if there existed a means to quantify the differences in impact of policies designed to serve youth with learning disabilities, difficulties, and disadvantages. To date, only the PISA and TIMSS examinations are tools for making relatively sound international comparisons about student achievement and, as mentioned, even these tools are imperfect. These international assessments suffer, in particular, from inconsistent sampling across the different student populations that exist within all countries.

Because students with learning disabilities, difficulties, and disadvantages are excluded from these examinations at considerably high rates, it is currently very difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the correlation, if any, between local, national, and international policies designed to serve these students and the academic achievement and quality of life outcomes with which those policies may be associated.

Barring changes such as these at the national and international levels, it is difficult to foresee whether nations and the international community will continue to make strides in better serving all students and especially those with special educational needs.

A Need for Further Reforms

The data presented here and in OECD/EC, 2009 indicate the need for further reforms in the education systems in order for students with disabilities who have special educational needs to improve outcomes and to create more equitable systems. The main themes are:

- Signing and ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities thus ensuring that all children are fully included in education.
- Increasing the quality of education and the supply of upper secondary and vocational training for SEN students.
- Developing a new understanding of Special Education Needs which is more in line with the social approach which permeates new thinking in this area, and creating databases which reflect this reformulation.
- Capacity development for gathering data on ALL children including those who are out of school. And improving the quality of the databases for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages.
- Improving the compatibility of data between Ministries and tackling confidentiality issues.
- Understanding gender issues, that is why more boys than girls are identified.
- Involving more countries and more SEN students in future rounds of PISA.
- Developing inclusive education in the sense defined in OECD (1999) by:
    - Increasing funding and redistributing it from special to regular education.
    - Developing more homogeneous provision within countries.
    - Making schools, the curriculum and the national examination systems more accessible.
    - Finding the optimal class size to allow all of this to happen.
    - Making efforts to prevent school abandonment and drop-out particularly focusing on diverse populations in school.
    - Promoting teaching methods to enable individualised teaching.
    - Promote teacher training for diversity.
    - Involving parents more fully.

More generally, providing opportunities for schools to become learning organisations would allow them to find creative solutions to challenges related to the full diversity of students' abilities. Whether schools are allowed to act in this way is a major policy issue which may require reforms that relinquish some centralised control over the curriculum and school organisation.

ANNEX - COUNTRY CODES

List of countries and codes

Belgium (Fl.)	BFL	Luxembourg	LUX
Bosnia Herzegovina	BIH	Malta	MLT
Bulgaria	BGR	Mexico	MEX
Canada (New Brunswick)	CNB	Montenegro	MNE
Croatia	HRV	Netherlands	NLD
Czech Republic	CZE	Serbia	SRB
Estonia	EST	Slovak Republic	SVK
Finland	FIN	Slovenia	SVN
Germany	DEU	Spain	ESP
Hungary	HUN	Switzerland	CHE
Japan	JPN	Turkey	TUR
Korea	KOR	United Kingdom (England)	GBR
Italy	ITA	United States	USA
Kosovo	KSV		
Latvia	LVA		
Lithuania	LTU		

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