



## **ANED country report on equality of educational and training opportunities for young disabled people**

**Country: Italy**

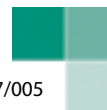
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The information contained in this report was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED).

The [Academic Network of European Disability experts](#) (ANED) was established by the European Commission in 2008 to provide scientific support and advice for its disability policy Unit. In particular, the activities of the Network will support the future development of the EU Disability Action Plan and practical implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.

This country report has been prepared as input for the Thematic report on the implementation of EU Equality of educational and training opportunities in European countries with reference to equality for young disabled people.

The purpose of the report ([Terms of Reference](#)) is to review national implementation on equality of educational and training opportunities for young people, and in particular the National Strategic Reports of member states from a disability equality perspective in education and training, and provide the Commission with useful evidence in supporting disability policy mainstreaming.



## Section 1: Executive summary and conclusions

Since the 1970s, Italy has undergone a gradual shift at legislative level towards the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream state schools. Twenty-five years since Act no. 577 of 1977 which initiated this process, we can say that high levels of inclusion have been achieved in the sense that the number of students with disabilities has increased significantly. However, the concept of inclusive education goes beyond merely increasing the number of students with disabilities in schools. Looking at the literature, we can see that inclusion is often considered as one of the most important quality dimensions of a school system. A deeper examination of the quality of integration requires us to focus on the same indicators used to describe the general quality of schools. Integration can hence be measured using indicators that assess both human resources and appropriate educational facilities; provide information on the extent of implementation of administrative procedures, the achievement of objectives established at the beginning of schooling and the satisfaction of individual needs; and finally allow costs to be monitored.

However, the data currently available only concern the presence of students with disabilities in state and private schools, and do not allow a deeper understanding of the diversity of disabled students' educational and support needs. The classification adopted in data on the school system to distinguish between different types of disabilities serves only the administrative purpose of calculating the number of support teachers needed, rather than assessing the real needs of students. The number of students with disabilities has grown progressively over the last 15 years. This increase can be interpreted as a sign of greater inclusion in the school system, but the numbers do not reveal the quality of educational integration.

Much more investment is needed in school facilities. Few schools have totally eliminated architectural barriers by, for example, installing toilets accessible to disabled people and providing functional appliances to assist movement or accessories for students with specific disabilities (e.g. blind and deaf pupils). Institutions seem to be better equipped with technologically advanced tools and aids to support the quality of teaching.

It is also essential to produce integrated plans for disabled children that cover both their education and working life, moving from a mere plan for their studies to a 'life plan'.

Data on the school integration of people with disabilities highlights an interesting fact: there is a strong presence of students with disabilities in state schools compared to private schools and there are very low rates of attendance at special schools. This represents a source of pride for our country, which believes that the integration process must take place in mainstream schools. Italy is, in fact, the European country with the highest inclusion of people with special needs in mainstream schools, while other European countries make use of special schools.

Significant results have been achieved in education, but there is still a long way to go in order to improve the system and make it more efficient.

One of the figures to emerge is that 13 per cent of children who do not attend school have had to interrupt their education due to the inadequacy or ineffective organisation of education. This could be a starting point for monitoring the effectiveness of interventions targeting school inclusion.

Another important element for the qualitative evaluation of progress towards educational inclusion could be the level of satisfaction of disabled young people with the school system. Finally, greater consideration must be given to data on school years repeated. Such data can be interpreted as a sign of the inappropriate use of the school system to compensate for the lack of the right facilities and services to support the full social inclusion of young people with disabilities.

## **Section 2: Legal and policy context**

The legal definition of ‘people with disabilities’ is enshrined within Act no. 104 of 05.02.1992. A ‘person with disabilities’ is anyone with a permanent or progressive physical, psychological or sensory impairment that causes a learning, social, or occupational difficulty and that entails disadvantage or social marginalisation. The Act applies without discrimination to foreigners, stateless persons, and persons domiciled or resident in Italy. The Act grants disabled people the right to education at pre-primary institutions (non-compulsory), in integrated settings at each grade of compulsory education (i.e. primary and lower and upper secondary education) and at university. The Act states: ‘Inclusion within schools aims to develop the potential of people with disabilities in learning, communication, relationships, and the life of society. The right to education cannot be limited by learning difficulties or problems caused by disabilities and handicaps. Recognition as a “person with disabilities” shall lead to the drawing up of functional diagnosis documentation used to formulate a personal education plan and an academic syllabus developed via cooperation between the parents of the pupil, health care personnel and, for each grade of education, the support teachers of the school where the pupil is enrolled. A profile shall indicate the physical, psychological and social characteristics of the pupil and highlight both the learning difficulties caused by his/her disability and the means of addressing them and the existing qualities of the pupil and how to stimulate, develop and support them within a perspective of respect for the cultural choices of the person with disabilities.’

The Presidential Decree of 19.5.2006 states that the medical commission appointed to issue a statement/certificate of disability has to refer to the international indicators listed by the WHO ICD-10.

### *Legal provisions for equality and non-discrimination*

The Italian constitution enshrines the principle of equality. Article 3 of the 1948 Constitution states that:



‘All citizens have equal social status and are equal before the law, without regard to their sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, and personal or social conditions’.

([http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/it00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/it00000_.html))

Act no. 104/1992 has made a significant contribution to a culture of inclusion. Article 1 prescribes the ‘full respect of the human dignity, freedom and autonomy of disabled people and promotion of their inclusion within the family, school, employment and society’.

This year an important step forward was made for the 350 000 Italian students with specific learning disorders (SpLD) such as dyslexia or dyscalculia. On 29 September 2010 the parliament approved a law (Act no. 170) that recognises these problems and encourages schools to identify them early on and defines the strategies and stages of diagnosis and education through the use of compensatory measures.

([http://www.aiditalia.org/upload/gazzetta\\_ufficiale\\_n\\_244\\_legge\\_170.pdf](http://www.aiditalia.org/upload/gazzetta_ufficiale_n_244_legge_170.pdf))

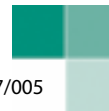
Students with SpLDs have the right to early diagnosis, personalised education plans, and dispensation from certain activities (such as writing on the blackboard or reading aloud) and can make use of technological tools (e.g. word processors, calculators and computers). This law meets the needs of children and families, for whom there are also rules on flexible working. Schools and teachers have a key role. They are responsible for preparing Personalised Education Plans (PEPs). The objective of these PEPs is to ensure a good quality of life to every student and student with learning difficulties, giving them the opportunity to learn in accordance with their characteristics. They are therefore an education plan in the broadest sense of the word. Teachers of different disciplines, working in a team, will have to consider the strengths of their students and their particular needs, and customise the plan to their requirements. This means using various forms of knowledge transmission, taking account of the speed of development of each student, and creating constructive, collaborative and active learning environments that foster intellectual curiosity and where a positive emotional climate prevails. Plans will be developed by a team of teachers or the class council<sup>1</sup> in a process that includes a preparatory meeting and dialogue between teachers, families and specialists in accordance with their mutual roles and responsibilities.

*Educational participation*

Italy has an advanced regulatory framework regarding the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in mainstream classes going back more than 25 years since the abolition of segregated classes in 1977 after a short trial period.

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<sup>1</sup> Italian secondary schools have class councils comprising all the teachers involved, assistants, and representatives of pupils and parents. These councils decide on appropriate action following difficulties in the class.



For pupils with disabilities a tailor-made Personalised Education Plan (PEP) is established according to educational goals which are not based on ministerial curricula but on disabled pupils' abilities, skills and potential. The PEP is drafted by schools, local health units and the family working together in cooperation, and it includes educational, rehabilitative, social and welfare aspects. It is intended as an all-round education plan for the disabled pupil. The PEP is hence the official document that enables inclusion in mainstream education and serves as a basis for mainstream and specialist teachers to design an academic syllabus tailored to pupils' needs and abilities.

If the class council finds that the pupil has achieved learning levels that meet or are comparable with the goals set by ministerial curricula, the pupil is assessed by the same system as other pupils. If not, the class council is required to grade the pupil's learning performance based on the aims set out by the PEP and issues a certificate of attendance rather than a school diploma in order for the student to progress to the next grade.

Constitutional Court Decision no. 215/1987 extended disabled students' right of inclusion to upper secondary schools, specifying that their attendance has to be 'ensured' and not only 'supported'. All the provisions of Act no. 517/77 have hence been extended to upper secondary education.

Special schools for blind, deaf and speech-impaired pupils exist. These groups may choose between mainstream and special schooling.

After they complete their compulsory education, pupils are guaranteed admission into mainstream secondary school classes and when they have completed these they are guaranteed access to higher education.

School Year 2008/09: students enrolled in state schools by level of school						Disabled students
Source: Ministry of Education		Source: Tuttoscuola			Source: Tuttoscuola	
REGION	Kindergarten	Primary school	Lower secondary school	Upper secondary school	Total	Disabled students
North West Piemonte	69 212	176 696	108 532	155 618	510 058	12 745
North West Valle D'Aosta	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West Lombardia	113 113	408 916	241 114	331 19	1 094 333	26 738
North East Trentino-Alto Adige	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Veneto	43 576	216 394	130 997	183 671	574 638	12 883
North East Friuli-Venezia G.	17 428	48 215	28 929	45 006	139 578	2 593
North West Liguria	19 859	55 218	36 24	55 329	166 646	4 112
North East Emilia Romagna	50 874	175 089	103 354	160 337	489 654	11 869
Centre Toscana	65 092	144 236	90 532	143 9	443 760	9 309
Centre Umbria	17 872	36 359	22 586	36 905	113 722	2 279
Centre Marche	33 972	67 383	42 067	69 637	213 059	5 016
Centro Lazio	84 51	229 309	151 687	238 126	703 632	20 812
South Abruzzo	27 712	55 104	36 779	60 845	180 440	4 936
South Molise	5 926	13 523	9 202	16 529	45 180	898
South Campania	130 597	295 618	211 319	318 603	956 137	20 875
South Puglia	91 437	204 693	135 233	220 517	651 880	13 205
South Basilicata	12 279	27 327	17 872	33 681	91 159	1 554
South Calabria	42 779	94 303	64 231	111 359	312 672	6 232
Island Sicilia	112 959	251 084	175 426	256 687	796 156	20 755
Island Sardegna	27 453	66 545	45 897	80 184	220 079	4 366
					7 702 783	181 177

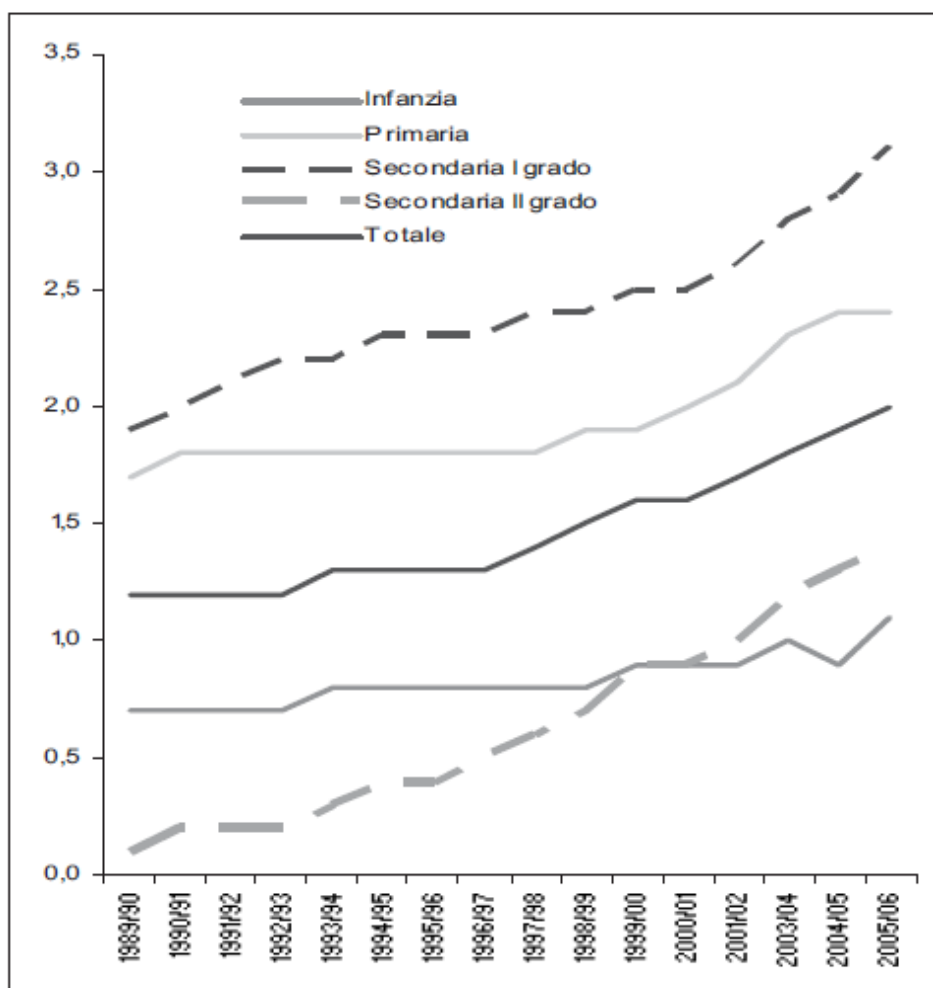
Table 1: School year 2008/09: students enrolled in state schools by level of school in each region

School level	Disabled students	% of total
Kindergarten	17 481	1.1
Primary	67 755	2.4
Lower secondary	55 244	3.1
Upper secondary	37 740	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>178 220</b>	<b>2.0</b>

Table 2: School year 2005/2006: students with disabilities by level of school

Around 1.4 per cent of pupils in upper secondary education are disabled. Of the latter, 11 per cent attend lyceums and gymnasiums, 59 per cent vocational training schools, 21 per cent technical schools and 9 per cent art schools.

Furthermore, Ministry Decree no. 330/97 introduced a kind of school certification based on abilities and skills acquired that can be used for a student to pursue his/her education or career. In fact, before 1996/97 students received only an attendance certification from their school, without any indication of their progress, difficulties and challenges. Certification based on accreditation of education is particularly important for disabled students because it describes their abilities and skills and specifies the kind of environment and context which would enable them to grow.



Graph 1 Source: ISTAT. Graphic representation of data from the Ministry of Education

In Graph 1, time-based analysis reveals a progressive growth in the percentage of students with disabilities both generally and at every level of school. In the school year 1989/1990 1.2 per cent of students were disabled, a figure which reached 2.0 per cent in the school year 2005/2006.

As regards the accessibility of school buildings, the environment still represents a barrier to education. In a Ministry of Education survey conducted in 2003/2004 on 40 383 schools, only 30.7 percent of state schools had accessible toilets, 29.7 per cent had doors that met accessibility requirements and 20.3 per cent had lifts or stair lifts. An analysis of the situation nationally reveals considerable differences between regions but also that even in the most 'virtuous' areas, 60 per cent of schools have not yet completely removed architectural barriers presented by educational buildings.

### *Higher education*

The Ministry for Education, Universities and Research promotes the development of both universities and other higher education institutions endowed with university status. It plans and coordinates developments and changes in the university system and allocates funds to individual universities. The number of disabled students attending university today is much greater than one would have ever imagined in the past. But the number of disabled students in all Italian universities is significant, and they are distributed across all degree courses.

Act no. 17/99 requires universities to provide for a lecturer to be appointed by the vice-chancellor to support and coordinate all activities related to the integration of people with disabilities within the Italian university system. As a result, some universities have opened a disability office. The services provided include study support (sign language interpretation, communication facilitation, note taking, etc.), tutoring, counselling and job placement.

Act no. 04/2004 – the Stanca Act – sets out provisions to facilitate access by people with disabilities to information technology. Its main objectives are i) to safeguard the right to access all sources of information and related services (i.e. it applies not only to the internet, but to all communication and electronic systems) and ii) to grant disabled people the right to access public administrative electronic resources and online services. The law draws on EU guidelines and international regulations addressed to government bodies, public economic agencies, private firms supplying the government, telecommunication and transport firms operating with public capital as well as IT service contractors.

The relevant points of the law are the following: 1) all internet sites created or modified in the future by public administrations must respect accessibility requirements; 2) accessibility is a grounds for preference during the procurement of computer products (hardware and software) for public administrations; 3) the law does not create a duty of accessibility for internet sites created by private individuals, but it is a stimulus to promote accessibility of sites; 4) all school textbooks, where possible, will be rendered available in electronic formats that may be read by the blind or partially sighted or people with other disabilities.



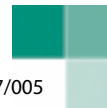
The law states that contracts for the creation or modification of web sites belonging to public bodies are subject to cancellation if they do not meet accessibility requirements. In addition, goods and services provided by private organisations to the public sector must also meet accessibility requirements. If not, the private organisation may lose public financing. However, the impact of the law is mitigated in that it does not include a positive duty for public administration websites to be accessible. It is actually Article 53 of the Administration Code that expressly specifies that central public administration sites have to be accessible and usable. The Stanca Act refers to the inclusion of accessibility requirements in contracts and not to websites themselves. If there is no contract, no penalty may be applied – sites may very well not be accessible as long as they are constructed internally, without a contract with external suppliers.

In order to transpose Directive 2000/78/EC into Italian law, the government approved Decree 2003/216 in July 2003. This decree repeats the text of the EU directive and basically aims to transplant the directive into the legal system as it is. No attempt is made to coordinate between or with other existing Italian legal rules. Since this method of transposition does not abolish pre-existing anti-discrimination rules nor attempt unification, it adds a further set of rules, thus creating a complex situation which could lead to litigation involving numerous legal arguments. Furthermore we would criticise the content of the law transposing the directive because it lacks a clear definition of ‘reasonable accommodation’. In addition, the burden of proof lies with those facing discrimination.

#### *Policies relevant to accessible life-long learning*

E-learning has been slower to develop in Italy than in the other European countries. Despite the promotional work carried out by the Ministry of Education, (*Ministero dell'Istruzione*), low levels of diffusion and use of IT still persist in education for disabled people. This shortcoming may possibly be explained by the need for a national strategy for the scholastic inclusion and education of disabled people. The first university e-learning consortium, Nettuno University, was set up in 1990 with the financial support of the Ministry of Education. This consortium is composed of around 45 companies and universities from all over the world and provides higher education through two television channels and the internet. This advanced e-learning project has created the basis for e-learning to be spread throughout Italian universities, but a real national e-learning policy has not emerged.

At the beginning of 2007 the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry for Technological Innovation (*Ministero dell'Innovazione Tecnologica*) promoted a project called ‘New Technologies and Disability’, with the specific aim of supporting e-learning and e-inclusion. This project is still ongoing.



The project has four main goals: (1) To build up a database of existing national, European and international best practices in the education of disabled students to make them available within schools as a resource for teachers; (2) To carry out specific training for project operators (teachers) on disability and technologies; (3) To increase the diffusion of hardware and software tools enabling the integration of disabled people; (iv) To undertake specific research looking at specific kinds of disabilities and involving the expertise of the main actors at national and international level, as well as networks of schools, research centres and private individuals.

Two goals of the project have been reached: (1) The creation of a website (<http://puntoeduri.indire.it/>) for online teacher training developed by the National Institute of Documentation for Innovation and Research in Education (*Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione per l'Innovazione e la Ricerca Educativa*) (INDIRE); (2) The creation of various online databases (<http://asd.itd.cnr.it/>; <http://sd2.itd.cnr.it/>; <http://www.bdp.it/software>). They contain different kinds of tools and educational software evaluated by project operators which can be downloaded for free by disabled students, parents and teachers.

The 'New Technologies and Disability' project could be the first step in Italy towards a nationwide strategy for the education of disabled people.

### **Section 3: Evidence of outcomes and progress towards inclusion**

In 2004, ISTAT (National Institute of Statistical Studies, <http://www.istat.it/>) conducted a survey of people with disabilities living in their own homes to examine their social integration into their living environment (network of relationships, school, work, leisure activities, etc.) and the factors that impede such integration (limitations in mobility, lack of adequate support, etc.). In particular, ISTAT reported interesting data collected from disabled people who were attending school in 2004/2005 or who had attended school in the past.

#### *Current educational experience*

In 2004 114 000 people with disabilities said they were enrolled in school or university. Disability was severe among 37.8 per cent of these respondents, moderate among 40.8 per cent and slight among 21.4 per cent. Different types of disability (physical, sensorial, intellectual) were evenly represented.

35.3 per cent of disabled students attended kindergarten or primary school, 19.2 per cent secondary school, and 44.5 per cent institutes of higher education, university or postgraduate courses. 8.73 per cent of students with disabilities had had to start school late because of their physical or mental condition. However, 26.3 per cent of those enrolled had repeated at least one year of their studies. Most of the latter were severely disabled. Although repeating a year does not represent a failure for people with a severe disability, in some cases it may highlight the fact that the school is being used to compensate for the lack of local social and support services.



As regards the accessibility of school or university facilities, 18 per cent of students with motor or visual disabilities (50.7 per cent of students with disabilities) attended a school with barriers that made it difficult or impossible to access (stairs or steps, narrow doorways, inadequate toilets, non-existent or inaccessible elevators, or lacking of parking). This data confirms information provided by the Ministry of Education.

32.7 per cent of students had a support teacher, whose work was valued fairly positively by the students concerned: the average satisfaction rating was 3.8 (rated on a scale of one to five, with one as the minimum). It was also positive that almost all of those who did not have a support teacher stated that they did not need one.

Overall, 39.9 per cent of the students felt that their psycho-physical condition caused only a slight or no disadvantage and 29.8 per cent reported a moderate level of disadvantage. It should be stressed, however, that 30 per cent of pupils still felt they were very disadvantaged. People with severe disabilities were strongly represented in the latter group.

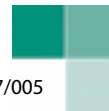
#### *Past experience*

485 000 disabled people who had attended courses in the past when surveyed were not enrolled in any school or university. 16.3 per cent of them were aged 19 years or under, 28 per cent were between 20 and 34 years, 35 per cent were between 35 and 54 years and the remaining 20.7 per cent were between 55 and 67 years.

52.3 per cent of disabled people who had undergone school education were severely disabled, 37.1 per cent were moderately disabled and 10.6 per cent were mildly disabled. Motor disabilities (33.8 per cent) and intellectual disabilities combined with other disabilities (25 per cent) were particularly prevalent. 21.5 per cent of this group had sensory disability (difficulties in seeing, hearing and talking) and 8.9 per cent had both motor and sensory difficulties.

11.4 per cent of those who had attended school in the past had started late; 27.8 per cent had needed a support teacher; 8.1 per cent had attended special schools; the same proportion had attended special classes in regular schools; and 5.7 per cent had studied at home. The data presented so far demonstrate a good level of inclusion, but a significant proportion of respondents, 5.4 per cent, had had to move into an institution because of their disability. The situation is particularly critical for people with severe disabilities, especially as regards support teachers and delays in starting school.

The distribution by level of education achieved among those not attending any course of education at the time of the study highlights a disadvantage compared to the population as a whole. A lower proportion of people had achieved an upper secondary school diploma (33.5 per cent compared with 45.7 per cent of the total population); a similar proportion had obtained a lower secondary school diploma (30.9 per cent) or primary school diploma (21.3 per cent).



However, a higher number had not obtained any qualification (14.2 per cent compared with 1.8 per cent of the total population).

Nearly half of people with a severe disability (46.7 per cent) had no qualification or had only completed primary school. People with intellectual disabilities were particularly disadvantaged. 59.7 per cent of them held only a primary school diploma or had no qualifications. In contrast, people with motor or sensory disabilities had mainly achieved an upper secondary diploma or a degree (48 per cent).

Among those who had attended school in the past and were not attending any course of study at the time of the survey, 47.9 per cent stated that they had experienced severe disadvantage during their studies, 21 per cent moderate disadvantage and 27.1 per cent a slight or no disadvantage, while the remaining 4 per cent did not express any opinion.

The overall assessment of school experience was good. In fact, the average score was 4.0 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was the lowest, and around a third of this group felt positive about school. Disabled people even expressed general satisfaction with respect to their relations with peers, teachers and other school staff. The majority of respondents felt very or fairly satisfied with their relationship with peers (84.6 per cent), teachers (85.1 per cent) and other educational personnel (84.2 per cent).

At first sight this framework seems positive, but if we go deeper we find that the education of disabled people is often interrupted for reasons beyond their control. 13.1 per cent had not completed compulsory education. 33 per cent of this group said that they left school as a result of their disability, another 20 per cent because of learning difficulties, and 12 per cent because of the lack of facilities and services.

#### **Section 4: Types of support for students and trainees**

A key role in the inclusive education and socialisation of students with disabilities is played by support teachers in kindergarten, primary and secondary school. This post was created by Presidential Decree 970/1975 as a specialist teacher distinct from other curriculum teachers, and was further defined by Act no. 517/77 ratifying the right of disabled students to full integration into state schools. This post was introduced as an initial response to the problem of integrating disabled or culturally disadvantaged students.

The support teacher coordinates interventions relating to the socialisation, education and qualifications and job placement of disabled persons and individuals experiencing or at risk of social and cultural marginalisation. They actively collaborate – with the team of teachers – in producing Personalised Education Plans as set out in the framework law on disability (Act no. 104/1992) aimed at ensuring educational continuity.



The support teacher must have knowledge and expertise in: the social and occupational integration of disadvantaged people and people with special needs; legislation promoting inclusion in education and the workplace; the psychological and sociological issues related to the particular type of service user; the methods used to draw up specific and individualised education plans; the organisation and coordination of an integrated educational process that involves companies and educational institutes to promote occupational training; and supported inclusion in the workplace.

Numbers of support teachers were previously calculated on the basis of one teacher for every four students with disabilities, with possible exceptions related to severity of disability. Following Act no. 449 passed in 1997, the number of support teachers is calculated in relation to the total number of pupils: one support teacher for every 138 pupils. The ratio of one to four represents the maximum number of students with disabilities assigned to a support teacher, but exceptions can be made depending on the severity of a student's disability, meaning the ratio can be as high as 1:1.

Italian students with disabilities have access to other benefits such as the Mobility Card and transport by the Trambus or School Bus schemes. These are examples of support provided by municipalities.

The Mobility Card is a card provided to a named holder that looks like a bank card and which is granted by the City of Rome to disabled people on request. It was designed to facilitate the transport of disabled people to work, study, therapy, and social activities. It has no time limit. People with severe physical disabilities, blindness or residual vision of not more than 1 / 20 in both eyes can use the service.

Rome provides the Trambus service for people with mobility impairments who cannot use normal public transport and who need to travel within the city for work, study or rehabilitation.

#### **Section 4a: Financial support**

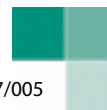
Disabled students can take advantage of the attendance allowance. This was instituted by Act no. 289 of 11 October 1990 to help minors. The amount for 2008 was EUR 246.73 per month. The conditions of entitlement are as follows:

- being younger than 18 years of age;
- being an Italian citizen living in Italy or a foreigner with a residence permit;
- recognition as a 'minor with persistent difficulties in carrying out functions typical of his/her age' (Act no. 289/90) or a 'minor with a hearing loss of more than 60 decibels in the better ear';
- attendance at any type or level of educational establishment;
- attendance at a rehabilitation or vocational training centre or sheltered employment centre;
- having a personal income of less than EUR 4,238.26 per year.

This allowance is provided for the entire length of attendance at a course, school or rehabilitation programme, and cannot be paid at the same time as an accompaniment allowance.

#### *Financial support at university level*

Under the Framework Act on the Integrated System of Social Measures and Services (Act no. 328/2000), disabled people are eligible for disability benefits depending on the nature and extent of their disability, their residual capacity, and the effectiveness of rehabilitation. The State is responsible for policy and coordinating and planning interventions concerning the right of students to university education. The Regions are responsible for implementing interventions such as general services, grants, health services and loans. These measures are implemented by a specific body with management and administrative autonomy in every single university. Universities are responsible for organising their own services, including guidance and mentoring. They can totally or partially exempt students from fees depending on their academic performance and income. The Ministerial Decree of 17 April 2003 governs distance learning courses provided by 'Open Universities' (virtual campus). The aim, among others, is to improve and widen access to higher education for disabled people or people living in remote areas ([http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national\\_impl/00\\_Nat-rep-05/National\\_Reports-Italy\\_050127.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-Italy_050127.pdf)).



## **Section 4(b): Personal assistance, equipment and adaptations**

The Italian school system provides specific staff to support disabled students, for example, educational and cultural assistants and communication assistants.

The objectives of educational and cultural assistants (ECAs) are to encourage self-sufficiency and promote social integration, with specific targets and actions, through monitoring disabled students and providing support and assistance to disabled children and adolescents who require daily help with personal hygiene and eating. The ECA gives educational support for the entire school day, for example, with laboratory work, mobility, and recreational activities, and works in collaboration with school transport providers. ECAs collaborate with teachers and support teachers in pursuing the personalised education plan established by the institution, and work to coordinate everyone involved in the education and socialisation of disabled students.

Another important figure is the communication assistant for deaf children. The communication assistant is a professional provided under Act no. 104 of 1992, but families with deaf children have only recently 'discovered' their right to request such an assistant and there has been an increase in demand. The communication assistant acts as a bridge between the deaf student and the class and teachers with the aim of breaking down communication barriers, providing equal opportunities and enabling deaf students to reach their full potential at school.

The school autonomy regulation adopted by Interministerial Decree no. 44/01 established Local Centres for Educational Inclusion by law. These centres each coordinate a local network of schools and offer a service allowing disabled students who attend schools in the network to buy or borrow aids and equipment.

## **Section 5: Evidence of good practice**

To give effect to the right to education in a process of effective integration to enhance the 'culture of diversity', Italian universities offer a special tutoring service as an additional individual and social resource. It is designed for students with sensory, motor or other kind of disabilities, and is part of the university education system. The service coordinates activities designed to facilitate learning through skills enhancement strategies. Integrating students with disabilities requires team work.

Specialist tutoring can aid reflection on educational strategies inside different teaching processes. The tutor must consider disabled people and their ambitions, the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, and educational agreements between university and students.

In addition students with disabilities can book counselling sessions when they start university that provide information on how services, classes and the tutoring scheme are organised. This service aims to identify disabled students' needs and make them aware of their educational expectations, their abilities and resources.



The counselling service helps specialised teaching strategies to be identified by clarifying the specific needs of each student.

After their needs have been identified, students can request: meetings with teachers to present their learning difficulties and needs; meetings with administrative staff and tutors; and access to language and computer laboratories. They can also ask for: lecture notes and reading texts; recordings of lectures; educational material on audio cassettes; lesson plans and notes; concept maps; sign language interpreters; aids such as computers with screen readers and adapted mice; audio recorders; and educational information on study with identification of the training program more responsive to needs. The students can use the service to plan which courses to take, organise their timetable and to access learning materials as well as to plan for examinations and receive information on dates, times and individual study support measures. They can also ask for coaching and support in reading texts.

The service organises a reading group, open to all students and led by a tutor, in order to promote a culture of equal opportunities through knowledge, study, research, sharing differences, learning, testing abilities, self-evaluation as an opportunity for acceptance and change, a mindset focused on acceptance of self and other, reflection on the need for and pleasure of interaction, and construction of a process with others in which everyone identifies their own learning. The service also organises workshops on Braille and sign language for students who are deaf or blind.

Universities offer a peer support service for students. Students who choose to be involved provide tutoring support to students with disabilities in the classroom and in study groups. The service provides the tutor with all the information needed about the student assigned to him/her and gives him/her the tools necessary to carry out support activities. For example, if slides are projected in the classroom, a peer tutor who is supporting a blind student describes and reads them out loud. Peer support tutors also help disabled students prepare papers, talk to lecturers and move from one location to another. Students who choose to take part in this scheme are very interested in the area of disability and develop interpersonal skills and an ability to help.





## Section 6: References

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