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Education statistics and out-of-school children

The CRPD exists since 2007. Most countries have ratified the CRPD. That means that they accept those rights. They accept that education should be inclusive for all students.

That was 9 years ago. We know that in some countries there was already much done towards more inclusive schools. Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain have good practices and good statistics. Italy has almost no children in segregated schools, zero percent.

Many other countries had many children with disabilities in special schools or in special classes when the convention first was implemented.

The UN committee on the rights of people with disabilities checks regularly how countries are working towards more inclusion. Everybody knows that it is difficult to make quick radical changes in a short period of time. Countries are obliged to write reports every two years and make clear to the UN committee what they have done to make schools more inclusive. The UN committee also invites DPO's to send in reports.

On this photo you see one of the members of the UN committee, Theresia Degener. Together with her colleagues she reads all the country reports and all the shadow reports. She must love reading because she will have to read large stacks of reports.

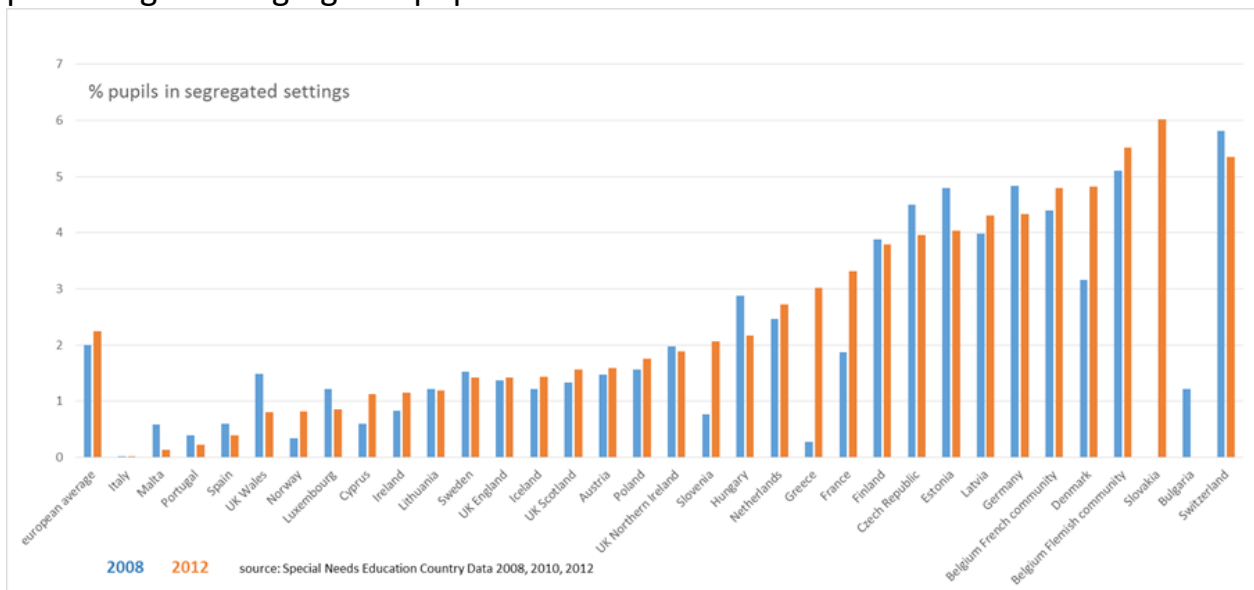


The education working group of Inclusion Europe has read the country reports and the comments that were made on them by the UN committee about education. We also read other reports and gathered statistics. We wanted to know what changes are being made in countries in Europe now that the right to inclusive education is recognised.

After all this reading and thinking about it, we are not so happy.

We could find statistics from different sources, for instance from the European Agency for special needs education.

Yesterday Belgium was named as the European country with the highest number of children in segregated schools, around 5%. It is not true, Slovakia is a bit worse, with 5,5% of all children in segregated classes. Switzerland is nearly as bad and the Netherlands and Germany are not doing so well in statistics either with high percentages of segregated pupils.



Source: data from Special Needs Education Country Data 2008, 2010 and 2012 by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. For some countries data were not available for given years, but only for specific years between 2008 and 2012.

The colour blue show the figures from 2008 when the countries first made their promise to make their educational system more inclusive.

The colour orange represents the situation in 2012, 5 years after the first signing of the CRPD. Many countries improved in these statistics. Portugal and Spain have reduced the number of pupils in segregated schools and segregated classes. Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary also reduced the percentage segregated students.

So that seems to be a good trend. The reality though is that in many other European countries the percentage segregated pupils increased. That happened in Ireland, Austria, Poland, France, Netherlands Belgium; they all show a growing number of children with disabilities being offered segregated education. The European average increases. In 2008 2% of all European children were being offered segregated education. In 2012 it was 2,25 % segregation.

Reports made by the Academic Network of European disability experts make clear that students with intellectual disabilities and complex needs are often being

regarded as too expensive to be educated in mainstream environments. They can be refused by schools because their individual accommodation seems to be unreasonable and expensive. This happens in Germany, Netherlands and Belgium.

The problem is that schools are not legally obliged to become more generally accessible. The less accessible a school is, the greater the necessity for individual accommodations if a disabled child applies to enroll. The larger the accommodation, the more readily it will be judged as unreasonable.

In many countries children with severe intellectual disabilities or complex needs do not have access to any education at all as they are being placed in daycare centers or residential institutions that provide no education. We know this from research by members of ANED and by C. Latimier C. and J. Šiška J. (2011), *Children's rights for all! Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for children with intellectual disabilities*, Brussels, Inclusion Europe. (Page 19)

The exclusion from education happens in the Netherlands (more than 5000 children are being excluded from any school); France (between 6000 to 20.000 children are being excluded), Bulgaria (3000 children). The situation may be similar in other countries. It is difficult to assess that as these children are not being represented in statistical data on special education.

We have also looked into what we know of experiences and wishes of parents and students. Sometimes it is said that many parents do not want inclusive education. They may prefer special schools. For governments that argument is used to keep on financing segregated schools so that everyone should be able to choose between regular and special schools.

What we know is that there is no real free choice for parents. Getting a place in an inclusive setting turns into a long and exhausting struggle for families. Families may feel that their children are not really welcomed. Their child may sit in the class without proper support and with a teacher who is not trained and not supported. In many countries legislation and financial systems dictate that support shall only be provided in segregated schools.

It is why families feel obliged to accept the referrals to segregated schools because sufficient support can only be obtained in these segregated settings.

There are encouraging policies and good practices in some European countries, such as Norway, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Austria.

The problem is that these positive changes have not led to an overall positive change for groups of children that are most at risk of being excluded from the right to inclusive education.

In countries that have a tradition of offering inclusive education, such as Spain, Portugal, Italy, budget cuts have had a negative effect on providing support for children with intellectual disabilities and complex needs.

Countries that have segregated systems do not invest in structural change. These countries promised the UN committee to make their schools more inclusive but they do not act on it. Their promises sound a bit like children that promise to behave when they go out to play. Such promises are easily made but quickly forgotten when something else draws attention.

I think the problem is that our government and societies think that exclusion of children with disabilities is not such a big problem. The statistics that are available may be wrongly interpreted. One might say: only 2,25% of children is segregated. Many would think that our schools should concentrate on getting the majority of children to high academic levels.

I have presented you some statistical data and I think it is important to keep on gathering such data. At the same time figures are poor instruments in trying to convince our politicians to make the right decisions. We should present always the real life stories behind the figures.

The statistics say:

In the Netherlands less than 1 % of young people with Down syndrome are allowed into secondary schools.



Pjotr on his way to vocational school

The story behind this is:

Pjotr was given the chance to go to a regular school and he was well supported such that he graduated and could enter vocational education, after secondary schools. He is happy and proud to be able to do that.

The two boys in this picture have no disability and have no difficulty whatsoever to enter the school of their choice. Josephine on the other hand could only finish secondary school because her parents were able to pay for private schooling after all publicly funded schools had refused her.



Josephine with brother and friend

We all know such stories and we tell them to each other. I think it might be worthwhile if we could come up with a way to share these stories within our European network and publish them, alongside the statistical information.