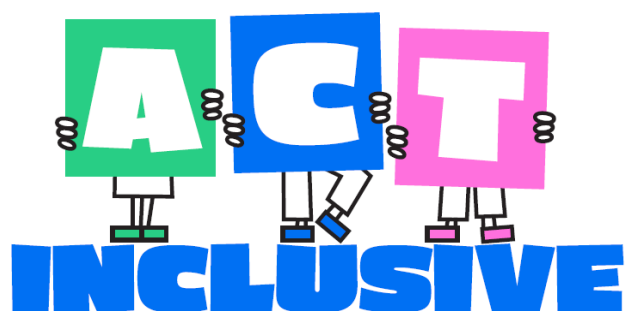


ACT-InclusivE – Actors of Change Towards Inclusive Education

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Country Sheets on Inclusiveness in Mainstream Schools in Slovenia.

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Foreword

The Country Sheets on Inclusiveness in Mainstream Schools is a series of key deliverables produced in the framework of the European project "ACT INCLUSIVE" funded by the Erasmus+ programme "Partnership for Cooperation in the field of Education and Training" (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PCOOP-ENGO). The "ACT INCLUSIVE" project brings together different stakeholders with expertise in disability rights, support provision, inclusive education and capacity building. The aim of this project is to enable the dissemination of knowledge to mainstream schools, spreading inclusive practices and materials suited to awareness raising of the school community (students, teachers, school staff) and empowerment of students with disabilities.

The Country Sheets on Inclusiveness in Mainstream Schools were developed through desk research on national level (Cyprus, France, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain) and conduction of interviews to teachers, students and school staff from the same target countries. This research format aimed at making sense of the state of play of inclusiveness in school settings based on the current structure of the educational system, recognition of student's rights and needs, and support instruments available, as well as the views and concerns as expressed by interviewees. The Country Sheets will constitute a basis for the development of ACT INCLUSIVE Targeted Awareness Raising Manuals, but are also composed as an informative material for education professionals, researchers, policy makers and interested public.

The ACT INCLUSIVE project is supported by the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (Belgium), besides educational centres and service providers supporting people with disabilities from 5 different countries: Spain (COGAMI), Hungary (ETA), Cyprus (CARDET), France (LADAPT), and Slovenia (Center VAL). For each target country, one Country Sheet has been issued with key information on Inclusiveness for students with disabilities, detailing current structures for access to education, legal provisions, current challenges to build inclusiveness in mainstream schools and ways forward.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is an evolving concept that, today, englobes the full access to *quality* instruction and educational guidance by all groups of society, regardless of their level of vulnerability or marginalisation (Florian 2019). Equally important, as precised by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education provides the means to realisation of other human rights, holding an overarching empowerment effect towards social mobility, participation and autonomy¹. In the specific context of disability-inclusiveness, Inclusive education has been repeatedly enriched at European and International level through different instruments². Those clearly state the right to equal opportunities and high-quality appropriate education; the right to participate in and contribute fully to an inclusive society; the right to choose and receive education in an inclusive environment; and to appropriate resources and expertise to meet their educational, social and health-related needs (including respect to the best interest of the child).

Inclusiveness on School environment also has supported evidence of bringing overall benefits to all students, since the interaction between students with and without disabilities on school context enable both groups to learn more³. Despite that, the realisation of fully inclusive education systems across Europe is yet to be achieved. The recent restrictive measures due to COVID-19 pandemic brought more emphasis to the urgent need for inclusive approaches for conceiving adapted environments that can respond to all students' needs. Bhan aand Julka (2021) pointed out that Educational challenges faced by children with disabilities in this context were: lack of peer interaction; lack of therapies; lack of diagnostic assessment; break in routine; lack of teacher support; lack of access to meals.

Special rapporteur also points out stigma and stereotypes due to their age, gender, impairment or other factor (page 14) as some of the key factors for continued segregation of children with disabilities to the mainstream school system.

¹ paragraph 85 of its general comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, the Committee provided further recognition of how inclusive education is essential to the right to participate.

² UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24 on Education and General Comment No.4 on Inclusive Education); The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4 - targets 4.4 and 4.5); The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (Area of Action 5.3); The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021), The European Child Guarantee (2021), etc.

³ (Bui,etal.,2010;Dupuis,Barclay,Holms,Platt,Shaha,&Lewis,2006;Newman,2006;Alquraini&Gut,2012)

While the response to educational systems transformation must certainly involve measures in multiple levels, the awareness of the school community, and capacity building of its professionals, is key to build up diversity in the school environment. The identification of the state of play of current context and existing structures of school system comes as a logical step.

Methodology

In order to achieve our goals, partners developed an extensive literature review concerning the history background, legislation and current school system structure and challenges/ limitations in the current state of play of inclusiveness in mainstream schools. The development of such material was guided by a set of questions developed by LADAPT, with inputs from all partners. The information collected was also reviewed by expert organisations with field expertise and knowledge on the national context in each country. Comments were incorporated, and content was summarised to compose this Country Sheet.

On a second phase, partners collected and analysed the perspectives, opinions, experiences, specific needs and challenges faced by students (disabled and non-disabled), teachers and staff of local schools. Through data collection in schools, we aim to gain a comprehensive overview of the state of inclusive education in schools, as well as a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of school staff, teachers and students and the main difficulties they face in their daily work.

In line with the research objectives, we collected data between DATE and DATE 2023 using different measurement tools to understand schools' practices and opinions on inclusive education, its challenges and successes. The measurement tools were developed and finalised with our project partners under the guidance of the French partner LADAPT.

The data collection focused on a total x of schools in Cyprus, French, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain, with 13 schools reached in France. When selecting the schools, it was important to select mainstream schools and to get the views of staff and students of primary and secondary education institutions. The schools were selected with particular attention being paid to the school's openness to the situation of people with disabilities and the importance of promoting acceptance and inclusion within the institution.

In total, X semi-structured interviews were done, among which 13 in France, with 2-2 interviews in each school. The professional profile of interviewees comprised: head and vice principal school staff, teachers, conductive educator, school psychologists and other support staff with different relevant positions in relation to inclusive education in the school. Participation was voluntary and respondents were granted anonymity when summarising the results.

Due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of the data collection and the aim to learn about school practices, the data collection does not aim to describe the entire institutional system and its functioning in the 5 countries, so the results presented in the following chapters are not, or only to a very limited extent, generalisable. Nevertheless, they bring in evidence to views, needs and ways forward for enabling more inclusive practices and build welcoming and diverse environments for students and the school community as a whole.

Background

Slovenia is a young republic that witnessed fast developments in its educational system as of its democratization process (year-year). **The institutional education and care for children with special educational needs (SEN)** started at the mid of the 20th century and grew into a highly professional special education model. The department of special pedagogy at the University of Ljubljana's Academy of Education, established in 1949, was responsible for the initial training of special education teachers. The most extensive segregation effect was registered between 1975 and 1977, when as many as 6–8% of the whole school population was educated in special schools and institutions (Galeša, 2003⁴; Opara et al., 2010)⁵ There was a special school for children with learning disabilities in almost every municipality, treatment schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, three institutions for deaf children and children with hearing and speech disabilities, two for blind and partially-sighted children and two for children with physical disabilities.

Slovenia did not have an independent role in the formation of the school system during this period, as it was part of the common state of Yugoslavia. More or less, the system was formed according to the directions they had in Belgrade (today's Serbia), but historically it had a different development than the school system in Slovenia.

With the constitution of 1963, new socialist self-governing relations began to be formed in education in Slovenia. After solving the material problems of education, the focus of work shifted to the fulfilment of the school system, and the **introduction of new methods and contents of education**. In primary education, full-day primary school was introduced from 1975 onwards. Directed education as the most important and (most controversial) reform project characterized secondary education between 1981 and 1987. Higher education also became richer in 1975 through the founding of a second university in Slovenia - in Maribor. Opportunities for teacher education have also expanded, both through regular school programs and various courses and seminars. Events in education were also influenced by broader social changes: after the declaration of independence and proclamation of

⁴ Galeša, M., 2003. *Ocenjevanje zmožnosti in posebnih potreb otrok v osnovni šoli ter načrtovanje individualiziranih programov: praktični pristop*. Celje: Valmar

⁵ Opara, B., Barle, A., Kobal Grum, D., Košir, S., Macedoni-Lukšič, M., Zorc-Maver, D., Bregar-Golobič, K., Molan, N., Vovk Ornik, N. and Klavžar, K., 2010. *Analiza vzgoje in izobraževanja otrok s posebnimi potrebami v Sloveniji*. Ljubljana: JRZ Pedagoški inštitut

the Republic of Slovenia and the adoption of the Constitution in 1991, the Slovenian school system changed significantly, especially with the adoption of new school laws in 1996.

Education in independent Slovenia

Structural changes in Slovenian society were related to independence, democratization, changes in the social and economic system, new values and new technology in the field of communications and unsuspected connections around the world. Those elements changed both the content and forms of education, and also triggered major knowledge needs. With the involvement of the new country in international cooperation and exchange, knowledge and education became an everyday necessity. Such openness process led regular schools to notice outdated content and to face difficulties to keep up with new knowledge requirements.

The education of children with special needs is a part of the whole education system that has faced most changes in the past fifty years. For a long century, Slovenia adopted a discriminatory mindset towards children with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, that were believed to need being educated differently. The country had developed an entire system of segregated special education which was differentiated by disabilities.

The process towards paradigm shift for inclusive education in Slovenia can then be reported to some fifty years ago, when this segregated educational system started to be questioned and the idea and concept of 'integration' emerged. In fact, it was adopted as Mikkelsen, a professional from Denmark, defined it »the integration of retarded(sic) persons into a normal environment as much as possible«. On the foundation of a new postmodern philosophy, ethics and theory of education, the view and the concept of integration wasn't enough and the idea and the term of **inclusion** was born. It stood up on new values and the notion that each individual is unique; and different individuals have to be raised and educated together.

The model of a modern school is, therefore, a heterogeneous school where every individual is different. Nowadays, inclusion in education is a universal model which aims at »the right to education for all«. Slovenia is on the path of the inclusive paradigm since 1995/1996 when the so-called school reform started. At that time, the term '**children with special needs**' was introduced in all general legislation of education. Since then, Slovenia set up a **continuum of educational programmes** for children with disabilities/special needs and redefined the procedures of identification and

classification as direction. The procedures were transferred from the Ministry of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Education, where they were not prepared for these changes, nor did they have enough professional staff to implement them. Teachers were not prepared to introduce children with special needs, nor did they have enough knowledge. The training of teachers for the education of children for majority schools and for the education of children with special needs is still conducted separately in Slovenia. The problems were because the schools for inclusion were also not spatially adapted, they had many obstacles and no equipment and aids. Therefore, application of the educational concept for children with special needs, lots of weaknesses still came to surface. Practitioners were not involved in the process of changes; and there were few opportunities for professional debates and finding a professional approval (Opara, 2010)⁵.

The educational practice was faced with new facts. As a country, Slovenia didn't consider putting in place instruments or committees to act as guardians of the implementation of the inclusive paradigm. The first document to put forward a conceptual framework for a change towards more inclusive education was the White Paper on Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1995)⁶. Combined with the Placement Act in 2000, the way to mainstream education was formally opened to children with SEN.

The Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000)⁷, hereafter referred to as **the Placement Act**, was an important milestone in inclusive education in Slovenia. Before this, Slovenia had a segregated, two-trailed education system (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, Last updated: 17 December, 2021)⁸.

Without exception, and in accordance with the Placement Act, all educational legislation at all education levels, from pre-primary to university, had to include provisions for children and adolescents with SEN. The concept of a two-track school system started to give way to the establishment of a more just and comprehensive school system.

⁶ White Paper on Education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1995)

⁷ Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2000)

⁸ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, Last updated: 17 December, 2021

The (reviewed) Placement Act (2011)⁹ came into use on 1 September 2013. It represented a new step towards ensuring the realisation of the inclusive paradigm by imposing conditions for providing continuous support to learners with SEN in education. To assure **the earlier identification and treatment of learning disabilities**, a conceptual framework for the systemic comprehensive treatment of children with learning disabilities was developed in 2008 (Magajna, 2008)¹⁰.

The approach introduced in Slovenia recognises the needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN) as disabilities, barriers and/or disorders that require changes or adjustments in the learner's environment or adaptation of the latter to the needs of the learner. The medical approach to the learner's disability, in use during the 1970s, has been abolished. The Act is based on the principle that a learner's needs must be recognised as soon as possible and that early childhood intervention is a dynamic process. The recognition of the learner's needs and early intervention occur simultaneously. Learners are recognised as having SEN when they get an official decision by the National Education Institute of Slovenia (NEIS). Parents usually request the introduction of official guidance procedures for learners with SEN, but schools or learners themselves (from 15 years old) can also request it.

The Children with SEN Guidance Commissions, founded by NEIS, are responsible for the placement. They work according to the Regulations for the organisation and work of the Children with SEN Guidance Commissions (Official Gazette No. 88/13) and the Criteria for the assessment of the type and degree of disadvantage, impairments and disabilities of learners with SEN (Source: FPIES – Slovenia Country Report, pp. 15–16)¹¹.

Country definitions of formal, non-formal and informal education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2011a. Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji. pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/1195/1/bela_knjiga_2011.pdf (Last accessed July 2023)¹².

Formal education is an intentional, timed, institutionalised activity, the outcome of which is normally a publicly recognised qualification. Non-formal education is an intentional, timed, institutionalised activity that does not end with the acquisition of publicly recognised qualifications. However, it is

⁹ Placement Act (2011) Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami (ZUOPP-1) (Uradni list RS, št. 58-2714/2011)

¹⁰ Magajna, L. et al., 2008. *Učne težave v osnovni šoli : koncept dela*. Ljubljana: Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo

¹¹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, pp. 15–16 (Last updated: 17 December, 2021)

¹² Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2011a. Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji. pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/1195/1/bela_knjiga_2011.pdf (Last accessed July 2023)

structured and planned (objectives, duration, teacher). Participants do not receive a publicly valid certificate upon completion of such education. Informal learning is an intentional, timed activity which does not take place in a particular institution and does not end with the acquisition of publicly recognised qualifications. It involves learning about everyday life, work, family and leisure time. It is not structured or planned and it is not possible to obtain a certificate. The national definitions of formal, non-formal and informal education are in line with the ISCED 2011 definitions.

Children considered out of education are those in the compulsory education age group who are not enrolled in any form of formal education. In Slovenia, home education is considered formal education.

Organisation of the education system in education

The Slovenian educational system is not highly centralised. Administration responsibilities are distributed among the national authorities, local authorities and schools (mainstream schools and special schools with adopted and special programmes). The special institutions for learners with SEN are under the responsibility of the Government (Ministry of Education).¹²

The education system of the Republic of Slovenia is organised as a **public service** rendered by public and private institutions that provide officially recognized or accredited programmes. By law, public schools are secular and the school space is autonomous. As specified by the [Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia](#), there is a **guarantee of freedom of choice in education and autonomy of higher education institutions**. The language of instruction is Slovenian. Members of the Italian and Hungarian national communities in ethnically mixed areas have the right to education in their respective languages. The Constitution also protects the status and gives special rights to members of the Roma community.

Table 1: The education system in Slovenia comprises:

Pre-primary education	1 – 6 y.o	non-obligatory and fee-based, with partial coverage from municipalities. Parents are required to pay up to 80% of the full programme cost, depending on their financial situation. Pre-primary provision includes unitary centre-based childcare and education which is mainly public (kindergartens).
Basic school education	6 – 14 y.o.	compulsory education and consists of a single structure, nine-year system, provided by public and private schools. Basic school is financed by the national budget and the municipality (which is a co-founder), as well as from donations, sponsorships and other sources. Education for children in public and private schools with a concession is free.

Upper-secondary education	15 – 18 y.o.	not compulsory, free of charge and provided by public upper-secondary schools that offer one or more programmes, by upper-secondary school centres and gimnazija's (high schools). Upper-secondary learners can choose between two education programmes: 6 general education (gimnazija programmes and matura examination course) and vocational-technical education (short upper-secondary vocational education, vocational education or technical education, as well as vocational-technical education and vocational courses).
Tertiary education		This includes short-cycle higher vocational education and higher education studies. Education for children and young people with special needs is provided as a public service, but may also be provided in private kindergartens and schools without concessions or in private institutions or as home education. There are many parallel forms (inclusive, integrated form or separate classes and specialised institutions) which meet different needs.

Source: FPIES – Slovenia Country Report, pp. 5–6¹³

Within the different levels of education, **the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act** regulates procedures for the placement of learners with special needs into the appropriate educational programmes. Depending on the learners' psychological and physical status, the Act enables their inclusion in education at all levels, **from pre-primary to secondary education**, based on the assumption that additional help from experts and adaptation of the implementation of programmes will help learners to achieve a comparable standard of knowledge. **Learners with severe disorders** can still attend special forms of education in schools for learners with special needs and institutions for the education and training of learners with severe developmental difficulties.

All educational programmes for learners with SEN have to follow the main curricular aims that are established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport¹⁴. According to current legislation, learners

¹³ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, pp. 5–6 (Last updated: 17 December, 2021)

¹⁴ Article 9 of the Organization and Financing of Education Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1996)

with SEN are placed into a **continuum of educational programmes**, which all are part of the integral school system. The Placement Act defines all the necessary procedures for the placement of learners with SEN in all types of education, from pre-primary to upper-secondary. Depending on the learner's psychological and physical status, the Placement Act **enables inclusion in the most appropriate educational programme**, based on the assumption that **additional professional help** and **adapted implementation of programmes** will help a learner to achieve a comparable standard of knowledge. If a learner's with special needs are severe or complex and it is not possible to provide a suitable environment in a mainstream kindergarten or school, the learner is placed in an **adapted programme at a specialised institution**. Furthermore, some institutions implement an adapted basic school programme with a lower educational standard and a special curriculum for learners with an intellectual disability, in addition to the primary disability. If learners live at a distance and daily commuting to and from an institution is not an option, they may reside in the institution free of charge. Funding in education the financing system for pre-primary, basic, upper-secondary and tertiary education is prescribed in detail at a national level.

Children considered out of education are those in the compulsory education age group who are not enrolled in any form of formal education. In Slovenia, home education is considered formal education.

Who are students with special needs?

According to the **Act on Guidance of Children with Special Needs (ZUOPP)**¹⁵, children with special needs are a group of children who **need various forms of help and adaptation for a shorter or longer period of time in their upbringing and education**. Special needs become the starting point for all actions. The needs are related to the individuality of each individual and his right to be offered adjustments and assistance by society.

In accordance with the law, students with special needs are included in the nine-year primary school program, which may relate to the type and assessment of the deficit or obstacles reach the standards of the elementary school program with appropriate adaptation of the organization, the method of testing knowledge, progression and timing of lessons and with additional professional help.

¹⁵ Act on Guidance of Children with Special Needs (ZUOPP) Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2011b. Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami. www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina?urlid=201158&stevilka=2714 (Last accessed July 2023)

Today, children with special needs are included in almost every class of primary school in Slovenia, about them is spoken and written more and more. Parents are also increasingly equipped with the knowledge of how to recognize certain problems at certain age periods (we have already written about deviations) and in the event of deviations, they visit the appropriate specialists. (Ministrstvo za šolstvo)¹⁶

Children with special needs differ from others only in the need for additional professional help to address impairments (areas of speech, vision, hearing, motor skills, movement, emotions, etc.). Different groups of children with special needs require adjustments in the implementation of education programs. They acquire these through guidance and additional professional help.

All groups of children with special needs (SEN) are sent to regular primary schools, secondary schools and universities, with the exception of children with intellectual disabilities, who are thus included in **adapted education and training programs**.

Educations Support system and funding mechanisms

Following the widely used three-tier Response to Intervention (RTI) model (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006)¹⁷ and considering the specific capabilities of the Slovenian education system, a **five-step model of continuity of assistance, help and support for learners** who are facing learning difficulties was developed (Kiswarday, 2017)¹⁸.

This approach promises the earlier identification of learners at risk of school failure and the provision of effective study assistance and support in collaboration with all participants (learners, their parents and education professionals). With the increasing intensity and specificity of individual learners' SEN, the education professionals who provide assistance are required to have increasingly specific knowledge. As such, **various forms of assistance are to be organised in each of the five steps**, in order to meet learners' individual needs.

Learners with an official decision of SEN are in school year 2021/2022 educated in separate special schools 316 children and young people in full-time institutional care, living in centres for training,

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.si/podrocja/izobrazevanje-znanost-in-sport/> (Last accessed May 2023)

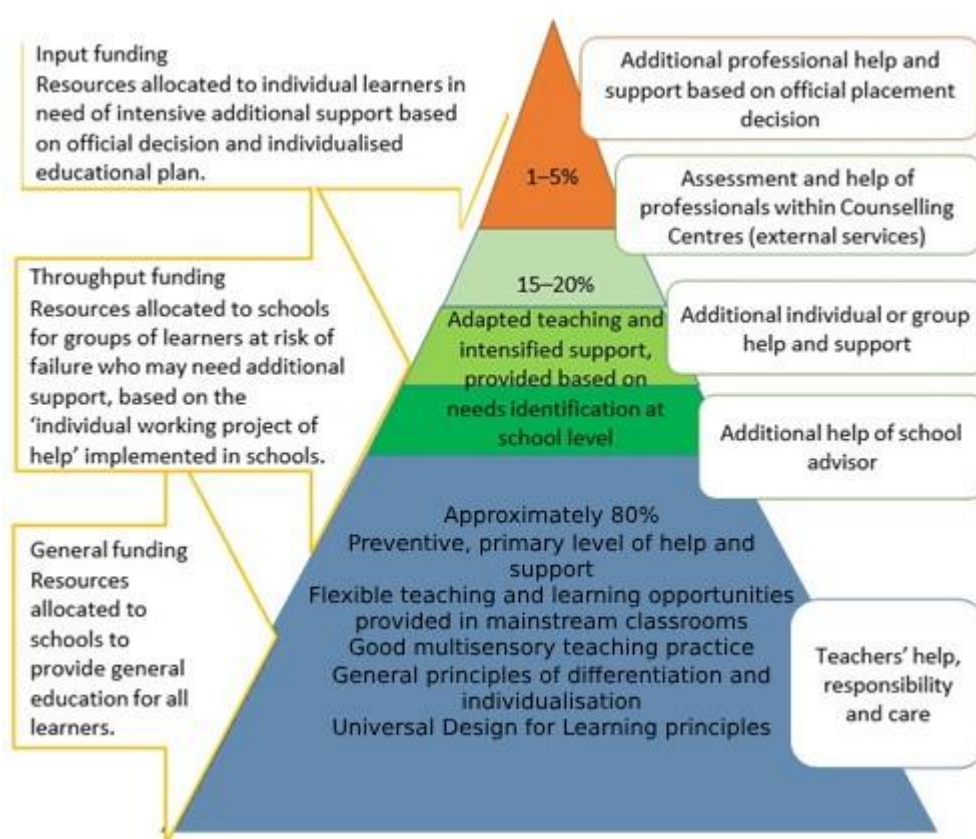
¹⁷ Fuchs, D. and Fuchs, L., 2006. Introduction to Response to Intervention: What, why, and how valid is it. Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

¹⁸ Kiswarday, V., 2017. 'The process of implementing inclusion in Slovenia', in E. Šmelová et al. (eds.), Social aspects of elementary school inclusion in the context of international research. Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Education

work and protection and 129 children and young people who are in daily care in these institutions. All of them are educated in special programmes. These institutions are maintained by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

(<https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0952752S.px/table/tableViewLayout2/>)²⁰.

Image 1: Resource allocation mechanisms for supporting learners in need, based on a five-step assistance model (five-step RTI approach)



Source: Financing policies for inclusive education systems²¹

The new Placement Act also foresees the establishment of **professional support centres** to build new collaborations between special institutions and mainstream schools.

¹⁹ <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0952752S.px/table/tableViewLayout2/>

²⁰ <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0952752S.px/table/tableViewLayout2/>

²¹ Financing policies for inclusive education systems: Country Report: Slovenia <https://hal.science/hal-03895817/document>

Slovenian education already has a well-developed advisory service, which has been an obligation of every school since the school system of Yugoslavia (former common state). It consists of different profiles: social worker, psychologist, special pedagogue, speech therapist or, if necessary, some other profile.

School counsellors provide help and support and can design individual support plans in collaboration with students, their teachers and parents. If the learner's needs are more severe and complex, **external assessment and advisory help** is provided in the fourth step, usually by Counselling Centres for children, young people and parents. These centres are financed by the Ministry of Health, the municipalities and from their own resources (excluding the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture). When an external institution believes a child requires **additional professional help and support** (within the fifth step) the child is presented to the Commission for Guidance.

Learners with SEN have the option to attend:

- Mainstream schools and nursery schools
- Schools offering individual adapted programmes
- Units in mainstream schools that follow the adapted programme
- Units in special institutions.

A large majority of learners with SEN are educated in mainstream schools where they are provided with additional professional assistance as decided by the Guidance Commission (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education)⁸, The latter can take the form of additional hours of assistance to overcome the disabilities, barriers and/or disorders (e.g. pupils who are deaf receive the help of a teacher for the deaf) or learning assistance with the objective of facilitating learning for a specific subject. A permanent or temporary assistant can be assigned to pupils with more severe physical impairments, depending on the severity of their impairments, to assist them during lessons or with other activities during school time.

Learners with complex or severe cognitive disability attend schools with adapted programmes that provide education at a lower level and special education programmes. Formal recognition of practice based on the formation of groups, following the adapted education programme(s) within mainstream schools is increasing.

Pre-primary children have the option to attend **nursery schools providing adapted programmes adjusted to specific disabilities within special institutions**. However, they may also decide to attend

mainstream nursery schools where they are provided with assistance from a relevant professional. Pre-primary children with complex disabilities can access development units within nursery schools that have been recognised in practice as an effective treatment for this group of pre-primary children. The education process within these units also involves a physiotherapist, a work therapist and the occasional involvement of a psychologist. The prescribed maximum number of children in such groups is limited to six, while the group must be constantly supervised by at least two professional members of staff.

Learners with SEN are also provided with the option of having basic **school education provision at their place of residence**. Through the education, a learner must acquire the **same education standard as required by the programme of the public school**. The decision on education at the place of residence is made by the commission that examines the learner and assesses that, due to disabilities, barriers or disorders, a pupil cannot attend education at school. Parents are required to ensure suitable learning and teaching conditions at their home. Assessment and evaluation of the pupil is organised at the school and/or institution where the pupil has been enrolled. Resources for education are provided from the state budget, whereas the Minister of Education adopts the decision on the allocation of funding for each individual school year.

The number of learners assigned to mainstream schools and nursery schools, in co-operation with special institutions upon their first examination by the commission, is constantly increasing. **Special institutions organise in-service teacher training programmes and provide practical advice for work with learners with SEN**. Mobile teachers from specialised institutions and schools with an adapted programme provide for learners with special needs in mainstream schools, providing individual and professional group aid for overcoming disabilities, barriers and disorders.

<https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0953221S.px> (Last accessed July 2023)²²

The Basic School Act (1996, 2008, last revised 2012)²³ allows pupils to transfer between programmes. Basic school pupils can transfer from adapted education programmes to education programmes with professional support offered in mainstream schools. Permanent or temporary transfers of pupils in

²² Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia (SORS) <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0953221S.px> (Last accessed July 2023)

²³ Basic School Act (1996, 2008, last revised 2012)

specific subjects or subject groups are also possible. Learners attending special programmes may, occasionally, also participate in the adapted.

Educational assessment procedure involving a multi-disciplinary team

Under the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, the **SEN Guidance Commission co-ordinates** professional and administrative activities that **qualify a child to be placed in an appropriate educational setting.**

The SEN Guidance Commission prepares an expert opinion, based on the child's direct statement and an interview with the child's legal representative and on pedagogical, special pedagogical, social, psychological, medical and other documentation acquired by the relevant institutions in accordance with personal data protection legislation.

The SEN Guidance Commission reports the professional statement to the National Educational institute, which issues a SEN Guidance Decision. **The multi-disciplinary team** includes members from within and external to the pupil's school. The Commission for the placement of children with special needs in first and second level is appointed depending on the type of disabilities, disorders and deficiencies.

It consists of three members: a special educator in the appropriate field (depending on the child's specific needs), a psychologist and a specialist paediatrician or specialist child psychiatrist or school medicine specialist. As a rule, the team includes those who deal with the child from the perspective of the child's special needs.

There is a legal document which describes the support the pupil is eligible to receive and which is used as the basis for planning. **The SEN Guidance Decision** is a legal document stating that the child may benefit from special education, indicating the most suitable programme and institution, the type and extent of special educational support, the provision of additional human or material resources and, if needed, a reduced class size. The official decision is subject to a formal, regular review process. The SEN Guidance Decision should be reviewed according to the Commission's opinion in order to give each child a chance to be reassessed.

In terms of their other individual skills and abilities, learners may be guided and placed into various education and training programmes. Educators in both pre-primary and primary schools provide the necessary adjustments in their endeavours to attain the required standards of knowledge. Instructions

for working in a specific programme of education and training provide the necessary support to the educators in implementing the curriculum.

Once a year, learners who are part of the individualised education programme with extra professional support take the national examination on general knowledge. The examination material is adapted to the individual learner's type and level of disability or disorder. Primarily, the purpose of the general knowledge examination is to obtain information. The other purpose of the examination is to supply learners and their parents with information about the outcomes, strengths or weaknesses of these learners. The information is also important for teachers and school directors as they can then analyse the outcomes and the reasons behind them and apply the results to improve didactic equipment and ways of teaching and evaluation. In this way, they are able to adapt the instruction and the school. There are also examinations at national level. The results of the 'national knowledge examinations' provide information about the level of attainment of curriculum standards and thereby enable the evaluation of outcomes at the national level.

Educators apply different methods in their work and often appreciate and use tailored information technologies.

The class is also adapted (e.g. the necessary table is added (e.g. kinesthetics table), balls instead of chairs), any other adaptation that is necessary according to the student's limitations. Some schools also have elevators for students who use wheelchairs. Additional support material for learning in class (specific learning difficulties) is also prepared, the writing on the tests is increased, the writing time is extended, the study sheet is printed on coloured sheets, the tests can be divided into individual tasks... The seating order is adjusted, the student sits there, where you can focus on your schoolwork. An additional explanation to the student can also be adjusted (for text assignments, mathematics...), the time for writing assignments, the method of oral examination and assessment of knowledge (if necessary outside the class, in small groups...), the writing and assessment of knowledge in two parts can be extended.

All adjustments are recorded in the child's Individual Program. Adjustments are also made in agreement with the child (the older he is, the more opportunities he has to decide whether he wants certain adjustments or not). Students with learning difficulties are offered adaptations, which are written in the decision and determined within the professional group (didactic, social, cultural and

physical adaptations). The assessment of knowledge is also adjusted (announced oral assessment and adjusted written assessment).

The teacher has a microphone for the hard of hearing student. In the case of a student with Down syndrome, the contents of all subjects are adjusted according to his abilities in individual subjects.

The National Examination Centre and the Evaluation Board at the national level are the chief evaluation institutions within the state that are responsible for evaluating knowledge outcomes. The Board evaluates all innovative education and pilot projects that receive consensus from the most important scientific authorities in the state.

In special institutions for learners with special needs, periodic supervision is carried out, primarily concerning the more challenging population of learners with special needs.

School inspection is the responsibility of the **National Inspectorate for Education and Sport** (Inšpektorat Republike Slovenije za šolstvo in šport), which falls under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. The National Inspectorate is also responsible for inspecting the education of learners with SEN.

Current context and Challenges

As regards access to education by students with disabilities, recent data point out the following trends:

Slightly more children were enrolled in kindergartens.

The percentage of children with SEN in the population of all children enrolled in public pre-primary schools has increased in recent years, from 1.2–1.3% between 2006 and 2011, up to 1.7% in 2015/2016. For such period, the inclusive trend is evident (Source: [FPIES – Slovenia Country Report, p. 23](#)).²⁴

In the school year 2022/23, 86,177 children with SEN were enrolled in kindergartens, i.e. 220 more than in the previous year. The number of children in the first age group (children aged 1 and 2) went up by 1.8%, while in the second age group (children from 3 years of age until entering school) it went slightly down (by 0.5%).

Pre-school education was provided by 992 kindergartens and their units, 869 of them public and 123 privates. A large majority of children (94%) were attending public kindergartens. (Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia (SORS) <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0953221S.px>)²¹

The number of children in basic education continues to grow.

Less than 1% of learners (1,169) were enrolled in six private schools in 2015–2016. In the same period, **1% of learners (1,946) were enrolled in 57 special schools** and almost **1% (1,318) in special educational programmes** (Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia (SORS))²¹.

There has been an increasing trend of including learners with SEN in mainstream basic schools – from 3.33% in 2005/2006 to 6.51% in 2012/2013. The total population of learners with SEN has increased over the years, mostly due to an increasing number of official decisions. The percentage of learners with SEN included in specialised forms of education has remained stable, at 1% of the total population of learners in basic school (Source: [FPIES – Slovenia Country Report, p. 26](#))²⁵.

²⁴ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, pp. 23 (Last updated: 17 December, 2021)

²⁵ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, FPIES Country Report: Slovenia, pp. 26 (Last updated: 17 December, 2021)

In the school year 2011/2012, there were **450 mainstream compulsory schools**, 27 special schools with adopted and special programmes and 16 special institutions for all eight recognised groups of learners with special educational needs (SEN).

In 2022/23, **197,062 children** were enrolled in basic school program **with regular and adapted curriculum**, which is 0.8% more than in the previous year. The number of children in basic education has been growing since 2010/11, when it was the lowest in independent Slovenia (161,046). In the school year 2022/23, 21,059 children entered first grade of basic school.

Compulsory basic education was carried out by 771 basic schools and their subsidiaries and by **48 basic schools with adapted curriculum and institutions for children with special education needs**. In the largest school, 1,140 pupils were attending classes, in the largest school branch 528 and in the smallest branch, only 3. The average class had 19 pupils. In independent and central basic schools, there were on average 21 pupils per class, and in subsidiary schools had only 11 pupils per class. The average number of children per class also varies among statistical regions. It was the lowest in basic schools in the Pomurska and Koroška statistical regions (16) and the highest in the Osrednjeslovenska statistical region (21).

9% of the basic school population were children with special needs. In regular and adapted basic education programmes, there were 18,409 children with special needs, which was 9% of all children in basic school. Most of them (85%) were included in regular programmes with adapted implementation and additional professional assistance and represented 8% of all pupils in regular basic education programmes.

More pupils in upper secondary education. In the school year 2022/23, 77,462 pupils were enrolled in upper secondary education, **2.7% more** than in the previous school year. We expect the number of pupils to continue to increase in the coming years, as there is still a large number of pupils in basic education. This education was carried out by 143 public upper secondary schools, 6 private upper secondary schools and 6 institutions for special needs children.

The fact is that **the number of children with special needs in primary schools has been increasing**. Despite this good trend of recognizing children's disabilities, there remains a certain percentage of parents and teachers who do not recognize it, or identify them too late, which leaves their children out of adapted programs, support provision and further consideration on statistics. (Statistical Office

of Republic of Slovenia (SORS) <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/0953221S.px>²¹

Challenges

Inclusion is certainly not to the same extent in all Slovenian schools. Not all children with disabilities receive hours of additional professional help and necessary adjustments, and as a result, they do not have an equal status in education. Even teachers often do not feel competent in teaching a child with special needs, or they label the students as lazy, difficult, etc. Inclusion is certainly not to the same extent in all Slovenian schools.

Although most of the schools participating in the research accept pupils with learning difficulties (lesser difficulties), many are not sufficiently equipped to teach children with mobility issues, as the school buildings are not customized for the use of a wheelchair. Most schools have steps and do not have an elevator, which makes moving for people using a wheelchair impossible by themselves. If a pupil has sensorial (sight, hearing) impairments, they receive support in the form of assistants that helps with adjusting and spends most of the time with them. The expenses are covered by the government. In some places problems occur when the classes are small and the number of pupils is high (Act inclusive reach 2023)²⁶.

Most learners attending special institutions have one or more disabilities aside from their main one. Thus, they require specially adapted forms of work, healthcare and rehabilitation, none of which can be provided during inclusion in mainstream schools.

There are no national programs for parents, there is training provided by parenting movements such as: Sožitje, Down syndrome Association, Sonček Association, Združenje za Avtizem... According to education legislation, learners with special educational needs (SEN) and/or their parents are entitled to certain financial support.

At some schools, acceptance by students is also a problem. Space is also a problem, as in some schools the spaces are small and there are many students in them. The majority of students are in primary school up to the 5th class, after which they mostly go to a specialized school.

Table: Number of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties per class in research schools (Act inclusive research 2023)²⁶.

²⁶ Act inclusive research 2023

Table 2: Number of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties per class in research schools (Act inclusive research 2023)²⁶.

Class	Ljubljana	Cven
1.	3	3
2.	3	3
3.	7	3
4.	12	2
5.	6	1
6.	8	0
7.	9	0
8.	8	0
9.	12	0
Total	68	12

Source: Act inclusive research 2023²⁶

Some general schools also have a school with an adapted program and a lower educational standard in the same building. Elsewhere, special schools are a branch school of a general school. According to school legislation, there can be a maximum of three students with specific learning difficulties or other adaptations in each section of the school.

- Schools are not adapted to the use of wheelchairs, have no elevators, signs for the blind, etc.
- The number of pupils in class is too high, as many as 28 or 29 students in class can lead to poor class execution if someone needs individual help.
- The teacher doesn't have appropriate training as they are not taught much about this problematic in the time of study.
- There are no didactic accessories, workbooks or materials for adapted class.
- In general, there are many prejudices from the teachers' side and a poor knowledge of pupils needs in this field of education.

- System of grading students with adjusted programme is not in force, the standard of knowledge is the same for all attendees, however pupils in higher grades mostly do not reach them.
- The learning plan is not flexible and does not allow any adaptations.

Interviewed teachers reported on preparation to include new students: they plan specific sessions with students to talk about disabilities and/or learning difficulties for example, driving students in wheelchairs between obstacles, guiding students around school blindfolded, participating in a conversation where some students wear earplugs to make their hearing worse... The counselling service often conducts workshops and presentations on disabilities, and interviews take place during class hours. Some schools do not have specific classes, but talk a lot about differences between people, duties and rights, and protecting the rights of all people in the subject they teach. Within the framework of the hours, we also talk about individuals who have learning difficulties or are disabled. The lessons are mainly focused on learning problems. Questionnaires on learning styles and different learning techniques are used depending on the individual learning style, a handbook for class lessons, Pearl seekers, Reason program... lessons are also conducted by the school counselling service, if necessary, in the department. They talk a lot about being different. They use Red Cross materials. The school also has a friendship day and cooperates with a nearby school with an adapted program.

Some schools talk about it more rarely. However, individual teachers discuss this topic with their students during class. They also conduct a learning to learn workshop.

They usually like such classes, they receive them very positively, with understanding and empathy. Unfortunately, many times the transfer of knowledge into practice is not successful for everyone. Some students already know something about it, while others are hearing things for the first time and are incomprehensible to them at first. At first, they react with amazement, what is this learning to learn, but later most of them listen to the topic being discussed.

Sometimes they (schools) collaborate with external partners (Association of the Disabled, parents' associations, schools with an adapted program...), but not always.

Students results

They are mostly familiar with people with disabilities. They mostly perceive people with disabilities as a person using a wheelchair (physical disability). Children describe them as a person who cannot move

by themselves. They are familiar with other more common groups such as people with Down syndrome, autists, restlessness (ADHD). Since Slovenia has still separate special schools for children with learning difficulties, they may also come across as people who are not successful at learning or do not learn much in the eyes of children included in the research.

Most of the children has communicated with people with disabilities as some pupils meet them in the schools they attend together. People with disabilities visiting schools are ones with difficulties in movement, deaf, blind and a lower number of those with other difficulties. Some have experience from home, but most of those are handicapped grandfather and grandmother or neighbours.

Most of the group did not experience bullying or other forms of threat towards persons with disabilities, but informed that if they did, they would tell a teacher or a counsellor at school or parents at home.

Annexes

The following definitions of a child with special needs are taken from the law on guidance of a child with special needs.

❖ Children with deficits in individual areas of learning are children in whom, due to known or unknown disturbances in the functioning of the central nervous system, delays in development occur in relation to attention, memorization, thinking, coordination, communication, the development of social skills and emotional maturation and in which pronounced problems are manifested in relation to reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic. Deficits in individual areas of learning last a lifetime and affect learning and behavior.

❖ Children with speech-language disorders Children with speech-language disorders have disorders in acquisition and understanding and speech expression that are not the result of hearing loss. Disturbances are manifested in the understanding of speech and in speech-language expression from mild retardation to underdevelopment. Specific disorders in the area of understanding, structuring, processing and expression are also manifested in a discrepancy with verbal and non-verbal abilities. Secondary disorders in speech and language communication are also manifested in the area of

reading and writing and in learning as a whole. Functional reading and writing skills may be impaired, ranging from mild retardation to functional illiteracy.

❖ Mobility impaired children have congenital or acquired defects, damage to the locomotor apparatus, central or peripheral nervous system. Mobility disability is reflected in the form of functional and movement disorders.

❖ Long-term sick children are children with long-term or chronic disorders and illnesses that prevent children from school work. A long-term illness is any illness that does not develop within three months. Long-term diseases include cardiology, endocrinology, gastroenterology, allergy, rheumatology, nephrology, pulmonology, oncology, hematology, dermatology, psychiatric and neurological diseases (e.g. epilepsy), autoimmune disorders and eating disorders.

❖ Children with emotional and behavioral disorders are children with dissocial behavior that is intense, repeated and more permanent and is manifested by unsuccessful social integration. A child's dissocial behavior can be an external or internal state and is manifested by symptoms such as aggressive behavior, auto-aggressive behavior, alcohol and drug use, destruction of other people's property, running away from home, emotional disturbances.

❖ Children with intellectual disabilities are characterized by:

- a reduced general or specific level of intelligence,
- lower abilities in the cognitive, speech, motor and social areas,
- a lack of skills, which is reflected in the discrepancy between their mental and chronological age...

Depending on the intellectual disability, we distinguish between:

a) children with a light intellectual disability,

b) children with a mild intellectual disability,

c) children with a moderate intellectual disability,

d) children with a severe intellectual disability. ...

- ❖ Blind or partially sighted children are those who have a vision, eye or visual field defect.
- ❖ Deaf or hard of hearing children have impairments in areas involving the ear, its structures and functions related to it.
- ❖ Children with autistic disorders show deficits, obstacles or disorders in the field of social communication and social interaction. Disorders are manifested as repetitive and stereotyped movements, stereotyped speech, rigidity in opinion and behavior, tendency to ritual and preoccupation with a certain area of interest.
- ❖ Children with multiple disabilities are those children with special needs who have several deficits, obstacles or disorders at the same time, and their primary disability is to be defined.

❖ **Legal entitlement to preschool education** Children in Slovenia are legally entitled to a place in a kindergarten (*vrtec*) from the age of 11 months (end of childcare leave) to the age of compulsory schooling. The steering document of public pre-school education is the Kindergarten curriculum.

❖ **Extended basic school programme** All basic schools have to provide free-of-charge non-compulsory activities of the extended programme, namely remedial and supplementary lessons, extracurricular interest activities, non-compulsory optional subjects, as well as morning care (grade 1) and after-school classes (grades 1 to 5). A wide majority of pupils attend the activities. The programme is provided by qualified teachers in line with officially adopted educational guidelines and concepts.

❖ **National assessment** At the end of grades 6 and 9, pupils undertake the compulsory national assessment in three subjects. The main objective is to improve the quality of teaching and learning, thereby also ensuring a higher quality of knowledge and competences of pupils.

Results do not influence the marks or have any immediate impact on the educational path of pupils. The future status and impact of the national assessment are currently under debate.

❖ **Music education** A well-developed network of publicly funded music schools provides music and ballet lessons to enthusiastic pupils who in turn do not have to take one of two compulsory optional subjects.

❖ **Inclusive approach for SEN children** The provision of special needs education in Slovenia embraces the multi-track approach to inclusion: kindergartens and schools tend to children with special needs by way of inclusion and special classes, and there are special education institutions, as well.

❖ **Late tracking** Tracking of students begins in upper secondary education, typically at the age of 15. Students may choose freely among general and vocational programmes. If the number of candidates exceeds the number of places, schools may limit enrolment in the first year.

❖ **High-stakes exams at the end of upper secondary education** At the end of upper secondary education, students take final exams. In two and three-year vocational programmes, the student completes their studies with a **school leaving examination**. At successfully completing the end of four years upper secondary general and technical education programme, students take general *matura* or *vocational matura*. *Matura* is a **national external examination**. Students who pass *matura* may enroll in tertiary study programmes.

❖ **Officially recognised informal adult education programmes** There is considerable diversity of adult education programmes and institutions. Besides formal programmes, there are also officially recognized informal programmes targeted at special groups of adults, in particular those who need to improve their basic competences or literacy skills or who are trying to integrate in society and need help.

❖ **Tertiary education** In Slovenia, almost half of all people aged 19 to 24 is enrolled in tertiary education. Majority of them (75.6 % in 2021/22) do not pay tuition fees. The public agency for quality assurance in higher education (SQAA) was founded in 2009 and Registered in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (EQUAR) in 2013. SQAA

is a part of the European system of quality assurance in higher education since 2013, its roles include accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes.

The groups of learners with SEN integrated in mainstream schools are as follows:

- Learners with disabilities in specific fields of education who could be very successful with adjustments and additional assistance.
- Learners with emotional and behavioural problems, excluding learners who, in addition to their emotional and behavioural disabilities, have additional problems (mental problems, reduced cognitive skills) and attend schools within a specialised institution; such problems are mainly the result of a dysfunctional domestic environment.
- Learners with a long-term illness who, during their hospital treatment, attend the hospital school – a unit of a mainstream school, located in the same city as the hospital.
- Learners with speech and language problems, provided that such disabilities are not too severe (autism); in such cases learners attend special institutions for people who are deaf or schools offering an adapted programme.
- Learners with physical disabilities attending education at an institution that corresponds to their intellectual abilities, if their movement is heavily restricted or they suffer from any other disability that requires medical rehabilitation, or they are integrated into special institutions.
- Most learners who are deaf or learners with hearing impairments and learners who are blind or learners with visual impairments. Only learners who suffer from an additional disability, in addition to their main disability, are integrated into specialised institutions.

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