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# European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education

Key Messages and Findings (2014 / 2016)

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**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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## **Key Messages and Findings (2014 / 2016)**



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## PREAMBLE

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For over 20 years, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) has served as a collaborative body on inclusive education policy issues for its member countries. Data collection is an integral part of this work. Whereas it initially focused upon learners with special educational needs (SEN), it is now broadening its scope and considering all learners within inclusive education systems.

The current [European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education](#) (EASIE) work involves collecting, presenting and analysing national data (European Agency, no date-a). The data is linked to agreed indicators that inform key policy questions for inclusive education. All data is provided by national-level [data experts](#) (European Agency, no date-b).

The available datasets cover 30 countries and provide insights into:

- access to mainstream education;
- access to inclusive education;
- placement of learners identified as having an official decision of SEN.

They incorporate breakdowns by gender and by [International Standard Classification of Education](#) (ISCED) level (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2011).

This short report aims to highlight the key messages and main findings from the EASIE work to date. Two [EASIE datasets](#) (European Agency, no date-c) and [Cross-Country Reports](#) are currently available:

- 2014, based on the 2012/2013 school year (European Agency, 2017)
- 2016, based on the 2014/2015 school year (European Agency, 2018a).

In addition to these reports, the full datasets are available upon request from the Agency Secretariat ([secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)) as Excel files that can be interrogated in different ways.

This report does not provide a detailed statistical analysis of the data or cover all forms of data analysis that may be possible using the dataset. Rather, it provides an overarching 'interpretation' of the 2014 and 2016 datasets. This is in order to highlight key messages and emerging findings across the datasets that are important for the Agency member countries' work.

The next section presents the **10 [key messages](#) emerging from the 2014 and 2016 EASIE work to date.**

The subsequent section presents the **main findings in relation to [five equity issues](#)** that the EASIE work has been developed to examine. Each of these is framed as a main question underpinning the equity issue.

The report's final section presents the [background to the overall EASIE work](#).



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We hope that policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and other system stakeholders will find the key messages and main findings from the recent EASIE work of interest to their collective work in developing more inclusive systems of education.

**Cor J.W. Meijer**

**Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



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## KEY MESSAGES

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Looking across the 2014 and 2016 datasets, 10 key messages can be identified:

- 1** Overall, the available data supports the assertion from other areas of Agency work that inclusive education is a policy vision for all Agency member countries. All countries provide inclusive education opportunities for some learners with an official decision of special educational needs (SEN). However, an examination of placement options and rates shows that, in relation to learners with an official decision of SEN, member countries are implementing this vision in different ways and to different extents.
  
- 2** Looking at countries' definitions of an 'official decision of SEN' – please refer to the [country background information](#) (European Agency, no date-c) – all countries identify different groups of learners as having SEN. Learners with an official decision of SEN include learners with disabilities as defined by the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006), but also other groups of learners who have special/additional educational needs that require extra support and resources. This is one of the main reasons why there are so many differences between countries' data and why comparisons between countries are complex – and may be impossible in some respects.
  
- 3** The identification rates of learners with an 'official decision of SEN' differ greatly across all countries. This data reflects country differences in legislation and policies for identifying learners with SEN, as presented and discussed in other areas of Agency work.
  
- 4** None of the countries has a fully inclusive system where 100% of learners attend mainstream classes and are educated with their peers for at least 80% of their time, in line with the EASIE placement benchmark. All countries use different forms of separate specialist provision – schools, classes and/or units, as well as different forms of non-school-based education (i.e. home-schooling or provision maintained by other sectors). The range of inclusive placements in countries is roughly between 92% and 99.5%. This data provides a snapshot of 'how close' countries are to a fully inclusive system.



- 5** The rates of placement in separate, non-mainstream provision (separate special schools, classes, units and non-formal education programmes) differ across all countries. This data reflects country differences in legislation and policies for educational support and provision, again as discussed and presented in other areas of Agency work.
  
- 6** In all countries, about twice as many boys as girls are identified as having a special educational need requiring an official decision of SEN. This 2:1 ratio is reflected in the placement rates of boys and girls in different settings that is apparent in most countries.
  
- 7** There is a very clear pattern across all countries in relation to gender distribution. However, regarding ISCED level distribution, it is exactly the opposite: no clear patterns are immediately discernible. There is substantial variation among countries in the proportion of learners within the two ISCED levels. This indicates that countries identify learners requiring an official decision in different ways and during different stages of their schooling.
  
- 8** The situation of learners who are out of school for different reasons and under different circumstances (i.e. formally enrolled in education but do not attend, or not enrolled in any form of education) is unclear in almost all countries. This requires further examination, as data for most countries is often limited or missing.
  
- 9** Trend data available from all countries shows no overall average change in the identification rates of learners with an official decision of SEN. However, some individual countries have clear increases in the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN.
  
- 10** Trend data available from all countries also shows that, on average, there is a negligible decrease in the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings (special classes and schools).



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## FIVE EQUITY ISSUES

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This section presents the main findings from 2014 and 2016 in relation to the **five equity issues** the EASIE work has been developed to examine. These equity issues are:

1. Access to mainstream education
2. Access to inclusive education
3. Placement of learners with an official decision of SEN
4. Gender breakdowns of data on placement of learners with an official decision of SEN
5. ISCED level breakdowns of data on placement of learners with an official decision of SEN.

Each of these issues is framed as a main question underpinning the equity issue. The section is then structured around the data analysis indicators that attempt to answer the question. The indicators discussed within each section follow the same numbering as the indicators in the 2014 and 2016 [Cross-Country Reports](#) (European Agency, 2017; 2018a).

For more detailed information about any given indicator, please refer to the Cross-Country Reports. They explain what each indicator is, the calculation method used, the countries included and the outcome of the indicator. They contain charts and tables presenting all available country data for each indicator.

For seven indicators that focus upon the whole school population, findings relating to trends in the data are presented. These findings look at differences between total averages (percentages) in data from 2014 and 2016. Trend data is presented as a percentage point indicating the increase or decrease between the two datasets. It is important to note that this trend data is only based on countries that have data for both 2014 and 2016.

For all of the indicators, the findings in relation to the main questions and issues are presented in textboxes.

### 1. What proportion of learners go to mainstream school?

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This issue focuses upon learners' access to mainstream education.

Indicator 1.1 looks at enrolment rates in **mainstream** education – that is, the percentage of learners enrolled in all mainstream settings, calculated against the number of learners enrolled in all educational settings.

The data provided focuses upon learners who are, or who are not, in mainstream educational settings.

In most countries, enrolment in mainstream education implies placement in a mainstream class or placement in a separate special class within a mainstream school. Learners who are not in mainstream settings are in fully separate special schools, non-formal education run by health or social services, etc., or are out-of-school learners.



2014 data is available from 28 countries. Across the 28 countries, the enrolment rate in mainstream education ranges from 93.44% to 99.88%; the total average for the 28 countries is 97.36%.

2016 data is available from 29 countries. Across the 29 countries, the enrolment rate in mainstream education ranges from 92.02% to 99.97%; the total average for the 29 countries is 98.64%.

The data available shows that for all countries, the vast majority of learners are educated in mainstream schools, but not all learners attend mainstream schools.

No country has full mainstream enrolment.

### **Trends in the data on learners' access to mainstream education**

Data from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 25 countries. Across the 25 countries, there was an average increase of just over 1 percentage point in the enrolment rate in mainstream education between 2014 and 2016.

The data indicates that the overall enrolment rate in mainstream education was just over 1 percentage point higher in 2016 compared to 2014.

## **2. What proportion of learners spend the majority of their time with their peers in mainstream classrooms?**

This issue focuses upon all learners' access to inclusive education.

Indicator 1.2 looks at the enrolment rate in **inclusive** education – that is, the percentage of learners identified as spending at least 80% of their time in a mainstream classroom with their peers, calculated against the number of learners enrolled in all educational settings.

The data shows learners who are, or who are not, in inclusive education, in line with the EASIE 80% time placement benchmark.

In most countries, enrolment in inclusive education implies placement in a mainstream class in line with the 80% time placement benchmark, or the various proxies for this benchmark (please refer to the operational definition of an [inclusive setting](#) in the 'Important dimensions within EASIE data collection work' section for more information).

Learners who are not in inclusive settings are in separate classes in mainstream schools, fully separate special schools, non-formal education run by health or social services, etc., or are out of formal education.

2014 data is available from 26 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 93.47% to 99.88%; the total average for the 26 countries is 97.54%.



2016 data is available from 28 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 92.02% to 99.97%; the total average for the 28 countries is 98.19%.

The available data indicates that none of the participating countries has 100% enrolment in inclusive settings. All countries use some form of fully separate specialist provision (separate schools and units), as well as separate classes in mainstream schools.

### Trends in the data on learners' access to inclusive education

Data from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 23 countries. Across the 23 countries, there was a negligible average increase (0.14 of a percentage point) in enrolment in inclusive education.

The data indicates that, between 2014 and 2016, there was an overall negligible increase in the proportion of learners who spend the majority of their time with their peers in mainstream classrooms.

## 3. Where are learners with an official decision of SEN placed for their education?

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This issue focuses upon where learners with an official decision of SEN are placed for their education, for the majority of their time (80% or more).

However, a main precursor to this is an examination of the **identification rates** of learners with an official decision of SEN. Indicator 3a.1 looks at this, focusing on the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 30 countries. The identification rates range from 1.11% to 17.47%. The average across the countries is 4.53%.

2016 data is available from 30 countries. The identification rates range from 1.06% to 20.50%. The average across the countries is 4.44%.

There are marked differences in the numbers and rates of learners identified as having a special educational need (including a disability) that requires some form of additional provision. This reflects differences in countries' policies and practices for education generally and for special education specifically.

The differences in identification rates can largely be explained by differences in assessment procedures and financing mechanisms, rather than by actual incidence of different forms of SEN or disability requiring an official decision of SEN.



## Trends in the data on identification rates of learners with an official decision of SEN

Data from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 29 countries. Across the 29 countries, the average proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN was about the same (0.04 of a percentage point difference) in 2014 as in 2016.

The data indicates that there was no overall change in the identification rate of learners with an official decision of SEN across all the countries, but some individual countries had noticeable variations.

The distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN can be examined in two ways:

1. Placement in comparison to the whole school population (i.e. all learners)
2. Placement in comparison to the population of learners with an official decision of SEN.

Each of these possibilities is considered separately below.

### Placement in comparison to the whole school population

Indicator 3b.1 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive education, based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 28 countries. The percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive settings ranges from 0.14% to 16.02%; the total average for the 28 countries is 2.36%.

2016 data is available from 28 countries. The percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive settings ranges from 0.12% to 19.05%; the total average for the 28 countries is 2.73%.

When looking at this data in comparison with the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population, it can be seen that for many countries with the highest SEN identification rates, most of those learners are placed in inclusive settings.

Indicator 3b.2 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special classes, based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 24 countries. The placement range is from 0.09% to 3.64%. A total average of 0.56% of learners with an official decision of SEN are educated in separate special classes in mainstream schools.

2016 data is available from 24 countries. The placement range is from 0.07% to 3.70%. A total average of 0.53% of learners with an official decision of SEN are educated in separate special classes in mainstream schools.



In all countries, there are possibilities for learners to be enrolled in a mainstream school, but they may spend the majority of their time away from their peers.

An important point to note here is that this aspect may be under-reported. Many countries state that it is difficult to provide data on learners in separate classes in mainstream schools. Data on special schools is more readily available in most countries providing data.

Indicator 3b.3 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools, based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 30 countries. The placement range is from 0.09% to 7.06%. A total average of 1.82% of learners are educated in separate special schools.

2016 data is available from 30 countries. The placement range is from 0.03% to 7.98%. A total average of 1.54% of learners are educated in separate special schools.

In all countries, there are possibilities for learners to be enrolled in separate special schools, where they spend the majority of their time away from their peers.

The wide range of special school placement rates indicates that very different placement procedures and structures are being used in different countries for learners with an official decision of SEN.

Indicator 3b.4 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in non-formal educational settings, based on the enrolled school population. Only four countries could provide data for this indicator. As a result, no clear findings emerge, so it is not considered here. (The '[Points to note](#)' section of this report refers to the issue of unavailable data.)

Indicator 3b.5 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings (i.e. special schools and classes), based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 24 countries. Placement in fully separate settings ranges from 0.36% to 6.28%, with a total average across the 24 countries of 1.67%.

2016 data is available from 24 countries. Placement in fully separate settings ranges from 0.55% to 5.88%, with a total average across the 24 countries of 1.62%.

Across all countries, for some learners – particularly those with complex and severe special needs and/or disabilities – separate specialist provision is still the educational placement that ensures their right to education, albeit not an inclusive education.



## **Trends in the data on placement of learners with an official decision of SEN in comparison to the whole school population**

Data for Indicator 3b.1 from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 25 countries. Across the 25 countries, there was a slight average increase (0.27 of a percentage point) in the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive settings between 2014 and 2016.

The data indicates that there was an overall slight average increase in learners with an official decision of SEN who are placed in inclusive settings.

Data for Indicator 3b.2 in both 2014 and 2016 is available for 23 countries. Across the 23 countries, the average proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in special classes was almost unchanged (0.04 of a percentage point decrease) between 2014 and 2016.

The data indicates that the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN who are placed in special classes was almost unchanged.

Data for Indicator 3b.3 from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 28 countries. Across the 28 countries, the average proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools was about the same (0.06 of a percentage point decrease) for 2014 and 2016.

The data indicates that the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN who are placed in special schools was almost unchanged.

Data for Indicator 3b.5 from both 2014 and 2016 is available for 23 countries. Across the 23 countries, there was a negligible decrease (0.05 of a percentage point) in the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings between 2014 and 2016.

The data indicates that there was a negligible decrease in the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings.

## **Placement in comparison to the population of learners with an official decision of SEN**

Indicator 3c.1 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive education, based on the population of learners with SEN.



2014 data is available from 28 countries, with a range from 3.46% to 98.18% and a total average of 52.68%.

2016 data is available from 28 countries, with a range from 4.98% to 99.21% and a total average of 60.56%.

The placement range of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive education is quite extensive. Again, this indicates that countries take very different approaches to providing education for learners identified as having SEN.

Across the countries, over half of all learners identified as having SEN are placed in inclusive settings – that is, a mainstream class – for more than 80% of the time.

Indicator 3c.2 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special classes, based on the population of learners with SEN.

2014 data is available from 24 countries, with a range from 1.89% to 59.69% and a total average of 13.16%.

2016 data is available from 24 countries, with a range from 2.15% to 55.34% and a total average of 11.91%.

Countries appear to differ a lot in the extent to which they use special classes as a placement option for learners with SEN.

In comparison to other forms of placement (i.e. inclusive education or special schools), this form of placement is not as widespread. However, as noted earlier, this data may be under-reported as many countries indicate it is difficult for them to provide reliable data on this indicator.

Indicator 3c.3 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools, based on the population of learners with SEN.

2014 data is available from 30 countries, with a range from 1.74% to 95.73% and a total average of 40.04%.

2016 data is available from 30 countries, with a range from 0.79% to 100.00% and a total average of 34.76%.



Countries report that the data on learners with SEN relating to this indicator is the most reliable. It is also available from all countries participating in the data collection exercises.

There is an extensive range in approaches to using this placement option – from below 1% to nearly 100% of learners with an official decision of SEN being placed in special schools. Once again, this reflects the wide range of policy and provision approaches across countries.

Indicator 3c.4 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in non-formal educational settings, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN. Only four countries could provide data for this indicator. As a result, no clear findings emerge, so it is not considered here. The '[Points to note](#)' section of this report discusses the issue of unavailable data.

Indicator 3c.5 looks at the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings (i.e. special schools and classes), based on the population of learners with SEN.

2014 data is available from 24 countries, with a range from 7.11% to 100% and a total average of 39.05%.

2016 data is available from 24 countries, with a range from 7.10% to 100%<sup>1</sup> and a total average of 36.56%.

The range of separate educational placements in countries differs greatly. Nevertheless, in all countries providing data, there are some learners whose right to an inclusive education with their peers is not being met.

Across the participating countries, nearly 40% of learners with an official decision of SEN are educated in separate, non-inclusive settings.

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<sup>1</sup> For both the 2014 and 2016 datasets, the data of 100% for one country included in this indicator should be viewed as an outlier. This is because data on learners with an official decision of SEN is only available for special classes and special schools and not for any form of inclusive placement.



## 4. What are the differences in the identification rates and placement rates of girls and boys with an official decision of SEN?

Within the data collection, for learners with an official decision of SEN, gender breakdowns are provided in relation to:

- identification rates;
- the distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population;
- the distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN.

The gender breakdown for the identification rates of learners with an official decision of SEN is looked at through Indicator 3a.1. This indicator focuses on the percentage of boy/girl learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population.

2014 data is available from 23 countries. The SEN identification rate for boys ranges from 0.68% to 10.99%, with a total average of 2.86%. The SEN identification rate for girls ranges from 0.43% to 6.48%, with a total average of 1.37%.

2016 data is available from 26 countries. The SEN identification rate for boys ranges from 0.64% to 12.69%, with a total average of 2.99%. The SEN identification rate for girls ranges from 0.42% to 7.82%, with a total average of 1.45%.

In addition to the gender breakdown, in 2016, the gender distribution was examined. This was based on the total number of boy/girl learners with an official decision of SEN, in relation to the total population of learners with an official decision of SEN.

2016 data is available from 26 countries. The distribution among boys ranges from 60.16% to 73.50%, with a total average of 67.35%. Among girls, the total average is 32.65% and the distribution ranges from 26.50% to 39.84%.

The boy-to-girl identification ratio in countries is 2:1. The population of learners with an official decision of SEN is made up of 68% boys and 32% girls.

Different numbers of countries can provide data for the 10 indicators relating to gender breakdowns for the placement of learners with an official decision of SEN in different settings (inclusive education, special classes, special schools, non-formal education, all separate settings).

Looking across all these indicators shows that the gender distribution is roughly the same for all indicators: around two-thirds of learners with an official decision of SEN across different settings are boys, while about one-third are girls. This finding is evident for indicators based on the whole school population, as well as the population of learners with an official decision of SEN.



The placement ratios in all settings (inclusive education, special classes, special schools and all separate settings) are also 2:1. That is, across all countries, approximately twice as many boys as girls are in the different placements.

This finding appears to indicate that all countries' educational systems identify boys as having SEN to a greater extent than girls.

The identification ratio of 2:1 is mirrored in placement ratios: twice as many boys with an official decision of SEN are placed in inclusive education, special classes or special schools, compared to girls.

## 5. What are the differences in the identification rates and placement rates of learners between ISCED 1 and 2?

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Two elements of EASIE data collection consider ISCED issues:

- Age sample data provided in Table 2
- ISCED levels 1 and 2 breakdowns provided in Table 3.

The age sample data identifies the population of learners of the specific ages of 9 years (corresponding with the typical ISCED 1 age range for most countries) and 15 years (corresponding with the typical ISCED 2 age range for most countries). These two ages also correspond with European Union-level data collection on school drop-out rates.

Indicator 2.1 provides age sample data for learners of 9 years of age. Indicator 2.2 provides age sample data for 15-year-old learners. Both indicators relate to enrolment rates in mainstream education, i.e. the percentage of learners of a specific age enrolled in all mainstream settings, calculated against the number of learners of the specific age enrolled in all educational settings.

The data focuses upon 9- and 15-year-old learners who are, or who are not, in mainstream education. It provides 'age snapshots' of the ISCED levels, as they are within the typical ISCED age ranges for nearly all countries.

For 9-year-olds, 2014 data is available from 25 countries. The enrolment rate in mainstream education for 9-year-olds ranges from 93.27% to 100.00% and the total average is 98.10%.

For 9-year-olds, 2016 data is available from 27 countries. The enrolment rate in mainstream education for 9-year-olds ranges from 93.79% to 99.98% and the total average is 98.54%.

For 15-year-olds, 2014 data is available from 23 countries. The enrolment rate in mainstream education for 15-year-olds ranges from 88.29% to 99.81% and the total average is 98.18%.

For 15-year-olds, 2016 data is available from 26 countries. The enrolment rate in mainstream education for 15-year-olds ranges from 88.23% to 99.99% and the total average is 97.07%.



For all countries, the vast majority of 9-year-old learners are educated in mainstream schools, but not all. For all countries, the vast majority of 15-year-olds are educated in mainstream schools, but not all. No country has full mainstream enrolment for learners of 15 years of age.

In looking at the age sample data in relation to the ISCED levels, the mainstream enrolment rates at ISCED levels 1 and 2 are roughly the same.

Indicators 2.3 and 2.4 examine the age sample enrolment rate in inclusive education for 9- and 15-year-olds (respectively), i.e. the percentage of learners of the specific ages identified as spending at least 80% of their time in a mainstream classroom with their peers, calculated against the number of learners of the specific age enrolled in all educational settings.

For 9-year-olds, 2014 data is available from 21 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 93.27% to 100.00% and the total average is 98.18%.

For 9-year-olds, 2016 data is available from 22 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 93.79% to 99.98% and the total average is 98.67%.

For 15-year-olds, 2014 data is available from 20 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 92.00% to 99.79%; the total average for the 20 countries is 97.88%.

For 15-year-olds, 2016 data is available from 21 countries. The inclusive enrolment rates range from 78.78% to 99.99%; the total average for the 21 countries is 98.45%.

Most countries educate at least some 9-year-old learners in some form of non-inclusive setting. Most countries have separate specialist provision (separate schools and units), as well as separate classes in mainstream schools, for ISCED level 1 programmes.

None of the participating countries has 100% enrolment in inclusive settings for 15-year-olds. All countries use some form of separate specialist provision (separate schools and units), as well as separate classes in mainstream schools, for ISCED level 2 programmes.

In looking at the age sample data in relation to the ISCED levels, the enrolment rates in inclusive education at ISCED levels 1 and 2 are roughly the same.

Within the data collection, for learners with an official decision of SEN, ISCED level 1 and 2 breakdowns are also provided in relation to:

- identification rates;
- the distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population;



- the distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN.

In relation to identification rates, 2014 data is available from 29 countries:

In ISCED 1, the SEN identification rate ranges from 0.62% to 10.89%; the total average for 29 countries is 2.62%.

In ISCED 2, the SEN identification rate ranges from 0.50% to 6.82%; the total average for 29 countries is 2.23%.

In relation to identification rates, 2016 data is available from 30 countries:

In ISCED 1, the SEN identification rate ranges from 0.62% to 12.57%; the total average for 30 countries is 2.37%.

In ISCED 2, the SEN identification rate ranges from 0.45% to 7.94%; the total average for 30 countries is 2.07%.

In addition to the ISCED breakdowns, the ISCED distribution within ISCED levels is examined. This is based on the total number of learners in ISCED 1/ISCED 2 identified as having an official decision of SEN, in relation to the total school population within each ISCED level.

2016 data is available for 30 countries. The total average for ISCED 1 is 4.12%, with a range from 0.90% to 19.45%. For ISCED 2, the total average is 4.86%, with a range from 1.42% to 22.48%.

The proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in ISCED 1 compared to ISCED 2 differs substantially among countries. In most countries, the proportion increases from ISCED 1 to ISCED 2.

One possible explanation is that many learners in these countries retain their 'label' as requiring support throughout their school career. In addition, there are other learners latterly identified as requiring an official decision of SEN in ISCED 2.

It should be noted that this is not the pattern for all countries: for a few countries, there are more learners with an official decision of SEN in ISCED 1.

Different numbers of countries can provide data for the 10 indicators relating to ISCED breakdowns for the placement of learners with an official decision of SEN in different settings (inclusive education, special classes, special schools, non-formal education, all separate settings).



Looking across all the available indicators, despite differences and different patterns among countries, the proportion of learners with an official decision of SEN in ISCED levels 1 and 2 across all settings does not change to any great degree. The overall average enrolment rate in inclusive settings and special classes is slightly higher in ISCED 1 than ISCED 2. Only for special schools is this slight variation reversed, with proportionally more learners in special schools in ISCED 2 than in ISCED 1.

However, in looking at the combined data for learners in all separate special settings – and while acknowledging there are differences among countries – it can be seen that there are more learners in fully separate placements in ISCED level 1 than in ISCED level 2.



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## BACKGROUND TO THE EASIE WORK

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For over 20 years, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) has served as a collaborative body on inclusive education policy issues for its member countries (currently covering 35 jurisdictions in 31 member countries).

The European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE) data collection work builds upon a series of Agency activities. The Agency first collected comparative quantitative data on the numbers of learners identified as having special educational needs (SEN) in 17 Agency member countries in 1999. This work was an activity under the evaluation of the European Commission's Socrates programme. The information collected in 1999 was reviewed and considered useful reference material for Agency country representatives. A decision was taken to regularly collect quantitative data on the numbers of learners identified as having SEN and where they were educated. Such data has been collected by Agency member country representatives and published by the Agency every two years since 2002. For more details, please refer to the [EASIE Methodology Report](#) (European Agency, 2016), covering the 2014 and 2016 data collection work<sup>2</sup>, and the various [Special Needs Education Country Data publications](#) (European Agency, 2009; 2010; 2012).

The EASIE data collection is a long-term, incremental Agency activity. It aims to inform learner rights and educational system quality and effectiveness issues, as outlined within the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (United Nations, 1989) and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (United Nations, 2006), as well as the European Union [strategic objectives for Education and Training](#) (ET 2020) (Publications Office of the European Union, 2016).

### Data coverage

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The EASIE work represents a shift in the emphasis of Agency data collection. It moves away from a sole focus on learners with SEN and placement in separate, segregated settings, towards a focus on all learners in compulsory education and enrolment in all settings – inclusive and separate. In addition, the EASIE data provides a wider range of indicators relating to access to inclusive education, including breakdowns by gender and ISCED programmes – currently ISCED levels 1 and 2.

The EASIE data collection covers:

- the compulsory school age range population in ISCED levels 1 and 2 (the number of learners in a given age range enrolled in schools);
- all sectors of compulsory education (state, independent and private);
- all possible educational placements (mainstream schools, special classes and units and special schools);

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<sup>2</sup> An updated version of the EASIE Methodology Report has been prepared to accompany the 2018 data collection exercise (European Agency, 2018b).



- non-formal education (e.g. provision maintained by non-education sectors, such as health or social services);
- learners out of any kind of educational provision.

This report examines the data available from all countries involved in the data collection exercises.

The 2014 dataset covers data provided by 30 countries: Belgium (Flemish community), Belgium (French community), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) and United Kingdom (Wales).

The 2016 dataset also covers data provided by 30 countries, but not the same countries: Belgium (Flemish community), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) and United Kingdom (Wales).

Both datasets have been analysed in relation to the 17 indicators that were identified and agreed upon with the national data experts (presented in full in the [Annex](#)). The indicators are based on three areas of country data:

- Population and enrolment data
- Data on learners with an official decision of SEN
- Age sample data (9- and 15-year-olds), corresponding to ISCED levels 1 and 2.

EASIE data focuses upon all learners, age samples of all learners and one subset of learners receiving support to meet their educational needs, i.e. those with an official decision of SEN.

Currently, the Agency does not collect data from countries on learners **without** an official decision of SEN who receive some form of additional learning support. It has been agreed with Agency member country representatives that data collection exploring these learners will not be pursued for the foreseeable future.

## **Important dimensions within EASIE data collection work**

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All participating countries have very different policy and practice situations for inclusive education. In order for country data covering the areas outlined above to be relatively comparable, two important operational definitions for data collection – identified and agreed upon with the national data collection experts – have been applied:

### **Operational definition of an official decision of SEN**

An official decision leads to a learner being recognised as eligible for additional educational support to meet their learning needs.



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An official decision meets the following criteria:

- There has been an educational assessment procedure involving a multi-disciplinary team.
- The multi-disciplinary team includes members from within and external to the learner's school.
- There is a legal document which describes the support the learner is eligible to receive and which is used as the basis for planning.
- The official decision is subject to a formal, regular review process.

All data collected relating to learners with an official decision of SEN is in line with this operational definition of an official decision of SEN.

### **Operational definition of an inclusive setting**

An inclusive setting refers to education where the learner with an official decision of SEN follows education in mainstream classes alongside their mainstream peers for the largest part – 80% or more – of the school week.

Previous Agency data collection work and projects have used this 80% time placement benchmark in different forms. 80% clearly indicates that a learner is placed in a mainstream setting for the majority of their school week. At the same time, it acknowledges possibilities for small group or one-to-one withdrawal for limited periods of time (i.e. 20% or one day a week).

Not all countries can provide exact data relating to the 80% time placement benchmark. Therefore, proxies have been identified, agreed upon and applied as needed. Please refer to the specific [country background information](#) for more details (European Agency, no date-c).

## **The focus for the EASIE data analysis**

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The long-term ambition for the EASIE work is to provide:

- an agreed set of indicators that can inform policy-makers' work in relation to European Union objectives for education and training and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006);
- data and supporting qualitative information that informs learners' rights issues.

The analysis aims to highlight main findings that inform work in line with these international guidance documents, as well as the [Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems](#) (European Agency, 2015). In particular, the information presented here aims to inform Agency member countries' shared ultimate vision for inclusive education systems, which is: 'to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (ibid., p. 1).



The focus on the entire school population within EASIE is in line with the position paper assertion that:

*... the policy governing inclusive education systems must provide a clear vision for and conceptualisation of inclusive education as an approach for improving the educational opportunities of all learners (ibid.).*

It is not possible for the EASIE data collection to inform the range of qualitative issues for inclusive education systems presented in the position paper. It can, however, provide information relating to ‘the availability of flexible continua of provision and resources’ (ibid., p. 2), specifically different forms of educational placements in countries.

## Points to note

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The data provided by countries is as comprehensive as possible at present. All data is confirmed as being in line with the Agency agreed operational definitions for an official decision of SEN and the 80% time placement benchmark or relevant proxies. Countries do not feel the need to change these definitions or the way they collect data in line with them. All data is provided by national data experts and then checked and approved by Agency member country representatives. All data calculations – as presented in the Cross-Country Reports – are checked and approved by both the data experts and Agency member country representatives.

However, there are a number of issues within the datasets that have to be acknowledged. The points below highlight some methodological and/or procedural issues arising from the data collection work that should be considered when reading this report.

The numbers of countries providing data linked to specific indicators differ within and between datasets. This means that the numbers of countries included in the calculations for each indicator differ. Therefore, it is not possible to make any reliable comparisons between indicators. In this report, findings are mainly presented in relation to each of the indicators individually.

Within all countries’ information, there is missing data, including SEN placement and gender breakdown data. For some countries, in relation to specific questions, zero (0) data is reported, when it may be more appropriate to indicate data is missing (M). For the data calculations within the Cross-Country Reports, most zeros have been replaced with M, in agreement with the countries concerned.

There is a significant impact that different countries make on the total averages for indicators. Countries with bigger populations have much more impact on the total averages than those with smaller populations. As a result, drawing conclusions in relation to the total averages must be done with caution.



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## **ANNEX: EASIE INDICATORS FOR 2014 AND 2016**

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### **1. Enrolment rate in mainstream education based on the enrolled school population**

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Indicator 1.1: the enrolment rate in mainstream education (%)

Indicator 1.2: the enrolment rate in inclusive education (%)

### **2. Age samples**

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Indicator 2.1: the age sample enrolment rate in mainstream education for 9-year-olds (%)

Indicator 2.2: the age sample enrolment rate in mainstream education for 15-year-olds (%)

Indicator 2.3: the age sample enrolment rate in inclusive education for 9-year-olds (%)

Indicator 2.4: the age sample enrolment rate in inclusive education for 15-year-olds (%)

### **3. Learners with an official decision of SEN**

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#### **3a. Identification rates**

Indicator 3a.1: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population (%)

#### **3b. Distribution of placements of learners with an official decision of SEN, based on the enrolled school population of learners**

Indicator 3b.1: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive settings, based on the enrolled school population (%)

Indicator 3b.2: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special classes, based on the enrolled school population (%)

Indicator 3b.3: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools, based on the enrolled school population (%)

Indicator 3b.4: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in non-formal educational settings, based on the enrolled school population (%)

Indicator 3b.5: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings, based on the enrolled school population (%)

#### **3c. Distribution of placements, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN**

Indicator 3c.1: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive education (%)



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Indicator 3c.2: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special classes in mainstream schools (%)

Indicator 3c.3: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools (%)

Indicator 3c.4: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in non-formal educational settings (%)

Indicator 3c.5: the percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in fully separate educational settings, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN (%)



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