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The integration of disabled students in public and private primary and lower secondary schools

School Year 2012-2013

Istat has released the results of the survey on students with disabilities in primary and lower secondary schools (public and private) for the 2012-2013 school year.

Conducted as part of a project financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (Miur), the goal of the survey was to examine the resources and tools that have been adopted by single school centers to facilitate the integration of students with disabilities. The survey response rate was 91%, 23,624 schools have filled the questionnaire.

Main results

During SY 2012-2013, about 149 thousand disabled students were enrolled in compulsory education: about 84 thousand in primary school and 65 thousand in lower secondary school.

About 4.3% of the disabled students in primary school had vision-related disabilities, about 5% had hearing difficulties and about 13.3% had problems related to mobility. Regional differences were clearly evident with respect to learning and attention-deficit problems, which affected 19.6% and 24.5% of disabled students. National values range from 14.7% with learning difficulties and 19.2% with attention-deficit issues in the North to 24.4% and 30.0% in the South, respectively (Table 1).

The difficulties that characterized disabled students in lower secondary school were similar to those found in primary school. Visual and hearing difficulties were experienced by 4% and 4.7%, respectively, of students with disability, while 9.9% were faced with mobility problems. Noteworthy geographical differences were found with respect to learning and attention-deficit difficulties, with higher values detected in the South and Islands area.

The school environment remained fairly inaccessible and the number of schools equipped to overcome architectural barriers appeared to be too low, although this area had shown some improvement. Lower secondary schools seemed to offer better access for disabled students in comparison to lower order schools. In general terms, the removal of architectural barriers for both scholastic orders seems to be improving from one year to the next (Table 2).

In terms of learning ability, the key professional figures are the curricular teacher and the learning-support teacher, who provide mutual support in the development of communications, relations and socialization. Other professional figures include the cultural education assistant (CEA) and the personal assistant[1], the communications facilitator[2], the communicator for the deaf[3] and the scholastic aide[4] with the specific assignment of assisting disabled students.

[1] Cultural education assistants are employees of the Municipality or Cooperative and collaborate actively to promote the integration of dependent minors, supporting their integration with the class and helping them eat and use the restrooms.
[2] The main activities of communications facilitators are targeted at students with cognitive disabilities or autism.
[3] Communicators for Italian sign language (LIS) or deaf-mutes are operators that act as a communication bridge between deaf students, the class and the teachers. The purpose is to reduce communication barriers, offer equal opportunities and make it possible for deaf students to express their full scholastic potential.
[4] Scholastic aides are qualified to provide disabled students with material and hygienic assistance, and they receive a stipendium supplement for this reason.

In SY 2012-2013, the Miur data indicate a total of about 67 thousand learning-support teachers for both scholastic orders of public schools combined. More than 80% of student with disability were supported in the learning activity by the learning support teacher while there was a percentage of student that was supported in the activity of daily living by the teacher in place of others professional figures such as the cultural education assistant (CEA) and the personal assistant (8.6% of students in primary schools and 6.8% of students in lower secondary schools).

Table 1. Disabled students categorized by problem type, division and scholastic order. School Year 2012-2013 *(percentage values)*

Problem type	North	Center	South	Italy
Primary school				
Blindness	0.5	1.3	1.2	0.9
Partial blindness	3.5	3.9	3.0	3.4
Acute deafness	1.7	1.0	1.7	1.6
Partial deafness	3.1	3.3	4.0	3.4
Problems related to mobility	12.6	14.8	13.3	13.3
Learning-specific disorder	14.7	22.1	24.4	19.6
Language-specific disorder	22.9	24.0	26.4	24.3
Generalized developmental disturbance	17.1	16.6	18.1	17.3
Mental retardation	40.0	28.4	41.4	38.1
Attention deficit disorder	19.2	25.7	30.6	24.5
Emotional-relational disturbances	15.8	17.1	19.2	17.2
Behavioral disorders	16.4	14.8	21.5	17.8
Early psychiatric disorder	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.6
Other	16.7	17.0	11.5	14.9
Lower secondary school				
Blindness	0.3	0.6	1.0	0.6
Partial blindness	2.9	3.3	4.2	3.4
Acute deafness	1.4	2.2	0.8	1.3
Partial deafness	3.1	3.8	3.6	3.4
Problems related to mobility	8.9	8.8	11.8	9.9
Learning-specific disorder	23.1	25.9	26.9	24.9
Language-specific disorder	13.6	11.6	15.9	14.0
Generalized developmental disturbance	10.6	13.2	13.0	11.9
Mental retardation	43.0	37.1	50.7	44.5
Attention deficit disorder	15.9	22.4	28.6	21.5
Emotional-relational disturbances	17.2	16.6	19.5	17.9
Behavioral disorders	13.9	14.9	20.0	16.2
Early psychiatric disorder	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.6
Other	15.4	15.7	13.8	14.9

Source: ISTAT

Note: The sum of each percentage column is greater than 100 because a single disabled student can have more than one type of problem.

Table 2. Schools with regulation architectural features by school year, architectural feature, scholastic order and region. School Year 2012-2013 *(for 100 schools in the same region)*

Regions	Accessible stairs	Accessible hygienic services	Accessible internal access routes	Accessible external access routes
		Primary school		
Piemonte	83.0	76.9	31.1	28.3
Valle d'Aosta	93.2	94.5	31.5	39.7
Lombardia	86.9	90.2	36.9	36.0
Trentino Alto Adige	89.3	77.1	58.7	55.0
P. A. Bolzano	92.6	75.4	66.0	62.5
P. A. Trento	83.4	80.0	45.7	41.7
Veneto	79.8	82.9	34.4	34.2
Friuli Venezia Giulia	79.0	79.3	29.0	32.2
Liguria	80.0	67.9	25.8	25.6
Emilia Romagna	82.0	87.0	36.5	34.8
Toscana	76.8	81.0	32.0	30.0
Umbria	67.3	67.3	30.2	29.9
Marche	85.9	71.6	36.2	33.1
Lazio	76.1	76.3	21.9	19.9
Abruzzo	77.5	71.8	27.0	23.9
Molise	64.2	70.9	30.6	24.6
Campania	76.1	63.2	22.2	21.8
Puglia	88.5	77.1	28.8	27.2
Basilicata	80.8	59.6	20.2	19.2
Calabria	60.6	58.7	17.8	15.7
Sicilia	72.0	72.2	23.2	21.1
Sardegna	74.2	82,2	24.7	23.3
Italy	**79,0**	**76.7**	**29.8**	**28.4**
		Lower secondary school		
Piemonte	87.6	81.6	33.8	31.0
Valle d'Aosta	100.0	95.2	33.3	38.1
Lombardia	92.1	91.1	38.4	35.4
Trentino Alto Adige	89.1	86.4	52.4	51.7
P. A. Bolzano	94.0	90.4	63.9	60.2
P. A. Trento	82.8	81.3	37.5	40.6
Veneto	88.3	84.2	35.8	32.7
Friuli Venezia Giulia	86.4	84.4	34.4	34.4
Liguria	90.9	71.7	28.9	21.9
Emilia Romagna	88.2	87.1	33.7	33.3
Toscana	89.5	85.5	30.8	27.1
Umbria	82.4	77.8	30.6	26.9
Marche	90.8	77.0	31.8	30.4
Lazio	82.1	76.0	20.1	19.4
Abruzzo	87.2	72.0	28.9	28.4
Molise	80.3	67.9	25.9	14.8
Campania	85.3	70.4	21.6	21.3
Puglia	91.8	79.9	25.5	24.1
Basilicata	87.2	58.9	17.0	16.3
Calabria	76.6	62.7	18.2	16.5
Sicilia	84.8	77.1	23.2	22.0
Sardegna	77.2	82.6	21.9	22.2
Italy	**86.8**	**79.7**	**29.1**	**27.2**

Source: ISTAT

Note: In the questionnaire of SY 2012-2013, items on presence of architectural barriers for sensorial disability.

Contact persons:
Health and social security unit
ISTAT – Italian National Institute of Statistics
Alessandra Battisti
ph. +39 06 4673.7582
albattis@istat.it