

CX3.1 Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Definitions and methodology

This indicator presents information on the proportions of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in OECD countries. Definitions of SEN vary widely across countries as they are specific to each country's legislation (see Table CX3.1.B). Some countries define SEN using a general definition of disabled children, others categorise SEN pupils into more than ten different categories.

However, differences in national definitions should not be exaggerated and do not preclude international comparisons of the available data. A child is commonly recognised as having special educational needs (SEN) if he or she is not able to benefit from the school education made generally available for children of the same age without additional support or adaptations in the content of studies. Therefore, SEN can cover a range of needs including physical or mental disabilities, and cognition or educational impairments.¹

The percentage of children with SEN reported here is calculated by dividing the number of children with SEN by the total number of children enrolled at school (multiplied by 100). This indicator covers compulsory school-aged children and as such cannot be treated as a total child population rate.

Key Findings

In the last 25 years, there has been global agreement that all children have the right to be formally educated individually and/or together, including children who have special educational needs. It is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008). Inclusive education for children with SEN is also addressed in several significant international declarations, including the World Declaration for Education for All (United Nations, 1990), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000). Yet despite recent international consensus on the rights of children with SEN, and efforts to find an international definition agreed by all the countries who signed these conventions, data on children with SEN are still being collected according to national definitions.

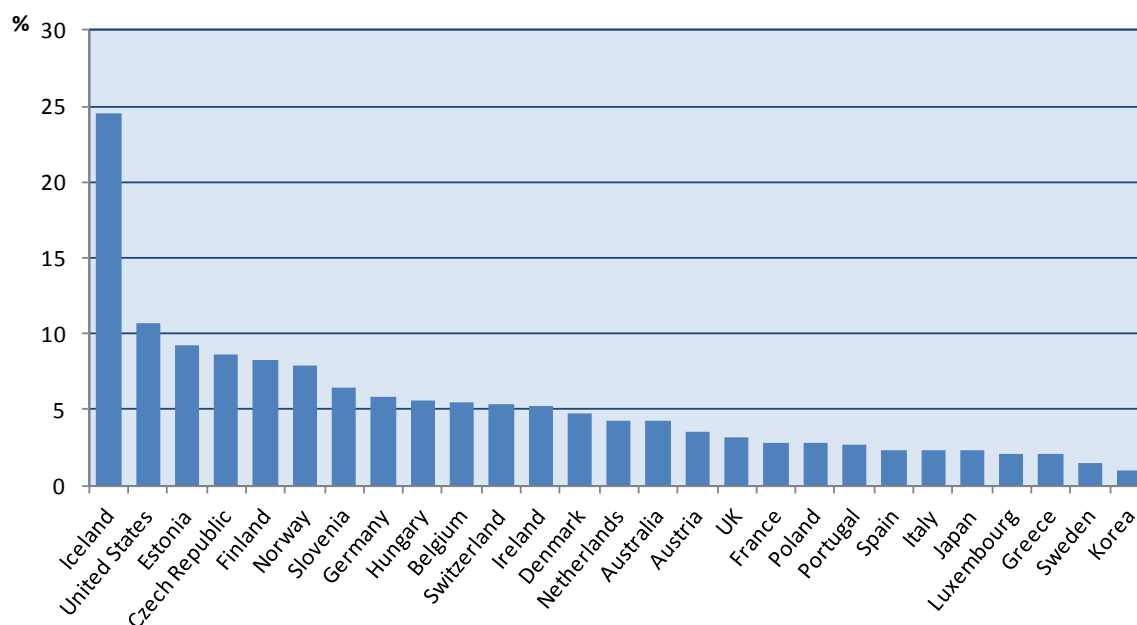
Other relevant indicators: *OECD Family database* – Educational attainment (CO3.1); *Child well-being module* – Literacy scores at age 10 (CO3.1); Literacy scores at age 15 (CO3.2).

¹ UNESCO (2011), Revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Special Education Needs is 'Education designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational programme. Reasons may include (but are not limited to) disadvantages in physical, behavioural, intellectual, emotional and social capacities. Educational programmes in special needs education may follow a similar curriculum as that offered in the parallel regular education system, however they take individuals' particular needs into account by providing specific resources (e.g. specially trained personnel, equipment, or space) and, if appropriate, modified educational content or learning objectives. These programmes can be offered for individual learners within already existing educational programmes, or be offered as a separate class in the same or separate educational institutions'. (p. 83)

Chart CX3.1.A presents the rates of children who have SEN as the proportion of total compulsory school-aged pupils in 27 OECD countries. Based on national definitions, Iceland stands out as a country with the highest proportion of SEN statements, at nearly 1 in 4 children. In the remaining countries, the proportion of children with SEN varies from 1% in Korea to above 10% in the United States. These large differences will, in no small part, be attributable to the differences in national definitions and the inclusion or not of children with some specific disabilities or disorders in the category of children with SEN (see Table CX3.1.B. for complete definitions). In Iceland, data referring to children who are recognised as having some form of special need that requires any additional support are included - for example children with reading difficulties are considered as receiving support with additional educational material. This definition is wide, and so it explains the high percentage of children falling into this category in Iceland. In contrast, Greece and Sweden only count children who attend special programmes and who are included in special schools or special classes. Children who have educational needs in mainstream schools are not counted by Greece or Sweden, which help to explain the low percentages.

Chart CX3.1.A Children with SEN represent less than a tenth in most OECD countries

Percentage of school aged pupils with SEN, 2007-2010¹



1. Academic school year 2007/2008 for Germany, Portugal, Spain; 2008/2009 for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States; 2009/2010 for Australia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia. Data for Belgium and the United Kingdom have been aggregated across the different jurisdictions.

Source: for European countries: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, for Australia, Japan and Korea: National Institute of Special Needs (Japan) and for the United States: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Across countries, children with SEN are either in segregated special schools or in segregated special classes in mainstream schools for the largest part – 80% or more - of the school day, or in regular classes in mainstream schools. Table CX3.1.A provides information on the number of children with SEN

by settings in OECD countries where data are available. Where disaggregated data are not available, this is because national statistics are not collected at this level of detail.

The 2010 data shows that most of the countries already have a large proportion of children in totally inclusive settings. Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain have included more than 75% of children with SEN in mainstream classes in mainstream schools in 2010. All countries, with the exception of Italy and Poland, have special classes in mainstream schools, but only in Denmark and France is this the most common form of educational setting for children with SEN.

Table CX3.1.A Breakdown by settings varies a lot across countries
 Children with SEN in different settings as a percentage of total number
 of children with SEN, various years

Country	2008 round			2010 round		
	Special schools	Special classes in mainstream schools	Inclusive settings	Special schools	Special classes in mainstream schools	Inclusive settings
Austria	36.9	7.7	55.4	41.3	3.4	55.3
Czech Republic	40.9	11.7	47.3	41.9	9.8	48.4
Denmark	21.8	70.2	8.0	37.8	56.3	5.9
Estonia	18.1	7.1	74.7	32.2	14.0	53.8
Finland	16.1	32.7	51.2	14.9	32.0	53.1
France	22.4	46.7	30.9	21.2	45.2	33.6
Germany	84.9		15.1	83.2		16.7
Greece	26.2	73.8		25.0	75.0	
Hungary	50.0		50.0	46.7		53.3
Iceland	7.5	17.9	74.6	1.3	3.3	95.4
Ireland	39.5	60.5		14.7	7.0 ⁽²⁾	78.3
Italy	0.4	n.a.	99.6	m.	m.	m.
Luxembourg	52.8		47.2	48.3		51.7
Netherlands	67.0	m.	33.0	62.1	m.	37.9
Norway	6.1	m.	93.9	4.0	10.9	85.1
Poland	54.3	n.a.	45.7	46.8	n.a.	53.2
Portugal	8.0	3.0	89.0	7.3	5.9	86.8
Slovenia	14.4	3.3	67.4	26.9	3.8	69.3
Spain	23.7		76.3	16.7		83.3
Sweden	3.6	96.4		3.7	96.3	
Switzerland	m.	m.	m.	39.0	61.0	m.
UK - England	41.4	7.4	51.2	42.6	7.2	50.3
UK - Northern Ireland	m.	m.	m.	29.1	13.4	57.5
UK - Scotland	18.7	5.7	75.6	14.7	3.3	82.1
UK - Wales	21.7	21.1	57.1	23.8	22.0	54.1

m: missing, n.a.: not applicable.

Note: 2008 round refers to academic school year 2006/2007 for Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and, UK (Scotland and Wales); 2007/2008 for the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and UK (England). 2010 round refers to academic school year 2007/2008 for Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain; 2008/2009 for Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland and UK (England and Wales); 2009/2010 for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and UK (Northern Ireland and Scotland).

Source: Data based on European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

In some cases children with SEN and without SEN may both be attending special classes. However, in the absence of detailed pupil level data within such classes, as is the case Luxembourg, all pupils in these special classes are considered to be in the same group as children in special schools and are counted together as SEN pupils. In Greece and in Sweden, there are no statistics on children with special needs integrated in fully inclusive settings. Finally, the rates of children with SEN in special school ranges from less than 0.5% in Italy – where special schools are only for children who have visual or hearing impairments – to over 60% in the Netherlands.

Overall, the two rounds of data show that an increasing number of children with SEN are attending school in totally inclusive settings. Thirteen of the 25 countries presented in the table show a larger proportion of children with SEN in mainstream school in 2010 than in 2008. This growth is particularly high in Ireland, Poland, Scotland, and in Spain. In countries where this proportion was higher in 2008 than in 2010 the difference is relatively small. Figures for Estonia and Iceland should be interpreted with caution as the definition of SEN children has changed between the two rounds, and therefore are not strictly comparable (see comparability and data issues below).

Comparability and data issues

There are two main issues in collecting data about children with SEN. First, some children's SENs are not always recognised. In the case of registered disabilities, a child who has a genetic disorder or a sensory impairment is generally diagnosed at birth or in early infancy, but other disabilities may not be apparent until the child is older, and corresponding educational needs are then not always reported. Figures are therefore likely to underestimate the real number of children which have SEN. Second, as noted above, reported data covers only the national definitions. There are other comparability issues which have been discussed in detail by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. For more detailed information, please refer to their papers mentioned in the "Further reading" section.

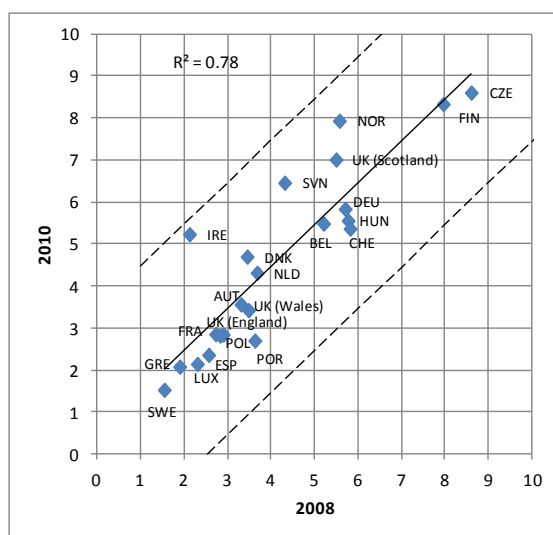
Data for this indicator comes from different sources. Data for European countries are from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (Special Needs Education, Country Data 2008 and 2010). Two sets of data are available: the 2008 collection which corresponds to the academic years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008; and the 2010 collection which corresponds to the academic years 2008/2009 to 2009/2010.

Chart CX3.1.B plots the differences between the 2008 and the 2010 datasets. Italy and Northern Ireland only participated in one round so they do not appear in this comparison. Estonia and Iceland do not appear because the definitions used for reporting data changed between the two rounds, and the data

cannot be compared over time. Iceland had reported the proportion of children with severe needs in 2006/2007 (it was at around 5%) but has reported all the children with needs in 2009/2010. In contrast, Estonia reported only children with an official decision of SEN in 2010 when all the children who received learning support were reported in the previous period.

Chart CX3.1.B No country year-on-year differences deviate substantially from the best fit line

Proportion of children who have SEN in compulsory school-aged education



Note: The line on this chart is the best fit line. Dashed lines represent +/- 3 standard deviations from the best fit line.

Source: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

The chart shows an area delineated by dashed lines representing +/- 3 standard deviations from the best fit line (calculated using year-on-year differences). All the countries fall within this range. This means that the two series are comparable. This area has been calculated with an outlier threshold of +/- 3 standard deviations, but the same calculation with +/- 2 standard deviations would show only Ireland out of this band, which reinforces the comparability between the two years.

Sources and further reading: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2008 and 2010), SNE Country Data. www.european-agency.org/; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011), Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE); Donnelly.V, C.Meijer and A.Watkins, "Inclusive Education – Diversity across European Countries", European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (IDEA), United States. www.ideadata.org accessed January 2012; National Institute of Special Needs Education (2010), Journal of Special Education in the Asia Pacific (JSEAP), Japan. www.nise.go.jp/; UNESCO (1990), World Declaration for Education for All and Framework for Action, www.unesco.org/education/pdf/JOMTIE_E.PDF; UNESCO (1994), Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF; UNESCO (2000), Dakar Framework for Action, www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf; United Nations (1989), United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child, www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm; United Nations (2008), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150.

Table CX3.1.B Children with SEN: definitions across OECD countries, various years

Country	Academic year	Children in special schools (% of enrolled pupils)	Definition and types of disabilities for Special Needs Education
Australia	2010	0.5	Each state and territory has a different definition of a student with special educational needs. However, there are a number of disability types recognised by all: physical disability, hearing and vision impairment, intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder.
Austria	2008/2009	1.5	A child is recognised as having SEN if – as a result of a physical or psychologically based disability – he/she is not able to achieve the goals of the national curriculum without receiving special provision. (Compulsory Schooling Act - "Schulpflichtgesetz").
Belgium (flemish)	2008/2009	5.3	Special education is defined as: ‘education, based on a pedagogical project that provides adapted schooling, care and therapy for pupils whose personal development cannot be or can insufficiently be guaranteed, temporarily or permanently, in a mainstream school.’ 8 types of special education are distinguished. The same categorisation is used for funding integrated education.
Belgium (french)	2008/2009	4.5	Specialised education is reserved for children and adolescents may access adapted education in relation to their special needs and pedagogical possibilities. These children and adolescents are identified as ‘children with special needs’ Specialised education is organised into 8 types. Each type is an adapted education associated with the general and particular needs of a group of children, whose needs belong to a same type and have defined as a function of the principal disability common to this group.
Czech Republic	2009/2010	3.6	A child/pupil/student with SEN is according to the law a child/pupil/student who is or is likely to be unable to benefit from school education made generally available for children/pupils/students of the same age without the provision of additional support. Children/pupils/students with special needs are children/pupils/students with impairment – physical, mental, sensory, speech and language impairment, specific learning and/or behavioural difficulties, autism and children with severe multiple needs.
Denmark	2008/2009	1.8	People with severe physical and/or intellectual special needs (handicaps). Special education and other special educational assistance shall be given to pupils whose development requires special consideration or support.
Estonia	2009/2010	3.0	Pupils with SEN are pupils whose outstanding talent, learning or behavioural difficulties, health problems, disabilities or long-term absence from studies creates the need to make changes or adaptations in the content of studies, the study processes or the learning environment (study aids, classrooms, language of communication, incl. alternative communications, specially trained teachers, support staff, etc.), or in the work plan prepared by the teacher for work with the relevant class.
Finland	2008/2009	1.2	Learners have SEN when their possibilities for growth, development or learning are decreased due to disability, sickness or decreased functioning. Learners with need of psychological or social support or at risk in these areas have the right to support for learning. Pupils with minor learning or adjustment difficulties have the right to receive part-time special needs education in conjunction with mainstream instruction.
France	2008/2010	0.6	There is no established term in France which refers to the population of children who benefit from specific measures defined on the basis of special educational needs. According to the law, a disability is constituted by any limit on activity or restriction on the participation in social life endured by a person in his or her environment due to a substantial, durable, or permanent alteration of one or several physical, sensory, mental, cognitive, or psychic functions, to a multiple disability or to a disabling health problem.’

OECD Child well-being Module www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database/CWBM
OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs

Table CX3.1.B Children with SEN: definitions across OECD countries, various years (cont')

Country	Academic year	Children in special schools (% of enrolled pupils)	Definition and types of disabilities for Special Needs Education
Germany	2007/2008	4.8	SEN means specific support for disabled pupils. The area of responsibility of special needs education with respect to all organisational aspects refers to the special needs within the context of disability exclusively. Pupils experiencing problems as a result of certain handicaps and/or in need of additional educational support because of problematic situations, as well as students with temporary learning difficulties (e.g. slow learners, reading and writing difficulties) are supported by a combination of measures of differentiation within the structure of the general system of support. Remedial or individual educational programmes based on the general structure offer and give support for problem situations during the learning process.
Greece	2009/2010	0.5	SEN refers to difficulties in learning due to sensory, intellectual, cognitive, developmental, mental and neuro-psychiatric disorders which are localised after a scientific and pedagogical evaluation. These difficulties influence the process of leaning and school adjustment. Pupils with SEN are considered those pupils who have disabilities in motion, vision, hearing, who suffer from chronic diseases, disorders in speech, attention deficit, and all pervasive developmental disorders. Special needs are also considered behaviours due to complex factors, i.e. cognitive, emotional, mental and social disadvantages deriving from the family and social environment. SEN are also the educational needs of 'pupils who have one or more mental abilities developed to a degree that exceed a lot the expected abilities of their age range'.
Hungary	2008/2009	2.6	Children/pupils with SEN are those who are suffering from: A) A physical, sensory, intellectual, or speech impairment, autism, or from several of the above mentioned, or from permanent and serious dysfunctions of perceptual functions or behavioural development due to organic reasons; B) Permanent and serious dysfunctions of perceptual functions or behavioural development due to non-organic reasons (as being permanently and seriously hindered in the education and learning process due to disturbances of psychic development.)
Iceland	2008/2009	0.3	Children who are entitled to services are the mentally or physically disabled who need special services and support for this reason. This refers to mental retardation, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness. Disabilities can also be the consequence of chronic illness as well as of accidents. Pupils with reading difficulties shall have access to specialised educational material.
Ireland	2008/2009	0.8	'Special educational needs' means a restriction in the capacity of a person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.
Israel	n.a.	n.a.	Special education is defined as "methodological teaching, learning and treatment granted by law to the handicapped child. The handicapped child" is defined as "a person aged three to twenty-one, whose capacity for adaptive behaviors is limited, due to faulty physical, mental, psychological or behavioral development, and is in need of special education" (Special Education Law, 1988).
Italy			A 'person with disabilities' is anyone who presents a physical, psychological, sensory impairment, permanent or progressive, that causes a learning difficulty and that causes a situation of disadvantage or marginalisation.
Japan	2010	0.6	Visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, physical/motor disabilities, health impairments, speech and language impairment, autism, emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and multiple disabilities.
Korea	2010	0.3	Visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental retardation, physical disability, emotional behavioral disorder, learning disabilities, speech-language impairment (communication disorder), health impairment and development delay.

Table CX3.1.B Children with SEN: definitions across OECD countries, various years (cont')

Country	Academic year	Children in special schools (% of enrolled pupils)	Definition and types of disabilities for Special Needs Education
Luxembourg	2008/2009	1.0	Law of Special Education of 1973: 'The Government makes sure that every child because of his/her mental, sensory, emotional or motor particularities gets the instruction required by his state or situation in the structures of Special Education.' Law of 1993 states that the named children can be included in mainstream schools.
Netherlands	2009/2010	2.7	Pupils are eligible for special education if they meet certain criteria. Criteria for the visually impaired are a visual acuity: <0.3 or a visual field: < 30 and limited participation in education as a result of the visual impairment. For hearing impaired pupils a hearing loss > 80 dB (or for hard of hearing pupils 35–80 dB) and limited participation in education are required. The decision to provide extra funding for mentally disabled pupils will be based largely on IQ < 60, for physically impaired and chronically ill pupils medical data showing diagnosed disabilities / illness are needed. The criteria for behaviourally disturbed pupils require a diagnosis in terms of categories of the DSM-IV, problems at school, at home and in the community and a limited participation in education as a result of the behaviour problems.
Norway	2009/2010	0.3	Right to special education: pupils who either do not or are unable to benefit satisfactorily from mainstream tuition have the right to special education. The content of the courses offered shall be such that the pupil receives adequate benefit from the tuition as a whole in relation to other pupils and in relation to educational objectives that are realistic for the pupil. Pupils who receive special education shall have the same total number of teaching hours as other pupils. An expert assessment shall consider and determine the benefit from mainstream tuition, learning difficulties the pupil has and other special conditions of importance to tuition, realistic educational objectives for the pupil and whether it is possible to provide help for the pupil's difficulties within mainstream educational provision and what kind of tuition it is appropriate to provide.
New Zealand	2010	0.4	Visual, deaf and hearing impaired, physical disabilities, health, learning difficulties.
Poland	2009/2010	1.3	Special Needs Education concerns children and youth with developmental disabilities who require special organization of work, working methods and special equipment. It can take place in general schools, or special schools. It covers: pupils with slight mental disability, pupils with moderate and severe mental disability, pupils with severe mental disability, deaf pupils, pupils with hearing impairment, blind pupils, pupils with visual impairment, physically disabled pupils, chronically ill pupils, pupils with psychiatric difficulties, autistic pupils and pupils with multiple disabilities, pupils with social and behavioral problems, pupils with speaking and communication problems.
Portugal	2007/2008	0.2	Children and young people receive special education because they have difficulties in their learning process and their participation considering the interaction between inter-related factors and limitations in their functioning
Slovenia	2009/2010	1.7	In legislation there are the following groups of disabled children (pupils): children with mental disabilities; blind and children with visual impairment; children with hearing impairments and deaf; children with speech and language problems; physically disabled children; children with long-term illness; children with learning difficulties and children with emotional and behaviour problems.

Table CX3.1.B Children with SEN: definitions across OECD countries, various years (cont')

Country	Academic year	Children in special schools (% of enrolled pupils)	Definition and types of disabilities for Special Needs Education
Spain	2007/2008	0.4	Students with SEN refer to those who require certain support and specific educational attention due to disability or serious behavioural disorder, either for a period or throughout the whole of their schooling. The schooling of these students in special education centres or units, which may be extended until the age of twenty-one, will only take place when their needs cannot be met by the special needs provisions available in mainstream schools.
Sweden	2008/2009	0.1	There is no legal definition of SEN. In Sweden education follows the principle of 'a school for all' and the focus is on what kind of support the student needs – access to equivalent education for all. This means that pupils in need of special support should not be treated or defined as a group that is any different from other pupils and their rights are not stated separately. The obligation for schools to attend to all pupils' needs is, however, emphasized.
Switzerland	2008/2009	2.1	Children and youth from birth on to 20 years of age, living in Switzerland, have the right to adequate provision of special educational services, providing that the following conditions are met: - Prior to compulsory education: if it can be established that the development of the child is limited or at risk or that following instruction in a mainstream classrooms without specific support will not be possible for the child; - During compulsory education: if it can be established that possibilities of development and education are limited in such a manner that instruction in mainstream classrooms cannot be followed without specific support any more or if other SEN are established
United Kingdom (England)	2008/2009	1.2	A child has 'special educational needs' if he has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him. A child has a 'learning difficulty' if he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age, he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of his age in schools within the area of the local education authority, or he is under compulsory school age and is, or would be if special educational provision were not made for him, likely to fall within one of these two categories when of that age.
United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	2009/2010	1.4	A child is having SEN if he or she has a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
United Kingdom (Scotland)		1.0	Definition of Additional Support Needs (ASN): (1) A child or young person has additional support needs where, for whatever reason, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person. (2) The reference to school education includes, in particular, such education directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.

Table CX3.1.B Children with SEN: definitions across OECD countries, various years (cont')

Country	Academic year	Children in special schools (% of enrolled pupils)	Definition and types of disabilities for Special Needs Education
United Kingdom (Wales)		0.8	Children have SEN if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a learning difficulty if they: a) Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or b) Have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facility of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; c) Are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them.
United States		n.a.	A child must be diagnosed as having a disability and the disability must be found to "adversely affect educational performance" so as to require special services. To receive special education services, a student must demonstrate a disability in one of 13 specific categories, including autism, developmental disability, specific learning disability, intellectual impairment, emotional and/or behavioral disability, speech and language disability, deaf-blind, visual impairment, hearing impairment, orthopedic or physical impairment, other health impaired (including attention deficit disorder), multiple disabilities and traumatic brain injury.

Source: for European countries: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, for Australia, Japan and Korea: National Institute of Special Needs (Japan) and for the United States: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.