# *Norway*

**Special Needs Education**

In 2011/12, approximately 53.000 (8.6 %) pupils in primary and lower secondary schools received individual decisions on special needs education (SNE). The Act of Education s. 5-1, states that “pupils who either do not or are unable to benefit satisfactory from ordinary teaching have the right to special education”. During the last decade there has been a substantial increase of pupils who are given SNE. For a long period during the 1990s and the first years of the new Millennium the percentage was stable at about 6 %. Since 2006, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of pupils with SNE. There are differences between counties with regard to the number of pupils receiving SNE, from 7 to 11 %.

When pupils receive special needs education, this is primarily organised in groups of 2-5 pupils (often from different classes). 14 % of the special needs education is organised as individualised tuition and 19 % of the special needs education is organised in other learning arrangements, in groups of 6 or more pupils or in the ordinary classes (extra teacher or an assistant). This mean that more than 80 % of Special needs education is provided outside the regular classes, as individual tuition or in small groups.

The percentage of pupils with an individual decision on special needs education increases during primary school and throughout lower secondary school. In 2011/12 about 4.4 % of the pupils in Year 1 had individual decision on SNE, whereas in year 10 the percentage was 11.6 %. This general pattern indicates that when pupils have a decision on SNE, they tend to continue with SNE throughout the rest of primary and lower secondary school.

**Pupils from language minorities**

Pupils attending the primary and lower secondary school, who have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami, have the right to Basic Norwegian for language minorities until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow the normal instruction of the school. If necessary, such pupils are also entitled to Mother tongue education, bilingual technical training, or both.

In the school year 2011/12, there were 44,000 pupils (7 %) with Basic Norwegian for language minorities. There has been a slight increase in the recent years. The percentage of pupils with Basic Norwegian for language minorities was highest in Oslo with nearly 25 %. Mother tongue education is given to pupils with a mother tongue other than Norwegian and Sami in addition to the number of regular teaching hours. Bilingual technical training is the teaching that takes place within the regular teaching hours, where the pupil’s mother tongue is used in the education and training (e.g. Mathematics in Urdu either alone or together with instruction in Norwegian).

In the school year 2010/11, mother tongue education and/or bilingual technical training or adapted education and training were given in more than 125 different languages. The dominant languages were Somali, Arabic and Polish.

**Inclusive and adapted education**

In this section the notions inclusive and adapted education is used in order to present a Norwegian approach to the two concepts universal design and reasonable accommodation. Although the two concepts integration and inclusion have many similarities, the Norwegian policy documents states that inclusive Education goes beyond physical integration. In an inclusive education system, every learner is part of what could be called a “learning community” with other peer learners that participate actively on equal terms. Relevant education and training of good quality is provided to all individuals, regardless of their personal features and social, cultural, economic and geographical factors. It is based on the fundamental principles of equity and education as a human right. Every individual – slow and fast learner alike – is given the opportunity to learn to his or her full potential in terms of pace and level, and is actively participating in the organisation and implementation of the learning provisions.

Inclusive education is not a final and stable condition, but rather a constant process whereby societies strive to remove obstacles and accommodate optimal learning for each and all individuals. The permanent dynamics pertain to the facts that people in the system are continuously being substituted, that individuals within the system and their learning needs to change over time and that the social, cultural and economic context which often defines learning needs, is in constant development.

A prerequisite for successful implementation of Inclusive Education is that the education system – and the individual teachers and trainers within the system – welcome diversity, address and respond adequately to the specific needs of the individual learners. This complies with the principle of “equality in treatment”: Provision of optimal learning opportunities to each and every learner.

In order to avoid physical and social segregation, individuals should as much as possible participate in education and receive additional support within the regular learning context. Thus special education in separate institutions in general falls outside the strict denotation of “inclusive education”.

**Inclusive education in the Norwegian context**

In Norway the principle of inclusive education [1]was introduced with the implementation of new laws in compulsory and upper secondary education in 1976, and further developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The operational understanding of, and approach to, inclusive education in Norway is that every individual shall be provided optimal learning conditions in the regular learning context – as far as possible. Adapted education is a principle, but not an individual right. In practical life it will always be necessary to consider and find a reasonable balance between costs and benefits to various affected parties: the individual learner (needs and learning conditions), the institutions and the greater society (money, social responsibility), the teacher (qualifications, working conditions, and available resources), and fellow children, pupils and students (learning conditions, social environment, security).

No individual shall be excluded. The report (MOER, 2008) raises some questions with regard to challenges in the Norwegian approaches to inclusive education. Among these are the tension between individual pupils and the community. What is the right thing to do if the provision of optimal learning conditions to one learner inevitably will imply to reduce learning opportunities for several other pupils? In some practical cases, the principle relating to the learning arena is being disregarded. Therefore, some pupils will receive all or parts of the teaching outside the regular classroom, in a specially adapted environment. This applies e.g. to learners with particular medical problems, deaf-blind learners, individuals that represent a physical threat to other pupils and staff, or persons that by their behaviour seriously reduce the learning opportunities for several other fellow pupils. In such cases, one will have to assess whether special education in a segregated learning context represents the best solution, all aspects and interests considered. Provided that pupils receive education adapted to her/his abilities, one might even with some right argue that this solution follow the principle of inclusive education part of the way, if not in the strict interpretation of the concept (MOER, 2008).

When reviewing inclusive education in Norway, one should in particular consider the situation for the following groups that might be at risk of exclusion:

The Sami population, one of the largest indigenous peoples of Europe. Sami pupils in basic education are legally entitled to receive instruction and textbooks in their own languages. It is estimated that 10.000 people today have Sami as their home language; most of them live in the three northernmost counties.

The immigrant population, counts in 2008 a total of 460,000 or almost 10 % of the total population. It consists of people with two foreign-born parents: 381,000 first generation immigrants who have moved to Norway and 79,000 descendent, i.e. people who were born in Norway of two parents with a different country of origin. They come from 213 different countries and independent regions, as refugees, labour immigrants, to study or through family reunion. Oslo has the largest proportion of immigrants with 25 %, or 140,000 people.

People with disabilities – physical, mental or multiple challenges. It is difficult to find accurate statistic on this group, partly due to different ways of defining “disability”. In many cases, “disabled” individuals will not be disabled but function very well if material and social conditions are being duly adapted.

**Inclusive education relates to many different factors at the various levels:**

Political level, i.e. national, regional and local levels. Decisions at these levels determine the framework for provisions, access and activities in the various parts of the education system.

Institutional level. Institutions involved in education and training to a varying degree have autonomy in professional and budgetary matters. This means that the management and staff make decisions regarding the internal allocation of resources and the level of professional and social services to the learners, recruitment and further training of teachers as well as prioritisation between various strategic measures and activities.

Micro level, i.e. class, group and individual levels. Whether or not the individual learner actually is given optimal learning opportunities, is directly and strongly influenced by several factors in the immediate learning environment.

**National VET system (Upper secondary vocational education and training)**

Upper secondary education and training is voluntary. All young people who have completed primary and lower secondary school are nevertheless entitled to three years of upper secondary education and training that shall lead to qualification for higher education or vocational qualifications. National statistics show that 91.5 % of all 16-18 year olds were enrolled in upper secondary education and training in the school year 2011/12.

**The structure of upper secondary education and training**

In the school year 2011/12 there were 430 upper secondary schools in Norway, 347 (80 %) of which were county-administered, 81 private and 2 state-administered. In the last decade the number of schools has decreased by 67 schools (15 %). The average number of pupils per school today is about 450 pupils. 7 % of the pupils in upper secondary education and training were enrolled in private schools in the school year 2011/12. The percentage is highest among pupils in general studies education programmes, where 9 % were enrolled in private schools, compared to 5 % of the pupils in vocational education programmes.

Until the school year 2009/10 pupils who were considered unqualified for regular educational programmes were separated out in the category of alternative education and training. Today all pupils are included under one of the 12 education programmes. Student considered unqualified for regular educational programmes are offered education and training that leads to basic competences, which is a competence at a lower level than full vocational qualifications and qualification for higher education. The decision is based on the criteria for special needs education and follows the procedures regulated by section 5-1 in the Education Act.

There are no national statistics for the amount of pupils aiming for qualification at a lower level, because the reports from the counties are too incomplete and variations in registrations among county authorities are too great. With regard to the amount of apprentices and apprentice-candidates (pupils with learning contracts), national statistics for 2010 report that there are about 36.000 apprentices and 1.000 learning candidates.[1]

**Education programmes**

Upper secondary education and training consists of 12 different education programmes, 3 in general studies and 9 vocational programmes. In VG2 (the second year) the pupils choose a programme area within an education programme. Some common core subjects are compulsory subjects that are taught at each year of education and training in school (e.g. Norwegian, English, Mathematics and Natural Sciences). In vocational education programmes, the programme subjects are common for all pupils in the same programme area.

**Present challenges**

In March 2013 the Ministry of Education and Research launched a White Paper (Report to the Storting no. 20, 2012-13). With regard to the vocational education and training the high percentage of school dropout causes worried and the government proposed several measures.

On the general level it is proposed to soften the 2+2 model in upper secondary education and training. In order to enhance the general school completeness, the government is discussing the appropriateness of the 2+2 model in VET. It is suggested that this model does not fit the needs of all pupils and branches. Therefore “(…) the ministry proposes that there is a potential for increasing pupils motivation and competence attainment through closer connection in the workplace. The present qualification requirements are maintained, but the education and training shall be more adapted to pupils’ choices, local needs and preconditions” (own translation, page 126). The ministry uses the term “exchanging models” [no: vekslingsmodell] and it is supposed that this model will integrate education in schools and workplaces in other ways than the 2+2 model. Further it is emphasised that the subject content, competence objectives and the total number of years in school and workplaces, and the relation between common subjects and programme subjects are the same as for the 2+2 model.

With regards to pupils with special needs and in risk of marginalisation and school-dropout, the report states that “(…) about 20 % of the youth population have low probabilities for completing upper secondary education with full vocational competencies or university admissions certification. For this group the Praksisbrev [practice letter] system is proposed. This is an adapted upper secondary education emphasising practical education and training the first years, and completed with a praksisbrevprøve [practice letter examination] after two years. The competence objectives are the same as for regular apprentices, but the number of competence objectives is reduced. The system with Praksisbrev has been tested for some years, and it is now proposed as a regular part of VET programmes in upper secondary education and training.

Although the report does not give many suggestions regarding the content of the education and training for the “20 % group”, it seems clear that both the introduction of “exchanging models” and the formalisation of “Practice letter” are new regulations that might influence the context where the Norwegian INVESTT-project is concerned.

[1] http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-...

[1] Although the term inclusion belongs to the discourse of the 1990s.