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**Inclusion and Achievements of Pupils with Special Educational Needs at the
National Assessment at the end of Primary Education**

Introduction

Slovenia is a small country with 2,054,300 inhabitants. 160,400 pupils are included in primary education. There are 448 elementary schools (together with smaller branch units 510). Primary (compulsory) education in Slovenia starts at the age of 6 and finishes at the age of 15, comprises 9 grades, is organised as a single structure and is divided into three periods, lasting three years each. All schools are public with only two exceptions (one Waldorf elementary school and one catholic elementary school). In 2012, 17,750 pupils will finish 9th grade, and 18,160 pupils will finish 6th grade. At the end of compulsory education around 99% of pupils continue their education in general (40 %), technical or vocational secondary education.

In comparison with countries of former Yugoslavia and some other former socialist countries, Slovenia has a relatively long tradition in external assessment. At the beginning of the 90s, we developed external assessment in primary education, and started working on the secondary school Matura exam.

National assessment (NA) in elementary school, which has had formative role since 2006, is regulated by *Elementary School Act, Regulations on National Examinations in Elementary Schools* and *Guidance on Implementation of National Assessment in Elementary School*. The same is true for national assessment of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), however, the rights of these pupils are regulated by the *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act*. The act regulates the placement of pupils and defines the types of educational process. In Slovenia, pupils with SEN, who should be able to attain the same level of education as their peers, are being schooled in regular schools with adapted educational programmes and additional professional help (regular elementary schools and institutions with equivalent educational standards for blind pupils, pupils with serious vision disorders, deaf and hard of hearing pupils). Pupils with mild intellectual disabilities are educated in adapted educational programmes with lower educational standards, while pupils with medium or severe intellectual disabilities are included into special educational programmes. Children with emotional and behavioural problems, whose healthy development is at risk or they pose risk to the society or themselves are included into special education centres. In Slovenia NA is administered in regular elementary schools and in elementary schools with adapted educational programme with lower educational standards. In regular elementary schools NA is optionally taken by sixth graders in the following subjects: Mother tongue, Mathematics and first Foreign language; for 9th grade pupils the assessment is compulsory and includes the following subjects: Mother tongue, Mathematics and a third subject selected each year by the Minister of Education. In schools with lower educational standards NA is always optional. In the sixth grade the pupils get tested in Mother tongue and Mathematics, while in the ninth grade one more compulsory subject is selected by the Minister of Education. NA is taken by more than one thousand sixth graders in regular schools who apply for certain adaptations when taking the test. The same is true for the ninth grade. In schools with lower educational standards the NA is taken by around 70 sixth graders as well as around 120 ninth graders. In this article we will study only pupils with SEN who are schooled in regular elementary schools with equivalent educational standard.

Today we can witness three opposing processes in Slovenia: erosion of standards of knowledge, the urge to improve our pupils' achievements especially at higher taxonomic levels, which causes competitive behaviour in schools as well as in pupils who aspire to higher and higher educational achievements as well as achievements at the NA. Furthermore, more and more pupils with SEN (especially pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas) are being integrated/included into regular primary educational programmes, where their achievements are supposed to be on a par with their peers', however, that is not the case for a substantial part of these pupils.

In the last five years, and especially after 2008, formative NA as a type of external assessment of knowledge has enabled us to accumulate a lot of data about pupils with SEN who require certain adaptations when taking the NA. Beside the objective, valid and reliable data on the achievements of pupils with SEN and their peers, other data needed for administration of the NA and for rating are being systematically collected. These data could also help us find an answer to the question of integration/inclusion and achievements of pupils with SEN as well as all other pupils. Unfortunately, the data has never been used in in-depth research.

In this article we attempt to answer the following questions:

- What are the achievements of pupils with SEN at the NA at the end of primary education?
- Do the final school grades of pupils with SEN in 9th grade truly reflect the pupils' actual knowledge?
- What can the achievements of pupils with SEN tell us about the process of integration/inclusion in the Slovene school system?
- How are the data about the achievements at the NA used in inclusive environments?

Methodological framework

Pupils with special educational needs

Upon the request of the pupil, his or her parents or the school, National Examinations Centre has the competency to decide on adaptations made when the pupil takes the NA. These adaptations are based on a precompiled list of adaptations matching the pupil's disorder, handicap or deficit. In the process of deciding which adaptations will be used at the NA, National Examinations Centre recognizes the pupils with the following handicaps and deficiency as pupils with SEN: blind pupils and pupils with serious vision disorders, deaf and hard of hearing pupils, pupils with speech disorders, pupils with physical disorders or pupils who suffer from long-term illnesses, have deficiencies in individual learning areas or emotional and behavioural disorders and have acquired Decision of Placement. Pupils who cannot take the NA for health reasons that have appeared shortly before the test and have received a note from the doctor to that effect and thus cannot demonstrate their knowledge at an equal footing and need certain adaptations to take the NA also fall into this category.

National Examinations Centre has been collecting various data on pupils with SEN who took external assessment of knowledge in eight-grade elementary school (from school year 1996/1997 to 2004/2005) and NA in nine-grade elementary school (from 2001/2002 to 2004/2005). Since the goal of common assessment of knowledge was primarily to select the best pupils and was primarily functioning as a secondary school entrance criterion, only a small fraction of pupils with SEN decided to take it. The same is true for "summative", so-called "high stakes" national assessments, which were never fully implemented on the whole population of pupils in 3rd, 6th and 9th grade due to gradual introduction of nine-grade elementary school. Important legal changes were made with regard to external assessment in school year 2005/2006. We introduced the NA in the sixth (at the end of the second three-year period) and ninth grade (at the end of the third period) of elementary school with a formative goal. The NA is optional in the sixth grade and yet around 80 % of pupils take the test every year, while it is compulsory in the ninth grade. This fact coupled with changes in legislation in 2000, which transferred pupils with SEN from specialized schools and institutions into regular elementary schools caused a sharp increase in pupils with SEN who took the NA.

In school years 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 the application for pupils with SEN taking the NA were collected in written form, which is why the only data in digital form that the National Examinations Centre has for those two years has is the number of pupils taking the exam. An increase in the number of pupils with SEN in school year 2007/2008 necessitated the introduction of electronic registration for pupils with SEN, which also enabled collection of data on adaptations that individual pupils required. The adaptations have to be made in compliance with the Decision of Placement and possible adaptations for individual disorder, handicap or deficiency as defined by the National Examinations Centre with participation of external experts.

What is the data on which the analysis is based?

The analysis includes pupils with SEN who are educated in regular elementary schools using an adapted educational programme and additional professional help (94.2 % of pupils with SEN in 2010) or in one of the five institutions with equivalent educational standard (5.8% of pupils with SEN in 2010). Since the majority of studied pupils with SEN is being educated in regular elementary schools with equivalent educational standard, we can say that in our analysis, which include all pupils with SEN, the share and consequently the influence of achievements of pupils who are educated in institutions with equivalent educational standard for the blind, pupils with serious vision problems, deaf pupils and hard of hearing pupils or pupils with physical disorders is miniscule.

Our analysis also studies the pupils with SEN who requested adaptations when sitting the NA.

In order to ensure better validity, the analysis includes 9th grade pupils, who are required to take the NA at the end of their primary education. The NA in 6th grade is optional and in many schools pupils with SEN are advised not to take the test. Additionally, objectivity of rating is higher at the end of the third period, as the rating is done by external raters at a single rating location and under the guidance of experts for individual disorders, handicaps or deficiency. Compared to other forms of external assessment in Slovenia the amount of processed data for pupils with SEN who take the NA in 9th grade of elementary school is much higher, which has a direct consequence on the validity of the results of the analysis.

The analysis includes data on the number of pupils with SEN from 2006 on, when the NA acquired its formative function.

Since 2008, when computer software was introduced to facilitate the application and to systematically collect all possible adaptations for pupils taking the NA, the National Examinations Centre has been keeping a comprehensive database of pupils with SEN that apply for adaptations when sitting the NA.

Increase in number and share of pupils with SEN

The number of pupils with SEN who sit the NA at the end of their primary education and need certain adaptations in order to do so, has increased from 480 in 2006 to 1,093 in 2010, meaning that there was a 127.7% increase from 2006 to 2010.

The number of elementary schools where SEN pupils take the NA is also steadily increasing. While pupils with SEN took the NA in 234 elementary schools in 2006, the number grew to 379 in 2010, which is a 62.0% increase. By 2010 pupils with SEN sat the NA in 83.5% of elementary schools.

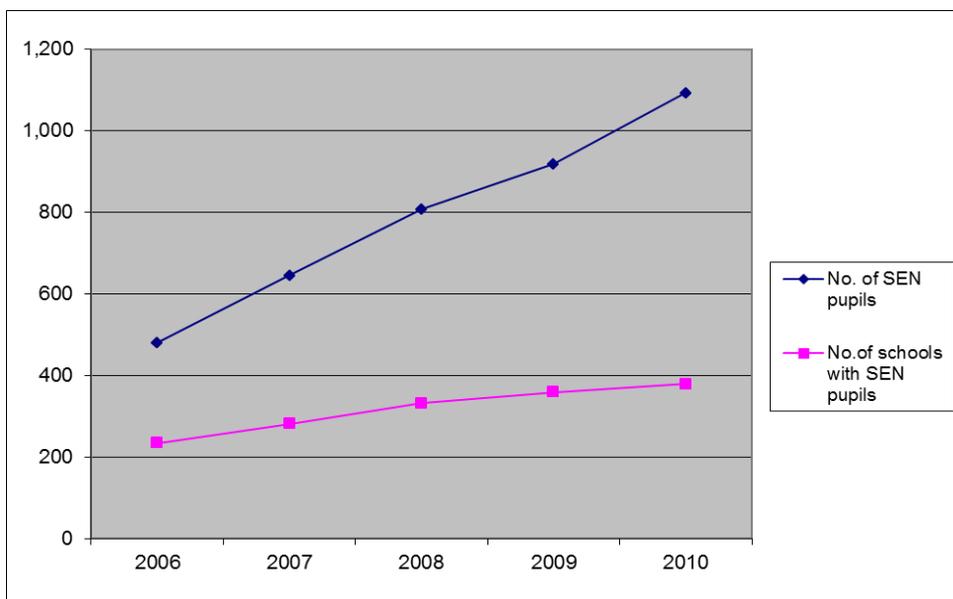


Figure 1: Number of pupils with SEN and number of elementary schools where they sat the NA at the end of the third period, regular examination term, 2006-2010.

Source: Ric 2010

Together with an absolute increase in number of pupils with SEN, this period also saw the growth of relative share of pupils with SEN in the generation of ninth-graders as a whole. While pupils with SEN represented only 2.3% of the whole generation in 2006, the percentage climbed to 6.0% in 2010. This is doubtlessly the consequence of inclusion of more and more pupils with SEN into regular elementary schools, as mandated by *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act*.

The authors of the publication *Analysis of Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Slovenia* (2010: 17-18) report that in most European Union member states there are 4.0% of pupils with SEN in the whole population of pupils, while according to the Ministry of Education and Sport there are 6.5% of children in Slovenia with a Decision of Placement and thus a formal status of pupil with SEN. Around 4.5% of children are included into educational programme of 9-year elementary school with adapted educational programmes and additional professional help. The data show that there are substantially more pupils with SEN, because there are 6.0% of pupils who apply for adaptations at the NA in the 9th grade. The number would probably be even higher if we included those who do not apply for adaptations.

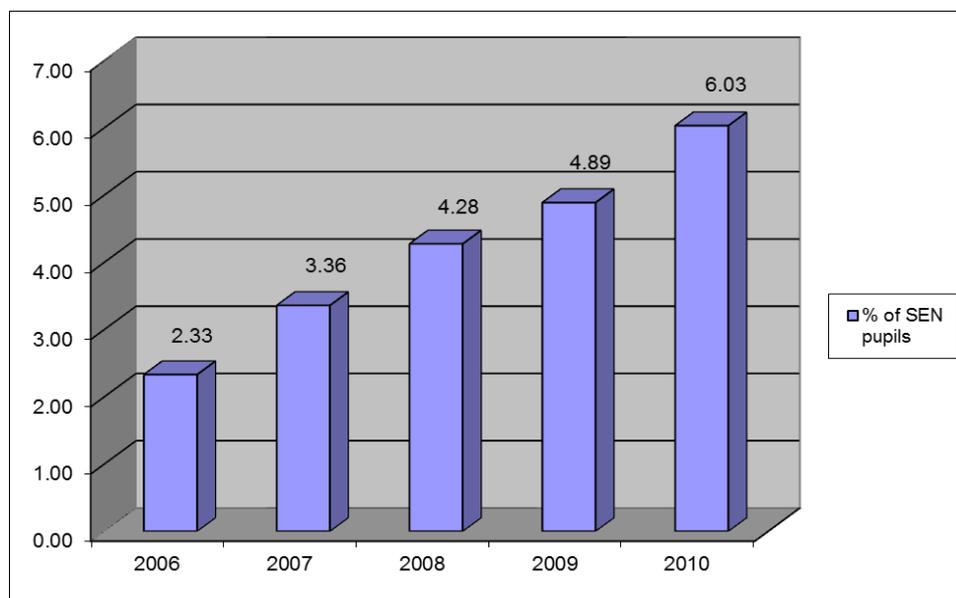


Figure 2: Share of pupils with SEN who sat the NA at the end of the third period, regular examination term, 2006-2010.
Source: Ric 2010

Statistical data for the period between 1991 and 2009 (source: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia*) show that in parallel with the increase of number of pupils with SEN in regular elementary schools, the population of special-needs children educated in special schools with adapted programme dropped from 4,142 to 1,589 children, which is more than 160% while the total decrease of children in regular schools in this period was only 36%. "These data most likely show the presence of unintentional, quiet integration, which requires clear answers and more comprehensive analysis of the present state of affairs." (Schmidt 2001: 2)

As shown in the figure of geographic distribution of shares of pupils with SEN by Slovene municipalities in regular examination term of the NA in 2010, the highest share of pupils with SEN was represented by areas close to Slovene border, especially at the northwest border with Italy, in individual municipalities at the northern border with Austria and especially at the northeast border with Croatia. In 43 municipalities the share of pupils with SEN was higher than 9.0%, in one of the municipalities it was as high as 24.6%. The shares were the highest in municipalities with a small number of ninth-graders where even a handful of pupils with SEN can cause percentage to soar. The issue of why the share of pupils with SEN in some municipalities is more than twice as high as the national average will require further study. Geographic distance is certainly one of the factors that influence the parents' decision to put their children in regular elementary schools closer to their homes rather than driving long distances into cities where professionals might be able to offer better aid to their children.

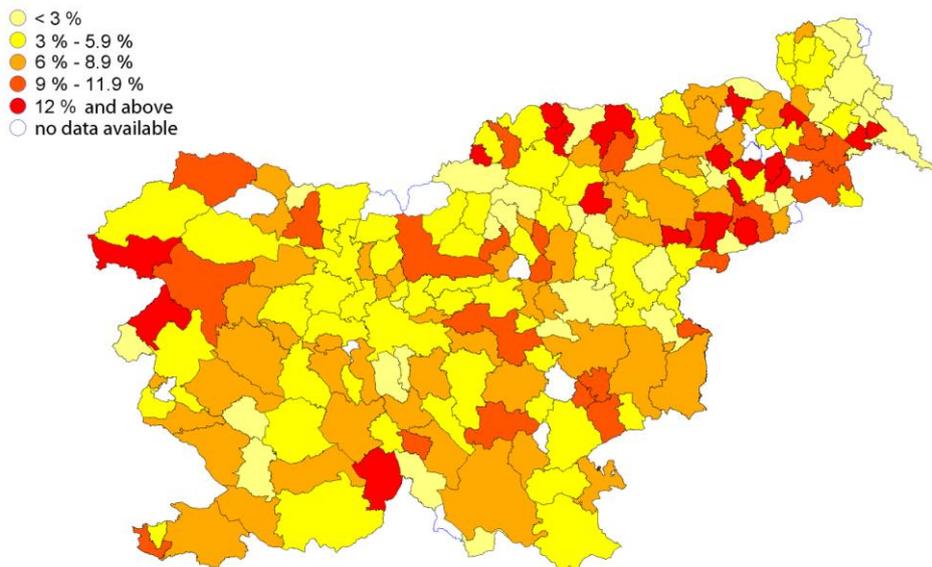


Figure 3: Share of pupils with SEN in Slovene municipalities who took the NA at the end of the third period, regular examination term, 2006-2010.

Source: Ric 2010

Pupils with SEN based on their disorder and defect

Both relatively and absolutely speaking, the highest share of pupils with SEN in 9th grade was represented by pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas. There were 588 (72.8%) of such pupils in 2008, 697 (75.9%) in 2009 and 740 (67.7%) in 2010. A decrease in the share of these pupils between 2009 and 2010 can be mostly attributed to the increase of pupils with speech disorders. The number of pupils in all other categories was more or less constant through the years.

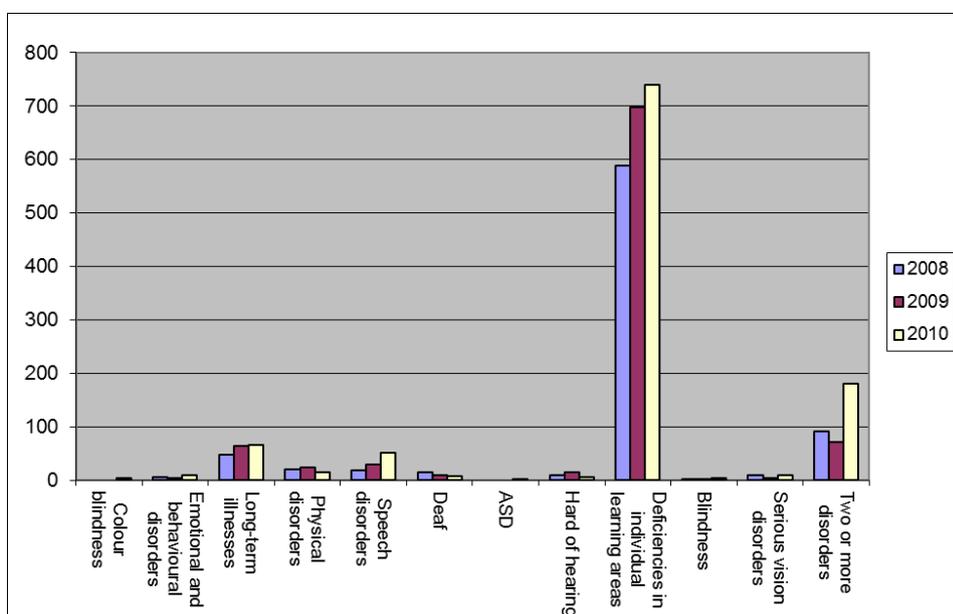


Figure 4: Number of pupils with SEN who sat the NA at the end of the third period, based on their disorder, handicap or deficiency, regular examination term 2006-2010.

Source: Ric 2010

With the introduction of *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act* the category of "Pupils with Borderline Intellectual Capabilities" was slowly abandoned because it had bad reputation. Later the same happened with the category "Pupils with Behavioural and Personal Disorders" which was

replaced by the category "Pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders". Additionally two new categories were introduced into the classification: "Pupils with Deficiencies in Individual Learning Areas" and "Pupils with Long-Term Illnesses". Many pupils with borderline intellectual capabilities are now categorised as pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas. There were about 20% of pupils with borderline intellectual capabilities among all pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas in 2010. The question is: did this shuffling make any sense considering the Slovene educational system, because these pupils usually have general learning difficulties not specific ones.

In 2010 the most numerous category of pupils with SEN sitting the NA was "Deficiencies in Individual Learning Areas", followed by pupils with several disorders or deficiency (16.5%) and pupils with long-term illnesses (6.0%). We can say that in the last five years the number of pupils with SEN increased mostly due to the category of pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas.

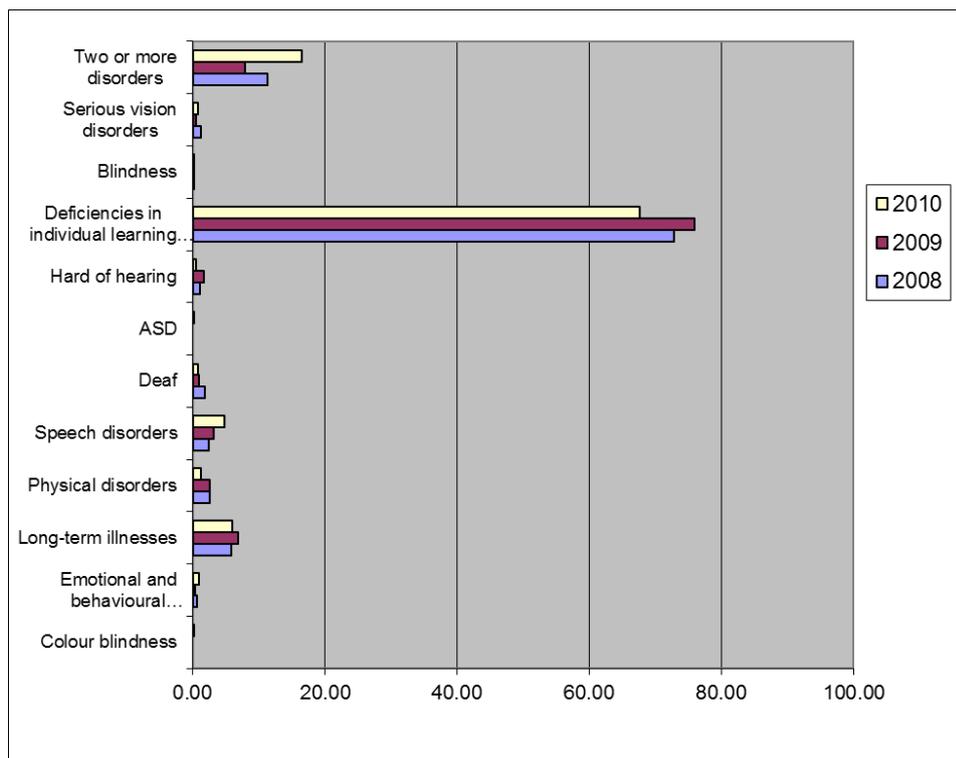


Figure 5: Share of pupils with SEN who sat the NA at the end of the third period, based on their disorder, handicap or deficiency, regular examination term 2006-2010 (in %). Source: Ric 2010

Adaptations when sitting the NA

When they sit the NA pupils with SEN may request various adaptations which have to comply with their *Decision of Placement and Guidance on Implementation of National Assessment in Elementary School*. Until 2008 schools informed National Examinations Centre on adaptations for individual pupils in written form and have switched to electronic communication since 2008. The applications from ever increasing number of SEN pupils clearly show that pupils with equal disorders, handicaps or deficiency often have very different needs, which is in itself not controversial. However, there were a lot of applications which requested adaptations linked to achieving standards of knowledge or were found to be in violation of Instructions for *Carrying Out Education Programmes with Adapted Teaching and Additional Professional Assistance in Nine-Year Elementary Schools* adopted by Council of Experts for General Education. We could not allow that. Consequently, National Examinations Centre and a team of experts for individual disorders, handicaps and deficiency defined a framework of adaptations, which has changed slightly since 2008, especially because of more precise definitions of disorders, handicaps and deficiency and practical experience with its implementation. This was done in an attempt to regulate adaptations at external assessment of knowledge, which enable pupils with SEN to show their knowledge and skills in the same manner as their peers.

Data for period between 2008 and 2010 show that pupils with SEN who request adaptations when they sit the NA also have adaptations in all three subjects: Slovene language (Italian or Hungarian), Mathematics and third subject.

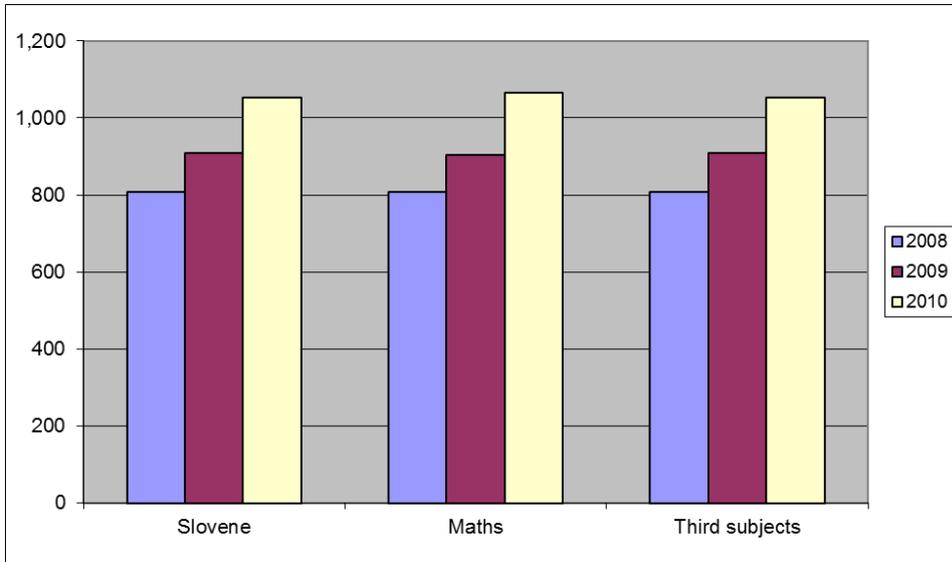


Figure 6: Number of pupils with SEN who took the NA at the end of the third period, by individual subjects, regular examination term 2008-2010.
Source: Ric 2010

At the regular examination term of the NA in Mathematics and Slovene in 2010, 99% of pupils with special needs opted for adaptations when sitting the exam (extended time, optional breaks during testing, writing or reading the test with the help of a computer or an assistant...). Almost half of pupils requested adapted rating and use of special accessories when taking the test in Slovene. In Mathematics a substantial number of pupils requested the use of special accessories (special writing kit, adapted geometry kit, additional sheets of paper, calculators, sheets with mathematical formulas without any hint as to how they might be used, cards with multiplication table, measure converting chart...). Less than a quarter of pupils used modified papers (modified enlarged papers, enlarged unmodified papers, tests in electronic form, Braille papers...) both in Mathematics and Slovene.

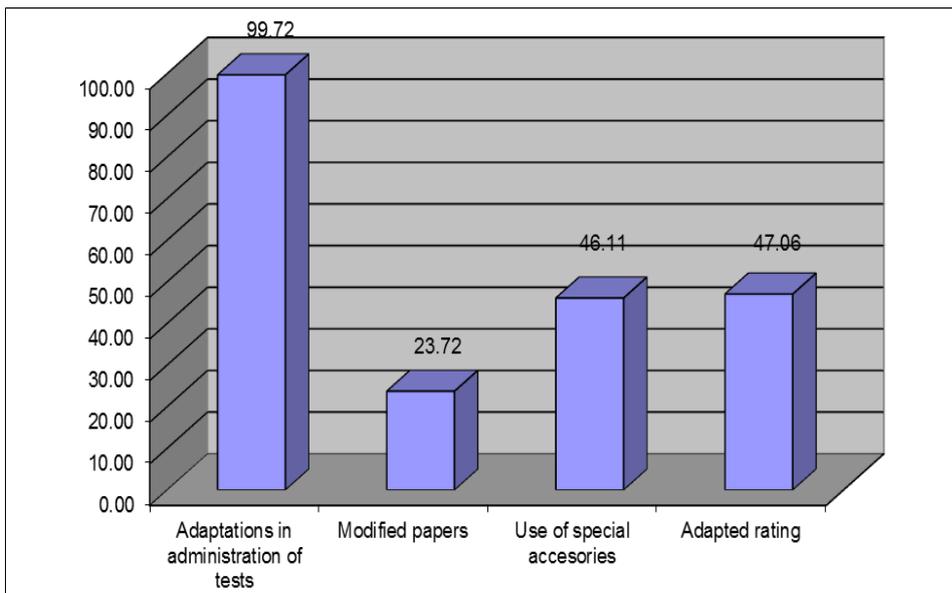


Figure 7: Types of adaptations used by pupils with SEN who took the NA in Slovene at the end of the third period, regular examination term 2010 (in %).
Source: Ric 2010

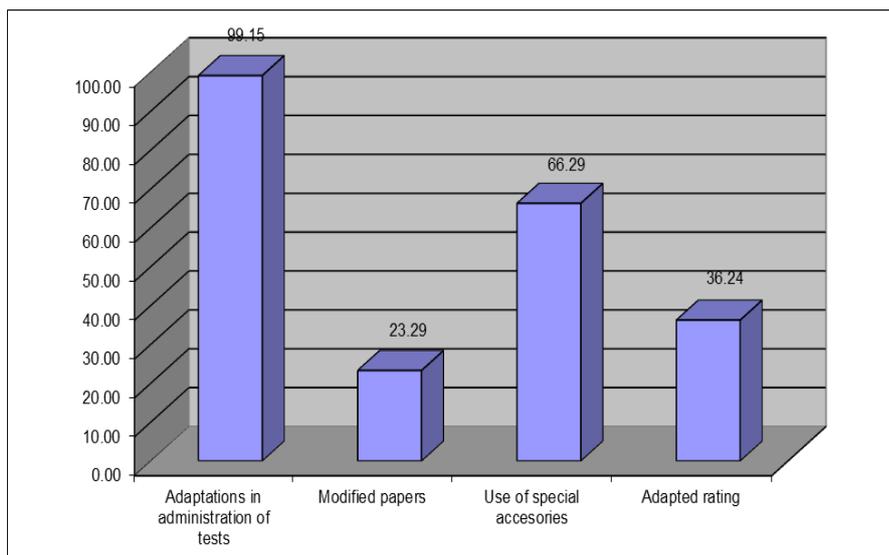


Figure 8: Types of adaptations used by pupils with SEN who took the NA in Mathematics at the end of the third period, regular examination term 2010 (in %).
Source: Ric 2010

At the regular examination term of the NA in 2010, 1,296 tests were rated using adapted criteria, 38.3% of which were in Slovene, 29.8% in Mathematics and 31.9% in third subject.

Figure 9 shows a share of pupils with SEN based on their disorder, handicap or deficiency with adapted rating at regular examination term of the NA in Slovene in 2010. All blind pupils, pupils with serious vision disorders, deaf and hard of hearing pupils were rated using adapted criteria. This ratio was also high for pupils with speech disorders, pupils with multiple disorders, handicaps and deficiency and pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas. There were only two pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their share was not authoritative. Compared to 2009, the share of pupils with deficiencies in individuals learning areas fell sharply, because when requesting the adaptations pupils were no longer able to choose the adaptations linked with achieving standards of knowledge.

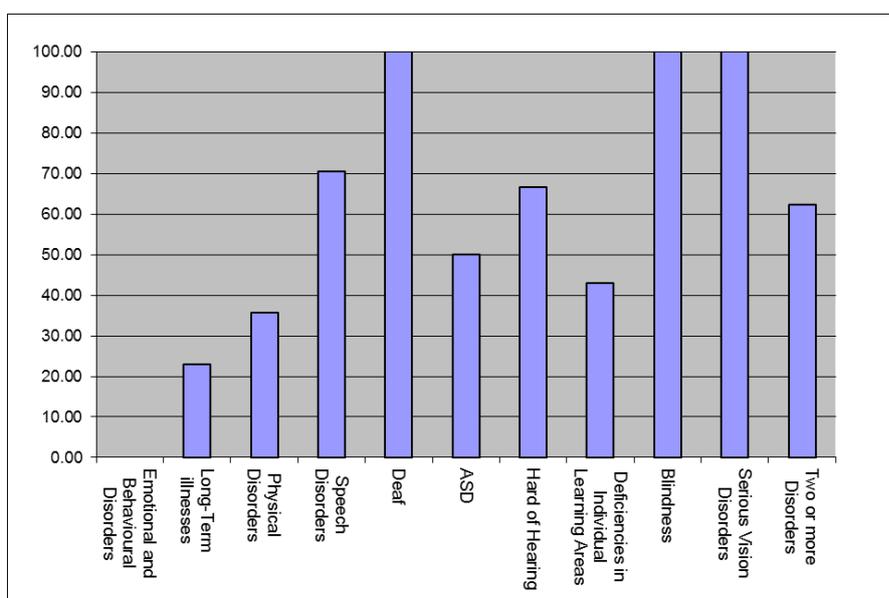


Figure 9: Share of pupils with SEN who took the NA in Slovene with adapted rating at the end of the third period, based on their disorder, handicap or deficiency, regular examination term 2006-2010 (in %).
Source: Ric 2010

Similar conditions were also seen at other subjects, although the shares were somewhat lower there.

Achievements of pupils with SEN at the NA

Assessment and grading of knowledge is one part of the learning process. Beside their school grades pupils in Slovenia can also receive information within the primary education system through their achievements at the NA, which provides the pupils, their parents, the schools and the entire education system with additional information on achieving standards of knowledge defined in the school curricula.

Far too little attention is devoted to the achievements at the NA and the same is true for the achievements of pupils with SEN. Instead of using the achievement analyses to provide better teaching, learning processes and better knowledge, for evaluation of school curricula, to form more uniform criteria of assessment performed by the teachers and last but not least to provide common educational opportunities for all pupils, these analyses are rarely taken into consideration, even worse, it seems that they are often intentionally ignored. Disregarding achievements means that the learning process is incomplete and that achievements do not act as feedback information on the teaching and learning processes and the knowledge acquired by the pupils.

We can agree with Štefanc that "in the Slovene pedagogical community we can often notice trends to take away from assessment in school the function for which it is regarded as 'repressive', as if the society were 'arm-twisting' the individual into submission." For this reason we must strive to reduce the amount of failure in schools as much as possible if we cannot eradicate it completely. Even though we believe that it is vital to ensure all pupils entering the school successful learning and steady improvement, this does not mean that we can unreservedly accept any solution in the field of assessment in schools. The problem of failure in school is much too complex to be isolated and transformed into a primarily "psychological problem" of an individual pupil, for which we are certain that it is best solved by believing that the social - primarily selective and thus repressive - function of assessment and failure in school will simply lose its edge if we can only mask it into practices such as authentic assessment, self-evaluation, descriptive evaluation etc." (Štefanc 2011:113–114)

Annual reports data on sitting the NA in the last few years show that pupils with SEN are achieving lower scores than their peers.

In the following paragraphs we will present the achievements of pupils with SEN compared to their peers at the regular examination term of the NA in 2010. Since this analysis covers pupils who are educated in elementary schools with equivalent education standard who use numerous adaptations when sitting the test, one would assume that their results would be comparable to that of their peers. However, the results show quite the opposite.

Because direct comparison of tests at individual subjects over the years is scientifically not quite acceptable, we calculated for all subjects that were being tested from 2008 to 2010 a share of average percentage points achieved by pupils with SEN compared to their peers. The analysis shows that pupils with SEN perform the worst in Mathematics. In 2010 they achieved only 58.8% of percentage points of their average peer. This share has been approximately constant in the last three years. Pupils with SEN fared somewhat better in Slovene where they achieved 64.0% of percentage points in 2010. They achieved much better results in third subjects. All "subjects which focus on developing motor and other physical skills" stand out although other compulsory third subjects in 8th and 9th grade do not lag behind by much. We need to point out that the NA in Hungarian and Italian were taken only by one or two pupils with SEN and the data is not authoritative in that case.

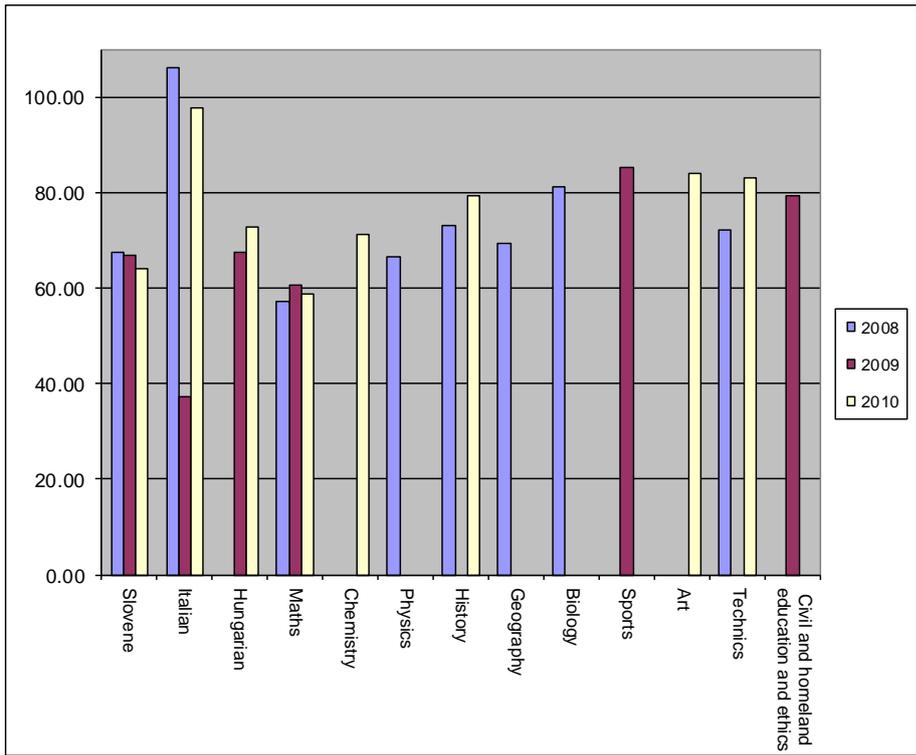


Figure 10: Share of percentage points achieved by pupils with SEN compared to their peers at the NA at the end of the third period, regular examination term 2008-2010 (in %).
Source: Ric 2010

The assertion above is corroborated also with Figure 11, which shows average number of percentage points of pupils with SEN and their peers at regular examination term of the NA in 2010.

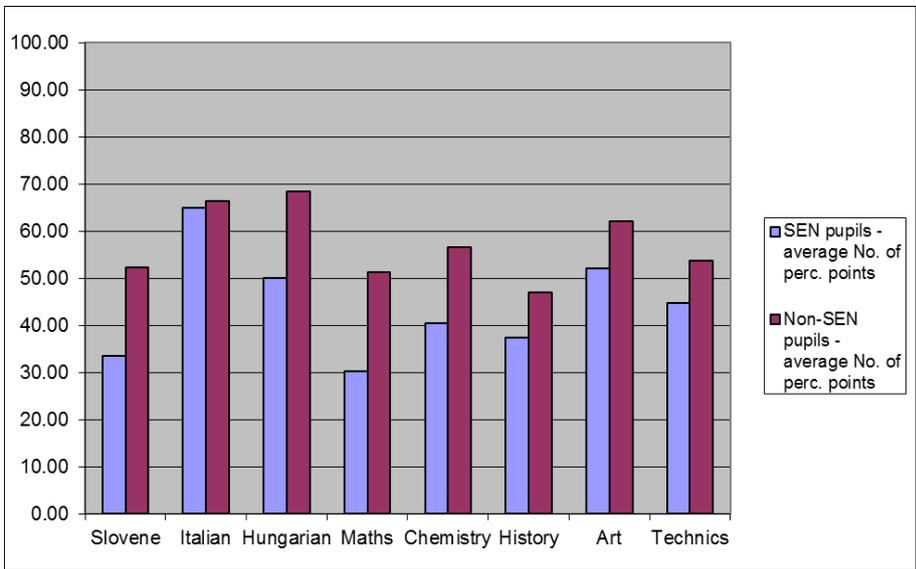


Figure 11: Average number of percentage points achieved by pupils with SEN compared to their peers at the NA at the end of the third period, regular examination term in 2010.
Source: Ric 2010

Average achievement of pupils with SEN in 9th grade in Slovene was 33.4 percentage points, while their peers achieved 52.0 percentage points. Distribution of achievements of non-SEN pupils is similar to the normal Gauss curve while distribution of achievements of SEN pupils is shifted to the left and asymmetric to the right because two thirds of pupils achieved less than 50 percentage points. In 2010,

81.8% of pupils with SEN achieved less than 50 percentage points while there were 45.7% of such pupils among their peers. Data show that this share has been increasing since 2008.

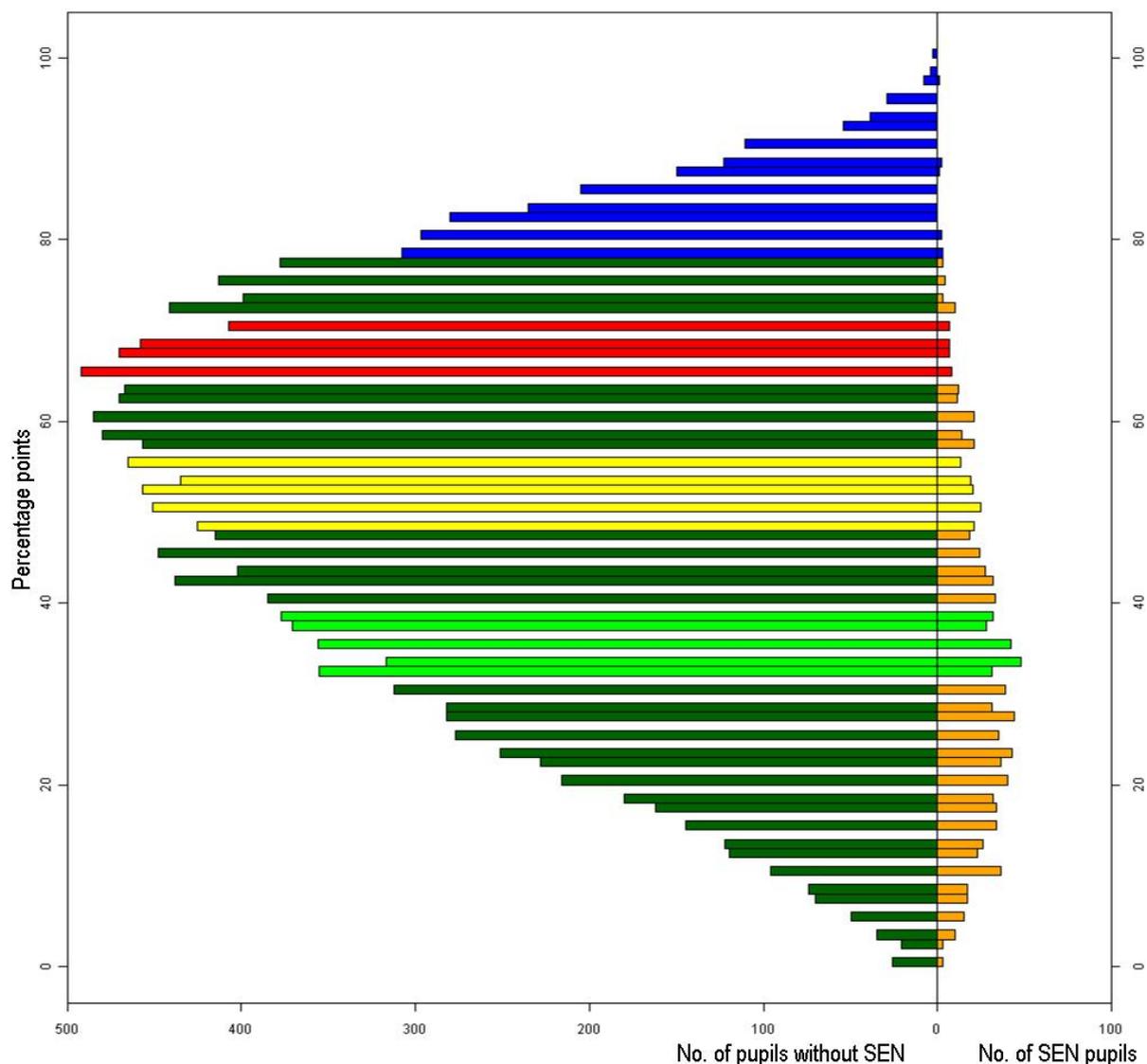


Figure 12: Distribution of pupils with SEN and their peers based on the number of percentage points achieved at the NA in Slovene, regular examination term 2010.

Source: Ric 2010

Average achievement of pupils with SEN in 9th grade in Mathematics was even worse than in Slovene and amounted to 30.3 percentage points, while the average achievement of their peers was 51.3 percentage points. Distribution of achievements of non-SEN pupils is similar to the normal Gauss curve while distribution of achievements of pupils with SEN is shifted to the left and asymmetric to the right because most pupils achieved less than 40 percentage points. In 2010, 87.4% of pupils with SEN achieved less than 50 percentage points while there were 49.3% of such pupils among their peers. Data show that this share has been increasing in Mathematics since 2008 as well.

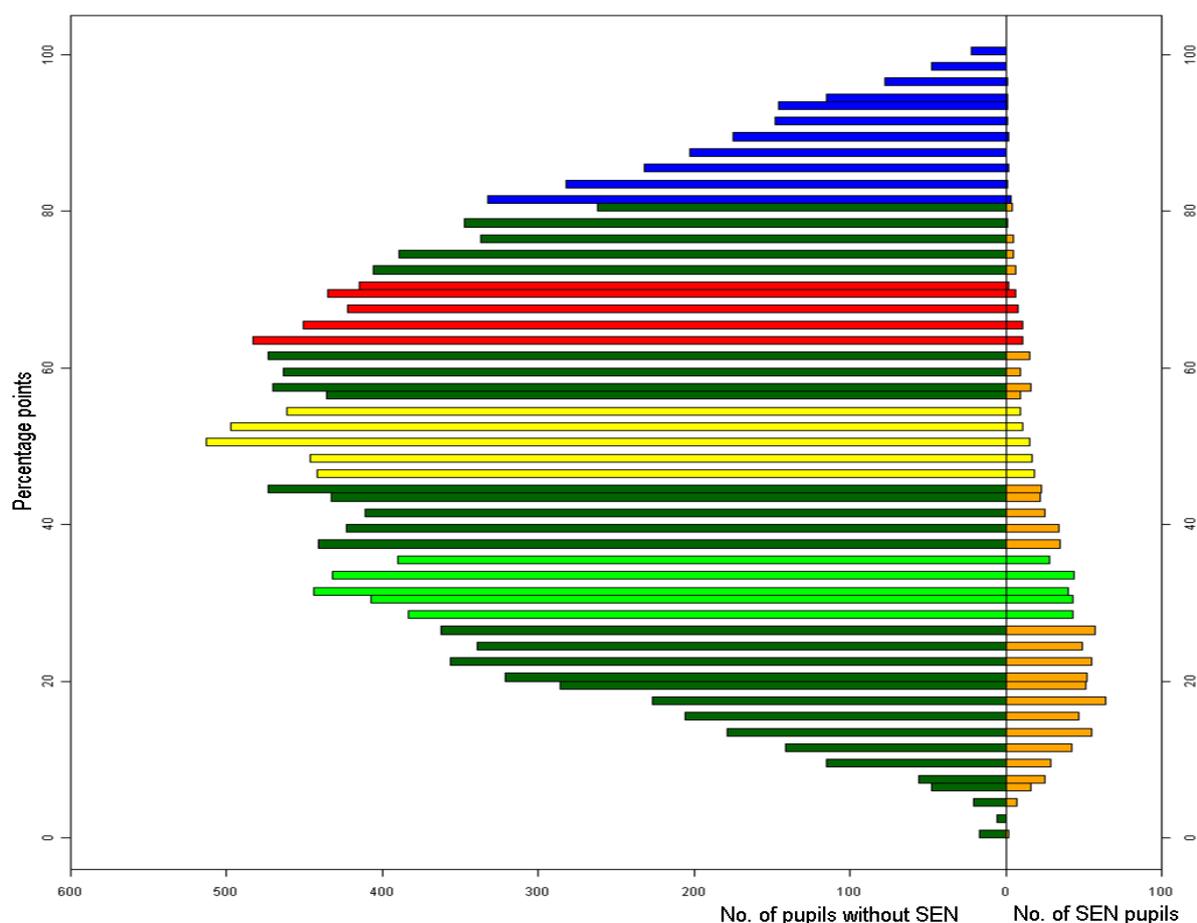


Figure 13: Distribution of pupils with SEN compared to their peers based on the percentage points achieved at the NA in Mathematics, regular examination term 2010.
Source: Ric 2010

Pupils with SEN have fared much worse at all subjects that are tested with the NA at the end of primary education compared to other pupils, which has a direct influence on statistically lower achievements of the whole population. Pupils with deficiencies in individual learning areas are the most extensive category so we can conclude that this bears influence on lower achievements of all pupils with SEN. For the sake of all pupils we should direct more attention to separate consideration of achievements in order to compensate for that. If we know the level of achievements of SEN and non-SEN pupils we will be able to successfully increase the educational standards of both. Data clearly show that other pupils, who are not classified as SEN pupils or they have Decision of Placement but did not apply for adaptations when taking the NA, also have poor achievements.

Data by Slovene municipalities also show that there is a weak correlation between the shares of achievements of SEN and non-SEN pupils. This means that the higher the share of pupils with SEN, the poorer are the achievements of all pupils at the NA, however, other factors also bare influence on poorer results.

We do not know the reason why the results are so poor. We can only guess that various factors bear influence: low rate of familiarity among teachers with methods and techniques of teaching pupils with various disorders, handicaps and deficiency, performance of teaching instead of expert activities which would help the pupils overcome their deficiency, lack of expert staff, especially in smaller schools located on the periphery, material conditions of the schools...

We would particularly like to point out one of the reasons that we notice every year when reading more than 2,000 applications of pupils with SEN, and that is improper placement of pupils into too advanced education programmes (regular elementary school). Even if we secured appropriate professional

education of teachers and experts and improved material conditions, it would still not remove weaknesses and deficiencies of inappropriate placement.

On the basis of adaptations when taking the NA proposed for their pupils by their schools in cooperation with their parents, we can conclude that numerous pupils in school take tests adapted just at or even below the threshold of minimal standards of knowledge. We assume that these pupils do not achieve equivalent standards of education and should not have been included into the educational programme in which they have been educated, which casts doubt on the eligibility of their placement and puts under question the adequacy of expert and teaching help. One would expect that pupils enrolled into regular elementary schools would show better learning results with the appropriate expert and teaching than they are currently showing. As put by Lesar (2009: 341): "Criterion for enrolment into regular school is whether a pupil has such a type and level of deficiency that she or he will be able to achieve the same standard of education as other pupils." *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act* therefore absolutely protects the minimal standards of knowledge. Unfortunately this has backfired in practice and our schools with equivalent educational standards also enrol pupils with intellectual disabilities who are educated in the same educational programme as other pupils. This is corroborated by Rovšek (2009: 355) who says: "Beside systemic introduction of nine-year elementary school, a chaotic practice has been noticed in Slovenia of enrolling children with intellectual disabilities into regular elementary schools. While *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act* predicts execution of programmes for children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools, this is not sufficient basis for inclusion." In order to explain this issue in detail, additional analysis is needed.

Achievements of pupils with SEN at the NA and their school grades

Distribution of pupils with SEN by number of percentage points achieved in Slovene at regular examination term of the NA in 2010 and distribution of pupils based on their school grade at this subject in 9th grade of elementary school match pretty well. At the end of elementary school, most pupils got a 2 (D) in Slovene, followed by pupils who received a 3 (C). The distribution on the graph in Figure 14 shows that very few pupils with school grade 2 achieved more than 50 percentage points at the NA. On the other hand, some pupils received a 5 (A) even with less than 40 percentage points at the NA.

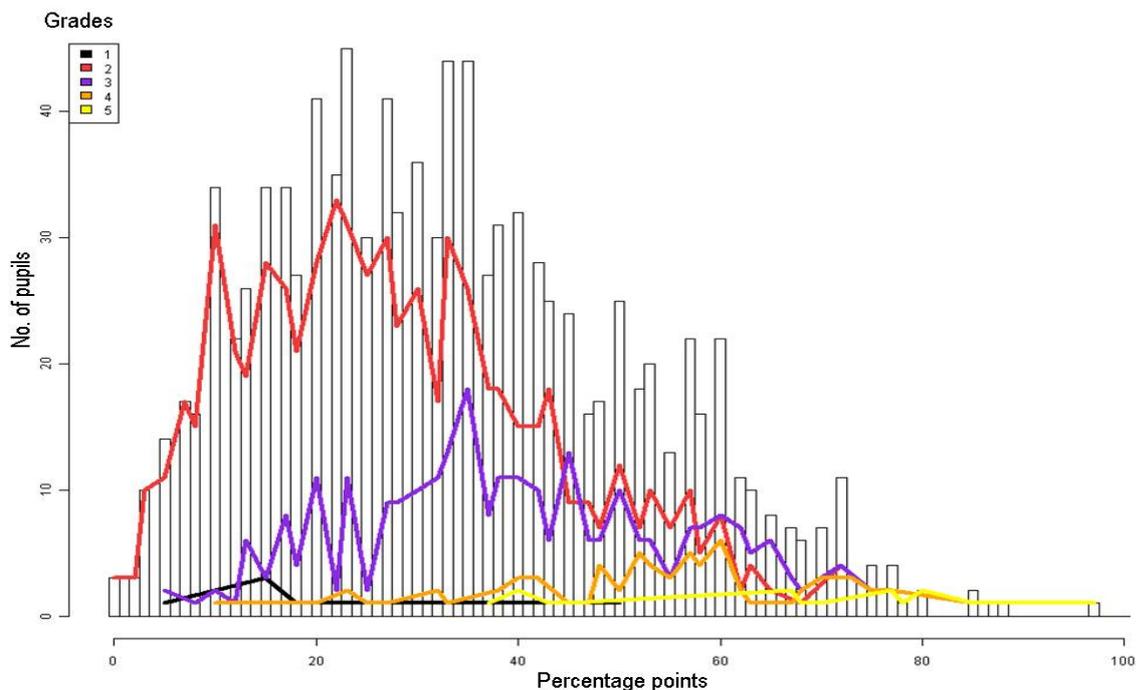


Figure 14: Distribution of pupils with SEN based on the number of percentage points achieved at the NA in Slovene at regular examination term and based on the school grades received in 9th grade in 2010.

Source: Ric 2010

The situation is similar in Mathematics, the only difference being that the distribution is shifted even further to the right. The same is true for this subject in 9th grade.

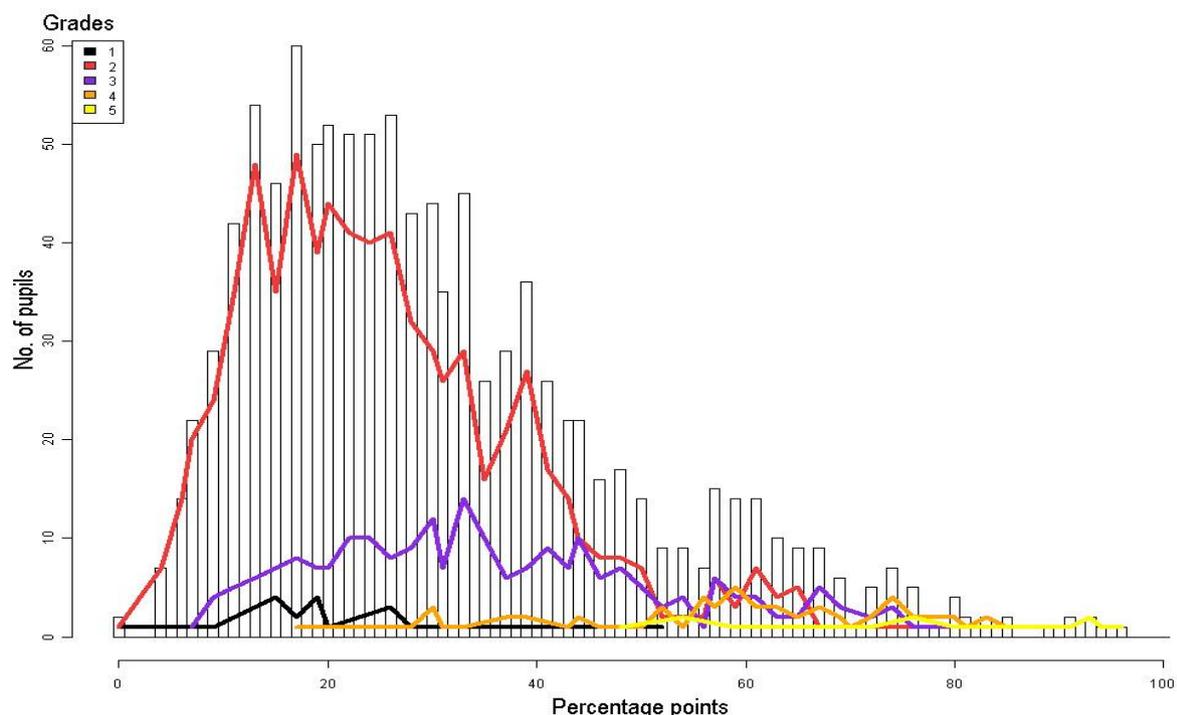


Figure 15: Distribution of pupils with SEN based on the number of percentage points achieved at the NA in Mathematics at regular examination term and based on the school grades received in 9th grade in 2010.

Source: Ric 2010

Data show that many pupils with SEN do not achieve minimal standards of knowledge and yet they complete primary education with a positive grade which puts under question the real value of their knowledge and their school grades. Based on this data and the records in applications for adaptations at the NA we can assume that the teachers lower minimal standards of knowledge to such an extent that even pupils with SEN can successfully complete their education. Consequently, criteria for achieving higher standards or levels of knowledge that must be achieved by other pupils to receive higher grades are lowered as well. Thus pupils who would barely achieve minimal standards of knowledge receive grades 2, 3 or 4 (D, C or B). The effect of this is a flood of A's and A-pupils in Slovene elementary schools.

Discrepancy between the actual knowledge and the school grades is corroborated also by the finding that positive grades do not guarantee that the children have achieved satisfactory level of knowledge. Research results, which included more than 127 experts (Jurišić 2006: 174–189) who work with pupils with SEN report that more than 56% of experts agree that teachers grade their pupils unrealistically because they are afraid of reproaches that they do not accept these pupils (11% are undecided, 13% did not provide an answer and only 18% disagree with this statement). The second finding, which is even more important for the educational system is that "positive grades do not necessarily mean that children gained sufficient knowledge". Whooping 85.7% of experts agree with this assertion (either in part or in full), 8% are undecided and only 6.3% partially disagree with this statement (no one completely disagreed with it).

What can the achievements of pupils with SEN tell us about the process of integration/inclusion into the Slovene school system?

With a gradual renovation of the Slovene educational system, which began 15 years ago, a new path of inclusive paradigm in the field of education of children with special educational needs was also conceived. Experts were divided which is corroborated by the following quote: "There exist among the pedagogues and specialist pedagogues different views and even disagreements regarding the concepts of inclusion and integration that have been dragging for more than a decade, ever since Salamanca, Spain in 1994 when a new concept of inclusion was added to the existing concept of integration at the UNESCO conference. At that time numerous experts disregarded this concept and are still very unhappy with it, saying that it is unnecessary and that the concept of integration already includes everything encompassed by the concept of inclusion; that inclusion is merely a new name for integration, which causes nothing but chaos and disruption among experts; that pedagogues and specialist pedagogues have only recently just barely overcome the worst abhorrence towards integration and now we are creating new ones; since integration has not really caught on yet, introduction of new concepts will only cast doubt on the integration paradigm. The introduction of concept of inclusion in pedagogy was received by many experts abroad and in Slovenia as unnecessary, redundant and even deceptive." (Skalar 2010: 1)

We can find many definitions of integration and inclusion in the professional literature. Most often it is said that integration means merely physical inclusion of pupils with SEN into the normal environment as much as possible, while inclusion also includes social adaptations and acceptance - in other words, school for everybody. A common school, where every pupil should be, even those with special educational needs. Every pupil is unique and the school must operate in such a way to satisfy educational needs of all pupils.

Although the ideas and our goals were much more clouded than they are today (Analysis of Education of Pupils with SEN 2010: 7-21) much has been done for SEN pupils in the last 15 years:

- Laws were adopted, which offer different possibilities of education to the pupils with SEN;
- A unified term was introduced: children with special needs;
- The categorisation of disorders, disabilities and deficiencies was modified;
- Categorisation process was replaced by the process of placement into educational programmes.

There is still no shortage of problems and disadvantages that need to be resolved:

- Although classification of pupils with SEN based on their disorder, handicap and deficiency is supposed to have been dropped in favour of actual educational needs of the pupils, this has not been put into practice;
- There were too few expert discussions and the experts were not widely included into the modification of the system;
- The preparation of teachers and experts for systemic changes was poor;
- Lack of properly trained staff and additional expert help;
- Problems with transfer among different educational programmes;
- Inadequate placement of children for various reasons.

All enumerated faults have doubtlessly had influence on poor performance of pupils with SEN and thus on the performance of the whole population. Pupils' achievements are the main indicator of efficiency and success of the school system. Primary goal of the school is to provide education and judging by the achievements of pupils with SEN in Slovenia, we can say that it has not performed well in this respect. NA results are without doubt an objective alarming indicator that changes in this area are urgent if we want to achieve inclusion in the true meaning of the word. The idea of inclusion presupposes a flexible educational system catering to the differences between pupils which we cannot say to be true for pupils with SEN in Slovenia who are enrolled into regular schools (exception might be blind pupils, pupils with serious vision disorders, deaf, hard of hearing or long-term illnesses). Pupils with SEN have been integrated into regular elementary schools, have been given individualised educational programmes (which are often incompatible with *Instructions for Adapted Educational Programmes with Additional Professional Help*, which are in turn too vague and in need of revision) and they were appointed teachers who did not receive proper training at the university or at the additional professional courses to teach SEN pupils. Last but not least our legislation does not enable education in several educational programmes at the same time. We can therefore say that Slovenia is

far away from true inclusive schooling at least in the area of educating children with SEN. In developed inclusive environments it is reported that the inclusion of pupils with SEN improved the achievements of all pupils, because teachers adapt their teaching methods to all pupils and not only to those with Decision of Placement. In Slovenia, on the other hand, the ever larger share of pupils with SEN has lowered achievements of all pupils.

Data analysis has lead us to the findings summarised above, however, we still cannot answer the question whether the inclusion of pupils with SEN into regular schools had any bearing on their poor performance as there is no comparable data available for external assessment before the intensive integration. Special analyses are needed even if we want to answer the question whether integration of pupils with SEN lowers the performance of their peers.

NA achievements and other data on pupils with SEN that are collected at the national level should have been taken into consideration when a new *Placement of Children with Special Needs Act*, was being prepared. It is unfortunate, however, that no comprehensive analysis was done.

Usefulness of data about achievements at the NA used in inclusive environments

European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education lists in its study *Assessment in Inclusive Settings – Key Issues for Policy and Practice* (Brussels, 2007), which was done on the basis of analysis of 23 countries of the European Community three different types of assessment: test of achievement of standards of knowledge, test of early determination of individual needs and test as a feedback on learning and teaching. Each of these assessment methods has its pros and cons and all countries strive to develop positive effects and minimise negative effects. The countries have also called for a new, "balanced" view of assessment where every element of different forms assessment provides information and lends support to other tests and where the system of assessment supports inclusion instead of being one of its barriers. Assessment is thus integral for the development of inclusive education.

Basic principles of inclusive assessment are:

- Assessment needs to promote learning and give feedback to all pupils.
- All pupils must be included in assessment process.
- Needs of all children with SEN have to be studied and considered when general and specific assessment policies are designed.
- All forms of assessment must be complementary and must provide information to each other.
- All forms of assessment must respect differences in identification and evaluation of individual progress of individual pupils.
- Inclusive assessment must always avoid segregation. It has to avoid any and all forms of ranking and rather has to focus on learning and teaching that promote inclusion in regular schools.

With the development of inclusive primary education in these countries, the view on the basic goal of assessment as well as the use of information acquired in this process have changed. The main goal of inclusive assessment of knowledge is the promotion of learning and inclusion of all participants in the education process, including pupils with SEN. Although there were differences among countries, all experts agreed that better performance of all pupils, including pupils with SEN is integral; furthermore, information on the achievements acquired with assessment must be used for various purposes and distributed to various users.

In Great Britain inclusion has been under intensive preparation for many years while integration was introduced 20 years ago. In 2004, national strategic programme "*Removing Barriers to Achievement*" was introduced in order to improve achievements of their pupils, which included various initiatives. First results are already showing. "26% of pupils aged around 11 achieved expected results at national assessment in English and Mathematics at Key Stage 2. The share of successful pupils rose to 34% in 2008, although the number of pupils with SEN had also increased. We determined that development of knowledge and resourcefulness of our teachers in handling in various ways both pupils with SEN as well as other pupils played a major role in this process." Differences in achievements of pupils with SEN and their peers are thus decreasing (Inclusion in action. Improving outcomes for special educational needs. The National Strategies: 2009).

If we want to offer knowledge in Slovene regular schools that would promote learning in all pupils, even pupils with SEN, the policies and practice must be aligned with the notion that assessment is the basic part of the learning process and teaching. Unfortunately the data on achievements of pupils with SEN have so far not been used to improve the educational system. As the data show, poor performance and low scores are not achieved only by pupils with SEN who applied for adaptations in sitting the tests. A national strategy is thus needed to boost performance of all pupils. We can say that our NA adheres to all principles of inclusive testing, however we found severe lagging in using testing results to plan educational policies.

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Abstract

Inclusion and Achievements of Pupils with SEN at the National Assessment in Slovenia at the end of Primary Education

In Slovene educational practice we can note three conflicting processes: the erosion of standards of knowledge, combined with a wish to improve the achievements of our pupils, particularly on higher taxonomic levels of knowledge, and the integration/inclusion of an increased number of pupils with special educational needs (especially pupils with specific learning deficiencies) into regular elementary schools, where they must achieve equivalent standards of knowledge as their peers.

In the presentation we discuss differences between the achievements of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and others in all subjects so far included in National Assessment at the end of primary education, where achievement gaps sometimes exceed 20 percentage points.

The analysis shows that pupils with SEN have their worst results in Mathematics. In 2010 there were almost 81.8% of pupils with SEN who achieved less than 50 percentage points in Slovene, rising to over 87.4% in Mathematics. The data show they nevertheless finish their education with a positive school grade, which makes us wonder how realistic their teacher assigned grades really are. We suspect that teachers are lowering minimum standards to the point where pupils with SEN are able to successfully finish the school year. As a consequence, the criteria for higher standards or levels of knowledge that other pupils need to achieve in order to get better grades are being lowered as well.

The data indicate that the so-called “soft” integration that we have been witnessing in Slovenia since 2004 is not yielding positive results. We question whether such low achievements mean that these pupils have been directed to an unsuitable educational programme, where no suitably adapted programme with appropriately trained teachers is available. We also have doubts about the financial effectiveness of extra help provided by teachers and specialists.

Translation of this article was co-financed by European Social Fund and Ministry of Education and Sport within the framework of “*Added Value Development Project*”.