

## *Chapter 1*

### **Post-school transitions for young adults with disabilities**

*Access to tertiary education is essential for young adults with disabilities: it boosts their chances of access to employment, their possibilities for inclusion and helps to put the prejudices surrounding impairment in the background. It can take on special meaning for young adults with disabilities in that the transition to adulthood changes the demands on educational systems and the conditions of eligibility for aid and support and creates new responsibilities for these individuals. In addition, the path to tertiary education requires the building of bridges and the creation of local synergies to mobilise actors in educational systems and in social and medical circles. Access to tertiary education also presupposes the existence of procedures for providing support to allow young adults with disabilities to cope with their new responsibilities and to adjust to the demands of tertiary education. In this respect it requires an integrated transition system that can ensure a safe pathway from secondary to tertiary education.*

## Introduction

This chapter identifies factors that affect the transition to tertiary education and employment for young adults with disabilities, and the good practices needed to offer them equal opportunities in terms of access, success and inclusion. It highlights specific factors linked to the passage to adulthood of young adults with a disability or a specific learning difficulty (see Box 1.1) and the impact, in terms of transition, of the definitions of disability, the eligibility for different forms of support, and the demands placed on young adults with disabilities. It also draws attention to the factors that facilitate the coherence and continuity of pathways through educational levels and sectors and into employment. It stresses in addition core elements that should be considered to allow young adults with disabilities to adapt to the requirements of tertiary education and the labour market, as well as the components of an integrated transition system.

## The context

It is not easy to obtain precise information on the number of young adults with a disability or a specific learning difficulty. Participating countries either do not have accurate data on those aged 18-25 years or did not include them in their reports. According to the data supplied by Ireland, there were 393 785 persons with disabilities in that country in 2006, of whom 8.7% were between the ages of 20 and 29 (Central Statistics Office, 2008). In Norway, 11% of all 20-35 year-olds were reported to have a form of disability in 2007, the equivalent of a little over 100 000 persons in this age group (Statistics Norway, 2009).

The Czech Republic had around 1 million persons with disabilities in 2007, or 10% of the total population; 60 621 (5.9% of persons with disabilities) were 15-29 years old (Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, 2009). According to the 2006 population survey, the United States had 41 259 809 non-institutionalised persons with disabilities (age 5 and older), of whom 1 501 184 were between the ages of 16 and 20 and represented 3.6% of the total population of persons with disabilities (US Census Bureau, 2006).

Data on young adults with disabilities described in the country reports are also lacking or imprecise. In Norway, these young adults have mental health problems (58%), cognitive disorders (36%), impaired mobility (20%), a communication disorder (26%), a breathing problem (20%), a visual impairment (18%), or a sensory impairment (10%) (Statistics Norway, 2009).

In the Czech Republic, these young adults have a physical disability (42.6%), a psychological disorder (37.7%), a metabolic problem (34.4%), a cognitive impairment (14.7%), or a sensory impairment (16.5%) (Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, 2009). In Ireland, they present a cognitive impairment (34.5%), a specific learning difficulty (31.6%), a psychological disorder (23.3%), or a sensory impairment (14.1%); in addition, 45.7% encountered problems for getting to work or to school (13.3%) or simply venturing outside their home (15.4%) (Central Statistics Office, 2008).

Young adults aged 16-20 years with one or more disabilities surveyed in the United States in 2008 had a visual impairment (17.3%), a hearing impairment (12.2%), a mobility impairment (15.6%), a cognitive impairment (68.9%), a self-care disability (11.6%) or difficulty for living independently (33.9%) (Erickson *et al.*, 2010).

### Box 1.1 Methodological considerations

This volume builds on previous OECD work on the transition to working life and higher education and on a literature review on the transition to tertiary education and to employment in the United States, in Germany, in Norway and in the United Kingdom (OECD, 2000, 2003a; Felkendorff and Lischer, 2005; Hvinden *et al.*, 2008; Dyson, 2008; Florian and Rafal, 2008; Ebersold, 2008a). It also relies on the background reports from the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Norway and the United States and on the site visits carried out in 2009.

The term tertiary education involves education offering ISCED 5A courses as well as ISCED 5B courses. Programmes, upper secondary schools and tertiary education institutions described in this volume were either mentioned in countries' background reports or visited during the site visits. However, these programmes and initiatives do not reflect the diversity of initiatives in participating countries to facilitate the transition of young adults with disabilities to tertiary education and to employment. This volume does not claim to reflect the full descriptions contained in the country reports but aims to identify good practices that facilitate the transition to tertiary education and employment

This publication focuses primarily on young adults with disabilities in the period of life at which adolescence ends and they start on the path to adulthood. They need to define what they want to do at the end of their schooling and determine how to achieve their goals and be included into society as adults (Furstenberg *et al.*, 2005). They are in the age bracket at which students normally complete upper secondary school or enter tertiary education.

In order to have a common approach that allows for comparing the rationales underlying policies for young adults with disabilities, the analysis relies on the OECD's grouping of national definitions of disability into three cross-national categories (OECD, 2005):

- Cross-national category A (CNC A) includes students with disabilities or impairments viewed in medical terms as organic disorders attributable to organic pathologies (*e.g.* in relation to sensory, motor or neurological defects). The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems attributable to these disabilities.
- Cross-national category B (CNC B) encompasses students with behavioural or emotional disorders or specific learning difficulties. The educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems in the interaction between the student and the educational context.
- Cross-national category C (CNC C) represents students with disadvantages arising primarily from socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistic factors. The educational need is to compensate for the disadvantages attributable to these factors.

This publication concentrates on young adults who have been granted additional resources designed to meet educational needs arising from an impairment or an illness (CNC A) or a specific learning difficulty (CNC B). It excludes those who receive additional resources as a result of a social disadvantage (CNC C), unless they also have educational needs stemming from an impairment, an illness or a learning difficulty.

The term learning difficulty therefore describes students whose needs arise primarily from problems in the interaction between the student and the educational context (CNC B).

## Access to tertiary education: a path towards inclusion

Access to tertiary education is an integral part of the right to education and a major condition for social and professional inclusion. It helps to reduce the burden of prejudice with respect to disability and increases the chances of employment. In 2007, for example, the employment rate of disabled Norwegians with tertiary education was 30% higher than that of persons with disabilities who had left school at the end of compulsory education (Bjerkan *et al.*, 2009);<sup>1</sup> in Ireland the probability of employment among persons with disabilities with a tertiary degree was 5% higher than that of the general working population with a tertiary degree (Gannon and Nolan, 2008). Access to tertiary education enhances the capacity of young adults with disabilities to cope with transitions and prevents those who wish and are able to work from gradually withdrawing from the labour market and becoming exposed to severe forms of marginalisation and poverty (OECD, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2008a).

Access to tertiary education is, however, more difficult for young adults with disabilities than for young adults on average. While possession of a secondary education diploma has become the rule in OECD countries in recent decades, this is not the case for young adults with disabilities. Table 1.1 shows that in many countries they have trouble getting into upper secondary school; in the United States, the number of children and teenagers receiving additional human, technical or financial resources for a disability or an illness (CNC A) decreased from 3.11% of the total student body in junior high school to 3.04% in senior high school, and it declined from 7.5% to 6.1% for students receiving additional resources because of a specific learning difficulty. In the Czech Republic, it dropped by 0.8% (from 4% to 3.2%) for students receiving additional resources because of a disability, and by more than 6% (from 6.5% to 0.5%) for those receiving additional resources because of a specific learning difficulty (OECD, 2007a).

According to Ireland's National Disability Authority (NDA), in 2007 slightly over 50% of the Irish working population (15-64 years) with disabilities had no secondary school education; the share was 18.8% for the general population (NDA, 2007) (Figure 1.1). In France, children with a disability or a specific learning difficulty have little chance of going on to upper secondary school: the country report shows that 40% of students with disabilities are placed in special education at the end of primary school, 7% are steered from lower secondary school into special education, and 6% are oriented to special education at the upper secondary level. In 2004, only 26% of persons with a disability in Norway attained a tertiary education level, compared to 33.4% for the general population (Borg, 2008). In the Czech Republic, the rate of persons with disabilities with a basic education is twice as high as that of the total population (see Figure 1.2).

The lack of academic credentials increases the vulnerability of young adults with disabilities, particularly as the level of education is rising among the general population (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). It increases their exposure to unemployment as well as to various forms of vulnerability attributable to recurrent unemployment and to the more acute forms of marginal existence associated with health systems that discourage them from searching for employment (OECD, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; De Stefano and Santamaria, 2006).

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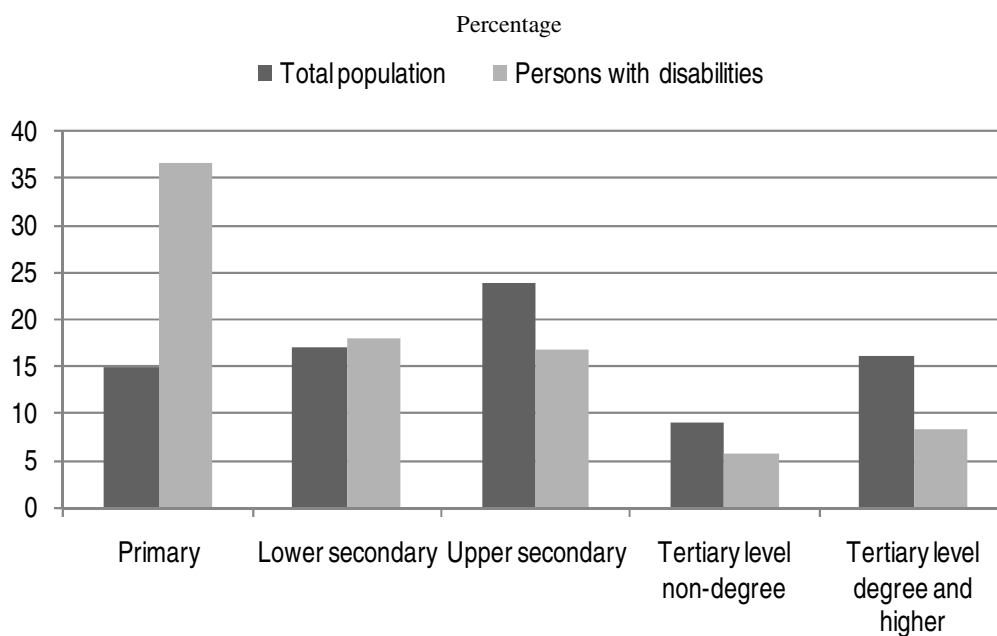
1. It is nevertheless important to recognise that, as shown later in this report, young adults with disabilities who have only secondary education may differ in profile and types of disabilities from those who have tertiary education.

**Table 1.1. Students in lower secondary education receiving disability-linked additional resources (CNC A)**

As a percentage of all students in that phase of education (2003)

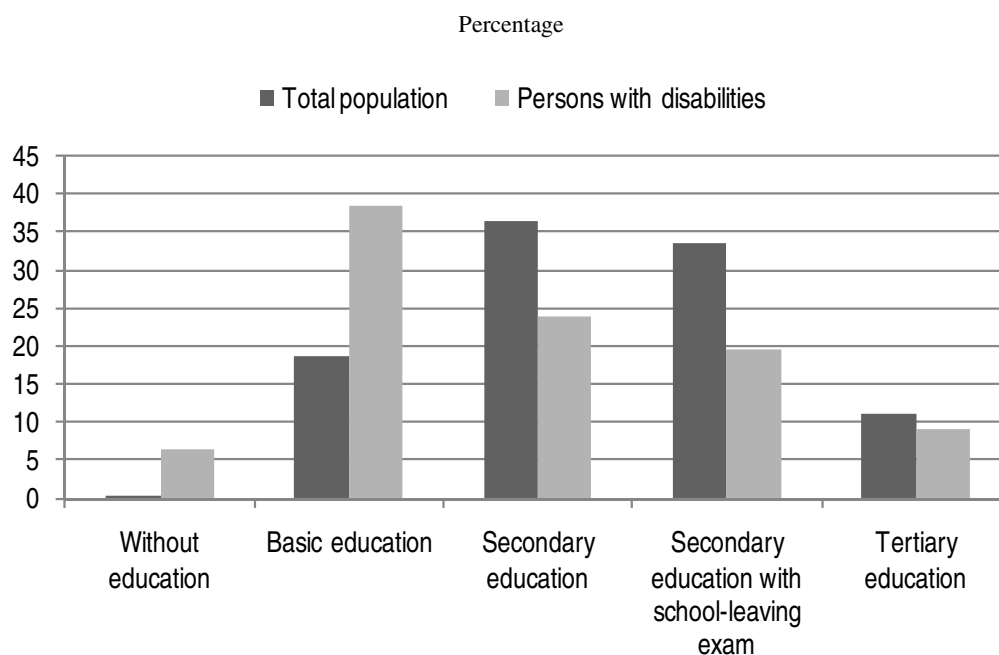
	CNC A	
	Lower secondary school	Upper secondary school
Japan	1.30	1.11
Hungary	2.87	0.09
Mexico	0.26	n.d.
Finland	4.76	1.37
Belgium (Flemish Community)	3.70	n.d.
Slovak Republic	3.60	1.75
Chile	1.34	n.d.
Spain	2.55	0.49
United Kingdom (England)	3.45	4.12
Czech Republic	3.96	3.18
United States	3.11	3.04

CNC A = Cross-national category A (see Box 1.1).

Source: OECD (2007), *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages: Policies, Statistics and Indicators*, OECD, Paris.**Figure 1.1. Education level of persons with disabilities and of the total population in Ireland (2006)**

Source: Higher Education Authority (2009), "OECD Project on Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary Education and to Employment", Country background report, Department of Education and Skills, Dublin.

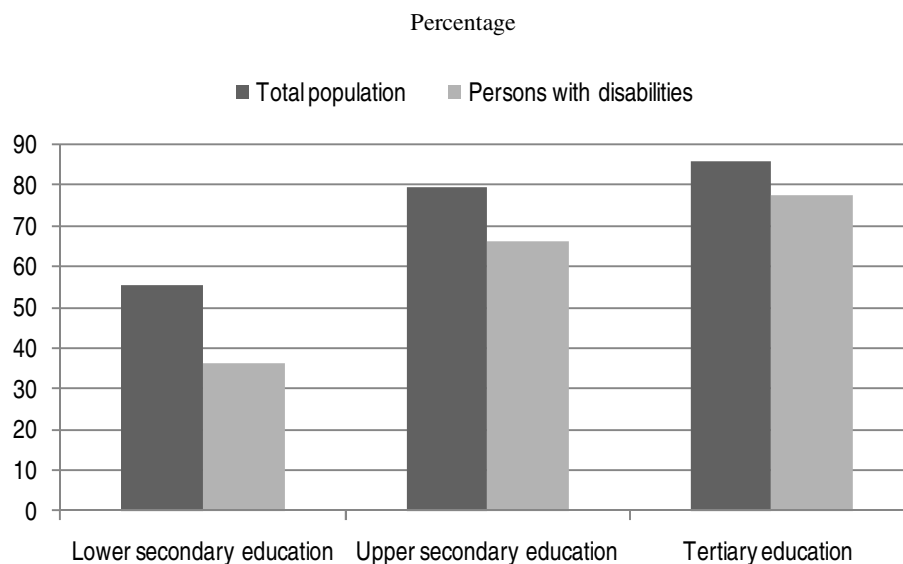
**Figure 1.2. Education level of persons with disabilities and of the total population in the Czech Republic (2007)**



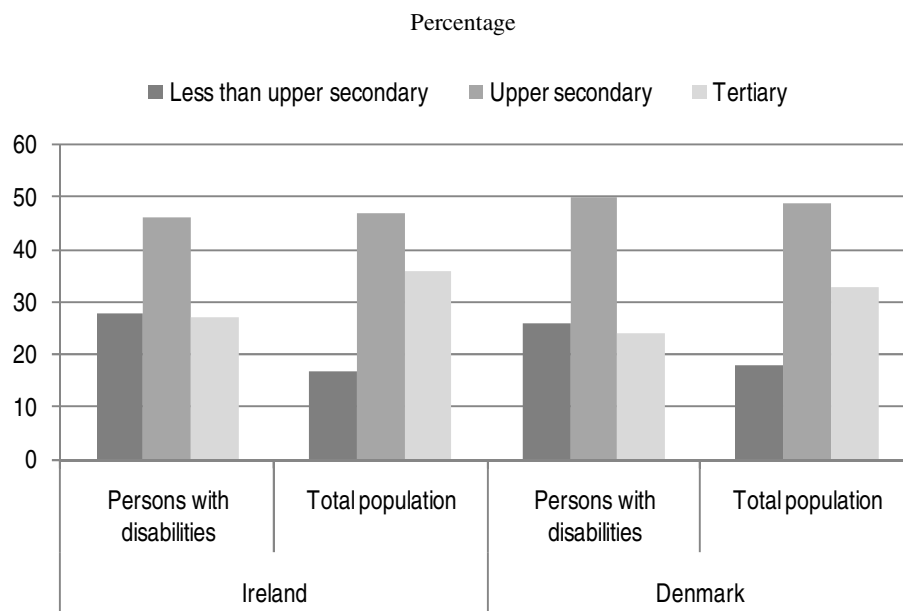
1. The number of persons with no education (0.1% of the total population) is not shown.

Source: Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic (2009), "Transitions to Tertiary Education and to Employment for Young People with Impairments and Learning Difficulties", Country background report, Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, Prague.

As with health care, individuals' well-being and chances for personal development depend on their access to education. Excluding young adults with disabilities from tertiary education deprives them of the qualifications they need for the labour market, especially in recessions when youth unemployment rises faster than that of the workforce as a whole. To exclude them from tertiary education implies a lack of interest in their chances to engage in international exchanges or in their opportunities to combine courses with a professional activity or internship. Such a lack of interest also leaves unaddressed certain challenges for tertiary education of the Bologna process, such as curriculum diversification, generalisation of lifelong education, and the creation of stronger links to the labour market. In effect it leaves young adults with disabilities more exposed to poverty, and even to crime, and to being irreparably marginalised (Wagner *et al.*, 2005; PMSU, 2005; Aston *et al.*, 2005; Dewson *et al.*, 2004).

**Figure 1.3. Employment rate by education level for persons aged 16-30 years in Norway (2006)**

Source: Legard, S. (2009), "Pathways from Education to Work for Young People with Impairments and Learning Difficulties in Norway", Work Research Institute, Oslo.

**Figure 1.4. Employment rate for persons with disabilities and for the total population aged 20-34 years in Ireland and in Denmark (2006)**

Source: OECD (2008), *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: Volume 3: Denmark, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands*, OECD, Paris.

## The challenging transition to tertiary education

Access to tertiary education and employment for young adults with disabilities greatly depends on the capacity of the secondary education system to prepare them for the passage to adulthood. The period beyond upper secondary school constitutes a transition which determines the possibilities for personal growth and for social and professional participation (OECD, 2000; Furstenberg *et al.*, 2005). It captures the passage from adolescence to adulthood, when young adults seek more autonomy, try to distance themselves from the family setting and have to face questions that require them to look both back towards a past for which they must take responsibility and towards a professional and social future that will prepare them for independence. It marks the passage from the status of pupil, whose learning is prescribed and closely supervised, to that of student, who chooses a course of further study in light of his or her interests and professional choices, which often leads to a combination of study and work, sometimes abroad. It means facing a labour market which requires qualities and skills quite different from those required of a pupil at school, and which can be unsettling for those who are not prepared.

### *New responsibilities to be shouldered*

The passage to adulthood can be especially intimidating for those with a disability or a specific learning difficulty. Their capacity to adapt to the demands of tertiary education and employment depends, more than for other young adults, on the availability of appropriate support. Pedagogical differentiation, mobilisation of additional technical, financial and human resources to support them through this period, and special arrangements to facilitate their academic success play an essential role (OECD, 1999).

Yet the conditions that give access to such support are often profoundly modified after secondary school. The requirement of accessibility in tertiary education institutions is conditioned by a specific formal request by individuals with disabilities. In Norway, for example, tertiary education institutions are merely required to make arrangements that are reasonable in the context, unlike primary and secondary schools, which are expected to provide all the conditions that may be necessary to students' success. In the United States, the legal obligation of tertiary education institutions in terms of accessibility depends on individuals' decisions to disclose their disability and needs, whereas schools are required to make the reasonable accommodations deemed appropriate for students with disabilities by the team in charge of their individual education plan (IEP) (Izzo and Lamb, 2002; Stodden *et al.*, 2002).

Access to support ceases to be the responsibility of the school at this point and depends on young adults' ability to demonstrate their needs, to see that these are recognised in terms of their course of study, and to learn about the available support and arrangements. Some young adults, especially those with a specific learning difficulty or a psychological disorder, may not want to reveal that disability, because they fear the consequences of disclosure or because they do not consider themselves "disabled". For example, according to a survey made by Trinity College Dublin, nearly two-thirds of enrolled students with disabilities hesitated to disclose their disability for fear of being stigmatised, or because they felt they did not need special support, or because, having already held a job, they did not consider themselves "disabled". In the United States, 55% of the students enrolled in tertiary education identified by their secondary school as having a disability did not consider themselves to have one by the time they had moved to tertiary education. An additional 8% who considered that they had a disability chose not



to disclose it to their tertiary schools (Newman *et al.*, 2009). Such students may deny themselves the special support and accommodation to which they are entitled.

The passage to adulthood may also modify definitions or approaches to disability. Most countries participating in the project no longer define adult disability in terms of academic standards, but instead link it to the standards of the labour market. This is the case in the United States, where the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) considers a 3-21 year-old person who needs special education and related services as having a disability. Young adults with disabilities who do not qualify for special education services under IDEA may qualify for special accommodations or modifications under Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973 and under the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA). Section 504 mainly associates disability with a problem in satisfying educational or professional requirements and the ADA protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination. In Norway, a child's or adolescent's disability is defined as an educational need indicated by the distance separating him/her from the norms of society, which must be closed by special education; for adults, the definition relates to a permanent incapacity to meet personal needs, induced by a reduced capacity to work or by a health problem that precludes employment.

Such changes of definition modify the conditions of eligibility for support and are a source of discontinuity for young adults with disabilities. This may be the case for young adults with a specific learning difficulty who have received support to facilitate their academic success but who, upon becoming adults, are no longer considered eligible in terms of access to employment. In Germany and the United Kingdom, for instance, "educational need" is no longer a formal administrative category once secondary education ends. As a result, young adults with learning difficulties, behavioural disorders or language problems may no longer have access to the support provided for in legislation concerned specifically with persons with disabilities, unless they are enrolled in education or training programmes designed for those leaving special schools (Dyson, 2008; Felkendorff and Lischer 2005). In the United States, under its eligibility criteria, the Social Security Administration provides income support for children with a disability from birth until they reach age 18. At that age, the criteria for eligibility to adult disability benefits change. According to the country report, 33% of child Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients with disabilities do not meet the eligibility criteria for adults, and more than half lose all social coverage, are not in tertiary education or employment, or have dropped out of school; a significant percentage have incomes below the poverty level. In Ireland, young adults with disabilities who reach adulthood are no longer assured the support they may have enjoyed throughout their education: only 68.4% of young adults with disabilities applying in 2007-08 for special conditions of access to tertiary education were able to provide sufficient evidence of their disability. In the Czech Republic, young adults with disabilities become recipients of support at age 18, and the modalities of access to resources change significantly, according to the country report.

The disparities between the social treatment of children and of adults with disabilities give the passage to adulthood a very specific nature. They cause changes that require restarting administrative procedures that may be costly in terms of time and energy and can jeopardise access to tertiary education. These changes are a source of discontinuities that may lead to an accumulation of educational and professional experiences that are hard to benefit from on the professional level and may be socially stigmatising (Ebersold, 2001; Caton and Kagan, 2006; Wagner *et al.*, 2006a). Secondary schools must therefore consider the impact of such changes on the academic path of their students and should integrate this in their preparedness strategies; tertiary education institutions should be

attentive to the risks of stigmatisation that go with special support and arrangements, which the admissions and support strategies adopted may exacerbate.

### *Co-operative efforts are needed*

The duration of the transition and the itineraries that characterise it are another component of the transition process. In many countries the risk of professional and social exclusion is proportionate to the duration of inactivity after leaving school. In the United States, the chances of success and employment for young Americans with disabilities are better when they move promptly to tertiary education after leaving high school (Newman *et al.*, 2009). As Table 1.2 shows, 22.2% of young adults in Denmark are neither in education nor in employment (NEET) during the first year out of school and 37.2% are in this position after three years. In Ireland, the proportion of young adults considered neither in education nor in employment rises from 19.4% in the first year after leaving school to 23.6% after three years (OECD, 2008b).

**Table 1.2. Status of 15-29 year-olds neither in education nor in employment one year, three years and five years after leaving school**

Percentage <sup>1</sup>					
	Time since end of initial education	Number of observations	Total	Unemployed	Inactive
Denmark	One year	(440)	29.5	7.3	22.2
	Three years	(326)	42.6	5.4	37.2
	Five years and more	(1 480)	22.4	4.2	18.2
Germany	One year	(1 558)	40.7	4.5	36.2
	Three years	(754)	8.7	4.0	4.7
	Five years and more	(4 976)	19.6	7.1	12.5
Ireland	One year	(625)	29.5	10.2	19.4
	Three years	(505)	31.5	7.8	23.6
	Five years and more	(2 571)	25.2	5.8	19.4
Portugal	One year	(756)	30.7	12.3	18.4
	Three years	(729)	15.3	4.6	10.7
	Five years and more	(3 425)	12.0	4.3	7.7

1. Sample restricted to youths aged 15 to 29 years leaving initial education in the years immediately preceding the five-year window of panel survey data used to analyse NEET status.

Source: OECD (2008), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD, Paris.

### *Co-operate to overcome bottlenecks*

The bottlenecks that impede continuity and the detours that prolong or change pathways, however, have a particular impact on young adults with disabilities. More than young adults without disabilities, they are exposed to the stigmatising effect of time. Time is, for example, one of the criteria used to assess a person's capacity to progress within a training course, to achieve professional legitimacy, and to take part in the development of society. Tertiary education students who need more time to complete their studies are deemed to have greater difficulty than others and they may face greater

obstacles to employment. On the other hand, those who complete their studies within standard time limits may be considered just as capable as others and will be more employable. Those with disabilities are also penalised, pedagogically and socially, by the inaccessibility of education programmes and by ineffective support. This reduces their chances of success and tends to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes about persons with disabilities, because setbacks and taking extra time to enter employment are considered to indicate a lack of ability.

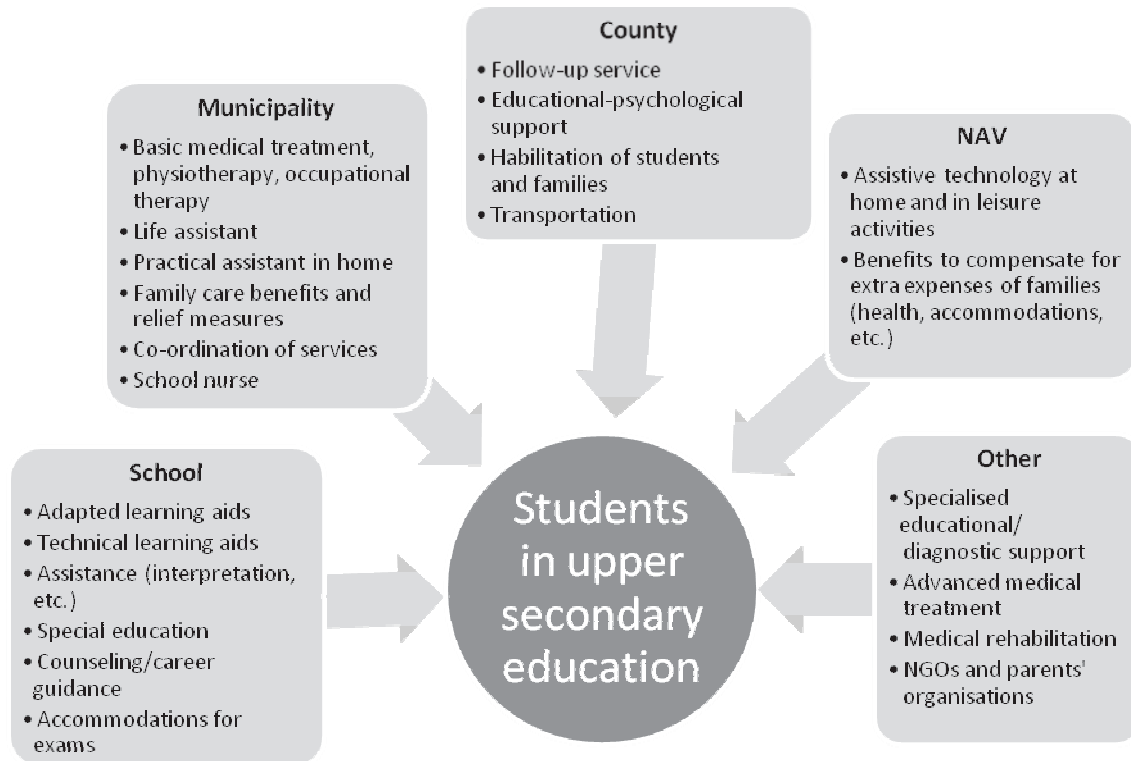
Transition to tertiary education therefore depends on the existence of bridges between successive levels and sectors of education. Young adults with disabilities are more exposed than the average to the discontinuities created by the compartmentalisation of general education and vocational education and training streams (OECD, 2000). In many countries, they tend to pursue training that will not prepare them for tertiary education. In France, high school students with disabilities are proportionally more enrolled in vocational education and training schools or in special vocational training courses within general education (SEGPA), where the chances for academic success and access to tertiary education are lower than in general secondary schools. In Germany the preference given to apprenticeships tends to penalise students who have the skills to go on to upper secondary school (Fasching and Niehaus, 2004). In the United Kingdom, young adults with disabilities are more likely to continue their education after compulsory schooling in the further education sector or in some kind of special provision. They thus embark on courses that are educationally less demanding and more precarious as routes into employment and training (Dyson, 2008). In Norway, only two-thirds of high school students with disabilities hoping for an apprenticeship in the second or third year of secondary school followed their desired course. The remaining third either took another course or dropped out.

The existence of bridges between the general education and the vocational education and training streams can prevent career decisions taken on the completion of secondary education from committing high school students with disabilities to branches or fields of study that might reduce their scope for choice and compromise their access to employment or their professional development. These bridges can also prevent students with disabilities who are enrolled in vocational training courses (*e.g.* apprenticeship or “sandwich” courses) on the completion of lower secondary education from being deprived of opportunities to upgrade their qualifications during working life and enhance their employability (Shavit and Müller, 2000). They reduce the likelihood of failure to which students obliged to change courses because of disability or chronic illness are exposed and which can risk halting or disrupting their progress. And they encourage the smooth continuation of a career path for those wishing to embark on more professionally oriented courses following the completion of lower secondary education (Reiersen, 2004).

Transition opportunities also depend on bridges between the education system, the social services and the health services (EADSNE, 2006). In most countries the responsibility for ensuring institutional accessibility lies with the education system, while the provision of support to compensate for disability falls to the health or social sector. In France, disability compensation is the responsibility of the *conseils généraux* through the departmental offices for persons with disabilities (*Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées*, MDPH), while the educational institutions themselves have to make the arrangements relating directly to the school or university course of study. In the United States, states’ rehabilitation agencies are tasked, among other obligations, with providing support to schools, and they must identify existing transition services and help

to finance transition services for any young adult with a disability who meets their eligibility criteria. In the Czech Republic, needs identification lies not with the Ministry of Education but with the Ministry of Health, while in Ireland it is the Ministry of Health that assesses educational needs in conjunction with the National Council for Special Education, which co-ordinates the educational process.

**Figure 1.5. Support structure for upper secondary students with special education needs in Norway**



Source: Legard, S. (2009), "Pathways from Education to Work for Young People with Impairments and Learning Difficulties in Norway", Work Research Institute, Oslo.

As indicated in Figure 1.5, Norwegian upper secondary students with disabilities may receive support from five different sources. The educational institution will offer technical aid and pedagogical support as well as any necessary arrangements for examinations, special education and coaching. The municipality is responsible for medical care and assisted living arrangements, family allowances and support, and co-ordination of services. The county provides monitoring services, psychological and educational support, transport, and assessment of students' and families' eligibility. The employment and social protection sector (*Arbeids- og velferdsforvaltningen* – NAV) covers families' extra costs and pays for technological aids required at home or for recreation. Upper secondary school students with disabilities are also eligible for educational and diagnostic support, advanced medical care, functional re-education, and support from associations of parents and of persons with disabilities.

Transition opportunities also depend on the incentive character of modes of funding. In France, interviews show that the efforts of tertiary education institutions for the admission and support of students with disabilities increased when specific funding for this purpose was included in the budget law. In the United States, financial incentives for universities to provide bursaries or loans to students with disabilities overcome the barriers raised by university registration fees. In Denmark, coverage of the costs of the medical certification which young adults with disabilities must have to be legally eligible for support has done much to facilitate access to tertiary education for young adults with specific learning disabilities. However, the absence of financial resources for accessing the medical or paramedical support needed to reconcile study with the constraints of a disability is often an important barrier, as is the absence of financial support for obtaining adapted housing or transport. The absence or inadequacy of bursaries is discouraging for young adults who wish to be independent, particularly if they cannot combine their studies with work.

The strength of such incentives also depends, however, on the bridges between the different sources of financing, as the conditions of eligibility and modes of funding are not always consistent with the requirements of educational pathways. In Norway, for example, young adults with disabilities are eligible for support from the employment and social protection sector (NAV) for four years, yet their studies are likely to take longer for reasons of health or, more frequently, because of the pedagogical inaccessibility of tertiary education institutions. In France, the pace of administrative procedures involved in the attribution of financial aids and support by the Departmental Offices for Persons with Disabilities (MDPH) differs from those of university courses of study, and students as well as universities may face significant delays in support and funding allocation.

### *Create local synergies*

Access to tertiary education and employment depends on the synergies created by the different stakeholders involved in the transition process. These synergies are based on close co-operation between the territorial levels involved in the transition to tertiary education and employment. In France, the education of students with disabilities involves the state, the health insurance system, the *départements*, the regions, and the family allowance funding bodies (*caisses d'allocations familiales*), and their prospects for progressing depend heavily on linkages among these different levels of intervention. The regions are responsible for vocational training and physical accessibility of secondary schools; the *conseils généraux*, at *département* level, are responsible for managing funds allocated to the MDPH by the *Caisse Nationale Solidarité Autonomie* (CNSA) for compensating disability, and university rectors are responsible for making their institutions accessible. The lack of information exchange between the different administrations, particularly when it is not legally authorised, makes it difficult to develop a holistic approach that facilitates defining, planning and implementing a person's transition process. Administrative compartmentalisation also works against the mobility that is essential in tertiary education, particularly when changing from one region, *département* or municipality to another. In the United States, young adults with disabilities often receive support in addition to that delivered by schools or universities, and the quality of transition depends on the co-ordinated efforts of specialised educators, non-specialised teachers, community service agencies and occupational rehabilitation agencies (Newman *et al.*, 2009).

These synergies relate to forms of co-operation established between secondary and tertiary education institutions. Where co-operation exists, specific arrangements can be

made early in order to meet academic or job requirements and to ensure sufficient continuity so that young adults with disabilities applying for support will not have to justify their disability or problem again. Such links also allow for anticipating the support that may be necessary, the skills required and the conditions for putting them to work. These links may be developed through teaching programmes in which staff are able to mentor students with disabilities, take part in teaching and in certain cases contribute to curricular design. They may be further developed by monitoring students with disabilities who complete secondary education, by appropriately targeted training initiatives for staff involved in both secondary and tertiary education, or by the establishment of multidisciplinary teams responsible for evaluating needs and devising transition procedures. They may also be pursued through bridges created by structures specifically devoted to transition issues, as in Denmark or the United States, or through the offer of postsecondary non-university training to prepare young adults for the demands of tertiary education.

These synergies can also be established through good links between the education sector and the employment sector in order to align young adults' plans and aspirations with the demands of the labour market (McKenzie, 1998). The absence of linkages between schools or universities and the employment sector may deprive persons with disabilities of valuable professional experience and employers of better insight into the potential and abilities of persons with disabilities (Anvik, 2006; Getzel *et al.*, 2001). For example, while schools in the United States generally try to be accessible to students with disabilities, only a quarter of them contact tertiary education institutions, vocational training service providers, or bodies dealing with placement in employment within the framework of the transition plan drawn up with students with disabilities (Florian and Rafal, 2008). A better relation between the education and employment sectors can be achieved through curricula that enable upper secondary school students to combine general education with vocational education and training and gain insight into the world of work, an experience much appreciated by employers (OECD, 2000). It may also take the form of a course of study which includes practical internships or work-study formulas; this incites upper secondary students to integrate a professional element into their career choice and prepares them to put their theoretical knowledge into practice as the situation demands (OECD, 2000; Béduwé and Giret, 2004). This relation can also be ensured through services specifically devoted to steering young adults towards employment and counselling them about access to employment, apprenticeship or vocational training courses.

These synergies also depend on the kinds of co-operation that secondary and tertiary education institutions establish with the family, which can have a direct influence on the student's academic performance and social inclusion (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; James and Partee, 2003; Simon, 2001). Family involvement improves upper secondary students' attendance, their involvement in the schooling process, their academic achievement and, correlatively, reduces the risk of dropout or failure at school (Catsambis and Garland, 1997; Lamorey, 2002; Harry, 2002). Family involvement also helps to compensate for a lack of linkages between sources of financing, to overcome possible discrepancies between different laws and regulations, and to fill the gaps that may exist between the different sectors involved in the transition process.

### ***Facilitating the adjustment to the demands of tertiary education***

Transition to tertiary education also depends on the capacity of young adults with disabilities to adjust to the demands of tertiary education and the labour market. This capacity is correlated with the effectiveness of upper secondary school, as university

access imposes demands in terms of a diploma, skills or test scores. A student with disabilities has fewer chances of success in secondary school than other students. In Germany, only a few dozen of the 45 000 students with disabilities leaving secondary school each year hold qualifications giving access to tertiary education (Powell *et al.*, 2008); in the United States, despite progress made, their dropout rate is twice as high as that of the student body as a whole, especially when they have an emotional disturbance (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004; Wagner *et al.*, 2006a).

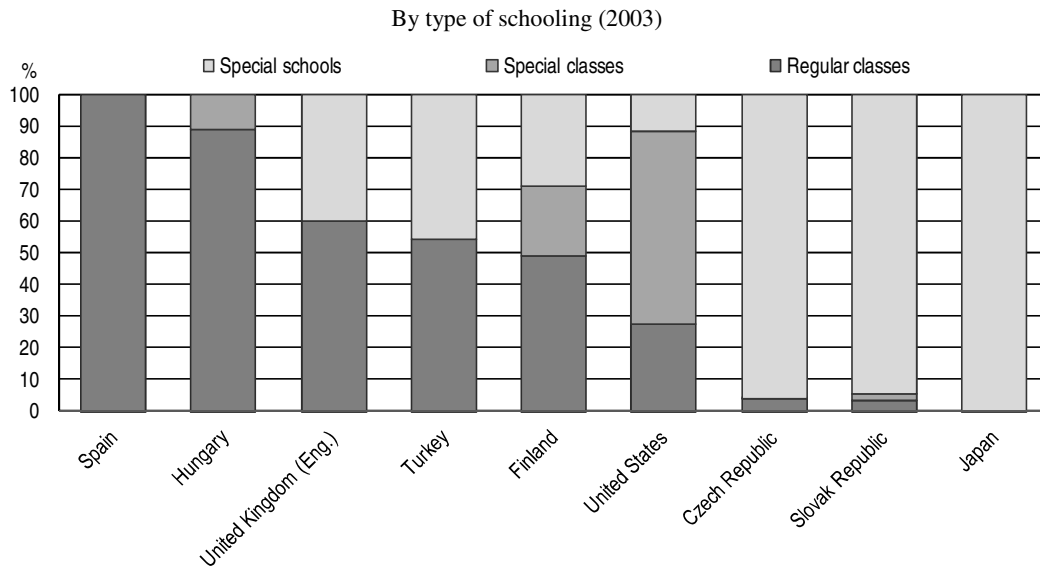
This capacity for adjustment also depends on the ability of the education system to adapt to the needs and rhythms of students with disabilities who may work at a slower than average pace and whose investment in the class group, motivation for schoolwork and academic performance depend, more than for other students, on the self-assurance that they are able to acquire (OECD, 2007b; McIntosh *et al.*, 1993; Côté, 1996). It is thus essential not to lower the demands made on upper secondary students as compared to those made on students without disabilities but to ensure that the school's pedagogical framework allows them to participate fully in school life. It is necessary to differentiate teaching practices sufficiently, to make course content more easily accessible, and to make the appropriate arrangements for test administration (Gersten, 1998; NCES, 2004; Thurlow *et al.*, 1998; OECD, 1999; Christenson, 2002; Sinclair *et al.*, 1999).

The modes of education offered to children and young adults with disabilities play an essential role in this regard. The chances of continuing to tertiary education are better when they are schooled in a regular class. They are more likely than those schooled in a special school or class to have a course of study conducive to their academic success and their inclusion (Burchardt, 2005; Wagner, 2006b). For example, according to the Norwegian country report, upper secondary school students with disabilities who receive the same instruction as other students, while benefiting from additional resources as necessary, have better academic results than those schooled in special classes and particularly in special schools.

Students with disabilities who receive appropriate instruction in a regular class are keener to go to school and perform better than those who attend a special class or who receive inadequate instruction in a regular class. They are also more likely to feel that they are in good health and to have the relational capacities needed to interact satisfactorily with their classmates. They are more likely to have the social resources that facilitate employment, since school gives them the chance to forge lasting bonds on which they can build social relations that will be useful in their professional and social life. By contrast, students with disabilities who cannot gain entrance to secondary school and who must be educated in a special setting may find themselves trapped in courses of study that do not facilitate academic success and social inclusion. In the United States, special schools may place fewer demands on students than a regular class, and give them higher marks than their performance would merit, at the risk of penalising them academically and professionally (Stodden *et al.*, 2002). In Germany, the chances of success of children schooled in special settings seem lower than for those in mainstream schools: only 0.01% of such students graduated from the school system in 2003 with a diploma that would give access to tertiary education (Kultusministerkonferenz, 2005), and the great majority were deprived of the knowledge and learning available to students in mainstream schools, despite the availability of special pedagogical resources (Wocken, 2000).

Access to tertiary education is not the same in all countries participating in the project. As Figure 1.6 shows, secondary school students in the Czech Republic who receive additional resources for disability (CNC A) are for the most part enrolled in special schools, while in the United States they tend to attend regular or special classes.

**Figure 1.6. Secondary education students receiving additional resources for disability (CNC A)**



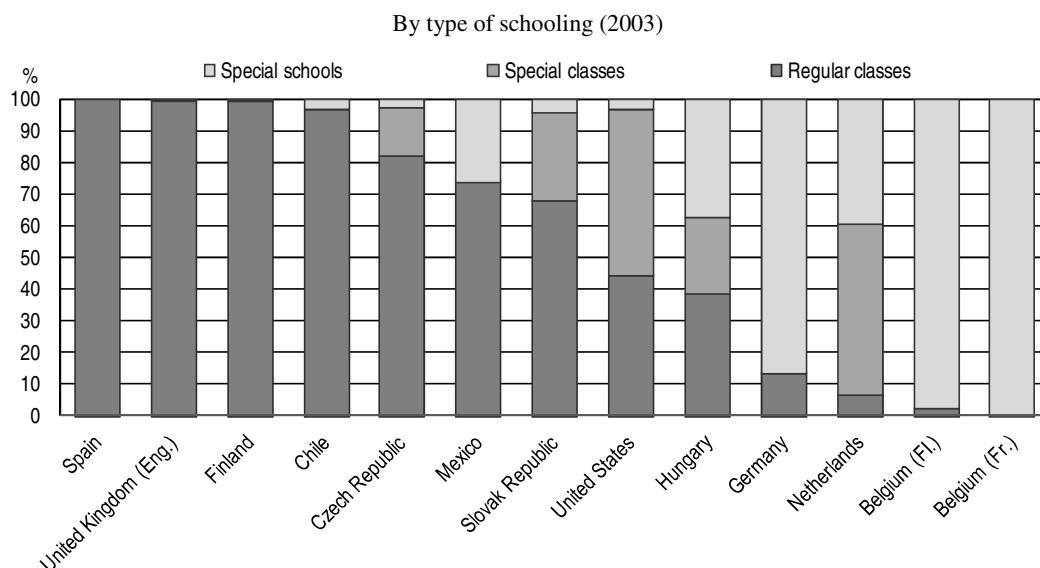
Source: OECD (2007), *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages: Policies, Statistics and Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

In contrast, as shown in Figure 1.7, American students with a specific learning difficulty (CNC B) receive special education services both in regular and in special classes. Czech students receiving additional resources for a specific learning difficulty are largely accommodated for regular classes.

The capacity of secondary school graduates to adapt to tertiary education and employment will also depend on the self-assurance they have acquired in school and/or through contact with the structures of the transition process (Côté, 1996). This involves the cognitive, emotional, ethical, social and physical skills needed to take decisions, to assume responsibility and to develop the sense of belonging required to interact with others on an equal footing. It provides, according to existing research, skills that are essential to move on to tertiary education (Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Schools may therefore need to encourage young adults with disabilities or specific learning difficulties to identify their preferences regarding their post-school careers, with due regard for their abilities and the corresponding required skills, as well as the professional opportunities they may have (Castellano *et al.*, 2002). It may also be necessary to enable them to overcome problems, take decisions and assume responsibility for themselves, by means of extracurricular activities or artistic, sports or voluntary activities (Larson, 2000; Wehman, 1996). They must be allowed as well to make use of transition periods to acquire skills and faculties that will strengthen their prospects of social and professional inclusion, to develop their self-confidence, to be aware of what is expected of them, and to see themselves as capable of responding to the possible changes and requirements entailed (Shaw, 2007; Jones, 2002).



**Figure 1.7. Students receiving additional resources for a specific learning difficulty (CNC B) during compulsory education**



Source: OECD (2007), *Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages: Policies, Statistics and Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

### Build integrated systems to safeguard the transition process

Access to tertiary education and to employment after secondary school does not depend solely on the capacity of education systems to be equitable in terms of access and success (Hutmacher *et al.*, 2001). It also depends on the ability to achieve a successful transition by helping students with disabilities to adapt to the changes that are part of the passage to adulthood, by preventing discontinuities and disruptions due to the compartmentalisation of the different levels and sectors of education, and by making it possible for them to satisfy the demands of tertiary education and the labour market. It requires paying close attention to the conditions of their progress towards tertiary education and employment, beyond simply informing them about existing opportunities, the jobs for which their studies will prepare them, and the requirements they will have to face by entering a new level of education.

It is necessary to place young adults with disabilities on an equal footing with young adults without disabilities in terms of:

- having, as far as possible, the same knowledge and skills;
- possessing, like their peers, qualifications that are recognised by tertiary education or employment;
- not being more exposed to being NEET;
- having the same chances of accessing a job of equal quality;
- not facing steeper or rockier pathways.

Ensuring a successful transition requires early planning to help young adults with disabilities and their families to make enlightened choices about their future, as pointed

out by the National Council for Special Education in Ireland following a series of studies. It also requires co-ordinated action throughout the process on the part of the parties involved in the student's career, as noted in the definition of IDEA transition services adopted in the 1990 amendment of IDEA in the United States. It depends in addition on the ability acquired by young adults with disabilities to cope with the changes involved in the passage to adulthood and on their belief in that ability.

An integrated transition system can help ensure a successful transition and prevent young adults with disabilities from the kinds of marginality and exclusion to which inactivity would expose them. It must be based on an education system that includes students' future in its missions and on education strategies that include their possibilities for social and professional participation once they have completed their schooling and received their diploma. This means giving young adults with disabilities the same opportunities to enter education programmes as their peers without disabilities and the same chances of success at all levels of schooling, so that they are ready for the academic demands of tertiary education institutions. Schools must be encouraged to view the pedagogical environment in light of students' itineraries, to mobilise local stakeholders and families, to reinforce their inclusion at the local level, and to develop warning systems to help keep students from abandoning their studies.

This integrated transition system takes an educational perspective that views disability, as suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO), in terms of the interaction between the individual, the constraints and possibilities imposed by the impairment, and the forms of support offered by the environment, rather than as an intrinsic characteristic of the individual. From this perspective, any person who does not receive the support that allows him or her to learn and to develop is in a sense "disabled". It focuses on the ability of education systems to help children and adolescents to move beyond their disability and achieve their full potential, and thus contributes to the continuity of the path they take (UNESCO, 1994; WHO, 2001; Ebersold, 2008b).

An integrated transition system presupposes the availability of co-ordinated financial, technical and human support to ensure equality of opportunity for young adults with disabilities in terms of access and progress, during their education and during the various stages of the transition process. This support may be informal and provided by students with disabilities and by their families. For this reason, they should be involved in defining the transition process and in its implementation. Support may also be more formal, provided by professional staff responsible for counselling and assistance in educational institutions as well as by other professionals specifically concerned with working out and implementing the transition process.

An integrated transition system also assumes the existence of guidance services and tools for linking the different levels and sectors of intervention as well as the different levels of education and of the bridges essential to ensure continuity and coherence. It is essential to have indicators that encourage the players involved to consider transition in the light of its real value and to have statistics which can be used to monitor individuals' paths, identify aspects conducive to the continuity and consistency of routes through education and towards employment, to fully understand the factors that impede progress in education and the social inclusion of young adults with disabilities, as well as to appreciate the positive or negative impact of policies and practices. Longitudinal studies following cohorts of individuals over a certain period of time are an essential tool here.

Such an integrated transition system can be organised within an institutional framework dedicated to transition that is able to create an environment favourable to

continuity. As in the United Kingdom, such a framework can take the form of specific structures designed to support institutions, young adults with disabilities and their families in preparing and implementing a transition plan. It can also take the form, as in the United States, of a body at municipal level, which brings together the partners needed for effective collaboration on transition planning, with equal representation of administrators, staff members, families and users. These bodies share financing programmes, develop policies and co-operation agreements on forms of co-operation, and advise young adults with disabilities and their families about existing services.

This institutional framework seems essential for equipping stakeholders to take innovative action. It can help to mobilise members of the education system around students' future by encouraging them to be open to their environment or by establishing linkages among the different stakeholders in the transition process (Dee, 2006). It may also contribute to putting young adults with disabilities in a position to satisfy the demands of tertiary education and employment by developing strategies that will give them the skills, the behaviour and the attitudes needed to learn and to build their future, to gear their expectations and their desires to their personal strengths, to participate actively in community life, and to take knowledgeable decisions. These transition services can also help young adults with special education needs see themselves as capable of coping with the demands imposed by the many changes along the road to adulthood, so that they feel entitled to participate in economic and social life on an equal footing with all.

## Conclusion

The conditions for entering tertiary education are different for young adults with disabilities than for other young adults. Unlike the latter, they need to be informed about the accessibility of tertiary education institutions and to make their educational needs known in order to receive the support and accommodations to which they are entitled. The continuity of their path depends on the manner in which upper secondary schools prepare them for the new responsibilities they must take on and include in their preparation strategies changes that may occur during the passage to adulthood in terms of access to support or the definition of disability. It also depends on the way in which tertiary education institutions inform them about course requirements and guidance opportunities and encourage them to disclose their special needs.

Unlike those of other young adults, their pathway opportunities may encounter bottlenecks that may hinder their progress or impose detours that may overexpose them to unemployment and exclusion. The continuity and coherence of their pathways therefore depend on bridges between secondary and tertiary education and the world of work made possible by local synergies developed by stakeholders involved in the transition process.

Transition to tertiary education and to employment thus calls for integrated transition systems able to ensure effective paths at the end of secondary education and education systems that are equitable in terms of access, success and inclusion.

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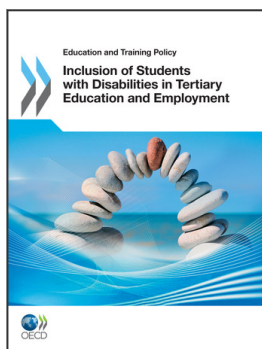
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