

SUMMARY

OECD countries are committed to ensuring that their education systems are equitable for all students, which requires them to provide for groups with diverse needs. An important part of this task is to structure programmes for students with disabilities, difficulties, and disadvantages in a way that respects and protects these groups' rights. This does not have clear-cut implications for the distribution of resources, since for many disabled students, for example, no amount of resources could produce outcomes equal to those of their non-disabled peers. Thus while this chapter provides an extensive international analysis of the allocation of resources to various groups (including by gender and age), these are indicators of the extent to which countries engage in a process of pursuing equity, rather than measuring progress towards an objective, well-defined standard.

What we can do, however, is to identify some key conditions that allow this process to be taken forward. The first is to recognise and plan for diversity. An indicator of whether this occurs is how many students attend special schools: this varies greatly across countries, and where it is high, this is a sign of mainstream schools' failure to accommodate diverse needs. Among a range of other conditions identified in the later part of this chapter, some relate to what is going on inside the school system, such as staff development and co-operation among schools, while others cover external relationships such as accountability and community involvement. The different national approaches documented in this chapter open up important questions about what works best for different types of students. Reforms in OECD countries are allowing understanding to accumulate on how best to address these issues, yet much remains to be done.