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# Support service for students with disabilities

Access To Universities for Persons with Disabilities - ATU



VARNA FREE  
UNIVERSITY

MASARYK  
UNIVERSITY



Consiglio  
Nazionale delle  
Ricerche



FiRR  
FUNDACJA INSTYTUT  
ROZWOJU REGIONALNEGO

RAPIV

**Varna Free University (VFU)**

**Masarykova University (MU)**

**Consiglio Nazionale Delle Ricerche (CNR)**

**Fundacja Instytut Rozwoju Regionalnego (FiRR)**

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## Introduction

As part of the project “Access to universities for people with disabilities – ATU”, financed by the EU program Erasmus +, surveys were carried out at several universities. Efforts were made to obtain information about the support services accessible in Europe and beyond in the following areas: architectural, digital, information – communication, didactic classes, legal bases and others, such as evacuation, training, awareness. Data on the facts at universities were also collected, taking into account the number of students with disabilities as well as the specification and number of regulations. Collecting the best, tested practices applied at universities allowed for the preparation of a universal and flexible system of support for students with disabilities.

**63 universities** from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Italy, Germany, Iceland, Spain, Estonia, United Kingdom, Russia, Japan and Malaysia participated in the study.

According to the survey carried out at the selected universities, students with disabilities constitute **2.7%** of all students. However, at some universities, students are not required to disclose any information about their health condition. Also, students with special needs constitute a larger group than students with disabilities (having appropriate certificates). Thus, the percentage of people who suffer from one or more limitations or disorders that affect their learning is possibly much higher.



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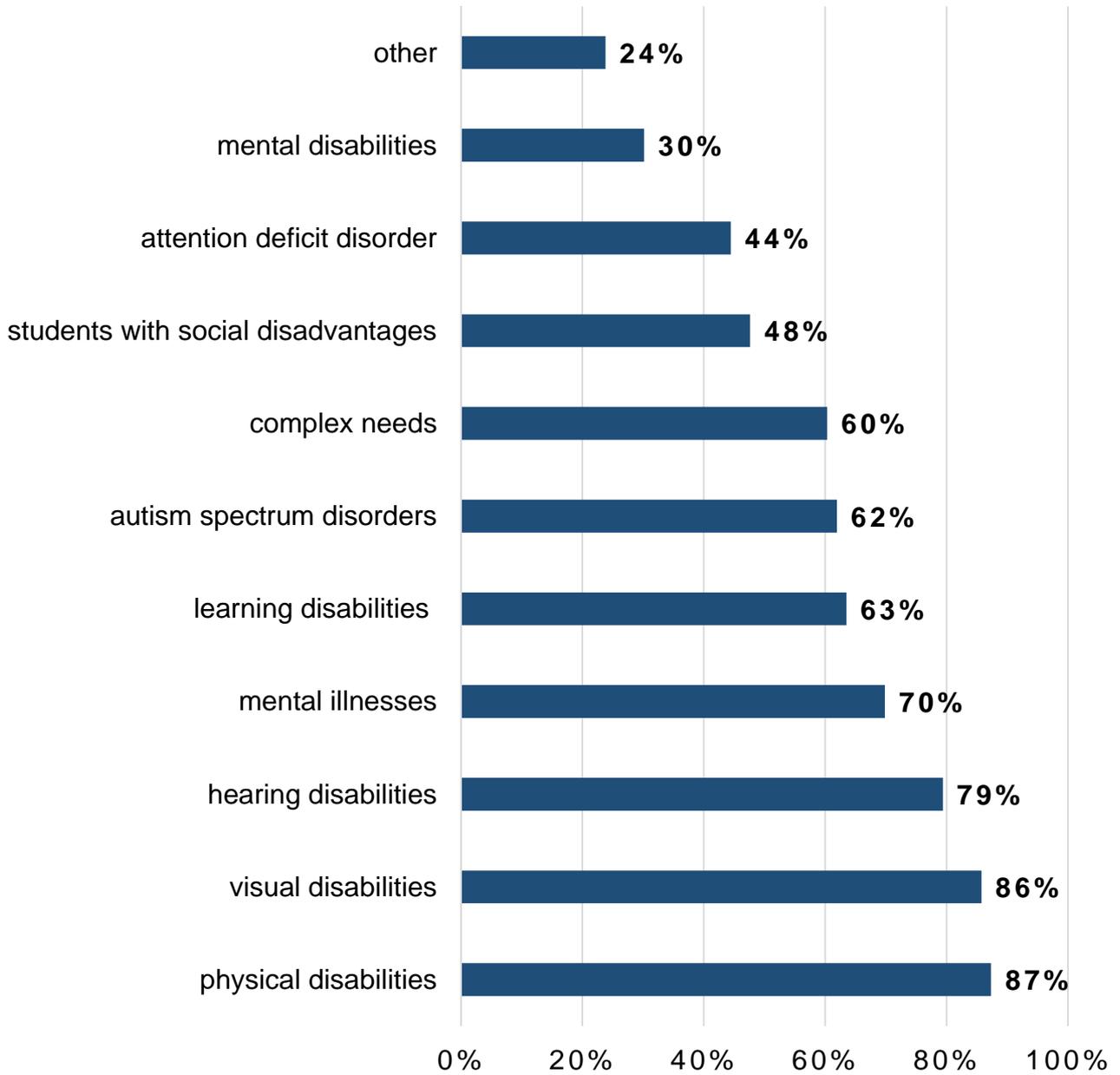
## The university's situation

This part of the survey aims to verify the situation at universities in terms of general support for students with special needs. According to the answers to the first question, students with **physical disabilities (87%** of universities), students with **visual disabilities (86%)** and students with **hearing disabilities (79%)** are the groups for which **most universities** provide support. The other groups taken into account are students with mental illnesses (70%), with learning disabilities (63%), with autism spectrum disorders (62%) and with complex needs (60%). Slightly fewer universities provide support for students with social disadvantages (48%) and attention deficit disorder (44%). **The least**, or 30% of universities, extend their support services to students with **mental disabilities**. Other groups provided for are also mentioned, such as Refugees, students with chronic illnesses, and those taking up work during their studies. The above-mentioned results are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1

Please select the target group/groups of students with special needs  
which the university provides support measures for:





The vast majority of universities carry out an analysis of the specific needs of its students and employees (**81%**) and designate a person or organisational unit to take care of accessibility issues (**87%**). However, there are a few universities which do not apply the above-mentioned practices (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2

Has the university carried out an analysis of the specific needs of its students/employees?

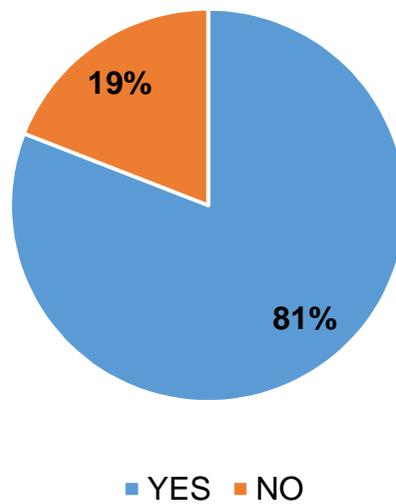
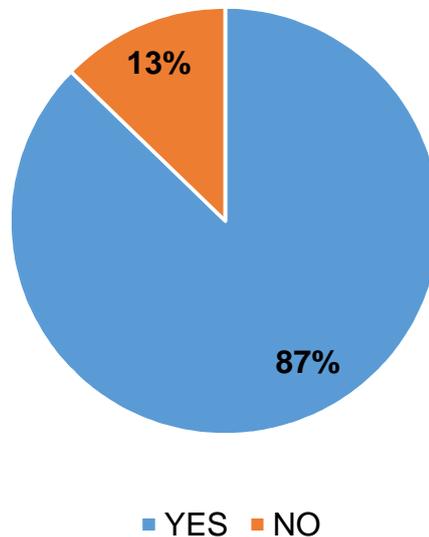


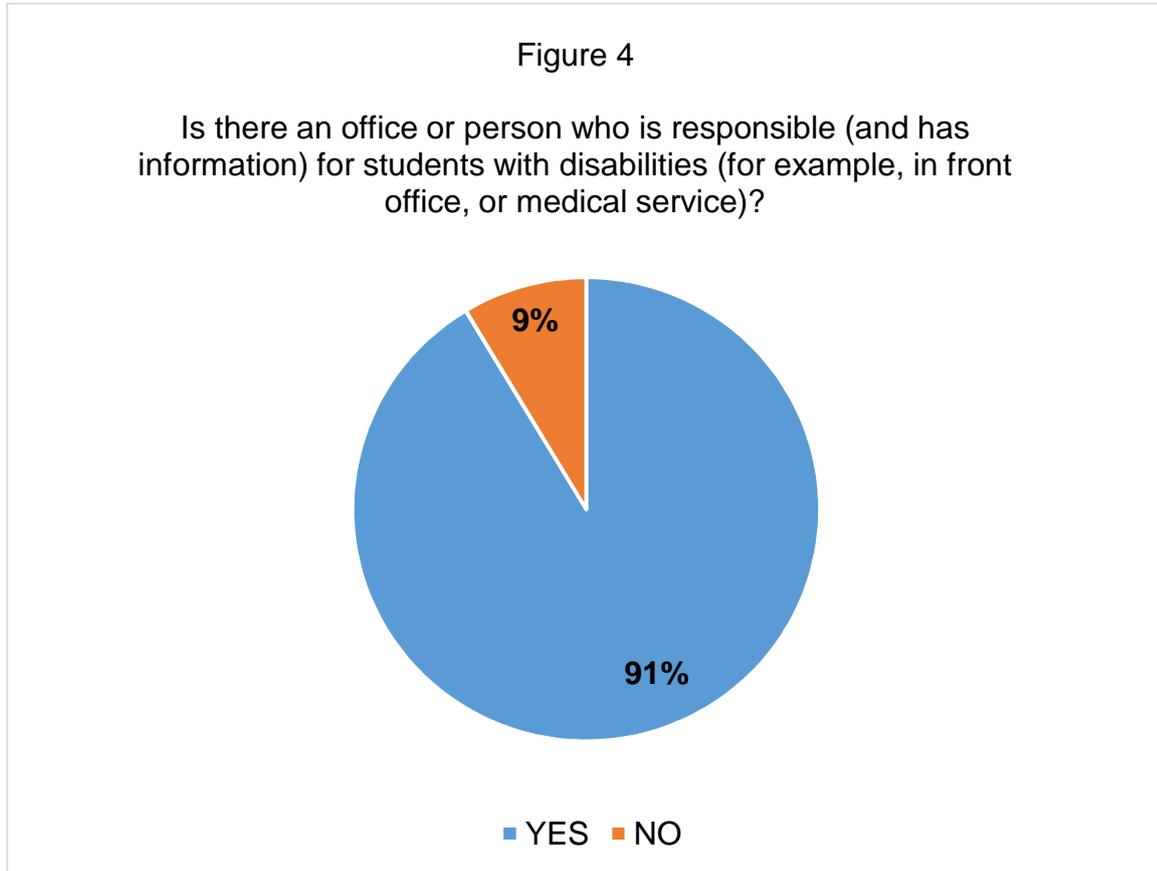
Figure 3

Has a person or organisational unit been designated to take care of accessibility issues?



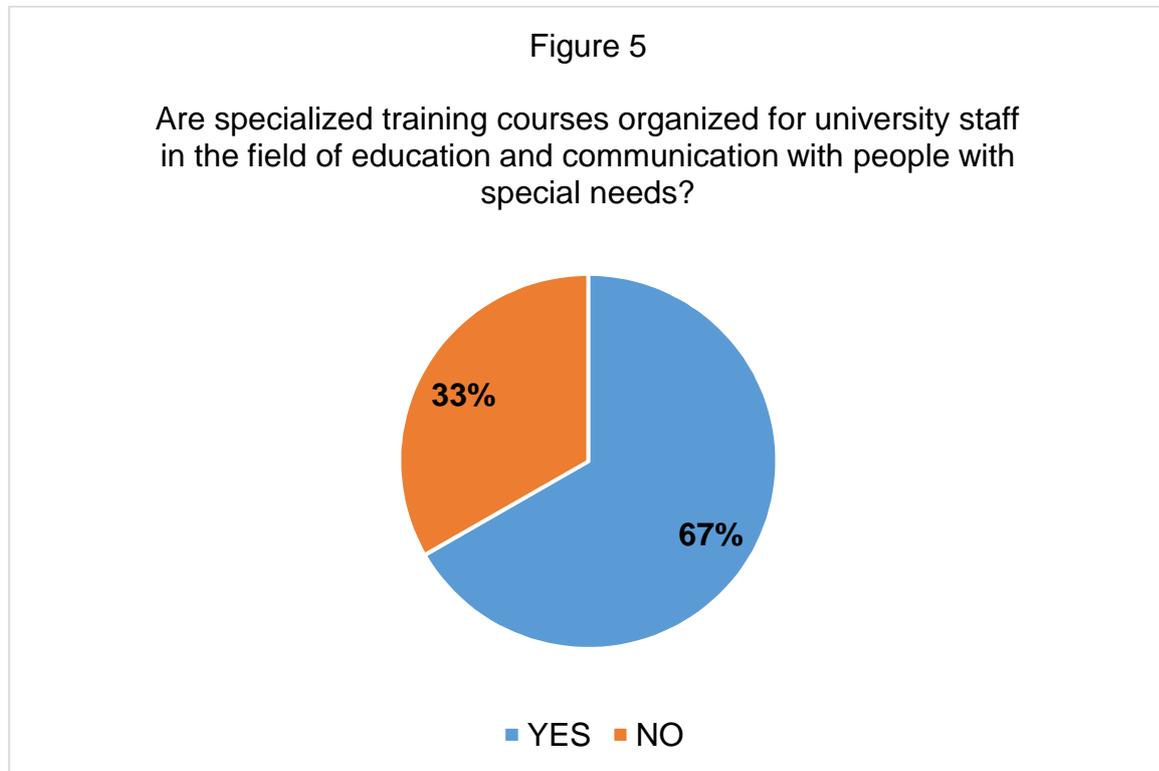


At **91%** of the universities surveyed there is an office or a person who is responsible for students with disabilities and has relevant information. Only **9%** of universities do not have this form of support. (Figure 4, results of 58 universities surveyed).





**67%** of the universities surveyed organize specialized training courses for university staff in the field of education and communication with people with special needs. However, there are a few universities (**33%**) which do not provide such training (Figure 5).

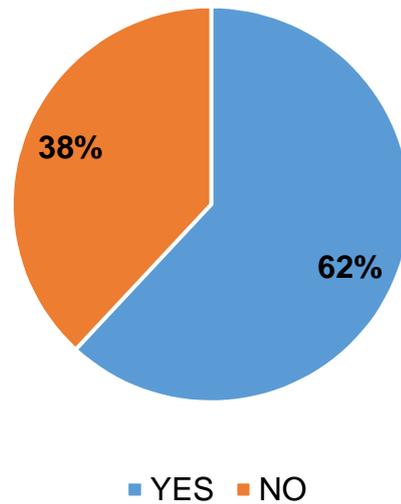


Another question concern the evacuation procedure. Not all universities (**38%**) have a safe evacuation procedure planned for students and university employees with special needs. On the other hand, **62%** of universities provide safe evacuation that takes into account the special needs of students and university employees (Figure 6).



Figure 6

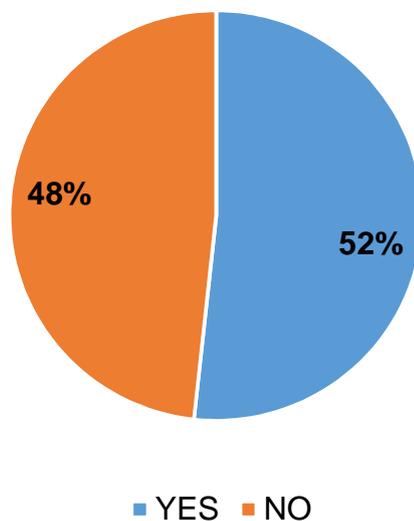
Is the evacuation procedure planned in a safe way for students/university employees with special needs and does it take into account those special needs?



**52%** of the universities surveyed offer support to people with special needs by trained students (on a volunteer basis). However, **48%** of universities do not organize such a form of volunteer work (Figure 7, results of 58 universities surveyed).

Figure 7

Are there trained students that assist students with disabilities on a volunteer basis?

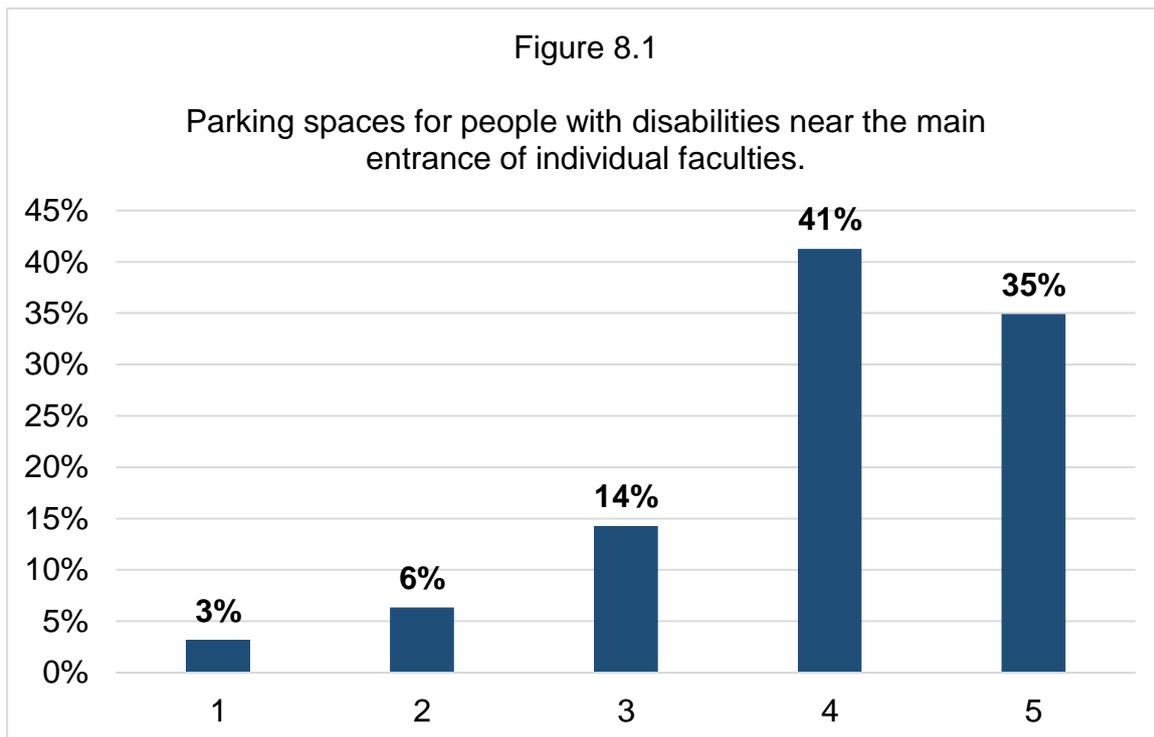




## Architectural accessibility

This section verifies whether and to what extent university premises are accessible to people with special needs and ensure their full access to the recruitment and education processes. The different areas of architectural accessibility are assessed on a five-point scale: 1 – not at all or not much, 2 – less than half, 3 – half, 4-more than half, 5 – all.

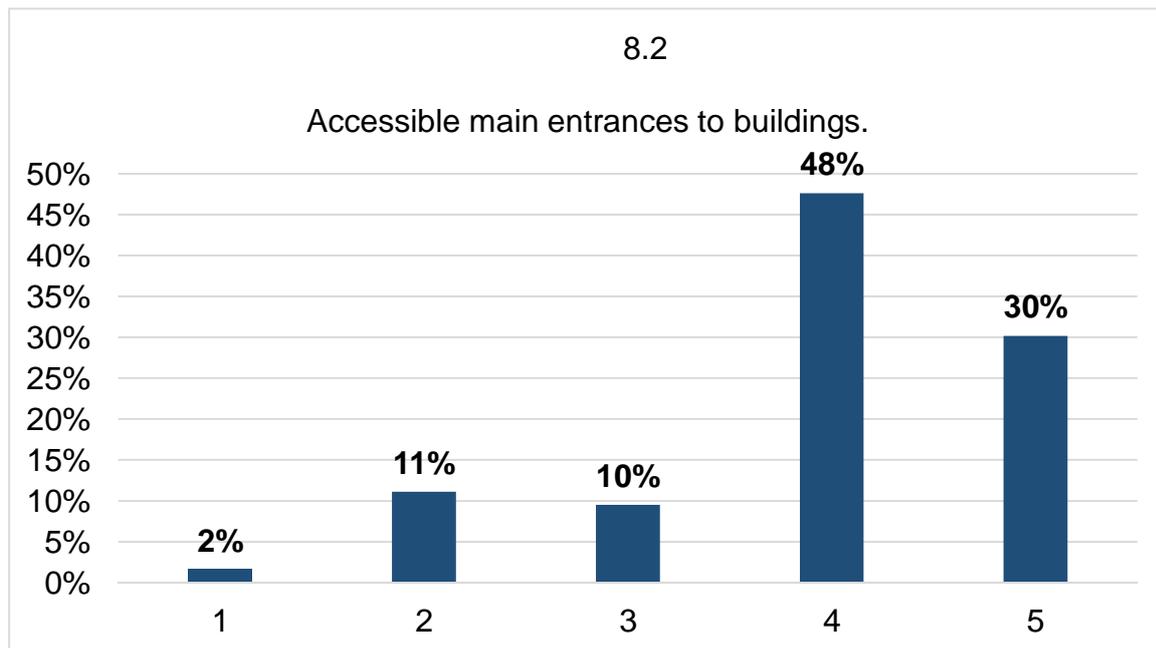
The first question concerns parking spaces for people with disabilities near the main entrance of particular faculties. Only **3%** of the universities surveyed have few or no such parking spaces. Definitely more, i.e. **41%** of universities, claim that they have more than half of them, and **35%** of universities say that all parking spaces are accessible to people with disabilities. The remaining results are: **6%** of universities – have less than half, **14%** - have half (Figure 8.1).



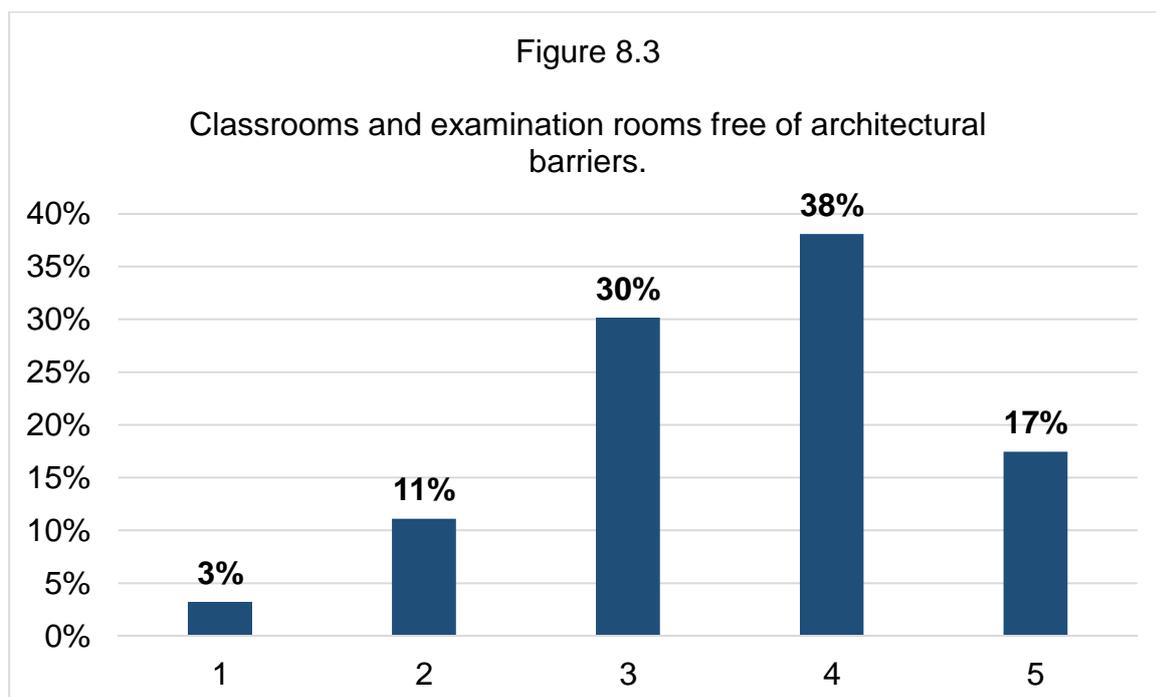
The number of accessible main entrances to the buildings has also been investigated. At most of the universities surveyed (**48%**) more than half of the entrances are accessible to people with disabilities. **30%** of universities declare that all entrances to buildings are accessible, while **2%** say they had few or no such entrances. **11%** of the universities surveyed indicate that less than half of their entrances are adapted to people with special



needs, and **10%** say that half of their entrances are accessible (Figure 8.2).

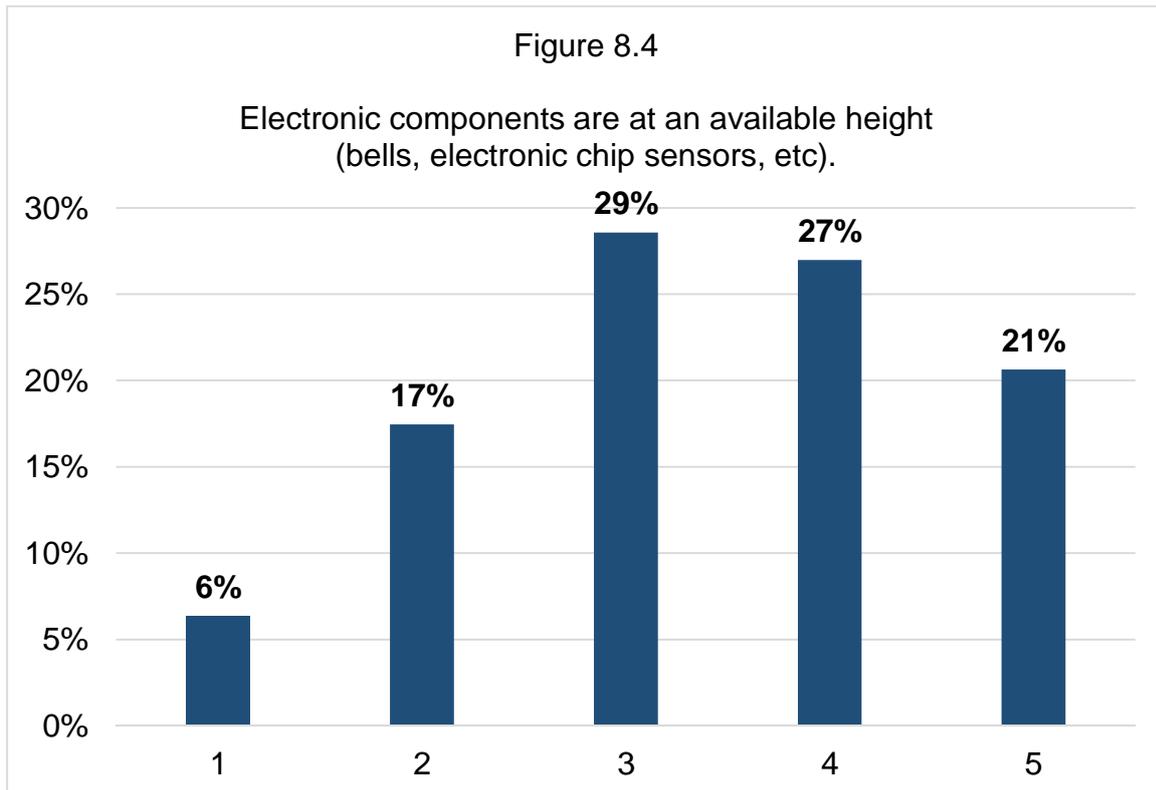


**17%** of universities indicate that all their classrooms and exam rooms are free of architectural barriers and **30%** say that half of their classrooms meet this criterion. The greatest amount of universities surveyed, or **38%**, respond that they have more than half of the accessible classrooms and exam rooms adapted. **11%** of universities have said that they have less than half of their rooms adapted. **3%** of universities claim that they meet this criterion only to a small extent or not at all. (Figure 8.3).



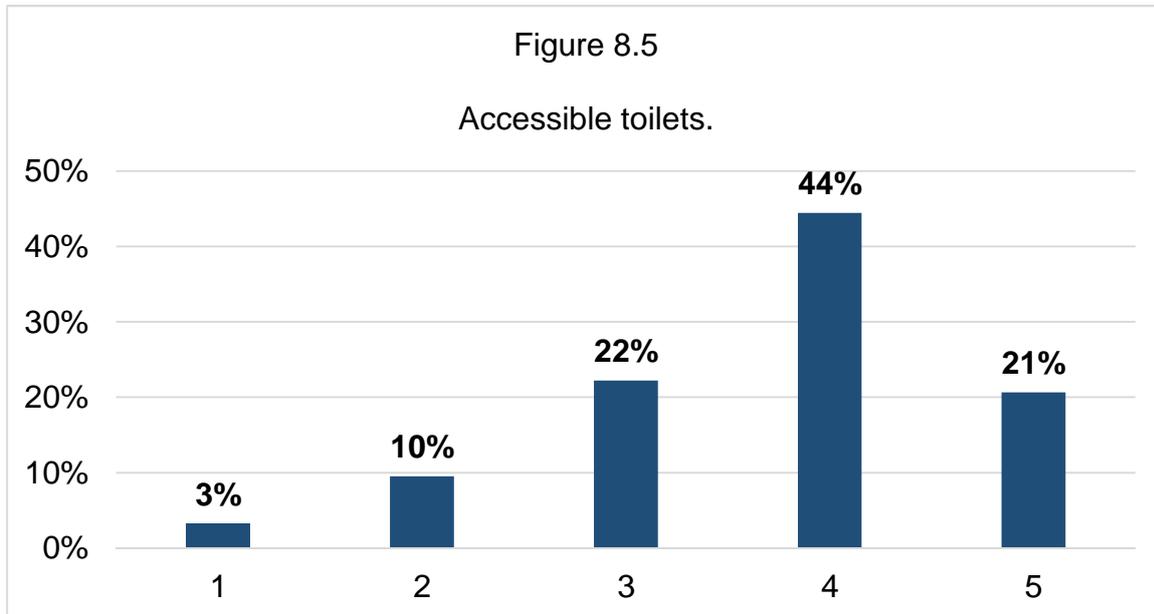


The greatest amount of universities surveyed, i.e. **29%**, claim that half of their electronic equipment, such as bells, electronic chip sensors are at an accessible height. **21%** of universities say that all such elements are at the right height and **27%** say that more than half meet this accessibility criterion. Less than half of the electronic components are at an accessible height at **17%** of universities. **6%** of universities indicate that no or few such electronic components are at an accessible height (Figure 8.4).

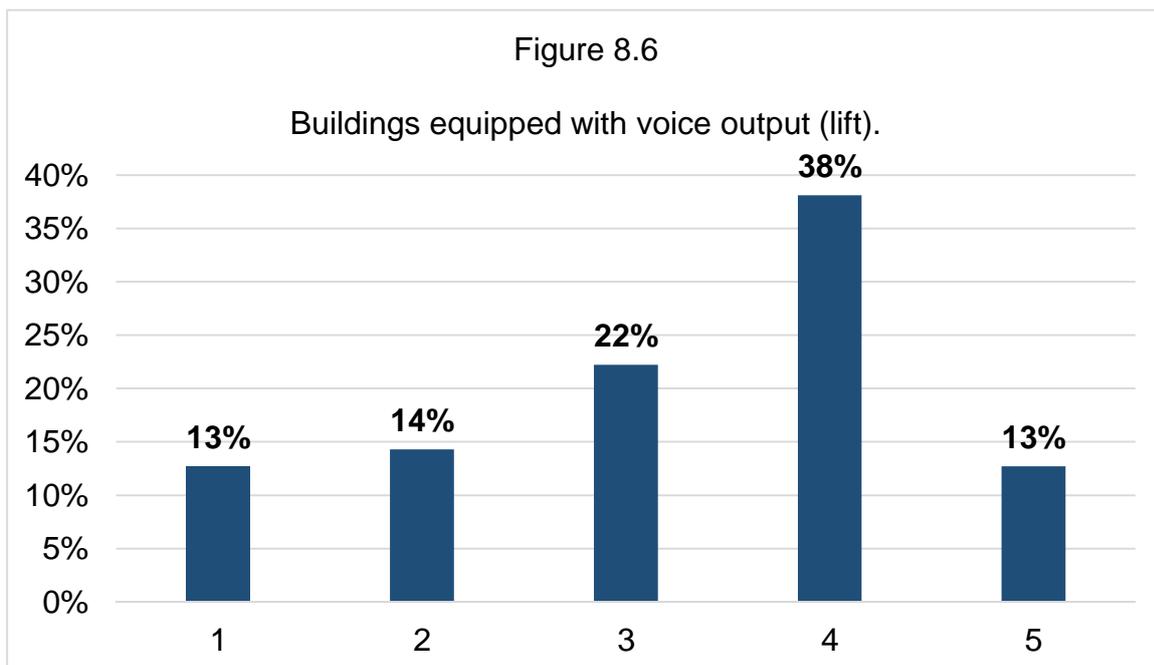




At the greatest amount of universities surveyed (**44%**) more than half of the toilets are accessible. **21%** of universities declare that all toilets are accessible, while **3%** say they have few or no such toilets. Less than half is stated by **10%** of universities, half is stated by **22%** (Figure 8.5).

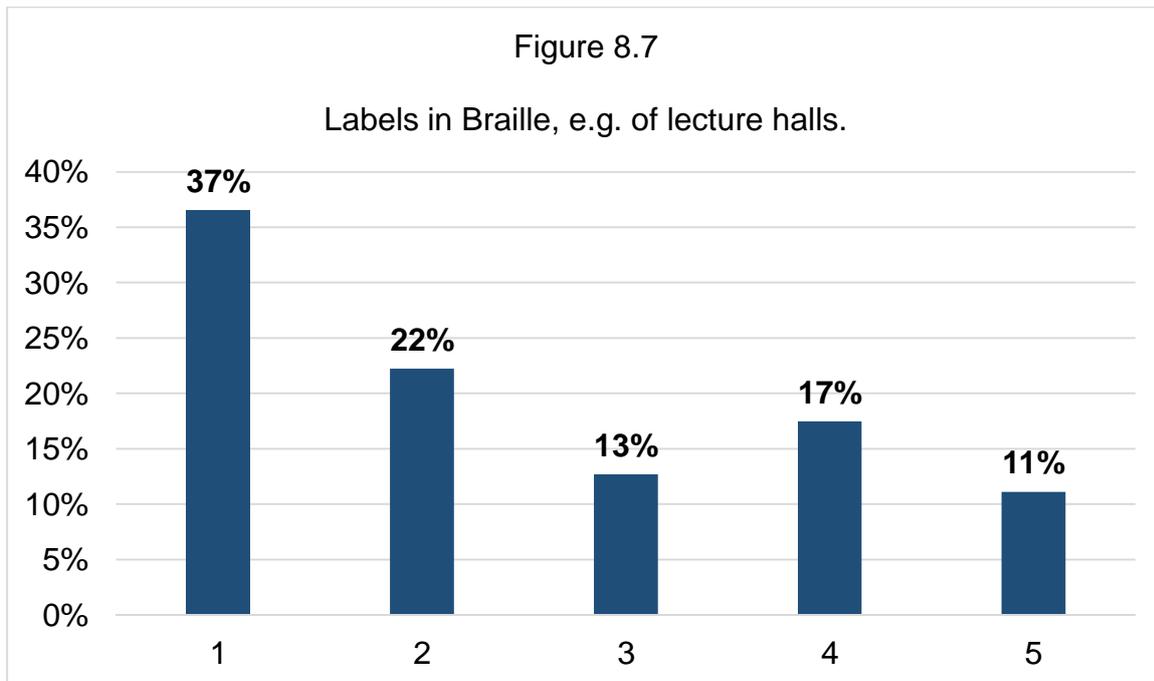


The survey also verifies whether universities use voice output in their buildings (e.g. in lifts). **13%** of universities say they do not use such systems at all. The remaining results are: **14%** of universities – use less than half, **22%** - use half, **38%** - state more than half. **13%** of universities choose the highest level of this availability - 5, or all (Figure 8.6).





In the survey universities are also asked whether they use labels in Braille. **37%** of universities say they do to little extent or not at all. **22%** choose the answer that they do but less than half, **13%** say half, **17%** select more than half. Only **11%** of universities (the smallest percentage of all universities surveyed) assess their adaptation in this respect to be at the highest level (Figure 8.7).

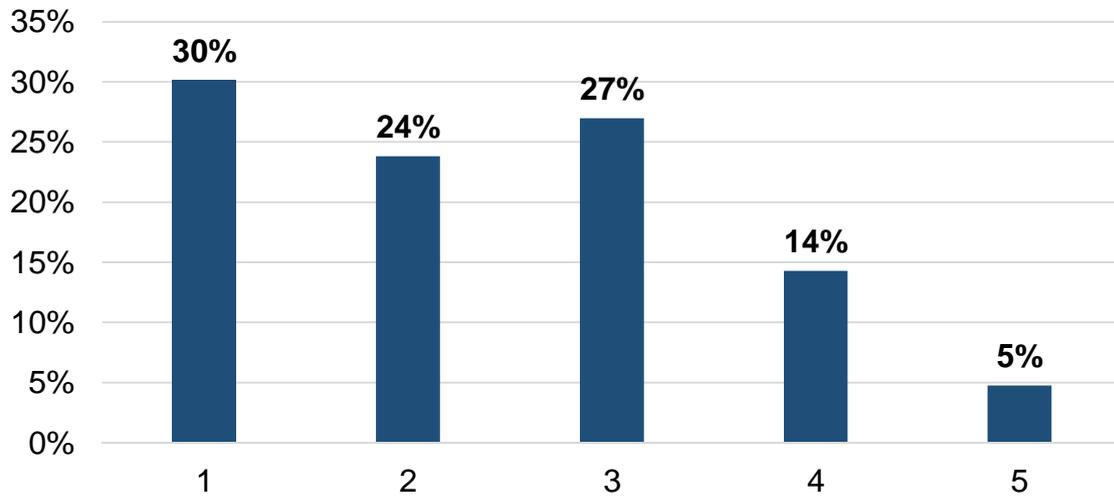


Contrasting or tactile surface markings are the last element of architectural accessibility that is verified in the study. **30%** of universities, say they do to little extent or not at all, **27%** use half of such markings. **24%** choose the answer that they do but less than half, **14%** select more than half. **5%** of universities choose the highest level of this availability - 5, or all (Figure 8.8).



Figure 8.8

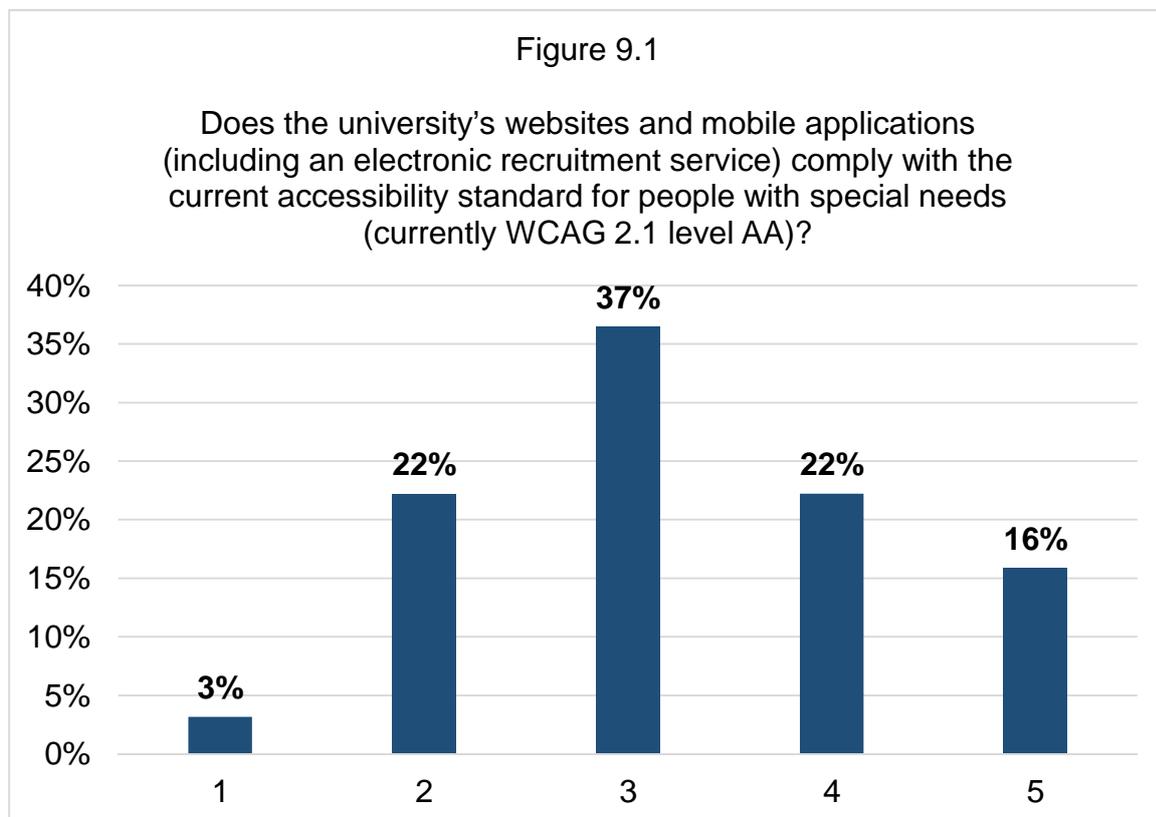
Contrasting or tactile surface markings.





## Digital accessibility

In this section of the study universities are asked whether the university's websites and mobile applications (including an electronic recruitment service) comply with the current accessibility standards for people with special needs (currently WCAG 2.1 level AA). Universities assess the situation of digital accessibility by choosing one of the options on a five-point scale: 1 - the weakest, 2 - weaker, 3 - hard to say, 4 – stronger, 5 - the strongest.



The greatest amount of universities surveyed, or **37%**, respond that it is hard to say and rate their availability at 3.

**3%** of universities choose the lowest level of this availability (1, or the weakest).

**22%** of universities surveyed say they have WCAG 2.1 AA-compliant websites and mobile apps at level 2, i.e. weak. Meanwhile, **22%** rate them at 4, i.e. strong.

**16%** of universities choose the highest level of this availability (5 - the strongest).

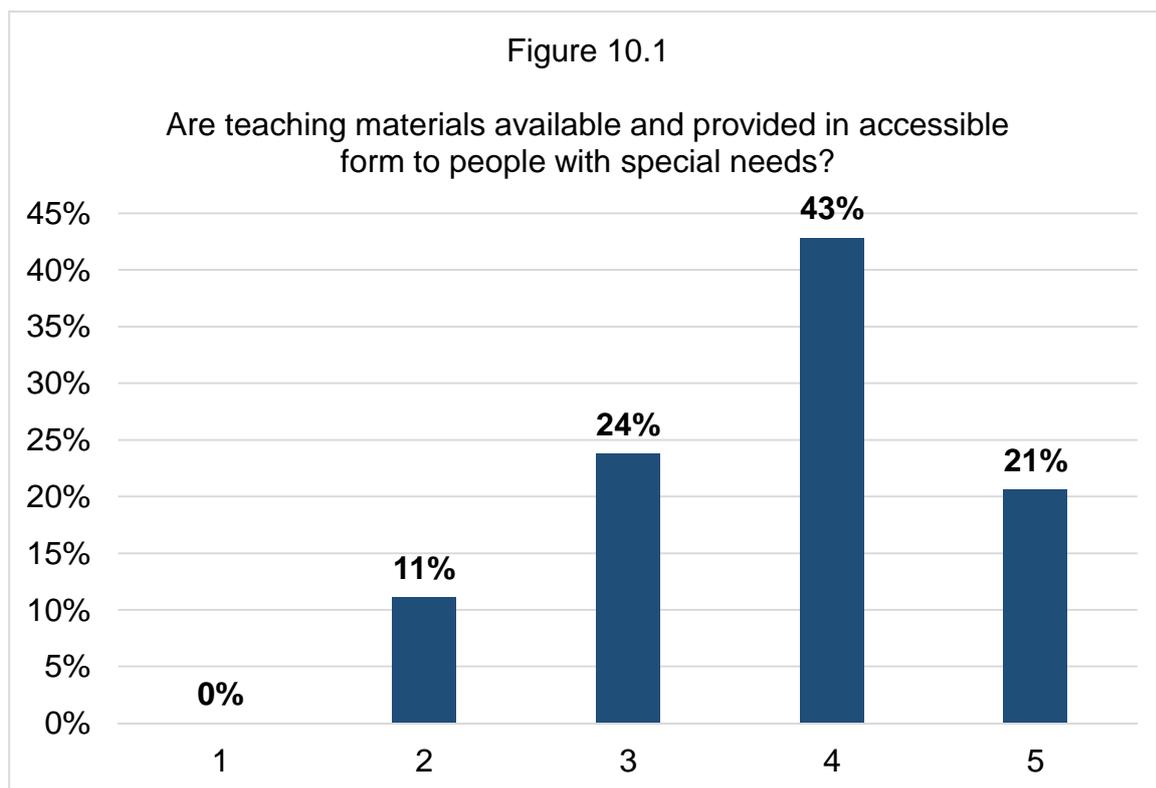
The results above are presented in Figure 9.1.



## Access to information and communication

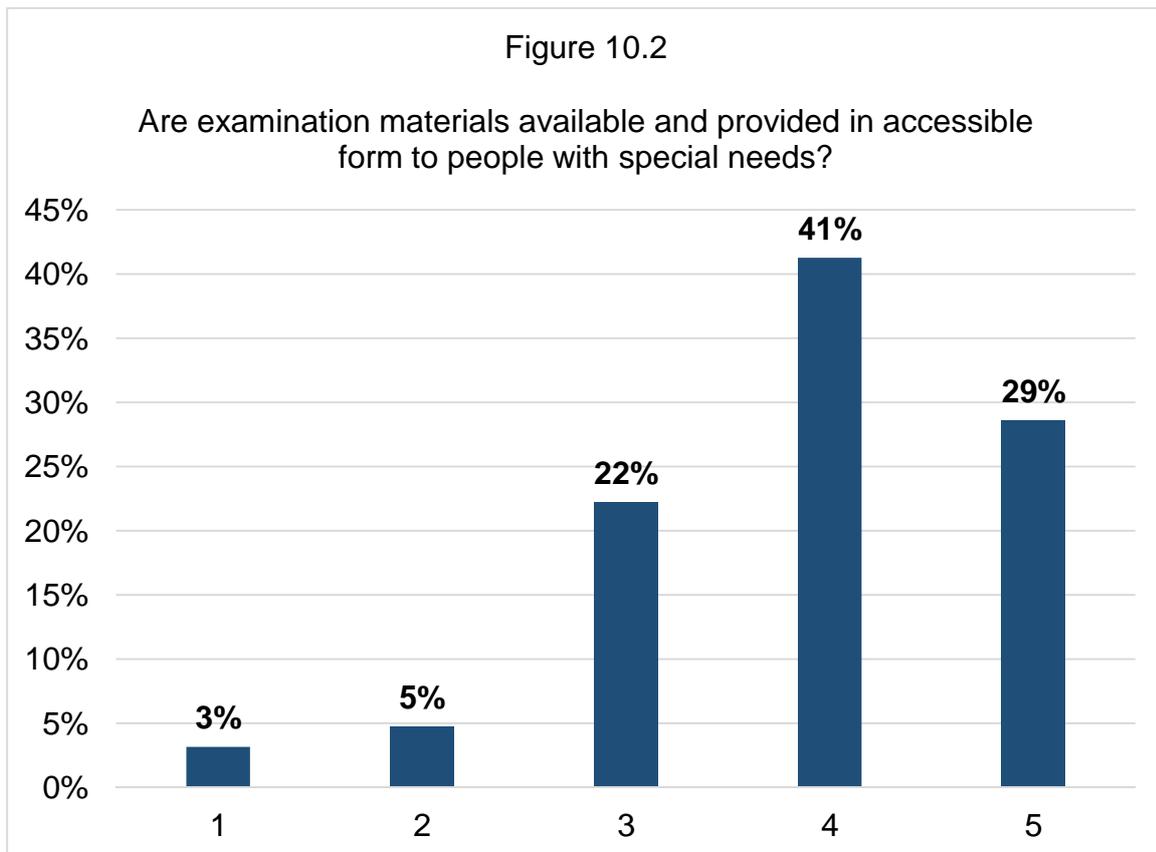
Universities have also been asked to assess the situation in the area of information and communication accessibility by marking the answer YES or NO and on a five-point scale: 1 – not at all or not much, 2 - less than half, 3 - half, 4-more than half, 5 – all.

The first question concerns the accessibility of teaching materials. **43%** of universities indicate that more than half of their teaching materials are accessible and provided in accessible form to people with special needs. On the other hand, **21%** of universities declare that all their materials are accessible. Less than half of the teaching materials are accessible and delivered in accessible form by **11%** of universities and half of all materials are accessible for students with disabilities in **24%** of the universities surveyed (Figure 10.1).



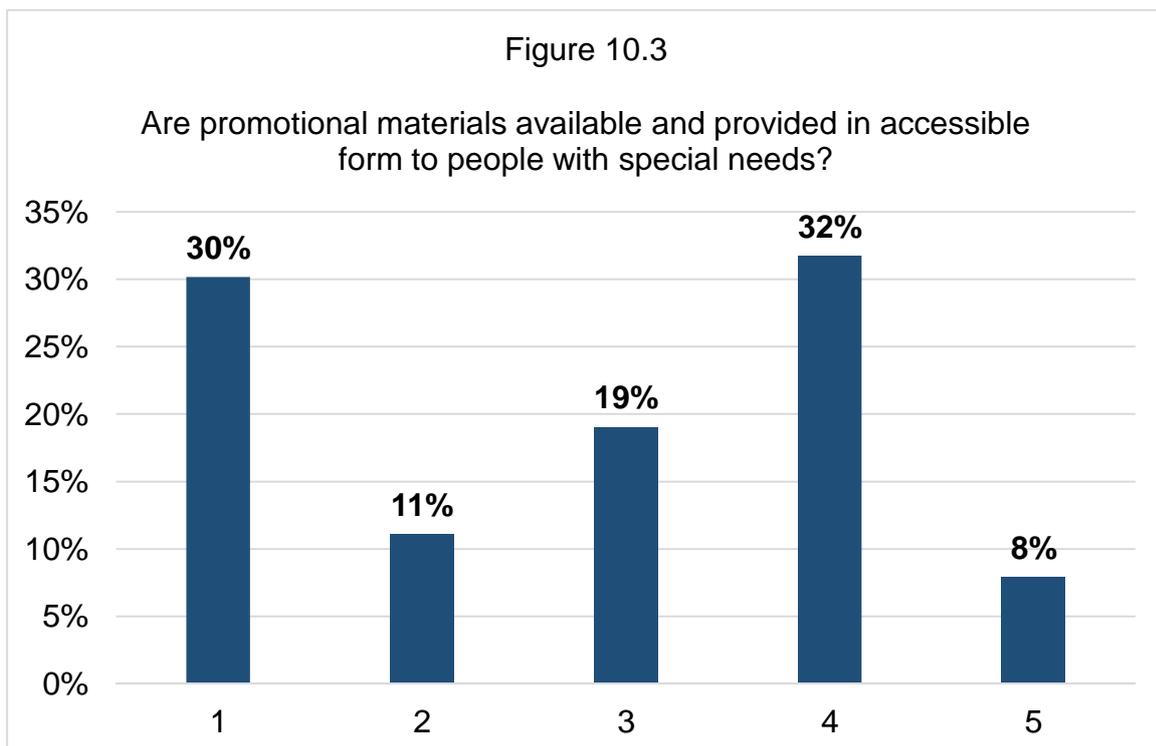


Subsequently, the accessibility of exam materials has been verified. The greatest amount of universities surveyed, or **41%**, say that more than half of their exam materials are accessible and provided in accessible form to people with special needs. All exam materials are accessible and provided in the appropriate form by **29%** of universities and half of all materials are accessible at **22%** of universities. On the other hand, the smallest number of universities, i.e. **3%**, claim that at all or little of their examination materials are accessible, and **5%** of universities – claim less than half (Figure 10.2).



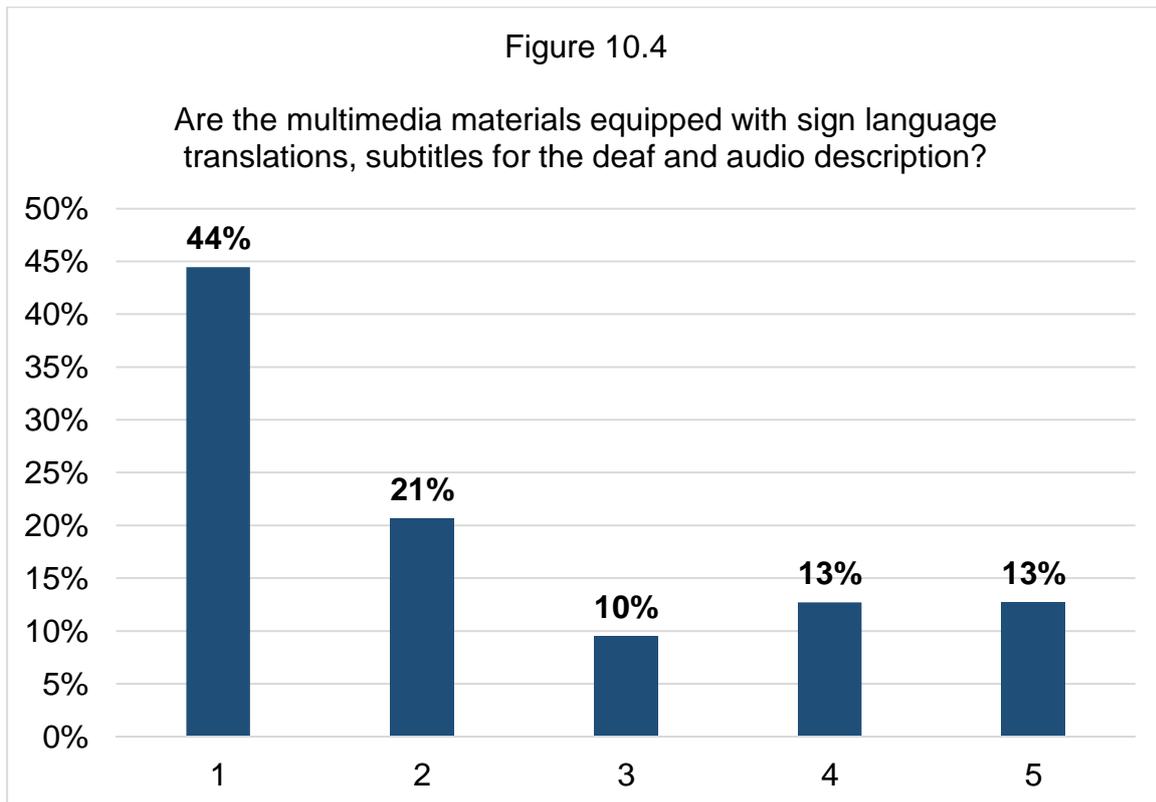


The greatest amount of universities surveyed, or **32%** indicate that more than half of their promotional materials are accessible and provided in accessible form to people with special needs. **30%** of universities do not have such materials at all. The smallest number of universities, i.e. **8%**, claim that that all their materials are accessible. Less than half of the promotional materials are accessible and provided in accessible form by **11%** of universities and half of all materials are accessible to students with disabilities in **19%** of the universities surveyed (Figure 10.3).





Only **13%** of the surveyed universities declare that all their published and presented multimedia materials are accessible with sign language translations, subtitles for the deaf and audio description. **44%** of universities indicate that no or few such materials are properly adapted. Less than half is owned by **21%** of universities, half by **10%**, and more than half by **13%** (Figure 10.4).





The vast majority of universities, i.e. **92%**, enable their students to benefit from devices, assistive technologies and working stations adapted to their special needs and in **94%** of the universities surveyed students are entitled to use the support of an assistant/adviser during classes, exams and in administrative services. However, there are a few universities which do not apply the above-mentioned practices (Figure 10.5).

Figure 10.5

Do students benefit from devices, assistive technologies and working stations adapted to their special needs during classes, exams and using administrative services?

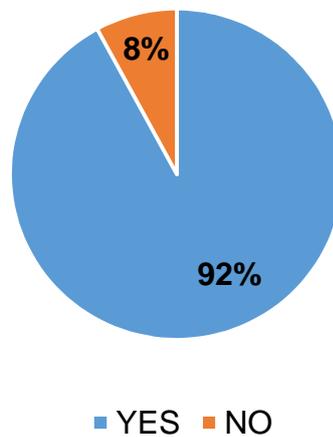
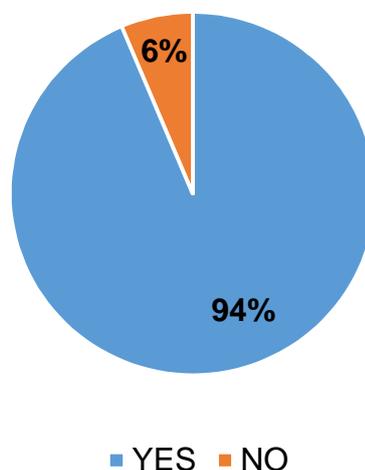


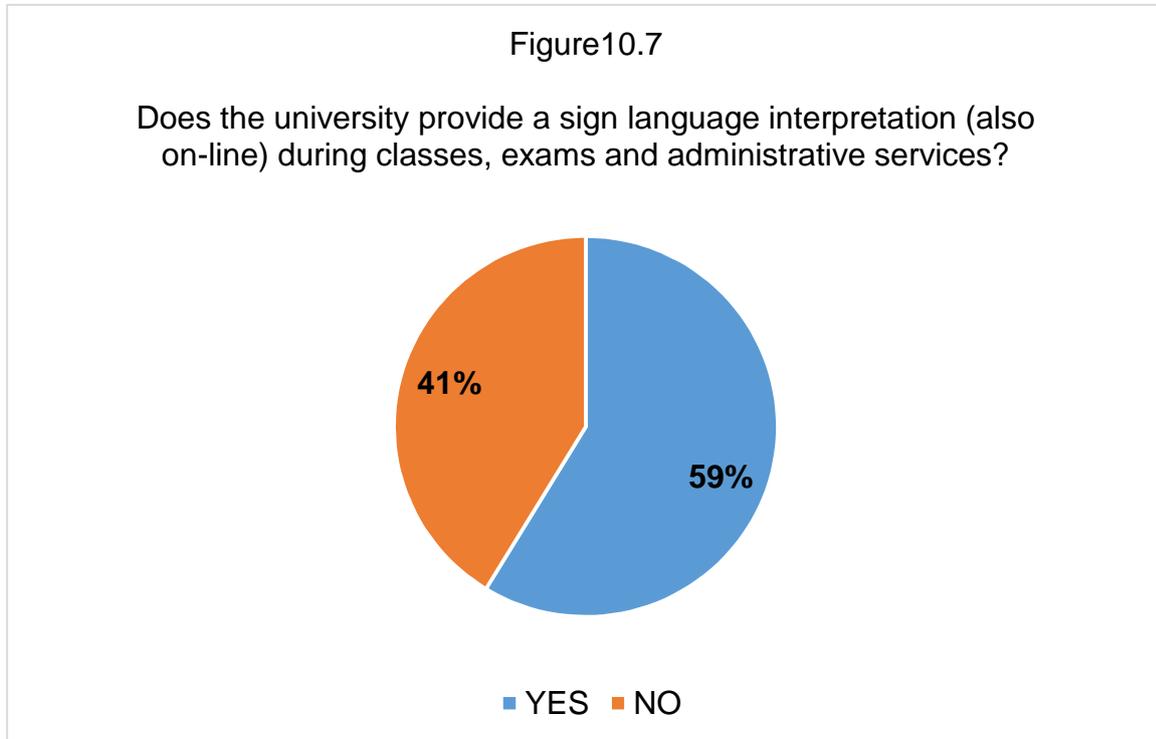
Figure 10.6

Are students entitled to use the support of an assistant / adviser during classes, exams and in administrative services?





More than half of the universities (**59%**) provide sign language interpretation (also online) during classes, exams and administrative services. **41%** of universities do not offer such support (Figure 10.7).

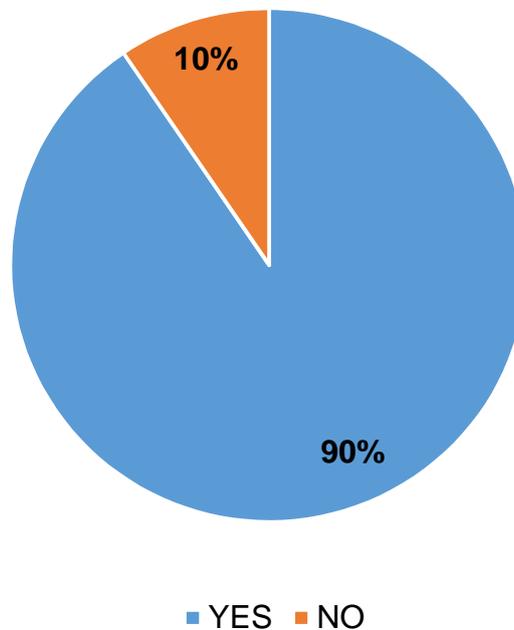




Most universities, i.e. **90%**, offer tailored individual consultations and advice (also on-line) to students with special needs regarding their current academic situation, the recruitment process (e.g. assistance in choosing a field of study) and education, as well as advice concerning assistive technologies, support, alternative solutions. Definitely fewer universities, i.e. **10%**, do not provide such services (Figure 10.8).

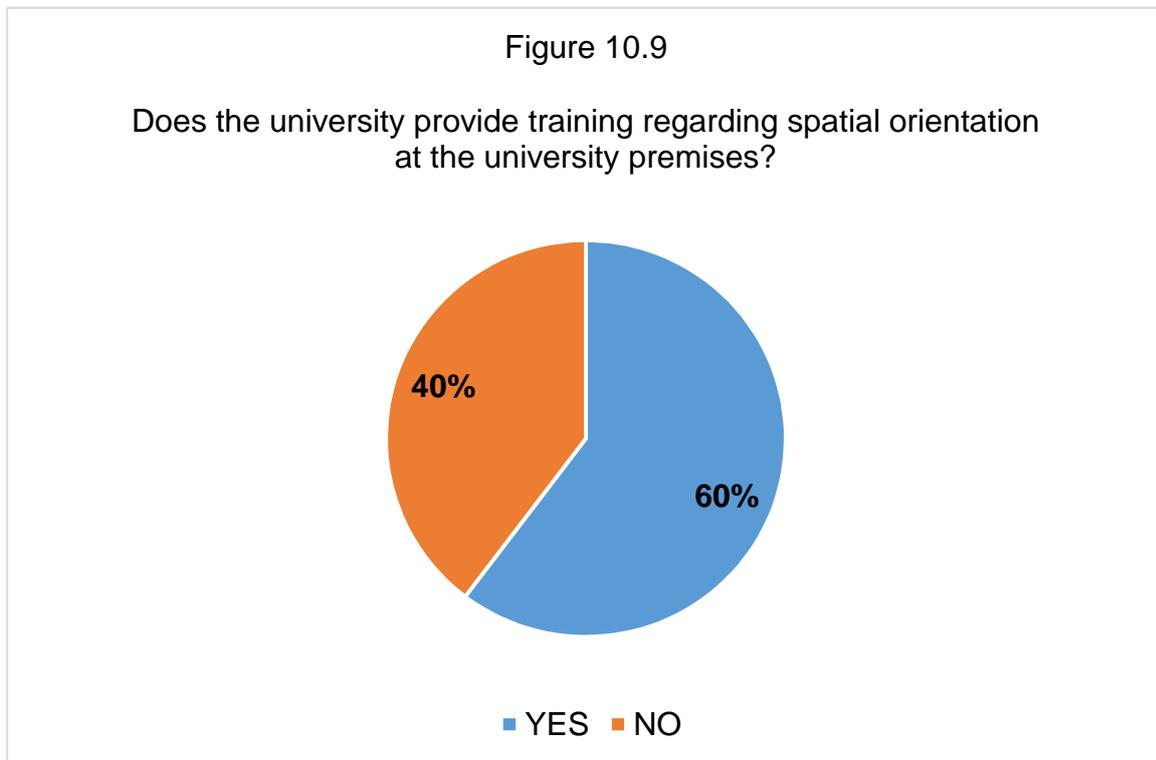
Figure 10.8

Does the university offer tailored individual consultations and advice (also on-line) to students with special needs regarding their current academic situation, the recruitment process (e.g. assistance in choosing a field of study) and education





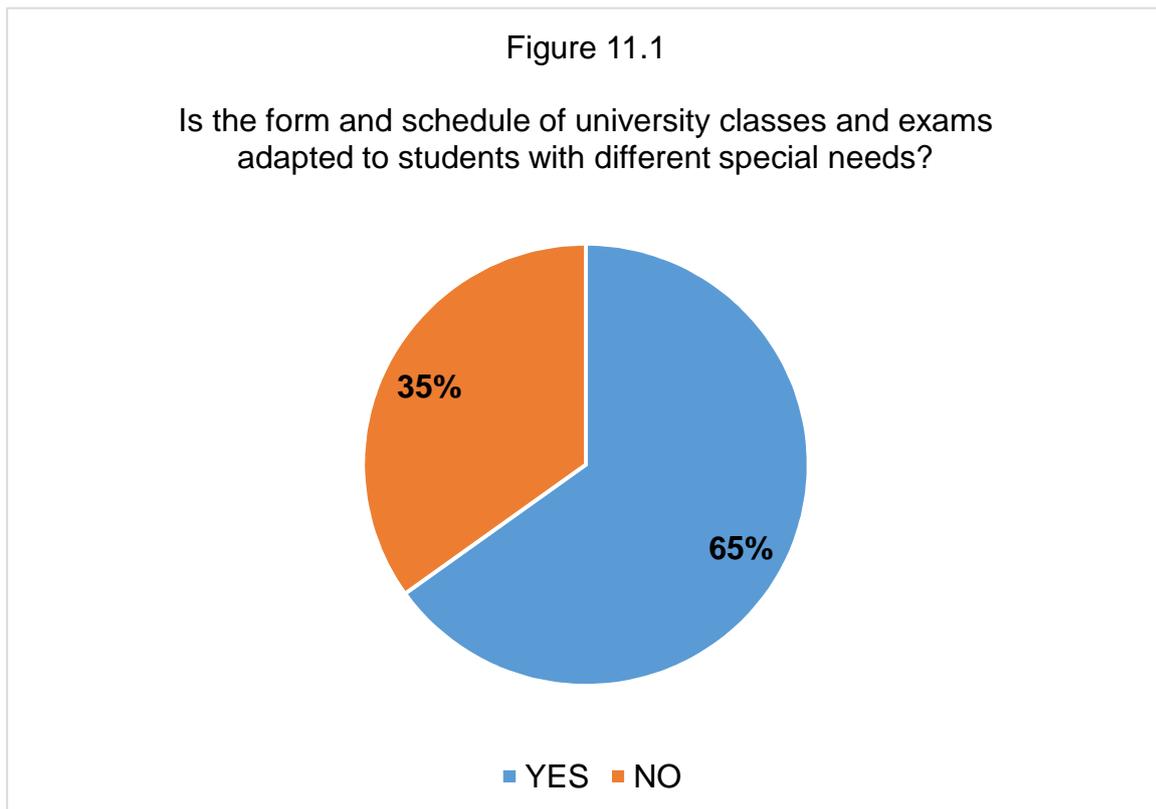
**60%** of the respondents provide training regarding spatial orientation at the university premises, while **40%** do not apply such practices (Figure 10.9).





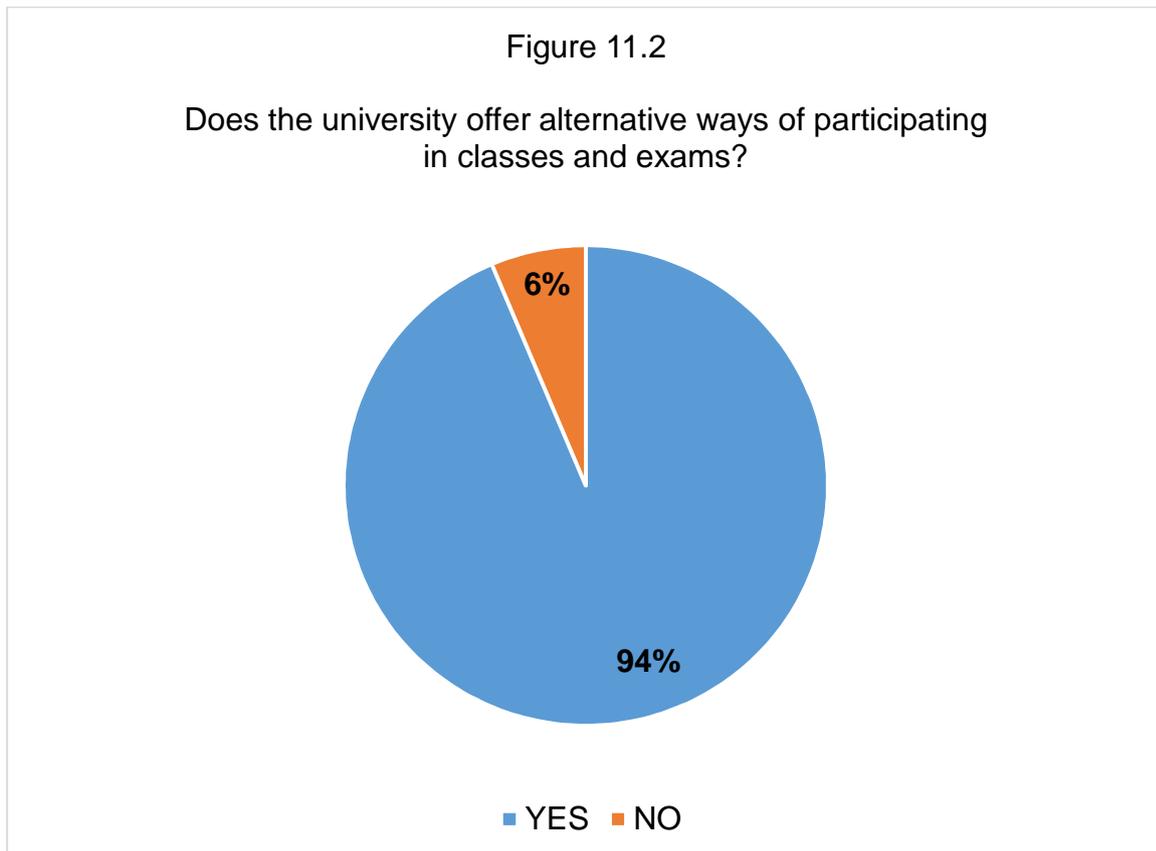
## The accessibility of didactic classes

This part of the survey assesses the accessibility of didactic classes at universities. At **65%** of universities there is adapted form and schedule of university classes and exams to students with special needs. However, **35%** of universities do not apply such practices (Figure 11.1).



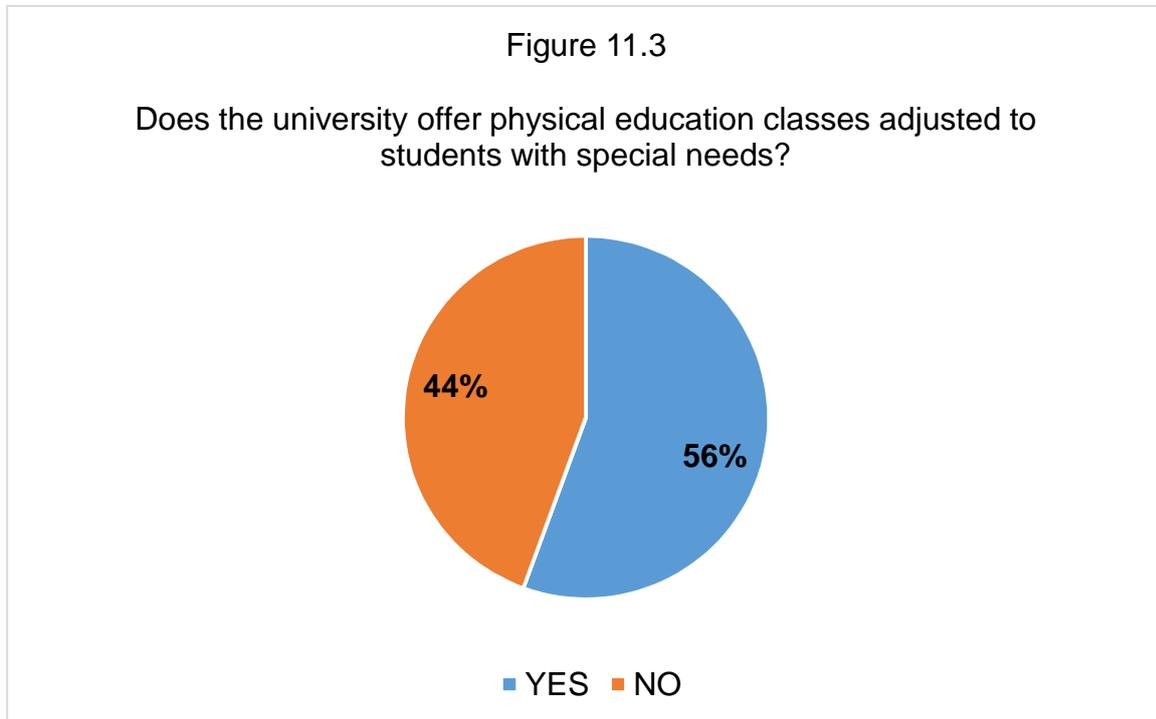


The vast majority of **94%** of universities offer an alternative ways of participating in classes and exams (e.g. by using video conferences, increased number of absence hours accepted with option of other way to get credits, individual classes, prolonged examination time). However, there are a few universities (**6%**) which do not apply the above-mentioned practices (Figure 11.2).

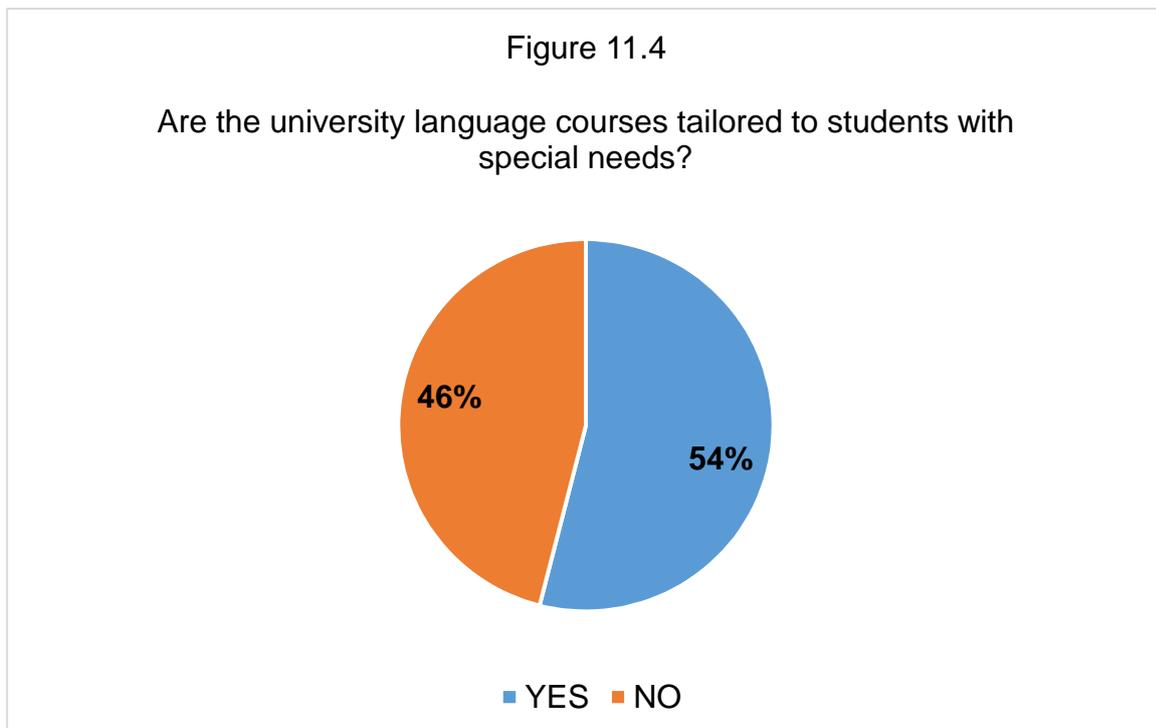




**56%** of universities offer physical education classes adjusted to students with special needs, while **44%** do not use such solution (Figure 11.3).

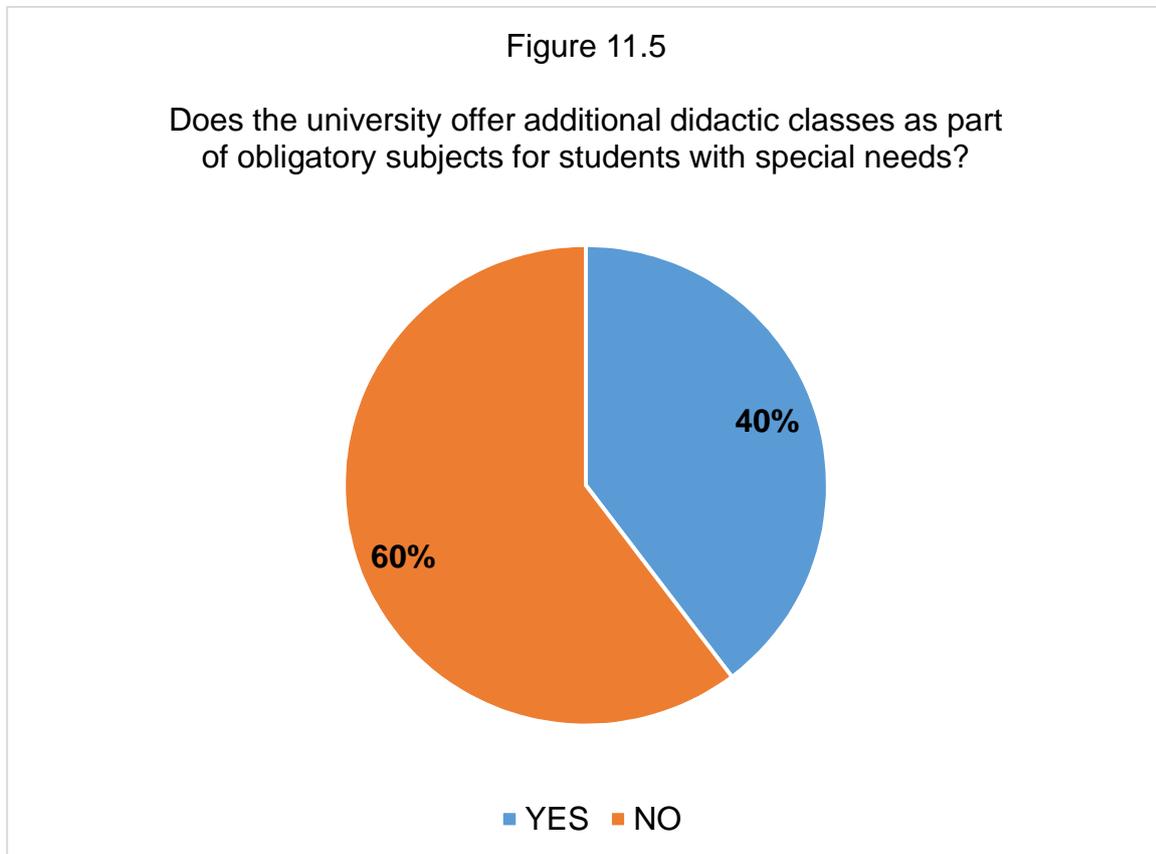


In **54%** of the universities surveyed are the language courses tailored to students with special needs. Slightly fewer universities (**46%**) do not use this solution (Figure 11.4).





**40%** of universities offer additional classes as part of obligatory subjects for students with special needs. Other universities surveyed (**60%**) do not provide such support services (Figure 11.5).





## Legislation

The last part of the survey asks about the legal basis for universities. **81%** of universities, have standards governing the rights and obligations of students with special needs. However, **19%** of universities have no such standards (Figure 12.1).

At most of the universities surveyed (**73%**) there are standards governing the rights and responsibilities of teaching staff for students with special needs. Other universities surveyed (**27%**) do not apply such standards (Figure 12.2).

The specification of regulations (numbers of laws, decrees, internal directives) at individual universities is quite diverse. These issues are regulated both by the regulations of studies and units, as well as by individual regulations, decrees, and general legal standards applicable in a given country.

Figure 12.1

Are there university standards governing the rights and obligations of students with special needs?

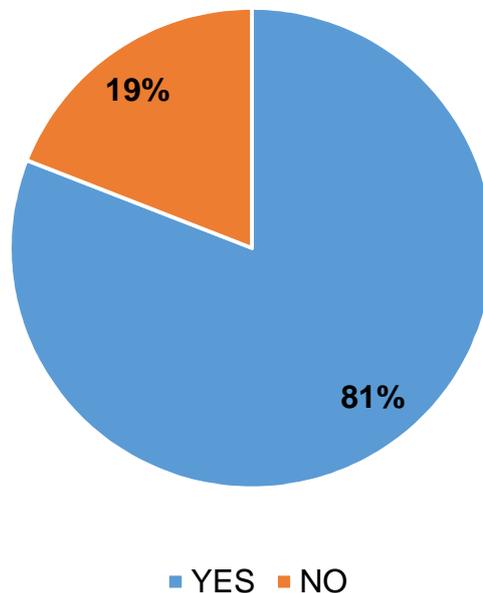
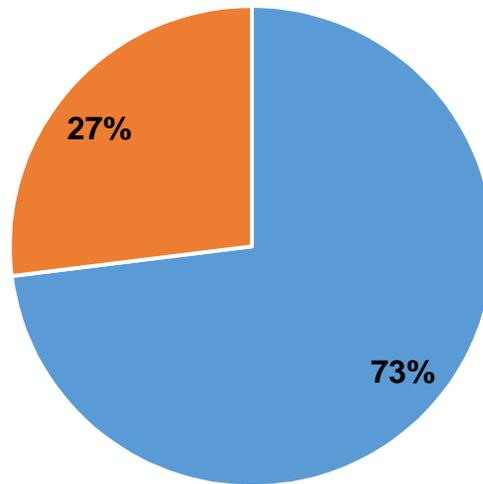




Figure12.2

Are there university standards that regulate the rights and obligations of teachers to students with special needs?



■ YES ■ NO



## Summary of survey results

Most universities provide support for students with physical disabilities, visual disabilities and hearing disabilities. Analyzing the specific needs of students and employees and designating a person or organizational unit to take care of accessibility issues are very common forms of support. At universities, there are also offices or persons dedicated who have the adequate information and knowledge to help students with special needs. In addition, some universities have their own specialized units that also support teachers and/or organize specialized training courses for university employees. A fairly common practice is to provide specialized training courses for university staff in the field of education and communication with people with special needs. It is important to organize evacuations in a way that is safe for students and staff with specific needs. Most universities provide safe evacuation taking into account the specific needs of students and staff. An interesting and convenient means used by many universities is to offer support to people with special needs by trained students (on a volunteer basis). It was said that these were often employees of specialized centers for students with special needs.

In the area of architectural accessibility, the standard is to have an adequate number of parking spaces for people with disabilities near the main entrances, accessible entrances to buildings, barrier-free classrooms and examination rooms. To a lesser extent, the solutions used by universities for people with special needs also include the installation of electronic components at an accessible height, accessible toilets as well as voice output in their buildings (e.g. in lifts). According to the surveys carried out, the use of labels in Braille (e.g. in lecture halls) and of contrasting or tactile surface markings is much less common.

Digital accessibility is also one of the standards present at universities, but it is not at the highest level. Universities should have websites and mobile applications (including an electronic recruitment portal) in line with the current accessibility criteria for people with special needs (currently WCAG 2.1 AA).

The use of accessible teaching and examination materials and their provision in a form adapted to people with special needs is a standard in the area of information and communication accessibility. On the other hand, promotional materials as well as multimedia materials with sign language translations, subtitles for the deaf and audio



description are accessible to a lesser degree. The vast majority of universities enable students to use devices, supporting technologies and adapted positions during classes, exams and administrative services, as well as support of an assistant / advisor during classes, exams and administrative services. A very common form of support in universities is to offer tailored, individual consultations and advice regarding their current academic situation, the recruitment process (e.g. assistance in choosing a field of study) and education, as well as advice concerning assistive technologies, support, alternative solutions. On the other hand, the provision of sign language interpreters (including on-line interpreters) during classes, exams and administrative services are less common forms of support.

In order to increase the accessibility of learning activities for students with special needs, a large part of the universities adapt the form and schedule of academic classes and exams for students with special needs. The vast majority of universities also offer the possibility to choose alternative ways of participating in classes and exams (e.g. video conferences, increased number of absence hours accepted with the option to get credits in other ways, individual classes, prolonged examination time). Other common forms of support at universities include the opportunity to participate in physical education classes or language courses tailored to the specific needs of students. By contrast, far fewer universities provide additional didactic classes for students with special needs as part of obligatory subjects.

Most universities have standards that govern the rights and obligations of teaching staff taking into account students with special needs and the standards governing the rights and obligations of these students.



## List of support services

On the basis of the studies carried out, the applied support services were collected and an example of a universal and flexible support system for students with disabilities at universities was created in the following areas: architectural, digital, information – communication, didactic classes, legal bases and others, such as evacuation, training, awareness.

1. Analyzing the specific needs of students and employees.
2. Designating a person or organisational unit to take care of accessibility issues.
3. Organizing specialized training courses for university staff in the field of education and communication with people with special needs.
4. Planning evacuation procedures in a safe way for students/university employees with special needs and does it take into account those special needs..
5. Adapting older buildings according to possibilities, designing new ones according to accessibility and universal design standards:
  - a. parking spaces for people with disabilities near the main entrance,
  - b. accessible main entrances to buildings,
  - c. classrooms and examination rooms free of architectural barriers,
  - d. accessible toilets,
  - e. electronic components mounted at an available height (bells, electronic chip sensors, etc),
  - f. buildings equipped with voice output.
6. The university's websites and mobile applications (including an electronic recruitment service) complying with the current accessibility standard for people with special needs (currently WCAG 2.1 level AA).
7. The accessible teaching and examination materials provided in accessible form to people with special needs.
8. Adapting the form and schedule of university classes and exams to students with different special needs.
9. Offering alternative ways of participating in classes and exams.
10. Offering physical education classes and language courses tailored to students with special needs.



11. Using devices, assistive technologies and working stations adapted to the special needs of students during classes, exams and in administrative services.
12. Offering the support of an assistant / adviser during classes, exams and in administrative services.
13. Offering the support to people with special needs by trained students (on a volunteer basis)
14. Setting up university standards governing the rights and obligations of students with special needs and regulating the rights and obligations of teachers to students with special needs..

The other recommended support services are:

- a. providing a sign language interpretation (also on-line) during classes, exams and administrative services,
- b. training regarding spatial orientation at the university premises,
- c. offering additional didactic classes as part of obligatory subjects,
- d. multimedia materials equipped with sign language translations, subtitles for the deaf and audio description,
- e. labels in Braille, e.g. of lecture halls,
- f. contrasting or tactile surface marking.



## List of universities that participated in the study

We would like to thank the universities that took part in the study and thus contributed to the preparation of this report and the development of a list of support services for students with special needs at universities.

1. Charles University
2. Masaryk University
3. Comenius University Bratislava
4. Palacky University
5. Brno University of Technology
6. Czech Technical University in Prague
7. University of Economics
8. VSB Technical University of Ostrava
9. Mendel University Brno
10. Tomas Bata University in Zlín
11. University of Ostrava
12. University of Presov
13. University of Hradec Králové
14. University of Veterinary and Farmaceutical Sciences
15. Varna Medical University
16. University of Veliko Tarnovo
17. Saint Petersburg University: SPBU
18. South Ural State University
19. University of Tokyo
20. Sofia University, "St. Kliment Ohridski"
21. Shumen University "Bishop Konstantin of Preslav"
22. Varna Free Univercity
23. Trakia University - Stara Zagora
24. Sofia Medical University
25. Law on Higher Education
26. Medical University – Plovdiv
27. Universität Stuttgart
28. University of Iceland



29. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
30. Vrije Universiteit Brussel
31. European University Viadrina Frankfurt
32. Università degli Studi di Padova
33. Politechnika Wroclawska
34. Uniwersytet w Białymstoku
35. Krakowska Akademia im. Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego
36. Politechnika Białostocka
37. Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Lublinie
38. Uniwersytet Gdański
39. Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy
40. Uniwersytet Jagielloński
41. Uniwersytet Warszawski
42. Uniwersytet Szczeciński
43. Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza im. Stanisława Staszica w Krakowie
44. Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa im. Witelona w Legnicy
45. Politechnika Łódzka
46. Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Raciborzu
47. Politechnika Warszawska
48. Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. KEN w Krakowie
49. AWF Wrocław
50. Krakowska Wyższa Szkoła Promocji Zdrowia
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52. Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie
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59. Technical University Gabrovo
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61. Technical University - Varna



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62. Brunel University London

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