

Using the ICF to assess and promote inclusive education in Italy: a bottom-up approach for defining national recommendations.

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Abstract The ICF Project is a national two-year programme financed by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MEUR) aimed at collecting inputs to recommend how to use ICF, especially in order to identify educational barriers and facilitators in participation. 91 projects were selected for funding. The mid-term monitoring results are presented.

Introduction

The ICF Project is a national two-year programme that began in 2010 and is scheduled to end in December 2012. It is financed by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MEUR) with a budget of 1.7 million euro. It built on the ICARE initiative, piloted from 2007 to 2009. A national call was launched in 2010 by the MEUR for partnerships between schools/universities and other agencies, mainly local health authorities and social services.

The aim was to support the use of ICF in the assessment of educational environments for their ability to accommodate diverse student populations and facilitate participation for all children.

The goal was to collect inputs to recommend how to use ICF, especially in order to identify educational barriers and facilitators in participation.

This paper presents some results of the project mid-term evaluation (1).

Methods & Materials

544 projects were submitted, coming from all the twenty Italian administrative regions; of these 95 were selected and funded. In May 2012, monitoring was carried out to verify the state of the art of each project and the usefulness of ICF in assessing the goodness of fit between environment and diverse students.

Information was collected using an ad-hoc self-reported questionnaire divided into three parts: Part 1 comprised general information about the partnership; Part 2 collected information about the assessment of the educational environment using ICF; and Part 3 explored the relationships between ICF-based assessment and individual educational plan. A database was created and a descriptive analysis was performed in order to manage the schools' answers.

Results

Data of Parts 1 and 2 of the questionnaire were considered from 91 projects. 4,430 personnel were involved (75% were teachers).

The great majority of the project networks comprised local health authorities too. In 75% of the projects, "contexts" other than the educational one were analyzed, mainly the health services context and the social services context.

70% of the schools believed that the ICF terms were sufficient and suitable to describe the educational setting. 65% of the schools utilized third level ICF categories. Existing ICF checklists were used in one third of the projects, while ad-hoc checklists were created in another third (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Usage of ICF checklists

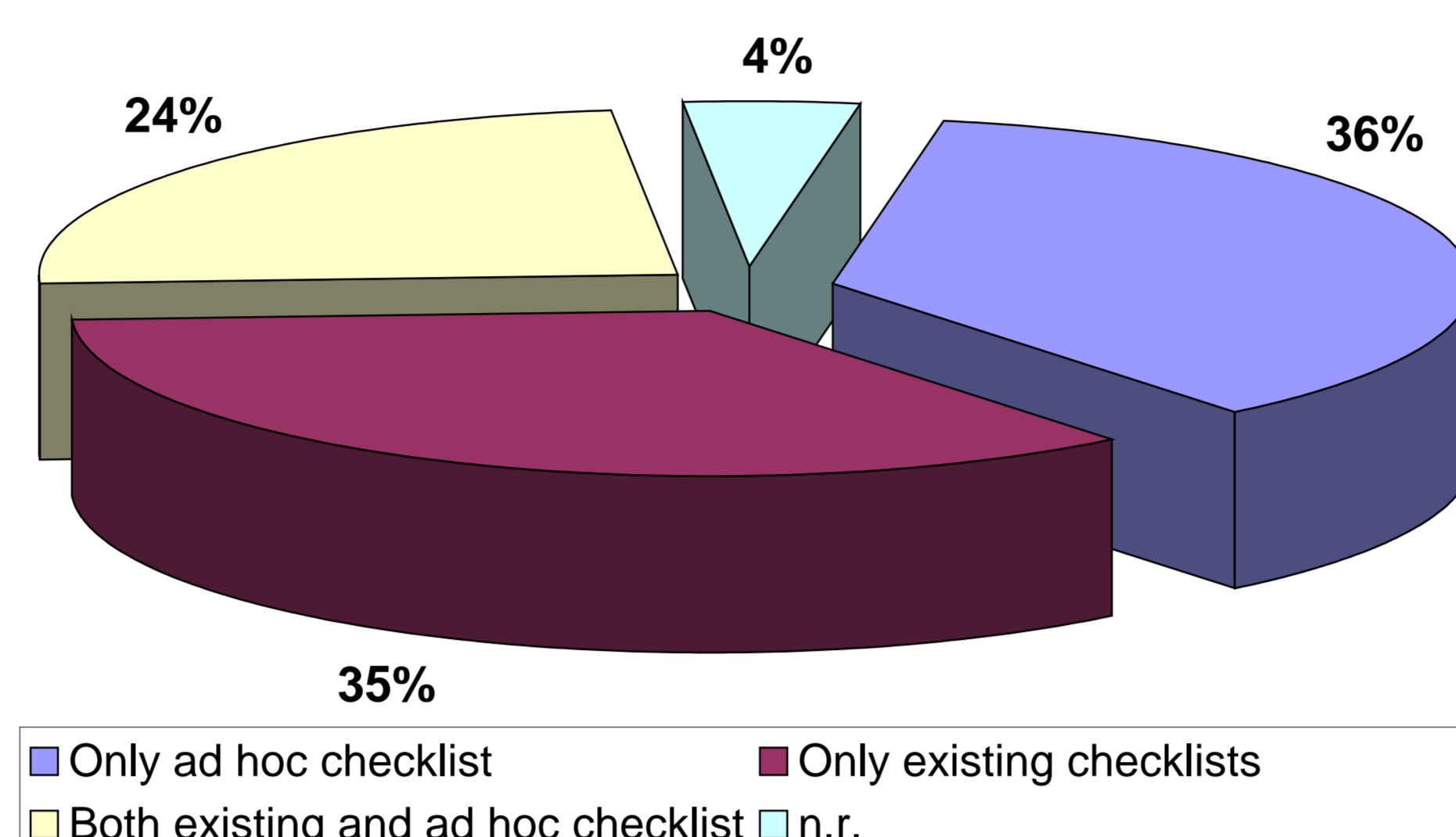
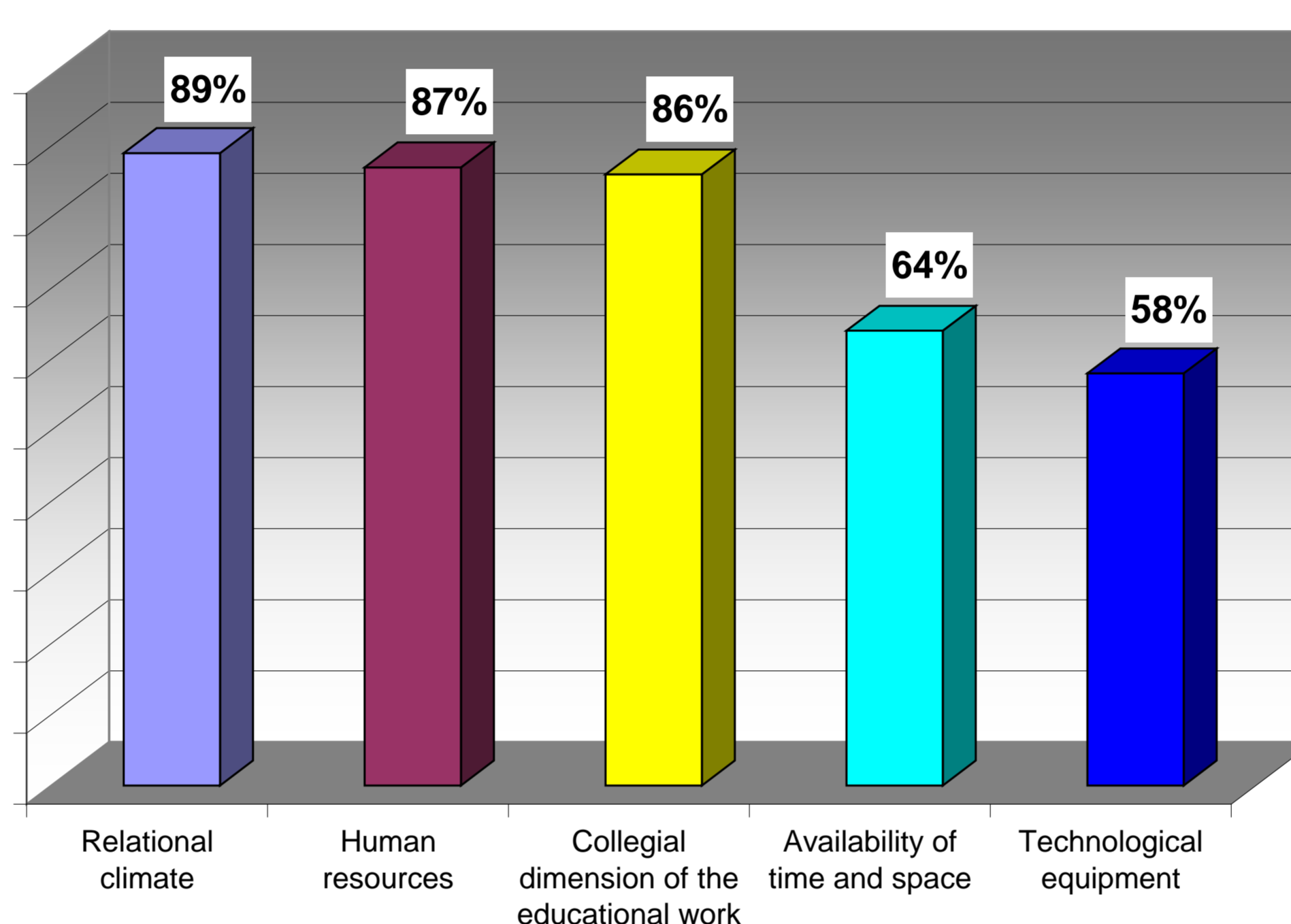


Figure 2 – Environmental factors considered for describing educational settings



Qualifiers were used very frequently: the first qualifier for body functions and body structure was used in 73% of the cases; performance and capacity, as well as facilitator and barrier qualifiers, were used in 93% and 96% of the projects, respectively. The great majority of the schools stated that *environmental factors* were evaluated jointly to the performance qualifier.

Figure 3– Pupils/Students' point of view in detecting barriers and facilitators

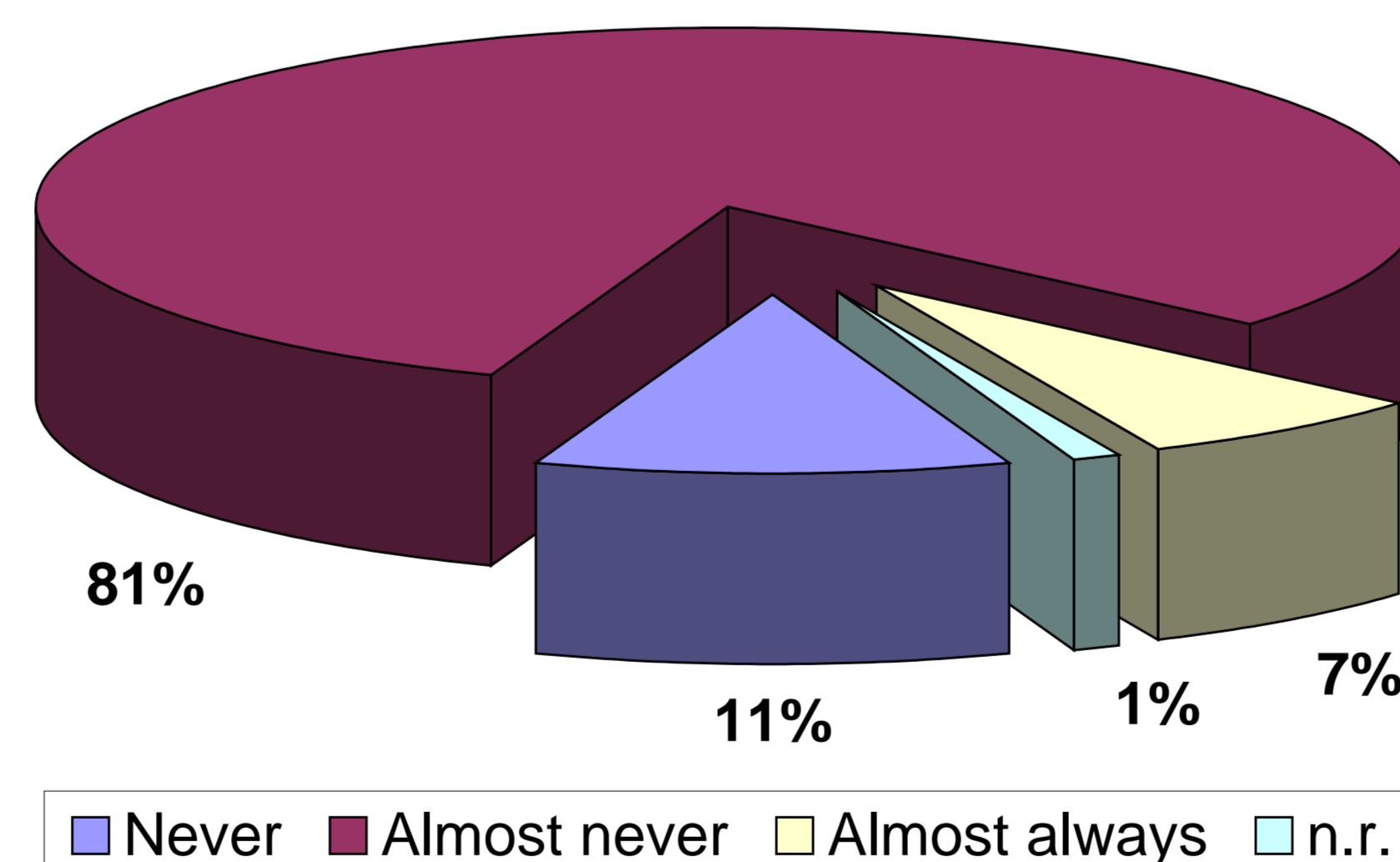
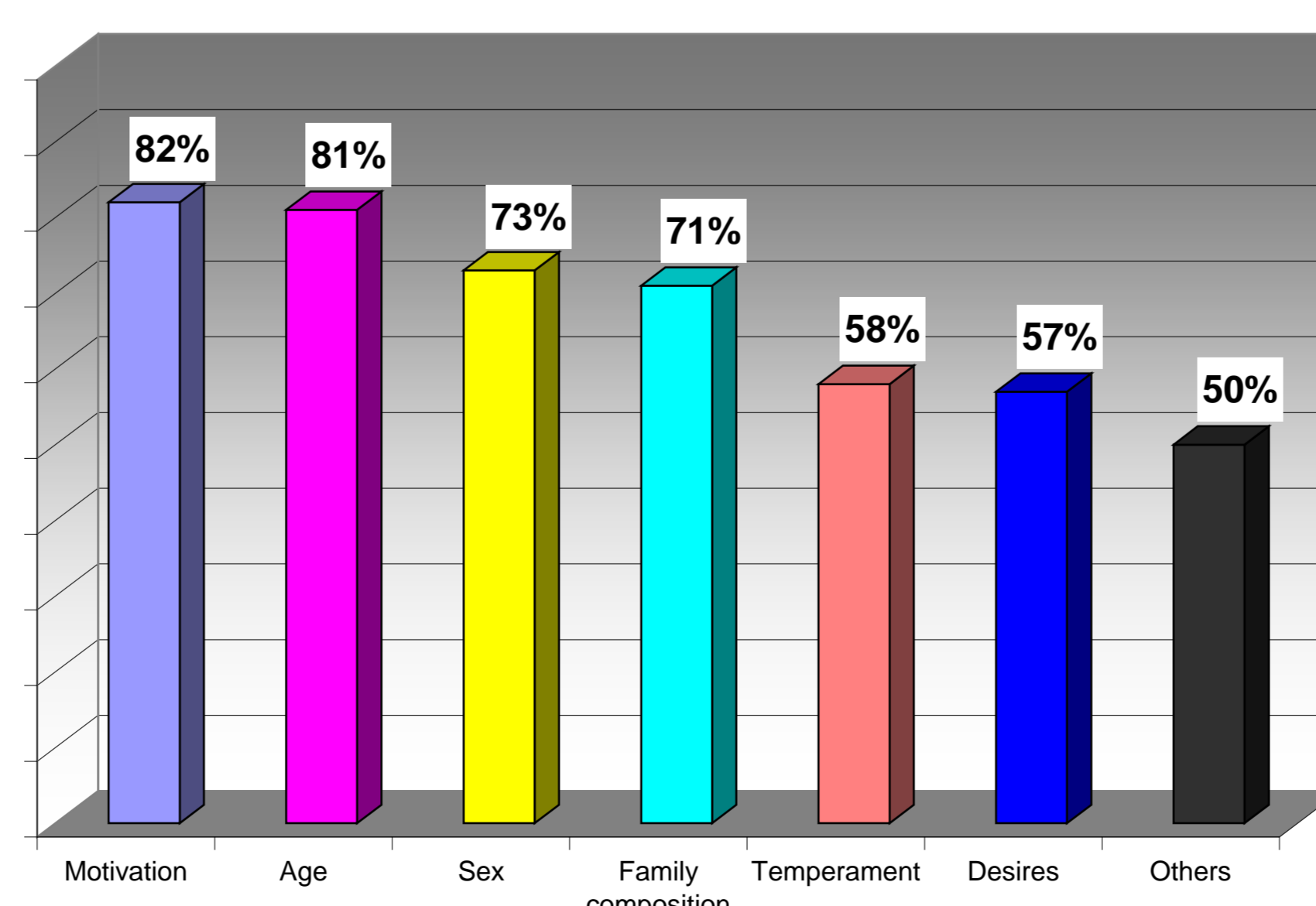


Figure 4 – Personal factors considered for describing students (N=91 projects)



The *child point of view* was used to assess the environmental factors effect in half of the projects, while the *family point of view* was considered in 81% of them (Figure 3). The *personal factors* were recorded in natural language. Sex (73%), age (81%), family composition (71%), personal attitude (58%), motivation (82%), and desires (57%) were the most common personal factors considered (Figure 4).

Conclusions

The goal of inclusive education has been part of the Italian agenda in the field of equity in education for several years. According to a study by OECD, 99.5% of students with disabilities are fully included in mainstream education in Italy (OECD, 2004). Since its publication, ICF has been used in Italy as an excellent conceptual framework helpful in promoting the quality of inclusive educational environments for diverse students. The national project aims at supporting the use of ICF in order to meliorate the inclusive capacity of the Italian school system. Some suggestions arising from the mid-term evaluation are useful to delineate national recommendations for using ICF profitably. These recommendations will be published in December 2012.

In the meanwhile, in July 2012, MEUR signed an agreement with the Italian Ministry of Health in order to adopt the ICF framework for eligibility purposes (2).

ICF Technical Group at MEUR

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2. Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, University and Research, Agreement for the rights to health and education of pupils and students with disability, Rome 12 July 2012

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