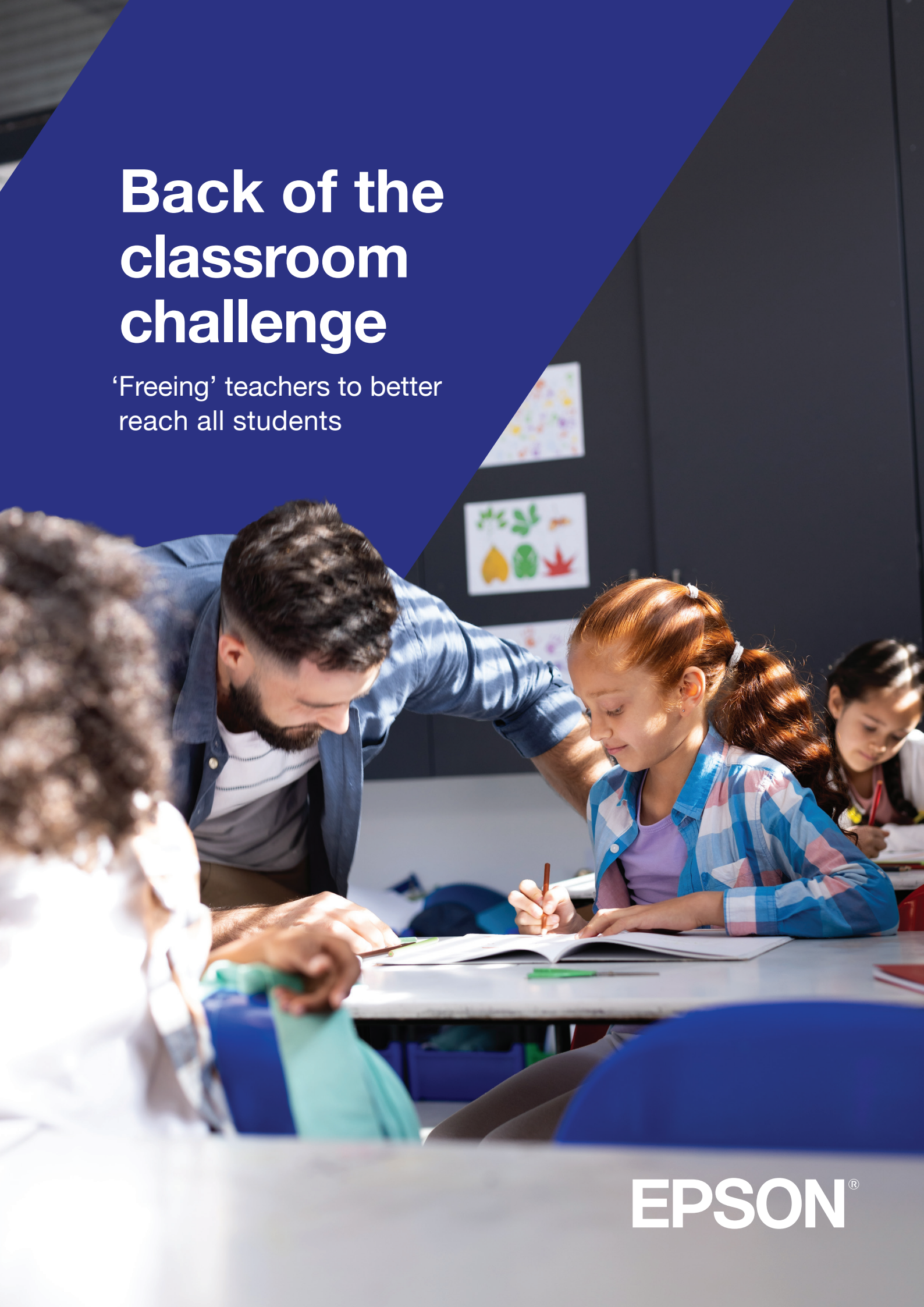
Back of the classroom challenge

‘Freeing’ teachers to better reach all students



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81%

of teachers across Europe now call for the "freedom to roam," around the classroom

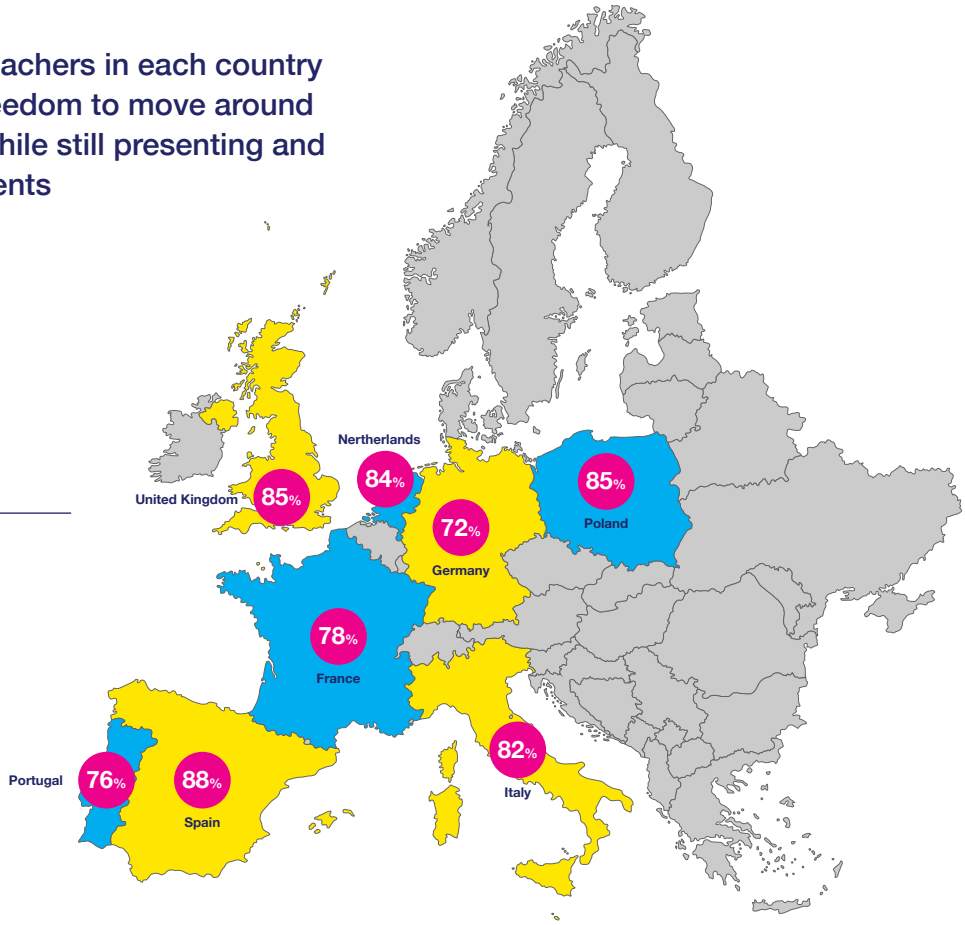
Introduction

The "back of the class" effect has been recognised for years: students who sit further away from the teacher are more likely to disengage, receive less attention, and in some cases, achieve lower results.[1] It's a dynamic that can quietly shape outcomes in every classroom.

New research, commissioned by Epson (see methodology), shows this divide is still very much present today – and may even be amplified by the way technology is used in schools. For educators, the issue is no longer just about seating plans. In classrooms increasingly reliant on flatscreens or touchscreen displays, teachers themselves feel tethered to the front of the room.

Figure 1
Percentage of teachers in each country who want the freedom to move around the classroom while still presenting and supporting students

88% **Spain**
85% **Poland**
85% **United Kingdom**
84% **Netherlands**
82% **Italy**
78% **France**
76% **Portugal**
72% **Germany**



Without the freedom to move, a long-standing challenge risks becoming harder to solve. It's why an overwhelming majority of teachers **(81 per cent)** across Europe now call for the "freedom to roam," where they're able to present and move around the classroom to provide equal help to students, regardless of where they sit (Figure 1).

This report explores how classroom technology and layout can unintentionally sideline students at a distance, and why teachers are calling for the freedom to move and teach wherever they're needed most.

When distance dictates engagement

Classrooms may be designed to serve every student equally, but physical positioning still shapes who is seen, supported, and engaged. Teachers themselves recognise this, with **41 per cent** agreeing that being stuck at the front of the classroom disadvantages learners at the back. While a similar proportion **(41 per cent)** believe it's harder for teachers to check on the progress of students sitting further away from the front.

41% **agree that being stuck at the front of the classroom disadvantages learners at the back**

Moreover, one out of every three teachers **(33 per cent)** agrees that students at the back are more easily distracted, while **29 per cent** notice that students sitting at the back often try to do less work. To compensate, **43 per cent** of teachers feel the need to change seating plans often to move some students forward.

The problem isn't just where students sit – it's what they can see and how easily teachers can reach them. Engagement depends on visibility and proximity, but both break down when teachers are fixed to the front of the room. Increasingly, classroom layouts and technology are part of the issue.

43%

of teachers feel the need to change seating plans often to move some students forward

Flat-panel touchscreen displays have become central to teaching, but they come with constraints. A quarter of teachers **(25 per cent)** say nearly all their lessons require a flat-panel touchscreen display, which means teaching is anchored to a single point in the room.

As a result, almost a third **(29 per cent)** agree they feel "chained" to the front of the classroom because of the need to be physically next to these displays to operate them; a further **39 per cent** neither agree nor disagree, suggesting many simply work around the limitations rather than challenge them.

Teachers working on the ground are clear about the importance of freedom of movement, too. Martin Macdonald, Lead Practitioner in Geography at Longdean School in the UK, explains: "Physical presence will always be the key factor in effective classroom monitoring progress."

Attention is, therefore, turning to how technology can support rather than restrict movement.

Rethinking the tech in the classroom

In the classroom, movement does matter. Educational studies over the years have shown that teacher movement helps maintain student focus and strengthens classroom connections.[2] So, when asked what mobility would allow them to do, the majority of teachers pointed to improvements in support, engagement, and overall classroom management (Figure 2).

Many already see the benefits, and as a result, teachers are calling for change. Active resistance is minimal, with only **13 per cent** of teachers disagreeing that new technology is needed to "unshackle" them from flat-panel touchscreen displays. Almost half **(49 per cent)** of teachers agree and support the idea, with many others open to change. Building on this, **69 per cent** of teachers agree they would like the ability to operate displays remotely from a device they can carry around the classroom.

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Visibility is a major factor in engagement, and teachers are already pointing to practical fixes. In fact, there's strong support across Europe (Figure 3) where teachers agree that large screen projectors would help ensure students at the back can see and engage with lesson content just as clearly as those at the front. Educational researchers have long warned that when students can't clearly see shared content, the risk of disengagement increases – particularly among quieter learners who are already less likely to ask for clarification.[3]

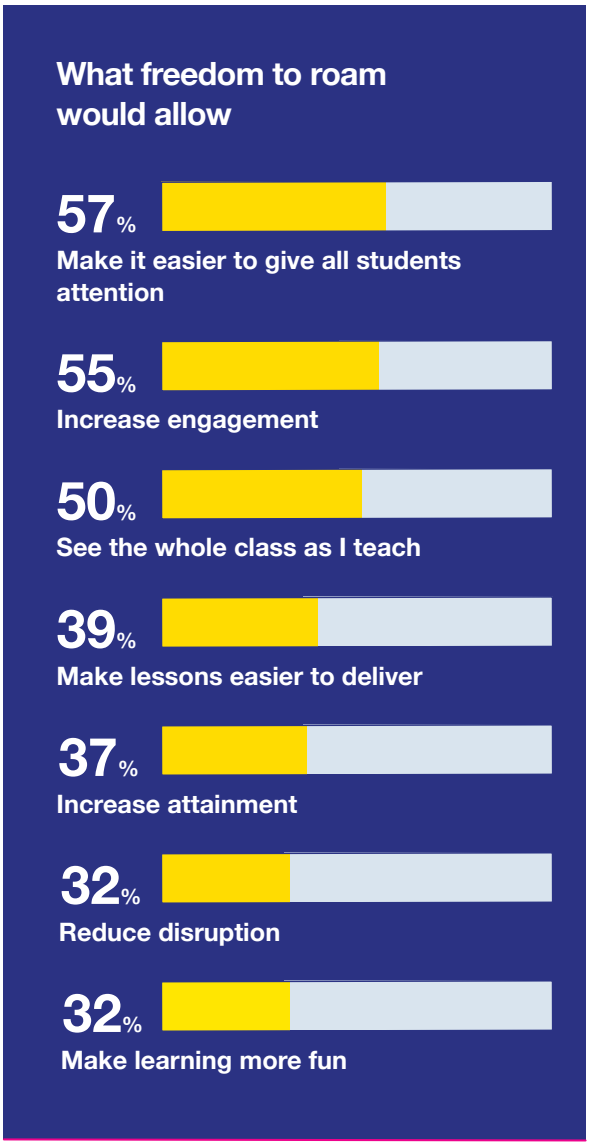
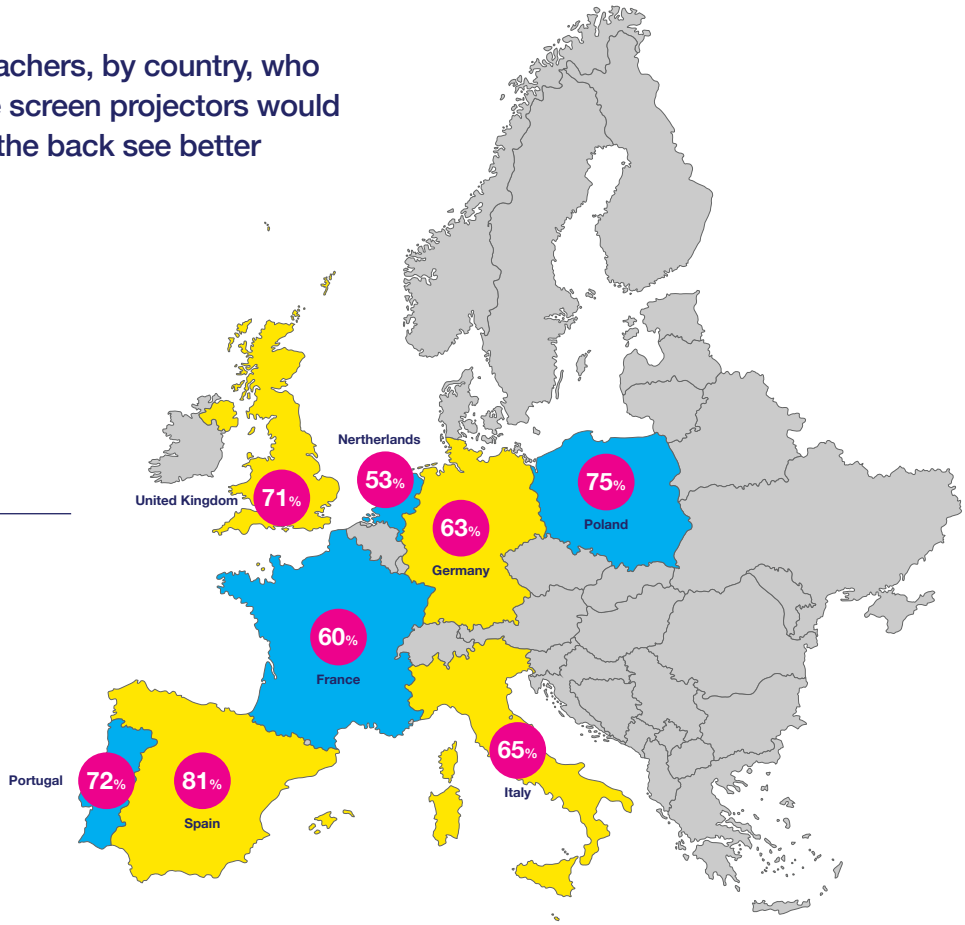


Figure 2

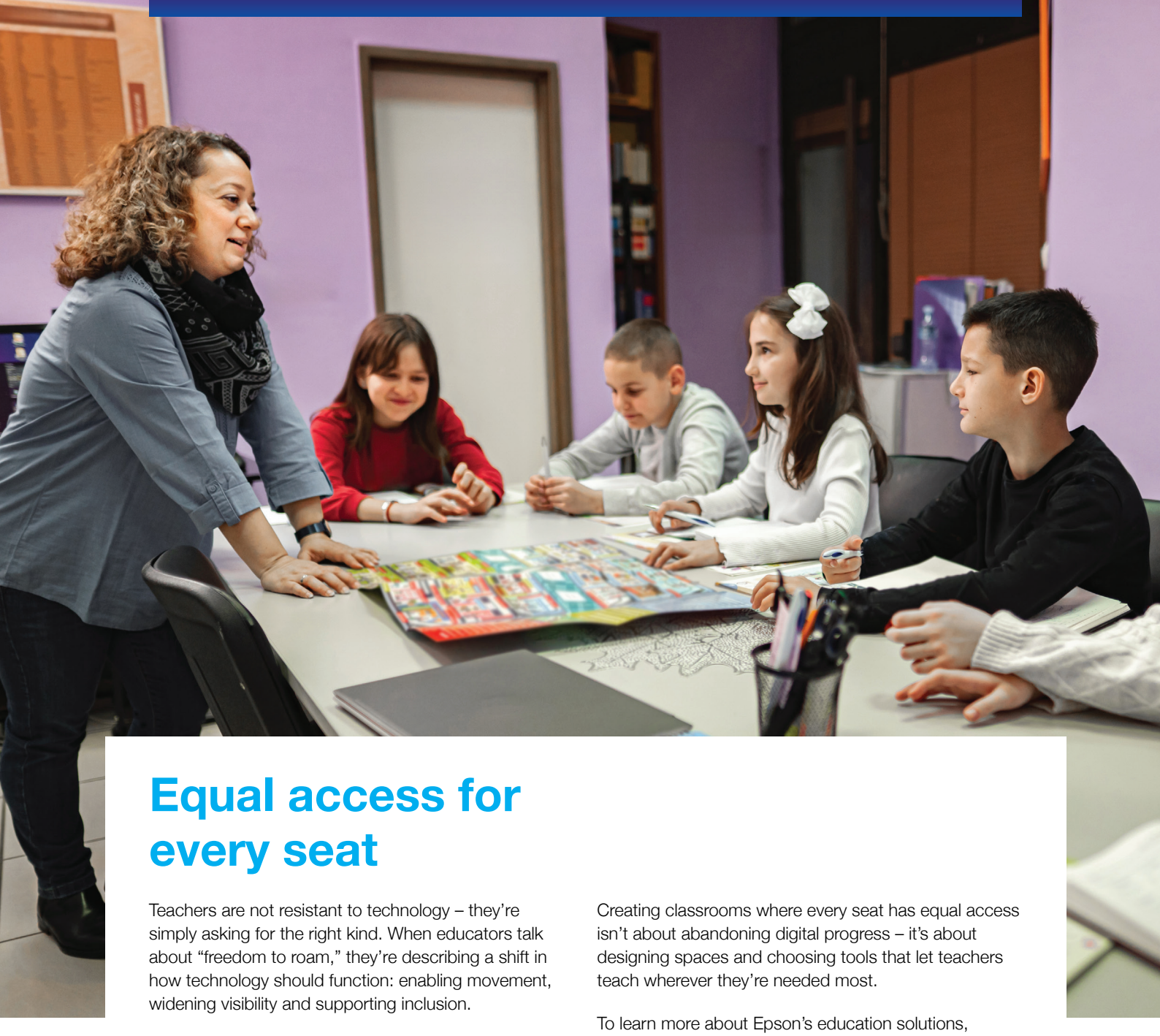
Figure 3
Percentage of teachers, by country, who believe that large screen projectors would help students at the back see better

81% Spain
75% Poland
72% Portugal
71% United Kingdom
65% Italy
63% Germany
60% France
53% Netherlands



The appeal, therefore, of projectors goes beyond visibility alone. Unlike flat panels, projectors can serve an entire classroom without requiring students to gather at the front or teachers to remain beside a fixed screen.

The opportunity, then, lies in rethinking how classroom technology is positioned and used. Epson projector-based setups allow teachers to move more freely around the classroom due to remote devices and software such as Apple Airplay that simplify the way that content can be shared and controlled. They also expand sightlines to better involve students regardless of where they sit. When paired with mobile controls, they turn the classroom from a front-anchored space into a more dynamic environment – one where visibility, interaction and teacher presence aren't limited by hardware.



Equal access for every seat

Teachers are not resistant to technology – they're simply asking for the right kind. When educators talk about "freedom to roam," they're describing a shift in how technology should function: enabling movement, widening visibility and supporting inclusion.

Projectors, in particular, offer a way forward. Large, shared displays and tools that can be controlled from anywhere in the room offer teachers the ability to monitor, interact and adapt in real-time – without sacrificing visibility for those seated furthest away. For students, the difference is simple but significant: if they can see, hear and be seen, they're more likely to stay engaged.

Creating classrooms where every seat has equal access isn't about abandoning digital progress – it's about designing spaces and choosing tools that let teachers teach wherever they're needed most.

To learn more about Epson's education solutions, please visit our website our website

Methodology

This research was commissioned by Epson Europe and carried out by FocalData. Fieldwork took place in September 2025, via Focaldata's proprietary technology platform, connected via API to online panels. The sample included 1,624 teachers from a range of school types and subject areas, covering both primary and secondary education from across France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK.

Results are reported as percentages, rounded to the nearest whole number, with country-level and demographic crossbreaks provided where relevant.

1 Epson, report: 'Cheap seats' in UK classrooms
2 Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature, Teachers' Nonverbal Cues in EFL Classrooms: Analyzing the Impact of Movement on Student Engagement and Comprehension
3 Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal, The Impact Of Classroom Environment On Student Learning And Engagement

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