

**Unclassified**

**EDU/EDPC(2007)21**

Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques  
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**11-May-2007**

**English - Or. English**

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE**

**EDU/EDPC(2007)21  
Unclassified**

**EDUCATION POLICIES FOR STUDENTS AT RISK AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH  
EASTERN EUROPE**

**Findings from the Follow-Up Visits, October 2006-January 2007**

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**JT03226892**

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## FOREWORD

In May 2006, the OECD published a set of detailed national reports on special needs education policies in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Tuzla Canton), Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia (OECD, 2006). This is the first inventory of national policies on special needs education since the disintegration of the former Republic of Yugoslavia and the armed conflicts in the region. The reports were drawn up by local examiners in collaboration with OECD experts. Their general and country-specific findings serve as an analytical reference point and an encouragement for further action in this field. The policy reviews describe education systems under the following headings: legal frameworks; the scope of policy development; statistics and indicators; teacher training; involvement of parents; pedagogical concepts; curriculum development; and school organisation. After two years of intensive work, the reviews were published in May 2006 in English and French. Translations into local languages are available.

As part of the OECD initiative, a series of capacity-building seminars were held for project administrators, statisticians and representatives (school principals, psychologists and teachers) of model schools. Between 2003 and 2006, six seminars took place to discuss issues of statistics and data gathering, school organisation, curriculum, classroom teaching and transition. Inclusive education programmes were implemented in a number of model schools; the visits made to these model schools are presented in the report in boxes.

In addition, a series of micro-projects in data collection and statistics was launched in response to the need for reliable data on students with SEN (especially those in mainstream schooling). Eight ministries of education participated in this exercise, starting in May 2006. An OECD seminar to discuss the currently used categories of disability – and to introduce the OECD model of cross-national categories of students with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages (OECD, 2005) – was held for statisticians from countries of South Eastern Europe. The evaluation report presents an overview of the progress and preliminary outcomes of the micro-projects.

As a follow-up to the various strands of the OECD initiative, an OECD team carried out nine evaluation visits to all participating education systems between October 2006 and January 2007. They involved representatives of ministries, local authorities and model schools. The team talked to Ministers, administrators, statisticians, representatives of international organisations, local and international NGOs, school principals, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, students and parents. The findings and recommendations of the OECD team are based on numerous interviews and site visits, as well as on additional information and documents made available to the team.

All education systems covered by the present report are members of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, with its underlying principle of regional co-operation and ownership. The OECD, as one of the lead institutions for education policy development and system improvement in the Task Force Education and Youth, has always used its forums to promote the importance of inclusive education. The evaluation team sought to build on these efforts and continued to discuss education for students with special education needs with senior ministry officials. The findings of these discussions are also included in this report.

Inclusive education for students with special needs and those with disabilities still faces many barriers in the increasingly diverse education systems of South East Europe. Major obstacles are scarce financial and human resources, the existing legal framework, the lack of clarity in the role of stakeholders, the lack of modern diagnostics, the lack of quality for special education needs in regular schools (including teacher training), the scarcity of reliable data and low public awareness of the inclusive approach in education. However, although it makes sense to identify common (regional) problems, it is also clear that different countries are finding specific solutions to counter them and that a gradual change of perspective is taking place. The evaluation report reflects these developments. It provides specific recommendations for a continuation of the regional project component and highlights country-specific solutions that promote inclusive education.

Barbara Ischinger

Director for Education

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## INTRODUCTION

It is important to distinguish between “children at risk”, “children with disabilities” and those with “special needs”. “At risk” is the broadest category and can include children living in severe poverty, children without parental care, children at risk of being abused, abandoned or trafficked, children in the street, children in prison and children living with HIV/Aids. In any country, “children with disabilities” (physical, sensory, intellectual) constitute on average about 2.5% of all children, according to European Academy of Childhood Disability (EACD) estimates; they are a subset of “children with special needs”, estimated to include 10% of all children in any country. The actual number depends on country definitions. In education systems, generally about 10% have special *educational* needs (SEN). Of that 10%, about 2 or 3% have disabilities and about 8% have “special needs”. In practice, it is the 8% that present the definition difficulties. The OECD categories (A, B and C – OECD, 2005) were developed to make cross-country comparisons more meaningful. However, as the micro-projects on data collection show, countries differ in how they assign children to categories – and not only in this region. In the United States, for example, the “2.5%” are almost always assigned to category A; those who are emotionally disturbed or have a specific learning disability are in B; and those receiving services under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (disadvantaged) are in C. In England, far fewer children are assigned to category A, because the system does not rely on medical diagnostic categorisation to determine SEN status. In SEE/CEE/CIS countries, medical categorisation is (generally) used, but – as the evaluation visits confirm – children are “counted” by where they are placed (*e.g.* in residential institutions, special schools), not by diagnosis. The micro-projects will need to decide how to deal with this issue.

### Summary of the initial findings of all teams

*These findings are based on information provided by participating ministries of education and were published by the OECD in May 2006.<sup>1</sup> These reports analysed education policies along the following headings: legislative framework, statistics and indicators, school organisation, pedagogy, curriculum and teacher training. Amongst them the following issues appeared to be crucial for understanding the current provision of students with special education needs with education services.*

*Categorisation.* In all education systems participating in this OECD initiative (except Kosovo) there is an expert body or commission dealing with the classification of children with special needs and making decisions about placement. Parents are usually involved and may have the final say about placement. In all countries, children are catered for in special schools, special classes in regular schools, or by integration (or sometimes full inclusion) of special needs children in regular classes. Classification and terminology differ, but new categories (*e.g.* autism, dyslexia) are now included in some cases and the OECD classification (A, B, C) is considered useful in creating common ground.

*Legal frameworks.* All participating systems have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and similar international declarations and conventions, such as the Salamanca Action Framework 1994. All

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1. *Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia* (OECD, 2006).

have also improved education legislation since 1989. Ministries of Education are generally in charge, although sometimes the responsibility is shared with the Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and/or Labour.

*Policy reviews focusing on special groups.* “Special needs” are defined differently; laws and regulations use various categorisations, some still reflecting a defectology approach, although the term itself is now used less. Physically disabled and severely mentally disabled children are usually looked after in special schools. At secondary level, youngsters with special educational needs tend to be in vocational courses or schools. There is little or no expectation that they will continue into higher education, although this, too, is slowly changing as access issues are gradually resolved.

*Concepts of integration and inclusion* are not clearly distinguished from each other in some systems. “Integration” [placing SENDDD<sup>2</sup> children in regular classes] and “inclusion” [making changes in the way the entire school works to include *all* children] are often used interchangeably. However, there is a growing understanding that all children have a right to education under international and national law; that all children are capable of being educated; and that it is a government responsibility to provide educational settings that respect these rights and capabilities.

*Barriers to, and facilitators of, inclusion.* The national reports list the main facilitators as adequate funding and co-ordination among responsible authorities; reform of the education system to remove unnecessary obstacles, *e.g.* in curricula and teacher training; and fostering a positive attitude towards inclusion. Barriers are lack of money at local and school level; lack of reliable data; lack of clarity in law; overcrowded classes and shift arrangements; inadequate training of teachers to work in inclusive settings; inappropriate buildings and facilities; and above all, negative public attitudes.

*Statistics and indicators.* All national reports submitted under this OECD project report a lack of information and co-ordination in data gathering. While data exist about children in special schools, and to some extent about children in special classes in regular schools, it is far less clear how many special needs children are trying to cope in regular classes. Moreover, in some places a substantial number of SENDDD children are not in school at all. Where figures are available, there are substantial differences between and among participating systems with regard to percentages of children with disabilities. In general, more boys than girls are categorised as having special needs; several national reports also mention that ethnic minority children are more likely to be so categorised.

*Teacher training.* This emerged as a key issue in the national reports, both in terms of pre-service (initial) and in-service teacher training. Special needs education is not generally part of pre-service training of teachers in regular schools; in-service (professional development) training in SEN is patchy and often left to NGOs. As a result, many regular teachers who are now expected to include SEN children in their classes are unprepared. Training for special needs teachers in special schools is generally available, but often the approach remains “defectology”-based although faculties are now modernising their curricula. Teachers in pre-schools get very little or no training in special needs. Much is being done by international agencies (*e.g.* UNICEF) and NGOs, rather than ministries or universities.

*Training for other professionals.* Some psychologists, speech therapists, pedagogues and social workers are trained for work with special needs children, but not all schools have access to specialist professionals able to support teachers in inclusive settings.

*Parents.* According to the national reports, their role is now more recognised, for example in assessing their child’s needs together with expert commissions. In most systems, parents have a legal right

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2. SENDDD stands for “Special Education Needs for Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages” and covers a wide range of children who are educationally and socially at risk.

to decide about their child's placement, or at least to be an equal partner with experts in making such decisions. Parents mention transport to and from school as a key problem; also the lack of trained teachers and advisors in schools to help with day-to-day concerns in looking after their children. Many parents are obliged to spend the school day in class with their child because teachers in large classes cannot provide enough attention. However, in some places parents have formed associations for mutual support and for lobbying the authorities.

*Pedagogy.* New approaches to teaching and learning are beginning to have an effect, for example where innovative methods such as Step-by-Step or Active Learning are used in pre-schools and early grades of primary. The trend is clearly towards individualised teaching and child-centred education for all. But there is a serious lack of resources and teaching materials suitable for SEN children.

*Curriculum.* As more systems are decentralised, there is a shift of control away from the centre and more alignment of regular and special needs curricula at school level. Individual educational plans (IEPs or, in Romania, PIPs or ISPs: see section on Romania) are being used more and teachers are being trained in their development. However, there is still a tendency to assume that SENDDD children will not go to academic upper secondary or higher education and that they need (often low-level) vocational skills instead.

*School Organisation.* Timetables and standards are set centrally, but pupil:teacher ratios are usually much more favourable in special schools than in regular schools. The shift system does not work well for SEN children or their parents. Physical access is a serious problem, even in the "model" schools taking part in the OECD project (steps and stairs, no disabled toilets, etc.). In several systems, special arrangements can be made for special needs students taking exams and SEN students can go to university if they pass their secondary school leaving examination. Youngsters with cognitive and complex disabilities are still generally looked after in special schools; those with physical and sensory disabilities are more often integrated in regular schools.

## FOLLOW-UP VISITS, OCTOBER – JANUARY 2006

Originally, the scope of this report was a narrow one, restricted to an evaluation of various activities under the OECD initiative “Education Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South-Eastern Europe”. However, as the evaluation visits progressed, the work acquired a wider perspective, extending to legal and policy issues and to a more general review of the status of special needs provision in the participating education systems. It is therefore hoped that this report will help identify policy areas that need attention beyond the immediate concerns of the OECD initiative itself.

The objectives of the follow-up visits were to (1) assess the impact of the project at local, national and regional level; (2) analyse the obstacles faced and progress made; (3) provide a set of recommendations to develop and implement a possible follow up, and (4) give input for the development of individual country action plans. The report will be presented on the occasion of a high-level meeting of senior officials of ministries of education from Southeast Europe, which will be organised jointly between the OECD and the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe in the first half of 2007.

The following education systems participate in the project: Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Tuzla Canton), Croatia, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia.<sup>3</sup> Between October and December 2006, follow-up visits were made to model schools, project administrators, as well as to ministries, local authorities, international agencies and relevant national and international NGOs; in addition, wherever possible, informal meetings and discussions were arranged with parents and community representatives. The following chapters reflect the findings, key concerns and suggestions that resulted from these meetings and visits.

### Overview of the project in a regional perspective

Overall, the OECD project has made good progress in meeting its initial objectives, which were:

1. identification, support and monitoring of a group of project administrators and institutions (model schools) to serve as contact points and facilitators within each participating system;
2. reviews of education policies, serving as a reference point for ongoing education reform, but also as encouragement for further systematic action in this field (English, French and languages of the region);
3. involvement and support of a broad range of stakeholders in the field of education of youngsters with special needs. These include ministry administrators, experts and examiners, teachers, headmasters and statisticians;
4. targeted training measures for specific groups providing international best practice experiences: teachers, statisticians, ministry representatives and other experts;

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3. Serbia and Kosovo are treated individually, as their education systems function separately.

5. support and monitoring of specific activities to disseminate project results undertaken by both education ministries and related institutions in the participating systems themselves.
6. micro-projects on statistics and data gathering for students with special education needs, in order to stimulate more accurate assessments of the situation.
7. lobbying both on a national and an international level while co-operating closely with the Education Reform Initiative of Southeast European (ERI SEE) within the framework of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe.

Objectives (1), (2), (4) and (6) have either been met or are well on their way of being achieved. The publication of the national reports took place early in 2006 and translations are now being arranged. Capacity building seminars (*e.g.* in Montenegro, Zagreb, Paris, Jerusalem and Vienna) have had an important impact on administrators, as well as on directors and teachers in model schools; micro-project statisticians and administrators have also benefited from targeted training in data collection and the use of the OECD (international) categorisation of special needs (A, B and C, explained below). Achievement of other objectives – such as (3) stakeholder involvement, (5) dissemination of project results and (7) lobbying – will depend on project follow-up and recommendations outlined in this report.

The international literature on the educational deprivation of Roma<sup>4</sup> children is voluminous and there is no need to repeat its dismal findings here. However, given the importance of Roma education issues in the region, parts of this report focus on the situation of Roma children and youth in particular countries. Of course, it is acknowledged that there are other significant minority groups in the region (*e.g.* Turks in Bulgaria, Hungarians in Romania, Albanians in the FYR of Macedonia, Gagauz in Moldova, Gorani in Kosovo, etc.), but in general their educational rights are better protected, for example by provision of instruction and textbooks in their own language. For Roma, this is rarely the case.

#### **Main findings of the evaluation visits October 2006 – January 2007**

- In all the model schools visited, there is progress towards full inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms, although (generally speaking) these children have either mild learning disabilities or are not severely physically disabled. Several children with a manageable level of cerebral palsy or speech difficulties are coping well in mainstream classrooms. However, the architectural characteristics of the school buildings – such as the ubiquitous presence of stairs, thresholds, narrow door frames and the lack of suitable sanitary facilities – still prevent full inclusion of children needing wheelchairs or other special equipment. This is equally true of “special” classes within mainstream schools; and it must be said that the lack of equipment, materials and adequate toilets affects *all* children in the schools, not only those with special needs. However, the OECD team believes that “lack of money” cannot always be an excuse. Sometimes, simple solutions, such as using some sturdy planks to provide a ramp, adding a few handrails, widening a door, or raising (or lowering) a desk to make it more comfortable for a child to use, can make all the difference. It is a question of paying attention and using a little

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4. The evaluation team is well aware that the term “Roma” covers a wide variety of ethnic sub-groups; for example, in Montenegro the term “RAE” is used (Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians) and in Bulgaria there are said to be a large number of ethnic sub-groups among the “Roma” population. It is particularly difficult to obtain accurate data, because some Roma do not identify themselves as such on census questionnaires. Moreover, the legacy of forced name-changes (*e.g.* in Bulgaria, on Turkish and Roma populations) means it is still difficult to give accurate estimates of the size of some ethnic minorities because of at least one whole generation of compulsory assimilation and name-changing.

creativity. Good day-to-day maintenance is just as important as installing lifts or buying computers.

- At the policy level, the trend in all participating systems is to move away from segregated types of provision, especially from the use of residential institutions, and to use special classes within mainstream schools as a stepping stone towards full inclusion. At present a “mixed economy” – of special classes, as well as full inclusion within mainstream schools – seems to be the most successful, both for the children and for the teaching staff.
- All participants in the OECD project confirmed that the absence of reliable data and the lack of co-ordination and data-sharing with other ministries (Health, Social Protection), continue to be a serious problem. While it is relatively easy to identify children already in the school system, an unknown number of “invisible” children remain un-reached. There is, in most places, no obligation on the part of family doctors, maternity hospitals or health authorities to work with parents and pre-schools to ensure early identification and remediation of special educational needs. Indeed, many parents reported that they had received no professional advice or support of any kind, until their child reached school age. Major efforts are needed to improve the exchange of information so that early, targeted support to families and children can be provided.
- In addition to statistics, there is a need for social indicators, both objective (quantitative) and subjective (qualitative). Not only are robust, appropriate and up to date statistics needed; qualitative data – how families and children perceive their situation – must also be gathered. Examples of subjective indicators are: (a) a person not feeling like he/she is treated as an equal citizen or not feeling respected and valued; (b) perceived powerlessness and negative self-image; (c) distrust of others and of institutions; (d) a feeling of hopelessness for the future. In particular, families of SEN children often mention (c) and (d) in connection with the care of their child; in addition, Roma families in particular are affected by (a) and (b). These factors, as well as “quantitative” and economic ones, are powerful determinants of whether a child is, or is not, successful in school. If inclusive education is to become a reality, these social dynamics must be better understood.
- The capacity-building seminars organised by the OECD are unanimously praised by those who participated in them. Many teachers said they would like the seminars to continue and then set up their own networks to share expertise and materials. They value their association with the OECD, UNICEF, Save the Children and other international (particularly Finnish, Norwegian) agencies and national NGOs for the methodological and material support they provide. It is, however, also clear that neither pre-service (initial) teacher education, nor in-service (professional development) opportunities for regular teachers are adequate to prepare them for full inclusion of SENDDD children in their mainstream classrooms. Much more will need to be done by faculties of education and by ministries and local authorities to fill this gap.
- Interaction and exchange of ideas among mainstream and special needs teaching staff are having an effect, and in the model schools there is evidence of a “whole school” approach to meeting the needs of all students. In many cases, there are opportunities for SEN children to join their mainstream peers in school activities and for mainstream children to share lessons with special classes and use equipment (for example, computers) together. Likewise, the close involvement of parents – who often attend classes together with their special needs children – has increased the teachers’ understanding of the real needs and preferences of their SEN students, and an appreciation of parents’ intimate knowledge of their child’s needs and capacities.

- Most model schools visited have specialist staff such as defectologists, speech therapists and pedagogues to assist teachers. However, the team also heard that in some schools the presence of a defectologist might work against full inclusion, because the other teachers believe that SEN children are the responsibility of the defectologist. In some places (*e.g.* Tuzla Canton, Serbia, Montenegro) mobile teams of specialists can be called upon when there is no specific expertise available in a school. This is a useful resource; as more schools admit SEN children, on-call specialist help will be needed, especially in rural and deprived areas.
- The model schools visited are starting to use individualised education plans (IEPs, PIPs, ISPs or their equivalents) and teachers report that this is a great help to them in working out curricula and teaching methods for each child. However, these plans are still constructed by teachers and specialist support teachers, with some input from parents, but not from the SEN children themselves. This is counter to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which states (Article 12) that children have a right to have their views taken into account and that they have a right to be consulted in any decision that directly affects them. It is perfectly feasible, in many cases, to ask for the wishes of the child her/himself, for example in “negotiating” learning goals with the teacher, which will motivate her/him to achieve these goals and to raise expectations.
- While IEPs/ISPs/PIPs are a step forward, the absence of flexible curricula and assessment methods remains a barrier. Most education systems visited have highly prescriptive curricula (for both mainstream and SEN children) and teachers are unsure how to adapt their lesson plans and grading (marking) practices. In some participating countries (*e.g.* Serbia), guides and teachers’ handbooks containing examples of “good inclusive practice” are now being published, often by UNICEF or NGOs. These are enormously valuable and should be shared among participants in the OECD project.
- The current legal framework for the categorisation and placement of children (via “Commissions”) remains rigid and dominated by medical perspectives, although in several countries the remit (as well as the names) of these Commissions are changing to reflect a more social and educational approach.<sup>5</sup> Many of the pedagogues and defectologists interviewed are aware of these problems and would like to see changes in law (and procedures) to make the assessments and placement decisions more educationally relevant. A considerable number of parents resist having their child formally certificated as having special needs, especially where such categorisations are – in practice – irreversible and/or mean that the child may be taken out of the family. In addition, the requirement under Article 25 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (that any decision taken about categorisation/placement of a child with SEN *must* be periodically reviewed) is too often ignored and children remain in their initial (often institutional) placement far longer than is warranted – even permanently.
- The involvement of parents is crucial and the team saw some good examples of collaboration between parents and teaching staff in model schools. In many places, there are active associations of parents of SEN children that not only provide mutual support and information, but serve as potentially powerful lobbying voices at the governmental level to modernise SEN provision and legislation.
- Finally, the children in the model schools have, in general, friendly and supportive relationships with their non-SEN peers. We saw several instances of children helping each other in the

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5. In Kosovo, the intention is to establish a team of specialists in each municipality to assess children’s needs. The OECD team has recommended that these new commissions should include educators, and take a more educationally relevant approach to diagnosing special needs.

classroom and playing games together. The presence of “Peer Helpers’ Clubs” and other forms of child-to-child support is extremely effective in achieving true inclusion, as well as raising awareness among other children of the difficulties special needs children face.

## Conclusions

The following key issues came up repeatedly during the evaluation visits:

- Priority for SEN inclusion is declared government policy in most countries, but this is not reflected in funding decisions. There is still a tendency to see inclusive SENDDD provision as a voluntary or NGO task, rather than a normal part of the government’s full responsibility for the education of every child.
- As a consequence, services to vulnerable children and families are resource-driven rather than need-driven, poorly targeted and often lacking in poor and rural areas. Community services (day care centres, specialist medical care, social assistance); preventive and rehabilitation services; and effective training in Child Rights of professionals working with vulnerable, excluded and/or discriminated children are all needed. To name but one example, one of the most effective preventive measures would be to ensure that every child has a birth certificate and/or an identity card that gives her/him legal access to health care, immunisation, education, housing and social assistance. The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes “the right to an identity” as a basic right of all children.<sup>6</sup> Some countries included in this OECD project do much better in this respect than others; “good practice” should be shared.
- Over and over again, parents told the evaluation team that they had received no support, advice, or encouragement after the birth of a child with special needs. Indeed, in some cases parents were told it would be best if they just left the baby in a hospital or an institution; maternity wards often do not allow “rooming-in”, so that mothers have little opportunity to bond with their babies before they leave the hospital, which also encourages abandonment. It is often the mother who is most affected and ostracised because of the disability of her child and therefore she deserves special support to assist her in providing primary care and nurturing – and to enable her to play a full and active role in society like any other mother. Perinatal care, home visits by competent health visitors and community support services are badly needed. One suggestion would be for each model school, together with the parents or parents’ association, to develop a “Parents’ Toolkit”, with an up to date “map” or directory of services available (health care, day care, social services, etc.) and how to access them.
- Early identification of at-risk children and data sharing across responsible ministries and agencies are essential. In all participating systems, there is an urgent need for better mechanisms to identify SENDDD children and ensure that prompt, targeted assistance is available to them and their families. The OECD micro-projects on data collection will help, but thus far they

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6. CRC, Articles 7 and 8. “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognised by law without unlawful interference. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to speedily re-establishing his or her identity”.

concentrate on children already in the education system (in special schools, in special classes, or in mainstream schools). The problem of “invisible children” is far more difficult to resolve and requires action on birth registration, early diagnosis, and data collection and data sharing at all levels, not only among ministries, but at county and municipal levels, among health practitioners, mother and baby clinics and social protection services.

- The proportion of the school population educated in special schools varies greatly across the region, reflecting both the historic pattern of provision and local commitment to supporting the inclusion of children with more severe needs in mainstream settings. Most countries have strengthened parents’ rights to choose a mainstream place for their child, but it remains the case that some children have such severe and complex needs that most mainstream schools cannot cope. However, the aim is that the proportion of children educated in special schools should go down over time, as mainstream schools grow in their skills and capacity. Children with less significant needs – including those with moderate learning difficulties and less severe behaviour, emotional and social needs – should be in a mainstream environment as soon as possible, provided that such a move is properly prepared to ensure that schools, children and families can cope.
- The team heard that some special schools have felt threatened by the inclusion agenda and unsure about what role they should play in future. We believe that special schools have an important role to play within the overall spectrum of provision for children with SEN – educating some children directly and sharing their expertise with mainstream schools to support greater inclusion and break down barriers to create a unified system using all available expertise. This could be done by promoting greater staff movement across sectors; and more students moving between the sectors, using the annual placement reviews to see whether there could be a dual placement or transition to a mainstream school. Local authorities should consider the potential of special school outreach to complement existing advice and support services, and/or locating mainstream and special school facilities on the same site.
- While life is hard for many families and children in the region, it is especially hard for minorities, in particular the Roma population. Roma children are more likely to be poor, more likely to be institutionalised, more likely to work from an early age, more likely to be malnourished, more likely to be trafficked, and more likely to miss out on education beyond the first few grades. In Romania, for example, the infant mortality rate among Roma is twice as high as for the Romanian population. Many Roma children also lack birth certificates and ID and/or health cards, without which they have very limited access to health care, social security, formal employment, and minimum income guarantees when they reach adulthood. A recent study done in Montenegro – covering four towns where 70% of the entire Roma population of Montenegro lives – showed that, of the 1 020 Roma and “Egyptian” children between 6 and 14 years of age, only 454 (44%) were in school, at the time of the research (December 2005 to January 2006).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, almost 80% of RE children in these towns drop out between first and third grade, nearly all of them because of family poverty. 81% of the families in the survey have no regular monthly income, and survive by finding food and recycling materials in litter bins and garbage containers. Clothing, footwear, and money for books and materials are simply not affordable, especially where there are a number of school-age children in a family. Much more needs to be done to ensure these at-risk children’s access to, and survival in, mainstream education. This will include action on housing, health care, nutrition, and targeted help for poor families, as well as registration and safe access to the same quality of schooling as non-Roma children.

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7. The towns included in the research were Podgorica, Niksic, Berane and Rozaje (see UNICEF-Podgorica, 2006).

- Moreover, at-risk factors are cumulative, and often inter-generational. One or two risk factors might be surmountable – e.g. being ill, unemployed, or a single parent – but if a third is added, such as the birth of a disabled child in an at-risk family, there will be a rapid descent into deprivation unless prompt, targeted help is available. Thus, if a SEN child is born into a Roma family with unemployed parents living in poverty, the life chances of *all* members of that family are negatively affected and their social exclusion will be more severe. Prompt, targeted, positive action is needed, rather than the all too common response of blaming the child (and the family) for low educational attainment.

## **Specific recommendations for the OECD Initiative**

### ***In relation to national and regional policy***

In all SEE countries, the legal “architecture” for inclusion of children with SENDDD is in place. Governments have signed international Conventions such as the UN Convention on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and are participating in initiatives such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. Countries of the region are also invited to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006. There are also national laws and regulations that promote inclusion. Implementation remains a problem; and although ministries and local authorities give reasons why this is so, both in terms of finance and in terms of enforcement of legal requirements, inclusion of SENDDD children is – in the words of one official – “not a priority”. **The OECD initiative**, despite its relatively small size, is effective in raising awareness of the issue among policy makers, but much more needs to be done. For example, national budgets could reflect more strongly the commitment to improving special needs education; and large, internationally funded projects – such as those financed by the European Union or the World Bank – could stimulate both financing and enforcement of special needs obligations by including a SEN component in their project designs.

### ***In relation to the model schools***

The model schools visited by the evaluation team are doing a fine job with limited resources, and they should continue to be supported in their daily work with children, parents, and local communities. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, there is a tendency for local and national authorities to see SEN inclusion as the task of NGOs or international agencies, which undermines the sustainability of the work done at school level. Therefore, although we strongly recommend continuation of support for and, if possible, extension of, the model school initiative through **the OECD initiative**, there must be reciprocal commitments by governmental authorities; for example by funding posts for support teachers, which emerged as one of the most urgent needs of the schools, and by allocating money to make school buildings wheelchair-friendly in all respects (ramps, lifts, toilets, etc.)

### ***In relation to capacity building (especially teachers and school directors)***

The seminars organised under the OECD initiative have made a great impact, not only on the participants from the model schools, but on those from ministries. The evaluation team strongly recommends that these seminars – and other forms of capacity building – should continue. Specifically, we recommend that **the next series of OECD seminars** be hosted by the model schools and their respective local authorities, so that teachers, school directors and officials can share actual experiences within their own context. Not only would this give the “host” model school a chance to show their achievements, but it would provide an opportunity for inviting local and national policy makers for an exchange of ideas and innovative practice elsewhere. Another suggestion is for model schools to set up a network among themselves, and a “clearinghouse” of innovative teaching materials they would like to share.

***In relation to categorisation and child rights***

The evaluation team welcomes the shift towards a less “medical” approach to categorisation and placement, and in some cases the new regulations for the Commissions or Boards are based on the rights of the child. However, there is still too little awareness among decision makers of exactly what the rights of SENDDD children are. Organisations such as UNICEF and Save the Children are conducting campaigns aimed at, for example, a child’s right to a birth certificate, and a child’s right to a family; but in some countries there are still counter-incentives (either imbedded in regulations, or social or financial counter-incentives) that prevent full protection of children’s rights to being part of the wider community. We recommend that efforts be made to work directly with the Commissions or Boards, to inform them of the requirements and to improve “gatekeeping” practices aimed at preventing placement of SENDDD children in institutions or special schools in the first place. In particular, the requirement that a child has the right to be consulted about any decision that affects him/her, and the requirement that any “categorisation” or placement decision must be reviewed periodically (*e.g.* at least annually), are widely ignored. **The OECD initiative** could support or co-ordinate a seminar for Commissions or Boards on a rights-based approach to gatekeeping and categorisation.

***In relation to parents***

Parents are the most powerful advocates for their children, and it is good that their voice is being heard more in SENDDD issues. In particular, Parents’ Associations are effective lobbying and fundraising instruments, and they also provide parents of children with special needs with opportunities to get together for information and support. In every model school visited by the evaluation team, the meetings with the parents were the most emotionally charged, but also the most effective in bringing home the realities of family life when there is a special needs child or young adult. Parents said that, until their child reached school age *and* had the good fortune to be in a sympathetic and inclusive school, they had received no practical advice, and no support, in caring for their special needs child. As a result, they felt isolated, left to struggle in poor conditions with no one to turn to. We recommend that Parents’ Associations should be given support by the schools where their children attend (*e.g.* in the form of space for weekly meetings, or the use of paper and photocopiers for leaflets, etc.); also that Parents’ Associations, perhaps with the help of donors, should develop directories or local “maps” for parents so that they know where they can go if they need specific medical, financial, or legal advice. In addition, local authorities should revise their practices to ensure that parents are not left without support once they take a newborn special needs child home from the hospital. Social isolation is extremely damaging, not only for the parents and the child, but for the whole family. **The OECD initiative** could support a seminar for parents in maximising their lobbying potential and their practical involvement in helping others.

***In relation to special schools and residential institutions***

The evaluation team accepts that there will always be a needs for special and residential institutions for the most severely physically and/or mentally disabled. Moreover, these institutions have years of experience and a great stock of expertise that are an invaluable resource. As birth rates continue to fall and the mainstream school system becomes more inclusive, fewer children will need to be in special schools; this means that the expertise and experience built up in the special system *must* be used to support inclusive schools. This is already being done, for example by mobile teams of specialists, and through training of mainstream teachers. The most effective models in other countries are where special and mainstream schools occupy the same site, so that there is constant interaction among children, teachers, and specialists and students can move easily between inclusive classrooms and specialised settings. Another successful arrangement is where special classes are attached to mainstream schools, so that children can again move easily between inclusive and more “protected” settings. We recommend extending the “mobile teams” practice, as well as encouraging interaction between mainstream and special

settings, to maximise resources and enable implementing students' IEPs. Since this is essentially a governmental/local authorities issue, **the OECD initiative is not the appropriate “vehicle” for it**, but it can play a role in raising awareness and stimulating other initiatives by donors.<sup>8</sup>

### *In relation to inclusive schools*

While inclusivity and “child-friendly” schools are clear objectives, as well as (in most places) declared government policy, schools will have to change fundamentally before they are the best option for **all** SENDDD children, both educationally and socially. The needs are, first, to improve physical access and the availability of suitable materials and equipment; second, to train teachers in inclusive teaching methods; and third, to adapt class sizes and the availability of teaching assistants to the inclusive approach. We saw too many examples of mainstream teachers struggling with large class sizes (sometimes including three or four SENDDD children), inflexible curricula and timetables, and lack of suitable materials. Several countries have rules that allow reduction of class sizes or assignment of teaching assistants when SENDDD children are included, but in many cases these rules cannot be implemented because of lack of money or staff. Besides, many schools work in shifts, which creates additional problems of classroom time and a consistency in teaching SEN children. The transition from class teaching (by the same teacher for all subjects) to subject teaching, which usually happens when children are about 10 or 11, is particularly difficult for SENDDD children because they have to get used to a variety of teaching styles as well as a considerable amount of moving around within the school building. With good school leadership, most of these problems can be overcome, but not without extra resources and training. **The OECD initiative** could work with donors and other agencies to provide school management training in preparing mainstream schools for inclusive education.

### *In relation to students*

Most SEN students we saw in the model schools seem to flourish in an inclusive setting, and their non-SEN peers seem to accept them easily, often more easily than the adults did. One successful practice is the establishment of a “Peer Helpers Club”, whereby high-achieving mainstream students are helping their special needs peers with their academic work and with organising sporting or social activities. We also saw some examples where students of nearby Pedagogical Faculties were doing their practice teaching in inclusive schools: these students said this was the most helpful way for them to understand the realities of special needs children and their families' lives, as well as helping them to adapt their teaching methods to slower learners. However, curricula and assessments are often focused on high achievers, with little room for those who need a little extra time or help. More could be done to assist students who are struggling to keep up; in any case, practices such as excluding low achievers from national tests, or sending those who “fail” to reach national standards to special schools, must be stopped. **The OECD initiative** could work with donors and other agencies to influence the development of appropriate practices that prevent premature drop-out (and push-out) of slow learners in an increasingly achievement-driven environment. One example of “good practice” is that of **career guidance** in Croatia: before the end of grade eight, all children registered as having special educational needs are counselled on possible career choices and directions in secondary schools. Since the transition to independent adulthood is particularly difficult for SEN youngsters, offering career advice at the right time is essential.

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8. Community-based resource centres, such as those established in various places by UNICEF, are effective in providing parents with a place where they can meet each other and receive advice and help, *e.g.* with nutrition, immunisation, and assessment of children's development. In Kosovo, several of these centres have now been taken over by municipalities.

*In relation to collaboration among organisations and funding*

At the ministerial level, there is far too little systematic collaboration and data sharing among ministries responsible for SENDDD children and young people – health, social protection, labour, education, housing, and justice. In some countries, ministers are now having joint meetings to ensure coherence in law and practice, but there are still inconsistencies that are harmful to youngsters and their families. In addition, there is too little awareness of the legal and financial implications of international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In terms of data sharing, it is unacceptable that many SENDDD children arrive at the school door without any information about their health status or the socio-economic situation of their families. By this time, children are 6 or 7 years old, and for some of them it is far too late for effective diagnostic and remedial intervention. Among international agencies and NGOs, there is also far too little co-ordination of effort, which leads to a waste of financial and human resources in unsustainable, small-scale “pilot” projects, however well meant and humanitarian. The OECD initiative could provide a forum for larger agencies, international and bilateral donors, and international NGOs such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the EU, bilateral donors, Save the Children, etc. should make a concerted effort to work with ministries – and with each other – to prevent duplication and ensure synergy. In addition, **the OECD initiative in data collection and statistics** (via the micro-projects and the OECD international categories) could stimulate a much-needed drive to create reliable, national data bases of SENDDD children, as well as an effort to identify those “invisible” children not being reached in many education systems.

## STATISTICS AND DATA GATHERING

### Summary of the initial findings of the Southeast Europe Synthesis Report (May 2005)

The synthesis report points to the paucity of available data on students with special education needs, but also to the limited significance – with respect to completeness, reliability and comparability – of data that is already available. These data are of crucial importance for education planning and monitoring, but also to provide the necessary human, financial and technical resources for all students with special education needs. Official data refer mainly to (organic) disabilities and impairments, but rarely include students with behavioural or emotional disorders or students affected by social, cultural or linguistic disadvantages.

Taking into consideration the international benchmark of 2.5 to 2.8% of children with disabilities (based on data from OECD countries) and looking at much lower or higher figures presented by some of the countries in Southeast Europe (OECD, 2006, p. 19ff.)<sup>9</sup> it can be assumed that a considerable number of students with disabilities in the countries concerned are not counted at all, with definitions differing greatly amongst participating countries or placement practices of students in education settings varying to a large extent. It can also be assumed that a considerable number of students without any impairment, such as Roma children, are segregated in special schools and therefore counted as having special education needs.

Available data on students with disabilities heavily rely on national disability registers, data from medical sources and state institutions. They are mostly based on a narrow model of identification of disorders and administrations only begin to consider models of inclusion of students with SEN in education settings. In some cases, data are not collected centrally, but by various state institutions and service providers. There is almost no regular mechanism of data exchange and information between Ministries of Education, Health and Social Welfare. Consequently, data do not keep track of single students, a fact that hinders planning for and monitoring of inclusive practices and the creation of reasonable benchmarks. Figures and definitions provided by institutions of the same country often vary greatly. The lack of a recent census (*e.g.* in Kosovo) and actual data adds to the fragmented situation in the field of data gathering.

In some of the ministries, education data on students with special education needs are based on the World Bank supported Education Management Information System (EMIS). Nevertheless, EMIS does not provide detailed data for an in depth analysis of education for students with special education needs. In addition, other international institutions (*e.g.* UNICEF), donor agencies (especially from Finland) and local NGOs collected data on children with disabilities. These data often contradict the official figures or replace official data collection.

In some countries, the lack of existing data is a general problem throughout the education sector; nevertheless, the data situation for students with special education needs seems to be the most fragmented and distorted one. Due to war, displacement or migration, a large number of people with disabilities are not counted in official registers. A considerable number of children with disabilities still remain missing in

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9. For issues of analysing disability rates, see also UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2005, p. xii ff.

official statistics, amongst them mainly children from the Roma population, children who dropped out of school or children abandoned by their parents.

### **Recommendations for improving existing systems on statistics and data collection (December 2005)**

During a meeting on statistics and data gathering organised by the OECD in December 2005 in Paris, country representatives (administrators and statisticians) emphasised the need for substantial changes to the existing data collection practices in their countries. Although concrete problems faced by each education system differ from country to country according to their specific historical, political, social and reform context, the following issues were seen as common challenges for the eight education ministries involved in the OECD activity:

- The current mechanisms of identification of children with disabilities are still based on a medical model in the tradition of defectology. A reform of existing classification and support systems and processes would have to shift concepts and working methods towards a resource based approach, which aims to improve the learning environment of students at risk and those with disabilities. This also means that current definitions of students with special education needs would have to be widened towards a definition that also includes students with learning difficulties and social disadvantages.
- Data collection would, therefore, have to cover all sectors of the education system from early childhood education and care to preschool education and higher education levels. Only a database covering the whole learning cycle could provide sufficient empirical basis for evidence based and sustainable policy development and planning. Transition issues (from compulsory/secondary education to the labour market or tertiary education) could only be tackled realistically on basis of a reliable data base.
- The establishment of a database on students with special education needs would have to go far beyond the data collection in special schools or special classes (attached to mainstream schools) and also reach out to regular classes, mainstream schooling and include out of school children. In some countries the issue of “missing” children became increasingly serious and data provision on these children is of the utmost importance in developing strategies to fully integrate these children into regular schooling.
- An all-embracing system of data collection would have to rely on an efficient mechanism of information and data exchange between all ministries and service providers involved (health, social welfare, education, employment). Early identification of students with special education needs would help to facilitate children’s placement into the regular school system and help to prevent a number of severe developments.
- Improved systems of data collection would not only have to address the training needs of a considerable number of statisticians and analysts, but also provide substantial financial investment in information technologies. It would also need to clarify technical issues in electronic data gathering and ensure the availability of user-friendly and reliable software.

### **Scope, objectives and output results of the micro-projects on statistics and data gathering (May 2006 – June 2007)**

As a first step to improving the current system in data collection, eight education ministries decided to design and implement micro projects on statistics and data gathering, an initial step to tackle the most immediate data gathering needs in each country. The micro-projects tackled key issues in statistics and

data gathering and were specifically tailored to fit the most urgent needs of education ministries in the field of data gathering for students with SEN.

From a technical point of view, these pilot activities were supposed to (1) last not longer than one year; (2) have limited financial and organisational complexity and (3) address a certain range of activities, such as studies and analysis, networking of institutions involved in data gathering or capacity building measures for statisticians and administrators.

The proposals varied greatly from country to country, their scope ranging from empirical data collection in special institutions (boarding schools) to a comparison of available country data with OECD cross-national categories.<sup>10</sup>

The activities of participating countries can be divided into the following categories: (1) data collection on students with special education needs in certain levels of mainstream schooling (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia); (2) data collection on students with SEN in special schools and special classes in regular schools (Kosovo, Moldova) and (3) comparison of existing categories and data with the OECD SENDDD cross-national categories (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania). FYR of Macedonia did not participate in the activities. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the micro project was limited to the education administration of Tuzla Canton.

At the time of completion of this report, final reports and conclusions cannot be drawn from these micro-projects on statistics and data gathering. Nevertheless, in the course of the OECD follow-up visits, the team spoke to representatives of the teams working on these issues. The country specific results of these discussions are incorporated in the findings and key points emerging from the of the evaluation visit in 2006/2007.

From a regional point of view, most of the interviewed administrators and statisticians shared common concerns about:

1. The lack of clear categories and mechanisms for identifying students with SENDDD beyond the existing categories of organic disorders and impairments: this fact made it extremely difficult to compare national categories with the OECD cross-national categories. It also lead to confusion about the definition of disability, learning difficulty or social disadvantage a student is affected by.
2. The lack of trained personnel is obvious. This made it necessary to strengthen the institutional and personal capacity to carry out data collection and analysis in the framework of this activity. This observation corresponds with the increasing demand for more knowledge and information on students with SENDDD on all levels of education.
3. A detailed data collection for students with SENDDD was not included in most of the data gathering activities undertaken in the framework of education reform going on in the last years. To include a precise and complex data gathering ex post into existing data collection mechanisms was seen as being problematic from a financial and administrative point of view, and seems to one of the main barriers for an efficient and lasting data collection process in this field.

Despite the promising results of the ongoing data collection, the fragmented situation with respect to data gathering and analysis is still one of the major obstacles for the improvement of education provision

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10. The OECD cross-national categories are referred to as A/Disabilities, B/Difficulties and C/Disadvantages. For a detailed discussion in the framework of the OECD Member Economies (see OECD, 2005)

for students with SEN. A wide scale epidemiological study on prevalence data in most of the Southeast European countries will, therefore, be a precondition for both a detailed country analysis on the situation of inclusive education and the development of a sustainable and evidence based policy. Such a study would also take into consideration future recommendations for a countrywide data collection.

**Overview on the micro-projects on statistics and data gathering**

<p><b>BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (Tuzla Canton)</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Data gathering on students with special education needs in Tuzla Canton.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the Tuzla Canton.</p>	
<p><b>Scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Development and compilation of questionnaire and a user manual.</p> <p>Capacity building for personnel involved in data gathering: training seminars.</p> <p>Data gathering in preschool institutions, primary and secondary schools, special schools and regular schools with attached classes.</p> <p>Creation of a unified electronic database.</p>	<p><b>Output results:</b></p> <p>Trained personnel.</p> <p>Detailed data on students with special education needs in special and mainstream schools in Tuzla Canton.</p>

<p><b>BULGARIA</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Pilot project on statistics and data gathering for students with special education needs in 10 pilot mainstream schools.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID)</p>	
<p><b>Scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Identification of a representative sample of pilot schools throughout Bulgaria.</p> <p>Development of a questionnaire for gathering statistical data on students with SEN.</p> <p>Capacity building for personnel involved in the survey: workshops, consultations.</p> <p>Comparison of national categories with OECD cross-national categories on SENDDD.</p> <p>Creation of an electronic database of students with SENDDD in the selected pilot schools.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Trained statisticians and administrators.</p> <p>Detailed data on students with special education needs in 10 pilot schools.</p> <p>Recommendations for data collection of students with SENDDD on national level.</p>

<p><b>CROATIA</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Pilot study on statistics and data gathering of students with SEN compulsory schools in Northwest Croatia (Medimurje and Varazdin county).</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Centre for Strategy and Development.</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Data collection on students with SENDDD in both regular and special schools in Northwest Croatia.</p> <p>Capacity training for survey participants: two workshops.</p> <p>Determine the validity of survey instruments created for data gathering for students with SENDDD on national level.</p> <p>Evaluate the validity of electronic data collection and delivery procedures.</p> <p>Improve both survey instruments and data collection procedures based on the outcomes of the pilot study.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Detailed data on students with special education needs in schools of Medimurje and Varazdin county.</p> <p>Set of recommendations to improve data collection for students with SENDDD on national level.</p>

<p><b>KOSOVO</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Gathering of statistical data on special needs education in special schools and special classes.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST).</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Data collection on students with SEN for all special schools and schools with attached special classes under the authority of MEST.</p> <p>Definition of relevant statistical indicators: preparation of a manual for data collection.</p> <p>Capacity building seminars for statisticians, administrators and school staff (headmasters, teachers): guidance for implementation of data collection.</p> <p>Development, distribution and analysis of questionnaires.</p> <p>Creation of an electronic database.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Trained statisticians.</p> <p>Electronic database on students with special needs in all special schools and schools with attached classes in Kosovo.</p>

<p><b>MOLDOVA</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Data gathering on students with SEN in residential institutions in Moldova.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> State Institute of Continuing Education of Moldova.</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Development and of questionnaires on students in residential institutions in Moldova.</p> <p>Data collection and analysis.</p> <p>Creation of an electronic database of students with special education needs in residential institutions in Moldova.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Electronic database on students with SEN in residential institutions.</p> <p>Dissemination conference of survey results.</p>

<p><b>MONTENEGRO</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Gathering of statistical data on special needs education in special schools and special classes.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Ministry of Education – Bureau for Education Services.</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Data collection on students with special education needs in preschool, primary, secondary and special schools.</p> <p>Establishment of a working party on data collection: administrators, representatives of professional services at schools (pedagogues, psychologists), representatives of parents associations and mobile teams.</p> <p>Preparation of instructions for data gathering at a school level: development, distribution and analysis of questionnaires.</p> <p>Creation of an electronic database on special education needs and integration into the overall database on education.</p> <p>Dissemination of results to stakeholders in education.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Trained statisticians.</p> <p>Detailed data on students with Special Education Needs in pre-school, primary and secondary education in Montenegro.</p>

<p><b>SERBIA</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Establishment of a database on students with disabilities in primary schools (special schools, special classes and mainstream classes).</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Institute for the Improvement of Education and Upbringing, Centre for Strategic Development.</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Creation of an electronic database of students with special education needs attending regular primary schools in the Republic of Serbia (excluding Kosovo).</p> <p>Capacity building (training) activities for school psychologists and pedagogues in regional school offices.</p> <p>Compilation and distribution of questionnaires; data collection at schools.</p> <p>Analyses of gathered data: systematisation along the OECD cross-national categories for SENDDD.</p> <p>Setting up the electronic database.</p>	<p><b>Expected output results:</b></p> <p>Trained personnel at regional school offices.</p> <p>Electronic database on students with special education needs in primary schools of Serbia.</p>

<p><b>ROMANIA</b></p> <p><i>Activity:</i> Development of a tool for inclusion of data on special education needs into education the data collection of Romania.</p> <p><i>Implementing institution:</i> Association RENINCO.</p>	
<p><b>Objective, scope and activities:</b></p> <p>Translation and adaptation of the instruction manual of the OECD electronic questionnaire on cross – national categories for SENDDD plus its annexes into Romanian language.</p> <p>Training of relevant stakeholders in education on proper use of the OECD electronic questionnaire (county level).</p> <p>Establishment of a national network and follow up scheme for data gathering in order to create a unified data system for SENDDD at national level.</p>	<p><b>Output results:</b></p> <p>Recommendations for a unified national data system including data collection on students with SENDDD.</p>

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

### **Summary of the initial findings of the BiH National Report (2005)**

#### ***Education reform***

The national report states that students with developmental difficulties remain isolated and marginalised by the system. Officially, only 0.4% of children with developmental difficulties are going to school (some say 0.8%); Roma, poor and ethnic minority children face the same problems. Teachers, especially those teaching regular classes, are insufficiently trained.

Most SEN children are still in special schools or special classes, but there is some movement towards inclusion. The 2003 Overall Law on Elementary and Secondary Education states that special needs children should be educated in regular classes.

War and conflict have resulted in many more orphans, invalids and displaced persons; they have also exacerbated prejudice and hostility along ethnic and religious lines. Poverty and difficulties faced by returning refugees are additional concerns. Social safety nets are insufficient: each social worker in the Federation is responsible for 13 000 citizens.

In education, there is no over-arching Ministry. The Federal Ministry has only a co-ordinating function among cantons. Each canton has its own Ministry of Education; there is also Republika Srpska, with its own Ministry. The Office of the High Representative has transferred responsibility for education to OSCE. However, the Federation and Srpska have now formed a joint commission to promote standards in education.

Primary enrolments are acceptable, although poor children do not do as well as or stay in school as long as wealthier ones. Pre-school is more affected by poverty: only 1% of poor children attend, while 5.6% of wealthier ones do.

#### ***Legal framework***

In pre-school, the Law states that the government budget will finance “units” within hospitals, institutions, etc. for special needs children “as well as for minority groups” (*e.g.* Roma). In primary school, the Law forbids any kind of discrimination on any grounds whatsoever. But definitions of “special needs” still assume that most of these children cannot be accommodated in regular schools. However, the Law also states that SEN is a priority, and that SEN children must be included “to the highest possible degree”. Special IEPs must be drawn up. Special schools are also in charge of training teachers for SEN. In theory, if a child’s condition changes it is possible for him/her to be transferred into the mainstream system. The new Overall Law says that grades one to eight should include children with SEN, and provide them with IEPs. These classes should not have more than 25 students. In secondary, schools are expected to educate “ordinary and gifted students as well as SEN students.” The emphasis seems to be on vocational secondary for SEN youngsters.

### ***Definitions***

“Special needs” is not a legally defined term in BiH, but it generally means youngsters whose circumstances or backgrounds are different from most of the school population. They are “those who, in order to reach their optimal level of abilities and other social or positive personality characteristics, need specifically adapted, individualised conditions and activities”.

### ***Classification***

This starts at municipal (canton) level with social protection services (Commission for Categorisation and Assessment of the Competence of People with Difficulties in their Development). Second-line commissions are at Federal or Srpska level. The first commission has six members, including a psychologist, a medical doctor, a neurophysiologist, special education teachers and a social worker. Once a child is placed in a special protection category he/she gets a supplementary welfare allowance.

### ***Returnee children***

Education Ministers in 2002 signed a provisional agreement on meeting the essential needs of returnee children. Many still encounter problems, although fewer school children are now transported to schools in other cantons.

### ***Roma***

The national report estimates that 80% of Roma children do not attend school and almost no Roma pupils are in higher grades of primary or in secondary. In 2004, an action plan for Roma and other ethnic minorities was signed and funds are available, but the poverty of the population is a barrier. Other categories of children “at risk” are orphans, children in dysfunctional families, street children, and working children.

### ***Statistics and indicators***

There is a “Rule Book on Detection [*sic*], Assessment, Classification [etc.]” of children and young people with psychic and physical disturbances [*sic*] in BiH. They have a right to an appropriate education, the right to professional qualification and employment and the right to different types of social care. But not in the “rule book” are autistic children, children with behavioural problems or ADHD or other types of conditions, including talented/gifted children.

The number of SEN children (9.3%) is greatest in Tuzla. A large number of refugees ended up there as a result of the war and many suffered from post-traumatic shock or were otherwise damaged by their experiences. There were (2004) 469 SEN children in regular primary schools, and 181 in regular secondary; none at university level. This does not take into account SEN children in special schools (institutions).

### ***Curriculum***

Curriculum is subject-bound, with no cross-subject integration. In vocational subjects and schools, the teaching is theoretical rather than practical. “Everything is taught at the same pace” and very little remediation or special help is on offer for children who struggle to keep up. In a few schools, individual education plans (IEPs) are being used.

### ***Teacher training***

SEN teachers follow a 4-year course at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation at the University of Tuzla and they specialise (vision, hearing, speech, etc.) Regular teachers do not receive much pre- or in-service training about dealing with SEN children.

### ***Training of other specialists***

Tuzla University is the only one in BiH offering higher education in the field of SEN. The Faculty of Defectology is now called the “Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation”, but the approach remains defectology-based. There are three departments: speech and hearing; education and rehabilitation of children with mental retardation, motor difficulties, and vision problems; and behavioural difficulties.

#### **Box 1. Tuzla Canton: Simin Han**

Simin Han is a community a few kilometres east of Tuzla, an industrial area with, before the war, a mixed population of Serbs, Muslims, Croats, and a few Roma. By early spring 1993, that Simin Han was gone.

Simin Han Primary School has a long history of innovation, community spirit, and dedication to “education for all”. It had already been in existence for more than 50 years when, in July 1992, a contingent of soldiers from the Bosnian Army took over the three-storey building.

Thousands of Muslim refugees from eastern Bosnia – mostly women, children and elderly people – flooded into the area, often moving into empty houses and apartments left by Serbs. The school building, now occupied by nearly a thousand soldiers, was no longer available to the children, and they moved into a private house. It was a cold spring; windows and parts of the roof were gone; and the house was far too small, especially when refugee children began to arrive. But the school never turned anyone away, and the headmaster, after long negotiations with the army, agreed a deal whereby the school would share the old school building fifty-fifty: “Soldiers and their guns, children and their school bags, shared the same space.” (Korda, 2005) Soon, more than a thousand children attended school in three shifts, until at last, by the end of 1994, the army moved out and some semblance of normality returned.

There were then 1 200 children in Simin Han Primary. Two-thirds of them had at least one parent missing; families had no work; everyone was poor; many adults had not finished (or ever attended) school, another barrier to finding employment. In response, Simin Han teachers began to hold adult classes in the evenings. More than 400 adults finished primary school since the programme started in 1995. The school also introduced active learning methods, involved parents in the maintenance of the school and in helping teachers in the classroom, to give more attention to children struggling with their new environment and, from 1998, the school included children with special needs in their art and music lessons. Gradually, they started to attend other classes as well. Finnish and other Norwegian NGOs worked with teachers and parents to develop individual education plans (IEPs) and adapt curricula and classroom methodology for a variety of learners.

From 2004, the school adopted a policy of “really inclusive education: a big step, and a challenge for us all: but every child belongs to the school, including traumatised children and those with special needs.” Simin Han became a “model school” in the OECD project and now has an outreach programme to share their practices and experiences with other schools.

### **Findings of the evaluation visit**

At the time of the OECD evaluation visit (October 2006), Simin Han Primary School had about 1 400 students grades one to eight, working in two shifts. Key findings were the following:

- According to law, when a school has an inclusive class, they are allowed to employ an additional teacher. Also, Tuzla canton now has three mobile teams of specialists in special needs diagnosis;

they visit schools once a year, and are authorised to assess children free of charge.<sup>11</sup> Their certificates (statements of a child's special needs) are legally valid. Some parents resist the assessment and certification procedures for fear that their child will be sent away to a special school; other parents believe that formal certification will be of long-term benefit to the child, for example in terms of financial support (10 Euros per month, plus transport) and social benefits such as pension rights in adulthood. The school would like to have the authority to diagnose children themselves, rather than send them to doctors or commissions, but at present this is not permitted. (It is also not clear how informal diagnoses would work in conjunction with new per capita financing arrangements in the canton.)

- The school has a special class, as well as a number of “inclusive” classes where SEN children are taught with other children. The specialist teacher of the special class assists other teachers in the school when they have problems. Some parents (mothers) come to school every day with their children and assist them in class. Access to the school building is a problem for physically disabled children: many steps and stairs, no lift, no suitable sanitary facilities.
- Relations with parents and the community are very good. There is an active Parents' Association, and co-operation with Simin Han district authorities and the Cantonal Ministry of Education is excellent. Support from the city (Tuzla) authorities is limited. The Pedagogical Institute sends inspectors, but they are subject specialists and not trained to deal with SEN children.
- Early identification of SEN children is a problem. Very few attend pre-school; and there is no co-operation with health authorities in terms of sharing information, so that “the first we know of these children is when they show up in grade one”. There is also a high proportion of refugees, especially Roma families from other parts of BiH, about whom little is known; there are “invisible” children who do not attend school at all, although the school makes every effort to find them – “teachers in Simin Han go out and knock on doors asking about the children”. Many families are traumatised by war and displacement; an increase in bullying and domestic violence can, to some extent, be traced back to the war experiences of the parents (in particular the fathers).
- Special schools exist in the canton, and most teachers in special schools (as well as a number of teachers in regular schools other than Simin Han Primary) are opposed to inclusion. However, attitudes are slowly changing.
- In an interview of the OECD team with the Minister of Education of Tuzla Canton, the Minister said she believed that inclusion was a good idea – “but only for children with mild mental retardation”. She supports the establishment of the new Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation at Tuzla University and stated that this Faculty is gathering data on SEN in order to better target resources. But she is aware that inclusion in BiH is still very weak; there are no reliable data, no systematic approach and too many architectural barriers in school buildings. There is also a lack of adapted curricula, materials and books and equipment for SEN children. On the other hand, she stated that there are, at present, no plans to train all regular teachers – either in their pre-service training, or through systematic in-service programmes – in special needs education, which, in her opinion, remains a matter for trained defectologists.

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11. Normally, parents have to pay 25 Euros plus transport to attend Categorisation Commissions and obtain a certificate.

**Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- The fragmented education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a barrier to co-ordination and equal provision across the country. The new effort to formulate common standards will help in this respect.
- Inclusion is slowly gaining ground. In 1997, UNICEF-BiH, together with *Médécins du Monde*, started a project called “Special Classrooms for Children with Disabilities.” By the end of this project (2001), 23 schools had approximately 45 special classes serving nearly 400 children. The project cost about USD 600 000 over the period 1997-2000, which shows that a relatively small amount of money can make a lasting difference to vulnerable children and young adults. Special classes are often a useful stepping stone to inclusion, as well as a way for SEN children to be educated in their own community.
- The extremely low coverage of pre-school education means that almost 95% of children arrive in primary school without previous contact with education (or health, or social affairs) authorities. This is especially bad for disadvantaged or disabled children, who are precisely the ones most likely to be affected by poor health, poor nutrition, low levels of immunisation and poverty.
- BiH still has a considerable number of refugee and returnee families. According to 2005 UNHCR figures, there are nearly 200 000 people “of concern” in BiH, 21% of them (about 40 000) under 18. Although, in strict terms, most of these youngsters are well able to integrate in their communities, they do in many ways have “special needs” that should be recognised. The integration and inclusion of Roma youngsters also need more attention.
- Categorisation and “defectology” still dominate public and professional thinking about special needs education; social stigma and prejudice towards disability remain obstacles to inclusion.

## BULGARIA

### Summary of the initial findings of the Bulgaria National Report (2005)

#### *General*

Bulgaria has signed up to various Conventions pertaining to children's rights and to the Salamanca Statement about special educational needs. In 2003-04, some changes were made to the law that guarantee equal access for all children. The steep decline in birth rates, with 31% fewer children in grades one to four and 23% fewer in grades five to eight by 2006/07, is making an impact. With regard to Roma and children with special educational needs, "inclusion is a priority".

#### *Legal framework*

There are 28 regional inspectorates directly under the Ministry of Education and Science, and they have front-line responsibility for carrying out educational policy including "inclusion". They also have the task of gathering and reporting data to the Ministry about inclusion and placement. The Public Education Act 2003/4 makes the year before entering first grade compulsory and free. This benefits children with special needs, as well as Roma and Turkish children. Schools are "obliged" to accept SEN children; special school placement should be only in exceptional cases.

If children do not reach educational standards, they have the right to an individual education plan and to receive a certificate of completion. In kindergartens and primary schools, there is a limit of two SEN children per class. Special classes within mainstream schools (*e.g.* for intellectually impaired or deaf children) are allowed.

#### *Policy review*

The national report states that there is now a move away from "defectology" to a more holistic view of children with SEN. Public opinion is changing. The Ministry policy is that every child can be educated, and all children have equal rights. "Integration" and "inclusion" are often used interchangeably. There are a number of special programmes, many of these supported by international and national NGOs.

#### *Categorisation*

Categorisation is done by regional "teams"; according to the national report, these are still constituted along traditional medical/defectology lines. Parents have the right to be involved in the assessment. The national report lists (1) *Schools and resource centres for intellectually impaired children*; they receive eight years of schooling and low-level vocational training. There are also special classes in some mainstream schools. (2) *Schools and resource centres for visually impaired*; (3) *Schools for hearing impaired*; (4) *Schools and centres for language and speech disorders*.

### ***National Plan for Integration of SEN children***

In December 2003, the Council of Ministers adopted an action plan 2004-07. There is a Department in the Ministry for Education and Cultural Integration – one section deals with SEN and one with minorities (Turkish and Roma). There is also a Consultative Council on Education of Ethnic Minorities. In January 2004, the Ministry adopted a “Strategy for Educational Integration of Children from Ethnic Minorities”, which gives Roma parents the right to choose their child’s school, and the schools the duty to accept and assist them, with special assistants.

### ***Drop-out problem and irregular attendance***

According to the national report, 3.1% of children of compulsory schooling age drop out. But there is also an issue of irregular attendance; this affects children with SEN, as well as minority children’s attainment, because irregular attendance often leads to grade repetition, which in turn greatly increases the risk of drop-out. Children from orphanages and SEN children are often placed in low-level vocational schools.

### ***Statistics and indicators***

Figures provided in the national report indicate that the number of children in special schools has not diminished (still about 17 000), with only a total of 1 249 included in kindergartens, schools and vocational schools (as of 2003). There is a perception that the number of special schools is going down, but available statistics do not show this. Special schools are under the MES, but special kindergartens are under the municipalities.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Curriculum***

The curriculum emphasises “universal values, national virtues and culture; and spiritual development”. Differentiation for children with SEN is minimal; the national report mentions that children in mainstream schools learn a foreign language from grade three, while those in special schools learn a foreign language only from grade eight, which in many cases is their final school year. Mainstream schools lack special teaching materials, and are not accessible for wheelchairs, with a few exceptions in Sofia.

### ***Teacher training***

The National Action Plan states that *all* teachers should be trained in teaching special needs children, but at present very few regular teachers have any preparation. There is specialist training in 11 universities across the country.

#### **Box 2. Visit to School 28, “Aleko Konstantinov”, Sofia**

Participating in the OECD project as a “model school”, School 28 has an inclusive approach to special needs education. During the visit, the OECD team observed a number of lessons, and had extensive meetings and discussions with teachers, specialists, parents, and representatives of the NGO “Together”, which has been the driving force behind the establishment of the SEN unit within the school. This unit is located in the basement of the school,

12. The national report mentions schools for children with behavioural disorders. According to the National Report on the Development of Education (MES, 2004, p. 45) these are “reformatory” schools and boarding houses “for students in grade 1 to 12 with deviant behaviour”, who “have perpetrated anti-social deeds” or live in “pre-conditions for them to perform such deeds”. Considering that a grade 1 child is, presumably, 7 years old, such placements for “deviant” behaviour (or the mere possibility of “deviant behaviour”) are highly questionable and probably in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

and comprises a number of small offices, therapy rooms (for language and speech therapy and for help to children with auditory problems and cochlear implants), as well as a large meeting-and play-room, which was financed and furnished by the parents in 2004. There is a lift for the use of children with physical impairments, but unfortunately it does not go down to the lower floor where the special needs unit is located. The rather steep steps leading from the ground floor (where the lift starts) down to the basement do have a set of metal rails that will accommodate a wheelchair, although it is not suitable for walking frames. Nevertheless, the installation of a lift to reach the upper floors of the school is a great asset, all the more so because every child in the SEN unit is given a key to operate it, a great source of pride.

The NGO “Together”, started by 16 volunteers, also helped establish the Sofia resource centre<sup>13</sup> and co-ordinated the initiatives of parents and special needs teachers in the school. It was also instrumental in persuading the authorities to fund the posts and salaries of the support teachers in the school, which is an impressive achievement.

The school’s catchment area is in a rather poor neighbourhood of Sofia and nearly all the children live nearby, which helps resolve transport issues and makes it easier for parents to participate actively in the school’s activities. In addition to regular classes, there are Saturday activities, such as music, English lessons, and art; these are open to the community and help overcome barriers between special needs children and their school mates. However, because this is not a wealthy neighbourhood, the families are not in a position to contribute financially, although they do assist in other ways, e.g. by helping with small maintenance and decorating tasks.

As in other model schools, the OECD team observed very good inclusive classroom teaching, where teachers made sure that all children had an opportunity to take part. In most cases, a support teacher was sitting (unobtrusively) with a special needs child, and encouraged him/her to complete tasks and answer the teacher’s questions. The relationships between teachers, students, support teachers and parents were friendly and supportive. The SEN children clearly felt most at home in their own space downstairs, and many of them chose to spend time there between classes and during break times. It was also clear that the parents were made welcome, were on friendly terms with the teachers, and were very much part of the inclusive environment created in the school. Roma children were treated no differently than any other children and the neighbourhood also appears to be relatively integrated.

The parents were unanimous in their praise of the school, and several mothers reported that their children had flourished once they transferred to this school from elsewhere. One child had reached eighth grade in another school, but could progress no further there, while in this school she continues her education and does well. Several children had been given successful cochlear implants, after which they were able to take part in regular classes without significant special help.

### Findings of the OECD evaluation visit

- One problem mentioned both by parents and teaching staff is that, although they acknowledge the value of an individual education plan (IEP) for a child, at present, children with formal IEPs cannot receive a regular school certificate, but are given a lower-level diploma instead. So although teachers do, with the help of parents, develop individual teaching plans, they do so unofficially to avoid the limitations (and the stigma) of these special diplomas. Secondly, there is some concern that when the new Matura examination is introduced in Bulgaria, this will encourage schools to channel slower learners into vocational education: “only the high achievers will go to schools where they prepare you for university.” While this is certainly not the intention of the Matura developers, it is a possibility that needs to be watched for.
- An interview with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science confirmed many of the points raised in the Bulgaria national report. There are two National Plans: one for inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs (adopted by the Council of Ministers), and one for

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13. There are now 28 such centres in Bulgaria.

ethnic minorities (approved by the Minister of Education and Science). Both these plans are being implemented by the Department for Educational Environment and Cultural Integration within the Ministry. The push for EU accession accelerated the formulation of these plans.

- Of special significance is the Child Protection Act (2000), which sees placement in special institutions only as “an extreme measure”, preferring a family environment and mainstream schooling. Only when all possibilities for inclusion have been exhausted – and with parental consent – can a child be placed in a special school or institution. Mainstream schools are obliged to accommodate SEN children. The State Agency for Child Protection implements this law at the national level, while at the municipal level there are Sections for Child Protection.
- As for the National Plan, it defines “inclusive education” as “a process in which all children, irrespective of their special needs, are included in the general education process”.
- However, the implementation of these laws and national plans is hampered by (1) the physical conditions in general schools, which are not suitable for many SEN children; (2) insufficient teacher preparation; (3) lack of money to ensure the quality of SEN education in mainstream, as well as special schools; and (4) public attitudes towards children with special needs.

#### **Key Points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- Priority for SEN inclusion is declared government policy in Bulgaria, but is not reflected in funding decisions. There is still a tendency to see inclusive special educational needs provision as a voluntary or NGO task, rather than a normal part of the government’s full responsibility for the education of every child.
- Encouraging progress is reflected in current statistics. In 2006, 3 863 children were included in mainstream schools, compared with 771 in 2004 and 1 230 in 2005. Inspectorates report data twice a year to the Ministry. There is financial support to assist families in sending children to school: they receive 80 BGN (about EUR 40) when a child enters grade one and textbooks for SEN children are provided for grades 1 to 12. (Other children receive textbooks only for grades one to four.) In addition, in 2005 the Ministry started a food programme for primary schools (milk and rolls for all children).
- The mainstream schools do not receive additional money for SEN students, although they do in many cases have additional (trained) resource staff, such as psychologists and speech therapists, who are paid by the municipality on the same scale as any other teachers working in the school. There are, however, only about 1 000 such specialists in the whole country, including those attached to the 28 regional resource centres. Each special teacher looks after 5 to 7 children. “Itinerant” teachers and those in resource centres are paid by the Ministry.
- By law, all instruction is in Bulgarian, but parents are entitled to choose to have 2 hours of minority language instruction per week (Romani language, Turkish, Hebrew, etc.). In practice, this entitlement is constrained by the availability of teachers and materials, and most minority parents – especially Roma parents – do not exercise, or may not be aware of, this right. Materials do, however, exist in Romani language.
- Inclusion of Roma children, although required by law and national action plans, remains problematic. Within Roma neighbourhoods, school quality is extremely poor; and outside Roma neighbourhoods, mainstream schools are not easily accessible or welcoming to Roma children and families. Roma children are over-represented in special schools for children with intellectual

impairment, although efforts are now being made to stop this practice.<sup>14</sup> However, the law still allows children to enter basic-level vocational schooling from grade six; most of these children are Roma and, in many cases, there are still separate (parallel) classes for Roma children in these vocational schools. The official justification is that after grade four, Roma drop-out is severe, and that vocational training can provide these children with some qualifications for entering the work force. However, the “market value” (as well as the social value) of these qualifications is low.

- In terms of adapting school buildings to the needs of SEN children, progress is slow; only about 300 out of the national total of 3 300 schools have wheelchair access and suitable toilets, with another 80 now being renovated. Since local authorities are responsible for school buildings, the MES has no legal mechanism to enforce physical access.
- “Invisible children”: The Ministry representatives insisted that monitoring of enrolment and attendance is well regulated, and that regional inspectorates and schools are required to file regular reports. But they admitted that there are not enough social workers to check whether all school-age children are indeed in school, especially among socially vulnerable groups. Since these are also the groups most likely to be poorly housed, poorly nourished and susceptible to illness, the early identification of SEN children is an issue. At present, family doctors and hospitals have no legal obligation to report special needs children to health authorities and, in any case, data are not systematically shared with education authorities at local and regional levels.
- Although pre-school coverage in Bulgaria is acceptable (at about 74% of the age group), it is crucial that *all* young children have access to early identification of special needs, health checks and immunisations during the critical early years of their development. The nutritional status of children is related not only to their physical health, but to their cognitive development, and thus to their longer-term learning achievement once they enter school. From a child welfare point of view, expansion of access to early childhood care – especially for children from low income households – is therefore vital to the improvement of their health, nutrition, and social and mental development as well as to their early learning.

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14. The OECD team was told that, for example, a special school in Russe, which had 100% Roma children – all of them of normal health and intelligence – has recently been closed, and that these children were now (reportedly) “integrated in local schools”. It is not clear to what extent this is indeed the case.

## CROATIA

### Summary of the findings of the Croatia National Report (2005)

#### *Status*

According to the Croatia national report, 66% of children with special educational needs are in regular schools. Croatia has a “National Strategy of Unique Policy Towards Disabled Persons 2002-2006”, which aims to replace educational isolation (in special schools) by a policy of inclusion. In 1974, “special education” was made an intrinsic part of the mainstream school system and, from 1980, SEN children were gradually included in regular classes.

#### *Legal framework*

Laws are quite progressive; inclusion has been a policy since 1980 and there are adjusted curricula from pre-school onwards. Implementation is difficult, mostly due to a lack of money, unsuitable school buildings and trained people. However, the new Strategic Plan 2002-2006 sets out a time-table for implementation.

#### *Categorisation*

All children are assessed before they enter primary school (similar to Hungary’s school-readiness certificate); if a child is not deemed to be school-ready, entry can be delayed by a year. Assessments are done by an expert commission and can be followed by a period of “pedagogical observation” to determine any special needs the child may have. Decisions can be appealed by parents.

#### *Effects of war and poverty*

An estimated 400 000 children suffered as a result of the war, either directly (by being wounded or maimed) or indirectly, by losing relatives, by being displaced, exiled or having their homes destroyed. About 12 000 children still live as refugees. As regards poverty, the national report states that 43% of families are poor, 43% of low/medium income, and only 14% are financially secure.

#### *Statistics and indicators*

Croatia uses an “orientation list”, which includes vision, hearing, speech (and other language-related handicaps *e.g.* dyslexia), physical disability, mental retardation (mild, moderate, severe, profound), behavioural disorders, autism, and multiple handicaps. Data are difficult to obtain. According to the latest census there are about 9.6% of youngsters under 19 with some type of impairment: 6 500 boys and 4 500 girls. A register has now been set up under the Croatian Institute of Public Health.

In preschool and primary, more children are integrated into regular schools than are in special schools; but at secondary level this is reversed. There were 254 disabled students in higher education in

2003/04, sharply up from 24 in 2000/01. Students get help with accommodation, and transport and facilities in universities are adapted.

### ***School organisation***

The principle underlying Croatian legislation is that integration/inclusion is always best for a child and that only in more severe cases can a student be placed in either partial integration or separate special education classes or schools. Hospital and home teaching are provided by teachers from the nearest primary school. Even special institutions follow the regular programme as much as possible, adapting to the various degrees of handicap and offering vocational and employment skills to those who are capable, varying from sheltered workshops to open employment.

However, most schools (70%) operate in shifts, and very few schools in Croatia have been adapted to provide wheelchair access. Regulations now require that new school buildings must include access for physically disabled students and, in some cases, lifts have been installed in existing buildings with the help of community fundraising.

### ***Curriculum, pedagogy and materials***

There are special curricula for children with developmental difficulties, *e.g.* in pre-school for autistic children, mentally retarded children, children with cerebral palsy and others. In primary schools, there are IEPs for each individual child. Teachers are starting to use active teaching methods, influenced (especially in primary) by Step-by-Step and similar NGO initiatives.

### ***Teacher training***

Pre-service training varies according to the level at which a teacher intends to teach – preschool only requires a two-year post-secondary course, primary and secondary a four-year course, sometimes in professional (vocational) colleges and sometimes in university faculties. Teachers for SEN children are not usually specifically trained – developmental psychology is part of regular teacher training, and in some universities there are one-semester courses in special needs education.

### ***Training of other professionals***

The Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation in Zagreb offers four-year courses in seven departments (vision, hearing, etc.) leading to a graduate degree.

### **Findings of the OECD evaluation visit**

- The legal architecture for inclusive education is in place in Croatia, and it is based on child rights, as well as international practice. Implementation is to some extent more difficult, limited by lack of funding, trained teachers and specialists and suitable buildings (wheelchair access, sanitary facilities suitable for disabled students, etc.)
- Per capita financing and decentralisation to county and local level have created some flexibility, but, despite an equalisation formula, there are growing inequities among counties and municipalities. (Counties are responsible for post-compulsory secondary schools; municipalities for compulsory schooling.) As of 2006, some children receive free textbooks grades one to eight and some only for grade one. The Ministry informed the OECD team that from 2007-08 all textbooks will be free for all children (including those with SEN) in grades one to eight in primary schools, and one grade in secondary schools.

- Although the requirement for all children to have school-readiness assessments before entering primary is generally beneficial, the OECD team heard that it may act as a deterrent for some (especially Roma) parents who do not want their children stigmatised as having “special needs” or even “taken away” for placement in a special school. On the other hand, some parents want protection and financial support for their SEN children; for example, if they are identified as having special needs, they may qualify for important social benefits in adult life (such as pensions and social support).
- Early identification of special needs is essential: indeed the first two or three years of life are vital to a child’s development. At present, there is little or no help or advice for parents after the birth of a child with special needs, although the child should be referred to Health or Social Affairs authorities. However, this information is not shared with the schools and nothing is known about these children until they enter (pre-)school. UNICEF is supporting a project on “Early Childhood Development and Parenting Skills”, which covers nutrition, immunisation, and health checks. There is also a health-visitor system, whereby visiting nurses are supposed to visit the mothers of new-born babies at home a number of times (six times, in theory); but these nurses are not specifically trained in supporting parents of babies with physical or sensory disabilities, Downs syndrome, or other special conditions that benefit from early diagnosis and remediation.
- Parents say that they often have to travel large distances with their child to get therapy, which is expensive, and often means that at least one parent cannot have a job. Other children in the family are affected by lack of money and attention. Outside Zagreb and a few other places, little specialist help is available, and parents say they have no one to turn to for advice.
- The majority of SEN children at primary level are included in regular classrooms, with a limit of three SEN children per class (the Pupil:Teacher Ratio is adjusted when children join a regular class). There is full integration if a child is mildly handicapped, partial integration if moderately handicapped and children with severe problems may be educated in special schools/institutions. Additional money and support come from the Ministry (usually Education, but sometimes Social Care). In secondary schools, if students are capable of following the curriculum, they can enrol either in academic or vocational schools, or (if their handicaps are severe) they can stay in primary schools and learn vocational skills. Again, integration can be full or partial, or children can go to special schools; class sizes are adjusted, and no more than three SEN children can be in one class. When a student turns 21, he/she can continue training in primary schools in manufacturing skills. Chronically ill or physically severely disabled children can be taught at home. If it becomes obvious that a youngster will not be able to be employed, there are provisions for long-term social and financial support.
- Career guidance: Before the end of grade eight, all children registered as having SEN are counselled on possible career choices and directions in secondary schools. This is an interesting feature that might be copied elsewhere.
- Teacher training: As elsewhere in SEE countries, this is an important issue. Although in Croatia regular teacher training does include some initial knowledge about child development, only one place (Rijeka) offers a two-semester course in special education, plus practical experience – this should be more commonly the case. In-service teacher development for work with SEN children is offered by the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation in Zagreb through seminars and workshops – this is effective, but does not reach most working teachers. As the national report notes, “Since integration has been the policy since 1980 in Croatia, teachers by now should all be prepared to work with SEN children.”

### Box 3. OŠ Ljudevita Gaja, Osijek

In a fifth grade Croatian language class with 29 children, the teacher is conducting a lively, competitive, quiz game. The children work in teams. One special needs child is encouraged by her team mates to give the answer to a question and when she succeeds, all the students – including those in the opposing teams – applaud. The rest of the day shows that this supportive, child-to-child approach is typical for the school. There is an active “Peer Helpers Club” of ten mainstream students, who help during classes; they organise “Let’s Learn Together” classes every Monday, as well as “Fun-Lessons” in the special class. Only outstanding students can become “Peer Helpers” for SEN children, so it is considered quite a privilege to be part of the Club.

OŠ Ljudevita Gaja (604 students, grades one to eight) has had an inclusive approach since 2002, inspired by a dynamic headmistress and dedicated staff who teach with great creativity, often with few materials and in classes of 29 or 30 children. There is a school team for special needs, consisting of 11 teachers, the psychologist and the school pedagogue, led by the headmistress. Some teachers have three or four SEN children – all with different needs, ranging from mild mental retardation to ADHD and Downs syndrome – in their overcrowded classes, but the school manages to maintain a positive, cheerful learning environment, as well as close relationships with parents and with County and local authorities. There are a number of Roma children as well; the physical education teacher for grades five to eight – who happens to be the national junior basketball team coach! – reports that he does some additional work with special needs children. All children are taught to swim (the River Drava is not far away!) and the Roma children do particularly well. “They are the school heroes when they help win a basketball game – it makes them feel important; the parents come to see them play and the other children accept and admire them. It helps to keep them coming to school.”

Because of its proximity to the border with Serbia, Eastern Slavonia has been affected by the 1991-92 war – in particular Osijek and Vukovar. During the 18 months of conflict, for example, more than 5 000 wounded civilians were treated in Osijek’s main hospital, more than half of them with shrapnel wounds; and some of the city’s buildings were destroyed. Fourteen years on, few signs of conflict remain and the community appears to be thriving. There are 70 primary schools serving 30 000 students; but there are only 20 psychologists and 9 defectologists, some of these working in the special school. The County has financed the publication of a SEN handbook and the City of Osijek has financed teacher training for all schools in the County. The city is working hard to make streets and buildings accessible for wheelchair users and has a progressive attitude towards support for children with special needs. Even so, not all schools are ready to be truly “inclusive”.

A fourth grade teacher says she has a class of 30 children, four of them with special needs. One is mildly retarded and has an IEP; every day the teacher assigns a different child to sit next to this girl and help her with her work. This is good for socialisation, the teacher says, and will make the transition to grade five – where the child will have to cope with a number of subject teachers, rather than just one class teacher – a little easier. But she adds that all teachers who have SEN children in their large classes would love to have an additional support teacher to help with the load. There is no money for teaching materials, or for specialised mobile teams. And yet the teachers all say they love the work they do, and are delighted by the progress of their special needs students.

Parents say that some families move house in order to be near this school; one says that her child was expelled from another school, but is now flourishing in this one. “Some of the Roma parents wait for several years to enrol their children until their favourite teacher can take them in first grade, because they know the children will learn and be happy.” The parents also say that the director of the school, as well as the teachers, are the ones they turn to in a crisis: “They are always ready to listen to us when we don’t know what to do.” There is some contact among parents, through a creative workshop during which they saw each other every week, but no formal parents’ association. They also worry about how their children will cope once they leave this school: “There is still prejudice in other schools and in the community and sometimes teachers don’t have patience and children are bullied by other children who are not used to them; how can we protect our children then?”

There are, of course, problems in this school, too. Physical access for disabled children is one of them: there is a ramp by the entrance, but no way to move around within the school. There are no proper toilets – “for *any* child, not just for disabled children!”; books and specialised equipment would help; but most of all, a trained support teacher in the classroom would make all the difference.

### **Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- Data gathering is done by a range of agencies and authorities at national, county, and municipal levels and by some NGOs, but the results are not shared, and different categorisations are used. There is little co-ordination among responsible ministries. The OECD categorisation (A, B, C) provides an opportunity to introduce a different approach and encourage better data sharing; the objective is to create a single, reliable database that uses consistent terminology and categories.
- Croatia now has new national standards based on higher-level thinking skills; while this is important in improving the quality of learning, care must be taken that, in a competitive environment, special needs children are not judged by criteria that are inappropriate for them. Teachers say they have problems with assessment and grading (marking) of their SEN students against the national standards of achievement. More guidance is needed.
- Other system barriers mentioned were: (1) From 2007, education in Croatia will become compulsory to the age of 18, but the labour laws still permit youngsters to work from the age of 16. There are concerns that less able or “inconvenient” children – such as those with behaviour problems or ethnic minority children – will not be encouraged to stay in school. (2) Transition from school to work is, in any case, difficult for SEN students and many remain unemployed. (3) Most schools operate on a shift system, which creates particular problems for parents who have to arrange transport for SEN children at irregular times during the day.
- UNICEF and some NGOs (for example, the national NGO “Association for the Promotion of Inclusion”) are working towards non-violent conflict resolution and non-stigmatisation of SEN children and Roma children, as well as adults. Programmes such as “Every Child Needs a Family” (fostering in a family setting) and “Early Childhood Development and Parenting Skills” (post-natal care and family support) are bringing the issue of social inclusion to public attention. Parents, too, are starting to organise themselves, but government must assume primary responsibility to promote and finance inclusive education.
- Too often, the language and terminology used in SEN remain “defectology”-based, and there are some vested interests in special schools and institutions that oppose inclusive education. However, the expertise of these special schools and institutions is greatly needed in mainstream schools trying hard to become inclusive; active outreach and exchange programmes should be encouraged wherever possible.
- The main concerns of teachers are training (both pre- and in-service); heavy workloads; lack of specialised support teachers, materials and equipment; and lack of guidance in assessment of SEN students. The main concerns of parents are transport; building access; advice on helping their child’s development; and most of all, the future of their child as an adult in an increasingly competitive society. In this respect, the practice of offering career guidance to all youngsters with SEN at the end of their compulsory schooling (grade eight) is excellent.

## FYR OF MACEDONIA

### Summary of the initial findings of the FYR of Macedonia National Report (2005)

Generally speaking, segregation of children with special needs is still the rule. There are special schools, institutions and a few special classes within mainstream schools, but the majority of SEN children are not integrated. According to the national report, there are special schools, as well as special institutions (mostly boarding) for children with visual, hearing, and physical and mental disabilities. The downward demographic trend means that fewer children are in the school system, and classes are smaller. Special schools and classes in regular schools are under the Ministry of Education, while residential institutions are partly administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

#### ***Legal Framework***

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified in 1999. The 2002 *Law on Elementary Education* (Article 27) states that elementary schools have an obligation to provide education for SEN children. Students with learning difficulties, as well as gifted children, are included in the definition. Article 5 states: “special elementary schools and classes in elementary schools shall be organised for children with physical and developmental disability” – also that there shall be special curricula and textbooks. SEN students are entitled to free transportation or, if none is available, to free board and lodging in a hostel or with a family. State obligation, however, ends at age 15; although in some cases youngsters can continue in primary (but only in the same school!) until the age of 17.<sup>15</sup>

#### ***Policy review***

SEN is part of the “education development strategy 2001-2010”. This was written in 2000, and at the time only 5% of SEN children were in mainstream schools; indeed it was said that only 20% of children with SEN were in *any* type of schooling. A document called “National Strategy for the Rights in Education of Persons with Handicap” was also under discussion at the time the national report was compiled.

#### ***At-risk and refugee populations***

The introduction of a compulsory pre-school year will help identify children at risk or with SEN. However, according to UNHCR (2005, latest available figures – see Annex 1) there are still 4 300 persons “of concern” (*e.g.* refugees from Kosovo and other displaced persons) in the FYR of Macedonia, 49% of them – about 2 000 - children under 18. It is not clear what is being done to meet their special needs, nor is there specific information about Roma inclusion, either in terms of data or in terms of policy initiatives.

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15. Article 51 of the Law on Elementary Education (2002) states “The liability for regular elementary education shall finish with the end of the school year when a student reaches the age of 15. [However] upon the request of the student or parents, and with the advice of the school pedagogue/psychologist, students above the age of 15 may continue elementary education in the same school until they reach the age of 17.”

### ***Categorisation***

Some institutions and commissions are entitled to diagnose developmental delays up to the age of 26. Various ministries can be involved. Parents may decide about placement. Interestingly, poverty is specifically mentioned as a cause of delayed development through “pauperisation” of vulnerable groups.

### ***Inclusion and integration***

Inclusion and integration is very slow, but slowly progressing. Since 1998, the Ministry of Education has worked on an inclusion project, and in 2005 there were 73 primary schools and 13 kindergartens that included SEN children. A mobile service offers specialist support to teachers who have SEN children in their regular classrooms. UNICEF has also led a project trying to de-institutionalise children and place them in families, either their own or foster families; support is offered and children can go to day centres in their own communities. A project of the Ministry of Education 2006-2010 mentions inclusion. Parents’ councils and parent representatives on school boards can have a say about inclusion.

### ***Obstacles***

Lack of funding: according to the national report, the education budget and numbers of teachers/specialists are actually decreasing. In mainstream schools, there is little support. A legal obstacle exists in that, after age 17, the system has no further obligation towards a youngster with SEN (Article 51, Education Law 2002).

### ***Statistics and indicators***

There is no systematic collection of SEN data, although the national report shows some statistics about special schools and institutions. No data are presented about integration, except that (apparently) there is a decrease in the number of children with SEN in special schools or institutions. Whether this is a result of demographic change or of inclusion in mainstream schools is unclear.

### ***School organisation, pedagogy and curriculum***

Legally, inclusion is possible and attitudes are changing, but progress is still slow. Some schools are trying to remove barriers (*e.g.* for wheelchair access), but the report states that many school buildings are in such poor state that SEN access is not a priority. Curriculum can be adapted (in theory), but according to the national report there is little progress in adapting curricula for individual needs (including SEN). As regards textbooks, there are some very old books (30 years old) for teaching mathematics to children with SEN, but no new materials for teachers to use.

### ***Teacher training***

Specialists trained to work with students with disabilities are trained in the Institute for Defectology (four years), part of the St Cyril and Methodius University Faculty of Philosophy. A defectologist is supposed to be placed in each special class attached to a mainstream school, but this does not always happen. Regular teachers are not trained to work with SEN children. Some courses may now be introduced.

## **Findings of the evaluation visit**

### ***Legal framework***

A legal framework exists, but the discourse seems to take place mostly at policy and “committee” levels. The OECD team heard that “old regulations are still in place...there are dozens of them, and some are mutually contradictory; the rights of children are not respected”. In addition, the education of children with SEN is neglected after the age of 15, although some are allowed remain in primary school until the age of 17 and there is a legal obligation to provide support until the age of 23. The Strategy for Educational Development 2005-2015 does mention inclusion of special needs children, but this Strategy may be rewritten after a change of Minister in 2006. A committee on inclusion is due to be set up in the Ministry (November 2006) to review various options.

### ***Diagnostics and placement***

The approach remains strongly medical, rather than educational and rights-based; and even when children are placed in mainstream schools, they are often kept separate from regular classes. In the special schools, Roma children are over-represented. The Ministry is responsible for the special schools and institutions; local municipalities are responsible for mainstream schools. There is some advantage to schools if they enrol SEN children: one child with diagnosed special needs counts for two, both in terms of per capita funding *and* in terms of determining class size.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Early identification***

In FYR of Macedonia, 98% of babies are born in hospital; therefore practically all children are registered and “in the system”. Pre-schools are the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. When a child reaches compulsory schooling age (“zero” class, pre-primary), local authorities notify parents that they have to enrol their child. However, health and social-service authorities do not systematically pass on information about special needs children; and because not all children attend pre-school in any case, schools have little or no notice of special needs until a child arrives in the “zero” class at age six.

### ***Integration and inclusion***

UNICEF has been working with national NGOs on the special needs issue since 2000. Their “Action Plan for Children” aims at de-institutionalising children, and placing them with families (their own, or adoptive or foster families) instead. There are a growing number of municipal day care centres throughout the country, supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; these day care centres provide care not only for children and adults with special needs, but for other at-risk groups as well. However, the FYR of Macedonia school system is still not able to fully include de-institutionalised children, partly because of lack of funding and physical facilities, but also partly because of public attitudes and weak capacity at local level.

### ***Enrolment and attendance***

Data gathering appears to be weak. Schools report enrolments only once a year (September), but there is no follow-up and actual attendance is not checked systematically throughout the year. The per capita funding mechanism is based on enrolment rather than attendance; thus there is no incentive for a school to

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16. However, visits to schools confirmed that (in practice) class sizes are often not reduced, and no additional support teachers can be hired because of a general freeze on personnel hiring.

report non-attendance or drop-out; for example, if families move or if Roma or SEN children do not attend. (On the contrary – because there is a financial and staffing advantage for a school if SEN children are enrolled, there is a tendency to over-report numbers and under-report absences.)

### ***Teacher training, curriculum and assessment***

The Bureau for Development of Education (BDE – the professional arm of the Ministry) is no longer responsible for in-service teacher training: a “private market” in in-service training is expected to take over, but apparently it is not yet functioning. The BDE remains responsible for curriculum and assessment, but it was not clear to the OECD team to what extent curriculum and assessment standards are adapted for children with various types of special needs.

#### **Box 4. Visits to schools**

The OECD team was able to visit two model schools that have an inclusive approach to special needs education. Both serve children from “zero” (pre-primary) year to grade eight.

School Johan Hajnrih Pestaloci (in Skopje itself) works in two shifts (8:00 a.m. until 12:30 and 1 p.m. until 5:30). There are two children with diagnosed special needs: a boy with cerebral palsy in the “zero” class, and a physically disabled, but highly intelligent girl in grade four (she too has cerebral palsy). There are a few other children in the school who have special needs that are not formally diagnosed, such as children with behavioural and language problems. There is a psychologist, but no other trained specialist permanently on staff, although there seems to be some support from a mobile (itinerant) service at the municipal level.

The girl, now in grade four, did not attend school at all until she was eight years old, and she only came to the school’s attention through a direct approach from her father.<sup>17</sup> The teacher, who has worked with this girl from grade one onwards (22 children in her class), says she received absolutely no training or any other kind of support: “I had to create my own methodology, and make my own materials.” These materials include an innovative set of plasticised cards with numbers and letters (in both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets) to teach arithmetic and reading. “But now she needs a computer...she knows a lot, but cannot communicate – a computer would liberate her and help her progress even faster.” Now the teacher worries because, after grade four, this child will move into grade five, where she will have to cope with a number of subject teachers, some of whom will not be used to working with a disabled child. The other teachers and the children in the school are, however, supportive, and they say that having these two children in the school has helped them understand better the problems faced by SEN children and their families.

The second school visited by the OECD team (P.S. Petar Petrovic Njegos, kol. Idrizovo) is some distance outside Skopje. This school has 700 students; grades zero to four work in two shifts, but grades five to eight have one shift. There are 35 teachers, and the support staff includes a pedagogue who works with the special needs children. There is a special class in the school, as well as a few children integrated in regular classes. Special needs include speech and language problems, behavioural and emotional problems. Few children coming to this school have had pre-school experience, because the nearest pre-school is far away and bus transport is difficult.

The relationship with parents is good. The OECD team met parents of special needs children. The father of one boy says that the family lived in Germany for a number of years; he says his older children speak Albanian and German as well as Macedonian, but because his younger boy did not speak Macedonian “they put him in the special class”, although the boy is of normal intelligence. Another boy has a cleft palate, which causes speech problems. Transporting the boy for speech therapy in Skopje requires a long and tiring bus journey, and because the mother needs to look after other children in the family, the father has to take time off work to take the child to appointments, as well as to and from school. There is hope that a further operation can be performed when the boy is older, which will greatly improve his chances of a normal life.

17. This illustrates how children can “fall through the net” because of a lack of information sharing between health, social affairs, and education authorities. On the other hand, some parents do not want their children to be formally diagnosed as having special needs, because of the stigma that still attaches to SEN. However, this means that, when the child enters school, there is no targeted support and many children and teachers struggle to cope.

**Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- The Strategy for Educational Development 2005-2015 is under renewed discussion at the Ministry, and it appears that the aspects relating to inclusion may be strengthened upon the recommendation of a new committee set up in November 2006. One point that needs attention is the current clause in the Education Law that limits the system's responsibility for children's education to the age of 15, although, in some cases, youngsters can continue (but only in the same primary school) until they are 17. This unnecessarily limits prospects for SEN children, as they may need additional time to acquire employable skills.
- UNICEF's Action Plan for Children, with its emphasis on de-institutionalisation, should be an important part of these discussions. Moreover, formal diagnostic and placement procedures should be rigorously reviewed to strengthen "gatekeeping", so that only as a last resort children can be placed in institutions, avoiding as much as possible separation from their families. This will, of course, require community support to families (e.g. day care centres, opportunities for learning vocational and independent-living skills) and transport where needed.
- As elsewhere in the region, full inclusion of Roma children remains an issue. There is still over-representation of Roma children in special schools and not enough opportunities for them to progress to upper secondary and higher education or to meaningful employment. In addition, UNHCR reports (2005) that there are still 4 320 persons "of concern" (e.g. refugees, stateless persons) in the Republic of Macedonia, 49% of them (>2 000) children under 18. By law, they have a right to education, but only elementary education (Article 9 of the 2002 Law).
- Access to pre-school experience, especially outside the cities, is limited by distance, fees, and lack of transport. This makes early diagnosis of special needs difficult; moreover, primary schools have no access to information about SEN children under the age of six. Better data sharing is essential.
- Teacher training, especially in-service training, is not functioning at the moment because the BDE is no longer responsible for it and the private market is not (yet) filling the gap. Besides, schools have no budget to buy in-service training on the open market; and if full inclusion of SEN children is to become a reality, all teachers in regular schools will need additional training, methodological help, and materials.
- Parents are active and are starting to bring some pressure to bear on the authorities, but the obstacles are many – both systemic and attitudinal.

## KOSOVO

### Summary of the initial findings of the Kosovo Background Report (2005)

According to the background report, there are about 150 000 people with disabilities (OECD, 2006) in Kosovo, but few children with special educational needs are integrated into regular schools. The vast majority still do not have access and slow learners and children in rural areas are also often left out. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is on record as supporting SEN education and inclusion, but thus far there has been no implementation. From 2002, the lead agency designated by the UN to promote inclusion was the “Finnish Support for Development of Education in Kosovo” (FSDEK).

#### *Legal framework*

All forms of discrimination are prohibited, but disability is not specifically mentioned. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international conventions have been signed. The Law on Primary and Secondary Education requires education “for all children”, but there is no separate body of law pertaining to special needs. The Law on Primary and Secondary merely “recommends” that the MEST adopt a policy on SEN by the year 2007. There is, however, a Strategic Plan for Education of Children with Special Needs in Kosovo (2003) – see below.

#### *Policy review*

After the end of the 1998-99 conflict (with Serbia), the parallel (Albanian) and formal (Serbian) school structures<sup>18</sup> had to be integrated, but teacher supply and training were a problem. The national report states that: teachers in special schools are trained in old-fashioned methods, schools have poor infrastructure, and there is a lack of materials; diagnosis and placement are inadequate; transport is not often available, especially outside the towns; funding is scarce; and public awareness is low. However, the MEST does collaborate with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Labour, and there is a Special Education Unit in the MEST, which is involved in setting up “attached” classes for SEN children in regular schools.

#### *Definitions and categorisations*

There is a glossary of terms related to SEN. The term “special needs” is used in Kosovo, although in Albania another term is used (“impaired people”). According to the national report, the plan is to create a diagnostic centre or a team of specialists who will be responsible for assessing and placing special needs children. The intention is that this centre or team will have a less “medical” approach to diagnosis and categorisation, and that placements will be reviewed regularly. It will then be the task of the school to draw up an individual education plan (IEP) with parents’ involvement.

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18. See explanation p. 49 f.

### ***Inclusion and integration***

This is the objective, but not yet the reality, and where SEN children are in regular schools, it remains “integration” rather than full inclusion. The national report states that special schools will gradually be transformed into “resource centres”, in two stages. First, special school teachers will be responsible for integrating SEN children into regular schools. Then, the special school will “change its structure into departments with specialisations”, and teachers, specialists and itinerant teachers will support regular teachers in mainstream schools. The idea of these “resource centres” is central to the current thinking of the MEST. Schools should also build a “network” that can co-ordinate in-service training, monitor IEPs, produce materials, etc.

### ***School organisation***

Pre-school covers nine months to six years of age. Coverage of pre-school is low: only about 3% of the age group is in state-run pre-schools, with perhaps another 1% in private or home-based groups. Early identification of special educational needs is a serious problem. A school preparatory year (ages five to six) is free and compulsory.

In primary schools, opportunities for SEN children have increased, but many are still not in school. There is no school for children with physical disabilities. FSDEK has provided a great deal of in-service teacher training related to special needs education and, according to the national report, 70 specialist teachers were expected to be trained by 2007. The number of “attached” classes is growing rapidly.

With regard to upper secondary education, there is a very high rate of youth unemployment in Kosovo, so youngsters with disabilities have little chance of finding work, even if they complete upper secondary. Vocational education for special needs is not developed: the national report estimates that, of approximately 41 000 students in secondary vocational schools, fewer than 100 students have SEN.

### ***Statistics and indicators***

Data are not systematically collected; the 2005/06 EMIS data include almost no information about special education. The national report’s estimate is that there are at least 12 000 students with mild or severe impairments. Many are not in the system at all. The national report states that in 2001 there were seven special schools and seven attached classrooms in regular schools, serving about 500 children. Now there are more attached classes and the number is growing. There is no special school for children with physical disabilities.

As for special needs students in mainstream schools, the national report states that 2.5% of students in the regular system have SEN. An (undated) table in the report states that there are 11 878 SEN children in regular schools, but it appears that these numbers come from teachers (who may, for example, count a child wearing glasses as being “visually impaired”). In reality, there are a high number of children (even those with diagnosed needs) who do not attend school.

### ***Strategic Plan for Education of Children with Special Needs in Kosovo***

Prepared with the help of FSDEK and approved by MEST in 2003, the emphasis of the Strategic Plan is on full inclusion. The Plan sets out a step-by-step approach, starting with adapting school buildings to allow full participation by SEN children in all aspects of school life. Teacher training and curriculum adaptation are part of the Plan. The reality, however, shows little change from the situation in 2002/03. There is no differentiation in curriculum and teaching for SEN children; attached classes and regular classes are expected to follow the same timetable and national standards, although the IEP should include a modified version of the core curriculum. Teachers are not permitted to reduce the number of hours; the

rationale is that any reduction would jeopardise the eventual inclusion of the child into mainstream education.

### **Kosovo: a special case**

Kosovo remains a particular, and difficult, case, both in terms of its still-uncertain political status and economic development, and in terms of its education system. Much has been written about the “Kosovo conflict” of 1998 and 1999, and does not need to be repeated here; suffice it to say that by the time the conflict ended in June 1999, an estimated 862 000 Kosovo Albanians had left the province for neighbouring Albania and FYR Macedonia. Thousands more remained internally displaced. At the same time, UNHCR estimated that more than 180 000 people – mostly Kosovo Serbs, but also Roma – had left, mostly for Serbia and Montenegro.

After the appointment in 1999 of a UN Special Representative and the establishment of an international civil presence (the UN Mission in Kosovo, or UNMIK) to serve as a de facto interim government, the return of refugees was swift; by the end of 1999, more than 800 000 had returned, although many Kosovo Serbs and Roma remained outside the province. Rebuilding communities and infrastructure – including education – is still a formidable task seven years later.

The following issues are specific to the situation of Kosovo’s education system:

- Between 1992 and 1998, a self-financed shadow or “parallel” Albanian system of education existed alongside the Serb system. Primary school children could, in some cases, continue to use their schools, but if Serb children also attended, the building was divided in half or a shift system was used. Most secondary and all university students, however, had their lessons in private locations. In 1998, there were 266 400 primary, 58 700 secondary, and 16 000 university students in the parallel system. Funding came from an informal taxation system and from trade unions and the Kosovo Albanian diaspora. Although openly conducted and, to some extent, tolerated by the Serb authorities, the classes were also subjected to repression, and the lack of materials and qualified teachers was severe. Quality inevitably suffered, and student numbers decreased sharply, especially among girls and especially at secondary and university levels. It is important to remember that most young people now struggling to find employment in Kosovo or elsewhere had their education severely disrupted and curtailed. Illiteracy, especially among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE) and Albanian populations, is once again a problem.
- Primary school facilities in Kosovo accommodate both primary and lower secondary classes. Until recently, primary schools comprised grades one to eight. Grade nine has now been included in the compulsory years of education and should be taught in primary schools. However, many schools have difficulty in physically accommodating the extra grade. Moreover, the Kosovo Serb education system in Kosovo is still based on Belgrade curricula and education law; thus, the primary school system for K-Serb children is composed of grades one to eight (eight years compulsory education).
- In contrast to demographic declines elsewhere in SEE, the birth rate in Kosovo is high (estimated at 21.6 per 1 000); the infant mortality rate is the highest in Europe (estimated at between 35 and 49 per 1 000 live births). There has not been a population census since 1981; the 1991 census was boycotted by the Albanian population and there has been none since. It is now hoped that a census (planned for 2007) will provide a more accurate picture. However, current estimates are that more than 40% of Kosovo’s present population is under 20 years old; unemployment stands at 57% for Kosovo Albanians, 47% for Kosovo Serbs and 68% for RAE (Petovka, 2005, p. 18). Clearly, these are formidable challenges for any education system. Class sizes (already high, with

many classes having between 30 and 35 students) are bound to keep rising as Kosovo's young population starts to raise its own families.

- The education infrastructure is very poor, due not only to destruction during the 1998/99 crisis, but also to the seven to eight years of under-resourcing while the parallel system went "underground". Moreover, the existing buildings (mostly used by Serb students) were already in poor condition, many without water supply or toilets. While the rehabilitation of school buildings is the MEST's priority and good progress is being made, very few schools (even some of the newly built ones!) have been constructed with the needs of disabled children in mind.
- Currently, no more than 5% of children aged nine months to five years in Kosovo have access to early childhood education and development programmes. Most pre-schools and pre-primary classes are located in urban centres. Since state-provided rural early childhood education services – such as pre-schools or kindergartens – did not exist during the previous administration, parents in rural areas know little about the value of early learning. The MEST aimed to increase children's access to early learning programmes to 25% by 2005, but this has not been achieved. The latest available figures (2003-04) indicate that about 5 000 children attended pre-schools (up to age five), and another 20 750 attended the compulsory pre-primary year (ages five to six). Almost no Roma children (only 17 in pre-school and 50 in pre-primary) attended. Nine municipalities had no pre-schools at all, according to figures provided by EMIS (MEST/EMIS, 2006).
- Drop-out, non-attendance, and non-completion are serious issues. Data are not available and/or unreliable, but in 2000 it was estimated that only about 80% of compulsory-school age children (7 to 15) were in school; for upper secondary (16-18), enrolments dropped to 38%. There is a steady erosion of school attendance as a cohort moves through the system. No "school record" system exists that ensures that children ceasing to attend in one part of Kosovo are enrolled again elsewhere: records are not transferred, and many children are "lost", either as their families move around within Kosovo or emigrate to other countries. Children from non-Serb minority communities (Roma, Ashkalia, Egyptian, Turkish, Bosniak and others) have much less chance of being or remaining in school. From these communities, only 77% of children in the age group 6 to 14 are enrolled in school. For girls from non-Serbian minorities, this percentage is 69% only. There is a lack of qualitative data on why children do not attend school. For special needs children, enrolment and regular attendance are even more problematic than for non-SEN children.
- Financing of the school system relies heavily on international donor contributions, and this is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Given the poor state of the economy, the low salaries and the high unemployment rates, income tax collection is extremely limited, and further hampered by widespread tax avoidance. The government's main source of income is from customs and excise duties. This means that the MEST budgets are tightly constrained by limits set by the international donor community, primarily the International Monetary Fund (IMF). For example, the overall size of the teaching force is strictly limited, which makes it virtually impossible to hire support teachers for inclusive classrooms where SEN children are "mainstreamed", even when class sizes are very large (>35 children).

### Findings of the evaluation visit

- The school system is organised on a 5 + 4 + 4 pattern, five years primary, four years secondary, and four years tertiary.<sup>19</sup> There are (OECD, 2006) 952 primary schools grades one to nine, designated either as main schools (537) or satellite schools (415). Nearly all have Albanian as the language of instruction, although 61 schools use Serbian. Classes, especially in urban areas, tend to be large.
- Of the 322 180 students, 96.4% are Albanian. Minority enrolment is low, especially for Roma: fewer than 550 are in school, most of them in Peja and Gjakova; they make up 0.16% of the primary school population. Other minorities fare slightly better; Ashkali, 2 573 students; Egyptians, 1 033; and Gorani (concentrated in Dragash), 1 450 students. In secondary, there were 108 schools in 2002/03, 95 of them Albanian-language. Of the nearly 75 000 students enrolled, only 34 were Roma, 14 Egyptian, 116 Ashkali and 89 Gorani. It is clear from these figures that minority students are under-represented in primary schools and practically absent in secondary. About 41 000 secondary-school students are in vocational schools, and 34 000 in academic secondary (*gymnasium*).
- Generally speaking, Serbian parents do not (yet) send their children to multi-ethnic schools. However, relationships between communities are said to be improving. In some areas, multi-ethnic working groups meet regularly at municipal level. Activities such as summer camps, musical and art events, art exhibitions, games, celebration of “all children’s day”, are events in which the whole community participates (Smudler, 2004). The OECD team did not have an opportunity to observe these activities, but it is hoped that special needs children are routinely included.
- In terms of special needs, very few reliable data are available, something the OECD micro-project is now seeking to rectify. EMIS data for 2005/06 show that there are six special schools: two in Prizren, one in Prishtina and one each in Peja, Mitrovica and Shtime.<sup>20</sup> There are, in total, 64 “attached” classes in Kosovo, serving 396 children, 250 of them boys and 146 girls. According to 2005/06 EMIS data, there are only 94 teachers specialised in SEN, although other figures were given in meetings with MEST officials (perhaps 230). The OECD team was told there is no provision in Kosovo for children with physical disabilities.
- There is, however, a Special Education Unit in the Ministry, which seeks to arrange “attached” classes in primary schools, as well as look after the special (boarding) schools. The Strategic Plan for the Education of Children with Special Needs (2003) is the main document pertaining to SEN. As for diagnosis and categorisation, there used to be “Commissions” similar to those operating in other parts of former Yugoslavia, but at the time of the OECD evaluation visit they were not functioning. The team was told that the intention is to set up a “diagnostic centre” or “team of experts” for each of Kosovo’s 30 municipalities

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19. The pre-primary year for five-to-six-year-olds is free and compulsory. In 2004/05, about 20 000 children were enrolled, 48% of them girls. Because there are no demographic data about the size of the age cohort, it is not clear what percentage of the five to six age group participated in the pre-primary year. Estimates say about 80%, although coverage among minorities is low and fewer girls attend than boys (see EMIS data for 2005/06). In addition, the Kosovo Serb system still functions according to Serbian laws and curricula.

20. No information is given about the types of special needs catered for in these special schools. Some are very small, with the Shtime school having only 10 children.

- It is also the intention, as has been explained earlier, that special schools will eventually be transformed into “resource centres” of specialists who would be able, also through the use of mobile teams and itinerant specialists, to assist teachers in regular schools with the inclusion of SEN children. The idea of these “resource centres” is central to the current planning of the MEST. However, at the time of the OECD visit (January 2007), no resource centres had yet been set up.
- UNICEF has helped to establish 20 community-based early-childhood centres for children between the ages of three and six, staffed by “facilitators” who can liaise with families to improve early identification of special educational needs. Twelve of these centres are now self-sustaining, with the help of municipalities. Inclusive education was also promoted by EducAid (focusing on special needs children) and activities focusing on children from minority groups. Training in special needs education has laid the foundation for inclusive education (attached and integrated classes) and has helped teachers to start recognising and addressing learning difficulties resulting from war trauma or physical and mental abuse. The latter avoids children who only need temporary, additional attention being permanently excluded from the regular system.
- Local NGOs, such as Handikos, are active in trying to locate SEN children who are not in school at all: one survey conducted in eight municipalities discovered a total of 157 school-age children who had never come to the attention of municipal authorities. By conducting media campaigns about child rights and access to education, UNICEF and Handikos – as well as other organisations – are seeking to stimulate community demand for SEN access to education and health services: many parents are unaware of their children’s entitlements and most municipalities do not see SEN access as a priority.

#### Box 5. Visit to “Thimi Mitko” model school in Gjilan

“Thimi Mitko” is a large (3 270 students) primary school, with about 20 children with special educational needs. Of these, six are integrated in regular classrooms: one in pre-primary, one in grade two, two in grade four, and one each in grades six and eight. The school has had an “attached” classroom since 2002, where other SEN children have their lessons. This classroom is well equipped with a computer, books, games and learning materials including a musical keyboard. The director says she hopes that, by 2008, all SEN children will be in mainstream classes. However, the intention is to retain the “attached” classroom as a resource room for one-on-one work with children.

On the day of our visit, three children were in the attached classroom; they were copying capital letters from a printed page by arranging small plastic sticks into the correct shape. A boy with Downs Syndrome was coping quite well, but the sticks were too small and light for a girl with cerebral palsy, who did not have the fine motor skills necessary to manipulate the sticks, although clearly she knew perfectly well what the letters should look like. It would have been easier for her to work with different materials, or to use the computer on the teacher’s desk.

Mainstream classes tend to be large, some having about 35 children. The school works in three shifts, starting at 07:30 and ending at 18:00; each shift lasts three and a half hours, covering about six lesson periods of 30 minutes each. “Attached” classes have a different timetable; if parents have difficulty getting their children to and from school, the municipality provides transport. The school has a full-time pedagogue, trained at the Faculty of Pedagogy and by the FSDEK project, who assists teachers in constructing IEPs in collaboration with parents. The OECD team heard that there is no formal diagnosis or categorisation of SEN: teachers make their own assessments of the children in their classes. According to the MEST’s Strategic Plan, diagnostic “Commissions” will be set up in each municipality, but at the time of the OECD visit, Gjilan did not yet have such a Commission. The director says the materials from the OECD seminars have been shared with all teachers in the school, and some have been translated into Albanian. Some teachers have also benefited from FSDEK or UNICEF training, and other seminars conducted by NGOs.

As for wheelchair access, a concrete ramp has been constructed at the entrance to the building, but it is difficult for the school’s two wheelchair users to move around within the school; nor are there toilet facilities suitable for physically disabled children. The director says the school could accommodate more SEN children, “but first the school

must be renovated". The OECD team pointed out that, with a population of more than 3 000 students, this school – if fully inclusive – could expect that between 250 and 300 children might have SEN, 75 of them with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities. Clearly the present facilities, as well as the overcrowding and the three-shift timetable, do not provide a suitable learning environment for children with special educational needs.

Parents and teachers, however, are positive about providing integrated conditions for the children and there are joint activities where SEN and non-SEN children can play together. The director says that after the war, when the school re-opened, she and the teaching staff went out to speak to parents, and sent questionnaires around the community making parents aware that SEN children could come to "Thimi Mitko", which is one of the most popular schools in Gjilan. There are regular parents' meetings, and they use local media (including television) to raise awareness and support for inclusive education. The most urgent need, as elsewhere, is for training of teachers in applying active teaching methods and adapting their teaching styles to fit individual children; and for support teachers in large mainstream classes, so that SEN children can get the extra attention they need. A reduction in class size is not, at the moment, possible in this popular school.

### Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit

- Data collection is extremely difficult, because there has not been a census for 25 years; and given the constant shifts, displacements, and migrations of Kosovo's population since the 1990s, basic information - such as cohort sizes, student flows, etc. – is often based on estimates. The OECD micro-project, while focussing on special needs, is helping to raise awareness of the need not just for ad-hoc "data gathering", but for a reliable demographic basis for educational planning in Kosovo.
- Because of the low coverage of early childhood education (no more than 5% of children up to the age of five), early identification of special educational needs is a serious problem. There is some collaboration among the Ministries of Health, Social Labour, and Education, but data are not systematically shared. The community-based centres set up by UNICEF are successful in encouraging families to bring their children for health checks, immunisation, nutrition advice and assessment of any developmental problems. The compulsory pre-primary year will also help, to some extent, with earlier identification of special needs; but the most important period is from birth to the age of three. At present, only a small percentage of children benefit from early childhood advice and care, especially among the poor, rural and minority populations who need it most.
- The Strategic Plan indicates that identification and categorisation of special needs will be done by new-style commissions or diagnostic teams, which would include doctors, neuro-psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. The OECD team believes it is important to ensure that these teams include a number of experienced educators, to avoid re-creating the old "medical" type of diagnostic Commissions. If the objective is the identification of special *educational* needs, it seems obvious that this should be done, at least in part, by educators. Another issue is to ensure that placements are reviewed regularly, so that SEN children's learning is not unnecessarily constrained.
- The OECD team heard that there are many "invisible" children who are not being educated at all. Municipalities are often unaware of these children, partly because not all of them have birth certificates or are registered and partly because the population in Kosovo is still in a state of flux after the war. One survey carried out by Handikos in eight municipalities discovered as many as 157 children who were not in school at all. UNICEF is seeking to ensure that every child is registered and has a birth certificate, but once again the absence of reliable demographic data for Kosovo is an obstacle. One solution could be to issue every child with an "electronic passport",

which would make it possible to track the child's educational, health, and domicile details. At present, children whose families move from one municipality to another often simply disappear from the system, because records are not transferred and schools do not know whether a student who has stopped attending is now enrolled elsewhere, or has dropped out. Municipal authorities should keep tighter control, not only of initial enrolment of all children of compulsory school age, but of their regular attendance and progress.

- The social and educational situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo is unsatisfactory, especially for Roma and other groups (Ashkali, Egyptians, Gorani), and especially in terms of early childhood care and education. EMIS data show that coverage is extremely low, with only one municipality (Gjakova) reporting that 17 Roma children were in pre-schools for children up to the age of five; no other municipality had any Roma children enrolled at all.<sup>21</sup> In pre-primary – which is now compulsory! – only 50 Roma children between five and six years of age were reported in 2005/06 (28 in Gjakova, 19 in Peja, one in Rahovec, and two in Istog). Again, more must be done to ensure that *all* children – girls as well as boys – receive at least their compulsory pre-primary year of education. Extension of pre-school provision in rural areas would also help: at present, it appears that nine of Kosovo's 30 municipalities have no state-run pre-schools at all.
- Conditions for learning are difficult for most Kosovo children and teachers, but they are more difficult for children with SEN. Although a state-of-the-art national curriculum framework was designed with international expertise (2002-03), there is an urgent need to “translate” the national standards and curriculum framework into school-level curricula that can be adapted to the needs of a particular school, and to the needs of particular children. At present, it seems that teachers are not allowed to reduce timetables and many teachers are uncertain to what extent they are allowed to change or adapt curricula. The OECD team understands that, in a class of 35 children of varying ability, it is almost impossible for a teacher to adapt the curriculum for each individual child, but more could be done to introduce greater differentiation in content and teaching methods, especially if “inclusive education for all” (rather than mere integration of a few SEN children in an otherwise unchanged mainstream classroom!) is ever to become a reality.
- While low participation and retention of at-risk and disabled children was recognised as a problem, teachers and officials did not perceive it as a “school” problem (*i.e.* one that can be resolved by changes in the way the school works). The expectation is that children will, with a little help, adapt to the school, not the other way round.
- The model school visited, which has an attached class, as well as regular classes in which some children with special needs participate, was positive about the effect of the inclusion of children with special needs. During integrated lessons, students help special needs children in a friendly way. However, observations in the attached class suggested that SEN students were not really challenged according to their individual development plans; they were given simple exercises and learning materials, but, as far as we could see, no demanding learning situations were created that would prepare these children to join mainstream education, as is the plan.
- A related concern is about the lack of support teachers in classrooms, in particular where class sizes are large, shifts provide only 3.5 hours per day of lesson, and where some children will be struggling to keep up with the demands of the curriculum and the time-table. The OECD team

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21. According to 2005/06 EMIS data, only one Ashkali child attended pre-school (in Ferizaj); in pre-primary (five-to-six-year-olds), 104 Ashkali children attended. In primary, Ashkali children do slightly better (2 573 attending), but in secondary only 116 Ashkali were still in school (compared with 34 Roma, 14 Egyptian, and 89 Gorani).

was told that there is no possibility of appointing more teachers as there is a strict limit to the numbers that can be employed. However, since this is the single most frequently mentioned obstacle to inclusion, we believe ways must be found to overcome it. With salaries low and unemployment high, it would appear possible to appoint classroom assistants – perhaps not fully-qualified teachers, but with some special training – where SEN children are integrated in mainstream classes.

- Physical conditions in many school buildings remain poor and even in renovated or newly-built buildings, little thought has been given to access for disabled children: most still have steps and stairs, as well as inadequate toilets. Closer work with architects and construction companies is needed. Moreover, maintenance is often poor, so that even small improvements (such as the installation of a ramp) often fall into disrepair. To a disabled child, this can mean the difference between being able to go to school or having to stay at home.
- In Kosovo, there is concern about trafficking of vulnerable children. UNICEF and other organisations are raising awareness among the population, but the risk is greatest for the poorest, least-educated, and most marginalised children, especially girls under 18. While schools cannot, by themselves, do much about this growing threat to children, they can play a role in making parents and youngsters aware of it. Since only 48% of primary school children (and only 43.1% of secondary) are girls, it is clear that too many girls are missing out on a good education that might make them less vulnerable to being exploited or manipulated. Under the Convention of the Rights of the Child, a “child” is defined as any person under 18 years of age; most victims of trafficking are younger than 18, and therefore entitled to protection. This, of course, applies even more to youngsters with special needs, in particular those with intellectual impairments.

## MOLDOVA

### Summary of the initial findings of the Moldova National Report (2005)

Education is free<sup>22</sup> and compulsory for grades one to nine.<sup>23</sup> Children under the age of three are educated at home and may receive benefits in certain circumstances. Pre-school (three to six) is not compulsory, and is provided in public as well as private pre-schools. Coverage has decreased to 40%. Pre-school (and upper secondary) enrolments have fallen most in rural areas; parents cannot afford the cost, and schools are not adequate (lack of heating, distance from home, etc.) Teachers are scarce – in 2004, 1 900 teachers left the profession due to their low salaries and poor conditions. There are also children without parents/families due to emigration. There are tests at the end of grade nine (*gimnazium*) and grade 12 (lycée or Baccalauréat).

#### *Legislative framework*

Different legal documents apply, but the most relevant here are the National Strategy for Education for All (EFA), 2004-2015, and the assessment/diagnostic procedures of 1994 (Medical-Psychological Pedagogical Councils). Moldova has also ratified the relevant international conventions, e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Salamanca Statement, and the Framework for Action. In the framework of the National Strategy of Poverty Reduction, a pilot programme “Children with Disabilities” was approved in 2002, but it appears not to be aimed at inclusion. The national report also mentions a “quota system” for admission of SEN students to colleges, *lyceums*, and vocational schools.

The Education Law includes special needs education, and the National Strategy mentions it as a priority. Compulsory education is eight years for children with mental disabilities and 10 to 11 years for children with sensory and physical disabilities. The Government, at the request of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other ministries, regulates special education institutions. The “Division for Social Problems” [sic] under the Government Chancellery oversees these institutions, but the education system for SEN children is run by the Ministries of Education, Health, and Labour/Social Protection. In special needs institutions, there may be special classes for children diagnosed with “psycho-pedagogical problems”. Other special needs children (e.g. children in social care or at-risk) may be looked after by the MoE or by local authorities. Children with severe disabilities are looked after in special (residential) institutions run by the Ministry of Labour. However, several pilot programmes are trying to introduce inclusive education and there are special programmes for abused children, orphans and children with psychological problems.

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22. As elsewhere, “free” only means tuition-free, but parents pay for books, meals, and other expenses related to school attendance.

23. Apparently, compulsion lasts eight years for mentally impaired children. This could not be confirmed during the OECD evaluation visit.

### ***Diagnosis and Placement***

This is the responsibility of the Republic of Moldova Medical Psycho-Pedagogical Council. The approach is strongly “medical”<sup>24</sup> and although parents have the right to make the final decision, their (at present, rather theoretical) choice is limited to special institutions, integrated classes, or inclusive classes.

According to the national report (2005), there are 63 special institutions throughout Moldova, run by the Ministry of Education from the state budget, with about 11 000 children. Many special institutions are boarding schools. There is a very small number of day centres. About 35% of institutionalised children are orphans or social orphans and the remaining 65% are from “vulnerable families”. Children with severe disorders are in special boarding schools. The largest category is “auxiliary schools”, of which there are 27. Children can be sent there “after two consecutive years of failure in mainstream schools” on the recommendation of local authorities, in conjunction with the MoE and the Medical Psycho-Pedagogical Council. Sanatorium boarding schools (three) are run by the Ministries of Education and Health, and are meant for children with shorter-term illnesses (6 to 12 months).

Schools for children with behaviour problems are for youngsters in conflict with the law. Offenders can be between the ages of 11 to 14, if ordered by the court. There are also orphanages (Ministry of Health) for very young children between birth and the age of six. The Ministry of Labour and Social/Family Protection is responsible for special boarding schools for children with severe mental disabilities. There are about 3 000<sup>25</sup> of these children, almost 85% from “vulnerable families” (which raises questions about whether such placements are made on the basis of the child’s actual disabilities, or whether he/she is institutionalised for other reasons; see “Findings” below).

### ***Policy review***

Moldova does not, at present, have the financial or human resources to support vulnerable children, including SEN children. There is a National Strategy for Family and Child Protection (2003), and the National EFA Strategy 2004-2015 has identified three priorities – early childhood, SEN, and non-formal education. The Strategy states that Moldova “should develop” education policy for the “integration” of SEN children, with the aim of the “eventual” integration of SEN children in mainstream schools. The Strategy includes not only SEN, but other disadvantaged groups (orphans, children without parental care, abused children, refugee children and children with behavioural problems).

### ***Inclusion and integration***

According to the national report, this is (thus far) not successful in Moldova, due to lack of support from authorities and negative attitudes of parents and teachers. Mainstream and special education systems remain completely separate.

There are some pilot projects run by UNICEF or NGOs, (*e.g.* Child Public Care System Reform) aimed at transforming institutional care into a community-based system, rather than the present institutional system where children lose all ties with their families. UNICEF supports the creation of community-based centres for disabled children in co-operation with local authorities in some counties.

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24. The national report describes the assessment process in some detail, *e.g.* the measurement of “skull size” and other highly normative criteria rather than a whole-child approach. It also appears that this assessment is done only once – the national report does not mention periodic re-assessments.

25. According to available data, there are 11 600 institutionalised students in Moldova, about 3 000 in the institutions for severely mentally disabled children run by the Ministry of Labour and Social/Family Protection and the others in boarding schools run by the Ministry of Education.

There is also an agreement between the MoE, the “Amici dei Bambini-Italia” and “Children’s Friends-Moldova” (2005), called “Social integration of children from residential institutions”. In Chisinau, there is a toy library (*Ludoteca*) where SEN children can mix with others. Save the Children focuses on the right of children to have a family, and runs a programme for deaf children.

### ***Statistics and indicators***

There is an acknowledged need for the gathering of reliable data about SEN. There are numerous calls for this in the legislation and in various strategies, but thus far little has been achieved. The national report contains a table showing the number of children in special schools 2003-2005, but it does not show children with disabilities: it mentions orphans, children whose parents are in mental institutions or in prison, and even children whose parents are “unable to work”, but it is not clear why these (presumably quite “normal”) children should be in special schools where their educational and social prospects are restricted.

### ***Teacher training***

The national report describes the initial and in-service teacher training system. Teachers in regular schools are not trained to teach special needs children, either in their pre-service (initial) training or through in-service seminars or workshops, although some are provided by NGOs. There is some training for teachers in special schools, but the approach is defectology-based and not aimed at integration or inclusion.

### **Findings of the OECD evaluation visit**

- The mainstream and special education systems are almost completely separate, although, according to the Minister, legislation and National Strategies are in place to ensure that “all children have the same opportunities”. In May 2006, the President of the Republic stated that children should be de-institutionalised, but there is little enthusiasm in the school system to make this happen. Generally speaking, few regular schools are ready or willing to take care of SEN children; and special schools have strong vested interests in retaining the “boarding school” structure. Local authorities do not have the resources to adapt school buildings and society (and even some teachers) are not in favour of having SEN children included in the mainstream system. (One proposal mentioned to the OECD evaluation team was to start inclusion with pre-school, and gradually extend the model into primary and secondary schools, but obviously this would take many years. Another suggestion was to set up a “centre” suitable for inclusive summer camps, but thus far no donor has been found to fund this; and in any case a summer camp does not resolve the problem of segregated education.)
- At the time of the OECD visit (November 2006), a “National Plan for Education Reform” was being discussed in Parliament, as well as a “Code” (or “package” of new education legislation).<sup>26</sup> There is a World Bank Rural Education Project, as well as a Fast-Track Initiative (also World Bank) for pre-school and early intervention. The OECD team was told that these new legislative documents and projects will help improve education for special needs children. The 2005 Strategy (based on the National Plan) is related to EU accession, and therefore seeks to align Moldovan practice with EU standards.

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26. “Programul di Reformare a Invatamantului”: this is on the Ministry’s website (in Moldovan), but no text of the “Code” could be found.

- There are good connections between the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Protection and, apparently, since 2005 there have been joint Ministerial meetings. The sharing of data, however, is still problematic; data are gathered at local level, but not necessarily using the same methodology or covering the same populations. From this year, children entering the system will be issued an “electronic passport” that will help track their progress more systematically.
- The involvement of international agencies such as UNICEF and the World Bank has been influential in Moldova, as has the work of national NGOs such as Pro Didactica. UNICEF’s focus at present is on early childhood care and development and on child protection (especially from abandonment and trafficking). As part of social sector reform, UNICEF has an education project aimed at de-institutionalisation, child protection, and early identification using local family services. The World Bank’s Fast-Track Initiative includes a teacher training module (three to five days) about inclusive education. Pro Didactica also has a project related to children without parental care, which is a serious problem in Moldova.<sup>27</sup>

#### Box 6. Visit to National Lyceum “Mihai Viteazul” in Chisinau

This model school has about 1 600 students, including about 20 children with special educational needs, 11 of these with physical disabilities. There is a psychologist, and two sports trainers.<sup>28</sup> The school organises workshops for parents of SEN children, as well as meetings with doctors, psychologists and volunteers who work with SEN students. The University “Ion Creanga” provides methodological help to teachers.

The OECD team met a student with severe physical and speech disabilities who recently graduated from the Lyceum, and is now studying at the IT Faculty of Moldova State University. Before this young man came to the Lyceum, he was in a boarding school for children with locomotor problems, but when he was included in mainstream education at the Lyceum he made swift progress, also thanks to the fact that the school was able to support him with computer and other IT equipment that helped him to communicate. Another student who had been studying at home has now been successfully integrated into the ninth grade of the Lyceum.

Meetings with the director and the teachers, and many classroom observations – ranging from an organic chemistry class to a ballet class and a musical performance – showed a clear commitment to inclusive education. As in other model schools observed by the OECD team, child-to-child relations and mutual support were very good, as was the enthusiasm and care of the teachers working with the SEN children. There are computers for children with physical disabilities and those with language/speech problems.

The parents who came to meet the team were all very happy with their children’s progress and with the support they receive from the director, the psychologist, and the teachers. They have an informal parents’ association, and they meet regularly at activities arranged by the school. There are some social services available at the local level, as well as after-school facilities and sports activities at the school; the swimming pool needs to be repaired, and the municipality has promised to provide funding for this. However, there is no satisfactory wheelchair access even to this “model” school; nor are there suitable toilets, or any lifts or ramps for physically disabled children to move around within the building. Apparently, there is no local-authority money available to improve *this* situation!

#### Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit

- One issue that emerged strongly is that many, if not most, of the children now in special boarding schools are there for reasons unrelated to their own physical or mental health. Indeed the OECD

27. As a result of legal and illegal emigration as parents are looking for work, estimates are that in some parts of Moldova as many as 30% of children do not live with their own families. A considerable proportion of these youngsters end up in special education boarding schools.

28. The Lyceum has an arts, sports, and technology “profile”.

micro-project, which is gathering data about 50 boarding schools in Moldova, reports that among the 8 000 children in these institutions, the largest number (more than 2 000) are there because their parents have disappeared;<sup>29</sup> and other large groups of children are there because their mothers are divorced (1 100), because their families are “disadvantaged” (1 700), because their parents are alcoholics (1 140), or because their parents are in prison, or otherwise unable to care for their children. While it is (usually) better for children to be institutionalised rather than “on the streets”, placing so many perfectly normal and healthy children in special needs boarding schools cannot be defended, especially since such placements carry a certain stigma, as well as educational limitations that will affect these youngsters for the rest of their lives.

- To be fair, the micro-project data covering 50 boarding schools do show that there are mentally impaired students (about 2 000) as well as children with visual, hearing, speech/language, and physical impairments in these institutions; but there are also nearly 1 000 students identified as being “unsuccessful in school” – apparently placed in these schools “after two consecutive years of failure in mainstream schools” as permitted under current legislation. Slow learners and low achievers are not, it appears, welcome in mainstream schools: an attitude that will need to change radically if “inclusive education for all” is to become a reality in Moldova.
- Poverty and mass emigration have placed many children at risk of social exclusion, abandonment, and educational deprivation. Where so many social problems exist, and so many mainstream schools are in serious need of repair, heating, teaching materials, and equipment, inclusion of special needs children in mainstream schools is not seen as a priority and public opinion still favours segregation of SEN children in special schools. Nevertheless, there seems to be more awareness of children’s rights to equality in education and the new legislation supports inclusion. What is needed now is strong financial commitment to make inclusive education possible at governmental, county and municipal levels. It is not the long-term responsibility of international donors or NGOs to ensure that all children in Moldova have equal access to high-quality education – this responsibility rests squarely on elected public authorities, at all levels of government.

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29. It was not possible to determine, from the data shown to the OECD team, how many of these children were abandoned because they were disabled or mentally handicapped; some probably were.

## MONTENEGRO

### **Summary of the initial findings of the Montenegro National Report (2005)**

System-wide reform has been going on since 2000 and there are a number of useful pilot projects and other initiatives. But Montenegro does not have a teacher training facility for special educational needs within its own borders and resources for teachers are few.

There is a network of special institutions, but also some inclusive schools and special classes in regular schools. Classification of “special needs” includes gifted children. Until recently, seven different laws governed special needs, including a separate Special Education Law (1992), but in 2004 a new draft was ratified and incorporated into the General Law on Education.

Only 21% of pre-school age children attend, most of them near primary school age. In primary, the pupil-teacher ratio is about 23 pupils per teacher, but in some areas there is overcrowding, while in others there are very small schools. Compulsory education has been extended to nine years, with children starting at age six. The new system will consist of three three-year cycles and is being gradually introduced (complete by 2009). The new-system schools with their more flexible curricula are suitable for children with SEN, and the intention is to include them in regular classes (where possible).

In kindergartens, children with SEN are usually included in regular classes and there are specialists (psychologists, speech therapists, etc.) to help. A maximum number of SEN children is set for each class. If disabilities are severe, there may also be separate special groups set up for them. In elementary schools, inclusion is already in place in some cases and more are being added. There are also plans to include other types of “at risk” children.

#### ***Legal framework***

The new Law places the education of children with special needs exclusively under the Ministry of Education (MoE). “SEN” means both gifted and “children with developmental disorders”. Montenegro also recognises “at risk” (all children with some risk factor that needs special attention, e.g. a genetic problem or a social problem). Article 9 says that all children are equal in exercising their right to education and it is the school that must adapt to their needs. “At risk”, however, is also interpreted negatively, in that there is a “National Program of Prevention of Unacceptable Behaviour”.

#### ***Policy review***

There are 4% of children with identified special needs integrated into regular schools. Regular schools in almost all major towns in Montenegro have special classrooms with adjusted curricula for children with mild intellectual retardation. For children with moderately severe and severe disorders (about one-third of SEN children in Montenegro) no education is available in regular schools and there are no day care options; these children are either in institutions or not being educated at all. If they are at home, families receive only 60% of the minimum wage (or about EUR 30) as an allowance, but this is irregularly paid; and usually one of the parents has to stay home to look after the child, meaning more loss of income.

Tests/exams are not (yet) adjusted for special needs children. However, at the request of students or parents, SEN children can continue into secondary school even if they have not passed their elementary school exams. The national report also states that, between 1997 and 2005, only seven special needs persons have found employment, out of more than 560 registered with the Employment Office – 30 of them with university degrees.

### ***Categorisation***

Categorisation is done by an expert commission. There are seven categories. The approach is medical, and categorisation is based on one single examination only; there is no continual monitoring or re-categorisation after that.

### ***Integration and inclusion***

In pre-school, inclusion is relatively successful thanks to NGO involvement and a Step-by-Step methodology. IEPs are prepared for SEN children. In primary, in theory the school should adjust its workings to accommodate SEN and in the lower grades (one to three) there is enough follow-up from Step-by-Step to make this at least a possibility. But buildings are not suitable and there is not enough trained staff. Of 161 schools in Montenegro, 10 have 21 special classrooms. The 2004 national report states that, in the “Inclusive Education Programme” (MoE with Save the Children), 12 schools participated and 67 children with diverse needs were included.

### ***Students at risk***

This refers mostly to “unacceptable behaviour”, although some social protection of young people also comes into play – e.g. Roma, displaced children, etc. – especially at pre-school. In compulsory school the emphasis is on drug and alcohol abuse prevention. Students over 14 who have not completed primary can do so in a special programme.

### ***Barriers to inclusion***

Barriers to inclusion include attitudes, prejudice and shame and denial on the part of families – children are sometimes not registered at all. Some teachers and parents of other children are not convinced these children have the potential to achieve and see them as “problems”. Montenegro does not have a register of SEN children and, especially in rural areas, it is not known where some of these children are.

### ***Opportunities for inclusion***

Progressive policies and laws (based on Montenegro’s “Book of Changes”) provide opportunities for inclusion. In addition, Montenegro is a small country and the number of SEN children is not too great. Parents’ participation is improving. However, before a child can enter pre-school he/she needs a doctor’s certificate of the child’s “psycho-physical condition” and because developmental difficulties are treated as illnesses, parents have no legal right to enrol them in kindergartens. It does happen (ad hoc), but changes are now planned to enable SEN children to go to pre-school.

### ***Statistics and Indicators***

As elsewhere in the region, data is poor. The MoE has no reliable information about SEN children in the system, except for Roma, who are defined as a category of children with special needs (language, cultural barrier, migration experience) whose integration into regular schools has already begun with help from NGOs. It is estimated that there are 7 000 children with developmental disorders (this is a statistical estimate, not an actual count). However, the national report states that more than 11 000 students attend

435 classrooms that are said to be “inclusive”, and another 9 000 are in 370 “attached” classrooms and in 21 special classrooms. There are five special boarding schools (one in Kotor with 140 children, and 4 in Podgorica with a total of about 270 children).

### ***MoE co-operation with NGOs***

Save the Children UK has been working since 1996 on training, toy libraries, etc. The Pedagogical Centre of Montenegro and UNICEF are implementing an “Inclusive Education in Elementary Schools” programme (since 2002).

### ***Curriculum, pedagogy and teacher training***

There is now an expert National Curriculum Council that works out the curriculum – 80% central, 5% school-based, and 15% “local community”-based. The draft curricula are not yet adjusted for SEN children. As regards pedagogy, the influence of Step-by-Step and Active Learning makes a difference at pre-school and the in the first grades of primary. Pre-service teacher training does not include enough about SEN, but this may change. In-service training is greatly helped by NGO involvement. There is no university-level preparation in Montenegro for the training of SEN teachers and specialists, but some students can go to Belgrade or Novi Sad in Serbia.

### ***Parents and other helpers***

Parents can stay with their child in the classroom in pre-school; in elementary, parents can help in the classroom (especially if Step-by-Step is used). There are some seminars for parents.

### **Findings of the evaluation visit**

- Montenegro has worked hard on education reform and currently spends 7.2% of GDP on education. The MoE is widely seen as one of the most pro-active and innovative among all the ministries in Montenegro, in particular under its present Minister. There will now be a new unit for Special Needs in the Ministry, and the Bureau for Educational Services (BES) will co-ordinate various SEN projects conducted by donors and NGOs.
- The “Plan of Action for Children 2004-2010” (Republic of Montenegro, 2004) is firmly based on the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). This rights-based approach extends to the education of children of national minorities, ethnic groups such as Roma<sup>30</sup> and those with special needs. Among the indicators used in the Plan are “Children up to the age of 3, particularly those of socially vulnerable groups, have access to nursery”... [with increased] enrolment of children from the age of 3 to primary school age, especially RAE children, children with special needs, and those from socially vulnerable families.” Given that in 2002/03 a total of only 50 RAE children were in pre-schools in Montenegro and that at that time no data were available for SEN children in pre-schools, the need for better access (as well as more reliable data) is obvious.
- The OECD team heard that a number of pre-school age children are in private kindergartens, but because most of these private schools are legally constituted as NGOs, “the Ministry cannot ask for data”. Since these are fee-paying pre-schools, it is unlikely that many children from socially

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30. In Montenegro, the abbreviation “RAE” is used, for Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian ethnic groups. There is also a “Plan for Roma Inclusion”, being developed under the chairmanship of the Deputy Minister with roundtable participation by OSCE, OSI, Save the Children, and UNICEF.

vulnerable groups are enrolled; but it should be possible for the Ministry to request data for statistical purposes.

- The notion of “categorisation” is no longer used. The Commissions are now called “Commissions for Direction”; there are at present 10 of them at local level. They include parents, as well as school psychologists and defectologists, but the approach is no longer “medical”.
- To help families and educators cope with inclusion, the intention is to set up day care centres in collaboration with local authorities, health care providers and primary schools. At the time of the OECD visit there was only one such centre, but the plan is to replicate this successful model, partially funded by municipalities and partly by the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- Another important innovation is the establishment of “mobile teams” of SEN specialists, such as defectologists (mostly from Special Schools), psychologists, speech therapists and other trained staff. At the time of the OECD visit, there were four such teams, one for the north of Montenegro, one for the coastal area, one for the Niksic municipality and one for Podgorica. The Ministry’s intention is that these mobile teams will help speed up change. The relationships with special schools are improving, after some initial misunderstanding of the notion of inclusion as a new concept.
- The involvement of NGOs continues to be a strong catalyst for inclusive education. UNICEF and Save the Children started in 2001, assisting the Ministry with the preparation of legislative and regulatory changes, as well as with training trainers to link special schools with mainstream schools and training teachers in strategies to work with SEN children in regular classes. The involvement of UNDP, UNICEF, of national NGOs, of international NGOs such as OSI (Pedagogical Centre), Save the Children, and of bilateral donors (*e.g.* Finland and Canada) has been essential. This role has not been limited to financial or material support only. Objectives such as inclusive education, equity for disadvantaged and RAE children, open government and grass-roots involvement by parents, teachers and schools (and students themselves) are now reflected in the Plan of Action, in legislative documents, and in “The Book of Changes”, which are the foundations of education reform for the next decade.
- Physical access to school buildings for disabled and wheelchair-bound children remains a problem. The plan now is to renovate three schools in Podgorica, to which a number of “satellite schools” can send physically disabled children who need suitable wheelchair access, lifts and toilets. Eventually there should be such a renovated school in each municipality, with a number of satellite schools sharing the facilities.
- Parent Associations are increasingly active, *e.g.* through a Parent’s Union for special needs education and a national Parents’ Union concerned with general education issues (not specifically special needs).

### **Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- The new Commissions for Direction are taking a less “medical” and more educational and social approach to the assessment of special needs. However, these Commissions need training in shifting to a rights-based, inclusive approach. Save the Children are organising some seminars for the Commissions, but more is needed especially in terms of child rights.
- The issue of finding “invisible children” (*i.e.* those who are not in any type of education) is being addressed, for example, by the Finnish project, by Save the Children and by UNICEF.

Experience shows that municipality-based day care centres are successful in bringing services – health, early-childhood care, nutrition, education – to socially vulnerable families who would not otherwise be reached. At present there is only one such centre (in Niksič), but more are needed. The intention is that municipalities and the Ministry of Social Affairs will share the cost.

- MoE has been successful in raising international funding for a range of activities that support the educational needs of children, including those with special needs, and refugees and IDPs. However, there is now an urgent need for planning and co-ordination among projects. In addition to the appointment of a SEN co-ordinator at Ministry level, it is intended that the Bureau of Educational Services (BES) will co-ordinate all projects aimed at improving provision for special needs children. This is an important step, because there is a danger of fragmentation, not only of effort, but of responsibility, of system capacity, and among ministries including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, as well as municipal initiatives, donor activities, NGOs, and parents' associations. Since 2005, the Finnish project is being co-ordinated by BES, but a more pro-active, planning (not only monitoring) role is needed.
- The mobile teams, and the plans to renovate a number of centrally-located school buildings in municipalities, will make a difference for special needs children and their families. However, the issue of transport (especially in more remote areas) remains problematic for many families, especially socio-economically vulnerable ones.
- Although Montenegro spends a respectable 7.2% of GDP on education, parents are still expected to pay for books, meals and similar expenses. Especially during compulsory schooling – now extended to nine years in Montenegro – this is contrary to the requirements of EFA, the Millennium Development Goals and the CRC, which state unequivocally that basic education is compulsory and free. While the realities of the budget are well understood, school fees are bound to hit hardest in poor and socially vulnerable families, especially those with three or more children.
- Despite the “Action Plan for Roma Inclusion” (headed by the Deputy Minister), the issue of equal educational opportunities for RAE children remains problematic. In addition, the OECD team heard that there are an estimated 10 000 Kosovar Roma still in Montenegro, but that their citizenship status is unclear and their access to health, education, housing and other social services is often ignored (“it is a taboo subject”, the team was told). According to the latest available figures from UNHCR (2005), nearly half a million persons “of concern” live in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo,<sup>31</sup> 21% of them children under 18 (*i.e.* about 100 000 children). It was not clear to the OECD whether the “special needs” of these children are being taken into account in special needs education projects and initiatives.

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31. UNCHR defines populations “of concern” as refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees (returned refugees), internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned IDPs, and “various” (*e.g.* stateless persons). UNHCR does not quote separate figures for Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

## ROMANIA

### Summary of initial findings of the Romania National Report (2005)

#### *Legislative framework*

By law, all Romanian citizens have equal rights to education; public education (during the compulsory phase) is free. Special needs education is part of the general education system. The current Education Law refers to integration of children with “light and medium” disabilities into mainstream education; those with medium, severe, profound, and multiple disabilities are usually in special schools. For special educational needs legislation, the bases are the UN conventions, the Salamanca Agreement, the Standard Rules for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (Rule 6 on education) and EFA, as well as the Constitution. The 1995 Education Law places SEN during pre-school and compulsory school under the Ministry of Education and Research (MER). The Teachers’ Statute says that children with light and medium mental disabilities are integrated into mainstream schools “near their homes.”

#### *New initiatives*

According to the national report, there was a 2005 Government decision aimed at inclusion and EFA. In the same year, a curriculum framework was developed for special schools and for SEN students in mainstream schools. Probably the most important is a Ministerial Order (2005) that restructures the existing education services at *judet* (county) level, promotes mainstream inclusion and the establishment of resource and educational assistance centres. Some special schools will also be transformed into school centres for inclusive education.

#### *Policy review*

“Special educational needs” is interpreted as meaning “supplementary education, complementary to general education, and adapted to the individual; it also implies complex assistance including medical, social and educational aspects.” In addition, SEN could mean disadvantaged children, those in institutions, those in trouble with the law, ethnic minority children, street children, abused or mistreated children, and children with chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes, etc. Apparently, there are major legislative changes underway with regard to mainstream schooling and a curriculum adapted to 10-year schooling.

#### *Integration and inclusion*

Inclusion means breaking all learning barriers and ensuring participation of all who are vulnerable to exclusion. The national report concludes that thus far in Romania, there is mainly “integration” (with support) rather than true inclusion. The support services are inadequate. But a number of international and national projects have made progress: The EU PHARE programme (ended in 2004); National Strategy for Community Action (2004/05) and the National Programme “Together in the same school”.

### ***Categorisation***

Decisions are made by the Commission for Child Protection in each *judet* and in Bucharest.<sup>32</sup> The Complex Evaluation Service makes an assessment, using methods approved by the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoptions. By law, parents have the right to make the final decision about where their child is to be educated and the duty to ensure attendance during compulsory schooling.

### ***Facilitators and barriers***

The main barriers are lack of funds, scarcity of trained people, lack of access to school buildings for physically disabled students and prejudice. Among facilitators, the national report mentions support services, which include itinerant teachers (mobile teams) who assist mainstream schools and teachers in coping with SEN children. They also help construct individual service programmes (ISPs) and their sub-components, personalised intervention plans (PIPs) for students with special needs. With regard to support for minority students: Hungarian is taught in many schools, but so far there is little teaching in Romany (Rom) language, which constitutes a barrier for Roma children especially on entering school.

### ***“Invisible children”***

There are a surprisingly high number of children who, for a variety of reasons, are not in the education system. These include (1) Children with severe or complex disabilities. There are two categories – children who stay at home and never enter school at all; and (2) abandoned children or severely disabled children who are just living in hospitals or centres without education.<sup>33</sup> Other children who may not be in school include those with HIV/AIDS; street children; children whose parents migrate from one place to another without transferring school records; and over-age students (*i.e.* those who are older by three or more years than their class peers). Some over-age youngsters enrol in adult literacy courses. In 2005-06, a new programme for people who did not finish primary was introduced; there is also a programme to complete secondary education. The “Second Chance” programme has an innovative curriculum that allows primary graduates to finish secondary in three and a half years. They receive the same diploma and may also get a vocational certificate.

### ***Statistics and indicators***

As elsewhere in the region, it is difficult to obtain reliable data. The fact that several Ministries are in charge of children with SEN makes it hard to compile a coherent monitoring system, but there is now an awareness of this problem and recommendations have been made, *e.g.* by PHARE. RENINCO-Romania is conducting a micro-project on SEN data gathering in the context of this OECD initiative, and the hope is that the methodology and categorisation used in the micro-project will serve as a model for the MER and for county and local authorities.

### ***School organisation***

Only those with severe, profound or multiple disabilities are accepted in special schools. The curriculum has three components: teaching/learning (in the morning); compensatory or remedial work; and educational activities (in the afternoon). There are upper limits of the number of children in a group depending on the severity of the disability. Students who graduate from special schools may participate in

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32. The OECD evaluation team learned later that each of these Commissions has only one education expert among its members and that there is little or no training in Child Rights.

33. There are now efforts to enrol these children into special schools and develop curricula for them.

national exams and special arrangements are made for them (longer time, use of large-print or Braille). If they pass the *Bac* examination, they can go to university.

### ***School access***

There is an awareness of the needs and some collaboration between the MER and the National Authority for Handicapped Persons, but, in practice, most school buildings have problems not only in terms of architecture, but in terms of equipment for communication (e.g. computers). Awareness of children's rights is also low, as is the preparedness of mainstream teachers. MER and international donors are making efforts; PHARE 2003 has set up a number of resource centres, in a project called "Access to education for disadvantaged groups". Under a "National Strategy for Community Action", the 2004/05 school year was extended with the help of more than 22 000 volunteers; and a pilot project called "I learn as much as I can and would like" is active in 11 special schools, based on activities according to the interests of children.

### ***Teacher training***

The national report shows that a great deal of work has been done to prepare mainstream teachers for work with SEN children, through the MER and with NGO involvement; the Teachers' Centres (CCDs) in various *judets* conduct in-service seminars, not only for teachers, but for parents and administrators.

### **Findings of the OECD evaluation visit**

- It is evident that Romania is making concerted efforts to improve special needs education and to work with the school system, as well as external donors and NGOs, towards integration and eventually towards full inclusion of all children in the mainstream system. As a result, the system is becoming more open and differentiated curricula will allow more flexibility for youngsters with learning difficulties.
- Several of the OECD evaluation team's discussion partners expressed the view that the switch – both in policy and in practice – from special boarding schools to mainstream integration had been too abrupt. The mainstream schools were not prepared; the public and many teachers were not in favour; the local authorities had no budget to provide physical access or extra support staff in the schools. Moreover, parents of de-institutionalised children found little support, for example in getting their children to and from school or ensuring proper medical care in the community.
- Statistics available to the team do show a decrease in the raw numbers of children in institutions (from 53 000 in 1999/2000 to 27 000 in 2002/03); but the corresponding numbers of SEN children now in mainstream schools have only increased from about 1 000 to 11 700 over the same period. This leaves at least 15 000 children unaccounted for. According to the Ministry of Education, these 15 000 are now in mainstream schools "because they had no special needs in the first place." Not only does this explanation, if accurate, raise important child-rights questions,<sup>34</sup> but the team was unable to find evidence that these 15 000 children actually *did* all make the transition into integrated mainstream schools. On the contrary, given the general lack of preparedness in the mainstream system and in the community, it is more than likely that a significant number of these children either did not enter regular schools at all, or found the transition so difficult that they dropped out after a short time.

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34. Some of these children will have had particular difficulties in being "integrated" after prolonged periods of institutionalisation and social segregation. Some also no longer have contact with their families, or have no local connections.

- A great deal of confusion was also generated when, in 2000, special school boarding houses (where children could stay during the week) were abruptly changed into “placement centres”, under the co-ordination of each county’s Child Protection Department.<sup>35</sup> To be able to continue to attend their respective (special) schools, children now needed to be formally categorised as having special needs and accepted by a “placement centre”; some children were not accepted (some lived in other localities and there is no possibility of transferring funds from one county to another) and left without a place to go. Others were more or less dumped in regular schools within the county system, without any support, while yet others had to be formally “institutionalised” (often against the wishes of their parents) to be able to remain in their special schools.
- This illustrates the necessity of careful preparation and ensuring that issues of finance flow, community services such as day care centres, transport, and specialist support in mainstream schools have been resolved before institutionalised children are “integrated” (let alone “included”) in the general school system.
- On the positive side, significant work has been done to develop curricula for special schools (appropriate to the needs of learners with various impairments), curricula for children integrated into mainstream schools. For the latter, a support teacher (if available) together with the class teacher develops an individual services programme (ISP) as well as a component of this programme, the personalised intervention plan (PIP). ISPs are reviewed at least annually, while PIPs are reviewed every three or six months. Especially for children with mild to medium learning difficulties, this approach is reported as showing good results. With the help of suitable equipment (computers) and materials (Braille, audio-visual aids) and learning support, children with physical or sensory impairments can also do very well, but obviously such support materials are not available in all schools.
- Yet in ordinary classrooms with regular teachers, there is still little attention paid to slow learners and low achievers, too little differentiation in setting achievement levels and a tendency to blame the child for “failing”. The assessment system is creating some special conditions for SEN children to take national tests and some work towards a “Contextual Value-Added” approach is being done. At the time of the OECD evaluation visit, the National Assessment and Examinations Centre (SNEE) was assisting a PHARE project in 175 VET schools by preparing learning plans for SEN students. In fact, VET schools have, for some time, taken the lead in creating modularised learning “packages” and occupational standards that are helpful for SEN students in acquiring vocational skills and finding employment.
- In addition to meetings at the Ministry of Education, the OECD team had several meetings with other organisations concerned with SEN, including UNICEF and RENINCO-Romania, an umbrella organisation of 80 NGOs (as well as five university faculties of psychology or social work).
- In 2007, UNICEF-Romania will focus on special needs children, in particular very young ones (from birth to the age of three). One significant issue is that of non-registration of newborns, and non-certification (or non-diagnosis) of special needs during a child’s early years. Romania’s infant mortality rate is still the highest in Europe (18 per 1 000 births), especially among disadvantaged and vulnerable families. Considerable attention is now being paid to this issue. The European Bank has approved a loan of more than EUR 100 million for “birth-to-3” care and development; UNICEF-Romania has set up “multi-functional resource centres” based in former

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35. These “Commissions” have only one education specialist among their membership.

crèches or kindergartens, but with a wider mandate, providing inclusive services to children and their families. UNICEF-Romania is also leading a drive for the registration of newborns, so that they can obtain birth certificates that, in turn, will give them access to a range of social, medical and educational services.

- Special schools have been, and to some extent still are, boarding schools. Many children with no disabilities attend these boarding schools; they mostly come from poor families who could not afford to send them to regular schools and refused to place them in institutions. In 2000, an assessment done by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights (ANPDC) showed there were about 48 000 children in the boarding schools; starting in 2000/01, about 18 000 children with disabilities were "de-institutionalised". Of these, about 5 600 were completely integrated, 4 800 were assigned to special classrooms, and 7 600 continued to attend the same schools now turned into mainstream schools.<sup>36</sup>
- In the 2003/04 school year, there were 11 770 children with disabilities in mainstream schools, according to MER figures. The ANPDC sets this figure substantially lower, at 4 475. Both these figures are substantially lower than the total number (said to be 18 000) transferred from special schools to mainstream schools, confirming the OECD team's concern raised at the Ministry meeting (see above) that many of these children – some say 80% – have dropped out.
- According to current legislation, children with severe or very severe disabilities have the right to be educated at home. ANPDC estimates that by the end of 2004, there were more than 47 000 such children – most of them of compulsory-school age – but only 871 children benefited from home schooling or similar forms of adapted education (UNICEF, 2006a, p. 89).
- The OECD team also had meetings with RENINCO-Romania, a remarkable umbrella organisation including some 80 NGOs, as well as academic faculties and interested individuals. When, in 1991, UNICEF began working with the Ministry of Education on a project called "Inclusion Timișoara", a group of NGOs interested in inclusive education collaborated and eventually (1996) formally established themselves as a legal entity (RENINCO-Romania) forming a network for inclusion. Today, the network includes about 400 people, and RENINCO has an office, a research library and resource centre and permanent, as well as volunteer staff in Bucharest.
- RENINCO is conducting the micro-project on data gathering within the OECD project. As elsewhere, obtaining accurate data is an enormous problem; the micro-project is important because, if successful, it will provide an instrument that can be used around the country in all *judets* and under all local authorities and "Commissions" now in charge of assessing SEN children.
- The OECD team heard that there is no coherent policy on data gathering (or on SEN provision) among various responsible Ministries and that too much still depends on small, local projects run by NGOs: "these are fine in themselves but do not change national policy". Nevertheless, because of its size and visibility, RENINCO is able to lobby at the national level in matters that affect children at risk and those with disabilities. Two main concerns are the lack of co-ordination (especially in a decentralised system), and the lack of attention paid to the financial and resource

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36. Based on an important situation analysis done by UNICEF in collaboration with a wide range of national and international NGOs, as well as the ministries of health, education and social protection, and national agencies responsible for child protection (see UNICEF, 2006a, pp. 84-90).

implications of social inclusion. Another issue that needs more attention is the transition of institutionalised and disabled children to adult life.

**Box 7. Visits to Schools “Gheorghe Cosbuc” and “Andrei Mureşanu”, Oradea, Bihor Judet**

In this *judet*, there were, at the time of the OECD visit, about 500 “mainstreamed” children with certificated special educational needs and only 40 qualified support teachers. The number of children identified with SEN goes up every year, according to local authorities. Fifty percent of the nearly 1 000 institutionalised children in Bihor are in large (>100 children) institutions. Most rural schools in the *judet* do not have specialist support teachers or day care centres for de-institutionalised children.

The first school visited by the OECD team (*Gheorghe Cosbuc*) has 760 students in 36 classes (in four buildings); 63 teachers and nine non-teaching staff. There are 40 children with SEN in regular classrooms; they are divided into four groups and one support teacher is responsible for 10 SEN children. In the Step-by-Step classes, there are three support teachers, each responsible for 8-12 children.

Disabilities include learning difficulties, behavioural problems, speech/language problems, autism, etc. They are evaluated when they enter school, and if necessary an ISP/PIP will be developed. Little information is passed on by pre-schools, except when a child has already been formally “certificated” as having SEN. There are now efforts at early identification (birth to three years old) via the *judet*-level “Commission”, but, in many cases, nothing is known about children until they attend the compulsory pre-primary year (age six to seven). Some parents are reluctant to have their child “certificated”, but other parents want to ensure that the child receives benefits, such as personal assistance and counselling; also in addition, families receive double the amount of child benefits for a certificated child. The team also heard that some children who had been in integrated pre-schools went to special schools when they reached the age of six; parents believe that their children will have better health care and better food there than in an inclusive mainstream school.

The school has a scheme whereby high-achieving mainstream students work with low-achievers and with SEN children, similar to the “Peer Helpers Club” in Osijek.

The second school visited, model school “*Andrej Mureşanu*”, has 553 students, 249 in primary through grade four, and 304 in secondary, grades five to eight. The school has 24 classrooms in three buildings, with a support room for one-on-one or small-group teaching, a library, and a doctor’s office. There are 13 SEN children in 10 classes; disabilities include muscular dystrophy, speech problems, and mild mental retardation. There are three Roma children in this school...“they all come from orphanages because they were abandoned; they have no families”, the team was told. There is no wheelchair access. The school has had an inclusive approach since 2000 and takes part in a number of international pilot projects.

The OECD team heard that, especially at the beginning, teachers were not adequately prepared for the inclusion of SEN children in their regular classes, but with the help of in-service seminars and specialist support teachers helping children (either one-on-one or in the classroom) they feel more confident. However, teachers say (1) classes are too large; (2) there is not enough time to cover even the regular curriculum, let alone work on an adapted curriculum for special needs students; and (3) they are not yet used to developing ISP/PIPs or differentiated teaching methods.

The support teachers say that being responsible for eight or 10 SEN students is very difficult; they (and the parents) believe that a limit of three, or at most four, would be much more effective. The children need time with their special teacher and become much attached to her and they (and the parents) find it frustrating when the teacher cannot spend more time with them at crucial points in their learning.

In a meeting with school leaders and university professors involved in special needs education, the team was told that one of the main barriers to inclusion is the lack of social acceptance. A recent study of attitudes involving 100 teachers, 800 parents of children with special needs, and 100 parents of children without special needs, found that intellectual/learning disabilities are less easily accepted than physical disabilities, especially by parents of non-SEN children. The attitudes of children, by comparison, were far more accepting. One general comment was that inclusive education is not always the best solution for every child and that in some cases it can be detrimental, unless there is strong specialised and social (family and community) support.

A meeting with parents of SEN children showed that the school is important source of advice and support, as well

as education and much-needed socialisation for the children. They confirmed that there is a positive and accepting atmosphere in the school and that the children do well. Their main concerns were about the lack of support teachers' time ("too many children for every teacher"); the scarcity of suitable materials and equipment; the lack of physical access; and the difficulties of transporting children to and from school. They are also fearful for their children's future once they leave this school and later move into adulthood. There is an association of parents with Down's syndrome children in Ordeal, but no SEN parents' association at the school. The director was interested in starting such an initiative, which would be an important liaison between parents and the school.

### Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit

- European integration has started to affect the child care and child protection system. A new law on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child came into effect on 1 January 2005. However, awareness of child rights among professionals dealing with vulnerable groups is still inadequate. This is particularly worrying in the case of the *judet*-level "Commissions" responsible for the assessment and placement of SEN children, especially since only one member of these "Commissions" is an education expert.
- Most needed is a coherent, national strategy for social inclusion among *all* ministries and authorities involved with young people at risk – health, labour, social and family protection, education, housing, and justice – rather than a range of (sometimes contradictory) legal and regulatory documents. For example, a recent survey (Ministry of Justice and UNICEF) found that only one prison (Craiova) offers schooling for young offenders, although it does not use the national curricula. In other prisons, only illiterate children receive literacy lessons. Since 60% of all juvenile sentences (*i.e.* for 14-18 year olds, some still of compulsory-schooling age) are for more than one year, many at-risk children in custody do not receive any education for long periods and on release they fall foul of the MER's "over-age" rule (see below) and cannot return to school. Co-ordinated, strategic thinking between the Ministry of Justice and the MER could resolve such contradictions.
- Although the number of institutionalised children has dropped and the number of those in alternative care (return to family, adoption/fostering) has risen, the relatively abrupt nature of some of these changes (*e.g.* the transformation of boarding schools into placement centres) has left a substantial number of children and families without support and has led to an unacceptable level of drop-out among the most vulnerable. Even if some of these children could be brought back into the system, it may by then be too late for many; for example, if a student is three or more years older than his class peers, he/she is regarded as "over-age" and referred to adult classes (if available). Motivation will be low and future prospects even lower.
- Given that Bihor is among the three counties with the highest absolute and relative numbers of Roma,<sup>37</sup> it was surprising to the OECD team to find almost no reference to Roma inclusion during their visit to Oradea. The model school has only three Roma children (sent to the school from a local orphanage) among its 553 students. The explanation given was that the school is not in a "Roma neighbourhood", which in itself is a comment on the relative segregation of the Roma population in the city. More could be done to break down these barriers.
- The team also found that it is still the practice, even in the model school, for parents to "contribute" financially to the school's resources – not in an obligatory sense, or in large amounts, but as a general expectation, which all parents feel. This, of course, is contrary to the

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37. Romanian National Institute of Statistics, The 2002 Housing and Population Census.

UN Convention on Human Rights and the CRC (to which Romania is a signatory), as well as the Education for All initiative, the Millennium Goals and national legislation. All require that compulsory education must be free. Since one of the main reasons for drop-out is that a family cannot “afford” to send its child to school, it is obvious that there are unacceptable costs involved, even if there are no formal “fees”. While these may not be high in themselves, for a poor family with several children they can be prohibitive, as well as a source of embarrassment.

## **SERBIA**

### **Summary of initial findings of the Serbia National Report (2005)**

#### ***Context***

During the 1980s, Serbia – along with other former Yugoslav republics – started to recognise the rights of children with special needs (UN Decade of the Disabled Person). Serbia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and took part in the EFA initiative. But war and conflict intervened (1992-2000) and Serbia was not part of the Salamanca Agreement (1994) or the Dakar Framework for Action (2000). After 2000, much has been accomplished, although there is still not a fully developed system for SEN. In 2002, an expert group was formed to design such a system, in collaboration with the Faculty of Defectology at Belgrade University.

#### ***Legal Framework***

In 2003, a Charter of Human and Minority Rights and Civic Freedoms was passed, which bans discrimination on the basis of disability. Other legal documents edge towards inclusive education, but there is no explicit mention of it. SEN is not mentioned in the Primary Education Law, but a 2002 amendment refers to special needs and defines the procedure whereby children are thus classified. The 2003 General Law broadens the basis of Serbia's educational philosophy and has implications for SEN children. The term "children who require special social support" is used, rather than disabled or impaired children. In 2004, seven national centres were abolished and replaced with two, one of which (Institute for Improvement of Education and Upbringing) seems to be closest to SEN issues, but it is not explicit. A 2002 law (about financial support for families with children) mentions financial support for at-risk and disabled children.

#### ***Policy review***

All children have to be educated (in primary school) between the ages of 7 and 15. For children with special needs, there are special schools, special classes in regular schools, and some integration in regular schools. As a result of recent reforms, the presumption now is on inclusive education, unless it can be shown that it is in the child's best interests to be in a special school or other special environment. All schools are legally obliged to accept SEN children and teachers and buildings are obliged to adapt. Slovenia and Croatia are mentioned as models.

#### ***Categorisation***

The preferred term now is "children who require special social support", and this includes gifted children, at-risk children and Roma, as well as children with disabilities. Before this change in terminology, categorisation was done by "Boards for Classifying Children with Development Problems". School principals can refer a child to this Board, on the advice of the school pedagogue or psychologist. Such referrals are usually made as a result of the school-readiness examination required by law. Now these

Boards will be re-named Assessment and Guidance and will take more account of social factors. There are 76 such Boards, and four Boards of Appeal.

### ***Integration and inclusion***

The national report describes a “trivalent” approach to inclusion in Serbia – inclusive education, partially inclusive education, and a new-type special school or institution. “Partial inclusion” can mean either special classes in mainstream schools, or mainstream activities in special schools. The new-type special schools would use three types of curricula (A, B and C) in accordance with the ability of children to cope. The national report says this approach needs (1) a strategy, (2) a legal framework, and (3) the preparation of schools, staff, curriculum, and the community.

### ***Facilitators and barriers***

Among the facilitators mentioned by the national report are other reforms that are taking place in education in Serbia; also the network of existing (regular and special) schools. Barriers mentioned are the Law on Primary and Secondary School (1992) and the new Law on the Basis of the Education System (2003), because they do not require inclusive education. The law also does not allow for the curriculum to be adapted, there is not enough co-ordination among ministries and, in any case, there are large differences among the 12 regions of Serbia in terms of economic development and readiness to accept inclusion.

### ***Data collection and categorisation***

A 1986 regulation classifies children into five categories, with a number of sub-groups. In March 2003, the MoE set up a Department for Informatics and Educational Statistics, which should be a help. For now, the only data available are about children in the special school system. The most recent figures (2003: Colin and Markovic, 2004) state that 8 213 children and young people attend elementary and secondary special schools. Of these, about 1 500 are in residential schools. Less than 20% of special school students progress into secondary, usually those with physical or sensory disabilities or mild intellectual impairments. There are also a number of regular schools with special classes. In addition, there are said to be about 8 000 SEN children in mainstream schools, half of them with reading, writing, mathematical or emotional problems. Numbers of pre-school SEN children are not known, but there are some small pre-school groups in special schools and a few inclusive mainstream pre-school classes.

### ***Regular schools with children with SEN***

The national report describes a survey of 97 regular primary schools; this found that about one percent of students have special needs, according to the 1986 categorisation. In these 97 mainstream schools, only 20 defectologists are working. The drop-out rate is fairly high, because there are 1200 SEN children in grade one, but only 800 in grade eight.

### ***School organisation***

The issue here is that SEN children, according to the national report, are systematically separated from their peers and, because special schools are not evenly distributed across the country, children are often separated from their families from a very young age. Also, once a child is in the special system, he/she very rarely gets out, which is a major problem because placing/keeping children in these special schools is, in many cases, quite unjustified. Special schools are reluctant to transfer children into mainstream schools even if their condition improves, because (1) they fear the child may fail in a regular school, and (2) they fear that special schools will have to close if students return to regular schooling. Promotion to higher grades is also a problem, because this is based entirely on the level of achievement in the prescribed curriculum. Secondary special schools concentrate on low-level training rather than

education: the national report says it is practically unheard of for any SEN student to go to university. Technical equipment, including computers, tends to be better in special schools than in regular ones, and teachers earn a little (8%) more. Special school buildings are better adapted for SEN.

### ***Education options for SEN children***

The majority of children with SEN are not in any form of education until the age of six. There are 85 special schools in Serbia (of which five are in Kosovo): 51 called primary schools and 34 called secondary schools. Of these, 33 offer both primary and secondary and only one school offers only secondary. A total of 70 primary and 11 secondary schools have “attached” classes; they have a total of 155 defectologists. There is a need for special textbooks.

### ***Curriculum***

All mainstream schools follow the same curriculum. It is strictly subject-bound – the 2002 Board for Curriculum Development had no fewer than 339 members divided into the subject sub-committees. All work on the curriculum will now be taken over by the new Institute for Improvement of Education (which includes the Centre for Strategic Development and the Centre for Development of Programs and Textbooks). There are, as yet, no special curricula for special schools, although some moves have been made in that direction. Parents are not involved, nor are students themselves or graduates from the special school system.

### ***Curricula for adjusted programmes***

A 2004 document (General Basis of the Educational Programme) proposes some ways of adapting curricula, but, according to the national report (2005), this is not yet happening. Three forms of inclusion are foreseen (see above) – inclusion; partial inclusion; and a new type of special school with A, B and C levels. Each will need a different curricular approach.

### ***Teacher training***

According to the law, defectologists may only teach in special schools and not in regular schools. Pre-school teachers for regular kindergartens are not trained to work with SEN children, although they can get extra training later. The same is true for primary school teachers. The Faculty of Teacher Education in Belgrade offers a course called “Methodology for Dealing with Persons with Mild Development Problems” in the fourth year of teacher training, but this is only for teachers going to special schools. There is no SEN programme for teachers in mainstream schools. Parental involvement is minimal.

### ***Conclusion***

The “trivalent” proposal (inclusion, partial inclusion, new-style special schools with adapted curricula), officially adopted by the Council for Reform in 2003, offers a way forward. In addition, there needs to be a coherent strategy, a legal framework and a plan to reform the Faculty of Defectology, which is expected to happen by 2007. Gradual implementation of the inclusive model is also expected by 2007.

### **Findings of the OECD evaluation visit**

#### ***Strategy***

Inclusive education is part of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) strategy 2005-2010: the National Action Plan for Children also supports inclusion. There are agreements and projects (*e.g.* with

Save the Children, 2005-2008) aimed at mainstreaming special needs children. However, mainstream schools have few resources, so initially it will at best be “integration” rather than fully inclusive education.

There is a “Sector for Special Educational Needs” within the Centre for Strategic Development of the Institute for the Improvement of Education,<sup>38</sup> At the time of the OECD visit, this sector had only one person dealing with SEN and the work seemed to be at a preparatory and “strategic” stage. (In fact, the Director of the Institute said during the meeting that “SEN is not a priority for this Institute”.) Moreover, this SEN sector appears to be formally separate from other sectors and centres within the Institute – *e.g.* the schools network, teacher education and development, textbooks and materials, and even “gifted children” – although clearly *all* of these need to be involved in special needs provision in Serbia. The team was told there is informal communication among staff members, but no joint work across sectors.

### ***Finances***

As per capita funding has not yet been implemented in Serbia, at present there is no financial incentive or benefit for regular schools to accept SEN students, either in terms of extra per capita “weighting” or a reduction in class size. The contributions of large (World Bank, UNICEF and other UN agencies, EU, OSCE, USAID, Open Society and Save the Children) and smaller aid and development agencies over the last decade are widely acknowledged. Without them, inclusive education would probably not have been a prominent part of Serbia’s education agenda, as it now is. However, in the longer term the government will need to assume full responsibility for funding inclusive education for all. The OECD team heard that the plan for the Ministry of Education is to increase the annual percentage of GDP spent on education by 0.4% each year, so that by 2010 it will reach 6%, compared with 3.4% in 2005. Such an increase would provide more resources for special needs and other vulnerable children.

### ***War and displacement***

In Serbia, the effects of the 1999 NATO bombardments and of sanctions and isolation (1992-2000) on children with special needs and their families were severe. Serbia received large numbers of internally displaced and refugee families from other parts of former Yugoslavia, some of whom had children with special needs or conflict-related trauma for whom there was very little support. SEN children placed in institutions outside their home republics were cut off from parental contacts during hostilities (Radoman, Nano and Closs, 2006). The latest available UNHCR figures (2005) still show nearly 100 000 youngsters under 18 as being “of concern”<sup>39</sup> in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. While a relatively small number of these will be formally categorised as having “special educational needs”, most will undoubtedly have difficulties that affect their performance in school. It was not clear to the OECD team what is being done, and by whom, about their “special needs”.

### ***Categorisation***

An agreement among ministries to change the Boards for Classifying Children’s “categorisation” approach to one of “Assessment and Monitoring” had, at the time of the OECD evaluation visit, been agreed by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs, but not (yet) by the Ministry of Education. In meetings, the OECD team found strong support for this social (rather than “labelling”) model, although some feared that the implications of this change had not been fully understood. Greater flexibility in placements, regular re-evaluations of children and continuous monitoring of each child’s progress will require financial and human resources that, at present, do not seem to be available.

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38. The funding for this Institute comes from the Government, not from the Ministry’s budget.

39. UNCHR defines populations “of concern” as refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees (returned refugees), internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned IDPs, and “various” (*e.g.* stateless persons).

### ***Data collection and “invisible children”***

As elsewhere in the region, accurate data are difficult to obtain. The micro-project under this OECD initiative seeks to adapt the five 1986 “categories” to the OECD’s A-B-C model, and to collect current data; however, there is some resistance from schools and parents to the micro-project questionnaires, because of concerns about confidentiality and “stigmatisation”. In any case, at present the focus of the micro-project is on SEN children who are already in the system, while it is probable that the most vulnerable ones are not in school at all, and may not even have birth certificates. A UNICEF report (2001) estimated that around 85% of SEN children remain outside the education system entirely. This figure is disputed by the Ministry, but in a country that has compulsory education for all between the ages of 7 and 15, even a much lower figure would be unacceptable.

### ***Early identification***

Pre-school coverage of the age group three to six is low (21%), and apparently only 1% of SEN children are in pre-school education. There is, at present, no sharing of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Social Affairs or local data on children from birth to age three, which hinders early identification of children with special needs. Local authorities often are unaware of the real situation in their own municipalities: the UNICEF study discovered many children who had either not been registered (at birth) or were kept hidden in families because of social stigma attached to SEN; in addition, apparently there is a rule that children of working parents have priority in pre-school admission, which virtually rules out Roma children, as well as children of the poorest families among the unemployed. Since there is a strong link between pre-school attendance and school success, especially for socially disadvantaged children, such low participation rates have serious long-term consequences.

### ***Roma***

A major concern is the huge over-representation of Roma in special schools or institutions for mentally impaired children. Estimates are that at least 25 to 30% of children in these schools are Roma, while Roma constitute only about 2-3% of the overall population of Serbia. Clearly this cannot be justified on any grounds.

Not only that, but the relatively few Roma children who do manage to attend regular schools show much lower achievement in Serbian language and mathematics tests at the end of grade three. Secondary analysis of these results (Baucal, 2006) shows that about 40% of the achievement gap can be attributed to the lower socio-economic status of their families, their low (and short) experience of pre-school preparation, and similar social factors; but that 60% is due to “the poor level of education offered to Roma students in Serbian schools”. Nearly half of all Roma students enrolled in regular schools are placed in classes for low achievers, compared with 20% of non-Roma; their teachers’ expectations are low, little extra attention is paid to them and they are often offered a “shortened” or “simplified” curriculum. Moreover, the repetition rate for Roma students in the first three grades of elementary school is 11%, whereas the national average for Serbia is 1%. Since repetition is a well-known factor in students’ dropping out (or being “pushed out”) altogether, the chances that a Roma child “survives” beyond grade three or four are much smaller than those of his/her non-Roma class mates.

### ***Teachers***

Teachers in mainstream schools feel they are not prepared for special needs education in inclusive classrooms. A 2003 attitude survey showed that only a minority of teachers were “positive” towards the idea of inclusion – 24% in primary grades one to four, 16% in grades five to eight, and 28% of school directors. The Ministry of Education, as well as NGOs such as Open Society and Save the Children, are

now conducting seminars and developing teachers' guides. Open Society has developed a set of criteria for "good practice" in inclusive education and has set up a network of outstanding inclusive teachers in 10 cities around Serbia who can help local inclusive teams of school directors and teachers. All discussion partners report that teachers need (1) assistance/assistants in inclusive classes; (2) smaller class sizes, and (3) better teaching/learning materials suitable for SEN children.

There is an urgent need to change pre-service (initial) teacher training. In Serbia, the separate special needs education sector and its defectologists are perceived by others, and often by themselves, as the only qualified educators for SEN children. The Faculty of Defectology at the University of Belgrade is on public record (2003) as being largely, but not completely, against inclusive education. Combined with mainstream teachers' lack of enthusiasm and society's ambivalence, this creates a substantial barrier. Perhaps if defectologists were legally permitted to work as teachers in mainstream schools, their attitudes might change, as indeed has already happened in some cases where successful inclusive practices are being modelled.

#### **Box 8. Visit to model school OŠ "Josif Pančić", Belgrade**

This school has 1 470 students in 48 classes, with 70 teachers, 24 low-grade teachers, one psychologist and one pedagogue. The school has been "inclusive" for several years and has good connections with the Developmental Counselling Unit of the local health centre, as well as with the Teacher Training College (several students do their teaching practice in this school) and with a nearby special school.

Teachers working in classes that have students with special needs are now preparing individual education plans (IEPs) in second and third grade, which they find helpful in adapting their lessons (and the children's work) to the capacities of the children. However, the teachers expressed the need for more in-service training (also for mainstream teachers), for example in the development and use of IEPs; in teaching methods and team work; and assessment of SEN students' progress in terms of curriculum and assessment standards set nationally. Materials such as the guide-book now being developed for "good inclusive practice" would be invaluable, not only for the teachers now working with SEN children, but for all the teachers, as well as the parents.

They would also like help with developing music therapy for their SEN children and classroom assistants to help the slower learners achieve their goals. The classes tend to be large and there is very little time (and not enough special teaching material, see above) to give meaningful support to special needs children. However, the overall attitude of the teachers is very positive and dedicated and they believe that inclusive education is effective given good support, good connections with other institutions in the system and good team-work within the school. Parents, too, agree that their children are happy in this school and progressing well.

There is no defectologist assigned to the school, but the special school can be called upon for expert help with SEN children. There are joint activities (clubs, sports) with non-SEN students, fostering greater understanding and acceptance.

#### **Key points emerging during the OECD evaluation visit**

- **Board modernisation:** The evaluation team heard that the Ministry of Education had not yet (at the time of the visit, 20 October 2006) formally agreed to modernising the current Boards for Classifying Children's "categorisation" approach to one of "Assessment and Monitoring/Guidance". Given the general dissatisfaction with the present procedure, which is based on inadequate diagnostic procedures and does not require regular revisions as the child's condition changes, signing this agreement is of great importance. However, training must be given to the Boards in the protection of child rights and in international good practice of inclusive education.

- Early identification: According to several discussion partners during the visit, as well as according to available research, there are still too many “invisible children” in Serbia, especially among the most vulnerable populations. Without a birth certificate and early identification of difficulties, these children are at high risk of long-term disadvantage and social exclusion. The new requirement that six-year-olds must spend at least six months in compulsory pre-primary classes might bring some children to official attention slightly earlier, but the team heard that, thus far, participation has been uneven, especially among poor and rural families. In addition, it appears that the children of employed parents have priority in pre-school admissions, which virtually rules out the children of the poorest (unemployed) families.
- Roma: The situation of Roma children has been discussed in some detail above. It is not acceptable (or statistically possible!) that at least 25-30% (some say 85%) of children in schools for the mentally impaired are Roma, when the percentage of Roma in the general population is about 2-3%. The team was told that parents are given incentives to place their children in these institutions, not realising that by doing this they are effectively closing off their future opportunities to education, employment and social inclusion.
- Access: Even in the inclusive model school visited by the team, physical access for severely disabled youngsters (*e.g.* wheelchair users) is a problem. “Regular” schools without SEN children will, no doubt, have the same problem. School buildings are the responsibility of local authorities, and municipal funding is insufficient to make all schools accessible for all children; however, by law and international conventions, every child has the right to an education in the least restrictive environment possible, and therefore physical access must be made possible in all schools. Unfortunately it was the impression of the team that “official” interest in inclusive education is still very limited, and that SEN access is not considered a priority.
- There is an inevitable tension between the drive for educational excellence (for example, in terms of national standards and Serbia’s performance in international surveys such as PISA) and the right of every child to an inclusive education regardless of ability. Nevertheless, the government and the Ministry have a clear responsibility to provide high-quality education to all children, not just the high achievers.

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**ANNEX A: UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES  
FIGURES FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE**

Country of asylum/residence	Population of concern to UNHCR end-2005	Share of less than 18 year olds	Population for which demographic data is available
Bosnia and Herzegovina	199 967	21%	199 967
Bulgaria	5 218	25%	822
Croatia	15 756	21%	15 736
FYR Macedonia	4 320	49%	2 115
Moldova	1 762	16%	232
Romania	2 720	9%	1 039
Serbia (including Kosovo) and Montenegro	487 998	21%	482 089

Note: UNHCR defines populations "of concern" as refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees (returned refugees), internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned IDPs, and "various" (e.g. stateless persons).

Source: UNHCR (2005), *2004 Global Refugee Trends: Overview of Refugee Populations, New Arrivals, Durable Solutions Asylum-Seekers, Stateless and Other Persons Of Concern to UNHCR*, 17 June 2005, UNHCR, Population and Geographical Data Section, Division of Operational Support, Geneva.

## **ANNEX B: INTERVIEWED PARTICIPANTS**

### ***Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in Southeast Europe***

Interviews with stakeholders, in date order, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia.

***18-21 October 2006***

#### ***SERBIA (Belgrade)***

*Ministry of Education and Sports:*

Ms. Marija JOKSIMOVIC (Senior Executive Officer)  
Ms. Jadranka BUKWA-UROSEVIC (Defectologist)

*OECD Project Administrator:*

Ms. Gordana NIKOLIC (OECD project administrator, Institute for the Improvement of Education)

*OECD model school OS Josip Pancic:*

Ms. Radica GARACA (Headmistress)  
Ms. Spomenka MARKOVIC (Teacher)  
Students, school staff and parents

*Institute for the Improvement of Education:*

Mr. Ljubomir PROTIC (Director)  
Ms. Zvezdana DJURIC (Head of the Department for Strategic Planning)  
Ms. Jukica JANKOVIC (Statistician)  
Ms. Mirjana LUKIC (Statistician)

*UNICEF:*

Ms. Svetlana MAROJEVIC (Project Officer of Belgrade UNICEF Office)

*Open Society Institute:*

Ms. Tatjana STOJIC (Director of Open Society Institute Serbia)

*Model school OS Josip Pancic:*

Ms. Radica GARACA (Headmistress at OS Josip Pancic School)  
Ms. Spomenka MARKOVIC (Teacher at OS Josip Pancic School)  
Students, school staff and parents

**21-24 October 2006**

***MONTENEGRO (Podgorica):***

*Ministry of Education and Science:*

Mr. Slobodan BACKOVIC (Minister)

Ms. Jelena ILIC (Statistician, Ministry of Education and Science)

Ms. Tanja OSTOJIC (International Co-operation Unit, Ministry of Education and Science)

Ms. Ana GREGO (Former PISA co-ordinator Montenegro)

Ms. Tamara MILIC (OECD project administrator, school psychologist of Stampar Makarije School)

*OECD model school Stampar Makarije:*

Ms. Dragana DMITROVIC (Headmistress of Stampar Makarije School)

Ms. Anita GRANIC (Teacher at Stampar Makarije School)

*UNICEF:*

Ms. Branka KOVACEVIC (Officer in Charge of Podgorica UNICEF office)

*Open Society Institute:*

Ms. Sanja ELEZOVIC (Director of Open Society Institute Montenegro)

Ms. Gordana MILJEVIC (Senior Program Manager of Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute)

**24-27 October 2006**

***FYR of MACEDONIA (Skopje):***

*Ministry of Education and Sports:*

Mr. Suleyman RUSHITI (Minister)

Ms. Desanka UGRINOVSKA (OECD project administrator)

*OECD model schools:*

Ms. Valentina KIEVSKA ANGELOVSKA (Headmistress of school P.S. Petar Petrovic Njegos)

Ms. XY STRUMKA (Headmistress of model school Johan Hajnrih Pestaloci)

Ms. Marija MIRTEVA (School Pedagogue of model school Johan Hajnrih Pestaloci)

Students, school staff and parents

*UNICEF:*

Ms. Isabella CASTROGIOVANNI (Programme Officer Skopje UNICEF Office)

Ms. Nora SABANI (Skopje UNICEF Office)

Ms. Marcella DELUCA (Consultant)

*EDUCAID:*

Ms. Fulvia TOMATIS (Skopje Office)

**27-29 October 2006**

***CROATIA (Zagreb, Osijek):***

*Ministry of Science, Education and Sports:*

Mr. Drazen VIKIC TOPIC (State Secretary)

Ms. Edita RUZIC (Statistical Department)

Mr. Tomislav GOLUBIC (Statistical Department)

Ms. Maja LJUBIC (OECD project administrator, Education and Teacher Training Agency)

*UNICEF:*

Ms. Tanja RADOCAJ (Head of Zagreb UNICEF Office)

*University of Zagreb:*

Ms. Ivana BATARELO (Institute for Social Research)

*Center for Strategy and Development:*

Ms. Petra HOBLAJ (Director)

*OECD model school OŠ Ljudevita Gaja, Osijek I:*

Ms. Aleksandra KRAMPAČ-GRLJUŠIĆ (Headmistress)

Ms. Ivana MARINIĆ (Teacher)

Students, school staff and parents

*Regional government and city administration of Osijek:*

Ms. Mirjana KOLARIC (Education counsellor of the regional administration of Osijek-Baranjska)

Mr. Davor BRUST (Head of department for Education, Culture and Young People of Osijek city administration)

Zdenka ŠUVAKOVIĆ (Administrative counsellor of the regional administration of Osijek-Baranjska)

**29-31 October 2006**

***BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (Tuzla Canton):***

*Ministry of Education and Sports of Tuzla Canton:*

Ms. Zlata ZIGIC (Minister)

Mr. Djulaga HADZIC (OECD project administrator, Ministry of Education and Sports of Tuzla Canton)

*OECD model school Simin Han:*

Mr. Senad OSMANOVIC (Headmaster)  
Ms. Maja MESANOVIC (Teacher)  
Ms. Nermina HUKIC (Teacher)  
Students, school staff and parents

*Tuzla University:*

Ms. Melika SMAJIC (Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation)

**20-24 November 2006**

***ROMANIA (Oradea, Bucharest)***

*Ministry of Education, Research and Youth:*

Ms. Lucretia SIRINIANU (Counsellor to the Secretary of State)  
Ms. Simona NICOLAE (OECD project administrator, department for children with special education needs)  
Ms. Nicoleta ANDRONACHI (Speech therapist, Special School No.1)  
Ms. Doina GYORI (Inspector for teaching students with special needs, Oradea)

*UNICEF:*

Mr. Eugen Vasile CRAI (Project Officer Education, Bucharest UNICEF Office)

*National Assessment and Examination Service:*

Mr. Cristian MIRESCU (Director)

*RENINCO Romania:*

Ms. Ecaterina VRASMAS (President))  
Mr. Traian VRASMAS (Associate Professor))

*OECD model school "Andre Muresanu", Oradea:*

Mr. Erdeli GHEORGE (Principal)  
Ms. Laura MIHAELA-HAVA (Vice Principal)  
Ms. Adriana OPREA (Teacher)  
Students, school staff and parents

*School "George Cosbuc", Oradea:*

Ms. Florica COPACEANU (Headmistress)

*University of Oradea:*

Mr. Chelemen IOAN (Faculty for Pedagogy)  
Ms. Cecilia SAS (Faculty for Pedagogy)

**20-24 November 2006**

**MOLDOVA (Chisinau)**

*Ministry of Education and Youth:*

Mr. Victor TVIRCUN (Minister)

Ms. Victoria ISAAC (Department for International Relations)

Ms. Tatiana TINTIUC OECD project administrator, Department for Education for Children with Special Needs)

Ms. Svetlana ISTRATE (Department for Education for Children with Special Needs)

*State Institute of Continuing Training:*

Mr. Simion CAISIN (Rector)

*OECD model school "Mihai Viteazul":*

Ms. Nelly BEREZOVSCHI (Headmistress)

Ms. Ala VIRLAN (Teacher)

Students, school staff and parents

*Kindergarten for children with special needs:*

Children and school staff

*UNICEF:*

Mr. Mohammed Azzedine SALAH (Programme Officer of Chisinau UNICEF Office)

*Institute for Public Policies:*

Mr. Victor GREMALSCHI (Director)

*KulturKontakt Austria:*

Mr. Reinhard HANNESSCHLÄGER (Education Co-ordinator)

*Association Gaudeamus:*

Ms. Natalia BUGA (President)

**4-8 December 2006**

**BULGARIA (Sofia)**

*Ministry of Education and Science:*

Mr. Asen PETROV (Director of the Department for Education environment and educational integration")

EDU/EDPC(2007)21

Ms. Greta GANCHEVA (OECD project administrator, Head of Department for Integration of Children with Special Educational Needs).

*National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID)*

Ms. Vanya Angelova GRASHINKA – MINCHEVA (Executive Director)  
Mr. Kostadin Kirilov TONEV (Head of Sector International Projects and Programs)  
Mr. Milen Chavdarov ANGELOV (Head of Department Automation of Information Services)

*Open Society Institute Sofia:*

Ms. Petya KABAKCHIEVA (Chair)

*OECD Model school Aleko Konstantinov:*

Ms. Elena BOYADJIEVA (Teacher)  
Ms. Sofia DIMITROVA (Teacher)  
Students, school staff and parents

*Parents Associations:*

Ms. Valentina IGNATOVA (Chairwoman of the Association Together)  
Ms. Maya STOITZEVA (Chairwoman of parents association in the Regional Resource Center, Sofia)

**11-12 January 2007**

***KOSOVO (Prishtina, Gilan)***

*Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:*

Mr. Fehmi ISMAILY (General Secretary)  
Mr. Vedat BARJAMI (Senior Education Officer for Special Needs Education)  
Mr. Enver MEKOLLI (OECD project administrator, Education Management Information System)  
Mr. Gizim AFEMI (Statistical Office)

*Model School Thimi Mitko, Gilan:*

Ms. Drita MALIQI (Headmistress)  
Students, school staff and parents.

*Center Education 2000+:*

Mr. Alexandru CRISAN (Executive President)

*UNICEF:*

Mr. Rob FUDERICH (Head of UNICEF office Prishtina)  
Ms. Aferdita SPAHIU (Education Officer)