Children at Risk and those with Disabilities in South East Europe

- Initial surveys done by nine national teams, and published by OECD in 2006.
  - Participants: Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tuzla); Bulgaria; Croatia; Kosovo; FYR of Macedonia; Moldova; Montenegro; Romania; and Serbia.
- One “model school” set up in each, with a project administrator, and contacts made with policy decision-makers and donors.
Main Objectives of OECD Initiative

- Identification and monitoring of **issues and trends** in Special Needs provision
- Law and policy review
- Creating a “**network**” and contact points throughout SEE
- Conducting **capacity-building** seminars
  (Montenegro, Zagreb, Paris, Jerusalem, Vienna)
- “**Micro-projects**” in data gathering and statistical systems
- Awareness-raising and lobbying

SEN/DDD: Special Educational Needs
Disability, Difficulty, Disadvantage

*Children At Risk* = broadest category; can include children in severe poverty, without parental care, street children, children in prison, at risk of being trafficked or abused, affected by HIV/AIDS…

*Children with Special Educational Needs* = about 10% of school-age population in any country

*Children with (intellectual or physical) Disabilities* = a sub-set of SEN, typically representing 2-3% of school-age population.

Definition/categorisation problem is greatest for the 7-8% of non-disabled SEN children
All require full educational rights for all children

**EFA/MDG: No later than 2015:** full course of free, compulsory primary schooling for all boys and girls

**European Benchmarks: No later than 2010:**
- Percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy in the EU reduced by at least 20% (compared to 2000);
- EU average of max. 10% early school leavers (defined as students leaving before the end of compulsory schooling);
- At least 85% of 22-year-olds in EU have completed upper secondary education.

Main Issues 1

- “Categorisation”. Used to be defectology-driven and strongly medical in approach. Now, a shift towards social/educational approaches.
- OECD’s A-B-C scheme is useful; but may not fit with categories in national legislation. Micro-projects help clarify these issues.
- Legal commitments are in place (Convention on Rights of the Child, Salamanca Agreement etc.) but laws and policies are not always child-rights based, and SEN/DDD provision is rarely reflected in budget priorities.
Concepts of “integration” and “inclusion” are not well understood.

- **Integration** = placing SEN/DDD children in regular classes/schools without changing the system (“the child adapts to the school”)
- **Inclusion** = making changes in the way the entire school works, to include all children, by creating educational settings that respect each child’s rights and capabilities (“the school adapts to the child”).

In SEE, more “integration” than “inclusion”

### Inclusion: Barriers and Facilitators

**Barriers:**
- Lack of money at local & school level
- Lack of data, and lack of data-sharing
- Overcrowding and multiple shifts in schools
- Teachers not trained to work in inclusive settings
- Poor facilities
- Negative public attitudes
Facilitators:

- Clarity in law and policy
- Adequate financing, incl. teacher salaries
- Teaching assistants in large, inclusive classes
- Teacher training in **PRE**- as well as IN-service, so that *every* teacher is familiar with inclusive approaches to teaching and learning
- Reform of curricula and assessment methods to remove *unnecessary* obstacles to achievement
- Public advocacy and awareness-raising

“Child-Friendly Schools”

Findings

1. Priority for SEN provision is declared policy, but is not reflected in **financing**.

2. Provision is *resource-* rather than *need-driven*; poorly targeted; and often lacking in rural and deprived areas.

3. The most vulnerable children are those who are “invisible”, e.g. no birth certificate, no registration, isolated communities…..
4. Services to *families, early identification*, and *data sharing* among authorities are essential (but often lacking).

5. Contacts and *sharing of expertise* between mainstream and special schools are getting better, but the systems are still not sufficiently “porous” and flexible.

5. The position of *Roma children* is particularly difficult, both in general and in SEN education.

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**Recommendations arising from Evaluation Visits**

- Ensure **financing for, and enforcement of**, existing governmental obligations under Conventions/laws/policies.

- Ensure **long-term sustainability**, SEN provision is not “a task for NGOs and donors”, but part of the primary **governmental** obligation to every child.

- Ensure training in SEN for *all teachers* and school directors – especially pre-service training.
Recommendations (cont.)

- Ensure that “categorisation” of children is not in conflict with Child Rights: better “gate-keeping” procedures are needed to prevent unnecessary placements. (The right to regular review, for example, is often ignored.)

- Make better use of expertise in special schools, e.g. via “mobile teams” of specialists, and easier movement of students and teachers between regular and special settings.

Recommendations (cont.)

- **Inclusive schools need** –
  --good physical access, facilities, equipment
  --teachers trained in inclusive methods
  --smaller class sizes, and *teaching assistants*
  --flexible curricula and time-tables
  --minimal use of “shift” systems
  --careful transition from *class* teaching (one teacher) to *subject* teaching (several teachers) – difficult for SEN children!
Recommendations (continued)

- Share good practice via networking. E.g., “Peer Helpers Clubs”, practice teaching by student teachers in SEN settings, parents’ associations, career guidance for SEN students….

- Use the experience of the micro-projects to stimulate a drive to create reliable national data bases, not only of SEN/DDD children in the system, but reaching out to find the “invisible” ones -- and ensure that their educational rights are respected.