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with Special Needs:
Barriers and Opportunities
in Central and Eastern Europe

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Executive Summary

Throughout the world children who have disabilities and many others who experience difficulties in learning have traditionally been marginalized within or excluded from schools. This paper examines the situation in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, focusing in particular on developments that have occurred over recent years and comparing these with overall international patterns.

As a result of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, the challenge of exclusion from education has been put on the political agenda in many countries. This has helped to focus attention on a much broader range of children who may be excluded from or marginalized within education systems because of their apparent difficulties. These may include those who are already enrolled in education but for a variety of reasons do not achieve adequately, those who are not enrolled in schools but who could participate if schools were more flexible in their responses, and the relatively small group of children with more severe impairments who may have a need for some form of additional support.

Given this broad range of children, all of whom may be seen as having special needs, the paper argues that it is essential to consider special education policies and practices in relation to overall educational arrangements within any given national context. This points immediately to a major difficulty facing anybody wishing to summarize international trends in this field. That is to say, when suggesting “patterns”, one must take care to engage with the ways in which children come to be defined as being special within particular places, since a child categorized as having special needs in one country might not be so categorized in another. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the forms of education provided for all children within a given context, including a consideration of which children are given the opportunity to participate in schools and who is excluded.

The analysis of the situation in the region is contrasted with overall international trends. These trends include an emphasis on moves towards more inclusive arrangements whereby schools are reformed in ways that extend their capacity to respond to diversity. However it is important to recognize that, throughout the world, such trends are the subject of considerable debate, not least as a result of arguments made by those who believe that the education of children with special needs can be provided more effectively through separate, specialized provision of various kinds.

The paper provides evidence of similar arguments within the region under consideration. Unfortunately these may act as a barrier to improvement

efforts. Reviewing the information for selected countries in the region, the paper illustrates some other barriers to the improvement of educational opportunities for children with special needs and to providing these opportunities in a way that allows the children to learn alongside others in their local community schools. It indicates how the depressed economic situation and the ensuing shortage of funds in much of the region prevent expenditure on initiatives that would shift provision away from separate special schools. This may be one reason why, in general, it is the richer countries that have been able to introduce a degree of integration into their educational provision, although it is the poorer countries where the eventual improvements in practice and possible cost-savings from effective integration efforts would be of greatest benefit. Meanwhile, a degree of institutional inertia, including that arising from vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo, prevents reform in this area of educational provision. Furthermore, the lack of wider developments of education systems means that reforms in the special needs field are even more difficult. Finally, the inheritance of a dominant medical approach to assessment, categorization and intervention, influenced by the Soviet science of “defectology”, continues to be a major barrier to experimentation.

Nevertheless, the indications are that there is considerable debate in many of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe as to how best to proceed in order to provide effective schooling for all children in these communities. Some of this has been stimulated by contacts that have occurred with individuals and groups from countries outside the region. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize that those in the region have themselves generated agendas for change as a result of internal review processes. Within these discussions very different positions exist, reflecting similar differences to those that exist throughout the developed world. In this sense the systems of Central and Eastern Europe can be said to be “in transition”, much as the systems in most other countries are around the world.

On the other hand, it is also true that certain traditions that are peculiar to the region, particularly the emphasis on “defectology”, dominate the way provision for children with special needs is conceptualized and organized. Thus, as reforms are proposed, it is inevitable that the overall global debates outlined in the early sections of the paper should manifest themselves in a form that seems likely to create further dispute. All of this is likely to lead to some confusion amongst those who are unfamiliar with this wider debate. So, for example, parents, administrators and politicians may be faced, on the one hand, with highly regarded specialists who argue for a policy push to reform mainstream schooling in order to make it more inclusive, whilst, on the other hand, there may be equally eminent voices arguing for an extension of separate spe-

cialized provision. And, of course, this seemingly contradictory advice has to be evaluated within a context of reduced budgets for education and an overall emphasis on raising standards in ways that can be seen to contribute to economic reconstruction.

The paper argues that those within these countries who wish to encourage moves towards more inclusive practices need to be realistic in taking account of the barriers they face. These are likely to take the form of negative attitudes towards certain groups within the community seen as being different, curricula and assessment policies that lack the flexibility to respond to pupil diversity, and the actions of those who, for a variety of reasons, have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo.

On the other hand, the paper identifies traditions and experiences within the region that provide important building blocks for further development. For example, the tradition of providing education opportunities for all members of the community in many of these countries encourages an expectation that this is a matter of right. In addition, the strong emphasis placed on the importance of teacher education is a significant starting point. Then, more recently, the greater focus on community involvement in some parts of the region has fostered an atmosphere within which parent support groups can blossom. Experience in many different parts of the world suggests that such groups are likely to become increasingly concerned with advocacy issues and, as a result, will mobilize political forces that can campaign for improved educational provision for marginalized children.

It is important, too, that Western consultants who become involved in supporting developments in the region take note of these positive starting points. It is suggested that too often such visitors focus their attention on “defects” in what they find, a strategy which is often useful in harnessing resources from international aid agencies. On the other hand, such approaches may be counter-productive when one is attempting to influence policies and practices within a country, particularly when they are coupled with a lack of sensitivity to differences in history, culture and perspectives on disability.

Bearing these points in mind, the paper concludes with discussion of certain issues that experience and research in other parts of the world suggest may have a bearing on the success of attempts to make school systems more inclusive.

The themes of the paper might appear to be only of interest to readers with a specialist background. However, the connections that are drawn between responses to children seen as having special needs and arrangements made for the majority of children mean that the paper’s analysis and argument have direct relevance for all those who have an interest in the improvement of education in the region.

Abstract

Children with disabilities and many others who experience difficulties in learning are often marginalized within or even excluded from school systems. This paper considers the situation in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, examining particular developments that have occurred in recent years and how these compare with overall trends internationally. This analysis suggests certain barriers to progress, including attitudes within communities towards certain groups of children, traditional practices in the field of special education, and the effects of the depressed economic situation within the region. The paper concludes with a consideration of possible opportunities for improvements in provision and an outline of issues that need to be kept in mind.

Keywords: Children with Disabilities, Special Education, Inclusive Education, Central and Eastern Europe

JEL classification: H4, I2, J7



1. Introduction

Throughout the world, children with disabilities and many others who experience difficulties in learning are often marginalized within or, indeed, even sometimes excluded from school systems. This paper provides an overall picture of the current situation with regard to the education of such children in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Specifically, it asks:

- What arrangements are made for children defined as “having special needs”?
- How have these arrangements developed, particularly in recent years?
- How do these arrangements compare with overall international trends in thinking and practice?
- What are the implications of this analysis for future developments?

Clearly this is a very wide and complex agenda. When it is coupled with the size and immense diversity of traditions, languages and cultures represented in the countries under review, the task of this paper clearly becomes a daunting one. For these reasons, the authors have chosen to adopt an approach which attempts to identify overall patterns, including similarities, differences and contradictions, both within and among countries, but in a way that guards against any temptation to over-generalize. So, whilst some general themes are indicated, far more attention is given to illustrating the diversity of current

arrangements through the use of examples.

It is also important to recognize at the outset the limitation of the study in terms of the data used. Put simply, the basis of the analysis provided in the paper has been the information “that was available”, drawing in particular on data collected within the region by UNICEF and other international organizations. As will be explained, this is in itself informative in that it points to the paucity of data upon which policy decisions and improvement efforts are based, suggesting possible avenues for further, more detailed research.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that the approach in most countries in the region towards children with disabilities has been heavily influenced by the Soviet science of “defectology”. Developed in the USSR during the 1920s, defectology concerns both the theory and treatment of disability and is seen as an independent discipline, with its own methods and techniques. The name itself reflects attitudes – a person with a disability has defects that need to be addressed – and emphasizes the discipline’s “medical” approach to disabled individuals, in contrast to those approaches that focus on the influence of environmental conditions.

Defectology is usually associated with the education of children with disabilities in special schools, separated from other children. These schools clearly do not encourage any social integration, particularly when they take the form of large-scale residential institutions of the type that exist in some parts of the region. However, the education of children with disabilities and others who experience difficulties in school (often referred to as “having special needs”) remains a subject of fierce debate in other industrialized countries.

The analysis presented in this paper begins by reviewing overall international trends in special needs education, emphasizing the range of different practices that exist and the main issues that have arisen in recent years. One view sees the “problem” of disability as not something that is wrong with the child but rather something that is wrong with the organization of schools. This “inclusive” approach to special needs education argues that schools should be made sufficiently flexible to accommodate diversity, whether this stems from disability or any other source. Within the region under consideration this argument strikes a particular chord given what has been reported about the rigidity of the school systems inherited from the communist period (Daunt 1993, UNICEF 1998). On the other hand, some argue that, although integration should be achieved where possible, the wholesale inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream classes is not an appropriate road to take in that it may disadvantage the very children it seeks to help.

The discussion, then, focuses particularly on the situation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union. How does

special needs education in the region compare with overall trends in thinking and practice, and what changes have there been in the 1990s? As we will see, significant differences emerge across the region, but the continuation of old practices is very evident in many countries, and a lack of funding to support development is a common problem.

2. International Trends

As a result of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, the challenge of exclusion from education has been put on the political agenda in many countries. This has helped to focus attention on a much broader range of children who may be excluded from or marginalized within education systems because of their apparent difficulties. Such children may include:

- Those who are already enrolled in education but for a variety of reasons do not achieve adequately.
- Those who are not enrolled in schools but who could participate if schools were more flexible in their responses.
- The relatively small group of children with more severe impairments who may have a need for some form of additional support.

Given this broad range of children, all of whom may be seen as having special needs, it is essential to consider policies and practices in relation to overall educational arrangements within any given context. This points immediately to a major difficulty facing anybody wishing to summarize international trends in this field. That is to say, when suggesting “patterns”, one must take care to engage with the ways in which children come to be defined as special within particular places. Put bluntly, a child categorized as having special needs in one country might not so categorized in another. This means that attention needs to be given to the forms of education provided for all children within a given context, including a consideration of which children are given the opportunity to participate in schools and which children are excluded (Booth and Ainscow 1998). Bearing these concerns in mind, one may suggest certain overall trends that seem to be evident in many countries.

The field of special education has developed relatively recently and unevenly in different parts of the world (Reynolds and Ainscow 1994). Its development has involved a series of stages during which education systems have explored different ways of responding to children with disabilities and others who experience difficulties in learning. As a result, special education has

sometimes been provided as a supplement to general education provision, whereas in other cases it may be totally separate.

For a number of reasons, attempting to define the numbers of children who receive special forms of education presents considerable difficulties. In particular, care has to be taken in considering any data that are presented since terminology and categorization systems vary considerably from country to country. Furthermore, in some countries it is very difficult, even impossible, to obtain reliable and recent data. To illustrate these difficulties, figures reported in the same year with regard to children with disabilities in so-called “developing countries” range from 31 million (Mittler 1993), through 117 million (Brouillette 1993) to 160 million (Hegarty 1993). What is beyond doubt is that around the world many children do not receive any form of conventional schooling, including large numbers who have disabilities. Considerable concern also exists about the poor quality of teaching offered to children in many schools, particularly in developing countries (see Levin and Lockheed 1993), whilst in the developed world, although sufficient school places are usually available, the problem still exists of finding forms of schooling that will enable all children to experience success in their learning. Sadly, for too many children their attendance at school is a largely unsatisfying experience, leaving them despondent about their own capabilities and disillusioned about the value of education to their lives (Glasser 1990, Smith and Tomlinson 1989). Indeed, it has been argued that in some countries such circumstances are the major cause of children becoming categorized as having special needs and, as a result, being marginalized in or even excluded from general education (Booth and Ainscow 1998, Fulcher 1989). These realities exist despite the fact that it is now more than 50 years since the nations of the world, speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that “everyone has a right to education”.

A helpful source of data with respect to patterns of special education provision internationally arises out of a survey of 63 countries carried out recently (UNESCO 1995), although once again great care needs to be taken in interpreting the findings because of the way in which data were collected. Overall the evidence from many of the countries in the sample implies that integration is a key policy idea, although only a small number spelled out their guiding principles explicitly. The report suggests that there is a case for “guarded optimism” in that, since UNESCO’s previous survey in 1986, special educational provision has become much more firmly located within regular education at both the school and administrative levels. However, the pattern of provision varies from country to country. In 96 percent of countries the national ministry of education holds sole or shared responsibility for the administration

and organization of services for children with disabilities. Other ministries sharing responsibility are mostly ministries of health and of social welfare. State funding is the predominant source of finance, whilst other funding comes from voluntary bodies, nongovernmental organizations and parents. Most countries acknowledge the importance of parents in matters relating to special educational provision, and some give them a central role in the processes of assessment and decisionmaking. There was also evidence of a substantial increase in in-service training of staff related to special needs. Having said that, the report also warns against complacency in that many countries face fiscal and personnel constraints such that even maintaining the existing level of investment may not be easy. Furthermore, pressures created by more general school reforms in many countries could, it is argued, reduce the priority given to provision for children seen as having special needs.

An analysis of the history of special education provision in many Western countries suggests certain patterns (Reynolds and Ainscow 1994). Initial provision frequently took the form of separate special schools set up by religious or philanthropic organizations. This was then, eventually, adopted and extended as part of national education arrangements, often leading to a separate, parallel school system for those pupils seen as being in need of special attention. There is also some evidence of similar trends in developing countries (for example, see various chapters in Mittler, Brouillette and Harris 1993).

In recent years, however, the appropriateness of having such a separate system has been challenged both from a human rights perspective and, indeed, from the point of view of effectiveness. This has led to an increased emphasis in many countries, both developed and developing, on the notion of integration (Ainscow 1990, Hegarty 1990, O'Hanlon 1995, Pijl and Meijer 1991, UNESCO 1995). As an idea, this can take many forms and in itself remains a topic of considerable debate (see, for example, Fuchs and Fuchs 1994, Norwich 1990).

Such an emphasis, involving attempts to increase the flexibility of response within neighbourhood schools, seems sensible for economically poorer countries given the extent of the need and the limitations of resources (UNESCO 1988). It is also important to recognize that in many developing countries substantial "casual" integration of children with disabilities in local schools already occurs, particularly in rural districts (Miles 1989).

In considering the current scene internationally with respect to integration, we immediately come up against differences of definition. For example, Pijl and Meijer (1991) use the term "integration" as a collective noun for all attempts to avoid a segregated and isolated education for pupils with disabilities. As a result of their survey of policies for integration in eight Western

countries, they suggest that the scope can range from the actual integration of regular and special schools (or classes) to measures for reducing the outflow from general education to special education provision. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to quantify the numbers of pupils with special needs who receive their schooling in integrated settings, particularly if the important distinction is made between locational integration (“being present”), social integration (“mixing with the other pupils”) and curricular integration (“learning together with the other pupils”).

The existence of well-established separate provision in special schools and classes creates complex policy dilemmas, leading many countries to operate what Pijl and Meijer (1991) refer to as “two tracks”. In other words, these countries have parallel but separate segregation and integration policies, something that may well become a trend in Central and Eastern Europe. A rather obvious problem here, of course, is the costing implications of maintaining such parallel arrangements.

In some countries integration still largely represents an aspiration. In Germany, for example, while some pilot initiatives based on the idea of integration are under way, students who are declared eligible for special education must be placed in a special school. In the Netherlands it is reported that almost 4 percent of all pupils aged 4 to 18 attend full-time special schools, although the exact proportion varies with age. So, for example, 7.4 percent of 11-year-olds are in special schools (Reezigt and Pijl 1998). Recent national policies are attempting to change this emphasis. Similar developments in other countries, such as Austria, England and New Zealand, have led to major discussions about the future roles of special education facilities and support services within a system driven by a greater emphasis on integration.

Some countries (for example, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain) have shown considerable progress in implementing the integration principle universally. Here, the local community school is often viewed as the normal setting for pupils seen as having special needs, although even in these contexts the situation often exhibits variation from place to place (Booth and Ainscow 1998, Daunt 1993, Mordal and Stromstad 1998, Pijl and Meijer 1991).

A problem reported from a number of industrialized countries is that, despite national policies emphasizing integration, paradoxically there is evidence of a significant increase in the proportions of pupils being categorized in order that their schools can earn additional resources (Ainscow 1991). As a result of her analysis of policies in Australia, England, Scandinavia and the United States, Fulcher (1989) suggests that the increased bureaucracy that is often associated with special education legislation and the inevitable struggles

for additional resources have the effect of escalating the proportion of children who are labelled as disabled. As an illustration, she describes how in Victoria, Australia, during the 1980s, some pupils in regular schools came to be described as “integration children”. She notes that over 3,000 children were in this category, which had not existed prior to 1984, and that often schools would argue that these pupils could not be taught unless extra resources were made available. It is because of situations such as this, of course, that data gauging changes over time in the numbers of children with special needs said to be integrated must be treated with caution.

Dissatisfaction with progress towards integration has caused demands for more radical changes in many countries (see Ainscow 1991, Ballard 1996, Skrtic 1991, Slee 1996). One of the concerns of those who adopt this view is the way in which pupils come to be designated as having special needs. They see this as a social process that needs to be continually challenged. More specifically, they argue that the continued use of what is sometimes referred to as a “medical model” of assessment within which educational difficulties are explained solely in terms of child deficits, prevents progress in the field, not least in that this distracts attention from questions about why schools fail to teach so many children successfully. Such arguments lead to proposals for a reconceptualization of the special needs task (Ainscow 1991). This suggests that progress will be much more likely when it is recognized that difficulties experienced by pupils come about as a result of the ways in which schools are currently organized and the forms of teaching that are provided. In other words, as Skrtic (1991) puts it, pupils with special needs are “artifacts of the traditional curriculum”. Consequently, it is argued, the path forward must be to reform schools and improve pedagogy in ways that will lead them to respond positively to pupil diversity, seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning. Within such a conceptualization, a consideration of difficulties experienced by pupils and, indeed, teachers can supply an agenda for reforms and insights as to how these reforms might be brought about. However, it has been argued that this kind of approach is probably only possible in contexts where there exists a respect for individuality and a culture of collaboration that fosters and supports problem-solving (Ainscow 1991, Skrtic 1991).

All of this has helped to encourage the emergence of another orientation in many countries, that of “inclusive” education (Sebba and Ainscow 1996). This adds yet further complications and disputes to those that already exist. Driven in part at least by ideological considerations, the idea of inclusive education challenges much of existing thinking in the special needs field, whilst at the same time offering a critique of the practices of general education. Put

simply, many of those who are supporting the idea are raising the question: Why is it that schools throughout the world fail to teach so many pupils successfully? Thus, instead of an emphasis on the idea of *integration*, with its assumption that additional arrangements will be made to accommodate exceptional children within a system that remains largely unchanged, they are arguing for *inclusive* education, where the aim is to restructure schools and classrooms in order to respond to the needs of all children (Ainscow 1995, 1998).

This new, inclusive orientation is a strong feature of “The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education”, agreed by representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations in June 1994 (UNESCO 1994). Specifically the Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are:

“the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.” (page ix)

Implicit in this orientation is a fundamental shift with respect to the way in which educational difficulties are addressed. This shift in thinking is based on the belief that methodological and organizational changes made in response to pupils experiencing barriers to their learning are, under certain conditions, likely to benefit all children, thus linking together the pursuit of equity and excellence (Ainscow 1995). It involves a continuous process of school improvement aimed at using available resources, particularly human resources, to support the participation and learning of all pupils within a local community. In this way those pupils seen as having special needs come to be regarded as the stimulus that can encourage developments towards a much richer overall educational environment.

Moves towards inclusion are also endorsed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically the adoption of the Convention by the UN General Assembly and its subsequent ratification by 187 countries impose a requirement for radical changes to traditional approaches to provision made for children with disabilities. The Convention contains a number of articles which require governments to undertake a systematic analysis of their laws, policies and practices in order to assess the extent to which they currently comply with the obligations they impose in respect to such children.

Article 28 of the Convention asserts the right of every child to education and requires that this should be provided on the basis of equality of opportunity. In other words, the Convention allows no discrimination in relation to

access to education on grounds of disability. Furthermore, the continued justification of the types of segregated provision made in many countries needs to be tested against the child's rights not to be discriminated against, not least in that Articles 28 and 29, together with Articles 2, 3 and 23, seem to imply that all children have a right to inclusive education, irrespective of disability.

Advancing towards the implementation of this new orientation is far from easy, however, and evidence of progress is limited in most countries. Moreover, there is not full acceptance of the inclusive philosophy (see Fuchs and Fuchs 1994, Brantlinger 1997). There are, for example, those who argue that small specialist units located in the standard school environment can provide the specialist knowledge, equipment and support for which the mainstream classroom and teacher can never be a full substitute. In this view, such units may be the only way to provide feasible and effective access to education for certain groups of children.

In summary, then, as we consider educational provision for children with disabilities and those who experience difficulties in learning in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and compare this with international trends, we must recognize that these trends are in themselves riddled with uncertainties, disputes and contradictions. However, what can be said is that throughout the world attempts are being made to develop more effective educational responses for such children and that, encouraged by the lead given by the Salamanca Statement, the overall trend is towards making these responses, as far as possible, within the context of general educational provision. This is leading to a reconsideration of the future roles and purposes of specialists and facilities in the special needs field.

3. Central and Eastern Europe: Context and Data

The complexities of the issues within the field of special needs education internationally are summarized in the previous section. Here, the paper portrays the geographical, socio-historical and educational background of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In view of the enormity and diversity of this region, this is in itself a difficult task. However, for the purposes of setting the scene for the analysis of the situation of special education in that part of the world, it is deemed to be of some importance.

The countries that we are concerned with here are often referred to as "economies in transition" (UNICEF 1997). They are 19 in number: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia (Central Europe); Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia (former Yugoslav

Republic), Albania, Bulgaria and Romania (Southeast Europe); Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (the Baltic States), and Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (CIS). The fact that these countries are in close geographical proximity does not mean they are in any way homogeneous.

It is not within the scope of this paper to give a detailed analysis of the situation of special education in all of the above countries. Indeed, the variety of their systems and experiences cannot be explained in a paper of this length. Consequently, whilst reference is made to many countries, more detailed attention is given to those for which there is more detailed up-to-date information available. These are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and, to a lesser extent, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The differences that exist between these countries will become apparent when one looks at some of the features of their educational systems. At present, their educational developments seem to be heading in various directions (UNICEF 1998). For example, while a country like Slovenia has opted to adopt aspects of the English educational system (its two-tier exam system and a sequence of staged attainments), Hungary and Lithuania have opted to travel a much slower and process-oriented journey involving an educational plan up to the year 2002 and 2004, respectively.

The difficulties encountered in carrying out a cross-country analysis of this sort may already be apparent. These complexities are made clearer by an engagement with the guidelines concerning studies of a comparative nature suggested by Susan Peters (1993) in her book *Education and Disability in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Taken together, they represent a series of challenges to the analysis that is presented in this paper. They are introduced here in order to encourage readers to be sensitive to the limitations of what is presented.

First, Peters argues that the assumption that a country is a homogeneous unit should be avoided. To illustrate the point in relation to the context of this paper, in Russia a generalization cannot be made concerning special schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties since such establishments only exist in 38 of 86 regions (Lubovsky and Martinovskaja 1994). Second, Peters suggests that a historical perspective is vital to a deeper analysis of an educational context. This connects to her third challenge where she draws attention to the importance of linking an analysis of the treatment of people in a particular country with the dominant ideology of that country. It is clear, for example, that in many of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe political ideologies have had a significant influence on the development of educational systems. For instance, in Hungary before 1989, when the

school system was highly centralized, the curriculum was seen as state law and was incorporated into state textbooks (Kozma and Illyes 1993).

A further aspect that has to be taken into account, according to Peters, is the influence of values and religion. Unfortunately, a lack of prolonged and extensive hands-on experience in this region means that, here, such an analysis is largely made on the basis of secondary sources and is therefore brief and superficial.

Peters' final challenge is concerned with the need to take account of the experience and views of those people who are most affected by the situation under review. In the context of this paper, this draws attention to the importance of listening to the "voices" of children with special needs, their families and those who work with them in different capacities. Unfortunately, it has only been possible to hold detailed discussions with a few people who are themselves involved in policymaking, policy implementation and training in a small number of these countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania). Furthermore, it has not been possible to talk directly to any of those currently receiving special educational services in Central and Eastern Europe; nor, as far as we can determine, did any of the available sources draw on such evidence.

In scrutinizing data about countries within the region, one must be very sensitive to the profound differences that exist among them. For example, historians and others have pointed out the limitations of the concept of "Eastern Europe" in any analysis of the region (see Swain and Swain 1993). Traditionally the use of the term was limited to eight or nine countries, that is, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and, at times, East Germany. These countries shared certain geopolitical similarities when they became nation-states in that they were all at one time or another part of the former Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian or Turkish empires. Further commonalities also exist in that these countries have shared a communist system of one form or another from just after the Second World War to the late 1980s or early 90s. However, these similar experiences do not seem to have created the notion of a region that is a single entity (Swain and Swain 1993, Feher and Arato 1991).

The situation becomes further complicated when countries of the former Soviet Union are included in the umbrella term "Eastern Europe". The diversity within the former Soviet Union requires its own space. Here, differences are found in respect to ethnicity, religion and other cultural dimensions. Effectively, these countries remained under direct Soviet rule until the early 1990s. Countries that are today seen as being Eastern and Central European were also under the Soviet political sphere of influence.

These historical and political events have played important roles in educational developments in this region and are often deep rooted. For example, Hungary inherited its school system from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was seen as being “German-like” (Kozma and Illyes 1993). In Germany special schools were established from the 1880s after the Education Act of 1872 (Ellger-Rüttgardt 1995). There was a tradition of strict segregation which affected the social status of children in special provisions. The Hungarian special education system initially based its practice on this German model and even called itself “remedial education”, a term derived from the German “Heilpädagogik” (Kozma and Illyes 1993).

The materials available in carrying out this study have included detailed country reports and statistics from UNICEF and other international organizations, journal articles and books, specific programme reports from non-governmental organizations and various research papers. As we have indicated, the available material is characterized by a general paucity and uneven spread of information across much of the region. This is one of the reasons why a “big picture” cannot be drawn. Whether or not this lack of information is limited to the field of special needs education is not known. However, the place that special education is given in the context of the larger education debate is quite minimal (Gornikowska and Elliot 1996).

The statistics used in the analysis relate to the following three main areas.

- The number of children categorized as having special needs and/or learning difficulties.
- The number of children enrolled in special educational provision or in other institutional care facilities.
- The number or percentage of categorized children who are integrated in mainstream school provision.

The situations described by such statistics provide but a glimpse of the situation that exists in the various countries. Nevertheless they do help in illustrating discrepancies in the definitions, perceptions and the actual figures presented.

Definitions are highly problematic in the field of special needs education. Primarily, there is the problem of the country- and culture-specific nature of the definitions used. Consequently, terms have to be defined within the context of each individual country. There is also the need to look at the socio-political context within which disability is defined. For instance, in one Russian city, Saratov, there has been a marked increase in the number of children categorized as having disabilities. In 1989 there were said to be 2,745, but by 1994 the number had increased to 6,780. This increase was attributed

to the change in the definitions of disability in Russia. The Ministry of Health Care Act in 1991 broadened the definition of disability to include all “inherent and generic illnesses leading to a partial disturbance of life activity and social disadaptation” (Smirnova 1996).

In addition, perceptions differ even within countries, and this can cause havoc when one seeks to present statistics on disability. So, for example, it has been reported that in Hungary each institution has its own criteria of classification (Kozma and Illyes 1993). The category “mental disability” may have been defined using separate medical, educational and social classifications. Since the definitions used may therefore be different, it is not possible to assume a coherent figure when incidence-prevalence data are quoted at the national level.

Issues of perceptions are even more sensitive when “outsiders” carry out surveys using predetermined categories that do not fit the realities within a specific situation. Indeed, many in the field argue that for this reason the idea of a “standard methodology” using global categories is neither possible, nor desirable (for instance, see Booth and Ainscow 1998, Stubbs 1994).

It follows logically that the figures cannot be fully relied upon if problems exist at the fundamental levels of definitions and perceptions. However, there is an even more basic problem in that recent statistics of any kind may not be available for some countries. For example, in Slovenia it is reported that there are no recent figures available for the number of people, of all age groups, that have various special needs (UNICEF 1996). Meanwhile, in Bosnia-Herzegovina there are problems because of destruction caused by war (Cavanagh 1996, UNESCO 1996).

Even where available, statistics are often inconclusive because they are susceptible to omissions. In some cases, for example, certain categories of children are not included in surveys that are carried out (Closs 1996, Cerna 1994, Daunt 1993). Furthermore, since schools provide a vital statistical base, children who are not within the educational system at all are likely to be excluded from most figures. For example, it is estimated that a large percentage of Romany children do not attend school in some countries in the region. In Hungary it has been reported that only 5 percent of the Romany population attend mainstream primary education (Kozma and Illyes 1993). On the other hand the figures in Hungary also suggest that Romany children make up between 30 and 40 percent of the special school population. Clearly, these figures are not able to tell us the full story, though they point to some interesting questions that could be investigated and suggest certain deductions that might be made.

So far the focus has been largely on quantitative data. However, qualitative data are not without difficulties. The problems of perception that plague sta-

tistics are just as evident here (Peters 1993). On the other hand, recent moves in the field of special education away from the so-called “medical model” towards an orientation that places much greater emphasis on the role of context in explaining difficulties in learning have increased the use of qualitative forms of enquiry (Heshusius 1989, Iano 1986). This does not deny the place of statistics in the field of special education, but rather points towards what is perhaps their most useful function, that is, supporting and working alongside more in-depth, qualitative forms of enquiry.

4. Special Education in Transition

The educational systems of Central and Eastern Europe have gone through their fair share of upheavals (UNICEF 1998). So, too, has the special educational subsystem. This part of the paper expands on some of the points which stand out distinctly in the literature for countries which have been examined as part of this study. In particular, consideration is given to the overall context of the general education system, dominant approaches in special needs education, recent developments in the field, excluded groups, and the process of change. All these themes are explored with a view to stimulating discussion and as a basis for making some tentative recommendations.

■ 4.1 *The general education system*

Education systems are often vulnerable to changes that take place at the socio-political and economic levels. Certainly this can be illustrated by the strong influence that Soviet policy had on the educational systems of Eastern European countries. For example, the educational systems in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland saw pre-1989 reforms which appeared to adopt Soviet educational plans, curriculum and textbooks indiscriminately (UNICEF 1997).

In Hungary, the level of control that politics had in the education sphere is well illustrated. The school system was highly centralized and the curriculum seen as state law (Kozma and Illyes 1993). It was presented and given official interpretation in state textbooks. Teachers who did not follow the method and interpretation presented were in danger of being accused of failing to observe state law. To ensure that the teaching was in line with policy, supervisors were sent into schools to assess teachers, although it is difficult to say how strict this was implemented in individual schools. Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate the control that the political system had in schools.

The economic transformation that Eastern Europe is currently undergoing has also had a huge bearing on the education sector. In particular, the transition to a market economy seems to have aggravated the existing socio-economic difficulties (UNICEF 1997, 1998). As a result, the meaning of “basic free education” has undergone significant changes. Across the region, services that were once free or provided for minimal fees are now offered at market prices. In the light of budget constraints, schools are increasingly encouraged to raise their own funds and introduce fees for “extra” services. Local foundations linked to individual schools in Poland and Hungary, for example, run commercial businesses and transfer their profits to the schools. Fees have been introduced, both at primary and secondary levels, for extracurricular activities, elective courses, tutoring and participation in hobby clubs. Meanwhile, availability of textbooks and school supplies has become an acute problem. As a result, children from poorer households increasingly face difficulties in access to schooling (UNICEF 1997).

In Bulgaria priorities for expenditure have largely been linked to economic reform, and in this context building educational structures is seen to be too costly (Tzokova and Garner 1996). The impact of the competitive market economy has often meant that the education system itself moves towards a market-based approach where attainment becomes totally performance related. In such a context there is a growing danger that educational reform will add to, rather than lessen social divisions and inequalities. On the other hand, some have argued that the freer economic situation can benefit systems by, for example, opening the doors for private and church schools which are seen to provide more opportunities to children who have severe learning difficulties (Closs 1992).

Broadly speaking, educational systems in Central and Eastern Europe have been described as being highly academic, rigid and conservative in their uniformity (Johnson 1996). In the Czech Republic, for example, the curriculum has been undergoing change, and so far the concern has been with making each aspect of the curriculum more demanding in the belief that this will raise standards in education (Closs 1992). Similarly, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the curriculum is dense and overloaded, making it difficult for teachers to respond to pupil diversity (UNESCO 1996). More encouraging in this respect, however, are the recent reforms that have led to the introduction of a national core curriculum in Hungary (MCE 1996). Emphasizing flexibility, this new curriculum is seen as a framework which provides the basis for working out more detailed plans at the school level. Particular attention is given to the importance of strengthening minority identities, and principles are laid out as to how the “special needs of challenged pupils” are to be addressed.

Separate institutional provision for children who are perceived as special was largely consistent with other aspects of educational policy in the communist period. The strict streaming of secondary school pupils was associated with their separation into academic, technical and vocational schools (UNICEF 1998). In this sense, the physical separation of different types of pupils was rather taken for granted in education systems in general. And, of course, the lack of flexibility in school curricula and the rigidity in the methods of teaching did not favour the participation of children who might experience difficulties in learning.

Although some recent figures for expenditure on education as a percentage of overall government spending exist for most of the countries dealt with in this paper, it is difficult to say whether there is any correlation between the amount spent on an education system and its ability to be effective in responding to diversity.

■ 4.2 *Dominant approaches to special education*

The influence that Soviet educational philosophy had on Eastern and Central Europe has been widely recognized (see Ajdinski and Florian 1997, Cerna 1994, Vrasmas and Daunt 1997, Csanyi 1996, Gornikowska and Elliot 1996). In the field of special education, the Soviet impact was particularly felt through the theory of defectology originally developed by Vygotsky, a scholar best known internationally for his work in developmental psychology and linguistics. At the Scientific Research Institute of Defectology, in Moscow, he developed “an area of scientific scholarship devoted to problems of diagnosing, educating and rehabilitating children with physical and mental handicap [known as ‘defects’]” (Knox 1989).

Vygotsky utilized disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, sociology and political thought to find effective ways to assess children with disabilities and to determine how progress could be made in the learning process of these children (Daniels 1997). In addition, he directed his theory towards the analysis of the broader social and cultural implications of disability (Knox and Stevens 1993, cited in Daniels 1997). Some believe that his theory addresses the problems that are faced today in attempting to educate children seen as having difficulties in mainstream school settings. Indeed, Vygotsky argued that children with disabilities should not be socially cut off from mainstream society (Daniels 1997) and that they would be better served if they learned in interactive environments (Knox 1989). Thus, a closer analysis of the original theory of defectology shows that the environmental factors which affect the child are seen as being of the utmost importance. For this reason, Knox (1989)

and Daniels (1997) present “defectology” as being closer to what they describe as the “social paradigm”. Within the social paradigm normal functioning is seen as relative to cultural values and beliefs. In addition, the characteristics of students are believed to be both socially constructed and culturally mediated identities (Peters 1993). According to some interpretations of Vygotsky’s work, the two words “socially constructed” are the key to defectology, in that “one of the best learning situations for a child is believed to be in an environment of shared activity” (Yaroshevsky 1989, cited in Daniels 1997).

This interpretation of defectology is, of course, quite contrary to the medical paradigm. It does seem, however, that within the region the term defectology has come to be seen more generally as a means of defining and, indeed, justifying various forms of separate special educational provision. Having said that, it has to be kept in mind that the concept of defectology may well mean different things in different countries. This last point is an important one in highlighting the fact that present trends and practices in special education are often interpreted and applied in the context of a particular area, taking into account unique environmental conditions. It is worth noting, for example, that a number of countries in Eastern and Central Europe did participate in the conference that led to the preparation of the Salamanca Statement, though that does not necessarily mean that the interpretation and application of the principles found in the statement will be identical among and within countries.

It seems reasonable to conclude that in many countries within the region the ideas that have become associated with defectology have encouraged ways of working that are largely consistent with what has been referred to as a “medical paradigm”; that is, “...people are labelled as diseased and separated on the basis of their diagnosis into separate programmes where they are made functional for their place in society as a handicapped person... it concentrates on the individual, at the expense of context” (Peters 1993, page 28). Certainly there is very strong evidence that the scientific nature of the theory of defectology has meant that it has been an influential legacy in the field of special education in many parts of Eastern and Central Europe (Knox 1989). In addition to the strong inclination that special needs education has had towards institutional provision (Wolfensberger 1972), this scientific-medical emphasis has also encouraged the development of practices that have proved difficult to change.

The influence of the medical model in determining which label a child is given has been very strong. In Russia, for example, children said to have mental disabilities are defined in terms of their IQ scores (Lubovsky and Martinovskaja 1994), despite the fact that some of those who have put for-

ward Vygotsky's theory argue that, if a child is not seen holistically, then an erroneous diagnosis will be made (Knox 1989). Meanwhile, assessment is usually seen as leading to a *diagnosis*, thus implying that *treatment* of the perceived disease is a necessity.

The concept of diagnosis is undoubtedly medical in orientation and suggests a narrow, within-child interpretation of educational difficulties. This kind of methodology can have negative consequences for a child and, indeed, for the development of educational provision within a community. In the Czech Republic, for example, a large number of children were considered to be ineducable following a process of formal assessment that they received at the age of 6. Often these children were not even accepted by special schools (Closs 1992).

In some countries, however, processes of assessment are changing progressively, including developments that encourage the involvement of multidisciplinary teams. Parents are also becoming more involved in some areas, however weak their voices may seem by the standards of some Western countries. In Hungary, the 1985 Education Act set up a state committee that determined what kind of a school a child should go to (Kozma and Illyes 1993). The committee carried out medical, psychological and pedagogical tests and evaluated the reports of teachers. With the parents consent, a proposal for placement was suggested. The committee's decision was binding on the parents, and, although the parents could appeal, it was reported that this rarely occurred.

Similar to most countries in Western Europe and North America, the dominant approach to the care and education of children with disabilities has involved provision through various kinds of institutions. This is often associated with a strong belief that children with special needs are best catered for in specialist contexts where there is an emphasis on rehabilitation (Wolfensberger 1972). This is clearly consistent with the ideas of defectology that have placed the issue of disability within the medical field and, as a result, away from other possible forms of assessment and intervention.

This legacy has been so strong in a country like Hungary that legislation pertaining to disability has continued to emphasize medical concepts (Kozma and Illyes 1993). The objective of special education in Hungary has been to prepare children for independent life and general socialization and, in addition, to reduce the disability. This is perhaps best illustrated by the idea of conductive education. This is an internationally known method for correcting physical disabilities that was developed by Andras Peto in Budapest. Since it is so highly specialized a field it is seen as quite separate from other approaches and may not necessarily reflect the general picture of special educational provision in that country.

In most of the countries examined in this paper an institutional-based approach has been used extensively to guide the development of special educational provision. In the Russian Federation, for example, special schools are known as “specialized correcting educational establishments”, the aim of which is to provide education, correct development problems, give medical treatment, and create appropriate conditions for social adaptation. In 1990-1 there were 1,817 of these establishments. There has been an annual increase of institutions such as these, and by 1995-6 there were 1,871, all of this despite the rhetoric of integration. In fairness, however, it also has to be noted that the overall numbers of children in these schools had actually fallen over this period from 312,100 to 270,900.

Different types of institutions concerned with special education exist across the region, and for this reason it is impossible to make generalizations about their nature and condition and about the children who can be found in them (UNICEF 1997). In Romania, for example, there are orphanages, homes for disabled children whose parents cannot give them adequate care, and others for children from dysfunctional families and children seen as having emotional or behavioural difficulties (Daunt 1993, Zamfir 1997). All these children are considered to have special needs. Some schools also specialize in children with particular disabilities; thus, in the 1996/7 school year there were 124 schools for children with mental disabilities, 12 for children with hearing impairments, and three for children with visual impairments (Vrasmas and Daunt 1997). In Lithuania, on the other hand, until recently some children with serious disabilities had no teaching provided for them at all, so they would not have been included in statistics on children in special schools or special classes. (This seems to have been characteristic of the former Soviet Union in general.)

■ 4.3 *Recent developments*

Although the proportions of children placed in institutional establishments within the region are relatively high by international standards, in a country like Hungary it has been argued by some that there are still categories of pupils for whom special schools do not exist, for instance, children with behavioural difficulties, those with various forms of learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, attention deficit), and socially disadvantaged children (Kozma and Illyes 1993). It is also suggested that those with relatively mild difficulties are often integrated into mainstream schools. However, it would be ill advised to assume that the nonexistence of special schools is evidence of moves towards more inclusive arrangements. Special schools are usually

maintained by the state and are more expensive to run than mainstream schools. Therefore, their reduction in number may have more to do with financial policy decisions.

Certainly moves towards the integration of children with disabilities can be found in various countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania. The discussion that follows contains reference to most of these, together with other countries where there is no evidence of significant moves towards integration, or where the situation remains unclear.

Children with disabilities in the Czech Republic have been progressively integrated into regular schools since 1990, both in ordinary and special classes (Gargiulo, Cerna and Hilton 1997). However, despite a drop of some 15 percent in the number of children in separate special schools at the primary and lower secondary levels, the overall share of enrolments in special schools at these levels grew because of the falling number of children in the age group. Indeed, the share rose from 4 percent in 1989 to 4.4 percent in 1996, the highest figure in any country for which data from the region are available. In addition, the number of children in upper secondary schools rose by 10 percent, to more than 17,000.

This information can be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, there are positive signs of moves towards integration, but, on the other, it appears that there are relatively large numbers of children categorized as having special needs, the reasons for which remain unclear. It is reported, for example, that Romany children in the Czech Republic are a noticeable presence in special schools, where, it has been suggested, they may be placed because they are not able to communicate sufficiently well in the language of instruction of regular schools (Closs 1996).

Slovenia is another country where there have been significant moves to integrate children with special needs into mainstream schools, including into regular classrooms (UNICEF 1996). Available data suggest that the number of children in special schools has fallen by one-quarter and that their share of total basic school enrolment in 1996 was 1.5 percent. However, provision is reported to be uneven across the country. Poland has also seen changes towards greater integration (Gornikowska and Elliot 1996). However, of the 119,000 children classified as receiving special needs education at the basic level in Poland in 1996, 80,000 were still in separate schools (that is, 1.6 percent of total basic level enrolments) and only 5,800 in mainstream classes.

Bulgaria is a good example of the problems facing a country wishing to switch away from separate special schools (Tzokova and Garner 1996). The number of children in special schools has fallen by 20 percent since 1989, but

the share of enrolments overall in basic education (1.2 percent in 1996) has changed little, reflecting both the smaller size of the age cohort and a decline in all enrolments at the basic level. As of mid-1997 all children categorized as having special needs received their education in separate special schools. A 1995 law provides for the integration of children with disabilities in regular schools, but its implementation has been postponed because of a lack of financial resources, illustrating well the problem of the set-up costs of integration. There was a marked economic downturn in Bulgaria in 1996-7, and the shelving of the new legislation is a concrete example of the implications for vulnerable children of set-backs in the economy (UNICEF 1998).

In contrast with Bulgaria, the process of integration seems to have progressed steadily in Lithuania following the 1991 Law on Education (Johnson 1996). The number of children in separate special schools at the basic level has fallen substantially as a result of stricter criteria for categorization, and there has been an increase in the number of children with special needs attending mainstream schools. Another positive development has been the recent move to ensure access to education for those with the severest disabilities, for whom there was previously no provision. In the majority of instances these children live with their parents, rather than in institutions, and attend newly established development centres.

Some commentators in Lithuania have argued that the process of integration has been implemented too quickly without sufficient preparation of appropriate facilities or retraining of teachers. Moreover, the situation in rural areas gives cause for particular concern. Some children with disabilities receive only limited teaching in their own homes; others are sent to mainstream schools, but without any planned attempt to integrate them, and as a result many are said to stop attending.

The figures in Moldova for children in separate special schools show a huge drop, from 11,400 in 1989 to 5,800 in 1996, that is, 1 percent of all enrolments (UNICEF 1998). Part of this decline may reflect the exclusion of enrolments for the latter year among children in the region of Transdnier, but this cannot account for most of the change. There is no indication that the shifts in enrolment are due to increased integration into mainstream schools, and the data suggest a collapse in special provision. Similarly, Moldova has suffered enormously during the transition period, with output in 1996 down by two-thirds on its 1989 level, and no rise estimated for 1997. Conditions in special schools have apparently deteriorated very badly due to the severe shortage of funds. There has been enormous neglect of buildings (including heating and water systems) and other equipment, and malnutrition and disease among children in special schools have apparently risen (UNICEF 1998).

Difficulties of interpretation are also presented when scrutinizing data from Russia. These show that the number of children in either special schools, or in special classes attached to regular schools have gone up appreciably in recent years (UNICEF 1998). For example, the figure for 1995 represents 2.3 percent of total basic level enrolments, up from 2 percent in 1990. Enrolments in special schools have gone down, and those in special classes have gone up during the same period. These data suggest positive trends, but without knowledge of what is driving the changes it is difficult to say anything conclusive. For example, the most marked addition in the numbers of children with special needs in regular schools has been in "classes to support psychic development", a category distinct from "classes for the mentally disabled". Meanwhile another report suggests that only one-third of children with cerebral palsy in Russia are enrolled in either special schools, or special classes, implying that one group of children at least is excluded from the data and, more importantly, from access to education (Lubovsky and Martinovskaja 1994).

It is also possible that the rising number of children in special classes in Russia might merely reflect the operation of an incentive to classify more children as having special needs. In this context it is worth noting that the number of children officially recognized as disabled through receipt of an invalidity pension has risen enormously, from 155,000 in 1990 to 454,000 in 1995 (that is, 1.3 percent of all children), but it is known that this increase was due to a liberalization in the criteria used for awarding benefits (UNICEF 1998).

Within the countries that make up former Yugoslavia the situation continues to be very uncertain, despite considerable international efforts to support development (UNESCO 1996, 1997). For example, it is reported that recently the Ministry of Education in FYR Macedonia has set up a commission charged with developing new regulations for the education of children with disabilities and emphasizing the need to develop responses in ordinary schools (Ajdinski and Florian 1997). However, the implementation of new policies is likely to meet difficulties because of what are described as "deeply rooted systems of diagnosis, categorization and institutionalization" and economic constraints.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina the administration of education is carried out separately by two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where responsibility is delegated to the ten cantons, and the Republica Srpska. Both have severe economic difficulties and confusion about leadership responsibilities following recent conflicts, and these make improvement efforts difficult. In the Federation there are severe shortages of qualified teachers in some areas. There are also enormous difficulties because of the damage to build-

ings, including the many special schools that were destroyed, and shortages of materials. The current policy is to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools as far as possible, although some special schools in Sarajevo remain open, albeit with reduced numbers in attendance (UNESCO 1996). It is reported, however, that many pupils with special educational needs are not receiving any formal education. Meanwhile teachers are faced with many new challenges in attempting to respond to children who suffered the trauma of war, those who have lost parents and, increasingly, those returning from exile in other countries, many of whom are not familiar with the language used in local schools. In such a context it is becoming increasingly evident that all classrooms need to provide responses that are responsive to pupil differences. In this sense, somewhat paradoxically, the situation may eventually encourage moves towards more inclusive forms of education.

The Republic Srpska has been described as a “humanitarian disaster area”, with unemployment estimated in 1996 at 90 percent, and most of the population suffering from the deepest forms of material and social deprivation (UNESCO 1997). Furthermore, a confluence of factors has meant that few international efforts have been possible to alleviate this suffering. Some special schools exist, however, and neither pre-war, nor present-day policy seeks to integrate children with disabilities into the regular school system. On the other hand, it is reported that there are plans to develop pilot projects to include “mentally retarded children” in regular preschools.

In summary, then, a consideration of the limited information and figures that are available suggests a possible, though somewhat uncertain, conclusion that the most dominant approach in special education has to date been an institutional approach. Available statistical data for the region also suggest a variety of changes in overall access to education for children seen as having special needs. In some countries there is evidence of moves to provide for such children within the mainstream, whilst in others there appears to have been little or no change, or even a worsening of previous arrangements. It is also clear that the proportion of children categorized as having special needs varies significantly from country to country, as it does in other parts of the world. These and other uncertainties surrounding much of the available data underline the need for more detailed investigations.

■ 4.4 *Excluded groups*

As we have examined the information available to us, we have become increasingly aware of the ways in which certain groups of children are dealt with and how some appear to have been excluded from both mainstream and

special schools. In particular, children of Romany backgrounds, those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and children who are socially disadvantaged have been identified as groups that are sometimes excluded from any type of educational provision (Closs 1996, Daunt 1993, UNICEF 1997, Kozma and Illyes 1993, Tatiou 1994). Exclusion from educational provision manifests itself in various ways, including the absence of these groups from legislation and assumptions by those who ought to facilitate their education that they are ineducable or, sometimes, undesirable. In the case of the Czech Republic it has been suggested that, even where there are laws in place, opportunities are not fully optimized because of the attitudinal, knowledge and skill gaps that exist amongst those who should implement the legislation (Closs 1992).

In Central Europe, Romany people make up 2.5 to 4 percent of the entire population (Closs 1996, UNICEF 1997). The educational status of Romany children is usually low, as reflected in the 75-85 percent dropout rate in the Czech Republic (Closs 1996) and the 27.3 percent illiteracy rate in Romania (UNICEF 1997). Romany children also make up a large portion of the pupils in special schools in certain countries, for example 30-40 percent in Hungary (Kozma and Illyes 1993). The reason that is sometimes given for this is that mainstream schools do not seem to be able to meet the needs of these children, and, as a result, they end up in educationally inappropriate special schools in a way that appears to violate their rights to education. The situation is similar in the Czech Republic, where between 25 and 100 percent of pupils in schools for children with moderate learning difficulties are from Romany backgrounds (Closs 1996). In addition, mainstream schools are deemed to have too many socio-cultural and racial tensions and conflicts for Romany children. The fact that most of these children are then sent to special schools means that at a later stage their ability to compete in the job market is diminished.

In the Czech Republic legislation has been the first step towards including Romany children into mainstream schools and society (Tepla 1997). In 1991, the "Federal Government Policy Document on the Rom Ethnic Minority" provided broad aims covering equal rights and respect for all aspects of Rom culture and heritage. Unfortunately, the legislation seems to have had many loopholes. For example, since the legislation, the Ministry of Education's responsibilities have been devolved to schools and head teachers, and, as a result, participation is very much dependent upon the will of these people to accommodate such children (Closs 1996). In this context, change in attitudes is vital if steps are to be taken towards greater integration.

Children with profound and multiple learning difficulties are also frequently excluded from special education within the region because they are con-

sidered to be ineducable (Daunt 1993). The number of such children that are currently in institutional care is probably not reflective of the actual population since there is evidence that a significant proportion stay at home (UNICEF 1997). In Russia, statistics for children with these more severe disabilities are not available within the education sector since they are the responsibility of the health department (Lubovsky and Martinovskaja 1994). Meanwhile, it is reported that in Lithuania such children who are placed in residential provision do not have any form of curriculum (Johnson 1996), and those in residential schools in Bosnia-Herzegovina are said to be living in very poor conditions (Cavanagh 1996). Concern has also been expressed about the conditions found in some residential institutions in FYR Macedonia and Romania (UNICEF 1998).

■ 4.5 *Process of change*

The economic and social transition in the region has had mixed implications for the education of children seen as having special needs. On the one hand, more open attitudes to new teaching methods and concerns to build a more humane society have led to moves towards the integration of children with disabilities in some countries. On the other hand, a greater emphasis on academic competition and on selectivity into elite schools, coupled with a tradition of rigid curricula and pedagogy, creates an atmosphere that is not favourable towards children who experience difficulties of any kind. Clearly this has not helped the integration of children with disabilities, still less any moves towards a more “inclusive” approach. Reduced national incomes has also hindered moves towards integration, given the set-up costs of training teachers and support staff, and of adapting buildings. And where children have remained firmly in separate special schools, economic downturn has threatened the quality of teaching and care provided.

There is also evidence of emerging pressures for yet further reform. For example, within the Czech Republic, a document entitled “The National Plan of Measures to Reduce the Negative Impact of Disability” has been produced by the government as a result of pressure groups composed of people with disabilities, their families and those who work with them (Gargiulo, Cerna and Hilton 1997). It will take time, however, for such developments to bring about the fundamental changes of attitude that will be necessary in order to provide more equitable education systems. As Peters (1993, page 6) suggests, “...obstacles to education result not from inherent incapacities, but from the physical and attitudinal barriers socially and politically constructed within the environment.”

Since 1993 the Ministry of Education in Romania, with support from UNICEF, has carried out a series of initiatives in order to explore ways of encouraging the development of more inclusive practices (Vrasmas and Daunt 1997). These have included a project based on the UNESCO teacher education resource pack "Special Needs in the Classroom". (This pack is also being used as part of projects in Bosnia, Hungary and FYR Macedonia.) These materials, which have been distributed in over 50 countries, are intended to prepare and support teachers in regular schools to facilitate the participation and learning of children who might otherwise be excluded, particularly those with disabilities. The Romanian initiative has included a programme of awareness-raising involving teachers, inspectors and teacher trainers from around the country. More recently, intensive action research has been undertaken in a small number of schools. This has demonstrated the relevance of the overall approach and, at the same time, drawn attention to how it can be used in the context of Romanian schools (Ainscow 1997). In addition, these experiences are leading to the development of further training materials arising from local efforts and the identification of personnel who will be available to lead dissemination efforts. A strategy for wider dissemination is currently being formulated. Meanwhile, efforts are under way to encourage special schools to develop closer working links with the mainstream and to reintegrate pupils with relatively mild disabilities. In this way, space can be made for those with severe difficulties, many of whom currently receive no form of schooling.

Other teacher education initiatives, such as the Tempus programmes, which fund collaborative partnerships between Western universities and East European teachers and their trainers, have taken steps towards developing the understanding of leaders in this field about how to manage and support the process of change (Johnson 1996, Csyani 1996). For example, in Bulgaria between 1994 and 1997 there was a Tempus programme entitled "Action on Reflective Practice" that was situated at the Department of Special Education at Sofia University and at the Higher Institute of Pedagogics at Blagoevgrad. The programme was intended to impact on the work of teacher trainers in special needs and the practice of all school teachers. Various problems were identified as a result of the programme, including a preoccupation with cost-effectiveness and the difficulties involved in changing "change agents" (Tzokova and Garner 1996).

Changing the attitudes of those who are part of the process is crucial to any kind of innovation within the field. The reported preoccupation with cost-effectiveness is symptomatic of the difficulties to be faced. Attitudinal change takes time and is often difficult to evaluate (Kozma and Illyes 1993). In the

Czech Republic, it has been pointed out that teacher training had to be focused in specific areas if change is to be expected, for example, in responding to learning difficulties and in exploring teacher attitudes to children with learning difficulties (Closs 1992).

Lessons can be learned from other areas in the education field that can be useful in understanding the process of change in Eastern and Central Europe. As a result of work in the area of reforms in school-leaving and university entrance examinations in the region, West (1997) has identified some important issues and barriers to change. Some of these seem to be equally relevant to the field of special needs education. Reform vis-à-vis teacher attitudes is one such issue. Another relates to the legacy of the highly centralized socialist system of policy planning and implementation. This legacy is seen to have negatively affected the ability of those at the grassroots to innovate and to participate in initiating and planning development programmes, leading them to shy away from making decisions. It seems that such bottom-up initiatives were not encouraged in highly centralized systems.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

This review of information on selected countries in the region has illustrated some of the barriers to improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities and many others who come to be regarded as having special needs, as well as some of the barriers to providing these opportunities in a way that allows these children to learn alongside others in their local community schools. It has indicated that the depressed economic situation and the ensuing shortage of funds in much of the region prevent expenditure on initiatives that would shift provision away from separate special schools. This may be one reason why, in general, it is the richer countries that have been able to introduce a degree of integration into their provision, despite the fact that the poorer countries would benefit the most from eventual improvements in practice and possible cost-savings from effective integration efforts. Meanwhile, a degree of institutional inertia, including that arising from vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo, prevents reform in this area of educational provision. Furthermore, the lack of wider developments of education systems means that reforms in the special needs field are rendered even more difficult. Finally, the inheritance of a dominant medical approach to assessment, categorization and intervention, with all the associated dangers that this entails, continues to represent a major barrier to experimentation.

Nevertheless, the indications are that there is considerable debate in many

of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe as to how best to proceed in order to provide effective schooling for all children in these communities. As we have seen, some of this has been stimulated by contacts that have occurred with individuals and groups from countries outside the region. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize that people in the region have themselves generated agendas for change as a result of internal review processes. Within these discussions very different positions exist that are similar to those that we have found throughout the developed world. In this sense, the systems of Central and Eastern Europe can be said to be “in transition”, much as the systems in most other countries are around the world.

It is also true that certain traditions that are peculiar to the region, particularly the emphasis on “defectology”, still dominate the way provision for children with special needs is conceptualized and organized. Thus, as reforms are proposed, it is inevitable that the overall global debates will manifest themselves in a form that seems likely to create further dispute. All of this may lead to some confusion amongst those who are unfamiliar with this wider debate. So, for example, parents, administrators and politicians may be faced, on the one hand, with highly regarded specialists who are using the rhetoric of Salamanca to argue for a policy push to reform mainstream schooling in order to make it more inclusive; whilst, on the other hand, there may be equally eminent voices arguing for an extension of separate specialized provision. And, of course, this seemingly contradictory advice has to be evaluated within a context of reduced budgets for education and an overall emphasis on raising standards in ways that can be seen to contribute to economic reconstruction.

Certainly those within these countries who wish to encourage moves towards more inclusive practices need to be realistic in taking account of the barriers they face. These barriers are likely to take the form of negative attitudes towards certain groups within the community seen as being different, curricula and assessment policies that lack the flexibility to respond to pupil diversity, and the actions of those who, for a variety of reasons, have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo.

On the other hand, there are many traditions and experiences within the region that provide important building blocks for further development. For example, the tradition of providing education opportunities for all members of the community in many of these countries encourages an expectation that this is a matter of right. In addition, the strong emphasis placed on the importance of teacher education is a healthy starting point. Then, more recently, the greater emphasis being placed on community involvement in some parts of the region has fostered an atmosphere within which parent support groups can blossom. For example, the “Speranta” centre in the city of Timisoara,

Romania, supports parents and schools in fostering more inclusive practices (Ainscow 1997). Experience in many different parts of the world suggests that such groups are likely to become increasingly concerned with advocacy issues and, as a result, will mobilize political forces that can campaign for improved educational provision for marginalized groups of children.

It is important, too, that Western consultants who become involved in supporting developments in the region take note of these positive starting points. As Ajdinski and Florian (1997) suggest, such visitors tend to focus their attention on “defects” in what they find, a strategy which is often useful in harnessing resources from international aid agencies. On the other hand, such approaches may be counter-productive when attempting to influence policies and practices within a country, particularly when these approaches are coupled with a lack of sensitivity to differences in history, culture and perspectives on disability.

Bearing these points in mind, we recommend that it may be helpful to consider a number of issues that experience and research in other parts of the world suggest may have a bearing on the success of attempts to make school systems more inclusive. These are the following.

■ **5.1 Legislation**

Efforts need to be made to ensure that all educational legislation emphasizes the responsibility to respond to pupil diversity. A consideration of examples from countries that have had success in this respect may be useful, not least because certain approaches to legislation have proved to be counter-productive in some countries (Fulcher 1989). In particular, efforts to move towards more inclusive policies need to be reflected in overall policies for curriculum and assessment, as seems to be the case in the reforms currently being introduced in Hungary. In addition, it is important to incorporate strategies that make clear the future roles of those working in specialized contexts and services. Without this there is a strong possibility that such groups may act in ways that distort or even block proposed changes.

■ **5.2 Practice**

Pilot projects that demonstrate the way in which schools can be developed in order to reach out to learners with different characteristics have been found to be useful in encouraging innovations and, at the same time, can help in preparing personnel who may then be used to lead implementation efforts (Ainscow 1994). It is helpful if such initiatives take as their starting point

examples of local good practice. The aim is overall school improvement that can benefit all children, thus connecting the ideas of equity and excellence in the way suggested by the Salamanca Statement. Here, it may also be sensible to link the responses for children who have disabilities to other groups that are disadvantaged within existing arrangements, not least children from the various minority groups.

■ **5.3 Teacher education**

There is strong evidence to support the view that educational improvements of any kind are dependent on the skills and confidence of teachers in taking proposals into their classrooms. Put simply, once in their classrooms, teachers are policymakers (Fulcher 1989). Consequently, teacher education at both the pre- and in-service stages has a key role to play in supporting reform. More specifically, the research evidence indicates the importance of school-based staff development, including “peer coaching” arrangements among teachers that encourage experimentation with new classroom practices (Joyce and Showers 1988, Ainscow 1995). Such approaches may be new to some countries in the region, and their introduction will require a sound strategy for supporting implementation (Hopkins, Ainscow and West 1994).

■ **5.4 Support**

Given what we know of the difficulties that arise when one attempts to bring about change within education systems, it is important to mobilize all available support resources behind any proposed innovations. Experience in other parts of the world points to the significance of community participation in this respect, particularly the involvement of parents (Levin and Lockheed 1993). It is also important to give training and support to those who are expected to provide leadership for such initiatives, including psychologists and speech therapists, whose work has a strong bearing on the way in which services are supplied for children with disabilities.

■ **5.5 Research**

There are serious difficulties in bringing together sensitive and authentic information about the existing situation in these countries in order to inform strategic planning. This points to the need for a consideration of what forms of data are going to be most helpful in this respect and how they should be collected. Certainly, within countries there is a need to have better statistics on

patterns of school enrolment and attendance, not least as a means of determining where improvement efforts should be targeted. However, within the special needs field, care has to be taken to ensure that statistics do not further encourage existing arguments for even more segregated arrangements. More relevant in this respect would be the collection of evidence on “indicators” of how far the education system is addressing the needs of all children within a given community, which groups are currently excluded or marginalized, and why. Work is currently going on that might offer the basis for such indicators (see Ainscow 1998, Eichinger, Meyer and D’Aquanni 1996). In addition, there is a need for qualitative studies illustrating ways in which schools and classrooms within countries have been made more inclusive.

6. Final Remarks

Our hope is that the analysis provided in this paper will stimulate and encourage moves to create more effective and inclusive educational arrangements for children with disabilities in Central and Eastern European countries. The rather general recommendations we make are also offered with this purpose in mind. As we note, these arise from international experience and research evidence. It is important to recognize the nature of these ideas and how they might be best applied. In particular, we need to be somewhat cautious about assuming that ideas and approaches can be transposed from one national context to another.

Even if we were not to step foot outside our own countries, each of us already possesses extensive knowledge of the existence of differences in perspective on issues about processes of schooling, between parents and professionals, within and among a variety of cultural groups, and amongst academics and researchers. This knowledge should ensure that we avoid two pitfalls of comparative discourse: the idea that there is a single national perspective on matters to do with education and the notion that practice can be generalized across countries without attention to local contexts and meanings. Nevertheless, some writers still present reports of their own or other countries as if they were monocultures. What is called a national perspective is usually, in fact, a version of an official view. We hope that the approach taken in this paper will contribute, at least a little, towards the end of attempts to treat countries as though they had a uniform approach.

The paper may also encourage an interest in the shaping effect that national and local policies and cultural histories have on practice. The tendency to present single national perspectives is matched by a common failure to

describe the way practice is to be understood within its local and national context (Fuller and Clark 1994). This is all part of an approach to social science in which research in one country can be amalgamated with that in another (Booth and Ainscow 1998). The problem is compounded by differences in the meaning of terms. Often this leads to the presentation of deceptively misleading international statistics. This has been a particular feature of the field of special education, where data are frequently used to imply that the actual numbers of disabled children are the problem, leading to an assumption that solutions must focus on prevention, cure and steps to make these children as normal as possible. In this way, statistics can distract our attention from the ways in which attitudes, policies and institutions exclude or marginalize certain groups of children and young people.

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The UNICEF International Child Development Centre (ICDC) in Florence, Italy, is an international knowledge base and training centre focusing on the rights of children. It was established in 1988 to strengthen the capacity of UNICEF and its cooperating institutions to promote a new global ethic for children and to respond to their evolving needs. A primary objective of the Centre is to encourage the effective implementation of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in both developing and industrialized countries.

- Information management is at the heart of the Centre's approach. The Centre systematically filters existing information and its own research results to produce key findings, policy studies and case materials on key aspects relating to children's rights.
- Research, particularly to explore both critical and front-line issues, is carried out to further the understanding, development and monitoring of children's rights. Special attention is paid to problems of equity, economic affordability and the financing of social programmes to benefit children.
- Capacity building is the third important component of ICDC's activities. The emphasis is on improving understanding of the principles of the CRC to enable UNICEF staff to promote its implementation more effectively.

The Centre disseminates the results of its activities through seminars, training workshops and publications targeted at executive decision-makers, programme managers, researchers and other practitioners in child-related fields, both inside and outside UNICEF. The government of Italy has provided core funding for the Centre since its establishment, and other governments, international institutions and private organizations have provided supplementary funds for specific projects. The Centre benefits from the counsel of an International Advisory Committee, chaired by UNICEF's Executive Director.

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