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Title: Inclusive education in Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina: policy and practice

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Abstract

This paper examines developments in inclusive education in Bulgaria (BG) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) in the context of actual and desired accession to the European Union respectively. It seeks to provide insights into the national special education traditions in these countries and aims to establish how these have influenced current developments in inclusive education together with and alongside powerful external change agents. This research focuses on policy makers' perspectives on changes associated with inclusion. There are significant similarities in the way inclusive education reforms are being perceived and implemented in both countries, and analysis suggests there is a strong need for regional co-operation with shifts in both policy and practice.

Key words

Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, special needs, education, European Union, defectology

Introduction

Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) and both countries refer to international documents, children's rights, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) and the Framework for Action on the World Education Forum in Dakar (UNESCO 2000) in education strategies and policy documents (OECD 2006). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) addressed inclusion on the level of rights, values and diversity, and went beyond disability in defining special needs. Recently the call for inclusion was further strengthened by the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006) that calls for States to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning and to respect the home and family. Once a country signs and ratifies the convention it will have an obligation to end the placement of children in residential educational or care institutions. There are still difficulties with the ratification of this convention. In most cases, the perceived difficulty rests with the potential closure of special schools: this in turn being seen as problematic in both political (parents' rights) and practical terms.

The countries: social and political context

As defined in international publications (OECD 2007) BG and B&H belong to the South Eastern European Region. Both countries have undergone major political changes and upheavals in the past twenty years. Bulgaria experienced collapsed of Soviet dominated communist political system and years of transition marked by poverty and uncertainty. In January 2007, Bulgaria became a member of the European Union.

The years of transition in B&H were marked by severe war that lasted for three and a half years and claimed an estimated 258,000 lives or 5.9 percent of the population (UNESCO 2003, in OECD 2006). The war also obstructed development of social policy. The war in B&H ended in November 1995 with the Dayton Peace agreement that divided the country into two entities, Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of B&H, with the Federation of B&H further divided into 10 cantons and District Brcko. This division has serious implications for education, because it has resulted in a proliferation of major educational authorities and it cause a lack of unified standards in school practices and financing (OECD 2006).

Burke (1994) argued that pre-transition policies in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe provided little support to families with disabled children. Governments for example, would remove children from home in order to make parents available for work. In addition, those perceived as having a greater disability were looked after in specially created social care institutions. In Bulgaria special schools and social care institutions were built exclusively in remote and isolated places (Tzokova and Garner 2000).

Currently both countries are aiming at improving economy and establishing stable democracies - processes further encouraged by the European Union (EU) accession. Bulgaria's joining of the EU is seen as a promising economical, social and political development. Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not part of the EU but it is aspiring to become a member. The recent signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with B&H confirmed the EU's commitment to the country's European future (Commission of the European Communities 2008). The countries joining the EU are expected to demonstrate progress in educational reforms and to align their policies and

practice to the EU agenda centred on education for all, development of the individual and society, increase of inclusion and social cohesion, and promotion of humanistic values (Council of Europe, 2001).

Understanding Inclusive Education: shifting paradigms?

From Defectology to Special and Inclusive Education

In both BG and B&H, 'Defectology' was the term used to define special education. It reflects the strong influence of the Soviet psychological and pedagogical traditions. Despite some strong theoretical benefits, e.g. Vygotsky's theory of child development and pedagogy, notably his work on the foundations of 'Defectology' (1983), the dominant discourse remained firmly grounded in the 'psycho-medical' paradigm, whilst social interpretations of handicap and disability have been largely ignored.

In Bulgaria, in accordance with the defectological tradition a parallel special education system, consisting of special schools and institutions was firmly established and developed whilst in B&H special classes within mainstream schools were the more popular option. In both countries, special schools provided mainly for children with mild disabilities, though not for all; for the excluded groups responsibility was shared between education, health and social care authorities, for whom effective co-ordination has been notoriously difficult.

The early post-communist period marked the end of a period of cultural isolation, with increasing exchanges with western countries. In Bulgaria, international cooperation saw 'Defectology' renamed as 'special education' - at least within academia (Tzokova & Garner, 2000). Professional assumptions came under scrutiny and revision. Increasingly,

academic debates focused on the inclusion of certain groups of children, e.g. those with severe intellectual disability and profound and multiple disabilities in the education system. These processes were influenced and accelerated by international exchange programmes, notably 'Action on Reflective Practice: educating the educators' (TEMPUS JEP- 07215.94 (1994-1998) that has created opportunities for cohorts of influential special educators to learn from developed countries about integration and inclusion, and to reflect on their own practices (Tzokova & Garner, 1996). The dissemination of project outcomes and the establishment of the Bulgarian Journal of Special Education, where the paradigmatic shift, associated with transforming defectology into special education were publically advertised, played a crucial role for the widespread national popularisation and acceptance of this change (*Bulgarian Journal of Special Education 1995-2008*). In B&H the Finnish co-operation programme (2003-2006) supported the education reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has created sustainable initiatives on inclusive education by launching and conducting post-diploma specialization studies in inclusive education.

The level of actual understanding of how different the philosophical underpinnings of defectology and special education are, as well as the difference between integration and inclusion, continue unexamined. In consequence it is unclear of how wide-spread such an understanding is, from theory to policy and practice. The debates about commonalities and differences between defectology and special education, have been quickly brushed under the carpet, replaced by more pressing preoccupation with the 'what, how and who' of inclusion and inclusive education. Current policy accelerated the refocusing by placing concrete requirements for action in practice.

How does inclusion relate to the Roma?

UNICEF (2007, 13) noted that *'Separate provision for children with disabilities is still the rule. There is little evidence of any improvement in the situation of ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma'*. In both BG and B&H the issue of educational integration of Roma children has become particularly acute. Some of the learning difficulties that Roma children seem to experience are *'perceived to lie in their social and economic disadvantage, others in their specific ethnic and cultural traditions, the nature and importance of which is largely unacknowledged by the education system'* (Tzokova & Dobrev, 2001, 143). In B&H Roma children are severely excluded from primary and secondary education with only 15% of Roma children completing primary school (Amnesty International 2006). Main reasons for school non-attendance are inability of parents to pay for schoolbooks, stationery and transport to school. Prejudice and lack of Roma teachers in a formal education system is also an obstacle for Roma children education (Save the Children, 2006). In Bulgaria Roma children are often excluded from mainstream schools, but continuously over- represented in special schools. According to research by Open Society Institute (2007) 44-70% of Roma children learn in segregated schools, while 51% of children in special schools in Bulgaria are Roma.

Our research: Aim and objectives and methodology

In contrast to the situation in some developed European countries, the changing worlds of special and inclusive education in BG and B&H are less documented and reflected in academic literature, although UNESCO, OECD and UNICEF have been active in collecting and publishing data from this region. The aim of this article is to trace the moves towards inclusive education in Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2002 with regards to policy and practice, and through the ‘eyes’ of policy makers. This overall aim was made concrete via the following objectives:

- To highlight core developments of educational policy promoting inclusion in both countries;
- To investigate factors contributing to these developments
- To explore policy makers’ perspectives from the two countries and from major international organisations of educational change related to inclusion;

In this study we strive to understand inclusive policy and practice as embedded in the national contexts of the two countries. Geographical proximity and similarity in political and cultural history are regarded as a common ground for comparison.

This research was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria (2007 and 2008) with 10 participants, all occupying senior positions, as national government policy makers, in international non-governmental organisations, and national NGOs, as demonstrated in table 1 below.

All were involved with the education policies for children with disabilities. The sampling was facilitated by networking with various organisations and individuals. In addition we analysed key education policies in both countries.

The main method of data collection comprised of semi-structured interviews. We asked one initial open-ended question about how participants view changes with regard to policy and practice of special education in the last few years. Follow-up questions were asked when needed around issues of EU accession, international agents and inclusion in practice. The interviews in B&H were conducted in the Bosnian language, whilst in BG some interviews were conducted in English and some in Bulgarian language with the help of an experienced translator. Eight of the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. A further two interviews were conducted and recorded by means of detailed notes. Interviews were subjected to negotiated transcript and translation by both authors. One of the interviews in Bulgaria was conducted by both authors, who independently took notes. In this instance the authors compared notes and agreed on final transcripts.

The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Informants were carefully briefed on ethics, given information about the study and the opportunity to withdraw their participation at any time. In this study the external translator was familiar with the research and terminology used. Contingently, the researcher and translator discussed the interview dynamics and negotiated meanings. This aided the triangulation of the data.

The raw data was subjected to cross case thematic analysis to increase generalisability and to deepen understanding and explanation (Miles and Huberman 1994). The analysis was strengthened using the 'constant comparative method' (Glasser and Strauss, 1967)

and final themes were reached through negotiations and comparisons between both researchers. The findings presented in the next section are organised around three main themes that emerged from the analysis: understanding and supporting inclusive education, policy making and external pressures and organisation of inclusion in practice.

Findings and analysis

1. Understanding and supporting inclusive education

The interviewees from both BG and B&H reflected that inclusive education has not received sufficient popularity and support in society. Negative social attitudes are still prevalent. For both countries, interviewees reported difficulties with public attitudes towards ‘disability’ and children with SEN in mainstream schools:

‘In our society we are still not prepared for life with disabled children, prejudices exist...they do not have enough chance to take part. There are no clubs where disabled and non disabled children could be together, and have some activities together... (B&H, NGO).

There is much confusion and misunderstanding of what inclusion means – in terms of both its ideological charge and in terms of practice:

‘Because the definition of inclusive education was a bit problematic on a political level - whether it is for children with disabilities or for children from the minorities, the same goes about the respective measures. And some time had to pass, to become clear that these two groups of children require different support measures’ (BG, NGO).

It seems policy makers are becoming increasingly aware that 'inclusion' implies a change in the way that schools function, that schools must change to meet the needs of the child. There is the question as to how this awareness will filter down to the level at which practice is required:

'So far people understand it more as integration but not as inclusion. The idea for integrated education has not come from teachers or schools - it has been imposed upon them by us, the policy makers. When every individual school creates its own policy on integration we could talk about inclusion' (BG, government policy maker).

Integration itself seems to be understood as relevant for some groups of children and not for others, with it being apparently more problematic for those with moderate and severe intellectual disability:

'The majority of professionals declaratively support inclusive education. However when asked they list a number of reasons why all children cannot be included, especially children with more severe intellectual disabilities. They believe that for children with disabilities, being with others like themselves is the best option educationally and emotionally' (B&H, government policy maker).

2. Current Education Policy with regard to special education and Integration

In the period of transition, in both Bulgaria (Dobrev, 2002; Radoulov, 1996), and B&H (Sunkic 2003) a necessity for shifts in policy was recognised in order to reflect the emerging advances in understanding of the changing world of special education - a new set of policies that would set the start of a reform aimed at educational integration of

children with SEN. At this stage it was unclear how education authorities would be pressured to develop such policies and who would be involved in the process. NGOs and lobby groups were in their embryonic stages and traditional links between institutions and academia appear to have been neglected. The education policies promoting inclusive education in BG and B&H emerged in the following years, mainly in the period 2000 – 2003. Their main characteristics are outlined in table 2 below.

In both countries, policies emphasise non-discrimination and dictate that children who opt for special education should only do so after all other education options within the mainstream system have been exhausted and according to the explicitly stated wishes of their parents. Table 2 shows that overall educational policy in both countries relates to rights, entitlement, access and equal educational opportunities. The second set of policies addresses integration of children with special needs has both visionary and practical character. The third set of policies regulates education of children with special education needs at the schools and classroom level, including identification, placement, and organisation of teams, support and IEPs. The inclusion of Roma children is addressed separately, as indicated by policies in row 4.

In Bulgaria individual education programmes are developed by the local diagnostic teams, whilst in B&H the individual programs are developed in consultation with SEN supporting mobile teams. In Bulgaria, 28 regional inspectorates have been created under the Ministry of Education and Science and they are in charge of implementing educational policy related to inclusion (OECD, 2007). Attached to each inspectorate is a resource centre and a regional diagnostic teams. These teams collect data annually from all schools about children with learning difficulties, those at risk, or in need of

support/additional provision for integrated education. They are involved in the identification of SEN and also advise on transfers from mainstream to special schools. In B&H schools submit data twice a year to Cantonal Ministries of Education and in Republika Srpska to Ministry of Education of Republika Srpska, who then communicate data to statistical institutes when requested. It has been assessed that the process is not up to EU standards and efforts are being made to improve and align this procedure with International Standard Classification of Education levels and Statistical Office of the European Communities requirements (Government of B&H 2008).

The legislative guidance and the national plans for integration/inclusion in both BG and B&H referred to above have further clarified the path for reform. What remains to be achieved at this stage is their consolidation in practice. Furthermore, the policy makers will have to take the reform to mainstream schools.

2.1 The process of policy making: external pressures and internal constraints

National governments in the region experience increased external pressure from the EU to adopt inclusive orientations in various directions in order to demonstrate higher standards in relation to inclusive education: reducing numbers of children and young people in residential institutions, reducing numbers of children in special schools, and developing policies for education and social inclusion of children and young people from ethnic minorities. The following comment illustrates the experience of a policy maker in this respect:

‘Basically, the European Union was not interested in Bulgarian education at all.

In the period of accession they checked all our normative acts and said that they

were OK. However they saw problems with the existing special education system and this is where the pressure came. In a short space of time we had to create Legislative Acts to start and support integration' (BG, government policy maker).

This was confirmed by another interviewee:

'In 2006, they came here ...and found that not much had happened so we pressed the Ministry of Education... in an extremely short period of time they started the integration of kids with special needs into general education. As they had to do it very fast – the quality was not so good.' (BG, government policy maker.)

In B&H the major political aspiration now is to join the EU and this has influenced the development of social policies within the country. A more down-to earth attitude transpired in one of our B&H interviews:

'The European Union should be our goal. But within our capacities...we need to be given the opportunity to slowly build society according to the EU standards, instead of just doing it for the sake of gaining membership' (B&H, NGO).

Arguably different stages of EU integration for individual countries suggest different advances towards inclusive practices on ideological, political and practical levels. In their efforts to achieve higher standards, most of the countries from the region, including BG and B&H, looked for quick-solution 'inclusion imports' from developed countries of the EU and have been less inclined to look for regional cooperation. Developed countries like the UK, Norway, and Finland are generally very pro-active in supporting the processes in

South-East Europe by exporting ‘solutions’. Such ‘solutions’ are often applied without due consideration of the unique political, economic, educational and social contexts. In addition there are influences from international NGO’s and charities that often have different ideological approaches ranging from needs to rights orientations.

‘In policy making we usually look for examples from abroad. However, this usually shows that they cannot be applied directly here. I don’t like the fact that we always try to translate policy making initiatives either from the region or from the West. We need to recognise that Sweden, Norway and the UK have much better standards when it comes to policy and practice so we cannot really copy them exactly’ (B&H, government policy maker).

Another significant issue, experienced as pressure both from the outside and within the countries is the funding of inclusive education. This transpired in most of the interviews.

Special education continues to be better resourced than inclusive education. There are no clear mechanisms for the transfer of funds across these separate systems. Funding is divided between central and local government and often between various Ministries. Resources vary widely between different local areas. A central government policy maker from BG stressed that from EU perspective education is seen primarily as a national matter and where EU funds are directly deployed they are mainly orientated towards social care policies.

For policy makers, striving towards EU standards of inclusion potentially also means having to deal with the consequences of internally unpopular measures. For example, a Bulgarian policy maker described one instance where teachers from a special school had

organised demonstrations against the perceived closure of their school, bringing along children from the school. Thus, the Governments are being caught in-between opposing forces, with EU pressures to include, charitable foreigners reinforcing segregation by donating money to special schools and institutions, and having to shield against internal fury.

3. Implementing Inclusion

3.1 Current statistics

In both countries interviewees indicated that changes towards further integration of children with SEN in education are taking place, though there is a limited hard evidence to support this contention. Respondents from both countries reported problems with the gathering of statistical data, which in B&H is attributed to the fragmentation of the education system and the absence of a joint national database for educational statistics. In Bulgaria too, it was reported that the Education Ministry has been compiling its own statistical data for the last three years. Policy makers draw on the evaluation of this data to monitor educational change and report to national and international institutions. Such data however is rarely made accessible to the wider public.

In Bulgaria, there appears to be a notable shift in numbers according to this compiled data:

'In 2002 there was a major change in legislation. At the time there were only a few mainstream schools offering integrated education. In 2003 only 120 children were integrated with appropriate resources. In 2008 we have 5573 integrated students with appropriate resources' (BG, government policy maker).

These figures certainly suggest an increase in the numbers of children integrated in general education. Statistical data for 2007-2008, offered by our interviewee, shows that the number of special schools for children with intellectual disability, traditionally representing the biggest proportion of special schools within the education system, has declined from 76 in 2003 to 59 in 2008. Student numbers in the corresponding period have gone from 9163 to 5679. Over half of all children integrated in mainstream schools are from the categories of mild intellectual disability and learning difficulties, with the remainder spanning the visually and hearing impaired, physical disabilities, autism, psychiatric disorders, multiple disabilities and speech and language difficulties.

Interviewees from B&H were unable to provide thorough data, but thought the numbers of SEN children in mainstream schools had increased. When asked about changes with regard to greater inclusion of children and young people with SEN in education one policy maker remarked:

'According to data from October 2005 in Republika Srpska (Entity of B&H) we had 56 disabled children included in mainstream pre-school education. Now we have to report numbers, there is one column in our reports where we record the number of disabled children included, but also children who come from socially disadvantaged families of children from ethnic minorities. Parents heard that pre-school institutions are including disabled children and started to bring them.'
(B&H, government policy maker).

Efforts to integrate Roma children continue, though there are complex issues with the implementation of policy and the organisation of practice.

'...parents of Roma origin which are socially disadvantaged prefer to place their children in special schools because in such kind of institutions the State is entirely responsible for the children. When such children are placed in those institutions they are treated like disabled children. And this is one of the reasons why statistics are not very clear on the number of children placed in institutions – who are disabled, who are not (BG, NGO)'.

3.2 Organisation of support in mainstream school

In BG 'resource teams' and B&H 'mobile teams' are considered of crucial importance for the organisation of support in mainstream schools. A government policy maker from BG reflected on their experience in the last few years:

'In the first year, the need for administrative support has been acute, so we made appointments of heads for the resource centres. So far they have managed to organise teachers and to build teams with psychologists and speech and language therapists. The teams will be involved in the identification and assessment of children's SEN. The resource centres will send these teams to schools as required. They will prescribe Individual education programmes for the children assessed.'

In B&H although there is clear acceptance of the inclusion principal (DUGA, 2005), interviewees have expressed concerns about its practical implementation:

'Everybody now accepts inclusion, but the problems are that children don't have a diagnosis; mainstream pre-school facilities are inadequate; there are old ways of working and poor utilisation of resources...it would be better if we invested in teaching materials, toys and equipment than in some so called experts. I think that in this region we still don't have experts for inclusion. That is something new for us and we are still trying to find our way' (B&H, government policy maker).

Thus, there is recognition that inclusive education requires 'inclusive education experts' and pedagogies but not those trained and developed to serve segregated special education. In Bulgaria, children with SEN who are integrated receive direct support from a range of professionals: resource teachers, class teachers, psychologists, and speech and language therapists. In B&H they receive support from the school pedagogue and the mobile (peripatetic) team consisting of defectologists, 'logopeds' (SLTs), psychologists. Government policy makers (BG) affirmed that currently all integrated children have access to a resource teacher, yet our NGO interviewee emphasised that the appointment of resource teachers is dependent on there being at least seven disabled students in a school. This means that schools with fewer than this will be denied support. This may be more likely the case in rural areas.

The multi-professional teams are supposed to work collaboratively with and alongside mainstream teachers but in practice this proves difficult. Many of our respondents in BG and B&H indicated that a common practice was for team members to work individually with children and that mainstream teachers' lack confidence when faced with their new roles and responsibilities. In B&H 'mobile teams' are supposed to visit schools and provide support to mainstream teachers and individual children, especially with

development and implementation of individual education plans. However difficulties with the operation have been noted:

'They don't have a car to go to schools, or a mobile team consists of one person. Furthermore the purpose of mobile teams to facilitate inclusion has been questioned because they usually work with the SEN child separately' (B&H, NGO).

3.3 Training of professionals for work in inclusive education

Participants from both countries recognised the need to train mainstream teachers to work with diverse groups of students. According to government policy makers 'higher education institutions are the most likely providers of teacher training for inclusive education'. In BG, it was pointed out, they have to bid alongside NGOs in order to undertake this role and receive funding. Teacher education will be extended to cover resource teachers (BG) and inclusion teachers/consultants at Masters level in B&H. In both countries there are not many options for in-service training.

The existing different rates of pay between resource teachers, who work in mainstream schools, and special school teachers, who enjoy more favourable remuneration, do not help the aim of inclusion:

'On our behalf we are providing external stimuli in the form of bonuses: unfortunately special school teachers are still paid more compared to resource teachers to educate the same children, so in reality these bonuses are insufficient' (BG policy maker).

Thus, segregated special education still has a higher status compared to inclusive education.

Conclusions and Discussion

Our research confirmed that European integration has a major impact on national developments towards inclusive education. For BG and B&H as part of the South East Europe these influences are being felt acutely as external pressures sometimes hard to be dealt with in a short space of time. Although it can be argued that European integration poses common challenges and dilemmas for all member countries, the countries at the brink of accession come under much more rigorous scrutiny and evaluation, demonstrated by regular reporting to the EU and large scale research studies conducted by OECD, UNICEF, UNESCO and other international organisations. The inclusive education reforms are being carried out with scarce funds and resources, which in the situation of the global economic stagnation and recent halt of EU subsidies (The New York Times, 2008) will become even more problematic in the future.

In the last decade, the questions of how the 'new' language of inclusion has been interpreted and applied in policy and how it has shaped practices have become a focus of research interests from a cross-cultural perspective (Barton & Armstrong 2007; Norwich, 2008). Such studies focus on the ongoing dynamic changes in the European countries' systems of education aimed at inclusive transformation.

In practice, the conceptual misunderstanding of inclusion with underpinning ideologies and values, and approaches applied are being mixed and matched in a haphazard fashion and create considerable scope for confusion. This is clearly the case in BG and B&H

where policies and practices of inclusive education are being developed without a clear home grown strategy and instead are reliant on a poorly conceived model imported from outside. The questions remain: what unique future practices can be built on the basis of such imports? Would national inclusion stakeholders join together to shape practices grounded in the national contexts or would the education of vulnerable children be continuously thrown at the mercy of the next international inclusion ‘vogue’?

In B&H the English terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘integration’ are used unchanged or in slightly domesticated versions, whilst in BG, academic writings and policy documents include a variety of attempted literal translations. It has to be noted, that in the local languages of BG and B&H there are no direct terminological equivalents to ‘inclusion’. Consequently there isn’t a precise term to reflect the difference in philosophical positions between the terms integration and inclusion.

Although policy is aimed at creating conditions for non-discriminatory practices, the ‘societal conscience’ is slow to change. However, experience in other countries according to UNICEF (2007, 68) suggests that

‘a combination of rights-based legislation, training, awareness campaigns, and linkages between inclusive education and general education reform can help overcome the problems associated with shame, stigma, prejudice and lack of recognition of the resources needed for effective inclusion.’

With rights appropriately reflected in policy documents in BG and B&H the challenge now would be to take the special education reforms further into becoming reforms of the mainstream school rather than remaining confined to special education.

The voices of disabled people and especially children are not being considered in policy development. There was a notable absence of mention in policy makers' responses of the need for participation of disability activists in the policy making process, which could play a role in changing attitudes.

In BG and B&H there is little follow up or evaluation of inclusive education in terms of children's outcomes. We acknowledge the existing controversy surrounding the use of research evidence in inclusive education. However, we agree with Lindsey (2003, 10) that inclusion as a matter of rights may not need researching, but that the issues with 'the implementation of inclusion in practice' need to be considered: *'We need to ensure that there is a dual approach focusing on both the rights of children and the effectiveness of their education.'*

There is also a lack of clarity as to whether inclusive education is for 'all', or for some children. In policy documents this is evident in relation to different groups of children with SEN and those whose needs arise from social disadvantage and/or different ethnic background. The figures quoted by participants in our study indicate a slight move towards more educational integration of children with SEN in both BG and B&H, particularly of those with mild intellectual disability. Still, it is difficult to establish who these children are reality? Previous research from Bulgaria (Tzokova&Dobrev 2001) and more recent one (Open Society Institute 2007) draw attention to the overrepresentation of Roma children in special schools for children with mild intellectual disability. Our data supports the fact that this is still an issue for policy and practice of special education. With shifting numbers from these schools to mainstream school it would be worth investigating who gets to be integrated – disabled children or the Roma and how is this

reflected in official statistics. In addition, it has to be stressed that the increased figures do not tell us much about the quality of educational provision received. In most cases such integration is only by placement and seemingly, with insufficient support.

In BG and B&H there are advances towards a more acceptable terminology addressing SEN and disability. In BG the influence of ‘defectology’, at least terminologically, in the education for children with special needs has declined - evident in policy, theory and to some extent in practice. However, in B&H, the ‘defectological’ tradition remains and amalgamates with the new ideas of inclusion. For both BG and B&H integration and inclusion are matters dealt with mainly in special education / defectology. The main debates and the professional support for inclusion comes also from these circles. Yet the relationship between the traditional approach and current inclusive education paradigms is unclear with a tendency of total rejection of the ‘defectological’ foundations. It is a question that in our opinion deserves separate attention and further investigation.

There are notable similarities in the policies and practices for SEN children in BG and B&H, such as the preservation and the traditional favouring of special schools, the power of the medical model of disability. In Bulgaria there was a marked resistance from special schools, which have not been mentioned as an issue in B&H participants’ view. In B&H, Gam (2003) contends that the shift towards inclusion may be made easier because, B&H does not have a well developed system of special schooling that needs to be overcome. In B&H special classes in mainstream schools seem to be more popular than special schools, and as Rouse, Florian and Connolly (2000) point out sometimes special classes were found to serve as an entry route to schooling for children who were previously outside the education system. It is hard to predict if the lack of elaborate formal structure

will make the shift to a unified integrated system easier but it is certainly a point to follow.

In both BG and B&H teacher education is viewed as lagging behind the theory and policy of inclusive education. Finally, it can be argued that partially shared past political experiences and current relations with the EU, along with similarities found in the way inclusive education is approached in both countries can serve as a common ground for regional co-operation.

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Table 1: List and profile of the participants

Organizations	Position of interviewees	BG No	B&H No
Government	Key policy makers	2	2
3 International organizations	Project officers	1	2
3 Different national NGOs	Director, project officer, policy officer	2	1

Table 2. Main policies addressing inclusion

	Policies Bulgaria	Policies B&H	Main points
1	People Education Act (Government of Bulgaria 1991)	Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education, (Government of B&H 2003)	Affirms the entitlement of all children to education and equal participation in education.
2	National plan for the integration of children with special educational needs and/or chronic diseases in the system of public education 2004-2007 (Council of Ministers of Bulgaria, 2003)	Action Plan on Children with Special Needs adopted in 2006 (OSCE 2006)	Emphasises leading fulfilling lives and having equal rights and opportunities in the labour market. In B&H plan also addresses funding, raising awareness, responsibilities.
3	Regulation No. 6 of 19.08.2002 on Teaching of Children with Special Education needs and/or with chronic diseases	Rulebooks for education of children with special educational needs (RS 2004) and rulebooks for assessment and classifications exist for each Canton and for RS.	Sets out statutory guidelines for identification, assessment, placement and individual education plans, make up of professional teams, number of students in classroom.
4	Strategy for Educational Integration of Children from Ethnic Minorities (Government of Bulgaria, 2004)	The National Plan of Action for Education of Roma Children and Other National Minorities (OSCE 2004)	Roma parents have right to choose their child's school. The schools have the duty to accept and assist them, with special assistants, removal of financial obstacles.