

Special Needs Education in Europe

Thematic Publication



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European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

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Contents

Preface	4
Introduction.....	5
1 Special Needs Education in Europe: Inclusive Policies and Practices.....	7
1.1 Common characteristics of policies and practices	7
1.2 Definitions of special needs/disability.....	8
1.3 Provision for pupils with special needs	8
1.4 Special schools	11
1.5 Additional topics in relation to special provision and inclusion	12
1.6 Common trends in Europe	14
1.7 Concluding comments	17
2 Funding of Special Needs Education.....	19
2.1 Funding models	19
2.2 Funding systems	20
2.3 Efficiency, effectiveness, strategic behaviour and accountability	23
2.4 Concluding comments	24
3 Teachers and Special Needs Education.....	26
3.1 Inclusion and teacher support.....	26
3.2 Initial teacher training in special needs education.....	30
3.3 Supplementary training in special needs education.....	33
3.4 Concluding comments	36
4 Information and Communication Technology in Special Needs Education.....	37
4.1 ICT and special needs education policies	37
4.2 Specialist ICT in special needs education support.....	39
4.3 ICT in special needs education training.....	44
4.4 Issues in the application of ICT in special needs education	44
4.5 Concluding comments	47
5 Early Intervention	49
5.1 Provision for young children and transition to pre-primary education	49
5.2 Early intervention teams	51
5.3 Financial support to families.....	53
5.4 Concluding comments	54
6 Final Comments.....	55
6.1 Summary of issues.....	55
6.2 Further information	56
Annex 1 European Agency Working Partners	57
Annex 2 Eurydice National Units.....	59

Preface

This document has been prepared by the European Agency with contributions from the Eurydice national units. Co-operation between the European Agency and Eurydice dates back to 1999 when the European Agency was asked to provide information for Chapter H (Special Needs Education), a part of the Key Data on Education in Europe 1999/2000. The new edition also includes indicators, which have been prepared within this framework of close co-operation.

Effective co-operation between the two networks of Eurydice and the European Agency has helped to make the publication of this thematic publication *Special Needs Education in Europe* possible.

The most sincere gratitude is expressed to European Agency National Working partners for their support and co-operation in the preparation of this thematic publication. Thanks also go to the Eurydice National Units for their contribution, with special reference to the contributions from Units in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia.



Jorgen Greve
Director

Introduction

Special Needs Education in Europe provides a summary of the relevant information, collected by the European Agency National Working Partners in the following five priority areas of special needs education:

- Inclusive Education Policies and Practices
- Funding of Special Needs Education
- Teachers and Special Needs Education
- Information and Communication Technology in Special Needs Education
- Early Intervention

Information has been collected through the provision of national reports per topic, prepared by the European Agency members via questionnaires and, in some cases, practical examples. The document has been edited by the European Agency, with contributions mainly from the Eurydice National Units in those countries not represented in the European Agency. However, contributions and comments from all Eurydice national units were included.

The main purpose of this document is to develop the scope of existing information on the five areas focused upon to cover more countries. Materials already available from the European Agency member countries were sent to the Eurydice national units in order to facilitate their task.

The national units in Belgium (German community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Poland and Slovakia are therefore gratefully acknowledged for their relevant contribution to this publication.

This document provides an overview of the five key issues across the different countries. It needs to be highlighted that a lot of information is presented in tabular format, which is the best way to summarise descriptive information. Such a presentation format must not be perceived as a means of comparing country situations.

This publication does not look at special needs education issues with any one particular definition or philosophy in mind. There is no agreed interpretation of terms such as handicap, special need or disability across the countries. Definitions and categories of special educational needs vary across countries. The approach taken here is to consider all definitions and perspectives within the debates around special needs education practice in the five key areas.

Chapter 1 deals with *Special Needs Education in Europe, Inclusive Policies and Practices*. It presents a global characterisation of policies and practices in the different countries; definitions of special needs/ disability used by the countries; the types of provision for pupils with special needs; characteristics and roles of special schools; additional topics on special provision and inclusion, and common trends in Europe.

Chapter 2 provides an overview on *Funding of Needs Special Needs Education*. It covers existing funding models in different countries; systems of funding; efficiency, effectiveness, strategic behaviour and accountability related to the different funding systems.

Chapter 3 deals with *Teachers and Special Needs Education* and covers inclusion and teacher support provided to class teachers; initial teacher training in special needs education and supplementary training in special needs education.

Chapter 4 deals with *Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Special Needs Education*. It looks at ICT and special needs education policies in the different countries; specialist ICT support within the framework of special needs education; ICT in special needs education training and issues relating to the application of ICT in special needs education.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Chapter 5 deals with *Early Intervention* and looks at provision available for young children and transition to pre-primary education; characteristics of early intervention teams and financial support provided to families.

An overview of key issues arising from information on these five areas can be found in Final Comments at the end of the document.

1 Special Needs Education in Europe: Inclusive Policies and Practices

1.1 Common characteristics of policies and practices

The current tendency in the EU and the candidate countries is to develop a policy towards inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools, providing teachers with varying degrees of support in terms of supplementary staff, materials, in-service training and equipment.

Countries can be grouped into three categories according to their policy on including pupils with special educational needs:

- The first category (*one-track* approach) includes countries that develop policy and practices geared towards the inclusion of almost all pupils within mainstream education. This is supported by a wide range of services focusing on the mainstream school. This approach can be found in Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Cyprus.
- The countries belonging to the second category (*multi-track* approach) have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion. They offer a variety of services between the two systems (i.e. mainstream and special needs education systems). Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia belong to this category.
- In the third category (*two-track* approach), there are two distinct education systems. Pupils with SEN are usually placed in special schools or special classes. Generally, a vast majority of pupils officially registered as having special educational needs do not follow the mainstream curriculum among their non-disabled peers. These systems are (or at least were until very recently) under separate legislation, with different laws for mainstream and special needs education. In Switzerland and Belgium, special needs education is fairly well developed. In Switzerland, the situation is rather complicated: mainly, different legislation exists for special schools and special classes (including special services within mainstream classes). At the same time, there is a fairly well developed system of services for special services within mainstream classes – of course depending upon the canton.

At times it can be difficult to classify a country according to the type of inclusion policy, because of recent policy changes. For instance, Germany and the Netherlands were recently positioned within the two-track system but are now moving towards the multi-track system.

Of course, the developmental stage of countries with regards to inclusion varies a lot. In Sweden, Denmark, Italy and Norway, clear inclusive policies have been developed and implemented at an earlier stage. In these countries, major legislative choices have already been made years ago: important changes have not occurred in the last few years. In most of the other countries huge legislative changes can be recognised, some of which are pointed out below:

- Already in the 1980s, some countries defined their special needs education system as a resource for mainstream schools. More countries follow this approach today, such as Germany, Finland, Greece, Portugal, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic.
- Parental choice has become a topic for legislative changes in Austria, the Netherlands, the UK and Lithuania.
- Decentralisation of the responsibilities for meeting special educational needs is a topic of the legislation in Finland (municipalities), the UK, the Netherlands (school clusters), the

Czech Republic and Lithuania. In the UK, schools are increasingly being resourced by their local education authority in such a way that they can make their own decisions about the best way to allocate their overall budget to meet the educational needs of all pupils on roll, including pupils with severe special educational needs.

- The change in funding special needs education is an important innovation in the Netherlands.
- In Switzerland the funding of special needs education is discussed at a political level: it is proposed to put special needs education entirely in the responsibility of the cantons (up until now confederation).
- Legislation concerning special needs education at the secondary school level is now being developed or has recently been developed in the Netherlands, Austria and Spain.

1.2 Definitions of special needs/disability

As expected, definitions and categories of special educational needs and handicap vary across countries. Some countries define only one or two types of special needs (for example Denmark). Others categorise pupils with special needs in more than 10 categories (Poland). Most countries distinguish 6–10 types of special needs. In Liechtenstein no types of special needs are distinguished; only the type of support is defined.

These differences between countries are strongly related to administrative, financial and procedural regulations. They do not reflect variations of the incidence and the types of special educational needs between these countries.

In almost every country the concept of special educational needs is on the agenda. More and more people are convinced that the medical approach of the concept of ‘handicap’ should be replaced with a more educational approach: the central focus has now turned to the consequences of disability for education. However, at the same time it is clear that this approach is very complex, and countries are currently struggling with the practical implementation of this philosophy. Nevertheless, this topic, the description of disabilities in terms of educational consequences, is being debated in most European countries.

In relation to this discussion in more and more countries, using the assessment of pupils with special needs for the implementation of appropriate education is being developed. This is mostly done through individual education programmes (other terms are in use in the different countries, for example, *Individual Educational Plan*).

1.3 Provision for pupils with special needs

Comparing countries, especially on quantitative indicators, is very complex in the field of special needs education and inclusion. This is especially the case when some countries provide relatively precise data, and others only global estimations. Some countries cannot provide exact figures because of the decentralised character of their education system. This holds for example for Sweden, Finland and Denmark. In other countries the number of pupils in segregated provision is only estimated on the basis that, in general, pupils are educated in the mainstream education system. However, as some specific regions or schools may always provide other solutions than the mainstream school, in these cases, the percentage of pupils in special settings is estimated as below 0.5%. The following table gives some indications for the general situation of the type of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Table 1.1 *Provision for pupils with special educational needs¹*

	Number of compulsory school aged pupils	Percentage of pupils with SENs	Percentage of pupils in segregated provision ²	Year of reference
Austria	848,126	3.2%	1.6%	2000/2001
Belgium (DE)	9,427	2.7%	2.3%	2000/2001
Belgium (F)	680,360	4.0%	4.0%	2000/2001
Belgium (NL) ³	822,666	5.0%	4.9%	2000/2001
Cyprus	N/A	5.6%	0.7%	2000/2001
Czech Republic	1,146,607	9.8%	5.0%	2000/2001
Denmark	670,000	11.9%	1.5%	2000/2001
Estonia	205,367	12.5%	3.4%	2000/2001
Finland	583,945	17.8%	3.7%	1999
France	9,709,000	3.1%	2.6%	1999/2000/2001
Germany	9,159,068	5.3%	4.6%	2000/2001
Greece	1,439,411	0.9%	< 0.5%	1999/2000
Hungary	1,191,750	4.1%	3.7%	1999/2000
Iceland	42,320	15.0%	0.9%	2000/2001
Ireland	575,559	4.2%	1.2%	1999/2000
Italy	8,867,824	1.5%	< 0.5%	2001
Latvia	294,607	3.7%	3.6%	2000/2001
Liechtenstein	3,813	2.3%	1.8%	2001/2002
Lithuania	583,858	9.4%	1.1%	2001/2002
Luxembourg	57,295	≈ 2.6%	≈ 1.0%	2001/2002
Netherlands ⁴	2,200,000	2.1%	1.8%	1999/2000/2001
Norway	601,826	5.6%	0.5%	2001
Poland	4,410,516	3.5%	2.0%	2000/2001
Portugal	1,365,830	5.8%	< 0.5%	2000/2001
Slovakia	762,111	4.0%	3.4%	2001/2002
Slovenia	189,342	4.7%	(:)	2000
Spain	4,541,489	3.7%	0.4%	1999/2000
Sweden	1,062,735	2.0%	1.3%	2001
Switzerland ⁵	807,101	6.0%	6.0%	1999/2000
United Kingdom	9,994,159	3.2%	1.1%	1999/2000

Source: European Agency and Eurydice Network

¹ More extensive information related to statistics in different countries, can be found on the National Overviews section of the European Agency website: www.european-agency.org

² The term 'segregated settings' or 'provision' throughout this text refers to special schools and full-time (or almost full-time) special classes.

³ In the Flemish Community, specific educational programmes exist in mainstream schools to support teaching practice in schools (e.g. for pupils from underprivileged families, refugee children etc.). Schools get additional and earmarked funding for this. The number of children belonging to these target groups are not included in the figures of pupils with SEN. Numbers are only referring to pupils with intellectual, physical, visual or hearing impairments, with severe learning disabilities or emotional and behavioural problems.

⁴ The percentage of the Netherlands has fallen sharply compared with a few years ago because of changes in legislation and regulations: some types of special schools now belong to the mainstream school system.

⁵ Statistics at national level do not allow for differentiation between pupils with SEN in inclusive and segregated settings (many pupils with SEN in mainstream are not counted separately).

As expected, numbers vary considerably across countries. Some countries register a total of about 1% of all pupils with special educational needs (for example, Greece), others register more than 10% (Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Denmark). These contrasts in the percentage of registered pupils with SEN reflect differences in legislation, assessment procedures, funding arrangements and provision. Of course, they do *not reflect differences in the incidence of special needs* between the countries.

Information is also provided on the percentage of pupils educated in segregated settings (special schools and classes). Though the general feeling is that this data is fairly reliable for the current state of the art, it should be emphasised that these percentages of pupils in segregated settings are based on *different age groups* (the compulsory age range varies across countries). All countries considered together, about 2% of all pupils in Europe are educated in special schools or (full-time) special classes.

Table 1.2 *Percentage of pupils with SEN in segregated settings⁶*

< 1%	1–2%	2–4%	> 4%
Cyprus	Austria	Belgium (DE)	Belgium (F)
Greece	Denmark	Estonia	Belgium (NL)
Iceland	Ireland	Finland	Czech Rep.
Italy	Liechtenstein	France	Germany
Norway	Lithuania	Hungary	Switzerland
Portugal	Luxembourg	Latvia	
Spain	Netherlands ⁷	Poland	
	Sweden	Slovakia	
	UK		

Some countries place less than 1% of all pupils in segregated schools and classes, others up to 6% (Switzerland). Especially the countries in northwest Europe seem to place pupils more frequently in special settings as opposed to southern European and Scandinavian countries. Also here, these differences cannot be easily attributed to a specific set of factors on the level of policies or practices, although they may be related to demographic characteristics. In the study *Integration in Europe: Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs* (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, Middelfart, 1998)⁸ a high correlation between percentages of pupils in segregated provision and population density of countries was found. The correlation between the two variables was relatively high: 0.60 (at N = 15), being significant at a 0.05 level. In statistical terms, about 36% of the variance of the percentage of segregated pupils is explained by population density.

This relatively high correlation may come from the fact that in countries with a low population density, segregation in segregated special schools has some clear disadvantages. First, in these countries, education in segregated settings requires large time-consuming travel distances, since pupils have to be transported to other towns or cities. Secondly, there are negative social consequences: children are taken out of their social environment and have less time for their friends in their own neighbourhood. Furthermore, special settings in low-populated areas are not very cost effective. In countries with high population densities, special placements have fewer negative consequences: travel distances are smaller, negative social effects are relatively restricted and special placements could be more cost effective.

Of course, differences in the placement of pupils with special needs reflect more than just variations in population density. Some countries do have a long history of inclusive policy

⁶ See note 2.

⁷ See note 4.

⁸ Those calculations included a different subset of countries compared to the sample of this study.

and practice, while others have only recently started developing an inclusive policy. However, it should be recognised that more trivial factors, of which population density is an example, may also play an important role.

1.4 Special schools

The transformation of special schools and institutes into resource centres is a very common trend in Europe. Most countries report that they are planning to develop, are developing or have already developed a network of resource centres in their countries. These centres are given different names and different tasks are assigned to them. Some countries call them knowledge centres, others expertise centres or resource centres. In general, the following tasks are distinguished for these centres:

- provision for training and courses for teachers and other professionals;
- development and dissemination of materials and methods;
- support for mainstream schools and parents;
- short-time or part-time help for individual students;
- support in entering the labour market.

Some of these centres have a national level task, especially with respect to certain specific target groups (particularly milder special needs); others have a wider and more regional level task.

A few countries have already gained some experience with resource centres (Austria, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, for example); others are implementing the system (Cyprus, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the Czech Republic). In some countries special schools are obliged to co-operate with mainstream school in the catchment area (Spain), or special schools supply ambulant or other services to mainstream schools (Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, the UK).

The role of special schools in terms of inclusion is, of course, strongly related to the education system of the country. In countries with almost no special schools, like Norway and Italy for example, their role is structurally modest (in Norway, 20 of the previously state special schools, are defined in terms of regional or national resource centres). In Cyprus, the 1999 Special Needs Education Law demands that new special schools must be built within the boundaries of a mainstream school to facilitate contacts and networking and, where possible, promote inclusion.

In countries with a relatively large special needs education system, special schools are more actively involved in the process of inclusion. In those countries co-operation between special and mainstream education is key. However, in those countries voices are heard that special schools are threatened by the process of inclusion (Belgium, the Netherlands, France for example). This is a more or less direct consequence of having a relatively large special school system: on the one hand, co-operation of special schools in the process towards inclusion is necessary; on the other hand, the inclusion process itself is a direct danger for them. At the same time, inclusion in these countries is difficult to achieve, since mainstream schools are more or less used to transferring their problems to other parts of the school system, the special schools. Besides, specialist teachers and other professionals working in the special school system often consider themselves to be the experts on special educational needs and usually think that they fulfil the need and challenge the notion of inclusion. It is extremely difficult to change such a status quo.

Of course, this transformation implies huge consequences for special needs education. Briefly, pupil-based educational institutes have to switch into support structures or resource centres for teachers, parents and others. Their new task is to give support to mainstream

schools, develop materials and methods, gather information and provide it to parents and teachers, take care of the necessary liaison between educational and non-educational institutions, and give support when transition from school to work takes place. In some cases special educators and special schools arrange short-term help for individual pupils or small groups of pupils.

1.5 Additional topics in relation to special provision and inclusion

1.5.1 Individual educational programmes

Most countries use individual educational programmes for pupils with special needs. This document presents information on how a mainstream curriculum is adapted, and what are the necessary additional resources, goals and evaluation of the educational approach. Adaptations can take different forms and in some cases, for specific categories of pupils, they may even mean omitting certain subjects of the general curriculum.

Recent views on inclusion have stressed the fact that inclusion is in the first place an educational reform issue and not a placement issue. Inclusion starts from the right of all pupils to follow mainstream education. A few countries (for example, Italy) have expressed this clearly in direct and legal terms and they have changed their educational approach so as to offer more provisions within mainstream education. Of course, the different approaches are narrowly correlated to the current position of special needs education in those countries.

The countries, aiming at providing SEN facilities within the mainstream school, stress the view that the curriculum framework should cover all pupils. Of course, some specific adaptations to the curriculum may be necessary. This is mostly done in terms of an individual educational programme. It is clear from the country descriptions that in almost all of the countries the individual educational programme plays a major role for inclusive special needs education. It is one of the current trends across Europe to use such an individual document to specify the pupils' needs, goals and means, and to detail the degree and type of adaptations to be made to the mainstream curriculum to evaluate the progresses of the concerned pupils. It may also serve as a 'contract' between the different 'actors': parents, teachers and other professionals.

1.5.2 Secondary education

Another topic in the field of special needs and the curriculum is the provision of special needs at the secondary level. As is shown in various country reports, inclusion generally progresses well at the primary education level, but at secondary level serious problems emerge. It is well known that an increasing topic specialisation and the different organisation of secondary schools result in serious difficulties for inclusion at the secondary level. It was also reported that generally the 'gap' between pupils with special needs and their peers increases with age.

It should be stressed that most countries 'agreed' that the topic of inclusion at the secondary level should be one of the main areas of concern. Specific problem areas are insufficient teacher training and less positive teacher attitudes.

1.5.3 Attitudes of teachers

Concerning attitudes of teachers, it is frequently mentioned that they strongly depend on their experience (with pupils with special needs), their training, the support available and some other conditions such as the class size and workload of teachers. Especially in secondary

education, teachers are less willing to include pupils with special needs in their classes (especially when they have severe emotional and behaviour problems).

1.5.4 *Role of parents*

Most countries report that in general parents have positive attitudes towards inclusion; the same holds for the attitudes in the society. Of course, attitudes of parents are largely determined by personal experiences, as is mentioned for example by Austria and Greece. Thus, positive experiences with inclusion are quite rare in countries where the facilities are concentrated in the special school system and not available for the mainstream schools. However, if mainstream schools can offer these services, parents soon develop positive attitudes towards inclusion (Pijl, Meijer, Hegarty, 1997).⁹ The media can also play an important role here (as the experience in Cyprus has shown).

In countries with a more segregated school system, parental pressure is increasing towards inclusion (for example in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland). Positive attitudes of parents are also reported in countries where inclusion is a common practice (for example Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden). At the same time, countries report that in the case of more severe special needs, parents (and pupils) sometimes prefer special needs education within a segregated setting. This is the case, for example, in Norway and Sweden, where parents of deaf children want their children to have the possibility of communicating with their fellow pupils through sign language. It is also the case in Finland for severe special needs. In Spain and Portugal, some people advocate placement in special classes and schools. Some parents and teachers believe that special schools have more resources, competence and skills than mainstream schools, especially for secondary education and for the most severe needs (including severe emotional and behaviour problems).

Parental choice is an important issue in Austria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the UK. In these countries, parents generally assume that they have the legal right to express a preference for the school they would like their child to attend. In other countries the role of parents seems to be rather modest. In Slovakia, for instance, although parental opinion is needed, the decision for the transfer of a pupil to a special school lies within the competence of the headmaster from the special school.

In Belgium (Flemish Community) a new Decree on equal opportunities in education was passed in Parliament in June 2002. This new legislation emphasises the rights of parents and pupils to be enrolled in the school of their choice. The reasons for schools refusing a pupil are very clearly defined. Within this general framework, specific rules apply for pupils with special educational needs. Referral of a pupil with SEN to another (mainstream or special) school has to be based on a description of the supporting power of the school and after consultation of the parents involved, consultation and advice of the school guidance centre and taking into account the additional resources available. In case of refusal or referral, schools have to give a written statement to the parents and the chairman of a municipal or regional platform (in which parents are also represented). In any case parents with a child with SEN can not be forced to enrol their child in a special school.

Some countries, like France, point out the influence of decentralisation on the attitudes of parents: it is believed that at local and regional levels parental influence is developed more easily, and a close contact with the responsible authorities can facilitate a positive change. In Sweden, it seems that decisions on the necessary support for individual pupils are made at local level, in co-operation with teachers and parents. Therefore, it has been decided that local authorities would transfer certain responsibilities and parts of the decision-making processes to local boards, which are mostly represented by parents.

⁹ Pijl, S.J., Meijer, C.J.W., Hegarty, S. (eds) (1997) *Inclusive Education, A Global Agenda*, London: Routledge.

1.5.5 *Barriers*

Quite a number of factors can be interpreted as barriers for inclusion. A few countries point out the importance of an appropriate funding system. They state that their funding system is not enhancing inclusive practices. Chapter 2, section 2.1 (pp. 000–00) focuses on this issue in more detail.

Not only the funding system may inhibit inclusion processes; but also the existence of a large segregated setting itself is a hindrance for inclusion. As shown before, in countries having a relatively large segregated school system, special schools and specialist teachers may feel threatened by the inclusion process. They fear that the survival of their position may be endangered. It is even more the case when the economic context is quite tense and finally their jobs may be in danger. In such situations it is very complex to debate inclusion on the basis of educational or normative arguments.

Other important factors that were raised refer to the availability of sufficient conditions for support within mainstream schools. If knowledge, skills, attitudes and materials are not available in the mainstream settings, inclusion of pupils with special needs will be difficult to achieve. An adequate teacher training (in initial teacher training or through in-service) is an essential prerequisite for inclusion.

A few countries, like France, consider class sizes in mainstream schools to be a negative factor for inclusion. These countries point out that it is extremely difficult for teachers to include pupils with special needs when they already have a relatively high workload.

1.5.6 *Pupils*

Additionally, factors at the level of pupils have been mentioned. Countries highlighted the fact that in some cases (deaf pupils, severe emotional and/or behaviour problems), inclusion is a real challenge. This is especially the case in secondary schools.

1.6 **Common trends in Europe**

What are the common trends in Europe? Has there been any progress on the issue of special needs education? What are the main challenges for the future? The most important developments within European countries in the last ten years are pointed out below.

1.6.1 *Trends and progress*

1. There is a movement in which countries with a clear two-track system of special needs education (relatively large special needs education system beside the mainstream system) are developing a continuum of services between the two systems. Furthermore, special schools are more and more defined as resources for mainstream schools.
2. Legislative progress regarding inclusion was achieved in many countries. This applies especially to countries with a big segregated special needs education system, which developed new legislative frameworks concerning SEN within the mainstream school.
3. A few countries have planned to change their funding system in order to achieve more inclusive services. In other countries, there is a growing awareness of the importance of an adequate funding system.

4. Parental choice has become a major topic in a few countries in the last few years. There is an attempt to achieve a more inclusive setting through an increasing number of possibilities for parents to choose an educational setting for their child.
5. The transformation of special schools in resource centres has been continued in most countries. In some other countries this model is being initiated.
6. The role of the individual educational plan in the practice of special needs education is a common trend in European countries. Progress has been made in relation to this issue.
7. Countries try to move from a psycho-medical paradigm to a more education-oriented or interactive paradigm. However, at the moment this is mainly done in terms of changing concepts and views. The implementation of these new views in the practice of special education still needs to be developed.

1.6.2 *Challenges*

1. In general, the tension between, on the one hand, the pressure for better outputs of schools and, on the other hand, the position of vulnerable pupils, is increasing. There is a growing attention in the society for the outputs of educational processes. One of the most explicit examples can be found in England where the publication of pupils' performance, by school, at the end of key stage assessment, including performance in public examinations at the end of statutory education (16+), has drawn much attention and discussion. The results are published by the media in the form of 'league tables', by rank order to 'raw' scores.

Of course, it is not surprising that societies generally ask for more outcomes and benefits. As a result, market thinking is introduced in education and parents start to behave as clients. Schools are made 'accountable' for the results they achieve and there is an increasing tendency to judge schools on the basis of their outputs. It should be stressed that this development presents some dangers for vulnerable pupils and their parents. First, parents of children who are not identified as having special needs could tend to choose a school where the learning process is efficient and effective, and not hindered by slow learners or other pupils who need additional attention. Generally, parents want the best school for their child.

Secondly, schools are most likely to favour pupils who contribute to higher outputs. Pupils with special needs not only contribute to more variance within the class but also to lower average achievements. These two factors are a direct threat for pupils with special needs. This is especially the case within the context of a free school choice and the absence of an obligation for schools to admit all pupils within the catchment area. In this sense, the wish to achieve higher outputs and to include pupils with special needs can become antithetical. This dilemma needs serious attention. A few countries have pointed out this dilemma and it can be expected that others will follow in the near future. It is a clear area of tension that has to be addressed in order to protect the position of vulnerable pupils.

2. The position of pupils with special needs within mainstream schools and the quality of services provided to them should be monitored more systematically in Europe. Monitoring and evaluation procedures must be developed and, in general, the issue of accountability still has to be addressed within the framework of special needs education. This is especially needed in the current context of increasing decentralisation in most

countries. A systematic assessment procedure should be set up in order to control these developments and their outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are essential elements to achieve 'accountability' in education, and also and especially in special needs education. First, this would address a growing need to increase efficient and effective use of public funds. Secondly, and this is also the case within the context of inclusion, users of educational facilities (especially pupils with SEN and their parents) must be convinced that the provision offered to them is of a good quality: forms of (external) monitoring, control and evaluation are then necessary.

It is precisely in this area that some tension may emerge. A few countries report that development towards inclusion requires reduction of labelling and assessment procedures. Certainly, it is very important that funds should be spent as much as possible for educational processes (teaching, providing additional services and help etc.) instead of diagnosis, assessment, testing and litigation. However, it is extremely important to monitor and evaluate the development of pupils with special needs, for example to increase the fit between needs and provision. Furthermore, parents need to be informed on how their child progresses.

3. Inclusion at the level of secondary education is also an area of concern. Development of possibilities for (in-service) teacher training and positive attitudes are challenges for the near future.
4. A 'rough' estimate of the percentage of pupils with special needs in European countries reveals that about 2% of all pupils are educated in segregated settings. It is difficult to assess to what extent progress has been made considering the number of pupils in segregated or inclusive provisions in European countries. However, during the last few years, countries with a relatively large special needs education system in segregated settings showed an ongoing increase in the percentages of pupils educated in special schools. Though exact figures are lacking, it could be said that not much progress has been made towards inclusion at the European level during the last ten years. On the contrary, the most reliable estimation tends to reveal a slight increase in segregation. Some countries still have to put their policies into practice. However, there is a general basis for optimism, especially in those countries that experienced an important growth in the number of pupils in segregated provisions, and which are now implementing promising policies.
5. Responsibility is a central issue in the field of special needs education. In most countries, responsibility for special needs education rests with the Ministry of Education or other education authorities. In some other countries, other ministries are also involved. France and Portugal are clear examples of countries where responsibility for educational provision for pupils with special needs is divided between different ministries.

In some countries, this share of responsibilities is, most likely, the result of tradition and has strong historical roots. However, one clear disadvantage of such a division of responsibilities is the fact that different approaches towards educational innovation in general, and towards the issue of inclusion in particular, may emerge. While the shift from a medical paradigm on special needs towards more modern paradigms (for example the educational and interactive paradigm in diagnostics, assessments, but also in types of provision) is most likely to emerge within the context of education, within other ministries this may be otherwise. Furthermore, it seems that monitoring, evaluation and information gathering concerning special needs provision (for example concerning the provision and number of pupils educated within that provision) are complicated in countries where a certain degree of duality exists in responsibilities and administration.

Although in most countries the ministries of education have the sole responsibility for special needs education, there is a clear and widespread trend towards decentralisation. Decentralisation of responsibilities seems to play a key role in many countries. For example, in the UK, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands decentralisation is a crucial theme in the debate on special needs education provision. In England there is an increasing shift of resources and decision-making to those nearest the child because there is evidence that, because of increased flexibility, it brings the greatest benefits to the largest numbers of pupils needing such support. In the 1990s in Finland, the number of special schools decreased following reforms of school administration towards decentralisation of decision-making power to municipalities. Local forces can more easily influence the organisation of special needs education.

In other Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark and Norway) special needs education is also strongly related to decentralisation. In these countries a law makes municipalities responsible for providing all pupils, who are residents of the municipality, with education regardless of their abilities.

The French report reveals a strong development of decentralisation in France. This evolution allows more adaptation to the local and regional circumstances. Promising developments can be accelerated within the local or regional context. Pressure of parents is then a facilitating factor.

There is a clear need to adapt national policies to varying regional circumstances. There is also a wish to have clear and closer communication with the responsible actors.

It seems that decentralisation is, indeed, a central issue in the provision of special needs education and that local regional responsibilities may well enhance inclusive practices.

1.7 Concluding comments

This chapter provided a brief overview of the main characteristics related to the progress of inclusive policies and practices in Europe. The main points of the chapter are summarised as follows:

- **Inclusive policies:** countries can be divided into three categories according to their policy of including pupils with special educational needs:
 - (a) The first category (*one-track* approach) includes countries that develop policy and practices geared towards the inclusion of almost all pupils within mainstream education. This type of inclusion is supported by a wide range of services focusing on the mainstream school.
 - (b) The countries belonging to the second category (*multi-track* approach) have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion. They offer a variety of services between the two systems, mainstream and special needs education.
 - (c) In the third category (*two-track* approach) there are two distinct educational systems. Pupils with SEN are usually placed in special schools or special classes. Generally, a vast majority of the pupils officially registered as having special educational needs do not follow the mainstream curriculum among non-disabled peers.
- **Definitions and categories:** definitions and categories of special needs and handicap vary across countries. Some countries define only one or two types of special needs. Others categorise pupils with special needs in more than ten categories. Most countries distinguish six to ten types of special needs.

- **Provision for pupils with special needs:** quantitative indicators are very complex in the field of special needs education and inclusion. The percentage of pupils registered as having special needs varies strongly across countries. Some countries register about 1% of all pupils, others register more than 10%. These differences in the percentage of registered pupils between countries reflect differences in assessment procedures, funding arrangements and provision. Of course, they do not reflect differences in the incidence of special needs across countries. All countries considered together, around 2.1% of all pupils in Europe are educated in either special schools or (full-time) special classes.
- **Special schools:** the transfer of special schools and institutes into resource centres is a very common trend in Europe. Almost all the countries report that they are planning to develop, are developing, or have already developed a network of resource centres in their countries. This situation has huge consequences for special needs education. Briefly, special needs education has to switch from a pupil-based educational institute into a support structure or resource centre for teachers, parents and others.
- **Additional topics:** most countries make use of an individual educational programme for students with special needs. It appears from the country descriptions that in almost all of the countries the elaboration of an individual educational programme plays a major role in special needs education within the mainstream setting. It serves both as an expression and specification of the degree and type of adaptations to the mainstream curriculum and as a tool for evaluating the progress of pupils with special needs. It may also serve as a 'contract' between the different 'actors': parents, teachers and other professionals.

2 Funding of Special Needs Education

Funding is an essential element of inclusion. If a country advocates inclusion, then legislation and especially financial regulations have to be adapted to this goal. If these regulations are not in accordance with the specified goals, then the chances of achieving these objectives are presumably low. In this sense funding may be a decisive factor in achieving inclusion. Country descriptions clearly show that the funding system can inhibit the inclusion processes.

In some countries funding is not linked to pupils but to the setting in which they are educated. In practice this means that a referral to special schools is rewarded. Maintaining pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, or transferring them from special to mainstream schools, is insufficiently encouraged. Thus, with those systems, a premium is put on segregation, while inclusion is discouraged.

A segregated system also implies that education of pupils with special needs should be undertaken by specialist teachers and professionals. This division has several negative consequences: the help required is linked to a special needs education setting, which largely results in more and more pupils being placed in segregated schools. In this case, special needs education is an attractive alternative, as it provides all necessary services for extra help.

2.1 Funding models

When discussing funding regulations, various issues need to be considered. Funding systems affect the flexibility of schools in making special provision; they may necessitate formal identification procedures, may create bureaucracy, raise questions of accountability and (budget) control, affect the position of parents and may promote the need for decentralisation of decision-making processes. Each way of funding special needs provision is expected to have certain positive outcomes. For instance, funding based on lump-sum models is more flexible and avoids bureaucratic procedures, while pupil-bound budget empowers the parents, stimulates accountability and promotes equal access to appropriate education.

New funding systems will always be a compromise between all these aspects, a number of which are analysed in the following section.

2.1.1 *Parameters in funding models*

Every existing or newly developed funding model can be described with a set of parameters. Here, two main parameters are used for our analysis: the destination locus (who gets the funds) and the conditions (indicators) for funding.

1. DESTINATION LOCUS

This parameter is quite important in discussions on inclusion. In principle, funds can be allocated in many different ways. In the first place they can be allocated to the clients of the education system: the pupils and/or parents. Schools can also receive funding. In this respect there are two options: special schools or mainstream schools. Another possibility is to allocate funds to groups of schools or other regional institutions like school advisory centres. Finally, funds can be delegated to municipalities or regions.

2. FUNDING INDICATORS

Three main categories of indicators are usually distinguished: *input*, *throughput* and *output*.

- (a) *Input* funding is when the funding is based, for example, on the identified need of each of the destination levels, such as the number of pupils with special needs in a school,

municipality or region. Inputs may also be defined in terms of referral rates, low achievement scores, the number of disadvantaged pupils and so on. The key point is that funding is based on the (expressed or measured) needs.

- (b) The second model, *throughput* funding, is based on the functions or tasks that have to be undertaken or developed. It is not based on needs, but rather on the services provided by a school, municipality or region. Finances are allocated on condition that particular services be developed or maintained. Schools, municipalities or regions are equally treated: funds are based on total enrolment or on other population indicators. Of course, certain output conditions can be included in this model, but funding itself is not based on outputs (or inputs). Control and accountability can play an important role here, as with the other funding models.
- (c) In the third option, funds are allocated according to the *outputs*: for example, the number of referred pupils (the lower the number, the more funds) or the achievement scores (added value: the higher the achievement scores, the more funds). Outputs can be defined on the basis of different aggregation levels, as pointed out before.

It is clear that these three models have extremely different incentives. A needs-based input system entails a bonus for having or formulating needs; an output-based system promotes the achievement of the desired results; finally, a throughput model does not reinforce inputs or outputs, but tries to generate services. The three models may also have their own negative side effects and lead to unexpected or expected strategic behaviour. For example, an output model may reinforce the transfer of pupils with expected low gains in achievement scores to other parts of the system. On the other hand, input funding on the basis of low achievements reinforces low achievements themselves: more funds can then be expected. Finally, throughput funding may lead to inactivity and inertia, due to the fact that, whether anything is done or not, funds will be available.

Combinations of different indicators are also possible, such as throughput funding combined with output control. Low outputs could then be used as a possible correction mechanism for the throughput budget for a following period of time.

The following sections analyse the funding systems in different countries, based on the framework of the two discussed parameters, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of those systems.

2.2 Funding systems

Throughout the countries of Europe, different models of funding special needs education can be distinguished. However, it is impossible to group the participating countries into a few clear categories: in most countries different funding models are used simultaneously for different groups of pupils with special needs. In addition, within the strongly decentralised countries, different funding models are used by the regional authorities. In some countries (e.g. France and Portugal) different ministries are involved in the education of pupils with SEN, which may also result in different approaches to the funding of special needs education. Finally, because the funding of inclusive services usually differs from the funding of special provision in segregated settings, it is impossible to characterise a country by one simple formula or funding system.

As a result, the discussion about the different funding models is not based on comparisons between countries but between models. Below, countries are mentioned alongside different funding models: this should not be interpreted as an attempt to highlight

the countries' main funding model but rather as an illustration of the place where the specific model can be found.

The first model is the one currently used in countries with a relatively high proportion of pupils in segregated settings, where special schools are financed by central government on the basis of the number of pupils with SEN and the severity of the disability. This model is typically described as a needs-based funding model at the level of special schools. To refer to the theoretical framework used here, this model is an *input* model: funding is based on the degree of needs. Governments fund special schools based on their needs. The indicator for 'need' here is the number of pupils with special needs. Decision-making processes are mostly organised by regional or school-based commissions.

Countries working with this type of *input-based* funding at the (special) school level are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Countries with relatively low percentages of pupils in special schools or classes may also use a central needs-based model for the funding of special schools. Thus, in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Spain and (at least a small part of) Sweden, the special school system is paid for by the central Government on the basis of the number of pupils and their disabilities.

In the second model, the central Government allocates funds to the municipalities via a lump sum (with possible adjustments for socio-economic differences) and municipalities have the main responsibility for dividing the funds to lower levels. The first step can be characterised with a *throughput model*: funds are allocated to municipalities whatever the number of pupils with special needs in these municipalities.

As for the second step, the needs-based indicators can be used, but also other types of allocation processes. Countries focusing strongly on this type of decentralised special needs funding are Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Here, municipalities decide on how special needs education funds should be used, and on the degree of funding. In Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden the following principle is embedded in the funding system: the more funds municipalities allocate to the segregated provisions, such as special schools or special classes, the less funding is available for inclusive services. In Lithuania, policy-makers are planning to introduce such a system in the near future.

In the countries where this model can be found (for example Denmark and Norway) school resource centres generally play a decisive role in the allocation procedures.

As pointed out before, different indicators and procedures can be used for the allocation processes from municipalities to schools: in some countries *throughput models* are also used at this stage. For example, in Sweden, some municipalities allocate special needs education funds to schools, irrespective of the needs of those schools. However, most of the time, an indicator for need is also used at this stage of the process.

In the third model, funding is not delegated to municipalities but to a higher level of aggregation, such as regions, provinces, counties, prefectures, school clusters etc. Special needs education is financed indirectly by central government through other layers which have the main responsibility for special provision. This model is used, for instance, in Denmark (for the most severe special needs), France (for inclusive services), Greece, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Italy. In the Netherlands it has recently been introduced for milder special needs: the funds dedicated to these pupils are allocated to school clusters on the basis of a throughput model. Clusters made up of mainstream and special schools receive funds for special provision irrespective of the number of pupils with special needs.

In the UK, responsibility for deciding on the levels of funding to meet special educational needs is, in the first instance, at the level of the local education authority.

In some countries, funds are tied to pupils: the budget for special needs education is based on the type of disability; and parents can in principle choose where they want their child to be educated. This can be described as an input or needs-based model at the pupil level: the more needs a pupil has, the more funds are connected to them.

This model of pupil-bound budget can be found in Austria (for certified pupils), the UK (for some of the funding within the statement procedure), France (SEA procedure), the Czech Republic and Luxembourg. This system is expected to be introduced in the Netherlands for the most severe needs. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the Ministry of Welfare is experimenting with the allocation of personal-assistance budgets. In the few cases of financing pupils in this way, the money is used by some parents to fill in the need of support for their child in the mainstream school.

In a few countries authorities base at least part of the funding of special needs education on the belief or assumption that milder forms of special needs are evenly spread across schools. Other countries believe that every mainstream school requires a certain amount of earmarked special needs funding in order to educate these pupils adequately: in these cases, the funding of mainstream schools consists of a fixed budget for special needs education irrespective of the number of pupils with special needs in the schools. This model – or at least this part of the funding model for special needs education – can be characterised as a throughput funding system at the school level. Such approaches of funding milder forms of special needs can be found, for instance, in Austria (fixed budget based on the total number of pupils in a school), Denmark (some municipalities) and Sweden (some municipalities). In the Netherlands this throughput model is currently used for funding special needs education (for the milder forms of special needs) at the school cluster level. In Belgium (Flemish Community), additional funding for coordinating special needs education, based on the number of pupils, will be introduced in the school year 2002/2003 in mainstream primary schools.

Descriptions of the funding of special needs education in the member countries reveal that funding models are undergoing a significant process of development. In some countries huge changes are to be expected or have recently been implemented:

- In the Netherlands, the funding both of provision for milder special needs and for more severe needs is and will be drastically changed. The input-based model at the school level (the special school is funded according to the number of pupils) will be replaced by a throughput model for the milder special needs (through the funding of school clusters, which has already been implemented) and an input model on the pupil level: the pupil-bound budget.
- In Lithuania, a new funding model is now being debated; in this model, funds will be allocated according to the ‘throughput’ model as it is now currently used in some Scandinavian countries.
- In Liechtenstein, the funding system has been changed recently: costs for special provision are shared between the state and the municipalities (50% each). This has resulted in less resistance towards inclusion by the municipalities.
- In the Czech Republic, regional authorities decide on the funding of an individually included pupil. The actual amount of funding depends on expert opinion concerning the needs of the pupil. However, generally pupils receive less than the amount they would have had in a special school.
- In Austria, the model of pupil-bound budgets is held responsible for the undesired growth of labelling and special needs education budgets and as a hindrance to more emphasis being placed upon prevention.
- In Germany, the current debate is focused on the issue of decentralisation and autonomy of schools. It is felt more and more that decentralisation might enhance inclusive practices and that more responsibility at lower levels within the education system could positively influence the policy goal of more inclusion.

- In Ireland, there has been a recent key statement made by the Minister of Education and Science regarding the automatic entitlement of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools to teaching and child care resources. This is regarded as underpinning the Government's commitment to encouraging the maximum participation of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream schooling system.
- In Belgium (Flemish Community), the funding system is also being currently debated and in the future new policy interventions can be expected.
- In Switzerland, a change in funding of more severe forms of SEN is discussed at the political level. The responsibility for funding would be transferred entirely to the educational authorities (because up till now they were ensured by education authorities and social services, such as social insurance), which also leads to decentralisation of funding. Whereas a unique funding authority for educational matters is welcomed, there are fears whether the actual high level of funding can be maintained under the new system.

2.3 Efficiency, effectiveness, strategic behaviour and accountability

Some countries mention that the funding system is responsible for an increase in the number of pupils with special needs (for example, Austria); others (for example, Belgium, Germany, Lithuania and the Netherlands) regard the funding system as a barrier to more inclusive practices. In Liechtenstein the funding system has been changed in order to enhance inclusive processes and to avoid negative strategic behaviour.

The *first clear result* of this study is that in countries where the funding system is characterised as a direct-input-funding model of special schools (more pupils in special schools, more funds), the most negative voices are heard. Countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium (French and Flemish Communities) and France point out the different forms of strategic behaviour within the educational field (by parents, teachers or other actors). These forms of strategic behaviour may result in less inclusion, more labelling and a rise in costs. A great deal of money is spent on non-educational matters such as litigation, diagnostic procedures and so forth. It is not surprising that these countries identify themselves with the group of countries with relatively high percentages of pupils with special needs in segregated settings.

Quite clearly, some of these countries report that the funding system negatively influences their inclusive policy! For some countries (the Netherlands, for example) this finding is the main reason for a drastic change of the funding system of special needs education.

Other countries also report on forms of strategic behaviour. These forms of strategic behaviour can be summarised as follows:

- parents want as much funding for their child with special needs as possible;
- in addition, special and mainstream schools want as much funding as possible;
- however, schools generally prefer the funds and not the difficult-to-handle pupils.

The *second finding* is that countries with a strong decentralised system, where the municipality has the main responsibility for the organisation of special needs education, generally report positive effects of their systems. Countries like Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark mention almost no negative side effects of their systems and are generally very satisfied with their funding systems. Systems where the municipalities decide on the basis of information from school support or advisory centres, and where the allocation

of more funds to segregated settings directly influences the amount of funds for mainstream schools, seem to be very effective in terms of achieving inclusion.

However, these strongly decentralised countries highlight a negative aspect that regional differences can be quite strong; as a result circumstances can differ for parents with children with special educational needs.

Overall, decentralisation is generally seen as an important prerequisite for inclusion. Countries such as Sweden, France and Norway state this more or less explicitly. It is exactly this argument that stimulates the debate for more decentralisation in Germany as well.

Pupil-bound budgeting, as used in Austria, also seems to have some clear disadvantages. At times mainstream schools are eager to have these pupils (and their budgets) within their walls in order to be able to split the existing classes into smaller ones. However, it is likely that they prefer those pupils (with budgets) who do not cause too much additional work. In addition, parents will always try to get the best for their child and as a result will try to obtain the highest amounts of special needs funding.

This pupil-bound budget system is certainly not advisable for pupils with milder special needs. In practice, only clear-cut criteria are useful if funds are tied to pupils. If it is not possible to develop these, pupil-bound budgets should not be used. Generally it is desirable that funds are spent on special needs education itself (in an inclusive setting), instead of on bureaucratic procedures such as diagnosis, categorisation, appeals and litigation.

It is also interesting that some countries report that the efficiency of their system is fairly high (no resources wasted) and that some of these countries explain this by stating that costs for assessment, diagnosis and litigation are paid from a source other than the education budget. It could be considered a little naïve not to judge these costs as being inherent to the whole funding system. Quite obviously such costs should also be taken into consideration when evaluating the funding system within the framework of special needs education. The fact that countries do not consider this as inherent to their educational budgets does not necessarily mean that their procedures are efficient.

With regards to the issue of accountability, it should be noted that in none of the member countries is it common for schools to have to report what they have achieved with their special needs education budgets. Although in some countries inspections are quite usual, these are mostly concerned with the efforts of schools concerning educational arrangements and matters, but rarely with the output of these efforts. The focus is mostly on the type of arrangements and interventions and the way they are carried out, but never on the results that have been achieved.

It could be argued that the evaluation and monitoring procedures within countries could also be improved within the framework of special needs education. In the first instance it is important to guarantee and stimulate an efficient and effective spending of public funds. Secondly, it seems necessary to give clients of the education systems (pupils with special needs and their parents) a clear demonstration that education within the mainstream setting (including all the additional facilities and support) is of a sufficiently high quality. It appears that earmarking of special needs education funds, methods of control and effective monitoring and evaluation, form inherent elements of an adequate funding system within the field of special needs education.

2.4 Concluding comments

This chapter provides a short analysis of several funding models applied in different countries in Europe. The following issues seem to work well in practice:

- In the first step of the allocation process regions are to be treated equally, provided an adjustment is made according to the differences in socio-economic composition across the

regions. There is no evidence that the prevalence of pupils with special educational needs differs between regions when socio-economic differences are already taken into account. Funds can therefore be allocated simply on the basis of total enrolment in primary education or some other population indicator.

- The local or regional organisation decides how to spend the money and identifies those particular pupils who should benefit from the special services. Preferably, this local organisation also holds independent expertise in the area of special needs and is able to implement and maintain strategies and services to provide special needs education to those who require it. Further, if the staff of this local organisation are also regular visitors in mainstream of schools, some control can easily be executed as to the use of the funding being provided.
- A smaller and fixed part of the budget can be allocated to all schools regardless of the needs (based on the assumption that every school has to have at least some facilities for pupils with special needs), while another (flexible and more substantial) part of the budget can be distributed among schools on the basis of an independent assessment of needs. This seems to be a promising funding model, especially if some elements of output funding are also incorporated. Low output may then be used as a possible correction of the budget for the next period of time. However, some degree of budget stability over years is important.
- Inclusion appears to be achieved more easily with a decentralised model in comparison to a centralised approach. In a centrally prescribed plan, too much emphasis may be put on the organisational characteristics of that specific model without inclusive practice being realised in practice. Local organisations with some autonomy may be far better equipped to change the system. Therefore, a decentralised model is likely to be more cost-effective and provide fewer opportunities for undesirable forms of strategic behaviour. Nevertheless, central government has to clearly specify which goals must be achieved. Decisions concerning the way in which such goals are to be achieved are then left to local organisations.
- An important concern in a decentralised system is the issue of accountability. Clients of the education system and taxpayers in general have a right to know how funds are spent and to what end. Accordingly, some kind of monitoring, inspection and evaluation procedures will be inevitable elements of the funding system. The need for monitoring and evaluation is even greater in a decentralised model compared with more centralised options. Independent evaluation of the quality of education for pupils with special needs is therefore part of such a model.

3 Teachers and Special Needs Education

3.1 Inclusion and teacher support

Class teachers play a key role in relation to the work to be done with pupils with special educational needs who have been included in mainstream schools. They are responsible for all pupils. In case of need, support is mainly delivered by a specialist teacher in the mainstream school – inside or outside the classroom.

A clear distinction appears between, on the one hand, countries where support is delivered by a specialist school staff member and, on the other, those where support is delivered by a specialist professional external to the school. In this case, special schools, through their teachers, play a key role in supporting included pupils and their class teachers. This situation is in line with the tendency of special schools acting more and more as resource centres. It needs to be said that in some countries (Sweden, for instance), both types of support exist.

Support is addressed to both pupils and teachers, but the main focus is still on the pupil, even though some of the countries clearly indicate that priority is given to the work with class teachers. Support addressed to the class teachers can be perceived as a tendency, but is not yet implemented.

As far as support of pupils is concerned, it is implemented in school with a lot of flexibility, depending on the available resources and the pupils' needs. Support is provided inside and outside the classroom. The main forms of support provided to teachers consist of the following:

- information;
- selection of teaching materials;
- elaboration of individual educational plans;
- organisation of training sessions.

External educational services, located outside the mainstream school, may also intervene providing various types of support to pupils, teachers and parents. They can be special schools; local, regional or national resource centres; local educational support teams; or school clusters.

This is the situation in most countries as far as inclusion is concerned. However, services other than education are also involved in supporting pupils with special educational needs in co-operation with mainstream class teachers. They include support services, mainly health services (through medical staff and different therapists) and social services, as well as volunteer organisations. The amount of help provided varies greatly from one country to the other and the degree of the services' intervention (other than education) is very unequal.

The following table summarises information on provision of different forms of educational support to class teachers in various countries. The information covers different types of professional services in charge of delivering the support in mainstream classes as well as different organisations or institutions with which the support professionals are connected.

Table 3.1 Different forms of educational support to class teachers

Country	Types of professionals and services
Austria	Support is mainly provided by specialist teachers from special schools or from visiting services. They support both the class teacher and the pupil. Classroom and specialist teachers work as a team, sharing the planning and organisation of the educational work. Professionals from visiting services may offer temporary direct support to included pupils presenting specific disabilities.
Belgium	Support is mainly provided by specialist teachers from special schools and from Centres for Pupil Guidance.. They provide information, advice and support to the class teacher. It is possible to find remedial teachers working as school staff members. They mainly support pupils presenting short-term difficulties, but more and more providing direct support to class teachers and the school, trying to co-ordinate provision of support, working methods and educational programmes.
Cyprus	Support is provided by specialist teachers fully or partially attached to the school and by specialists, such as speech therapists, who have specific time allocated to each school. Outside the school, central services, such as inspectors, SEN co-ordinators, education and psychology specialists, or health and social services, also provide the necessary support.
Czech Republic	Support is mainly provided by specialist teachers or other professionals, such as psychologists. They provide advice and support to class teachers, parents and direct support to the included pupil. Support is provided through special educational centres or pedagogical psychological advice centres according to the specification of the pupil's need. These specialist advice and guidance centres are in charge of determining, proposing and providing support and of elaborating the individual educational plan in close co-operation with the class teacher, the parents and the pupil (in accordance with his/her impairment and level of active participation).
Denmark	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They co-operate inside the class with the class teacher on a part-time basis. 'Group teaching' outside the classroom is another possibility where the pupil needs regular support in more than one subject. Local pedagogical psychological services are in charge of determining, proposing and following the type of support to be provided to the pupil in close co-operation with the mainstream school.
England and Wales	All schools have a member of staff who is the designated special educational needs co-ordinator with a wide range of responsibilities, articulated in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practices (DfES, 2001), including: overseeing provision, monitoring pupils' progress, liaising with parents and external agencies, and supporting colleagues. Support is also provided by external agencies – specialist support services (from the education department and the health authority), colleagues in other schools, and other LEA personnel. Peripatetic staff work increasingly with teachers, in order to develop teaching approaches and strategies within the school, rather than directly with pupils.
Finland	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. A counselling teacher, school social worker or school nurse, depending on the local educational authorities, can also provide support to the school in general, to the teacher and/or the pupil. A pupil welfare team is set up involving the pupil, their parents, all teachers and any other experts involved in order to prepare an individual educational programme to be implemented in the mainstream school. There also exists a 'pupil support group' involving all professionals and the principal of the school to ensure good educational conditions and progress.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Country	Types of professionals and services
France	Support is mainly provided by specialist professionals from various services. They support included pupils on a short- or long-term basis. They also help the class teacher and the school staff. Specialist teachers from special support networks also provide support to pupils presenting temporary or permanent learning difficulties.
Germany	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher from a special school or from a social service. Support is diverse and includes preventive measures, joint education actions in mainstream schools, education co-operation between special and mainstream schools etc. There can also be a support teacher working as a school staff member. They are mainly teachers specialising in language or behaviour problems. They work mainly with pupils inside or outside the classroom according to the pupils' needs.
Greece	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher from a special school. Their work consists of directly helping the pupil, assisting the teacher with the variety of teaching materials and in differentiating the curriculum – informing other pupils and ensuring good co-operation between the school and the family.
Iceland	Support is mainly provided by a remedial teacher working as a school staff member. Other types of support are also provided by specialist teachers, psychologists or other professionals from the local municipalities. They will provide general advice on the curriculum and on the teaching of the main subjects; guidance for pupils and psychological counselling. Their aim is to support teachers and head teachers on daily schoolwork and school improvement.
Ireland	Support can be provided by a specialist or resource teacher working as a school staff member. They are dealing with pupils with assessed learning disabilities. Support can also be provided by a remedial teacher working as a school staff member. Their main aim is to work with pupils with difficulties in reading and mathematics. All primary and post-primary schools have such a teacher. Another type of support is a visiting teacher from the Visiting Teacher Service (Department of Education). They work with individual pupils, both inside and outside the classroom, and advice teachers on teaching approaches, methodology, programmes and resources. They also provide support for parents. The Psychological Service of the Department of Education and Science provides assessment and advisory service for mainstream schools with a focus on pupils with emotional and behaviour problems and with learning difficulties.
Italy	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They act as class teachers, providing support in the mainstream school after obtaining parental authorisation. Support teachers share responsibility with the class teacher concerning the work to be done with all pupils. Implementation of an individual education plan is one of their main tasks. They also support pupils inside the classroom; pupils with disabilities are not to be pulled out of their classes unless absolutely necessary.
Liechtenstein	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher from a special school. They mainly provide support to pupils but also to teachers and parents.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Country	Types of professionals and services
Lithuania	Support is mainly provided by specialist teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, social pedagogues from special schools or from pedagogical psychological services. Specialist teachers provide class teachers with information and practical support: elaborating an individual educational programme, selecting educational materials etc. Support can also be provided by a remedial teacher, speech therapists, school psychologists working as school staff members. These specialists are mainly available in mainstream schools in big cities or towns; there is still a lack of specialists in rural areas. Pedagogical psychological services at local or national levels provide assessment of pupils and guidance for education of included pupils.
Luxembourg	Support is mainly provided by specialist support professionals from the SREA (Ambulatory Remedial Department). They are professionals in education and rehabilitation and share responsibilities with class teachers with regard to direct support to the pupil. Class teachers are always in charge of the organisation of the class.
Netherlands	Support is mainly provided by a support teacher from a special school. They work with the class teachers to develop educational programmes, to prepare and provide additional materials, to work with pupils individually and to contact parents. Support may also be provided through mainstream schools with experience in inclusion. Support focuses on information to teachers, assessment and providing teaching materials. Support teacher may also be one of the mainstream schoolteachers providing direct help and support to the pupil.
Norway	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. They co-operate with the class teacher part-time or full time. Support can also be provided by an assistant in the classroom. There is close co-operation between the three of them. The local educational psychological services are the ones to advise school and parents on the content and organisation of the education required for the pupil. They are the people mainly responsible for advising teachers on the daily work.
Poland	Teachers working with disabled pupils receive support from the National Centre of Psychological and Pedagogical Support or from regional Teaching Methodology Centres. These centres provide training courses for teachers. Mainstream schools are to provide psychological and pedagogical support to pupils, parents and teachers, organising, for example, remedial classes.
Portugal	Support is mainly provided by specialist teachers, or other professionals either from local support teams or internal school staff members. National policy gives priority to the second situation. The aim is to create co-ordinated teams which will provide guidance to class teachers. They co-operate with the head teacher and the school to organise the necessary educational support; they co-operate with class teachers in order to reorganise the curriculum in a flexible way; to facilitate differentiation of educational methods and strategies; to support teachers and pupils and contribute to educational innovation.
Spain	Support is mainly provided by a specialist support teacher working as a school staff member. They work in primary and secondary schools and play an important role with the pupil and the teacher, planning together the curriculum differentiation and its implementation. They also support families and work in co-operation with other professionals. Another type of support is a remedial teacher for learning support, present in all primary schools. Support can also be provided by local psychological pedagogical support teams. They are responsible for the assessment of pupils, advising teachers and school staff on the measures to be taken, following pupils' progress and involving families.

Country	Types of professionals and services
Sweden	Support is mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a school staff member. Municipalities are responsible for providing and financing support to schools. If needed, support to build up knowledge in the municipalities can be provided at a national level through the Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education.
Switzerland	Support is mainly provided by support teachers, specialist teachers or specialist professionals from special schools or mainstream schools (milder forms of SEN). They provide support to included pupils and their teachers.

3.2 Initial teacher training in special needs education

Class teachers are perceived by all countries as the main professionals responsible for the education of all pupils. This means that they need to receive the appropriate knowledge and skills in order to meet different needs of the pupils. It is important to consider the type of training offered to all future class teachers during their initial special educational needs training.

All countries refer to the fact that class teachers receive some form of compulsory training concerning pupils with special needs during the initial training. This must be seen as a positive impact on teachers' responsibilities regarding pupils' individual needs. It provides future teachers with a broader base of information and at least some kind of basic knowledge about the diversity of pupils' needs which they may encounter later. Nevertheless, data gives the impression that such training is often too general, vague or insufficient, with limited practical experience and may not satisfy teachers' later professional needs.

Compulsory training on special needs varies greatly in duration, content and organisation. It is obvious that initial teacher training cannot attempt to cover the vast range of teachers' needs. But it is also obvious that differences regarding content on initial teacher training reflect, to some extent, differences regarding inclusion policies in different countries. Initial training in special needs education appears to be delivered in three ways:

- by providing general information which is the case for all countries, but which seems to be of limited use for future teachers;
- by providing specific subject studies in some of the countries; this seems to ensure better knowledge in special needs even if differences in content and duration are quite large across the countries;
- by permeating all subject studies in a limited number of countries; this situation is referred to by the Netherlands, Norway, England and Wales.

In a few countries (the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Slovakia and Spain) specialist training is offered to teachers in the form of initial training.

Some form of initial training in special needs education is also proposed, in parallel, as an option in a large number of countries.

The following table summarises the training possibilities in different countries, concerning special needs education during initial training for all class teachers. The information focuses upon the training of mainstream future teachers working in primary and lower secondary education.

Table 3.2 Compulsory initial teacher training in special needs education for class teachers, duration and main characteristics

Country	Duration and main characteristics
Austria	The extent to which special needs information is provided to future class teachers depends on the autonomous curriculum of the various pedagogical academies in nine federal provinces. It varies from several lectures a week to special projects and additional optional training covering the whole range of inclusive pedagogy. In most academies' practical experience, teaching in inclusive classes and co-teaching is offered.
Belgium	Initial training includes general information and basic knowledge on special needs education. Practical training is to be followed during the last year. At the end of the initial training it is expected that teachers have the necessary competencies to work in a special school or the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with pupils included in mainstream education.
Cyprus	Initial training is a four-year university course. It offers one compulsory and one optional module on special needs education that provide basic information on special needs and educational approaches, as a complement to the other initial training courses. Staff is encouraged to attend these courses and seminars to enrich their knowledge.
Czech Republic	For primary teachers, depending on university, initial training on special needs education is offered to all class teachers; it usually corresponds to 2–3 hours of lecture per week for 1–2 semesters. Training includes general information on disabilities. Initial training on special needs is not common for lower and upper secondary teachers; it depends on the university. The content is similar to that offered to primary teachers; 10-semester fully specialist university studies providing professional competencies in special needs education are organised as well. Graduates also work as class teachers.
Denmark	Initial training corresponds to a course of 40 hours. Usually this is optional. The aim is to acquire specialist knowledge related to special needs, preventing and remedying difficulties arising from those needs.
England and Wales	Within the programme there are competence elements relating to special educational needs. Standards for Qualified Teacher Status set out minimum requirements for special educational needs training. These include knowing the broad procedures to be followed for identifying, assessing and meeting special educational needs in mainstream education.
Finland	Pre-primary and primary class teachers have 1½–2 study weeks, depending on university. That includes lectures, practical work and visiting schools. In lower secondary education, teachers follow one study week, mainly through lectures. Optional training proposed, depending on university, may include 15 study weeks for pre-primary and primary teachers and 1–2 study weeks for lower secondary and upper secondary teachers. Depending on university, it is possible to select special needs education as a major subject during the initial teacher training, acquiring the specialist teacher diploma directly.
France	Initial training corresponds to training modules of 42 hours. They include information on teaching pupils presenting disabilities, illnesses or other problems.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Country	Duration and main characteristics
Germany	Two possibilities are offered to the future teachers: (1) specialist training can take the form of initial training of 4.5 years, or 9 semesters, at the university plus two years of practical training at school, or (2) all class teachers acquire competence elements on special educational needs within their initial training programme.
Greece	Initial training includes courses on special needs education and learning difficulties and visits to special schools. No central ministry indications and/or regulations exist on initial teacher training curriculum, because every university is independent as far as curriculum is concerned. A new department has been established at the University of Thessaly, in Volos, training specialist teachers.
Iceland	Initial training corresponds to a course of 30 hours for one year.
Ireland	Initial training includes a 30-hour general module and a minimum two-week practical training in special educational settings. The focus is on observation and assessment.
Italy	Initial training provides general information on special educational needs to all teachers.
Lithuania	Initial teacher training provides 2–4 credits on special needs education at pedagogical universities. After graduating from secondary school, students can start studying special needs education at Bachelor level, followed by a Master's level at the university.
Luxembourg	Initial teacher training includes information on special needs education provided to all pre-primary and primary teachers. It includes practical training for one year during the second training year.
Netherlands	Special educational needs are featured throughout the general training programme. Training includes an introduction to education for pupils with special needs.
Norway	Initial teacher training is included in the regular pedagogic subjects for half a year. All teachers receive introductory courses in special needs education and support services.
Portugal	Initial teacher training corresponds to a one-year 60-hour course and includes general information on pupil diversity, special needs, curricula adaptation and work with parents.
Slovakia	Initial teacher training is 10 semesters of full- or part-time studies providing professional competences. Specialist training is proposed as a form of initial training. An admission procedure needs to be passed.
Spain	Two possibilities are offered to the future teachers: (1) specialist training can take the form of initial training of three years, or (2) all teachers follow one subject of 80 hours on learning difficulties and special needs. Every university has the freedom to set up its own programme but taking into account the minimum number of hours referred to above. This includes both academic and theoretical issues and teaching practice.
Sweden	Special needs education is a prioritised area in initial teacher education and is included in the general education courses. In addition, students can choose special courses. Length and content of these courses (as for all courses) vary between the different higher education institutions.
Switzerland	Initial teacher training needs to comprise, among other elements, educational science courses including aspects of special needs education. Teacher training requires a 3-year study on International Standard Classification of Education at level 5. Details vary in different training institutions.

3.3 Supplementary training in special needs education

Supplementary training concerns those teachers who wish to work with pupils with special educational needs in special or mainstream schools.

It usually takes place after initial training. In countries such as Belgium, France or Italy for example, teachers can start additional training immediately after completing initial training, however, in other countries, it is necessary to have worked in the mainstream system beforehand and in the majority of these cases a minimum period is even imposed. In countries like Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands both of these situations are possible.

Supplementary training is compulsory only in a few countries; in the majority of the countries it is offered as an option, but in many cases it is strongly recommended. In countries where supplementary training is compulsory, it mainly covers specific training related to different types of impairment, i.e. visual or hearing impairment. As to the rest of the countries, in practice, teachers need and are encouraged to follow in-depth training in order to obtain or retain their jobs or to gain promotion. A further element needs to be considered: an improved salary or professional profile experienced by specialist teachers, such as in Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), France, Germany, Greece or the Netherlands. This gives an added incentive for teachers to follow such additional training.

Duration of both compulsory and optional supplementary training varies greatly. It may consist of an additional year of specialist training covering a certain type of disability, or it may cover a broader specialisation and last for 2–4 years (both cases lead to a diploma).

As to whether the studies followed are general or specific to a particular type of disability, the majority of countries offer both options. Germany and Luxembourg seem to be offering the highest level of specialisation.

The following table summarises the situation in different countries concerning supplementary training offered to teachers. It covers the following prerequisites: required professional experience and duration, basis (compulsory or optional) and duration, as well as a brief description of the type of studies.

Table 3.3 Supplementary training for teachers

Country	Pre-requisites, basis, description of the type of training
Austria	Professional experience is not always required. Supplementary training is not really compulsory, but teachers with additional qualifications in the field of special needs are given employment priority. Supplementary training includes specific qualifications required to work with pupils with visual, hearing, physical or speech impairments and severe behaviour problems, and with pupils in hospitals.
Belgium	Professional experience is not required. Supplementary training is optional and lasts from 1 to 2 years or 240 hours of general training and 420 hours of practice in school (spread across a larger number of years). It includes general knowledge about teaching techniques, curricular adaptations and specific knowledge on particular disabilities (visual, aural, intellectual etc.) and techniques, e.g. sign language. Even if it is optional, most special schools want their staff to undertake such training during their first working years.
Cyprus	Professional experience is not required. No supplementary training programme is available in Cyprus (those wishing to specialise can attend courses at universities outside Cyprus). However, all educators are encouraged to attend local optional training seminars and courses dealing with special needs education (they do not lead to postgraduate qualifications).

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Country	Pre-requisites, basis, description of the type of training
Czech Republic	Professional experience is not required. Supplementary training is compulsory and varies from 2 to 3 years. Specialist courses include general and specific subjects and specific training for one type of disability according to the teacher's choice, e.g. learning disabilities, language disorders etc.
Denmark	Professional experience is required: 2 years working at school for diploma studies and 5 years for Master level studies. Professional experience is not required for short courses. It is optional and varies from 40 hours to 1½ years. It includes general and specific subjects concerning special needs education.
England and Wales	One year of professional experience is required before specialist training. Specific training is compulsory for specialist teachers of the deaf and those specialising in working with visually impaired pupils. All other professional development within special needs education is voluntary though many practitioners working in this area will follow accredited courses, often at degree or diploma level (e.g. in relation to autistic spectrum disorders or specific learning difficulties) and almost all will attend short, non-accredited courses and training.
Finland	Professional experience is not required, but work experience is used as an indicator for selection of students. Supplementary training is compulsory and lasts from 1 to 1½ years (35 study weeks). It applies to all teachers from pre-school to upper secondary levels. It includes specific training for special class teachers dealing with pupils presenting visual, hearing, physical or mental impairments. Compulsory general training is provided for support teachers.
France	Professional experience is not required but recommended for the specialist teacher to obtain the certificate of aptitude for educational adaptation and inclusive activities. Supplementary training is optional, lasts for 2 years and includes one of seven options relating to different types of pupils' difficulties. It includes general and specific training according to different types of disabilities and covers theoretical and practical training.
Germany	Two years of professional experience are required. Supplementary training is compulsory and lasts for two years. It includes specific training in two main subjects: learning difficulties and intellectual disabilities; visual impairment and behaviour problems etc.
Greece	Five years of professional experience are required. Supplementary training is compulsory, lasts 2 years and is aimed at primary teachers. An admission examination is required and includes training on learning difficulties. Specific training on visual, hearing and physical impairments is optional. Secondary teachers may participate in 40-hour training sessions, providing them with general information on special needs education.
Iceland	Two years of professional experience are required. Supplementary training is optional and varies from 1 to 2 years. It covers general training on learning difficulties and National Curriculum adaptation. Further optional training is offered in specific areas, such as visual and hearing impairments.
Ireland	Two to three years of professional experience are required. Supplementary training is optional and lasts for one year. It includes general training for resource teachers or those working in special classes. There is general training on learning difficulties for support teachers and specific training for visiting teachers or those working with hearing impaired pupils. A one-year course is being implemented addressed to special classes and resource teachers at secondary level.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Country	Pre-requisites, basis, description of the type of training
Italy	Professional experience is not required. Specialist teachers need to follow a one-year compulsory course at university which covers specific theoretical and practical training. Theoretical training is delivered at university and practical training is attended in local schools. One optional additional semester is offered for teachers working with deaf or blind pupils or for any further specialisation.
Lithuania	Professional experience is not always required. Specialist education and training regarding a type of disability at university level is available. An additional specialisation in special needs education is available for any in-service teacher as well.
Luxembourg	Professional experience is not always required. Supplementary training is optional and lasts for one year. It includes specific compulsory training according to type of disability.
Netherlands	Professional experience is recommended but not required. Supplementary training is optional, lasts for 2 years part-time and includes theoretical and practical training targeted at different categories of impairments and different tasks/jobs in SEN education. In practice supplementary training is required for teachers working in special schools; they have a slightly higher salary and are considered more qualified in the labour market.
Norway	Supplementary training is optional and varies from 1 to 4 years full time or part-time. It is addressed to primary and secondary teachers. It includes general and specific training on special needs education work, prevention and advice.
Poland	Professional experience is not required. Supplementary training is broad and includes a 5-year Masters degree for teachers working in special needs education; 3 semesters of post-graduate studies addressed to teachers who have graduated from a Masters degree course; its main aim is to prepare them for teaching. The third option is two-semester studies offered to Masters degree holders (with preparation for teaching) who intend to work or already work in schools where pupils with disabilities are partially or fully included with the others.
Portugal	Two years' professional experience are required. Supplementary training is compulsory, lasts 2 years and includes general and specific training, theoretical and practical training. Several areas of specialist training are offered. It is compulsory for all specialist teachers.
Slovakia	Professional experience is not required. An admission procedure needs to be passed in order to proceed with supplementary training which lasts four semesters full-time or part-time. Specific training of any type of disability is provided for teachers working in special schools, including pedagogical and professional competencies. The same applies for teachers working in mainstream schools with included pupils.
Spain	Professional experience is not required as supplementary training can be part of initial training education. Supplementary training is aimed at primary education teachers working in special settings or in mainstream schools. It is compulsory and lasts for 3 years. It includes general training on learning difficulties and disabilities. Specific training is also provided for teachers working with hearing impaired pupils.
Sweden	Professional experience is not required. Special needs education is included in the initial training for teachers. Supplementary training includes practical knowledge for teaching pupils with specific special needs as well as strategies for support teachers. In-service training is compulsory for all teachers.
Switzerland	Professional experience is not required. Supplementary training is compulsory and lasts 2 years full-time (or more, part-time). A specialisation or additional training is recommended, especially for visual and hearing impairments.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that all countries provide in-service training for teachers mainly on a voluntary basis. It takes place in schools, resource centres or training institutions. In-service training sessions are very flexible and highly variable from one country to another. It constitutes one of the most frequently used and useful means of support for class teachers working with pupils with special needs included into mainstream education.

3.4 Concluding comments

This chapter provides a general overview concerning support and training delivered to class teachers working with pupils with special needs. The following issues have to be highlighted:

➤ *Inclusion and teacher support*

- (a) Class teachers are the professionals responsible for all pupils, including those with special needs. In case of need, support to class teachers is mainly provided by specialist teachers inside the mainstream school. They can be school staff members or related to external services (e.g. special schools). In addition to the specialist teachers, remedial teachers in several countries support pupils with learning difficulties and other staff members.
- (b) Support is still mainly focused on direct work with a pupil. Direct support to teachers is still a trend rather than a *fait accompli*, even if it is recognised as being the main goal. Support offered to teachers concerns information on the pupil's individual needs, selection of teaching materials, elaboration of an individual educational plan, and organisation of training sessions.

➤ *Teacher training in special needs education:*

- (a) All class teachers receive some form of compulsory training on special needs education during their initial training. Training offered is often too general, vague or insufficient with limited practical experience according to future teacher's needs.
- (b) Teachers, who wish to work with pupils with special educational needs, have to follow supplementary training, usually after their initial training. In the majority of the countries, supplementary training is optional but is strongly recommended.
- (c) Some countries consider supplementary training to be a part of in-service training. It is mainly provided on a voluntary basis. Flexibility is the main characteristic related to in-service training and appears to be one of the most useful means of support for class teachers working with pupils with special needs.

4 Information and Communication Technology in Special Needs Education

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is currently very high on the political agendas of nearly all European countries as well as the European Union itself. The European Union *eEurope Action Plan* (2000) outlines the steps that need to be taken to move into the Information Society and the central role played by education in making the Information Society a reality is clearly highlighted. The OECD study *Learning to Change: ICT in Schools* (2001) clearly shows how ICT is set to transform schools and the educational experience of pupils.

However, the use of ICT in special needs education settings is not always considered within these high profile agendas and access to appropriate ICT solutions for some pupils with special needs, their families and their teachers, is often problematic. Special strategies and steps therefore need to be taken if access to appropriate ICT for all pupils is to be achieved across Europe.

The aim of this chapter is to provide background information on the situation in countries, identify trends in ICT in special needs education in the countries, as well as draw out key issues and highlight possible implications in a number of key areas relating to policy and practice.

4.1 ICT and special needs education policies

ICT policies are generally a specific national level statement on principles, intentions, means, objectives and timetables relating to ICT in special needs education. Short- and long-term aims of national policies on ICT in the education system dictate the infrastructure of hardware and software made available to teachers and pupils. Policies and resources also have a direct impact upon a teacher's access to training, support and information relating to ICT. The different areas of concern for national level ICT policies appear to cover five elements:

1. infrastructure (hardware, software and Internet access);
2. support for practice;
3. training;
4. co-operation/research;
5. evaluation.

Different stresses and emphases may be placed upon these different aspects. The policy arrangements for each of the countries are described in the table below.

Table 4.1 ICT policy arrangements in European countries

Element of ICT policy	Evident in
General – not special needs education specific – ICT policies that include statements and objectives on the five areas	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus (under development), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
The general ICT policy includes statements of equity of educational opportunity with respect to and through the use of ICT	Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden
As an element of educational policy, ICT is embodied within the school curriculum that applies to all pupils, including those with SENs	Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus (applies to secondary and special schools only), Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Sweden, UK
Different bodies are responsible for policy implementation	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK
Some form of evaluation of general ICT policy is being conducted	Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain (at a regional level), Sweden, Switzerland, UK
ICT is incorporated as a particular element of national disability and SEN policy and legislation	Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia
Policy is being implemented and evaluated via dedicated ICT projects at a national level	Czech Republic, Lithuania, Norway
Policies have a direct impact upon a teacher’s access to training, support and information relating to ICT	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK

Most countries agree that access to appropriate ICT can reduce inequalities in education and ICT can be a powerful tool in supporting educational inclusion. However, inappropriate or limited access to ICT can be seen to reinforce inequalities in education faced by some pupils including those with special educational needs. The digital divide that could potentially develop within countries’ education systems (OECD, 2001) can be seen to be particularly significant within the special needs education sector.

The contributions suggest that the role of policy-makers relating to ICT must be to:

- promote basic and specific training for teachers in the use of ICT;
- ensure adequate hardware and software infrastructure is available for all pupils;
- promote research, innovation and the exchange information and experiences;
- make the educational community and wider society aware of the benefits of ICT in special needs education.

These aims can be achieved through general or special needs education specific policies, projects or programmes.

It can be argued that there is a need for a shift in focus of ICT in special needs education policies and programmes. Previously the emphasis has been upon establishing the means (infrastructure in terms of equipment and expertise) to enable ICT to be effectively applied in special needs education settings. More countries now appear to be investigating how the emphasis of policy should be placed upon the ends – the aims and goals – of using ICT in special needs education and not just the means of that use. Such a focus would help inform debates about the development of appropriate infrastructure, but would most importantly focus attention upon why and how ICT can be most appropriately used in different educational contexts.

Significantly, this shift in emphasis would help centre attention upon using ICT to learn in different contexts, rather than upon just learning to use ICT. Genuine inclusion of ICT in the curriculum for pupils with SENs will only occur when the full potential of ICT as a tool for learning is understood and this may need more specialist policy directives than is currently in evidence in countries.

4.2 Specialist ICT in special needs education support

There are a variety of different possible support arrangements for ICT in special needs education in the countries: services, centres, resources and people. These are not only directed by policy, but also by existing support practices and services in the countries.

The focus on the table below is upon describing the types of provision available within special educational settings.

Table 4.2 Types of specialist ICT in special needs education support

Type of support	Available in
National dedicated agencies for ICT in Education	Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK
Support services that work directly with teachers and pupils within special needs education	Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, Sweden, UK
Specialist resource centres where teachers obtain advice, materials and information	Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (some Länder), Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Specialist support provided by special schools	Cyprus
Specialist national and/or regional working groups	Austria, Portugal
Specialist websites and online networks	Austria, Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK
In school support	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus (under development), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK*

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

* Most countries suggested that individual schools may have named staff with special expertise acting as ICT co-ordinators, but these staff were not necessarily those with SEN expertise.

Support structures appear to be quite flexible and yet interconnected in countries, usually with a variety of options being made available to teachers. In-school support is suggested as being crucial to class teachers in their work, but this appears to be an area requiring attention.

The following two tables present factors that are considered to be weaknesses and strengths (respectively) in the present systems of support in countries.

Table 4.3 Perceived weaknesses of ICT in special needs education support

Perceived weaknesses	Identified by
Diffused responsibility for policy implementation	Austria, Cyprus
Attitudinal barriers in relation to understanding the benefits and possibilities of ICT – at policy and implementation levels	Cyprus, Portugal, Switzerland
Lack of information on needs and requirements of schools and pupils upon which to base policy initiatives	Netherlands
Limited finances supporting different aspects of provision or funding that is not needs-targeted	Austria, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Netherlands, UK
Lack of specialist teacher training; limited flexibility in training options	Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain
Limited availability of specialist hard and software resources	Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain
No formalised national support structure for ICT in special needs education	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Iceland, Lithuania
Disparity in availability of specialist expertise at regional level (including centralisation of services within one area, e.g. the capital)	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, UK
Limited availability of specialist information resources (particularly online)	Cyprus, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal
Geographical isolation of teachers	Portugal
Lack of research information on applications of ICT in special needs education	Belgium (Flemish Community), Czech Republic, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden

Table 4.4 Perceived strengths of ICT in special needs education support

Perceived strengths	Identified by
On-going inclusion of ICT in special needs education objectives into general educational policies	Czech Republic, Lithuania
Local level implementation that is able to identify needs and target resources accordingly	Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden
Existence of support structures for teachers	Belgium [Flemish Community], Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Sweden
Incorporation of ICT into pupils' individual education plans	Cyprus (where facilities exist), Finland, Portugal
Possibility for additional ICT funding based on need, upon application to authorities	Cyprus, France, Ireland, Norway
High proportion of staff in the ICT sector	Greece
Accessibility to global information via the Internet	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Existence of specialist projects and initiatives	Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Sweden
Principles of pupils' rights to appropriate ICT underpinning policy	Norway
Specific legislation on disability and special needs education that promotes ICT in special needs education	UK (SENDA, 2001)

It can be observed that in some instances, perceived strengths of support options are often elements that specifically address the potential weaknesses identified earlier (see Table 4.3). Weaknesses are often areas of 'lack of ...' rather than failings in existing structures.

Generally, the availability of appropriate support structures for implementing ICT in special needs education settings is stressed as being as important for many teachers as having the appropriate hardware and software to use. This is a point highlighted by most countries in one way or another.

Appropriate support is crucial for an individual teacher if they are to use ICT to meet individual pupils' learning needs. In the following tables the specific factors that appear to hinder or support such use are presented.

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Table 4.5 Factors hindering an individual teacher’s use of ICT in special needs education

Hindering factors	Identified by
Teachers’ lack of confidence in applying ICT within SEN programmes and curricula	Belgium (Flemish Community), Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Spain, UK
Lack of information exchange, sharing of expertise at the school level and between schools	Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Switzerland
Limited school level availability of specialist hardware and software resources and/or upgrades	Austria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden
School level access to specialist support and information	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway
ICT in special needs education is not a clear element within school development plans	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania
Lack of provision on assessment of pupils ICT requirements	Cyprus, Lithuania, UK
Inflexible school organisational structures	Cyprus (evident in mainstream schools, but not in special schools), Norway, Portugal
Age and gender barriers in using ICT	Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark
Resistance to change generally and specifically change brought about by ICT	Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal
Limited availability of or access to in-service training in ICT	Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Spain, Sweden
Limited uptake/participation in in-service training	Denmark, Ireland
Confusion over uncoordinated sources of support, information and advice	Cyprus, Ireland, UK
Lack of ICT expertise and/or interest on the part of specialist SEN support staff (i.e. psychologists)	Norway, Portugal
Limited possibilities for teachers to apply outcomes of research	Sweden
Limited number of SEN specialist teachers able to implement ICT generally	Czech Republic, Lithuania

Table 4.6 Factors supporting an individual teacher's use of ICT in special needs education

Supporting factors	Identified by
A clear ICT in special needs education policy in the school	Ireland
Commitment and support of school managers	Austria, Cyprus, Iceland, Norway
Introduction of ICT-based subjects within the special needs education curricula	Czech Republic, Lithuania
Availability of appropriate specialist hardware and software resources and support at the school and classroom level	Czech Republic, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Sweden
Access to specialist training that develops teachers' feelings of confidence	Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Norway, Spain, UK
Availability of specialist information and examples of other teachers' practice	Czech Republic, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden
Teachers' teamwork and sharing of experiences and expertise	Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden
Teachers' increasing motivation and competence in using ICT flexibly	Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden
Positive outcomes in terms of pupils' learning and/or motivation as a result of ICT application	Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
Increased usage of ICT at home, by parents and in society generally	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Sweden
Possibilities and awareness of these possibilities for new teaching strategies presented by the use of ICT	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden
Awareness raising of benefits of ICT at all levels of educational provision (policy-makers included)	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden
Regional co-ordination of all forms of ICT in special needs education support	UK

Support for individual teachers in using specialist ICT can be provided at national, regional, local, school or colleague levels. While this can lead to a range of flexible information, advice and practical support services, it also presents problems in terms of split responsibilities, difficulties in accessing funding and potential lack of co-ordination in provision of services. Co-ordination and rationalisation of support, based on clear information about needs and requirements of teachers and their pupils, appear to be very important.

4.3 ICT in special needs education training

Training teachers in the effective use of ICT needs to be considered during initial training as well as being a form of ongoing in-service training. The table below indicates the training arrangements for ICT in special needs education in the countries.

Table 4.7 Training arrangements for ICT in special needs education

Aspect of training	Available in
General ICT is an integral part of initial teacher training	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Training in the use of ICT to meet SENs is a part of initial teacher training	Austria, Czech Republic*
General in-service training ICT courses for teachers	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Specialist in-service teacher training in applying ICT to meet SENs	Austria (regional differences), Denmark, Cyprus (a new training programme is being developed), France, Germany (variations across Länder), Greece (distance learning), Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and UK

* In the Czech Republic, universities and their faculties have full autonomy in determining study programmes and while there is no official guideline concerning the inclusion of the ICT into special needs education teacher training, there is flexibility for this to happen.

In all training scenarios, training should aim towards helping teachers include ICT in their daily practice generally and the individual education plans of pupils specifically. ICT training in the main needs to be made more flexible and take account of the individual needs of the teacher. In addition, any training in the use of ICT needs to examine methodologies, didactics and the organisation of learning with clear connections made between theory and practice.

ICT in special needs education should also be the focus of specialist training – for SEN support teachers or ICT support teachers. The issue of the lack of training in special needs education generally means that it is unreasonable to expect teachers to use ICT effectively in special needs education if they have not been trained in special needs education initially.

4.4 Issues in the application of ICT in special needs education

ICT is used to fulfil a range of functions in the special needs education arena. It can be used as a:

- teaching tool;
- learning tool;
- learning environment;
- communication tool;
- therapeutic aid;

- diagnostic aid;
- tool for administrative tasks.

In addition, the potential of ICT as an individualised assistive (or adaptive) technology to meet physical, sensory or intellectual needs is enormous.

Countries highlight a range of issues that currently influence the application of ICT in the special needs education context. Each country differed in the types and emphasis placed upon the issues identified as being faced in their country, but from the information presented it is possible to identify a number of common themes where issues are evident: infrastructure (hardware, software and Internet access); links to educational theory (pedagogy); teacher level issues; and pupil level issues. The tables below relate to these different issues concerning the application of ICT in special needs education.

Table 4.8 Infrastructure – hardware, software and Internet access

Influencing factors	Raised by
Access to appropriate IT resources at the school and individual pupil level: hardware, software, Internet access and funding for running costs	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Norway Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Access to suitably adapted or designed hardware	Cyprus, Germany, Iceland, Norway
Access to software that meets pupils particular needs	Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Sweden
Access to Internet material designed for pupils with different types of special needs	Cyprus, Greece, Norway, Sweden

Table 4.9 Links with educational theory (pedagogy)

Influencing factors	Raised by
Developing methods on how to use ICT as a pedagogical aid in the teaching of all pupils	Cyprus, Germany, Norway, Sweden
Dissemination of information on using ICT effectively in the learning environment and good pedagogical practice	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK
ICT methods of use adapted to meet the requirements of an individual country's educational programme	Cyprus, Greece, Iceland
ICT provides more, or added, value to the educational experiences of pupils with special needs	Belgium (French Community), Cyprus, France, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden
ICT is used to support a particular pedagogical philosophy, i.e. a school for all	Cyprus, Sweden
ICT is made an integral part of special educational provision, where every school develops its own concepts on the best use of ICT to meet the needs of its pupils	Germany

The aim of ICT in the special needs education setting could be considered to be meeting the individual needs of pupils with SENs via an appropriate personal technical infrastructure. The provision of appropriate technical infrastructure requires a consideration of the key principles of learning and teaching as well as the identification of individual learning styles and approaches.

Table 4.10 Teacher level issues

Influencing factors	Raised by
A satisfactory infrastructure and the availability of good quality ICT educational materials are not a guarantee of effective ICT usage in schools	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
There are various problems associated with teachers' lack of knowledge and expertise in ICT	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
Ensuring adequate forms of teacher training for ICT in special needs education (ITT and in-service).	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK
In all training scenarios, training should aim towards helping teachers include ICT in their daily practice and the individual education plans of pupils	Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden
There are attitudinal factors in uptake/participation in specialist in-service training and subsequent implementation of new teaching methods	Belgium (German-speaking Community), Cyprus, Denmark
The application of ICT in the process of school development and management requires attention	Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Germany
The issue of the lack of training in special needs education generally	Cyprus, Ireland
There are problems associated with access to specialist information for teachers of pupils with SENs	Austria, Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, UK

If ICT in the field of special needs education is to reach its potential, teachers require access to more expert knowledge and there is a need for more systematic co-operation between different professionals who support teachers working with pupils with SENs in different ways. The application of ICT in the process of school development and management will need to be carefully planned and implemented. ICT in special needs education support services must be improved, as must teaching arrangements, with teachers and other professionals given time and opportunity for collaboration, promoting guidance and professional advice as closely as possible to the workplace.

Table 4.11 Pupil level issues

Influencing factors	Raised by
As concepts such as ‘learning to learn’, ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘online distance education’ become increasingly accepted, traditional educational methodology will need to change dramatically for all pupils and those who work with them	Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Sweden
The provision of different forms of support is not always appropriate or comparable across regions	Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden, UK
There are information presentation barriers associated with the Internet faced by pupils with special needs – both in terms of level, content and languages	Austria, Cyprus, France, Greece

Access to different forms of ICT within education is a reality for many pupils with SENs, but not for all pupils. Equality of opportunity in accessing ICT through an appropriate infrastructure, specialist support and ICT-competent, experienced teachers is a goal still to be worked towards across Europe.

4.5 Concluding comments

The following issues seem to emerge as points for further consideration:

- A key tendency emerging from a consideration of all countries’ inputs is the degree of agreement that exists between countries regarding what are the priority issues for consideration.
- It can be argued that there is a need for a shift in focus of ICT in special needs education policies and programmes. Previously the emphasis has been upon establishing the means (infrastructure in terms of equipment and expertise) to enable ICT to be effectively applied in special needs education settings. The information from countries suggests that the emphasis needs to be placed upon the ends – the aims and goals – of using ICT in special needs education and not just the means of that use. Such a focus would help inform debates about the development of appropriate infrastructure, but would most importantly focus attention upon why and how ICT can be most appropriately used in different educational contexts. Significantly, this shift in emphasis would help centre attention upon using ICT to learn in different contexts rather than upon just learning to use ICT in different ways. Genuine inclusion of ICT in the curriculum for pupils with SENs will only occur when the full potential of ICT as a tool for learning is understood.
- While provision of a basic ICT infrastructure in terms of quality hardware and software is stressed, other important issues relate to developing a clear, evidence-based rationale for using ICT in the educational context and equipping teachers with the necessary skills and feelings of competence to implement this rationale in their practice.
- The development of theory for using ICT in special needs education is seen as being potentially enhanced if there are opportunities for co-operation between different groups of actors (pupils and their families, teachers, support professionals and researchers) at national and international levels. Furthermore, the possibility of enhancing virtual co-

operation with face-to-face meetings and exchanges was raised. The power of ICT as a tool for communication as well as a tool for learning is reinforced by the personal contact and exchange of SEN and ICT specialists.

- Finally, while there is information on ICT in special needs education usage available at national and international levels, information of the correct type, format and focus does not always exist – it has yet to be created and disseminated. It is crucial that the principles of information accessibility for all apply to information yet to be generated as well as that which already exists. Clear information on the needs of pupils with SENs and their teachers as ICT users should inform technological development as well as the formation and implementation of educational policy.

5 Early Intervention

The concept of early intervention takes into account two intimately related aspects: the child's age and the action itself. This action can begin at the birth of the child or in the very first years of life, before the child starts school education. Early intervention can be considered as a range of all necessary interventions and measures – social, medical, psychological and educational – targeted towards children and their families, to meet the special needs of children who show or risk some degree of delay in development (European Agency, 1998).

Studies on this topic underline the importance of setting up clear objectives regarding the aim of early intervention, that is, to provide an early diagnosis, to prevent further difficulties and to stimulate the child and their environment as much as needed. Three key issues are raised here: early intervention concerns early age (mainly from birth to three years of age), so it must not be confused with early education; early intervention means a multidisciplinary approach (several disciplines are involved and need to work together) and also an ecologic approach (the focus is no longer solely on the child but on the child, family and community) (Peterander, 1996).

In general, the situation in different countries corresponds to this concept and objectives, but includes country-specific differences.

5.1 Provision for young children and transition to pre-primary education

The age at which children join the education system determines the age at which early intervention services start providing support. In most countries, these services take care of children from birth till the age of three and in a few countries the children are followed up to the age of six, in close co-operation with the education system.

This is a very important aspect from the educational standpoint, as it has to do with making support measures or educational intervention available as soon as the need is reported or identified.

In a number of countries, children are included in the education system at the age of three or four. In some others, the entry into the education system takes place earlier. Before entering primary school, children can attend various types of 'pre-primary' settings (institutions or centres) covering all kind of provisions necessary for children before attending primary education. These centres or institutions for infants vary a lot. The main differences between them are related to qualifications of their staff members – in education or otherwise, and the service they are related to – education or otherwise. They can be grouped as follows:

- On the one hand, there are *nurseries*, *day-care centres* and *play centres*, which are generally not under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and whose personnel are not necessarily qualified in education.
- Alongside those day-care centres and play centres, there may be *non-school institutions with educational orientation* which accept children at a very early age until the time they enter primary school. As is the case with day-care centres, these non-school institutions are generally not under the responsibility of the services in charge of education, although the staff members working with pupils are qualified in education.
- Finally, there are *schools*. These are under the direct responsibility of education authorities, and the staff members working with pupils are necessarily qualified in education.

The table below presents situations in different countries.

Table 5.1 Possible pre-primary settings available to children before compulsory education

	Nurseries/ day care	Institutions with educational orientation	Schools
From birth	Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, Spain	Czech Republic, Norway	Lithuania
3 months	Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland		Spain
6 months		Denmark, Finland	
1 year	Germany	Italy, Sweden	Estonia, Iceland, Latvia
2–2.5 years			Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Czech Republic, France**
3 years		Austria, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia	Cyprus, England, Italy, Portugal, Belgium (German-speaking Community)
4 years		Switzerland	Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands
5 years			Germany*

* In a few Länder, children at the age of 5 are eligible to enter school, when their emotional, cognitive and physical development allows it.

** In priority education areas.

Source: Eurydice and national data

With regard to the choice of pre-primary institutions, parents in most of the countries are entitled to choose the pre-primary centre which suits them best. Nevertheless, there may be problems when the centres are private or are not located in the region where the family is domiciled. In practice, this choice can also be limited if the centre to which an application is made argues that it does not have the resources the child may need, if it refuses to accept the child, or if there are waiting lists. Waiting lists are mentioned by Austria, England, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland.

In certain countries, children with disabilities are given priority to access educational centres for pre-primary education, although there are not specific measures provided for them. This is the case in England, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. In countries where compulsory education begins at five, children with disabilities often attend school from two and a half or three years of age.

In the Czech Republic, there is a trend to offer pre-school education to all children before they start primary education, for children with special needs both in mainstream kindergarten settings and special kindergartens. In exceptional cases, children under three years are

admitted in pre-school education. Children with special educational needs have the right to specific professional and educational support.

In some Länder in Germany the pre-school system is under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Children from three to six years can attend kindergarten and have recently acquired a hundred per cent right to a place in a kindergarten.

In Italy, children with disabilities are entitled to attend pre-primary settings alongside children without disabilities. Support is to be provided by a specialist teacher with other professionals from the local health unit, and continuity is to be ensured from one educational level to the next one.

In Sweden, all children have a right to child care. Those with special needs have the right to specific support.

In many countries, early acceptance of children in a pre-primary institution underlines the importance of providing good co-ordination between the early intervention services and teams and the various pre-primary centres to ensure continuity of work conducted with children with special needs. This continuity should be ensured in order to avoid any gaps due to age or for administrative reasons associated with the services responsible for providing child care. It also means that information and skills will be passed on to further teams taking charge of the child.

5.2 Early intervention teams

Three issues are to be mentioned concerning early intervention teams: tasks or functions, composition and models.

Countries refer to the fact that the main task of early intervention teams is to support first the child and secondly their family. The choice of measures to be taken will depend on the type of needs of both the child and the family.

- *Work with the family* constitutes a fundamental element that covers such aspects as providing information, orientation and guidance, support and training.
- *Work with the child* is very complex not only in terms of its content, but also in the way it can be provided. It includes support for the child's global development, preventative measures and educational measures available to aid the process of transition to the education system. There are various measures of support chosen, so as to reflect the overall requirements for care of the child.

These are the measures which must be understood from the standpoint of helping the child gain independence – helping the child to help itself. This is an approach that tries to avoid using external programmes that the child and the family resent as something imposed on them and which is quite distant from their interests. According to professionals working in the field of early intervention, the best results can be obtained when the needs and centres of interest of both the child and the parents are taken into account. Various methods, currently used in the field of early intervention, follow this line. This means that the work must be based on what is possible: aptitudes and capacities, rather than starting with what is impossible: deficiencies.

Professionals from different countries mentioned a variety of support measures. They take into account the needs, but they also depend on resources available at local or regional levels.

Four possible support situations were reported. Support can be provided at *home*, in *outpatient or day-care clinics*, in *early intervention services* or in *pre-primary settings* (that is, day-care centres, kindergarten or pre-school centres).

Support of infants at home is particularly mentioned by all countries, but there is a trend towards making it the first option for care in the different countries. In the Netherlands for a long time early intervention support was available in specialist centres where children would

spend days, or even stay there full time. Now early intervention focuses on keeping children in the family by ensuring the provision of necessary support there.

Support can also be provided by *early intervention services*. This support can be provided in specialist centres for certain types of disabilities. Both early intervention services and *outpatient or day-care clinics* are located as close as possible to the family home. But in Germany, due to its federal structure, different systems exist. In some Länder early intervention is provided by socio-paediatric centres (medically oriented), but in most cases it is organised in special early intervention centres, 50% of the support being provided in the centre, the other 50% at home.

In Lithuania specialist services, which depend on the health authorities, play an important role.

In Spain, medical services are mainly provided to new-born children or those needing a long stay in hospital. Support at home or in educational centres has been the first priority since 2000.

In the Czech Republic, early intervention services are also provided by volunteer organisations.

Support can also be provided in *pre-primary settings* as is reported by a number of countries. This form of support is particularly emphasised by countries that enrol children in schools at a very early age.

Support is provided by early intervention teams targeting both the child and the staff working in these centres. This process is the beginning of preparation for the transition that is to take place in the framework of the countries' educational structures in which the child is to be enrolled later on.

A particular situation exists in Poland, with early support classes for children and their families. Every class includes two to three children and their parents. These can be organised at home or in special educational units. Children are at least three years old.

None of the options mentioned above is exclusive. All combinations are possible, depending on the age and needs of children. In Italy, for example, support can be given at home, in day clinics, in pre-primary settings or in specialist services (for severe disabilities) according to the child's situation. Any intervention will always require parental authorisation and involvement.

Composition of teams is referred to by all countries as being multidisciplinary, with different professionals and competences involved. The main differences among countries seem to be related to the extent to which professionals from education sector are involved in the teams, and the difficulties encountered in order to ensure good co-ordination and co-operation among professionals.

Regarding how the different existing teams are organised to fulfil their tasks, three models could be identified:

- A 'local' and decentralised model, in which provision and co-ordination of services are ensured by the local authorities (municipalities). This is mainly in place in the Nordic countries.
- A 'specialist' model, in which very specialist early intervention services and centres are provided and offered to children and their families. They mainly depend on social or health authorities, even if education is also involved. This is the case in countries like France or Germany.
- A third model could be called 'inter-service'. It is based on agreement and co-operation between different local, regional or even national services. Education is fully involved in this model. This is the case in countries such as Portugal.

5.3 Financial support to families

Information to families constitutes a very important task which needs to be enacted as early as possible. Information must be clear, understandable and complete. It involves various aspects: it can deal with the detected or potential *problems*, their scope, the process to be followed and its limits.

In addition to this, it includes all the information about parental rights and the *financial aid* which parents can use to claim benefits. Families in various countries are entitled to different kinds of financial support allocated by the social or health services. In general, this takes the form of increased *family allowances*, to which all families with children are entitled. The amounts provided are highly variable, depending on the parents' income and, above all, on the degree of disability and independence of the child. In the Nordic countries extra allowances are allocated to families and not related to parents' income. In Austria, for example, financial support can reach a maximum amount of 1,531.54 Euro per month depending on the degree of disability of the child and the amount of hours needed for special care (from 50 to more than 180 hours per month).

Financial support can also cover *additional costs*, which parents incur for taking care of their child. In some countries, this kind of exceptional cost will be borne by the health services or insurance companies, as for example in Germany. The amounts are set by those companies or public services, given the amount of care the child will require. Several countries also mentioned financial aid for covering various expenses incurred as a result of the child's difficulties. This includes technical aids, whether they are used for activities in daily life (e.g. mobility, travel, housing) or for the child's education. These are free, at least partially, in all countries. In Luxembourg, for example, parents receive an additional complementary amount during the child's life. In the Netherlands these additional costs are provided by the municipalities and families can also apply for a so-called *client-bound budget* to arrange for help and nursing at home.

Other financial aids take the form of direct economic aid to the family, in this case to one of the parents, who will remain at home to take care of the child after the birth for a variable amount of time (up to two years at most), in relation to the child's need. This is considered to be a salary or compensation of wages allocated to the parent remaining at home, who maintains his or her social rights with regards to health insurance etc. This can be found in the Nordic countries, Germany and Luxembourg. In the Czech Republic parents without a job, or partly employed because they need to take care of their child, are entitled to parental benefits until the child is seven years old.

Families in most countries benefit from *tax reduction*. This reduction takes account of the fact that in general families with disabled children must cope with higher expenses than other families. This tax reduction is related to the disability and is established taking into account the same conditions as the ones used for increased family allowances. For example, in Belgium or in Greece the child must have a 66% or 67% (respectively) decrease in physical or mental capacities to benefit from these aids.

There are advantages given to parents in relation to their *living and working conditions*. In Italy, for example, the family is given priority for allocation of a council house. If parents work in the public sector, they are given priority when choosing the workplace, in order to be as close to the home as possible; they also have priority for transfers in the workplace and are also entitled to three paid non-working days per month 'according to 104/92 law). In Cyprus, employees from public sector can also have a priority in the selection of workplace. Free or reduced transport costs are mentioned by all countries.

One final element to be mentioned is *relief families*. This is a type of support offered to families by public or private services. It does not exist in all countries, but this service is in an increasing demand, particularly in the case of families with seriously disabled children. Relief families are carefully chosen. They are not related to the child's family, and they take the

child for a certain amount of time. It can be one day, one week or a weekend, in order to give the parents some rest, to let them be alone together or to concentrate on other brothers or sisters. This is a common practice in Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. It appears in specific situations in France, Germany, Iceland, Italy and Luxembourg. It can also be found in England and Wales, depending on availability of resources. In Lithuania such type of family support is provided only by private services.

Other schemes are also evident: they target the same thing – taking some of the load off the parents. In some countries it may be the case that children are placed with a host family for a short period. It can also entail having various organisations taking charge of the child during the holidays, and offering a variety of activities.

5.4 Concluding comments

Early intervention includes all necessary interventions and measures focused on the child and their family, to meet the special needs of children who present or risk some degree of developmental delay.

- Early intervention concerns early age, and it must not be confused with early education. A good co-operation between early intervention services and the education ones needs to be ensured in order to guarantee a correct transition from early intervention to education.
- Early intervention implies multidisciplinary: professionals from different disciplines are involved and need to work together. They might be related to different authorities: health, social services and education. Co-ordination and sharing of responsibilities is a must.
- Early intervention teams do not focus solely on the child any longer, but also take into account the family and the community.
- Families need to receive extensive and clear information on the child's problems as well as receive all kinds of required support. Financial support to families appears to be an essential support measure to permit families to handle adequately the costs generated by the child's needs.

6 Final Comments

Special needs education, particularly where it involves issues related to inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream education, is a sensitive area that needs to be considered with full respect being paid to the countries' diverse situations, resources and histories.

All countries try to provide the best possible education for their pupils according to their individual situation and are fully committed to equal opportunities and quality of education for all pupils.

6.1 Summary of issues

This document raises relevant issues mentioned by the countries in their national reports, related to the five areas covered in the document.

6.1.1 *Inclusive policies and practices*

Different situations can be identified between countries concerning (a) their policy regarding inclusion (from extended inclusion to offering a multiplicity of approaches, or to a clear distinction between mainstream and special educational systems); (b) definitions and categories of special needs and handicap and consequently the number of pupils registered as having special needs (from 1% to more than 10%) and differences in the percentages of pupils in segregated provision (from less than 1% to more than 5%).

Also, common trends appear between countries: (a) the transfer of special schools into resource centres; (b) the development of an individual educational programme for pupils with special needs included in mainstream settings.

6.1.2 *Funding of special needs education*

The information seems to indicate that financing of special needs education is one of the most significant factors determining inclusion. If funds are not allocated in line with an explicit policy, inclusion is unlikely to be realised in practice. The mechanisms of financing may explain discrepancies between general policies and practical organisation and implementation. In fact, financing could be regarded as one of the most important factors that may contribute to the further development of inclusive practices.

In countries where the financing system is characterised by a direct input-funding model for special schools (more pupils in special schools – more funds), the most criticism is raised. These countries point to the different forms of strategic behaviour within the educational field (by parents, teachers or other actors). These forms of strategic behaviour may result in less inclusion, more labelling and rising costs.

Countries with a strongly decentralised system – where the region or municipality has the main responsibility for the organisation of special needs education – generally report the positive effects of their systems. Systems where the municipalities make decisions on the basis of information from school support services or advisory centres, and where the allocation of more funds to separate settings directly influences the amount of funds for mainstream schools, seem to be very effective in terms of achieving inclusion.

6.1.3 *Teachers and special needs education*

Class teachers are responsible for *all* pupils, including those with special needs. In case of need, some kind of support will be provided. Direct support to teachers is still a tendency rather than a fait accompli in the majority of countries and is still mainly focused on direct work with a pupil.

All class teachers receive some form of general training on special needs education during their initial training in all countries. Supplementary training, to become a specialist, is optional in the majority of the countries. In-service training appears to be organised in a flexible way and to provide a useful support for class teachers.

6.1.4 *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)*

Information provided by countries highlights the fact that there is a need for a shift in focus of ICT in special needs education policies and programmes. Emphasis needs to be placed upon the aims and goals of using ICT in special needs education and not just the means of that use. This would help to centre attention upon using ICT to learn in different contexts rather than upon learning to use ICT in different ways.

This would be facilitated by increasing opportunities for co-operation between different actors from special needs education and ICT specialists.

It is important that the principles of information accessibility *for all* apply to information yet to be generated as well as that which already exists.

6.1.5 *Early intervention*

Effective early intervention is based upon (a) a good co-operation between early intervention and educational services; (b) multidisciplinary teams that are well co-ordinated and share responsibilities; (c) a professional focus not only on the child but also on the family and the community; (d) the provision of extensive and clear information to the families on any matter concerning their child as well as access to any kind of required support, financial support included.

6.2 Further information

For those interested in specific and more extensive information relating to country situations and/or to one of the particular areas of the document, more detailed information can be found on different areas of the European Agency website: www.european-agency.org: *National Overviews*, *Agency Publications* and *National Pages* and the new web section: *Special Needs Education in Europe* – National Reports from Eurydice Units from Belgium (German speaking Community), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Poland and Slovakia.

Detailed information regarding the situation and organisation of mainstream education in the different countries and in particular on the areas included in the report can be found on the Eurydice website: www.eurydice.org. This also provides comparative studies on various issues such as teaching foreign languages, the integration of ICT in education or teachers' training and a detailed report on the financing of education in Europe including one chapter focusing on the special provisions allocated to schools for pupils with special needs. The Eurydice database Eurybase (www.eurybase.org) provides very detailed information on educational systems and also contains one chapter for each participating country dedicated to special needs education.

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