

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Key contextual data

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note:

The terms used for the main forms of centre-based ECEC settings in this report are **childcare centre** (formerly: *detské jasle*, currently: *zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa*, 0–2) and **kindergarten** (*materské školy*, 3–5)¹. Any additional forms of provision are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Slovakia

1829	First children’s care home founded by Countess Therese Brunswick
1872	First childcare institution founded – with a focus on child protection, instilling a sense of cleanliness and orderliness and the development of age-appropriate skills.
1881	The Hungarian Act XV states that 3 to 6 year-olds are to attend an ECEC institution if their parents are unable to care for them at home on a regular basis.
1913-14	Towards the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire there are 416 ECEC institutions in the Slovak region.
1918	After the founding of the Republic of Czechoslovakia an expansion phase follows, but by 1937 the number of ECEC settings had decreased to 160.
1948	At the onset of the communist regime there are 1000 ECEC institutions in Czechoslovakia.
1952	Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Health.
1950s and 1960s	Age-integrated centres are set up for 3 to 6 year-olds and under 3 year-olds under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.
1970s and 1980s	Employer-based childcare facilities and co-operatives are set up.
1970	There are 561 childcare centres and 2645 kindergartens in the Slovak region.
1980	Ten years later the total has risen to 973 childcare centres and 3723 kindergartens.
1989	At the time of the collapse of the communist regime, 92 % of 3 to 6 year-olds are enrolled in one of the 4052 kindergartens.
1993	Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds are removed from the auspices of the Ministry of Health.
1994	Over a period of 5 years, the number of kindergartens decreases by 709 to 3343.
2001-2006	330 ECEC services are closed down, mostly those for under 3 year-olds.
2008	– Kindergarten (<i>materská škola</i>) becomes the first stage in the education system. – ECEC settings for under 3 year-olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.
2009	Fundamental changes introduced in the professional and career development of teachers. Lifelong learning is made compulsory.
2014 -2016	– Expansion of provision begins: by 2015/16 there are 2935 kindergartens. – Demand exceeds supply and there is an extreme shortage of places.
2019	Amendments to the Education Act regarding kindergartens – the professional development system for teachers is updated, including compulsory and non-compulsory forms

¹ **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3-, 4- and 5 year-olds in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In justified and professionally assessed cases, this may be 7 years of age in the Slovak Republic.



2021	Amendments to the Education Act – Attending a kindergarten one year before school enrolment becomes compulsory for 5 year-olds. Compulsory pre-primary education can also be organised in an individual form in the home environment.
2023	On 9 May 2023, deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved a major amendment to the Education Act ² . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As from the 2024/2025 school year, all 4 year-olds are entitled to a place in kindergarten. As from the 2025/2026 school year, this will also apply to all 3 year-olds. – A new profession – Social Worker – is established as a support team member. – Kindergarten Teachers will be obliged to complete compulsory innovative training in the field of pre-primary education pedagogy in the range of 50 to 100 hours; it must be completed the teachers within seven years from the beginning of their employment as a pedagogical employee.

Sources: Oberhuemer et al. 2010; Baďuriková 2018; Melikantová et al. 2020; Eurydice 2023, 14.1

ECEC system type and auspices³

In the separately organised system of early childhood education and care, kindergartens for children aged 3–5/6 years come under the auspices of the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (*Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu*). The Ministry is responsible for overarching regulations relating to educational goals, supervision, evaluation and financial budgets. Organisation at the local level is the responsibility of the municipalities or private and religious founders of kindergartens.

Until 1993, day nurseries for under 3 year-olds came under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. Between 1993 and 2017, no ministry was responsible for the few, almost exclusively privately run ECEC facilities for this age group. Since March 2017 (Act No. 448/2008), settings for under 3 year-olds are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (*Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny*) (2021c). The providers of ECEC are state, private or church affiliated. Municipal facilities receive financial subsidies from the Ministry and can also support private ECEC settings through their own resources.

General objectives and legislative framework

Childcare centres for under 3 year-olds are subject to the Act on Social Services (*zákona o sociálnych službách*, 2008), updated in 2021. These childcare facilities for children up to 3 years of age provide routine childcare and upbringing. This is a service that enables working and studying parents to reconcile work and family life. The service is also provided for children with disabilities up to 7 years of age.

Equal opportunities and lifelong learning are fundamental principles of the education system, including kindergartens for 3 to 6 year-olds. Everyone has a right to education, including ethnic minorities, whose culture and language must be taken into account in education provision.

Kindergartens are regulated by the Education Act (*školský zákon*), as amended in 2021. The most important change is that the so-called ‘zero classes’ for 5 year-olds, a substitute provision mainly for children with a socially disadvantaged background who had not attended kindergarten, lost

² Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2023

³ The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Slovakia provided orientation on legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

their relevance with the introduction of compulsory education for 5 year olds in kindergarten and were abolished.

Following the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education, Decree No. 541/2021 (*vyhláška o materskej škole*) was amended to provide for a changed organisation of pre-primary education.

However, Slovak education is facing further changes. On 9 May 2023, deputies of the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved a major amendment to the Education Act which still has to be approved by the President of the Slovak Republic. Under the amendment, "introductory classes" may be established in primary schools from the 2023/2024 school year (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2023).

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

In the Slovak Republic, there was no legal entitlement to a place in an ECEC setting for children under 5 years of age before 2023.

The above-mentioned amendment to the Education Act introduces entitlement for the first time. The Ministry of Education has thus responded to the demands of parents to ensure access to quality and affordable pre-primary education for all children. In the 2024/2025 school year, all 4 year-olds will be eligible for admission, and from the 2025/2026 school year, all 3 year-olds. Since September 2021, attendance has been compulsory for children who are 5 years old by 31 August. Statutory primary education starts at the age of 6.

Main types of provision

Childcare centres (*detské jasle*) admit children aged 6 months to 3 years. In 2016, the Ministry of Labour changed their name from 'nurseries' to 'childcare services for children up to 3 years' (*zariadenia starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa*). Under 3 year-olds can also be cared for in mother-and-child centres or in **home-based provision** (*opatrovateľ detí*) run and managed by private individuals, parents' associations or local authorities. The respective providers decide on opening hours and daily schedules.

Kindergartens (*materské školy*) accept children between 3 and 6 years of age in full-day groups (up to 12 hours) or half-day groups (up to 5 hours). If capacities allow, 2 year-old children are also accepted. Most kindergartens are open from 6:00 to 18:00. Kindergartens are usually self-contained institutions, but they may also be integrated into primary schools (*základná škola s materskou školou*). The kindergarten year runs from 1 September to 31 August. During the school holidays, the opening hours are agreed with the parents. However, due to staff holidays and renovations, they remain closed for at least three weeks during the summer. For children with special educational needs who cannot attend a regular institution, there are separate special needs kindergartens (*špeciálna materská škola*). Zero grades in primary schools were abolished as from 2022/2023. 5 year-old children are required to attend compulsory pre-primary education in kindergartens. Compulsory pre-primary education can also be organised individually in the home environment with a partial supervision by the kindergarten. Children not able to attend kindergarten because of a disability receive full support by the kindergarten.

Some kindergartens follow specific approaches to pedagogy such as forest or nature kindergartens, or Montessori kindergartens; a pilot programme for the latter was completed in 2016.

In 2022, there were a total of 3,137 kindergartens in Slovakia attended by 178,830 children. Of these, 60,630 children were enrolled in compulsory pre-primary education (CVTI 2023a).

Provider structures

Municipalities are the providers of most kindergartens; some are state-owned, others are established by the local education authority. Private kindergartens can be established by individuals or legal entities, or by churches or church organisations registered with the state. Private providers play a significant role in facilities for under 3 year-olds (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 42).

If private kindergartens are included in the network of schools and educational institutions under the Ministry of Education, they receive funding from the state budget. They must implement pre-primary education in accordance with the applicable legal standards. This means that education must also be carried out in accordance with the national curriculum. Since 2007, private kindergartens receive funding from the municipalities (Act No. 564/2004 Coll.) and since September 2009—they have been bound to the national curricular programme. The provider is responsible for the educational programme specific to the institution.

The majority of the 3,137 kindergartens in Slovakia in 2022 (89.0%) were publicly funded and operated as full-day settings (96.7%). Only 7.4% were run by private providers and 3.6% by church-affiliated providers (see *Table 1*). Private settings receive state subsidies but may also set fees for parents. 93.7% of enrolled children attended the settings full day (CVTI 2023a).

Table 1

Slovakia: Number of kindergartens and number of children enrolled by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Kinder-gartens	Distribution of Kindergartens by provider*	Full-day Kinder-gartens	Children enrolled	Children attending full day	Distribution of children by full-day attendance*
Public	2,793	89.0	2,702	162,254	151,583	93.4
Private	232	7.4	227	10,169	9,687	95.3
Church-affiliated	112	3.6	112	6,407	6,220	97.1
Total	3,137		3,041	178,830	167,490	93.7

Source: CVTI 2023a *own calculations

Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

Until 2010, only very few children under the age of 3 were enrolled in an ECEC setting, which can at least partly be explained by the comparatively long parental leave (see chapter on *Parental leave*). Another reason is the fact that most of the childcare centres for under 3 year-olds had closed down in the 1990s. Between 2010 and 2022, the proportion of children attending ECEC settings fell from 3% to 2.4%). However, the proportion of children between the ages of 3 and school entry who attended an institution rose significantly from 67% to 85% between 2005 and 2022 (see *Table 2*).



Table 2

Slovakia: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and weekly duration of attendance, 2005–2022

Year	Weekly hours of attendance	Under 3 year-olds, in %	3 years to minimum compulsory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	0	10
	Over 30 hours	3	57
	No enrolment in ECEC	97	33
2010	1 to 29 hours	0	8
	Over 30 hours	3	64
	No enrolment in ECEC	97	28
2015	1 to 29 hours	0.2	14.0
	Over 30 hours	0.9	53.6
	No enrolment in ECEC	98.9	32.5
2022	1 to 29 hours	0	11.3
	Over 30 hours	2.4	73.7
	No enrolment in ECEC	97.6	15.0

Source: Eurostat 2023b, slight deviations from 100 % due to rounding

Table 3

Slovakia: Number of children in kindergartens by age and provider type, 2022

Age	Public	Private	Church-affiliated	Total
Under 3 years (in childcare centres)	6,573	1,276	297	8,146
3 year-olds	36,566	2,593	1,457	40,616
4 year-olds	43,842	2,624	1,765	48,231
5 year-olds	50,793	2,572	2,019	55,384
6 year-olds	23,746	1,074	856	25,676
7 year-olds and older*	734	30	13	777
Total	162,254	10,169	6,407	178,830

Source: CVTI 2023a

*7 year-olds in kindergarten are children for whom compulsory school attendance has been deferred, based on assessment and recommendation by experts in the Centres for Educational Guidance and Prevention

Broken down by age group, the highest attendance rates in 2022 were among 5 year-olds, followed by 4 year-olds (see Table 4).

In 2021, there were 157 non-public ECEC-settings for children under 3 which were attended by 1,796 children. Most of them were between 1 and 3 years old, only 52 children under age 1 were enrolled (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2021a). In the same year, 45 public ECEC-settings provided for 855 children (15 under age 1) (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2021b).

Table 4

Slovakia: Number of children and enrolment rates in kindergartens by age, 2022

	Number of children in the population*	Number of children in kindergartens**	Share of children in kindergartens, in %***
Under 1 year-olds	55,087	8,146	4.8
1 year-olds	57,527		

	Number of children in the population*	Number of children in kindergartens**	Share of children in kindergartens, in %***
2 year-olds	58,365		
3 year-olds	59,683	40,616	68.1
4 year-olds	60,493	48,231	79.7
5 year-olds	60,650	55,384	91.3
6 year-olds	59,629	25,676	43.1
7 year-olds	58,366	777	1.3

Source: * Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2023, ** CVTI 2023a, ***own calculations

In 2022, a total of 178,830 children were cared for by 17,811 qualified teachers and 612 teachers' assistants. The majority of them worked in public settings (89.1%), only 7.4% in private and 3.5% in church-affiliated institutions (CVTI 2023a, own calculations). In 2023, an additional 527 qualified staff worked in special kindergartens; among this group of teachers, 358 are qualified in special pedagogy, 59 were assistants (CVTI 2023b).

Financing and costs for parents

In 2020, government spending on 'education' in Slovakia was 4.6% of GDP, of which 'pre-primary and primary education' accounted for 1.3% of GDP (Eurostat 2023i). In 2019, a total of 0.65% of GDP was allocated to the early education sector, approximately 0.5% to the kindergarten sector and only 0.1% on the childcare sector for under 3 year-olds (OECD 2023).

Childcare centres are funded by private providers and by municipalities as founders, not through the state budget. Kindergartens are financed through state budgets (of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior) or by the municipalities; they are also funded by private or church-affiliated providers. The municipalities receive subsidies through tax revenues and pass some of these on to private and church providers – mostly for staff salaries.

According to the Kindergarten Funding Act (597/2003 Z. z.) the sources of funding for church schools and private schools are:

- (a) Funds from the State budget under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior
- (b) Funds from other individuals and legal entities for renting the premises and equipment of schools when they are not used for the educational process
- (c) Profit from business activities
- (d) Contributions from founders
- (e) Contributions from parents or any other person who has a maintenance obligation towards the pupil, to cover the costs of education and training
- (f) Contributions from employers and employers' associations
- (g) Donations
- (h) Other sources according to a special regulation.

Even if the founder of the kindergarten is a church, it does not automatically mean that the founder is a non-profit entity.

Childcare centres set their fees locally, which can vary greatly from region to region. However, parents are entitled to apply for a childcare allowance. Fees are also charged for the first two years of kindergarten, which are set by the municipality in the case of public facilities and by the provider in the case of private facilities. The final compulsory year of kindergarten is free of charge – in private facilities the amount is partly covered by state subsidies. Meals are paid for

by the parents; in the last year of kindergarten, the state contributes €1.40 (May 2023) to the daily costs (Eurydice 2023, 3.1).

Since 2017, only EU funds have been used for the expansion of kindergarten places through programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic.

According to OECD data, in 2022, a couple with two children spent about 7% of net household income on childcare costs⁴ (OECD.Stat 2023). However, Act 245/2008 (§ 28) stipulates that for the attendance of a child in a municipal kindergarten, the parents/guardians contribute to the partial reimbursement of kindergarten expenses per month in an amount not exceeding 7.5% of the minimum subsistence level for one dependent child. The amount of the parents' contribution shall be determined by the founder of the kindergarten (city, municipality, legal or private person).

Staff to child ratios and group size

Since 2020, the regulated group size in **childcare centres** is 12 children, with no more than five children per qualified member of staff (amendment and supplement to Act No. 455/1991 on Trade Activities). At least 75% of staff must be professionals.

In **kindergartens**, children can be allocated to same-age or mixed-age groups. The requirements for group size are: a maximum of 18 children aged 2 and 3 years, 20 children aged 3 to 4 years, 21 children aged 4 to 5 years, 22 children aged 5 to 6 years or 21 children aged 3 to 6 years. These numbers may be exceeded by up to three children by the management under certain circumstances and if space allows. In all-day facilities, two professionals alternate shifts. If there are more than ten children under 3 years of age, three professionals work alternately with the support of an assistant. As a rule, two fully qualified teachers are allocated per kindergarten class, one working in the morning and one in the afternoon.

In a kindergarten group, a maximum of two children with special needs may be admitted; in this case, the number of children is then reduced (Act No. 245/2008 Section 28).

As a rule, the staffing ratio in private ECEC settings is more favourable than in public or church-affiliated institutions (CVTI 2023a), see *Table 5*.

Table 5

Slovakia: Calculated staff to child ratios in kindergartens by provider type, 2022

Provider type	Number of children enrolled	Number of staff (including centre leaders)	Calculated staff to child ratio*
Public	162,254	15,865	10.2
Private	10,169	1,324	7.7
Church-affiliated	6,407	622	10.3
Total	178,830	17,811	10.0

Source: CVTI 2023a, *own calculations

Note: Although there are usually two teachers per class, they rotate in shifts and there are only about two hours of overlap in their work with the children. In some one-group kindergartens, this may be even less than an hour.

⁴ The calculation is based on the following fictitious model: two parents working full-time (average income); two 2 and 3 year-old children in full-time care; relevant care allowances taken into account.

Curricular frameworks

There are no legal regulations or recommendations regarding an educational programme for **childcare centres**. The respective provider is only obliged to comply with health and safety regulations issued by the Ministry of Health, which emphasise quiet time, outdoor activities in all weather conditions and physical exercise for the children.

The State Education Programme for Kindergartens (*Štátny vzdelávací program pre predprimárne vzdelávanie v materských školách*), which was revised in 2016 and 2022, is the mandatory basis for the pedagogical work in **kindergartens** and is coordinated with the curriculum of primary schools. In addition, each kindergarten develops its own educational programme based on this National Curriculum. Special focus is placed on the evaluation of educational goals in the kindergarten as well as on inclusive education.

Kindergartens support the socio-emotional, intellectual, physical, moral and aesthetic areas of children's development. The aim is to prepare them 'for life' in an age-appropriate manner. Before entering compulsory school, the children receive a certificate of completion.

The curriculum is divided into seven learning areas: (1) language and communication, (2) mathematics and handling information, (3) people and nature, (4) people and society, (5) people and work, (6) art and culture, (7) health and movement. Educational and achievement standards are formulated for each of these areas that also play a role in evaluation procedures. The professionals can decide on materials and learning approaches themselves, but play should be the predominant form.

Digital education

Digital technologies available in every kindergarten should be used in play and in the activities chosen by the children. The National Curriculum states that a child should acquire basic digital skills in kindergarten. For example, digital games should be used to learn the concept of numbers and relations. The methods chosen by the staff should include not only print media, but also digital texts on the internet and digital educational programmes. Children should be supported in using different age-appropriate digital games and also learn to operate different electronic devices such as keyboard, mouse, tablet, interactive board (National Institute of Education and Youth 2022).

In 2020, the Ministry of Education established a central repository for digital educational content "Viki" to support interactive teaching in kindergartens and schools. The website (<https://viki.iedu.sk/resources/browser/verejne>) contains, among other things, publicly available educational content for kindergartens, which is much used by kindergarten professionals. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, professionals worked on documents and materials from home and kept in touch with children and parents via Facebook groups and video conferences.

Monitoring – evaluation

In **childcare centres** for under 3 year-olds, no mandatory evaluations or other assessments are required.

Child-related assessment

In **kindergartens**, the children are assessed by the pedagogy professionals, the lead staff and the kindergarten supervisor, mostly through observations, in order to determine the individual stage of development, to assess the effectiveness of the educational activities and to evaluate and improve the individual work with a child. In addition to observations recorded in writing by the staff, drawings or handicraft work of the child, for example, are also included in the evaluation. The teacher cooperates closely with the parents and informs them regularly about the child's development. The results of the pedagogical observation are recorded in diagnostic sheets. Each child has its own portfolio in which the results and the current development of the child are documented.

In order for a child to transfer to primary school, "school readiness" is meant to be assessed (Melikantová et al. 2020, 46). This can be done by the Centre of Counselling and Prevention, but this is not carried out in all kindergartens and not for all children. The final decision on school enrolment lies with the parents.

Centre-based internal evaluation

All educational institutions, i.e. also **kindergartens**, carry out annual, obligatory self-evaluation measures and submit a report to the school supervisory authority and the responsible body. This focuses in particular on the children, the staff team and their continuing professional development, the educational activities, projects, cooperation with other institutions, material and financial resources, as well as the goals that are being pursued. The educational processes and the children's achievements are also taken into account. These reports are prepared by the centre leaders in cooperation with the staff and also include the results of the external evaluation of the school supervisory authority as well as the children's own perspectives (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 104).

External evaluation

If external evaluations take place at all in **childcare centres**, they are conducted within the framework of the annual evaluation plan of the Ministry of Labour or when there have been complaints (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 125).

In **kindergartens**, the school inspectorate, as an independent external body, controls the quality of the pedagogical management, the personnel, spatial and material conditions as well as the educational process according to certain criteria, which can be viewed for each type of educational institution on its website. This is done, for example, by means of observations, questionnaires, checklists, document analyses, inspections of the facilities and interviews with the professionals. These aspects are summarised in a report which is discussed with the management and which also contains recommendations for improving quality.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The Education Act requires that children with special educational needs receive the support they require. They can either attend mainstream ECEC settings or separate support institutions. Special education facilities are established primarily for children with multiple disabilities who, despite supports, are unable to attend mainstream kindergarten. In regular kindergartens, special groups can be set up for these children, or they join a regular group with the other children. Specialised professionals or psychologists are called in as support and an individual educational

plan is developed for each child, which is, however, based on the national curriculum framework.

In 2023, a total of 2,485 children were cared for by 527 professionals in 333 special needs kindergartens, with 208 children enrolled in 28 special classes in regular kindergartens (CVTI 2023b).

Children with a migration background and children from Roma communities

Slovakia belongs to the countries with the highest proportion of other ethnic and minority populations in the Central European region. The territory of Slovakia with its present borders was defined when the Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918. Until then, the territory was part of the Kingdom of Hungary (from around 1000 to 1867) and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918). Until 1918, Slovakia was not understood as a state formation, but as the territory where Slovaks lived. This territory was also inhabited by other ethnic groups. At the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, Old Hungarian tribes penetrated a significant part of the area of today's Slovakia. In the 16th to 18th centuries, Roma, Croats, Serbs, Czechs, as well as Germans, Jews, and Ruthenians arrived. At the end of the 19th century, Bulgarians were added, and by the beginning of the 20th century, Czechs as well (Botík et al. 2020).

Nowadays, the population of national minorities has predominantly Slovak citizenship. The Constitution guarantees national minorities the right to education in their own language (national schools). For example, in the school year 2022/2023, there were 258 kindergartens in the Slovak Republic in which the language of instruction was Hungarian only. In 2022, there were 2,760 children in kindergartens in Slovakia who did not have Slovak citizenship (see *Table 6*). Only these children can be assumed to have an immigration background. However, based on the available statistics, we cannot identify the nationality of these children.

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population held a non-Slovak citizenship, of which 60% came from other EU27(2020) countries. Among the under 5 year-olds, the respective shares are 0.2% and 62.1% (Eurostat 2023c).

According to the 2021 Census, 16.2% of the population belonged to minority ethnic groups, Hungarians made up the largest group (7.7%). Roma comprise the second largest group, who make up just under 1.2% of the total population (Eurydice 2023, 1.3). However, it is assumed that these figures are actually higher. Since many Roma do not declare their ethnicity in census and other surveys, their numbers are generally not correctly reflected in statistical data. Data from the Roma communities themselves speak of 7.5% of the total population (Melikantová et al. 2020, 19). Data from compiled national and local authority surveys estimate a total number of approximately 400,000 Roma in Slovakia, whereas the results of the 2021 census indicate the number of Roma in the Slovak Republic to be 67,179 (Eurydice 2023, 1.3).

In 2021, the government approved the "Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2030" (*Stratégia pre rovnosť, inklúziu a participáciu Rómov do roku 2030*). Priority areas are employment, education, health and housing, with special emphasis on increasing the attendance rate of Roma children in kindergarten, non-discrimination and strengthening measures to combat anti-Roma racism (Ministry of the Interior 2021). To better connect with Roma communities, professionals also make home visits to familiarise families with early education opportunities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 120).

For children whose family language is not Slovak, there are a number of kindergartens where national minority languages are represented. In 2022, Hungarian was the most common language in public kindergartens (in 258 kindergartens), followed by Slovak-Hungarian (75). Other languages were spoken in four kindergartens. In the private sector, there was one kindergarten

each where German and Hungarian were spoken and seven with other languages. Hungarian was spoken in 22 church-affiliated kindergartens.

Among all children in kindergartens with a nationality other than Slovak, children with Hungarian nationality are the most frequent (94.4%), followed by 0.5% children with Czech/Silesian and 0.4% with Roma nationality. Most children with other nationalities attend public kindergartens (90.8%), followed by church-affiliated kindergartens (7.9%) and private kindergartens (1.3%) (see Table 6, CVTI 2023a, own calculations).

Table 6

Slovakia: Children in kindergartens by citizenship, nationality and provider type, 2022

Children in kindergartens	Public	Private	Church affiliated	Total
By citizenship				
With Slovak citizenship	160,139	9,669	6,262	176,070
With non-Slovak citizenship ⁵	2,115	500	145	2,760
By nationality				
Slovakian	150,599	9,536	5,427	165,562
Hungarian	9,059	52	804	9,915
Roma	84	1	19	104
Czech, Moravian-Silesian	71	6	4	81
Ukrainian	59	10	1	70
Ruthenians	51	1	2	54
German	17	4		21
Polish	6		2	8
Others	193	59	3	255
Total number of children with a non-Slovak nationality	9,540	133	835	10,508

Source: CVTI 2023a

Parental leave arrangements⁶

Maternity leave (*materská dovolenka*) is 34 weeks, of which six to eight weeks are taken before birth. 14 weeks, six of which are taken after the birth, are compulsory. During this time, 75% of the former average income is paid, with an upper limit of €1,851. A total of 270 days of health insurance contributions must have been paid during the previous two years. No work with the former employer is allowed when on Maternity leave, though working with another employer is possible. Single mothers receive 37 weeks of maternity protection.

Paternity leave lasts 28 weeks after birth; it is remunerated during two weeks within the first six weeks after birth to the same conditions as maternity benefit. Fathers are also entitled to a non-transferable maternity benefit throughout the period of Paternity leave. However, both parents cannot receive this allowance at the same time. While the father is taking Paternity

⁵ Calculated from the difference between the total number of children in kindergarten and the number of children with Slovak citizenship. Children with another nationality (e.g. Hungarian) may also have Slovak citizenship.

⁶ The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Slovakia by Zuzana Dančíková in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see References).

leave, the mother cannot receive Parental leave benefit either. Single fathers are entitled to 31 weeks of Paternity leave.

Parental leave (*rodičovská dovolenka*) can be taken by both the mother and the father – even simultaneously – until the child is 3 years old. It is an individual, non-transferable entitlement. All employed parents permanently or temporarily residing in the Slovak Republic and caring for at least one child under 3 years in the same household of age are entitled to receive a **Parental allowance** (*rodičovský príspevok*) of €413 per month if they previously received Maternity leave pay and €301 if they did not. Only one parent can claim this amount even when both parents are on leave which can be interrupted several times. It is also possible to work.

Parents of under 3 year-olds who are in employment or studying are entitled to a **Childcare allowance** (*príspevok na starostlivosť o dieťa*): €80 per month for enrolment in a kindergarten attached to a school, €280 for care in other public institutions and €41 for other persons or relatives taking care of the child.

In 2019, 24% of fathers, especially those with higher incomes, made use of their share of maternity benefit. In February 2023, parental allowance was paid to 138,969 parents, of whom 97% were women.

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Slovakia

*Country expert assessment by **Monika Miňová, Zuzana Lynch and Milena Lipnická***

Although pre-primary education has received increased attention in the Slovak Republic in recent years, there are many problem areas that need to be addressed. We face a number of challenges and the following are issues that we see as needing urgent attention.

Qualified and motivated teachers: The teaching profession is not sufficiently attractive in the Slovak Republic. There are risks of an ageing workforce and teacher shortages. Financial motivation is insufficient. International comparisons show that teachers in Slovakia have some of the lowest salaries in OECD member states (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2021). The remuneration system does not reflect the quality of teaching. It depends on the level of education attained, the career stage and the number of years of service in education. There is also a need to improve working conditions and to increase the social status and recognition of their work. Moreover, in line with European trends, kindergartens need to be staffed by teachers with a university degree. In the Slovak Republic, vocational secondary education is still the regular qualification requirement.

Pre-primary education available for all children: The introduction of compulsory education from 2021 for all 5 year-olds has been a major challenge until recently. This has increased pressure on municipalities to focus on building or expanding kindergarten places, but some are currently under-used, e.g. in the Košice Autonomous Region the average occupancy rate of newly created capacities was 76%. Particularly in marginalised Roma communities, it is difficult to get parents to bring their children to kindergarten. It is therefore necessary to work more with Roma parents to help them appreciate the benefits of pre-primary education. However, the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education has prevented many younger children from attending kindergartens as the 5 year-olds now have priority because of their required enrolment. However, the 2023 amendment to the Education Act requires municipalities to create sufficient capacity for 4 and 3 year-olds.

ECEC for children up to 3 years of age. A system of joint nursery and kindergarten facilities operated in our country until the 1990s. For vulnerable groups of children, such as children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, marginalised Roma communities, children with disabilities,

institutional conditions for their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development have not yet been created by the State. Instead, the State supports early childhood care with social services (including in facilities for children up to 3 years of age). The State also makes financial contributions to parents, legal guardians for the proper care of children in the family. It is therefore not seen as necessary for them to entrust early years children to ECEC settings. Currently, there is no national curriculum for this age group of children. Supporting the development of children under 3 years of age should become one of the country's key priorities. It should not just be about placing children in institutions.

Inclusive education and teamwork. In order for education in the Slovak Republic to be open to all, it is necessary to create adequate organisational, staffing and spatial conditions through increased funding. The lack of specialist support staff (special educators, school psychologists, social educators) contributes to the inability of pre-primary settings to respond to the diverse needs of children and pupils. Slovak teachers are used to working individually in the classroom, but an inclusive environment requires developing the competence to work with others, as a team. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic has decided to address the pressing issues in this area. The proposed direction is set out in a document called Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education and Training (*Stratégia inkluzívneho prístupu vo výchove a vzdelávaní*, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport 2021).

Professional staff and new non-teaching staff positions. Developing the potential and considering the diverse needs of children is another goal in our ECEC system. This requires the coordinated work of professionals in pre-primary support teams. It is not common practice in Slovakia for specialist staff to be employed in mainstream kindergartens. The number of teaching assistants is also very low. Teachers have to manage many duties alone, often in the isolation of their own classroom, without the teamwork and support of teaching assistants and professional staff. Helping to provide compulsory pre-primary education to children with disabilities or children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is the most recent role of the assistant teacher.

Informatisation and digitisation of education. In the past, this area has been underestimated and the global pandemic COVID-19 caught education unprepared. This unpreparedness was reflected not only in the lack of technical equipment in kindergartens and schools, but also in the underdeveloped digital competences of teachers for distance learning, especially during the first wave, which started in March 2020. At the same time, however, we have also seen increased efforts by teachers themselves to deal with the situation and face new challenges. On social media, teachers have been supporting each other and giving each other support and professional advice. In the context of the digitalisation of education, funding has also been earmarked for teacher education/training. A new post of digital technology coordinator has been created, with the task of helping teachers and pupils improve their work with digital technologies. Although children are supposed to learn and play mainly in natural environments, we cannot completely ignore new digital technologies in education. Integrating them in a meaningful way is a challenge for today's kindergarten.

Demographic data

Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.

Total population

In 2022, the total population of the Slovak Republic was 5,434,712 inhabitants; thus, the population has increased slightly from 2005 to 2021 (2000: 5,598,657, 2005: 5,372,685, 2010: 5,390,410; 2015: 5,421,349; 2020: 5,457,873) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (as of 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.63, Slovakia was above the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)⁷.

Children under age 6

Table 7

Slovakia: Number of under 6 year-olds in the total population, 2022

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	57,032
1 year-olds	57,400
2 year-olds	59,066
3 year-olds	60,111
4 year-olds	60,788
5 year-olds	60,465
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	354,862

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 3.2% of the total population were children under the age of 3, and 6.5% were children under the age of 6. These proportions are significantly above the EU27 average.

Table 8

Slovakia: Distribution of under 6 year-olds in population by age compared with EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %*

Year	Comparison Slovakia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Slovakia	3.2	3.4	6.6
	∅ EU15 ⁸	3.2	3.2	6.4

⁷ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

⁸ The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Year	Comparison Slovakia/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2005	Slovakia	2.9	3.0	5.9
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Slovakia	3.1	3.3	6.4
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Slovakia	3.2	3.3	6.5
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

Single households with children under age 6

In 2022, more than half (56.5%) of households in the Slovak Republic with children under 6 years of age were couple households. Single parent households accounted for only 1.3% – almost exclusively single mothers.

Table 9

Slovakia: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in % ⁺
Total households	693,000	
Couple households	391,200	56.5
Other types of households	292,800	42.3
Total single households	9,000	1.29
Single households, women	8,900	1.28
Single households, men	100**	0.01

Source: Eurostat 2023k, *Own calculations, ** data calculated

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In the Slovak Republic, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.8% and for women 72.2% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 64.8% of women and 85.3% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were slightly below the EU average (87.2%) and those of mothers were slightly above the EU-average (63.6%) (Eurostat 2023f).

Table 10a

Slovakia: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 and 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Slovakia	36.8	82.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁹	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7

⁹ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

	2021	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Slovakia	64.8	85.3
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ¹⁰	Netherlands: 80.5	Malta: 95.8
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Rep.: 42.3	Romania: 81.5

Source: Eurostat 2023f

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b*.

Table 10b

Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
†Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)				
with dependent children	75.6	92.1	++72.3	++79.2
with children under 2 years	72.4	93.1	++72.1 (2023)	++79.4 (2023)
with children 3–4 years	70.7	95.0		

*Eurostat 2023f, 2023j

**[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbssquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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¹⁰ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹¹

In 2022, 24.9% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which was lower than the EU27 average (23.3%). The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 16.5% compared to 21.6% for the European average. 3.4% of under 6 year-olds and 3.2% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1 % and 4.3% respectively) (Eurostat 2023g, k).

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¹¹ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation)[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))

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