

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Early Childhood Education and Care ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

Monika Miňová

University of Prešov, Faculty of Education

Zuzana Lynch

Matej Bel University Banská Bystrica, Faculty of Education

Milena Lipnická

Matej Bel University Banská Bystrica, Faculty of Education

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Glossary

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the authors:

Monika Miňová, PhD, is a former teacher and kindergarten principal. Currently, she is a member of the Department of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy and Psychology at the Pedagogical Faculty of Prešov University. She is the president of the Slovak Committee of the World Organisation for Preschool Education (OMEP). Research interests include pre-primary education, pedagogical diagnostics and didactics, kindergarten management and marketing, alternative approaches in education and cooperation between schools and institutions.

Zuzana Lynch, PhD, works at the Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. In her pedagogical and scientific research activities she focuses on early childhood education and care. Particular interests include the pre-school curriculum and inclusive education. She has participated in several national and international projects. Currently she is working on the issue of improving the conditions of education of 2 year-olds in kindergartens.

Milena Lipnická, Associate Professor, works at the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, with a focus on the pedagogy of early childhood and pre-primary education. She edited the publication "Care for children up to three years of age" and led a research project on the upbringing and education of 2 year-olds in kindergartens. She has participated in national research projects and in the development of state-approved didactic materials.

1. ECEC governance in the Slovak Republic

A split system characterises ECEC in Slovakia. Since 2017, the care and education of children up to 3 years of age (ISCED 01) has fallen within the remit of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family¹, which is responsible for the management and financing of childcare provision for this age group. “Childcare settings for children up to three years of age” (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b) are set up to reconcile work and family life. Alongside centre-based provision, more informal services may be arranged by a childcare provider in different settings: in the child’s home, in the provider’s home, in a setting organised by the parents’ employer, or in a unit attached to a childcare centre. This social service is provided by municipalities, self-governing regions (VUC)² or natural persons.

ECEC for children aged three years and older (ISCED 02) is provided by kindergartens (Act 245/2008, NR SR 2008a), which come under the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. The Ministry of Education regulates legal measures, develops national education programmes, monitors quality and provides funding. Children aged 3 to 6 are admitted to kindergartens. If there is free capacity, 2 year-olds may also be admitted. A kindergarten may be established by a municipality, self-governing region, regional school administration office, state-recognised church or religious society, another legal entity or natural person, or central government authority.

Since September 2021 (Act 209/2019, NR SR 2019a), pre-primary education has been compulsory for all 5 year-old children, i.e. for those due to attend primary school one year later. The introduction of compulsory attendance means that ECEC providers have had to expand their capacities. Grants from European funds have been earmarked for this purpose (*Increasing the Capacity of Kindergarten Infrastructure*). However, capacity remains insufficient and many younger children are still unable to attend kindergarten.

Compulsory pre-primary education may also be provided during the transitional period from 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2024 in “pre-primary education settings” that are registered in the pre-primary education settings database administered by the Ministry of Education.

All kindergartens included in the Slovak Republic’s network of schools and school settings are financed from tax revenues received by municipalities and self-governing regions (Act 371/2020, NR SR 2020).

¹ Nursery settings used to fall under the health portfolio, but were separated from the health system in the 1990s through reforms and legislative changes. Conditions for the management of nursery provision have not been adequately regulated in legislation for several years.

² The Slovak acronym VUC (*Vyšší Územný Celok*) stands for ‘higher territorial units’, a new administrative (legal) term enshrined in the Constitution which was created after the division of powers between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Specific job categories are regulated by legislation for staff working directly with children in settings for under 3 year-olds (Act 40/2017, NR SR 2017) and for staff in kindergartens (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Table 1 provides an overview of staff working in direct contact with children in these settings. The core practitioner (Kindergarten Teacher/Pre-primary Teacher) is also categorised according to one of five profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this section).

Table 1

Slovak Republic: Regular staff in ECEC settings in direct contact with children

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range ³	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Kindergarten Teacher / Pre-primary Teacher <i>Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania</i> <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 3–5 years <i>Základná škola s materskou školou</i> Primary school with kindergarten 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Kindergarten Head Deputy head of primary school	3–5 years	Route 1 4 years upper secondary vocational school (<i>stredná pedagogická škola</i>) specialising in pedagogy (<i>pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>) <i>Award:</i> School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation (<i>vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>) ECTS credits: n/a ⁴ EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354 Route 2 School leaving exam certificate of general secondary or secondary vocational education (<i>vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>)

³ **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 for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In justified and professionally assessed cases, this may be 7 years of age in the Slovak Republic.

⁴ n/a: not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range ³	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				<p>plus 2 years upper secondary studies specialising in pre-primary pedagogy (<i>stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>).</p> <p>Award: School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation (<i>vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>)</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 454</p> <p>Route 3: Optional, not required 3 years at university Award: Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education (can be followed up with MA and PhD)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 (BA) 120 (MA). 180 (PhD) EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD) ISCED 2011: 655 (BA), 767 (MA), 864 (PhD)</p>
<p>Kindergarten Teacher / Pre-primary Teacher for children with special educational needs <i>Učiteľ/ka materskej školy pre deti so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami</i></p> <p>Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional (Special Needs)</p>	<p><i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special educational needs 3–5 years</p>	<p>Core practitioner with group responsibility</p> <p>Centre leader (principal, head) of kindergarten for children with special educational needs</p>	3–5 years	<p>4 years upper secondary vocational school specialising in pedagogy plus 2 years upper secondary study in special pedagogy</p> <p>Award: Certificate of Final Examination (<i>vysvedčenie o záverečnej skúške</i>)</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 454</p>

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range ³	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<p>Childcare Worker, Caregiver <i>Opatrovateľ/ka</i></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Social Care/ Health Care Professional</p>	<p><i>Zariadenie starostlivosti o deti do troch rokov veku dieťaťa</i></p> <p>Childcare settings for children up to 3 years of age</p>	Core practitioner	<p>0–2 years (social service)</p> <p>0–5 years</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Since the beginning of 2017, facilities that provide care for under 3 year-olds and at the same time for children up to 6 years of age (if these make up at least 75% of the total number) are no longer considered to be a social service.</p>	<p>Route 1 Completed upper secondary vocational education specialising in preschool pedagogy or in health and care</p> <p><i>Award:</i> School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation <i>(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)</i></p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354</p> <p>Route 2 Completed general secondary education with school leaving exam certificate <i>(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)</i></p> <p>plus 220 hours accredited course for Childcare Workers</p> <p><i>Award:</i> Certificate of course completion</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 344 or 454</p>
<p>Teaching Assistant <i>Assistant učiteľa</i></p>	<p><i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 3–5 years</p> <p><i>Základná škola s materskou školou</i> Primary school with kindergarten 3–5 years</p> <p><i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special needs 3–5 years</p>	Qualified co-worker	3–5 years	<p>Route 1 4 years upper secondary vocational education (without pedagogical specialisation)</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2011: 354</p> <p>Route 2 Optional, not required 3-year university study programme <i>Award:</i> Bachelor</p>

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range ³	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Assistant Educator <i>Pomocný vychovávateľ*</i>	<i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 3–5 years <i>Základná škola s materskou školou,</i> Primary school with indergarten 3–5 years <i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special needs 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker, Non-teaching staff	3–5 years	Completed secondary education, including lower secondary vocational education (without pedagogical specialisation) ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354
Health Professional <i>Zdravotnícky asistent</i>	<i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 3–5 years <i>Základná škola s materskou školou,</i> Primary school with indergarten 3–5 years <i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special needs 3–5 years	Qualified co-worker, Non-teaching staff	3–5 years	Completed secondary education, including lower secondary vocational education with health specialisation (without pedagogical specialisation) <i>Award:</i> School leaving exam certificate with stated specialisation <i>(vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške)</i> ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 354

*The same qualification requirements apply to Health Professionals.

Childcare sector

According to relevant legislation, the main duties of **Childcare Workers** in settings for children up to 3 years of age are: Providing a service to support the reconciliation of family and work life for children's parents; supporting physical and intellectual development in the child's best interests; performing specialist activities in the scope of social services established by law appropriate to the child's age and health condition, individual needs and abilities; developing a child's abilities and personal characteristics and guiding them in their upbringing and socialisation. They

cooperate in education and care for children with their parents or legal representatives (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b).

Education sector

Kindergarten Teachers provide education according to the kindergarten curriculum and are responsible for the quality of that process. They support the all-round personal development of children, develop their abilities and skills for life, and provide specific guidance in accordance with the child's individual and age-related characteristics (Act 245/2008, NR SR 2008a). They work on the basis of current scientific knowledge, values and goals of education. They direct and evaluate education, and provide counselling and specialist assistance related to education (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Childcare sector

In **ECEC settings for children up to the age of 3**, statutory representatives (service providers) are required to have a Level 2 university education, as they are providing social services in a group setting where proper operating conditions have to be ensured. These include sufficient staffing, materials, technical equipment and financing; moreover, they are responsible for the safety, protection and appropriate care of children, while unconditionally respecting their rights. For persons who were working in existing settings up to the end of February 2017, a full secondary general or vocational education is sufficient as a qualification requirement (Act 448/2008, NR SR 2008b). Centre Leaders coordinate the provision of ECEC to children up to three years of age according to the children's needs and the conditions of the setting. In doing so, they have to comply with legislation issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Family and the Ministry of Health that governs the organisation and conditions for children's activities and protects their health and safety.

Education sector

Centre Leaders or head teachers in **kindergartens** (from now on referred to as Kindergarten Heads) have to meet the following requirements (§ 39 [3] Act 138/2019b):

- They must have the qualifications needed for the relevant teaching or specialist category and subcategory, the minimum being a full secondary vocational education (Decree 1/2020 MŠVVŠ SR 2020).

- They must fulfil the conditions to be classified at the career level of an independent teacher or independent specialist⁵ (§ 29 Act 138/2019b) (see Table 7 for a breakdown of career levels).
- They must fulfil the conditions for acquiring the professional competences necessary to be employed in senior teaching staff or senior specialist staff positions.

Formal training for a Kindergarten Head's position is designed to develop professional senior teaching staff and/or senior specialist staff competences (§ 47 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). On its website, the Ministry of Education publishes a list of professional development providers of courses designed to qualify teachers for managerial functions (www.minedu.sk). The list may include:

- Universities offering school management study programmes
- Methodology and pedagogy centres
- Catholic methodology and pedagogy centres
- Registered churches or religious societies that have founded centres.

Professional development courses for designated posts or functions are organised for a duration of at least 220 hours. The programme is structured as a basic module and extension modules. Applicants must complete the basic module before they can take up a position as a Kindergarten Head. The extension modules may be completed no later than five years after taking up the position. The professional development programme ends with the defence of a final thesis and passing a final examination before a three-member board appointed by the provider's statutory body. Graduates receive a certificate of completed education for managerial functions. Transitional provisions applied until the end of 2022 (§ 89 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b), during which successful completion of the basic module was not required.

Another requirement for applying to be a Kindergarten Head is at least five years' teaching experience. Applicants are also required to meet the conditions of integrity, medical fitness and have to be proficient in the Slovak language (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). The Kindergarten Head is appointed by the founding entity, who also sets out employment conditions for the term of the position and determines salary conditions. A Kindergarten Head's term of employment is usually five years. The founding entity can also dismiss the head of a kindergarten.

Kindergarten Heads are responsible for the management of the setting, handling both administrative and pedagogical tasks. Their job description can be divided into several areas. Duties in the area of **management and organisation** include supervising compliance with legislation related to school funding regulations, children's health, occupational safety and other activities. They are responsible for both teaching and non-teaching staff involved in the running of the kindergarten. Kindergarten Heads are obliged to create appropriate personnel, material and social conditions for their employees. They supervise all employees and evaluate the results of their work, analysing the educational work of employees through their own observations and on the basis of inspections and reports from representatives (if any). These are discussed with the employee concerned and conclusions are drawn about the employee's further activities.

In the **education process**, Kindergarten Heads are responsible for the admission of children to kindergarten and for creating the appropriate conditions for their education and learning. They

⁵ Of the four career levels in the Slovak Republic, **newly qualified** staff (teachers or specialist staff, first level) are all graduates who are starting their careers and carry out their work under the supervision of the service provider. An **independent teacher** (second level) has successfully completed adaptation education or has practised for at least two years in an educational facility abroad or in Slovakia. This employee can carry out his/her work independently. The third and fourth career levels comprise teaching or specialist staff with **1st or 2nd certification** respectively.

ensure that educational activities are carried out in accordance with the national curriculum (State Pedagogical Institute 2016). On the basis of its principles and objectives, they develop, in cooperation with other teaching staff, a centre-specific curriculum that takes into account the kindergarten’s local conditions. Kindergarten Heads constantly strive to raise the level of education the kindergartens provide, motivate teaching staff to seek further education and coordinate projects within the setting. They create conditions for providing education opportunities for children with special needs.

Kindergarten Heads are responsible in the area of **management and handling the kindergarten budget** for the efficient and effective use of budgeted funds. They are responsible for the appropriate management of property administered by the kindergarten setting. Depending on whether the kindergarten has legal subjectivity status⁶ or not, Kindergarten Heads also require a certain degree of economic and legal competence when working with the founding entity (service provider).

Kindergarten Heads also **work directly with children on a regular basis**. Direct teaching time depends on the number of groups the kindergarten has (*Table 2*). In ECEC, hours are defined as 60 minutes, whereas at all other school levels, an hour is defined as 45 minutes (Government Regulation 201 /2019, Government of the Slovak Republic 2019).

Table 2

Slovak Republic: Kindergarten Heads’ direct working hours with children according to the number of kindergarten classes

Type of setting	Number of kindergarten classes	Hours of direct work with children per week
Kindergarten	1	23
	2	20
Kindergarten for children with special educational needs	3 – 4	17
	5 – 6	14
	7 – 10	12
	11 – 12	10
	13 – 14	9
	15 – 16	8
	17 – 18	7
	19 or more	6

Source: Annex 6 to Government Regulation 201/2019 (Government of the Slovak Republic 2019)

Kindergartens with four or more classes/groups also have a designated **Deputy Kindergarten Head** position (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b). While the appointment and dismissal of Kindergarten Heads are covered in education legislation, there are no provisions in the case of Deputy Kindergarten Heads. This position is created by the kindergarten itself and governed by generally binding labour legislation.

Kindergarten management is the lowest level of management in education. The way a kindergarten is managed depends largely on the personality and approach of the Kindergarten Head. Although the Kindergarten Head is hierarchically at the top of the organisational structure, kindergarten management can take on various features. In practice, democratic, liberal and authoritarian management styles can be observed. The choice of a particular style also depends on

⁶ These are mainly state-owned kindergartens which have extended competences defined by the founder in the field of legal, labour and economic management.

how the school's staff is structured, their level of maturity and acquired professional competences. The professional development modules for senior teaching staff (mentioned earlier) also focus on staff management and team leadership.

The two bodies advising a Kindergarten Head – the Pedagogical Council and the Methodological Circle (see *Chapter 2.3*) – provide a basis for ensuring that the kindergarten is managed democratically (§ 2 Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b). The School Council as a self-governing body consisting of representatives of the service provider, legal representatives of children (parents, legal guardians), and the staff of the kindergarten also contributes to democratic governance. These three advisory bodies are described in more detail in the next section.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

There are a number of designated posts of responsibility in Slovak kindergartens (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). They include the following focus areas:

Class leaders: There are usually two teachers in each kindergarten class, both teachers are fully qualified practitioners, but only one of them is designated by the kindergarten head as the **class teacher**. Each kindergarten class has its own class teacher. One teacher cannot be the class teacher for more than one class. Teachers may rotate in this role. They receive a supplement for this function. The *class teacher* is responsible for teaching and coordinating activities in the respective kindergarten class/group. Tasks include keeping pedagogical records and creating conditions for the development of positive relationships among the children and between children and staff. The class teacher also cooperates in an advisory role with legal representatives and with other teaching and specialist staff.

Induction of newly qualified staff: The person responsible for supervising the probationary period of newly qualified staff may be an induction teaching staff member or a *specialist staff member for induction*. Induction into practice cannot be made across professions, only within the scope of one's own qualification (teacher to teacher, special educator to special educator, school psychologist to school psychologist, and so on). The induction person provides an assessment at the end of the period detailing the extent to which the newly qualified member of staff has acquired the necessary professional competences.

Supporting children from socially disadvantaged milieus: The kindergarten *specialist in education* provides educational activities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. They guide colleagues in helping and assisting these children, obtaining the necessary information in this area. They also organise the training of kindergarten core practitioners.

Sport: The *specialist in sport* supports the development of children's sports skills and the basic acquisition of a particular type of sport in accordance with the kindergarten curriculum. The position is occupied by a teaching staff member who meets the qualification requirements for teaching physical education and sport, has completed specialised training in the relevant sport or has acquired professional competence in the relevant field according to a special regulation.

Team support: The *support team coordinator* coordinates staff activities; supports cooperation of teaching and specialist staff with legal representatives and employees of counselling and prevention facilities; plans individual and group activities for children for the kindergarten support team to implement, evaluates their effectiveness and ensures and assesses interaction between members of the kindergarten support team and other teaching staff.

Digital education: The digital coordinator provides advice and expert assistance in introducing new digital methods in the work with children, gives feedback to staff on the application and use of digital tools in education, and provides training in the use of digital content or forms of work with digital content.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

The pedagogical work in kindergartens is coordinated and related tasks are distributed according to continuously updated guidelines from the Ministry of Education. They respond to societal needs and issues, such as measures during the COVID-19 pandemic and currently the refugee crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine. The development of inclusive practices is also topical. It is in these areas that internal advisory boards are helpful for the decision-making of the Kindergarten Head, and each kindergarten has these boards of collective responsibility.

Three examples of internally coordinated activities:

- 1. Pedagogical Council:** Members include all the teaching staff working in the setting. The council discusses both educational and organisational matters, such as proposals related to improving the quality of the kindergarten, reflecting on the current demands of parents and the community. All staff have the opportunity to shape the mission of the kindergarten and participate in the development of its curriculum and project plans. They may also comment on management issues and staff assessments (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b).
- 2. Methodological Circle:** This is established if the kindergarten has at least two classes. It comprises all teaching and specialist support staff and is led by a teacher with at least five years of teaching experience. The methodological circle focuses primarily on didactic issues of working with young children. It focuses on opportunities for innovation and also on developing professional competences among the staff. At joint meetings, the head of the circle coordinates activities so that staff can develop their knowledge and skills in a wide range of areas to meet current needs. Areas for improvement are diverse and include promoting inclusive education, strategies for working with children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, developing pre-reading literacy, strengthening media literacy, communicating with parents, counselling and prevention, providing constructive feedback, and formative assessment. If a methodological circle cannot be established, the Pedagogical Council discusses such pedagogical and didactic issues (Decree 541/2021, MŠVVŠ SR 2021b).
- 3. Kindergarten Council:** A Kindergarten Council is established in each setting as an initiative-taking, advisory and self-governing body which promotes the public interests of the children, their parents, teachers and other kindergarten staff. Consisting of 5–11 members, neither the Kindergarten Head nor the Deputy Kindergarten Head can be on the council. The council publicly scrutinises the kindergarten's activities, commenting on them and on the service provider's activities in terms of kindergarten-specific issues. It comments on both the setting's conceptual plans and on possible closure of the setting. The greatest power vested in the Kindergarten Council is the election and petitioning for the removal of the Kindergarten Head (Act 596/2003, NR SR 2003; Decree 291/2004, Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic 2004).

External specialised coordination activities support and improve the educational process for children and staff. They are provided by institutions and facilities established by the Ministry of Education. The National Institute of Education and Youth, established on 1st of July 2022, unites into one entity several institutions, including: the *National Institute for Education in Bratislava* (www.statpedu.sk) and *The Methodology and Pedagogy Centre* in Bratislava with branches across Slovakia (www.mpc-edu.sk). Support is also provided by counselling and prevention facilities (Decree 24/2022, MŠVVŠ SR 2022). For many years, Slovak kindergartens cooperated primarily with the *Centre for Counselling and Prevention*, which provides comprehensive psychological, special educational, diagnostic, educational, counselling and preventive care for children and youth throughout the Slovak Republic. Kindergartens mainly use the centre's counselling

services, while specialist support staff, such as speech therapists, are invited to regular speech therapy screenings to identify and correct speech problems of kindergarten children as early as possible.

The State School Inspectorate inspects the pedagogical management at the national level (www.ssi.sk). It monitors the quality of education, including the inspection of compliance with binding legal regulations, and it inspects the spatial conditions and material equipment of the setting and the professional development of teaching staff. The SSI contributes to the external evaluation of the education system. Its remit also includes providing counselling and expertise in remedying identified deficiencies.

2.5 Specialist support staff

In **ECEC settings for children up to the age of three**, Centre Leaders recruit specialist support staff depending on the services they decide to provide for children.

Other specialist staff who may work in **kindergartens** include the following (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b), although it must be said that they are more likely to work in schools than in kindergartens. A team comprising all the listed professional staff is the exception rather than the rule. However, if some of these staff do work in a kindergarten, their activities are coordinated by the pedagogical or professional staff member supervised by the Kindergarten Head.

Psychologist (§ 24 [1]): This position is tied only to counselling centres, the psychologist is not part of the kindergarten staff. Psychologists diagnose psychological issues in special educational settings, school educational counselling and prevention or social assistance settings; provide individual or group psychological counselling, prevention and intervention to children and pupils with a focus on education; and provide psychological counselling to legal representatives, teaching and specialist staff and families.

School Special Pedagogue (§ 21 [3]): These specialist support staff carry out diagnostic activities; provide special educational interventions to children in kindergarten; provide professional advice and consultation to children, parents and pedagogical staff; contribute to the creation of the child's individual learning programme; carry out direct educational activities and cooperate with professionals from the centres of counselling and prevention.

Kindergarten Psychologist (§ 24 [2]): Diagnoses psychological issues in kindergartens and ECEC settings apart from school educational counselling and prevention settings; provides individual, or group psychological counselling, prevention and intervention to children and pupils with a focus on education; provides psychological counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff; works to overcome barriers in education and upbringing of children.

Special Education Pedagogue (§ 25 [1]): Diagnoses psychological issues in a special educational setting, school educational counselling, prevention or social assistance setting; engages in special education diagnostics and provides individual or group counselling and intervention to children and pupils with special educational needs and to children with developmental risks; provides curative education for children with learning and behavioural disorders; and provides special pedagogical counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff. He/she is not an employee of the kindergarten, but of the counselling centre.

Special Education Field Pedagogue (§ 25 [2]): These specialist support staff are not employed by the kindergarten but by the counselling centre. They make regular visits to education institutions in the region and may also visit children in the home environment. They engage in special pedagogical, diagnostic, counselling, preventive, educational and methodical activities for children with disabilities; in methodological activities; and provide consultations and special pedagogical counselling to legal representatives.

Speech Therapist and School Speech Therapist (§ 27 [1]): Diagnoses speech therapy issues, provides intervention and counselling to children and pupils with impaired communication skills, and provides speech therapy counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff.

Therapeutic Pedagogue (§ 27 [2]): Provides therapeutic educational assistance to children and pupils with at-risk psychological, emotional or social development and behavioural disorders, as well as therapeutic educational assistance and counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff.

Social Pedagogue (§ 27 [3]): Engages in preventive activities; provides counselling and intervention with a focus on children and pupils with at-risk behaviour, at risk of socio-pathological phenomena and from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; provides counselling to legal representatives, teaching staff and specialist staff; diagnoses socio-pedagogical issues in the environment and of relationships; raises awareness and engages in other socio-economical activities.

An amendment to the Education Act approved by the National Assembly in May 2023 provides for the introduction of a new position in schools, that of a **Social Worker**. The role of the Social Worker will be to support children and parents in disadvantaged/precarious social situations.

3. Structural composition of the ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Childcare sector

Childcare Workers comprise the main component of the workforce in **childcare settings** for children under 3 years of age. Most of the settings are private and the number of the qualified staff varies considerably. In 2021, 490 full-time staff (92.2% of whom were women) cared for 1,768 children under 3 years in non-public settings. In public settings, with a total of 855 children, 278 full-time staff were employed (see *Tables 3 and 4*).

Table 3

Slovak Republic: Number of providers and children by provider type, 2019-2021

Year	Public providers ⁷				Non-public providers		
	Number of providers		Number of children		Number of providers	Number of children	
	0–1 year	1–3 years	0–1 year	1–3 years	0–3 years	0–1 year	1–3 years
2019	6	40	18	853	170	1,918	
2020	3	39	7	736	141	36	1,665
2021	6	43	15	840	157	52	1,716

Source: MPSVR SR 2021a, 2021b

Table 4

Slovak Republic: Number of full-time staff in 0–3 settings by provider type and gender, 2019-2021

Year	Public providers		Non-public providers	
	Total	Women	Total	Women
2019	266	264	363	357

⁷ Municipalities and superior territorial units (regions)

2020	243	242	368	358
2021	278	277	490	452

Source: Personal communication with Alexandra Bublišová, Department of Social Services, Social Policy Section, Ministry of Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, in June 2023

Education sector

Table 5

Slovak Republic: Structural composition of staff in kindergartens (qualifications, gender, ethnicity) 2021/2022

Staff categories	Kindergarten Teachers	Teaching assistants and specialist staff	Total	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with specialist higher education degree (BA)	322	21	343	1.8
Staff with specialist higher education degree (MA)	711	218	929	5
Staff with specialist higher education degree (PhD)	23	0	23	0.2
Staff with specialist upper secondary education (Complete secondary education)	1,351	17	1,368	7.3
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	31	0	31	0.2
Staff with non-specialist qualification/ Unidentified qualification	15,507	476	15,983	85.5
Unqualified staff	None – all staff must meet the statutory qualification requirements			
Men	0.3%			
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data			

Source: Based on data from the information system of Ministry of Education; personal communication with Juraj Ždiňák in April 2023 (Ždiňák and MŠVVŠ SR/Sekcia informačných technológií 2022)

Statistical data on the **pre-primary education** workforce are collected on a regular basis. The *Centre for Scientific and Technical Information* of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Education are responsible for collection and processing these data. This may lead to a distorted picture of reality because some of the data do not have to be entered into the Ministerial information system. For example, data related to the qualification levels in the previous SEEPRO-R report reported that ECEC staff included 10.5% of teachers with a Bachelor's degree and 17.6% with a Master's degree, whereas recent data from the Ministry of Education suggests that only 1.8% of staff have a Bachelor's degree and 5% a Master's degree and that 85.5% of staff had not provided information about their qualification level (see *Table 5*).

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Childcare sector

Childcare Workers employed in settings for under 3 year-olds require a completed secondary vocational education focused on childcare (Decree 64/2015, MŠVVŠ SR 2015) or a completed secondary education not focused on childcare plus the completion of an accredited course of childcare for children up to three years or up to six years lasting at least 220 hours. Childcare Workers, as well as teaching and specialist staff members in the education system, have to meet the basic requirements of integrity, medical fitness and a good command of the Slovak language.

Table 6

Slovak Republic: Childcare Worker

Job title in Slovak: <i>Opatrovateľ/ka</i> Profile: Social Care/ Health Care Professional
Entry requirements: Completed general or vocational upper secondary education Professional studies: Upper secondary vocational education specialising in pre-primary pedagogy or in health and care or completed secondary general education plus 220 hours accredited course for Childcare Workers Award: School leaving exam certificate (<i>vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>) or certificate of completion of the course above ECTS credits: not applicable EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 344, 454 Main workplace settings: ECEC settings for children under 3 years (centre-based and home-based)

Education sector

Kindergarten Teachers meet the qualification requirements if they have completed a secondary vocational education in teacher training for kindergartens or a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree in teacher training or pedagogical science (Decree 1/2020). *Table 7* illustrates possible qualification pathways.

Table 7

Slovak Republic: Kindergarten / Pre-primary Teacher

Job title in Slovak: <i>Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania</i> Profile: Pre-primary education professional
Route 1: Entry requirements: Completed lower secondary education, entrance exam (music, art, language, physical education) Professional studies: 4 years of upper secondary vocational studies at a secondary pedagogical school or pedagogical and social academy or pedagogical and cultural academy (<i>stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia, pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>) specialising in pre-primary pedagogy Award: School leaving exam certificate (<i>vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške</i>) ¹

Job title in Slovak: *Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania*
Profile: Pre-primary education professional

ECTS credits: not applicable

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 354

Main workplace settings: Kindergarten (*materská škola*), 3-5 years; primary school with kindergarten (*základná škola s materskou školou*), 3-5 years; kindergarten for children with special educational needs (*špeciálna materská škola*), 3-5 years; school clubs for children, 6-15 years

Route 2:

Entry requirements: Completed upper secondary education

Professional studies: 2 years' post-secondary studies at a secondary pedagogical school or pedagogical and social academy or pedagogical and cultural academy specialising in pre-primary pedagogy

Award: School leaving exam certificate (*vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške*)¹

ECTS credits: not applicable

EQF level: 4

ISCED 2011: 454

Main workplaces: see above

Route 3:

Entry requirements: Completed upper secondary education (*vysvedčenie o maturitnej skúške*)¹ and university admission procedures

Professional studies: 3 years at university²

Award: Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education; can be followed with a 2-year Master's degree programme (Master in Pre-primary Education) and a 3-year doctoral programme (Doctor of Philosophy in Pre-primary Education)

ECTS credits: 180 (BA), plus 120 (MA), plus 180 (PhD)

EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD)

ISCED 2011: 655 (BA), 767 (MA), 864 (PhD)

Main ECEC workplaces: see above. Graduates with a Master's degree can work as centre leaders of kindergartens, inspectors, methodological experts; graduates with a Doctoral degree mainly work at universities or other specialised institutions.

¹ The school leaving certificate is a condition for higher education

² Students specialising in special education/ pedagogy may work in the classes/schools for children with special educational needs

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Childcare Workers: competences and course content

The courses followed by Childcare Workers usually focus on child care, basics of health and hygiene requirements, legal awareness and practical teaching skills. Specific competences acquired relate to childcare in settings and home environments, methods and forms of educational activities, basic knowledge in pedagogy, psychology and patho-psychology, principles of preventing injuries and child safety, first aid, care of a sick child in the home environment, acquisition of hygienic habits, principles of a good lifestyle, ethical principles in childcare work and requirements for working with children in centre-based settings.

Kindergarten Teachers: competences and course content at upper secondary level

The initial professional education of Kindergarten Teachers at upper secondary level includes the fundamentals of pedagogy, psychology and didactic theory and their practical implementation. The specific skills teachers acquire are focused mainly on the all-around development of a child's personality, methods and methodologies of education, human rights and diversity, responsible use of information, specific education of disadvantaged children, applying skills in practice, design, organisation, implementation of educational activities, evaluation, hygiene and safety, health care, creating and protecting the environment, kindergarten culture, pro-social behaviour, creativity, independence, professional communication and cooperation, self-regulation, self-control and professional development.

Kindergarten Teachers: competences and course content at university level

At its core, IPE at university level includes systematic knowledge about the phenomena of pedagogical reality, educational processes and their influencing factors, education determinants, recognising and evaluating pedagogical reality, pedagogical and didactic approaches and concepts, knowledge of solving various pedagogical situations and reflecting on relevant psychological and social science knowledge. It includes scientific knowledge of the disciplines in selected educational areas. The main topics focus on the education system; legal and curricular provisions; inclusive education; development of scientific, cultural and language literacy; methodical and methodological competences; digital technologies and the application of diagnostic, intervention and evaluation tools.

The pedagogical and didactic approaches found in the IPE programmes are based on humanistic pedagogy and psychology; democratic values in society and in education; human rights and freedoms; inclusive approaches; responsibility; and on personal and social constructivism. They develop the areas and range of knowledge, skills and competences relevant to the teacher's professional competence according to the relevant level of the Slovak National Qualifications Framework. With these foundations, Kindergarten Teachers can practice their profession at a high professional and scientific level.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

People in different professions can also become Childcare Workers or Kindergarten Teachers if they follow one of two qualification routes within the vocational or higher education and training system.

- **A two-year post-secondary qualification** is an alternative to obtaining a secondary-school pre-primary school qualification at pedagogical and social academies. These prepare graduates with minimum qualification requirements for working in the ECEC field.
- **A two-year post-university qualification** is organised as an **extension course** (§ 43 Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). It is an alternative path for obtaining a university qualification to become a teacher in pre-primary or primary education. It is provided by universities with the relevant accredited study programme. The condition for admission to the extension course is a completed Master's degree in teaching and non-teaching study programmes with a completed two-year supplementary course on pedagogy. It ends with a final exam.

Opportunities for men and women to prepare for the profession and in professional development are equal. They can progress equally in their careers according to legislation (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). However, interest by men in the teaching profession has always been generally low. This is especially true for kindergartens, where only 0.3% of teaching and specialist staff are men.

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

In the IPE of prospective childcare workers in ECEC settings for children up to three years of age, there is no practicum specified by law.

Guided workplace experience in kindergartens – *teaching practice* – takes place mainly at “training kindergartens”. Public vocational schools and universities preparing teaching professionals conclude a cooperation agreement with these kindergartens; however, there is no legislation governing this practice. Teaching and specialist staff at training kindergartens do not have to complete a specific qualification course to guide students during practice teaching. However, they have to be independent teaching or specialist staff at the first or second certification level (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Remuneration for supervising teaching practice in kindergartens

A performance agreement governs remuneration. Kindergarten Teachers are remunerated for supervising and supporting trainee Kindergarten Teachers as provided in the conditions stipulated in the agreement with the training institution or with a trainee Kindergarten Teacher. The amount is regulated by the budget issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. The methodology for allocating subsidies for the relevant year is published on the Ministry of Education’s website. According to the regulations for 2022 (MŠVVŠ SR 2021a), the amount is set at €10.63 per hour. The financial remuneration for conducting practice teaching can also be assigned by a Kindergarten Head. Such remuneration is usually paid at the end of a calendar year when service providers release funds for this purpose. In the case of a state kindergarten with a legal subjectivity or in private kindergartens, funding may be set aside in the budget for this purpose by the Kindergarten Head.

Teaching practice in upper secondary training programmes for Kindergarten Teachers

Guided workplace experience is provided by both secondary schools and secondary vocational schools throughout the programme. In the 1st year, students spend two weeks (10 days) in a kindergarten class/group. Students are allocated five teaching hours per day and complete a total of 50 teaching hours for the entire continuing teaching practice. In the 3rd year of study, trainee teachers have guided workplace experience lasting three weeks (15 days). One day comprises six teaching hours, 90 hours in total.

Teaching practice in university study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Guided workplace experience as offered by universities is reflexive and oriented towards the profile of the study programme graduate (Act 131/2002). There are several types of practice teaching for students. They take place according to agreements and plans in cooperation with or university. *Table 8* shows an example of the practicum component in the Bachelor study programmes for Preschool and Primary Education at two universities.

Table 8

Slovak Republic: Characteristics of teaching practice in two Bachelor's degree study programmes for Kindergarten Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Matej Bel University, Faculty of Education (Banská Bystrica)				University of Prešov, Faculty of Education (Prešov)			
Type of teaching practice	Year of study	Hours	ECTS credits	Type of teaching practice	Year of study	Hours	ECTS credits
Initial teaching practice in kindergartens	1st	13	3	Initial teaching practice in kindergartens	1st	60	3
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 1	2nd	39	3	Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 1	2nd	60	3
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 2	2nd	52	3				
Assistant practice teaching in the 1st year of a primary school**	3rd	39	4				
Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 3	3rd	80	6	Continuing teaching practice in kindergartens 2	3rd	60	6*

* Credits are earned either for continuing practice teaching in a kindergarten or in a children's school club.

** BA study programmes also prepare students to be a Teaching Assistant in both primary schools and kindergartens

Skills and competences of kindergarten trainees at university level

The skills and competences expected from kindergarten trainees are determined by the profile of a graduate with a Bachelor's degree in teacher training and pedagogical science.⁸ Trainee Kindergarten Teachers who have completed guided workplace experience should be able to do the following:

- Identify the developmental and individual characteristics and educational needs of a child
- Accept the individuality of a child
- Have basic practical experience in identifying psychological and social factors of their learning
- Accept the diversity of students in a socio-cultural context.

The trainees are familiar with:

- Generally binding legal regulations related to the work of a teacher
- Pedagogical and other documentation
- Other conceptual and strategic documents and materials of a kindergarten.

The trainees:

- Can record, analyse and solve various pedagogical situations
- Have the skills to plan, design, manage and organise the educational process effectively
- Have basic methodological skills in the profile educational areas or specialisations

⁸ For more information, go to [www.portalvs.sk](https://www.portalvs.sk/sk/studijne-odbory/zo-brazit/ucitelstvo-a-pedagogicke-vedy#details-level-p) – (<https://www.portalvs.sk/sk/studijne-odbory/zo-brazit/ucitelstvo-a-pedagogicke-vedy#details-level-p>)

- Can use information and communication technologies in the educational process effectively
- Can apply an appropriate method of pedagogical assessment and evaluation
- Can modify their activities and make them more efficient
- Can communicate and cooperate with parents, foster parents, community, etc. efficiently.

Evaluation of teaching practice

Several forms of self-assessment and external evaluation of students are used during teaching practice. Secondary school students use more methodologically oriented evaluation procedures. University students reflect on pedagogical practice in more detail and at a deeper theoretical level. The main means for (self)assessment of a kindergarten trainee is a **portfolio** that contains, for example, features of the training kindergarten (philosophy, profiling, environmental characteristics), an overview of binding pedagogical documents, records and transcripts from observing educational activities, analysis of didactic procedures, design and implementation of teaching situations/educational projects, analysis and reflection of their own teaching, professional development plan for newly qualified teachers, and personal SWOT analyses of strengths and weaknesses in teaching skills.

A student's own **reflexive diary** during teaching practice is also a means of (self)assessment. Students are continuously assessed by the supervisory training teacher. When their guided workplace experience is completed, a structured final evaluation is prepared. It mainly assesses the quality of the particular student's outputs, preparation and reflection during teaching practice. A student's active participation in the colloquium is also included in the final evaluation, which is conducted in the form of a focus group. The students reflect on their own work during teaching practice and actively assess the relationship between study and practice.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Legislation and regulation

The Slovak Republic has a highly regulated system of CPD for pre-primary education, located within the same regulatory framework that applies to primary schools. There is no such framework for staff working in childcare centres for children up to 3 years of age.

Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) on teaching and specialist staff provides both the **right** and **obligation** for continuing education as part of professional development. CPD enables the acquisition, deepening, improving and expanding of diverse professional competences. These include acquiring competences for carrying out specialised activities or for qualifying for the post of Centre Leader or Kindergarten Head, acquiring competences needed for promotion to higher career levels, or meeting the qualification requirements needed for additional responsibilities.

Professional development programmes for teaching and specialist staff in the school system are provided by Professional Development Teachers. They are not employees of schools, but of the Methodology and Pedagogy Centres, which are directly managed by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Professional Development Teachers participate in the development of programmes and professional standards based on research, provide counselling and cooperate with kindergartens in professional development. They manage related certification audits and serve on examination and certification boards. Professional Development Teachers lecture on teaching; their role includes being a professional development methodologist and they consult

on the teacher certification procedure (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). They must likewise meet the set qualification requirements of at least the 2nd level of university education in the field and the second certification (see *Table 9*).

Professional development plan

CPD takes place within the kindergarten's approved professional development plan. It is issued by the Kindergarten Head and approved by the Pedagogical Council. The training plan can be supplemented and modified for as long as it remains valid in accordance with the setting's current possibilities and needs. The maximum time frame is five years.

Providers and main types of CPD

The professional development of teaching and specialist staff takes place through CPD courses, scientific research, publishing, or creative and artistic activities as well as through self-education. CPD in the educational system is organised as training to qualify for specialised posts of responsibility and includes adaptive, pre-certification, innovation and refresher training.

Refresher training is designed according to the needs of the school's founding entity to maintain or refresh the professional competence required for a specific position, to acquire new knowledge and information about changes in legislation, educational programmes, pedagogical documentation and other documentation and to acquire new knowledge and skills in a specific area of work. Either the school or the founding entity of a kindergarten provides refresher training. It is organised as a simple programme approved by the Kindergarten Head. The academic supervisor is a teaching or specialist staff member with a 2nd certification.

Certain kinds of CPD are offered free of charge in Methodology and Pedagogy Centres. Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) determines the requirements of training programmes accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Particular types of training may be provided by a university or organisation established by the Ministry of Education or another government agency, a Catholic education and catechetical centre, a school, a school setting, a social assistance setting, an employer granted a certificate of competence to provide practical training in the system of dual education and by other legal entities that have education in the scope of their activities. Participants receive a state recognised certificate of completion for each type of professional training.

Various other types of professional seminars, courses, trainings and activities are also available for the ECEC sector employees. They are usually organised by commercial and third sector entities. They are not coordinated by state standards and a completion certificate is not issued.

Leave entitlement for CPD

Teaching and specialist staff are entitled to five working days' paid leave for professional development per calendar year, another five working days' leave to prepare for and take the first or second certification examinations, and yet another five working days' leave to participate in a career advancement module to become a Kindergarten Head or another managing role. Employers may allow teaching staff to take a sabbatical for a maximum of one school year if they have been employed for a minimum of ten consecutive years. They are not entitled to a salary or pay while they are on sabbatical, but their return to the position they held when they went on sabbatical is guaranteed (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b).

Releasing employees for training is most difficult in one-class kindergartens and when there is a higher rate of illness among staff. Online training minimised this problem during the COVID-19 pandemic because it took place mostly after the teachers' working hours.

Financing CPD

Some types of professional development training are self-financed by staff. These include the costs for taking the basic module for career advancement if the teacher had not completed it during the pre-certification period. Teachers also pay for adaptive education if it is not provided by the kindergarten, but instead by an organisation established by the Ministry of Education. The kindergartens' founding entities will pay staff for extended study if it is part of the setting's professional development plan. The law provides for other forms of education within the professional development plan financed by employers. Professional development is also supported by financial benefits when training is completed. Teachers receive supplemental pay amounting to 6% for extension studies, 12% for state language examinations passed, 3% for specialised training and 3% for innovation training. Supplemental pay for professional development is for seven years to a maximum of 12%, of which a maximum of 9% is for innovation training.

CPD and career advancement

In the professional development of teaching staff (also Kindergarten Teachers) and specialist staff, there are opportunities for career progress according to qualifications frameworks, career levels and positions (see *Table 9*).

Table 9

Slovak Republic: Career levels and positions of teaching and specialist staff

Career level	a) Newly qualified teaching or specialist staff
	b) Independent teaching or specialist staff
	c) Teaching or specialist staff with 1st certification
	d) Teaching or specialist staff with 2nd certification
Career positions	Specialised activities of teaching staff
	Induction teaching staff, class teacher, leader of methodological circle, supervisor, school support team coordinator
	Specialised activities of specialist staff
Staff head	Teaching staff head: Headteacher, deputy headteacher, head educator
	Specialist staff head: Headteacher, deputy headteacher, specialist department head

Source: Own processing according to Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b

Main topics of CPD

Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) recommends focusing the content of refresher training in kindergartens on school curriculum changes, inclusive education, and the digitisation of education and training.

The State School Inspectorate (Štofková Dianovská et al. 2021) requires the focus to be on improving the quality of educational activities, the activities and tasks of the Kindergarten Head's advisory bodies and school management, and inclusive education and teamwork, including cooperation with families. In view of the pandemic, it was important to focus on online education through various forms of active remote learning. An analysis of teaching staff needs (Methodology and Pedagogy Centre 2013) carried out for the *Inclusive Model of Education at the Pre-primary Level of the School System*, a national project, shows teachers wishing to be educated in such topics as adapting learning tasks to individual needs and abilities of children from marginalised Roma communities (MRC); creating teaching resources (tools, worksheets, etc.) individually adapted to the needs and possibilities of MRC children; preparing children for adverse life

situations of MRC children; connecting kindergarten education with life experiences of MRC children; teaching children using materials available in an MRC child's home environment while also planning educational activities; how to facilitate problematic adaptation and socialisation of MRC children; child diagnostics; and knowledge of socially and culturally conditioned behaviours of MRC children.

At present, the focus has shifted to the acceptance of Ukrainian children in the kindergarten environment, where attention needs to be paid to communicating with children and family members, explaining to the children the situation in Ukraine and taking note of the flood of information on how to help them adapt ('Slovak Government – Children from Ukraine are Coming to Your School, What to Do/For School Headteachers', Verejná Správa SR 2022) and identifying their educational needs, among other things.

Research projects on CPD

The Methodology and Pedagogy centre, working in cooperation with the National Institute for Education, was involved in implementing Professional Development of Teachers (TEACHERS), a national project. Its main goal was to support the professional development of teaching and specialist staff in introducing and implementing changes in kindergartens and schools, including crisis and post-crisis situation management and the impact caused by interruptions in kindergartens due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was completed on 31 December 2022.

Current debates on CPD

The issue of professional development is still topical, especially in a period of upcoming changes and amendments to laws and decrees dealing with the issue. Professional organisations such as the Slovak Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (*SV OMEP*), the Society for Preschool Education (*Spoločnosť pre predškolskú výchovu*), the Kindergarten Development Council (*Rada pre rozvoj materských škôl*) and the Slovak Teachers' Chamber regularly comment on proposals for changes in the legal status. Sometimes compromise agreements are successfully reached, but at other times proposals and well-founded arguments are not accepted.

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

Remuneration of staff in kindergartens and primary schools is regulated by 2019-18526:1-B2001 on salary tariffs of teaching and specialist staff (MŠVVŠ SR 2019). Its annexes list pay classes depending on the length of credited experience. Kindergarten Teachers and specialist staff are remunerated under the same rules as their primary and secondary school colleagues. In terms of remuneration, it makes no difference at what level of school and education teachers work, but rather what initial professional education they have, their pedagogical experience in education and what career level in professional development they have achieved. Salaries includes variable components, such as supplemental pay for a specific career position and function, working shifts, running classes and management. Bonuses can be paid from the founding entity's budget, usually allocated at the end of a calendar year.

At the end of 2021, the average monthly salary in Slovakia for teachers was €1,211 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2022). The salary earned by a newly qualified teacher has been

€881.50 since 1 September 2019, with the tariff rate (€831.50) + 6% supplemental pay amounting to €50 (MŠVVŠ SR and The Education Policy Institute 2019).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Direct educational activities of teaching and specialist staff are regulated by Government Regulation 201/2019 (Government of the Slovak Republic 2019). They may work full time or part time for a definite or indefinite period as set out in the employment agreement with the kindergarten's founding entity or statutory representative. They can be employed by several kindergartens and schools, up to a maximum of 48 hours per week. Time spent teaching includes two components: direct educational activities and education-related activities. The base work week for a kindergarten teacher's direct educational activities teacher is 28 hours, with each hour lasting 60 minutes. Usually, two teachers in a class take turns in alternating their working hours between morning and afternoon shifts. Statistically, both teachers are reported as one full-time teacher in one class. Part-time employment is very rare and not statistically documented.

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

According to Act 138/2019 (NR SR 2019b) *adaptive training* is intended for newly qualified teaching staff or specialist staff who have completed a post-secondary qualification (see *Chapter 4.3*). Newly qualified teachers have to work under the supervision of a staff member responsible for induction, whose supervision lasts a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years. Newly qualified teachers can get further help from colleagues in the kindergarten support team. At least once a year, their employer may offer preventive psychological counselling and counselling aimed at managing aggression, self-knowledge and conflict resolution (Act 138/2019, NR SR 2019b). Mentoring and coaching are not established by law. It depends on the founding entity whether and in what quality they are provided to their staff.

A simple induction programme is established that is approved by the Kindergarten Head or a statutory representative of a government education agency. The academic supervisor of adaptive training is the Kindergarten Head or the Professional Development Methodologist (see *Chapter 2.3*). Training starts no later than five days after the date of hiring, regardless of whether the new employee is qualified for the position or not. It ends with a recommendation for the newly qualified or specialist staff member before a three-member examination board as outlined in the adaptive training programme, and a report. The newly qualified staff member then becomes an independent employee ("independent teacher").

Teaching and specialist staff have the same protective status as other public sector employees in connection with the performance of work activities. Their right is to be provided with the conditions required for their jobs, in particular protection against acts of violence by children, legal representatives and other persons, against socio-pathological behaviour of management staff, founding entities, legal representatives and other persons and unprofessional interference while they are working.

7.4 Non-contact time

A Kindergarten Teacher is granted 9.5 hours out of the paid working time of 37.5 hours per week for non-teaching activities. The time is usually spent preparing for educational activities, providing a learning environment, collecting and creating tools, keeping pedagogical documentation, personal files and portfolios of children, providing consultation and pedagogical counselling, cooperating in the school support team and with legal representatives, working in a Methodical

Circle (see *Chapter 2.4*), participating in operational work briefings and meetings of the Pedagogical Council, managing the school library, if any, improving and decorating the school premises and participating in the city's, municipality's or community's pedagogical activities. They carry out these activities according to current kindergarten management requirements and also following the kindergarten curriculum and its regulations.

7.5 Current staffing issues

In terms of staff recruitment, employers are obliged to advertise teaching and specialist staff vacancies by publishing information about them on their websites, or on the website of the founding entity or regional office. There is usually a selection procedure for the employer to select from registered applicants. Some regions, especially those with high living costs like Bratislava, have a shortage of teachers. Employers in these regions mainly have a recruitment process, not a selection process, but this is a matter for the founding entities and not a systemic national solution. Therefore, it is usual for teachers to work until retirement age. Most teachers are women aged around 50 years (CVTI SR 2021). Teaching's attractiveness among young people is declining in the light of low salaries and high demands on competences and responsibilities in the profession.

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Political reforms and initiatives related to ECEC staffing and professionalisation are based on the *National Programme for the Development of Education* (MŠVVŠ SR 2018), which was prepared from tasks outlined in *Learning Slovakia* (Burjan et al. 2017).

One of the programme's priorities is to increase the quality of education and strengthen the social status of teachers in the context of international comparisons and global trends. This also applies to pre-primary teachers. There has been a long-term professional discussion about whether secondary-level education is sufficient for the performance of this profession, and whether, within a reasonable time horizon, such as 10 years, it would be desirable to achieve qualification requirements for the 1st or 2nd level (Bachelor or Master) of university education. This is a topical question, especially with regard to the compulsory part of pre-primary education. At the same time, finding a solution is difficult because of the declining attractiveness of the teaching profession. The current challenge is to ensure an overall sufficient number of qualified kindergarten teachers.

Another ECEC initiative is the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2021), which also includes a reform aimed at "preparing and developing teachers for new content and forms of teaching". Its grant programme for universities (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2022) will support new teacher training programmes in the field of inclusive teaching, teaching pupils with different home languages and the development of digital competences. At the regional level, it will finance the establishment of regional teacher support centres.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Attitudes of Kindergarten Teachers to professional development

Source: Hall, Renáta, Peter Drál, Petra Fridrichová, Miroslava Hapalová, Stanislav Lukáč, Jozef Miškolci, and Katarína Vančíková 2019 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To define problems in Slovak education and propose an internally coordinated reform of the entire education system – from pre-school, through primary, secondary and higher education, to lifelong learning, based on detailed research findings.

Methods: More than 400 individual and 20 group interviews, together more than 500 respondents; questionnaires with approximately 5,000 respondents (teaching and specialist staff in education in Slovakia and abroad).

Selected findings: The study analyses the overall state of education in Slovakia. ECEC staff related findings suggest that Kindergarten Teachers have different attitudes regarding compulsory professional training. One third of the respondents attend CPD voluntarily, one third under certain conditions and one third are not interested in continuing professional development. Salary increases motivate several teachers to learn. However, they criticise the insufficient choice of accredited programmes free of tuition fees. They see a problem in the insufficient funding of programmes that attract their interest (mostly by non-profit organisations). The teachers have management support for further education, but they feel they cannot respond flexibly to the choice of courses. These are taken according to a plan aligned with the school's operation and vision. The findings of the study have also affirmed a strong feminisation in the ECEC sector, with the teachers experiencing excessive workload and little social appreciation.

Implications: The authors of the study have proposed a set of measures for the entire education system in Slovakia. Their study has initiated a discussion among professionals and ordinary people, provided stimuli for changes in the content and forms of education, and stimulated the need for changes in preparation for the teaching profession and the further education of teachers.

Inclusive education in kindergartens

Source: Alberty Ladislav, Peter Drál, Vladimír Klein, Emil Komárik, Milena Lipnická, Alica Petrasová, Viera Šilonová, and Miron Zelina 2019 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To promote inclusive education, to provide equal access to quality education by improving the professional competences of teaching staff and specialist staff and to improve children's outcomes.

Methods: Separate questionnaires for learning about the views of Kindergarten Heads, Teachers and Teaching Assistants on the conditions for an inclusive model of education in the kindergarten environment. 48 directors of the 50 participating kindergartens took part in the first evaluation phase and 43 Kindergarten Heads and 64 teaching staff in the second evaluation phase.

Selected findings: According to the final report (Alberty et al. 2019), in the 2nd evaluation, both Centre Leaders and Teachers expressed the opinion that, in practice, the national project had significantly strengthened in kindergartens the personnel, material-technical and curricular conditions of inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Centre leaders expressed the importance of the education of teaching staff and staffing ratios in the inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Kindergartens need Special Pedagogues (Heads 79.59%; Teachers 76.56%), School Psychologists (Heads 67.35%; Teachers 65.08%), and to a lesser extent Social Pedagogues (Heads 55.10%; Teachers 62.50%). More than

half of the Kindergarten Heads (55.10%) and Teachers (50.76%) expressed the opinion that the number of teachers in inclusive education of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds should be increased to three per class and the number of children in such classes should be reduced to 16 children or less per class. They require teamwork in pre-primary education.

Implications: The National Institute for Education is currently developing a system of inclusive education support measures that would implement continuing education programmes for teaching and specialist staff. The project continues in two national projects: *Assisting Professions in the Education of Children and Pupils* and *Professional Development of Teachers (Teachers)*.

Professional development of Kindergarten Teachers

Source: Methodology and Pedagogy Centre/ State Pedagogical Institute – Metodicko-pedagogické centrum/ Štátny pedagogický ústav⁹ 2020 (see *References* for full details)¹⁰

Aims: To support the professional development of teaching and specialist staff in the implementation of changes in schools and kindergartens, including crisis and post-crisis situation management and impacts related to school interruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Online questionnaire, group interviews (focus groups), 291 respondents including 60 Kindergarten Teachers were involved

Selected findings: The final report of the preliminary survey (Methodology and Pedagogy Centre/ State Pedagogical Institute 2021) states that within further education, Kindergarten Teachers are most interested in the topics of pedagogical diagnostics, the use of inclusive approaches in the educational process, educating children with special educational needs, creating and developing a positive climate in the classroom, team teaching, ICT teaching, self-reflexive and self-assessment competences and self-development topics (such as dealing with difficult communication and conflict situations), managing stress, fatigue and burnout, emotional intelligence, professional portfolios. For CPD activities, teachers prefer morning working hours and in-person teaching. They consider exercises, trainings and experiential forms of education, workshops, creative workshops, demonstrations and exchanges of experience between participants to be effective. In remote education, they mostly used the website "We teach at a distance" and materials from the National Institute for Education and The Methodology and Pedagogy centre. Education during the pandemic has also confirmed the need to train teachers for remote forms of learning.

Implications: University study programmes are currently being harmonised in teacher training according to new accreditation rules. These also reflect requirements for the development of digital competences in kindergarten teachers and for the flexible implementation of various forms of professional development.

⁹ From 1.7.2022 the two organisations merged. Currently they operate under the name of the National Institute of Education and Youth.

¹⁰ For more information about the project see the implementer's website (www.mpc-edu.sk/sk/project/teachers/o-projekte) and (www.statpedu.sk/sk/o-organizacii/projekty/narodny-projekt-profesijny-rozvoj-ucitelov-teachers/)

10. Workforce challenges – country experts' assessment

Potential challenges for workforce development in early childhood education and care in Slovakia include the following:

- **High quality inclusive pre-primary education.** To educate teachers in this area and prepare them practically for the pedagogical consideration of children's diverse educational needs as well as to cooperate in school support teams and with legal representatives for the children and the community.
- **Institutionalised education and care for children from 0 to 3 years of age,** with special attention to children from marginalised Roma communities. To prepare teachers for various forms of non-formal education and participation in school, health and social activities as well as in communities.
- **Adequate remuneration.** Appropriate salaries in education are seen as a strong motivating factor for joining the profession and keeping young teachers in it. This is an important factor to attract talented students for the study route as a kindergarten teacher.
- **University educated teachers** in compulsory pre-primary education to ensure a smooth transition of children from pre-primary to primary education. The teachers should have the competences for the process that requires a higher level of scientific and critical thinking.

In the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia and the Union of Slovak Cities are discussing the current state of education with several professional organisations. These include the Slovak Committee of the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (SV OMEP), the Society for Preschool Education, the Council for Kindergarten Development, and the Slovak Chamber of Teachers.

Discussions are also being held within the above organisations. In particular, the SV OMEP (www.omep.sk) and the Society for Preschool Education are organising professional and scientific conferences and workshops for employees in the ECEC sector. Thus, they are contributing to the dissemination of knowledge, inspiring them with examples of practice from abroad and enabling them to reflect upon their own work.

The most recently discussed topic is the planned introduction of a legal right to a place in kindergarten for all children from 4 years (2024) and 3 years (2025) of age.

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