

SLOVENIA

Early Childhood Education and Care
ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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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-efq>

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 author

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1. ECEC governance in Slovenia

In Slovenia, early childhood education and care provision is organised as a unitary system. Since 1993, the age-integrated ECEC institutions for children aged 11 months up to statutory schooling, generally at age 6, come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (*Ministrstvo za vzgojo in izobraževanje*).

Slovenia was the first of the post-communist countries to transfer responsibility for early childhood education from the then Ministry of Health, Family and Social Security to the then Ministry of Education and Sport (Krek 1995, 37). The government's concrete responsibilities include issuing relevant legislation and providing an ECEC curriculum. Municipalities have a duty to provide sufficient places and to ensure that the national curricular framework is implemented.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 gives an overview of the main staff categories working in centre-based settings. Core professionals (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) are also categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this chapter).

Table 1
Slovenia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Early Childhood Teacher/ Kindergarten Teacher <i>Vzgojitelj/ vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok</i> <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months–5 years ¹	Core professional with group responsibility Leader of an ECEC setting Head of an ECEC unit in a primary school	11 months – 5/6 years	3 years of higher education <i>Award:</i> Bachelor's degree (Professional Bachelor) ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6

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 settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Slovenia, the relevant format is **0–5** years. However, some 6 year-olds may also attend kindergarten if they were born before September 1st.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogy Professional	<i>Osnovna šola</i> Basic school ² 1 st grade 6–7 years	Core professional with group responsibility (works along Primary School Teacher; Early Childhood Teacher teaches half of the lessons)	0–5/6 years	
	<i>Bolnišnica</i> Hospital 0–5 years	Core professional with small group responsibility	11 months – 5/6 years	
Early Childhood Assistant Teacher ³ <i>Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja / vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok – pomočnica vzgojiteljice</i>	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months– 5 years	Qualified co-worker – works with core professional or alone with group during absence of Early Childhood Teacher, e.g. rest time for children, morning assembly, pick-up time, etc. ⁴	11 months – 5/6 years	4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification <i>Award:</i> Vocational <i>Matura</i> ECTS credits: n/a ⁵ EQF level: 3 ISCED 2011: 3
Early Childhood Teacher for early intervention <i>Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok za zgodnjo obravnavo</i>	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months– 5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months– 5/6 years	University degree in a relevant subject area ⁶ ECTS credits: 240/180 EQF level: 7 or 6 ISCED 2011: 7 or 6 3-year Professional Bachelor's degree course ECTS credits: 180

² Unified school for primary and first stage of secondary education, ISCED 1 and 2 (Eurydice 2023a)

³ The job title changed from Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant (previous) to Early Childhood Teacher – Teacher's Assistant (valid from 01.09.2018). For reasons of readability we have chosen the title **Early Childhood Assistant Teacher** for this report.

⁴ A Preschool Teacher's Assistant, as a member of the kindergarten staff, may also organise an ECEC programme for under 3 year-olds in their own home.

⁵ n/a = not applicable

⁶ Defectology, Pedagogy, Psychology, Social pedagogy or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 180 ECTS, some with 240 ECTS

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Master's degree in relevant subject area ⁷ ECTS credits: 120 (2 year programme) 60 (1 year programme) EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Early Childhood Teacher for children with special needs <i>Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok s posebnimi potrebami</i>	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months–5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	University degree in relevant subject area ⁸ ECTS credits: 240/180 EQF level: 7 or 6 ISCED 2011: 7 or 6 Master's degree in relevant subject area ⁹ ECTS credits: 120/60 EQF level: 7 ISCED 2011: 7
Early Childhood Teacher for communication in Slovenian sign language <i>Vzgojitelj za komunikacijo v slovenskem znakovnem jeziku</i>	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months–5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	3-year Professional Bachelor's qualification as Early Childhood Teacher plus additional qualification as an instructor of Slovenian sign language. ¹⁰
Early Childhood Teacher for working with the deaf-blind <i>Vzgojitelj za delo z gluhoslepimi</i>	<i>Vrtec</i> ECEC centre/ Kindergarten 11 months–5 years	Individual work with children in need of additional support	11 months – 5/6 years	3-year Professional Bachelor's qualification as Early Childhood Teacher plus additional qualifications as an interpreter for the deaf-blind and as a

⁷ Inclusive pedagogy, Inclusion in education, Speech therapy and deaf pedagogy, Pedagogy, Psychology, Social pedagogy or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 60 ECTS, some with 120 ECTS.

⁸ Defectology or Special and rehabilitation pedagogy (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programmes are credited with 180 ECTS, some with 240 ECTS.

⁹ Special and rehabilitation pedagogy, Speech therapy and deaf pedagogy, Inclusive pedagogy or Inclusion in education (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22); some study programs are credited with 60 ECTS, some with 120 ECTS.

¹⁰ Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22.

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				specialist in working with the deaf-blind. ¹¹

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

Public kindergartens are managed by Principals/Centre Heads. They assume two roles: that of a pedagogical leader and that of an executive manager.

Anyone who meets the conditions for an Early Childhood Teacher or school consultant, has at least five years of work experience in education, holds the title of Senior Councillor, Councillor or Adviser or has held the title of Mentor for at least five years and has passed the principal's exam (see below) can be appointed as the director of a public kindergarten (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22).

Principals/Centre Heads are appointed by a kindergarten council comprising five representatives of kindergarten's staff, three representatives of a founder (municipality), and three representatives of parents (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 46).

Responsibilities of the Principal of an ECEC centre are described in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 49). The ECEC Principal performs the following tasks:

- Organises, plans and manages the work of the kindergarten
- Prepares a kindergarten development programme
- Prepares a proposal for the annual work plan and is responsible for its implementation
- Is responsible for realising the rights of children and the rights and duties of adults
- Leads the work of the Teachers' Council
- Creates a proposal for above-standard programmes
- Promotes lifelong education and the training of professionals
- Organises mentoring for students during work placements/practicum
- Participates in the educational work of EC teachers, monitors their work and advises them
- Proposes the promotion of staff to job titles
- Decides on the promotion of employees to pay grades
- Monitors the work of the advisory service

¹¹ Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22.



- Takes care of the institution's cooperation with parents (parental meetings, 'speaking' hours and other forms of cooperation)
- Informs parents about the work of the kindergarten and about changes in the rights and obligations of pupils, apprentices and students¹²
- Ensures the enforcement of decisions of state bodies
- Represents the kindergarten and is responsible for the legality of the work
- Determines the systematisation of workplaces
- Decides on the employment relationships and on the disciplinary responsibility of employees
- Is responsible for ensuring and determining quality through self-evaluation and preparing an annual report on the self-evaluation of the kindergarten
- Performs other tasks in accordance with laws and other regulations.

During absence from the centre the ECEC Principal may authorise in writing specific members of the kindergarten staff to carry out tasks within their competence.

A candidate who has not taken the leadership exam can also be appointed, but must complete it no later than one year after the beginning of the mandate. If the ECEC Principal does not pass the exam within the year, the mandate is terminated by law. An ECEC leader's mandate lasts five years (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 53).

Leadership is predominantly understood as hierarchical (ECEC leader as the main person to make decisions, to sign official papers, etc.); however, in most cases ECEC leaders make decisions based on discussions made with their deputy leaders and/or consultants (basically with persons close to them; so in this sense leadership is also to some extent shared).

As part of a full-time workload, the ECEC Principal is obliged to carry out

- Three hours of work with children, or four hours of counselling work per week in a kindergarten with 10 or 11 playrooms or
- One and a half hours of work with children, or two hours of counselling work per week in a kindergarten with 12 or 13 playrooms.

In a kindergarten with 14 or more playrooms, the Principal does not have the obligation to work with children or to do consulting work as part of his full-time work obligation (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/2014, 54/21, Article 3).

Specific qualification requirements for ECEC centre leaders

The education and training programme for the leadership exam and the content of the exam are determined by the minister on the proposal of the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education.

A completed postgraduate study programme can also be recognised in lieu of the leadership exam, for which the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education determines that it provides the knowledge specified for the exam (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 106).

Content of the leadership exam

- Introduction to educational management (globalisation and trends, introduction of changes)
- Theory of organisations and management (educational institutions as organisations, management, decision-making, organisational climate and culture)

¹² Children 0-6 are not mentioned in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007).

- Planning (planning and evaluation, aspects of quality in education, financial operations)
- People in the organisation (motivation, communication, meeting management, conflict resolution)
- The principal as a pedagogical leader (newer insights into student and professional learning, leadership strategies for learning, assessment of annual work performance, monitoring and observation of lessons, professionalism and professional development)
- Legislation in education (systemic regulations in the field of education, sectoral laws and by-laws, employment relations, inspection)
- Optional subjects (current subjects in the field of leadership in education).

The goal of the “Headship Licence Programme” is to train participants for the tasks of managing and governing schools and kindergartens, defined in school legislation, and to develop knowledge and skills that contribute to personal and organisational efficiency. It is based on modern theoretical views on management in education, on international and national research on the management of educational organisations and on the previous experience with the work of Principals (National School for Leadership in Education 2023).

In 2021, the National School for Leadership in Education (NSLE) was deleted from the court register, and was attached to the National Institute for Education. The Ministry’s argumentation was the realisation of the goals of the coalition agreement. The former NSLE’s director disagreed with the “purely political” decision to attach the NSLE to the National Institute for Education (Delo 2021). ECEC leaders are also not satisfied with the situation; many argue that they miss the specifically targeted support for ECEC leaders.

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Slovenia has an exceptionally highly structured system of credit point acquisition for continuing professional development and career advancement. This enables both Early Childhood Teachers and ECEC Centre Principals to acquire different levels of recognised expertise and posts of responsibility.

Education staff may be promoted to the job titles Mentor, Adviser and Councillor, and from September 2023 on, a fourth title is in use: Senior Councillor (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22). From 2022 on, Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 115/22). For this, they must have sufficient work experience, demonstrate good work performance, complete further education and training programmes in education or otherwise obtain additional functional knowledge and perform various additional professional work.

Titles gained are permanent and do not have to be reviewed or renewed.

Early Childhood Teachers who act as mentors during students’ workplace-based learning do not need any formally acquired training or qualification for this post. Centre leaders are in charge of choosing a mentor for each of the students undertaking workplace-based learning.

Article 60 of the Collective Agreement does not specify special conditions for the post of mentor from which it can be concluded that the mentor can also be an employee who does not have a title as designated mentor to the trainee, but it probably makes sense for the mentor in such cases to be a person who knows the field of work well (e-Ravnatelj 2022).

The mentor is credited for working with the trainee for four hours per week (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/2014, 54/21, Article 13).



2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

In public kindergartens there is an on-site counselling service for children, staff and parents which cooperates with staff and management in planning, monitoring and evaluating the development of the kindergarten and the educational work. The Councillors are in most cases employed at one ECEC centre; in some cases, they may have a working contract with two ECEC centres (working part-time job at each centre). In Slovenia, it is not the case that Councillors would be generally responsible for a number of centres (there is no “Pedagogical Co-ordinator” as, for example, in some regions of Italy).

The counselling service participates in the preparation and implementation of individualised programmes for children with special needs, however they do have also other work obligations. Staff are Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers, Social Pedagogues and Defectologists (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 67).

Professional workers must master the written Slovenian language, have the appropriate education/qualification specified by law and other regulations, and pass a legally required professional exam (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 92, paragraph 3).

The basic educational goal of the kindergarten, and in this context also of the counselling service in the kindergarten, is the optimal development of the child regardless of gender, social and cultural origin, religion, nationality, and physical and mental constitution. The counselling service in the kindergarten supports the basic purpose that all participants in the kindergarten are as successful as possible in realising both the fundamental and systemically specified general and special educational goals. The counselling service performs interdisciplinary professional work. On the basis of their specialist knowledge, through a consultative relationship and in a professionally autonomous manner, the counselling staff involve themselves in the complex solution of pedagogical, psychological and social issues of educational work in the kindergarten by helping and cooperating with all participants and, if necessary, also with relevant external institutions. The counselling service in the kindergarten or school is therefore a professional *colleague* in the kindergarten and not a professional kindergarten *service* (Nagode 2008, 5).

There are no special supervisory staff employed by the centre provider. The Centre Leader is responsible for monitoring the work of the staff and advising them (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 17/2007, Article 49).

The external evaluation of the educational system and educational organisations in Slovenia takes place in parallel with the self-evaluation of educational institutions (for more details, see the twin document: *Slovenia – Key Contextual Data*).

2.5 Specialist support staff

Specialist support staff are listed in *Table 1*. Specialist staff are in most cases understood as being connected to children with special needs, ensuring them appropriate support in order to develop their potential. The majority of children with special needs attend regular kindergartens, where they are offered various forms of assistance, such as Early Childhood Teachers for Early Intervention. The organisation and manner of implementing programmes are adjusted according to their needs. From June 2022 onwards (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 85/22), EC Teachers for Early Intervention, EC Teachers for additional professional support or other appropriately qualified professional staff may also support the children’s development in kindergartens. Children might also get assistance from a sign language specialist or a specialist in adapted communication and work with deaf-blind children.

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

Table 2 gives a breakdown of the ECEC workforce in Slovenia according to qualification and gender.

Table 2
Slovenia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings, 2022/2023

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce, in %
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) higher education degree	58.8 (7,979 of total 13,564 ECEC staff)
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary, post-secondary)	43.2 (5,585 of total 13,564 ECEC staff)
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	No data available
Trainee staff	No data available
Unqualified staff	No data available
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	4.4* (599 of total 13,564 practitioners in kindergartens) *consultants and other professionals
Male practitioners (387 of total 13,564 ECEC staff)	2.8
14 out of a total of 372 were centre leaders	3.8
133 out of 7,057 were core pedagogues	1.9
211 out of 5,536 were auxiliary staff/assistants	3.8
Staff with a minority ethnic background or a 'background of migration'	No official data available ¹³

Source: Statistical Office RS 2023c

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Table 3 describes the initial qualifying route for prospective Early Childhood Teachers. The study route is open for those who have finished general secondary education with a university entrance exam (*matura*) **or** for those who have completed vocational secondary education with a *vocational matura* or final exam, and for those who finished the 4-year upper secondary programme before 1st June 1995. The course of study lasts three years; candidates must acquire 180 ECTS credits from the compulsory and optional parts of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and

¹³ In the 2017/2018 school year, 12 Roma professionals were employed in kindergartens, including one teacher, three teacher assistants and eight Roma assistants (Bozovičar 2019).



skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a written Bachelor thesis. If successful, the candidate is awarded the title of *diplomirana vzgojiteljica/diplomiran vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok* (State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher).

Table 3

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher

<p>Job title in Slovenian: <i>Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>
<p>Entry requirements: General <i>matura</i>, vocational <i>matura</i> or final exam or a 4-year upper secondary vocational programme completed before 1 June 1995.</p> <p>In the case of enrolment limitation, the candidates are selected according to: (1) overall performance in the general <i>matura</i>, the vocational <i>matura</i> or the final exam: 70 % of credits awarded; (2) overall performance in grades 3 and 4 of the secondary education programme: 30 % of credits awarded.</p> <p>Professional studies: 3 years of higher education; candidates must acquire all the required ECTS credits (180) from the compulsory and optional part of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a Bachelor thesis.</p> <p>Award: State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher (Bachelor)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: A graduate Early Childhood Teacher can be employed in any organisation engaged in early learning and teaching; most often this means in ECEC settings and the first grade of the nine-year compulsory school. The graduate Early Childhood Teacher can also work in hospital units for young children.</p>

The initial qualifying route for Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is presented in Table 4. The route is open for anyone who has successfully completed compulsory education (9 years) or lower vocational education or the equivalent qualifying route under previous regulations. The route is at the upper secondary vocational level and is of 4 years' duration. Students are awarded the vocational *matura* after successful completion of the course. The mandatory part of the vocational *matura* involves taking a written and oral examination in the Slovene language on the education of young children. An optional part is a written and oral exam in a foreign language or mathematics, or exam performances and their defence. Successful candidates are awarded the title of an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher (*vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja / vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok – pomočnica vzgojiteljice*) and with this qualification they can be employed in a co-worker role in kindergartens. Persons with a vocational *matura* can either enter employment or continue their initial professional studies at a higher education programme of early childhood education, other professional programmes, and various university programmes (after completing a specific subject at *matura* level).

Table 4

Slovenia: Early Childhood Assistant Teacher

<p>Job title in Slovenian: <i>Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja</i></p>
<p>Entry requirements: Completed compulsory education (9 years) or lower vocational education or equivalent education under the previous regulations.</p> <p>In the case of enrolment limitation, candidates are selected according to the final assessment of the compulsory subjects in the 7th, 8th and 9th grade.</p>

Job title in Slovenian: Vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok – pomočnik vzgojitelja

Professional studies: 4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification, ending with vocational *matura*. The mandatory part of the vocational *matura* is a written and oral examination in Slovene language and early childhood education (2 subjects). The optional part (2 subjects) is a written and oral examination in a foreign language or mathematics, and exam performances (three performances) and their defence.

Note: The vocational *matura* award qualifies for employment or continuing education, e.g. higher education programme in early childhood education, other professional programmes, various university programmes (after completion of one subject at *matura*). After successful completion of a one-year *matura*-course, it is also possible to enrol for any kind of university studies.

Award: License as Early Childhood Assistant Teacher / Vocational *matura*

ECTS credits: not applicable

EQF level: 3

ISCED 2011: 3

Main ECEC workplace: ECEC setting (in a co-worker role) or home-based childcare setting (as core practitioner).

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

Early Childhood Teacher – higher education route

Competency specifications

In Slovenia, three universities (University of Maribor, University of Ljubljana, University of Primorska) provide Bachelor-level *studies* for future EC Teachers. Each university publishes its own list of competence specifications for graduates of the Faculty of Education. Here, one example is presented (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2023b). The other two can be accessed via direct links in the References list (University of Maribor 2023; University of Primorska 2023a).

Early Childhood Teacher study programme, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

The fundamental goal of the programme is to train students for quality educational work with children 0–6 and children in the first grade of the nine-year Basic compulsory school and for cooperation with their parents, colleagues and other professionals.

In the process of education, students of pre-school education become familiar with different conceptions of childhood and education and acquire basic theoretical and practical knowledge from individual areas of activities in kindergarten (Ministry of Education 2020). Graduates of the programme must know how to communicate with children and adults and be able to plan, implement and critically analyse educational work. The programme's electives encourage students to get more in-depth training for those areas of kindergarten work for which they have a particular interest and ability. An important goal of the study programme is the acquisition of basic and broadly transferable knowledge which will enable graduates to search for resources and ways to acquire the specific knowledge and skills they need at work in the process of lifelong learning.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana has adapted the list of general and subject-specific competences developed by an international working group for the field of educational science and the TUNING (*Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*) teacher education programme supported by the European Union within the Socrates–Erasmus programme (<http://www.unideusto.org/tuning/>) and used it for developing new study programmes.



General competence specifications

- Knowledge and understanding of social systems (in particular the education system)
- Sensitivity/openness to people and social situations
- Knowledge and understanding of developmental principles, differences and individual needs
- Knowledge of educational concepts, their philosophical and historical foundations
- Knowledge of and compliance with the institutional frameworks of work (requirements, legislation, documentation requirements, legal aspects of educational work)
- Ability to research in education
- Organisational and management skills in education, mentoring students and trainees
- Use of ICT in education
- Understanding individual values and value systems, management of professional-ethical issues
- Knowledge, understanding, focusing on inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism.

In addition to these competences, students also gain wider general competencies, acquired by students of *all* higher education programmes, irrespective of the course of study:

- Knowledge and understanding of social systems (especially processes in education)
- Sensitivity/openness to people and social situations
- Knowledge and understanding of developmental laws, differences and individual needs
- Knowledge of educational and educational concepts, their philosophical and historical foundations
- Knowledge and consideration of the institutional framework of work (requirements, legislation, documentation needs, legal aspects of educational work)
- Qualification for research in education
- Organisational and managerial skills in education, mentoring of students and interns
- Use of information and communication technology in education
- Understanding individual values and value systems, mastering professional-ethical issues
- Knowledge, understanding, orientation towards inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism.

Subject-specific competence specifications

- Knowledge of the content and didactics of the field
- Understanding and application of curriculum theories and general and didactic knowledge in the subject area
- Interdisciplinary integration of contents
- Use of special-pedagogical skills to work with children with special needs
- Pedagogical classroom management and/or group management
- Organising active and independent learning, supporting effective learning strategies
- Ability to verify and evaluate the skills and achievements of pupils and developing feedback information
- Communicating with professionals from various educational fields
- Cooperation with parents
- Understanding the relationship between the educational institution and the social environment. Systemic vision and action
- Knowing and understanding the theoretical foundations of counselling
- Creation of a comprehensive assessment of the needs of a child or a group of children, their strong and weak areas taking into account environmental factors (physical, social, cultural) with the appropriate procedures and instruments
- Applying knowledge of management procedures and principles of counselling, planning and implementation of intervention programmes

- Ability to establish and maintain partnerships with other users or groups (parents, local community, advisory services, economy, etc.)
- Promoting such changes of a system that ensure basic rights and needs of a user/group
- Knowledge, critical assessment and application of theories of childhood development and learning in the planning, implementation and evaluation process of educational activities.
- Knowledge of forms, contents and methods of work and autonomous implementation of the curriculum for kindergarten and first grade curriculum of primary school
- Knowledge of all early childhood curricular areas and first grade subjects and their (interdisciplinary) integration in the learning process
- Efficient and flexible organisation of time and space: the layout of the classroom for a variety of activities (places for play and for calm activities), the appropriate choice of teaching and didactic materials, flexible scheduling of activities and transitions between them
- Observing and monitoring the achievements, progress and development of children
- Identifying and taking into account individual needs and other differences among children (in personality, abilities, cognitive styles, family or socio-cultural environment, ...) at educational work
- Providing emotional safety of children and the promotion of autonomy in accordance with their maturity
- Nurturing curiosity of children, taking into account the intrinsic motivation and interests, spreading interests and promoting exploratory and active learning
- Knowledge of teamwork and co-operation in a team with a teacher or teacher's assistant, work in a collective or professional team
- Effective communication with parents and knowledge and use of various forms of cooperation with them.

Curricular areas

Tables 5 and 6 present an overview of the compulsory and optional content in the curricula of the three Slovenian universities.

Table 5

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher study programmes – compulsory curricular areas/subjects, 2023

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	University of Ljubljana (2023b)	University of Primorska (2023a)
Pedagogic/ didactic	Pre-school pedagogy	Pre-school pedagogy	Basics of pedagogy
	Didactics	School pedagogy with didactics	Pre-school pedagogy
	Theory of education	Theory of education	Didactics
Psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology
	Educational psychology	Educational psychology	Educational psychology
Pedagogical methodology	Introduction to the methodology of pedagogical research	Pedagogical methodology	Pedagogical research
Language and literature	Slovene language	Slovene language	Slovene language I, II / Italian language I, II ¹⁴

¹⁴ The programme has two majors: *Preschool education major* and *Preschool education major for institutions with Italian as language of instruction*. For students who choose the Preschool education major for institutions with an Italian language of instruction, the courses will also be conducted (10 contact hours each) in the Italian language.

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	University of Ljubljana (2023b)	University of Primorska (2023a)
			Early learning of Slovene / Italian language
	Children's literature	Language and Literature	Children's literature
	Didactics of language education		Language activities in kindergarten
Mathematics	Mathematics education	Early learning of mathematics	Early learning of mathematics
Art	Elementary art educational practice	Art education	Art activities
	Didactics of visual art activities		
Theatre	Puppetry – drama education	Puppets, drama, media	Puppets, theatre, film
Technics	Didactics of technical education	Technical education	Technical activities
Music	Vocal-instrumental practicum I	Music	Musical language
			Child and music
			Musical activities
	Didactics of music education	Music in early childhood	Musical activities
Dance	Dance education didactics	Dance expression	Dance activities
Motor development	Didactics of physical education	Movement	Child's motor development
	Children's motoric	Children's motoric	Motor-sport activities
	Motor practical course		
Natural sciences	Didactics of early science	Early natural sciences – chemistry	Early learning of natural science
	Principles of natural sciences	Early natural sciences – physics	
		Early natural sciences – biology	
Social sciences	Didactics of introduction into social environment	Child in society	Early learning of social studies
		Social studies	
	Sociology of the family and the pre-school child	Sociology of education	Sociology of education
Philosophy	/	Selected topics in Philosophy	Philosophy of education
Inclusive/special pedagogy	Special pedagogy	Inclusive education	Inclusion in a kindergarten
ICT	/	/	Educational technology
Health	/	/	Taking care of the health of kindergarten children
Practicum	Practical training I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII	Practicum in the first age group classrooms (children up to 3 years old)	Practical training I, II, III
		Practicum in the second age group classrooms (children 3–6 years old)	
		Practicum in the first grade of compulsory school	
Elective courses	Elective course 1, 2, 3, 4	Professional elective	Elective course – foreign

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	University of Ljubljana (2023b)	University of Primorska (2023a)
		course I, II, III	language
		General elective course I, II	Elective course I, II, III
Graduation	Graduation project	Graduation project	Graduation thesis
Other	/	Cross-curricular connections – projects	/

Table 6

Slovenia: Preschool Education study programmes – elective courses

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	University of Ljubljana (2023b)	University of Primorska (2023a)
Media	/	Media education	Communication and media in contemporary society
Dance	Dancing dramatisation in the kindergarten	Dance theatre	/
		Artistic movement and dance pedagogy	
		Stage of Faculty of Education	
Puppets	Preparing and realizing a puppetry project – performance	Puppets in pedagogical process	Puppetry
Nature	Children’s play and inquiry in natural environment	Nature in kindergarten, kindergarten in nature	Learn to read nature
		Nature and young children	
Mathematics	Learning mathematics through play	Mathematical challenges in kindergarten	Mathematical plays
		Mathematics through English	
Language and literature / literacy / communication	Slovenian oral texts	Children’s literature	Teaching Slovene at pre-school level
	Family literacy	Family literacy	Writing fairy tale texts
	Language activities in kindergarten	Interpersonal communication	Communication skills in education
	Interpretation of texts in juvenile literature		
Technics	/	Creative technical workshops	Selected topics in technical activities
Music	Music activities in kindergarten	Choir III	Musical interpretations I
	Playing instruments – Orff instruments	Communication with music	Musical didactical games
Experiential pedagogics	/	/	Experiential pedagogy
Children with disabilities	/	Special pedagogy	Basic methods of working with pre-school blind and visually impaired children

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor (2023a)	University of Ljubljana (2023b)	University of Primorska (2023a)
Psychology	Useful psychological approaches in pre-school education	Development, teaching and learning in early childhood	Family Psychology
	Children's play and attachment		
Motor development / sport activities	Sensory motoric	Movement – a method of play	Physical sports activities in nature – swimming
	Physically talented children	Movement – a method of play for all periods of life	Sport for relaxation – tennis
		Mountaineering	Sports for relaxation – aerobics
	Sports in outdoor education	Swimming	Basic physical education
Foreign Language	Teaching English at pre-school level	English language I – Strategies for learning a foreign language	Teaching English language at an early stage
			Learning Italian in the pre-school period
		English language II – linguistic abilities	Foreign language
Art	Artistic expression and space	Artistic creativity	/
	Visual art activities in the museum and gallery	Embodied approaches to creativity and learning	
Pedagogical methodology	Methodology of qualitative and quantitative pedagogical research	Research in education	/
Pedagogy	Educational Concepts in Theory and Practice	Pedagogical speech in kindergarten	Alternative pedagogical concepts in theory and practice
	Moral education and ethics		
	Pedagogical communication and partnership between kindergarten, school and family		
Other	Adult's role in child's introducing into social environment	Children with experience of violence	Education for diversity and social justice
		Children in the animals' kingdom	
	Team work in kindergarten and in school	Play and natural sciences	Italian as a professional language
		Kindergarten – a democratic community	
	Mathematical art picture book and didactic materials	Children's rights in kindergarten	

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

In line with general academic practice, higher education teachers are autonomous regarding the choice of content, literature and other resources for a particular course. In general, they are expected to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, including innovative and well-established procedures in the profession based on research evidence and theories of pedagogy.

Based on data accessible in the course syllabuses of study programmes at the University of Maribor (2023a) and the University of Primorska (2023b) (the University of Ljubljana does not have a course syllabus published on its website), higher education teachers use the following learning and teaching methods: lecture, discussion, documents analysis, theoretical and empirical research, project work (individual and in groups), discourse, cooperative learning, individual learning, teamwork, laboratory work, seminar work, problem based learning, individual presentations of lessons, e-learning, multimedia presentations.

In courses where specific didactics are required, higher education teachers use varying didactic approaches depending on the subject they teach (e.g. music workshops, musical methods of teaching and learning, public performance (music), display of planned motor/dance activities (motor development, musical education), homework assignments (art), exercises in a swimming pool or in the sea (outdoor activities – swimming), integrated practice etc.

Early Childhood Assistant Teacher– vocational route

Goals of the vocational programme

The 2020 version of the “Educational programme Pre-school education” (Portal MIZŠ 2023a) defines the goals of the study programme rather than competence specifications. These include enabling students to:

- Systematically acquire general and basic knowledge for understanding the principles in nature, society and profession
- Develop skills for successful work and professional growth and ability to understand human relationships
- Learn how to analyse specific technical problems in the workplace, and to plan measures to address them effectively
- Develop personal skills (responsibility, communication skills, creativity and innovation, empathy and openness, and persistence) and values (honesty, act in accordance with ethical principles), which are important for the education context
- Learn about interdisciplinary expertise and acquire knowledge of the basic principles of teamwork
- Develop motivation for education, training and lifelong learning
- Develop a willingness to discover and follow new developments in the professional field
- Master the basic professional terminology and know how to use scientific literature
- Use modern information technology to work in the professional field and to work with the resources
- Acquire the basics of entrepreneurship, making it easier to adapt to changes in the workplace and the labour market, and to successfully plan and manage his/her own career
- Develop social skills, independence and responsibility
- Actively take care of their own health and the health of the children entrusted to them and to develop a positive attitude towards a healthy lifestyle
- Work safely and ecologically aware, to act as responsible citizens, and know how to properly protect and preserve nature
- Know about and link theoretical and practical knowledge about development and education of children



- Master theoretical and practical knowledge of individual educational fields, the methodology and didactics of these areas, educational resources, tools and materials
- Effectively and creatively plan and implement educational work in the group
- Know how to organise a stimulating educational environment for the all-round development of children
- Learn how to observe, monitor and evaluate the child's development and progress
- Learn to communicate with children and adults and to learn about the methods and forms of cooperation with parents
- Learn to evaluate their own work through self-reflection and self-regulation.

Curricular areas

The vocational education programme consists of various mandatory and optional modules. The following are included in the 2020 version of the “Curriculum Pre-school Education” (Portal MIZŠ 2023b).

General education subjects: Slovenian; mathematics; foreign language; arts; history; geography; sociology; psychology; physics; chemistry; biology; physical education.

Professional modules: Communication skills; pedagogy and pedagogical approaches in the pre-school period; development and learning of young children; safe and healthy environment; early childhood curriculum; games for children; creative expression; maths for young children; linguistic expression of children; nature for children; social studies for children; information and communication technology; artistic expression; musical expression; dance expression; sports for children; multimedia.

The emphasis is also on practical training (practicum in ECEC settings), optional (elective) courses and an open curriculum.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

The teacher is autonomous in determining the number of hours devoted to addressing the individual learning topics and determining the sequence of learning content. Orientation goals oblige the teacher to motivate the student to find the most innovative and feasible ideas and also projects.

Lessons should be conducted using various methods: brainstorming, explanation, guided discussion, demonstration, practical student activities, method of using resources, etc. The teacher is the moderator in the lesson, directing it to the students' activities and enabling reflection of experience, autonomy in thinking, critical analysis and creativity. Explanation and demonstration are problem-oriented (e.g. Gimnazija in srednja šola Rudolfa Maistra Kamnik 2023).

Vocational schools emphasise experiential learning, the importance of internships in kindergarten, give students additional knowledge of alternative pedagogies, and at the same time enable them to gain concrete experience abroad, in the Erasmus+ programme (practical training with work abroad).

Part of the lessons are conducted in the form of cross-curricular workshops for children, which will be held either at school or in the other relevant organisations in the community (e.g. museum), or in kindergartens, and in the form of courses in the field of sports (hiking, rollerblading, skating, swimming, skiing) (e.g. Gimnazija Celje – Centre 2023).



4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

For graduates with related academic qualifications

The University of Primorska (University of Primorska 2022) and the University of Ljubljana (University of Ljubljana 2022) both offer Programmes for educational improvement. These are study programmes that upgrade, deepen and expand the acquired education and are determined by law or by-laws as a condition for carrying out the educational work.

The *Programme for Pedagogical Training in Preschool Education* is a training programme that allows graduates of programmes that train teachers and graduates of other related study programmes to obtain qualifications for employment in kindergarten.

Graduates from the following study programmes can enrol:

- University study programmes where graduates have obtained the professional title of a teacher
- University study programmes in the field of education, arts, social sciences or humanities
- Higher education professional or university study programme in social work
- Second-cycle Master's study programme in the field of education, arts, social sciences or humanities
- Second-cycle Master's study programme in social work, social inclusion and justice in the field of handicap, ethics and gender or social work with the family.

Candidates who have completed equivalent education abroad can also enrol in the programme. After completion, the participant receives a public document proving the appropriate qualifications for employment as an Early Childhood Teacher.

The programme lasts for one academic year and comprises 60 ECTS credits.

For non-qualified co-workers

See below – “career changers”.

Formal opportunities for moving up

Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can continue their studies by attending an Early Childhood Teacher Bachelor's degree programme (1st cycle) at one of the three universities with this programme.

Qualified Early Childhood Teachers can continue their studies in a 2nd cycle Master's study (e.g. *'Early Learning'* at the University of Primorska Faculty of Education or *'Pre-school education'* at the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Education and the University of Maribor Faculty of Education). Studies last two years (120 ECTS).

Besides employment in ECEC settings and primary schools, post-graduates with this qualification (Master's degree) can find employment in all institutions/organisations connected with early learning and teaching as well as in organisations which indirectly deal with children or with providing a stimulating environment for young children. Due to their broad professional profile, the graduate will be able to get a job and perform (University of Primorska 2023c):

- Work and tasks of providing professional assistance in working with children in various public institutions (e.g. in schools and kindergartens) and those organisations that deal with activities for children
- The work and tasks of the Assistant Principal and the Principal of the kindergarten
- Work and duties of a Kindergarten Teacher
- New, innovative forms of work with students in free time, extended stays, societies, centres, etc.



- Work and tasks of a professional worker in a mobile teaching service
- With an additional and appropriate qualification, the work and duties of an assistant in study programmes that are related content-wise to early learning and teaching
- Organisation and management of animation programmes for children
- Work and tasks of professional consulting in the preparation of children's programmes on RTV
- Participation in editorial and expert commissions of printed and electronic media for children
- Cooperation with manufacturers of equipment, lessons and toys intended for younger children.

The interdisciplinary Master's programme at the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Education (2023a), also provides a comparative approach. During studies, students are encouraged to get involved in development and research projects at the faculty and in ECEC centres. Students acquire competences for researching preschool education, managing and developing the quality of kindergartens, and competences in special didactic areas.

Master graduates of the programme at the University of Maribor Faculty of Education (2023b) are able to work as:

- Principal or head of kindergarten
- Pedagogical adviser and professional associate; professional assistance in working with children in various public institutions (e.g. schools and kindergartens) and those organisations that deal with activities for children
- Assistant in editorial and professional commissions of printed and electronic media for children
- Assistant (with an additional and appropriate qualification) in study programmes that are substantively related to preschool education
- Associate or consultant in other public institutions responsible for development and research in the preschool field (Institute for Education, Office for Education, Pedagogical Institute ...)
- Contractor on individual projects in various research and evaluation teams
- Job holder for new, innovative forms of work with children in their free time, extended stays abroad, associations, centres, etc., organisation and management of animation programmes for children
- Associate or consultant at equipment manufacturers, teaching aids and toys for young children.

Formal opportunities for moving across qualifications frameworks

Early Childhood Assistant Teacher

Anyone who is about to or has already passed the vocational *matura* examination has the opportunity to take an additional subject of the general *matura* examination (the so-called 5th subject). If they pass this additional exam, graduates have the opportunity to enrol in most university study programmes; however, without the 5th subject they are permitted only to enrol in post-secondary programmes.

Completion of the 5th *matura* exam is possible *in parallel* with the completion of the vocational *matura* exam or *after* completing the vocational *matura* exam.

Early Childhood Teacher

A qualified Early Childhood Teacher (1st cycle) can continue studies for a Master's degree in most 2nd cycle programmes after having passed the exams specified by individual study programmes.

Options for men and women with non-specialist qualifications (career changers)

A candidate who has finished a general (gymnasium) or vocational programme for obtaining secondary professional education can enrol for a vocational course 'Early Childhood Education' (60 ECTS) (CPI 2023).

The candidate is awarded the professional title Early Childhood Teacher, and can be employed as an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher.

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

Regulation and cooperation

Each university's Faculty of Education develops its own programme of workplace-based learning as a part of the initial study programme which must be accredited by the National Agency of Republic of Slovenia for Quality in Higher Education (*NAKVIS – Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije za kakovost v visokvem šolstvu*).

Since the profession of an Early Childhood Teacher is a regulated profession, the minimum amount of field-based studies has to be taken into account when drawing up the curriculum, and in the accreditation process of the programme in general.

For the envisaged number of enrolled students, each Faculty of Education must have signed agreements of collaboration with an adequate number of ECEC services.

Duration of workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education

The study programme foresees workplace-based learning in all three academic years. The scope of workplace-based learning is 660 hours or 22 ECTS, the share in the entire programme is 12.2%. Workplace-based learning (practical training) 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 is carried out in the form of *integrated* practice. Integrated practice is carried out in all three academic years under the guidance of university teachers and is awarded 10 ECTS credits. The student is expected to carry out concrete tasks one day a week in kindergarten or 1st grade of elementary school (planned observation of various aspects of educational work, analyses, visits and getting to know institutions, etc.) (University of Maribor Faculty of Education 2023a).

Practical training units 5 and 8 are carried out in the form of 'block' practice. Condensed practice is carried out in the second and third academic year to the extent of 12 ECTS credits. In the second academic year, the condensed practice lasts two weeks (4 ECTS) and is carried out in kindergarten, in the third academic year it lasts for four weeks (8 ECTS) and is carried out three weeks in the kindergarten and one week in the 1st grade of primary school (University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2023a).

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

Workplace-based learning takes place during the second semester of each academic year and amount to a total of 360 hours (12 ECTS credits). In the first year, students spend their workplace-based learning in ECEC centres in groups with children aged up to 3 years (3 ECTS credits). In the second year, students spend their workplace-based learning in the first class of an elementary school (3 ECTS credits), and in the third year they spend their workplace-based learning in groups with children aged from 3 to 6 years (6 ECTS credits) (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2023b).

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

Workplace-based learning takes place during the second semester of each academic year. In the first and second academic year, 3 ECTS are allocated for each year (6 ECTS together). In the last academic year, 6 ECTS are allocated (University of Primorska, Faculty of Education 2023d).

Table 7

Slovenia: Number of ECTS credits allocated to workplace-based learning in the professional study routes for core pedagogues

University	Workplace-based learning			TOTAL
	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	
Ljubljana (2023/2024)	3 ECTS credits	3 ECTS credits	6 ECTS credits	12 ECTS credits
Maribor (2023/2024)	4 ECTS credits	7 ECTS credits	9 ECTS credits	20 ECTS credits
Primorska (2023/2024)	3 ECTS credits	3 ECTS credits	6 ECTS credits	12 ECTS credits

Skills and competences students are expected to develop during workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education (2023a)

- To be able to define basic pedagogical terms and explain relations between them.
- To analyse, from the aspect of upbringing, the different roles of educator/teacher and child/student and other pedagogical workers.
- To learn the importance of kindergarten and school documentation.
- To be able to plan, realise and evaluate pedagogical work in kindergarten and the 1st grade of primary school.
- To lead the group independently in carrying out activities in all subject areas of the curriculum.
- To know how to solve educational problems.

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (2023b)

The purpose of workplace-based learning is “to use the acquired theoretical knowledge in practical work and to critically reflect on one’s own and others’ decisions and actions”. As part of the integrated practice under the mentoring of the providers of the study programme, which takes place approximately once a week, students “will observe children, educators and kindergarten, experiment with the implementation of pedagogical work and participate in field studies in the outdoor environment”.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (2023b, 148-151)

Workplace-based learning contributes to the development of both generic and specific competences throughout the three years of study.

General competences

- Understanding the significance of reflective practitioner
- Qualification to thoughtfully performance and for critical analysis and improvement of educational work (professional development)
- The ability to actively participate in research projects aimed at improving educational practices
- Evaluation of the role of Preschool Teacher.

Specific competences

- Developing reflective approach to educational work
- The ability of self-reflection and of planning changes
- The effectiveness of collaboration with colleagues, the participants in the learning process, and with the environment
- The ability of observing and monitoring the performance of colleagues
- Educational leadership of a section, group, or individuals
- Knowledge of adequate preparation and presentation on a chosen topic or part of a teaching unit.

Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education

No data available.

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education (2023a)

As conditions for admission to the exam, the following are mentioned:

- 100% compulsory participation in practical training
- A positive evaluation of the Report of practice/work
- Submission of all the necessary documents.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education (2023b, 48; 107; 151)

The assessment of students in practical training includes the following:

- 1st academic year: student's project work; report on Practical Training 1 with self-evaluation
- 2nd academic year: report on Practical Training 2
- 3rd academic year: completed and presented obligations, i.e. shorter written products (e.g. lesson plans, reflections, journals, etc.) collected in teaching practice portfolio.

Submission of adequate documentation in compliance with mentor's instruction and with that of the corresponding services of the faculty is prerequisite for entering the course grade in student's resume.

Working conditions of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres

The workplace-based learning of students is regulated by the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 52/94, 11/23). In Article 59 it is stated that students are accepted by the principal of the setting and that the practicum is carried out according to the programme of the Faculty that sends students. The ECEC setting and the faculty sign a special cooperation contract.

Article 60 of the Collective Agreement stipulates that a mentor is assigned to the pupil or student. The student's mentor monitors, guides and supervises the student during the internship, and at the end also evaluates their work.



Mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC settings do not have a designated role, with a specific time allocation and specifications for mentoring. The roles of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres differ from faculty to faculty. Faculties may introduce these roles at special meetings with ECEC leaders, or students bring the allocated specifications for mentoring with them in the ECEC centre when they start their workplace-based learning.

Mentoring staff are not remunerated for their work with students, but they do receive a certificate (with credits), which they can use when seeking job promotion (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 54/2002, Article 17).

The still relevant White Paper on Education (Krek and Metljak 2011, 488-489) proposed the following solutions in the area of mentoring: *“The practical training of students in educational institutions (compact and integrated practice) should be carried out under the expert guidance of a mentor (teacher, educator or councillor) who acquires a permanent license through a CPD programme for which at least 3 credits are awarded. Practitioners with this title agree to cooperate with higher education institutions during the students’ practical placements and contribute towards improving this area through further education and training.”*

The White Paper 2011 also proposes that *“The work of mentors and partner institutions must be systematically regulated, given the technical and financial evaluation.”* From 2018-2022, the project MUNERA3 addressed the practical training of mentors (Ministry of Education 2023d).

In her master's thesis, A. Maravič (2016) notes that ECEC settings receive instructions for implementing workplace-based learning from universities. In principle, the instructions include guidelines for the implementation of pedagogical practice. However, according to the results of Maravič's research, the way in which the mentor implements or leads the mentee to new knowledge and experience is missing. More emphasis should also be given on the preparation of mentors for mentoring a student before the actual beginning of workplace-based learning.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Frameworks for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel

The CPD framework for ECEC staff is guided by general national regulations regarding in-service training for all educational professionals, i.e. also for school teachers (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 23/2023a). The overall aims of CPD are the provision of professional competences for carrying out specific specialist work, supporting a professional education system and thus improving its quality and efficiency.

In 2022, an amendment to the Act on Organisation and Financing of Education was adopted, with an aim to complement the career development of professionals in the field of education and to enable further career development by introducing the fourth title – Senior Councillor (Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers’ Assistants can be promoted as Mentor and Adviser only).

Main forms of CPD

“There are many high-quality programmes for further education and training available to education staff. By way of a public call for proposals, the Ministry selects professional training programmes to be published in the Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff (KATIS) and determines conditions for co-funding such programmes. Every year,

the Ministry also publishes a public call for applications for grants to subsidise the further education of education and other staff in kindergartens and schools providing public services” (Ministry of Education 2023a).

Further education and training of professionals is carried out in different ways (Ministry of Education 2023b):

– *Programmes for improving education*

Programmes for the improvement of education upgrade, deepen and expand the education of professional workers. They are defined by law and regulations as a qualifying condition for carrying out the educational work of an individual professional worker.

– *Career development programmes*

Career development programmes enable the continuing professional development of professionals, training for the implementation of new public educational programmes and the achievement of the goals of new curricula or knowledge catalogues and exam catalogues, continuous updating of disciplinary and professional knowledge, familiarisation with effective educational practices and successful approaches for professional management of the educational process and increasing its efficiency. These are:

- Professional training programmes (shorter forms of career development programmes, which are intended for the professional and disciplinary development of individual professional workers or professional assets, and are selected through a public tender)
- Thematic conferences (shorter forms of career development programmes that are intended for education and training of all staff members of a certain organisation)
- Singular programmes (organised as a quick, concrete and operative response to sudden or unpredictable problems in education)
- Project programmes are implemented in accordance with the regulations governing the use of European cohesion policy funds. They are intended for the implementation of new pedagogical practices.

From 2023 onwards (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 23/2023) also

- Programmes of public institutions (also study groups and mentoring networks) and
- Programmes of higher education institutions.

In general, there are no specific forms of CPD for different core professionals and qualified co-workers (EC Teachers and EC Assistant Teacher). The forms for those qualified workers who do not have regular contact with children in the classrooms (such as Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers etc.) are the same as those mentioned above. In many cases CPD is provided for all of them at the same time, especially if the CPD activity is workplace-based and out of working hours (e.g. a thematic conference).

In the case of CPD activities outside the workplace, ECEC providers have to cope with certain problems regarding the replacement of staff during CPD attendance and the costs for travelling. At the setting level, the most popular form of CPD is the so-called thematic conference where ECEC Centre Heads can choose the topic either independently or from the providers’ CPD programme, and these workshops usually take place at the ECEC workplace, and in after-school hours.

Conditions of CPD

According to the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 52/1994, 11/2023, Article 53), workers have the right to continuing professional training. For those workers with at least an intermediate education at least five days of professional training per year are obligatory or 15 days every third year; for



other workers at least two days per year and six days every third year. As both Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teachers – Teachers’ Assistants have an intermediate or higher level of education they are guaranteed five days per year for professional training during working hours (the same applies for ECEC centre leaders).

The ECEC Centre Head is obliged to plan trainings and other CPD activities for practitioners within the yearly work plan and to enable them to participate (usually, ECEC centre leaders plan some of the CPD activities as obligatory for all staff, some are left up to the personal/individual choice of staff members). At the same time, it is also the practitioners’ obligation to participate in these activities. CPD is thus both obligation and entitlement.

Providers of ECEC provision cover the costs for CPD activities, which are incorporated into the programme budget.

Main providers of CPD

The main providers of CPD include higher education institutions (Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, Faculty for Social Work), the National Education Institute, the Educational Research Institute, the National School for Leadership in Education (from 2021 part of the National Education Institute) and non-profit and private providers. Each year these providers are invited to submit their programmes to the Ministry of Education in order to receive accreditation (and co-financing if relevant) for the training formally recognised for career advancement.

The legislation only defines who can apply to the public call for tenders for the selection of further education and training programmes, on the basis of which the Ministry of Education selects the training programmes for co-funding. The basic conditions for the co-financing of education and training programmes are determined on the basis of an evaluation of the programme providers from the previous calendar year, and on the basis of the priority themes set by the Ministry in cooperation with the development and advisory institutes for each school year (Kovšča 2021, 49).

The basic conditions for applying for the public call are, in particular (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2023a, Article 8):

- The applicant (organisation) has an education activity specified in its act of establishment.
- The programmes applied for are in line with the aims of education in accordance with the law governing the organisation and financing of education and with these rules.
- The programmes applied for have been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the public call.

Formal recognition of CPD

If the CPD activity is accredited by the Ministry of Education, staff are awarded credits which are taken into account for advancement opportunities (i.e. promotion to Mentor, Adviser or Councillor, Senior Councillor). In order to achieve these titles, they collect credits defined by the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector (mostly for participation in trainings, projects, professional conferences, publishing articles, organising events with children, etc.). The awarded titles are permanent and influence the salary to some extent but not the working obligations.

For the programmes that are published in the *Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff* (KATIS), there is no doubt that they would not be recognised. For programmes that are not part of the KATIS, the Ministry of Education decides on their recognition.



CPD and career advancement

As previously mentioned, the CPD system in Slovenia enables career advancement through credit point acquisition. This enables Early Childhood Teachers, Early Childhood Assistant Teachers and ECEC Principals to acquire different levels of recognised expertise and posts of responsibility.

Education staff may be promoted to the job titles Mentor, Adviser and Councillor, and since September 2023 on, a fourth title is in use: Senior Councillor (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 141/22). From 2022 on, Early Childhood Assistant Teacher can also be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 115/22).

Funding

ECEC employers cover the costs of attending CPD activities (the costs for CPD activities are incorporated into the programme costs). However, in some cases it might happen that an EC Teacher wishes to attend a CPD activity, which is (maybe) expensive or it follows a personal (not institutional – based on a yearly work plan) need; in such cases EC Teachers pay for participation in such a CPD activity themselves (if not agreed differently with their employer).

Challenges

The main problem is that ECEC settings do not have enough replacement staff available on a regular basis, especially if other staff are off on sick leave at the same time. This is nowadays the main reason that not only one member of staff cannot participate in CPD activities, but that the complete ECEC team is unable to attend a certain event due to shortage of staff. This is also the main reason that many CPD activities take place in the late afternoon after the children have left, or even on Saturdays.

Contents

Each year, the Ministry of Education suggests priority topics for CPD which are accepted by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education. Priority topics for the school year 2023/24 are (for the entire educational system, including secondary schools): teaching, learning and evaluation of achievements in the learning and study process with an emphasis on modern learning technologies and innovative approaches; sustainable development and active citizenship; giftedness in the educational process and the upbringing and education of children with special needs (sensitisation and training for the use of new pedagogical methods and approaches); implementing lifelong career orientation and ensuring equal opportunities with an emphasis on vulnerable groups; social-emotional competence and well-being in education and the empowerment of professionals to deal with the topics of mental health and addiction; consulting work in the educational and study process; development of communication skills in the Slovenian language, bilingualism/multilingualism and media literacy. The practitioner voice is not present in the selection of priority topics process.

Apart from priority topics, there are also general topics: preschool education, elementary school, music education, upbringing and education of children and adolescents with special needs, secondary general education, secondary vocational and professional education, higher professional education, adult education.

In the *Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education staff (KATIS)*, for early childhood area, there were seven CPD courses offered in the 2022/23 school year. Topics of the programmes that had the most participants were: learning environments and formative

assessment (a one-day conference), digital literacy (a thematic conference in an ECEC setting); cooperation with parents (thematic conference in an ECEC setting).

The topics, emerging as issues for the near future in the context of CPD, are the renewal of a preschool curriculum, starting with its implementation in September 2025 (planned). CPD activities will need to be implemented before that date. Professionals will receive trainings related to the introduction of the new curriculum, but at the moment it is not yet clear what these trainings will be, what they will include and who will attend them (only EC Teachers, or both professionals, or maybe only ECEC centre leaders?).

Currently, a substantial project entitled “Digit-sustainable teacher” (Training of professionals and managers in education to strengthen their digital competences, competences for sustainable development and financial literacy)¹⁵ just started with its implementation and activities. The aim of the project, financed from the National Resilience and Recovery Plan, is to successfully train at least 20,000 professionals and managers. Currently, this is the project, involving the highest number of targeted professionals through the entire educational system.

Although digital education is important and Early Childhood Teachers and staff are the least educated group in this topic, there are also other topics that would need greater awareness and targeted support, for example: (self-)reflection skills; competences for shared learning within the team(s); the transition from kindergarten to schools; how to support families with children with any kind of disabilities/coming from challenging background(s). In general, there is a lack of CPD activities that would enable continuous professional support after attending a CPD course, e.g. professional learning communities where staff discusses and share experiences and challenges on newly implemented concepts, topics, activities, etc. Such activities¹⁶ are implemented only in kindergartens where ECEC leaders are aware of the importance of ensuring professional support to their staff after the attendance at the CPD activity (with an aim that knowledge, gained at the CPD activity, will remain sustainable).

Research on the CPD activities of ECEC personnel

Using the SICRIS (Slovenian Current Research Information System) database, very few projects are listed on the topic of ECEC, and none explicitly on the topic of the CPD of ECEC personnel (Institute of Information Science & Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency 2023).

The professional development of ECEC teachers is discussed in many diploma and master's theses; however, large-scale projects on this topic are not common.

CPD for ECEC staff is an issue in regards to not having enough staff who would supplement absent staff (those who attend CPD activities). This is a big challenge in ECEC centres, and very often ECEC centre leaders cancel the participation of their employees at the last moment because they do not have enough replacement staff available.

On the other hand, not enough attention is paid to CPD activities which would increase process quality of educational work. There are also other topics that would need greater awareness and targeted support, for example (self-)reflection skills, competences for shared learning within the team(s), the transition from kindergarten to schools, supporting families with children with any kind of disabilities/coming from challenging background(s). There is also a lack of CPD activities that would enable continuous professional support *after* the attendance at the training.

¹⁵ Project's budget is a little less than 17.6 mio EUR.

¹⁶ Professional learning communities were introduced to Slovenian kindergartens, members of *Step by Step Network for Changing Quality*, managed by Educational Research Institute, Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education. Centre ensures continuous support to ECEC leaders and professional learning community leaders.



7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

When starting to work, core pedagogues in ECEC start on the same wage grade as Primary School Teachers. However, differences appear in the wage grades over the years: EC Teachers can progress to a maximum of the 44th wage grade, whereas a Primary School Teacher (and also Early Childhood Teachers who work in the 1st grade of primary school) can progress up to the 46th wage grade.

Table 8

Slovenia: Lowest and highest basic salaries, from October 2022¹⁷

	Min. (per month)		Max. (per month)	
	Salary grade	Basic salary (gross)	Wage grade	Basic salary (gross)
Early Childhood Assistant Teacher	26	€ 1,226.82	36	€ 1,815.99
Early Childhood Teacher	32	€ 1,552.31	46	€ 2,485.30
Basic School Teacher	32	€ 1,552.31	48	€ 2,688.10

A little over 22% in contributions for social security and income tax (from 16 to 41%) is deducted from the gross salary.

Living as a single parent and being a teacher in a major city is a challenge, especially if you do not own an apartment/house. It is even more difficult to live on the salary of an Early Childhood Assistant Teacher (pre-2023, the salary of Teacher Assistants was under the minimum wage).

Posts of responsibility mostly bring an increase in salary. The minimum wage grade of ECEC Centre Leaders is 48 (€ 2,907.45 gross), the maximum 54 (€ 3,678.86 gross) (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 157/22). Deputy leaders' minimum wage grade is 37 (€ 1,888.62 gross and the maximum 50 (€ 3,144.70 gross) (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 11/2023; Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 139/2022).

Mentors to students during workplace-based learning do not receive a higher wage, however mentors to trainees (newly qualified staff) are credited four hours per week (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 27/14, 54/21).

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

In the school year 2021/2022, nearly all (96.53%) ECEC staff – EC Teachers, EC Assistant Teachers, Centre Leaders, consultants and other professionals – worked full-time in public kindergartens (Statistical Office RS 2023a). Full-time posts comprise 40 hours/week.

In Slovenia, on average, Early Childhood Teachers are in direct contact with children in playrooms for 1,344 hours a year, which is more than the average in OECD countries (987 hours) (Eurydice 2022).

¹⁷ Eurydice 2023b *Conditions of service for teachers working in early childhood and school education*. Last update: 31 August 2023. Data for Early Childhood Assistant Teachers were obtained from Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 139/22.

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

Induction measures for newly qualified staff

No specified regulations exist regarding induction measures for newly qualified staff. However, they may be supported by mentors if the Ministry of Education opens a call for applications for this post. Otherwise early childhood centres do their best to support new employees, although they are not officially classed as trainees.

In March 2023, the Ministry of Education published an open call for mentoring trainees for 30 EC Teachers and Councillors, and for 50 EC Assistant Teachers. Places for the latter were filled before the open call deadline.

Depending on the Ministry's call for applications, a trainee is allocated to an ECEC centre in order to be under the guidance of a mentor. The mentor's role is to support them so that they can work independently when the probation time is over. Probation periods are conducted on the basis of a signed employment contract with an ECEC centre.

Voluntary probation was abolished in 2014 (Ministry of Education 2023c).

Appointment and tasks of a Mentor

A mentor is appointed by the Centre Head and must meet the conditions defined by law. Mentors perform the following tasks:

- Develop a programme of traineeship
- Advise the trainee to perform the tasks in accordance with the programme
- Cooperate with the Principal, Councillors, relevant expert working groups and other expert bodies in a kindergarten or school on the organisation and implementation of a traineeship programme
- Advise the trainee in the planning, organisation and implementation of practical presentations and other forms of direct educational work, and also monitor and analyse this work and provide the trainee with feedback
- Monitor the trainees' preparation and his/her logbook regarding the development of the traineeship programme
- Report on the trainees' skills for independent work and prepare an assessment of their practical work or written assignments necessary for admission to the professional examination
- In cooperation with the Principal, report on the completed traineeship
- Perform other tasks related to the traineeship programme (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2006, 70/2022, Article 19).

Each practical assignment, monitored and evaluated by a mentor and the ECEC Centre Leader lasts one hour. The trainee is given the topic of the assignment by the mentor at least three days beforehand (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2006, 70/2022, Article 22).

7.4 Non-contact time

The full-time working obligation for Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is 40 hours per week. Legally, the EC Teacher's work with children should not exceed 30 hours per week and the Assistants' work 35 hours per week (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 100/2005, 18/2021, Article 41-).

Early Childhood Teachers thus have 7.5 hours/week non-contact time, and Early Childhood Teachers' Assistants 2.5 hours/week.-The remaining time is intended for breaks (0.5 hour/day).



7.5 Current staffing issues

In Slovenia, we currently face a great staff shortage, especially of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers. The main reason lies in (too) low salary, and on the other hand the responsibility is very high. The shortage of staff was also one of the reason that Ministry of Education published an open call for internship after quite a long period of time. Places for the job position of EC Teacher – Teacher's Assistant were already filled already before official closure of the call.

Regarding the age distribution in the workforce in public kindergartens in school year 2022/23, the situation is presented below:

Table 9

Slovenia: Age distribution of ECEC staff (Teachers and Assistant Teachers)

Age range (years)	Number
15-19	-
20-24	647
25-29	1,360
30-34	1,894
35-39	2,179
40-44	2,078
45-49	1,649
50-54	1,287
55-59	1,312
60-64	290
65 +	10
Total	12,730

Source: Statistical Office RS 2023b

Weaknesses in the system still exist. Newly qualified graduates often have difficulties in finding a job as an Early Childhood Teacher when they first enter the labour market. Most of them start as an Assistant, and subsequently they may be in danger of losing their initial drive to be productive, innovative and to develop new ideas. Young graduates often have to wait until an Early Childhood Teacher retires before being offered a post.

There is also increasing anecdotal evidence which suggests that many ECEC settings are not satisfied with the level of knowledge and skills, the values and reflective abilities of 'career changers'.

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

Until 2017, the position of Teacher's Assistant was classified in the starting salary grade 19. After salary anomalies were eliminated, a new job position (Early Childhood Assistant Teacher) was determined, with placement in the initial 21st salary class. Since January 2019, the position of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers has been classified in the 22nd starting salary class. With this change, the starting salary was raised by three salary classes. Until 2022, it was possible to advance by ten salary grades, up to the 32nd salary grade. From 2022, EC Teachers' Assistants can be promoted to the job titles of Mentor and Adviser (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia

115/22), which includes a salary rise. From 2023, the initial salary wage grade of Early Childhood Assistant Teachers is 26 (NGO and trade union initiatives strongly supported this).

In 2022, an amendment to the Act on the Organisation and Financing of Education was adopted, with an aim to complement the career development of professionals in the field of education and to enable further career development by introducing a fourth title – Senior Councillor. The minister at the time stated that the purpose of the fourth title is to establish additional motivation in the career development of professionals, extend the period of career advancement and enable expansion and deepening of knowledge. The law entered into force on 1 September 2023 (National Education Institute Slovenia 2022).

As already mentioned, the Ministry of Education published an open call for internship for 30 EC Teachers and Councillors, and for 50 Early Childhood Assistant Teachers in order to stimulate students to make a swifter transition to the labour market and to some extent to fill the gap regarding the shortages of staff.

In 2021, with the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Slovenia committed to renovating the education system. This began in 2022 and should last until completion in 2025. The introduction of the new curriculum for kindergartens is scheduled for September 1, 2025, and for the initial professional education of staff is expected to take place by then. It is not yet known what they will be.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Research on the educational process in preschool education and its effects during the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Jager et al. 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: Research funded by the Ministry of Education on the educational process in early childhood education during the COVID-19 epidemic took place between March and August 2021 and was designed as an observation of the preschool education of an individual child from several parallel levels: the institution kindergarten, the kindergarten group and the child's home environment. For each level, we determined the target population of people (ECEC leaders, professional staff in kindergarten classrooms and parents of children), from whom we collected information, opinions and explanations of the situation and challenges they faced. 155 ECEC leaders, 580 ECEC staff (EC Teachers), and 2,816 parents participated in the research study.

Selected findings: Findings indicated that kindergartens felt neglected, forgotten during the pandemic, as if they were not part of the education system. They missed the support of leading and responsible institutions, as well as two-way communication and the involvement of preschool education experts in decision-making.

Both ECEC leaders and EC teachers expressed that the designation "*emergency care*" that was in use during the time of closure of public life was inadequate, and were concerned about the marked dominance of the medical-hygiene paradigm over the educational paradigm. At the expense of compliance with hygiene recommendations, the volume of work, especially for ECEC leaders and administrative staff, increased significantly, while EC Teachers' compliance with hygiene recommendations reduced the time for direct work with children. Also, due to the organisation of work, which required work in so called "*bubbles*", the simultaneous presence of ECEC staff in the group of children was reduced, which undoubtedly affected the quality of work in

the classrooms. In relation to the concept of "emergency care", it was found that kindergartens did not provide only "care", but an integrated education and care process.

Preschool teachers found the work in so-called "bubbles" a positive measure, but in the sense of working in smaller groups of children, in which they could adapt to the individual needs and interests of the children to a greater extent. However, "bubbles" were not understood as a positive measure in the context of children's social development.

The closure of the kindergartens did not have a significant financial impact on their operation; the financial consequences were very high costs for disinfectants, cleaners, protective equipment, and covering sick leaves.

Professional development activities moved to online platforms, the availability of professional training was also greater, kindergartens had less expenses to cover in terms of travel costs.

According to the parents, the time of the epidemic affected the children in the direction of reduced adherence to rules, which, in addition to reduced persistence, resulted in problems with concentration, less independence in dressing, difficulties in resolving conflicts, understanding instructions and fine motor skills – which EC Teachers also found.

Competences for the use of ICT proved to be very important and necessary. Preschool teachers reported that during the epidemic they raised their own competences in this area, but despite everything, the need for additional training remains, as does the need for better equipment of kindergartens.

Almost all kindergartens made additional contact with families at least once during the closure period, but only a small percentage of kindergartens made an inquiry regarding the needs of families during the epidemic.

Last but not least, it must be noted that support for vulnerable groups is a distinctly undernourished area even during the time of unchanged conditions, but during the epidemic this has only deepened.

Implications: As part of the research, an expert group of different ECEC professionals was formed, resulting in the preparation of *Recommendations for measures and systemic solutions in the field of preschool education after the experience with the COVID-19 pandemic* (Bozovičar et al. 2021).

The document can be of help to the leading institutions in the country in formulating measures in the case of the need again for online education (distance learning), and for ECEC leaders and professionals as guidance to maintain supportive education and care even in emergency situations.

Transition from kindergarten to primary school

Source: Jager, J. et al. 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Aims and methods: In recent years, we have seen an increase in the postponement of children's enrolment in the first grade of elementary school. For a successful transition from kindergarten to school, it is necessary to ensure professional, developmental and pedagogical continuity (OECD 2017). The research project "Ensuring a smooth transition between kindergarten and primary school", funded by the Ministry of Education, was focused on gaining insight into the provision of all three continuities by looking at the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved in the research: children, parents, professionals, leaders and advisory workers of kindergartens and primary schools.

The research aims were to:

- Identify activities, approaches and methods in kindergarten and first grade of primary school that contribute to pedagogical, developmental and professional continuity



- Gain insight into the understanding of the image of the child by professionals in kindergartens and primary schools and how this is reflected in their pedagogical practice
- Identify the mutual expectations of professional, advisory and leadership staff of kindergartens and schools and parents in relation to ensuring a smooth transition of children from kindergarten to primary school
- Gain insight into the reasons for postponing schooling and the possibilities for reducing them
- Gain insight into children's experience of transition.

The research was based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative pedagogical research and triangulation between methods. In the context of quantitative research, descriptive and causal non-experimental research methods were used; and in the context of qualitative research, observations with reflective interviews and focus interviews with children.

149 ECEC teachers from Slovenian public kindergartens (from 30 ECEC centres) and 50 classroom teachers (from 45 schools), children enrolled in kindergarten in the last year before entering school (88 children) and children in the first grades of primary schools (57 pupils) were included in the research, as well as advisory staff (15 from ECEC centres, 41 from schools) and leaders (8 from ECEC centres, 32 from schools).

Selected findings: The results obtained through questionnaires show the relative uniformity of pedagogical educational approaches at the level of interactions, teaching strategies and the learning environment in kindergartens and the first grades of elementary schools; results obtained through observation in kindergartens and schools, however, do not fully confirm this.

Implications: In order to ensure continuity and, as a result, a smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school, it is crucial to ensure systemic professional continuity (at the level of study programmes that educate/train for the profession of EC Teachers and Primary School Teachers), as well as developmental and pedagogical continuity, which kindergartens should be able to develop and provide. ECEC centres and schools ideally need to be connected in learning communities with the possibility of shared learning, self-reflection and with collegial support in the context of changing practices.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Lack of relevant staff

ECEC centres face great challenges finding appropriate staff for job positions they advertise. The most wanted staff are in the Assistant category. However, the very low salary (only a little above the minimum wage) does not make this an attractive job.

There is also difficulty in recruiting Early Childhood Teachers, while various providers of additional professional help for children with special needs in kindergartens have been missing for a long time, such as Special Rehabilitation Pedagogues and Speech Therapists.

Professional staff in kindergartens are underpaid for very responsible work they carry out. According to data from the Ministry of Public Administration, in 2022 the average gross salary of preschool teachers and other professional staff in ECEC centres was € 1,669 gross. *“The level of payment shows the devaluation of the work of educators”*, stated the president of the Association of Kindergartens Slovenia, Silviya Komočar. *“A Primary School Teacher is ranked higher in*

wage grades than an Early Childhood Teacher, but the work of an Early Childhood Teacher is no less demanding than that of a School Teacher.”

Internal support to EC Teachers and EC Teacher Assistants and quality improvement

Not enough attention is paid to internal support groups in which ECEC staff could reflect on and plan future work. There are some ECEC centres where staff have regular time slots (paid) for reflection and planning together as a group (in some cases once per month), but in most cases there are the most three staff meetings during the whole year, at which ECEC centres organise different CPD events. However, regular and frequent organised meetings in ECEC centres at which staff can focus on the reflection of their work, make plans for improving the quality of their work and can support each other in the process of becoming and being a reflective practitioner are very rare.

It is also important that researchers and other field experts are actively connected with practitioners in co-constructing new knowledge and practices and in evaluating them, taking into account both the perspectives of the children’s development and well-being and the needs of families and communities.

Continuing professional development

In-service education is not regulated externally, but the choice of CPD providers who deliver a training is under the autonomy of each ECEC leader. The question is how CDP providers are selected, and what competence they have. Courses of some CPD providers are co-financed by the Ministry of Education if providers apply to a certain public call. This takes place each year, meaning that at least references and general aims and methods are checked by a professional group of experts. However, there is a vast group of CPD providers who do not undergo any kind of assessment but can still offer CPD activities to public (and private) ECEC centres.

Inter-institutional collaboration

In order to ensure a smooth transition from the ECEC centre to primary school and to learn from each other, these two organisations need to establish regular and formalised ways of collaboration. By forming an inter-institutional professional learning group, Primary School Teachers from the first three grades can learn about the approaches, didactics and concepts ECEC staff are using and promoting in early childhood education. Allocated time for peer-to-peer observation and reflective discussion are also essential, with the aim of converging approaches and practices between the two institutions and thus ensuring a smooth transition from the ECEC centre to school.

Promotion system

Although from 2022 Early Childhood Assistant Teachers can be promoted to the title of Mentor and Adviser and since 1 September 2023 a fourth title has been in effect to stimulate professional career development of core professionals, the promotion system still does not reward practitioners who are striving to improve the process quality of their work, but focuses only on credits and certificates received at trainings, conferences, or through extra work such as participating in a project, since no one knows how this person is performing in the classroom, since for a promotion no direct classroom observations are required. This kind of system does not support efforts to improve the quality of work, but rewards only those who know how to wisely collect certain credits/certificates.



Professional titles

All professional titles (Mentor, Adviser, Councillor, and from 2023 on Senior Councillor) are permanent – no renewal procedures are required, as is the case in higher education. In other words, professional titles are not limited to a certain period of time and no checks are made to ensure that the teacher is still fulfilling the requirements.

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