

System of early education/care and professionalisation in **Slovenia**

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I. Population

In year 2006, there were 2 008 516 people living in Slovenia. In the last 18 years, the population has been slightly growing¹. However, the increase in population is not due to the number of births, which has fallen if compared to the number of births in the early nineties². In year 1991, Slovenia had 1 998 912 inhabitants and 21 583 births. However, in year 2005, there were 2 001 114 people living in Slovenia and 18 157 births per year. The increase in population is due to an increase in immigration into Slovenia. In 2005, the number of immigrants was ten times higher than in year 1996³. In 1995, 2 191 people moved to Slovenia; this number was falling during the next two years and has been gradually increasing ever since. In 2005, the number of immigrants has reached 15 041, which is 3000 people less than the total number of births this year.

Demographic indicators also indicate the changes in the age structure of the population. The population of Slovenia is ageing. From 1991 to 2006, a decrease in the population categories from 0-4 years to 35-39 years has been noticed, while the categories from 40-44 years and over have been growing. That means that from 1991 to 2006, the population under 39 has decreased, while the population over 40 has grown⁴. This is clearly shown in the age pyramid for year 1989, where the top of the pyramid represents the population from 29 to 39 years, while the top of the age pyramid for 2006 represents the population from 40 to 49 years⁵. We could say that the Slovenian population has aged for 10 years from 1989 to 2006, which is rather concerning. The ageing of the population also endangers the pension system.

II. Families

There has also been a decrease in the number of marriages. In 1991, there were 8.173 marriages, while there were 7.201 marriages in 2000 and only 5.769 in 2005⁶. The number of marriages is not only decreasing, marriages are also solemnised at a higher age, which decreases the possibilities for a larger number of births in the most fertile years. In 1991, the average age of a groom was 26.8 and 24 years for a bride. In 2005, the average age of a groom has increased to 30.6 and to 28.2 years for a bride⁷. At the same time, the average age of mothers at the birth of their first, second and third child is growing. In 1991, the average age of a mother was 24.1 at the birth of her first child, 27.3 at the birth of her second child and 30.4 at the birth of her third child. In 2005, the average age of a mother has increased to 27.8 at the birth of her first child, to 30.3 at the birth of her second child and to 32.7 at the birth of her third child. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is an increase of young people, who are attending university. In 1995, 6 419 students graduated from all Slovenian Universities (higher vocational programme (2 years), higher education programme (3 years) or 4-year university programme); in 2005, this number has risen to 11 942. During this period (in 2002), the two-year higher vocational programme was abolished and was reformed into a three-year higher education programme. An increase in years of studying before entering the labour market definitely increases the age at which young people decide to live together and to have children.

Even if the number of marriages is decreasing, the number of non-marital partnerships is increasing. Although there is no official information about the number of non-marital partnerships, we indirectly conclude it from the acknowledged paternity data, as the number of acknowledgments before birth or in the first month after birth has in-

creased for more than 50% from year 2001 (3262) to 2005 (7238)⁸. In Slovenia, non-marital partnerships are legally equal to marriages.

Furthermore, the number of divorces is also increasing⁹. In 1991, there were 1 828 divorces, while there were 2 647 divorces in 2005. We can conclude that more and more children are living in single-parent families. When comparing data about the number of children per family living in the city or in the country, we will only notice small differences¹⁰. We can see that the number of families without children has grown for 1.5 % from 1991 to 2002 (2 % in the cities and 1.7 % in the country). There has been an increase in the number of families with one child (more often in cities), the number of families with two children has fallen mainly in the cities (2.6 % in the cities and 0.2 % in the country), the number of families with three children has fallen as well (greater decrease in the country than in the city) and the same trend was noticed when analysing the families with four children (greater decrease in the country). Although the percentage of families with a larger number of children (3, 4 or 5 children) has decreased more in the country than in the city, more families with a larger number of children are still living in the country. However, the trend of a decreasing number of children per family is present in cities and in the country as well. When comparing the types of families, the most common type in 2002 represented married parents with children, followed by a single-parent family (mother – child), a non-marital partnership with children and a single-parent family (father – child) at the end. There are some differences between the families in the cities and those in the country, yet they are not explicit.

In Table 1 we can see that over the last 5 years, the rate of employed women in Slovenia, aged from 15 to 44 year shows that majority of over 25 years old women are employed. The employment rates for women's are almost the same as the rate of employed men at the same age for those over 35 years old, but less women aged from 20 to 35 year are employed as men's¹¹. One of the reasons could be the fact that women are in our culture more involved in upbringing children and that they have more problems to find a job because of the fact that they can have a baby or will have to take care for the baby. At the same time those data shows that majority of parents work and because of that there is a big need for child-care facilities in our country. Traditionally our young families try to establish their own home and don't like to share it with their parents. Many young couples also establish their home in another place as their parents place and even if they would like to use their parents as caregivers for their grandchildren it is not possible. At the same time more and more grandparents are now days still active in their work. Majority of parents are willing to find a place in preschool for their children, especially after child's third year.

Age	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	w	m	w	m	w	m	w	m	w	m
15-19	9,3	13,6	10,4	13,3	7,0	10,3	12,1	16,8	10,3	15,3
20-24	52,7	64,3	52,6	63,0	47,8	61,6	56,3	66,1	51,1	64,3
25-29	85,1	91,5	85,8	89,8	85,7	89,5	85,7	90,4	85,7	90,0
30-34	92,9	94,7	92,9	96,1	91,8	96,2	95,5	96,2	91,2	97,5
35-39	93,4	95,7	92,8	94,6	93,8	95,0	90,9	96,1	93,4	96,6
40-44	90,4	94,3	89,7	95,0	89,9	92,8	90,9	92,6	92,3	92,9

Tab. 1 Activity rates by age groups¹²

III. Care for children and their families

The State offers different provisions to take care for children and their families. Among others state provides family benefits, parental leave, and health care for children and early childhood education in preschools.

A. Family benefits

Family benefits are represented by different benefits and allowances. They include:

- Childbirth allowance (“newborn equipment”) is a one time allowance in money or in equipment for newborns, which is chosen by parents (baby carriage, car seat, etc.). Children, whose mother or father has a permanent residence in Republic of Slovenia, are entitled to this allowance. The amount of childbirth allowance was regulated by the implementation of the new law on 2002 and has amounted to 50 000 Sit (208 €). Once per year, the amount of childbirth allowance is reconciled with the growth index of consumer prices. In February 2007, the childbirth allowance was 250.26 euros¹³.
- Child benefit is a supplementary family benefit, meant as help for partial covering of children’s upbringing. One of the child’s parents is entitled to exercise the right to child benefit, while the child is the recipient of the benefit. From 1st January till 30th April 1994, children from families where their income per family member did not exceed 43 % of the average wage in Slovenia. From 1st of May 1994 till 1st May 1999, the income per family member had to be lower than 50% of the average wage. From 1st may 1999, the amount of the child benefit depended on the income per family member on the basis of 8 income brackets. According to the Parental Care and Family Cash Benefits Act, which entered into force on 1st January 2002, the amount of the benefit depends on the amount of income per family member, which is determined on the basis of 8 income brackets. The income brackets are defined according to the percentage of the average wage of everyone employed in Slovenia for the calendar year before submitting the application. The amount of child benefit is determined according to the family’s placement in the income brackets. The amount of child benefit also depends on the number of children in the family, receiving child benefit; the first child receives the lowest amount, the second one receives a higher amount, while the third and further children receive the highest amount. The amount of the child benefit is determined in nominal amounts, which are reconciled with the index of growing necessities prices once per year. In March, nominal borders of income brackets are determined for previous calendar year. If a child lives in a single-parent family, the amount of child benefit increases for 10 %. If a preschool child is not included in preschool education according to preschool regulations, the amount of child benefit increases for 20 %¹⁴. Even though the number of children in Slovenia is falling, the number of children who are receiving child benefit is increasing – also after 2002, when a new law for this field was introduced. In 1995, average monthly number of children who received benefit was 222634, while in 2000 there was 411397 and in 2005 already 383467¹⁵. However, the amount of child benefit is relatively low as we can see in Table 2, considering the average wage in Slovenia, which amounted to 176 311 SIT net (735.73 euros) or 277 279 SIT gross (1 157.06 euros) in year 2005.

Family income per family member, which is determined on the basis of 8 income brackets	Amount of Child Benefit		
	1st child	2nd child	3rd and all next children
Up to 15%	94,44	103,89	113,34
Above 15% do 25%	80,75	89,27	97,73
Above 25% do 30%	61,55	68,78	76,00
Above 30% do 35%	48,54	55,39	62,36
Above 35% do 45%	39,69	46,32	52,91
Above 45% do 55%	25,15	31,48	37,77
Above 55% do 75%	18,86	25,15	31,48
Above 75% do 99%	16,42	22,71	29,00

Tab. 2 Amount of Child benefits (From January 1, 2007)¹⁶

- Parental Allowance represents financial help for parents, who according to the Parental Care and Family Relations Act, are not entitled to parental compensation after birth (unemployed persons, university or high school students etc.)¹⁷. The right to parental allowance was introduced with the Family Benefits Act (18th December 1993). Entitled parent had the right to a parental allowance for the time determined in regulations governing labour relations concerning the right to maternity and childcare leave. Parental allowance amounted to 52 % of the guaranteed wage. At the moment (February 2007), parental allowance amounts to 175.15 euros¹⁸. Once per year, the amount of parental allowance is reconciled with the price growth of necessities.
- Parental Compensation is reconciled with the growth of starting salary for the non economic sector. Parental compensation is wage compensation according to the Parental Protection and Family Benefit Act¹⁹. Parental compensation includes: maternity leave allowance (105 days), childcare allowance (260 days), paternity benefit (90 days) and adoption benefit (for a child from 1 to 4 years 150 days and 120 days for a child from 4 to 10 years)²⁰.
- Part-time work allowance is the right of a parent to work part-time owing to parenthood up to the child's 3rd birthday and has been introduced in 2003²¹. 828 beneficiaries used this kind of services in 2003 and 2403 in 2005²². According to this data it looks that more and more parents use this kind of services.
- Partial payment for loss of earnings is in charge since 2003²³. A parent is entitled to partial payment for loss of earnings if he/she loses a job or starts working part time in order to look after a child with special needs.
- Supplement for Large Family is an annual benefit for families with more than three children and is defined in the Parental Protection and Family Benefit Act. The supplement is paid once per year in a lump sum. The supplement was introduced in 2002. At the moment (February 2007), it comes up to 350.73 euros for a family with three children and 427.72 euros for a family with four or more children (per year)²⁴. The number of families entitled for the supplement has remained almost the same over the years.

B. Parental leave

Parents are entitled to following types of leaves²⁵:

- Maternity leave, is meant for preparation for childbirth and childcare after birth as well as for the protection of mother's health at birth and afterwards. The mother of the child, in some cases even the father, one of the grandparents or any other person is entitled to maternity leave. The maternity leave lasts for 105 days and must begin 28 days before the estimated date of the delivery, which has been determined by a gynaecologist. The father or other persons can exercise the right to maternity leave if the mother died, abandoned the child or if the authorized doctor defined her as permanently or temporary incapable of working. In case the mother is under age and is attending school, a father or one of the grandparents has the right to maternity leave. The father, any other person or one of the grand parents has the right to 77 days of maternity leave after the birth of the child. Maternity leave is used in one piece in the form of full absence from work.
- Paternity leave is meant for fathers to cooperate with the child's mother at childcare from the tenderest age of the child. Since 1st January 2005, the father has the right to 90 days of paternity leave, regardless of the number of children he has. The first 15 days of paternity leave must be used before the child turns 6 months old (in this case the state ensures a paternity benefit), while the other 75 days can be used until the child turns 3 years old (the state ensures to pay contributions for social security from the minimum wage). If the father is using maternity leave, he is not entitled to the first 15 days of paternity leave.
- Childcare leave is meant for further care of the child and follows the maternity leave. One of the parents, in some cases both parents or one of the grandparents is entitled to childcare leave, which usually lasts for 260 days. The leave can be prolonged if the mother gave birth to twins or more live born children or if the child requires special care (90 days), for a prematurely born child (for so many days as the pregnancy was shorter than 260 days), if the parents are already caring for at least two children younger than 8 years (for 30 days, for three children 60 days and 90 days for four or more children). Part of the childcare leave (maximum 75 days) can be used until the child's 8 year. Childcare leave can be used in one piece, in form of full or part-time absence from work. The right to childcare leave can be used by one of the parents or both of them, if they sign a written agreement, in which they precisely determine the period and the kind of leave. The agreement and the application for childcare leave must be handed in to the department of Social Security, while the employer must be informed about it.

In case the mother is younger than 18 and has the status of an apprentice or student and the father is not asserting the right to childcare leave, one of the grand parents has the right to childcare leave with the mother's consent. In this case the leave last as long as it would have for the mother of father, minus the number of days that the mother and father have already used. It can only be used in one piece and in form of full absence from work.

- Adoption leave is meant for one or both adopters, so that both adopters and the child can devote themselves to one another after adoption. One or both adopters, or a person the child has been entrusted to with the intention of adoption (unless adopting the child of the spouse) has the right to adoption leave, which lasts for 150 days if the child is one to four years old and 120 days from four to ten years.

C. Other benefits

For low or unwaged people, the state ensures:

Social benefits in cash for persons who are lacking means for survival, whose means are not enabling them to survive, are actively involved in resolving their social problem, are citizens and permanent residents of the Republic of Slovenia or foreigners with a permanent residence permit in Slovenia and are permanent residents in Slovenia. The current amount of financial social benefit (if the person has no means at all to survive) amounts from 200.56 euros per person. Every further person receives 140 euros, while the children, who are bound to be supported by unemployed parents, receive 60.17 euros²⁶.

Single grants in cash, summer or winter holidays of primary school students, school meals, winter stores or heating are provided by individual municipalities²⁷. Some organisations (the Red Cross, Caritas, Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, etc.) are implementing programmes for especially affected children. They organize summer holidays; help primary school students buy school books and requisites, pay for school meals and open-air school.

D. Health care for preschool children

This field is regulated by the Health Care and Health Insurance Act of Republic of Slovenia and various rules and regulations²⁸. As a family member, the child's health insurance is covered until his/her 15th birthday or 18th birthday in case that he/she is not insured by himself/herself. In case of attending school/university, the child is insured until the end of regular schooling. The mandatory health insurance ensures a full payment of systematic and preventive examinations, medical treatment and rehabilitation, mandatory vaccinations, immune and chemo prophylaxis according to programme, which is annually determined by the Ministry of Health, emergency medical service including emergent medical transport, medication on receipt from the approved list of medications, orthopaedic and other utensils²⁹.

Mandatory medical examinations are performed at the age of 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 and 18 months and at the age of 3 and 5 years. Medical examination is mandatory before enrolling preschool and primary school. During schooling, group medical examinations are performed in 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th grade of the 8-year primary school programme and in 8th grade of 9-year programme.

Mandatory vaccination includes³⁰:

- 4X Di-Te-Per, poliomyelitis and hepatitis B (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, infantile paralysis and hepatitis B) at the age of 3 months, 4.5 months, 6 months and 18 months. MMR vaccination (measles, mumps and rubella) is at the age of 1 year
- Hepatitis B 3X (before enrolling primary school, after 1-3 months, after 6-12 months)
- MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) before enrolling primary school
- Di-Te (diphtheria and tetanus) in 3rd grade

Children and adolescents younger than 19 years have the right to choose their personal doctor, who must be a paediatrician or school medicine specialist or exceptionally a

general practitioner with a specialization to work with children and youngsters or a specialist in general medicine. The chosen dentist must also be specialised in dental care of children and youngsters. Girls have the right to choose their personal gynaecologist.

One of the parents or the person having custody has the right to paid sick leave to care for a sick child or youngster. For a child younger than 7 years and for a child with moderate or severe physically or mental impairment, the parent has the right to use 15 working days of paid sick leave. For a child, older than 7, the parent can use 7 working days of sick leave. If the health condition of the child demands longer care, a commission can approve a prolongation of absence from work with a compensation of income to 30 days for children younger than 7 and to 14 working days for children over 7 years. One of the parents has the right to 6 months of sick leave (with compensation) for a child under 18, if the child has a serious brain dysfunction, suffers from cancer or if there are any other serious deteriorations of the child's health condition. The compensation during sick leave amounts to 80 % of average monthly wage from the calendar year before sick leave plus the growth index.

E. After school programme for children in primary school

The state ensures after school programme for children from 1st to 6th grade of primary school (in the morning, minding of commuters) and even up to 7th and 9th grade for children with special needs and the decision on orientation. After school programme must have professional guidance and must include independent learning, relaxation and creative activities, as well as food. Morning minding activities must include: breakfast, rest, relaxation activity and preparations for classes. These child-care activities are optional and free of charge, except for lunch.

IV. Organized preschool care and education

Care and education of preschool children from ages 1 to 6, or to primary school enrolment, which has been changed from 7 to 6 years age in 1997, is organized in preschool institutions- VRTEC.

New conceptual designs of the whole Slovenian education system, which have been developed since 1995 in Slovenia, also include preschools. According to the analysis of the situation in the field of organised preschool education in Slovenia, the scope and the quality of the previous system have been well developed if compared to the rest of the world³¹. Since 1993, preschools have been included into the programme of the Ministry of Education. The system of public preschools was uniform, it included children aged from 1 to 7 years, and had one compulsory year - before enrolling primary school. Most of the children visited the whole-day programmes; special activities were organized for preschool children aged 3-7, who were not attending preschool, while 6-year-olds were visiting a preparatory programme class (the little school programme). The whole day programme also covered the child's needs for food and sleeping. The percentage of children, enrolled in preschool has been growing since the 70's; by 1980, 33.4 % of children were enrolled in preschool, while the number has grown to 51 % in the next 10 years. Probably, one of the reasons for low enrolment into preschools was the organisational monotony of programmes, which did not satisfy the needs of parents. According to

norms, 16 children were foreseen for a group of children younger than 2, 20 children for a group of 2 and 3-year-olds and a maximum of 30 children per group for children over 3 years. For groups with children younger than 2, one preschool teacher and one assistant with 5 hours of simultaneous work were foreseen, while other groups only included one preschool teacher and half of assistant with 1 hour of simultaneous work. Only preschool teachers and medical nurses for paediatrics could work with children under 2, while in preparatory classes preschool and primary school teachers could work. Preschool teachers had had secondary or higher education of the preschool branch and had to pass the proficiency examination, while the assistants had to finish the school for assistants. In the early 90's, before the implementation of a new law, which demanded college education for preschool teachers, almost all preschool teachers had an appropriate education for their position³². Preschool work was based on the Educational Programme for Education of Preschool Children from 1980, which has at that time reflected the development of preschool education in the world and the belief in the power of stimulating cognitive development in the early childhood, with the intention to prepare the child for primary school³³. In praxis, the prevailing method was teacher-oriented work with the whole group of children, poor response to individual needs of children and a teacher-centred approach with transmission paradigm in educational work. In the mid 80's, many preschool teachers have therefore decided to use new approaches, which were mainly focused on changing individual, isolated and narrow elements of preschool life.

Children with special needs were included in preschool classes for children with special educational needs, while some children with minor disorders have been included in regular preschool classes³⁴. In 1993, 13 mobile services were cooperating with preschools for 177 children included in regular preschool and primary school classes. In ethnically mixed areas, primary school preparation lasted for 2 years and took place in Slovenian language and in the language of the ethnic minority (Italian, Hungarian).

System and conceptual reform of preschool education was simultaneous with the reform of the whole education system and was therefore based on the general theoretic frame for the reform of the public education system presented in White Paper³⁵. The main goal of the institutional preschool education development was to ensure a network of preschools, which would be accessible for all children and would provide an appropriate environment for a healthy childhood and for the development of children's physical and mental skills and would improve the quality of family life³⁶. The preschool reform was based on the principles of democracy and pluralism, the principle of autonomy, professional competence and responsibility, the principle of equal opportunities, consideration of diversity of children and acknowledging the right to chose and to be different, the principle of balancing different developmental aspects and the principle of cooperation with the environment. In 1999, the Preschool Curriculum, a national document which represents the expert groundwork for work in preschools, was published³⁷. The curriculum should ensure a shift from the traditional stressing of content to emphasizing the process and enabling professional autonomy and responsibility of preschool teachers. The preschool curriculum sees the child as an active participant in the process, who gains new skills and knowledge by exploring, testing and choosing by himself/herself. The main stress is placed on the educational process and on the sum of interaction and experiences, from which the child learns. The preschool curriculum represents goals, principles, basic knowledge about the development of the child, about learning in the preschool age, global goals and their derived goals for different domains (movement, language, art, society, nature and maths). The curriculum also includes examples of content and activities for each domain, which connect the domains and represent them in the context of the child's daily life in preschool. The introduced content and activities represent possible ways of goal realization, while the preschool teacher must use his/her professional judgement and

decide for himself/herself. Each domain includes goals and activity examples separately for children aged from 1 to 3 years and for children from 3 to 6 years, as well as the role of the adults. Main goals of the curriculum reform were to achieve more open curriculum, more varied activities in all fields, to ensure greater respect to each individual child and his/her needs, to give children more choices, to re-conceptualize group routine and re-organise time and space, to improving the communication and cooperation with parents and to achieve goals.

A. Preschool institutions and programmes

Preschool education in Slovenia is not compulsory. Preschools are established and financed by municipalities and regulated by different laws and regulations. The most important acts are:

the Organization and Financing of Education and Training Act³⁸, which regulates all levels of education, and the Kindergarten Act³⁹, which regulates preschool education in public and private preschools. The last act defines the duties of preschools, the kinds of possible preschool programmes, financing, demands for the education of professional workers, the work of preschool teachers and assistant teachers, gathering and protection of personal data in preschool, etc. The legislation defines the legal basis for establishing public and private preschools. Public preschools are established by municipalities, private preschools can be established by Slovenian or foreign legal persons or private individuals. Public preschools and private preschools with a concession implements the publicly valid programme, based on the national preschool curriculum⁴⁰. Municipalities can establish⁴¹:

- Independent preschool (SAMOSTOJNI VRTEC) – public institution, if it includes at least 10 groups of children. It can include a maximum of 30 groups.
- Preschool as an organisational unit of a public educational institution e.g. primary school (VRTEC PRI OSNOVNI ŠOLI) or any other institution with at least 8 groups, in special cases with 6 groups,
- Unit of an independent preschool or primary school or organisational unit of a preschool (ENOTA VRTCA), which is organized for the implementation of educational work in one or more locations.

A private preschool can receive the municipality's concession in case there is the need for preschool education. That means that the private preschool with granted concession is executing a public service and has the same curriculum as a public preschool, while the concession defines the amount of financial means, guaranteed by the municipality. Private preschools can also implement a programme, which follows special pedagogic principles, after it has gained a positive opinion of the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education⁴². In school year 2006/2007, 18 private preschools are active in Slovenia, 6 of those with concession and 5 of those are ecclesiastical⁴³. Private preschools initiative is still not developed. The reasons may be in the fact that these services are expensive due to all kinds of regulations. On other hand private services doesn't have any tradition and parents do trust to public service. In the school year 2005/2006 in Slovenia 304 preschools were active (Table 3), majority of them were independent and some were connected with primary schools especially in small sites.

	Number of preschools	Percentage of enrolled children
Independent preschools	108	79%
Preschool units of primary schools	178	20%
Private preschools	18 (6 concession)	1%

Tab. 3 The number of preschools and the percentage of children enrolled in preschools in school year 2005/2006⁴⁴

In accordance with the pluralism principle, parents have the right to choose between public and private preschools, as well as between different programmes. Preschools can offer different programmes regarding the duration and the organisation of the programmes. The existing programmes are:

- A whole day (CELODNEVNI PROGRAM) and a half day programme (POLDNEVNI PROGRAM), for children from 1 year until primary school enrolment. They include education, child-care and food. The whole day programme last 6-9 hours and can take place in the morning, in the afternoon, the whole day or in turns. The half day programme lasts from 4 to 6 hours and takes place in the morning, in the afternoon or in turns.
- A shorter programme (KRAJŠI PROGRAM), which lasts from 240 to 600 hours per year. It is designed for children from remote and demographically distant places, from 3 years until primary school enrolment and includes education, child-care and food.
- An educational programme in an educational family (PROGRAM VZGOJE IN VARSTVA V VZGOJNO-VARSTVENI DRUŽINI) takes place at home and can be realized by a preschool teacher or assistant, who is employed in preschool. The conditions for organizing an educational family are the need and the interest of parents as well as the number of available positions in a public preschool.
- Part-time child-care at home (OBČASNO VAROVANJE OTROK NA DOMU). Considering the possibilities, interest and the environment's peculiarities, preschools can organize part-time child-minding at the child's home. This is realized by the preschool's professionals (preschool teachers, assistants and counsel workers) and external partners, who must have at least secondary education or five years of experience in educational institutions. The service is fully covered by parents.

As we can see from the Table 4 majority of children are involved in whole day programme⁴⁵. It shows that the majority of families need whole day care for their children at the time when they are working. The number of children in half day programme and shorter programme stays almost the same in last two years when according the reform all 7 years old are involved in primary school.

	2000/2001		2003/2004		2004/2005		2005/2006	
	Children	Classes	Children	Classes	Children	Classes	Children	Classes
Whole Day	57844	3321	50980	3102	51603	3131	53867	3241
Half day	4943	183	3335	136	3039	121	3150	125
Shorter	541	27	200	5	173	10	117	9

Tab. 4 Number of children involved in different programme (2000-2006)

At the same time in Table 5 we can see that there are not many children involved in educational families. But majority of them are for children up to 3 years old⁴⁶.

	2000/2001		2003/2004		2004/2005		2005/2006	
	Children	Families	Children	Families	Children	Families	Children	Families
1-3 hom	75	12	66	9	37	5	102	12
3-6 hom	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
1-3 het	12	2	12	2	51	9	10	1
3-6 het	0	0	0	0	31	4	33	2
Combine	90	8	0	0	12	1	0	0

Tab. 5 Number of children involved in educational families according to the formation of the group in school years 2000/2001 to 2005/2006 (hom=homogenous; het=heterogenous)

B. Children and adults in preschools- Formation of groups

The kind and the number of groups and the number of children per group are determined by preschools, in agreement with the municipality, the preschools' founder and under the consideration of legally determined norms⁴⁷. Considering the local community relations, the number of children in one group can only increase for two children. The founder of the preschool determines the lowest number of children when a preschool is obliged to start or end their working time. Children are grouped according to their age. The groups of the first age period include children from 1 to 3 years, while the groups of the second age period include children over 3 years and up to primary school enrolment. The number of children per group varies according to:

- Groups of homogeneous age (children of approximately the same age are included into one group – age difference of 1 year),
- Groups of heterogeneous age (includes children of and age period, e.g. children from 1 to 3 or children from 3 to 6 years),
- Combined groups (includes children from both age periods, e.g. children from 2 to 6 years).

A homogeneous group of the first age period can include a maximum of 12 children, while a heterogeneous group can include a maximum of 10 children. A homogeneous group of the second age period can include a maximum of 17 children aged from 3 to 4 years and 22 children aged from 4 to 5 or 5 to 6 years. A heterogeneous group of the second age period can include a maximum of 19 children. A combined group can include a maximum of 17 children, while only 7 of them can be from the first age period⁴⁸.

The educational family can include a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 children of the first age period and a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 8 in a group of the second age period, while a combined group can include a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 7 children. The number of children per group can decrease if children with special needs are included in the preschool group. Each group can include a maximum of 2 children with special needs. Preschool's groups for children with special needs must include at least 3 children and can not include more than 6 children with special needs. In Roma groups, the groups of the first age period must ensure at least 3 hours of a 4:1 ratio, while the groups of the second age period must ensure 3 hours of 7:1 ratio.

In the group of the whole day programme for children of the first age period two pedagogues must be present for at least 6 hours per day and for at least 4 hours in the group of the second age period. In a half-day programme, two persons must be present for 3 hours per day in the group of first age period and for at least 2 hours for children of the second age period.

Over the last few years, the ratio of children and adults per group has slightly improved. The ratio is less satisfactory in private preschools than in public preschools (8.0 in public preschools and 8.2 in private preschools)⁴⁹.

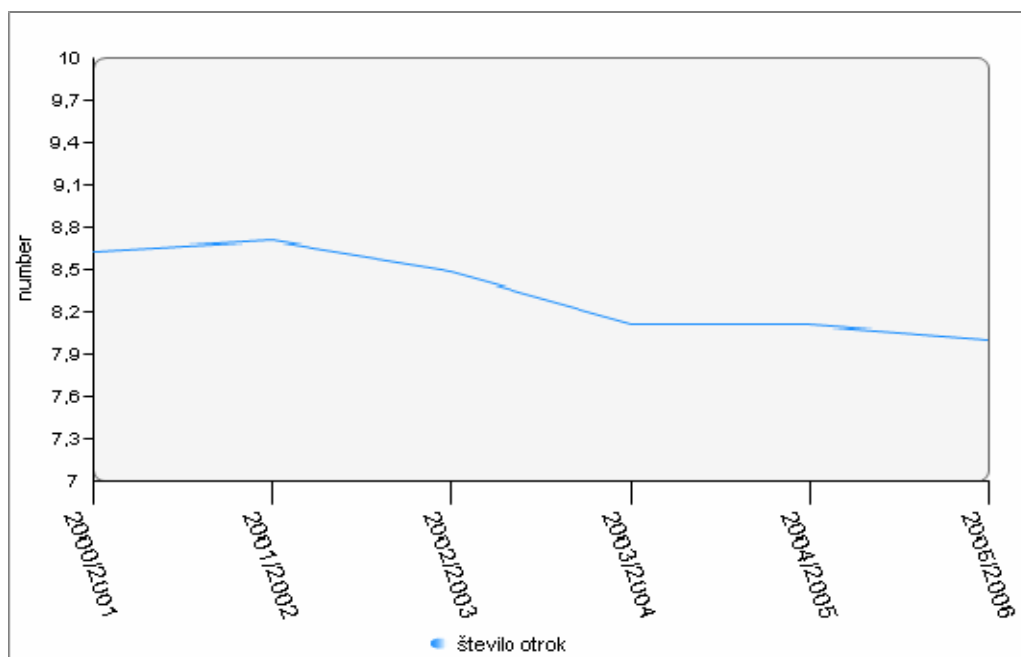


Abb. 1 The number of children per one preschool teacher or one assistant teacher, school years 2000/2001 - 2005/2006⁵⁰

Better child/adult ratios in groups offer better chances for the implementation of the equal opportunities and diversity principle among children, as well as the recognition of the right to choose and be different, which leads to the inclusion of children with special

needs into regular preschool groups. According to the law, children with special needs can be included in the preschool education programme with extra professional help (integrated children) or into adapted programmes (programmes for children with special needs)⁵¹. Organisational units of the institute of Education of the RS are responsible for the placement process for children with special needs. The work in such groups is realized in accordance with the Handbook for Preschool Curriculum in Programmes with Adapted Teaching and Additional Specialist Help for Children with Special Needs⁵², which defends timely placement into an adequate preschool programme, interdisciplinary approach to children, creating conditions for an inclusive process, which offers enough opportunities for individualised approaches, integrity and continuity in relation to the child's development. In 2005/2006, there were 42 groups for children with special needs⁵³. However, there is no information on the number of children integrated in regular groups. In 1997/98, there were 60 such groups, what shows a decreasing trend in the number of special groups and a better integration of children with special needs in regular groups⁵⁴.

A group of experts is responsible for a holistic treatment for children with special needs. In preschool, these are preschool teachers, assistant teachers, the preschool's counsel workers, special pedagogue/special need educator and other, according to content. In some environments, a mobile service has been organized for that purpose. The expert team for the preparation of an individualised programme includes the group of experts that cooperates in the educational process of a child with special needs and the child's parents. During the implementation of the individualised programme, the preschool's curriculum and the group's curriculum are considered; the individualised programme is adjusted to content and activities, which are being realized in the preschool group at that moment. The holistic treatment includes parents, a paediatrician, other specialist doctors, a physiotherapist and special pedagogues, a developmental psychologist, social worker and others. In most cases, children of migrants are included in regular groups, where Slovenian language is used. There is only one preschool in Slovenia, where English language is used. Preschools solve the problem of integration of migrant children by cooperating with their parents. However, preschool teachers are not trained for work in a multicultural group and do not recognise special advantages and demands that should be considered.

C. Costs for services and payment

On principle, the state finances 20% of the preschool's programme, while the municipality and the parents share the rest of the expenses. Because of decentralisation, some municipalities cover additional 20 % of expenses, other cover only 1 %. Therefore, the parents' contribution varies substantially from one municipality to another, even though they are in the same wage grade⁵⁵. The basis for the parents' contribution is the cost of the programme, in which the child is included, whereas the parents are categorised into different wage grades considering family income.

Payment range/class	Income range: brutto monthly income to family member in comparison to average brutto salary in Slovenia in year 2005	Monthly brutto income on family member in year 2005 in Euro	Payment in % from full pre-school price*
1	to 25%	to 289,27	10%
2	above 25 to 35%	above 289,27 to 404,97	20%
3	above 35 to 45%	above 404,97 to 520,68	30%
4	above 45 to 55%	above 520,68 to 636,38	40%
5	above 55 to 70%	above 636,38 to 809,94	50%
6	above 70 to 90	above 809,94 to 1.041,34	60%
7	above 90 to 110%	above 1.041,34 to 1.272,22	70%
8	above 110%	above 1.272,22	80%

Tab. 6 Payment ranges for preschool services⁵⁶

Note.

- Full price for full day programme with three meals for 1-3 years is 404,77 Euros for 3-6 is 267,07 Euros
- Half day programme (4-5 hours) with no meal 210, 98 euros
- Short programme (3 hours) with no meal 94,33 euros⁵⁷

D. Children in preschools

The percentage of enrolled children is growing; in 1991/1992, less than half of the children of an appropriate age were enrolled in preschool education; in school year 2005/2006, this percentage has grown to 63.6 %. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, there were 57 134 children enrolled in preschools in school year 2005/2006, among them 872 children were enrolled in private preschools⁵⁸. The number of children, included in programmes of the second age period (3-6 years), has increased the most.

School year	1995/96	2000/01	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
% of enrolment	56,9	56,6	60,6	61,4	63,6

Tab. 7 Percentage of children, enrolled in preschools, Slovenia, school years 1995/1996 - 2005/2006⁵⁹

Even though the percentage of enrolled children is increasing, the absolute number of children enrolled in preschools has fallen from 66 550 in year 1995/96 to 57 134 in year 2005/06. The reason for the decrease is a falling birth rate and the school reform, which was being implemented in these years and has included the population of 6 and 7-year-olds into first grade of a reformed compulsory primary school with a 9-year programme. Therefore, preschools have lost a one year generation of children, which was mostly included in preschools' »school preparations« before the implementation of the 9 year primary school programme. The 9 year primary school has been implemented gradually, which is why preschools were gradually losing 6-year-olds from 1997 to 2004. In the same period, preschools have also lost some preschool teachers, which were employed as a second pedagogic person next to the primary school teacher.

	Institutions	Class units	Children	Staff
1995/96	793	3500	66553	6672
1999/00	808	3523	64151	7329
2000/01	814	3531	63328	7163
2001/02	801	3477	61803	7099
2002/03	773	3342	58968	6949
2003/04	767	3243	54515	6729
2004/05	752	3232	54815	6762
2005/06	777	3375	57134	7115

Tab. 8 Preschools, groups, children and staff⁶⁰

Data on enrolled children into preschools, according to their age, shows that most children start attending preschool with more than 3 years, what indicates how severe the problem of child-care for children from 1 to 3 years is.

Age/ years	1 or less	2	3	4	5	6	To-gether
Boys	2.603	4.576	6.474	7.330	8.096	736	29.817
Girls	2.364	4.127	5.950	6.847	7.462	567	27.317
Together	4.967	8.703	12.424	14.177	15.558	1.303	57.134

Tab. 9 Children enrolled in preschools, according to their age, school year 2005/2006⁶¹

In spite of the increase in the percentage of enrolled children, the Court of Auditors of the Republic of Slovenia stated in their report on the preschool education provision in years 2003-2006, that 32 699 (36.4 %) of preschool children have not been included into any of the official preschool education forms in 2005/06⁶². The Ministry is not aware of the reasons and does not know which kind of child-minding these children have received. According to the same source, preschools in some areas are overcrowded; there are substantial price differences of the same programmes in different municipalities and they doubt the appropriateness and fairness of the wage classification. According to a questionnaire, conducted among 542 parents in fall 2006, parents help themselves with baby-sitters,

almost one third (approximately 10 thousand children) are being watched by unregistered babysitters from the grey market, which is estimated to 30 million euros. This raises the question of the quality of such child-minding. At the same time, the legislation enables the acquisition of a private preschool teacher status, which would regulate undeclared work⁶³. However, according to the Ministry of Education and Sport, there are no private preschool teachers in Slovenia⁶⁴.

F. Family involvement

In accordance with the reform's principles, the cooperation with parents has been reformed as well. In a public preschool, the interest of parents are represented and organized in the parents' council. Each preschool group has one representative, which is voted by other parents at the group meeting. The parents' council suggests programmes above standard, gives consent to head teacher's suggestion on programmes above standard, states opinion about the suggested development of the preschool/primary school and about the annual work plan, discusses the head teacher's report on educational problems, discusses parents' complaints concerning educational work and votes for representatives in the parents' council.

Preschools must enable parents:

- publicly available written and oral information on different programmes offered in preschool,
- regular exchange of information and deep discussions with preschool teacher, teacher assistant, counsel workers about the child,
- gradual introduction of children into different preschool programmes,
- cooperation in the planning of work and life in preschool and in a group and also cooperation in educational work (by agreement with the preschool teacher and by considering the professional autonomy of the preschool),
- the family's private sphere, their culture, identity, language, world views, values, beliefs, points of view, customs and habits and respect for their right to privacy and protection of personal data,
- regular and systematic information about their rights and responsibilities.

Preschools have made quite a progress in this field over the last few years. However, the inclusion of families into the planning of preschool life and work and the parents' cooperation in educational work are still lacking in active participation of parents. Some of the reasons are the lack of parents' awareness about the need to cooperate and their belief that this would be interference into the preschool's autonomy. There are also problems connected to the traditional understanding of the preschool teacher's role in her/his relationship to parents. More respect should be given to family culture. The educational staff should be sensitized in their educational process, so that better conditions for the child's individual dimensions in his/her educational process would be respected and that social fairness and inclusion would be realized. This would contribute to a quality politics of transition of children from home to preschool. At the organisational level, this is realized by gradual introduction of children into preschool and by constant exchange of information between the preschool and parents.

G. Running Preschools

Independent preschools are administrative and pedagogically managed by preschool's head master. They are appointed for the period of five years and can renew their term of office as many times they want. A head master is appointed by the Preschool Council based on the opinion of the preschool's Council of Staff and the preschool's founder. The Minister gives his/her consent to the appointment. All head masters had to finish the program of School for head masters consisting of 5 or 6 training modules in the duration of 144 hours⁶⁵. The content of modules focuses on team work, introduction to management in education, theory of organisations and management, planning and decision-making, people in organisations, head teacher as a pedagogical leader, legislation in education and one optional theme. The preschool's head master is responsible for ensuring quality work in preschool and must therefore conduct monitoring in groups (at least 21 per year) and have individual discussions with preschool teachers. Measures and procedures for this activity are chosen by the head master and are partly subjective.

The primary school's head master usually runs the preschool unit of a primary school and appoints an assistant or unit leader for the preschool, depending on the number of preschool groups, which are part of the school.

The Preschool Council includes three representatives of the preschool's founder, three representatives of preschool's workers and three representatives of parents. The board appoints discharges and assesses the effectiveness of the head teacher's work, approves the programme of development, the annual work plan and the report on its realization, decides about the implementation of programmes above standard and other programmes and deals with reports on educational problems etc.

V. Control over Preschool's work

Control over preschool's work including control over the implementation of laws and acts, which regulate organisation, realization of preschool education in preschools and the use of public funds is exercised by the Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Education and Sport⁶⁶. Parents, guardians or foster parents, the parents' council, employed workers or representatives of the trade union can inform the inspectorate about irregularities and introduce the initiative for exceptional control. The inspector is obliged to inform them about the performed work and measures, on their request. Inspectorate performs periodical control (every fifth year), exceptional control (based on the initiative) and repeated control (after the expiration of the deadline for the remedy of infringement). Control also refers to planning of preschool work and annual and continuous planning of educational work, preschool enrolment, execution of children's rights, the rights and responsibilities of parents and staff, price setting, cooperation with parents, organisation of children, keeping of pedagogical documentation, appointing and discharging of head teachers and their assistants, the work of the Council of staff and execution of rights of children with special needs. The control of private preschools, which implement public programmes, refers to organization, financing and the implementation of public programmes.

VI. Professional Institutions in support of Preschool Activity

Developmental and counselling work in educational institutions for the field of preschool education is done by various institutions.

The Service for Human Resource Management in Education at the Ministry of Education and Sport ensures planning, organization, implementation and co-financing of the school staff development and ensures professional help and system support for the development of human resources in the field of education. Their activities are included in the Programming Document of the Republic of Slovenia 2004-2006 and are part of long-term strategy and goals of the European Union in field of education and training⁶⁷. The financing of activities is executed by the European structural Funds and funds from the Ministry. Service for Human Resource Management in Education at the Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for all proceedings for ensuring in-service trainings⁶⁸. They also deal with activities in the field of internship, scholarships and grants, as well as vocational training qualification. To increase the competence of teachers, support professional development and personal growth of teachers and to stimulate quality and efficiency of the pedagogical process, they organize open tenders for in-service trainings. Several kinds of programmes exist; the most common ones in the field of preschool education are: Updating of competence programmes (individual participants from preschools can apply) and Programmes for councils of preschool staff, which are designed for the whole preschool teacher's staff. Special commission chooses the list of accepted training programs. The chosen programmes are published on the internet. Even though, most of programme providers give extra notice about their programmes to preschools. Programme participants receive an attendance certificate, which can be used for promotion. A special committee for the verification of programmes also deals with other in-service trainings, which are not included in the training catalogue, and gives them points if their goals are in accordance with the goals of further in-service training policy towards educational staff⁶⁹.

The National Education Institute is a central institution, which cooperates in conceptualisation, implementation and monitoring of innovative programmes and practices in preschools and other educational institutions⁷⁰. It strives to achieve the goals set by the reform – increase the accessibility of education for everyone, open up the education system globally and ensure the highest possible degree of quality in education. They plan, test, develop and implement new elements together with the professional staff and heads at preschools. The National Education Institute has 8 offices in different regions (Ljubljana, Kranj, Maribor, Novo mesto, Celje, Slovenj Gradec, Murska Sobota, Koper, Nova Gorica), which enable a decentralization of activities and a connection to all institutions. In the office in Ljubljana, one head of the department and 5 counsellors for preschool education are employed, whereas each regional unit employs one counsellor for preschool education. Besides them, there are counsellors for counsel workers and an extra field – children with special needs.

Their activities are: performing research and development tasks and, by linking theory and practice, forming conceptual solutions, implementing projects, defined by the directives and demands of the national curricular reform on one hand and by internationally recognized pedagogical approaches on the other. Teachers and other educators as well as educational professionals from faculties and research organisations are participating in these projects. The results are used directly in education. The following activities are available for preschools: seminars, study groups, mentor

networks consultation, project work, thematic conferences, symposiums and professional conferences, multiplier training, professional publications. Further activities of the Institute are:

- Preparing professional groundwork for decision-making in education.
- Preparing proposals for educational programs requested by professional councils and state bodies. We also formulate other professional material necessary.
- Monitoring and evaluating pedagogical practice, especially the introduction of new programs or programme elements, and publish relevant data about the educational activities of preschools, schools and other educational institutions.
- Linking research and development institutions and educational institutions that deal with pedagogical work at home and abroad.

Preschools receive professional support from the Educational Research Institute, Slovenian central institution for conducting basic, developmental and applicative research in all fields of education and for developing educational sciences and their interdisciplinary connection. For 12 years, the Developmental Research Centre for Educational Initiatives Step By Step at the Educational Research Institute has been conducting research, developing, implementing and evaluating educational initiatives, which contribute to developing full potentials of every child, offer equal opportunities for reaching a high quality education and stimulate progress in the field of education. Their work is based on the principles of a democratic and civil society, the rights of children and parents, recent findings on the development and learning of children and the implementation of changes in the field of education, active inclusion of all environmental social factors into the changing of life-quality for children, families and educational institutions. When carrying out their mission, they cooperate with practicing experts, other organisations and competent Ministries, higher education institutions and connect to similar international organisations. Their work started in 1995, under the auspices of Open Society New York. The Centre played an extremely important role in the period before the implementation and in first years of implementation of the new curriculum and before the adoption of legal changes, and has opened many new ways.

The Centre is actively involved in the following fields: cooperative learning; active learning and teaching; social fairness and democratic principles in education; multicultural and bilingual education; cooperation with parents and the community; evaluating and maintaining quality of the educational process; support and stimulation of professional growth and formation of reflective practitioner (mentoring, networking, certification); the integration of Roma children into mainstream education. Their network of trainers, mentors and certifiers provide trainings, mentoring, certification and different network activities for preschools and primary schools (in their network 48 institutions are involved). They are also very involved in networking on international level, they provides expertise, trainings, mentoring and other activities for other countries in transition. Additionally they publish handbooks for teachers and carry out research work especially action and participatory research work.

104 independent preschools and 123 preschools as primary school units are joined in the Slovenian Council of Preschools⁷¹. The council consists of different working groups, of which the consulting workers' working group is especially important⁷². The working group solves professional problems and questions, which occur in practice, it monitors the profession's development and findings in preschool education, develops professional work in preschools and creates the necessary conditions for it, cooperates in the development of preschool education with professionally planned work on current topics, questi-

ons and tasks about consulting work in preschool education and forwards findings to the public. The head teachers are joined in the head teachers' working group. Among institutions, which defend professional interest of preschool teachers and teacher assistants, the Trade Union of Educational Workers and the Association of Educational Societies should be mentioned.

VII. Preschool staff, their qualifications and terms of promotion

A. Education and qualification

In a preschool group, a preschool teacher and a teacher assistant are employed. Preschool teachers had to finish a higher vocational or vocational university programme for the field of preschool education or an adequate university programme plus a preschool education training in the form of an educational programme.

Teachers assistants are educated in secondary vocational school (Secondary School for Preschool Education), which lasts for 4 years after finishing primary school (8 or 9 years according to the new system). 54 % the subjects, the students are attending, are general educational subjects (Slovene, first foreign language (English), mathematics, history, geography, sociology, computer science, biology, chemistry, physics, physical education), 26 % of them are professional theoretical subjects (music, arts and dancing teaching methods, musical instruments, psychology, pedagogic, hygiene with housekeeping), 7 % are activities of interest and 12 % are practice (preschool practice, attending preschool lessons, practical educational work of 484 hours). Their education ends with vocational Matura – final examination for secondary vocational schools. After passing the examination, they are granted the title preschool teacher. The title of a preschool teacher can be also gained by people who have finished the 4th grade of gymnasium (grammar school for general education) and have passed one year of vocational training with the following subjects: children's and youth's literature, music, arts and dancing teaching methods, psychology, pedagogic, hygiene with housekeeping, sports courses and a mandatory practice of 62 hours. The course training is followed by vocational Matura.

Vocational training for preschool teachers is organized at Faculties for Education. The 3 year university programme includes general educational and professional theoretic subjects (Slovene, developmental psychology, pedagogical psychology, special pedagogic, educational theory with preschool pedagogy, sociology of education, chosen chapters from philosophy, didactics with teaching technology, the basic of pedagogic methodology, motor skills of preschool children, physical education and health education), professional subjects (methodics: art, elementary natural science, puppet, drama and movie roles, technical education, mathematics, movement –sport activities, dancing lessons, musical lessons), optional subjects (2) and 180 hours of practice. Education ends with the diploma thesis. University education can also be gained by graduates of the 2-year higher educational programme "Preschool teacher", which was abolished in 1992, if they finish the 176 hour long one-year programme at the Faculty of Education. The programme includes special pedagogics, language education methods, social environment, drama and film

education, mathematics, natural sciences, plus two optional subjects. For the position of a preschool teacher, persons with an adequate higher educational programme (University diploma after 8 semesters) and pedagogic-andragogic vocational training (one year) in the field of preschool education, can be employed. The programme includes developmental and pedagogic psychology, preschool pedagogic, motor skills, special pedagogic and 5 optional methodologies. Those, not employed in a preschool, must attend 120 hours of preschool practice.

Vocational training for preschool teacher's assistants is organized by secondary educational schools and by some centers for adult education, while the training for preschool teachers is organized by Faculties of Education. At the moment, three faculties in Slovenia (Faculties of Education at the University in Ljubljana, Maribor and University of Primorska) are educating graduate preschool teachers. In May 2004, the Slovenian government adopted the Amendment of the Higher Education Act, which should change the Slovenian university system according to the Bologna process⁷³. According to the new amendment, the new university structure should consist of three levels, the first one being the undergraduate studies, while the second and third level would represent the postgraduate studies. The new undergraduate studies should include university higher-vocational studies, which would last 3 years for the title of preschool teacher. All three faculties are in the process of reforming their study programme in accordance to the Bologna process. The process will enable graduates of the 3-year study programme for preschool teachers a direct transition to the 2-year master studies. In this way, preschool teachers will be enabled to be promoted within their profession, which has not been possible until now. If a graduated preschool teacher wished to continue her studies now, she could not do so in her profession and had to matriculate for another undergraduate study, finish it and then continue with postgraduate studies. The Faculty of Education in Ljubljana has made the greatest progress in the process of the Bologna reform and will have its programme confirmed in this spring. All three faculties are educating full-time and part-time students. In 2006/2007, at all three Educational Faculties 776 full time students and 615 part time students are studying at preschool departments. Majority of part time students are already employed in preschools⁷⁴.

The structure of employed preschool teachers and preschool teacher assistants according to their education is quite various as a consequence of different ways of acquiring education in the past. In 60's and 70's, preschool teachers had to finish a five-year secondary school programme for preschool teachers. With the reform, the secondary school programme was reduced to 4 years and a two year university programme was established. In the 90's, the three-year university vocational programme for preschool teachers was established. In spite of the increase in years of education and in accordance with legal regulations, preschool teachers with lower education and enough years of practice could remain in the position of a preschool teacher. In 2005, there were 3 479 preschool teachers with appropriate education and only 28 preschool teachers without the appropriate education, which represents less than 1 %⁷⁵. However, 60 % of all preschool teachers only have secondary school education. Detailed information on the structure of preschool teacher with an appropriate education is shown in the Table 10⁷⁶.

Completed educational programme	Number	Percentage
4 year secondary school programme	1043	30
5 year secondary school programme	1029	30
Higher vocational programme (2 years)	594	17
University vocational programme (3 years and a diploma)	758	22
University programme (4 years with a diploma and pedagogic training)	64	1

Tab. 10 The number of employed preschool teachers according to their education

Completed education	Number	Percentage
School for preschool teacher's assistants	798	24
4 year secondary school programme	2053	61
5 year secondary school programme	121	4
Higher vocational programme (2 years)	120	4
University vocational programme (3 years and a diploma)	239	7
University programme (4 years with a diploma and pedagogic training)	17	0

Tab. 11 The number of employed preschool teacher's assistants according to their education

In 2005, there were 3 348 or 94 % of preschool teacher's assistants with an appropriate education and 529 or 6% of those with an inappropriate association (Table 11). It can be seen, that the structure of preschool teacher's assistants with an adequate education varies from the school for preschool teacher's assistants to university education. However, the majority of assistants has finished the 4-year secondary school programme, while one fourth of them has finished the school for preschool teachers' assistants.

Before the first employment in preschool, an internship can be done⁷⁷. However, it is difficult to get an internship, because it is no longer obligatory. The trainee with a signed contract receives 70 % of the basic wage, the pension premium, transport compensation, food compensation, pay for annual leave, years of service are being counted, health insurance is regulated. An internship can also be voluntary. In this case, the trainee must regulate his/her status and health insurance. A trainee can also be a person with no pedagogic education but with appropriate education (level and programme). However, he/she must gain pedagogic-andragogic knowledge according to an appropriate and publicly valid vocational study programme before taking the proficiency examination. The mentor must have a title of councillor or adviser or a mentor for at least 3 years and is assigned by the head teacher. The mentor prepares the internship programme. During the internship, the candidate must have 30 independent practical presentations in the group of the mentor. During the lessons, the mentor is always present, while 5 of the presentations must be realized in the presence of the head teacher. Practical presentations are assessed by the mentor and the head teacher with "passed" or "failed". A trainee, who did not pass practical presentations, can repeat them. The internship lasts from 6 to 10 months, depending of the education (less for those with higher education). After the internship is finished, the

mentor and the head teacher finish a report on the monitoring of internship for the Ministry.

A trainee, who is being trained for the preschool teachers' assistant, can apply for the proficiency examination⁷⁸ if he has successfully passed all five practical presentations⁷⁹. A trainee with secondary school education can apply for the proficiency examination after 4 months of educational work in preschool or primary school. A trainee with higher or college education can apply after 6 months of educational work in preschool or primary school. If a counsel worker is not applying for internship, he/she must work in preschool for at least 6 months and must have passed five practical presentations. The proficiency exam for preschool teachers includes an oral exam on the constitutional structure of the Republic of Slovenia, the structure of European Union's institutions and its legal system with regulations on human and children's rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as regulations of the field of education and Slovenian language.

The number of unemployed persons with education from the field of preschool education shows, that there were 194 unemployed persons with higher and university education in the field of preschool education at the end of 2005 and 77 of them at the end of 2006. The number of unemployed preschool teachers with secondary school education was even higher; 167 at the end of 2005 and 213 at the end of 2006⁸⁰.

Preschools also employ consulting workers, who must have appropriate university education and pedagogic education. The appropriate university programmes are: pedagogy, psychology, social pedagogics or social work. For social workers, a higher educational programme is sufficient. Preschools with at least 30 groups can have a consulting worker. If the groups are in more locations, the number of groups automatically decreases. More preschools, with 60 or 70 groups altogether can connect their consulting workers in a counselling team. Preschools also employ a nutritionist (in preschools with more than 60 groups), health-hygiene regime organizer (per 60 groups), administrative – accounting workers, cooks, laundresses or tailors and cleaning staff in accordance with regulations⁸¹.

B. Promotion of educational staff⁸²

Preschool teachers, consulting workers and head teachers can promote in their titles. There are 3 titles in the system of promotion: mentor, adviser and councillor. Gained titles are permanent and do not have to be renewed. The promotion of a professional in his title is suggested by the head teacher in agreement with the professional and the Council of Staff. The promotion of the head teacher is suggested by the Preschool Board in agreement with the head teacher. The Council of Staff states their opinion on the promotion. The application for promotion and proofs are handed to the Ministry of Education. If the professional hands in his/her own application, he/she must also hand in an assessment of working efficiency, which is conducted by the head teacher, an opinion of the Council of Staff and proof about extra professional work and successfully attended in-service training programmes. According to the law, a mentor must have at least 4 years of service, has successfully finished in-service trainings programmes or has gained new functional knowledge and has done different professional work, which is worth at least 4 points. An advisor can be a professional, a head master or director, who has been mentor for at least 4 years, is successful in his/her work, has successfully finished in-service training programmes or gained additional functional knowledge, which should be worth at least 5 points, has done additional professional work and gathered at least 18 points, at least 9 of

those points for additional professional work, worth two or more points according to this regulation. A councillor can be a professional, a head teacher or a director, who has been an adviser for at least 5 years, is successful in his/her work, has successfully finished in-service training programmes or gained additional functional knowledge, which are worth at least 7 points according to the regulation, has done additional professional work and gathered at least 38 points, at least 18 of them for additional professional work worth more than 3 points in accordance to the regulation.

Participating at training is worth half point for a one-day seminar, verified by the Ministry. According to the Collective Agreement for Education, a preschool teacher can spend at the most 5 days per calendar year for his/her vocational training. Additional professional work and individual in-service training programmes or additional functional knowledge for the promotion in title can only be used once.

Additional professional work of preschool staff, connected with the educational work in preschool is worth 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10 points. These points can be granted for following activities: attendance of students, parents and preschool teachers in groups, realization of workshops/lectures for colleagues or parents, realization of meetings with active cooperation of children, parents and preschool teachers, being responsible for children at winter or summer holidays, camps, organizing different events for children, leading cabinets, activities of interest and professional working groups in preschool, active cooperation in preparations and publishing of the preschool's publication, organizing theme exhibitions, poster presentations or exhibitions at vocational trainings or professional conferences out of preschool, cooperating in assessment committees or juries, publishing independent articles in a professional magazine, didactic assignments, independent translation/professional article, professional review of a handbook or teaching aid, cooperating in a professional advisory committee for choosing contents for vocational training, cooperation in preparations for suggesting an educational programme, independent lecture, report or workshop at a conference organized by an institution on a national level, publishing a research assignment or a book, a professional article in foreign specialist press, publishing an individual translation of a specialist book, research-developmental work connected to the Ministry, faculties of education and some institutions on a national level, which deal with the questions of education, organisation of international conferences of specialists, placement among the first 3 places or winning a price of recognition in an international competition, being the author of a didactic toy with a recognition from the State, one term in office in the Council of Experts for Education. Most of the points or proofs for promotion can be gathered by additional work outside the teacher's group or with work, which is not directly connected to what the person does in the group, which represents an anomaly in the system.

Promotion in title results in a higher wage. The wage is also affected by efficiency in working with children, cooperating with parents, by cooperation and team work among the preschool staff and other experts, the use of professional knowledge gained in trainings, additional work which is a peculiarity of the profession or the position. Work efficiency is monthly assessed by the head teacher and can amount to 2 % of the total sum for monthly gross wages. An individual can receive 0-20 %, while measures are the same for all preschools. In the end, the wage also depends on the promotion to higher wage grades, which takes place every three years. The terms for promotion are additional knowledge, independence, creativity, work efficiency and other, defined in the regulations⁸³. Usually, proofs, which were not used for the promotion in title, are handed in for this kind of promotion.

VIII. Conclusions and Measures

As the system of promotions and teacher assessment is extremely complicated and has caused numerous misunderstandings in many collectives, this field will also have to face changes in the future. The anomaly of the whole system can be seen in the fact that assistant teachers can not be promoted in their title and that preschool teachers can be promoted on the basis of activities, which are not directly connected to the quality level of their work in a preschool group. Master teachers will have to have more knowledge on quality issues to be able to support school improvement. Only preschools within the Step by Step network are using international pedagogic standards in the purpose of formative quality assessment. At the same time, these standards are used for self-assessment, for stimulating the development of reflective practice and for professional growth and mentoring.

A lot of work has to be done considering the modernization and reform of faculty study programmes, where it is important to ensure a holistic organization of educational studies, which would prevent the crushing of the content into individual segments of different domains (special methodic), where a child could get lost in them. Study programmes of the second level of studies should be organized. Experts, working with preschool children, will have to take part in them and would in this way contribute to further development in this field. At the moment, activities in this direction have started to develop.

Finally, the system of “in-service training” will need to offer training, which can be transferred into practice. For this purpose, the prevailing practice of seminars in one piece, without insight into the changing practice, will have to be altered. Until now, preschools, where only one or two of their staff members took part in a training, have organized a background information about the training for the whole preschool staff, which often resulted in a simplified, changed context and level of understanding and was more damaging than useful. According to our experience, it is more useful to ensure a long-term direct contact of the participant with the trainer and ensure enough time in the system for the implementation of new findings and a common reflexion⁸⁴. Finally, the system of pre-service training and the system of in-service training will have to make sure, that preschool teacher and their assistants realize the need for life-long learning. Results of research warn that the need for changes is present with them, yet most of them are not ready to sacrifice a lot of time and energy for that⁸⁵. This shows a large difference between the wish to change and the willingness to change in this field.

A lot will have to be done, to achieve a 90 % inclusion of children into preschool in next few years in Slovenia. If preschools should respond and offer parents more varied programmes, which would fit the parents needs better, at first we will have to find out what are their needs. Secondly it is also necessary to find more possibilities for programmes designed for children of the first age period and programmes, designed for most endangered groups of children (especially Roma children).

Because of the need to broaden the children’s enrolment, there is a danger of mechanical interference in the system and the danger of pressures on increasing the number of children and decreasing the number of adults per preschool group. The need for advocacy for quality early childhood education on community level will be even bigger in future. At preschool enrolment, local communities even have attempted to give priority to children of employed parents (with the explanations that they are paying taxes), which, assuming the preschool is doing quality work, reduces the possibilities of a holistic development of children of unemployed parents. Much more thought should be given on how to support the competence of parents, especially during maternity leave and the first few

years of the child's life, and in the case of unemployment, how to support their active participation in decision making processes in preschools.

On the process level, more attention should be focused on the understanding of quality and the surpassing of teacher-centred approaches. One of the evidence that they are still alive in our praxis is that only individual preschool teachers are trained for systematic observation and assessment of child's development, which represents one of the basis for planning education process. Child's observation and assessment is not systematic, it is uncontrolled, full of personal judgements, and on general level. Some preschool teachers are gathering the products of children in their portfolios and use them in cooperation with parents. Because of a very rigid understanding of the secrecy of the child's personal data, most preschool teachers are not collecting any information on the child's development. Teachers from the Step by Step network have been trained to do so and have managed to create conditions for this activity, which is legally forbidden, by masking the names of children and by locking up the information and by receiving permission from parents. In some preschools, there is still a lot of room for a better connection among professional staff and for team work, which both contribute to a more collegial climate. What is more, teachers will have to be trained to respect multiculturalism, differences and to be able to educate children for coexistence and against biases. Although, such seminars are already available for teachers, the interest for them is minimal because preschools are not sensible enough and informed enough about the differences which already exist and are about to increase in future.

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² Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register

³ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register, Ministry of the Interior - Directorate for Administrative Interior Affairs

⁴ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register, Ministry of the Interior - Directorate for Administrative Interior Affairs.

⁵ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register, Ministry of the Interior - Directorate for Administrative Interior Affairs

⁶ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register.

⁷ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register.

⁸ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register.

⁹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register.

¹⁰ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior – Central Population Register.

¹¹ www.stat.si/letopis/2006/12_06/12-1106.htm?jezik=si

¹² http://www.stat.si/letopis/2006/12_06/12-11-06.htm?jezik=si (Source: Labour Force Survey)

¹³ Homepage Department of Social Security Šiška <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12

¹⁴ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12

¹⁵ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12

¹⁶ Homepage CSD Šiška: <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>

¹⁷ Homepage Department of Social Security Šiška <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>, and Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12

¹⁸ Homepage CSD Šiška: <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>

¹⁹ Family Benefit Act (OJ RS no. 97/2001)

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- 20 Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12 and Family Benefits Act (OJ RS. 65/93) and Act amending the Family Benefits Act (OJ. 71/94, 73/95, 26/99)
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- 22 http://www.stat.si/letopis/2006/10_06/10-24-06.htm?jezik=si
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- 24 Homepage Department of Social Security Šiška <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12
- 25 Homepage Department of Social Security Šiška <http://www.csd-lj-siska.si/splosno/index.asp>, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia http://www.stat.si/metodologija_pojasnila.asp?pod=12
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