

TRANSITIONS FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE TO PRIMARY EDUCATION

OECD Review of Policies and Practices for
Transitions from ECEC to Primary Education

COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT
Slovenia



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND SPORT



National
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September 2017



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Country Background Report
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Foreword

**Stanka
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Quality

In Slovenia, care for the youngest is traditionally one of the priority topics both in the broader social sense and especially in the field of education. This certainly applies to the questions related to the transition of children from kindergarten to school.

Until recently, the problem of transition was solved by the Educational Programme of the Preparation of Preschool Children for School, the so-called “little school”, which all preschool children had to attend a year before they entered school. After completing the “little school”, all children had to take tests of school readiness. In general, and especially in the last year of kindergarten, the educational programme was marked by the instrumental orientation of preschool education in kindergartens as a preparation for school.

The last comprehensive school reform (1996 - 1999) – which dates back to the time of the Slovenian independence and of general social changes towards a greater democratization (eg. exercising the right to choice, privacy, individual autonomy, etc.) and which, accordingly, introduces certain new key emphasis into the concept of the curriculum in kindergarten and school –, makes an important break with the described orientation: children enter school one year younger, the “little school” is abolished, and the compulsory ‘test of school readiness’ is also abandoned. The task of transition from kindergarten to school is now somehow changed: the school should be prepared for one year younger children. The new Year 1 should approach the way of life and work in kindergarten. A new cooperation between kindergarten and school should be established. A cooperation which will bring harmonization to the way of educational work in kindergarten and the new – younger – Year 1. A cooperation requiring mutual learning of both subsystems.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport decided to participate in the OECD study to find answers to how successful or unsuccessful we are on this path. The results of this national review did not keep us waiting for the release of the international report. We discussed them with the heads of kindergartens and basic schools at the end of 2016 at their regular annual conferences with the ministry. In 2017, we started with many activities which help solving the problems highlighted in the national report. Here is the list of some of the most important ones: preparing the situation analysis and examining the reasons for the postponement of entering school; introduction of free shorter preschool programmes for children who do not attend kindergarten in the year before entering school; establishing a system of early treatment of children which will provide more professional support for children with special needs in the transition from kindergarten to school; preparing a comprehensive concept of an extended basic school programme, in which special attention will be given to supporting the transition of children from kindergarten to school; preparing a

pilot introduction of a compulsory first foreign language in Year 1; introducing important novelties for a more effective system of further education and career development of educators; holding regional consultations and national conferences on the topic of safe and stimulating environment and well-being in kindergartens and schools, etc.

The national review undoubtedly demonstrated a sensitive and responsible systemic concern of the Slovenian educational policy about issues related to the transition of children from kindergarten to school. It also showed that we do not address these issues as a separate policy area, which would be systematically and comprehensively monitored and evaluated. We made an important step forward in this respect at the ministry this year: several projects are establishing (and piloting) a systemic model for assessing and assuring quality in education. For the first time, the diffused evaluation activities of the individual elements of the system will be integrated into a coherent whole. Last but not least, part of these activities is the setting up of the ministerial Quality Assessment and Assurance Collection, in which the results of the most important national and international research and studies will be published. The central purpose of the collection will be that the results do not remain in the drawer; quite the opposite, its purpose is that they are taken in one's hands and are used to a greater extent than before. Taken in hands by policy makers as well as experts in practice, parents, etc. I am particularly pleased that this report is the first publication in the new collection. A report that has awakened us already at the time of preparation ...

Allow me in the end to thank the OECD and the ECEC network as the leading institution of this important international study for their work and excellent cooperation. I would also like to thank all the participants in the preparation and publication of the national report, especially the authors and the national project coordinator in Slovenia Ms Nada Požar Matijašič, also the editor of the report we have before us.

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AWP	Annual Work Plan(s)	MESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
CRPEI	Central Register of Participants in Educational Institutions	NCC	National Curriculum Council
CBR	Country Background Report	NEIS	National Education Institute Slovenia
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
IESRS	Inspectorate for Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia	SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education		

List of abbreviations

Summary

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) took part in the OECD project 'Review of Policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood to Primary Education' in 2015–2016. One of the aims of the study was to provide an international analysis of countries' policies and practices on transitions between ECEC and primary education. The data from 27 OECD countries and three partner countries were included in the study regarding the perspective of the pedagogical, professional and developmental continuity from ECEC settings to school.

In the context of the study, Slovenia prepared the national Country Background Report (CBR) where the approaches to transitions from kindergarten to school were presented in more detail. The preparation of the national CBR for Slovenia was a process of multi-disciplinary and inter-agency collaboration and coordinated by the MESS – Department of Educational Development and Quality. It is based on four different types of sources from legislative documents, relevant publications, administrative data, and on-line surveys and interviews with heads of kindergartens and schools and experts from various institutions.

The CBR shows that more attention should be paid to the transition from kindergarten to school. One of the main challenges facing the transition is that the implementation of the systematic solutions conceived in the 1990's, when the curricular reform took place, was not always appropriate.

The CBR shows that there are differences between settings and teachers regarding the understanding and the implementation of a smooth transition. Differences between methods and learning approaches exist as different expectations of how children should be prepared for school. Another challenge that has emerged is the transfer of information on an individual child between the kindergarten and school, which is a very sensitive question in many ways.

The report also indicates that the role of the settings' head is very important since the head's understanding of pedagogical, professional and developmental continuity for ensuring smooth transitions is crucial.

It is concluded that further research, evaluation and data collection are needed. In future, the preparation of additional recommendations, trainings and (joint) reflections of the professional staff of both levels of education will be considered.

Key words:

Transition

Kindergarten


Basic school

Pedagogical continuity

Professional continuity

Developmental continuity

Introduction



In 2015–2016, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia participated in the OECD project 'Review of Policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood to Primary Education'.

The aims of the OECD project were:

- to provide an in-depth and extensive overview of available international research evidence on the importance of transitions from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to primary education, what aspects are found to contribute to successful transitions, and the effects of transitions on child development outcomes;
- to bring together international approaches and practices that deal with opportunities and challenges of ensuring successful transitions, with a specific focus on the child, thus highlighting the curriculum, pedagogy and development assessments; staff education, training and leadership; and parental and community involvement in transitions;
- to provide an international analysis of countries' policies and practices on transitions, with in-depth case studies, an overview of challenges and strategies, and lessons learned on ensuring successful transitions between kindergarten and school.

The process of identifying important levers which affect the quality of education has shown it is important to ensure that the benefits of a high-quality ECEC last when children leave ECEC and continue their development in school. Therefore, it is necessary to have strong and high quality transitions between ECEC and basic education level (OECD, 2016).

The study is intended for various stakeholders interested in transition policies and the ECEC data such as: national and local policy-makers, researchers, ECEC and school headmasters and staff, parents, etc.

Methodology

The data on transitions from ECEC to primary education were collected with an Excel questionnaire prepared by the OECD regarding the perspective of the pedagogical (the curriculum, pedagogy and development assessment), professional (staff qualifications, training and leadership) and developmental (vertical and horizontal transitions and collaborations) continuity from ECEC to school. The questionnaire was answered by 27 OECD countries and three partner countries.

In the context of the study, Slovenia and eight other countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Sweden, and Wales) also prepared the national country background report (CBR) where the approaches to transitions from ECEC to school were presented in more detail - also from the aspects of pedagogical, professional and developmental continuity.

The preparation of the CBR for Slovenia was a process of multi-disciplinary and inter-agency collaboration (the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Educational Research Institute, the National Education Institute Slovenia, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Arts, kindergartens, schools). The process was coordinated by the MESS (Department of Educational Development and Quality). The CBR draft was prepared by the researchers of the Educational Research Institute in cooperation with the MESS and was reviewed by Ljubica Marjanovič Umek, Phd, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

Four types of sources were used in the preparation of this CBR:

- legislative documents: throughout the CBR, the English titles of legislative documents and links to the documents are provided in the text. All legislation is available only in the Slovenian language, except for the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#);
- relevant publications (see references);
- administrative data from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS, 2016) and Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS, 2016);
- surveys conducted by the Educational Research Institute for the purpose of the preparation of the CBR (2016):
 - an online survey (52 schools and 49 kindergartens participated with their heads completing the survey);
 - 20 semi-structured phone interviews with heads/counselling service of kindergartens and schools: 3 interviewees were randomly selected from the list of all kindergartens; 4 interviewees were randomly selected from the list of all schools; 9 interviewees came from kindergartens/schools where researchers had already established contacts and 4 interviewees came from kindergartens/schools suggested by the National Education Institute Slovenia (NEIS);
 - 3 semi-structured phone interviews with NEIS experts : 1 expert in the counselling service in preschool, primary and (lower and upper) secondary education; 2 experts in preschool education;
 - 1 semi-structured interview with an expert from the Faculty of Education: the criterion for the selection of the expert was the long-standing and on-going experience in practice (in-service training for preschool and primary education teachers; a supervised practicum of children in kindergartens; the counselling service at kindergarten) – in addition to the professorship at the faculty.

The Slovenian CBR includes chapters linked to the OECD methodology / comparative framework. Accordingly, this report describes the systemic aspect

of the transitions from kindergarten to school and all three aspects the experts and the OECD ECEC network perceived as important for a high-quality transition from kindergarten to school.

Terminology

A significant amount of time was dedicated also to the adequate translation of the Slovenian educational terms into English. The English translation of (Slovenian) national terms relevant for national educational systems poses several challenges that have been discussed on several occasions over the past two decades in Slovenia.

Slovenian terms imply certain systemic solutions that may not be embedded in their English counterparts (e.g. *vrtec* is an integrated ECEC setting for children from 1 to 6 years, *osnovna šola* is integrated primary and lower secondary education). Thus, we are faced with a dilemma whether to use a well-established English term that may not necessarily imply all the characteristics of a Slovenian term (e.g. kindergarten, primary school) or use a term that may not be widely used in English (e.g. basic school).

Box 1 Kindergarten (*vrtec*) in Slovenia

Preschool education is delivered in kindergartens – **the setting for the whole preschool age range (1 to 6 years)**. During the entire period, the national Curriculum for Kindergartens is implemented. Preschool teachers for all age groups hold bachelor degrees in preschool education and work together with assistant preschool teachers (upper-secondary degree in preschool education) in pairs (the preschool teacher and preschool teacher's assistant are present together in a group during the core hours of the day; i.e. between four and six hours per day, depending on the age of children), the children : staff ratio and size of groups are also regulated. The service is subsidized by national regulation. Kindergarten is by far the most dominant form of ECEC settings (home-based ECEC also exists, but it caters for a very small share of children). The great majority of kindergartens are public (96 % of children who attend kindergartens are in public settings; SORS, 2016).

Moreover, English terms have evolved over time in the translations of the Slovenian national documents: for example, in the English translation of the White Paper on Education (1995) the terms 'preschool institutions' and 'primary schools' were used for *vrtec* and *osnovna šola*, respectively. In the translation of the introductory chapter of the White Paper on Education (2011) the terms 'kindergarten' and 'primary schools' were most commonly used for *vrtec* and *osnovna šola*. The Ministry of Education published the English translation of the education act (Organisation and Financing of Education Act) in December 2015, where terms 'kindergartens' and 'basic schools' were used.

To make the situation even more complicated, the English titles of the relevant legislative documents (see Legal Information System of the Republic of Slovenia) are inconsistent in the terminology used, particularly for the school,

e.g. Elementary School Act (Zakon o osnovni šoli) versus [Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme](#) (Pravilnik o normativih in standardih za izvajanje programa osnovne šole). For ECEC settings, the most commonly used term in legislative documents is 'pre-school institutions'.

Box 2 Basic school (*osnovna šola*) in Slovenia

The term 'basic school' describes **integrated primary and lower secondary education settings providing compulsory education (catering for pupils aged 6 to 15 years)**. Basic school comprises **three three-year cycles** (the first cycle from Year 1 to Year 3; the second cycle from Year 4 to Year 6; the third cycle from Year 7 to Year 9). In the first three-year cycle, children are taught by a general (class) teacher. A second teacher is also present half of the lessons in Year 1. In the second cycle, the class teacher still delivers most lessons; however, individual subjects are gradually taken over by specialist teachers. In the third cycle, lessons are delivered by specialist subject teachers. Teachers hold master degrees.

In conclusion, based mostly on the recent ministry's translation of the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), the English term 'kindergarten(s)' is used for the Slovenian term *vrtec* and the English term 'school(s)' or 'basic school' is used for the Slovenian term *osnovna šola* throughout the CBR. It is explained below what each term means from the perspective of the Slovenian educational system. However, the decision for using different terminology (e.g. preschool for *vrtec* and elementary school for *osnovna šola*) would also be possible and justified.

For the purpose of this report, the terms kindergarten and basic school is used throughout the text.

1 The transition system and its organisation

The purpose of this chapter is to describe some of the main features of the transition system in terms of organisation, governance and performance.

1.1 Policy context

Slovenia's independence in 1991 and the transition to a new constitutional and political system were followed by the first reform of public service. As a result of social, political and economic changes, changes to the education system became imminent. The conceptual changes of the education system, the main principles and the theoretical framework, based on human rights and the notion of the rule of law, were presented in **the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (1995)** and resulted in **new legislation on education**.

The curricular reform was planned broadly and introduced numerous changes in the areas of organization, goals, contents, planning and implementing the educational process as well as in the area of the teacher and child/pupil/student roles. The curricular reform encompassed early childhood education and care (a unitary system for ages one to six),¹ primary and (lower and upper) secondary education and adult education. In Slovenia, primary and lower secondary education are integrated into a single structure.²

As indicated in **the Framework of the Curricular Reform (1996)**, some of **the main goals** of the reform were to:

- increase the autonomy and professional responsibility of schools and teachers;
- attain better cooperation between various disciplines;
- encourage a balanced mental and physical growth of the individual;
- increase the importance of school in social integration;
- prepare pupils for a high-quality life, education for life and for a profession and to develop abilities for an independent, creative and critical thinking and judgment;
- prepare pupils to be able to face and solve problems with confidence;
- prevent overtaxing and dropping out of pupils.

Among main principles of the reform, special attention is paid to **the autonomy of individuals** (children, pupils and teachers), which **includes a new perspective emphasising the protection of the individuals' privacy** and the relating control of the collection of data on children and their parents.

¹ The term 'kindergarten(s)' is used to describe such settings. See Introduction (text in Box 1, p. 13).

² The term 'school(s)' or 'basic school' is used to describe the integrated primary and lower secondary settings. See Introduction (text in Box 2, p. 14).

The anticipated changes for preschool education were based on the developmental trends in preschool education in the world, the recommendations of international organisations and the findings of social studies and humanities on the concepts of childhood and preschool education.

Several changes in preschool education were proposed: the right of choice between different preschool programmes and/or between various methods, activities and contents; the right to privacy and intimacy with such space and time organisation which allows the child to withdraw from the group routine or to express their individuality through various activities; lowering the group size and the staff : children ratio; space arrangements; the introduction of a flexible open national curriculum; the prolongation of the initial training of preschool teachers; raising the quality of the management of kindergartens.

The reform has introduced **a broader definition of the preschool curriculum** which encompasses all activities, interactions and experiences the child uses to learn from and which includes care, education and environment factors experienced by children in kindergartens every day. The renewed curriculum draws attention also to the effects of **the hidden curriculum** which are mainly reflected in day-to-day kindergarten routines. It includes many elements of educational influence on the child which are not defined in the curricular documents; it often appears in the form of indirect education and is more influential than direct educational activities defined by the curriculum.

In regard to the transition, the main aspect of the reform was extending the duration of compulsory schooling from eight to nine years by enrolling one year younger pupils (i.e. six-year-olds). Before the curricular reform, the 'Educational programme for preparing children for school' (1981, cited in the White Paper on Education, 2011) was implemented for this age group by kindergartens and was compulsory for all children in the last year before entering school (it could also be carried out in schools). There were great variations in the organization (e.g. the number of hours provided) and in the content of the programme, which no longer allowed all children to develop their potentials (White Paper on Education, 1995). The new entrance age aimed at tackling these issues. That coincided with changes in the understanding of the concept of school readiness (from the normative 'readiness is a norm/milestone that a child reaches' to a process, readiness to learn in each developmental period).

Lowering the school entry age had a strong implication for transitions and entering into school (the school programme has to be adapted to the child's developmental level and his/her learning process). Thus, new subject curricula for all the subjects in Year 1 were developed in the 1990's which reflected the developmental characteristics of pupils and the way of learning which suits six-year-olds. Important knowledge standards (e.g. writing, reading) aim at a gradual, in-depth and individualized acquisition of knowledge; this means that the attainment of the objectives is distributed across the first three years of school – the 1st cycle of basic school (for those pupils who need a slower pace).

At that time **a lot of public and professional attention was dedicated to getting the school, the educational staff and the system ready for one year younger children**. A lot of attention was given to the in-service training of primary-education and preschool teachers to be working in Year 1 (a second teacher was appointed to Year 1). It was compulsory for teachers who enrolled in the supplementary study programme (provided at Faculties of Education).

In regard to the transition, the main aspect of the reform was extending the duration of compulsory schooling from eight to nine years by enrolling one year younger pupils.

Lowering compulsory school age from 7 to 6 years and extending the compulsory education from eight to nine years were introduced gradually; in 1999/2000, the first schools introduced the new 9-year programme, in 2003/04 all schools enrolled first-year pupils in the new programme and in 2007/08 all schools provided only that programme in all years.

Moreover, in that period there was a lot of investment in school buildings (to enlarge them, provide an additional separate entrance for younger pupils, etc.).

In 2011, a **new White Paper on Education** was presented. The aim was to systematically reflect the structure and functioning of the Slovenian education system after the reform in 1996 (White Paper on Education, 2011). In the period between 2008 and 2011, the subject curricula of compulsory subjects in school were amended. The modernisation was associated in particular with the development of key competences, the so-called competence approach (Eurydice, n.d.).

The 2011 White Paper tackled issues regarding the organization of work in kindergartens (e.g. opening hours, the provision of short and half-day programmes), the national Curriculum for Kindergartens (e.g. more emphasis on early language development and emerging literacy, teaching a foreign language in the last year, teaching the Slovenian language for those with other mother tongues), structural conditions (e.g. the maximum number of groups per kindergarten and children per group, indoor space, staff qualifications) and funding of kindergartens (e.g. determining parental fees).

For basic school, the 2011 White Paper tackled mostly the issues of subjects taught (compulsory and non-compulsory elective subjects, the first and second foreign languages), the amount of instruction time in each year, differentiation and assessment. Those changes mostly pertained to the years beyond Year 1 (e.g. 2 more hours/lessons per week in Years 2 and 3; the introduction of numeric grades in Year 3 – before the new White Paper, numeric grades started in Year 4).

The changes in the new White Paper did not directly tackle transitions. The most relevant aspects of this White Paper for transitions were the early introduction of reading and writing skills in order to ensure the optimal development of children's language competences, thus enabling the continuity of literacy at school. The findings of evaluation studies and the research on the effect of kindergarten on the child's development and learning show that **the development of the child's language competences** (approaches to promote the child's speech in planned and all other activities in kindergarten, taking into account the diversity of children with regard to the socioeconomic status and gender) represents **a critical point** in the national Curriculum for Kindergartens (1999, hereinafter the Kindergarten Curriculum). As initial reading and writing skills should be acquired by the end of Year 2 of the first cycle in basic school, Year 3 should be dedicated to the consolidation of reading more demanding texts with understanding and independent writing of long and diverse texts.

Regarding the instruction of the first foreign language, the 2011 White Paper suggests that it should be compulsory in Year 2³ and introduced as a non-compulsory elective subject in Year 1.

³ The change in 2013 Basic School Act places the instruction of the compulsory first foreign language from Year 4 to Year 2 and the introduction of the first foreign language in Year 1 as a non-compulsory elective subject. In school year 2014/2015, schools started to phase in a compulsory first foreign language in Year 2. In school year 2015/16, English is introduced as an optional elective subject in Year 1 of basic school (86 % of pupils have English lessons. Source: MESS, 2015/2016).

1.1.1 Key traditions and values in transitions from ECEC to primary education

The main changes in values in the education system go back to the 1990's. The key tradition and values in transitions have not changed over the last decade. Traditionally, the Slovenian education system has strongly emphasised cooperation between both institutions, the kindergarten and the basic school, and paid special attention to the transition of children from kindergarten to basic school.

The principle of cooperation between educational institutions from various levels is emphasized in relevant systemic steering curricular documents and in the basic legislation regulating the fields of preschool and school education.

In the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999, p. 14) **the principle of vertical cohesion and continuity**, which draws upon the cooperation and continuity of work between kindergarten and school, is mentioned among the basic principles of implementation, strongly emphasising that 'it is important that the kindergarten is not converted into school and that it insists on its fundamental specifics'.

Special care in the transition of children from kindergarten to school is also explicitly mentioned among the basic tasks of the counselling service in kindergarten (Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Kindergarten, 1999, p. 17) **and in basic school** (Guidelines for the Counselling Service in School, 1999, p. 17).

According to the [Kindergarten Act](#) and the [Basic School Act](#), kindergartens and schools determine their cooperation in Annual Work Plans (AWP). An important aspect of transitions is **the admission procedure into school** (including postponement of admission or early admission and determining school-readiness).

1.2 Goals and purposes

1.2.1 Goals and purposes of transitions from ECEC to basic school

According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), one of the objectives of education in Slovenia is ensuring optimal development of an individual (regardless of their gender, social or cultural background, religion, ethnicity, etc.). Moreover, the Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Kindergarten (1999) and the Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Schools (1999) state that the counselling service provides support and care at the child's transition from kindergarten to school and helps with his/her integration into school life. This relates to the goal of transitions which is to ensure the individual's optimal development.

One of the objectives of education in Slovenia is ensuring optimal development of an individual.

1.2.2 Equity goals through transitions between ECEC and basic school

The Slovenian education system as a whole includes **several systemic mechanisms for disadvantaged groups** (positive discrimination) to help reduce inequity (uneven starting positions) and help with an optimal development and successful integration in the education system for all children. The following mechanisms are relevant but **not specific to transition**, e.g.:

Children with special education needs and from disadvantaged families (including low income families, i.e. who are given a recommendation by a centre for social work for being families with medical, financial or social problems) have priority in allocating kindergarten places. Given the importance of high-quality ECEC for these groups in particular, the priority allocation can be viewed as supporting transitions to school.

Members of the Roma community are defined as a special group whose rights are regulated by legal provisions in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. The exercise of special rights is regulated by the 'Roma Community Act' and, in the field of education, by the [Organisation and Financing of Education Act](#), the [Kindergarten Act](#) and the [Basic School Act](#). The education of Roma children is guided by the strategy adopted in 2004 and amended in 2011 which lays down additional measures for an increase in their educational level and their successful integration into the system of education. These measures mostly consist of additional financial and human resources for schools with Roma children and pupils, such as:

- a special focus on the communication and cooperation with parents of Roma children (additional materials to help them better understand the school matter, visits to Roma settlements, organizing special visits of Roma parents to the school, etc.),
- an additional member of the educational staff may be employed depending on the number of Roma children in kindergarten groups,
- additional forms of learning support for Roma children (peer support, help and support of NGOs, local Roma communities, etc.),
- Roma assistants (within the framework of a European Social Fund project, Roma assistants are employed in kindergartens and schools; typically, they are members of the Roma community and help children overcome the emotional and linguistic barriers and to bridge the gap between kindergarten and school and the Roma community),
- a reduced number of pupils in school classes with a larger number of Roma,
- additional funds for food, schoolbooks, school excursions (i.e. days of activities) etc. for Roma pupils,
- additional funds for special learning materials for Roma pupils,
- additional funds for learning time in smaller groups of students (not only Roma pupils) for schools with a larger number of Roma pupils,
- an additional member of the educational staff may be employed depending on the number of Roma pupils in school,

- additional presence (additional 5 school hours per week) of the second teacher in the class of Year 1 with at least three Roma pupils,
- additional lessons in the Slovenian language,
- implementing an optional school subject Roma culture in the school curriculum.

The supplemented strategy underlines the importance of education in terms of increasing social, human and cultural capital.

The rights of **children who are not citizens of the Republic of Slovenia** are regulated in detail by the [Organisation and Financing of Education Act](#), the [Kindergarten Act](#) and [Basic School Act](#); the [International Protection Act](#) ensures the right to education of refugees and asylum seekers. Upon the admission into the education system, special care is dedicated to children/pupils/students with migrant background. For example:

- preparing a special individualised programme for each child to individualise the learning process according to learning and other special needs of the child,
- providing special classes of the Slovenian language for pupils (and also their parents),
- providing special materials, learning aids for pupils' better understanding,
- closer monitoring of the child's progress,
- closer contact with parents (providing help in learning the Slovenian language, translating basic information to their languages ...),
- the school/kindergarten chooses a staff member who will act as the child's confidant and will take care of the interaction between the school/kindergarten, parents and the local community, especially NGO's in the local community that are engaged in the integration of immigrant children,
- supporting a child in the preservation of his/her mother tongue (some schools provide extracurricular lessons of children's mother tongues).

According to the law and other regulations, persons belonging to **the Italian and Hungarian ethnic communities** have the right to education in their mother tongues and to form and develop education in ethnically mixed areas. Detailed definitions of the rights are laid down in the [Act Regulating the Exercise of the Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education](#).

For these specific groups, several guidelines, strategies and supplementing documents have been developed and adopted.⁴

⁴ [Guidelines for the Integration of Immigrant Children in Kindergartens and Schools, Strategy of Education and Training of Roma Children in the Republic of Slovenia, Guidelines to the Kindergarten Curriculum in programmes with adapted implementation and additional expert support for children with special needs, Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum in ethnically mixed areas, Supplement to the Kindergarten Curriculum for work with Roma children, Kindergarten Curriculum in the adapted programme for pre-school children, Learning difficulties in school: concept of work, Children with deficits in certain areas of learning: instruction for adapted provision of the Basic School Programme with additional expert assistance.](#)

For the school programme in ethnically mixed areas, there is a list of adapted subject curricula and the [Instructions for the implementation of the 9-year bilingual basic school](#). In addition, there are also the adapted subject curricula for certain groups of SEN pupils (with hearing, sight or motor impairments) and the adapted subject curricula with lower educational standards.

Several documents were accepted which relate to all stakeholders in education and can be of particular help to the specific groups of children (e.g. minorities, Roma, special needs, immigrants).⁵

These documents are provided on the website of the Ministry (http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/direktorat_za_pedsolsko_vzgojo_in_osnovno_solstvo/izobrazevanje_otrok_s_posebnimi_potrebami/programi/). These documents tackle issues of transitions and enrolment in school directly or indirectly.

Receiving support specifically in/for the transitional period is limited to **various projects**, e.g.:

(1) 'Interculturalism as a new form of coexistence' (<http://www.medkulturnost.si/>); a series of good practices and materials educational staff can use for an effective integration of immigrant children in education and training, e.g. language and cultural introductory workshops before the school year starts;

(2) 'Together towards knowledge' (<http://skupajdoznanja.si/>); innovative and alternative ways of education for Roma, e.g. Roma assistants help build a bridge between Roma community/parents/child and school or kindergarten; a kindergarten in Roma settlement, Roma community centres providing learning support and leisure activities;

(3) 'The increase in social and cultural capital in areas with Roma population' (<http://www.khetanes.si/>); creating and implementing diverse educational activities for preschool children and their families in kindergartens, schools and in the transitional period, e.g. introduction and building trust with educational institutions and families, activities for children who do not attend kindergartens and for their families, creating culturally and linguistically appropriate materials for children, learning a second language in kindergartens and schools.

⁵ [Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Kindergarten](#); [Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Schools](#); [After-school classes and other forms of care in the nine-year school: the concept](#); [Programme guidelines for the work of class' teaching staff and class community in basic and upper-secondary schools and student residence halls](#).

1.2.3 Settings/services in socio-economically disadvantaged areas

In Slovenia, the socio-economically disadvantaged areas are a type of area with special development problems (according to the [Decree on the criteria for defining territories with special development problems, and on the determination of municipalities meeting these criteria](#)). According to the [Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme](#), the norms for forming a class or establishing/closing down a setting may be more favourable in such areas. There is no other additional support in these areas. Measures for the disadvantaged in Slovenia mostly target individuals, not disadvantaged areas.

1.3 Organisation of ECEC and primary education

Slovenia has a unitary system of preschool education for children from the age of 11 months until the age of six. The participation of children in preschool education is not mandatory. Preschool education is an integral part of the education system. Since 1993, it has been in the domain of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS), which ensures continuity from preschool to basic school education.

The government is responsible for the national policy, the legislative framework and the general programme of preschool education. The most important acts are: the Organization and Financing of Education and Training Act, which regulates all levels of education, and the Kindergarten Act, which regulates preschool education in public in private⁶ kindergartens. Municipalities establish kindergartens and are responsible for the implementation of preschool education programmes.

According to the Kindergarten Act, the main goal of kindergartens is providing comprehensive care for children, improving the quality of life of families and children and creating conditions for the development of children's physical and mental abilities.

The ECEC system in Slovenia has not changed much for almost two decades. Between 1996 and 2010, the [Kindergarten Act](#) was amended. It established less favourable structural conditions (e.g. the number of children per group, the size of indoor space)⁷ and a new form of ECEC was introduced, the so-called home-based care (provided by a home-based child-minder of preschool

According to the Kindergarten Act, the main goal of kindergartens is providing comprehensive care for children, improving the quality of life of families and children and creating conditions for the development of children's physical and mental abilities.

⁶ In Slovenia, preschool education is organized as a public service. In 2014/15, there were 93 % public and 7 % private kindergartens.

⁷ Depending on their circumstances, municipalities may raise the maximum number of children per group by two in both age groups (the first age group: 12 + 2; the second age group: 22 + 2), regarding the conditions and the situation of preschool education in the local community. This amendment has been introduced mostly due to the increased birth rate and enrolment of children in kindergartens. The regulations also stipulate a minimum of 3m² of indoor space per child. The realisation of this condition has been continuously postponed since 1996 due to a lack of funding and an increase in the number of children. It was determined that it would be realised in September 2017.

children); it caters for a very small share of children (White Paper on Education, 2011).

Basic school education includes primary and lower secondary education. Basic schools provide compulsory education and cater for pupils aged 6 to 15 years. The Basic School Act regulates the field of basic education. It defines general basic education objectives; prescribes components and the scope of compulsory and elective basic school programme; regulates enrolments, rights and responsibilities of pupils, basic assessment and testing rules, conditions for pupils progression to the next year etc.

1.3.1 Organizational status of kindergartens

In regard to transition, a very important characteristic of the kindergarten is its potential organization **as a unit of the school**⁸ – as a school branch, i.e. it is associated with the school (the so-called *vrtec pri šoli* - ‘**kindergarten at the school**’ and is also typically located in the same building; the head, administration and counselling service are shared). In some schools, the kindergarten and the first year class may be located very close together. This situation is more common in rural areas and smaller towns. In 2014/15, 27 % of children were enrolled in kindergartens at the school, 72 % were in ‘independent’ kindergartens (SORS, 2016). According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), a public kindergarten may be established if the inclusion of at least ten groups of children is guaranteed. If there are less than 10 groups of children, the kindergarten may be associated with the school. This ensures a good network of kindergartens. In kindergartens at the schools, the school’s head appoints his/her assistant as an educational and organizational leader of the kindergarten unit (according to the [Rules on standards to conduct pre-school education activities](#)).

In interviews, the NEIS experts report that **the transition is ‘softer’ (more continuous) for the children when a kindergarten is at the school**; usually children do not change the building, in some cases they just go to a classroom across the hall; children are familiar with the space of the school in general (the school library, the gym, bathrooms, outdoors) as well as with the teachers and other staff working at school. Moreover, in the case of a kindergarten at the school it is easier to organize for a preschool teacher to follow ‘her/his’ children to Year 1 of basic school (and to work there as a second teacher). In kindergartens at the schools, it is more common that the peer group remains the same (all or the majority of children from the kindergarten enrol in the same school).

However, experts also report that **there are some drawbacks for kindergartens at the school**; for example, because the counselling service is shared, it seems that the ‘problems’ of the school are always more important than the ‘problems’ of the kindergarten, so the counselling service cannot devote the attention to the kindergarten issues according to the plan. Moreover, a recent study (Taštanoska, 2015) also shows that when a kindergarten is attached to a school, it is overlooked in the self-evaluation of the setting (schools with

⁸ Kindergartens may be organised as independent units or may be attached to basic schools. In 2013/14 there were 170 independent kindergartens (105 public and 65 private kindergartens).

kindergartens as their units did not list a single goal/area of self-evaluation that would specifically relate to the kindergarten). These results are indicative of head's priorities and focus (head is responsible for self-evaluation).

1.3.2 Organizational status of basic school

Schools are organised in single institutions or organisational units of other institutions. A basic school may include kindergarten units or groups and/or classes with an adapted programme; alternatively, it may operate as an organisational unit of another education institution. Single and central basic schools usually organise all years (1-9) in the same building. Smaller branch units in rural, usually more remote locations, where there are less children, usually provide education for the first three or six years in smaller buildings.

In the first three-year cycle, children are taught by a general (class) teacher. It is recommended that the same teacher teaches the class for all three years. A second teacher (she/he can be a preschool teacher) is also present half of the lessons in Year 1. In the second cycle, the class teacher still teaches most lessons, however, individual subjects are gradually taken over by specialist teachers. In the third cycle, lessons are delivered by specialist subject teachers.

A second teacher (she/he can be a preschool teacher) is also present half of the lessons in Year 1.

1.4 Distribution of responsibilities

1.4.1 Collaboration between different levels of authorities involved in transitions

There is no specific co-operation between various levels (the state and municipality) in regard to the transition. Legislation and other steering documents are adopted at the national level. According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), public kindergartens and schools are founded by municipalities.

The admission procedure is regulated at the national level (see the [Basic School Act](#)), but municipalities can determine additional criteria for admission to a school that is not within the child's school district (see the [Decree on criteria for setting up a public network of elementary schools, a public network of elementary schools and educational institutions for children and youth with special needs, and a public network of music schools](#)). Parents enrol their child in the basic school in the school district where the child resides; however, they may decide to switch and enrol the child in another school (Eurydice, n.d.); the school in which parents wish to enrol their child makes a final decision.

1.4.2 Decision-making responsibilities between different authorities and between different levels of the administration

Generally, there are **no separate financial and physical resources to support transitions**; i.e. regular funding is used to finance transitions as well. Kindergartens and schools are financed by municipal and state budgets and other sources (donations, kindergartens also from parental fees, which are adjusted to the family's social economic situation).

Financing of kindergartens is mainly the responsibility of municipalities (the central authority covers some costs in ethnically mixed areas, for Roma children, for pre-school education in hospitals⁹ and when several children from the same family attend kindergarten).

In schools, municipalities are responsible for the funding of capital investments (maintenance costs and material costs for buildings, equipment), transportation of pupils, and the 'above standard programme'. The state finances the provision of the programme (staff salaries, material costs of the programme). The above standard programme, for example, means that **some municipalities provide funding for a second teacher in Year 1 in addition to the hours provided by the state** (according to the [Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme](#), a second teacher in Year 1 teaches 10-15 hours/week, municipalities can fund additional hours).

Financial and physical support for transitions of Roma children and immigrants is provided by system measures (e.g. in the first-year classes with Roma pupils, a second teacher is present for more hours per week than otherwise, there is a reduced maximum number of pupils in this class; and also within projects (see page 21).

1.4.3 Regulations and minimum standards for ECEC and primary education

Regulations for kindergartens and schools are under the authority of the MESS (the Ministry of Health adopts legislative framework and guidelines for the health and hygiene regime in educational institutions).

⁹ Preschool education is carried out in hospitals for hospitalized children. It has had a long tradition in practice and is explained in the document 'The concept of work in kindergarten hospital units', which has not (yet) been officially adopted. Preschool education in hospitals follows closely the Kindergarten Curriculum; however, it adds the humanization of hospitalized children as the first principle. The document explains the role and tasks of the preschool teacher in a hospital setting and gives examples of activities for each activity area (movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics).

Similarly, basic education can also be provided in hospitals. As described by Eurydice (n.d.), the Basic School Act makes a provision for pupils who are undergoing medical treatment in hospitals for whom classes may be organised on hospital wards. In this environment, pupils are organised in small groups or taught on a one-to-one basis, as school activities must be adapted to the child's abilities, health condition, and contents. The main objectives of education provided in hospitals include: to ensure a continuation of school work and to facilitate an easy transition from hospital to school; to enrich the period of time spent in hospital and thus mitigate negative consequences of the hospitalisation and make it easier to deal with the illness and being in hospital. Hospital schools have lessons, organise day activities, social relaxation activities, art and entertainment activities, book loans, visits of artists, athletes and other celebrities. Due to special features of the work with sick children, such classes are complemented by supportive relaxation and therapeutic activities. Eleven basic schools provide education in 14 hospitals. Teachers follow official guidelines stipulated in the Concept of educational work with pupils and students who are hospitalized, adopted by the National Expert Council for General Education in 2013.

The overarching legislative document is the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#) which pertains to both preschool and basic education. It stipulates conditions to carry out education (preschool, basic, special needs etc.) and determines governing and funding. There are special laws for each level of education: the Kindergarten Act for the field of preschool education and the Basic School Act for the field of basic education. For both levels, there is a series of other legislative documents (rules, regulations, orders, decrees).

Regulations regarding transitions are limited to the enrolment procedure and the identification of school readiness ([Basic School Act](#)). The Kindergarten Curriculum emphasises the link between kindergarten and school, but no central level measures are given. Each kindergarten defines activities to facilitate transitions in their AWP.

The Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Kindergarten (1999) and Guidelines for the Counselling Service in School (1999) emphasise the importance of supporting children and pupils in making the transition to school and adapting to the school life. **The role of the kindergarten/school counselling service is highlighted in that area.** The counselling service participates in the planning, establishment and maintenance of appropriate conditions for the safe and supportive educational environment that allows the child's/pupil's optimal progress. According to Guidelines, the counselling service supports all the participants in the educational process (thus also in the transition period), including parents and teachers.

Regulations regarding transitions are limited to the enrolment procedure and the identification of school readiness.

1.4.4 Curriculum development and assessment in ECEC and primary education

The curriculum

As mentioned earlier, the kindergarten and school curricula were developed in the comprehensive curricular reform (1996-1999), thus following the same main principles and framework. **The Framework of the curriculum reform (1996) explicitly states that education programmes and the curricula have to be consistent and aligned vertically and horizontally.** ECEC and basic education are considered part of the education system and are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

During the curricular reform (1996-1999), the curricular basis was prepared by the National Curriculum Council (NCC) appointed by the Slovenian Government. The Kindergarten Curriculum and the Basic School Programme were drafted by the bodies operating under the NCC. After that period, the subject curricula for basic school (amendments to the curricula) were drafted at the national level by the NEIS (e.g. in 2011, the subject curricula for basic school were amended). According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), the programme for preschool education (the Kindergarten Curriculum) is adopted by the Expert Council for General Education, whereas the Basic School Programme (the timetable¹⁰ and curricula) is confirmed by this body (the Expert Council for General Education) and adopted by the minister in charge of education.

¹⁰ A document determining time allocation for subjects and educational activities.

There is no separate curriculum for Year 1; it is incorporated in the Basic School Programme. Each subject has a separate curriculum – one document for all the years in which the subject is taught; thus to put together the curriculum for Year 1 you should look for relevant parts in separate subject curricula. Moreover, all documents pertaining to the Basic School Programme are relevant also for Year 1 (e.g. [After-school classes and other forms of care in the nine-year school: the concept](#)).

Assessment

In the Kindergarten Curriculum, the principles of critical evaluation, the development-process approach and active learning assume that the preschool teacher observes the development and learning of each child and uses the data from observations for the planning and implementation of goals, activities, the educational process and individualization. **Observation is thus the most common method of following the development and learning of children. Each kindergarten decides on how this is recorded** (various protocols, the portfolio of the child ...).

As stipulated in the [Basic School Act](#), assessment in Years 1 and 2 is done by **descriptive grading**. With descriptive grading, teachers assess the progress of each pupil toward the standards of knowledge stipulated by the subject curricula. From Year 3 onwards, teachers assess with numerical grades on a scale from 1 to 5 how well pupils meet the knowledge standards in accordance with the prescribed subject curricula, whereby 1 is a negative grade and all others are positive grades (for details, see the [Rules on knowledge assessment and grading and students' progress to a higher class standing in elementary schools](#)). Pupils are also assessed in national examinations (in school year 2013/14, the national testing of knowledge became mandatory for pupils of Year 6 and not just Year 9 as in the past).

1.4.5 Staff qualifications for kindergarten and school

Qualifications for kindergarten and school staff are regulated at the national level. The legislation prescribes:

- profiles of pre-school and other teachers who teach at individual levels of the education system (from pre-school to higher education);
- general qualification conditions (levels, professional knowledge, knowledge of the language of instruction);
- competencies for making decisions about their qualifications according to subjects or subject areas;
- undergoing traineeship and taking the teaching certification examination;
- competencies and procedures regarding employment and dismissal;
- specific working conditions (field of work, teaching obligations, advancement), and
- professional development.

Initial and ongoing education and training for the staff

Preschool and basic school teachers have different initial education (duration and content). **They are all trained at the tertiary level (at the Faculties of Education), preschool teachers at ISCED 6** (bachelor or first Bologna cycle; professional higher education programme) **and basic school teachers at ISCED 7** (masters or second Bologna cycle). With the regulations regarding the initial level of education for preschool and primary education teachers having changed in the 1990's, not all teachers were initially trained at this level. With the curricular reform (1996-1999), preschool and primary education teachers took part in the Supplementary Study Programme conducted at the Faculty of Education and financed by the ministry responsible for education, which qualified them for work in the 'new' Year 1.

Preschool and basic school teachers have different initial education.

Initial education programmes are offered by universities and must follow the [Criteria for the Accreditation of the Study Programmes for the Teacher Education](#). These programmes follow the quality standards stipulated by the National Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

In-service education and training is a professional duty and right according to the Organisation and Financing of Education Act and the [Collective Agreement for Education in the Republic of Slovenia](#). The Collective Agreement determines **the right of the staff (kindergarten and school) to 5 days of in-service training a year or 15 days over three years** (in-service education takes place within regular working hours and is paid by the institution – can be (co-)financed by the MESS).

In-service training can be organized together or separate for preschool and school teachers. Teachers can also participate in (national) conferences that are held for both groups of teachers (e.g. in 2015: the National Conference on Quality Assurance in Education - <http://www.zrss.si/keks/>; the International Conference on Quality and Equal Opportunities: Key Steps in Education and Care from birth to 10 years - <http://www.korakzakorakom.si/content/view/190/189/>).

Strategies to support the staff in ensuring successful transitions at ECEC and primary education

During the curricular reform (1996-1999) and in the years that followed, a lot was done to ensure a successful transition (the Supplementary Study Programme for preschool and basic school teachers to be teaching in the 'new' Year 1; study groups¹¹ at the NEIS).

Nowadays, there are **no guidelines (at the national or municipality levels) on strategies to support the staff in ensuring a successful transition**. As mentioned before, **the role of the kindergarten/school counselling service is highlighted** in supporting children and pupils in easing their transition to school; however, there are no specific strategies on how to do that for counsellors or teachers. At the local level, specific strategies have been developed and implemented within the network of kindergartens and schools included in the Step by Step programme since 1995 ([Step by Step Slovenia](#)).

¹¹ Study groups are a form of active education and co-operation of teachers of individual subjects or fields.

1.4.6 Decision to enrol in primary education

According to the [Basic School Act](#), the basic school enrolls children who will be 6 years old in the calendar year they start attending school. According to the same act, the child's admission to school may be deferred on the basis of **the parental and health service's suggestions or on the basis of the decision for the placement of a child with special educational needs (SEN)**. A child may not enter school at the age of six, i.e. the admission to the first year of basic education may be postponed for one year. The criterion for the postponement is the level of readiness for school. A relevant committee (appointed by school head) consisting of a physician, a school counsellor and a teacher (a primary education or preschool teacher) is responsible to evaluate and assess the level of readiness. **The committee evaluates and assesses the level of readiness** of all children whose parents or physicians suggested postponing the admission to the first year of school. The committee can (and usually does) cooperate with the kindergarten in assessing the readiness (interviews with the child's kindergarten teacher, the kindergarten counselling service). According to the Basic School Act (Article 60b), **the final decision is taken by school head** on the basis of the opinion of the relevant committee. Parents may appeal to head's decision.

According to the [Basic School Act](#), schooling may also be postponed during the school year of Year 1 in which a child already started school (suggested by parents, school counselling service or health service – based on medical or other reasons).

In Slovenia, postponing admission to the first year of basic school is much more common than early entry. Early entry means that a child starts school one year younger than stipulated in the legislation. The aim of early entry is to support acceleration in child development. The administrative data of the MESS (2016) show that **over the last 5 years (2010/11 to 2014/2015) the share of postponed admissions was steadily increasing** (from 5.1% to 7.4 %; those children usually attended kindergarten), while the proportion of early admission was consistently less than 0.3%. The procedure of early admission is not defined in the legislation, but sometimes schools enrol younger children upon parental request. In relation to this, both heads and NEIS experts report on increasing rates of parental suggestions to postpone their child's admission to school.

Organisation of the formal stakeholder consultation procedures on transitions

Usually there are consultation procedures between the stakeholders in designing the education policy. These procedures should be the same for issues of transitions and any other issues. The MESS writes laws and subordinate legislation and brings them into line with representative associations of municipalities. Though it is not obligatory, **the ministry seeks opinions of other relevant associations (associations of kindergartens, heads, parents)**.

Before issuing the rules on norms and standards (which cover teaching responsibilities of the teaching staff, the criteria for the provision of the

counselling service, the administrative, account-keeping and technical services and the classroom/grouping criteria, qualification requirements for the staff, space and equipment requirements), **the Minister of Education shall seek the opinion of the Expert Council for General Education and the teachers' union** – the Education, Science and Culture Union of Slovenia (in case of the norms and standards for the provision of education in ethnically mixed areas, the minister shall seek also the approval of the Italian and Hungarian Self-governing National Communities).

1.5 Monitoring transitions

1.5.1 Monitoring instruments

The monitoring of transitions is **limited to the monitoring of the admission procedure into school**. According to the [School Inspection Act](#), the Inspectorate for Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia (IESRS) monitors the admission procedures. The [Guidelines for the Counselling Service in Schools](#) stipulate that school counsellors base their work on the analyses of admission, retention, accelerations etc.; the analyses are based on the needs of a school and their results help plan school-level interventions. Each kindergarten defines activities to facilitate transitions in its AWP. No central level measures are given. Schools may monitor the admission procedure within the setting's self-evaluation.

1.5.2 The common monitoring cycle or practice of monitoring transitions works at the national, regional or local level

Two mechanisms to monitor the admission procedure are possible:

1. The IESRS and the MESS can determine the admission procedure as a priority area for inspection. The evaluation/inspection can be conducted regularly or upon a referral (e.g. from parents).
2. Every year, a school acquires the list of all children to be enrolled in Year 1 within the school district through the ministry's on-line application. If a child is not enrolled, the school is obliged to report this to the IESRS who can impose fines on parents.

There are also two indirect ways of monitoring transitions at the national and local levels. The MESS collects the data on the number of children in kindergartens and children enrolled in basic schools (including the number of children whose enrolment in basic school is postponed etc.) with the possibility of using the data for policy decisions. The MESS set up a database called the Central Register of Participants in Educational Institutions (CRPEI, 2011) which compiles available school and education data on students in pre-school, primary, lower- and upper-secondary education as well as short-cycle higher vocational education. The CRPEI is used to follow up on key education goals

and objectives, make decisions on the rights to public funding and provide evidence for scientific research and statistical work. The use of the CRPEI is restricted to schools (limited access) and the ministry.

The municipalities prepare forward planning measures and estimations of demographic trends for the following five years to ensure enough places in kindergartens and schools.

2 Professional continuity

This chapter is concerned with how professional continuity is ensured or arranged. It addresses initial education and training in ECEC and school, and professional development.

2.1 Leadership

According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), the school/ kindergarten head has a double role: as a pedagogical leader and as a manager. **Heads are most directly involved in the transitions by appointing the committee that evaluates the child's school readiness and by making the final decision in this process for the children whose deferment to enter school was suggested.** Heads' role in ensuring smooth transitions is also indirect:

- preparing a draft AWP and being responsible for its implementation; this document determines the cooperation with external institutions (including schools, kindergartens);
- being responsible for ensuring children's rights and the rights and duties of pupils;
- encouraging continuous professional development of educational staff;
- following the work of the counselling service;
- providing for cooperation with parents;
- providing for cooperation of the school with the school health service and
- being responsible for settings' self-evaluation.

Interviews with heads and experts from the NEIS show that **head's role in transitions is mostly organisational. Usually kindergarten/school counsellors have the most important role in planning the transition activities in kindergartens/schools.** Heads plan transition activities every year in the kindergarten/school AWP and they monitor their implementation. They organise the work and activities in the kindergarten/school in the way that preschool/primary education teachers and counsellors have time and space for the planned transition activities.

Some heads also report on a more direct involvement in transition activities; they take part in expert teams that monitor special needs children and decide whether they are ready for school or not. School heads also actively participate in the meetings for parents that schools usually organise once or twice a year before their children start school.

2.2 Staff support for transitions

2.2.1 Material resources for the staff

With the introduction of the new curriculum for kindergartens and the systemic changes several scientific and professional papers have been published on the topic (e.g. Marjanovič Umek, 1993; Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja Peklaj & Grgič, 2006; Marjanovič Umek, Kranjc, Fekonja Peklaj & Grgič, 2008) mainly in order to facilitate the implementation of the new kindergarten curriculum (e.g. Marjanovič Umek, 2001; Bahovec & Bregar Golobič, 2004) and to support the curriculum changes to kindergartens (e.g. Hohmann, M. & Weikart, 2005). In 2004, another manual was published, entitled *School and Kindergarten Through the Looking-glass*, whose purpose was to support the implementation of the renewed curriculum in terms of raising awareness of the hidden curriculum and introducing changes to the daily routine.

The Kindergarten Curriculum encourages and emphasizes the use of such materials for various activities (including activities to support transition). **Specific support materials** (instruction books, didactical material and teaching aids) **for transitions are not prescribed**. Basic education teachers make autonomous decisions in regard to teaching methods and aids. Kindergartens and schools may autonomously buy didactic or teaching materials and aids.

2.2.2 Human resources to help facilitate transitions from ECEC to basic school

Helping children with the transition to school and adaptation to school life falls within **regular activities of the kindergarten/school counselling service**.

Public kindergartens and schools must have counselling services employing professional counsellors. School counsellors are psychologists, pedagogues, social workers, social pedagogues or SEN teachers. They hold at least master's degrees (or equivalent) in psychology, pedagogy, social pedagogy or social work, special and rehabilitation pedagogy, social work with families, social inclusion and equity in cases of disabilities, ethnic and gender affiliation, mental health within the society, supervision, counselling for individuals and organisations, and inclusive pedagogy. Larger kindergartens and schools may have more counsellors on the staff, but smaller ones must have at least one if only for reduced work hours. School counsellors perform three related and often entwined types of activities: **support, development and prevention, and planning and evaluation**. School counsellors do **the pedagogical, psychological, and/or social counselling work**. They provide **support to children, pupils, students, educators, teachers, parents, and kindergarten or school management**. They work together with all stakeholders in their everyday lives and duties of learning and teaching (in kindergartens, of playing and teaching), in the institution's culture, the overall climate and order, the physical, personal and social development of children, pupils and students, in training and vocational orientation (transition), and in the scope of socio-economic differences. They plan and implement individual support programmes for children with special needs.

In kindergartens no additional support staff for transitions is provided.

Public kindergartens and schools must have counselling services employing professional counsellors.

In schools, two teachers are present in Year 1 (as suggested by the White Paper on Education, 1995, and stipulated by the [Basic School Act](#)). According to the Basic School Act the first teacher is a primary education teacher and the second is a preschool teacher; exceptionally, a second teacher can also be a primary education teacher. The purpose of this additional staff member is to help with the transition and individualization and make transitions ‘softer’ and less stressful for children. Moreover, a second teacher, being a preschool teacher, helps ensure pedagogical continuity with kindergartens and helps adequately cater for first-year pupils. A second teacher is present for 10 to 20 hours per week, depending on the number of pupils in the class and Roma pupils (for details, see the [Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme](#)); this means that usually two teachers are not present in all lessons.

In regard to the two teachers in Year 1, the concept envisioned by the school reform in the 1990’s was that **the preschool teacher would be ‘in transit’ between kindergarten and school** – she/he would leave the kindergarten, work at a school for a year or more (preferably with ‘her/his’ kindergarten children) and then return to work in the kindergarten. The [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#) explicitly foresees this possibility in the employment section: for a period of one school year, a school may employ a preschool teacher who has an employment relationship in a kindergarten, for teaching in Year 1, morning care and after-school classes/activities. For the duration of the employment contract with the school, the preschool teacher’s employment contract in the kindergarten is temporarily suspended in accordance with relevant laws.

Moreover, the primary education teacher was suggested to go with ‘her/his’ pupils from Year 1 to Year 3 (White Paper on Education, 1995).

It is noteworthy that even though it is indicated that two teachers trained as basic school teachers in Year 1 should be an exception (a preschool teacher as a second teacher is preferred), the administrative data from the MESS (2016) show that this is rather a rule; **in 2014/15, 55 % of second teachers were primary education teachers** and about 27 % were preschool teachers. The rest of second teachers have various types of education-related qualifications, mostly at the tertiary level (e.g. sports teachers, social pedagogues, special education teachers, psychologists) and also upper-secondary degrees in preschool education.

Vonta (1993) evaluated various models of the staff transition; she reported the most favourable model for the child development and adjustment (including health) was where the whole preschool group – i.e. peers and the preschool teacher – went together to the same Year 1. The model brought some initial adjustment problems for the primary education teacher, but after some time there was **positive mutual influence and both teachers started to understand each other’s perspectives**.

In the on-line survey done for the purpose of the CBR, any practice (or model) of staff transition has been very rarely reported; only one kindergarten has reported that their preschool teachers make transit to school for two years and then return to kindergarten (49 kindergartens and 52 schools participated) – and it was kindergarten at the school. The exchange or transition of the staff is easier for schools with a kindergarten as their unit.

Interviews with heads and NEIS experts show that **the main support staff for transitions are school counsellors**. They plan and participate in meetings

with parents and in the teams who evaluate children with special needs, they manage the administration of the admission and take care of the entire transition. They also explain the reasons for employing primary education teachers on the positions of second teachers (instead of preschool teachers) – because a primary education teacher is considered to be more ‘useful’, more flexible around the school and can help substitute other teachers from Year 1 to Year 6 if necessary (e.g. in case of sick leaves). However, some heads say they do not understand why primary education teachers are employed as second teachers, because this was not the intention of the school reform. In regard to the transition of the preschool teacher from kindergarten to school and back again, heads state that when the ‘new’ Year 1 was introduced, there was a large demand for preschool teachers in schools and many came from kindergartens to work in school, but also stayed there (were employed) and did not come back.

To support children from a disadvantaged background the maximum number of children is lower in classes with Roma pupils (the child : adult ratio is more favourable in kindergartens). Moreover, two teachers are present for more hours in classes with three or more Roma pupils and the school may employ additional educational staff (a counsellor or a teacher) to offer Roma pupils help in learning and other assistance. Within the European Social Fund project, Roma assistants are employed in kindergartens and schools. Also in ethnically mixed areas and in classes with pupils with special needs, special regulations relating in particular to class size and groupings are in place. According to the [Rules on norms and standards for the implementation of the primary school programme in bilingual primary schools and primary schools with Italian as the language of instruction](#), two teachers are present in Years 1 to 3 in the Hungarian-Slovenian bilingual schools.

2.3 Collaborations between authorities and kindergarten/school on professional continuity

Before issuing changes to the rules on norms and standards (which cover e.g. teaching responsibilities of the teaching staff, qualification requirements for the staff), the Minister of Education will seek the opinion of the Expert Council for General Education and the trade unions. The Expert Council for General Education consists of at least one quarter of kindergarten or school workers; thus **teachers have a say through the Expert Council and the union.**

In-service training of preschool and basic school teachers is determined in the AWP of the institution. The AWP is adopted by the kindergarten/school council (according to the Organisation and Financing of Education Act), which is the kindergarten/school’s governing body and is comprised from representatives of the municipality, staff and parents; this means that **the municipality, staff and parents have an (indirect) say in the staff training through the council.** Within this framework, kindergartens and schools decide for themselves in which trainings they want to participate (they can choose the training related to transitions). However, experts from the NEIS report that **in-service courses closely related to transitions have been very rare in the last 10 years** (there were some on the early learning and school readiness).

Staff salaries are determined at the central level (the [Public Sector Salary System Act](#) and the [Collective Agreement for the Public Sector](#), which specify common salary bases of all employees in the public sector). Work positions are set up in various salary grades. The levels of salary grades are adjusted annually and the unions play an active role in their negotiations (thus teachers have a say through their unions).

3 Pedagogical continuity

This chapter is concerned with how pedagogical continuity is ensured between early learning and primary education. It addresses similarities and differences in curricular contents and methods of work.

3.1 Curriculum framework and development goals

As already mentioned, the **Kindergarten Curriculum and Basic School Programme** were prepared in the same comprehensive curricular reform in the 1990's, thus a similar theoretical framework and principles hold for both.

The main difference between the two is that the Kindergarten Curriculum is much more flexible. It is an open and flexible national document with specified principles, goals and examples of activities for two age groups, but not structured in detail. The preschool teacher has the autonomy to choose what, when and how activities are implemented. There are no compulsory topics within the activity area or any standards to achieve.

For basic school (integrated primary and lower secondary levels of education for children from 6 to 15 years old), however, **there are over 20 subject curricula for compulsory subjects** (in addition, there are also adapted versions for ethnically mixed areas; and there are the subject curricula for elective subjects, too) **that set compulsory topics and knowledge standards (including minimal standards)**. In Year 1 only six compulsory subjects are taught. They are: the Slovenian language, mathematics, music, fine arts, sport, environmental education (includes contents on nature and society), and they coincide with the main areas of the Kindergarten Curriculum.

Another important difference is that **the cross-curricular dimension** is embedded in the Kindergarten Curriculum (at the implementation level, various activity areas are intertwined), whereas in the Basic School Programme this is a desired (and also stipulated in the didactical recommendations), but not an intrinsic element (e.g. the timetable has time allocated for a specific subject, there are separate subject curricula for subjects). In each year of the first 3-year cycle of basic school, the same teacher usually teaches all six (or the majority of) subjects, which also gives her/him the opportunity for cross-curricular activities.

The main difference between the two is that the Kindergarten Curriculum is much more flexible.

3.1.1 The Kindergarten Curriculum

The Kindergarten Curriculum is based on the developmental-process approach, which includes planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process that takes into account individual traits and the development of each child, which represents a more important goal than achieving the goals set.

The curriculum contains the basic goals and principles of preschool education (e.g. democracy and pluralism, the right to choice and diversity, autonomy,

a professional and responsible approach of the staff). It contains the description of activity areas (i.e. learning areas, subject areas) and, for each of them, the goals, objectives and the examples of activities for children aged from 1 to 3 years and from 3 to 6 years and the role of the adult. There are six activity areas: **movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics**. Some areas (e.g. moral development, health education, safety, road safety and mobility education) are cross-curricular. Other aspects regarding the child in kindergarten are also covered: development and learning, sleeping/resting, feeding and other routine activities, relationships among children and between children and adults, the importance of space, the cooperation with parents. The curriculum emphasises the importance of communication for social learning and a flexibly managed, safe and supportive environment. The kindergarten staff must respect children's special traits and their right to choice.

In terms of educational approaches, child-centred approaches are emphasized. An alternation of **adult-led and child-initiated activities/play** is recommended (e.g. the kindergarten staff should provide a comfortable and supportive environment for learning which permits planned and unplanned activities, initiated by the teacher or by children themselves). An alternation of **(small) group activities and individual activities** is highlighted (e.g. the organization of activities allows the child's withdrawal from the group routines or the expression of his/her individuality). The two approaches are closely linked to the principle of **free play**. Free play brings together basic principles of preschool education in the most natural way and is understood as a means of the child's development and learning.

The Kindergarten Curriculum emphasizes and explains the role of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to the internal ideology of the kindergarten as an institution and is reflected in the ways the educational process is organized in time and space, how children's emotional reactions and biological needs are met, in what way punishment and reward are used, how preschool teachers implement their authority, how they react to children's comments, how much say children are given in deciding and choosing, how the space is organized and how materials for activities are prepared (with or without children's participation) (Bahovec & Kodolja, 1996). The hidden curriculum refers to the most ordinary routine repeated day by day that includes rules on time and space, communication between children and adults and among children, patterns of behaviour, habits, rituals. As stated in the Kindergarten Curriculum, the hidden curriculum includes many elements of the (educational) influence on a child that are not explicitly defined, but often have more effect than explicitly stated activities in the written curriculum. The Kindergarten Curriculum thus emphasizes that attention to daily routine is needed and it should be carried out in such a way that individual children's (and families') needs are met and their characteristics have the opportunity to be expressed (the right to choose and diversity).

The Kindergarten Curriculum contains the description of activity areas (i.e. learning areas, subject areas) and, for each of them, the goals, objectives and the examples of activities for children aged from 1 to 3 years, and from 3 to 6 years, and the role of the adult.

3.1.2 The Basic School Programme

The Basic School Programme consists of a compulsory and extended part. The compulsory programme includes compulsory and elective subjects as well as

class discussion periods (form time) and the so-called 'days of activities' (e.g. cross-curricular projects, field work). The extended programme – pupils may decide not to take part in the extended programme – includes after-school classes, morning care, remedial lessons, supplementary lessons, extracurricular activities and non-compulsory optional subjects.

The Basic School Programme is specified by the timetable and the curricula of compulsory and elective subjects and by guidelines and educational concepts that define other methods of work with children (morning care, after-school classes, extra-curricular activities, outdoor school), cross-curricular contents (days of activities, how to use libraries and information technologies) and other documents to guide the work of the education staff.

The individual subject curriculum includes the description, objectives and contents of the subject, attainment standards and didactical recommendations for teachers. Each subject curriculum stipulates minimal knowledge standards which pupils have to acquire. The curriculum also contains a detailed list of (minimum) knowledge standards.

The curricula for some subjects also include elective goals and topics (e.g. the Slovenian language) – teachers can decide whether to include these topics or not. The topics and attainment standards are defined on the level of three-year cycles (mostly for the first cycle, i.e. Years 1 to 3) and/or on the level of individual years; usually, when they are defined per year, they are only given as references or orientation points. Within this framework, teachers make autonomous decisions on teaching methods and adjustments in contents for specific circumstances.

The Basic School Programme stresses the importance of developing pupils' complex and critical thinking, creativity, the capability of expressing and justifying their ideas, an assertive approach to problem solving, teamwork and cooperation with others. It also mentions the importance of supporting the development of pupils' learning-to-learn skills, social and civic competences, digital literacy and entrepreneurship. It states cultural education as an important element of lifelong learning and promoting a respectful attitude towards other cultures and intercultural dialogue. The need to develop aesthetic sensitivity and evaluation of works of art and shape attitudes to art heritage and contemporary art is also noted. Creativity is defined as a natural and indispensable component of art and music development. It is suggested that processes and forms of creativity include the production (and reproduction) of art and creative expression of artistic experiences and performances.

The teacher's role is primarily to provide a stimulating learning and creative environment and specific situations that allow pupils to discover and create knowledge through various cognitive processes (e.g. observing, comparing, describing, classifying, sorting, inductive and deductive reasoning, demonstration, experimentation, problem solving, creating, etc.).

Teachers are encouraged to use active hands-on approach and diverse methods and forms of work. The curricula of some school subjects explicitly suggest a certain percentage of hours that should include active methods of work. They also suggest that pupils should work in small groups and pairs. Pupils should acquire knowledge through their own activities, research, creation and exploration, use of information technology, role play, project work, cooperative learning, etc. Teachers are advised to consider pupils' variety of cognitive

The Basic School Programme is specified by the timetable and the curricula of compulsory and elective subjects and by guidelines and educational concepts that define other methods of work with children, cross-curricular contents and other documents to guide the work of the education staff.

abilities, various types of intelligence and cognitive styles and to individualize and differentiate instruction. **The interdisciplinary links between school subjects are also suggested.** The goal of the interdisciplinary linking is viewed as a whole-school approach that promotes holistic learning and teaching.

The concept of activity days in basic school

The school programme includes so-called activity days. The objective of activity days is to enable pupils to consolidate and integrate the knowledge obtained in individual subjects and subject areas. Moreover, they represent a possibility for the application of knowledge and for upgrading practical learning by means of cooperation and response to current events in the local and wider social environments. Activity days are organized as whole-day activities for pupils on specific topics. Activities encourage pupils' curiosity, creativity and initiative. Pupils are encouraged to observe independently and gain experience and knowledge about various topics. **The emphasis is on cross-curricular (interdisciplinary) integration.**

There are four types of activity days: **cultural, science, sports and technical days.** There are 15 activity days (3-4 cultural, 3 science, 5 sports and 3-4 technical days) per school year. Activities are often organised in the form of project work, so that pupils' research and experimentation skills and competences are developed. Visits of experts, artists, sportsmen, etc. at school are also organised. Furthermore, pupils can visit various learning environments (e.g. cultural centres and other institutions, the botanical garden, the ZOO, the arboretum, the observatory, etc.). Activities are planned to encourage learning for cooperation between pupils within the class, between classes, between teachers and pupils and only between teachers.

3.1.3 The alignment/integration of the ECEC and school curriculum frameworks

The ECEC and the school curricula are harmonized to some extent since they were developed during the same curricular reform (1996-1999). Similar subject areas are covered in the Kindergarten Curriculum and in the subject curricula, especially for the first three-year cycle; in subsequent years, subjects are more specialized.

3.1.4 Continuity and coherence between ECEC and basic school regarding language learning

In regard to language learning, the [Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2014–2018](#) (available also [in English](#)) was adopted in 2013. In November 2015 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia approved two implementation documents: the [Action plan for language education](#) and the [Action plan for language infrastructure](#) which concretise aims and measures of the resolution and specify the timeframes. The Action plan for language

education covers the following topics: Slovenian as the first language; Slovenian as the second or/and foreign language; Slovenian outside the territory of the Republic Slovenia; languages of minorities and immigrants in Slovenia; foreign languages; special needs; language policy in higher education and science.

In the area of literacy, numerous projects were carried out in Slovenia (e.g. ['Empowering pupils through improving their reading literacy and access to knowledge'](#)), which examined various aspects of literacy and contributed to the improvement of reading literacy together with the results of PISA and PIRLS. In the project ['Development of reading literacy: diagnostic tools for evaluating reading literacy and the creation of a reading literacy model'](#) several tools for the assessment of language competence and reading literacy were developed for various ages of children, also as a support of one of the objective's of preschool education: 'the nurture of language development for effective and creative use of speech, later also reading and writing'. They can be used by psychologists, pedagogues, special pedagogues or other counselors and preschool/school teachers ...

Furthermore, the [National strategy for the development of literacy](#) (prepared by the National Committee for the Development of Literacy) which covers all ages from childhood to adulthood was adopted in 2006 by all relevant Councils of Experts (general education, technical and vocational education, higher education, adult education). This allows for the continuity and coherence of the literacy (language) development. In this document, the general objectives and basic principles of the literacy strategy are presented. Furthermore, the specific objectives and levels of literacy for the preschool age period (0-6 years), basic school ages (6-9 years, 9-12 years, 12-15 years), upper secondary age (15-19 years), tertiary age period (19-25 years) and adults are presented. To achieve the objectives of the national strategy, adequate programmes, qualified staff, a network of providers, the organization of the system as a whole, funding and yearly action plans are needed. The national strategy emphasizes that attention to the literacy of vulnerable groups is needed. In 2014, a working group was appointed to review and supplement the national strategy; the working group is cross-sectoral and operates within the Ministry of Education. Their work is in progress.

The Kindergarten Curriculum (area of activity Language) and the basic school curriculum for the Slovenian Language both recognize **language as a basis of the individual's identity**. The development of the communication competence (oral, written) and creativity are highlighted. In regard to language learning in kindergarten, research shows (Marjanovič Umek, Zupančič, Fekonja, & Kavčič, 2003; Marjanovič & Fekonja, 2006) that an adequate support of children's language development remains an issue and a challenge for preschool teachers and assistants.

The last White Paper on Education (2011) suggested **strengthening the activities for language development and early literacy in kindergarten**. Special attention is given to children whose mother tongue is not the same as the language of instruction (Slovene, Italian/Hungarian in ethnically mixed areas).

Foreign languages in kindergartens are most often offered by external services as an afternoon course subject to a fee. In Year 1 of basic school, the first foreign language is optional. The instruction of a compulsory first foreign language begins in Year 2 (see page 17, note 3).

The language development of ethnic minorities: Slovenia has a long-standing tradition of bilingual education settings in the context of minorities' legal right to be educated in their own languages, to know their cultures and to develop their national identities (for details, see the [Act Regulating the Exercise of the Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education](#)). In the Italian ethnic minority area, education may be provided in two ways: the language of instruction can be Slovenian and the children/pupils/students learn Italian or the language of instruction is Italian and children/pupils/students learn Slovenian. Bilingual education is provided in kindergartens and schools where the Hungarian ethnic minority resides.

3.1.5 Flexibility of regional and local authorities, settings and staff to adapt the curriculum framework

The Kindergarten Curriculum is considered a binding document for public kindergartens and also some private kindergartens. As an open and flexible national document, **the Kindergarten Curriculum allows/expects the kindergarten educational staff to make autonomous and responsible expert decisions within the proposed principles and guidelines** in regard to the selection of goals, activities, appropriate methods of work for pre-school children – to choose what, when and how activities are implemented. Time allocated to each area of activity is not prescribed, but it is expected to be balanced; the Curriculum stipulates that at the implementation level it is necessary that activity areas are mutually intertwined and also intertwined with daily routine (e.g. the theme of sound is treated in artistic activities, nature, society, mathematics, language, and physical activities, but also when children are getting ready to rest, have a meal, have their diapers changed, etc.).

The Basic School Programme is considered binding for public schools (private schools follow their own programmes that must be approved by the Expert Council for General Education). **It allows for less flexibility compared to the Kindergarten Curriculum.** The curricula for each basic school subject typically include the list of compulsory and elective contents, related objectives and knowledge standards a pupil should meet. Minimum knowledge standards are given. Knowledge standards, objectives and topics for each subject are usually structured per cycle (mostly in the first 3-year cycle – Years 1 to 3), which gives teachers some flexibility in which year a certain topic will be discussed and in which year each pupil will achieve the knowledge standard. **Teachers thus make autonomous decisions in regard to teaching methods** and adjustments in contents for specific circumstances. Moreover, a school is free to organise the weekly number of lessons within each year differently from what the curriculum stipulates (a flexible timetable).

3.1.6 Changes in ECEC and/or the school curriculum in the last five years

The Kindergarten Curriculum has not been amended since 1999. The Basic School Programme was adopted in 1999. The renewed curricula for compulsory subjects complemented by new knowledge of individual professional domains and by an emphasis on the development of key competences were introduced in 2011.

3.2 Pedagogy

3.2.1 Pedagogical approaches in ECEC and/or basic school

The Framework of the Curricular Reform (1996) sets the principle to be applied to all levels of education, which is that **the programmes and curricula are goal-, development- and content-oriented**. Kroflič (1997) writes that the values and objectives stipulated in the White Paper on Education (1995) and the Framework of the Curricular Reform (1996) demand a shift from the traditional cultural-transmission model (in which the aim of education is the transmission of a predetermined body of knowledge to a pupil), to the developmental-process approach (in which knowledge and experience are also transmitted, but the development of the child's potential is a priority).

The following section presents the main ideas and theories for ECEC and primary education.

The Kindergarten Curriculum is based on the developmental process approach (taking into account the child's individual traits and the development of each child as a more important goal than achieving the prescribed results). It reflects a contemporary view of the child's development and is based on scientific findings on the early child development, the importance of early learning and language development and the critical periods in development (e.g. the social developmental theories of Bruner, Vygotsky's social constructivism).

In the Curriculum, early learning (education) is emphasized from the youngest age; there is no distinction between the ways the younger and older pre-school children are treated (no distinction between care and education); the document pertains to both groups of children. **All developmental areas (cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical/motor) are to be encouraged through the entire period (there is no exclusive emphasis on care for younger children or developing academic skills for those entering school the following year); goals of activity areas are determined for both groups.** The importance of the course of daily routine, the encouragement of social interactions and the use of language are highlighted. The Kindergarten curriculum is not understood just as a list of topics or activities which have to be carried out, but is an integration of all activities, interactions, experiences and learning that children have in the kindergarten (including the hidden curriculum).

There are several principles a preschool teacher should follow (e.g. the principle of choice and diversity, the principle of balance between developmental areas). The Kindergarten Curriculum states that preschool teachers are

The Kindergarten curriculum is not understood just as a list of topics or activities which have to be carried out, but is an integration of all activities, interactions, experiences and learning that children have in the kindergarten (including the hidden curriculum).

autonomous in choosing appropriate methods of work and techniques; there are, however, descriptions of the adults' roles under each activity area (how an adult can further support the development, what kinds of method can be used, the issues adults need to pay attention to).

The school curriculum is also based on social developmental theories of Bruner and Vygotsky's social constructivism. It stresses the importance of the child's active participation in knowledge construction and states the importance of the developmental process approach.

For basic school, the curricula for each subject include didactical recommendations for teachers. Suggestions about individualization, assessment, the use of information technology and cross-curricular links can be found in this section. **The aim of didactic recommendations is to increase the pupil's active participation in knowledge acquisition, the development of skills and competences and a pupil-centred learning process.** Teachers are autonomous in choosing appropriate methods of work and techniques.

3.2.2 The main differences between a regular school day (in Year 1 of basic school) and the last year of ECEC

A typical day in a kindergarten is very similar in all age groups (the last year is no different from other years). It starts with the morning arrivals of children, followed by breakfast (around 8.30 am). After breakfast, planned (structured) activities start according to the programme, they intertwine with free play indoors or outdoors (including trips and walks); children have a snack in between. They have lunch around noon, followed by time for rest (sleep and quiet activities) and an afternoon snack (until parents pick them up – the majority around 3 pm, but can be as late as 5.30 pm; the White Paper on Education, 2011). Afternoon activities are usually less structured and are initiated/chosen by children indoors or outdoors.

In basic school, instruction normally starts around 8 am. First-year pupils can attend the morning care before instruction free of charge; the morning care may start up to two hours before regular instruction; 72 % of first-year pupils attend morning care (the administrative data, MESS 2015/16). The school timetable schedules lessons for each day in the week. Depending on a school and a teacher, the Year 1 timetable can follow structured lessons of 45 minutes with 5-minute breaks or the distribution of lessons and breaks is more flexible (adjusted to children's needs, attention, interests etc.). The Ministry's document [Working paper on content and organizational questions in the 9-year elementary schools](#) explicitly states that the length of school hours in Year 1 is not prescribed. In between the lessons, children have a longer (20- to 30-minute) break for a light meal (the break takes place around 10 am). Lessons end around 11.30 and are followed by lunch and after-school programmes (not compulsory, but free of charge); pupils do their homework, learn, take part in various activities, have a light meal; 93% of pupils in Year 1 attend them (the administrative data, MESS, 2016). After-school programmes are available until around 5 pm.

Thus, the main difference is that **a regular day in school is more structured compared to a kindergarten day** (it usually has a fixed weekly schedule of

45-minute lessons) and **has more structured activities (lessons)**. Teachers in Year 1 may organize lessons more flexibly (and not follow 45-minute units). The difference is also that a school day is divided into a compulsory part (8 am to 11.30 am) and a non-compulsory part (before and after the compulsory part). The compulsory part of the school day does not include breakfast or time for rest after lunch. However, the time for rest and a meal (breakfast or a light meal) are provided in the non-compulsory morning care and after-school programmes.

According to the [Basic School Act](#), Year 1 pupils are entitled to free school transportation, free morning care and free after-school programmes. The school has to provide at least one meal; schools typically provide breakfast, a morning snack, lunch, an afternoon snack (meals can be free of charge depending on the family economic situation); in kindergartens, meals are included in the cost of the programme.

3.3 Child development

3.3.1 Child development monitoring tools and practices commonly in place in the transition year only

The only monitoring tool in the year before the child starts school is **a medical health check for all 6-year olds**. Parents receive a written invitation for their child's health check-up which is usually done at the Community Health Centre.

Within the setting (kindergarten) there are no specific monitoring tools for the child's development in the year before the child starts school. As mentioned before, the most common monitoring tool is observation only (no written records). Each kindergarten decides on how this is recorded (various protocols, the child's portfolio etc.).

Assessment of the child's 'readiness for school' is limited to children for whom it was suggested to postpone their admission to school for one year. There are no prescribed (psychological) tests for assessing readiness for school, but can be used (they can be administered by school counselling service). Schools can also cooperate with counselling services from other schools or with external institutions for testing purposes (e.g. with the Department for Mental Health within the Community Health Centre; with the Counselling Centre for Children, Adolescents and Parents).

The NEIS experts say that preschool teachers are good at observations, but these observations are rarely systematic and recorded in a written form. Experts also report that there has been a lot of in-service training for preschool teachers on the topic of the child's portfolio and view the portfolio as a helpful tool to boost the child's participation and ease her/his transition to school; there are some examples of good practice where a child brought her/his kindergarten portfolio to Year 1 and discussed it with the primary education teacher.

There was a strong tradition of school readiness testing in Slovenia (*Test šolskih novincev* – Test for school entrants, Toličič & Skerget, 1966; *Preizkus pripravljenosti otrok za šolo (POŠ)* – Assessment of children's school readiness (ACSR), Toličič, 1986). With the introduction of the compulsory Educational

Assessment of the child's 'readiness for school' is limited to children for whom it was suggested to postpone their admission to school for one year.

programme for preparing preschool children for school in 1981, school readiness testing was compulsory. In the early 1990's, the school readiness assessment was no longer compulsory for all children; it was compulsory only for the school-aged children who did not turn seven by the end of the calendar year in which they started school (Marjanovič Umek & Zupančič, 2004).

With the termination of the compulsory Educational programme for preparing preschool children for school, the curricular reform (1996-1999), which included conceptual and systemic solutions to the new [Kindergarten Act](#) and [Basic School Act](#)) and lowering the school entry age, the ACSR test was no longer adequate. It was adapted to one year younger children and [new norms on a smaller sample](#) were developed in the 1998. **The test measures verbal comprehension, reasoning, graphomotor skills and the perception of quantities.** A new version was developed for research purposes later on – with updated pictures and scoring (*Preizkus pripravljenosti za šolo – PPŠ* – Assessment of school readiness (ASR), Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja & Bajc, 2005). According to the NEIS expert for counselling service, the ACSR test is rarely used in practice and there is a need for a new diagnostic/screening tool. As noted by the authors of the 1998 adaptation (Marjanovič Umek, 1999), developing a new instrument (or a battery of them) would be more appropriate, and several steps in this direction have already been made. The following standardized instruments for school readiness assessment are available: The [scale of general language development](#) (LSGR-LJ, Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja Peklaj, Podlesek, Kranjc & Grgič, 2008), [Social competence and behaviour evaluation](#) (SV-O, La Freniere, Dumas, Zupančič, Gril & Kavčič, 2001), [Wechsler Intelligence Scale](#) (WPPSI-III, Wechsler et al., 2013), etc.

Related to the topic, a 102-item teacher-reported instrument 'Profile of functioning of 5-year-olds before school entry' has been developed recently (Ozbić, Kogovšek, Zver, 2011). It aims to detect potential learning difficulties and the child's strengths prior to/at the school entry. The following areas are assessed by the child's preschool teacher on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = never/nothing/the characteristic is not present to 5 = always/a lot/the characteristic is very pronounced): early mathematics, early literacy, graphomotor skills, visual motor skills, graphic skills, meta-literary skills, orientation in time and space, meta-cognition, behavioural regulation, language and speech, communication, interests, cognition, verbal memory, verbal retrieval, knowledge, speed of learning, lexical fluency, early use of symbols, empathy, creativity, self-perception, play. The instrument is not standardized; however, it is used in practice.

3.3.2 Children and/or parents' involvement in the child development monitoring practice in the final year before basic school

The NEIS experts report that **children are usually not involved in monitoring their own development**; exceptions are those preschool teachers who use portfolios. Some preschool teachers who use portfolios to monitor child development report that they try to include children in choosing the products they want to put in their portfolios. However, such cases are rare.

Cooperation with parents is emphasised in the Kindergarten Curriculum (e.g. parents have a right to a continuous and real-time exchange of information; while cooperating with parents, the private sphere of families, their cultures, languages, life philosophies, values, views and traditions should be respected). Cooperation with parents is stipulated also in the AWP of kindergartens. At the practical level, **parents are involved in monitoring their child's development** mostly through informative meetings and individual consultations with preschool teachers. In these sessions, the preschool teacher and parent talk about the child development and progress (the parent can see the child's products, drawings, give feedback, express concerns, etc.), school readiness and any other issues.

The NEIS experts and kindergarten heads report that parents of children with special needs are more involved in monitoring their development. They participate in the expert team meetings where the development of their child is discussed and actively contribute to planning the transition to school. The collaboration/involvement of parents of children with special needs is stipulated also in the [Placement of Children with Special Needs Act](#).

3.3.3 Additional support for children with developmental delay in the final year before starting primary education

If a preschool teacher or a parent notices potential delays in development, they involve the kindergarten counselling service. This can be done any time during preschool education (not only in the last year before school). At first the child is given support by his/her preschool teacher and the kindergarten counselling service. If the child needs more support, a special needs referral is possible upon parental request (the kindergarten can also submit a request), however, it is not common in kindergarten (for details, see [Placement of Children with Special Needs Act](#)). Usually a lot of support is provided by the preschool teacher and/or counselling service. If a child is placed in a special needs programme, the NEIS decree which places special needs children in such programmes specifies the support (amount, type) and modifications of the programme. In the year before school, the children with special needs decrees are issued with new decrees which state their support and modifications at school (the new decree is not issued automatically, it is done upon parental request). The enrolment of a child can also be postponed.

3.4 Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/basic school on pedagogical continuity

Preschool and school teachers working in these settings **can be members of the NEIS bodies** which prepare the curricula (based on various innovation projects and other projects conducted by other institutions). According to the [Organization and Financing of Education Act](#), the educational staff **can also be members of the Expert Council for General Education** which adopts/confirms the curricula.

Preschool and school teachers are actively involved in the preparation of the curricula. The NEIS working groups are composed of teachers, university and NEIS experts and they prepare the curricula.

Moreover, as members of the educational staff are also members of the Expert Council for General Education, teachers are directly involved in adopting/confirming the curricula. At least a quarter of all members (26 + president) are part of the education staff at kindergartens, schools and educational institutions for SEN children.

The involvement of preschool and school teachers was more extensive in the 1990's when the curricular reform took place. At that time, the commission for pre-school education (appointed by the NCC; members were experts from universities, educational advisers from various institutions, such as the NEIS and the Educational Research Institute, and representatives from kindergartens) prepared a draft of the curriculum which took account of the NCC's principles and methodology. All Slovenian preschool teachers were invited to participate in the verification of the curriculum via surveys and meetings of 'study groups' where they were able to discuss the draft curriculum. The conclusions of the discussions were sent to the authors of the draft curriculum. The members of the curricular commission prepared an analysis of how the preschool teachers' comments were integrated into the draft. That analysis was disseminated to the preschool teachers and included in the documents which were submitted together with the final version of the curriculum proposals.

All Slovenian preschool teachers were invited to participate in the verification of the curriculum via surveys and meetings of 'study groups' where they were able to discuss the draft curriculum. The conclusions of the discussions were sent to the authors of the draft curriculum.

4 Developmental continuity

This chapter is concerned with how developmental continuity is established in Slovenia. It considers the involvement of various stakeholders in the child's development.

4.1 Collaborations with the child

4.1.1 Preparing children for basic school

As already mentioned, the Kindergarten Curriculum explicitly states that early childhood should not be understood as the preparation for the next level(s) of education (kindergarten should not become 'schoolified'), however, it emphasizes a smooth transition and connection between kindergarten and school. The last year before school is not viewed any differently than other years in the preschool period; rather it is seen as a continuum. **In the Kindergarten Curriculum there are no separate guidelines nor activities for the last year before school.** Throughout the preschool period, developmental pertinence of activities is highlighted. However, within activity areas (e.g. language, mathematics), cross-curricular areas and routine activities (e.g. sleeping/resting, meals) many activities in kindergarten take place that help children develop relevant competences and skills.

The NEIS experts and some kindergarten heads highlight the following competences that are being developed in kindergarten (all deriving from the Kindergarten Curriculum) as particularly relevant for functioning in the school environment. **Developing these competences is not seen as the preparation for school, but as developmentally pertinent activities supporting the child's learning and development in the preschool period:** developing autonomy of children in all areas (e.g. to be able to dress on their own, to go to the toilet – take care of themselves); encouraging metacognitive abilities; introducing and using written language, developing phonological awareness; understanding and using mathematical knowledge; understanding basic principles of scientific research; using technical terms within subject areas; knowing the differences between kindergarten and school; developing concern for safety; being able to focus and persist in activities; being able to make decisions and take responsibility for decisions; improving general knowledge ('widening horizons'); developing the competence of cooperation with others.

Some heads report that children use notebooks and practice orientation on paper in the year or two before school. Some preschool teachers use worksheets for various activities. There are various play corners in the playroom (a book corner, cooking corner, science corner, arts corner, media corner, board games corner, etc.), where they can develop writing, numerical and other skills (children choose where they want to play). Children play various didactic games (e.g. with dice to learn counting). They also visit the library, theatre, etc. Thus preschool teachers follow/respond to the interests and developmental

The Kindergarten Curriculum explicitly states that early childhood should not be understood as the preparation for the next level(s) of education.

levels of children. It should be emphasized that emerging and early literacy and numeracy activities take place in kindergarten, but are not viewed as a preparation for school (e.g. Saksida, 2010, emphasizes the importance of early literacy skills).

None of these activities are prescribed, there are variations from one pre-school teacher to another in how many and which activities (s)he would plan and implement.

According to the interviews with heads, **the most common practices** kindergartens and schools apply to help with the transition are:

(1) **kindergartens**: (a) conversations between preschool teachers and children about school, the development of emerging and early literacy, independence in dressing and personal hygiene, (b) organizing meetings and lectures for parents (in the kindergarten) and (c) visits to schools;

(2) **schools**: (a) visits (kindergarten children visit the first-year children during instruction and first-year pupils visit the kindergarten), (b) meetings with parents and children in schools in the final year (future first-year pupils and their parents are invited to school where they meet their future teachers and head teacher and get to know the school environment) and (c) various art, cultural and sports events to which children from kindergartens are invited.

4.1.2 Children's views on the preparation for basic school in ECEC

Based on interviews with heads and the NEIS experts, **children's views and opinions on the preparation for school are not really taken into account** (the fact that preschool teachers have conversations with children on the topic does not ensure children's participation, it is more about informing children of what is going to happen).

4.2 Collaborations with the home environment

The Kindergarten Curriculum emphasizes cooperation with parents. **In regard to transition, kindergarten and school practices are well-established.** Most commonly, parents are involved in the transition process through parents' meetings organised by kindergartens and schools.

Heads report that **most schools organise parent meetings in January** (9 months before school starts). This is an introductory meeting where they explain the organisation of the school and their expectations for children. Most importantly, they give parents all the information about the enrolment of the child, which in Slovenia takes place in February. **In February, schools organise admission procedures for children.** They are usually accompanied with some activities for children in classrooms. The last meeting before school starts is usually organised **in June. Parents and children come to school and meet the teachers and other future first-year pupils.** Parents get the list of textbooks and other materials they need to buy.

Heads report that most kindergartens organise at least one or two meetings for parents whose children attend the final year before school. The purpose

of the meetings is to explain to parents what the school environment will be like for children, so they can prepare them for the change. Sometimes school counsellors from the nearest school also attend these meetings in order to help present the school environment and the transition process to the parents.

Moreover, kindergartens have to prepare **special publications for parents** where they present their programmes, goals, topics and methods of work. Compulsory parts of the publication are determined by the Minister. Schools were obliged to prepare the publication, but now they have to provide the same information on their websites (about the school, the programme, the organization of school work in accordance with the AWP, the rights and duties of pupils, house rules and other information). However, the information must be available in print at the school.

In regard to the Roma community, a lot of effort is put into establishing links and creating trust between kindergartens/schools and the local Roma community by means of projects. **Roma assistants** usually act as a link between the two environments (Roma assistants help with the language, establishing the first contact). Kindergartens/schools organize activities in the settings (e.g. workshops, visits of Roma children to the afternoon groups in kindergarten, New Year's gifts) and in the community (e.g. workshops).

4.3 Collaborations at the setting level

The most common collaboration to ensure good transitions for the child is **visits to school**. These visits help children get acquainted with the environment – the space and people (adults, pupils); in some cases children also meet their future school teacher.

Visits can take various forms and can be a one-time event or a series of them. Some heads report that kindergartens and schools collaborate closely in planning these visits – the kindergarten and school teams have meetings together to plan the visits and are jointly responsible for their realization (including the counselling service and heads or head deputies). Visits usually start in the beginning of the calendar year (children start school in September in the same calendar year). When children from kindergarten visit school, several forms are possible which mainly differ in whether the activity involves only kindergarten children or also first-year pupils:

1. the event is **only for kindergarten children** and includes **a tour of the school** (may include a meal) and some activities (e.g. in a gym) or a visit to the school library, science classroom, etc.
2. **kindergarten children and the first-year pupils have some activities together** – e.g. in the gym, in the library
3. **kindergarten children visit the first-year pupils in their classrooms to attend instruction (lessons)** - usually the first-year pupils and their teachers prepare some activities or a performance for kindergarten children and have some small presents for them – drawings, etc; the first-year pupils lend them their school supplies and offer assistance
4. **kindergarten children have a lesson in a Year 1 classroom** (the first-year pupils are not there)

5. kindergarten children are **invited to a large school event** (e.g. school fairs, exhibitions, concerts, performances).

One or all of these visits may take place as a special kind of kindergarten-school collaboration (however, they are not prescribed). According to some interviews with heads, these connections and collaborations depend mostly on the personalities, competences and readiness of teachers, preschool teachers and kindergarten and school counsellors.

The visits between kindergarten and school can also be mutual (the first-year pupils visit kindergarten, get to know each other, play together; and vice versa – kindergarten children come to visit the first-year pupils).

Professional networks for sharing practices are the so-called **study groups** which operate within the NEIS. The NEIS has several regional units that organize study groups; groups are arranged separately for preschool teachers, counsellors and heads, they meet regularly (four times per year either in person or on-line) and discuss various topics.

The collaboration between settings in organizing visits for children mainly aims at ensuring a smooth transitions for children. However, some heads report they see these visits also as an assurance of pedagogical continuity between kindergarten and school – **when planning visits, preschool and primary school teachers together develop common topics and methods of work** (e.g. both groups agree to work on the language/speech competences of children in relation to creativity, share ideas, experiences, and practices). Moreover, mutual visits also ensure continuity for the first-year pupils and maintain the link with their preschool experience (when they return to visit the kindergarten and show their progress to their former preschool teachers).

In terms of collaboration between kindergartens and schools, **the organizational status of kindergarten is very relevant** (see page 23). Slovenian kindergartens and schools can be completely independent from each other (two separate settings) or a kindergarten can be affiliated with a school. When they are affiliated, they usually share some (or all) facilities. This fact also affects the transition practices they implement. When they are affiliated and share the same facilities, they also collaborate more in the transition process. When they are not affiliated and especially in larger towns where children from many kindergartens are enrolled in one school, the transition practices become more difficult to implement and are also less efficient. Since these practices are not defined by any legal document, schools and kindergartens are left to decide how they will be implemented (transition activities are in their AWP).

Kindergartens and schools usually cooperate in determining the child's school readiness. According to the [Rules on the collection and protection of personal data in elementary education](#), the information about a child which is necessary for decision-making in the process of determining the child school readiness may be obtained from the kindergarten.

4.4 Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organisations

Medical services (health centres) are involved in the transition of children. On the country level, all 6-year-olds are **checked-up by paediatricians** in a health care organisation before starting school. The check-up includes medical examination and a quick screening of basic competences. Doctors may suggest deferring the admission. A doctor is also a member of the school committee responsible for the assessment and evaluation of school readiness.

Moreover, **a school may collaborate with external services in assessing school readiness** (e.g. psychological testing – the Department for Mental Health within a Community Health Centre, the Counselling Centre for Children, Adolescents and Parents).

School and kindergarten counsellors are the main experts who plan and implement the transitions besides teachers and preschool teachers (for special-needs children/pupils also teachers for additional expert assistance).

For **the transitions of children who obtained special-needs decrees in kindergarten**, a new application has to be filed by parents for the referral to a special needs school setting. The kindergarten counselling service helps parents to arrange the documentation in time for the child to get appropriate support from the first day of school.

5 Challenges

This chapter's intention is to collect information on what challenges Slovenia experiences in transitions in general, and in ensuring professional, pedagogical and developmental continuity in particular.

5.1 Main challenges

There is no pressure for a decentralisation or recentralization of the transition system. Since the Ministry of Education is responsible for preschool education and for basic education (integrated primary and lower secondary levels), there is no tension or lack of collaboration at the level of national authorities.

As already mentioned, **the topic of transitions received a lot of attention when the curricular reform took place between 1996-1999**. A lot of attention was given to gradual implementation of the new programme and to adequate in-service training of teachers working in Year 1 (primary education teachers and preschool teachers). It was compulsory for Year 1 teachers to enrol in the Supplementary Study Programme at the Faculties of Education and complete some modules before they started teaching the 'new' Year 1. Furthermore, it was suggested that the primary education teacher should follow the same group of pupils from Year 1 to Year 3 (White Paper on Education, 1995), whereas the second teacher (the preschool teacher) could return to work in kindergarten and then come to work again in school.

Following that period, the topic of transitions was disregarded over the last 10 years in public and political discourses. The results of the on-line survey conducted for the purpose of data collection for this CBR, the interviews with kindergarten/school heads and the NEIS experts and the MESS administrative data show that the main challenge facing transitions today is that, in general, it is no longer carried out as it was conceived in the 1990's and that large differences between settings and teachers exist regarding the understanding and the implementation of a smooth transition. Firstly, **the majority of second teachers in Year 1 are primary education (and not preschool) teachers**. Secondly, out of more than 100 kindergartens and schools which participated in the on-line survey, only one reported that the preschool teacher 'transited' between the kindergarten and Year 1. Last but not least, the fact is that **the share of children whose school admission was postponed, has been steadily increasing** over the last five years. Another very consistent challenge that has emerged is **the transfer of information about an individual child between the kindergarten and school** in regards to the protection of personal data.

On the other hand, some attempts to question the adequacy of Year 1 for six-year olds can be observed recently; the questions go in the direction of whether Year 1 is too demanding and not adapted for six-year olds and, relating to this, the possibility of a postponement of the child's admission to school. The issue has been present in the media recently (e.g. *Prvi dnevnik*, 14 September

2015; Delo, 25 January 2016, <http://www.delo.si/nedelo/odlog-solanja-vsak-otrok-je-primer-zase-ni-pravila.html>). A NEIS expert attributed such attempts to the overprotectiveness of children. On the other hand, parents also report that their children are bored at school in Year 1 and that their potential is not being developed. The results of a recent study (Vidmar, 2012) indeed demonstrate large differences between children in literacy and numeracy competences at the school entry (within the first few weeks in Year 1, N=325); about 27 % of children can identify all the letters of the alphabet, whereas about 18 % cannot identify a single letter and about 8 % of children can read (out loud with very few mistakes); almost 50 % of children can identify numbers up to 20, about 13 % cannot identify a single number.

This issue is very sensitive in many respects and various interpretations occur, which requires further investigation.

5.1.1 Main challenges on ensuring continuities

Professional continuity

Preschool teachers and primary school teachers have both tertiary education, but at different levels: **preschool teachers have ISCED 6 and primary education teachers ISCED 7** (according to the ISCED, 2011). However, an interview with an expert from the Faculty of Education shows that **preschool and primary teachers have different professional identities and different understanding of their own professional missions**: the primary school teacher's mission is to teach (they also feel strained by the curricula and the achievement of goals and standards therein), whereas the preschool teacher's mission is to support the child's learning and development and help develop values, attitudes, habits. Preschool teachers perceive kindergartens primarily as a place where education and upbringing take place and not as a service shaped by external demands (e.g. preparing children for school, parental employment, Turnšek, 2002).

Pedagogical continuity

Even though the kindergarten and school curricula were developed during the same curricular reform and share the same principles and framework, the interview with the expert from the Faculty of Education shows that, **in kindergarten, the focus is on the process, whereas in school, there is more focus on achievement, outcomes, results, knowledge standards**.

Heads report that there is a big difference between methods and learning approaches teachers use in kindergartens and in schools.¹² Even though the Kindergarten Curriculum and the school subject curricula both stipulate goals that need to be reached, the methods teachers use in schools are less pupil-centred than in kindergartens. Heads report there is a lot of sitting and listening to teachers and less playing, cooperative learning and active participation

¹² Please note this is the qualitative data based on interviews with heads and not with preschool and primary education teachers.

of children in the instruction process. On a similar note, Bahovec and Bregar Golobič (2004) indicate that even the joint work of primary education teachers and preschool teachers in the first year did not contribute to a more pronounced exercise of pedagogical continuity (i.e. the influence of kindergarten on school; even though this was one of the important objectives of the reform measures). The institutional temptation to 'schoolify' preschool teachers and the kindergarten curricular principles was very strong; the institutional resistance to making the first year more like kindergarten was stronger than the institutional resistance of kindergarten and preschool teachers to 'schoolifying'. In its basic methods of work, the new first year of the reformed nine-year school is more similar to the first year of previous basic school than to the kindergarten and the prevailing new way of work in it.

However, an evaluation study (Polak, 2008) of the first 3-year cycle in the basic school (i.e. Years 1 to 3) has shown that the majority of the educational staff changed their methods of teaching, so that they were more appropriate for younger pupils (more practical work, experiential learning, didactical games, work in pairs or in groups, etc.).

Still, both studies are a decade old now and to cite an expert of the NEIS, 'We do not have a comprehensive picture of what is going on in the first year – it all very much depends on an individual teacher and head's ability to select the right teachers.' **This indicates the need for further research and data collection.**

When comparing the kindergarten and school curricula, it can be observed that in the Kindergarten Curriculum routine activities (e.g. resting/sleeping, feeding, transition between activities, rules) and the organization of space are explicitly viewed as part of the hidden curriculum. Routine activities, communication patterns and the organization of space are highlighted and viewed as an integral part of learning and upbringing. In the school curricula, these activities are also mentioned, but not elaborated to such an extent as in the kindergarten one. For example, the [Guidelines for meals in educational settings](#) stipulate educational goals related to meals (e.g. developing a healthy lifestyle, developing responsibility for oneself, one's health and environment). In the opinion of Bregar Golobič (2014), it seems that the curricular shift in the treatment of physical environment (space) is implemented much slower and less systematically in schools than in kindergartens.

The expert from the NEIS also reports the difference between preschool and school teachers in their understanding of the importance of physical contact with children; preschool teachers view this as an integral part of their work with children (to hug, to hold), whereas primary school teachers more often consider this as inappropriate.¹³

Interviews with heads reveal that kindergartens and schools in general have different expectations of how children should be prepared for school.¹⁴

Year 1 teachers in general expect children to come to school prepared to sit still the entire instruction hour. Heads also report that teachers expect children to be able, for example, to hold a pencil correctly, to stay within lines when colouring a drawing, to draw straight lines, to complete working sheets according to instructions (even though this was not intended by the curricular reform

Routine activities, communication patterns and the organization of space are highlighted and viewed as an integral part of learning and upbringing. In the school curricula, these activities are also mentioned, but not elaborated to such an extent as in the kindergarten one.

¹³ See note 12.

¹⁴ See note 12.

1996-1999). On the other hand, preschool teachers in kindergarten follow activity areas stipulated in the Kindergarten Curriculum and, within them, focus their attention also on children's practical skills such as taking care of their own things, dressing up on their own, using toilet on their own, etc., and expect that children will develop the above mentioned competences and skills in the first year of schooling. Moreover, in kindergarten children are reminded all the time about these things (e.g. wash your hands, go to the toilet, dress up, clean up), whereas in school these things are expected to be taken care of without adults' guidance. These different subjective perspectives about the role of kindergarten in preparing for school cause tensions and misunderstandings between schools and kindergartens and affect children's transition to school. In a kindergarten interview, it has been reported that such tensions have been detected. As a result, the kindergarten plans a meeting with the school team to discuss the different expectations and try to harmonize them.

These data and information indicate that **there is a need for further research and data collection.**

Developmental continuity

Collaboration with parents in the issues of transitions is very good (individual consultations about the child development in kindergarten, a parent can suggest the postponement of entering school, informative meetings at school prior to the school entry). Some kindergarten heads report in their interviews that some parents started to put pressure on preschool teachers to prepare children for schools.

In regard to the collaboration between kindergarten and school, the challenge that keeps surfacing is **the transfer of information about an individual child between the two settings**. Kindergarten and school heads report that schools complain they do not get enough information about children from kindergartens. The main reason for this is legislative, i.e. the [Personal Data Protection Act](#), [Basic School Act](#) and [Rules on the collection and protection of personal data in elementary education](#). The legislation provides a list of data that school is allowed to collect and also for what purposes (the Information Commissioner has issued [Guidelines for protection of personal data in schools](#)). This situation is quite different from the time before 1990's.

Until 1991, all children were tested for school readiness and discussed by the school readiness committee composed of the kindergarten and school staff and a physician. In this way, a lot of information passed from kindergarten to school, but not all of it was relevant. Children may not have been given an opportunity to have a clean start, but may have been stigmatized from the start of school by the information provided by the kindergarten. Moreover, schools used the information about a child to 'normalize' classes (White Paper on Education, 1995; e.g. not to put two children characterized as 'problematic' in the same class). They also used the data on children's scores on the readiness tests and their socio-economic status. That was a misuse of the school readiness assessment which happened when the assessment was compulsory for all children.

Schools are now allowed only to collect the data listed in the [Basic School Act](#), which prevents automatic sharing of information about a child between institutions. The collection of some of these data (eg. collection of personal

data for children and pupils who need help and counselling) and other personal data which is not specified by law and the transfer of personal data from kindergartens to schools are possible only on the basis of a written consent of parents and a precise definition of the purpose of the collection. By legislation, schools may get information from a kindergarten about the children who are in the process of school readiness evaluation (for the postponement of schooling). The legislation ([Rules on the collection and protection of personal data in elementary education](#)) stipulates that the committee evaluating school readiness may obtain information about a child that is needed to decide about the child's school readiness from the kindergarten.

It seems that, on the one hand, **kindergartens are pressured by schools to provide information on children, but on the other hand, they are bounded by the protection of the child's personal data**. These are the reasons some kindergartens encourage parents to share as much of relevant information about their child as possible with the school (also the information on what a preschool teacher told parents about a child – areas where a child needs additional support, individual help), and some kindergartens encourage children to take their portfolios to Year 1.

The protection of personal data poses particular challenges for kindergartens and schools that are independent (compared to schools that have a kindergarten as one of their units (kindergartens affiliated with the school)).

The conclusion that follows from these findings is that schools are discouraged from trying to connect with kindergartens in regard to an individual child, which makes it difficult to ensure the continuity of information at the level of a child. It seems that **training of the kindergarten and school staff on how to deal with sensitive personal data is needed as well as clearer guidelines in this respect**.

5.1.2 The main areas of disagreement between relevant stakeholders

Professional continuity

There are differences in hours which preschool teachers spend with children compared to hours primary education teachers spend teaching in the classroom; preschool teachers spend more hours (daily and weekly) in direct contact with children. Moreover, in school, lessons are provided for 38 weeks, whereas kindergarten is open all-year round. There are also some minor differences in salaries (in favour of school teachers who also have higher levels of education). However, these differences do not cause any loud disputes or oppositions.

In general, the kindergarten and school staff are inclined to cooperation. However, a NEIS expert reports that where a school and kindergarten operate within the same setting (kindergarten affiliated with the school) preschool teachers feel looked down on by teachers working at school. Based on this information it can be concluded that the role of the school's head is very important – head's understanding of pedagogical, professional and developmental continuity for ensuring smooth transitions is crucial – head should understand

its meaning and significance; namely, head has a direct impact on professional continuity. For example, some heads report employing a primary education teacher as a second teacher in Year 1, because this is more practical; on the other hand, some heads do not follow such practice, because a preschool teacher in Year 1 is viewed as ensuring pedagogical continuity with the kindergarten. Moreover, head may or may not encourage/support the transition of preschool teachers from kindergarten to school and back; head may support the counselling service in planning activities for smooth transitions or leave it to the counsellor to deal with it etc.

Pedagogical continuity

As already mentioned, the preschool teacher's and primary school teacher's expectations for each other and for a child are sometimes not in harmony. Heads also report that primary education teachers are more focused on topics and achieving knowledge standards.

Developmental continuity

As already mentioned, the main disagreement is about the exchange of data on an individual child between the kindergarten and school. There is no data about dissatisfaction with the involvement of parents.

5.2. Conclusion

The above mentioned challenges are a reflection on the information and data collected for the purpose of this CBR. The data in the report certainly show that **more systematic attention** should be paid to the transitions from kindergarten to school. They also show that, in general, systemic solutions are appropriate, but the **implementation of transitions in practice is not always adequate**. Therefore, **further research, evaluation and data collection are needed**. It would be necessary to rethink and plan targeted changes, potential additional recommendations, training, (joint) reflections of the professional staff of both levels of education.

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The national review undoubtedly demonstrated a sensitive and responsible systemic concern of the Slovenian educational policy about issues related to the transition of children from kindergarten to school. It also showed that we do not address these issues as a separate policy area, which would be systematically and comprehensively monitored and evaluated. We made an important step forward in this respect at the ministry this year: several projects are establishing (and piloting) a systemic model for assessing and assuring quality in education. For the first time, the diffused evaluation activities of the individual elements of the system will be integrated into a coherent whole.

Stanka Lunder Verlič, PhD, from the Foreword

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