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SLOVENIA

ECEC Workforce Profile

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Note from the editors: In official translations of government documents, ECEC settings in Slovenia are often described as *Preschools* or *Pre-school Institutions* and core practitioners as *Pre-school Teachers*. The preferred terms in the **seepro-r** reports for countries with a unitary ECEC system are: *ECEC Centre* (or *Setting/Institution*) and *Early Childhood Pedagogue/Educator/Teacher*.

The distinction is made because the term 'pre-school', whether as adjective or noun, is often used internationally to mean 'pre-primary' education, referring to the two or three years prior to school entry only. In this report, the term *Early Childhood Teacher* has been chosen to describe the main core practitioners in the Slovenian ECEC system.

1. ECEC governance

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

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

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

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

Table 1
Slovenia: Staff in ECEC settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED[1] level
Vzgojitelj **Early Childhood Teacher** *Profile:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre** 11 months–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head of a free-standing ECEC setting Head of an ECEC unit in a primary school	0–7 years	3 years higher education Bachelor's degree ECTS points: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6
	Osnovna šola **Primary school** 1st grade, 6–7 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility (works along primary	0–7 years	

[1] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2012, 2014

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED[1] level
		school teacher)		
	Bolnišnica **Hospital** 0–6 years	Core practitioner with small group responsibility	0–7 years	
Pomočnik vzgojitelja **Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant** *Profile in family day care:* Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	*Vrtec* **ECEC centre** 11 months–6 years	Qualified co-worker (works with core practitioner or alone with group during absence of Early Childhood Teacher, e.g. rest time for children, morning assembly, pick up time, etc.)	11 months – 6 years	4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification; vocational *Matura* ECTS points: n/a[2] EQF level: 3 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 3
	Varuh predšolskih otrok na domu **Home-based childcare setting** 11 months–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility; at child minder's home, smaller group than in an ECEC setting (6 children maximum)	11 months – 6 years	

Box 1
SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners (adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010)

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

2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

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

Table 2
Slovenia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings, 2015

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce – 2015
Staff with a specialist three-year (or longer) early years higher education degree	**40.0 %***
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with a specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	**59.2 %***
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	**0.7 %***
Staff with no initial formal qualification	There are no official data, but according to research reports, around 26 Roma assistants work in

[2] n/a = not applicable

Staff categories	Proportion of workforce – 2015
	ECEC settings in the context of specific projects and most have been attending vocational courses.
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists) who work on site on a regular basis	**2.7 %**** (324 of total 11,797 practitioners in kindergartens)
Male practitioners	**2.5 %**** (292 of total 11,797 practitioners in kindergartens)
Centre leaders	**4.6 %**** (19 of total 417 centre leaders)
Core practitioners	**1.0 %**** (54 of total 5174 core practitioners)
School counsellors	**0.6 %**** (1 of total 155 school counsellors)
Auxiliary staff/assistants	**3.4 %**** (196 of total 5,727 auxiliary staff/assistants)
Other professional staff	**6.8 %**** (22 of total 324 other professional staff)
Staff with a BME (black and minority ethnic) background or a 'background of migration'	There are no official data, but according to research reports, around 26 Roma assistants work in ECEC settings in the context of specific projects and most have been attending vocational courses.

* Statistical Office RS 2016a.
** Statistical Office RS 2016b.

3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

Table 3 describes the initial qualifying route for prospective Early Childhood Teachers. The study route is open for those who have finished general secondary education with a university entrance exam (*matura*) ***or*** for those who have completed vocational secondary education with a *vocational matura* or final exam, and for those who finished the 4-year upper secondary programme before 1st June 1995. The course of study lasts 3 years; candidates must acquire 180 ECTS points from the compulsory and optional parts of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a written Bachelor thesis. If successful, the candidate is awarded the title of *Diplomirana vzgojiteljica/diplomiran vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok/Diplomirana vzgojiteljica predšolskih otrok* (State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher).

Table 3

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher (IPS)

Job title in Slovenian: *Vzgojitelj* **Profile**: *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional*
Entry requirements: General *matura*, vocational *matura* or final exam or a 4-year upper secondary vocational programme completed before 1 June 1995. In the case of enrolment limitation, the candidates are selected according to: (1) overall performance in the general *matura*, the vocational *matura* or the final exam: 70 % of points awarded; (2) overall performance in grades 3 and 4 of the secondary education programme: 30 % of points awarded. **Professional studies:** 3 years higher education; candidates must acquire all the required ECTS points (180) from the compulsory and optional part of the programme. Credits obtained at other higher education institutions or achieved on the basis of recognised knowledge and skills may also be considered. The course of study concludes by presenting and defending a Bachelor thesis. **Award:** State-approved Early Childhood Education Teacher (Bachelor)

Job title in Slovenian: *Vzgojitelj* **Profile**: *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional*
ECTS points: 180 **EQF level:** 6 **ISCED 2013-F:** 0112 **ISCED 2011**: 6 **Main ECEC workplace:** A graduate Early Childhood Teacher can be employed in any organisation engaged in early learning and teaching; most often this means in ECEC settings and the first grade of the nine-year compulsory school. The graduate Early Childhood Teacher can also work in hospital units for young children.

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

Table 4

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant (IPS)

Job title in Slovenian: *Pomočnik vzgojitelja*
Entry requirements: Completed compulsory education (9 years) or lower vocational education or equivalent education under the previous regulations. In case of enrolment limitation the candidates are selected according to the final assessment of the compulsory subjects in the 7th, 8th and 9th grade. **Professional studies:** 4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification, ending with vocational *matura*. The mandatory part of the vocational *matura* is a written and oral examination in Slovene language and early childhood education. The optional part is a written and oral examination in a foreign language or mathematics, or exam performances and their defence. *Note:* The vocational *matura* award qualifies for employment or continuing education, e.g. higher education programme in early childhood education, other professional programmes, various university programmes (after completion of one subject at *matura*). After successful completion of a one-year *matura*-course, it is also possible to enrol for any kind of university studies. **Award:** Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant/Vocational *matura* **ECTS points:** not applicable **EQF level:** 3 **ISCED 2013-F:** 0112 **ISCED 2011**: 3 **Main ECEC workplace:** ECEC setting (as EC Teacher's Assistant) or home-based childcare setting (as core practitioner).

3.2 Competencies and curricula in IPS programmes

Early Childhood Teacher – higher education route

Competency specifications

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

Early Childhood Teacher study programme, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education[3]

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

General competence specifications

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

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

Subject-specific competence specifications

- Knowledge of the content and didactics of the field.
- Understanding and application of curriculum theories and general and didactic knowledge in the subject area.
- Interdisciplinary integration of contents.
- Use of special-pedagogical skills to work with children with special needs.
- Pedagogical classroom management and/or group management.
- Organising active and independent learning, supporting effective learning strategies.
- Ability to verify and evaluate the skills and achievements of pupils and developing feedback information.
- Communicating with professionals from various educational fields.
- Cooperation with parents.
- Understanding the relationship between the educational institution and the social environment. Systemic vision and action.
- Knowing and understanding the theoretical foundations of counselling.

[3] Data obtained from the National Agency for Quality in Higher Education (received by post, June 2016).

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

Curricular areas

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

Table 5

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher study programmes: Compulsory curricular areas/subjects, 2015

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor[4]	University of Ljubljana[5]	University of Primorska[6]
Pedagogy/ didactics			Basics of Pedagogy
	Pre-school pedagogy	Pre-school pedagogy	Pre-school pedagogy
	Didactics	School pedagogy with di-dactics	Didactics
	Theory of education	Theory of education	
Psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental psychology
	Educational psychology	Educational psychology	Educational psychology
Pedagogical methodology	Basics of methodology of peda-gogical research	Pedagogical methodology	Pedagogical research
Language and	Slovene language	Slovene language	Slovene language I

[4] University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2015, 72-77.
[5] University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2016a.
[6] University of Primorska, Faculty of Education 2016.

Curricular Area	Subjects under specific curricular area		
	University of Maribor[4]	**University of Ljubljana**[5]	**University of Primorska**[6]
literature			Slovene language II
			Early learning of Slovene language
	Children's literature	Language and Literature	Children's literature
	Didactics of language education		Language activities in kindergarten
Mathematics	Didactics of mathematics	Early learning of mathematics	Early learning of mathematics
Art	Elementary art - educational practicum	Art education	Art activities
	Didactics of art activities		
Theatre	Puppet-theatre education	Puppets, drama, media	Puppets, theatre, film
Technics	Didactics of technical education	Technical education	Technical activities
Music	Vocal-instrumental practicum I	Music	Musical language
	Vocal-instrumental practicum II		Child and music
	Didactics of musical education	Music in early childhood	Musical activities
Dance	Didactic of dance education	Dance expression	Dance activities
Motor development	Didactics of physical education	Movement	Dance-sport activities
	Kinesiology of a child	Kinesiology of a child	Motor development
	Motor practicum		
Natural Sciences	Early natural sciences	Early natural sciences – chemistry	Early learning of natural science
		Early natural sciences - physics	
		Early natural sciences - biology	
	Didactics of learning about natural environment		
Social Sciences	Didactics of introduction to the social environment	Child in a society	Early learning of social studies
		Social studies	
	Sociology of a family and a pre-school child	Sociology of education	Sociology of education
Philosophy		Selected Topics in Philosophy	Philosophy of education
Inclusive/special pedagogy	Special pedagogics	Inclusive education	Inclusion in a pre-school
ICT			Educational technology
Health			Education for health in pre-school period
Other		Cross-curricular connections – projects	

Table 6

Slovenia: Early Childhood Teacher study programmes: Optional curricular areas/subjects, 2015 -Elective subjects (the list includes subjects of all three Faculties of Education)

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor[7]	**University of Ljubljana**[8]	**University of Primorska**[9]
Media		Media education	Communication and media in contemporary society
Dance	Dancing dramatisation in the kindergarten	Dance theatre	Dance theatre
		Artistic movement and	

[7] University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2015, 72-77.
[8] University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2016.
[9] University of Primorska, Faculty of Education 2016.

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor[7]	**University of Ljubljana**[8]	**University of Primorska**[9]
		dance pedagogy	
		Stage of Faculty of Education	
Puppets	Preparation and implementation of a Puppet – Shows (project)	Puppetry	Puppetry
Nature	Play and exploring the natural environment	Nature in kindergarten, kindergarten in nature	Learn to read nature
		Nature and young children	
Mathematics	Learning mathematics through play	Mathematical challenges in kindergarten	Mathematical plays
		Mathematics through English	
Language and literature / literacy / communication	Slovenian language texts	Youth literature	Teaching the Slovene language at pre-school level
	Literary education	Family literacy	
	Language activities in kindergarten	Interpersonal communication	
	Interpretation of youth literature		
Technics		Creative technical workshops	Selected topics in technical activities
Music	Music activities in kindergarten	Choir III	Musical interpretations I
	Playing instruments - Orff instruments		
Experiential pedagogics	Sports in outdoor education		Experiential pedagogy
Children with disabilities	Children with special needs and Movement Therapy	Special pedagogics	Basic methods of working with pre-school blind and visually impaired children
	Speech and language disorders in children		
Psychology	Useful psychological approaches in pre-school education	Development, teaching and learning in early childhood	Family Psychology
	Children's play and attachment		
Motor development / sport activities	Sensory motor development	Movement - as a form of play	Physical sports activities in nature - swimming
		Mountaineering	
		Swimming	
	Motor gifted children	Movement – as a form of play for all stages of life	
		Basic physical education	
Foreign language	Teaching English language at pre-school level	English language I - Strategies for learning a foreign language	Teaching English language at an early stage
		English language II - linguistic abilities	
Music		Communication with music	Musical didactical games
Art	Artistic expression and space	Artistic creativity	
	Artistic activities in the museum and gallery		
Pedagogical methodology	The methodology of qualitative and quantitative pedagogical research	Research in education	
Pedagogy	Educational Concepts in Theory and Practice	Pedagogical language in kindergarten	Alternative pedagogical concepts in theory and

Curricular Area	Subject areas in three universities		
	University of Maribor[7]	**University of Ljubljana**[8]	**University of Primorska**[9]
	Factors of successful teaching		practice
	Moral education and ethics		
	Pedagogical communication and partnership between kindergarten, school and family		
Other	The role of the adult in the child's introduction into society		
	Team work in kindergarten and in school		
		Children with an experience of violence	
		Children in the animals' kingdom	
		Play and natural sciences	
		Kindergarten – a democratic organisation	
			Education for diversity and social justice

Pedagogic-didactic approaches[10]

In line with general academic practice, higher education teachers are autonomous regarding the choice of content, literature and other resources for a particular course. In the public sphere, a teacher's autonomy is limited by the conflict of interest clause. This means that course content and approaches should be in tune with the mission of the relevant Faculty. In general, they are expected to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, including innovative and well-established procedures in the profession based on research evidence and theories of pedagogy.

In general, it can be said that all three Faculties follow child-centred approaches and educate their students regarding compliance with children's rights in educational processes. Any difference in approach is more a result of higher education teachers' varying understandings and interpretations of what is meant by concepts such as 'child-centred' and 'children's rights'.

Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant – vocational route

Goals of the study programme (Educational programme Pre-school education 2016a)

Students are encouraged to:

- systematically acquire general and basic knowledge for understanding the principles in nature, society and profession;
- develop skills for successful work and professional growth and ability to understand human relationships;
- learn how to analyse specific technical problems in the workplace, and to plan measures to address them effectively;
- develop personal skills (responsibility, communication skills, creativity and innovation, empathy and openness, and persistence) and values (honesty, act in accordance with ethical principles), which are important for the education context;
- learn about interdisciplinary expertise and acquire knowledge of the basic principles of teamwork;

[10] Data obtained from the interview with a higher education teacher (11. 7. 2016, 14. 7. 2016).

- develop motivation for education, training and lifelong learning;
- develop a willingness to discover and follow new developments in the professional field;
- master the basic professional terminology and know how to use scientific literature;
- use modern information technology to work in the professional field and to work with the resources;
- acquire the basics of entrepreneurship, making it easier to adapt to changes in the workplace and the labour market, and to successfully plan and manage his/her own career;
- develop social skills, independence and responsibility;
- actively take care of their own health and the health of the children entrusted to them and to develop a positive attitude towards a healthy lifestyle;
- work safely and ecologically aware, to act as responsible citizens, and know how to properly protect and preserve nature;
- know about and link theoretical and practical knowledge about development and education of children;
- master theoretical and practical knowledge of individual educational fields, the methodology and didactics of these areas, educational resources, tools and materials;
- effectively and creatively plan and implement educational work in the group;
- know how to organise a stimulating educational environment for the all-round development of children;
- learn how to observe, monitor and evaluate the child's development and progress;
- learn to communicate with children and adults and to learn about the methods and forms of cooperation with parents.
- learn to evaluate their own work through self-reflection and self-regulation.

Competence specifications (Professional Standard Pre-school Teacher's Assistant 2016)

The candidate is able to:

- plan, prepare, carry out and evaluate his/her own work;
- participate in administrative processes related to the work;
- provide for the quality of work and carry out self-evaluation;
- contribute towards the maintenance of premises, equipment and working facilities;
- communicate with children and their parents;
- use technical terminology and communicate in a foreign language;
- use modern information and communication technology;
- participate in professional team work;
- develop entrepreneurial characteristics, skills and behaviour
- use energy, material and time rationally;
- protect health and environment, and be responsible for his/her own safety and the safety of other people;
- contribute towards the maintenance of an attractive, stimulating and safe learning environment for children;
- protect children from abuse;
- feed children, take care of their hygiene and ensure that they get sufficient rest and sleep;
- provide effective verbal, non-verbal and electronic communication with the child, his/her family, with co-workers and various institutions;
- implement the principle of equality and diversity in the individual development of a child in the social context;
- express personal principles and convictions in accordance with professional ethics;
- implement legislative regulations, rules and principles of pre-school education in accordance with the social context;
- participate in planning and implementing the curriculum based on an understanding of children's development;

- use modern pedagogical methods in his/her work with children, parents and co-workers;
- encourage the development of cognitive, perceptual, social, emotional and motor processes;
- support the development of positive behaviour in children;
- support children with special needs in their personal development through appropriate nurturing and protection and individualised curriculum implementation;
- maintain appropriate relations with a child and a group of children;
- communicate and cooperate with parents on educational matters concerning their child.

Curricular areas (Curriculum Pre-school Education 2016)

The vocational education programme is competence based and consists of various mandatory and optional modules. The emphasis is on practical training to work in ECEC settings, optional courses and an open curriculum (Secondary Pre-school Education and Gimnazija Ljubljana 2016). Assessment and evaluation of knowledge is regulated. For Slovene language, maths and a foreign language both an oral and written examination is required, for other general education subjects an oral examination is required; products or presentations are required for the more practice-oriented parts of the curriculum. Physical activities are examined through the demonstration of practical skills (Educational Program Pre-school Education 2016b).

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

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

3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Alternative entry and qualification routes

For graduates with related academic qualifications

The University of Primorska (University of Primorska 2016a) and the University of Ljubljana (University of Ljubljana 2016a) both offer a study programme for graduates with related qualifications to qualify for work in ECEC settings. The programmes are expected to last for one academic year, and comprise 60 ECTS points. They are for those who have graduated as teachers in a particular field of expertise; those with a degree in the fields of education, the arts, humanities and sciences; or graduates of a higher professional or university programme in social work (University of Ljubljana 2016a).

For specialist staff

There are no alternative pathways of entry into ECEC work for specialist staff (speech therapists, psychologists, ECEC settings counsellors etc.) besides meeting the requirements of specific job vacancies according to current regulations.

For non-qualified co-workers

Romani workers can gain the title of Roma Assistant through project work (mainly ESF-funded projects) in ECEC settings and compulsory schools.

Formal opportunities for moving up

Early Childhood Teacher's Assistants can continue their studies by attending an Early Childhood Teacher Bachelor's degree programme at one of the three universities with this specialisation.

Qualified Early Childhood Teachers can continue their studies in a Master's programme (e.g. 'Early Learning' at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Education or 'Pre-school education' at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education). Besides employment in ECEC settings and primary schools, with this qualification post-graduates can find employment in all institutions/organisations dealing with early learning and teaching as well as in organisations which indirectly deal with children or with providing a stimulating environment for young children. Due to their broad professional profile, they can also take on:

- Tasks of providing professional support in work with children in different public institutions and in those organisations that are engaged in activities for children;
- Various forms of support to children with different needs;
- New, innovative forms of work with children in leisure time, after school classes, clubs and associations, centres, etc.;
- Expert tasks in mobile special pedagogical services;
- Work as a university tutor/assistant in the study programmes related to early learning and teaching, after acquiring additional and appropriate authorisation qualifications;
- Organisational and leadership work in animation programmes for children;
- Tasks of professional consultants in preparing programmes for children on radio or TV;
- Participation in editorial and expert commissions of printed and electronic media for children;
- Cooperation with producers of equipment, teaching aids and toys for younger children. (University of Primorska 2017).

The Master's programme at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, is aimed to create a critical mass of experts who will ensure continuous and contemporary development of quality in early childhood education in Slovenia. Students are prepared to develop a system of early childhood education at the national level, i.e. in the direction of policy development, professional standards and ethical standards of the profession (University of Ljubljana 2017).

Both study programmes can be implemented as a full- or part-time study programme.

Formal opportunities for moving across qualifications frameworks

A qualified Early Childhood Teacher can continue studies for a Master's degree in programmes such as the following:

- **Adult learning /andragogy**: If their degree was awarded before 2004, and they can demonstrate completion of the following courses totalling 15 ECTS points: Basics in Andragogy (5 ECTS points), History of Education (5 ECTS points), Educational Psychology (5 ECTS points) (University of Ljubljana 2016b);
- **Pedagogy**: If their degree was awarded before 2004, and they can demonstrate completeon of the following courses totalling 15 ECTS points: History of Education (5 ECTS points), Theory of Education (5 ECTS points), Didactics I (5 ECTS points) (University of Ljubljana 2016c);
- **Sociology**: If their degree was awarded before 2004, and if the candidate has completed the necessary entry requirements essential for a Master's degree; these obligations are determined in relation to the candidate's initial professional field and comprise up to 60 ECTS points (University of Ljubljana 2016d);
- **Inclusive Pedagogy**: At the University of Primorska, ECE teachers can continue with a study of Inclusive Pedagogy without any special entry requirements, while at the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor (study programme: Inclusion in Education), candidates must demonstrate knowledge of different subjects (different for each faculty) (University of Maribor 2016; University of Primorska 2016b; University of Ljubljana 2016e).

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

A candidate who has finished the 4th year of high school or the final year of a vocational education programme can enrol for a one-year vocational course in 'Early Childhood Education'

(60 ECTS points; B2 2016). The candidate is awarded the professional title of Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant after passing the vocational *matura* exam comprising a written and oral examination in the Slovene language, in the education of pre-school children, in a foreign language or mathematics, as well as examination performance and defence (Cene Štupar 2016). Following that they can be employed as Early Childhood Education Assistants. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many ECEC settings are not satisfied with the level of knowledge and skills, the values and reflective abilities of these candidates.

4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners

Regulation and cooperation

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

Since the profession of an Early Childhood Teacher is a regulated profession, the minimum amount of field-based studies is set by law and has to be taken into account when drawing up the curriculum and in the accreditation process of the programme in general.[11] Criteria for the accreditation of study programmes for teacher education (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia, 94/2011, Article 4) indicate that the workplace-based component should be compulsory and be valued at a minimum of 15 ECTS points. It should be organised and implemented according to the principle of reflective practice and should allow students to integrate subject-related and pedagogical-professional knowledge through a gradual introduction into teaching and the teaching profession.

For the envisaged number of enrolled students, each Faculty of Education must have signed agreements of collaboration with an adequate number of ECEC services (University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2015, 7).

Duration of workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education

600 hours (20 ECTS points) are allocated to field-based studies in the three-year IPS programme, comprising 11% of the total length of the degree course. Students start by observing everyday practices and organised activities, following by a gradual involvement in educational processes. At the end of their work placement they should be able to work independently with a group of children. Documentation is an integral part of field-based studies. There are two main forms of placement: *Integrated practice* (9 ECTS points in 3 years) takes place throughout the 3 years under the supervision and monitoring of higher education teachers. Students are expected to be in an ECEC setting one day per week and undertake specific assignments (e.g. observation of different aspects of educational processes, analysing, visits, interviews); *compact practice* (11 ECTS points) takes place for two weeks during the second year (4 ECTS points) and four weeks during the third year (7 ECTS points) (University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2015, 80).

[11] Data obtained from the interview with a higher education teacher (11. 7. 2016, 14. 7. 2016).

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education[12]

Field-based studies take place during the second semester of each academic year and amount to a total of 740 hours (roughly 25 ECTS points). In the first year, students are placed in ECEC groups for 1- to 3-years olds for two weeks (3 ECTS points); in the second year they spend one week in the first class of a primary school (3 ECTS points); and in the third year they are placed in groups for 3- to 6-year olds for four weeks (6 ECTS points). *Integrated practice* is related to 17 different subjects and is carried out in ECEC settings or other institutions for young children under the supervision of a higher education teacher. At the end of their field-based studies, students are expected to be able to carry out independent work with children in the areas of art, nature, music, technical education, movement, literature and early maths. They receive support from teachers in the setting who act as a mentor for the students.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education[13]

Field-based studies are allocated 12 ECTS points and take place during the second semester of each academic year. They are organised both as *integrated practice* (45 hours during the 1st year, 75 hours during the 2nd year, 105 hours during the 3rd year) and *compact practice* (6 ECTS points each study year) – altogether 25.5 ECTS points.

Table 7

Slovenia: Number of ECTS points allocated to workplace-based learning in the professional study routes for core practitioners, 2015/2016

University	Integrated field-based studies (workplace learning)			Compact field-based studies (workplace learning)			TOTAL
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	
Maribor	4 ECTS points	3 ECTS points	2 ECTS points	--	4 ECTS points	7 ECTS points	20 ECTS points
Ljubljana	*Integrated practice* is implemented in the framework of 17 different subjects (12 ECTS points).			3 ECTS points	3 ECTS points	6 ECTS points	25 ECTS points
Primorska	1.5 ECTS points	2.5 ECTS points	3.5 ECTS points	6 ECTS points	6 ECTS points	6 ECTS points	25.5 ECTS points

Skills and competence specifications during workplace-based learning

University of Maribor, Faculty of Education

Students are expected to become familiar with the ECEC setting as an institution, the work of the core staff, to test the abilities and knowledge acquired during the study programme. During the compact practice periods, the student gradually learns to lead a group of children independently and has the opportunity to evaluate his/her performance (University of Maribor, Faculty of Education 2015, 80).

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education 2016b)

The field-based component contributes to the development of both generic and specific competences:

- Knowledge of a teacher's work in a group of young children through observing and co-operating.
- Getting to know and understand the institutional framework of work (ECEC centre as an institution).

[12] Data obtained from the National Agency for Quality in Higher Education (received by post, June 2016).
[13] Data obtained from an interview with a higher education teacher (11. 7. 2016, 14. 7. 2016).

- Identifying and taking into account individual needs and other differences among children in educational work.
- Developing awareness for the care and safety needs of children.
- Independent (under supervision) implementation of the early childhood curriculum combined with self-reflection.
- Efficient and flexible organisation of time and space (e.g. prepares space for different activities and play, chooses appropriate didactic materials and resources) as well as transitions between activities.
- Cooperation with the Early Childhood Education Assistant and other educators in the centre team and beyond.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the achievements, progress and development of children.
- Communication with parents and implementation of various forms of cooperation with them.

University of Primorska, Faculty of Education[14]

The field-based component contributes to the development of both generic and specific competences throughout the three years of study. During the final year, two specific competences are added (the last two in the list below).

General competences

The student is able to…

- create a safe and supportive learning environment in which children feel accepted, where diversity and their social, cultural, linguistic and religious origin are respected, and where independence and responsibility are promoted;
- communicate effectively with children and develop a favourable climate in the group;
- identify children with special needs, adapt work to their needs and work together with other educators (teachers) and specialists;
- master the basic principles and procedures for the planning, implementation and evaluation of learning processes;
- effectively communicate and collaborate with educators and other professionals in educational institutions (teamwork);
- show sensitivity for the child's values.

Specific competences

The student learns about…

- kindergarten/school as educational institutions;
- the legal basis of operation of kindergartens/schools;
- the integration of kindergartens/schools in the national education system;
- the vertical relations of kindergartens/schools in regard to other educational institutions;
- the role and work of an Early Childhood Education Teacher and an Early Childhood Teacher's Assistant;
- the role and the work of other professional services in the kindergarten/school;
- how to collaborate with the staff team in adapting the curriculum for children with special developmental needs;
- the daily timetable and routines in kindergartens/schools;
- approaches to learning for young children;
- the conditions for effective learning;
- the importance of partnerships with families and about forms and methods of building a partnership;

[14] Data obtained from the interview with a higher education teacher (11. 7. 2016, 14. 7. 2016).

- different ways of planning (the annual work plan of kindergartens, annual work plan of units, the annual work plan of departments, plans and preparation of teachers for educational work);
- ways of customising the programme for children with special needs in relation to the programme for children with specialist support;
- forms of individualisation and ensuring inclusion (children with disabilities, children of migrants), and social cohesion;
- the objectives, principles and methods of monitoring a child's learning;
- the objectives, principles and forms of cooperation with the community.

Forms of student self-evaluation and external evaluation

In the case of a *compact practice* placement, university tutors evaluate the students' written assignments. During the *integrated practice* periods, the students' planning and direct work with children in compulsory subject areas are evaluated. Student self-evaluation is carried out mostly in the form of individual and group reflection.[15]

ECEC settings receive guidelines from the university on how to prepare a report about a student's work during the placement period. Students have to prepare and conduct several activities with children which are evaluated by his/her mentor teacher.[16]

Qualifying courses for mentors/supervisors in the workplaces

The teachers who act as mentors during the field-based studies of future EC teachers do not need any formally acquired training or qualification for this post. Teachers who have achieved the title/level of 'mentor' within the promotion system are eligible for this work. The University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, holds preparatory annual meetings for those interested in the role of mentor. Centre heads are usually present at these meetings and explain what is expected of a mentor teacher during the students' field studies. Participants are also informed about evaluation procedures during the placement periods. Following this meeting, they occasionally organise workshops on modern approaches to teaching and learning in the early years. Teachers-as-mentors have expressed their interest in this kind of training and have suggested that they should be organised as an e-learning opportunity.[16]

Centre leaders are in charge of choosing the student-mentor according to requests of students who choose the setting where they wish to be placed. The ECEC setting and the university faculty sign a special cooperation contract.[16]

It sometimes occurs that the students are not visited by their university tutors during their placement periods in ECEC settings.[17]

Working conditions of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres

Mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC settings do not have a designated role, with a specific time allocation and specifications for mentoring. The roles of mentoring/supervising staff in ECEC centres differ from faculty to faculty. Faculties may introduce these roles at special meetings on ECEC management (see the example at the University of Primorska above), or students bring the allocated specifications for mentoring with them in the ECEC centre when they start their workplace-based learning.[17]

Mentoring staff are not remunerated for their work with students, but they do receive a certificate, which they can use when seeking job promotion.

[15] Data obtained from an interview with a higher education teacher (11. 7. 2016, 14. 7. 2016).
[16] Data obtained from interviews with pre-school head teachers (5. 5. 2016).

Recent reforms, trends and debates regarding field-based studies

The White Paper on Education (Krek and Metljak 2011, 488-489) proposed the following solutions in the area of mentoring: "The practical training of students in educational institutions (compact and integrated practice) should be carried out under the expert guidance of a mentor (teacher, educator or counsellor) who acquires a permanent license through a CPD programme for which at least 3 credits are awarded. Practitioners with this title agree to cooperate with higher education institutions during the students' practical placements and contribute towards improving this area through further education and training." The White Paper also proposes that "The work of mentors and partner institutions must be systematically regulated, given the technical and financial evaluation."

At the informal level this proposal is under discussion in the Faculties of Education. But in order to really change something, many systemic changes are needed. However, such changes are associated with financial implications (e.g. training for mentors, employment of a person who will visit students in the ECEC setting, etc.) and can only be solved through initiatives of the relevant ministry,[17] within the framework of overall government employment policies.

5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

Slovenia has an exceptionally highly structured system of credit point acquisition for continuing professional development and career advancement. This enables both Early Childhood Teachers and ECEC centre directors to acquire different levels of recognised expertise and posts of responsibility. The three possibilities are: mentor, adviser and counsellor. Titles gained are permanent and do not have to be renewed.

Frameworks for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel

The CPD framework for ECEC staff is guided by general national regulations regarding in-service training for all educational professionals, i.e. also for school teachers (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 64/2004, 42/2009). The overall aims of CPD are the provision of professional competences for carrying out specific specialist work, supporting a professional education system and thus improving its quality and efficiency.

Main forms of CPD

Further education and training for (a) core practitioners and (b) qualified and non-qualified co-workers are carried out in accordance with this regulation in many different forms. These include:

- Further training courses;
- Professional training courses (e.g. obligatory courses, updating courses, good practice dissemination courses, professional development courses);
- Thematic conferences;
- Training in study groups, mentored and other networks that connect professional staff from public ECEC centres;
- Computer literacy courses;
- Verified programmes outside the national framework of CPD (sometimes abroad) with objectives consistent to national regulations.

In general, there are no specific forms of CPD for different core practitioners and qualified co-workers (teachers and teacher assistants). The forms for those qualified workers who do not

[17] Data obtained from the interview with a higher education teacher (11.07.2016, 14.07.2016).

have regular contact with children in the classrooms (such as psychologists, pedagogues, social workers etc.) are the same as those mentioned above. In many cases CPD is provided for all of them at the same time, especially if the CPD activity is workplace-based and out of working hours. In the case of CPD activities outside the workplace, ECEC providers have to cope with certain problems regarding the replacement of staff during CPD attendance and the costs for travelling. At the setting-level, the most popular form of CPD is the so called thematic conferences where ECEC centre heads can choose the topic either independently or from the providers' CPD programme, and these workshops usually take place at the ECEC workplace. In cases when there are not enough participants for this kind of event in one ECEC setting, up to four ECEC settings can organise the event together.

Non-qualified co-workers (here, Roma Assistants) employed in an ECEC setting may participate in all forms of CPD activities; however, attendance certificates are not formally recognised in terms of career development. They can also gain professional competences during project-related CPD activities.

Conditions of CPD

According to the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 52/1994, 8/2016, Article 53), workers have the right to continuing professional training. For those workers with at least an intermediate education at least five days of professional training per year are obligatory or 15 days every third year; for other workers at least two days per year and six days every third year. As both Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teacher's Assistants have an intermediate or higher level of education they are guaranteed five days per year for professional training during working hours.

The ECEC centre head is obliged to plan trainings and other CPD activities for practitioners within the yearly work plan and to enable them to participate. At the same time, it is also the practitioners' obligation to participate in these activities, although some, mostly older teachers, tend not to be very involved. CPD is thus both obligation and entitlement.

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

The main problem is that ECEC settings do not have enough replacement staff available on a regular basis, especially if other staff are off on sick leave at the same time. Many CPD activities take place in the late afternoon after the children have left, or even on Saturdays.

Main providers of CPD

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

Formal recognition of CPD

If the CPD activity is accredited by the Ministry of Education, staff are awarded credit points which are taken into account for advancement opportunities (i.e. promotion to mentor, adviser or counsellor). In order to achieve these titles, they collect points defined by the Collective Agreement for the Education Sector (mostly for participation in trainings, projects, professional conferences, publishing articles, organising events with children, etc.). The awarded titles are permanent and influence the salary to some extent but not the working obligations. The fact that professional titles are permanent and unchangeable does not encourage the motivation for continuing professional development and or promote the need for change. Furthermore, there is no promotional system for the teachers' assistants (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia 54/2002).

Specific qualification requirements for heads of ECEC provision

Public kindergartens are managed by principals/centre heads. They assume two roles: that of a pedagogical leader and that of an executive manager. A kindergarten head candidate has to be qualified as an Early Childhood Teacher (with the title adviser or counsellor) or as a school counsellor. They are also required to have at least five years of working experience in education, and to have completed relevant courses at the School for Leadership. Principals/centre heads are appointed by an ECEC setting council comprising Early Childhood Teachers, members of the local community, the council of parents, and a representative of the Ministry of Education (Taštanoska 2015).

Specialist courses/modules for other specified posts

For student mentors there are no official courses or modules but in some faculties one-day seminars are offered, sometimes for the mentoring teachers, sometimes just for the centre head.

For the early learning of a foreign language there is a special one-year Master's degree programme at all three universities. Students who have completed a first degree in a foreign language (English, German, Spanish, etc.) can also choose a study programme on Early Childhood Education or Early Learning as a Master's degree study programme.

There have been initiatives to develop training modules for language support coaches and to introduce this profile in ECEC settings for the Romani language. There is also a strong initiative to introduce the Roma assistant (in locations with a Romani population) in all kinds of ECEC settings (independent, organised as a pre-school unit located in primary schools or as a unit of the ECEC centre). Until now they were sometimes involved only in the work at pre-school units located in primary schools, since the Roma assistants were officially working at primary schools but received their salaries from project funding. In some projects focused on Romani education provided by the Educational Research Institute they are involved in all trainings provided for staff at ECEC settings where the projects took place.

Options for supplementary/additional study routes

Early Childhood Teachers can be admitted to a Master's degree programme on *Early Childhood Education and Early Learning* or other Master's degree study programmes - mostly after passing an additional examination defined in the entry conditions of those programmes. They are open for anyone who has completed a Bachelor's programme in early childhood education, primary school pedagogy, psychology, special education or educational sciences. Participants study at their own expense. For several years faculties organised Master's degree programmes on early childhood education and early learning as a regular afternoon study programme and on Saturdays to give employed teachers the opportunity to study alongside their work. The state and the municipalities are not very interested in supporting the students financially, since in legal terms a Bachelor's degree is sufficient to become an Early Childhood Teacher.

Candidates who have completed first degree studies in other areas have to meet certain exam obligations (up to a total of 30 ECTS points), e.g. in the Slovene language, pedagogy, developmental psychology, educational psychology or special education which have to be completed by the date of enrolment, or at the latest by the start of the 2nd year. Candidates who completed their initial professional studies before June 2004 (i.e. before the Bologna study reform) can also be enrolled, but they may have to meet additional obligations, such as examinations in the Slovene language, pedagogy, developmental psychology, educational psychology or special education.

Large-scale research projects on the CPD activities of ECEC personnel

In 2013-2014, a research study on the *Identification of competences needed for particular jobs in comparison to competences of the study programs* (Vonta and Gril 2014) focused in one section on teachers' competences in contemporary ECEC settings and teachers' and principals' opinions about the importance of competences that were identified in the CoRe study (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari, and Van Laere 2011) and their presence in study programmes.

The research was carried out with a representative sample of preschools (110) and 320 teachers (*see also Section 7*). This was a government-funded project through the Slovenian Research Agency in the context of reforming study programmes at universities.

6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

In 2012, the government adopted the Fiscal Balance Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 40/2012, 102/2015) in order to ensure sustainable public finances and to reduce budget expenditure. Some of the measures were related to the staffing and working conditions in ECEC, for example: In cases of longer absence from work, e.g. longer sick-leaves, maternity leaves, or termination of employment, a principal/centre head must provide reallocation of responsibilities between other employees (Ministry of Education, Science, Education and Sport 2016a). In terms of reduced expenditure, the government proposed an increase in group size by one child and a reduction of the number of hours of simultaneous presence of the Early Childhood Teacher and the teacher assistants in a classroom (Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia 2016). The Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia was very active in negotiations with the government in this respect; they also organised a strike (April 18th, 2012). After more than half a year of negotiations, the government withdrew the proposals and measures (Krajnc 2012).

As from 2012, the government lowered the salaries of public servants. In 2014, a proposal was made to reduce the public sector salaries by another 5%. The employees were afraid that this would also result in severe job cuts, which would have led to between 5,000 to 8,000 unemployed people in the public sector (altogether, not just in education). What actually happened was another partial reduction in wages and the number of employees was reduced by one per cent point (Belovič in Starič 2014).

7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues

Comparing job requirements with competence specifications in study programmes

***Source*:** Vonta, T. and A. Gril. 2014. *Kompetence, potrebne za opravljanje poklica vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok v sodobnem vrtcu: njihova pomembnost in zastopanost v študijskih programih: zaključno poročilo o raziskavi, Naslov temeljnega raziskovalnega projekta: Identifikacija kompetenc, potrebnih za opravljanje določenih poklicev v primerjavi s kompetencami študijskih programov.* [Identification of Competences Needed for Particular Jobs in Comparison to Competences of the Study Programmes.] Ljubljana: Pedagoški inštitut.

Background/Aims: The study was conducted in 2013-2014 within the context of developing new university study programmes. One section of the study focused on the competence requirements for teachers in contemporary ECEC settings and teachers' and centre heads' views on competences identified in the CoRe study (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari, and Van Laere 2011) and their presence in current study programmes.

Procedure: The research was carried out with a representative sample of 110 ECEC centres and 320 teachers. On a five-point scale teachers and centre heads evaluated each item from the CoRe list of individual competences for 'importance' and 'presence' in their initial professional studies. Individual competences were listed randomly but separately for knowledge, practices

and values and - if needed - were adapted to the Slovenian context. Overall, 24 items each for 'importance' and 'presence' were computed through non-parametric statistical tests.

Findings: Most important for teachers were competence categories directly linked to work in the classroom (holistic development, strategies of learning, communication and participation). Less important were competence categories not directly related to work in the classroom, but which represent foundations for high quality work such as cooperation with parents, context of diversity, ECE in partnership, team work. If the students do not become aware of the importance of certain aspects of knowledge, practices and values during their IPS, it is unlikely that they will be able to understand their relevance later in their job. This suggests that changes are needed in the higher education study programmes regarding the acquisition of attitudes and skills needed to see the relevance of certain aspects. Such changes would be:

- developing competences for co-operating with adults and the community in order to work more effectively within the ECEC centre;
- connecting all three levels of competences (knowledge, practice and values) with reflection.

Three main variables could be identified that influence teachers' opinions about the importance of particular competences:

1. Their experiences with competences in their initial professional studies
2. ECEC centre leaders' opinions about the importance of different categories influence the staff's rating
3. Organisational structure of the school (higher ratings in independent (free-standing) ECEC settings).

The teachers' age, their job experience and the region where they worked did not have a statistically significant impact on their views.

Discussion/Implications: Are ECEC teachers in Slovenia prepared for new challenges in ECEC? It seems that they are not yet ready to open up towards parents, community and life outside the institution and towards a contribution of ECEC to social cohesion. But it is not only the teachers who should change;-changes are needed particularly in leadership positions in ECEC centres, in initial and continuing professional studies regarding topics and methods, and certain changes at the governance level in supporting professional development at early childhoods units located in primary schools. Is the academic orientation of practitioners a result of the values in our 'knowledge' society or a result of the inability of those who should support the professionalisation of teachers and leaders and help them in connecting different levels of competences with reflection? Or both?

Views of pre-school principals, staff and community members on programmes for disadvantaged children

***Source*:** Jager, J. 2015. *Odnos ravnateljev in strokovnih delavcev vrtcev ter predstavnikov lokalnih skupnosti do izvajanja predšolskih programov za ogrožene otroke.* [The Attitude of Pre-school Principals, Pres-chool Staff and Representatives of Local Communities Towards Implementation of Pres-chool Programmes for Disadvantaged Children.] PhD diss. Koper: University of Primorska.

Background/Aims: In Slovenia, the proportion of children enrolled in ECEC programmes is relatively high, but the data raises questions, especially when we consider the involvement of children in ECEC settings in relation to the entire population of young children (76.8 % enrolment), and if we consider inclusion in ECEC programmes as being the realisation of children's rights. In this regard, we explored how well the Slovenian ECEC settings are aware of the importance of providing access to quality ECEC programmes *for all* children. For this purpose, we collected data on disadvantaged children and data on ECEC programmes for them (inclusive approach), and also about how ECEC heads support the professional development of ECE teachers.

Procedure: ECEC heads were selected in the sample using the stratified random sampling method. Data were obtained from a representative sample of Slovenian ECEC principals (29.94% of all pre-school principals in Slovenia).

Findings: Focusing on results about the ECEC head's support for staff CPD activities, we found out that according to the views of ECEC heads, ECE teachers mostly draw on a range of "internal sources", such as tandem work, professional literature, other colleagues, support through the school counsellor and/or the ECEC head. It was also found out that ECE staff often have access also to so-called "external sources" of support systems, such as CPD programmes, study groups, regional consultations and country-wide conferences. Less often do ECEC staff have access to observing practices among each other and mentoring, which indicates the still predominant practice of "staying only in my own classroom". This creates disadvantages for mutual learning and creating a common understanding of quality practices, lack of discussions about approaches for its improvement, about teaching concepts, etc. According to ECEC heads, ECE teachers also lack skills needed to work with disadvantaged children.

Discussion/Implications: Questions on what future teachers learn in connection with the topic of inclusion of disadvantaged children in ECEC programmes in the course of their studies, and what the options are for inclusion in further education and training programmes on this topic, have already been raised in Slovenia and call for a change in study programmes (Jager 2013; Vonta and Gril 2014) and the programmes of further education and training (Meke 2014). At the same time, ECEC heads are the ones who are responsible for developing ECEC settings in the direction that will enable ECE teachers to adapt to rapid social changes. However, the ECEC heads cannot answer all the questions: there is a need to develop a competent system (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari, and van Laere 2011) that will help ensure access to quality pre-school education and equal opportunities for *all* children at several different levels. It is not enough for the enrolment of all children in quality pre-school programmes to be promoted only at the level of ECEC settings; this idea should be internalised by everyone who is (in)directly connected to early childhood education (Jager 2016; Vonta 2013).

8. General workforce issues

8.1 Remuneration

When starting to work, core practitioners in ECEC are paid the same as primary school teachers. In terms of acquiring professional titles, both EC Teachers and Primary School Teachers can reach the title of counsellor. However, differences appear in the wage grades: Early Childhood Teachers can progress to a maximum of the 41st wage grade, whereas a Primary School Teacher (and also Early Childhood Teachers who work in the 1st grade of primary school) up to the 43rd wage grade.

Living as a single parent and being a teacher in a major city is a challenge, especially if you do not own an apartment/house. As children get older, more activities at school have to be paid for. It is even more difficult to live on the salary of an Early Childhood Assistant (which amounts to approximately half that of an Early Childhood Teacher).

Posts of responsibility mostly bring an increase in salary: Centre leaders can receive a 5-8% higher monthly salary (depending on the number of staff employed); they also receive an additional three days of annual leave.[18] Deputy leaders with the professional title of counsellor (highest professional title possible) may receive a salary at the 43rd grade, instead of the 41st, which is the highest possible salary for an EC Teacher.[19]

[18] Data obtained from the interview with pre-school head teachers (5. 5. 2016).

8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

In 2015, nearly all ECEC staff (94.8%) worked full-time (over 38.5 hours/week) (Statistical Office RS 2016a).

8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

Induction measures for newly qualified staff

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

Depending on the Ministry's call for applications, a trainee is allocated to an ECEC centre in order to be under the guidance of a mentor. The mentor's role is to train him/her to work independently. Traineeships in Early Childhood Centres or Primary Schools are conducted on the basis of a signed employment contract or contracts for the provision of voluntary traineeship (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2016b). The traineeship for trainees with ISCED 3 level education lasts six months, for those with an ISCED 6 level education ten months (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2016b).

During the traineeship, a trainee is supported by a mentor who has gained the job title of counsellor or adviser or has at least three years' experience as a mentor (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2016b).

Traineeships in education are regulated by law. In accordance with the regulations governing employment, a traineeship is not mandatory but can be implemented. However, since the end of 2014, voluntary traineeship in the public sector is no longer supported by the government (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2016b).

Appointment and tasks of a mentor

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

- develop a programme of traineeship,
- advise the trainee to perform the tasks in accordance with the programme,
- cooperate with the head teacher, school counsellors, relevant expert working groups and other expert bodies in a kindergarten or school about the organisation and implementation of a traineeship programme,
- advise the trainee in the planning, organisation and implementation of practical presentations and other forms of direct educational work, and also monitor and analyse this work and provide the trainee with feedback,
- monitor the trainees' preparation and his/her logbook regarding the development of the traineeship programme,
- report on the trainees' skills for independent work and prepare an assessment of their practical work or written assignments necessary for admission to the professional examination,
- in cooperation with the head teacher, report on the completed traineeship,
- perform other tasks related to the traineeship programme (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 23/2006, 38/2014, Article 19).

Each practical assignment, monitored and evaluated by a mentor and the ECEC centre head lasts one hour. At least during the final three of five assignments, the centre head also has to be present. The trainee is given the topic of the assignment by the mentor at least three days beforehand. The assignments are assessed as 'passed' or 'failed' by both the mentor and the centre head. If a trainee fails the assignment, they are permitted to repeat it (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2016b).

Improving the quality of professional work – the role of selected organisations

DRCPI SBS - Developmental Research Centre for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step

For almost 20 years, the Developmental Research Centre for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step (DRCPI SBS; from 2016 named as Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education) at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana provides various activities for ECEC staff in order to support quality improvement through CPD activities and sharing experiences of good practice. The National Step by Step Network that brings together more than 1,200 professionals from around 40 Early Childhood Centres and Primary Schools was set up in 2000. Members can choose to participate in trainings, workshops, professional meetings, conferences, visits, observations with reflections, mentoring and consulting activities, action research and other research projects. In all these activities, DRCPI SBS strives to involve centre heads, teachers and teachers' assistants.

The framework for quality improvement activities is based on the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) quality pedagogy principles (ISSA 2010). The 20 ISSA principles comprise 85 indicators in seven areas (interactions; family and community; inclusion, diversity, and values of democracy; assessment and planning; teaching strategies; learning environment; professional development) that define quality teaching practices in work with children from 3 to 10 years and their families with the aim of supporting the children's development and wellbeing (Vonta and Ševkušić 2011). A similar document for children from 0 to 3 years (*A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Practices in Services for Children Under Three*) has also recently been published (ISSA 2016). The principles in the latter document were built on international documents and research findings and through the active participation of practitioners.

The DRCPI SBS has introduced the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy to the National Step by Step Network. During the implementation process, the DRCPI SBS supports dialogues with and among professionals about child-centred, democratic and inclusive practices, through self-evaluation and social-constructivist learning processes supported by mentors or through the development of professional learning communities and networks. Members of the Network choose their preferred areas of quality improvement on an annual basis. In such a participatory process, they are much more active in making decisions regarding their professional development and take greater responsibility for the quality of their practice. The tools from ISSA's Quality Resource Pack and external support provided by the DRCPI SBS help to strengthen processes of change.

Key questions which have developed from this collaborative work include the following:

- What is the role of the centre heads and counsellors in these processes?
- How to assure participation in decision making processes and to assure autonomy?
- What is the role of the external professional support and how to organise it?
- How to assure reliability in assessing quality?
- How to connect members of the network?
- What are the needs for intensive trainings?
- How to assure continuity and sustainability?

National School for Leadership in Education

The *National School for Leadership in Education*, established by the government in 1995, carries out activities in adult education, especially in the field of educating early childhood and school leaders. The School develops lifelong education programmes for early childhood and school leaders, which are supplemented by other forms of training and support that they may attend at any time (National School for Leadership in Education 2016a).

Within an organised system of on-site mentoring or regional networking aimed at improving professional quality, the School for Leadership in Education carries out two relevant programmes:

- *Network of learning schools and early childhood education centres* (National School for Leadership in Education 2016b): In schools and ECE centres, teachers and other education staff, together with principals, improve the selected area of interest for meetings of school development teams and for related implementation strategies. In the school year 2016/2017, these areas of interest were: (1) Career and professional development of practitioners, (2) Culture and climate of educational institutions, (3) Strengthening cooperation through networking.
- *Training for self-evaluation* (National School for Leadership in Education 2016c): Education institutions monitor and self-evaluate the implementation of goal-oriented strategies. Based on the findings of self-evaluation, they plan measures for the next school year. The training programme for self-evaluation was prepared within two ESF projects conducted between 2008 and 2014. Evaluation of the training indicates that programme participants acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to generate improvement and self-evaluation and that the staff in the EC centres and school perceive positive changes in the organisational functioning of their institution.

8.4 Non-contact time

The full-time working obligation both for Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teachers' Assistants is 40 hours per week. Legally, the EC Teacher's work with children should not exceed 30 hours per week and the Assistants' work 35 hours per week (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 100/2005, 14/2015).[19]

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

8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

In Slovenia, there are currently no staff shortages, but there are some weaknesses in the system. Newly qualified graduates often have difficulties in finding a job as an Early Childhood Teacher when he/she first enters the labour market. Most of them start as an Assistant, and subsequently they may be in danger of losing their initial drive to be productive, innovative, and to develop new ideas, etc. Young graduates often have to wait until an Early Childhood Teacher retires before being offered a post.

9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Promotion system

The current promotion system (in terms of professional titles and also in financial terms) does not reward practitioners who are striving to improve the process quality of their work, but focuses only on credits and certificates received at trainings, conferences, or through doing some extra work like being included in a project. That kind of system does not support efforts for better quality of work, but rewards only those who know how to wisely collect certain points/certificates. This means that no one knows how this person is performing in the classroom, since for a promotion no direct classroom observations are required.

[19] Suggestions for changes in Pre-school Institutions Act are in preparation.

Professional titles

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

Educational levels of Early Childhood Teachers and Early Childhood Teachers' Assistants

Many younger Early Childhood Teachers' Assistants nowadays have a higher formal education level than the Early Childhood Teachers they are working with. Pre-school teachers who gained their qualification before the 2012 regulations were adopted are still allowed to work as a fully qualified teacher, even if the assistant in their group has gained a higher-level award.

Workplace-based learning

Much more attention needs to be paid to the conditions for workplace-based learning in ECEC centres and for collaboration at the workplace during CPD activities: the allocation of time and place for these activities, acquiring external professional support/expertise, organising support for creating learning communities both within the centre and with other centres.

Mentoring

Mentoring support for students and for novice teachers is neither well developed nor well organised. Instead, the centre teams are expected to carry out these tasks with little or no systemic support. For example, a much stronger collaboration between IPS institutions and mentoring staff in the workplace is needed, as are training courses for mentors, remuneration for those in a mentoring position, and greater participation of the ECEC settings regarding competence development during the workplace component of initial professional studies.

Retirement age

Raising the retirement age from 57 years and 4 months to 59 years and 4 months over the last five years is becoming a stress factor (physically and mentally) for older ECEC staff. A reconsideration of assigned tasks is needed to utilise their rich experiences more wisely.

Diversity issues

In 2015, only 2.5% of ECEC staff were men (Statistical Office RS 2016b) or staff reflecting the diversity and cultural differences in the ECEC neighbourhood. A study on *The attitudes of pre-school principals, pre-school staff and representatives of local communities towards implementation of pre-school programs for disadvantaged children* (Jager 2015) was carried out with a representative sample of Slovenian ECEC settings; only 15.4% of ECEC principals indicated that they explicitly employed staff to reflect the diversity in the community.

Recently there are projects (mostly EU funded) involving persons of the Romani minority in ECEC and providing them with special trainings. Many of those persons are now starting to begin a vocational education in order to complete a qualification as pre-school teacher's assistant or even as a pre-school teacher.

Quality improvement

Quality improvement procedures need to be regarded as an on-going democratic process; there will always be many open questions about shared understanding of quality indicators. In this respect, much more attention needs to be placed on involving parents and community stakeholders in these processes. The quality of educational processes can only be studied in specific educational environments. It is therefore important for researchers and other field experts to be actively connected with practitioners in co-constructing new knowledge and practices and in evaluating them, taking into account both the perspectives of the children's development and wellbeing and the needs of families and communities.

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