

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

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1. ECEC governance

In the split system of early childhood education and care in Slovakia, kindergartens for 3- to 6-year olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu*). The ministry is responsible for regulating legislative measures, national curricula, inspection, monitoring and funding. At the local level, the providers of kindergartens - mostly municipalities, but also regions (for kindergartens for children with special needs), private persons and churches - are in charge of the organisation of ECEC settings.

As from 1993, provision for the under-threes was not assigned to a specific jurisdiction. However, since March 2017 (Law No. 448/2008) ECEC settings for children under the age of 3 come under the auspices of the Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Family (*Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny*). The providers of these settings can be municipal or private (the majority). In the first case, they receive financial support from the Ministry. Municipalities can also choose to support private institutions from their own sources.

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Table 1 shows the ECEC staff in centre-based settings in Slovakia and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at end of this section).

Table 1

Slovakia: ECEC staff in centre-based 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
Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania Pre-primary Education Teacher/ Kindergarten Teacher	<i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 2/3-6 years <i>Základná škola s materskou školou,</i> Primary school with kindergarten groups 2/3-6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head	2/3-6 years	Required qualification: 4 years upper secondary vocational school (<i>stredná pedagogická škola</i>), specialising in pedagogy (<i>pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>) Award: <i>maturita</i> ECTS points: n/a ² EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 354 OR Upper secondary school plus 2 years post-
<i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special needs 2/3-6 years <i>Materská škola v prírode</i> Forest kindergarten/			

¹UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012, 2014.

²n/a: not applicable

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
	nature school 5-6 years			secondary vocational qualification at above mentioned schools Award: <i>maturita</i> ECTS points: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 4 OR 4 years upper secondary vocational school PLUS additional qualification in special education ECTS points: n/a EQF: level 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 4 <i>Optional but not required:</i> 3 years university Award: Bachelor ECTS points: 180 EQF: level 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6
<i>Asistent učiteľa</i> Teacher Assistant	<i>Materská škola</i> Kindergarten 2/3-6 years <i>Základná škola s materskou školou,</i> Primary school with kindergarten 2/3-6 years <i>Špeciálna materská škola</i> Kindergarten for children with special needs 2/3-6 years	Qualified co-worker	2/3-6 years	4 years upper secondary vocational education ECTS points : n/a EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 3 OR <i>Optional, not required:</i> 3 years of studies at university Award: Bachelor ECTS points: 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6
<i>Sestra v jasliach</i> Childcare Worker Nurse, Caregiver <i>Profile:</i> Social Care/Health Care Professional	<i>Detské jasle</i> Infant/toddler childcare centres 6 months - 3 years <i>Súkromné detské centrá</i> Private childcare centres 0-6 years	Core practitioner	6 months - 3 years 0-6 years	<i>Until end of 2016</i> non-regulated, therefore no official minimum qualification requirement, but medical nurses are often employed in the post of core practitioner. <i>As from March 2017:</i> 4 years upper secondary vocational school, specialising in kindergarten; education

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
				and care or health care OR Upper secondary education (<i>maturita</i>) plus 220 hours accredited course on child care ECTS points: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 3

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

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

Since day nurseries and similar centres for children up to three years did not until recently fall within the competence of a specific ministry, qualification requirements for staff were not regulated and no official data were compiled about the composition of the workforce. Qualified medical nurses are often employed in the position of nursery nurse/childcare practitioner.

Regular contact staff in kindergartens are Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teachers and Teacher Assistants. 96.1% of Kindergarten Teachers and 60.4% of Teacher Assistants meet the necessary qualification requirements. 89.7% of Kindergarten Teachers are Slovak by nationality and 9% Hungarian. Women constitute an absolute majority in the Kindergarten Teacher workforce, only 0.3% are men (Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

Table 2

Slovakia: Structural composition of core practitioners in kindergartens (3-6)

Staff categories	Proportion of teacher workforce – 2014
Staff with specialist higher education degree – Bachelor	10.5%
Staff with specialist higher education degree – Master	17.6%
Staff with specialist higher education degree – PhD.	0.3%
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	67.7%
Staff with non-specified qualification	3.3%
Staff with no formal IPS	3.3%
Specialist support staff (e.g. speech therapists)	Mostly off-site
Male kindergarten teachers	0.3%
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

Table 3

Slovakia: Structural composition of Teacher Assistants in kindergartens (3-6)*

Staff categories	Proportion of teacher assistant workforce – 2014
Staff with higher education degree – Bachelor	9.4%
Staff with higher education degree – Master	18.1%
Staff with higher education degree – PhD.	2.0%
Staff with vocational qualification (upper secondary)	30.2%
Staff with lower secondary qualification	0.7%
Staff with no formal IPS	39.6%
Male staff	No data available
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

*Source: (Damián Forgács, personal communication, March 2016).

3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

There are two legally regulated possibilities to obtain the qualification necessary to work with kindergarten-age children: to complete the upper secondary vocational school with a specialisation in pedagogy or to acquire a higher education qualification.

3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher (*Učiteľ/ka materskej školy, Učiteľ/ka predprimárneho vzdelávania*)

Those who have completed lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and have successfully passed an entrance examination may apply for a course of study at an upper secondary vocational school with a specialisation in pedagogy. The main part of the entrance examination is the talent examination consisting of: (1) music education (tested areas: voice and intonation skills, rhythmic feeling, music memory, tone feeling, harmony); (2) fine art education (two fine art works testing fantasy and imagination, colour feeling, the ability to draw and paint visual objects); (3) literacy and language education (recitation by heart, to read a given text, correct pronunciation, ability to imagine on a given topic, ability to communicate promptly); (4) physical education (gymnastics, motor tests, sports games, etc.).

Applicants with severe and irreparable speech disorders as well as those who are exempt from physical education cannot be accepted for this course of study (Pedagogická a sociálna akadémia Bratislava 2016a; Pedagogická a sociálna akadémia Prešov 2016b).

The initial professional study route lasts for four years and is completed with a school leaving certificate (*maturita*) which qualifies for university entrance (ISCED 354, EQF level 4). School-leavers work as qualified teachers in kindergartens and private childcare centres. They are also qualified to work as educators in after-school clubs for children and in residential care settings.

School-leavers from other types of upper secondary schools can apply for a two-year post-secondary qualification at an upper secondary vocational school with a specialisation in pedagogy. They finish with a school leaving certificate which qualifies for university entrance and a post-secondary non-tertiary education at level ISCED 4, EQF 4.

The higher education qualification 'Pre-primary and Primary School Education' is structured according to two levels. The first one is the Bachelor's degree programme. Entry requirements include the completed school-leaving examination and the successfully passed entrance examination (the form of entrance examination is set out by the university faculties). The degree course takes three years to complete and the achieved level of education is ISCED 6, EQF 6, 180

ECTS points and graduates are awarded a Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education.

The subsequent second level is a Master's degree programme which can be followed after a completed Bachelor's degree in the same or related field of study and successful completion of an entrance examination set by the university faculty. The course of study lasts for two years and the achieved level of education is ISCED 7, EQF 7, 120 ECTS points; graduates are awarded a Master in Pre-primary Education. Graduates mostly work as teachers or directors/centre heads in kindergartens; they may work also as inspectors, methodologists³ for pre-school education, and also in the field of public administration.

They can also go on to take a Doctoral degree programme if they pass the faculty entrance examination. The doctoral programme takes three years to complete and the achieved level of education is ISCED 8, EQF 8, 180 ECTS points, with an award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Pre-primary Education. Graduates mostly work at universities and other specialised institutions.

Table 4

Slovakia: Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Slovakian: <i>Učiteľka materskej školy / Učiteľka predprimárneho vzdelávania</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional
<p><i>Route 1:</i> Entry requirements: Completed lower secondary education, entrance exam (music, art, language, physical education) Professional studies: 4 years upper secondary vocational study, specialising in pedagogy (<i>stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia, pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>) Award: School leaving certificate (<i>maturita</i>) - higher education entrance certificate ECTS points: not applicable EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 354 Main ECEC workplaces: Kindergarten (<i>materská škola</i>), 2/3-6 years; Primary school with kindergarten (<i>základná škola s materskou školou</i>), 2/3-6 years; Kindergarten for children with special needs (<i>špeciálna materská škola</i>), 2/3-6 years; Forest kindergarten/nature school (<i>materská škola v prírode</i>), 5-6 years; After-school clubs for children 6-15 years</p> <p><i>Route 2:</i> Entry requirements: Completed upper secondary school Professional studies: 2 years post-secondary course of studies (<i>stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálna akadémia; pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia</i>) in educational and social/cultural studies Award: School leaving certificate – higher education entrance certificate (<i>maturita</i>) ECTS points: not applicable EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 454 Main ECEC workplaces: see above</p> <p><i>Route 3:</i> Entry requirements: Completed school leaving exam (<i>maturita</i>) and university faculty entrance exam Professional studies: 3 years university* Award: Bachelor in Pre-primary and Primary School Education; can be followed with a 2-year Master's degree programme (Master in Pre-primary Education) and a 3-year doctoral programme (Doctor of Philosophy in Pre-primary Education) ECTS: 180 (BA), plus 120 (MA), plus 180 (PhD) EQF level: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD)</p>

³'Methodologists' in Slovakia are senior Kindergarten Teachers responsible for professional support in organising the educational work in kindergartens. Usually they are based at regional methodological centres.

Job title in Slovakian: <i>Učiteľka materskej školy / Učiteľka predprimárneho vzdelávania</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional
ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6 (BA), 7 (MA), 8 (PhD) Main ECEC workplaces: see above; graduates with a Master's degree can work as directors/centre heads of kindergartens, inspectors, methodological experts; graduates with a Doctoral degree mainly work at universities or other specialised institutions.

* Students specialising in special education/pedagogy may work in classes/schools for children with special needs

Teacher Assistant (*Asistent učiteľa/ky*)

Guidance issued by the Ministry of Education (No. 1631/2002) on the implementation of the Teacher Assistant profession in preschool centres, primary schools and schools for children with special needs enabled providers to employ a Teacher Assistant in kindergarten classrooms attended by at least five children from a disadvantaged social background. The purpose was to facilitate their adaptation process in a new environment, to help them to overcome language and social barriers and to cooperate with their families.

Since this time, the qualification requirement for working as a Teacher Assistant is a 4 year upper secondary vocational education. However, not all Teacher Assistants are qualified to this level.

Table 5

Slovakia: Teacher Assistant

Job title in Slovakian: <i>Asistent učiteľa/ky</i>
Route 1: Entry requirements: Completed lower secondary education, vocational school entrance exam Professional studies: 4 years upper secondary vocational education Award: School leaving certificate (<i>maturita</i>) – higher education entrance certificate ECTS points: not applicable EQF level: 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 3 Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten (<i>materská škola</i>), 2/3-6 years; Primary school with kindergarten groups (<i>základná škola s materskou školou</i>), 2/3-6 years; Kindergarten for children with special needs (<i>špeciálna materská škola</i>), 2/3-6 years
Route 2: Entry requirements: Completed school leaving exam (<i>maturita</i>) and university faculty entrance exam Professional studies: 3 years university Award: Bachelor ECTS points : 180 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6 Main ECEC workplaces: see above

Table 6

Slovakia: Childcare Worker

Job title in Slovakian: <i>Sestra v jasliach/opatrovatel'/ka detí</i> Profile: Social Care/Health Care Professional
<p><i>Since March 2017:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Completed lower secondary education, vocational school entrance exam</p> <p>Professional studies: 4 years upper secondary vocational school (<i>stredná pedagogická škola, pedagogická a sociálne akadémia, pedagogická a kultúrna akadémia, stredná zdravotnícka škola</i>), specialising in kindergarten, education and care or health care.</p> <p>Award: <i>maturita</i></p> <p>OR</p> <p>Upper secondary education (<i>maturita</i>) plus 220 hours accredited course on child care</p> <p>ECTS points: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0922</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Infant/toddler childcare centre (<i>detské jasle</i>), 6 months-3 years</p>

Note: Since March 2017, 75% of all staff in ECEC settings for under-threes are required to have this qualification

3.2 Competencies and curricula in IPS programmes for core practitioners

Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher – upper secondary route

Competence requirements

The prospective kindergarten teachers acquire the following basic competencies during the upper secondary vocational school route (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania 2016, 24-33):

1. Communicative and socio-interactive skills essential for working life, including skills to develop a culture of thinking and learning, to search for information, to use and to create knowledge, and to develop communicative skills in at least one foreign language:
 - Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills needed for engagement in society; skills of self-reflection to improve one's performance; skills to follow a lifelong learning strategy, to work in a team, to respect universal ethical values;
 - Creative problem solving skills – identifying the problem, analysing and establishing effective procedures, strategies and evaluative assessments;
 - To learn how to learn, to adapt to changes and to use information flows;
 - Capacity to use information technologies;
 - Capacity for democratic citizenship.
2. Professional competencies at the required level – being able to
 - Describe, explain, analyse, compare the conditions, principles, contents, methods, forms, and approaches in education – in music education, fine art education, physical education, literary and language education, drama education for pre-school age children;
 - Define rules for pedagogical communication;
 - Define and describe types, regularities and conditions of learning, efficiency and organisation of teaching, characteristics of educational practice.

Curricular areas

The vocational schools have to prepare their own syllabus in accordance with the content areas defined in the national curricular framework (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania 2016, 44-76):

1. **Language and communication:** Supporting the students' abilities to communicate, to use information, to develop their social competencies, to improve their verbal skills.

2. **Humankind, values and society:** Supporting students in developing their own identity and respect for others, for nature and national values, for the fundamental principles of democracy and tolerance; preparing them to nurture stable relationships with their families, at work, in community groups, both national and international.
3. **Humankind and nature:** Developing a positive disposition towards natural sciences through an interdisciplinary approach including chemistry, physics, biology and ecology.
4. **Mathematics and working with information:** Developing an understanding of quantitative relations in nature, society, technology or economics; providing students with sufficient knowledge to study a specific field and to transfer it to practice and use it as a basis for on-going learning.
5. **Health and movement:** Providing fundamental information about biological, physical, emotional, psychological and social aspects for leading a healthy lifestyle; providing knowledge about the body, movement development, movement skills, physical fitness and health, including health protection and prevention of diseases.

The school syllabus also includes drama education, music education, fine art education, physical education (swimming and skiing courses) and nature conservation courses.

Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher – Bachelor’s degree route

Competence requirements

These include theoretical and practical aspects:

- a) *Theoretical:* being familiar with the psychological interpretation of a child’s development and education; knowing and understanding the concepts of socialisation and educational processes within a broader social context; knowing the principles for creating and designing an age-appropriate learning environment; being able to interpret scientific texts and research in the field of pedagogy; being able to effectively cooperate to design school-wide and community projects regarding the work with children.
- b) *Practical:* being able to organise and manage pedagogical processes at the pre-school class level and with groups of young school-age children; being able to apply specific programmes, as well as to plan and implement different approaches for each part of the curriculum; being able to communicate personal pedagogical knowledge at the appropriate community level; following the principle of lifelong learning (Akreditačná komisia 2016).

Curricular areas

During the development of the syllabus for the Bachelor’s degree, all faculties are required to respect the so-called core curriculum approved by the accreditation commission. The core curriculum for the Bachelor’s degree in Pre-primary and Primary Education consists of: basic philosophical concepts in education; social and political context of education; basic concepts of developmental psychology and biology in early childhood; general theories of education; theory of early childhood and out-of-school education; curricula and methodology in fundamental learning areas (language, mathematics, natural sciences, art, physical education); management of educational institutions; selected topics in medicine, gender studies, alternative education programmes. An educational project (semester work), the final thesis (theoretical research) and the final state examination are also parts of the curriculum (Akreditačná komisia 2016).

Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher – Master’s degree route

Competence requirements

The required competencies for the Master’s degree are also organised according to theoretical and practical aspects:

- a) *Theoretical*: working critically with theoretical concepts in pre-primary and primary education; knowing the current theoretical models of education, socialisation and acculturation; knowing and analysing the concepts of cultural literacy; knowing cognitive algorithms in didactics and related fields (especially didactics of language, mathematics, natural sciences and art); knowledge of the legal framework, economics and ethical aspects within the field of study; specialisation in a particular didactic area.
- b) *Practical*: independently planning and realising educational processes; handling methodological and organisational work in the field of pre-primary education; planning integrative approaches for children with special needs; analysing and considering alternative pre-school education programmes; preparing methodological texts with a wide range of applicability; effectively communicating with a wider public and professional community (Akreditačná komisia 2016).

Curricular areas

Cultural and socio-anthropological contexts of education; sociology of childhood; methodology for creating social knowledge; theories for forming cultural literacy; models of cognitive development, models of personal and social development; theory and practice of primary education; theory of management of pre-primary and out-of-school education; didactics of the basic fields of education (language, mathematics, bases of natural and social science, art and physical education); research and project work in didactics; semester project (empirical research). The course of study ends with a Master's thesis either on general educational topics and issues or on a specialised area of didactics. Graduates are qualified to hold continuing professional development activities for pre-primary and primary school teachers (Akreditačná komisia 2016).

Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teacher – Doctoral degree

Competence requirements

Conducting research and guiding complex projects and development activities related to the field of study; identifying scientific problems and conducting projects in the field of pre-primary and primary education; adopting research methodology appropriate for the problem at hand; adhering to principles for presenting the research findings; contextualising the findings in the scientific literature; stating implications for further research and relevance for educational practices; being aware of the ethical and legal principles relevant to scientific work; contextualising the research in the broader philosophical and social context of the field.

Curricular areas

Methodology of educational research; quantitative and qualitative approaches; theoretical and empirical research; language of science; scientific texts; research on pre-primary and primary education; philosophy of education; individual research project work (Akreditačná komisia 2016).

3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

There are no alternative qualification routes for staff working in ECEC settings in Slovakia. Almost all Pre-primary Teachers in the Slovak Republic are qualified. If an unqualified person is employed as a teacher, it is his/her duty to complete the qualification, either through a post-secondary, non-tertiary part-time education (ISCED 4) route at an upper secondary vocational school with a specialisation in pedagogy (two years) or by acquiring a Bachelor's (three/four years) or Master's (two years) degree through part-time study in the study programme Pre-primary and Primary Education (ISCED 6). Exception is 220 hours course for those who are already working as childcare workers with children 0-3.

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

In the Slovak Republic, there is no regulated time allocation for workplace-based learning in the IPS of prospective Pre-primary Teachers, neither at the upper secondary nor at the tertiary level. However, the national curricular framework and the universities' approved and accredited core syllabus, both of which are binding documents, do provide a general framework for field placements.

Four-year vocational route

A minimum number of 68 hours is set out in the national curricular framework: 20 hours for theoretical studies and 18 hours for field-based studies. The remaining 30 hours can be used by the vocational schools according to their own conditions and needs (Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania 2016, 38).

In consequence, the range and duration of practical experiences varies from school to school. The placements are usually conducted in the form of continuous pedagogical practice in the student's place of residence and surroundings, usually for between five to 10/15 working days per year for six hours a day. Beyond this, in the 3rd and 4th year of study students participate in pedagogical placements throughout the school year for three to ten hours a week. They spend half of this time in kindergartens and half in after-school clubs for children.

For example, at the upper vocational school for education and social studies in Prešov, the workplace-based learning component of IPS is set out in the syllabus as follows: in the 3rd year of study four hours a week and in the 4th year of study three hours a week. The continuous vocational practice is a part of the subject called "practice" and is scheduled for five working days in the 1st and 2nd year of study and for ten working days in the 3rd and 4th year of study (always for six hours a day), making a total of 180 hours overall (Pedagogická a sociálna akadémia Prešov 2016c).

Tertiary-level route

At tertiary education level, each faculty of education usually offers a Bachelor's degree programme in Pre-primary and Primary Education. It is the responsibility of each faculty to determine the range and the content of practical placements. For example, the faculty of education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra implements 40 hours of introductory observational practice in kindergartens and after-school clubs into the 3rd semester. In the 4th semester there are 20 hours of observation and working in an assistant role in kindergarten and in the 6th semester there are 40 hours of independent practice in kindergartens and after-school clubs for children.

The range of pedagogical practice is not centrally determined; it is set out by each faculty in its study programmes. Two examples:

- The faculty of education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra awards 10 ECTS points (2+2+6) for field-based studies during the Bachelor's degree programme. During the 3rd semester, 40 hours of observational practice take place in a kindergarten and an after-school club (2 ECTS points); during the 4th semester students work in an observational and assistant role in a kindergarten (20 hours, 2 ECTS points); and during the 6th semester students undertake independent pedagogical assignments in both a kindergarten and an after-school club for children (40 hours, 6 ECTS points; Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre 2016).
- At Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the faculty of education's Bachelor's degree syllabus includes a course on the Theory and Practice of Pre-primary and Primary Education. This comprises one lecture, two seminars, two exercises and three practical sessions per week. 9 ECTS points are awarded for this subject. During the 6th semester students undertake pedagogical field placements for about 80 hours (6 ECTS points). Within the Master's study programme, students can study a course on Education of Children with Specific

Educational Needs. The course comprises one seminar and one placement per week (10 ECTS points). During the placement period, students are expected to develop observational skills, to monitor and record a child's development, to manage and evaluate the educational process, to carry out written preparations, to organise activities for children aimed at developing complex skills and supporting the child's personal development, to handle pedagogical documentation, to compile an individual pedagogical plan for a child. The students are expected to use self-reflection methods and write a report about their practice. A variety of self-evaluation tools are used, in particular a pedagogical diary or log book. The student's activities are also assessed by an experienced teacher, another student, or a university tutor. A written external evaluation is carried out by a supervising teacher and on this basis the responsible university tutor awards credits for the practical placement. Observation and analysis of the teacher's activity, familiarisation with the specific working conditions in kindergarten are all part of workplace-based learning (Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici 2016).

Teachers who take on a mentoring or supervising role are not required to have a specific qualification or training for this task. In general they are experienced teachers and are paid for this work by the faculty.

5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

In accordance with Law No. 317/2009 on pedagogical and professional employees, teachers and teacher assistants have both a right and an obligation to participate in continuing education that ensures professional development within a career system.

Independent of the education level of the teacher (vocational studies or university studies), teachers can progress from one career stage to another. Each of the following four career stages corresponds to a certain level of competence and each reflects a different salary level:

1. novice/newly qualified teacher (graduate in his/her first employment);
2. independent teacher (after completing an adaptation course);
3. teacher with first attestation (after meeting the established criteria);
4. teacher with second attestation.

The aim of continuing education is to gain up-to-date knowledge, skills and competences in order to maintain, refresh, improve and complement the teachers' professional competencies. CPD courses are organised through programmes for continuing education accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. They are mostly provided by universities, regional Methodological Centres, church-affiliated communities, or other legal entities specialising in education (Ministerstvo školstva vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej 2016a).

The centre head is responsible for organising the CPD activities of staff and preparing the annual programme for continuing professional development. Teachers can participate in CPD activities once they have completed six months of teaching.

There are five main types of continuing education within the career stage system:

- adaptation/induction courses,
- update courses,
- educational innovation courses,
- specialisation courses,
- kindergarten and school leadership courses.

The goal of *adaptation/induction courses* is to provide newly qualified teachers with the necessary professional competencies to carry out standard teacher activities which it was not possible to acquire during the practical placements provided by the secondary vocational schools or

universities. Induction courses are organised according to the programme drawn up by the employer and build on the framework programmes for induction courses issued by the ministry. Novice teachers are obliged to undertake and successfully complete an induction course not later than two years after signing their work contract, otherwise the work contract will be terminated. Unqualified persons working as teachers and teacher assistants are also obliged to attend an induction course.

Update and educational innovation courses aim to make teachers aware of new developments in their field and to provide them with a further improvement of the professional competencies needed for carrying out standard teacher activities.

The goal of *specialisation courses* is to provide teachers with the professional competencies to carry out specialised tasks (for example educational counselling).

The goal of *kindergarten and school leadership courses* is to provide teachers with the professional competencies necessary for carrying out management duties and to professionalise the work of centre heads. This includes the development of competencies in working with data, becoming familiar with indicators of teacher evaluation, learning about innovations in the management of kindergartens, etc.

Pre-primary Teachers are entitled to paid leave by the employer in the following cases:

- five working days of paid leave per year to participate in CPD activities;
- an additional five working days for preparation for the first or second attestation examination;
- an additional five working days to participate in a school leadership course or a course on innovation in school leadership education, the latter being specifically for the heads of ECEC settings.

The kindergarten plans the annual costs involved for CPD activities. The costs are covered by employers, providers and participants depending on the course provider.

Attestations and continuing education are funded through state budgets, municipal budgets, employers, participant fees, and through donations or other resources.

Problems related to participation in CPD activities include: releasing the teachers from their workload, financing in cases where the teachers have to pay for course attendance, substituting the teacher in the ECEC setting. For financial reasons, some municipalities prefer staff with a lower qualification.

Unqualified persons working as teachers in kindergartens are obliged to start the qualifying course (post-secondary study at a vocational school or university) within a period of two years after concluding a work contract and to complete it within four years at the latest.

Similarly, teachers in kindergartens for children with special needs have to gain the qualification within a maximum of seven years.

The Head Teacher of a kindergarten is appointed on the basis of a selection process. The Head Teacher must meet the following conditions: have the required qualification, have completed the first attestation, have the required length of professional experience (usually five years), have to complete the school leadership course within three years at latest.

A student mentor is required to have the first attestation, or to have at least completed the preparatory course for attestation. No specific topics focusing on the supervisory and supportive activities of a student mentor are required. Additional support staff (e.g. school psychologist, speech therapist, therapeutic educator) have developed their particular specialisation during their university studies and also have an obligation to participate in continuing study.

The state supports the university study of Pre-primary Teachers by offering full-time studies at all three levels free of charge. In the case of in-service study the employer can grant support according to the law (e.g. study leave; Ministerstvo školstva vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej Republiky 2016b).

Since 1997, the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education (Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR 2016d) has ensured the collection and management of data about institutions offering continuing education in the Slovak Republic and their educational activities. All programmes and activities that complement, broaden and deepen the acquired education are considered as continuing education. Large-scale research has not been conducted.

6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

A fundamental reform of the continuing education of Pre-primary Teachers began with the adoption of the Law on Pedagogical and Professional Employees (2009), when Kindergarten Teachers were first included in the state school system of continuing education. At present, there are intentions to drive the transfer of the initial professional studies of Pre-primary/Kindergarten Teachers at a greater rate to the university level and to accredit the programmes of continuing education aimed at pre-primary education.

Changes in the credit award system for continuing education are also on the policy agenda. The number of awarded credits for particular CPD courses currently takes into account:

- the extent and complexity of the continuing education programme;
- authoring or co-authoring approved textbooks, learning texts, workbooks, recommended teaching tools or other measurable creative/productive activities related to pedagogical practice or specialised practice.

Credits are valid for a period of seven years from the date of award; for serious reasons (especially maternity leave, parental leave or sickness absence longer than six months continuously) and upon a written request from the employee, the employer may extend this period for no more than three years.

Recent discussions have focused specifically on the allocation and recognition of credits.

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

In the Slovak Republic, no research related to the professionalisation of ECEC staff has been conducted during the past five years. Some projects were carried out to prepare Pre-primary Teachers for changes in the education programme ISCED 0, particularly since the introduction of a new National Curriculum for kindergartens in September 2016 (Štátny pedagogický ústav 2017).

8. General workforce issues

8.1 Remuneration

The salary of Pre-primary Teachers depends on the level of their initial professional studies and the length of professional practice. Teachers may obtain a so called *credit salary rise* for completed continuing education.

Taking into account the level of education and the societal value of their work, teachers belong to the group of employees with inadequate remuneration. Since teachers are state employees, their wages are relatively low, and the state is very conscious of this fact. Currently, a wage increase is under consideration.

One of the main problems that novice teachers have to face is to ensure their accommodation. Beneficial mortgages are available to help young teachers buy a flat. The state subsidises these by reducing the interest rate of commercial mortgages, in cooperation with banks. The state reduces the interest rate by 3% and the banks by another 1.5%. Neither mortgage for teachers is available free of charge. Those who want to take a mortgage have to agree to work for the state for a period of five years. Currently, there is a discussion under way about providing social housing for newly qualified teachers.

The cost of renting accommodation can be prohibitive, depending on the location, size and quality of the flat. For example, in Bratislava a single parent with a child can barely afford to rent a flat. Kindergarten head teachers, deputy head teachers and student mentors receive a higher salary (with extra payment for management).

In accordance with Decree No 437/2009, Pre-primary Teachers are classified into the following salary grades (monthly salaries, valid since September 2016):

Grade 7: beginning teacher with upper secondary education (ISCED 3, 4), 561.50€

Grade 8: independent teacher with upper secondary education (ISCED 3, 4) and beginning teacher with Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6), 620.50€

Grade 9: independent teacher with a Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6) and beginning teacher with a Master's degree (ISCED 7), 694.50€

Grade 10: independent teacher with a Master's degree (ISCED 7), 757.50€

Grade 11: teacher with first attestation, 849€

Grade 12: teacher with second attestation, 950€

In addition to this basic salary, teachers receive each year a monthly increase in pay according to their years of practice (e.g. after the first year 5.50 - 9€, after six years 31.50 – 53.50€, after 20 years 94.50 – 160.50€, after 30 years 121 - 205€).

8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

Pre-primary Teachers work 37.5 hours a week and usually work full-time. Only a very small number in kindergartens for children with special needs are employed part-time (nine teachers of 255 working in public kindergartens, three teachers of 27 working in private kindergartens and one teacher of 12 working in church-affiliated kindergartens/schools).

8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

Newly qualified teachers work under the supervision and with the support of a supervising teacher (mentor) who familiarises him with the organisation and activities of the kindergarten, explains relevant rules, and helps to plan and evaluate the new teacher's pedagogical work. Together they analyse and evaluate the activities of the children and the teachers, prepare meetings with parents, organise events, etc. There are also other colleagues who help the beginning teacher to get to know the children.

Additional support for teachers is available through regional associations (e.g. OMEP - national branch of an international early childhood education association, Society for Pre-school Education) that organise multiple education events for teachers (lectures, workshops, open days in kindergarten, etc.).

8.4 Non-contact time

Out of 37.5 working hours per week, 28 hours are allocated to direct pedagogical activities and 9.5 hours to other activities related to the working process (e.g. preparation and planning of activities, cooperation with parents, workshops, consultations with specialists, etc.).

8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

In the Slovak Republic, there are currently no staff shortages in the ECEC field, and therefore there is no need for special recruitment strategies.

9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

1. Guaranteeing the qualification level of Pre-primary Teachers. In some cases municipalities as providers of kindergartens prefer to employ unqualified persons as a teacher for financial reasons. Moreover, skilled teachers may possibly find better paid jobs in other areas of work.
2. Improving the quality of Pre-primary Teacher education at all levels of initial professional studies. Teachers' theoretical education is already at a high level, but more attention should be paid to the practical elements of the professional qualification and its planning and organisation as well as finding a balance between the two aspects.
3. Increasing the salaries of teachers and employees in the education sector.

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