



# INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) COUNTRY QUESTIONNAIRE – SLOVAK REPUBLIC

## 1. ACCESS, PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPATION

### Key principles

1.1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

1.2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

It is first necessary to mention that, despite pre-primary education being generally understood as education and care for children from birth until starting compulsory education, the answers in this questionnaire focus on the period in which children enrol in kindergartens in Slovakia; that is, from the age of 2 to the beginning of compulsory education (usually at 6 years of age). The reason for this is that maternity leave lasts for 3 years in Slovakia. Parents who want to place their child in a pre-primary setting earlier usually turn to the private sector, but the state only guarantees educational programmes in the kindergarten network.

ECE for children aged from 6 months to 3 years generally takes place in a crèche, nursery or children’s centre. These facilities provide personal full-day, half-day or hourly care for children, including the provision of adequate food and hygiene. These facilities are not included in the network of schools under Act no. 596/2003 Coll. on state administration in education and school self-government or the changes and amendments of these acts. A small number of these facilities are founded by villages or towns, occasionally they are connected to a church, but most are founded by individuals or legal entities. The criteria for admission to these facilities are not stated in law, but are set by their individual founders. Parents have the right to choose any facility close to the place where they live or outside their locality, depending on availability of places. Care in crèches, nurseries or children’s centres is normally provided for children from 6 months to 3 years. The group size in these facilities is dependent on the age of the children and their maturity. Parents in Slovakia prefer to place their children in state kindergartens. As long as there is capacity, they can do so when their children reach 2 years of age.

### *Legislation and policy at national level*

Guiding questions	Country responses
1. Is there a national policy and	The Slovakian Constitution ensures equal protection of the rights and interests of all citizens, regardless of their age, sex,



Guiding questions	Country responses
<p>legislation that gives the right to all children, without exception, from at least 3 years onwards, to attend mainstream Early Childhood Education (ECE)?</p>	<p>nationality, skin colour or type of citizenship. Total gross attendance of pre-school children in Slovakia is around 90%. Despite the fact that there is a wide network of kindergartens in Slovakia (mostly state owned, but also private and clerical kindergartens) higher demand for places is being recorded due to an increased demographic curve. The statistics show that on 15 September 2015 there were 2,935 kindergartens in operation.</p> <p>To satisfy the high demand the Slovakian Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport allocated funds for the expansion of the existing network with the aim of allowing 95% of children aged 4–5 to participate in pre-primary education by 2020.</p> <p>Pre-primary education in kindergartens is provided through fees, with the exception of kindergartens at health facilities such as hospitals, spas, sanatoriums or health resorts – parents do not pay during their child’s treatment at these facilities.</p> <p>Pre-primary education is also provided free of charge for children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– who have one year left before primary school enrolment;</li><li>– whose legal guardian has submitted documents confirming that they receive social assistance benefits and allowances to social assistance benefit to the kindergarten’s head teacher;</li><li>– who have been placed in the kindergarten after a court decision.</li></ul> <p>The monthly fee is defined by provision providers and is usually under 75 euros. The average monthly payment is about 12–15 euros, excluding the fee for meals.</p> <p>The kindergarten’s founder can decide that a parent/legal guardian does not need to pay the monthly contributions if their child has been absent from kindergarten for more than 30 consecutive calendar days due to illness or demonstrable family reasons. The founder may also decide that a</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>parent/legal guardian will only pay a proportion of the contribution if their child has not attended kindergarten during the school holidays or if the kindergarten's operation has been interrupted by the founder or due to other serious reasons.</p>
<p>2. Is there support available to enable every child to attend ECE?</p>	<p>Slovakia supports ECE for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background. There is no 'ethnic principle' for the admission of children into pre-primary education.</p> <p>Presenting the importance of ECE for successful later learning in primary schools helps to increase parents' interest in it. This includes parents from socially disadvantaged and marginalised communities (in Slovakia these are mostly marginalised Roma communities) and admission of their children to ECE settings where inclusive education is supported.</p> <p>The problem in Slovakia is not a lack of interest in pre-primary education but, in some towns and villages, the lack of capacity. However, there are parents, especially parents in marginalised Roma communities, who despite intense promotion of the importance of pre-primary education show little or any interest in it. In many cases they show interest after the capacity of facilities is reached. It should also be taken into account that in some regions with a high number of Roma communities there are more children, so the municipalities need to show willing to increase capacities in pre-primary education settings.</p> <p>It is not possible to say what percentage of the population is Roma, or even what percentage of Roma children are in Slovakia. In the last census in 2011 only 105,738 people considered themselves as having Roma nationality (about 2% of the population: <a href="http://census2011.statistics.sk/tabulky.html">http://census2011.statistics.sk/tabulky.html</a>; more information in TAB 115). Statistical estimations and sociological monitoring show a higher number. Roma usually class themselves as having Slovak or Hungarian nationality.</p> <p>It is important to take a different approach with marginalised Roma communities in order to change their opinion of ECE and</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>support the education and inclusion of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The most significant starting points in this matter are the <i>National Project of the Inclusive Educational Model for Pre-primary Education</i> and <i>The National Project for Marginalised Roma Communities</i> (NP MRK 1 and NP MRK 2). The main goal of these projects was to improve the professional competencies of pedagogical staff and employees who are involved in work with Roma communities. Both projects helped to expand the number of teaching assistants. This significantly improved communication between staff, parents and children. Both projects have now finished, but the projects' activities are still required to convince Roma parents of the importance of pre-primary education for their children. For this reason, it is necessary to intensively continue the work with families and support the successful systematic co-operation with social workers.</p> <p>Continuity of NP MRK 1 and NP MRK 2 will enable a follow-up project, <i>School Open to Everyone (Škola otvorená všetkým)</i>. The aim of the new project is to contribute to compensation for disadvantaged children and will ensure equal opportunities in the education process for children and learners from marginalised Roma communities (in this case the Roma communities whose living conditions are below the poverty line, they fail to meet many of the current standards of living). The project requires the involvement of several organisations in the educational system, which will create a model of effective co-operation between the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovakia, the Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention, pre-primary and informal education institutions.</p> <p>The national project <i>Take Away</i> will also be implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary Government for Roma Communities. The project will focus on the expansion of pre-primary education capacity, especially in municipalities which were part of the Atlas of Roma Communities in 2013 and in municipalities in which excluded communities and segregated Roma settlements are established.</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
3. Is there a period of compulsory ECE before school starts?	<p>Pre-primary education in Slovakia is not compulsory but optional, so parents can decide to use it or not. No legislative entitlement exists for kindergarten places, but during enrolment the head teacher of the kindergarten must give preference to children who are one year away from starting their compulsory education.</p> <p>The introduction of compulsory ECE can force parents under sanctions to enrol children into kindergartens, but what real attendance would look like is questionable. From survey results and project reports such as ROCEPO's (a Roma education centre) <i>Správa o výsledkoch prieskumu 2011</i>, which monitored the actual attendance of children from socially disadvantaged families in primary schools, we know that children's attendance at schools is determined by parents' awareness of the importance of education for their children. Another factor which determines school attendance is the presence of a teaching assistant in class who helps children to learn. Punitive measures are ineffective, so only systematic work with families as a type of early intervention can help.</p>
4. Are arrangements in place for transition from home to ECE and from ECE to primary education for all children?	<p>The transition from home to the ECE setting is sometimes accompanied by adaptation problems. Usually children who have already experienced some time in a crèche, nursery or children's centre pass more smoothly through the adaptation process. To facilitate the process, an adaptation programme can be used in which the legal guardian brings the child to the setting, initially for one hour, two hours or up to four hours, in co-operation with the pedagogical staff. If the child adapts, they can begin to attend for the normal hours. If the child's ability to adapt is impaired, the head teacher may agree with the legal guardian to suspend the child's attendance for an agreed period. In the meantime they try to find the most suitable strategy to help the child to start ECE and sometimes other specialists are involved to help solve the adaptation problem.</p> <p>Smooth transition from pre-primary to primary school is also important. It is a procedural matter, which needs on-going attention. By supporting children in their personal growth in</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>the social and emotional, intellectual, physical, moral and aesthetic dimensions and by developing their abilities and skills, foundations for further education at primary school are laid. The co-operation and communication between pre-primary and primary schools is always present. This involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Communication between school staff and ECE staff and parents;</li><li>- Participation on educational projects;</li><li>- Understanding of the specifics of both types of environment, educational processes, etc.</li></ul> <p>The main focus of the National Project for Inclusive Education (PRINED) was the adaptation of children from at-risk groups, especially children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. PRINED lasted from 1 April 2014 to 30 November 2015, a time span of 20 months. Its mission was to promote an inclusive environment in pre-primary and primary schools and ensure the prevention of unnecessary inclusion of learners in the special education system. A series of indicative screenings were carried out in 50 kindergartens and were used as a basis to identify any possible issues for children in terms of their readiness and, subsequently, intervention programmes were started up. By creating inclusive teams at primary schools the conditions for the provision of the specific educational needs of students from MRC (Marginalised Roma Communities) were created to support inclusion in the school environment.</p> <p>PRINED has provided an impetus for a systemic change at the level of school policy (including its legislative framework), as well as at the level of schools and school facilities (introducing new working positions for professional staff, improving diagnosis) but it is necessary to ensure its continuity, i.e. to search for ways to promote the formation of inclusive teams not only in primary schools but also in pre-primary education.</p> <p>The continuity of PRINED will ensure a follow-up project <i>School Open to Everyone</i> (see previous text).</p>
5. Is inclusion stated as a goal of	Slovakia committed to several international conventions with the challenge of directing the educational system towards



Guiding questions	Country responses
ECE provision? Is there a policy making ECE accessible to all children?	<p>inclusive education, such as the Salamanca Statement, the Lisbon Strategy, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and UNESCO Policy Guidelines for inclusion in education. Slovakia is obliged to address the issue of inclusive education and an inclusive society.</p> <p>In Act No. 245/2008 (the Education Act) there are no references to Slovakia's policy on inclusive education, the law does not use this term. However, the Education Act sets out 'equality of access to education, taking into account the educational needs of an individual' and emphasises the 'prohibition of all forms of discrimination, particularly segregation.'</p> <p>The idea of inclusive education is stated in the national curriculum, the <i>Innovative National Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education in Kindergartens</i>. The curriculum supports the principles of inclusion, urging that they are considered in school educational programmes, and specifies the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Justice and equality in the provision of education and care;</li><li>– Co-ordinated objectives and co-operation of all stakeholders;</li><li>– The readiness of teachers for inclusive education;</li><li>– Inclusive environment in kindergartens (specified in the school educational programmes).</li></ul>
6. Is there a policy that obliges mainstream publicly funded ECE to make adaptations so that all children can attend and participate? Please describe	<p>The law allows the admission of all children. Children with special educational needs are also accepted in mainstream, publicly-funded kindergartens.</p> <p>§ 28 of the Education Act states that the placement of a child with SEN (special educational needs) will be decided by the kindergarten director, based on the recommendation of the child's general practitioner and school educational counsellor and informed consent of the legal guardian. The number of children in the classroom can be reduced by up to two for each child with special educational needs. A maximum of two</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>children with SEN can be enrolled in one class at a time.</p> <p>If the director of the kindergarten or the relevant Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention decides that placing the child into a mainstream class is not beneficial for the child or children in question, written considerations are suggested to the legal guardian of different learning methods for the child. If the legal guardian does not agree with the suggested changes to the child's education, the guardian can turn to a court, where the next educational approach will be decided. The director of the kindergarten can also allow the legal guardian direct participation in pre-primary education.</p> <p>Since 1 January 2016 the new version of paragraph 107 of the Education Act has been valid. It is specifically dedicated to the education and care of children with SEN and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The education and care of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in kindergartens is carried out according to individual conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– the adaptation of the education and care organisation;</li><li>– the adaptation of the school environment in which education is carried out;</li><li>– the application of specific education and care methods and forms.</li></ul> <p>Children whose special educational needs are due solely to their socially disadvantaged backgrounds cannot be placed in special kindergartens or in special classes in kindergartens.</p> <p>The Slovakian Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport can provide a contribution (an allowance for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds) to the kindergarten founder to improve the educational conditions for these children.</p> <p>The financing and contribution payment system is favourable to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (see section about Access).</p>





### **Practice at national level**

<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Country responses</b>
1. What percentage of children attend mainstream ECE provision at ages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 years</li> <li>• 4 years</li> <li>• 5 years (if not primary)</li> <li>• 6 years (if not primary)?</li> </ul>	Table 1 shows the percentage of children who attend kindergartens in Slovakia.

**Table 1. Percentage of children attending kindergartens in Slovakia**

D = age of children in kindergarten.

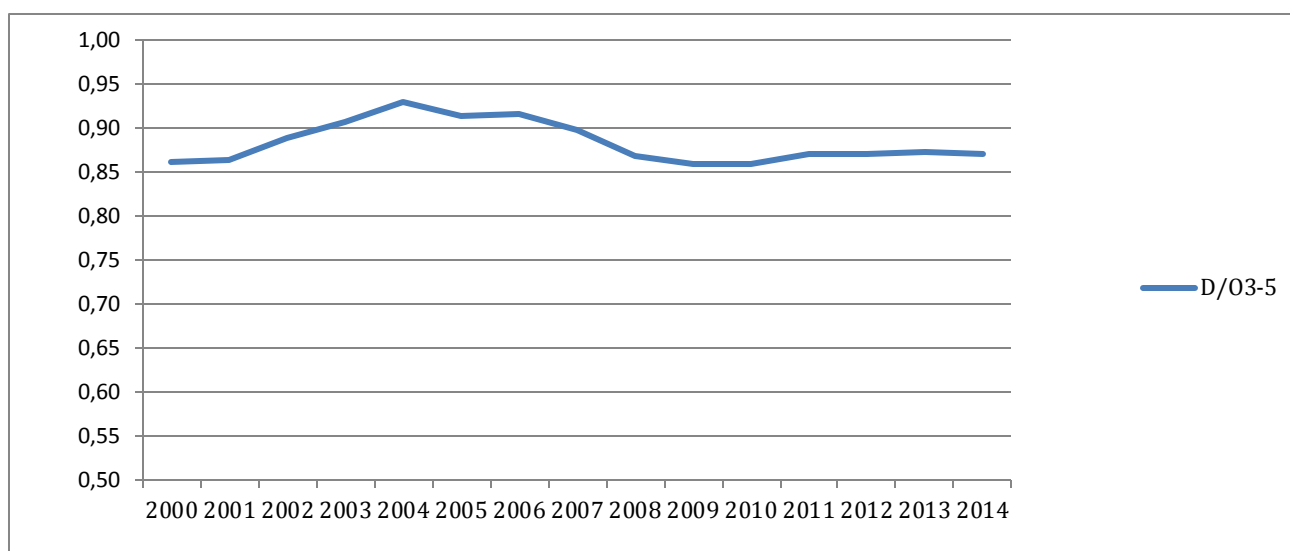
Q = age of population: extreme cases (Q2, Q6) show children younger than 3 years and 6 years and over.

D3–5 / P3–5 (referred to as gross attendance in kindergarten) is the ratio of children in kindergarten to a group of 3- to 5-year-old children.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>	<b>Q6</b>	<b>D3–5 / P3–05</b>
2000	14.6%	54.2%	68.1%	83.5%	35.1%	0.86
2001	16.3%	55.9%	68.2%	81.4%	35.6%	0.86
2002	17.7%	57.3%	69.7%	83.6%	36.7%	0.89
2003	18.8%	60.1%	71.4%	84.2%	37.3%	0.91
2004	20.6%	60.6%	73.6%	84.7%	37.7%	0.93
2005	16.5%	59.5%	72.8%	84.8%	37.0%	0.91
2006	15.2%	61.8%	73.8%	83.9%	37.6%	0.92
2007	12.8%	62.6%	74.4%	82.9%	37.2%	0.90



Year	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	D3-5 / P3-05
2008	10.1%	60.9%	73.0%	81.8%	37.2%	0.87
2009	8.9%	60.0%	72.3%	81.4%	36.7%	0.86
2010	7.8%	60.0%	72.3%	81.4%	36.3%	0.86
2011	10.3%	62.2%	72.3%	80.6%	35.9%	0.87
2012	12.0%	62.3%	73.3%	80.6%	36.2%	0.87
2013	11.6%	63.7%	73.3%	80.5%	35.2%	0.87
2014	13.4%	60.0%	75.1%	80.4%	35.6%	0.87



**Figure 1. Ratio of children attending kindergartens in Slovakia between 2000 and 2014**

Source:

[www.uips.sk/sub/uips.sk/images/JH/vyvoj\\_ukazovatelov\\_m\\_z\\_a\\_s\\_13.pdf](http://www.uips.sk/sub/uips.sk/images/JH/vyvoj_ukazovatelov_m_z_a_s_13.pdf)

Attendance started growing in 1995 and the growth phase lasted for 10 years. Since 2005 attendance has had a steady growth, or has slightly decreased (in 5-year-old children). In the case of children younger than 3 years, there has been a sharp decline.

Additional information – according to regular statistics which are analysed every September for each school year in Slovakia, the following data on absolute numbers of children at ECE on 15 September 2015 can be presented:

- Attendance in Slovakian state kindergartens on 15 September 2015;



- Attendance in private kindergartens on 15 September 2015;
- Attendance in clerical kindergartens on 15 September 2015.

**Table 2. Number of children in kindergartens**

<b>Age of children</b>	<b>State kindergartens</b>	<b>Private kindergartens</b>	<b>Clerical kindergartens</b>
Under 3 years	7,660	1,014	292
3 years old	35,120	1,458	1,072
4 years old	41,150	1,225	1,140
5 years old	44,776	1,129	1,244
6 years old	19,321	405	505
Children older than 6 (deferred schooling), 7 and 8 years old	429	9	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>148,456</b>	<b>5,240</b>	<b>4,260</b>

Source: [www.uips.sk/prehlady-skol/prehľad-materskych-skol](http://www.uips.sk/prehlady-skol/prehľad-materskych-skol)

Pre-primary education in Slovakia was attended by 157,956 children on 15 September 2015.

<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Country responses</b>
2. What are the main factors preventing some children from accessing mainstream ECE?	<p>As mentioned in the previous text, interest in ECE in Slovakia is very high. Children who do not access mainstream ECE are usually from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and usually live with their families in settlements. In order to help them to integrate, it is important to work with whole communities. The main factors which determine attendance levels at kindergarten are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The low education level of parents (not even finished primary school);</li> <li>– High levels of unemployment, criminality;</li> <li>– Weak or no infrastructure between settlements and ECE provisions;</li> </ul>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of capacity;</li> <li>- Low or no interest in ECE from parents, especially at time of registration.</li> </ul> <p>This unfavourable situation is evident in the creation of new ECE settings, not only in towns and villages, but also right in the centre of Roma communities in order to ensure the widest possible participation in ECE education.</p>
<p>3. Are there children who attend special ECE settings? Please provide data if available.</p>	<p>In the last few years, the policy in Slovakia has encouraged inclusion: <i>Kindergarten for all children</i>. As many children as possible are encouraged to attend mainstream ECE. In some cases, for children with special educational needs, it is necessary to provide education and care in special kindergartens.</p> <p>There are 58 special kindergartens in Slovakia (statistics from 15 September 2015). This number includes state, private and clerical kindergartens. Children with different disabilities are placed in special kindergartens, including those with intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, autism, impaired communication skills or other pervasive developmental disorders and children with multiple disabilities. Unfortunately there are no percentage statistics available for children with SEN at special kindergartens. According to the statistics from September 15 2015 there were 1,317 children placed in special kindergartens.</p> <p>Table 3 shows the types of disability in children who attended special kindergartens in September 2015.</p>

**Table 3. Types of disability among children attending special kindergartens in September 2015**

Type of disability	Number of children
Children with autism	142
Intellectual disability	660
Hearing impairment	114



Type of disability	Number of children
Visual impairment	118
Impaired communication skills	200
Physical disability	67
Impaired communication skills or other pervasive developmental disorders	16

Source: [www.uips.sk/prehlady-skol/statisticka-rocenka---specialne-skoly](http://www.uips.sk/prehlady-skol/statisticka-rocenka---specialne-skoly)

Guiding questions	Country responses
4. Describe arrangements for inter-service collaboration to enable children's attendance and participation?	<p>The national education system (2015) outlines the importance of close and strong co-operation between all stakeholders and demands the formation of a well-structured team that supports inclusiveness in education. Each kindergarten has intensive communication with parents of children with special educational needs and parents, children and other experts form a co-ordinated team to ensure that all the specific needs of the children are being met. Each kindergarten authorises a specific person responsible for co-ordinating the provision of complex services for children with special educational needs.</p> <p>Whilst this is how it is outlined, it is difficult to guarantee such teamwork in practice. There is a shortage of inclusive teams directly participating in work in kindergartens and poor connections to organisations devoted to family work in the field (with there being a minimal number of such organisations).</p> <p>Despite the fact that the system of supportive institutions in Slovakia is systematically set, there is nevertheless a failure in practice. This is due to an insufficient number of counselling centres and a shortage of adequate professional staff directly in the kindergartens, such as special education teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, etc. The financing system also needs to change to allow kindergarten founders the ability to employ the necessary teaching assistants and other experts to promote inclusion in education.</p> <p>An extension of the advisory services working directly in the</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	field (such as in kindergartens) could serve as a way out of this situation. However, it will also be important to focus on co-operation with families in order to enable prompt intervention by the experts.
5. What proportion of children is formally identified as having additional needs at: <ul data-bbox="180 808 344 1032" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 years</li><li>• 4 years</li><li>• 5 years</li><li>• 6 years</li></ul>	There is no statistical data available on this. There are no statistics regarding the age of children and their type of special educational needs.



## 2. WORKFORCE

### Key principles

2.1. Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.

2.2. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership that creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and co-operation with parents.

### Legislation and policy

Guiding questions	Country responses
<p>1. What level of qualification is required to work in ECE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for teachers?</li> <li>• for other staff?</li> </ul>	<p>Education and care in the kindergarten is carried out by pre-primary education teachers who satisfy the professional and pedagogic qualification conditions outlined in the relevant legislation (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic Regulation Decree no. 437/2009 Coll. by which are stipulated the qualifications and specific requirements for different categories of teaching and professional staff, as amended).</p> <p>All teachers must be fully qualified. Pedagogical staff have completed either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in Pre-Primary and Primary Pedagogical Study programmes or Pre-Primary and Inclusive Pedagogical Study programmes. Education and care is provided by 14,841 teachers, of whom 96.67% satisfy the qualification requirements laid down by the legislation. The majority of teachers have completed secondary education (4 years study), followed by groups of teachers with the second and third stages of higher education. The number of teachers with the first stage of higher education is gradually increasing. There are 286 teaching assistants in kindergartens, which is far from sufficient to cover the schools' real needs.</p> <p>Teaching of religious education and religion is undertaken by a qualified teacher who also has authorisation in accordance with the regulations of the particular church or religious society. In addition, there may be teaching assistants and specialist staff working in kindergartens who satisfy the qualification requirements prescribed by effective legislation.</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>The requirements for the degree and field of education of pre-primary education teachers, including teachers in special classes and special kindergartens, are given in the legislation.</p> <p>Educational and training for children with special educational needs is carried out by special pedagogues, speech therapists, pedagogic assistants, etc., but the funding system for ECE provision in Slovakia works in such a way that most kindergartens are unable to afford these experts.</p>
<p>2. What regulation is there for staff-child ratios in ECE?</p>	<p>The Education Act No. 245/2008 Col. from 2008 regulates the number of children in class as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– 20 children in a class of 3–4-year-olds;</li><li>– 21 children in a class of 4–5-year-olds;</li><li>– 22 children in a class of 5–6-year-olds;</li><li>– 21 children in a class of 3–6-year-olds.</li></ul> <p>§28 section 10 allows the increase in the number of children in a class by 3 (classroom space allowing) in the following cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Residency of the child changed;</li><li>– The child is solely undertaking an adaptation or diagnostic stay in kindergarten;</li><li>– Compulsory school attendance is delayed or further delayed;</li><li>– Increased interest in the child’s kindergarten education from legal representatives.</li></ul> <p>In setting the number of children in the class under §28 section 10 the number of children in the classroom under the age of three may be taken into account.</p> <p>The official statistics (processed on the basis of the average total numbers of teachers and children) indicate the ratio of teachers and children is 1:11, but due to the nature of kindergarten teachers’ activities, this ratio is 1:20 or 1:24 despite the fact that there are two teachers registered to each class. Most of the time each teacher is working alone with the whole class of 20 to 24 children. The statistics should therefore show the ratio of 1:20, rather than 1:11.</p>





Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>The ratio of children to teachers is still high, on the one hand influencing professional teacher performance and, on the other, influencing the optimal learning performance of children and therefore their achievements and learning outcomes.</p>
<p>3. What provision is there for additional staffing to support children with diverse and additional needs?</p>	<p>Act 317/2009 Col. and Act 437/2009 set out the required provision for staff at kindergartens. The requirements are there for ordinary teachers as well for additional staffing. All information is available in the legislation and regional educational system sections of the website <a href="http://www.minedu.sk">www.minedu.sk</a>.</p>
<p>4. Does the initial training of staff include understanding and supporting children with diverse and additional needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for teachers?</li> <li>• for other staff?</li> </ul>	<p>– For teachers:</p> <p>The issue of understanding and supporting children with diverse and additional educational needs is included in each university accredited training programme.</p> <p>In Slovakia there is long tradition of special pedagogy (special schools). For this reason, perhaps more than in other European countries, the medical approach and assessment of children’s educational needs is applied. However, while this system has assisted the growth of special pedagogy and the specialisation of university training programmes, it has also made them more closed to the idea of inclusion.</p> <p>The issue of inclusion is also included in programmes which are run by other organisations in accordance with the Act about pedagogical employees. These programmes were designed specially: <i>National Projects of Inclusive Educational Model for Pre-primary Education</i> and <i>The National Project for Marginalised Roma Communities</i> (NP MRK 1 and NP MRK 2). More programmes that emphasise professional skills and knowledge of staff in inclusive education will be contained within the national project <i>School Open to Everyone</i>.</p> <p>– For other staff:</p> <p>Additional expert staff who work together within the kindergarten environment are trained and educated primarily for Advisory and Counselling Centres. Working in</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>kindergartens, in the class and in co-operation with teachers, is less common for them.</p> <p>Depending on the types of activities undertaken by additional (professional) staff, there is of course the possibility to develop professional skills through continuous training. The professional competencies achieved can then be applied in work with children in the kindergarten.</p>
<p>5. Does initial training include preparation for working in partnership with families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• for teachers?</li><li>• for other staff?</li></ul>	<p>Initial training includes preparation for work in partnership with families. Students learn how to communicate with families, how to support co-operation between the kindergarten and families (advisory methods, communication skills, etc.).</p>
<p>6. Is there a policy for in-service training? Does it cover inclusive education skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• for teachers?</li><li>• for other staff?</li></ul>	<p>There is a policy for in-service training. Kindergartens perform an educational, caring and consulting function and it is very important to facilitate these functions through in-service training. The Methodological and Pedagogical Centre provides most of the continual educational courses for teachers all around the country. There are a variety of courses on offer for teachers to choose from.</p> <p>Once children with SEN have been enrolled in the kindergarten the pedagogical staff have training to support their work with these children. Continual in-service training is also offered by other accredited organisations.</p>



### 3. CURRICULUM

#### Key principles

3.1. A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

3.2. A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

#### Legislation and policy

Guiding questions	Country responses
<p>1. Is there a national ECE curriculum for <i>all</i> children?</p>	<p>Since 1 September 2009 Slovakia has applied a two-level model in the educational system. This means that education of children in kindergartens runs under the School Educational Programme (second level), which must be prepared in accordance with the National Educational Programme (first level).</p> <p>The National Educational Programme is the supreme curricular document. It is a sufficiently open document, but a school educational programme presents genuine openness of the curriculum and its dynamics.</p> <p>This school year is very unusual because there are two State Educational Programmes valid during the transition year: <i>National Educational Programme ISCED 0 - Pre-primary Education</i> (2008, which also contains educational programmes for children with health impairments and children with special educational needs) and the <i>Innovative National Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education in Kindergartens</i> (2015).</p> <p>The <i>Innovative National Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education in Kindergartens</i> was approved in March 2015 in Slovakia and its pilot phase has been implemented into kindergarten practice in the school year 2015/2016 on a voluntary basis. The programme is only being tested in kindergartens which subscribed to the National Institute for Education (guarantor of curricular reform in Slovakia) in order to participate. Kindergartens which are not enrolled in the pilot phase continue their pre-primary education according to the School Curricula, in which the educational standards developed were based on the <i>State Educational Programme</i></p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p><i>ISCED 0 - Pre-primary Education (2008)</i>, the validity of which expires on 31 August 2016. After the pilot assessment phase, the <i>Innovative National Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education in Kindergartens</i> will be modified and full implementation of the programme in all Slovakian kindergartens will start from the school year 2016/2017.</p>
2. Does it include skills and competences to be achieved by children?	Both abovementioned curricular documents define the skills and competences which should be achieved by children.
3. Describe how the curriculum facilitates inclusion?	<p>Because of the abovementioned curricular upgrade in Slovakia this description is based only on the national curriculum. The national curriculum (2015) supports principles of inclusion and specifies the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Justice and equality in the provision of education and care:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ All children, regardless of gender, religion, ethical, linguistic or cultural affiliation, economic background or physical disadvantage, have equal access to education. All children have the same entitlement to the same support and the same approach;</li></ul></li><li>– Co-ordinated objectives and co-operation of all stakeholders:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Staff in the kindergarten are responsible for the intensive co-operation of all stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on communication with families of children with SEN. In the kindergarten there is a co-ordinator for inclusive teamwork;</li></ul></li><li>– The readiness of teachers for inclusive education:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Teachers in kindergartens are able to identify SEN of children and to communicate with other specialists to provide meaningful and individually-based learning. Teachers create individual</li></ul></li></ul>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>education plans for children, starting with pedagogical diagnosis. The national curriculum helps teachers with pedagogical diagnosis through a set of evaluation questions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Inclusive environment in kindergartens (specified in the school educational programmes)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Kindergartens are committed to ensuring that children with SEN are provided for and specifically adapted equipment and materials are available. The kindergarten environment is arranged in order to create as much as possible space for all children – those with and without SEN.</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Despite the curriculum facilitating inclusive principles, in practise there are few inclusive teams in kindergartens. Co-operation with psychologists, speech therapists, etc. is not straightforward.</p>
4. Is the use of new technologies included in the curriculum?	<p>Yes, Slovakian kindergartens are quite well equipped with ICT. New technologies have a wide spectrum of use in the educational process. Children have the opportunity to work with different types of robotic toys, computer programs, etc. Emphasis is put on a constructivist application of ICT in the educational process. Teachers are aware of ICT assets in the education of children with SEN and these are applied depending on children’s specific needs.</p> <p>Teachers can enrol on training courses where they obtain basic skills or they can expand their ICT skills through courses offered mainly by the Methodological and Pedagogical Centres and other accredited organisations.</p> <p>ICT is used for open communication with parents and with the public, as well as for teachers’ preparation for work, administration, etc.</p>
5. Is the curriculum adaptable to meet the needs of all children?	<p>The national curriculum contains target requirements (performance standards) that children should reach before starting primary school. In Slovakia there is a two level model of the curriculum, so at the school level curriculum planning</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>allows the individual needs of children to be met. Teachers can adapt the curriculum, taking local conditions into account – school specifics, school environment, children in a class, etc. This on one hand give teachers the freedom to plan their own school curriculum as a challenge to meet the individualities of children, and on the other hand teachers have a responsibility to create good learning conditions for children and for the aforementioned performance standards.</p>
<p>6. How are parents involved in the adaptation of the curriculum to individual children?</p>	<p>When teachers plan a new school curriculum, or when the school curriculum is adjusted or upgraded, it is negotiated by the School Council. Parents are always represented in the School Council. This means that there are always opportunities for parents to influence the school curriculum.</p>
<p>7. Is there awareness of the impact of labelling on children's participation and learning.</p>	<p>In kindergartens children are evaluated formatively. The child's current performance is compared with their previous performance, rather than with the performance of other children. The individual child's achievements are observed with the aim of enabling all children to continue to successfully learn in mainstream compulsory education. Their individual developing abilities are considered.</p> <p>Educational establishments are aware of the impact of labelling which can influence children's future learning. Early interventions can significantly help children in their learning process and enable them to set the conditions for learning in the mainstream. Learning problems can be revealed through the intense collaboration of inclusive teams with parents.</p>

***Practice at national level***

Guiding questions	Country responses
<p>1. Is there assessment of the learning and development of children from age 3 years?</p>	<p>Teachers continually record the assessment of each child's individual development. Teachers observe learning changes in all areas of a child's personality – Pedagogical Diagnostics. The emphasis is always on the child's previous performance.</p> <p>The national curriculum offers sets of evaluation questions to teachers which are designed to contribute to the functional</p>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	learning process and evaluate children’s learning and progress. The evaluation questions are a tool to ensure inclusion in education. They allow the scheduling of the achievement of performance standards with regard to differences in children and groups in the classroom.
2. What arrangements are there for the screening of children’s functioning?	Based on the pedagogical diagnostics, the teacher, in co-operation with the family and with professionals from the Counselling and Advisory centres, proposes a follow-up procedure. Subsequently, as recommended by experts, teachers design individual educational plans for children with SEN.
3. Is children's engagement and participation in ECE activities monitored?	<p>Yes, children's engagement and participation in ECE activities is monitored internally at kindergarten level (by teachers and by the head teacher) and externally by the State School Inspectorate.</p> <p>In assessing the results of education, teachers use direct pedagogical observation to verify the achievement of educational standards and prepare their own worksheets, which serve as ‘tests’ taking into account the fact that children in nursery school are not expected to know how to read or write.</p> <p>The State School Inspectorate does not use standardised tools for external assessment but does use detailed criteria to assess both the teaching process and children’s learning processes and results.</p> <p>Inspections compare the level of education actually achieved with the expectations laid down in the national curriculum in the form of educational standards. The State School Inspectorate also assesses whether the School Education Programme conforms to the national curriculum.</p>
4. How do ECE settings reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of all children?	<p>In Slovakia there are kindergartens with additional languages of instruction. The total number of 2,935 kindergartens have the following languages of instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– 2,581 Slovakian;</li><li>– 269 Hungarian;</li></ul>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– 72 Hungarian and Slovakian;</li><li>– 5 Ukrainian;</li><li>– 1 German;</li><li>– 1 Ruthenian;</li><li>– 1 Slovakian and French;</li><li>– 1 Slovakian and English;</li><li>– 1 Bulgarian;</li><li>– 1 French;</li><li>– 2 English.</li></ul> <p>In areas where there is a high concentration of Roma people, teachers try to use at least some terms in the Romani language. Special teaching assistants in the classroom may help to overcome barriers for children who speak only Romani. Most of these assistants have Roma origin. The role of an assistant, in addition to overcoming language barriers, is to ensure respect for cultural differences, such as traditional Roma culture, historical background, etc.</p> <p>The situation could be improved by setting schools with Romani language instruction, thereby validating Romani as a linguistic minority like the other languages mentioned. However, this would be a long process. There are minimal qualified people who speak Romani and low levels of education among Roma people. Also, there is not a standardised Romani language, and as such it is not clear which dialect should be the official language of instruction.</p>
5. How do staff adapt (prepare and present) the curriculum and the learning activities to make them accessible to all children?	Emphasis is placed on an individual approach, respecting the individual needs of each child. In practice children are given freedom of choice of learning activities and activity centres. In pre-primary education natural children’s activities, such as play, children’s relationships, experimental and manipulative activities must be accepted and taken into account when planning daily activities for children. This is the individual process of reflexive thinking of each kindergarten teacher. The process involves decision-making before and during the teaching process, modifying actual situations if necessary and reflecting on activities after teaching.





Guiding questions	Country responses
6. How are parents involved in this process?	In Slovakian kindergartens, parents can participate in pre-primary education if approved by the head teacher. This participation can be open or closed depending on the level set by the kindergarten. Again, this is very individual and varies in each ECE setting.
7. How are children themselves involved in this process?	Children have the opportunity to participate in managing their own learning process through the flexible daily schedule and the freedom of choice of learning activities, games, toys, etc.
8. How is ICT used to overcome barriers to participation and learning?	Special educational programmes are used in some kindergartens (see Curriculum, part 3).
9. What provisions are there for meeting children's additional needs?	<p>If conditions allow then there are modified classrooms and the numbers of children and the ratio of staff to children are changed. There is an opportunity for parents to participate in the educational process. Teaching assistants can also be employed.</p> <p>As was already mentioned, there are many obstacles in the process of creating real inclusive teams directly within mainstream kindergartens.</p>
10. How is the environment adapted to the needs of all children?	<p>In order to meet the needs of all children kindergarten environments need to be created with wider contexts, including cultural, social, material and learning environments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Cultural environment: the idea of kindergarten profiling is supported. Profiling is determined by the ability of kindergarten staff to use regional conditions;</li><li>– Material environment: the gradual introduction of wheelchair access in kindergartens. Organisation of education so that children do not have to overcome physical and architectural barriers;</li><li>– Social environment: the system conditions for inclusive teams is beginning to be supported. In practice, good</li></ul>



Guiding questions	Country responses
	<p>and open relationships between all stakeholders will determine success;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Learning environment: especially in supporting learning for children with SEN, special classes are equipped with mobility aids, furniture and learning aids depending on actual needs.</li></ul> <p>A specific feature of many kindergartens in Slovakia is the fact that they have sufficient external space, such as courtyards and gardens, which allows social contact among children.</p>



## 4. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

### Key principles

4.1. Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

4.2. Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

### Legislation and policy

Guiding questions	Country response
<p><b>Legislation and policy</b></p> <p>1. What standards are in place for ensuring the quality of ECE at national level?</p> <p>2. Describe the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of ECE provision?</p> <p>3. How is the participation of all children reflected in the national quality standards for ECE?</p> <p>4. How does national policy identify and address inequalities in participation in ECE?</p> <p>5. How does research inform policy and practice in ECE?</p>	<p>The quality of upbringing and education in Slovakia is monitored and evaluated. The State School Inspectorate (SSI) was set by law on 1 January 2000. The SSI is independent in its work and acts in accordance with laws and other valid legal norms, acts and decrees, especially Act No 596/2003 Col. on school organisation and local school governance that identifies the scope of SSI competences and activities. The SSI performs a supervisory function on behalf of the state, observing the quality of education and being responsible for evaluating the quality of school management, teaching and learning processes and the material and technical conditions including practical training in schools and other educational facilities.</p> <p>In Slovakia the SSI regularly sets criteria and indicators for external evaluation. These are used by pedagogical staff to evaluate their own practice. All school head teachers are required to regularly update their management competences using the education programme for school managers. This programme focuses on innovative pedagogic methods, improving internal monitoring and evaluation, management skills and the provision of pedagogic advice to parents.</p> <p>The SSI external evaluation follows uniform criteria for assessing the level of educational activities approved by the chief school inspector. Inspection is based on high professional and ethical foundations. Inspectors carrying out external evaluations in kindergartens are thoroughly</p>



Guiding questions	Country response
	<p>familiar with the problems in pre-primary education, particularly because each of them has experience as a kindergarten teacher and director.</p> <p>Based on the findings of the school inspection the following is done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– the results of the inspection activity are processed for the purpose of a report on the level of education and training in educational facilities for the respective school year, in co-operation with other state administration bodies in the school system, local governments, school authorities, school facilities and educational institutions, which is then submitted by the chief school inspector to the Minister of Education;</li><li>– school authorities point out in writing deficiencies identified during the inspection activity in the educational institutions that are under their authority;</li><li>– inspectors submit written opinions, statements and information to the state school administration bodies and local government authorities regarding matters of education, training, management and the establishment and closing of schools and school facilities;</li><li>– inspectors summarise the experience and knowledge from the inspections at workshops, seminars and educational events for managerial and other teaching staff;</li><li>– the results of the monitoring are used in amendments to the National Educational Programme and other school educational programmes, the development of conceptual materials concerning the pre-primary education system in Slovakia, as well as in amendments to legal regulations related to kindergarten</li></ul>



Guiding questions	Country response
	<p>management and organisation. Efficiency is achieved by presenting SSI findings at meetings, in the media, in reports and within the continuing education frame.</p> <p>In order to act in the best interests of children, the school inspection focuses on checking the quality of teachers' pedagogical approaches, respect for children's rights and the appropriate spatial and material-technical conditions. The school inspectors check the personal conditions in kindergartens and that the educational process is performed by qualified staff. They also check that the educational content in kindergartens is modified for children with special educational needs who are included in mainstream classes.</p>

### ***Practice at national level***

Guiding questions	Country responses
1. How do staff monitor and evaluate the participation and learning of all children?	Teachers monitor the learning of all children (see part 3, page 23, regarding pedagogical diagnostics). Teachers use different diagnostic tools, such as observations or portfolios. The national curriculum puts an emphasis on evaluation questions.
2. How are parents involved in this process? 3. How are children themselves involved in this process?	Depending on parents' requirements, teachers inform them of their children's learning progress. Children's portfolios are always available to parents. Through their portfolios children and parents can monitor learning achievements and can see long-term progress.



## 5. GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

### Key principles

5.1. Stakeholders in the ECE system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

5.2. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECE, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

### Legislation and policy

Guiding questions	Country responses
<p>1. Under which ministry(ies) / department(s) are ECE provisions regulated and funded?</p> <p>2. How is free or affordable provision guaranteed to all children age 3 years and over?</p> <p>3. What additional economic measures are available for children with additional needs and their families to access mainstream ECE?</p>	<p>Kindergarten funding (those founded by municipalities, church and private) is regulated by § 6 section 12 Act no. 596/2003 Coll. on state administration in education and school self-government and on amendments to certain laws (Act no. 596/2003 Coll. as amended) and the Government Ordinance no. 668/2004 Coll. on the distribution of income tax revenues to local governments, as amended.</p> <p>According to § 6 section 12 Act no. 596/2003 Coll. municipalities prepare investment plans. They breakdown the funds allocated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and Ministry of the Interior to district offices with funding responsibility for schools across the country. The funds are allocated according to base rate tax revenue, the revenue from the corresponding kindergarten and the total number of children in the kindergarten.</p> <p>Pre-primary education in kindergartens is provided in return for partial compensation, with the exclusion of kindergartens at health facilities. Pre-primary education is provided free of charge to children who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– have one year left before primary school enrolment;</li> <li>– whose legal guardian has submitted evidence of receiving social assistance benefits and allowances to social assistance benefit to the kindergarten’s head teacher;</li> <li>– have been placed in kindergarten by a court decision.</li> </ul>



<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Country responses</b>
4. How is additional funding allocated?	Kindergartens respond to different call grants (governmental and non-governmental), through which they can improve not only material equipment, but also the educational process, supporting various learning activities for all children.

***Practice at national level***

<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Country responses</b>
1. How far does the standard of ECE provision vary across regions and localities?	There are no differences in kindergarten funding, as it is allocated nationally. Local differences arise as a result of unequal distribution of financial resources to individual kindergartens by their founders. Founders are not legally obliged to fully reallocate all funds described above. The simple legal obligation to allocate funds in full to kindergartens would create better conditions for inclusive education.

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