



LOCAL MAPPING REPORT

SLOVENIA

Contents

1. Overall national context of early childhood education and care.....	2
2. Specific regulations and strategies for Romani children and families.....	4
3. Pilot area information - Local context.....	4
Information on pilot municipalities	4
Main conclusions of the interviews	6



1. Overall national context of early childhood education and care

In sectors such as ECEC (preventive) health, social service and family support, several legislations and specific strategies have been unfolded over the past decades. However, problems of accessibility and social exclusion persist mostly for Romani children and their families.

In **education**, Slovenia has developed an integrated ECEC system for children aged 11m to 6 y (preschool, called 'vrtec'), after which compulsory education starts (from 6-15y). Since 1993, all ECEC provision fall under the auspices of one single Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Preschools are founded and funded on the municipal level, albeit that the funding is far from fully taken care of by the authorities (e.g. Parents with the lowest incomes are exempt from payment, parents with the highest income pay 77% of the price of the program, the rest is paid by the municipality). In preschool, parents need to pay fees, according to their income and the number of attending children they have. Some funding can also come from donations (funding for compulsory education is fully covered by public funds.) The law contains priority rules for access for children from vulnerable groups¹. As preschool is not obligatory, the choice is up to parents whether or not to send their children to preschool. They also have a free choice between private and public preschool, a full day program or short program. Attendance in Slovenia may also depend on the distance between preschool provision and home. The preschools provide care and education for two age groups: 1 to 3y and 3 to 6 y, or to both groups combined. Preschool programs are also offered by childminders at home, who are also registered by the Ministry and require the same qualifications as preschool teachers or preschool teachers' assistants. For children with certain illness, preschool can be offered at home as well.

Besides preschool, childcare at home is also possible, with a maximum of 6 children. These childminders need to be registered as well and need childcare qualifications but they do not need to be qualified for the implementation of the pre-school curriculum (even though they may well offer that curriculum). Due to shortage of places in public preschools, this type of care is increasing.

Not much attention is paid to transition from preschool to primary school, despite the impact transitions can have on the child's well-being. If anything, there are some ad hoc activities (e.g. toddlers visiting a primary school) or meetings with parents, but this is all quite insufficient.

For more vulnerable groups of children (such as Romani children) the transition issue becomes even more problematic children, as they often do not attend preschool. Their home situation is often very different from the school situation or climate and little or nothing is done to facilitate a certain bond of trust, so needed for all parties involved, between parents and the schools.

Comprehensive legislation is also in place in the area of **health**, containing preventive health care regulations for children, both for babies and young children (age 0-6y) and for school children and youth up to 19 y of age. These regulations also pertain to socially disadvantaged groups. Funding is mostly public (about 80%) and additional private health insurance.

Within the broader **social service** sector, different services are available for families aiming at eliminating social stress and difficulties of different kinds. A broad spectrum of social support is available, such as personal social assistance, family support, institutional care, employee's support etc. On the more structural level a system of social security is in place dealing with general supportive measures in the field of health, labour, housing, education and general welfare benefits.

¹ "In accordance with the decision of the competent authority the priority for admission to kindergarten have children with special needs. Priority for admission to kindergarten have also children whose parents submit an opinion of the Centre for social work that the child is at risk due to social status of the family." (article 20) In practice, however, not all parents attend the Centre for Social work 'because they may feel ashamed or labelled).



In terms of **family support** service, the Department for family affairs at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is responsible for the formation² and implementation of family policy regarding marital relations, unmarried partners, parents and children, state policy regarding children, adoption, fostering and guardianship, and family incomes: child supplements, compensation for childbirth leave, parental supplement, childcare supplement, and childbirth allowance. The Department is in charge for implementation of rights under insurance for parental protection³ and types of family benefit.⁴

Another important strategic document, relevant for the focus of the INTESYS project is the **Programme for Children and Youth 2006-2016** (2006 with an update in 2013). The Programme strives to “use a broad public debate, including key institutions and individuals, to define the vision of the future of Slovenian children and youth and formulate the guidelines and measures for the vision’s implementation”. The Programme is “the first document, after the 1993-adopted resolution on the grounds for the formation of family policy, thereby filling the gap in the area of integration of children, youth and family as a whole. Its implementation will only be successful if it is carried out with the broadest possible cooperation of various social agents and, at least on the level of elementary definitions, strives towards achieving as broad a consensus as possible and linking key institutions”. The Programme includes several programming areas: health, education, family, social affairs, protection, free time etc.

Overall the main drivers towards more integrated working are:

- The need for better coordination in supporting vulnerable families facing multiple problems, such as very high unemployment, poverty, bad housing conditions etc.
- The need to work on better accessibility and tackle the fact that ECEC services are least used by children of ethnic minorities, single-parent families & other social disadvantaged groups.
- The need to answer to the reality that different problems are never isolated but linked together: services dealing with these issues need to link as well
- The need to guarantee a holistic view of a child and family as a baseline of all integrated initiatives.

More detailed, the mapping exercise shows the main issues at stake for the pilots:

- Persistent **prejudices and stereotypes** towards Romani community, although Romani families have been living in the pilot communities for a very long time in the participating municipalities, albeit in segregated Romani settlements, outside of city centre. Challenging and breaking prejudices of workforce towards Romani community and their culture should be the first step towards a more welcoming attitude.
- **Collaborative work, power sharing and joint decision making** is necessary, as most services and institutions are still not connected, and everyone works according its’ own rules and regulations. Change everyone’s thinking and move towards developing joint plans and actions is harder than it may sound, as most partners have been working individually for so many years.
- A **shared understanding** about the image of the child, the family, and the ECEC services should be developed and promoted. Professionals from different sectors have views on children and families from their own sector’s perspective, and every sector has its’ own priorities and beliefs. It will be a challenge to bring these views together towards a shared understanding.

²The basic document is the Resolution on the grounds for the formation of family policy in the Republic of Slovenia (Resolucija o temeljih oblikovanja družinske politike v Republiki Sloveniji, 1993), a planning-strategic document which determines the direction of development of individual parts of family policy within the competence of individual ministries.

³http://www.mddsz.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/family/rights_under_insurance_for_parental_protection/ (20. 6. 2016)

⁴http://www.mddsz.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/family/types_of_family_benefit/ (20. 6. 2016)



- **Outreach activities** should be an obligation of all sectors, working with families with young children. Families in vulnerable situations are usually less represented in ECEC services. Providers seem to have an “institutional approach” in which outreach activities are not considered necessary or ‘part of the job’.

2. Specific regulations and strategies for Romani children and families

On the issue of education for Romani children, The Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education has adopted an **Appendix to the Pre-school Curriculum** (2002) to work with Romani children. The purpose of this Appendix is to help managers and practitioners in preschools in creating the conditions for the exercise of the rights of Romani children to equal opportunities. This is the only guiding document in this respect, and the professional audience recognizes more and more that the document should be revised and updated.

In 2004, the **Strategy for education of Roma** in the Republic of Slovenia was developed. This strategy includes the basis, principles, objectives and fundamental solutions for the successful integration of the Roma in education at all levels. After a first evaluation, an Appendix was added proposing solutions and measures to enable more successful integration of Romani children in the education system, from pre-school to university and post-graduate education.

On a more general level, there is also a **Slovenian National Roma Integration Strategy** (2010-2015)⁵ defining the roadmap for public policies in the area of the social inclusion of Roma. The strategy aims to gradually eliminate poverty and social exclusion in marginalised Roma communities, with a particular focus on child welfare, education, employment, healthcare and housing.

3. Pilot area information - Local context

Information on pilot municipalities

The pilot in Slovenia will be implemented in two municipalities, Grosuplje and Trebnje, characterised by a very low enrolment rate of Romani children preschools education. The environments where the pilot will be implemented are environments with traditional Romani settlement.

Both communities are geographically rather large, compared to the population (Grosuplje: 134 km² for 19.595 inhabitants. Trebnje: 163.3 km² for 12, 213 inhabitants.)

The Municipality of Grosuplje, a commercial and industrial city, is a growing community. In recent years, many young families moved to Grosuplje, being close enough to Ljubljana, offering more employment possibilities, while still in a smaller town, where quality of life can be better and housing is not that expensive. Grosuplje is mainly a middle class town. However, the majority of Romani parents is unemployed, and their housing is very bad. All of the settlements have electricity, which is in some settlements paid by municipality, but not all of the cottages have running water, sewerage system is not

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/slovenia/national-strategy/national_en.htm (21. 6. 2016)



regulated.

In the area of the preschool Kekec Grosuplje, 36 Romani preschool children live in 6 different Romani settlements. None of them is currently enrolled in the preschool. 5 families have submitted application for the enrolment of their 4-6 years old children in the preschool for the school year 2016/2017.

The municipality of Trebnje is a stretched urbanized settlement along the important railway Ljubljana – Novo mesto and along a highway Ljubljana – Zagreb. Development of the municipality is increasing and the unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the country. Trebnje is very similar to Grosuplje in terms of socio-economic status.

In the preschool Mavrica Trebnje, 22 Romani children are enrolled (3-6 years old). Families live in the Romani settlement “Vejar”, which is 4 km away from the city centre. Vejar is currently one of the best communal equipped settlements in the Trebnje municipality. It has electricity, water, sewerage, wastewater treatment plant, public lighting and paved road. Since 2009, there is also a preschool within the settlement. The ambition of a Romani community living in the settlement Vejar is to become an autonomous local community.

At the start of building a more integrated system, both pre-schools have already established some kind of cooperation with representatives of local institutions/services/organizations/individuals, but this is still very basic and ad hoc (e.g. an event on International Roma Day).

Since there is very low participation of Romani children in the pre-school education, especially for the 0-3 age group, we will aim to develop a common understanding about the right to education for every child and about the importance of quality education for each and every child. We will strive to mobilise all relevant stakeholders, in order to connect them and to develop services that will correspond to Romani families' needs.

The pilot will focus on both a horizontal and vertical integration and aims at:

- Increasing the enrolment rate and attendance of Romani children in preschool programs (Preschool Kekec Grosuplje) and
- Making transition from preschool to primary school for the Romani children smoother (Preschool Mavrica Trebnje).

More specific the objectives include:

- To raise awareness about the importance of addressing holistically child's and family's needs and providing them with integrated ECEC services, especially when it comes to the most disadvantage children like Roma;
- To empower all in the pilot included stakeholders (representatives of Romani community, educators, social workers, health workers, administrators, etc.) for recognizing and understanding the importance of integration of ECEC systems, and the importance of supporting the whole family and bringing it at the centre point of view;
- To be successful in bringing representatives of the municipality to joint meetings with other relevant stakeholders (Grosuplje);
- To raise questions of social justice and equal rights for all members of society (both environments, and in Grosuplje especially on the level of representatives of the municipality);
- To raise awareness about benefits of joint, integrated work (in Trebnje especially on the level of Elementary school);
- To break stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma (both environments);
- To raise participation of representatives of Roma community in all activities connected to Romani issues (both environments).



Target groups that the pilot will address: Romani children and their families (indirectly); representatives of Romani community, educators, social workers, health workers, administrators (directly); other stakeholder in the environment (directly/indirectly).

Main conclusions of the interviews

Although there is some integration among different providers and authorities already established, there still is “a room for improvement”, especially on the topics below.

- **Transition:** this is a relevant issue, to get elementary schools more focused on preparing for future pupils, to get better connected with preschool (and preschool with elementary school), and create an understanding about the added value of working together with preschool teachers (this especially applies to Trebnje pilot site).
- **Connecting activities:** instead of organising (too) many different actions for Romani children and families, a joint plan of action would be better and could have a more positive impact. There is a lack of understanding about the importance of joint planning and implementation
- **Participation:** the Romani community is not consulted and included in decision-making processes that concern them. Decisions are taken in a paternalistic way (‘we know what is good for you’) without even understanding enough about the Romani community.
- **Confidentiality:** there is a need for cooperation in sharing information about children and families between schools, municipalities, health and social centres to get a clearer view on what the needs of families are (on school enrolment, social support and benefits and so forth). The only purpose of sharing information should be a more meaningful work with children and families, and responding to their needs accordingly.
- **Linking sectors:** certain issues and opportunities need to be better linked (e.g. the issue of higher child allowance when children are not enrolled in preschool, employment systems, like the public work program, which can have Roma engaged also in educational work)
- **Importance of shared learning:** about working methods, about successful approaches (e.g. social centre in Vejar Roma settlement, cooperating with schools, **health sector and** others, work with Roma people...)
- **Outreach activities:** the work of pre-schools is still very much considered only the work with children, already involved in pre-school. Outreach work is still very rare, which may be a barrier. Also, as these institutions already have enough regular work, there is no sense of urgency to engage in outreach work.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** besides the regular project M&E, more combined strategies should be used, such as self-evaluation, group- and external-evaluation, and getting parents and children involved. This approach could probably lead to a higher quality level in all sectors involved.

Within the pilot, a work plan has been drafted with timing and content of different meetings, round tables, use of the toolkit, planning of training activities etc.

Annexe

People interviewed:

Category/institution	Type of staff	Name and position
Policy level	Municipality Grosuplje	Jelka Kogovsek, head of department
	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport	Vida Staric Holobar, head of preschool department
Social services	Daily centre for Romani children and youth and their parents	Natasa Smolic, Coordinator
	Centre for Social Work	Maja Hribar, Jasmina Zaman, staff members (Grosuplje); Mateja Kozlev ar, staff member (Trebnje)
Preschools	Director, management	Vlasta Starc, director Trebnje Majda Fajdiga, director Grosuplje Andreja Jaklic Simnic, deputy director Grosuplje
	Teacher	Aljana Skoporc, Mihela Kotar, teachers Trebjne Maja Markovic, teacher for children with special needs, Grosuplje
	Consultant in schools	Ksenija Pravne, Trebnje
Elementary school	teacher	Mihela Kotar, 1 st and 2 nd grade teacher
Health sector	Health centre Trebnje	Vlasta Rajkovic, district nurse
Intermediary bodies	Roma Association	Vida Hocevar, member
	National Education Institute Slovenia	Marta Novak
ECEC expert		Tatjana Vonta, researcher