



# LITERACY IN SLOVENIA

COUNTRY REPORT  
SHORT VERSION

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**Main authors (in alphabetical order):**

Marjeta Doupona Horvat, Nataša Potočnik, Veronika Rot Gabrovec

**Contributing authors (in alphabetical order):**

Christine Garbe, Dominique Lafontaine, Nicolae Pellegrini, Gerry Shiel, Renate Valtin

**Coordinator of the ELINET-Project:**

University of Cologne

Prof. Dr. Christine Garbe

Institut für Deutsche Sprache und Literatur

Richard-Strauss-Str. 2

50931 Köln – Cologne

Germany

christine.garbe@uni-koeln.de

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# 1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Slovenia is one of a series produced in 2015 and 2016 by ELINET, the European Literacy Policy Network. ELINET was founded in February 2014 and has 78 partner organisations in 28 European countries<sup>1</sup>. ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its member countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills. One major tool to achieve this aim is to produce a set of reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive reports on the state of literacy in each country where ELINET has one or more partners, and to provide guidance towards improving literacy policies in those countries. The reports are based (wherever possible) on available, internationally comparable performance data, as well as reliable national data provided (and translated) by our partners.

ELINET continues the work of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLG) which was established by the European Commission in January 2011 and reported in September 2012<sup>2</sup>. All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"<sup>3</sup>.

The Country Reports are organised around the three recommendations of the HLG's literacy report:

- Creating a literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation, inclusion (and equity<sup>4</sup>).

Within its two-year funding period ELINET has completed Literacy Country Reports for all 30 ELINET member countries. In most cases we published separate **Long Reports** for specific age groups (Children / Adolescents and Adults), in some cases comprehensive reports covering all age groups. Additionally, for all 30 countries, we published **Short Reports** covering all age groups, containing the summary of performance data and policy messages of the Long Reports. These reports are accompanied by a collection of good practice examples which cover all age groups and policy areas as well. These examples refer to the **European Framework of Good Practice in Raising Literacy Levels**; both are to be found in the section "Good Practice"<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the network and its activities see: [www.eli-net.eu](http://www.eli-net.eu).

<sup>2</sup> In the following, the final report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy is referenced as "HLG report". This report can be downloaded under the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf).

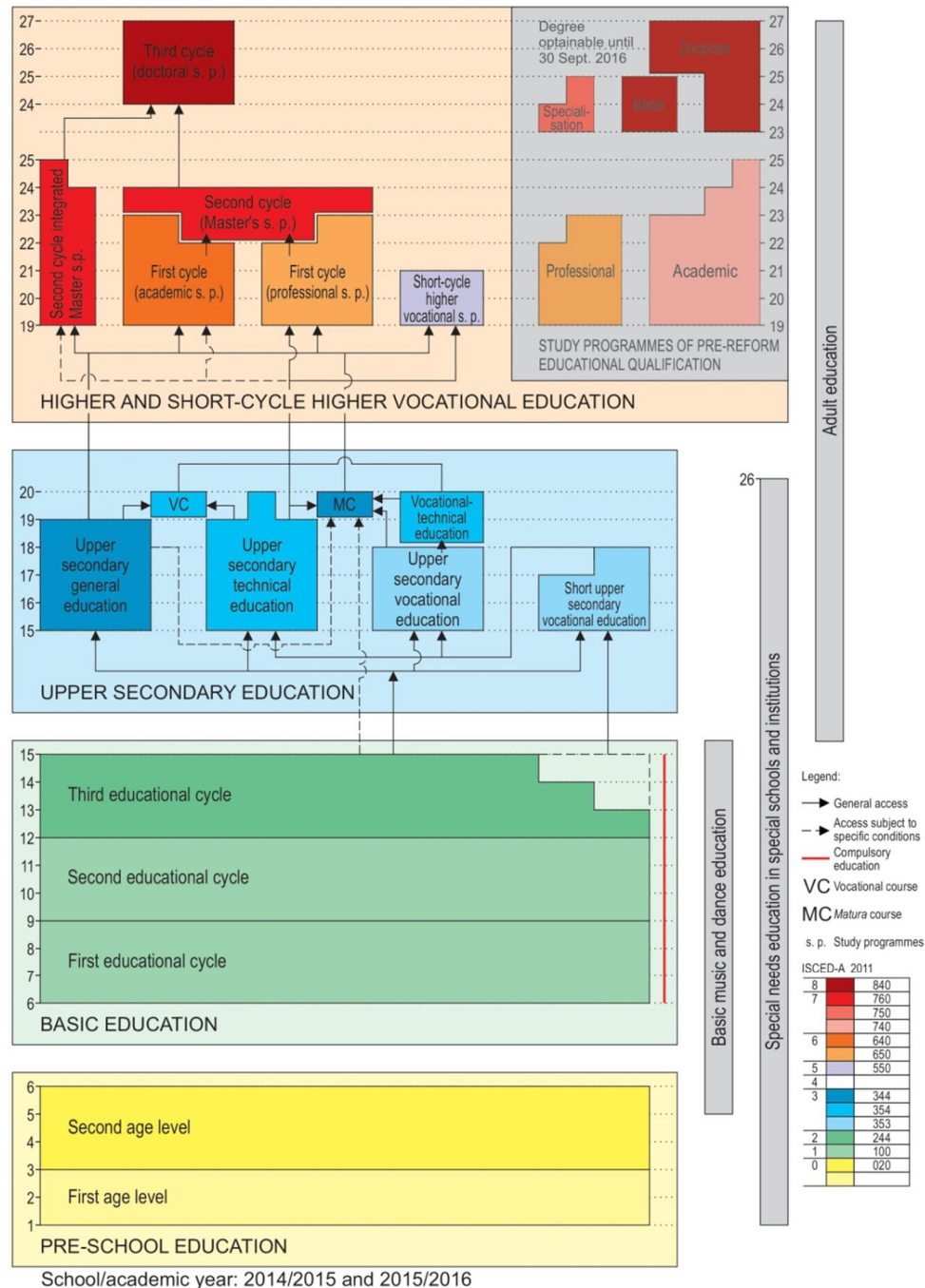
<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/research/country-reports/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Equity" was added by ELINET.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.eli-net.eu/good-practice/>.

## 2 General Information about the Slovenian Education System

Figure 1: Structure of the Slovenia School System<sup>6</sup>



In Slovenia, primary (elementary) school is compulsory for all children aged 6 –15. Children enter primary school in the autumn of the calendar year when they are six years old. Primary schooling lasts

<sup>6</sup> See: [http://www.mizs.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/ministrstvo/Zgradba\\_sistema\\_izobrazevanja\\_2014\\_15\\_an.pdf](http://www.mizs.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/ministrstvo/Zgradba_sistema_izobrazevanja_2014_15_an.pdf).

for 9 years, and comprises three cycles, each three years long ('triads'). The first and second cycles (Grades 1–3 and 4–6 respectively) are comprehensive. In the

third cycle (Grades 7–9), the school can decide whether or not to stream students, i. e. to divide the classes into separate groups within a number of selected subjects (mathematics, the Slovene language, and foreign languages) – mostly based on students' knowledge and teacher or parent preferences. There are usually also a number of elective subjects offered to students to choose from.

Upper secondary education consists of four-year gymnasias (general upper-secondary schools), technical and professional schools, and two - to three-year vocational and lower vocational schools. Students who plan to study at a university must pass the General Matura exam at the end of the general upper secondary education in gymnasias.

The first level of higher education is undergraduate study (BA), the second and third levels being postgraduate studies (MA and doctoral studies). Programmes of study within the first level must correspond to the European Union undergraduate programmes and are thus limited to three or four years and 180–240 credits. The second level is a master's, which encompasses 60–120 credits and usually takes two years to complete (only rarely just one). Doctoral programmes comprise the third level of higher education.

### **3 Literacy Performance Data**

Slovenia participated in IEA's PIRLS (4<sup>th</sup> graders reading comprehension) in 2001, 2006 and 2011, and in OECD's PISA (15 year-olds' reading literacy) in 2009 and 2012. This means it is possible to describe the changes over time in average reading proficiency, according to different characteristics of the readers, and to compare relative reading levels of proficiencies for different age groups.

Slovenia performed slightly below the EU average both in PIRLS 2011 (530 vs 535 EU-average) and in PISA 2012 (481 vs 489 EU average). The performance in PIRLS gradually and drastically increased between 2001 and 2011 (+ 20 points in 2006, + 9 points in 2012, leading to an increase of 29 score points between 2001 and 2011). In PISA, the performance slightly decreased between 2000 and 2012, remaining below the EU average.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers was almost the same in PIRLS and PISA (21%), a proportion very close to EU average (20%). These students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low-performing readers greatly decreased in PIRLS between 2001 and 2011 (from around 35% to 20%) That proportion of low performers remained quite unchanged in PISA between 2001 and 2012. The proportion of top-performing readers is 8% in PIRLS (vs 9% in EU) and 5% in PISA (vs 7% in EU).

The gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was higher than the EU average in PIRLS (89 vs 76 on average). In PISA, it was very close to the EU average (88 vs 89 on average). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was higher than in EU countries on average (47 vs 38 EU-average), but lower (49 vs 54 EU-average) as for the score difference according to the language at home. In PIRLS, the data about the gap according to the language were not available.

In Slovenia, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was higher than the corresponding EU average differences in PIRLS 2011 (16 vs 12 on EU average) and was even higher in the two previous cycles of the study. The gender difference was identical (5 points) in PIRLS 2006 and 2011 whereas this gap slightly decreased on EU average. In PISA, the gender gap was lower than on EU average (26 vs 44 on average). The stability in reading performance observed between 2000 and 2012 results in a perfect status quo of the gender gap.

In conclusion, even if Slovenia still performed below the EU average, this country shows an unusual improvement of its global reading score among 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. Its proportion of low performing readers significantly decreased, leading its mean very close to the EU average. In PISA, the trend is quite different: a very slight decrease of the global reading performance was observed between 2000 and 2012. The data point to the same stability as for the percentage of low-performing readers. Moreover, the proportion of top performers is low, resulting in a score which remained below the EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) was lower than in the EU on average in PIRLS and higher in PISA.

The gap according to the gender is higher (in PIRLS) and lower (in PISA) than on EU average. The gap according to socioeconomic status is lower in PIRLS and very close to in PISA. The gap according to migration is higher than in the EU on average. On the contrary, the gap according to the language spoken at home is lower.

## **4 Key Literacy Policy Areas for Development (age-specific and across age-groups)**

### **4.1 Pre-primary years**

#### **Kindergarten**

Doupona Horvat (2012) notes that preprimary school is non-compulsory, and is intended for children ages 1–6. She states that the preprimary curriculum dates from 1999 and consists of six main areas: physical activity, language, art, society, the natural world, and mathematics. The curriculum consists of two cycles: the first for ages 1–3 and the second for ages 3–6. The curriculum promotes full day, half-day, and short programmes, with children attending full day programmes may remain in kindergarten for up to nine hours per day.

The area of emergent literacy in preschool institutions already receives special attention, due to the introduction of the Preschool Curricula (1999), and is systematically introduced into the educational practice today.

The National Education Institute (NEI) of Slovenia trains the professionals through study groups, seminars and other forms of education, changing the roles of children and adults in the learning process.

### **Providing a literate environment at home**

The PIRLS 2011 database provides the figures below about the number of children's books in the home, as reported by participating parents. The availability of children's books in the home is close to the European Average in Slovenia.

Compared to the European average, it seems that fewer pupils in Slovenia have parents with positive attitudes towards reading if judged by the first answer only ('Like'). If 'Somewhat like' is also accepted as a positive answer, the answer can be interpreted rather differently.

PIRLS 2011 reports the percentage of students whose parents (often, never or almost never) engaged in literacy-relevant activities with them before the beginning of primary school (Mullis et al. 2012a). Nine activities are considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, reading signs and labels aloud.

In Slovenia, there are many parents often involved in at least one of the nine activities (48.5%, European average 40.7%). Parents - most often the mother of the child - are usually also closely involved in the work of the kindergarten; they might occasionally join their toddler's or child's group to read or tell a story to the whole group, they support the kindergarten reading badges by using lap time to read the books the child brings home from kindergarten etc. (The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4)

### **Family literacy programmes**

The most common 'family literacy programmes' in Slovenia are various *reading badges*. The most well-known and best established programme is the one organised by the Slovenian Reading Badge Society, some are organised by kindergartens (e.g. *'the reading backpack'*) or, more rarely, by publishing houses. It is not uncommon for the kindergarten children to participate in two or more of these programmes.

However, there is still a need for programmes to raise awareness of all parents that literacy is a key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

## **4.2 Primary Children and Adolescents**

### **Providing a literate environment in school**

Most Slovenian primary schools have school libraries, a lot of classrooms have a 'reading corner', or are equipped with a classroom library (Grade 1 - 4). Many schools participate in the activities offered by their local public libraries, and more than 95% of all primary schools take part in the Slovenian Reading Badge programme.

Reading for pleasure is not particularly specified in secondary curriculum. Nevertheless, it is generally understood that pupils should be by all means encouraged to read books. Secondary level schools usually have their own school libraries and cooperate closely with their local libraries.



## **Supporting reading motivation outside school**

Reading for pleasure is strongly encouraged by libraries, the Slovenian Reading Badge Society, various organisations and NGOs (e.g. the Slovenian Book Agency, Slovenian Reading Association and IBBY Slovenia).

There are local and regional campaigns (for instance *Poletavci – poletni bralci/Fly away reading into the summer* for primary school children and *NajPoletavci/TeenSummerReaders* etc. organised by the Ljubljana City Library) that are very well accepted among the young readers, and have often been publically acknowledged for their merit.

The family environment still plays an important role: in Slovenia, there are significant differences in reading performance at grade 4 (primary school) between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 556) and those who do not (average achievement 497). There have been some programmes introduced to support family literacy – e.g. in migrant families, in Roma families etc. Also in these programmes, libraries have a vital role as they offer free books, important especially for families who cannot afford to buy books.

## **4.3 Young Adults and Adults**

### **Fostering literacy provision for adults**

There is a growing number of adult reading groups and/or campaigns in Slovenia. As a rule, they are organised by public libraries, in some instances also by schools or homes for the elderly. They might be targeting all adults (starting with young adults and reaching the retired population as well – e.g. *Mesto bere/The town reads* in the Municipal library Ljubljana/Mestna knjižnica Ljubljana or the Reading Badge for Adults in Knjižnica Ivana Potrča Ptuj), just the retired (e.g. University of the Third Age) or a mixed population (these readers form intergenerational reading clubs). These groups often receive other types of instruction and a variety of contents: they might have computer classes or sessions as to how to use e-readers, they indulge in painting or creative writing etc.).

For school dropouts, there are regular courses organised by some institutions (e. g. by Andragoški center Slovenije/the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education) or evening classes by some secondary schools.

## **4.4 Digital literacy as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools**

Media education is explicitly mentioned in the Slovenian national curriculum (since 1996), as a cross-curricular topic and a separate subject. At some primary schools, ICT is offered as an elective subject (often in the last triad), and is part of the curriculum and thus taught as a separate subject in secondary schools.

The percentage of students in schools with an ICT coordinator figure is above the EU average. Also, the percentage of students in schools, where teachers receive some form of reward for applying ICT is well above the EU mean score. (SoS Country Profile). The report concludes the following: "Overall, many Slovenian students are in schools with strong policies and support for ICT, but this is not always reflected in high levels of ICT use, even though home access and use tend to be high, owing to relatively low levels of equipment provision." (ibid., p.26)

## 4.5 Improving the Quality of Teaching

The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher in Slovenia is the Bachelor level (ISCED 5) with 3 years of training (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101). The teachers at higher levels should hold a Master's degree.

N.B. The programmes described henceforth are not specifically focused on literacy, rather, they are general professional development programmes.

### 4.5.1 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing professional development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105), but it is encouraged. Teachers have the right to claim 5 days of CPD per year or 15 days in 3 years. The Ministry of Education manages the organisation and funding of CPD. However, there are also various educational institutions (NGOs, private companies etc) that offer possibilities for further (informal) education.

#### Update CPD programmes (*Posodobitveni programi*)

"Update programmes are training programmes for teaching new ideas and new pedagogical methods, using ICT and similar tools. The programmes for the development of teaching practice can be provided as part of the developmental and research programmes" (Eurydice Reports on CPD).

#### Supplementary programmes

Supplementary programmes are programmes which qualify pre-school teachers and teachers for other job positions, teaching a new subject or a subject on a higher level. Providers of these programmes are higher education institutions.

Among these programmes is also a programme for head teachers, which is compulsory for everyone who wishes to apply for the position of head teacher.

### 4.5.2 Teachers and the ICT

Frequency of use of ICT for teachers is higher than EU average (but for students, it is lower) (Emedus Country Overview). There are various ICT courses available, organised at schools or provided by institutions, focusing on Moodle (e-classrooms), safety on the internet etc.

# 5 Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

The Slovenian Constitution grants everyone a right to free education – education is funded by public revenues (The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia 1991: Art. 57).

## **Child poverty**

An indicator of child poverty is the percentage of children living in a household in which disposable income, when adjusted for family size and composition, is less than 50% of the national median income (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2012). With the range reaching from 4.7% (Iceland) to 25.5% in Romania, Slovenia scored 6.3%.

## **Teenage mothers**

In Slovenia, teenage mothers are very rare. (To compare, even among 20-year olds, only 5 % of women are mothers.) Teenage mothers are usually not married and do not live with the child's father. According to the 2007 data, half of them were unemployed, a third attended secondary school or university, and only 18% were employed (Source: Statistical Office R Slovenia 2007).

## **Single parent**

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in Slovenia the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 5.5%. The range for the European countries participating in ELINET is from 1.4% in Croatia to 30% in Denmark

## **5.1 Pre-primary years**

According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 is 89.8%. Slovenia does not yet reach the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC. Slovenia does not belong to the European countries where the entire period of ECEC is free nor to the countries which provide at least one year of free pre-primary education - parents contribute financially depending on their income and other social circumstances.

The benefit of preschool attendance in Slovenia is suggested by the fact that there is a significant difference in reading competence at grade 4. The reading score of pupils who attended pre-primary education for 3 years and more was 19 points higher than that of pupils who did not attend it at all. Nevertheless, according to Doupona Horvat and Rosén (2007), the benefit of preschool attendance in Slovenia is not yet proven, as it is merely a correlation which disappears when controlled by parents' education.

## 5.2 Children and adolescents

### Support for children with special needs

**Children whose home language is not the language of school:** Children in centre-based ECEC settings receive language support. Slovenia seeks to employ staff from a migrant or minority background, people who are involved in the teaching process to provide language support to migrant children and those from ethnic minorities and to help them integrate in ECEC. Slovenia runs projects to train Roma assistants to support Roma children in ECEC, and help to build links with the Roma community. Bilingual staff are further motivated by being entitled to additional salary payments. (European Commission/EACA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 146-147).

**Children with delays in their language development:** Children with speech and language disorders may attend adapted education programmes in mainstream Kindergartens<sup>7</sup>.

### Are there trained specialists for children with special needs available?

There is provision for support from specialised professionals (EURYDICE et al., 2014, p. 109).

### Early school leavers

In Slovenia, 71.7% of 15-24 year olds were in some form of education in 2011, which was well above the average EU-27 value of 61.9% (the indicator being on a slightly increasing trend, as it stood at 72.4% by 2012). According to Eurostat, in Slovenia, the rate of early school leavers was 3.9 % in 2013, down from 4.4% a year before.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is co-financing (with the support of the European Social Fund) the project 'Raising the social and cultural capital in local communities for the development of equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion', which tackles early school leaving and improves the quality of pre-primary and compulsory education by networking with parents and other stakeholders (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 27).

Some new and updated upper secondary vocational, upper secondary technical and short-cycle higher vocational programmes are being introduced in Slovenia (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 64).

### Migrant Children

Since October 2012, Slovenia has implemented the renewed Guidelines for the Inclusion of Migrant Children in Education, from pre-school to upper secondary school. The guidelines define principles and suggest strategies, as well as teaching-related modifications and methods for cooperating with and integrating of migrant children and their parents (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 89).

### Support for Disadvantaged Adolescents/ Struggling Readers

There is a legal right for support for struggling readers (the Organization and Financing of Education Act 2014).

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<sup>7</sup> See: EURYDICE. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment\\_in\\_Programmes\\_for\\_all\\_Pre-Primary\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment_in_Programmes_for_all_Pre-Primary_Education). 25.08.2014.

Several projects have also been focused on improving literacy skills. The National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia<sup>8</sup> launched a project called "Empowerment of Students by Improving Reading Literacy and Access to Knowledge" that embraced 42 (less than 10%) basic schools that had displayed low achievement in national tests in Mother tongue and Mathematics for a number of years. The "Helping teachers adapt to pupils with learning difficulties in Mathematics and Slovenian Language" project, also launched by the National Institute of Education, aims to improve coping with learning difficulties in Mathematics and Slovenian.

### **What support is available for students whose home language is not the language of school?**

In Slovenian schools, the language of instruction is Slovenian. However, Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities have a right to receive education in their own mother tongue. In general, children of migrants have a right to compulsory basic education under the same conditions as other citizens of the Republic of Slovenia (Eurydice, 2014b).

Roma pupils are also granted some special treatment in Slovenia. The Roma Education Strategy introduces the following measures to better integrate and increase the educational level of Roma pupils:

- Early participation in the educational system (ensuring spacious capacities in the Roma settlements, development and offer of aid programmes, extracurricular activities and adult programmes);
- A Roma assistant (acquisition of a National Vocational Qualification, education of assistants, a systematic regulation of employment);
- The adaptation of programmes in terms of content (recommendation for introducing the Roma culture into textbooks, as well as staff training);
- Permanent further vocational training course for the staff;
- Special forms of organisation and material conditions;
- Individualisation and differentiation with no segregation (didactic strategies, evaluation, after school study assistance);
- Various forms of study assistance;
- The establishment of trust in the school, as well as eliminating prejudice;
- The education of adult Roma for the elevation of the educational level as well as workforce development (counselling centres, education of Roma girls and women).

In terms of teaching immigrant pupils, adjustments can be made concerning assessment, for example by letting pupils progress to the next grade without final grades in individual subjects, during their first year of inclusion. Remedial classes on mother tongues and cultures for immigrant children in basic and secondary schools are also recommended by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. In the school year 2012/13, remedial classes on the German, Dutch, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian, Russian and Albanian languages and cultures took place (c.f. Rot Gabrovec 2015).

Slovenian language instruction is also provided for immigrants in schools, and it is funded by the State. The Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2012-2018 states disseminating and improving language skills in Slovenian as a second or foreign language as one of its main goals. The following measures are set out for the purpose:

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<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.zrss.si/default.asp?link=ang>.

- Modernisation of norms and standards in view of the implementation of intensive Slovenian language courses targeted at immigrant children;
- Development of subject curricula for Slovenian as a foreign language and definition of taught time;
- Development of relevant e-materials aimed at independent and combined learning for the most diverse target audiences;
- Expert support in the development of new courses on Slovenian as a second and foreign language. (Eurydice, 2014c) \*The Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2012-2018 could not be found in English

**Are adolescents whose home language is not the language of school taught alongside native speakers? Is there a focus on supporting them to access the curriculum or on developing their language skills?**

Immigrant pupils are most likely taught alongside native speakers for the majority of the time, as Slovenian as Second Language and lessons of immigrants' native languages are given separately. The students would often get additional instructions and extra lessons on language and literacy, or any subject to catch up as soon as possible.

**What support measures are in place to specifically address the gender gap?**

There are no special programmes to address the gender gap in Slovenia.

**What policy measures are there to prevent segregation of low-ses and high-ses students (into different tracks, schools and so on)? What policy measures are there to support schools at which students' average SES is low?**

In Slovenia, the percentage of early school leavers is rather high. Preventive measures to cut down the number in basic and upper secondary schools include the following:

- Remedial classes and other forms of assistance for pupils and upper secondary school students which are in need of help with learning;
- Counselling service performing pedagogical, psychological and/or social counselling work with pupils or upper secondary students, parents, teachers and school management;
- Individualisation and differentiation of the teaching process;
- Established system of notifying parents about unannounced absences;
- Possibility of taking exams if a pupil or upper secondary school student has not been able to visit classes;
- Possibility of schooling taking longer than foreseen by the programme (status renewal);
- Career guidance on educational choice and occupations electing further education in cooperation with other professional institutions;
- Care for pupils and upper secondary school students from vulnerable groups.

Young people of 15-25 years of age without education, occupation or employment can take part in a one-year programme called Project learning for young people (PUM). In the programme, mentors help youth to overcome social outlying, encourage them to continue their education and help them acquire the knowledge and skills that would make it easier for them to find employment. Once a young person completes the programme, the mentors still continue to monitor them for another six months to see whether the young are participating in education or have become employed.

In 2013, the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth helped to establish 59 youth centres with the aim of promoting the active participation of young people in the local environment, in particular those youths with fewer opportunities by reason of social exclusion. In 2012/13, the Office's programme of co-financing the construction of youth centres with accommodation facilities expired. In the scope of the programme, ten youth centres were put up across Slovenia. In total, the youth sector gained 456 new beds and created 28 new jobs.

One of the measures for prevention of early school leaving is also the programme for life successfulness (in particular, "We read and write together"), which is being carried out at libraries or other public institutions. Parents who hold a lower educational level are being encouraged to read fairytales to their children in the early grades of basic schools (Eurydice, 2014c).

On supporting certain schools, the project "Opolnomočenje učencev z izboljšanjem bralne pismenosti in dostopa do znanja" ("Empowerment of Students by Improving Reading Literacy and Access to Knowledge") is a good example (See question 2).

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