



LITERACY IN LITHUANIA

COUNTRY REPORT

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

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1 Introduction

This report on the state of literacy in Lithuania 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 countries¹. 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 2012². All country reports produced by ELINET use a common theoretical framework which is described here: "ELINET Country Reports – Frame of Reference"³.

The Country Reports about Children and Adolescents 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 equity⁴).

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"⁵.

¹ For more information about the network and its activities see: www.eli-net.eu.

² 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.

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

⁴ "Equity" was added by ELINET.

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

2 Executive Summary

LITERACY PERFORMANCE DATA

Lithuania participated in IEA's PIRLS (4th 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.

Lithuania performed below the EU average both in PIRLS 2011 (528 vs 535 EU-average) and to a larger extent in PISA 2012 (477 vs 489 EU average). The performance in PIRLS gradually decreased between the first and the third cycles of the study: - 6 points between 2001 and 2006, and the performance dropped by 15 score points between 2006 and 2011 whereas it remained largely unchanged across the European countries. Conversely, an increase (+ 9 score points) was observed in PISA between 2009 and 2012, the two only cycles Lithuania was involved in.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered as low-performing readers was almost the same as the EU average, both in PIRLS (21% vs 20%) and in PISA. This proportion of low-performing readers tends to decrease among 15-year olds, it was near 25% in 2009. These low-performing students can read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of top-performing readers is less than in EU countries on average both in PIRLS (6% vs 9% in EU) and in PISA (3.3% vs 7%).

The gap according to the pupils' socioeconomic background was similar to the EU average in PIRLS (76). In PISA, it was somewhat lower than the EU average (84 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. Moreover, the percentage of students with a migrant background was very low in Lithuania (1.7% vs 8.3% in EU).

In Lithuania, 7% of pupils had parents whose highest level of education was lower secondary or below, compared with an EU average of 18%. The gap in performance in Lithuania between children of parents with a basic University degree or higher, and those of parents with lower secondary education or below was 76 points, the same as the EU average. Similarly, students in Lithuania scoring in the top quartile on PISA's measure of economic, social and cultural status achieved a mean score that was higher (by 85 points) than that of students in the bottom quartile. This was below the corresponding EU average of 93 points, indicating a slightly smaller gap in Lithuania.

The gap in performance in Lithuania between those who always spoke the language of the test at home and those who sometimes or never did so was 20 points – a little lower than the EU-24 average of 26 points. Eighty-three percent of students in Lithuania 'always' spoke the language of the PIRLS test at home, compared with 80% on average across the EU-24. Compared with other EU countries, there were relatively few immigrant students in Lithuanian schools (2%, compared with an EU average of 8% in PISA 2009). In PISA 2009, immigrant students in Lithuania (described as first or second-generation immigrants) had a mean reading literacy score that was significantly lower, by 23 point, than that of native students. The corresponding EU average difference was 39 points. The mean score of the 4% of students in Lithuania who reported 'sometimes' or 'never' speaking a home language that

was different from the language of the PIRLS 2009 reading was significantly lower, by 34 points, than the mean score of those who reported 'always' speaking the language of the test at home. The corresponding EU average difference was 54 points.

The gap in performance in favour of girls in PIRLS 2011 overall reading was 18 points. This is above the EU-24 average difference of 12 points. The difference between genders in Lithuania was stable between 2001 and 2011. In PISA 2009, the gender difference in favour of female students in Lithuania (59 points) was greater than the corresponding EU average difference (44). Differences of similar size were observed in PISA 2012. Whereas boys in Lithuania achieved a mean score that was 18 points lower than boys on average across EU countries in 2012, girls in Lithuania achieved a mean score that was just 6 points lower than the average for girls across EU countries, indicating a stronger level of underperformance among boys.

Less than one half of students in PIRLS 2011 in Lithuania had access to a computer during reading lessons, and less than one-third used a computer to write stories or other texts at least monthly. While similar to corresponding EU-24 averages, levels of computer use for reading and writing in Lithuania fall well below the levels reported for Nordic countries.

Instructional time spent on language and reading in Fourth grade in Lithuania – 649 hours per year – was lower than on average across the EU-24 (850 hours), even though students in Lithuania spent almost 30% of instructional time on instruction on the language of the PIRLS test. In Lithuania, 51 instructional hours per year were spent on reading as part of language, compared with an EU-24 average of 68.

Despite spending proportionally less time on language instruction than on average across the EU-24, more students in Lithuania were reported by their teachers to engage more frequently in a range of reading comprehension strategies than on average across the EU-24. However, fewer than one-half of students engaged in higher level strategies such as comparing what they read with experiences they had, and determining the author's perspective or intention.

In PIRLS 2011, 93% of students in Lithuania were in classrooms in which teachers implemented instructional practices to engage students in 'most lessons'. This is well above the EU-24 average of 70%.

Teachers in PIRLS 2011 in Lithuania estimated that 10.8% of students in fourth grade were in need of remedial reading instruction. It was also estimated by teachers that 9.5% were in receipt of remedial reading instruction. These are low relative to the corresponding EU average percentages, and relative to the proportion of lower-achieving students identified by PIRLS (20%).

While responsibility for screening struggling readers mainly rests with classroom teachers in Lithuania, PIRLS 2011 indicated that most pupils in fourth grade were taught by teachers who did not use national or regional standardised tests to screen performance.

PIRLS 2011 showed that 87% of students in Lithuania were in classrooms which had class libraries – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 73%. However, just under one-quarter of students in Lithuania was in classrooms with more than 50 books. This was below the EU-24 average of 32%. There is also evidence of a shortage of print-based texts in students' homes.

In PISA 2009, the gap between native students and students with a migrant background was lower than in EU countries on average (23 vs 38 EU-average). In PIRLS the mean score difference between those who always spoke the language of the test at home, and those who sometimes or never did so

was below the EU average (20 vs 26). Similarly, in PISA, this gap was below the EU average (34 vs 54), with a low percentage of students reporting they spoke another language at home (4.3% vs 13.3% on EU average).

In Lithuania, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was higher than the corresponding EU average differences both in PIRLS (18 vs 12 on EU average) as well as in PISA (59 vs 44 on average), the equivalent of one year and a half of schooling. The gender difference was very similar through the three cycles of PIRLS in Lithuania whereas this gap tended to decrease on EU average. In PISA, the score difference between girls and boys was very high and it should be underlined that even if the proportion of low-performers decreased in that country, there are still more boys in 2012 achieving the lower benchmarks (32% in 2012 among boys vs 10% among girls).

In conclusion, Lithuania significantly decreased its performance in reading over time among 4th graders and for the first time, fell below the EU average. In PISA, an increase was observed between 2009 and 2012 but Lithuania still performs well below the EU countries on average. It has a proportion of low-performing readers higher and a percentage of top performing readers lower than European countries both in PIRLS and in PISA. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) is lower than in the EU on average at both levels.

The gap according to gender is higher than the EU average in both studies. The pattern of boys' results is a real matter of concern: nearly a third of them scored in the low performing category. The gap according to socioeconomic status is similar in PIRLS and lower in PISA. The gap according to migration or language spoken at home is lower than in the EU on average at both levels, but data point to a very low proportion of students with a migrant background and speaking another language at home. Lithuania is then less effective but may be a little more equitable than EU countries on average.

KEY LITERACY POLICY AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (AGE-SPECIFIC AND ACROSS AGE-GROUPS)

Creating a Literate Environment

Pre-Primary Years

Providing a supportive home environment: Compared to the European average, the percentage of pupils in Lithuania whose parents like reading was somewhat lower. The importance of parental attitudes to reading was illustrated by the significant difference in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 548) and those who do not (average achievement 509). The availability of children's books in the home was lower in Lithuania, with more children having fewer children's books at home, and fewer children having high numbers of children's books at home. However, more pupils in Lithuania (16%) reported having over 200 books than on average across EU countries (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 71 points, which is less than the EU average of 82 points.

Engagement of children in early literacy activities (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) on a frequent basis ('often') was marginally lower in Lithuania than on average across the EU-24. The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score of pupils in Lithuania who were engaged often in these activities was 541, as compared with 524 for those pupils who were sometimes engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school.

More family literacy programmes needed: Since reading to the child is a predictor of future literacy achievement, it is a matter of concern that more than half of the children were not often read to. There is 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.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Providing a literate environment in school: According to PIRLS 2011, 87.1% of students in Lithuania were in classrooms with class libraries, which is above the corresponding EU-24 average of 72.9%.

Supporting reading motivation, especially among boys and adolescents: In Lithuania, reading for pleasure is not particularly specified in primary curriculum. However, the curriculum emphasises that pupils should be encouraged to read books, and this can be done by creating conditions for pupils to share what they have read with their classmates; allowing pupils to select the books to read; and introducing children's literature.

As we know from the PISA and other studies, there is a high correlation between reading for pleasure and reading performance. Therefore, schools, libraries, families and communities should do more in order to support reading motivation, reading habits and a stable self-concept as a reader among adolescents, especially boys and students from disadvantaged families (low SES, migrant background). Many local and regional initiatives exist already, but there is a lack of coordination and evaluation.

Strengthening the role of public libraries in reading promotion: Lithuania's libraries have generally supported schools and communities in developing literacy, and have adjusted their activities in line with changed expectations and new technologies. There is a need to ensure that high levels of cooperation and support continue, building on the National Reading Programme promotion and other successful community initiatives.

Offering digital literacy learning opportunities at school: In Lithuania, slightly more than one third of teachers use ICT in more than 25% of lessons. According to Survey of Schools: ICT in Education (European Union, 2013), 70% of students at all grades use school desktops/laptops for learning purposes 'at least weekly'. Only 12% of grade 8 and 14% of grade 11 students use their own laptop and two-thirds (66%) of students at grade 11 use their own mobile phone in lessons 'at least weekly' (p. 11). Nearly one third use interactive whiteboards 'at least weekly', which is above the EU average (25%). The level of connected schools is close to the EU average (88% as compared to 90%), but the use of virtual learning environments is below the EU average (36% as compared to 61%). While there are guidelines for the inclusion of ICT use in initial teacher education, these guidelines do not explicitly refer to teaching students to read on-line texts. Fostering digital literacy skills of teachers and students needs a stronger emphasis.

Improving the Quality of Teaching

Pre-Primary Years

Providing free or affordable high quality preschool education for all children / investing more money in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in Lithuania is 0.7% (the percentages range from 0.04% in Turkey to 1.01% in Denmark); 0.7% of the pre-primary teachers in Lithuania are males (the EU values range from 0.2% in Bulgaria and Hungary to 17.7% in France).

Raising the professional qualification level of staff in ECEC: In Lithuania, the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5), and the length of initial training is 3 years. Continuing professional development for preschool teachers is compulsory. Although ECEC educators are highly qualified in Lithuania, they do not always provide the types of experiences that are designed to support children's emerging language and literacy skills. This calls for a need to improve the structural quality of ECEC.

Improving early language and literacy screening and training: In Lithuania, there is no systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development problems. General assessment responsibilities are assigned to teachers. Children in centre-based ECEC settings receive language support. Specialist assistance by speech therapists, psychologists, social pedagogues, etc. can be provided in ECEC settings, in local pedagogical-psychological services or at home. A full time working position for speech therapist should be established in ECEC institutions when there are 25-30 children with language and communication disorders. In addition, there is a system of complex assistance provided by municipalities, which aims to ensure effective for the development of pre-school aged children.

Introducing comprehensive literacy curricula in pre-primary schools: In Lithuania, there is no national curriculum for pre-school education (0-6 years). The curriculum for pre-primary education (6-7 years) is developed and approved by the Minister of Education and Science. It is highly oriented to

the child's socio-emotional development. The content of the general curriculum of pre-primary education focuses on the development of the child's general competences in social and health care, knowledge and understanding of the world, and communication and artistic development. While literacy is not specified, the pre-primary education curriculum aims to establish a basis for the written language development and interest in books through the development of child's language skills.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Ensuring adequate time for language and literacy instruction in primary and secondary schools:

According to PIRLS 2011, teachers in Lithuania report allocating less amount of time to the teaching of reading across the curriculum and in reading classes than on average across the EU countries (147 hours).

Improving the quality of literacy instruction: According to PIRLS 2011, more students in Lithuania than on average across the EU-24 were engaged in all the listed reading comprehension strategies on a daily or almost daily basis, perhaps reflecting the emphasis in the curriculum on these strategies. A few strategies, however, such as making predictions about what will happen next in the text and determining the author's perspective or intention, were practiced by relatively small proportions of students in Lithuania.

According to the Eurydice report (2011), in Lithuania, the reading strategies emphasised at primary level are drawing inferences, summarising text, and making connections between parts of a text. In addition, Lithuania is singled out as a country in which there is a clear and explicit emphasis on monitoring comprehension at lower-secondary level and in which students reflect on their own reading processes at both primary and lower-secondary levels. Lithuania is also identified as a country in which there is an emphasis on collaborative, text-based learning at both levels.

There is a need to conduct a qualitative analysis of reading comprehension instruction in classrooms to ensure that the level of interaction among teachers and students during comprehension strategy instruction leads to satisfactory learning outcomes.

Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training: While assessing pupils' reading skills is not a topic in Initial Teacher Training (ITE), tackling reading difficulties is part of ITE. Theoretical and practical training time is devoted to the teaching of reading to children with a range of special educational needs. In Lithuania, it is explicitly stated that skills relating to the teaching of reading must be practised during in-school placements of student teachers. Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers of all subject areas.

Improving the quality and quantity (participation rates) of continuing professional development (CPD):

CPD attendance is expected for 5 days per school year and is a pre-condition for acquiring a higher or retaining the same qualification category. Teachers have the right and opportunity to freely choose the field and form of professional development in line with the needs of their education institution and the whole country, as well as an opportunity to pursue their career in management. In PIRLS 2011, teachers were asked how much time they had spent on professional development in reading in the past two years. In Lithuania, 14% of the students had teachers who spent 16 hours or more (EU-24 average: 18%), 68% had teachers who spent some time but less than 16 hours (EU-24 average 53%), and 18% had teachers who spent no time (EU-24 average 29%) (Mullis et al. 2012a). The development of CPD programmes on literacy-related topics is currently part of an overall national

strategy on improving reading and literacy skills. The Parliament of Lithuania declared the year of 2008 as the reading promotion year. At the same time, CPD training providers were encouraged to develop programmes related to improvement of reading skills. Literacy promotion and literacy instruction across the curriculum should be a systematic part of CPD, addressing teachers of all grades and all subjects.

Extending systematic assessment of literacy skills: Mullis et al. (2012a) note in Lithuania that assessment standards and methods are prescribed by the reading/language curriculum. The standards operate as a broad guideline for classroom teachers, who take responsibility for screening struggling readers, though in the case of students who may have disabilities associated with language, including reading, speech therapists are available. In PIRLS 2011, it was found that 78% of pupils in Grade 4 were taught by teachers who placed a major emphasis on evaluation of students' ongoing work to monitor progress in reading. Fifty-six percent were taught by teachers who reported placing a strong emphasis on use of classroom tests for the same purpose. According to Elijo (2012), however, in Lithuania, there are no diagnostic measures to identify students with major problems in reading, nor are there any special materials or programmes to help students reach a desired level of reading.

Building a stronger focus on literacy into curricula: There is a need to mainstream reading / writing literacy across the curriculum and to offer content area literacy instruction in all school subjects throughout secondary education, whether academic or vocational. Lithuanian secondary curricula locate literacy skills mainly in mother-tongue education and not across all school subjects, but they should be integrated in all content areas. It would be worthwhile to sharpen the literacy focus to help teachers of all subjects to become literacy teachers and share responsibility for literacy development of their students throughout secondary education, be it academic or vocational.

Increasing Participation, Inclusion and Equity

Pre-Primary Years

Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors: The share of migrant students in the Lithuanian education system is very small compared to the rest of Europe (0.2%), and, in fact, 85% of those who arrive in Lithuania are returning Lithuanian nationals. The reading performance gap between students speaking Lithuanian at home and those who do not (4.3% of the students) was lower (by 34 score points) than the EU-26 average. Lithuania has put in place a series of measures to ensure that students whose first language is not Lithuanian and those with low socio-economic status are provided with opportunities to build language and other skills in school settings. It is important that the outcomes of these efforts are monitored on an ongoing basis and that provision and programmes are adjusted in line with need.

Increasing pre-school attendance of disadvantaged children: According to OECD (2014), the participation rate at age 4 and age 5 is about 65-70 percent. The length of kindergarten attendance has a positive effect on reading. Children who attended 3 years and more had a higher reading score at grade 4 (539) than children who attended between 1 and 3 years (530).

Significantly reducing poverty and social exclusion was mentioned as one of the main aims in the National Education Strategy 2003-2012. Measurable targets to be reached by 2012 included the following: all children, in particular those coming from socially disadvantaged families, should be provided with conditions to prepare for school and start attending it; all children (over 3 years of age)

from socially disadvantaged families should have free access to early childhood education and care (pre-school education) provision, and pre-primary education should become universal.

Primary Children and Adolescents

Supporting struggling literacy learners: The Lithuanian Law on Education (2011) names equal opportunities as one of its general principles. This means that education must be socially fair and ensure equal opportunities for all individuals. Teachers are to provide education suitable to their pupils' abilities, render help to those who face difficulties, respect and motivate pupils as well as cooperate with other teachers to reach educational objectives.

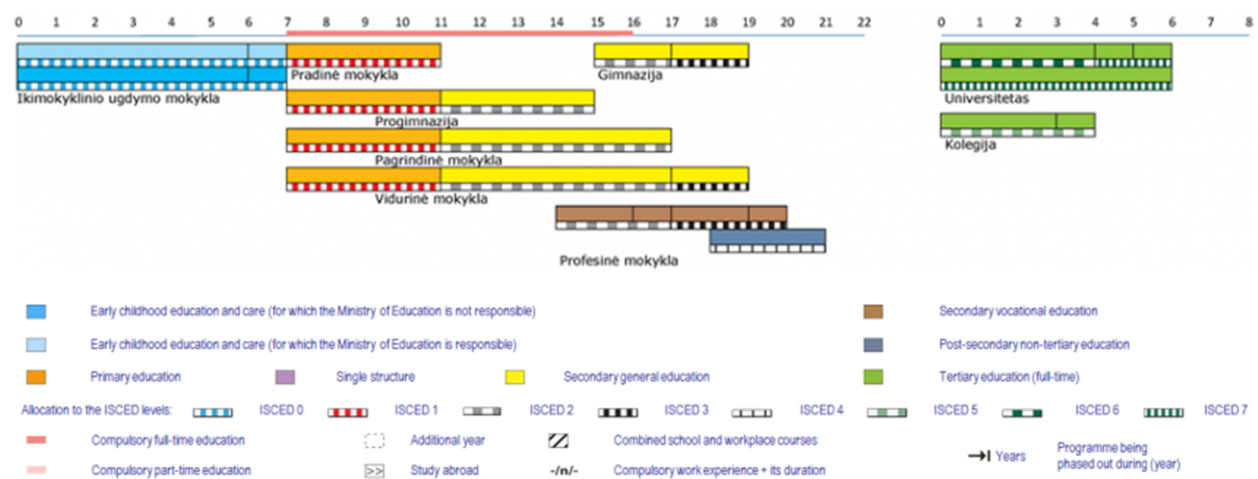
The proportions of students achieving at or below the lowest proficiency levels are at or below EU average levels. The proportion of students who are judged by their teachers to be in need of remedial teaching (10%) is considerably lower than the proportion identified as being struggling readers in PIRLS (20%). Seventy percent of students were in classes where there was always access to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties, compared with the EU-24 average of 25%. According to responses provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011, 76% of students in Lithuania were in classes where the teacher arranges for students falling behind in reading to work with a specialised professional such as a reading professional. The corresponding EU average was lower at 55%. Thirty percent of students in Lithuania were in classes whose teachers wait to see if performance improves with maturation – lower than the EU-24 average of 37%. Almost all students in Lithuania (98%) were taught by teachers who spend more time working on reading individually with a student who falls behind – a little above the EU-24 average (90%). Finally, 98% of students in Lithuania and 97% on average across the EU-24 were taught by teachers who asked parents to provide additional support to a student who fell behind in reading. There is a continued need to clearly identify students who have literacy difficulties, and ensure that they are supported to reach their potential.

3 General Information on the Lithuanian Education System

There is a wide range of educational institutions in Lithuania: public and private, secular and religious (representing various faiths), as well as those identified with ethnic groups. The development of the Lithuanian education system focuses on the continuous modernisation and harmonisation of the learning system and learning conditions in order to provide the best quality education for all learners: from children to adults.

The Lithuanian education system consists of twelve years of comprehensive education and three cycles (i.e. Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate) of higher education (see Figure 1). This corresponds with the 7 levels of the International Standard Classification of Education system (ISCED).

Figure 1: Structure of the Lithuanian Education system 2014/2015



Source: Eurydice⁶

Early childhood education and care in Lithuania consists of pre-school and pre-primary education. Pre-school education in Lithuania is offered for children aged 0-6 years and is non-compulsory. Pre-primary education is basically provided for children aged 6-7 years (if the child is mature enough, then it can be also provided at age 5) and aims to help children better prepare for school. In general, it is also non-compulsory, though on some occasions it may become obligatory (e.g. for children from social risk families) (Ministry of Education and Science webpage, www.smm.lt).

Compulsory education in Lithuania includes primary and basic education. It starts from 7 years (or if parents request and if the child is mature enough, from 6 years) and lasts until 16 years. The compulsory education curriculum is delivered by primary schools (pradinė mokykla), pro-gymnasiums (progimnazija), basic education schools (pagrindinė mokykla), secondary schools (vidurinė mokykla), gymnasiums (gimnazija) and vocational schools (profesinė mokykla) (Eurydice, 2015).

Secondary education is optional and takes two years to complete. Its objective is to assist a student with the acquisition of general academic, socio-cultural and technological literacy, moral, national and

⁶ See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Overview>.

civic maturity, and the basics of vocational competence and/or qualification. Students may accomplish the secondary education programme in secondary, vocational schools and gymnasiums. At the end of the secondary education programme, students sit matura exams. They are arranged centrally by the National Examination Centre to ensure that students' achievements are evaluated objectively and without bias⁷.

Vocational education lasts up to three years. It is designed to develop skills necessary for the labour market.

Higher education may be of two types: university studies and non-university studies. The latter are usually provided at colleges and they focus on practical activities. The programme lasts 3-4 years and graduates obtain a vocational qualification. University studies comprise three cycles: 1) undergraduate (Bachelor) studies (usually last 4 academic years); 2) graduate studies (Masters, last 2 years); 3) doctoral studies (last 4 years). Also available are post-graduate art studies and residency studies (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2004).

Adults can get involved in formal and non-formal education programmes in adult schools, adult education centres, vocational schools, colleges, universities and labour market training centres. They can also attend courses organised by private companies or public organisations and study at distance education centres (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2004).

In the 2010–2011 school year, there were 62 special schools educating 3,860 students with special needs, or 9.2 percent of all learners across primary and post-primary schools⁸.

⁷ See: https://www.lietuva.lt/en/education_sience/education/education_system.

⁸ See: <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/lithuania/national-overview/special-needs-education-within-the-education-system>

4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents

4.1 Performance Data for Primary Children

The performance data for primary children are derived from the IEA's PIRLS studies.

Inaugurated in 2001 and conducted every 5 years, **PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study)** is an assessment of students' reading achievement at fourth grade organized by the Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The survey was administered in 35 countries in 2001, 45 education systems in 2006, and 50 in 2011. PIRLS assesses different purposes for reading (literary and informational) and different reading processes (retrieve explicit information, make inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and information, examine and evaluate content, language, and textual elements). Both multiple choice and open-ended questions are used.

Combining newly developed reading assessment passages and questions for 2011 with a selection of secure assessment passages and questions from 2001 and 2006, PIRLS 2011 allowed for measurement of changes since 2001. PIRLS 2011 also examined the national policies, curricula and practices related to literacy in participating countries, and included a set of questionnaires for students, parents/caregivers, teachers, and school principals to investigate the experiences that young children have at home and school in learning to read, in particular their attitudes and motivation towards reading.

For all PIRLS data used in this report, detailed tables with data for all participating countries in ELINET are provided, together with the EU averages (see Appendix C: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Data, Appendix D: ELINET PIRLS 2001 and 2006 Data).

4.1.1 Performance and variation in reading: proportion of low and high performing readers

Students in Lithuania achieved an overall mean reading score of 528 in PIRLS 2011 (Table 1). This was significantly below the EU-24 average of 535. Performance in Lithuania was similar across reading purposes (Literary, Informational) and reading processes (retrieve, make inferences, interpret and integrate, evaluate) (Appendix C, Tables A2-A5).

Table 1: Overall Performance on PIRLS 2011 – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

	Overall Reading – Mean Score
Lithuania	528
EU-24	535

Significant differences (relative to the EU-24 Average) are shown in **bold**.

In Lithuania, 20% of students performed at or below the Low benchmark on overall reading, the same as the EU-24 average (Table 2). Other countries with around 20% of students performing at or below the Low benchmark included Austria, Hungary and Slovenia (see Appendix Table A.6). In Lithuania, 6% of students achieved the Advanced benchmark. This is below the EU average of 9%.

Table 2: Performance by Overall PIRLS Reading Benchmarks 2011 - Percentages of Pupils – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

	Below 400	400-475 Low	475-550 Intermediate	550-625 High	Above 625 Advanced
Lithuania	3	17	41	33	6
EU-24	5	15	36	35	9

Lithuania's standard deviation of 66 was marginally lower than the EU-24 average (70) indicating a slightly smaller spread of achievement. Among EU countries, the Czech Republic (62) had a similar standard deviation.

The difference between the scores of pupils at the 10th and 90th percentiles in Lithuania – 169 points – was 11 points below the corresponding EU-24 average of 180 (Table 3). This indicated a narrower range of achievement between the 10th and 90th percentiles than on average across the EU-24. The relatively low score of students at the 90th percentile in Lithuania is further evidence of under-performance among higher-achieving students.

Table 3: Spread of Achievement – Standard Deviation, 10th, 90th Percentiles, and Difference between 90th and 10th Percentiles on Overall Reading

	Standard Deviation	10 th Percentile	90 th Percentile	90 th -10 th
Lithuania	66	440	609	169
EU-24 Avg	70	441	621	180

Statistically significant differences in **bold**

Performance on PIRLS overall reading in Lithuania dropped by 15 points between 2001 and 2011, whereas it remained largely constant across the EU-24 (Table 4). The decline occurred in two increments – by 6 points between 2001 and 2006, and by 9 between 2006 and 2011.

Table 4: Trends in Performance 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – Lithuania and EU-24

	2001	2006	Change (2006- 2001)	2006	2011	Change (2011- 2006)	2001	2011	Change (2011- 2001)
Lithuania	543	537	-6	537	528	-9	543	528	-15
EU Countries	534	534	0	534	535	1	534	535	1

Significant differences in **bold**

4.1.2 Gaps in reading

As in every European country, there are achievement gaps between different groups.

Parents' educational achievement

Students in Lithuania whose parents' highest level of education was a basic degree or higher achieved a mean score (562) that was some 76 points higher than that of students whose parents' highest level was lower secondary or below (486) (Table 5). The average difference across the EU-24 was also 76 points, indicating a similar relationship between parents' educational level and performance in

Lithuania. However, fewer students in Lithuania had parents whose highest level of education was lower secondary or below (7%), compared with the corresponding EU-24 average (18%), while similar percentages had a university degree or higher (30% in Lithuania and on average across EU countries).

Table 5: Percentages of Parents Whose Highest Level of Education was Lower Secondary, and Percentages who Finished University or Higher and Associated Mean Scores – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Level of Education	Lower Secondary or Below		University or Higher		Difference (Univ or Higher – Lower Sec)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Lithuania	7	486	30	562	76
EU-24	18	495	30	571	76

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

In Lithuania, 83% of pupils reported that they always spoke the language of the PIRLS reading test at home – just above the corresponding EU-24 Average (80) (Table 6). Seventeen percent in Lithuania said they sometimes or never spoke the language of the test at home. The difference in achievement between students in Lithuania reporting that they always or sometimes/never spoke the language of the test was 20 score points – 6 points lower than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (26).

Table 6: Percentages of Students Reporting that They Always or Sometimes / Never Spoke the Language of the PIRLS Test at Home, and Associated Mean Score Differences – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Language of the Test Spoken at Home	Always		Sometimes /Never		Mean Score Difference (Always – Sometimes/Never)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Lithuania	83	532	17	512	20
EU-24 Avg	80	541	20	519	26

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Gender

Girls in Lithuania achieved a mean score on overall reading that was higher than boys' by 18 points in 2011 (Table 7). This was higher than the EU-24 average difference of 12 points. Girls outperformed boys by similar amounts in 2001 (17) and 2006 (18). Hence, Lithuania did not see the reduction in the gender difference observed on average across EU countries between 2001 and 2011.

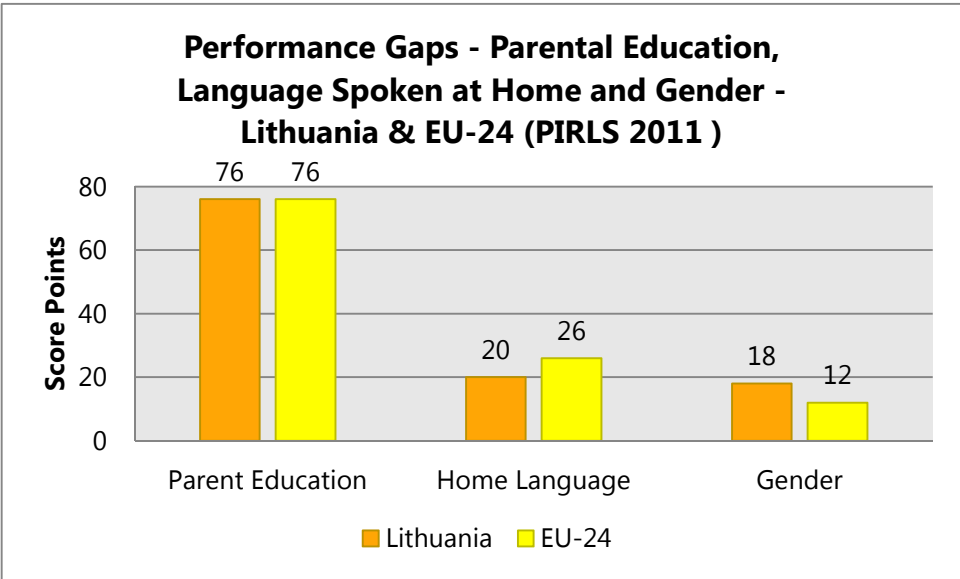
Table 7: Trends in Performance by Gender 2001-2011 (Overall Scale)

Year	Lithuania			EU-24		
	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys
2011	538	520	18	541	529	12
2006	546	528	18	541	528	13
2001	552	535	17	542	525	17

Significant differences in **bold**

The performance gaps in Lithuania are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Performance Gaps in Lithuania and on Average across the EU-24 - Primary Level



Education: University – Lower Secondary or lower; Language: Language of test spoken always – sometimes/never; Gender: Girls – Boys.

Attitudes to Reading

In 2011, there was a difference of 39 points between the top and bottom quartiles of the Like Reading scale in Lithuania (Table 8). On average across the EU-24, the difference between pupils in the top and bottom quarters of the Like Reading scale was 52 points, indicating a relatively weaker relationship between liking reading and performance in Lithuania.

Table 8: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Like Reading Scale – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Like Reading	Overall Reading Score		Difference (Q4-Q1)
	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	
Lithuania	553	515	39
EU-24	563	511	52

Significant differences in **bold**

In Lithuania, fewer students (47%) ‘strongly agreed’ that they enjoyed reading (a component of the Like Reading scale), compared with the average across the EU-24 (55%) (Appendix C, Table D3). On the other hand, similar percentages in Lithuania (8%) and on average across the EU-24 ‘disagreed a lot’ that they enjoyed reading.

Pupils in Lithuania in the top quarter of the Confidence in Reading scale achieved a mean score (553) that was some 82 points higher than students in the bottom quarter (Table 9). The average difference across the EU-24 was 80 points, again indicating a similar relationship between Confidence and performance in Lithuania and on average across EU countries.

Table 9: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Confidence in Reading Scale – Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Confidence in Reading	Overall Reading Score		
	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Lithuania	567	485	82
EU-24	570	490	80

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

4.1.3 National student achievement research – primary

National student achievement research has been implemented in Fourth (and Eighth) grades since 2002. In 2002-2005 studies were conducted by implementing Schools' Development Programme prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science. Since 2006 such research has been continued under the implementation of National Educational Strategy Programme. Due to economic difficulties, national student achievement studies were not conducted in 2008-2011. They resumed in 2012. The newest national student achievement study refers to the year 2014 and is published on the webpage of National Examination Centre (nec.lt). A brief summary of the main findings related to literacy is provided below.

In 2014, fourth graders showed relatively lower achievement in reading. Boys' reading and writing achievements were significantly lower than girls'. Fourth graders from villages achieved less well than fourth graders from cities and towns in reading, though not in writing.

An effective Lithuanian language teaching practice for fourth-graders relates to consistent teaching on how to write texts. A positive correlation has been found between students' reading achievement and this practice. Additionally, reading nonfiction outside the school also positively correlated with pupils' achievements in reading, while the amount of writing did not have positive impact on fourth-graders achievements. It was found that teaching pupils how to understand texts is often done ineffectively.

When fourth graders were asked to state whether they liked Lithuanian language, 83.3% of fourth-graders said they liked Lithuanian language in 2014, while in 2007, 78.7% fourth-graders said the same.

Source: 2014 metų Nacionalinio mokinių pasiekimų tyrimo pirminių rezultatų pristatymas⁹ (National student achievement research results in 2014).

⁹ See: http://nec.lt/failai/5564_NMPT_2014_pristatymas_SMM.pdf.

4.2 Performance Data for Adolescents

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD (<http://www.pisa.OECD.org>) **assesses the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students every three years in all OECD countries** and in a number of partner countries.

Since 2000, PISA has been testing students in reading, mathematics and science. The OECD assessment also collects information on students' backgrounds and on practices, motivational attributes and metacognitive strategies related to reading.

The PISA tests assess different aspects of reading literacy – retrieve information, interpret, reflect on and evaluate texts – and use a variety of texts – continuous (prose) and non-continuous (texts including graphs, tables, maps). About half of the questions are multiple-choice, the other half open-ended (short or constructed answers). Results are reported on scales defining different levels of proficiency ranging from 1 (low performing) to 6 (high performing). Level 2 is considered as the level all 15 year-olds should reach to enable them to participate effectively in future learning and in society. Since 2015, PISA has been administered on computers only in most participating countries.

The follow-up of students who were assessed by PISA in 2000 as part of the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey has shown that students scoring below Level 2 face a disproportionately higher risk of poor post-secondary participation or low labour-market outcomes at age 19, and even more so at age 21, the latest age for which data from this longitudinal study are currently available. For example, of students who performed below Level 2 in PISA reading in 2000, over 60% did not go on to any post-school education by the age of 21; by contrast, more than half of the students (55%) whose highest level was Level 2 attended college or university (OECD 2010, S. 52).

4.2.1 Performance and variation in reading; proportion of low and high performing readers

In PISA 2012 in Lithuania, the mean score in overall reading literacy was significantly lower than the EU-27 average (Table 10).

Table 10: Mean Reading Scores in PISA 2012 – Lithuania and EU-27 average

	Mean	S.E.
Lithuania	477	(2.5)
EU-27	489	(0.6)

S. E. = standard error; Significant differences between the country and the EU average are shown in **bold**

Lithuania has been participating in PISA surveys since 2006. It is therefore only possible to describe changes in reading performance over the last two PISA cycles (2009 and 2012), according to different characteristics of readers. The overall performance of students in Lithuania increased significantly, by 9 score points, between 2009 and 2012 (Table 11).

Table 11: Trends in Reading Performance - PISA 2009-2012- Lithuania and EU averages

	2000		2009		2012		Change 2000–2009		Change 2009–2012		Change 2000–2012	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
Lithuania	-	-	468	(2.4)	477	(2.5)	-	-	9	(4.3)	-	-
EU-27	489*	(0.7)	486**	(0.6)	489***	(0.6)	-3*	(5.0)	5**	(2.7)	3*	(6.0)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold** *EU21 **EU26 ***EU27

In Lithuania, the spread of achievement, defined as the overall difference between the scores of students at the 10th and 90th percentiles, is smaller than in the EU countries on average (Table 12). The spread in Lithuania is narrower for girls (196) than for boys (224).

Table 12: Spread of achievement. Difference between 10th and 90th percentiles on the reading scale, all students and by gender – PISA 2012

	Difference 90 th –10 th for all students		Difference 90 th –10 th for girls		Difference 90 th –10 th for boys	
	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Lithuania	222	(4.6)	196	(5.8)	224	(5.2)
EU-27	251	(1.3)	230	(1.2)	259	(1.6)

Significant differences between the country and EU in **bold**

In Lithuania, the proportion of low-performing students (21%) (those scoring at or below Level 2 on PISA) is slightly higher than the average of European countries (20%) (Table 13), while the percentage of high-performing readers (3.3%) (those scoring at Levels 5-6) is less than half the corresponding EU average of 7%.

Table 13: Percentage of low-performing (below level 2) and high-performing (levels 5 and 6) students - PISA 2012

	Below level 2		Levels 5 and 6	
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.
Lithuania	21.2	(1.2)	3.3	(0.4)
EU-27	19.7	(0.2)	7.0	(0.1)

Significant differences between the country and EU in **bold**

4.2.2 Gaps in reading performance

Socio-economic status

In 2009 in Lithuania, the gap in reading performance between students in the top and bottom quarters of the socioeconomic scale (the PISA index of economic, social, cultural status) (85 points) was marginally lower than the EU-26 average difference of 93 points (Table 14).

Table 14: Difference in reading performance between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status – PISA 2009 – Lithuania and EU-26 average

Difference between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status		
	Score diff.	S.E.
Lithuania	85	(4.8)
EU-26	93	(1.1)

Significant within country and within EU-26 differences in **bold**.

Migration

The share of migrant students in the Lithuania education system is very small (0.2%) compared to the rest of Europe. An interesting fact is that 85% of those who arrive in Lithuania are returning Lithuanian nationals (European Migration Network (EMN). Migration in Numbers.¹⁰). According to national statistics (and confirmed by PISA 2012), 0.2% of learners in compulsory education were first-generation migrants. In addition, 1.4% of the learners were second-generation migrants.

The gap between native students and those with an immigrant background was 23 score points, which is equivalent to a half year of schooling (Table 15). This gap was lower than the EU average, but this should be interpreted with caution, due to the low proportion of students with a migrant background.

Table 15: Percentage of Students and Reading Performance by Immigrant Status – PISA 2009 – Lithuania and EU Average

	Native students				Students with an immigrant background (first- or second-generation)				Difference in reading performance between native and students with an immigrant background	
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Score dif.	S.E.
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.		
Lithuania	98.3	(0.3)	471	(2.4)	1.7	(0.3)	448	(10.5)	23	(10.8)
EU-26	91.7	(0.02)	490	(0.4)	8.3	(0.02)	452	(6.4)	38.5	(6.4)

Significant within country and within EU-26 differences in **bold**.

¹⁰ See: <http://123.emn.lt/en/home>.

Language spoken at home

In Lithuania, the gap between students who spoke the PISA test language at home (96% of students) and those who did not (4%) was lower (by 34 score points) than the EU-26 average (Table 16). It is equivalent to almost one year of schooling.

Table 16: Percentage of Students and Reading Performance by Language Spoken at Home – PISA 2009

	Speak test language at home				Speak another language at home				Difference in reading according to language spoken at home	
	Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Percentage of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Score dif.	S.E.
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.		
			Lithuania	95.7			(0.8)	471		
EU-26	86.7	(0.02)	494	(0.4)	13.3	(0.02)	441	(5.4)	54	(5.4)

Significant within country and within EU-26 differences in **bold**.

Gender

In Lithuania, between 2009 and 2012, the proportion of low-performing readers (defined as those achieving below proficiency level 2) decreased by 3.2% overall. The decrease for females was 2.6%, while for males it was 3.6% (Table 17). Nevertheless, there was a large proportion of male students performing below Level 2 in 2012 (32%).

Table 17: Trends in the Proportion of Low-performers (below level 2) in Reading, All students, and by Gender – PISA 2000-2012

	Proportion of students below level 2 in reading						
	All students		Girls		Boys		
	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	%	S.E.	
2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2009	24.4	(1.2)	13.0	(1.0)	35.5	(1.6)	
2012	21.2	(1.2)	10.4	(0.9)	31.9	(1.7)	

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold**

In PISA 2009, the gender difference in Lithuania was 59 points – some 15 points higher than the EU-26 average difference (Table 18).

Table 18: Mean reading performance by gender and gender differences – PISA 2009

	Boys		Girls		Difference (B – G)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Lithuania	439	(2.8)	498	(2.6)	-59	(2.8)
EU-26	463	(0.5)	506	(0.4)	-44	(0.5)

In Lithuania, between 2009 and 2012, girls' performance increased by 7 score points while the performance of boys increased by 11 (Table 19).

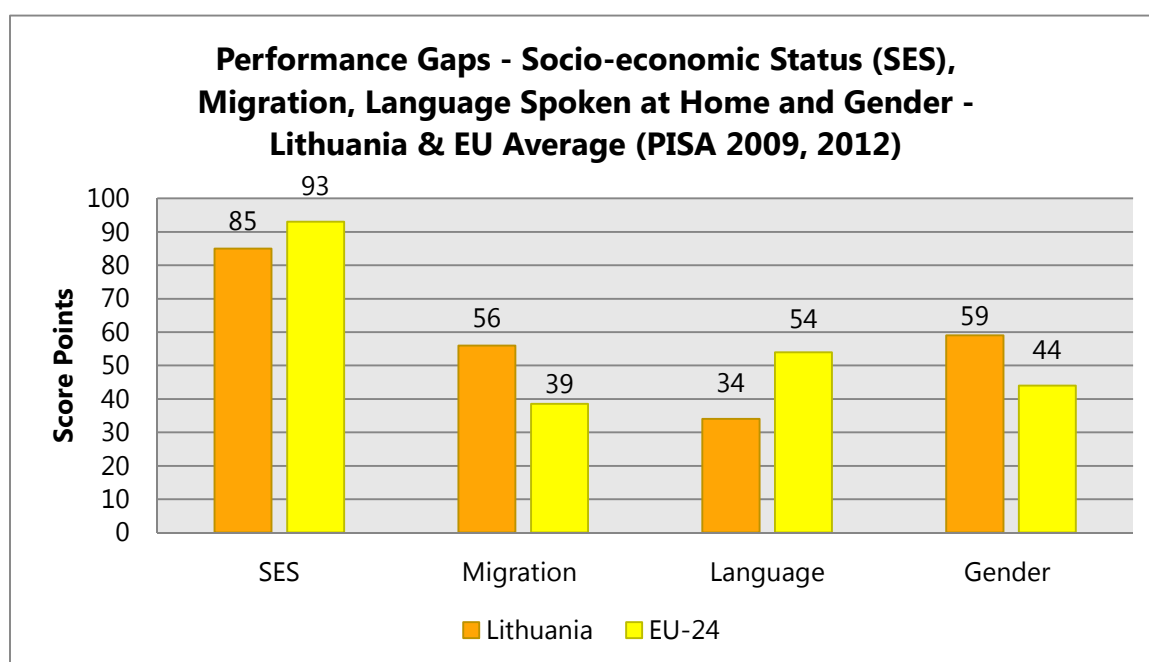
Table 19: Trends in reading performance by gender – PISA 2000-2012 – Lithuania and EU Average

	Lithuania				EU-27			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
2000	-	-	-	-	506*	(0,8)	473*	(0,9)
2009	498	(2,6)	439	(2,8)	507**	(0,7)	464**	(0,8)
2012	505	(2,6)	450	(2,8)	511***	(0,6)	468***	(0,8)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold** *EU21 **EU26 ***EU27

The main performance gaps at post-primary level in Lithuania are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Performance gaps in Lithuania and on average across EU Countries - Post-primary level



SES: Top – Bottom quartile on PISA ESCS scale; Migration: Native – first/second generation immigrants; Language: Speaks language of the PISA test at home – speaks another language; Gender: Girls - Boys

Engagement and metacognition

In PISA 2009, the OECD developed a scale based on a series of questions that tapped into students' engagement in reading. In Lithuania, there is a gap of 96 score points – which is equivalent to almost

two and a half years of schooling - between the students who reported that they were highly engaged in reading (top quarter), and those reporting low engagement (bottom quarter) in that activity (Table 20). Not surprisingly, students who reported that they were highly engaged in reading performed better on the PISA test. The difference between the most and the least engaged readers in Lithuania (96 points) was close to the EU-26 average difference (99).

Table 20: Mean Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quarters of the PISA 2009 Engagement in Reading Scale – Lithuania and EU-26 Average

	Bottom quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Lithuania	429	(3.3)	525	(2.7)	96
EU-26	444	(0.8)	543	(0.8)	99

Significant differences in achievement between top and bottom quarters in **bold**

In Lithuania, there was a gap of 78 score points - equivalent to almost two years of schooling - between students who knew which reading strategies were the most efficient to understand and remember a text, and those who had more limited knowledge (Table 21). On average, in the EU, the gap is higher (98 score points). These performance differences suggest a link between awareness of efficient reading strategies for understanding and remembering texts and reading proficiency.

Table 21: Mean reading scores of students in bottom and top quarters of understanding and remembering strategy scale – PISA 2009 – Lithuania and EU-26 Average

	Bottom quarter		Top quarter		Difference (Top-Bottom)
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Lithuania	436	(3.4)	514	(3.7)	78
EU-26	433	(0.8)	531	(0.8)	98

In Lithuania, the gap of 82 score points – which is equivalent to two years of schooling – was found between the students who knew which strategies were the most efficient to summarize a text, and those who had limited knowledge (Table 22). This is a little below the EU-26 average. This difference in performance between students in low and top quarters in Lithuania and on average across EU countries suggests a link between awareness of efficient summarising strategies and reading proficiency.

Table 22: Mean Reading Scores of Students in the Bottom and Top Quarters of the Summarizing Strategies Scale – PISA 2009 – Lithuania and EU-26 Average

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Lithuania	428	(2.9)	510	(3.0)	82
EU-26	440	(0.8)	530	(0.7)	90

4.2.3 National literacy surveys - adolescents

As noted earlier, the most recent national assessment survey involving Fourth and Eighth graders took place in 2014 with boys' reading and writing achievements significantly lower than girls' at both grade levels. Eighth graders from villages also performed less well in reading and writing than Eighth graders from cities and towns.

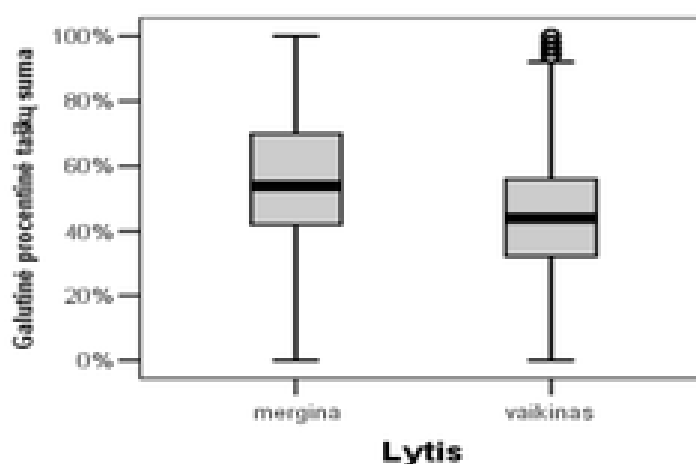
For eighth-graders, the applied practice of teaching how to understand text was deemed effective, while practices for teaching how to write were found to be less effective. This reveals the need to search for more effective practices of this type.

When Eighth-graders were asked to state whether they liked Lithuanian language, 61.2% said they liked Lithuanian language in 2014. This compares favourably with a previous national assessment in 2007, when 55.8% responded positively.

Source: 2014 metų Nacionalinio mokinių pasiekimų tyrimo pirminių rezultatų pristatymas (National student achievement research results in 2014)¹¹

In the national Lithuanian language and literature exam in 2015, 10.2% of students did not obtain a passing grade. Girls showed better results than boys (see the figure below).

Figure 4: The distribution of national Lithuanian language and literature exam scores by gender in 2015



Source: 2015 metų lietuvių kalbos ir literatūros valstybinio brandos egzamino rezultatų statistinė analizė (The statistical analysis of the national Lithuanian language and literature exam in 2015)¹²

Note: mergina – girl; vaikinai – boy

In comparison with the national Lithuanian language and literature exam results in 2014, the share of students who did not pass the exam decreased by 1.71% in 2015. In 2014, the share of students who did not pass was 11.92%.

(Source: 2014 metų lietuvių kalbos ir literatūros valstybinio brandos egzamino rezultatų statistinė analizė (The statistical analysis of the national Lithuanian language and literature exam in 2014)¹³, 2015

¹¹ See: http://nec.lt/failai/5564_NMPT_2014_pristatymas_SMM.pdf.

¹² See: http://nec.lt/failai/5487_2015_LT_st_analize_tinkl.pdf.

¹³ See: http://nec.lt/failai/4584_2014_LT_st_analize.pdf

metų lietuvių kalbos ir literatūros valstybinio brandos egzamino rezultatų statistinė analizė (The statistical analysis of the national Lithuanian language and literature exam in 2015)¹⁴)

Challenges:

The decline in Lithuania in performance on PIRLS overall reading between 2001 and 2011 is a matter of concern. Steps need to be taken to address this decline including a stronger focus on literacy in current reform initiatives.

One in five students in Lithuania were identified by PIRLS as performing at or below the Low reading benchmark. Although similar to the EU-24 average, it is a matter of concern. Several EU countries have fewer than 10% of students categorised in this way.

The proportion of students in Lithuania who are judged by their teachers to be in need of remedial teaching (10%) is considerably lower than the proportion identified as struggling readers in PIRLS (20%). There is a need to develop assessment tools that will support teachers in identifying (and supporting) more struggling readers.

The performance of higher-achievers in Lithuania (the proportion achieving at the Advanced PIRLS benchmark) is lower than on average across the EU-24. In addition to addressing the needs of lower-achieving students, there is a need to raise the performance of higher-achievers.

Although there was some improvement in Lithuania on PISA reading literacy since 2009, performance in 2012 lagged behind the average for EU countries. There is a need to raise performance on PISA. A reasonable target might be to reach the EU average by 2021.

As with PIRLS at primary level, higher performers in Lithuania do less well on PISA (i.e. fewer students score at Levels 5-6), compared with the corresponding EU average. Expectations for higher-achieving students need to be raised, and greater challenges set.

As in PIRLS, the gender difference in Lithuania on PISA overall reading literacy is large and above the corresponding EU average. Underperformance among boys in particular needs to be addressed, in the context of raising overall levels of reading literacy.

¹⁴ See: http://www.nec.lt/failai/5487_2015_LT_st_analize_tinkl.pdf.

5 Policy areas

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012, p. 38) recommended that all EU Member States should focus on the following areas as they craft their own literacy solutions:

- 1) Creating a more literate environment
- 2) Improving the quality of teaching
- 3) Increasing participation, inclusion and equity (with the term “equity” was added by ELINET).

The following parts refer to these three key issues, though some overlap occurs.

In order to achieve as much comparability as possible across countries, quantitative and qualitative indicators for which information from international data are available are reported. Appendix A provides more information on criteria for the choice of indicators and the chosen indicators for the pre-primary age group. For each of these indicators, Appendix B contains a table with numbers of the European countries participating in ELINET. Appendix C has been created using the international database for PIRLS 2011 – and contains separate tables for all information reported. If countries did not participate in PIRLS 2011, data for PIRLS 2001 and/or PIRLS 2006 are referred to. Appendix D offers this information.

5.1 Creating a literate environment for children and adolescents

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated the following in relation to ***creating a more literate environment***:

“Creating a more literate environment will help stimulate a culture of reading, i.e. where **reading for pleasure** is seen as the norm for all children and adults. Such a culture will fuel reading motivation and reading achievement: people who like to read, read more. Because they read more, they read better, and because they read better they read more: a virtuous circle which benefits individuals, families and society as a whole.” (HLG report 2012, p. 41).

Parents play a central role in children’s emergent literacy development. They are the first teachers, and shape children’s language and communication abilities and attitudes to reading by being good reading role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child.

Schools play an important role in offering a literate environment for students. Schools may foster reading motivation and reading for pleasure by establishing school and classroom libraries, offering a wide variety of books and other reading material in different genres, providing sheltered and comfortable spaces for individual reading activities (like reading clubs), and not forcing children into having to express and exchange their individual (intimate) reading experiences.

In addition to parents and schools, public libraries have a vital role if they offer free books, especially for families who cannot afford to buy them. Regional or national campaigns may inspire children and their parents to engage in reading activities. (Cf. ELINET Country Reports, Frame of Reference, pp. 29ff.)

Adolescence is a crucial phase in life where young people develop long-term *identities* and *self-concepts* which include media preferences and practices (*media identity*). In this perspective, it is of great importance that families, schools and communities offer young people rich opportunities to

encounter the *culture of reading* and develop a stable *self-concept as a reader/writer* and member of a literary culture. This includes access to a broad variety of reading materials (in print and electronic forms) and stimulating literate environments in and outside of schools; it also includes opportunities to get actively involved in engaging with texts, and communicating, reflecting on and exchanging ideas about texts with peers and ‘competent others’, such as teachers or parents (Ibid., pp. 45f).

5.1.1 Providing a literate environment at home

The **home learning environment**, particularly in the first three years, is extremely important (Brooks et al. 2012). It determines the quantity and quality of interactions between the infant and the primary caregivers, who are the most powerful agents of language development, both receptive and expressive, in the context of everyday activities and experiences. During these years, experience-dependent creation of synapses is maximal. We know that the more words the children are exposed to, the more they can learn. Caregiver-child relations in their turn strongly influence the ability to learn, by influencing self-esteem, general knowledge and motivation.

Several indicators are used to describe the literate home environment of very young children in this report, drawing on data from international sources (PIRLS) that are comparable across countries. It is important to acknowledge that some of the PIRLS data are self-reported and may be biased by social desirability and the ways in which questions are interpreted by parents within countries.

Parental Attitudes to Reading

PIRLS 2011 used the “Parents Like Reading Scale” based on parents’ responses to seven statements about reading and how often parents read for enjoyment. The figures are presented below with the percentage of students in Lithuania whose parents “like”, “somewhat like” or “do not like” reading” as reported by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.4 – Parents Like Reading, p. 120).

- Like: 25.4% (EU average 35.3 %)
- Somewhat like: 57.3% (EU average 52.6 %)
- Do not like: 17.3% (EU average 17.9 %)

Compared to the EU average, the percentage of students in Lithuania whose parents like reading was somewhat lower. The importance of parental attitudes to reading was illustrated by the significant difference in reading performance at grade 4 between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 548) and those who do not (average achievement 509).

Home Educational Resources

Thirty-four percent parents in Lithuania reported having few home resources for learning – well above the EU average of 25% (Table 23). Similarly, a 9 percentage point gap between the EU average (25%) for many resources, and the Lithuanian average (16%) suggests that students in Lithuania have less access to home educational resources (Table 23). The difference in achievement between students in Lithuania whose parents reported having many home resources and few resources was 77 score points – 2 points lower than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (79).

Table 23: Percentages of Pupils Whose Parents Reported Having Few or Many Home Resources for Learning, and Corresponding Mean Overall Reading Scores – Lithuania and EU-24 Average – PIRLS 2011

Level of Home Resources	Few Resources		Many Resources		Difference (Many - Few)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Lithuania	34	497	16	574	77
EU-24	25	495	25	573	79

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Number of children's books in the home

PIRLS 2011 offers two sets of data concerning books in the home: The first refers to numbers of children's books in the home, based on reports by parents; the second refers to books in the home (regardless of whether they are children's books or not), as reported by students. A possible discrepancy might be explained by the difference in sources and questions.

The PIRLS 2011 database provides the figures below about the number of children's books in the home based on the reports of parents in Lithuania (EU averages are in brackets):

- 0-10: 21.8 % (EU-24 average 11.8%)
- 11-25: 32.1 % (EU-24 average 19.7%)
- 26-50: 26.9 % (EU-24 average 29.4%)
- 51-100: 13.2% (EU-24 average 23.4%)
- >100: 6.0 % (EU-24 average 15.7%).

Compared to the European average (for an overview of European countries, see table B2 in Appendix B), the availability of children's books in the home was lower in Lithuania, with more children having fewer children's books at home, and fewer children having high numbers of children's books at home.

A second measure of number of books in the home was provided by students in PIRLS 2011. In Lithuania, 14% of students reported having 10 or fewer books at home, compared with the EU-24 average of 11% (Table 24). Fewer students in Lithuania (6%) reported having over 200 books than on average across EU countries (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 71 points. This is less than the EU average of 82 points.

Table 24: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Pupil with 0-10 Books at Home, and those with More than 200 Books – PIRLS 2011 - Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Books in the Home	None or Few Books (0-10)		More than 200 Books		Mean Score Difference (More than 200 – None or few)
	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	Percent of Students	Mean Reading Score	
Lithuania	14	486	6	557	71
EU-24	11	482	12	563	82

Statistically significant mean score differences in **bold**.

Early Literacy Activity Scale

PIRLS 2011 reported the percentages 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, exhibit 4.6 - Early Literacy Activities Before Beginning Primary School, p. 126). Nine activities were 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.

The figures for Lithuania in the composite score for all these activities are below (for an overview of European countries, see table B3 in Appendix B):

- Often: 35.7% (EU-24 average 40.7%)
- Sometimes: 62.8% (EU-24 average 57.4)
- Never or almost never: 1.5% (European average 1.9%).

This means that, in Lithuania, engagement of children in early literacy activities on a frequent basis ('often') was marginally lower than on average across the EU-24.

The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score of students in Lithuania who were engaged often in these activities was 541, as compared with 524 for those students who were sometimes engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school. These figures suggest a relationship between the time devoted to literacy-related activities in early childhood and subsequent achievement in grade 4.

While the Early Literacy Activity Scale is a composite scale, it is of interest to look at single items. If only the category "often" is considered, the percentage of pupils in Lithuania whose parents engaged in literacy-related activities with them before the beginning of primary school was lower than the European average:

- read books to them often: 47.9% (EU average 58.4 %)
- told stories to them often: 47.2% (EU average 51.5%)
- sang songs to them often: 28.9% (EU average 50.6%)
- played games involving shapes (toys and puzzles) with them often: 57.4% (EU average 63.5%).

(For more details and an overview of European countries, see tables B4-B7 in Appendix B).

Challenge: Since reading to the child is a good predictor of future literacy achievement, it is a matter of concern that more than half of the children in Lithuania were not often read to before starting school. There is a need for programmes **to raise awareness of all parents** that literacy is key to learning and life chances and that the basis for good literacy achievement is laid in early childhood.

5.1.2 Providing a literate environment in school

Availability and use of classroom library

Based on data provided by teachers, PIRLS 2011 showed that 87.1% of students in Lithuania were in classrooms which had class libraries – above the corresponding EU-24 average of 72.9% (Appendix C, Table H2). However, 23.7% of students in Lithuania were in classrooms with more than 50 books, which is below the EU-24 average of 32.1% (ibid.).

Challenge: There is evidence that access to books may be a problem in classrooms in Lithuania, as well as in students' homes. There is a need to increase students' access to books, both at home and at school, in the pre-primary and primary years.

5.1.3 Providing a digital environment

Digital environment of primary students

A literate environment can also be created by incorporating digital devices into the school environment. According to teachers' reports, 44.6% of students in Lithuania had a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 44.9% (Appendix C, Table I6). In Lithuania, 41% used a computer at least monthly to look up information. The corresponding EU-24 average was similar at 39% (ibid). In Lithuania, 31.8% of students were in classrooms whose teachers reported that the students used computers to write stories or other texts at least monthly. The corresponding EU-24 average is 33.1%. Although estimates for Lithuania relating to computer usage and computer-based activities were close to EU-24 average levels, they lagged well behind those of countries like Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.

According to Eljio (2012), despite the increased availability of literacy-related computer programmes in Lithuania, their use is still very limited in schools, though students' access to computers for reading and writing has increased since 2006.

Digital environment of secondary students

According to the Survey of Schools: ICT in Education (European Schoolnet and University of Liege, 2012), ICT was found to be used in class in Lithuania as a general tool for specific tasks in various subjects, as well as a subject in its own right (p. 4). At all grade levels surveyed (4, 8 and 11), use of ICT by teachers in Lithuania was in line with EU average levels. At 8th grade, 29% of students were taught by teachers who reported using ICTs in at least 25% of lessons, compared with an EU average of 32% (p. 10). Teachers also engaged in ICT training provided by school staff: in grade 8 – 53% of students, compared to the EU average of 51%; in grade 11 (general) – 58% (EU 44%); and in grade 11 (vocational) – 63% (EU 41%) (p. 18). Compared to the EU level, more students were in schools where ICT coordinators provided pedagogical as well as ICT support, while incentives for using ICT (equipment and prizes) were above the EU average levels at all grades (p. 21).

Problem area: According to PIRLS at primary level and the *Survey of Schools: ICT in Education* study covering grades 4, 8 and 11, use of computers by teachers and students in Lithuania were similar to EU average levels (which themselves are low, compared with, for example, Nordic countries). Schools and teachers in Lithuania should be supported in integrating ICT into teaching and learning, especially in

the literacy area, over time, while access to ICT should also be increased. The goal should be to reach the levels of infrastructure and usage achieved by Nordic countries.

5.1.4 The role of public libraries in reading promotion

Public libraries are an important agent in reading promotion. In general, libraries in Lithuania seem to have become more community-centred. "Yesterday the libraries focused on the books. Today we focus on the reader. Yesterday the library emphasised knowledge and information, today it is becoming a space for communication and a community centre. Today the libraries participate actively in public life, develop creativity, promote reading culture and reduce digital and social exclusion."¹⁵

Cooperation between secondary schools, families, libraries and other agents in literacy promotion for adolescents

Lithuania adopted the "National Reading Promotion Programme" which was in effect from 2006-2011 (Eurydice. Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices, p. 121). According to the description available at <http://www.skaitymometai.lt/index.php?530400038>, in 2010, the reading promotion programme focused on adolescents, library services for this age readers, and on youth literature promotion.

Cooperation between public libraries and schools and other reading promotion agents seems to be of high importance in Lithuania. (County Public Libraries Association, 2012).

Problem Area/Challenge: Lithuania's libraries have generally supported schools and communities in developing literacy, and have adjusted their activities in line with changed expectations and new technologies. There is a need to ensure that high levels of cooperation and support continue, building on the National Reading Promotion Programme and other successful community initiatives.

5.1.5 Improving literate environments for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

The non-profit, non-governmental Modern Didactics Centre (MDC) aims to "promote and maintain professional cooperation and collaboration among all educators." (Modern Didactics Centre (N/A). About us. <http://sdcentras.lt/en/apiemus.htm>). However, none of their programmes target adolescents in particular.

The project "Social actions", implemented in September-November 2007, actively engaged secondary school and college students not only to discover reading again, but also to share their experience with others. On 7 September, *The Book Fair* was held in Molėtai gymnasium and the collected books were donated to Molėtai child care home. Students of Vilnius Pedagogical University Social Communication Institute visited pupils in kindergartens, child care homes and Vilnius Santariskės children's hospital oncology section. They distributed the books, read fairy tales, and talked not only about reading but also about other things that are important for children. Students of Vilnius Pedagogical University Social Communication Institute also organised a students' reading promotion campaign in Vilnius, P. Vileišis secondary school (Modern Didactics Centre. Reading and Sharing)¹⁶.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.klavb.lt/leidiniai/County%20public%20libraries%20association.pdf>

¹⁶ See: http://www.sdcentras.lt/en/proj_sk.htm

Family literacy programmes

The programme "Visa Lietuva skaito vaikams" ("All Lithuania Reads to Kids"¹⁷) was launched in 2011. This is a social and educational initiative to encourage parents to read to their children for 20 minutes daily. It is a long-term project which started to be implemented once Lithuania signed the international declaration "All Europe reads to kids". The initiative promotes reading culture and educates children through reading by involving them in various reading-related events.

The French Institute organises a series of events called "An hour with a fairy tale". Once a month, actors read fairy tales for children and their parents in Lithuanian and, to some extent, in the French language.

Initiatives for introducing parents and children to libraries and bookstores

The Lithuanian Publishers' Association organised the reading promotion event "Lithuania reads!" for the first time on 7 May 2015. Lithuanian authors, publishers and bookstores invited people to participate in this event, during which readers and authors read their favorite books. During the festival, 27 events in bookstores and 10 events in public spaces were organised in eight different Lithuanian cities¹⁸.

Initiatives to foster reading engagement among children and adolescents and offering attractive reading material for children and adolescents in print and non-print

The initiative "Book of the Year Campaign" has taken place since 2005. The aim is to encourage Lithuanian readers to become interested in contemporary Lithuanian literature and improve the prestige of reading in Lithuanian society. Every year the best Lithuanian literary works issued during the previous year are presented in four different categories: books for children; books for adolescents, books for adults; and poetry. People are encouraged to read these books and vote for their favourite. The winners are awarded during the Vilnius Book Fair event¹⁹.

The Association for Reading and Cultural Literacy has organised the event "Famous people read" at the Vilnius Book Fair since 2006. The aim of the project is to encourage people, especially young people, to read by following the example of famous people²⁰.

There is an educational website www.skaitymometai.lt created with the motto "read, get free and grow!" There are special spaces for children, adolescents and specialists where they can find various literacy-related news (events, competitions, and articles), recommended books to read and useful links. In addition, children and adolescents can upload their literary works and participate in discussion forums²¹.

Another website²² invites all children to become part of a virtual reading community. On this website, children can create their profile, register the books they read, perform various tasks and win the prize of the week. Also, children can recommend books they like and read others' recommendations.

¹⁷ See: www.vlsv.lt.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.lla.lt/lt/articles/view/id.44>.

¹⁹ See: <http://metuknygosrinkimai.skaitymometai.lt/index.php?430509887>.

²⁰ See: <http://www.skra.lt/lt/kiti-projektai>.

²¹ See: <http://www.skaitymometai.lt/index.php?1865743609>.

²² See: www.auguskaitydamas.lt.

The Association for Reading and Cultural Literacy started a project for young people "What are you doing on Saturday?" The main part of the project is meeting with writers, poets, and literature critics. Three authors come to meet with young people on Saturday and to talk about creativity and writing.

Many different books about reading for children were published last years: Emili Teixidor "Reading and life" (National Library, 2015), "Book clubs for children and youth" (National Library, 2016), "Happy because of reading" („Laikas skaityti", 2015)

The fund „Švieskime vaikus" organises a contest for the best book for children. Five manuscripts get a possibility to be published and all of those books later are given to Lithuanian schools.

5.2 Improving the quality of teaching

To improve the quality of teaching, important aspects need to be considered:

- the quality of preschool
- coherent literacy curricula
- high-quality reading instruction,
- early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners
- highly qualified teachers (cf. Frame of Reference for ELINET Country Reports).

Especially crucial is the quality of teaching and of teachers. According to the McKinsey report "How the world best performing school systems come out on top" (McKinsey et al., 2007): "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (McKinsey et al., 2007).

5.2.1 Quality of preschool

While early childhood education has long been neglected as a public issue, nowadays early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been recognised as important for "better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large" (OECD 2012 *Starting Strong III*, p. 9). In all European countries pre-primary education is an important part of political reflection and action.

The EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy stated:

"Increasing investment in high-quality ECEC is one of the best investments Member States can make in Europe's future human capital. 'High quality' means highly-qualified staff and a curriculum focused on language development through play with an emphasis on language, psychomotor and social development, and emerging literacy skills, building on children's natural developmental stages." (High Level Group Report, 2012a, p. 59).

While there is no international or Europe-wide agreed concept of ECEC quality, there is agreement that quality is a complex concept and has different dimensions which are interrelated. In this report we focus on *structural quality* which refers to characteristics of the whole system, e.g. the financing of pre-primary education, the relation of staff to children, regulations for the qualifications and training of the staff, and the design of the curriculum. There are some data concerning structural quality, but there is a lack of research and data about process quality, practices in ECEC institutions, the relation between children and teachers, and what children actually experience in their institutions and programmes.

Annual expenditure on pre-primary education

According to Eurostat (2014, Figure D3), the total public expenditure per child in pre-primary education as a percentage of GDP in Lithuania is 0.7%. The range is from 0.04% in Turkey and 0.1% in Ireland to 1.01% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries, see table D1 in Appendix B).

Ratio of children to teachers in pre-primary school

Group size in pre-primary school in Lithuania is as follows:

- up to 1 year old – maximum 6 children;
- 1 – 1.5 years – maximum 10 children;
- 1.5 – 3 years – maximum 15 children;
- 3-6 years – maximum 20 children.
- Mixed age groups (children from birth to three years) may contain no more than eight children (EC, Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving. Annex 4: Group size and practitioner to child ratio in Europe, 2014)

Regarding the child-teacher ratio, a group of children from birth to one year must have at least two educators working together and a group of children from 1 to 7 years old must have at least two employees, including at least one pedagogue (a pre-school educator or pre-primary class teacher) (ibid).

Percentage of males among preschool teachers

According to Pordata (2014), 0.7% of the pre-primary teachers in Lithuania are males. The range is from 0.2% in Bulgaria and Hungary to 17.7% in France (for an overview of European countries, see table D3 in Appendix B).

Preschool teachers' qualifications

The minimum required level to become a qualified teacher is Bachelor level (ISCED 5). Length of training is 3 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101).

Continuing Professional Development is obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105).

In Lithuania, by the year 2014 all educators working in ECEC should have the following qualifications:

- Higher education degree (or post-secondary education if it is obtained before the year 2009; or specialised secondary education if it is obtained before the year 1995);
- Educator's qualification. If a person does not have it, he/she has to acquire educator's qualification within two years from starting to work as a pre-primary educator;
- Completed relevant programme of the subject he/she is going to teach (pre-school education practitioners have to complete pre-school education programme; pre-primary educators have to complete both pre-school education and primary education programmes).

(Source: Order of Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, „Dėl kvalifikacinių reikalavimų mokytojams, dirbantiems pagal ikimokyklinio, priešmokyklinio, neformaliojo vaikų švietimo, pradinio, pagrindinio, vidurinio, specialiojo ugdymo ir profesinio mokymo programas aprašo tvirtinimo“ [„Description of qualification requirements for pedagogues working in pre-school, pre-primary education, primary education, compulsory education, special education and VET programmes“], 29 July 2011 (ISAK-506).)

Some exceptions can be applied. If a person meets the first two of the above-mentioned criteria and has at least 15 years of relevant experience, he/she is treated as a specialist and is not required to complete the programme of the subject he/she is teaching. Also, these requirements are not applied to ECEC teachers who have 5 or fewer years left until retirement. This means that a part of the cohort of ECEC educators is exempted from obtaining newer competencies in modern practices of children's education.

Challenge: Although ECEC educators are highly qualified in Lithuania, they do not always provide the types of experiences that are designed to support children's emerging language and literacy skills. The main reasons for this are large group sizes (the actual size of the group often is bigger than the one stipulated by law), insufficient help and support from their assistants who often have low qualifications; outdated knowledge and qualifications (especially among the older educators), gaps in initial teacher training (e.g. practical training lasts only two months); and a lack of specialist support staff in ECEC settings. This calls for a need to improve the structural quality of ECEC (see, for example, the EU Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving, Annex 3: Case studies. 2014).

Preschool language and literacy curriculum

The design of the kindergarten curriculum is an important aspect of quality. Therefore, it is included in this section and not in the next section "Literacy curricula in schools". It also takes into consideration that young children have learning needs that are sometimes different to those of school children. Pre-school programmes should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience rather than systematic training in phonics or teaching the alphabet. There is no evidence that systematic instruction of reading in preschool has any benefit for future learning (Suggate, 2012).

Fostering the development of emergent literacy skills through playful activities is an important function of pre-school institutions, providing a basis for formal literacy instruction in primary school. We consider the following to be key components: oral language development, including vocabulary learning and grammar, familiarisation with the language of books (e.g. through hearing stories read and being told), being engaged and motivated in literacy-related activities, experiencing a literacy-rich environment, developing concepts of print, and developing language awareness (for more information, see the frame text of country reports).

In Lithuania there is no national curriculum for pre-school education (0-6 years). In 2005, the Outline of Criteria for Pre-school Education Curricula was approved by an order of the Minister of Education and Science (an upgraded version of this Outline was issued on 7 June 2011, following adoption of the new edition of the Law on Education in 2011). This initiated changes in pre-school education. It essentially changed the approach to designing the content of education in pre-school provision: pre-school institutions were encouraged to develop their own curriculum so that it could meet the needs of the local community and address the purpose of pre-school education better (i.e. to help the family in developing the child's intellectual, emotional, physical and other skills which would contribute to child's maturity and further success in pre-primary education). Educators were offered a creative and interpretative way of implementing the curriculum based on an evolutionary improvement of the content and methods of education and making the curriculum more individualised. Also, methodological recommendations on how to prepare pre-school education programme were made and general requirements were prepared for facilitation of the process of programmes preparation (ibid).

The curriculum for pre-primary education (6-7 years) is developed and approved by the Minister of Education and Science. It is highly oriented to the child's socio-emotional development. The content of the general curriculum of pre-primary education focuses on the development of the child's general competences in social and health care, knowledge and understanding of the world, and communication and artistic development. Every competence is described in detail by specifying what skills a competence consists of.

Does the curriculum include emergent literacy? If yes, what are the overall aims?

Among the objectives of pre-school education curricula, there is an aim to establish a basis for the written language development and interest in books through the development of child's language skills²³. Literacy is not specified, but the communicative competence is highly related to it.

Oral language development and vocabulary learning and grammar

Communicative competence in pre-school education in Lithuania refers to the child's ability to: talk to adults and children (not interfering when others are talking; sticking to the topic; speaking in an attempt to take into account context (time, location, interlocutor); creating new words; telling stories; reciting; and noticing differences in signs, letters, numbers, sounds; etc.

Engaging and motivating children in literacy-related activities

The objectives and the expected developmental outcomes defined in the communicative context domain of the pre-primary class curricula anticipate children's participation in activities which help them to: a) speak and listen to adults and peers, b) focus on the story or conversation, c) show interest in reading and writing, d) speak with regard of context, and e) display an intuitive feeling for the model of native tongue (Rimkiene & Sabaliauskiene, 2007, p. 14).

Providing a literacy-rich environment

The curriculum of pre-primary class education defines materials which can be used for children's communicative competence development. These include materials for individual use, such as paper (cards, slips and pieces of paper), personal notebooks, pens, pencils, paper stickers, etc.); materials for collective use, such as publications for children (books, magazines, children's encyclopedias, art albums, etc.), word cards, slips, table games with letters, inscriptions intended for the development of the language, blocks with inscriptions, recordings of fairy tales and music (CDs, audio cassettes) and so on (Eurydice 2012).

Concepts of print and language awareness

According to Eurydice (2012, p. 14), children should know the direction of reading and read a range of familiar and common words independently and play with language, use nonsense words, identify rhyming words, and explore and experiment with sounds, words and texts (Eurydice 2011, p. 14). The national curriculum for pre-primary education (last year before going to school) states that children's communication competence should be developed, more specifically their skills of listening, talking, expressing themselves, beginning to read and write. The activities described for children in order to develop this competence encompass the activities identified by Eurydice. For example, it is stated that children should listen to fairy tales, poems, music, then try to retell them, create their own stories,

²³ See: <http://www.upc.smm.lt/ekspertavimas/biblioteka/failai/priesmok.pdf>.

change the endings of fairy tales, etc. Also they are encouraged to use nonsense words and gestures to express their ideas; draw and try to write letters in sand, clay, board, glass, etc.

5.2.2 Literacy curricula in schools

Curricula provide a normative framework for teachers and a guideline for their teaching aims, methods, materials and activities. However, one should keep in mind that there is a difference between the intended curriculum, as outlined in official documents, and the implemented curriculum – what actually happens in the schools.

Primary school curricula

The primary school curriculum for Lithuania was published in 2008. The two main goals of primary school language teaching in Lithuania are:

- Helping students to acquire basics of fundamental literacy, and develop elementary skills for creating and understanding texts
- Creating pre-requisites to acquire and broaden intellectual capability, as well as emotional, moral, social and cultural experience.

In Lithuania, reading is a component of the language curriculum, which has two main foci relating to reading:

- Reading technique and text comprehension (conscious reading);
- Basic knowledge of literature and culture.

These foci are realised in the third and fourth grades by emphasising four related areas:

- Reading skills – with the type and tempo of students' reading determined by the reading purpose and the specific context in which reading takes place.
- Reading functions – including cognitive, educational and value-orientated or aesthetic functions.
- Reading of literary and non-literary texts, with students encouraged to adopt different reading stances for different text types.
- Attributes of good readers – students are encouraged to access reading materials in libraries and to develop into active readers, develop aesthetic awareness of reading, learn to choose books that address their needs, and make effective use of informational texts.

Reading for pleasure

According to PIRLS 2011 Encyclopaedia, there is 'some' emphasis on reading for pleasure in the intended language/reading curriculum in Lithuania. Lithuania is among a group of 11 countries participating in PIRLS 2011 which reported some emphasis on reading for pleasure in the curriculum. Four of the EU-24 countries in PIRLS 2011 reported that reading for pleasure was given little or no emphasis, and 9 countries that it had major emphasis (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.1, exhibit 9, p. 36).

While the primary curriculum does not specify reading for pleasure, it does emphasise that students should be encouraged to read books and this can be done by creating conditions for them to share with classmates books they have read; allowing them to select books for reading; and introducing children's literature to students.

Contents of literacy curricula

The Eurydice report “Teaching Reading in Europe” offers a broad range of information about the content of reading literacy curricula and official guidelines (European Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice 2011). In order not to duplicate this work, only two aspects were addressed in the ELINET country reports whose importance might not yet be acknowledged and therefore might be missing in the literacy curricula and official guidelines: explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (phonics), and reading strategies.

Explicit instruction of grapheme-phoneme correspondences

According to the Eurydice (2011) report on reading, two aspects of phonological awareness are promoted in official curriculum guidelines at pre-primary level in Lithuania: exploring and experimenting with sounds, words and texts; and playing with language using nonsense words and rhyming (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.1). At primary level, there is a strong emphasis on phonics in Lithuania, with all five skills examined by Eurydice referred to in official documents, including using knowledge of letter sounds and words when reading and understanding that the same sound can have different spellings (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.2). Lithuania is identified in the Eurydice report as a country in which children’s phonics knowledge is developed throughout the whole of primary schooling (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.3).

Teaching of reading strategies in primary schools

While literacy instruction in the early years is more focused on code-based skills, in later stages it is important to develop and foster a wide range of comprehension strategies with all children. Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is effective for improving reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability. These strategies include:

- Drawing inferences or interpretations while reading text and graphic data
- Summarising text and focusing selectively on the most important information
- Making connections between different parts of a text
- Using background knowledge
- Checking/monitoring own comprehension
- Constructing visual representations
- Pupils reflecting on their own reading process
- Predicting new events and combine them into a new story
- Learning how to interpret text
- Formulating and expressing opinions about characters

The Eurydice report identifies Lithuania as a country in which attention is given to three of six key comprehension strategies at primary level (and four at post-primary level). The strategies emphasised at primary level are drawing inferences, summarising text, and making connections between parts of a text; the three strategies not emphasised at this level are using background knowledge, monitoring own comprehension and constructing visual representations (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.4, p. 60). However, Lithuania is singled out as a country in which there is a clear and explicit emphasis on monitoring comprehension at lower-secondary level and in which students reflect on their own reading processes at both primary and lower-secondary levels. Lithuania is also identified as a country in which there is an emphasis on collaborative, text-based learning at both levels, in common with several of the Nordic countries (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.5).

In PIRLS 2011, the National Research Coordinator for Lithuania indicated the relative emphasis placed on the following aspects of reading comprehension in curriculum documents at Grade 4:

- Retrieving explicitly-stated information from a sentence or phrase (major emphasis)
- Locating and reproducing details from a clearly-defined section of text (major)
- Connecting two more pieces of information or ideas (some)
- Identifying main ideas (major)
- Recognising plot sequences and character traits (major)
- Describing overall theme or message (major)
- Comparing information in and across texts (some)
- Making generalisations and drawing inferences with textual support (some)
- Describing style or structure of text (little or none)
- Determining author's perspective or intention (little or none).

Literacy curricula in secondary schools

The general curriculum describes which competences students should have after finishing the education programme. In its annexes, for every subject, the curriculum describes in detail both aims and competences, as well as how particular students' skills should be developed across grades.

Literacy is not specified separately in the curriculum of secondary schools, but it is named among the key competences which each pupil must acquire. Communicative competence is described as the ability to develop constructive dialogue, responsible use of language, understanding of various written and oral presentations, and finding and critically assessing information and presenting it properly to others. Another example is knowledge competence, which refers to ability to describe the world through language, pictures, symbols, mathematical and other means (Source: Pradinio ir pagrindinio ugdymo bendrosios programos. Įvadas [Primary and Secondary education general programme. Introduction], 2008-08-26-ISAK -2433.

The concept of literacy is mentioned in one of the annexes of the general curriculum, namely in the linguistic education programme, where it is stated that linguistic education across grades should contribute to literacy skills development (such as the ability to create oral and written texts, etc.) The main identified activities are listening and talking, reading, learning about literature and culture, and writing. This is established across grades²⁴.

Also, in social education programmes (History), it is stated that the programme aims to provide pupils with knowledge about society and help them to understand the temporal flow of information (i.e. it aims to provide social literacy and encourage students to think critically)²⁵.

Arts education also aims to improve literacy by use of a musical dictionary, learning how to express feelings triggered by listening to music²⁶.

The annex for IT education states that digital literacy is part of the information communication competence, which students acquire by learning informational technologies. This is established across grades. Literacy does not have a separate chapter in the curriculum, so it is a part of the language curriculum²⁷.

²⁴ See: http://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/svietimas/ugdymo-programos/3_Kalbos.pdf.

²⁵ See: https://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/svietimas/ugdymo-programos/6_Socialinis-ugdymas.pdf.

²⁶ See: http://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/svietimas/ugdymo-programos/7_Meninis_ugdymas.pdf.

²⁷ See: http://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/svietimas/ugdymo-programos/8_Informacines_technologijos.pdf.

The general curriculum does not specify the amount of time for teaching literacy. It only broadly describes the content of education by referring to goals which should be achieved by pupils. Also, recommendations are provided for the education process by describing the content of the subjects and the characteristics of students' achievements. Based on this, schools and teachers develop the school-level and class-level content of education by taking into account the specific needs of classrooms and pupils. The programme should follow the requirements specified in education plans which set the minimal amount of time for the implementation of every subject in the curriculum.

Students take examinations at the end of basic school (Grade 10) and at the end of secondary school (Grade 12). The examinations at the end of basic school comprise mother tongue and mathematics. At the end of secondary school (Grade 12), the range of final examinations (the Matura or Brandos examinations) is much wider. Lithuanian language (either as mother tongue or as the national language) is the only compulsory examination.

Lithuania also administers national sample surveys in mother tongue, mathematics, science, and social science in Grades 4, 6, 8, and 10, which provide national level information about the main areas of education. Sometimes, and in some districts, all students are tested to monitor school conditions and to make educational management decisions. After these surveys, sample questions with scoring instructions and national level statistics are made available and can be used by teachers to gauge the relative achievement of their students.

Teachers assess student reading achievement as a part of their overall assessment in the subject of mother tongue.

Challenge/need for action: Current curricula place some emphasis on the teaching of literacy, both within Lithuanian language and literature, and across the curriculum (as a competence). There is a need to mainstream reading / writing literacy across the curriculum and to offer content area literacy instruction in all school subjects throughout secondary education, whether academic or vocational. In the current curricula for the different school subjects, literacy dimensions are not described in literacy-specific terms. It would be worthwhile to sharpen the literacy focus to help teachers of all subjects to become literacy teachers and to ensure that literacy development is a shared responsibility for all teachers.

Reading Instruction

While most literacy researchers have clear concepts about effective literacy instruction, we do not know much about what is actually going on in classrooms in European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive observational studies. However, there is a noteworthy shortage of data on actual reading instruction in school. Only PIRLS offer some data for primary schools, albeit based on self-reports by teachers. Hence, PIRLS may not provide data that are valid and free from bias related to social desirability.

In PIRLS 2011, principals and teachers provided some information on language and reading instruction. Concerning the **instructional time spent on language and reading**, the following results are of interest. In 2011, students in Lithuania spent fewer hours per year at school (649) than on average across EU-24 countries (850 hours). Students in Lithuania spent 204 hours (about 30 percent of all instructional hours) on instruction in the language of the PIRLS test, compared to an EU-24 average of 241 hours. In Lithuania, 51 instructional hours per year were spent on reading as part of language, compared with an EU-24 average of 68, though the EU-24 average is itself low relative to,

for example, the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Teachers in Lithuania reported allocating about the same amount of time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (147 instructional hours per year) as on average across EU-24 countries (147 hours).

Source: PIRLS 2011 (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy et al., 2012, p. 214, Exhibit 8.4). EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database (see Appendix C, Table I3).

According to the PIRLS 2011 Encyclopaedia, the curriculum for Lithuania specifies that 26% of instructional time (in grades 1-4) should be spent on language/reading time (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 6). In the same Encyclopaedia, Elijo (2012, p. 388) notes that the number of lessons allocated to mother tongue instruction in Fourth grade in Lithuania (each lasting 45 minutes), is 7-8 per week out of a total of 24 compulsory lessons (i.e., about 30% of instructional time).

According to the plan for Secondary Education for the year 2015-16, 695 lessons (each lasting 45 minutes) should be spent on teaching Lithuanian language in grades 5-8 (345 lessons in grades 5-6 and 350 in grades 7-8). In grades 9 and 10, in total 315 lessons are allocated to Lithuanian language teaching. The number of Lithuanian language lessons will increase for the academic year of 2016-17. Then 715 lessons will be allocated for teaching Lithuanian language in grades 5-8 and 324 lessons in total will be allocated for grades 9 and 10. The number of lessons might differ by the level chosen by students, whether they decide to attend an expanded or a general course. Students who attend the general Lithuanian language programme receive 8 lessons per week, while students attending the expanded Lithuanian language courses receive 10 lessons per week of Lithuanian language. The number of Lithuanian language lessons is the same in both minority and Lithuanian schools. In comparison with other subjects, the greatest number of lessons is allocated to teaching Lithuanian language.

(Source: 2015–2016 ir 2016–2017 mokslo metų pagrindinio ir vidurinio ugdymo programų bendrieji ugdymo planai²⁸ [Education plan for Secondary Education in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017])

Teaching of reading strategies

PIRLS 2011 provides information on the frequency with which teachers in Lithuania engage students in specific reading comprehension activities. The following are the percentages of students in Grade 4 in Lithuania and on average across the EU-24 who engaged in specified comprehension activities 'every day or almost every day' (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix C, Table I1):

- Locate information within the text: 85.4% (EU-24 = 65.5%)
- Identify main ideas of what they have read: 91.9 % (EU-24 = 55.5%)
- Explain or support their understanding of what they have read: 95.8% (EU-24 = 61.6%)
- Compare what they have read with experiences they have had: 67.3% (EU-24 = 34.7%)
- Compare what they have read with other things they have read: 45.9% (EU-24 = (22.4%))
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text: 37.9% (EU-24 = 22.4%)
- Make generalisations and inferences: 83.7% (EU-24 = 36.5%)
- Describe the style or structure of the text: 51.8% (EU-24 = 22.7%)
- Determine the author's perspective or intention: 38.3% (EU-24 = 21.0%)

More students in Lithuania than on average across the EU-24 were engaged in each strategy on a daily or almost daily basis, reflecting the emphasis in the curriculum on these strategies. Strategies such as

²⁸ See: <http://www.smm.lt/uploads/documents/svietimas/Bendrieji%20ugdymo%20planai.pdf>.

making predictions about what will happen next in the text and determining the author's perspective or intention were practised by relatively small proportions of students in Lithuania and across EU countries (Source: PIRLS 2011 database. See Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 8.8, p. 226 for data for 'at least weekly', see also Table I1 in Appendix C).

Engaging students in learning

PIRLS also assessed which instructional practices teachers use to engage students in learning (for an overview of responses in Lithuania and other European countries, see Table I2 in Appendix C). PIRLS 2011 demonstrates that students whose teachers used instructional practices to engage students' learning in most lessons (through such activities as summarising the lesson's goals, relating the lesson to students' daily lives, questioning to elicit reasons and explanations, encouraging students to show improvement, praising students for good effort, bringing interesting things to class) had higher scores in reading than those whose teachers used such practices in only about half the lessons or less (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.6, p.220).

Based on a scale summarising frequencies across all six items, 93% of students in Lithuania were deemed to be taught by teachers who implemented instructional practices to engage learning in "most lessons". The corresponding EU-24 average was 70% (Appendix C, Table I2). This finding, together with those based on frequency of student engagement in reading comprehension strategies, suggests high levels of reading engagement in classrooms in Lithuania, though they may need to be verified by observational studies.

It is well documented in research studies that explicit teaching of comprehension strategies may improve reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability. While there are no data available for secondary schools, some PISA data also suggest that there is a need for explicit instruction of reading strategies. As reported above, in Lithuania, there is a gap of 92 points – about two years of schooling – between students who know which strategies are the most efficient to summarise a text, and those who have limited knowledge of such strategies.

Challenge: Data provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011 indicate a strong focus on teaching key reading comprehension strategies in language classes. There is a need to conduct a qualitative analysis of reading comprehension instruction in classrooms to ensure that the level of interaction among teachers and students during comprehension strategy instruction leads to satisfactory learning outcomes. The outcomes of the 2014 national assessment at Grade 4 support a link between frequency of reading comprehension instruction and reading performance.

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

According to the Survey of Schools: ICT in Education (European Schoolnet and University of Liege, 2012), digital literacy is part of the curriculum in Lithuanian schools. There are national strategies covering training and research measures for ICT in schools, as well as central steering documents for all ICT learning objectives. According to these official steering documents, students and teachers should use ICT in all subjects in class and for complementary activities and for natural and social sciences. At secondary level, ICT is also taught as a separate subject. Public-private partnerships promote the use of hardware and software in schools (p. 4).

According to the study entitled *European Media Literacy Education Study. Country Overview, Lithuania* (Pérez-Tornero, 2014), media literacy is neither included in the curriculum of secondary education as a

specific subject, nor mentioned as a cross-curricular activity. Media education is rather found as a vague element of content in some subjects (p. 2). However, film literacy has been introduced into formal education.

According to Pérez-Tornero (2014), in Lithuania, students' ICT skills could be assessed in an optional certification on the use of computers or in an IT exam at school level (p. 3). An ICT coordinator offers pedagogical support to teachers (p. 4). The report does not specify how students are supported in developing their skills and knowledge.

5.2.3 Early identification of and support for struggling literacy learners

Effective assessment tools upon entry to primary school will help teachers identify literacy skills from the very beginning of formal education. Regular formative assessment throughout primary school will ensure that literacy problems do not continue to go unrecognised, and that students receive the support they need through education that matches their learning needs. This should prevent children from leaving school with unrecognised literacy problems (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 67).

Standards as basis of assessment of reading difficulties

Standards of reading achievement allow teachers, parents and school leaders to understand the rate of learners' progress and to identify individual strengths and needs. Standards should be integrated into the curriculum and should be the basis of assessments. The High Level Group pointed out that there is a need to establish minimal standards of literacy achievement (benchmarks) for each grade, and to administer regular tests based on these standards, to allow for identification of struggling readers/writers (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy 2012a, p. 43).

All EU countries have defined learning objectives in reading to be reached at the end of primary and secondary education cycles. However, only a few Member States have detailed standards (benchmarks) at each grade (school year) which form the basis of assessments allowing for early identification of reading difficulties and subsequent allocation of attention and resources. These standard-based assessments allow teachers and school leaders to judge children's progress and to target additional reading support.

Are there detailed standards at each grade (school years) which form the basis of assessments allowing early identification of reading difficulties?

Mullis et al. (Exhibit 7, 2012a) note that assessment standards and methods are prescribed by the reading/language curriculum in Lithuania. According to Eljio (2012), the standards operate as a broad guideline for teachers, who also use their professional judgement to assign grades. She also notes that, in Grades 1-4, students do not receive grades. Instead, detailed written statements, based on teacher observations, are generated, with grading beginning in Grade 5, on a scale of 1-10, where 4 represents a pass grade and 10 is considered excellent.

Screenings for reading competence to identify struggling readers

As noted above, responsibility for screening struggling readers rests with classroom teachers, though, in the case of students who may have disabilities associated with language, including reading, speech therapists are available.

According to Elijo (2012), there is virtually no special attention paid to students' reading disabilities in Lithuania. There are no diagnostic measures to identify students with major problems in reading, nor are there any special materials or programmes to help students reach a desired level of reading.

Just 12.3% of pupils in Grade 4 in Lithuania in PIRLS 2011 were taught by teachers who reported placing a major emphasis on the use of national or regional achievement tests – tools that are often used in other countries to identify children at risk of reading difficulties (Appendix C, Table I8).

Initial detection of a student's problem is made by the student's teacher. The teacher informs the student's parents that there may be a difficulty, and only after that can an initial assessment of the pupil's special educational needs be conducted by specialists (a special education teacher, speech therapist, psychologist). They present their findings and recommendations regarding adjustment of the curriculum to the School Special Needs Education Commission, which makes a decision (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2009).

The Law on Education (2011: Art. 38) states that institutions authorised by the Minister of Education and Science and municipal executive institutions shall organise testing of learning according to general education curricula (Matura examinations, other examinations, credits and other ways of testing learning achievements) in compliance with learning achievements, testing programmes approved by the Minister of Education and Science and descriptions of the procedure for organising and implementing the testing of learning achievements, including studies of learners' achievements. Such testing of learning achievements shall be organised equal for learners of schools of all languages, without violating the principle of equal opportunities defined in Article 5 of this Law. All general education schools shall ensure the command of the Lithuanian language according to the general programme approved by the Minister of Education and Science (through basic educational achievements testing and Matura examinations).

In addition, school assessment is done through summative, formative and diagnostic approaches. Diagnostic assessment is normally performed at the beginning and the end of a new learning phase, and used to diagnose the current situation: to identify the pupil's learning achievements and progress made and plan further learning. (Eurydice, 2013a).

Do teachers use formative assessments?

In PIRLS 2011, 78% of pupils in Grade 4 in Lithuania were taught by teachers who placed a major emphasis on evaluation of students' ongoing work to monitor progress in reading – an activity that is consistent with formative assessment (Appendix C, Table I8). Fifty-six percent were taught by teachers who reported placing a strong emphasis on use of classroom tests for the same purpose – another activity associated with formative assessment.

Supporting struggling literacy learners

Number of struggling readers receiving remedial instruction

Based on a question that class teachers answered in PIRLS 2011, it is estimated that 10.8% of students in Fourth grade in Lithuania were considered to be in need of remedial reading instruction. It was also estimated by teachers that 9.5% of students were in receipt of remedial reading instruction (Appendix C, Table K1). On average across EU-24 countries, 18.1% of students in Grade 4 were identified by their teachers as being in need of remedial teaching, while 13.3% were identified as being in receipt of such teaching.

In Lithuania, 20.1% of students in Fourth grade performed at or below the PIRLS low benchmark on overall reading (Appendix C, Table A6). Hence, the percentage of students in Lithuania in receipt of remedial reading instruction (9.5%) was well below the percentage who performed poorly on PIRLS 2011.

Kinds of support offered

Primary level: It is crucial that teachers provide support measures to help struggling readers. European Countries differ widely in their approaches, from in-class support with additional support staff (reading specialists, teaching assistants or other adults) working in the classroom together with a teacher, to out-of-class support where speech therapists or (educational) psychologists offer guidance and support for students with reading difficulties.

PIRLS 2011 provides information about additional staff and availability of support persons for reading. Seventy percent of students in Lithuania were in classes where there was always access to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties, compared with an EU-24 average of 25% (Table 25). Eighteen percent of students in Lithuania were in classrooms where there was access to a teacher aide with the same frequency, while 5% are in classrooms where there was access to an adult/parent volunteer. Corresponding EU-24 averages were 13% and 3%, respectively.

Table 25: Percentages of Students in Classrooms with Access to Additional Personnel to Work with Children with Reading Difficulties, Lithuania and EU-24 Average

Access to...	Lithuania			EU-24 Average		
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Some-times	Never
Specialised professional	70.4	25.3	4.3	24.9	41.8	33.3
Teacher aide	17.8	16.5	65.8	13.2	33.6	53.2
Adult/parent volunteer	4.9	43.5	51.6	2.8	17.5	79.7

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Tables K2-K4

According to responses provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011, 76% of students in Lithuania were in classes where the teacher arranged for students falling behind in reading to work with a specialised professional, such as a reading professional (Table 26). The corresponding EU average was lower, at 55%. Thirty percent of students in Lithuania were in classes whose teachers wait to see if performance improves with maturation – lower than the EU-24 average of 37%. Almost all students in Lithuania (98%) were taught by teachers who spend more time working on reading individually with a student who falls behind – a little above the EU-24 average (90%). Finally, 98% of students in Lithuania and 97% on average across the EU-24 were taught by teachers who asked parents to provide additional support to a student who fell behind in reading.

Table 26: Percentages of Students in Classrooms Where Teachers Engage in Specified Activities to Support Students Who Begin to Fall Behind in Reading, Lithuania and EU-24 Average

	Lithuania (Yes)	EU-24 Average (Yes)
I have students work with a specialised professional	75.5	55.2
I wait to see if performance improves with maturation	36.2	36.6
I spend more time working on reading individually with the student	98.4	90.1
I ask the parents to help the students with reading	98.0	96.9

Source: Appendix C, Tables K5-K8.

Post-primary level: Educational assistance in Lithuania comprises the following: vocational guidance, informational, psychological, socio-pedagogical, special pedagogical and special assistance of education, healthcare at school, consultation, in-service training of teachers and other assistance (Law on Education, 2011: Art.6).

Education curricula may be adapted according to learners' needs when necessary and adjustments can be made in the completion time of educational programmes (Art. 14). Adaptations can be made in assessment as well (Art. 38).

In addition, teachers are to provide education suitable to their pupils' abilities, render help to those who face difficulties, respect and motivate pupils as well as cooperate with other teachers to reach educational objectives (Art. 49).

The key provisions for pupils with special educational needs include:

- application, where possible, of alterations to school building facilities and other specific support measures to cater for the needs of children with limited mobility
- provision of objectives and ways to meet the needs of children with disabilities in the school activities programme and compliance with the equality of rights principle
- creation of conditions for teachers' continuing professional development in the field of special education needs provision
- involvement of the parents of children with disabilities into the education process, etc. (Eurydice, 2013b)

In state schools, education is funded mainly by the state and municipalities, and the school founder funds the upkeep and maintenance of schools in line with their own procedures (Eurydice, 2012a).

In addition to general and vocational teachers, there are social teachers and special education teachers in Lithuania (Eurydice, 2013c).

Support for struggling readers – a legal right?

The Lithuanian Law on Education (2011) names equal opportunities as one of its general principles. This means that education must be socially fair and ensure equal opportunities for all individuals; it must provide access to education for any person, grant acquisition of general education and the first

qualification and also create conditions for continuing professional development of the qualifications attained or acquisition of new qualifications (Art. 5).

The main goal of education is to develop a person's values, enabling them to become an honest, knowledge-seeking, independent, responsible and patriotically-minded human being; to cultivate the communication skills important in modern life; to assist in internalising the information culture characteristics of the knowledge society, by providing for command of the state language, foreign languages and the native language, information literacy as well as modern social competence and the skills to shape one's own life independently and to live a healthy lifestyle (Art. 3).

Furthermore, the purpose of education of learners with special educational needs shall be to help a learner learn and to be trained according to their abilities, attain an education level and acquire a qualification, by recognising and developing their abilities and capacities. Education of learners with special educational needs shall be organised in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Minister of Education and Science (Art. 14).

In addition, articles 19-22 of the Law grant the right to receive psychological, special-pedagogical, special and social-pedagogical assistance, as well as healthcare in schools.

Challenge: In Lithuania, there is a need to ensure that all struggling readers, including those who speak a language other than the language of instruction, and low-achieving boys, receive the support they need to achieve their potential in reading literacy. Current provision levels at primary level are below EU average levels.

5.2.4 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of Teachers

Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Training

Entry requirements to university and college teacher training study programmes are generally a graduation certificate from secondary school and motivation test (a written test and follow-up interview). The motivation assessment is performed by members of the examining board appointed by the Lithuanian Higher Institutions Association for Organising Joint Admission. Selection into teacher training is decentralised and implemented by the training institutions themselves. There is also a language test for all prospective higher education students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011. *Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices*).

The full requirements are (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe*):

- A certificate of final examination of upper secondary education decided at the level of the education authority;
- A written or oral examination specifically for admission to teacher education decided at the level of the education authority;
- An interview specifically for admission to teacher education decided at the level of the education authority.

Are there specific selection methods for admission to initial teacher education?

As specified above, there are specific selection criteria for admission to initial teacher education.

What is the level of qualification for primary teachers and what is the length of the required training?

Typically, primary teachers' education routes are through a four-year university bachelor's degree programme in primary education. In ten European countries – Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, France, Iceland, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia – initial education for primary teachers is at master's level and usually takes five years. Lithuania requires primary teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree, which takes four years' study. In recent years an increase in the minimum length of initial teacher education can be noted for many countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2012, Fig. E2, p. 112).

More information about reading teachers' formal education is offered by PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2011, exh. 7.1, p. 188). Fifteen percent of fourth grade students in Lithuania had teachers who completed a Postgraduate University Degree, 76% had teachers who completed a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent but not a Postgraduate Degree, 8% had teachers who completed post-secondary education but not a Bachelor's Degree, and none had teachers with no further than upper secondary education. The EU-24 average for the last category is 6%.

Length of required training of secondary teachers

General education teachers are trained in universities and colleges. The procedure for training teachers is specified in the Regulations on Teacher Training. Teacher training studies are integrated into the university first-cycle (Bachelor) or college study programmes (Professional Bachelor). Teacher training studies may be integrated into the second-cycle (Master) study programmes.

Training of lower and upper secondary teachers is done at Bachelor's level (4 years) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe*).

The teacher training studies consist of a theoretical part (3 years for ISCED 1-3) and a school practice part (1 year for ISCED 0-3). School practice can be performed in both Lithuanian and foreign schools, provided the services offered meet the nature of the study programme and school practice, and the university/college concludes a contract or is pursuing a joint study programme with those institutions.

The role of literacy expertise in Initial Teacher Training

Important teacher competences related to literacy development are: a) assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student they teach; b) selection of appropriate instructional methods; and c) instruction in an effective and efficient manner. These topics should therefore be addressed in teacher training.

The knowledge/skills in reading instruction for prospective primary and lower secondary teachers of reading, according to central guidelines for ITE, 2009/10 are cited in European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2011). Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at School in Europe are:

- Generic skills or methodology for teaching reading in ITE;
- Teaching to read on-line texts in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011. *Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices*).

There is a requirement for all teachers to know the Lithuanian language and the level of knowledge should meet the requirements set in the resolution for the confirmation and implementation of the national language knowledge categories (Source: Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2003 m. gruodžio

24 d. nutarimas Nr. 1688. Dėl Valstybinės kalbos mokėjimo kategorijų patvirtinimo ir įgyvendinimo). Teachers also have to attend Lithuanian language courses provided by the Lithuanian language training programme for teachers, school heads and their deputies (Source: Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministro 2005 m. spalio 20 d. įsakymas Nr. ISAK-2106. Dėl Mokytojų, mokyklų vadovų, jų pavaduotojų ugdymui bei skyrių vedėjų lietuvių kalbos kultūros mokymo programos patvirtinimo). It is up to universities to decide which materials, teaching strategies and assessment techniques to use.

As for digital literacy, ICT is included in the initial education of all teachers (EACEA; Eurydice, Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at School in Europe, 2011). There are "guidelines on the inclusion of theoretical and practical knowledge of the use of ICT in initial teacher education".

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, teaching to read on-line texts is a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99). In only five countries – Lithuania included - do these guidelines explicitly refer to teaching to read on-line texts. In Lithuania, teacher education programmes require prospective teachers to introduce pupils to the most up-to-date technologies and tools for reading, and initiate them in the skills for on-line reading (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 101).

Do all teachers of reading (normally classroom teachers) have training in language/literacy?

In PIRLS 2011, teachers reported about their areas of specialisation in their formal education and training (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.2, p. 190). In Lithuania, 81% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 71% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/ teaching reading, and 49% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. These figures were above the corresponding EU-24 means. On average across the EU-24, 74% of the fourth grade students were taught by teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 59% by teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 30% by teachers with an emphasis on reading theory (PIRLS 2011 Database).

Is tackling reading difficulties a topic in Initial Teacher Training?

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, tackling reading difficulties is a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99). In Lithuania, theoretical and practical training time is devoted to the teaching of reading to children with a range of special educational needs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, p. 100).

Is assessing pupils' reading skills a topic in Initial Teacher Training?

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, assessing pupils' reading skills is not a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 99).

Teaching practice for prospective teachers of reading: How long is the duration of in-school placement in Initial Teacher Training?

The minimum time allotted to in-school placements during ITE in Lithuania is 540 hours. There is considerable variation in Europe: For prospective primary teachers, this time ranges from 40 hours in Latvia to 900 hours in Austria (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, Fig. 2.6, p. 102).

Lithuania belongs to the eight countries which explicitly state that skills relating to the teaching of reading must be practised during in-school placements. The others are Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia,

Norway, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom (England and Wales) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.6, p. 102).

Challenge: Initial teacher education needs a compulsory focus on developing literacy expertise among future primary and secondary teachers of all subject areas. The assessment of students' reading skills should also be a focus of initial teacher education.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In Lithuania, the development of CPD programmes on literacy-related topics is currently part of an overall national strategy for improving reading and literacy skills. The Parliament of Lithuania declared the year 2008 as the reading promotion year. As a consequence, CPD providers were encouraged to develop programmes related to developing reading skills. In some countries, including Lithuania, some CPD programmes on reading literacy target all teachers rather than focusing only on those teaching the language of instruction (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 92).

According to TALIS data, over 98% of Lithuanian teachers who teach reading, writing and literature at lower-secondary level attended at least one CPD activity during the 18 months prior to data collection (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 92).

Courses/workshops on reading-related subject matter or methods and/or other education-related topics are undoubtedly the most common form of CPD. On average in the EU, 86% of teachers in TALIS teaching reading, writing and literature attended at least one course or workshop during the previous 18 months. Percentages were high in Lithuania (reaching over 90%) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 94).

Peer support activities seem to be popular forms of CPD in many central and eastern European countries, including Lithuania. Observations were very common in Lithuania, where approximately 60% of the teachers of reading, writing and literature conducted at least one observation visit to another school during the previous 18 months. Observation visits and being observed during a class are part of the process of certification for Lithuanian teachers. In Lithuania, teachers teaching reading-related subjects at lower-secondary level reported higher participation in all forms of CPD than the EU average (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 96).

Time frame and quality standards of CPD

CPD attendance is expected for 5 days per school year and is a pre-condition for acquiring a higher or retaining the same qualification category. There is free choice in choosing the CPD programmes, including managerial ones that might lead to a career in school management. Teachers have the right to participate in CPD for five days annually, but it is not compulsory to do this. A higher qualification category leads to higher pay (Eurydice, 2008).

CPD programmes consist of non-formal education and self-education "for the purpose of acquiring and developing those competences that are necessary for one's professional activities" (Eurydice²⁹).

²⁹ See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Redirect>

According to Eurydice, on 30 May 2012, the Teachers' Professional Development Concept was approved by the Minister of Education and Science, which recognises the following forms of professional development:

- individual learning (including scientific activities and research and professional publications);
- collegial knowledge sharing (participation in methodological groups and associations of subject teachers, demonstration and reflective supervision of lessons and other educational activities, coaching, mentoring and consultation);
- specialised events (seminars, courses, projects, internships, trainings);
- academic studies (higher degree studies, studies in another study field, study programmes aimed at retraining which do not award a degree, etc.);
- public activities (social activities, cultural activities, artistic expression).

The Concept states that teachers' professional development should continue the training they received in higher education institutions and last during their entire professional career (Eurydice³⁰).

According to the Concept, there are three types of teachers' professional development:

- The first year of teaching professional development. It should take no less than one-third of the teacher's paid work and primarily it should be done by learning from peers.
- Internship for professional development. Every eight years (excluding parental leave), teachers have the right to get an internship for professional development which should last no longer than one academic year.
- Professional development is combined with work, which is planned and assessed by the school where the teacher works.

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the financial planning of CPD programmes and analyses of CPD provision. This entails planning funds for CPD and, in conjunction with other relevant institutions, organising, coordinating and performing analyses of the need for arranging professional development events. To implement comprehensive reforms in the Lithuanian education system, special in-service training courses and programmes (some of them obligatory) are devised for teachers and head-teachers (Eurydice, 2011, *Teaching Reading in Europe*, p. 96).

In addition, every eight years, teachers acquire a right to get a sabbatical leave of up to one year for study or internship, without losing their monthly salary (Eurydice³¹).

CPD programmes are either free of charge or they should be co-paid by the attendants (in addition to subsidies from public funds). As a rule, CPD providers charge a fee. Funds for professional development are provided for in the school budget and depend on the number of pupils enrolled (the pupil's basket). After 2012, teachers' professional development continued to be financed from the state budget (pupil's basket) and other sources of financing. Teachers can accumulate funds provided by the State for their continuing professional development for several years. Schools also have the opportunity to have CPD consultants who help the staff design professional development plans (ibid).

To ensure the quality of CPD services, the institutions providing CPD services and programmes undergo an accreditation process (Source: Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministro 2007 m. lapkričio 23 d. įsakymas Nr. ISAK-2275, MOKYKLŲ VADOVŲ, JŲ PAVADUOTOJŲ UGDYMUI, UGDYMAŲ ORGANIZUOJANČIŲ SKYRIŲ VEDĖJŲ, MOKYTOJŲ, PAGALBOS MOKINIUI SPECIALISTŲ KVALIFIKACIJOS

³⁰ See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Redirect>.

³¹ See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Redirect>.

TOBULINIMO PROGRAMŲ AKREDITAVIMO TVARKOS APRAŠAS). The requirements for the programmes specified in the description are: 1. be in compliance with the priorities set by the Ministry of Education and Science; 2. further develop existing competences or new competences listed among competences for the teaching profession and/or competences for school heads. Both descriptions are approved by the Minister of Education and Science (Sources: Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministro 2007 m. sausio 15 d. įsakyma Nr. ISAK-54, Mokytojo profesijos kompetencijos aprašas [The description of competencies for teachers profession]; Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministro 2007 m. sausio 15 d. įsakymas Nr. ISAK- 55, Dėl mokyklos vadovo kompetencijos aprašo patvirtinimo [Approval of the description of competences for school heads]).

The institutions providing CPD include school-based methodological centres, municipal teacher education centres and higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations and agencies under the subordination of the Ministry of Education and Science (Eurydice³²).

Most CPD programmes are prepared and taught by teachers who are practitioners and subject teachers. The choice of the trainee is determined by their interests, the thematic topic of the course / seminar, qualifications of the trainee, competence and recommendations of others. There is no separate preparation for trainers of CPD programmes (Source: Valdonė Indrašienė, Pedagogų kvalifikacijos tobulinimas: ką turime ir ką norime turėti? [The development of pedagogues' qualification: what we have and what we would like to have?], unpublished).

Time spent on professional development related to literacy

In PIRLS 2011 teachers were asked how much time they had spent on professional development in reading in the past two years. In Lithuania, 14% of the students had teachers who spent 16 hours or more (EU-24 average: 18%), 68% had teachers who spent some time but less than 16 hours (EU-24 average 53%), and 18% had teachers who spent no time (EU-24 average 29%) (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 7.4, p. 196). These figures show a reasonably high engagement of Lithuanian teachers.

In Lithuania, prospective teachers must have practical experience of teaching reading to pupils with special needs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 102).

Challenge: There is a strong infrastructure in place in Lithuania for the delivery of CPD for teachers. There is a need to ensure that CPD in literacy addresses key issues such as assessing and identifying the needs of lower-achieving readers.

5.3 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity

The High Level Group of Experts on Literacy drew attention to persistent gaps in literacy, namely the gender gap, the socio-economic gap, and the migrant gap (HLG Final report 2012, pp. 46–50). These gaps derive from the reading literacy studies that repeatedly show unequal distribution of results among groups of children and adolescents (PIRLS, PISA).

The **socio-economic gap** in literacy refers to the fact that children and adolescents from disadvantaged families have lower mean performance in reading than students from more advantaged families. However, the degree to which family background relates to reading literacy performance varies from one country to another even in Europe. Family background measured as parents' educational level and/or occupation or measured as economic, social and cultural status is one of the

³² See: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Redirect>.

most important predictors of reading literacy performance. Family background also explains some of the performance differences between schools.

The **migrant gap** refers to unequal distribution of learning outcomes between the native students and immigrant students who in most countries have lower levels of performance in reading than the native students. In many countries the migrant gap is associated with the socio-economic gap but this explains only a part of it, because the migrant gap is also associated with home language differing from the language of instruction at school which increases the risk of low performance in reading. It is noteworthy that even language minorities with high status in the society (and above-average socioeconomic background) show below average performance if the language of school is not supported at home, which signals the importance of a good command of the language used at school.

Another alarming gap in reading literacy in many countries is the **gender difference**, which is more vital for adolescents than for children. In all PISA studies, 15-year-old girls outperformed boys in reading in all the European countries, and boys are frequently overrepresented among the low performers. PISA 2009 results showed that these differences are associated with differences in student attitudes and behaviours that are related to gender, i.e. with reading engagement, and not gender as such. Therefore, the gender gap is also related to growing up in a family or in a school environment that values reading and learning and considers reading as a meaningful activity.

To achieve fairer and more inclusive participation in literacy learning we need to close these gaps, which already start in early childhood, by supporting children, adolescents and adults “at risk”. The groups of students “at risk” must have access to language screening and flexible language learning opportunities in school, tailored to individual needs. Furthermore, early support for children and adolescents with special needs is necessary.

In the section below we address the following issues:

- Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors
- Support for children with special needs
- Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children
- Provisions for preschool children with language difficulties
- Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school.
- Preventing early school leaving
- Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

This section refers to children and adolescents who, for different reasons, can be considered as a group “at risk” (from disadvantaged homes, those whose home language is not the language of school, or those with “special needs”). The focus is on preventing literacy difficulties among members of these groups. There is a certain overlap with the topic “Identification of and support for struggling literacy learners”, dealt with in the section, “Improving the quality of teaching”, which is concerned with those who have already developed literacy difficulties (s. 5.2.4).

5.3.1 Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors

The child’s socioeconomic and cultural background has a strong impact on literacy. Material poverty and educational level, particularly of the mother, are well-recognized main factors influencing literacy (World Bank 2005, Naudeau et al., 2011). Socio-economic background also influences biological risks to children, by determining early exposure to risk factors and increased susceptibility (Jednoróg et al., 2012). The primary language spoken at home also influences literacy development (Sylva et al., 2004).

In order to describe the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence emergent literacy, several indicators were used which stem from international surveys, thus providing comparability across Europe (for more information concerning the concepts and indicators s. Appendix A).

Gini index

The Gini index is the most commonly used measure of inequality, and represents the income distribution of a nation's residents with values between 0 (maximum equality) and 100 (maximum inequality). In the European countries participating in ELINET the range is from 22.6% in Norway to 35% in Spain (for an overview of European countries see table A1 in Appendix B). With 32.0% Lithuania is somewhat below the European average.

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 15.4%, Lithuania is at the lower end of distribution. The range is from 4.7% in Iceland to 25.5% in Romania (for an overview of European countries, see table A2 in Appendix B).

Mother's education level

The PIRLS 2011 database offers information about mothers' level of education referring to ISCED levels. The figures for Lithuania are presented below and point to a very low proportion of mothers with no schooling or low level of education, compared with the average figures for the European countries participating in PIRLS (shown in parentheses) (for an overview of European countries see table A3 in Appendix B).

No schooling: 0.1% (0.6%)

ISCED 1: primary education: 1.0% (5.3%)

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education: 10.2% (16.7 %)

ISCED 3: Upper secondary education: 31.7% (36.1%)

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education: 20.4% (7.1 %)

ISCED 5B: Tertiary education (first stage) with occupation orientation: 7.5% (9.5%)

ISCED 5A: Tertiary education (first stage) with academic orientation 14.7% (13.9%)

BEYOND: 11.8% (10.1%)

Not applicable: 2.5% (0.9%).

Teenage mothers

No data are available for Lithuania; for an overview of European countries, see table A4 in Appendix B).

Single parent

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in Lithuania the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 16.9%. The range for the European countries participating in ELINET is from 1.4% in Croatia to 30% in Denmark (for an overview of European countries, see table A5 in Appendix B).

Migrant parents

According to PIRLS 2006 (Mullis et al. 2007, Exhibit 3.12 – Students’ Parents Born in Country), in Lithuania the proportion of children with both parents born outside the country (2%) or only one parent born outside the country (9%) is particularly low compared to the European average (for an overview about European countries, see table A6 in Appendix B).

Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

According to PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, exhibit 4.3 - Students Spoke the Language of the Test Before Starting School, p. 118), the proportion of children speaking a different language at home from the one used at school was low in Lithuania, at 2% (for an overview of European countries see table A7 in Appendix B).

5.3.2 Support for children with special needs

Not only are children from culturally disadvantaged families “at risk” in their literacy development, but also those with very low birth weight and severe prematurity, factors that are associated with developmental disabilities, including reading and writing disabilities. Also cognitive and sensory disabilities must be considered.

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.11, p.149), the percentage of live births with a birth weight under 2,500 grams in Lithuania was 4.0%. The range is from 3.0% in Iceland to 8.8% in Cyprus (for an overview of European countries, see table E1 in Appendix B).

Severe prematurity

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.14, p.155), the percentage of live births with a gestational age under 32 weeks was 0.9% in Lithuania (with a range from 0.7% in Iceland to 1.4% in Hungary). The percentage of live births with a gestational age between 32 and 36 weeks was 4.5% (with a range from 4.5% in Lithuania to 7.5% in Hungary (for an overview of European countries see table E2 in Appendix B).

5.3.3 Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children

According to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 in Lithuania is 84.2%. Lithuania reaches the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC (for an overview of European countries see table C1 in Appendix B).

The OECD Family Database (2014) offers more differentiated figures of participation rates at ages 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate was 70% for 5-year-olds, 65% for 4-year-olds, and 61.4% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B).

PIRLS 2011 (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 4.7, p. 128) provides information about the relationship between the length of preschool education attendance and average reading score in grade 4. These are the figures:

3 years and more: 53% (average reading score 539)

Between 1 and 3 years: 17% (average reading score 530)

1 year or less: 7% (average reading score 524)

Did not attend: 23% (average reading score 507)

(For an overview of European countries, see table C3 in Appendix B).

The benefit of preschool attendance in Lithuania 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 30 points higher than that of pupils who did not attend at all.

5.3.4 Provisions for preschool children with language problems

Literacy competence strongly builds on oral language proficiency, word knowledge, and syntactic knowledge. Measures must be taken by governments and institutions to ensure that children with poor language development (second-language speaking children and those from a low socio-cultural background, as well as others who experience difficulty in learning language) acquire adequate levels of oral language in kindergarten, preschool institutions and in school. It should be ensured that at age 4 at the latest all children are diagnosed in their oral language proficiency, and that there are obligatory courses for children falling behind in their acquisition of language competence. The aim should be that all children entering school can speak the language of the school so that they can profit from reading instruction.

Are there screenings/assessments to identify children at risk in their language?

There is no systematic assessment of children in order to identify language development problems. General assessment responsibilities are assigned to teachers (Eurydice³³).

Is there specialist support for children whose home language is not the language of school?

According to Elijo (2012), all schools whose language of instruction is other than Lithuanian (mainly Russian, Polish and some Belarusian) teach Lithuanian as the national language in addition to mother tongue as the language of instruction. Elijo notes that the syllabus for Lithuanian as the national language differs from Lithuanian as mother tongue, but it includes a wide range of aims for speaking, writing and reading in Lithuanian.

Is there specialist support for children with delays in their language development?

In Lithuania, children in centre-based ECEC settings receive language support. According to the regulations approved by the Minister of Education, assistance of professional specialists (speech therapists, psychologists, social pedagogues, etc.) for pre-school and pre-primary age children can be provided in the ECEC setting, in local pedagogical-psychological services (if there is no possibility to provide assistance of professional specialists in ECEC setting) or at home (if a child has a severe disability). A full-time working position for speech therapist should be established in an ECEC institution when there are 25-30 children with special needs, more precisely, children with language and communication disorders. If there are fewer children, then speech therapists should work part time. Also, there is a comprehensive system of help developed in municipalities. It aims to assure effective support for the pre-school age child who needs special support from at least two different specialists, and helps parents strengthen their parenthood and social skills. Comprehensive help services encompass implementation of coordinated pre-school and pre-primary education

³³ See: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Lithuania:Assessment_in_the_Pre-Primary_Class.

programmes, provision of social support, and health and educational support for children and their parents. Parents or the Centre of Social Support may request provision of these complex help services. If a need for complex help is identified by the child's welfare commission, then such services are provided by an inter-institutional team which consists of various different specialists (e.g. psychologists, special pedagogues, speech therapists, social workers, etc.). The provision of services is supervised by a coordinator responsible for assurance of inter-institutional cooperation (Sources: European Commission/EACA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 145; Giedrienė et al. (2011). Švietimo pagalba ugdymo įstaigoje: kaip kurti veiksmingą sistemą³⁴ [Educational support in educational institution: how to create an effective system]; European Commission (2014)). Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving. Annex 3: Case studies.

5.3.5 Support for children and adolescents whose home language is not the language of school

The Law on Education (2011: Art. 30) states that every citizen of the Republic of Lithuania and foreigners having the right of permanent or temporary residence in the Republic of Lithuania shall be guaranteed instruction in the state language and to learn the state language.

The Law also stipulates that municipal pre-school education and general education shall provide opportunities for learners belonging to national minorities to have supplementary study of their native language.

In Lithuania, schools of general and non-formal education providers create conditions for pupils of ethnic minorities to preserve their national, ethnic and linguistic identity, study their mother tongue, history and culture. In schools of general and non-formal education, the regulations allow for the possibility that students, at the request of their parents, may use the language of a particular ethnic minority as the language of instruction and to study it, and that the education process may be conducted and certain subjects taught in the language of the ethnic minority concerned. In those schools, the teaching of Lithuanian is an integral part of the curriculum and the number of hours allocated for its teaching may not be fewer than those allocated for the teaching of the mother tongue (Eurydice, 2012c).

The Ministry of Education and Science defines the following actions concerning the education of foreign pupils: schools prepare an integration plan for those pupils who have completed part of or a full international general education programme and, when necessary, an individual education plan; schools also set a suitable period for the pupil's adaptation. If the pupil is able to achieve a satisfactory level of knowledge and skills during the adaptation period, the school prepares the learning plan and provides educational assistance (Ministry of Education and Science, 2013a).

The school carries out a needs assessment for learning the Lithuanian language and organises learning in a bridging course/group (for an academic year or a shorter period) for pupils who do not know the Lithuanian language or have only basic knowledge of it (Ministry of Education and Science, 2013a).

A pupil's funding in minority schools is 21% higher than in mainstream school. In this way the means to cover the additional expenses related to teaching Lithuanian language (e.g. buying textbooks,

³⁴ See: <http://www.ikimokyklinis.lt/index.php/straipsniai/specialistams/svietimo-pagalba-ugdymo-istaigoje-kaip-kurti-veiksminga-sistema/3188>.

improving teacher's qualification, etc.) are secured. The number of hours allocated for teaching Lithuanian language is 1.5 hour more than in mainstream schools³⁵.

There is a website for teachers teaching Lithuanian (national) language in minority schools³⁶. Here teachers can access various useful links, materials and advice on how to organise the national language learning process. Also, Lithuanian language teachers can attend distance courses in a virtual learning environment "lituanistų avilys" where they could also get additional support on how to improve the Lithuanian language teaching process³⁷.

If the pupil does not know Lithuanian language at all, then before starting attending school, he/she can learn the Lithuanian language in a class or mobile group for equalisation. Such classes can be established in the school by the decision of the owner (usually it is the Municipality). In such a class or mobile group, children are taught Lithuanian language for 20-25 hours weekly. If a child joins the group in October or November, then 28 hours per week are given for Lithuanian language teaching. During the second semester Lithuanian language lessons are enriched by such topics as history and geography of Lithuania, and civic education. Also the main terms of various subjects in Lithuanian language are introduced for pupils. To improve communication skills in Lithuanian, pupils from class/mobile groups for equalisation have some classes together with local students (e.g. physical education activities or informal education activities)³⁸.

Challenge: Lithuania has put in place a series of measures to ensure that students whose first language is not Lithuanian and those with low socio-economic status are provided with opportunities to build language and other skills in school settings. It is important that the outcomes of these efforts are monitored on an ongoing basis and that provision and programmes are adjusted in line with need.

5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving

Literacy provision and participation in secondary schooling: What is the rate of early school leavers?

One important, but certainly not sufficient, precondition for raising performance levels in literacy for adolescents is literacy provision during secondary schooling, as functional literacy is mainly acquired in school-based learning. Thus, the provision of secondary education for all adolescents and the prevention of early school leaving may serve as indicators for the opportunities of adolescents to improve their literacy performance, especially related to basic functional literacy.

According to Eurostat, in Lithuania, the rate of early school leavers was 6.3 % in 2013, down from 6.5% a year before. The target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate set for 2020 is below 9%.

The duration of compulsory education in Lithuania is 9 years. Children start school at the age of 7; compulsory schooling ends at 16 years (Compulsory Education in Europe 2013/14, Eurydice report).

³⁵ See: http://www.svietimas.utena.lm.lt/TVS/images/stories/naujienos2011/2011_09_Del%20lietuviu%20kalbos.pdf.

³⁶ See: <http://www.valstybinek.lt/mburelis/>.

³⁷ See: http://www.svietimas.utena.lm.lt/TVS/images/stories/naujienos2011/2011_09_Del%20lietuviu%20kalbos.pdf.

³⁸ See: https://www.smm.lt/web/lt/smm-svietimas/svietimo-informacija-uzsienio-lietuviams/LR_pilieciu_uzsienieciu_gyvenanciu_lietuvije_vaiku_ugdymas_bendrojo_lavinimo_mokyklose.

The percentage of 18-year olds in education was 100% in 2011, which situated Lithuania well above the EU-27 average (80.7%). By 2012, this indicator decreased to 97%. Since 2001, Lithuania has consistently exceeded the EU average value for this indicator.

5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents

The National Education Strategy 2003-2012 stated reducing the relative difference between the number of boys and girls graduating from mathematics, informatics, natural science and technology studies by half as one its targets (Eurydice, 2012b). The Ministry of Education and Science has also published an article that includes a commitment to raising women's participation in the field of science (Ministry of Education and Science, 2013b).

However, there is no programme in place for addressing the gender gap in reading literacy in favour of girls which remained persistent according to PISA results: Boys are over-represented at the lowest proficiency levels. As PISA data show, the **gender gap** among 15-year-old girls and boys in Lithuania is equivalent to one and a half years of schooling. As this gap is mainly caused by the decline of reading motivation and reading activities between primary and secondary school, schools together with families, libraries and communities should support boys' literacy development in this critical phase.

Challenges: Fostering reading literacy and engagement for reading of disadvantaged boys: programmes specifically aiming at supporting boys' reading engagement are needed.

5.3.8 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples

Programmes against poverty

The National Progress Programme for 2014-2020 has four aims in order to reduce social exclusion: 1) to promote child and family well-being, strengthen and protect public health; 2) to increase the incentives and opportunities for the persons who are far removed from the labour market to participate in the labour market by implementing the active inclusion measures; 3) ensure the financial stability of income security system; 4) and improve the quality of the living environment and increase the accessibility to public services. The first aim is the most relevant for the purpose of this report, thus it will be presented in more detail. The following objectives are foreseen to achieve the first aim: a) to create favourable conditions for reconciliation of family and work commitments and increase the provision of complex help for child and family; b) to create favourable conditions for the child's growth, and strengthen the family, develop parents' social and positive parenthood skills; c) strengthen the system for children's rights protection – to ensure children's rights protection by developing cooperation among organisations working in educational, social, health and other fields; d) to develop social, health and other measures to reduce the social exclusion, health inequalities and poverty in Lithuanian society. (Source: 2014-2020 metų Nacionalinės pažangos programa³⁹ (National progress programme for 2014-2020)

Policies/programmes to prevent early school leaving

Since 2001, social pedagogues have worked in each school in Lithuania. There are about 1,000 social pedagogues working in the schools, day care centres, and children's homes. They offer counselling to

³⁹ See: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=439028&p_query=&p_tr2=2.

children, families and teachers. They organise social skills development groups for pupils with behaviour problems and implement prevention programmes. They are members of the 'Child's Welfare Group' at school, which deals with problems students face. The group consists of a wide range of specialists: social pedagogues, school administration representatives, teachers, special educational needs (SEN) teachers, school psychologists and parents. In addressing attendance problems in schools, the group works in close cooperation with territorial unit inspectors for juvenile affairs and the staff of the municipal children's rights protection departments (European Commission, 2013, p. 38).

Schools where young people may gather practical experience of job-related processes and requirements as well as insights into 'what professional life is about' have been established in Lithuania. These schools combine academic learning programmes and practical work experience. The aim is to raise the motivation of young people to engage in learning and to provide them with the experience necessary to make informed decisions on their future careers. These schools offer workshops for learning by doing, vocational guidance, socio-pedagogic support, practical experience and assistance in improving basic education skills (European Commission, 2013, p. 41).

In addition to the above, a number of specific projects to reduce early school leaving have been implemented, as described below.

The second step programme. It aims to prevent violence and develop pupils' self-regulation, empathy, management of emotions and problem-solving skills. It has been implemented since 2004 by Children Support Centre⁴⁰.

Olweus programme aims to prevent violence and bullying. It trains all school staff to notice, recognise and respond to bullying and violence. Since 2011, the programme has been coordinated by the centre of special pedagogy and psychology⁴¹.

Lions Quest programme "The crossroads of adolescence" is a comprehensive programme for 10-14 year olds, which unites teachers, parents and community members seeking to help adolescents to develop their competences and socio-emotional skills⁴².

Early school leaving prevention policies for VET include modernising the infrastructure, improving teachers' competences and qualifications and making the learning process more flexible: there is a possibility for students to combine studies and work; change learning modules; they are not left to repeat the course, instead there are provisions for students to prepare for examinations individually.

National programmes have been implemented to solve the problem of children who do not learn or do not attend school. For example, there was a children and youth socialisation programme implemented in 2004-2014, and programmes aiming to bring back to school children who do not attend it (2010-2011) (Source: Švietimo problemos analizė, "Anksti paliekantys mokykla: situacija Lietuvoje" (Early school leavers: situation in Lithuania), 2013, spalio, Nr. 8(94)). EU structural funds have been used to create more favourable learning environments and thus prevent early school leaving. The projects encompass implementation of such measures as the creation of new alternative teaching and learning programmes, creation of groups for children who do not attend school, and provision of professional development activities for educational stakeholders. The specific examples of EU funded and implemented projects are provided in the box below.

⁴⁰ See: <http://www.pvc.lt/lt/antras-zingsnis>.

⁴¹ See: <http://www.sppc.lt/index.php?-1194004933>.

⁴² See : <http://www.lions-quest.lt/index.php?id=156>.

Year(s) of implementation	Project title and brief description
2004-2006	<p><i>Bringing early school leavers back to school.</i> The project aimed to return early school leavers to the education system by increasing the access, effectiveness and quality of pedagogical and psychological support; and development of professional competence of staff providing pedagogical and psychological services.</p>
	<p>The project <i>Development of pedagogical and psychological services</i> aimed to improve infrastructure and physical environment of buildings where social and psychological services are provided to ensure the effective provision of pedagogical and psychological support.</p>
2008-2012	<p><i>Bringing school leavers back to schools</i> project aimed to improve and coordinate prevention activities by organising groups for children having special needs and difficulties in attending schools; creating a database about children who do not learn and do not attend school, supporting prevention programmes against violence, improving qualifications of education specialists working with social-risk children and their families and preparing methodical recommendations for parents and teachers.</p>
	<p><i>The development of effective and high quality support for students (I stage).</i> Project aimed to improve the effectiveness of support for students through development of educational specialist qualifications; improve the functioning of the education system through the creation of a safe environment for pupils by preparing consultants for crisis management who would teach school personnel how to manage difficult situations at school; and develop the methodological basis for children's pedagogical and psychological assessment.</p>
	<p><i>The preparation of tools for special education (I stage).</i> Project aims to develop the high quality psychological, special and social pedagogical support for learning by preparing and adjusting tools for special teaching, improving specialist qualification in using various tools to work with pupils having special needs.</p>
	<p><i>The development of various learning forms for individuals having special needs.</i> The project sought to: better address the needs of individuals with special needs by adjusting the learning environment and creating new learning forms; improve the capacities of administrative education staff to organise the learning process for children with special needs at school, prepare pedagogues to apply new learning forms, individualise learning process, prepare education specialists for provision of pedagogical and psychological support for pupils with special needs and consult parents and teachers; and prepare the documents describing how new teaching forms should be established.</p>

2012-2014	<p><i>The creation of a safe environment at school.</i> The project supports and develops various strategies for the prevention of violence, suicide, torture alcohol and drugs usage and human trafficking programmes. Also, within the framework of this project the informal learning programmes are organised and the database of informational system on pupils who do not attend learning and do not attend school is renewed.</p>
	<p><i>The development of effective and high quality support for students (II stage).</i> The project aimed to improve the effectiveness of support for student by organising seminars, visits and professional development courses for specialists providing educational support, school communities, psychologists, crisis management consultants and others; acquiring the methodology for the evaluation of child development; and preparing the methodology for the assessment of the child's reading development.</p>
	<p><i>The preparation of tools for special education (Second stage).</i> The project seeks to ensure the effectiveness of the learning process for students with special needs and create the conditions for the professional development of various educational stakeholders working with these children.</p>
	<p><i>The development of various learning forms for individuals having special needs (II stage).</i> The project aims to develop the effectiveness of the learning process for pupils with special needs (in particular those who have autism, behavioural/emotional and complex disorders).</p>

(Source: <http://www.sppc.lt/>)

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