



# LITERACY IN SLOVENIA

## COUNTRY REPORT

### CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

March 2016

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# 1 Introduction

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

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

The Country Reports 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 equity<sup>4</sup>).

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2 Executive Summary

### LITERACY PERFORMANCE DATA

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

Slovenia performed slightly but statistically significantly below the EU average in both PIRLS 2011 (530 vs 535 EU-average) and in PISA 2012 (481 vs 489 EU average). Average performance in PIRLS increased significantly between 2001 and 2011 (+ 20 points in 2006, + 9 points in 2012, leading to an increase of 29 score points between 2001 and 2011). In PISA, the performance slightly decreased between 2009 and 2012, remaining below the EU average.

The proportion of pupils who can be considered low-performing readers was almost the same in PIRLS and PISA (21%), proportion very close to corresponding EU averages (20% in both studies). In PISA, these students can, at best, read simple texts, retrieve explicit information, or make straightforward inferences, but they are not able to deal with longer or more complex texts, and are unable to interpret beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. The proportion of low-performing readers greatly decreased in PIRLS between 2001 and 2011 (from around 35% to 20%) That proportion of low performers remained quite unchanged in PISA between 2009 and 2012. The proportion of top-performing readers is 8% in PIRLS 2011 (vs 9% in EU) and 5% in PISA (vs 7% in EU).

In the reading achievement, the gap between students of parents having the highest and lowest levels of education was higher in Slovenia than on average across EU countries in PIRLS 2011 (89 and 76 respectively). In PISA, the gap between students in the highest and lowest SES groupings in Slovenia was close to the EU average (88 and 89 respectively). However, the indices of socioeconomic background are not the same in PIRLS and PISA, so the comparison should be taken with caution.

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

In Slovenia, the gender gap (in favour of girls) was higher than the corresponding EU average difference in PIRLS 2011 (16 vs 12 on EU average) and was even higher in the two previous cycles of the study. The gender difference was exactly similar (5 points) in PIRLS 2006 and 2011 whereas this gap slightly decreased on average across EU countries – it appears to have remained consistent over time - the change in differences is not statistically significant. In PISA, the gender gap was lower than the EU average (26 vs 44 on average). The stability in reading performance observed between 2009 and 2012 shows no change in the gender gap.

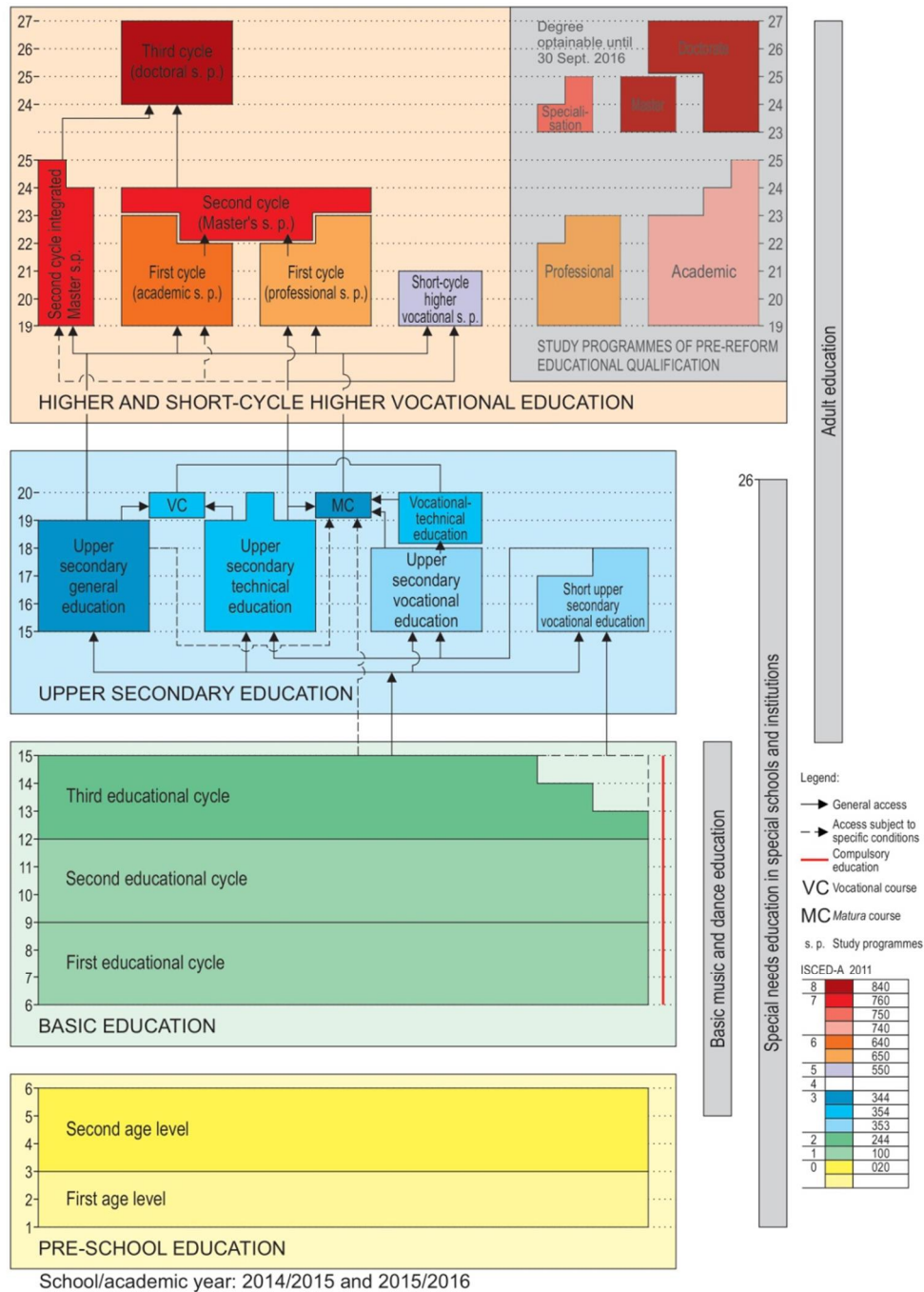
In conclusion, even if Slovenia still performed below the EU average, this country shows an unusual improvement of its global reading score among 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. Its proportion of low performing readers significantly decreased, leading to a mean score that is close to the EU average. In PISA, the trend is quite different: a very slight decrease of the global reading performance was observed between 2009 and 2012. The data also point to no real difference in the percentage of low-performing

readers between these years. Moreover, the proportion of top performers is low, resulting in a score which remained below the EU average. The spread of achievement (gap between low and top performing readers) was lower than in EU on average in PIRLS and higher in PISA.

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

# 3 General Information on the Slovenian Education System

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

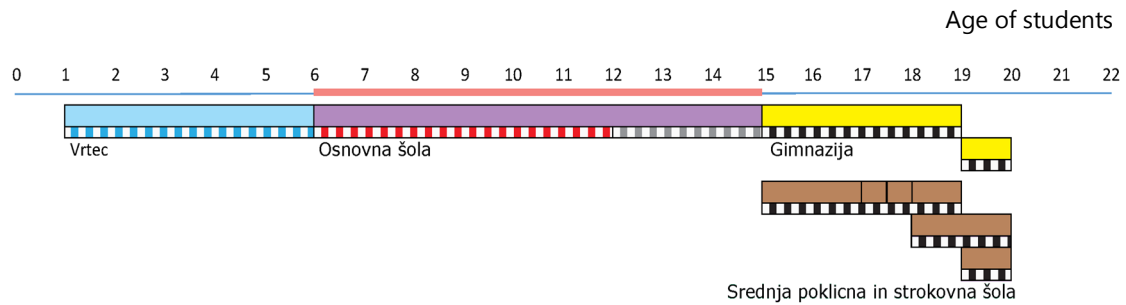


As can be seen from figure 1 the educational system includes early education (0- 6 years), including ante-preschool (0-3 years) and preschool education (3–6 years).

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



Figure 2: Structure of the Slovenia School System<sup>7</sup>



Legend: *Vrtec* = Kindergarten; *Osnovna šola* = Primary School; *Gimnazija* = Gymnasium (High School); *Srednja poklicna in strokovna šola* = Secondary vocational school

According to Doupona Horvat (2012), primary (elementary) school is compulsory for all children ages 6–15 living in Slovenia. Children enter primary school in the autumn of the year they are six years old. Primary schooling lasts for 9 years. Primary school comprises three cycles, each three years long. The first and second cycles (Grades 1–3 and 4–6, respectively) are comprehensive. In the third cycle (Grades 7–9), there is generally some form of streaming, or separate classes within selected subjects (mathematics, the Slovene language, and foreign languages) based on students’ knowledge and teacher or parent preferences. Schools can chose whether or not to stream students.

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

The first level of higher education is undergraduate study, with the second and third levels being postgraduate studies. Programmes of study within the first level must correspond to European Union undergraduate programmes and are limited to three or four years and 180–240 credits. The second level is a master’s, which encompasses 60–120 credits and takes a period of one or two years to complete. Doctoral programmes comprise the third level of higher education.

<sup>7</sup> Source: *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2014/15: Schematic Diagrams*, p. 20; see: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts\\_and\\_figures/education\\_structures\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/education_structures_EN.pdf).

# 4 Literacy Performance Data for Children and Adolescents

## 4.1 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 pupils' reading achievement at fourth grade organised 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 straightforward 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, PISA 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, including 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 2006 Data).

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

Pupils in Slovenia achieved an overall mean reading score of 530 in PIRLS 2011 (Table 1). This is below the EU-24 average of 535. Performance in Slovenia was slightly higher on Literacy texts (532) compared with Informational texts (528), and about the same on Retrieve & Infer and on Interpret, Integrate & Evaluate (Appendix A, Tables A2-A5).

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

	Overall Reading – Mean Score
Slovenia	<b>530</b>
EU-24	535

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

Performance on PIRLS in Slovenia increased by 29 points between 2001 and 2011, whereas across the EU-24, it rose by just one point. Performance in Slovenia rose by 20 point between 2001 and 2006 and by 9 points between 2006 and 2011.

Table 2: Trends in Performance in PIRLS 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

	2001	2006	Change (2006-2001)	2006	2011	Change (2011-2006)	2001	2011	Change (2011-2001)
Slovenia	502	522	<b>20</b>	522	530	<b>9</b>	502	530	<b>29</b>
EU Countries	534	534	0	534	535	1	534	535	1

Significant differences in **bold**. (N.B. The results are rounded.)

In Slovenia, 21% of students were at or below the low benchmark in PIRLS 2011. This is similar to the EU average of 20% (Table 3). In Slovenia, 8% of students achieve at the Advanced benchmark, which is close to the EU average of 9%.

Table 3: Performance by Overall PIRLS Reading Benchmarks 2011 - Percentages of Pupils- Slovenia and EU-24 Average

	Below 400	400-475 Low	475-550 Intermediate	550-625 High	Above 625 Advanced
Slovenia	5	16	38	34	8
EU-24	5	15	36	35	9

Slovenia's standard deviation of 70 is the same as the EU-24 average, indicating a similar spread of achievement. The difference between the scores of students at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles in Slovenia – 180 points – is also the same as the corresponding EU-24 average of 180.

Table 4: Spread of Achievement – Standard Deviation, 10th, 90th Percentiles, and Difference between 10th and 90th Percentiles on Overall Reading – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

	Standard Deviation	10 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	90 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	90 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>
Slovenia	70	437	616	<b>180</b>
EU-24 Avg	70	441	621	<b>180</b>

Significant differences in **bold**

#### 4.1.2 Gaps in reading

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

##### Parent's educational achievement

The PIRLS 2011 data show that students in Slovenia whose parent attended University or Higher achieved a mean score (567) that was some 89 points higher than students whose parents completed Lower Secondary or below (478) (Table 5). The average difference across the EU-24 was 76 points. It is notable that just 4% of students in Slovenia had parents whose lowest level of education was lower secondary or below, compared with an EU average of 18%. On the other hand, more students on average across EU countries had at least one parent with a basic university degree or higher (30%) than in Slovenia (24%).

Table 5: Percentages of Students with at least one Parent Whose Highest Level of Education was Lower Secondary, and Percentages who Finished University or Higher – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

Level of Education	Lower Secondary or Below		University or Higher		Difference (Univ or Higher – Lower Sec)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Slovenia	4	478	24	567	<b>89</b>
EU-24	18	495	30	571	<b>76</b>

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

### Primary language spoken at home different from language used at school

Data are not available on this variable for pupils in Slovenia.

### Gender

Girls in Slovenia achieved a mean score on overall reading that was higher than boys by 16 points in PIRLS 2011. This is slightly above the EU-24 average difference of 12 points (Table 6). The gender gap has narrowed in Slovenia, from 22 points in 2001 to 16 in 2011, i.e. it is on the declining trend between 2001 and 2011.

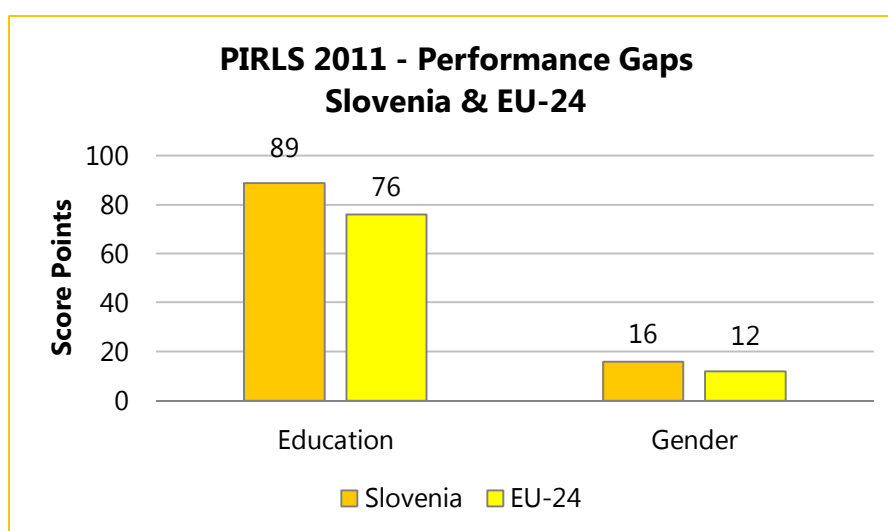
Table 6: Trends in Performance by Gender 2001-2011 (Overall Scale) – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

	Slovenia			EU		
	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls-Boys
2011	539	523	<b>16</b>	541	529	<b>12</b>
2006	532	512	<b>19</b>	541	528	<b>13</b>
2001	512	491	<b>22</b>	542	525	<b>17</b>

Significant differences in **bold**

Key performance gaps on reading literacy at primary level in Slovenia and on average across the EU-24 are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Performance Gaps – Gender and Education



Education: Parent has University vs. Lower Secondary/Primary education; Gender: Girls – boys

## Attitudes to Reading

There was a difference of 59 points between the top and bottom quarters of the Like Reading Scale in Slovenia in 2011 (Table 7). On average across the EU-24, the difference between students in the top and bottom quarters of the Like Reading scale was 52 points, indicating a relatively similar relationship between liking reading and performance in Slovenia. On one of the components of the 'Like Reading' scale, 49% of students in Slovenia 'agreed a lot' that they enjoyed reading. The corresponding EU-24 average was higher at 57%.

Table 7: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Students in the Top and Bottom Quartiles of the PIRLS Like Reading Scale – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

Like Reading	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Slovenia	560	501	<b>59</b>
EU-24	563	511	<b>52</b>

Statistically significant mean score differences in bold.

Students in Slovenia in the top quarter of the Confidence in Reading scale achieved a mean score (567) that was some 83 points higher than students in the bottom quarter (484) (Table 8). The average difference across the EU-24 was 80 points, indicating a similar relationship between Confidence and performance in Slovenia.

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

Confidence in Reading	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile	Difference (Q4-Q1)
Slovenia	567	484	<b>83</b>
EU-24	570	490	<b>80</b>

Statistically significant mean score differences in bold.

### 4.1.3 National literacy surveys at primary level

In Slovenia, there are no national literacy surveys for the 10 year olds.

## 4.2 Adolescents

The performance data are derived from the OECD PISA study.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) led by OECD<sup>8</sup> **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 that will enable them to participate effectively to 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, p. 52).

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

Slovenia has participated in PISA since 2006. It is only possible to describe the change in reading performance over the last two PISA cycles (2009 and 2012), according to different characteristics of the readers.

In PISA 2012, students in Slovenia achieved a mean score of 481 score points on the print reading scale, 8 score points below the EU-average (Table 9). Performance in reading of students in Slovenia has remained relatively constant, with a marginal decline of 2 score points, between 2009 and 2012 (Table 10).

Table 9: Reading performance in PISA 2012

	Mean	S.E.
Slovenia	<b>481</b>	(1.2)
EU-27	489	(0.6)

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

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.pisa.OECD.org>.

Table 10: Trends in reading performance - PISA 2000-2012

	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.
Slovenia	-	-	483	(1.0)	481	(1.2)	-	-	-2	(3.1)	-	-
EU-27	489*	(0.7)	486**	(0.6)	489***	(0.6)	-3*	(5.0)	<b>5**</b>	(2.7)	3*	(6.0)

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

In Slovenia, the spread of achievement is somewhat smaller than on average across the participating EU countries (Table 11). The difference between students performing at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles in Slovenia is similar to that found in Germany (237).

Table 11: Spread of achievement. Difference between 10th and 90th percentiles on the reading scale, all students and by gender – PISA 2012

	Difference 90th–10th for all students		Difference 90th–10th for girls		Difference 90th–10th for boys	
	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Slovenia	<b>237</b>	(3.1)	<b>214</b>	(5.9)	<b>240</b>	(5.3)
EU-27	<b>251</b>	(1.3)	<b>230</b>	(1.2)	<b>259</b>	(1.6)

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

In Slovenia the percentage of low-performing students (those performing below Level 2) is slightly higher than on average across the participating EU countries, while the percentage of high-performing readers is somewhat lower. Thus, Slovenia's below EU-average performance can be attributed to the variations in the proportions of students performing at the high and low levels (Table 12).

Table 12: 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.
Slovenia	<b>21.1</b>	(0.7)	<b>5.0</b>	(0.4)
EU-27	19.7	(0.2)	7.0	(0.1)

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

Between 2009 and 2012, the overall proportion of low-performing readers has stayed constant in Slovenia. However, slight differences are found. Among girls, there has been a small increase in the proportion performing below Level 2, while, among boys, there has been a small decline (Table 13), with these changes cancelling one another out. .

Table 13: 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	21.2	(0.6)	10.7	(0.7)	31.3	(0.9)
2012	21.1	(0.7)	11.1	(0.8)	30.5	(1.0)

Significant differences between assessment cycles in **bold**

#### 4.2.2 Gaps in reading performance

##### Socio-economic status

In Slovenia, the gap in reading performance according to the students' socioeconomic background (based on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) is close to but slightly lower than in the EU-countries on average (Table 14).

Table 14: Difference in reading performance between bottom and top national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status

	Score difference	S.E.
Slovenia	90	(3.8)
EU-26	93	(1.1)

##### Migration

In Slovenia, the percentage of students with an immigrant background is 8%, similar to that found on average across the participating EU countries. However, the gap in reading performance between native students and those with an immigrant background is 47 score points, the equivalent to slightly more than one year of schooling, which is over 10 score points above the EU average.

Table 15: Percentage of students and reading performance by immigrant status

	Native students				Students with an immigrant background (first- or second-generation)				Difference in reading performance between native and students with an immigrant background	
	Percent- age of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Percent- age of students	S.E.	Performance on the reading scale		Score dif.	S.E.
			Mean	S.E.			Mean	S.E.		
Slovenia	92.2	(0.4)	488	(1.1)	7.8	(0.4)	441	(4.8)	47	(4.9)
EU-26	91.7	(0.02)	490	(0.4)	8.3	(0.02)	452	(6.4)	38.5	(6.4)



## Language spoken at home

In Slovenia, the gap between students speaking the test language at home and those who do not (5.2 % of the students) is slightly lower (49 score points) than the EU average. It is equivalent to more than a year of schooling.

Table 16: Percentage of students and reading performance by language spoken at home – PISA 2012

	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.		
Slovenia	94.8	(0.3)	488	(1.2)	5.2	(0.3)	439	(5.2)	<b>49</b>	(5.7)
EU-27	86.7	(0.0)	494	(0.4)	13.3	(0.0)	441	(5.4)	54	(5.4)

Significant differences according to language spoken at home in **bold**

## Gender

The gender difference in reading performance in Slovenia is larger than on average across the participating EU countries (Table 17).

Table 17: Mean reading performance by gender and gender differences – PISA 2009

	Boys		Girls		Difference (G – B)	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Score diff.	S.E.
Slovenia	456	(1.6)	511	(1.4)	<b>55</b>	(2.3)
EU-26	463	(0.5)	506	(0.4)	<b>44</b>	(0.5)

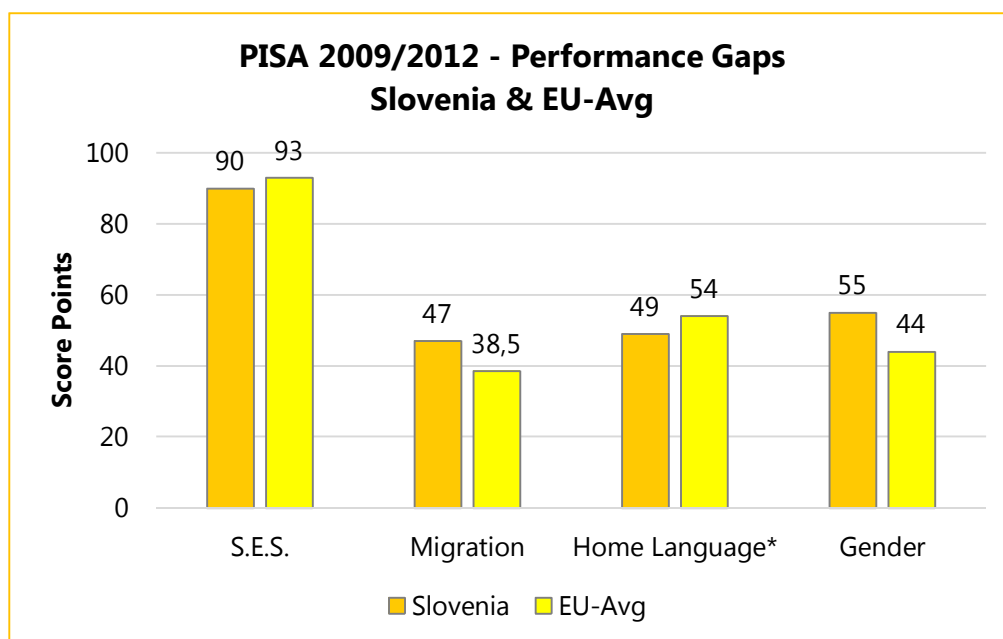
Reading performance among students in Slovenia remained relatively stable between 2009 and 2012, a marginal decrease among girls (- 1) and boys (-2) can be observed (Table 18). The trend is similar in EU countries on average: between 2009 and 2012 the performance of both boys and girls increased by 4 score points.

Table 18: Trends in reading performance by gender – PISA 2000-2012

	Slovenia				EU-averages			
	Girls		Boys		Girls		Boys	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.
2000	-	-	-	-	506*	(0.8)	473*	(0.9)
2009	511	(1.4)	456	(1.6)	507**	(0.7)	464**	(0.8)
2012	510	(1.8)	454	(1.7)	511***	(0.6)	468***	(0.8)

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

Figure 4: Performance Gaps – SES, Migration, Language Spoken at Home and Gender



\*2012

SES: Top – Bottom national quarters of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status; Migration: Native - Students with an immigrant background; Language: Speak test language at home – speak other language at home; Gender: Girl – Boy

### Engagement and metacognition

In Slovenia, there is a gap of 98 score points – which is equivalent to two years and a half of schooling - between the students who reported high engagement in reading (top quarter), and those who reported low engagement (bottom quarter). Not surprisingly, students who reported highest engagement in reading perform better in the PISA test. The difference between the most and the least engaged readers in Slovenia is similar to the EU-average – almost 100 scale score points.

Table 19: Mean reading scores between students with high and low engagement in reading – PISA 2009

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Slovenia	444	(1.9)	542	(2.4)	<b>98</b>
EU-26	444	(0.8)	543	(0.8)	<b>99</b>

In Slovenia, there is a gap of 90 score points - equivalent to more than two years of schooling - between students who know which strategies are the most efficient to understand and remember a text, and those who have a limited knowledge of these metacognitive activities (Table 20). On average across the participating EU countries, the gap is marginally higher (98 score points).

Table 20: Mean reading scores between students in low and top quarters of the understanding and remembering strategies scale (PISA 2009)

	Lowest quartile		Highest quartile		Difference
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Slovenia	438	(1.9)	528	(2.1)	<b>90</b>
EU-26	433	(0.8)	531	(0.8)	<b>98</b>

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

Similarly, students in Slovenia who use efficient summarising strategies perform 95 score points above those who are less knowledgeable about these strategies (Table 21). This gap is equivalent to almost two years and a half of schooling. The gap on average for the EU countries is slightly lower (90 score points). The difference in performance between those who use efficient strategies to aid reading comprehension and those who do not reflects the close relationship between reading proficiency and awareness of efficient reading strategies.

Table 21: Mean reading scores between students in low and top quarters of the summarising strategies scale (PISA 2009)

	Low quarter		Top quarter		Difference (Top-Botton)
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	
Slovenia	432	(1.8)	528	(2.1)	<b>95</b>
EU-26	440	(0.8)	530	(0.7)	<b>90</b>

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

#### 4.2.3 National literacy surveys

Besides the results of PISA, data about literacy are gathered with national examinations in the mother tongue. National examination tests, taken at the end of the 9th grade (14 or 15-year-olds), are compulsory; curricula standards are measured and similarly to the PISA research, they measure levels of reading literacy. The analysis of exam achievements serves as feedback for students, schools and parents, and results can be compared among different regions in the country. Assessment is not mandatory, and results do not affect pupils' grades, they are only additional information about their knowledge levels.

The problem indicated with PISA results was also confirmed by the results of the national examination tests, where a high proportion of pupils do not reach the average of national percentage points and only a small proportion of pupils from one generation master a higher level of reading literacy skills (Nolimal, Potočnik, 2015)

# 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” being added by ELINET).

The following parts refer to these three key issues, though some overlaps may occur.

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 2006 or PIRLS 2001 are referred to. Appendix D offers this information for the PIRLS 2006 data.

## 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. However, schools do not have sole responsibility. A broad range of actors may shape literacy motivation, from parents and peers to libraries. Parents may provide role models and influence children’s attitudes towards literacy practices. Also, libraries have a vital role if they offer free books, especially for families who cannot afford to buy books. 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. 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” to summarise parents’ responses to seven statements about reading and how often they read for enjoyment. The figures are presented below with the percentage of students 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: 25.8% (European average = 35.3 %)
- Somewhat like: 65.0% (European average = 52.6 %)
- Do not like: 9.2% (European average = 17.9%)

(For an overview of European countries see table B1 in Appendix B).

Compared to the European average, it seems that fewer students in Slovenia have parents to like reading compared with the corresponding EU average difference. The importance of parental attitudes to reading is shown by the significant differences in the reading performance of Slovenian students in Grade 4, namely between children whose parents like to read (average achievement 556) and those who do not (average achievement 497)

#### **Home Educational Resources**

Parents of 16% of students in Slovenia reported having few home resources for learning –below the EU Average of 25%, while similar proportions (24%, 25% respectively) had ‘many’ resources. The difference in achievement between pupils in Slovenia whose parents reported having many home resources and few resources was 87 score points – 8 points higher than the corresponding EU-24 average difference (79).

Table 22: Percentages of Pupils Whose Parents Reported Having Few or Many Home Resources for Learning, and Corresponding Mean Overall Reading Scores – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

Level of Home Resources	Few Resources		Many Resources		Difference (Many - Few)
	%	Mean	%	Mean	
Slovenia	16	486	24	573	<b>87</b>
EU-24	25	495	25	573	<b>79</b>

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

### Number of children's books in the home

The PIRLS 2011 database provides the figures below about the number of children's books in the home, as reported by participating students' parents:

- 0-10: 8.4% (European average 11.8%)
- 11-25: 22.6% (European average 19.7%)
- 26-50: 34.9% (European average 29.4%)
- 51-100: 23.0% (European average 23.4%)
- >100: 11.2% (European average 15.7%).

For an overview of European countries see table B2 in Appendix B. The availability of children's books in the home is close to the European Average in Slovenia.

A second measure of number of books in the home was provided by students in PIRLS 2011. In Slovenia, 7% of pupils reporting having 10 or fewer books at home, compared with an EU-24 average of 11%. 10% of pupils in Slovenia reported having over 200 books, close to the average across EU countries (12%). The achievement gap between those with 0-10 books and those with 200+ books is 87 points. This is slightly greater than the EU average of 82 points.

Table 23: Mean Overall Reading Scores of Pupils with 0-10 Books at Home, and Those with More than 200 Books – Slovenia 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	
Slovenia	7	468	10	555	<b>87</b>
EU-24	11	482	12	563	<b>82</b>

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

### Early Literacy Activity Scale

PIRLS 2011 reports 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 are considered: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys, talking about things done, talking about things read, playing word games, writing letters or words, and reading signs and labels aloud.

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

- Often: 48.5% (European average 40.7%)
- Sometimes: 51.0% (European average 57.4)
- Never or almost never: 0.5% (European average 1.9%).

This means that, in Slovenia, there are many parents often involved in the nine activities. The Early Literacy Activity Scale correlates with later reading performance in grade 4. The average reading score of pupils who were engaged often in these activities was 543, and 522 for those pupils who sometimes were engaged in these activities with their parents before the beginning of primary school. These figures demonstrate an important correlation between frequency of engagement in literacy-related activities in early childhood and achievement in Grade 4.

While the Early Literacy Activity Scale is a composite score it is of interest to look at single items. If only the category “often” is considered, the percentage of pupils in Slovenia whose parents engaged in literacy-related activities with them before the beginning of primary school is close to the European average:

- read books to them often: 68.4% (European average 58.4 %)
- told stories to them often: 51.5% (European average 51. 5%)
- sang songs to them often: 54.6% (European average 50.6%)
- played games involving shapes (toys and puzzles) with them often: 55.3% (European average 63.5%).

(For more details and an overview of European countries see table B 4 – B 7 in Appendix B).

**Challenges:** It is acknowledged that homes in Slovenia in general have supportive environments for reading. However, there is an ongoing need to ensure that all parents are aware of the value of supporting their children’s early literacy learning, through the provision of relevant learning resources, including books, and frequent engagement in early literacy activities, as some specific risk groups have been identified. In particular, there is a need to provide additional support to groups of children (and their parents) who speak a language other than Slovenian, those in poor economic circumstances, and those who may have early learning difficulties. This can be achieved through campaigns aimed at increasing parents’ awareness of their role in promoting early literacy activities, and targeting at risk groups.

## 5.1.2 Providing a Literate Environment in School

### Resources teachers use for teaching reading

Since the type of reading materials teachers use in literacy instruction may influence the motivation of students, it is of interest to have a closer look at this matter. PILRS 2011 provides some data. Approximately one-fifth of students in Slovenia (20.6%) are taught by teachers who use a variety of children’s books as a basis for reading instruction, compared with an EU average of 29%, 38% in Ireland and 83% in England. Ninety percent of students in Slovenia are taught by teachers who use a reading series as the basis of instruction, compared to an EU average of just 27%. In Slovenia, 61% of students are in classrooms where workbooks are used as a basis of reading instruction, compared to an EU average of 40%. Hence, reading instruction in Slovenia is characterised by the use of reading schemes and textbooks, and relatively less use of children’s books as a basis of reading instruction (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.12, p. 236, EU averages obtained from Table H1 in Appendix C).

## Availability and use of classroom library

Based on data provided by their teachers, PIRLS shows that 59% of pupils in Slovenia were in classrooms which had a classroom library. This is less than the corresponding EU-24 average of 73% and considerably less than countries such as the Netherlands (86%) and Ireland (98%). Only 4% of students in Slovenia had access to more than 50 books in their class libraries, compared to an EU-24 average of 29%. A similar percentage of students in Slovenia (26%) and on average across the participating EU countries (28%) had access to at least three magazines in their class library. Forty-two percent of students in Slovenia could spend class time in the library/reading corner at least weekly – less than on average across EU countries (61%). Across all classrooms (including those with no library), 84% of students in Slovenia had teachers who reported that they brought them to a library other than the class library at least monthly, higher than on average across EU-24 countries (65%) (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.13, p.240; EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database, s. Table H2 in Appendix C).

**Challenges:** Access to library books in Slovenian primary-level classrooms was lower than on average across EU countries in PIRLS 2011. There is a need to expand access so that students can experience a broad range of texts as they learn to read and enjoy reading.

### 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 teacher reports in PIRLS 2011, 36% of students in Slovenia have a computer available for reading lessons, compared to the EU-average of 45%.

Regarding computer activities during reading lessons, PIRLS provides figures that refer to all students, including those who do not have access to a computer during reading lessons.

The percentage of students in Slovenia who engage in specified computer activities during reading sessions at least monthly are below:

- to look up information: 32% (EU-24 average = 39%)
- to read stories or other texts: 25% (EU-24 = 32%)
- to write stories or other texts: 23% (EU-24 = 33%)
- to develop reading skills and strategies with instructional software: 22% (EU-24 = 27%).

Hence, for each indicator, computer use is lower in Slovenia than on average across the EU-24, despite the EU-24 averages being quite low (Mullis et al. 2012a, exh. 8.14, p. 242). In Denmark, 76% of students look up information at least monthly, and 78% do so in the Netherlands, while 83% and 68% respectively in these countries write stories or other texts with the same frequency.

According to Doupona Horvat (2012), use of technology in Slovenian primary classrooms is hampered by lack of access to Internet in all classrooms, as well as lack of financial resources at school level, and lack of interest by teachers and school authorities. She also notes a lack of electronic books for children in the Slovene language as a significant impediment.

#### Digital environment of secondary students

The EU-funded Survey of Schools: ICTs in Education (European Schoolnet and the University of Liege, 2012), found that, in Slovenia, there were 8 students per computing device, compared with 5 on average across EU countries, though just 40% of students were in schools where over 90% of



computers were operational (the second lowest in the EU). There were high levels of access to electronic whiteboards at both Grades 8 and 11. At Grade 8, 40% of students in Slovenia were in classrooms where computers were used in at least 25% of lessons, compared with an EU average of 32%. However, student usage at the same grade level was below EU average levels, with 31% using a school desktop or laptop computer at least weekly. The corresponding EU average was 53%. Students in Slovenia also lagged behind EU average levels in the frequency with which they used their own laptops and mobile phones in class for learning. The report concludes that, for Slovenia, 'overall, many Slovenian students are in schools with strong policies and support for ICT but this is not always reflected in high levels of ICT use, even though home access and use tend to be high, owing to relatively low levels of equipment provision' (p. 26). The report did not provide data that were specific to reading literacy.

**Challenges:** The expansion of digital reading in Slovenia primary and post-primary schools is hindered by a number of factors including lack of access to hardware and the Internet in some schools, as well as a shortage of reading materials in the Slovenian language, including e-books. In addition to improving infrastructure, it would seem important to ensure that students have access to relevant learning materials in digital format.

#### **5.1.4 The role of public libraries in reading promotion**

According to the Report of the EU Group of High Level Experts on Literacy (2012), in an era when smaller bookshops are disappearing, and there is a gradual move towards digital texts, the display of books continues to be important, and public libraries can play a key role in this, thereby making reading more visible. "This may involve creative solutions, such as putting libraries in shopping centres or in train stations routinely used by commuters, or making reading materials visible and available in family-focused restaurants" (p. 21). The Report also notes the key role that libraries can play in providing reading materials to families who cannot afford to purchase books.

Doupona Horvat (2012) notes the critical importance of public libraries in Slovenia in promoting literacy in Slovenia, noting that there are 58 public libraries in the country with 250 locations (including twelve bibliobuses with more than 600 bus stops) where people can borrow books, although 8.5 percent of the population live in municipalities without a library. She further notes that one quarter of the inhabitants of Slovenia are active members of public libraries, and attributes their popularity to the high prices of books in Slovenia, which are two to three times higher than the same titles in English.

Gujtman (2014) notes that public libraries are becoming local centres of culture, reading, meetings and gatherings as well as access to various information and thus contribute to the strengthening of the modern information society. Added to this is also their socio-developmental role in terms of commonality of cultural, educational and other social opportunities. Membership is open to children already in preschool period and they then attend a lifetime. General libraries for preschool, school children and young people prepare various forms of activities: group or individual forms of learning, information literacy, learning about books, authors, and recommendations for reading, a variety of shows and events. There are a lot of forms and contents - each library is adapted to the needs of the local environment. Schools, school libraries and teachers are involved in preparing the content and forms of biblio-pedagogical activities. At the youth sections of public libraries, there is a widespread variety of biblio-pedagogical activity, ie. forms of literary and library education, library and information literacy and reading promotion. Their purpose is to provide them with the use of the library, access to material information sources and inspire them to read and spread the reading experience.

**Challenge:** Libraries continue to play an important role in promoting reading among young people and providing access to digital materials, especially among those who may not be able to access reading materials in other ways (e.g. the visually impaired). Slovenia has a long tradition of supporting literacy development through its library network. The promotion of reading by libraries should continue to ensure that all children and adolescents have access to a broad range of texts, and activities that will build their interest in books and reading.

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

Library-related activities may also include specific projects designed to promote reading among groups in society. One such programme in Slovenia is the Reading Badge. This programme supports children between 7 and 15 years of age to read in their free time. The process is carried out by teacher-mentors together with the school library. It may have various forms: literary circle, school magazine, young reporters, etc. In secondary schools, the Slovenian Reading Badge Society encourages reading, talking about the books, and literary creativity. Such activities take place at debate clubs, at meetings with authors, at literary performances, etc." (Mohor, 2014; See *EURYDICE-report 2011, chapter 3.3 and 3.4, pp. 121ff*).

The Reading Badge is both the name and the "trade mark" of a cultural and educational movement, of an activity for the development of reading habits and reading culture among the youth. It is one of the most intimate free activities, but at the same time very popular as it includes up to 140,000 preschool and basic school children and a smaller number of upper-secondary school students and adults, what is quite a respectable number for a nation of two million people. Teachers and librarians have found The Reading Badge to be an excellent way and opportunity to make good books popular. Within the movement, good ways for motivation can be found and children and young adults are taught how to get in touch with literature and they are helped in their search of beauty and values in the rich world of literature. At the same time, pupils are directed to technical/non-fiction literature and getting used to dictionaries, encyclopaedias and various handbooks. The slogan "With Books into the World" is definitely appropriate (Manca Perko, Secretary General of the Slovene Reading Badge Society – Report on best practices in Slovenia, 2015).

The Slovenian Book Agency annually supports many projects or programmes in the field of reading culture and literary events that are central and important promoters of reading carried out by public libraries outside of their regular annual programme, co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and municipalities.

Some examples:

- The Primorska region reads campaign;
- reading clubs for high school students;
- The Roma are invited to the library;
- Read-only meetings for adults;
- Lists of recommended children's books;
- the Library under canopies project;
- the projects and awards of IBBY Slovenia;
- various campaigns of the Reading Badge Society - FYAS (usually hand in hand with the schools from Slovenia and our neighbouring countries), e.g. Gift picture books for pupils starting school; The golden readers' award; their e-newsletter Pinocchio;

- the Slovenian Writers' Association, whose projects provide an important contribution to the development of reading literacy;
- the symposia and publications of the Slovenian Reading Association;
- the national project "Growing Up With A Book" by the Slovenian Book Agency<sup>9</sup>;
- and others.

The national project "Growing up with a Book" includes all seventh-grade basic school students and all first-year upper-secondary school students, who receive the selected books during their yearly visit to the nearest general public library. By visiting the library, students are introduced to information science and the latest in Slovenian young adult literature. The selected books and authors are also presented.

The aims of the project "Growing up with a book" are:

- to promote acclaimed Slovenian authors of young adult literature,
- to motivate students to read and visit general public libraries,
- to encourage publishers to include more contemporary Slovenian authors in their publishing programmes for young adults.

Every year this national project officially starts on 8th September – the International Literacy Day. It is a joint effort of the Slovenian Book Agency, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Slovene Writers' Association. It is organised in cooperation with all general public libraries, all basic and upper- secondary schools, basic schools for children with special needs, institutions for children with special needs in Slovenia and with basic schools for Slovene children in neighbouring countries.

### **Project *Invite a Word* (Povabimo besedo)**

The Slovenian Writers' Association has been organising and coordinating the educational project *Invite a Word* since 1996. The purpose of the project is to encourage interest in Slovenian literature (created by the members of the Slovenian Writers' Association) among the youngest readers and teenagers - the programme is open to children in kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and university students. The members of the Slovenian Writers' Association, in agreement with the school or the library, visit the students/young readers; for two school hours (90 minutes) the young readers talk to the authors and thus learn about their work and creative processes. Their meetings are often quite innovative as both parties involved usually rather easily engage in games, lively exchanges of opinions, and other creative types of interactions.

### **Youth Literary Festival "Bralnice pod slamnikom" (Reading under a Straw Hat)**

The Youth Literary Festival "*Bralnice pod slamnikom*" (*Reading Under a Straw Hat*) was first organised in 2011 as the first festival of its kind in Slovenia, linking and upgrading efforts for motivation to read, and factors in the promotion of reading. The organisers address the readers, the teachers, the authors and promote reading (especially reading for pleasure), and books promoting tolerance and inter-generational integration. Their motto is "We think globally and act locally".

The objectives of the festival are:

- motivation for reading, especially Slovenian classics for youth;
- pre-, while- and post-reading activities;
- meeting with the best authors (writers and illustrators);

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<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.jakrs.si/en/reading-promotion-in-slovenia/growing-up-with-a-book/>.

- workshops and seminars for the teachers and mentors of reading groups at schools;
- general promotion of reading in public;
- intergenerational integration and
- bringing together the readers, the mentors, the texts and the authors in a specific environment.

### **Library under the Treetops (*Knjižnica pod krošnjami*)**

'The Library under the Treetops' is conceived as an open air possibility to browse and read in a quiet setting of selected urban areas. Collections of reading material are offered to anyone interested that might be passing by. Among the accumulated books, newspapers and magazines, there are all genres and many formats, including most of the literary novelties which offer insights into the latest book production. To make the collection of new titles possible, the library cooperates with a wide range of publishers. The "House Specialty" is a wide selection of Slovenian and foreign newspapers and magazines.

## **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, as the McKinsey report "How the world best performing school systems come out on top" (McKinsey et al. 2007) states: "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 recognized 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 Slovenia and in all the other 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 Slovenia is 0.6%. 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**

According to Education at a Glance 2014 (OECD 2014, p. 451) the student/teacher ratio in pre-primary schools for children at the age of four is 9.4. For an overview of European countries see table D2 in Appendix B).

### **Percentage of males among preschool teachers**

According to Pordata (2014), 2.4% of the pre-primary teachers in Slovenia 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 in Slovenia is Bachelor level (ISCED 5) Length of training is 3 years (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 101).

Continuing Professional Development is not obligatory (Eurostat 2014, pp. 104–105).

**Challenges:** There is a need to build on recent developments in pre-school education in Slovenia, by ensuring that pre-school teachers have opportunities to participate in ongoing professional development, including modules related to the development of language and literacy-related skills.

### **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", also taking into consideration that young children have other learning needs than school children. Pre-school programmes should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience, not by systematic training in phonics and teaching the alphabet. There is no evidence that systematic instruction of reading in preschool has any benefit for future learning (Suggate 2012).

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

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

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

The National Education Institute (NEI) of Slovenia trains the professionals through study groups, seminars and other forms of education for the creation of conditions for the changed role of children and adults in the learning process.

Special attention is given to active learning and providing opportunities for verbalisation and other ways of expression and on the principle of development-process approach. Particular attention is paid to incentives for the development of the child's language and literacy skills in all fields of activity of the kindergarten curricula (movement, language, society, nature, art, mathematics), the importance of joint activities for children and adults, as well as didactic conversation.

The consultants of NEI Slovenia provide specialist consultancy for kindergartens and papers on emergent literacy in preschool with theoretical views and practical experience:

- Promoting the voice of competencies in kindergarten (2009)
- Creative approach in promoting language skills and the sensible use of ICT in Kindergarten (2010)
- How the child explores, learns and expresses (2012)

### **Oral language development and vocabulary learning and grammar**

In the Kindergarten Curriculum, there is a special concern for encouraging linguistic skills (articulation, vocabulary, text building skills, communication etc.).

### **Familiarisation of children with the language of books (e.g. reading and telling stories)**

The kindergarten teachers are thoroughly trained to familiarise children with the language of books. They put a lot of emphasis on storytelling and reading aloud to children, discussing books and various post-reading activities.

### **Engaging and motivating children in literacy-related activities**

The main goals regarding children's participation in language and literacy activities are the following: "(1) learning language through games, (2) being aware of the existence of one's own and other languages and one's own and other cultures, (3) listening, understanding, and experiencing language, (4) experiencing and learning about basic literary works for children, (5) developing language from the viewpoint of a morally-ethical dimension, (6) encouraging creativity, (7) developing non-verbal communication skills, (8) encouraging linguistic skills (articulation, vocabulary, texts, communication etc.), (9) learning about symbols of the written language, (10) experiencing the status of the Slovenian language as the national official language" (Eurypedia 2014).

### **Providing a literacy-rich environment**

The steering documents for pre-primary education in Slovenia anticipate the provision of different types of printed materials (magazines, recipes, story books, etc.) in order for children to improve their emergent literacy skills and enhance their knowledge and understanding of print (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

## **Concepts of print**

In Slovenia, children know the conventional direction of reading, they are frequently involved in reading and writing activities, they read a range of familiar and common words independently. Furthermore, they write their own name from memory as well as other words (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

## **Language awareness**

Children play with language, use nonsense words and rhyming, explore and experiment with sounds, words and texts, break down speech into small units, blend syllables or sounds in sounds and sound the letters of the alphabet. Furthermore, children use knowledge of letters, sounds and words when reading, understand that same sound can have a different spelling and use knowledge of letters, sounds and words when writing (Eurydice 2011, pp. 55-56).

### **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 schools curricula**

According to Doupona Horvat (2012), the main objectives of primary education align with the ends of each of the three cycles—at Grades 3, 6, and 9. Reading is not a separate school subject, but is included within the Slovene language subject. Although there are no separate hours prescribed for teaching reading, there is a ratio prescribing time spent on language teaching (e.g. grammar) versus literature teaching. A new primary language curriculum was launched in 2011 (nevertheless, the students who were tested in PIRLS 2011 had no benefits of the new curricula)

#### **What are the main goals (objectives) of the curriculum? What key aspects of word identification and reading comprehension are emphasized?**

In the first educational cycle:

- Pupils systematically develop their pre-literacy skills.
- Pupils systematically develop their reading and writing technique.
- Pupils systematically develop their reading comprehension and writing simple texts.

In the second and third educational cycle:

- They can summarise the text and talk about the main points of the text.
- They can determine the function of the text.
- They can organise the data graphically,
- and are capable of self-evaluation of their critical understanding of the text.

#### **How does the 2011 curriculum differ from its predecessor?**

- In the 2011 curriculum, the goals and objectives in language and in literature learning are separated.
- All the goals are listed in the chapter '*Operativni cilji predmeta*' (Functional subject goals), and the content separately in the subchapter 'Content'.
- The goals and content are either compulsory or optional.

- Learning strategies are included in the chapter on pedagogical recommendations.
- Apart from the compulsory texts, all literary texts are merely suggested.
- Compulsory texts for the first and second triad have been added.
- There's more optionality in language classes.
- Knowledge standards are clearly arrayed across the triads and individual grades (starting with Grade 3).
- At the end of Grade 3, children can read both printed and cursive script. The minimum standard is achieved if they read the printed script, the basic standard if cursive.

### **Reading for pleasure**

According to PIRLS 2011 Encyclopaedia, there is 'some' emphasis on reading for pleasure in the intended language/reading curriculum in Slovenia. Slovenia 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 a little or no emphasis and 9 countries that it had major emphasis (Mullis et al. 2012b, Vol.1, exhibit 9, p. 36).

Reading for pleasure is not particularly specified in the primary curriculum. However, the curriculum emphasises that pupils should be encouraged to read books and this can be done by creating conditions for a pupil to present a book which she/ he has read to his/ her classmates; letting pupils to select the book for reading; and introducing children's literature for pupils.

Reading for pleasure is, however, strongly encouraged by libraries (school and public libraries), and various organisations, e.g. the Slovenian Reading Association, IBBY Slovenia, The Reading Badge Society. The latter is omnipresent at Slovenian (primary) schools, and a leading force in bringing quality authors and quality books to schools.

### **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, three aspects of phonological awareness are promoted in official curriculum guidelines at pre-primary and primary levels: breaking down speech into small units; exploring and experimenting with sounds, words and texts; and playing with language using non-sense words and rhyming (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.1). At both pre-primary and primary levels, there is a strong emphasis on phonics, with all five skills examined by Eurydice included 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). Slovenia is identified in the Eurydice report as a country in which phonics instruction is discontinued after the first or middle section of primary education (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 (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).
- Predict new events and combine them into a new story (Grade 4)
- Learn how to interpret text (Grade 4)
- Formulate and express opinions about characters (Grade 4).

The Eurydice report identifies Slovenia as a country in which attention is given to five of six key comprehension strategies at primary level (and five at post-primary level). The strategies emphasised at primary level are drawing inferences, summarising text, and making connections between parts of a text, using background knowledge, and making visual representations; the only strategy of the six not emphasised at either level was monitoring own comprehension. (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.4, p. 60). Slovenia is also identified as a country in which there is an emphasis on collaborative, text-based learning at primary (and post-primary) level, in common with several of the Nordic countries (Eurydice, 2011, Figure 1.5). Text-based collaborative learning is defined as students interacting with each other around a written text, and drawing meaning and interpretation from it, through a group process.

In PIRLS 2011, the National Research Coordinator for Slovenia indicated the relative emphasis placed on the following aspects of reading comprehension in the intended curriculum at Grade 4 (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 8, p. 34):

- 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 (major)
- Identifying main ideas (major)
- Recognising plot sequences and character traits (some)
- 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 (some).

The co-ordinator also indicated that, in Slovenia, reading to improve reading, reading to acquire information and reading for enjoyment received some emphasis in the intended language curriculum, while reading for literary experience received little or no emphasis (Mullis et al., 2012, Vol. 1, Exhibit 9, p. 36).

### **Literacy curricula in primary schools (Grade 1 – 9, age 6 -15)**

Teachers assess pupils throughout the period when the subject is taught. In years one and two, teachers assess pupils' progress in verbal form as descriptive grading (*opisne ocene*). From year three onwards, teachers assess how well pupils meet knowledge standards in accordance with the prescribed curriculum with numerical grades on a scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 is a negative grade and all others are positive grades.

Teachers assess pupils' oral presentations, written work, art works, technical, practical and other projects. The pupil is assessed at least three times in a school year if no more than two lessons per week are assigned to the subjects, and at least six times in a year in all other subjects. The majority of grades must not be awarded on the basis of written work.

At the end year six and year nine, pupils take the national examinations to be assessed in the mother tongue and mathematics, in year six also in a foreign language, and in year nine in a subject determined by the Minister. Assessment is not mandatory. Results do not affect pupils' grades, they represent only additional information about their knowledge levels.

National examinations are carried out by the National Examinations Centre.

### **Assessment in secondary schools**

In secondary schools, pupils are assessed regarding the learning outcomes which are set in the prescribed curriculum. The main emphasis is on applying complex reading learning strategies, metacognitive strategies to develop self-regulated reading behaviour and to develop critical reading. Teachers strive to lead pupils from the level of reading for information to reading on a higher level of abstraction where pupils can construct their own viewpoint of what they have read and critically analyse the viewpoints of others.

**Challenges:** The strengths and weaknesses of the 2011 language curriculum need to be evaluated. However, without the support of any analysis of the previous curricula, it is difficult to offer a reasonable evaluation.

### **5.2.3 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 Slovenia or other European countries. In order to describe the practice of reading instruction we would need extensive observational studies. However, there are only rare observational studies (Philipp 2014). 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 (PIRLS) which might not be valid and may be biased by social desirability (as it is the case with every social survey).

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. The allocation of time to language instruction in primary schools in Slovenia (193 hours) was below the average across participating EU countries (241 hours) (Mullis et al., 2012, Exhibit 6, p. 38). Similarly, the average number of hours allocated to teaching reading each year in Slovenia (46 hours) is less than the average across EU countries (68), even though the EU average is itself low relative to, for example, the United States and New Zealand (both 131 hours). Furthermore, teachers in Slovenia

report allocating less time to teaching reading across the curriculum and in reading classes (118 hours) than on average across EU countries (147 hours) (Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 8.4. p. 214. EU averages from PIRLS 2011 database).

As pointed out above, among adolescents there are remarkable gaps in reading achievement between students with good knowledge of reading strategies and those who have a limited knowledge of strategies, including metacognitive ones. There is a similar gap concerning the level of engagement. In view of these results it is of interest to look at the reports of teachers concerning reading strategies and engagement.

In PIRLS, teachers were asked which activities they use to develop students' reading comprehension skills. These are the figures based on the report of reading teachers in PIRLS 2011:

Percent of students whose teachers ask them to do the following daily or almost daily:

- Compare texts read with experiences they have had: 39% (EU avg. = 35%)
- Compare what they have read with other texts they have read: 20% (EU avg. = 22%)
- Identify main ideas of what they had read: 37% (EU avg. = 55%)
- Explain or support their understanding of what has been read: 61% (EU avg. = 62%)
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text: 8% (EU avg. = 22%)
- Make generalisations and draw inferences: 25% (EU avg. = 36%)
- Describe the style and structure of the text: 5% (EU avg. = 23%)
- Determine the author's perspective and intention: 15% (EU avg. = 21%)
- Locate information within the text: 74% (EU avg. = 66%)

(Source: PIRLS 2011 database. See Mullis et al. 2012a, Exhibit 8.8, p. 226 for data for 'at least weekly', s. also Table I.1 in Appendix C).

Overall, the reading strategies tended to be taught less frequently in Slovenia than on average across the EU-24. However, strategies such as comparing texts read with experiences, comparing what they have read with other texts and explaining or supporting their understanding of what has been read are utilised at similar rates to the EU averages.

PIRLS also examined engagement in reading lessons from the perspective of students (for an overview of responses in Slovenia and other European countries (see Table I.7 in Appendix C).

- 36% of students in Slovenia 'agree a lot' that they like what they read about in school. This is below the corresponding EU-24 average of 46%.
- 53% of students in Slovenia 'agree a lot' that their teacher gives them interesting things to read, compared with 48% on average across EU countries.

Students in Slovenia had a mean score of 9.8 on a scale measuring overall student engagement in reading lessons. The average across EU countries is 9.9. A score above 10.5 can be interpreted as indicating that students are 'engaged', while a score of between 7.4 and 10.5 indicates that students are 'somewhat engaged'. Hence, students in Slovenia, and on average across the EU-24, are 'somewhat engaged' in their reading lessons, with room for improvement.

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, PISA 2009 points to large gaps in performance between students who are familiar understanding and remembering strategies, and those who were not, and between students who were familiar with strategies for summarising texts, and those who were not.

**Challenge:** Data from PIRLS 2011 indicate that primary-level students in Slovenia engage less often in a range of reading comprehension strategies, compared with their counterparts on average across EU countries. There is a need to strengthen the focus on reading comprehension instruction in classrooms. Data from PISA 2009 point to a need to raise awareness of metacognitive strategies, especially among weaker readers. Steps should also be taken to ensure that students enjoy what they read at school.

### **What changes were introduced into the 2011 curriculum regarding the field of reading comprehension?**

Already in 1998, the curriculum for the Slovene language stated that the basis of the instruction should be texts, literary and non-literary. The main goal was that students would be able to independently read and write (and also listen to and talk about) different text types, taking into account the context and the purpose, which means choosing the right strategies in order to be efficient.

In the 2011 curriculum reading competence, i.e. the ability to critically read, understand and evaluate literary and non-literary texts, is still one of the most important goals for the instruction of Slovene in all grades. However, the level of difficulty increases with each grade by means of using different text types (literary and non-literary), of different length and difficulty. In order to develop reading comprehension, all components of the curriculum have to be taken into account and joined into a whole. Teachers do that by creating learning cycles around texts, bearing in mind the objectives in the curriculum that can be most efficiently achieved with a certain text or texts. The knowledge of grammar and literary theory (defined for each grade) is meant to support the development of reading competence (and with literary texts also receptive competence).

The changes between the 1998 and 2011 curricula are therefore not so much in the content as in the form – the 2011 curriculum is shorter and more concise, with a focus on students achieving also more complex levels of knowledge (less data, deeper understanding and knowledge):

- teachers are given more autonomy and more choice regarding the activities and the texts they can use, e.g. with non-literary texts the teacher is now the one who can choose whether the students will read the text, listen to it or both, and also which text will be dealt with in a certain way (in the older curriculum the types of texts were specified for each activity separately; now all types of texts are listed together under the heading Contents);
- teachers also have more autonomy to decide which texts or text types they will use to achieve certain objectives within the development of reading competence, that is to say which elements of reading competence will be in the centre of a certain learning cycle (reading strategies, the understanding of vocabulary or language forms or metaphorical meanings...) – this gives the teacher more possibilities to differentiate and adapt lessons for their students;
- different strategies of dealing with texts (e.g. what students can do before reading, while reading or after reading) are given together under the heading Didactic recommendations (chapter 5.1 Uresničevanje ciljev predmeta/Achieving the goals, p. 98) for all triads (three-year periods), which is important because the emphasis is on developing competences or process knowledge, which are/is then deepened and built upon in each higher grade; therefore, the curriculum is designed in the same way throughout the nine years of primary

education – following the same areas and competences (steps for the second triad on p. 102 and for the third triad on p. 105).

- for each triad, it is clearly specified how texts should be dealt with in class; in the first triad, it is additionally stated (pp. 98, 99) that “special attention is dedicated to teaching reading and writing. The goal is not only to master fluent reading and writing, but also to use written language for communication, thinking, creating, learning and amusement. The goal is to enable all children to get to know and *achieve a higher level of the so called critical literacy.*”

What is stressed, is a step-by-step, systematic and individual development of reading and writing skills (including the steps and the sequence of skills in this process), and the demand that students should acquire the basic technique of reading and writing by the end of the second grade (age 7–8), and then in grade 3 mostly just reinforce and improve their reading and writing.

The curriculum specifies the activities of students step by step, i. e. pre-, while- and post-reading strategies, whereby the 2011 curriculum stresses even more that “students evaluate their own competence of critical reading of texts, and plan to develop this competence”. With literary texts, the interpretation is also included. The recommended model for developing reading competence also includes various reading strategies – “introductory motivation, interpretative reading, pause after reading, aesthetic experiences, analysis and evaluation, second reading and new tasks”.

Similarly, reading strategies are closely linked to various text types and genres in the section about literature: in all three triads, the curriculum lists activities connected with reading (and writing) of poetry, prose and drama. The main purpose of reading is captured already in the title of this section and also in the learning standards: “developing receptive competence with reading [...] literary texts and talking and writing about them”.

All communicative activities are interlinked, as reading competence (which is not merely reading comprehension) cannot be assessed directly. Students react to the texts orally or in written form, which includes productive (e.g. writing) skills, and specific knowledge (e.g. the knowledge of literary terms).

In the section about language, the activities for developing different reading strategies are also included in all triads, and in all grades:

- “developing the ability to critically evaluate non-literary texts”, e.g. reading/comprehending descriptions, definitions ...
- “developing the ability to read selectively”, e.g. reading/comprehending lists, forms ...
- “developing the ability to correspond”, e.g. reading/comprehending letters, invitations ...

In short: The students should understand how each text is read differently according to its context and purpose, and how each text type includes or calls for specific reading strategies which support the understanding of such a text type.

### **Which are the strong and which are the weak areas of the curriculum (in the field of reading literacy)?**

The **strengths** (as mentioned in the curriculum, but unfortunately not always implemented in practice, because they demand a thorough knowledge of the curriculum):

- connecting, building on and developing all elements that support reading and comprehension (content, activities, knowledge of literary and grammar terminology);

- connecting all activities that students need to demonstrate their reading competence and comprehension (to show that, students must know how to form and write down their thoughts, which means having the knowledge about sentence and text formation, spelling rules, etc.);
- fewer data and more stress on the competences (fewer texts that should be dealt with in more detail, including different aspects);
- a lot of choice – variety of texts, activities, reading and learning strategies.;
- emphasis on formative assessment of competences;
- a lot of possibilities to adapt lessons to the abilities of the students (differentiation and individualisation);
- integration of modern technology.

The **weaknesses** (these are therefore even more stressed in the recommendations for changes):

- lack of understanding the importance of the knowledge of Slovene for the process of learning and for life in general (understanding language as the essence of one's identity);
- no clear interface between language and literature learning (lack of awareness of different purposes and use of different linguistic means);
- there should be more focus on higher taxonomic levels of knowledge (not just the quantity);
- lack of the vertical connective (the knowledge of what has been taught/learnt so far and how it can be used, and what is developed/learnt/taught anew in each grade);
- fragmentation of various learning standards, not seeing them as parts of a whole.

### **How do we develop reading literacy in secondary education?**

The curriculum in secondary schools builds on the primary school curriculum. The basic principles of working with texts are the same, but the level of difficulty is higher and the texts are longer. There is also more stress on theoretical knowledge (knowledge of grammar and of literary theory).

### **What are the findings about students' literacy according to the analysis of the external evaluation in grades 6 and 9?**

- Students do not read enough independently.
- Their reading strategies are not well-developed (they rarely read a text more than once, they don't use strategies like marking the text (underlining, circling etc).
- Among literary genres, drama proves to be most difficult to understand.
- Students are good at exercises that ask for data specifically stated in the text, but not so good at answering questions at higher taxonomic levels.
- Students have problems understanding metaphorical language in both literary and non-literary texts, etc.

In short, the findings regarding reading comprehension are similar to the findings in the PISA research.

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

*Is digital literacy part of the curriculum?*

According to the 2014 European Media Literacy Project (Emedus), media education is included in the Slovenian national curriculum, with Slovenia serving as a model for other former Yugoslavian countries concerning the inclusion of media education in the curricula. Media Education is explicitly mentioned

in the Slovenian national curriculum (since 1996), as a cross-curricular topic and a separate subject, both at primary and post primary levels.

According to the ESSIE Country Profile, ICT is taught as a separate subject in secondary schools.

*How are secondary students supported in acquiring digital literacy skills and knowledge?*

The percentage of students in schools with an ICT coordinator is above the EU average. Also, the percentage of students in schools, where teachers receive some form of reward for applying ICT is well above the EU mean score (ESSIE Country Profile).

According to the Emedus country overview, there is the Action Plan for the Informatization of Education<sup>10</sup>, launched in 2006. The question does not refer to specific types of support, for instance on a national level or between teacher and student.

*What classroom resources (books, notebooks, internet...) are used to support the development of adolescents' digital literacy?*

Slovenia's ESSIE country profile concludes that, "overall, many Slovenian students are in schools with strong policies and support for ICT, but this is not always reflected in high levels of ICT use, even though home access and use tend to be high, owing to relatively low levels of equipment provision" (p.26).

The Emedus Country Overview notes that the frequency of use of ICT for teachers is higher than the EU average, but that, for students, it is lower. Slovenian students have relatively low levels of access to computers. Levels of connection are higher than EU average (i.e. having a website or a virtual learning environment).

#### **5.2.4 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 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, allowing teachers, parents and school leaders to understand the rate of progress of learners and to identify individual strengths and needs, should be integrated in 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

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<sup>10</sup> See: [http://www.mizs.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/IKT/akcijski\\_nacrt\\_informatizacija\\_solstva\\_8\\_2006.pdf](http://www.mizs.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/IKT/akcijski_nacrt_informatizacija_solstva_8_2006.pdf).

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.

In Slovenia we have subject specific curricula. The basic school programme is divided into three educational cycles, each cycle covers three grades. In curricula for Slovenian language there are standards connected to fluency of reading available at the end/ for each educational cycle.

### **Screening for reading competence to identify struggling readers**

Since 2012 we have standardised tests for identifying struggling readers and measuring reading competence. The grading scheme for learners' reading skills from Grade 1-3 of the primary school and a reading test at the end of the third grade are standardised instruments created by S. Pečjak, L. Magajna and N. Potočnik within the project "Development of reading literacy: Diagnostic tools for assessment of reading literacy and design of reading literacy models", funded by the Ministry of Education and Sport.

According to Doupona Horvat (2012) the systematic screening is not available for dyslexia or other reading difficulties, and notes that relatively few professionals in Slovenia deal with dyslexia, with access to them often dependent on the persistence of parents.

### **Are there regular screenings for reading (and writing) competence? At what age / grades?**

There are national non-compulsory written tests in (among others) mother tongue in Grade 6 and compulsory external assessment in mother tongue (among others) in Grade 9. The results of the assessments are intended to provide feedback information on students' achievements and should not be used as a selection criterion for upper secondary school.

In addition, teachers evaluate their pupils' learning achievements on the basis of learning objectives laid down in the curriculum and the assessment regulations. Learning outcomes are continuously assessed in written, oral and practical forms and tests set by teachers (International Bureau of Education, 2011).

### **How are struggling readers identified?**

According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2012), the needs of children with special educational needs are seen as deficiencies or barriers that require changes in the child's environment. Education, according to the Act, is based on the principle that a child's needs must be recognised as early as possible and that early childhood intervention is a dynamic process. The recognition of the child's needs and early intervention occur simultaneously (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2012). However, learning difficulties are not considered as special educational needs in Slovenia, and they are handled by making adjustments in teaching and providing some remedial teaching.

### **Monitoring primary students' progress in reading**

In PIRLS 2011, teachers were asked how much emphasis they placed on specified assessment tools to monitor students' progress in reading. Table 24 shows that 82% students in Slovenia, and 84% on average across the EU-24 placed a major emphasis on the evaluation of students' ongoing work to monitor their progress in reading. However, fewer students in Slovenia were taught by teachers who



placed a major emphasis on use of class tests (35%) or national or regional achievement tests (13%), compared with the corresponding EU-24 averages.

Table 24: Percentages of Students with Teachers Reported Placing Varying Levels of Emphasis on the Use of Specified Tools to Monitor Students' Progress in Reading – Slovenia and EU-24 Average

	Slovenia			EU-24		
	Major Emphasis	Some Emphasis	Little/No Emphasis	Major Emphasis	Some Emphasis	Little/No Emphasis
Evaluation of student's ongoing work	82	18	-	84	16	1
Classroom tests (e.g., teacher-based tests)	35	43	2	51	45	5
National or regional achievement tests	13	51	36	25	52	24

Source: PIRLS 2011 database (see ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table I8)

### **Challenge:**

The early identification of children with reading difficulties could be facilitated by more regular administration of standardised tests.

- The standardised instruments created by S. Pečjak, L. Magajna and N. Potočnik within the project: "Development of reading literacy: Diagnostic tools for assessment of reading literacy and design of reading literacy models", funded by the Ministry of Education and Sport measure general reading competence for children at the end of first educational cycle (grade 3). The test measures speed and level of comprehension. It is not obligatory for schools to apply them, but it is obligatory for teachers who apply the test that they attend the training for applying and interpreting the results.
- All the assessment in primary and post-primary level is based upon the standards for language and literacy, set in the primary language curriculum (Slovenian language). The standards are generally available at each educational cycle (three grades: 1-3, 4-6, 7-9), with some detailed standards for each grade.

## **Supporting struggling literacy learners**

### **Number of struggling readers receiving remedial instruction**

PIRLS offers some data concerning issues of remedial instruction in primary schools. One question was whether all pupils receive remedial instruction when needed. There is some evidence that not all children in need of remedial support in reading receive such support when they need it. In PIRLS 2011, teachers in Slovenia estimated that 20% of students were in need of remedial instruction in reading, while it was estimated that 16% received remedial instruction when they needed it (ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Table K1). As noted earlier, 21% of students in Slovenia scored at or below the Low PIRLS benchmark.

### **Kinds of support offered**

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.

### Primary Level

PIRLS 2011 provides information about additional staff and availability of support persons for reading. Based on teacher responses to a series of questions in PIRLS 2011, 21% of students in Slovenia are in classes where there is always access to specialised professionals to work with students who have reading difficulties, while 41% are in classes where there is access sometimes (Table 25). The corresponding EU-24 averages are 25% and 42% respectively, indicating that the availability of professional support persons in Slovenia is comparable to that of the EU-24 on average. Access to teacher aides is lower in Slovenia (9% always have access) than on average across the EU-24 (13%). Access to volunteers to work with children with reading difficulties is broadly similar in Slovenia and on average across EU-24 countries.

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

Access to...	Slovenia			EU Average		
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never
Specialised professional	21	41	39	25	42	33
Teacher aide	9	47	44	13	34	53
Adult/parent volunteer	3	13	84	3	18	80

Source: ELINET PIRLS 2011 Appendix, Tables K2-K4.

Based on responses provided by teachers in PIRLS 2011, 49% of students in Slovenia are in classes where the teacher arranges for students falling behind in reading to work with a specialised professional (e.g. a reading specialist or a speech therapist) (Table 26). This is marginally below the EU-24 average of 55%, indicating schools and teachers in Slovenia may be at a slight disadvantage.

The percentage of teachers in Slovenia (26%) who say that they wait for students who are falling behind in reading to mature is less than on average across EU-24 countries (37%). Ninety-five percent of students in Slovenia and 90% of students across the EU-24 countries are in classes where the teacher spends more time working with students who are falling behind in reading. Similarly, 99% and 97% of students in Slovenia and across the participating EU countries, respectively, are in classes where the teacher asks the parents to help the student with reading.

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

	Slovenia	EU Average (Yes)
I have students work with a specialised professional	49	55
I wait to see if performance improves with maturation	26	37
I spend more time working on reading individually with the student	95	90
I ask the parents to help the students with reading	99	97

Doupona Horvat (2012) noted that pedagogical approaches used in addressing the needs of students with reading (and/or writing) difficulties often depended on school policy, the quality of the individual school's team of specialists (team comprising psychologists, pedagogical specialists and special education specialists), the school principal, and the individual teacher of the child with special education needs. She noted the use of a variety of approaches, including assistance in the classroom from a member of the school's team of specialists during regular classes,

In Slovenia, pupils with learning disabilities and gifted pupils are not considered as pupils with special educational needs. As of September 2012, since the Amendments to the Basic School Act 2011, the needs of pupils with varying abilities are met by providing adequate conditions through adapting working methods and including students in additional/remedial classes and other types of assistance or work, the subject contents for gifted pupils are also adapted (Eurydice, 2014c).

Several projects have also been targeted at improving literacy skills in Slovenia. The National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia launched a project called "Opolnomočenje učencev z izboljšanjem bralne pismenosti in dostopa do znanja" (*Empowerment of Students by Improving Reading Literacy and Access to Knowledge*) that embraced 42 (less than 10%) of basic schools that had displayed low achievement in national tests in Mother tongue and Mathematics for a number of years. Main targets of the project, which ended in December 2013, were to: ensure equal educational opportunities, improve access to quality education and integrate efficient didactical strategies in order to achieve higher levels of reading literacy. Measures to meet these targets included: promoting the development of a learning environment that is sensitive to individual differences among pupils, respects current socially constructivist didactical trends, cross curricular connection, formative assessment of the learning process, and well-defined theoretical bases and guidelines for the development of communication skills.

In the project they found that pupils from the all participating primary schools improved the motivation for and interest in reading (in the first five grades of primary school these two elements are approximately 20% higher than in the remaining four grades) as well as reading techniques and reading comprehension (Pečjak et al., 2013). With the aim to support participative and individual learning, the teachers and pupils were trained for the implementation of various reading learning strategies (RLS) and strategies for working with texts, which contributed to improved focus and comprehension, improved awareness during the reading and learning process, higher quality of knowledge and development of higher levels of literacy.

The results at participating schools reflect the position that overall, during the project, pupils with learning difficulties in the field of literacy received adequate support, since the lower boundary of

results at the national examination tests was higher<sup>11</sup> and less dispersed than the results of pupils from other schools (Cankar, 2013, 2014). Joint average results or percentage at the national examination achieved by participating schools were slightly lower (participating schools: SLO 51.0; MAT 54.06) than other schools (other schools: SLO 51.61; MAT 55.13), however, the difference was not statistically significant (ibid.), despite the fact that the sample (of participating schools) did not include a population of schools with normalised distribution<sup>12</sup> of pupils' results. A significant step was also made in the field of raising awareness of teachers and other professional staff of the significance of literacy development with respect to successful education and inclusion in the narrow and broader social environment and of the fact that literacy falls within the domain of responsibility of all teachers, not only class teachers or teachers of languages. The project also produced a bank of good examples of practice for the development of literacy. Professional school staff introduced different forms of peer learning, exchange of experience and knowledge (mutual teaching observation and critical friendly advice, team planning, teaching and evaluation), experience with the methodology of action research and how to take on various roles; e.g. the role of researcher of one's own practice, i.e. a new element for many participants. Furthermore, they found that the results between schools differ significantly, similar to results among pupils at specific schools. The differences occur due to several external and internal factors such as the integration of project objectives in the work of schools (main school priority), consistency of work by levels and throughout the vertical dimension (distributed leadership throughout the vertical dimension and among subject), clear responsibility of professional staff, compensation of deficiencies, personalisation of teaching and learning as well as learning support, regular observing and analyses of work, gathering of evidence and continuous introduction of improvements (Nolimal, Potočnik, 2015).

As indicated by empirical findings, the attainment of expectations was effective; participating schools have noted increased motivation for reading<sup>13</sup> and learning and found that pupils improved the speed and fluency of their reading, and became familiar with some complex reading learning strategies (RLS). All of the above has, as stated by many teachers, provided for improved activity of students during classes and made the classes more interesting and fun. Pupils have found that the application of RLS facilitates their learning and memory. However, reading comprehension and learning differentiation, individualisation and personalisation of education work and giving meaning to the metacognitive processes still need to be improved, since they encourage teachers and pupils "to improve overall literacy, critical thinking and development of inter-personal social and self-regulation skills" (Nolimal, Potočnik, 2015)

A project called "Podpora učiteljem pri izvajanju prilagoditev učencem z učnimi težavami pri matematiki in slovenščini" (Supporting teachers to implement adjustments for pupils with learning difficulties in Mathematics and Slovenian Language"), launched by the National Institute of Education,

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<sup>11</sup> The results at participating schools are concentrated around the centre of Gaussian curve, pupils on the left side of it, both in Slovenian and mathematics, do not as low as students of other schools (in Slovenian is the lowest result in the schools involved in the project -37.98 percentage points in the other schools -68.52 in mathematics at schools in the project -39.64 in the remaining schools - 79.12),

<sup>12</sup> As stated in the introduction, pupils from over 80% of schools participating in the project have been achieving statistically significant below-average results at the national examination tests for several subsequent years.

<sup>13</sup> These conclusions come from schools through self-evaluation, questionnaires for detecting reading motivation which were used at the beginning and the end of the project. 9<sup>th</sup> grade students were questioned at the end of the project as a part of central summative evaluation. We compared results with the PISA 2009 secondary study on reading motivation. Students in the project had 10 – 15% higher interest in reading (they visit libraries more often and with greater eagerness, they read books for fun and for study, they favour books as gifts etc.).

aims to improve coping with learning difficulties in Mathematics and Slovenian. In November 2013, the conference "Učne težave pri matematiki in slovenščini – izziv za učitelje in učence" ("Learning Difficulties In Mathematics And Slovenian Language – A Challenge For Teachers As Well As Pupils") took place with the following aims: highlighting the role of pupils and teachers in detecting and identifying learning difficulties and supporting pupils with learning difficulties in Mathematics and Slovenian language; enabling the participants to apply the new ideas and experience and knowledge to reflect on their own teaching practice (Eurydice, 2014a).

The results of the survey indicated that most teachers noticed learning disabilities occurring in multiplication, addition and subtraction over tenths, in quantities/measure units/conversion of units, and in solving mathematic problems and textual exercises. The teachers were fairly satisfied with the efficiency of the methodical ways of assistance. They expressed most satisfaction with those approaches which they felt they were most qualified for, i.e. the use of different didactic props and adapting the ways of reinforcing knowledge with pupils who had learning disabilities. (Žakelj, 2013)

### **Support for struggling readers – a legal right?**

Yes. The Organization and Financing of Education Act 2014 states that (among others) the goals of education are to: Provide the optimal development of the individual, irrespective of gender, social background or cultural identity, religion, racial, ethnic or national origin, and regardless of their physical and mental constitution or invalidity; Provide education that corresponds to the level of development and age of the individual; Provide equal educational opportunities in areas with specific development problems; Provide equal educational opportunities to children from less favourable social environments; Allow equal educational opportunities to SEN children and adults (Organization and Financing Education Act, 2014: Art. 2).

**Challenge:** Access to trained professionals such as remedial teachers is marginally lower in Slovenia than on average across EU countries. It should be strengthened so that all children in need of support have access, regardless of the school they attend.

## **5.2.5 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of Teachers**

### **Entry requirements for Initial Teacher Education**

#### **What are the entry qualifications for Initial Teacher Training of primary-level teachers?**

The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2013, Fig. A5, p. 32) notes the following entry requirements for prospective primary teachers in Slovenia:

- The Certificate of final examination of upper secondary education (decided at the level of the education authority)
- Performance at upper secondary level (decided at the level of the education authority and at school level )
- Performance at bachelor level (decided at the level of the education authority and at institutional level)

## What are the entry requirements for ITE of secondary teachers?

Requirements in Slovenia include:

- The Certificate of final examination of upper secondary education decided at the level of the education authority (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe);
- Performance at upper secondary level decided at the level of the education authority and at institutional level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe).
- Performance at bachelor level decided at the level of the education authority and at institutional level (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe);
- An exam in language skills for all prospective higher education students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011. Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices)

## Level of qualification and length of the required training for primary teachers

Table 27 shows the proportions of Grade 4 students taught by teachers with varying qualifications in PIRLS 2011.

Table 27: Percentages of Students Taught by Teachers with Varying Education Qualifications

Highest Qualification	Completed University Post-grad Degree	Completed Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent	Completed Post-Secondary Education but not a Degree	No Further than Upper Secondary
Slovenia	1	58	42	0
EU-24	27	53	14	6

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database (see Mullis et al., 2011, Exhibit 7.1, p. 188, and Appendix C, Table J1).

Slovenia now requires primary teachers to have a Master's degree which takes five years' study. 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. 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).

Doupona Horvat (2012) notes that teaching certificates are available only through university departments of education and that no alternate means of obtaining a certificate exist.

## Length of required training of secondary teachers

The teacher education study programme lasts 5 years: 4 years in 1st cycle programmes and 1 year study (postgraduate level) in 2nd cycle programme (master level). Some study programmes are unified 5-year master programmes (not divided in two cycles).

## The role of literacy expertise in Initial Teacher Training

Important teacher competences are a) the 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. In Slovenia, these topics are addressed during their teacher training – usually in pedagogical psychology classes or in special subject pre-service teaching training sessions.

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

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, generic skills or methodology for teaching reading is a topic in ITE in Slovenia (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 101). All teachers of reading (1-5<sup>th</sup> classroom teachers) have training in language (approx. 14 ECTS – varies between the 3 different Faculties of Education) and literacy (within the subject Didactics of Slovenian language).

**To what extent does initial training particularly emphasise the teaching of reading?**

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 Slovenia, 83% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 50% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/ teaching reading, and 27% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory. These figures are above the corresponding EU-24 means. On average across the EU-24, 74% of the fourth grade students had reading teachers with an educational emphasis on language, 59% had teachers with an emphasis on pedagogy/teaching reading, and 30% had teachers with an emphasis on reading theory (PIRLS 2011 Database).

Table 28: Percentages of Students Taught by Teachers who Reported each of Several Topics to be Areas of Emphasis during Initial Teacher Education

Topic	Test Language	Reading Pedagogy	Reading Theory	Remedial Reading	Assessment Methods in Reading
Slovenia	0	50	27	23	24
EU-24	74	59	30	22	27

Source: PIRLS 2011 Database (see Mullis et al., 2011, Exhibit 7.2, p. 190 and Appendix C, Table J2 – J3).

**Is tackling reading difficulties a topic in Initial Teacher Training?**

According to an analysis of guidelines for Initial Teacher Education institutions, tackling reading difficulties is a topic in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 101). However, in PIRLS 2011, just one-quarter of students were taught by teachers who reported that remedial reading was an area of emphasis in their ITT.

**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 a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 101), though, as noted above, it may not be perceived by all teachers as an area of emphasis.

**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 Slovenia is 300 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).

**Is there a curriculum for initial teacher training of secondary teachers? Are there quality standards?**

There is a framework of competences for teachers planning to teach at general (lower and upper) secondary education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe).

**Is “content area literacy” a compulsory part in initial teacher training of all secondary teachers?**

Knowledge/skills in reading instruction for prospective primary and lower secondary teachers of reading: central guidelines for ITE, 2009/10 (CITE 2):

- Teaching to read on-line texts in ITE;
- Assessing pupils' reading skills in ITE (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011. Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices).

“Content area literacy” is not a compulsory part in initial teacher training of all secondary teachers. Some faculties have this content in their curricula and some don't.

The universities are autonomous when creating their programmes. They do, however, take into account the general present-day guidelines for learner-centred education, and show awareness of the necessity of continuous observation and assessment of the learner.

**Challenges/need for action:** Although all teachers who teach reading (1-5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers) receive some training in language (approx. 14 ECTS – varies between the three different Faculties of Education) and literacy (within the subject ‘Didactics of the Slovenian language’), there should be more emphasis on content literacy and language of schooling for future teachers of all subjects on all levels of schooling.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

**Is there compulsory continuing professional development (in-service training) for teachers which focuses on literacy development?**

In Slovenia, there is compulsory continuous professional development (in-service training) for teachers which focuses on literacy development (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, pp. 109-110).

Peer support activities are popular forms of CPD in many central and eastern European countries (Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, p. 96).

**Are there courses for enhancing teachers' skills to deal with struggling readers?**

Teachers have the right to 5 days of CPD per year or 15 days in 3 years. The Ministry of Education manages the organisation and funding of CPD.

"The right and duty of pre-school teachers and teachers to continual professional development is stipulated by law and more specifically by regulations. The regulations regarding the professional development of teaching staff issued by the Minister of Education manage the organisation and financing of the programmes, decision-making bodies and their authorities, as well as the awarding



and recognition of points for advancement of pre-school teachers and teachers" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

Prescribed CPD programmes are supplementary programmes, which qualify pre-school teachers and teachers for other job positions, teaching a new subject or a subject on a higher level. Providers of these programmes are higher education institutions that have designed and implemented the programmes in accordance with the rules on higher education. The programme for head teachers is also prescribed – it is compulsory for everyone who wishes to apply for the position of head teacher. This programme is executed by the National School for Leadership in Education. Among the prescribed programmes is also the programme of preparing candidates for the teaching certification examination. The providers of the programmes must be accredited" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

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

### **Is it compulsory to participate in CPD?**

The Ministry in Slovenia allocates the financial means for covering the costs of participation to pre-school institutions and schools. It partially or entirely pays providers of priority and compulsory programmes. The system of collecting points for participating in programmes that are considered for promotion additionally motivates staff to undergo CPD training (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

### **Are there incentives or sanctions to participate in CPD? If so, what kind of incentives or sanctions are there? Is attending CPD encouraged by the employer?**

Pre-school institutions and schools plan CPD for their pedagogical staff. Teachers may also select the courses that fit their professional development.

"Pre-school institutions and schools plan CPD for their pedagogical staff in the annual work plan, the financial means of which are allocated for this purpose by the state. The state ensures a network of providers and the programmes on offer. Since CPD is the right of the pedagogical staff, pre-school teachers and teachers must get paid study leave, transport costs and a participant fee. This is how the state and municipalities ensure the means for covering the material costs of participation.

Pre-school teachers and teachers usually select training programmes themselves. Mostly they select one of the published priority programmes that bring points needed for promotion. In cases of extensive curriculum changes or reforms, training for the new innovations is either compulsory or highly advisable and awarded with points (for promotion)" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

### **Time frame and quality standards of CPD**

#### **How is its quality assured?**

Top-level education authority assures its quality (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013, Fig. C6, p. 64).

#### **What is the time format for CPD?**

CPD usually takes place out of the working time in schools.

"Programmes are occasionally provided during the week, but mostly on the weekends, during school holidays and in the evenings" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

## **Does CPD interlink theory and research on the one hand and practical work in the field on the other (e.g. action research)?**

Peer support activities are a popular form of CPD:

"(...) peer support activities seem to be popular forms of CPD in many central and eastern European countries (Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia)" (Teaching Reading in Europe, S. 96).

## **What is the qualification of the trainers?**

Prescribed CPD programmes

"The prescribed programmes are supplementary programmes, which qualify pre-school teachers and teachers for other job positions, teaching a new subject or subject on a higher level. Providers of these programmes are higher education institutions that have designed and implemented the programmes in accordance with the rules on higher education. The programme for head teachers is also prescribed – it is compulsory for everyone who wishes to apply for the position of head teacher. This programme is executed by the National School for Leadership in Education. Among the prescribed programmes is also the programme of preparing candidates for the teaching certification examination. The providers of the programmes must be accredited" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

CPD forms and institutions providing in-service training

"Topic conferences, study groups training, mentor networking and other networks of pre-school institutions or schools are offered by various public and private providers. Among the more significant ones are the following: The National Education Institute, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the Educational Research Institute, the National School for Leadership in Education, the National Examinations Centre and the Institute for Outdoor Education (out-of-school courses, delivered in a natural environment). Among the providers are also pre-school institutions, organisations for adult education and private providers" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

## **Are there national standards regarding CPD?**

CPD forms and institutions providing in-service training

"Topic conferences, study groups training, mentor networking and other networks of pre-school institutions or schools are offered by various public and private providers. Among the more significant ones are the following: The National Education Institute, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, the Educational Research Institute, the National School for Leadership in Education, the National Examinations Centre and the Institute for Outdoor Education (out-of-school courses, delivered in a natural environment). Among the providers are also pre-school institutions, organisations for adult education and private providers" (Eurypedia Reports on CPD).

The Programme Council is responsible for the selection of CPD priority programmes in accordance to the needs of the educational system announced annually by the Ministry of Education

"The Ministry of Education annually announces the needs of the educational system. Determining and selecting priority programmes is in the domain of the Programme Council, named by the Minister of Education. The programme council selects priority programmes and proposes the Minister to finance them. The selection is publicly announced. The published programmes are awarded points that the

participants use in relation to their promotion to titles. Participation in CPD programmes is one of the conditions for title promotion" (Eurydica Reports on CPD).

CPD courses are occasionally evaluated by the Programme Council Commission:

"The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport monitors the efficiency and success of the system. The Programme Council Commission conducts occasional evaluations of the CPD programmes" (Eurydica Reports on CPD).

## **Participation in CPD in Slovenia**

### **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 Slovenia, 16% of the students have teachers who spent 16 hours or more (EU-24 average: 18%), 66% 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 quite high engagement of Slovenian teachers.

**Challenge:** One of the goals is to continue to develop and implement quality teacher training programmes in the field of literacy for primary and secondary school teachers.

## **Digital literacy as part of initial teacher education**

### **Is teaching to read on-line texts a topic in Initial Teacher Training?**

According to an analysis of guidelines for ITE institutions, teaching to read on-line texts is not a topic in Initial Teacher Training (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2011, Fig. 2.5, p. 101).

### **Is digital literacy part of the teacher training of secondary teachers?**

"Institutions are free to decide whether or not to include ICT in initial teacher education" (EACEA; Eurydice, Key Data on Learning and Innovation through ICT at School in Europe, 2011).

At some faculties (e.g. Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana), IT courses are offered as part of pre-service teacher education to primary school teachers; occasionally, IT courses are offered as optional courses to students of pedagogical strands at other faculties. Some courses have been organised and are offered as part of in-service training to teachers, the content being either various software programmes, e-learning, or internet safety<sup>14</sup>.

**Challenge:** It is necessary to increase the awareness that digital learning resources and strategies can successfully complement the more traditional (non-digital) methods.

## **5.2.6 Improving the quality of literacy teaching for children and adolescents: Programmes, initiatives and examples**

Beside numerous seminars, conferences and other forms of in-service teacher , there are also other ways or programmes to reach teachers and improve their quality of teaching. As mentioned before, the National Education Institute of Slovenia (NEI) trains the professionals in kindergarten through

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<sup>14</sup> For instance by ARNES, the Academic and Research Network of Slovenia: <https://arnes.splet.arnes.si/about-arnes/>.

study groups, seminars and other forms of education for the creation of conditions for the changed role of children and adults in the learning process.

Special attention is given to active learning and providing opportunities for verbalisation and other ways of expression and on the principle of development-process approach. Particular attention is paid to incentives for the development of the child's language and literacy skills in all fields of activity of the kindergarten curricula (movement, language, society, nature, art, mathematics), the importance of joint activities for children and adults, as well as didactic conversation.

The consultants of NEI Slovenia provide specialist consultancy for kindergartens and produce papers on emergent literacy in preschool with theoretical views and practical experience.

To ensure sustainability of the project Empowering learners through improving reading literacy and access to knowledge, NEI of Slovenia created a thematic network in which teachers were organised according to the areas, which were successfully developed within the project. The thematic network was to promote continued professional growth, expand the knowledge and experience in school collectives, develop good practice in the field of literacy, and help pupils to raise the level of reading literacy. In the context of thematic networks, support was offered to schools in reading and writing techniques, motivation for reading, reading comprehension, formative assessment and others.

At the end of the project, the regional units of the National Education Institute took over the dissemination of findings and examples of good practice. In the year 2013/2014, the developmental work with schools started in 120 primary schools across Slovenia. All schools determined developmental priorities with regard to resolving the problems identified in the field of literacy. The heads of each regional unit, according to the needs of schools and their selected priorities, decided which members of thematic networks to engage.

The members of the development teams in participating schools were made aware of the results of the evaluation and the findings of the project to show what was achieved, they were introduced to reading and other teaching strategies in the instruction, strategies to increase reading motivation, creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment etc. Using the information obtained and the identification of problems in the field of reading literacy of each school involved, participants were empowered to plan the action steps independently.

Attendees were presented with the instruments to measure progress in reading, teaching reading strategies, reading techniques, reading motivation etc. that were developed in the project. Some schools have used these questionnaires to measure the initial and final state, which the initial project was unable to provide for all participating schools. Principals in all regions were informed and held discussions about literacy teaching management that supports the development of literacy.

Heads of the regional units and consultants have carried out a number of consultancy services in the field of literacy for schools in the project. The principals and Institute's pedagogical consultants have accomplished over 150 lesson observations and evaluations, and in this way took care of raising the level of literacy and planning new action steps. The activities continued with the same intensity in 2015 as well and will continue in the coming year (Nolimal, Potočnik, 2015).

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

The **migrant gap** refers to the 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
- Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children.

This section refers to children and adolescents who for different reasons can be considered as being “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.

### **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-recognised 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 23.7%, Slovenia is at the lower, favourable end of the distribution.

#### **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 6.3, Slovenia has a low percentage compared to all European countries participating in ELINET. 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 mother’s level of education referring to ISCED levels - information about highest education achieved by one parent is based on educational achievement for each parent. (Data for Slovenia is available in the international database.)

#### **Teenage mothers**

In 2006, per 1000 girls aged 15 – 19, there were 5 girls giving birth (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije 2006). According to the data available, more than half of teenage pregnancies are terminated; the number of pregnancies of the 15 – 17 year olds has remained the same in the recent years, the number of pregnancies of the girls aged 18 – 19 has decreased.

## **Single parents**

According to Eurostat (2012, Figure A 7), in Slovenia the percentage of children living mainly with a single parent is 5.5%. The range for the European countries participating in ELINET is from 1.4% in Croatia to 30% in Denmark (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 Slovenia the proportion of children with parents born outside the country (8%) or only one parent born outside the country (12%) is above 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 is 2.8% (for an overview of European countries see table A7 in Appendix B). However, there is a quite significant performance gap in reading competence at grade 4 between children who spoke the language of the test before starting school (mean reading score 533) and those who did not speak the language (mean reading score 475).

**Challenge:** There have been projects aiming to improve the support offered to families where Slovenian (i.e. the language of instruction) is not spoken at home; as we can expect more students with a non-Slovenian family background in our schools, the awareness that such students (families) need support should be further raised.

### **5.3.2 Support for children with special needs**

Not only children from culturally disadvantaged families are "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.

#### **Very low birth weight and severe prematurity**

According to PERISTAT (2010, Figure 7.11, p.149) the percentage of live births with a birth weight under 2500 grams in Slovenia was 5.2%. 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). Furthermore, according to the same report (PERISTAT 2010, Figure 7.14, p.155) the percentage of live births with a gestational age <32 weeks was 1.2% (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 6.0% (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).

## **Cognitive or sensory disabilities**

### **Do children with “special needs” / “children at risk” get early support?**

In Slovenia, children with special needs get support in mainstream Kindergartens and in special needs Kindergartens where they attend adapted education programmes or “developmental classes”<sup>15</sup>.

Children are entitled to support by law. Kindergarten professionals and special experts are usually executing an order issued by the National Institute of Education. The order is issued on the basis of expert opinion about an individual special need. The expert opinion consists of a description of the child’s special need(s), exact implications for support, hours of additional expert support (AES) per week and expert demands for delivering the listed recommendations. Children are supported by various experts, such as professors of visually impaired education and the pedagogy of specific learning difficulties, professors of Special and Rehabilitation Pedagogy, Professors of social pedagogy etc. The experts, the child’s teacher and parents cooperate in writing the individualised programme which they execute and evaluate regularly.

### **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<sup>16</sup>.

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

Children with speech and language disorders may attend adapted education programmes in mainstream Kindergartens<sup>17</sup>.

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

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

## **5.3.3 Promoting preschool attendance, especially among disadvantaged children**

The benefits of attending preschool institutions have been proven in many studies. The duration of attendance is associated with greater academic improvement (Mullis et al. 2012b).

### **Number of children attending day care and preschool institutions**

According to the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014, Figure C1 p.62), the enrolment rate at age 4 is 89.8%. Slovenia does not yet reach the European benchmark for at least 95% of children between age 4 and the start of compulsory education participating in ECEC (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 age 3, 4 and 5. According to 2010 statistical data, the participation rate is 92.0% for 5-year-olds, 87.6% for 4-year-olds, and 77.8% for 3-year-olds (OECD 2014) (for an overview of European countries see table C2 in Appendix B).

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<sup>15</sup> See: EURYDICE. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Special\\_Education\\_Needs\\_Provision\\_within\\_Mainstream\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Special_Education_Needs_Provision_within_Mainstream_Education).

<sup>16</sup> See: EURYDICE. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment\\_in\\_Programmes\\_for\\_all\\_Pre-Primary\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment_in_Programmes_for_all_Pre-Primary_Education).

<sup>17</sup> See: EURYDICE. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment\\_in\\_Programmes\\_for\\_all\\_Pre-Primary\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Assessment_in_Programmes_for_all_Pre-Primary_Education).



### **Average duration of preschool attendance**

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: 59% (average reading score 537)
- Between 1 and 3 years: 26% (average reading score 526)
- 1 year or less: 5% (average reading score 524)
- Did not attend: 9% (average reading score 519)

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

The benefit of preschool attendance in Slovenia is not yet proven, it is merely a correlation. When controlled by parents' education, the "benefit" of the kindergarten disappears (Doupona Horvat, Rosén 2007).

### **Is preschool education free?**

Pre-primary education is not free. Parents contribute financially depending on their income and other social circumstances<sup>18</sup>. Slovenia does not belong to the half of the European countries where the entire period of ECEC is free. Many countries provide at least one year of free pre-primary education.

**Challenge:** The benefits of the preschool have not yet been clearly identified. While the preschool can be generally beneficial, it is not the development of literacy skills that is at its core.

### **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. The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs suggested in 2001 (among other measures): Measures for the improvement of language proficiency in pre-schools: further development of educational concepts for pre-school lessons with particular attention to language development; language level assessment.

### **5.3.5 Support for students whose home language is not the language of school**

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

Children in centre-based ECEC settings receive language support. Slovenia seeks to employ staff from a migrant or minority background. These staff are involved in teaching process to provide language support to migrant children and those from ethnic minorities to help them integrate in ECEC. Slovenia runs projects to train Roma assistants to support Roma children in ECEC, and help to build links between settings and the Roma community. Bilingual staff are entitled to additional salary payments (European Commission/EACA/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014, p. 146-147).

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<sup>18</sup> See: EURYDICE. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovenia:Overview>.

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

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

Slovene as a second language is taught in Italian schools (in the areas where Italian is an official language) and in a small number of English (i.e., international) schools. In regular Slovene-speaking schools, there are no Slovene language courses for children who do not speak Slovene as their first language. Although remedial Slovene language instruction is available, it does not function as a second-language course. Some schools offer courses in Slovene, especially if they have immigrants or children of immigrants in the classroom, but they are not obliged to do so. (PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia, p. 601)

Roma pupils can also be granted some special treatment in Slovenia, although this does not mean they actually get this treatment. In PIRLS 2001, there were no Roma students included as the teachers made them stay at home on the testing day (NRC data).

The Roma Education Strategy introduces the following measures to better integrate and increase the educational level of Roma pupils:

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

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

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

Immigrant pupils are taught alongside native speakers for the majority of the time. Slovenian as a Second Language and lessons of immigrants' native languages are given separately.

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

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

#### **5.3.6 Preventing early school leaving**

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 Slovenia, the rate of early school leavers was 3.9 % in 2013, down from 4.4% a year before. The target value of the early school leaving (ESL) rate set for 2020 is 5%. The duration of compulsory education in Slovenia is 9 years. Children start school at the age of 6; compulsory schooling ends at 15 years (Compulsory Education in Europe 2013/14, Eurydice report). As concerns students (ISCED 1-6) aged 15-24 years, we find that in Slovenia, 71.7% of 15-24 year olds were in some form of education in 2011, which was well above the average EU-27 value of 61.9%. This indicator is on a slightly increasing trend: by 2012 it stood at 72.4%.

#### **5.3.7 Addressing the gender gap among adolescents**

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

There is no programme/policy which would specifically address the gender gap in Slovenia.

There has been an initiative to look more closely at reading for pleasure, more specifically at the reasons why there is a much bigger number of teenage girls winning the reading badge than boys. The data have been collected, but they haven't been analysed yet.

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

#### Compensating socio-economic and cultural background factors

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

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

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

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

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

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

**For programmes and initiatives against poverty** see the "European platform against poverty and social exclusion"<sup>19</sup>, one of seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>20</sup> for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

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<sup>19</sup> See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961>.

<sup>20</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm).

## **Policies to prevent early school leaving**

In Slovenia, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is co-financing (with the support of the European Social Fund) the project 'Raising the social and cultural capital in local communities for the development of equal opportunities and promoting social inclusion' (1.2.2013-31.8.2014), which tackles early school leaving and improves the quality of pre-primary and compulsory education by networking with parents and other stakeholders (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 27). Some new and updated upper secondary vocational, upper secondary technical and short-cycle higher vocational programmes are being introduced in Slovenia (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 64).

Since October 2012, Slovenia has implemented the renewed Guidelines for the Inclusion of Migrant Children in Education, from pre-school to upper secondary school. The guidelines define principles and suggest strategies, as well as teaching-related modifications and methods for cooperating with and integrating of migrant children and their parents (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 89). In Slovenia, a two-year project supported by the ESF started in 2013 to support 'innovative teaching through the implementation of programmes for introducing practical and flexible forms of employment and economic cooperation'. This project is geared to upper secondary and short-cycle higher education students. The objective is to improve their integration into the labour market. In addition, the new programme 'Youth Mentorship Schemes in Business Enterprises' aims at providing young people with the skills needed in the real work environment (Education and Training in Europe 2020, p. 99).

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