Overview

Slovenia became an independent state in 1991 and a year later its independence was internationally recognized. In 2004 it became a member of the EU and in 2010 also a member of the OECD. According to the constitution, Slovenia is a democratic republic. It has a population of about 2 million inhabitants and a surface area of 20,273 km².

At the start of the 2011/12 school year, enrolment in the primary school program with a regular curriculum stood at 159,700; just over 1,600 children were enrolled in the primary school program with an adapted curriculum; and 1,500 pupils were enrolled in the primary school program with a special curriculum. Compulsory primary education was conducted by 785 primary schools and their branches, and education for children with special needs was carried out by 57 schools and institutions.

At the start of the 2010/11 school year, 82,267 students were enrolled in upper secondary education programmes, most of whom were in general and technical programmes.
In the past few years, it has been observed that the enrolment in general and professional gymnasiums has kept increasing and in the 2010/11 school year reached 41 percent, among girls even 50 percent. An ever-increasing number of young people are deciding to continue schooling upon the successful completion of upper secondary education with the national matura exam (general matura), which enables enrolment in popular tertiary programmes. Passing a vocational matura allows students to enroll in higher professional colleges and some university programmes.

On the other hand, enrolment in short-term vocational and vocational programmes is declining and accounts for only 15.5 percent of all enrolled pupils. The Slovene education system consists of pre-primary, primary (elementary), upper-secondary, and higher education. Pre-school education (ages 1-5) is not compulsory. Compulsory primary education (ages 6-14) is organised as a single structure nine-year primary school. Upper secondary education (ages 15-18) consists of: short vocational education (2 years) provided by upper secondary vocational schools; vocational education (3 years) provided by upper secondary vocational and technical schools; technical education (4 years) provided by upper secondary technical schools; vocational and technical education provided by upper secondary vocational and technical schools (4 years); general education (4 years) provided by general upper secondary schools called “gimnazija” (general, classic and subject-specific, all of them lasting 4 years).

At the end of general secondary schools (“gimnazija”), students take the national matura examination (general matura). The matura is an externally assessed examination in five subjects, three of which (the mother tongue, mathematics, the first foreign language) are compulsory, while the other two are elective. The matura is an entrance requirement for university.

The national curriculum documents for primary and secondary education include general aims, objectives and core contents of the subject, didactic principles and recommendations, and knowledge standards.

Teachers are expected to adapt their work according to the ability of their students. The most common teaching method is internal differentiation, in which students of one or several classes can be divided into smaller study groups. In grades 7, 8 and 9 of the primary school, the school may decide to group students into three ability levels for mathematics and foreign language education. The curriculum defines standards of knowledge for each level that students are required to achieve by the end of each grade.

The government elected in November 2008 announced a new White Paper on Education, which was published in 2011. However, because of the change of government and the economic crisis, no major changes are expected to be implemented in the structure and organisation of education.
The structure of schooling

The Ministry of Education and Sport is responsible for the implementation of education policies at the pre-university level adopted by the National Assembly and for financial, administrative and technical tasks, as well as for developing concepts and strategies, legislation and regulations. Three national agencies provide support to the Ministry: the National Institute for General Education, the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training, and the National Examination Centre. These agencies prepare materials which serve as the basis for decision-making. They draw up national curricula for primary and secondary education, promote the further development of schools, and offer advice to teachers. The National Examination Centre prepares materials and procedures for the state-wide examinations. Programmes of pre-school education, primary education and general secondary education are adopted by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education.

At the local level, municipalities are responsible for managing public pre-school institutions, primary schools and music schools. They provide the funds for capital investments, maintenance and extracurricular activities. They also provide salaries for the staff of pre-school institutions. Public pre-school institutions are founded and (partly) financed by municipalities; however, they are also financed from parents’ contributions (depending on their income). The state provides funding for the salaries of employees in primary schools and supplementary funding for buildings, equipment and operational expenses.

Municipalities do not have authority over upper secondary education. At this level it is the government that acts as the founder. However, school councils do include representatives from local communities. Since head teachers are appointed by the school council, this enables the local community to participate in the selection of head teachers via a representative who is directly involved in the decision-making process.

The school managing bodies of primary and upper secondary schools consist of the school council and the head teacher. The primary school council consists of three representatives of the municipality, three representatives of employees and three representatives of parents. The upper secondary school council consists of two representatives of the school founder, one representative of the local community, three representatives of teachers and three representatives of parents. Student representatives also have the right to participate in the council’s activities when issues relating to their situation are considered. Among other things, the school council appoints the head teacher, adopts the school’s development plan, its annual work plan and a report on how the plan was implemented and determines the school rules.
Other bodies in primary schools and upper secondary schools include teachers’ assemblies, home-room teachers, expert panels and parents’ councils. Teachers’ assemblies adopt decisions on issues concerning the curriculum and educational measures. Teachers autonomously decide which textbooks they will use and which teaching methods they will apply. Home-room teachers follow the academic results of their class and participate in decisions on educational measures. Expert panels discuss issues regarding specific subjects. Parents are represented by the parents’ council, which consists of one parent representative from each class. The parents’ council has a consultative role.

The legal framework

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991) guarantees equal rights to education to all citizens. Article 57 guarantees freedom of education, and states that primary education is compulsory and must be financed from public funds. Additionally, it says that the state is responsible for creating “the opportunities for citizens to obtain a proper education”.

In Article 64 it is written that the native Italian and Hungarian national communities and their members have, according to the law, the right to education in their mother tongue and they are also permitted to create and “develop their own policy of education. The law determines the areas of compulsory bilingual education.” According to the Constitution, “members of the Roma population have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Specific educational rights of Roma children are guaranteed by the educational legislation and the Roma Community Act (2007)”.

The right to compulsory education is extended to immigrant children under the same conditions as citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, and the instruction in immigrant children’s native languages and cultures is offered in compliance with international agreements. Since 2007, schools have been “obliged to offer additional teaching of the Slovene language to those who need it. The objective is to prepare immigrant students for inclusion into the Slovene education system and society, and to support their cultural identity and bilingualism. The National Education Institute develops curricula for languages of immigrant children so that they may choose to study their own native language as an elective.”

The regulation of primary education is set by the Primary School Act (1996; last revision 2007), which “determines general educational aims; regulates the right to choose between public and private schools or home schooling; defines the core curriculum and extra-curricular contents. It sets forth the manner and rules concerning enrolment, pupils’ rights and duties; the basic rules concerning the
assessment and marking of pupils and their progress to a higher grade, and the
awarding of certificates. In conjunction with the Organisation and Financing of
Education Act (1996, last revision 2008), basic management and organisational
principles are regulated, and responsibilities and autonomy are divided “between the
State, municipalities and schools.

It also stipulates the basic rules on home schooling and primary education of adults,
and inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream arrangements”.

The minister is given by law “the power to regulate certain aspects of education in
greater detail by issuing rules, decrees, orders, decisions, and guidelines.”

Upper secondary education is “regulated by the following acts:

• The Organization and Financing Education Act lays out the conditions for the
  conduct of educational activities and the ways in which education is
  organised, managed, and funded. It also stipulates the compulsory
  components of educational programmes.

• The Gimnazija Act regulates education in general and specialised gimnazije
  where students are educated with the aim of continuing their studies in higher
  education. The Act regulates the following: the scope and management of
  education in the gimnazija; general rules on the requirements of admission,
  advancement and completion of education in the gimnazija; and rules on the
  gathering and protection of students’ personal information.”

• The Vocational and Technical Education Act 2006 regulates upper secondary
  vocational education and technical education where students acquire the
  appropriate knowledge, skills and competences for work in a specific technical
  area and for the opportunity to progress to higher education.

• The Matura Act stipulates:
  • the content of the vocational matura (poklicna matura) - upon completion of
    technical education;
  • the general matura (upon completion of gimnazja);
  • the rights and responsibilities of candidates taking the vocational or general
    matura;
  • the set up and responsibilities of matura-related bodies; and
  • the procedure for the vocational and general matura.
• The Special Rights of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Groups in Education Act regulates the implementation of the special rights extended to the aforementioned ethnic groups in education, including in upper secondary education.

• The Placement of Children with Special Needs Act regulates the placement of students with special needs and specifies the approaches to, and form of, education.

• The National Vocational Qualifications Act regulates the recognition of qualifications on the basis of formally and informally acquired knowledge, and potentially also on the basis of assessment of one’s knowledge and skills. The recognition on the basis of previously acquired certificates or on the basis of assessment follows the knowledge and skill catalogues adopted by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and confirmed by the minister of labour, family and social affairs. The assessment providers must satisfy special conditions stipulated by the minister of labour (the assessment providers are required to have a license to carry out assessment of formally and informally acquired knowledge; the license is awarded by the National Examination Centre upon completion of the relevant training programme).\(^{11}\)

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**Freedom to establish non-state schools**

In 1991, the amended Act on the Legal Position of Religious Communities in the Republic of Slovenia abolished the prohibition of private schools and granted public recognition to the three religious secondary schools which existed at that time in Slovenia. The Institutes Act was adopted at the same time, enabling the establishment of educational organizations.

Even though the Constitution does not explicitly provide for religious schools, it is understood that they are permitted on the basis of the guaranteed freedom of education.

The primary education law, the Act on the Organization and Financing of Education, which is the regulator of relations between the public and private school systems, introduces the separation of public and private educational institutions. The establishment of private schools is free, which means that on the basis of the Act on establishment, it is necessary to enter an educational organization into the court register or any other appropriate register.\(^{12}\) Private schools are free to develop their own educational programs, except if they want to offer educational programs that are
certified in public, in other words, if they wish for their diplomas to be recognized as public documents. In this case, they must secure the approval of the State that their educational program meets the same educational standard as the public educational program. The contents of the programs of those schools which have adopted the public programs are supervised by the school inspectorate. Churches and other religious communities may establish schools under the same conditions as any other private-law subject. Private schools are free to enroll students and to determine their own admission criteria. Private primary and private general secondary schools which implement public programs and are not licensees, have the right to public funds to the extent of 85 percent of the funds that the State or local community designate for salaries and material costs per student in public schools, if they comply with the conditions determined by the education laws."

**Homeschooling**

According to the Primary Education Act, parents have the right to home-school their children. However, they “must, in writing, notify the school at which their child is enrolled about the home schooling no less than three months before the beginning of the school year.” This notification “must contain the following information: the publicly established curriculum which the child will follow during home schooling, the child’s name and surname, the place where the schooling will be carried out and the name and surname of the person(s) who will be teaching the child.” The primary school at which the pupil is enrolled is obliged to “keep documentation on the pupil’s home schooling.” The law prescribes that such pupils “must receive an educational standard at least equivalent to that provided by the mandatory curriculum provided by the public school.” For this reason, “the pupil must sit examinations on the basis of which the achieved standard of knowledge” is assessed. Testing is performed at the end of each school year. In the first three school years pupils are “tested in knowledge of their native language and mathematics. In the fourth through sixth school years they are tested also in knowledge of a first foreign language. In addition to these subjects, in the seventh through ninth school years pupils are tested in knowledge of history, civic and patriotic education and ethics, physical education, one subject in the field of natural sciences, one in the field of social studies and one in the field of arts. “If the pupil fails to achieve the required standard of knowledge for an individual school year, they shall be entitled to revise the examination before the beginning of the following school year. If the pupil again fails to demonstrate the required level of knowledge, they must continue their elementary education in the following school year at a public or private elementary school.”

“Children with special needs who are educated at home following specially adapted curricula or special education and training programmes” are “tested according to the
manner of assessing the achieved standard of knowledge determined by those programmes.”

The primary school at which the pupil is enrolled issues the pupil a home schooling certificate which is a publicly recognized document.

**School choice not limited by family income**

Private initiative in the area of education is enabled, but at the same time conditions have been imposed: the restriction relates to their quality. If the curriculum does not ensure the required standards of quality, it is not confirmed and does not receive public accreditation, since it would not be in line with the right of children to education. A similar duality of enabling and conditions can be found in financing. All private schools established in this way receive public support, specifically 85 percent of the funds which “the state or local community provides for salaries and material costs per pupil in public school.” Yet the same article also places conditions on financing: schools must provide a curriculum for all class years, the employed teachers must fulfil the legal requirements for teachers in public schools, the level of fees is limited and teacher salaries are tied to the salaries of teachers in public schools. In order to make private schools accessible to all classes of the population, the amount of tuition fees in private schools which receive public funds (that is in a majority of schools) is limited. The highest tuition fee may not exceed 15 percent of the cost per student in a public school.

**School distinctiveness protected by law and policy**

**Distinctive character**

Private schools (primary and grammar schools) formulate their own curricula, but they must be confirmed by the expert council for general education. The expert council does so when it determines that their curriculum ensures an “equal educational standard.” This requirement is toned down for curricula provided by private schools under special pedagogical principles (Waldorf and Montessori schools, for example), for which the expert council must determine that they provide “minimal knowledge enabling the successful completion of education and are recognised by an appropriate association of such schools”. Private initiative in the area of education has therefore been enabled, but at the same time conditions have been imposed. If the curriculum does not ensure the required standards of quality, it does not receive public accreditation, since it would not be in line with the right of children to education.

As of 2012, there are four Catholic Church grammar schools, a Catholic Church primary school, a Waldorf primary school and grammar school, and a Montessori primary school.
The Waldorf and Montessori primary schools follow pedagogical principles which are specific for Waldorf and Montessori schools. The Catholic Church schools do not follow a specific educational philosophy; however, they are characterised by a specific ethos.

**Decisions about admitting pupils**

No special admission criteria exist for entering primary school, except a child's age (6 years). The primary school “located in the school district of the family residence is obligated to enroll their children, but parents are free to choose another primary school of their preference with the school's approval.”

Students are allowed to enroll in secondary schools (*gimnazija*, vocational or technical schools) if they have acquired a primary school certificate. Marks from their primary school education “are the most important criteria for enrolment, although schools may specify additional admission criteria (art talent tests, sports achievements, etc.). The transition from compulsory to upper secondary education is regulated at the national level through the national joint application system. Schools with a limited enrolment (mainly reputable *gimnazije*) take into account the marks from compulsory subjects obtained in the last three years of compulsory education (grades 7, 8 and 9).”

The private schools which receive public funds are not allowed to select their students on the basis of religion.

**Decisions about staff**

Primary and upper secondary school teachers may “qualify for a traineeship position in schools after obtaining a Master’s degree with the title of *magister professor*. The traineeship period of 6-10 months consisting of training in a work placement ends with a Teacher Certification Examination, which finally qualifies them for a permanent position.

Teachers of the first cycle (3 years) of primary education are generalist teachers. Teachers in the second cycle are either generalist teachers or specialist teachers, while in the third cycle only specialist teachers are allowed to teach”. “School teachers of general subjects must hold a relevant diploma (from a faculty of education, faculty of arts, faculty of sports, faculty of mathematics and sciences, and others) and the title required by legislation.
In upper secondary education all teachers are specialists in their field. Depending on the institution and subject, vocational and technical schoolteachers are required to complete either 1) an appropriate academic or professionally-oriented Bachelor's or Master's degree programme or 2) the highest possible qualification in their own vocational field and pedagogical course of 60 ECTS. A minimum of 3 years of work experience is often required.”

**Accountability for school quality**

Both internal and external evaluations are included in the quality assurance system.

Internal evaluations are conducted by schools. “The quality of the provision of the educational process is measured by means of different methods of self-evaluation, while on the national level various national and international research projects measure the pupils’ academic results.

The self-evaluation process is the responsibility of the school heads.

For external evaluation of schools, the state-wide external examinations of knowledge are used, at the end of the grades 6, 9 and 13. The evaluation procedures are conducted by expert bodies: the National Testing Committees and the National Matura Committees”. Technical and administrative support is provided to all committees by the National Examinations Centre. “The administrative aspects are evaluated by the National School Inspectorate which conducts inspections of schools and ensures protection of preschool children and other learners’ rights. The areas of control include the organisation, financing and conduct of educational programmes.

The implementation, monitoring and evaluation of new educational programmes, new programme elements and their changes follow the procedures prescribed by the Modernisation of Educational Activity Rules. Monitoring of educational practice is the responsibility of three public institutions: the National Education Institute, the Institute of the RS for Vocational Education and Training (vocational education programmes) and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

The evaluation of the education system in its entirety is conducted by a special ministerial advisory body called the Council for Quality and Evaluation. The Council proposes a list of evaluation topics and determines evaluational research projects. On the basis of research reports, the Council reports to the minister. External evaluation of the education system also includes annual analysis of pupils’ and students’ results in external assessment at the national level; analysis of national results and indicators
in comparable international research projects (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS, TALIS, SITES, CIVICS, etc.); and analysis of results of basic, developmental and applicative research projects in all areas of education co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency.”

**Teaching of values**

The foundation of the education system in Slovenia is the common European heritage of political, cultural and moral values (human rights, pluralistic democracy, tolerance, solidarity, and the rule of law). For this reason the main values which public schools are obliged to promote are: respect for human rights, intellectual freedom, mutual tolerance, acceptance of diversity, equal educational opportunity, justice, solidarity, responsibility, truth, good general and vocational knowledge and skills, national identity, the balanced cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development of pupils etc. Some of these values are embodied in the aims that schools should try to achieve.

Since Church and State are, according to the Constitution, strictly separated, the confessional religious education and other confessional activities (mass, prayer, etc.) are legally prohibited in public schools.

The private schools (Catholic, Waldorf and Montessori) also promote values which are specific for each of them.
Endnotes


2 In this report the term “primary school” is used as a common term for nine-year compulsory elementary and lower secondary schools. In some other texts the term “basic school” is used instead.

3 Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (News, 20.4. 2012). “At the end of the 2010/11 school year, education in elementary schools with a regular curriculum was successfully completed by 17,775 pupils, in elementary schools with adapted curriculum by 184 children and in elementary schools for adults by 256 students”. At the end of the year, 4percent of all pupils had an improvement exam in one or more subjects in the final grade, and 87percent of them improved on previously attained negative marks. In 2011, 1.4percent of students were drop-outs from primary education (Ibid.).

4 Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (News, 28.4.2011). At the end of the 2009/10 school year “a majority of the 20,100 upper secondary school pupils completed general programmes (8,311): 8,156 pupils graduated from general and professional gymnasiaums, and 155 pupils finished the matura course. Technical upper secondary education was finished by 8,015 pupils, of whom 1,629 graduated from vocational technical programmes and 156 finished vocational courses. Since enrolment in short-term vocational and vocational upper secondary programmes has been declining, fewer pupils have finished their studies in recent years. In the 2003/04 school year, the share of pupils who finished short-term vocational and vocational programmes was 26.3percent, at the end of the 2006/07 school year the share was down to 21.8percent, and in the 2009/10 school year down further to 18.7percent. More than half of all pupils completed “upper secondary education from the fields of general programmes and from the social sciences, business and law” (Ibid.).

5 The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education for vocational and technical education and training are both partially responsible “for the system for certification of national vocational qualifications, and the agreement of education policies with social partners. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for the training of police, customs and penal administration officers; the Ministry of Public Administration deals with professional training and further education programmes for civil servants; and the Ministry of Defence handles the education of military personnel. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health collectively manage and decide on health care matters relating to young people, the proper nutrition of young people, AIDS, tobacco use, drug abuse and violence. The Ministry of Culture co-operates with the Ministry of Education in all
matters pertaining to both education and culture (e.g. development of libraries, literacy and reading culture, linguistic issues, inter-cultural dialogue, etc.)” (Eurydice, Structures of Education and Training Systems in Europe, Slovenia (2009/10), p. 6.)

6 In Article 6 of the Primary School Act, it is stated that the language of instruction in primary schools is Slovenian, and that the language of instruction in primary schools providing instruction in the languages of ethnic minorities is Italian and, in bilingual primary schools, Slovene and Hungarian. In primary schools in areas defined as ethnically mixed areas populated by Slovanes and members of the Italian minority, students in schools which provide instruction in Slovene must also learn Italian, and vice versa, pupils in schools providing instruction in Italian must also learn Slovene.

7 Eurydice, Organisation of the education system in Slovenia, 2008/09, p. 25.

8 Ibid., p. 25.

9 Ibid., p. 65.

10 Ibid., p. 81. “The implementation of the provisions of the Act are regulated by detailed rules which are set out by government rules and regulations and other documents that are in the domain of the minister responsible for education (Ibid.)

11 Ibid., p. 81.

12 Primary schools and secondary schools may be established only in the form of an educational institution, or as an organization, thus their establishment must comply with the Institutes Act. However, all other schools may be organized as educational institutions, business companies, or other legal entities (e.g. societies, institutions, political parties, chambers, trade unions).

13 To grant licenses means in fact to include private schools or kindergartens in the public network of educational institutions, and consequently to equally apply all conditions that apply to public schools or kindergartens.


15 Primary Education Act, Art. 88.

16 Ibid., Art. 89
17 Ibid., Art. 89.
18 Ibid., Art. 90.
19 Ibid., Art. 90.
20 Ibid., Art. 90.
21 Ibid., Art. 90.
22 Ibid., Art. 90.
23 Ibid., Art. 92.

24 The Organization and Financing Education Act, Art. 86.

25 Ibid., Art. 89

26 Ibid., Art. 17.

27 Eurydice, National system overview on education systems in Europe, Slovenia (September 2011), p. 3.

28 Ibid., p. 5.

29 Ibid., p. 8.


References


