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# PROCEDURES OF PLACING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMES IN SLOVENIA

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## Abstract

The aim of this research was to establish whether the implementation of early intervention legislation is uniform throughout the national territory. The research included all pre-school children (1121) between 2008 and 2012, placed either in the programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support (regular classes) or the adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units. We tried to determine whether the gender proportion is equally distributed across the national territory and if there is a significant difference according to the two pre-school programmes. For this purpose we used a Z-test with a 5% risk in hypothesis testing. It determined that the gender proportion is similar in all regional units; structural difference thus does not result statistically significant ( $Z = 0,26$  for males and  $0,02$  for females); critical value for the appropriate number of degrees of freedom is  $Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ . The proportion of children placed in regular classes and special class units, however, results statistically significant;  $Z = 2,96$  with  $Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ . Similarly, the difference in the gender proportion in the entire sample results statistically significant;  $Z = 15,11$  with  $Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$  (the proportion of males is higher than those of females). In both programmes the representation of children by gender results more or less even across the national territory (two-thirds of males and one-third of females). With the results obtained, the research confirmed that the procedures of implementing early intervention legislation are uniform throughout the Slovene national territory.

**Keywords:** adapted curriculum, adapted programme placement.

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## **Introduction**

In Slovenia the education of children with special needs is regulated by two laws: the Elementary School Act (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia, 87/2011) and the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia, 58/2012) which came into force in 2013. The latter defines early intervention as part of the consultancy services; it defines the operation of centres of expertise (supporting inclusive education) and other rights. The Act defines the following groups of children with special needs: children with intellectual disabilities, blind and visually impaired children, deaf children and children with hearing impairment, children with speech and language impairment, children with motor impairment, children with long-term illnesses, children with learning problems, children with autism and children with emotional and behavioural disorders. Slovenia has seen increased involvement of children with special needs in regular preschool or elementary school programmes since 2000 (Opara, Barle Lakota and Globačnik, 2010: 23-57, 61; Globačnik, 2012: 21), when the first Placement of Children with Special Needs Act was adopted (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 54/2000). Slovenia is one of the European countries with the highest participation rate of children in kindergartens, achieving 74% of the total population of pre-school children up to 5 years of age (Opara, Barle Lakota and Globačnik, 2010: 69; Globačnik, 2012: 30; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2013).

## **Special education placement procedures in Slovenia**

The procedure of placing children into different programmes is run by the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, through its 9 regional units. Each of them has a Commission for Placement of Children with Special Needs which produces an expert opinion, on the basis of the mandatory documents, interview with an applicant and with a child. Prior to giving an expert opinion, the Commission needs to obtain the opinion of the kindergarten in which the child is to be included regarding material and spatial conditions, as well as regarding the specialist staff availability. The Commission with its expert opinion can suggest a suitable programme placement or it can establish that the placement is not necessary. The National Education Institute sends it to the applicant and issues a Decision. The placement decision determines the choice of the education programme; kindergarten, date. If necessary it determines the programme's scope, method and type, as well as the professional operator; accessories, space and equipment; occasional or permanent attendant for children with physical disabilities, etc. The

proposal for placement can be made by parents, guardians or an institute.

## **Two Pre-school programmes for children with special needs**

The Placement Act determines the inclusion of pre-school children with special needs into one of the two programmes: the programme for pre-school children with adapted curriculum and additional professional support and the adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units. The choice of the programme is based on the Decisions made by the Commissions. Children included in the first programme attend regular classes and are provided with additional professional support which can be carried out by suitably qualified experts from other institutes. It can be implemented as a support for overcoming the deficits; as an advisory service or study help. It can be carried out whether inside or outside class, individually inside or outside class. The scope and the method are defined by the placement decision, in accordance with the legal norms. In the pre-school period additional professional support is limited to a maximum of three hours a week.

The adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units includes children with prominent developmental deficits, particularly those with intellectual disabilities or other accompanying deficits. In Slovenia the network of kindergartens with special class units has changed during the last years (Globačnik, 2012: 29) due to the ever more important process of inclusive education (Kobal Grum, Kobal, 2009: 37) and due to an increased emphasis on programme quality improvement (Brejc, Koren, 2010: 15). According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport ([www.mizs.gov.si](http://www.mizs.gov.si), 2014) the number of children with special needs has been constantly increasing in the last decade while the number of children with special needs included in the kindergartens with special class units has decreased.

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The study included the entire pre-school population of children with special needs (1121) between 2008 and 2012 (Surs, 2012, 2013). The programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support (regular classes) included 904 children - 589 boys and 315 girls, whereas the adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units included 217 children - 162 boys and 55 girls.

We used the statistical method for establishing the structural proportion of children placed into the two programmes (according to gender) and

the Z test with a 5% risk in hypothesis testing to establish the differences between the proportions.

$$Z = \frac{p_1 - p_2}{\sqrt{p \cdot q \left( \frac{1}{N_1} + \frac{1}{N_2} \right)}}$$

$$p = \frac{f_1 + f_2}{N_1 + N_2}$$

### **Aim and goal**

The research was focused on defining the functions of the Commissions for Placement of Children with Special Needs in Slovenia and determining the population of children (according to gender) placed in one of the two programmes. Additionally, it was focused on outlining the practical application of the Placement Act through the work of expert commissions in nine regional units.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were set up:

- H1: there is a statistical difference in the gender proportion between two pre-school programmes - the programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support (regular classes) and the adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units.
- H2: there is a statistical difference in the proportion of children between the two pre-school programmes.
- H3: there is a statistical difference in the gender proportion in the entire sample of children.

### **Results**

Table 1 – Structural proportions (according to gender) in individual regional units for the programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support (regular classes)

REGIONAL UNITS	p - M	p - F
Ljubljana	0,65	0,35
Celje	0,62	0,38
Koper	0,65	0,35
Kranj	0,71	0,29
Maribor	0,67	0,33
Murska Sobota	0,63	0,37

Nova Gorica	0,60	0,40
Novo Mesto	0,59	0,41
Slovenj Gradec	0,74	0,26
Σ M	589	p – M = 0,65
Σ F	315	p – F = 0,35
Σ Σ (N)	904	

Note: N- numerus; p – proportions; M – males; F - females

Table 2 – Structural proportions (according to gender) in individual regional units for the adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units

REGIONAL UNITS	p - M	p - F
Ljubljana	0,67	0,33
Celje	0,16	0,84
Koper	0,57	0,43
Kranj	0,65	0,35
Maribor	0,48	0,52
Murska Sobota	1,00	0,00
Nova Gorica	0,43	0,57
Novo Mesto	0,62	0,38
Slovenj Gradec	0,00	0,00
Σ M	162	p – M = 0,75
Σ F	55	p – F = 0,25
Σ Σ (N)	217	

Note: N- numerus; p – proportions; M – males; F – females

Table 3 – Structural proportions (according to gender) in both pre-school programmes

Structural proportions /M	Structural proportions /F
$Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ $Z = 0,26$	$Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ $Z = 0,02$

Note: M – male, F - female

Z test showed that the structural difference (according to gender) between the two pre-school programmes does not result statistically significant.

Table 4 – Structural proportions (according to gender) in each pre-school programme

Programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support (regular classes)	p – M = 0,63	p – F = 0,37
Adapted programme for pre-school children in special class units	p – M = 0,55	p – F = 0,45
$Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ $Z = 2,96$		

Note: p – proportions, M – males, F – females

According to the Z test the proportion of children placed in regular classes and special class units results statistically significant, the result being in favour of regular classes.

Table 6 – Structural proportions between the two pre-school programmes

Gender	The number of children	p
M	1193	0,62
F	745	0,38
$\Sigma (N)$	1938	
$Z_{0,05}(1000) = 1,96$ $Z = 15,11$		

Note: M - male, F - female, N- numerus; p - proportions

The Z test determined that the difference in the gender proportion results statistically significant, the result being in favour of male population. Numerus is higher because some children were placed more than one time.

## Discussion

The aim of this research was to compare the operation of individual Commissions for Placement of Children with Special Needs, considering the issued Decisions on placing children with special needs in two pre-school programmes. It confirmed that the proportion of individual types of special needs is more or less even across the regional units. The proportion of children with special needs, placed into two pre-school programmes by expert commissions in different regional units, resulted more or less even. The research demonstrated that the commissions

follow the same professional standards in applying the existing legal norms. It established that there is no significant difference in the proportion of children (according to gender) between the two programmes. It confirmed that children with special needs are more often placed in the programme with the adapted curriculum and additional professional support carried out in regular classes (Orel, 2007: 182). It determined a statistically significant difference in the gender proportion; the result being in favour of male population (67% males and 33% females) in both pre-school programmes. With the results obtained, the research confirmed that the procedures of implementing early intervention by the Commissions for Placement of Children with Special Needs (and thus the corresponding legislation) are uniform throughout the Slovene national territory.

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