

System of early education/care and professionalisation in **Lithuania**

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I. Contextual Data

1.1. Introduction

The development of formal education system in Lithuania started by the end of the 14th century. The first known school was opened at Vilnius Cathedral more than 600 years ago (in 1397). In 1773, joint Lithuanian-Polish State educational institution, the Educational Commission, was formed. To use the contemporary terminology, it was the first ministry of education in Europe.

Literary sources assume that the first preschool in Lithuania was founded in Klaipėda in 1847. Lithuania found itself abreast of the major countries of the world on the territories of which preschools were only beginning to be founded at that time (in 1863 in Russia, in 1855 in the USA and in 1837 in Germany).

The history of Lithuanian education of the recent seventeen years could be divided into three relative phases: phase 1 from 1990 to 1997, phase 2 from 1998 to 2002 and phase 3 from 2003. **During phase 1, corresponding to the first stage of the Lithuanian education reform**, much effort has been expended to reform the *contents of education* (curricula, textbooks, pedagogy). In 1993, two alternative state programmes were proposed for pre-school educational institutions: 1) The Guidelines of Pre-School Education: a Curriculum for Teachers and Parents, and 2) The Kindergarten Programme Vėrinėlis (The String). A new type of pre-school educational institution – a kindergarten-school – has emerged for provision of education according to pre-school and pre-primary curriculum for three- to eleven-year-olds.

During phase 2, in 2002, the Concept of Pre-primary Education [“Priešmokyklinis ugdymas”] was approved. Legitimized as a discrete part of the educational system in the Law on Education in 2003, pre-primary education created preconditions for its further development and efforts to make it available to all children. As an alternative to pre-school education, the Law sets out provision of educational assistance to five or six-year-olds who do not attend pre-school institutions.

The third phase of development of education in the independent State of Lithuania is linked with the *National Education Strategy 2003-2012*. One of the goals to be achieved by 2012 is to ensure universal availability and social fairness of education. The goal focuses on: the development of pre-school education services, especially for children experiencing social exclusion and also for children from families of high social risk; and also creation and further development of the universal pre-primary education system.

1.2. Demographic features impacting on ECEC

At the beginning of 2007, the estimated population of Lithuania was 3384,9 thousand persons, i.e. by 18,4 thousand less than at the beginning of 2006. Over seven years population decreased by 127,2 thousand persons, or 3,6 per cent. In 2006, due to the natural decrease, the population declined by 13,5 thousand, due to the negative net migration – by 4,9 thousand persons. Over 2000-2006, due to the natural decrease, the population declined by 72,8 thousand, due to the negative net migration – by 54,4 thousand persons.

At the beginning of 2007, 66,8% of Lithuania's population lived in urban areas. Over the previous seven years, the number of the population in urban areas decreased by 4,1%, while in rural areas – by 2,6%. At the beginning of 2007, the number of population aged 60 and older amounted to 691,9 thousand, or 20,4%, while at the beginning of 2000 – 668,3 thousand, or 19%. At the beginning of 2007, each sixth man and each fourth woman were of elderly age. At the beginning of 2007, the number of children was by 22,2% lower than that of elderly people, while at the beginning of 2000 – by 6,2% higher. At the beginning of 2007, there were 129 elderly persons per 100 children (at the beginning of 2000 – only 94). At the beginning of 2007, the mean age of the population of Lithuania was 38,6 years, while at the beginning of 2000 – 36,7 years.

1.3. Families

In 2006, the number of marriages contracted reached 21,2 thousand, i.e. by 13 8 couples (6,6%) more than in 2005. Over the recent fifth years, after the decade (1991-2001) of rapid decrease, the number of marriages increased by one-third.

The number of marriages where at least one of the spouses was under 18 years age decreased significantly. In 2006, the number of underage men, who contracted a marriage, was 11, that of women – 189, while in 2000 this number reached 25 and 349 respectively.

The age of newlyweds has been increasing. In 2006, the average age at first marriage was 27,3 years for men and 25,1 years for women. Women contracting a marriage were by, on average, 3,5 years younger than men. The number of remarriages made up about one-fifth of the total number of marriages (in 2006-23,4% for men and 21,7% for women).

In 2006, the average duration of marriage was 13 years. One-fifth of the total number of married couples divorced after less than 10 years of being married, 15,6% - during the second decade of marriage, 4% - after having been married more than 25 years. Two-thirds of the divorced couples had common children under 18. After the divorce, on the average 10 thousand children were left without one of the parents (usually without a father) annually. In 2000-2006, as much as 72,3 thousand children lived in incomplete families.

Year	Total divorces, thousand	With common children, total, thousand	%	Number of children, thousand
2000	10,9	7,5	69	11,2
2005	11,1	7,0	63	9,9
2006	11,2	7,1	63	9,9

Tab. 1 Divorces by number of children (aged 0-17)

In Chart below we can see that over the last 9 years, the rate of employed women in Lithuania shows that majority of over 25 years old women are employed. The employment rates for women's are almost the same as the rate of employed men at the same age for those over 35 years old, but less women aged from 25 to 29 year are employed as men's. The reason is clear - the age of women giving birth has been increasing. In 2006,

the average age of women giving birth was 27,7 years, of mothers at the birth of their first child – 25,2 years.

Age groups	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total									
15–64	72.0	72.1	70.5	69.4	69.3	69.7	69.0	68.3	67.4
15–19	18.6	17.9	11.6	8.6	6.8	7.4	5.3	4.1	4.2
20–24	67.7	67.8	63.3	59.6	58.2	56.1	49.5	47.7	49.3
25–29	88.2	88.3	88.6	87.0	86.6	86.3	85.3	84.7	85.2
30–34	89.3	91.4	88.9	88.7	89.1	89.9	90.3	89.1	88.1
35–39	91.1	92.6	90.7	91.7	90.6	89.8	90.0	89.9	87.7
40–44	91.9	91.0	90.5	90.7	91.4	91.4	91.1	91.2	88.5
45–49	91.0	89.0	89.0	87.6	88.0	88.6	89.1	87.6	85.4
50–54	86.0	85.7	83.5	83.2	83.6	85.3	85.1	83.4	81.1
55–59	59.4	60.0	63.6	64.3	66.6	71.4	72.6	69.4	72.9
60–64	24.4	25.5	26.5	24.9	27.1	30.6	33.2	35.8	31.8
65+	6.1	5.5	7.5	5.7	4.5	5.0	3.9	3.9	4.5
Males									
15–64	77.7	76.3	74.2	73.4	73.2	73.1	72.7	72.0	70.5
15–19	23.5	21.3	16.2	11.1	8.6	8.8	7.1	5.2	4.7
20–24	77.0	75.3	70.1	67.0	64.5	63.0	57.2	55.5	55.2
25–29	93.0	91.7	90.3	91.1	90.4	90.2	91.2	89.7	90.6
30–34	93.9	94.0	92.1	92.3	92.2	92.7	94.2	93.0	89.9
35–39	93.2	92.9	92.3	92.8	93.1	92.9	91.2	91.6	88.9
40–44	90.8	90.7	89.7	89.6	92.2	91.3	91.7	91.7	91.4
45–49	91.5	86.8	89.0	87.2	88.3	88.3	87.9	87.9	85.9
50–54	88.4	84.7	82.1	82.1	83.9	85.4	86.4	84.9	84.6
55–59	78.4	79.2	75.7	77.9	78.4	79.2	76.0	73.0	74.0
60–64	35.8	36.6	38.3	39.6	40.3	44.5	51.1	54.0	44.4
65+	9.8	8.8	10.3	8.3	7.3	8.3	6.4	6.3	7.1
Females									
15–64	66.7	68.2	67.1	65.8	65.7	66.5	65.6	64.9	64.6
15–19	13.5	14.3	6.8	6.1	4.9	6.0	3.5	2.9	3.7
20–24	58.4	60.3	56.4	52.1	51.7	48.8	41.5	39.6	43.2
25–29	83.2	84.7	87.0	82.9	82.8	82.3	79.3	79.5	79.8
30–34	84.6	88.9	85.7	85.2	86.0	87.1	86.5	85.3	86.3
35–39	89.1	92.3	89.2	90.6	88.1	86.7	88.8	88.2	86.6
40–44	92.9	91.2	91.3	91.7	90.7	91.5	90.5	90.7	85.8
45–49	90.6	91.0	89.0	87.9	87.8	88.9	90.2	87.3	84.9
50–54	84.0	86.6	84.7	84.1	83.3	85.2	83.9	82.1	78.1

Age groups	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
55–59	44.5	45.0	54.1	53.7	57.3	65.3	69.9	66.5	72.1
60–64	16.2	17.6	18.0	14.2	17.5	20.5	20.3	22.7	22.8
65+	4.2	3.8	6.1	4.4	3.0	3.3	2.6	2.6	3.2

Tab. 2 Labour force activity rate by age groups and sex (average annual; per cent)

1.4. Information on family leave policies and benefits to families¹

Families are entitled to following types of leaves:

- Pregnancy and delivery leave – 126 days starting from the 30th week of pregnancy;
- Maternity (paternity) child care leave until the child is one-year old;
- Paternity leave - 1 month from the date of childbirth for fathers to cooperate with the child's mother at childcare.

The state support system for families and children comprises two main parts: benefits paid irrespective of the family assets and income and the assistance paid to low-income families according to their income level.

To ensure integrated reform of the state family allowances system and social security for all families raising children, the Law on Child Allowances was adopted in 2004 restructuring the family allowance paid for children under 3 and the allowance for families raising 3 and more children providing for the assistance to every child raised by the family until he reaches majority.

To improve the provision of social assistance to children and families raising children, amendments to the Law on Child Allowances were adopted in 2006 providing for the financial assistance to families who adopted children, improving the conditions for children in foster care, creating more favorable conditions for foreigners living in Lithuania and taking care of children who are citizens of the Republic of Lithuania.

To ensure assistance to low-income families raising children of school-age, the Law on Social Assistance to Pupils was adopted in 2006 providing for two types of social assistance to schoolchildren: free meals for pupils and provision with school supplies.

Family and child benefits:

The Law on Benefits to Children provides for the following benefits:

1. Benefits to children raised in families:

- a birth grant;
- a child benefit;

¹ **Update:** In 2008, new parental leave arrangements were introduced. Lithuania now has the longest parental leave with the highest level of compensation of earnings. Parental leave can be extended until the child is 3 years of age, the compensation for the first year's earnings is 100% (a ceiling does exist, but it is very high), for the second year it is 85%, and during the third year parents are entitled to a low flat-rate benefit. Recently a new social guarantee was introduced for parents using parental leave, enabling them to combine it with part-time work. In this case, the parental benefit covers the difference between the current salary and the full benefit.

- a benefit to a conscript's child.
- 2. Benefits to children under guardianship (curatorship):
 - a guardianship (curatorship) benefit;
 - a settlement grant;
- 3. A pregnancy grant.

These benefits are paid from the State budget irrespective of whether the person is covered by state social insurance or not.

- The **maternity benefit** for women, who gave birth after 30 weeks of pregnancy and later, is paid for 126 calendar days. In cases of difficult delivery and birth of more than one child, the benefit is paid for additional 14 calendar days.
- The amount of the maternity benefit is equal to 100% of the reimbursed salary of the beneficiary. During the month, this benefit may not be lower than one quarter of the insured income of the current year valid during the month in which the pregnancy and delivery leave was granted.
- A pregnant unemployed woman who, under the Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance, is not entitled to receive the maternity benefit, is granted a lump-sum benefit of 2 MSL (LTL 260) 70 calendar days (at 28 weeks of pregnancy) before the delivery.
- From 1 July 2007 one parent or foster-parent is paid a **maternity (paternity) benefit** equal to 100 percent of the compensated salary until the child is half a year old, and 85 percent, until one year.
- The amount of the **paternity** benefit is equal to 100% of the reimbursed salary of the beneficiary. Paternity Benefit is paid maximum 1 month from the date of childbirth.

According to the data of Sodra (State Social Insurance Fund of the Republic of Lithuania), the average number of recipients of maternity (paternity) benefit per month was 17879 in the first half of 2007 (including 14390 mothers and 3489 fathers). Paternity benefits until the child is one year old were paid to 4207 fathers. According to the data of the Department of Statistics, 31265 babies were born in Lithuania last year.

- Every child born receives a lump-sum benefit of 8 MSL (LTL 1040).
- Every adopted child, irrespective of the payment of the benefit for the child born, receives a lump-sum benefit of 8 MSL (LTL 1040).

For those raising one or two children:

- Every child under 3 receives a monthly benefit of 0.75 MSL (LTL 97,5).
- Every child between 3 and 12 receives a monthly benefit of 0.4 MSL (LTL 52).

For those raising three and more children:

- Every child under 3 receives a monthly benefit of 1.1 MSL (LTL 143).
- Every child between 3 and 18 and older, who are full time students at the general education school, vocational, high or higher school (including the period of academic leave), but only under 24 receives a monthly benefit of 0.4 MSL (LTL 52).
- Every child of the soldier of the compulsory initial military service receives, during the father's service, a monthly benefit of 1.5 MSL (LTL 195).

Low-income families and single persons are entitled to the following financial social assistance:

- social benefit;
- compensations for housing heating costs, hot water costs and cold water costs.

Social benefit is paid to the family and single person if the monthly income is below the level of the state-supported income (i.e. LTL 235 per person). There are two types of social support for pupils: free meals for pupils; provision of pupils with supplies prior to the beginning of a new school year.

From 1 September 1995, the Lithuanian Government established a rate of payment for the maintenance of children at pre-school institutions (except for private ones) that amounts to 60% of the daily cost of children's meals per each day of attendance. No payment may be charged when the child does not attend because of his/her illness, during the time of either parent's annual holidays (including forced leave from work), when the parents constantly work in shifts, when children attend special groups of general institutions or special kindergartens for children with severe development disorders and when children are educated by integrating them into general groups. No payment is charged to foster parents or guardians for the children in their care and also to parents receiving social support.

Payment for education of children in pre-school institutions is reduced by 50% in the following cases: if the child has only one of the parents (the other parent is dead, either of the parents is deprived of parental rights, unaccounted for, serving a sentence in prison, when the parents are divorced or when the child is raised by a lone mother or father), also if the father is doing a military service or if one of the parents in a family of learners is a full-time student of an educational institution. The above mentioned reduction is applied to families with three or more children (children under 18 and above 18 years of age if they study at day schools of all types or are invalids of Disability Groups 1 and 2).

Town and district councils and companies, agencies or organizations may establish reduced payment rates for education of children in pre-school institutions from the municipality budgets and their own funds, respectively.

Non-working mothers caring for their children at home receive allowances until the child turns three years of age. Educational and health care institutions provide methodological, diagnostic and consultancy assistance for families providing pre-school education to their children at home.

1.5. Social issues

Children may exercise their right to provision of pre-school and/or pre-primary education if their parents (foster parents) chose so and the municipality has sufficient number of places in educational establishments providing pre-school and pre-primary education. Meanwhile, for children from families of social risk or social exclusion, on recommendation by the children's rights protection services, care groups are established at the pre-school and general education establishments. Children are taught pre-school and pre-primary curricula and receive all indispensable social services like free meals, clothing, footwear, learning aids; their sleep and rest is organized, and they receive temporary minding and care.

From the Strategic goals of the Ministry of Health: "... To pay special attention to pregnant women and infants, in terms of health care provision. To give more attention to the preservation and improvement of health of children and youth. To provide free vaccination according to the immunization schedule and ensure free dental services to children."

Number of hospitals and hospital beds for 100 000 population in Lithuania is 1.5 times higher comparing to the average of the European countries.

As a family member, the child's health insurance is covered until his/her 18th birthday. The mandatory health insurance ensures a full payment of systematic and preventive examinations, medical treatment and rehabilitation, mandatory vaccinations, immune and chemo prophylaxis according to programme, which is annually determined by the Ministry of Health, emergency medical service including emergent medical transport, medication on receipt from the approved list of medications, orthopaedic and other utensils. Medical examination is mandatory before enrolling preschool and before the beginning of each school year.

Vaccine	Schedule	Vaccine	Schedule
BCG	birth;	IPV	6 years; [From January 2007]
DT	6 years;	MMR	15 months; 6-12 years;
DTaPHibIPV	2,4,6,18 months; [From January 2007]	OPV	6, 12 years;
DTwPHibIPV	2, 4, 6, 18 months;	Rabies	1st contact; +3,+7,+14,+28 days <i>[after exposure]</i>
HepB	birth; 1, 6 months; <i>[or 12 years (x3)]</i>	Td	15 years;

Tab. 3 Mandatory vaccination

One of the parents has the right to paid sick leave to care for a sick child. For a child younger than 14 years the parent has the right to use 14 working days of paid sick leave. If the health condition of the child demands longer care, a commission can approve a prolongation of absence from work with a compensation of income to 120 days for children younger than 7 years. One of the parents has the right to 6 months of sick leave (with compensation) for a child under 18, if the child has a serious health problems. The compensation during sick leave amounts to 85 % of average monthly salary.

One of the parents from family raising two children under 12 years old or one child with special needs under 18 years, has the right to paid one free day monthly. One of the parents from family raising three or more children under 18 years has the right to 2 paid free days monthly or 4 hours shorter working week.

	At-risk-of-poverty rate	At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers, excluding pensions
Households with children	22,6	28,8
1 adult with at least one child	47,9	53,8
2 adults with 1 child	15,7	19,4
2 adults with 2 children	18,0	24,1

	At-risk-of-poverty rate	At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers, excluding pensions
2 adults with 3+ children	45,0	59,8
Other households with children	14,3	19,2
Households without children	17,6	22,3

Tab. 4 At-risk-of-poverty rate in households with children, 2005 (Percent)

Note. At-risk-of-poverty rate is a share of persons with income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The at-risk-of-poverty rate is calculated using the at-risk-of-poverty line equalling 60% of the median equivalised disposable income. Equivalised disposable income is calculated dividing the disposable household income by equivalised household size. This equivalised income is then applied to each member of the household. The equivalised household size is defined according to the modified OECD scale (which gives a weight of 1 to the first adult, 0.5 – to each subsequent adult and 0.3 – to each child aged under 14.)

	Families total	Children total	Children by age group				
			0–3	4–6	7–9	10–14	15–17
Total	16361	36535	4954	6111	6684	10774	8012
due to:							
parents' drunkenness	9943	23008	2873	3689	4173	6967	5306
parents' abuse of gambling game	3	6	-	-	-	2	4
lack of skill	3122	7392	1329	1375	1332	2055	1301
parents' violence against children	761	1266	119	192	272	358	325
unsuitable use of assistance	537	1291	126	253	281	385	246
termless restriction of parents rights and newly born child	283	468	153	105	65	91	54
other reasons	1712	3104	354	497	561	916	776

Tab. 5 Number of families at social risk and children in them by causes and age group in 2005

Special attention is paid to the development of the social skills of children coming from families that belong to the social risk group; such children receive special emotional support and undergo a therapy of play and arts. For children from families of social risk

or social exclusion, on recommendation by the children's rights protection services, care groups are established at the pre-school and general education establishments. Children are taught pre-school and pre-primary curricula and receive all indispensable social services like free meals, clothing, footwear, learning aids; their sleep and rest is organized, and they receive temporary minding and care.

In order to ensure the principle of equal opportunities in early childhood education and reduce the number of children at risk, the following political measures are taken:

- The Provisions of the National Education Strategy 2003-2012 approved by the Lithuanian Seimas resolution No. IX-1700 (Žin., [State News] No.71-3216) of 4 June 2003 set out the development of pre-school and pre-primary education, the creation of family information and counselling system and opening up the access to pre-school education primarily to children living in rural areas, in social exclusion or at social risk in their own families.
- From 2003, the Education Law legitimized compulsory pre-school and pre-primary education based on the pre-school and/or pre-primary curricula to individual children following the recommendation by the children's rights protection services. This provision applies to children from families of social risk or in social exclusion.
- Among the measures set out by the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2006-2008, is the founding of pre-school and pre-primary education groups prioritizing rural areas. Its implementation yielded 37 pre-school - and 46 pre-primary new teaching staff positions in rural areas. There are plans to provide for no fewer than 150 such staff positions from 1 September 2007.
- The Programme of Support and Integration of Orphans and Children who Lost Parental Care 2005-2008 is being implemented (coordinator the Ministry of Social Security and Labour).

No separate or specialized groups are created for children disadvantaged in described ways (except care groups for children from families of social risk). At-risk children receive early childhood education at mainstream education institutions where they receive individualized educational support and the content of the curriculum is tailored to the child's educational needs.

II. Data on provision / early childhood services

2.1. Current statistics

Pre-school education belongs to the zero level of education. It comprises pre-school and pre-primary curricula.

Pre-school institutions belong to the non-formal type of educational institutions. Pre-school educational institutions include nurseries, nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens; nurseries, nursery-kindergartens and kindergartens for pre-school education of children with special needs and also sanatorium-rehabilitation schools. The pre-school and pre-primary curriculum is also implemented by kindergarten-schools and other schools of general education (most often in rural areas with no pre-school educational institutions).

Neither pre-school nor pre-primary education is compulsory. Up to the age of seven, any child may be educated at home, and both the child and his/her family are entitled to provision of educational assistance, including special pedagogical or psychological counselling, the necessary information, etc.

The management of pre-school education institutions is decentralized and its network depends on municipalities.

There is a vivid differentiation between municipalities by the number of children attending pre-school education institutions. Among the factors most strongly affecting the attendance figures of pre-school education institutions is the percentage of the urban population and people in employment within the municipality, or in other words, the larger the urban population of the municipality, the higher the number of children attending kindergartens, and, on the contrary, the larger the rural population or the poorer the municipality, the smaller the number of children attending kindergartens.

	2000	2003	2004	2005
Total number of pre-school establishments	714	672	655	656
nurseries-kindergartens	533	525	519	524
kindergartens	181	147	136	132
general education schools with pre-school education groups	259	296	241	249

Tab. 6 Pre-school establishments

	2000	2003	2004	2005
Total number of children	90087	89469	88423	90021
in nurseries-kindergartens	66597	67228	67374	68184
in kindergartens	9182	6740	6628	7722
in kindergartens-schools	12571	13726	13083	12091
in general education schools with pre-school education groups	1737	1775	1338	2024

Tab. 7 Number of children in pre-school establishments

	Total	Urban areas	Rural areas
Aged 1-6 and older	54,7	74,6	20,4
Up to 3 years of age	23,5	33,3	5,7
Aged 3-6	70,0	95,5	27,2

Tab. 8 Children attending pre-school establishments as a percentage of the total number of children of a certain age group, 2006 (end of year)

	2000-2001	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Total number of pre-primary groups	1,076	1,991	2,050	2185	2125
Total number of children in them	16,171	29,724	31,628	27376	30645
Number of pre-primary groups in schools of general education	632	843	896	999	946
Number of children in them	7,692	9,620	10,342	11727	10307
Number of pre-primary groups in pre-school education institutions	444	1,148	1,154	1189	1179
Number of children in them	8,479	20,104	21,286	15649	20338

Tab. 9 Number of pre-primary groups and children in them

Families raising pre-school children at home receive educational assistance according to a procedure established by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Children of 5–6 years of age who do not attend pre-school educational institutions receive educational assistance according to a procedure established by the the Ministry of Education and Science. A psychologist with a degree in higher education provides psychological assistance to children. His duties include diagnostic, consultative and educational work. Public health service specialists provide methodological assistance to teachers and parents on matters related to children's health. An increase in the number of high social risk families made pre-school educational institutions start establishing ward groups for neglected children and those who have been temporarily deprived of their parents' care. On noticing any instances of violence, intimidation, exploitation and sexual or other kinds of abuse against children, teachers must provide the necessary assistance to them and inform about it the management of the institution and institutions responsible for the protection of children's rights.

School-age children have possibility to participate in different after school activities according to their free choice: music group, art group, drama group, dance group, sports group etc. For example Lithuanian Children and Youth center in Vilnius has more than 60 different hobby groups.

2.2. Governance, regulation, administration and inspection of services

According to the Law on Education, the purpose of education supervision is to evaluate the implementation of State education policy, education provision, education quality, prudence of expenditures of allocated funds, implementation of education management decisions, implementation of the Law on Education and other legislative acts in the area of education, reliability of data on educational activity and also to promote improvement of performance by organizational, legislative and economic means. The purpose of education management is to provide the quality of the national educational policy implementation by means of management instruments, such as monitoring, planning, authority and responsibility distribution and supervision.

After the European Parliament approved the European Council's recommendations on cooperation in the evaluation of educational quality in 2001, the goal of Lithuania to design the internal and external auditing systems in schools and to focus on educational quality assurance is in full compliance with the European guidelines for education.

The Long Term Development Strategy of the State (*Valstybės ilgalaikės raidos strategija*) approved by the resolution of the ["Seimas"] in 2002 includes provisions on education that envisage quality assurance of the Lithuanian education system in the process of Lithuania's integration into the common education space of the European countries, performance of external evaluation of institutions and development of the monitoring, audit, diagnostic tests and strategic planning systems. The Provisions of the National Education Strategy 2003–2012 (*Valstybinės švietimo strategijos 2003–2012 m. nuostatos*) approved by the resolution of the ["Seimas"] in 2003 envisage measures to ensure the quality of education development. One of the measures is modernization of education research and assessment, including development of a state system for surveying pupils' achievements, regular commissioning and performance of research into the status of different fields of education and gradual replacement of certain education supervision and inspection functions by the school audit (internal and external) system. The main purpose of further restructuring of the education supervision system is to ensure its optimal contribution to the improvement of the quality and efficiency of education on the national, regional and school levels.

The spring of 2003 saw the approval of the Internal Audit Methodology Project for Pre-school Educational Institutions. The aim of the Project was to develop and offer pre-school educational institutions an instrument for self-evaluation of their activities. The Project's goal was to improve the culture of internal audit and planning of activities in pre-school educational institutions. The immediate tasks were to develop and test the methodology and prepare for its roll-on across the country. In 2007 all preschools started to implement Internal Audit Methodology.

In 2005, important documents concerning the evaluation of the education system were approved. They include the National List of Education Performance Indicators (*Nacionalinių švietimo būklės rodiklių sąrašas*) and the Procedure for Monitoring the State of Education (*Švietimo būklės stebėsenos tvarka*).

The founder of an educational institution carries out supervision of that institution's management and pedagogical activities. The supervision is regulated by the General Regulations of Supervision of Educational Institutions (*Bendrieji švietimo įstaigų priežiūros nuostatai*) adopted in 2000.

Supervision of the quality of higher education studies is performed by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (*Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras*).

Inspection, is carried out by inspectors of the education section in the county governor's administration and specialists of the corresponding divisions of the Ministry of

Education and Science. It is a systematic observation, analysis, testing and evaluation of the education system, its separate links and establishments. The founder conducts an ongoing observation of an educational institution and performs its comprehensive evaluation every seven years. Such evaluation is based on the analysis of the internal evaluation of the educational institution, observation of pedagogical practice during visits, analysis of work accomplished by learners, conferences or interviews with the learners, teaching staff, leadership, parents (foster parents or guardians) and other individuals related to the operations of the institution, analysis of the documents, facts and measurable indicators. Based on the information collected and the school records presented by the heads of the educational institutions, the founder annually files a dossier on the municipality's educational activity and presents it to the county and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The Internal Audit Methodology for Schools of Pre-primary Education (2005) regulates the internal audit model, organization and use of school self-evaluation procedures and requirements for the internal audit conducted at schools of pre-primary education. The Methodology is applied in institutions of pre-school education, including nurseries, nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens, kindergarten-schools and other providers of education implementing pre-school and pre-primary curriculum. Areas of activity for the evaluation of schools include the school ethos, learning and education of a child, his/her learning achievements, assistance to children and families, resources and school management. Every area of evaluation includes activity indicators and ancillary indicators that help to reveal more thoroughly different aspects of the areas undergoing evaluation and indicate the outcomes to be achieved. The Methodology sets out self evaluation of a school to be performed in two stages, by carrying out the 'broad' and 'in depth' audits. The internal audit is initiated by the head of the school which is responsible for the performance of the internal audit at school and the use of its findings. Director of a pre-school institution carries out self-evaluation and planning of the institution's activity. Internal audit in kindergarten-schools ["Mokykla-darželis"] is organized and performed by the kindergarten-school; it is based on the development plan worked out and the methodology of organizing internal audit. Internal audit is organized by the director of the institution and coordinated by the deputy director. The kindergarten-school council assess the managerial performance of the heads of the educational establishment and offer their opinions during their appraisal process.

2.3. Key policies and practices

The purpose of pre-school education is to help children satisfy their inherent, cultural, including ethnic, social and cognitive needs. Pre-school educational institutions carry out the functions of childcare and upbringing thus helping families and ensuring the flexibility and variance of the system.

Pre-primary education is intended to help the child prepare for following the primary education curriculum. The General Concept of Education in Lithuania (1992) defined pre-school education as an integral part of general education. Prior to 1 September 2007, all pre-school education establishments taught two alternative national pre-school curricula. Starting with 1 September 2007 all pre-school education providers start offering their own pre-school curricula which must meet the criteria established by the Minister of Science and Education. These curricula focus on integrated activities instrumental in building the foundations of five competencies: communicative, social, health care, cognitive and artistic. The learning process includes different models based on spontaneous,

teacher-inspired, purposeful individual and group activity. Learning comes along social services – meals, rest, care and minding. The key outcome achieved through the education process is child's maturity and readiness to follow the primary schooling curriculum. The maturity is measured using Pre-school Education Standards. The standards establish the target outcomes in each of the five above listed competencies (e.g. competence in communication: the child is able to speak and listen to adults and peers; focuses on the story or conversation; shows interest in reading and writing; is able to speak with regard of context; displays an intuitive feeling of the model of native tongue, etc.).

The activities of pre-school establishments are regulated by the Requirements for the Regulations on State- and Municipality-Run Schools approved by the order of the Minister of Education and Science in 2004. The activities, education procedures, organization of work, management and other functions of all pre-school educational institutions are subject to the provisions of the Requirements. Every pre-school educational institution devises its own regulations in accord with these Requirements.

The Concept of Pre-primary Education (2000) defines the concept of pre-primary education as a stage in consecutive education linking education in the family or at a pre-school institution (kindergarten) with education at school; it also sets out its goals, objectives and principles, the necessity of validation of universal pre-primary education and its place in the system of education.

Education in a pre-primary group is conducted under the General Programme of Pre-primary Education and Self-education approved by order of 24 June 2002 of the Lithuanian Minister of Education and Science. The programme defines the main aims and principles of the education of children from the age of 5 to 6 or 7, the most important competencies necessary for the child to continue education at school and also the main activities and methods practiced at this stage of education.

In 2003, the Pre-Primary Education Standard was approved. It set out the guidelines for maturity that a child following the pre-school curriculum should attain.

The new Law on Education adopted in 2003 defines the purpose and goals of pre-school and pre-primary education [“Priešmokyklinis ugdymas”], institutions where pre-school and pre-primary education curricula are implemented and other conditions of education.

Outline of the Models for Organizing Pre-Primary Education (2003) is a document containing recommendations to assist municipality education authorities, founders and principals of schools to achieve more effectiveness in organising pre-primary education.

Outline of the Procedure for Organizing Pre-Primary Education (2005) defines the way pre-primary education should be organized in general education, pre-school education and special schools providing pre-primary education curriculum.

Outline of the Procedure for Assessing the Child's Maturity to Follow the Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education Curriculum (2005) defines cases and procedures when and how the child should be assessed.

Children may be grouped according to the following age levels:

- nursery (early childhood) for children between one and three years;
- pre-school (for children between three and six years);
- pre-primary (for children between six and seven years) (in exceptional cases from five to six years)

The maximum group size per adult, health, hygiene and safe environment requirements are established at the national level. They are regulated by the Norms and Rules for Pre-school Education Institutions approved by the order of Minister of Health. They specify that in groups from birth to one and a half year – the number of children shall not exceed ten, in groups from one and a half to three – 15, and from three to seven years it

shall not exceed 20 children. Pre-school teacher has a teacher assistant – technical worker, tasked with cleaning the facilities, feeding children and other routine chores. The minimum number of children in a group is set by the founder and, therefore, different across municipalities from five to the maximum.

Children of the nursery age level are entitled to early years education provision in nursery groups. Nursery groups may be found in nurseries intended for children between one and three years and nursery-kindergartens intended for children between one and seven years. The maximum size of a nursery group is 15 children.

Children of the pre-school age level are entitled to early years education provision in pre-school groups which may be found in nursery-kindergartens and kindergartens (for children between three and seven years), kindergarten-schools (for children between three and eleven years) or general education schools. The maximum size of such groups is 20 children.

Children of the pre-primary age level are provided education in pre-primary groups which may be found in nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens, kindergarten-schools or general education schools. The maximum size of such groups is 20 children. The maximum number of children in groups of any age level is regulated by the health norms and rules approved by the Minister of Health. Groups in pre-school institutions are formed from children of the same or different age levels. The guiding principles for the formation of groups are set out by the founder who takes into account requests from families and the possibilities of the educational institution. Groups in pre-school institutions are formed every year before September 1st. In kindergartens, when groups comprise children of the same age, they are usually of three education levels: Level 1 for children aged 3–4, Level 2 for 4–5 year-olds and Level 3 for 5–6 year-olds (children over 6 attend the third group). There can be children of different ages in a mixed group (if parents request that siblings attend the same group). Children of nursery age (1.5–3 year-olds) are brought up together in one group. The minimum number of children per group is determined by the founder.

Every group has its own premises and the support staff. The teacher/educator does not change when the children move from one level to another. They usually stay on in the same premises (except when they are moved from a nursery group to a kindergarten group as the latter may need a different type of premises). The toys and teaching aids are adapted to meet the needs of respective age groups.

When admitting children to special groups providing education for children with various developmental disorders, multiplier 2 is applied to children with slight mental disorders, average or serious speaking handicaps or those children who are slightly deaf of hearing (one said child being regarded as the equal of two children without any impairment), and multiplier 3 is applied to blind and deaf children and also to those suffering from complex multi-sensory impairment.

Since 2004, Lithuania has been a full member of the European Special Education Development Agency. Lithuania has ratified the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In formulating the policy on education of children with special needs, Lithuania follows the Salamanca Declaration. The Lithuanian educational institutions seek to ensure equal teaching and learning opportunities for pupils and improve their social and pedagogical conditions for learning. The new amended version of the Lithuanian Law on Education (2003) legitimised provision of quality education to persons with special needs. In their effort to implement the sustained integration of pupils with special needs, the country's primary, basic and secondary schools and gymnasiums are becoming more and more open to children with special needs. In Lithuania, children with special needs comprise 10% of the total number of school-age children. Out of them, 89% learn together with all other children in integrated classes. As part of the process for implementing one of the

fundamental goals of the Provisions of the National Education Strategy (2003) to create opportunities for effective education provision for children with various abilities and needs, the Lithuanian Government approved the Programme for Special Education Provision (2004) (Specialiojo ugdymo paslaugų teikimo programa). The Programme is aimed at increasing provision of education to persons with special educational needs. The targets of the Programme are to create a favourable learning environment for persons with special needs and to ensure availability of teachers adequately qualified to educate persons of different age groups that are in need of special support. In the country, the network of pedagogical-psychological services is becoming more widely spread and their activities are concentrated closer to the children's places of residence. In 2004, the Ministry of Education and Science developed the Programme for the Establishment of Pedagogical-psychological Services in Municipalities. As a result, the number of these services nearly doubled over the past two years. The pedagogical-psychological services operate in 50 municipalities cooperating with schools and their founders.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and other institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science developed the Programme for the Use of the Sign Language and Provision of Services by Sign Language Interpreters for 2005–2008. The key objective of this Programme is to achieve integration of the deaf into society and reduce their social exclusion. The Programme was approved by the Government.

In the area of special education, the process of further improvement of the legal framework is carried on. One of the issues of the long-standing debate is whether it is reasonable to have two separate laws, viz., the Law on Education and the Law on Special Education. A working group set up for the purpose by the Minister of Education is performing a comparative analysis of the two laws. In the pipeline, there is also a plan of measures for informing the general public of what will change once the two laws are transformed into one. Full time positions of teachers' aides were introduced in schools. Their numbers are likely to increase as provision of this kind of support is based on additional funds: in 2005, the pupil's basket for learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools was increased by 10%. In response to questions and proposals put forward by numerous school communities on the establishment of teachers' aides positions and the organisation of their work, the Ministry of Education and Science is planning to draw up more documents regulating provision of teachers' aides services and education of pupils in need of special support.

Special education commissions, pedagogical-psychological services and the Centre of Special Pedagogy and Psychology use the Procedure to assess the special educational needs of persons with special needs. There are special education commissions operating in pre-school education establishments and general education schools. They are set up according to the 'Procedure for Setting up a Special Education Commission and Organising its Work' established by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Early education to children up to three years of age and special education in pre-school education establishments or provision of special pedagogical assistance to children from 3 to 7 years of age at home is delivered on the recommendation of the pedagogical-psychological service after it has assessed the child's special needs.

Pupils can be assigned temporary or permanent special education. In the event that the child has made progress and the commission has established that the child no longer needs special education, it can be terminated with the approval of the psychological-pedagogical service.

The educational institution provides free transportation to and from its facilities for persons with special needs under 21 years of age who are not able to reach the educational institution by themselves (cannot walk without assistance or, because of severe

handicaps, are not safe in the street) (excluding vocational schools, colleges and higher education schools).

Responsibility for issues related to provision of social support in the form of cash benefits is placed with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. In accordance with the law, families of pupils with special educational needs receive family support provided by the government or public authorities to guarantee a certain level of the financial circumstances of the family concerned. The family support involves provision of subsidised housing, reimbursement of transport fares, contributions to the expenditure of families for fuel, electricity, telephone and utility services and granting state social security pensions, nursing and social assistance allowances.

Pupils/students with special needs who are unable to reach the special school or other institution of special education every day are eligible for free accommodation in that school's hall of residence.

Pursuant to the Law on Special Education, persons recognised as having special needs may be integrated within mainstream education in the following forms:

- by provision of total integration – i.e. education of persons with special needs in general classes or groups of general education schools;
- by provision of partial integration – i.e. education of persons with special needs in separate classes (developmental or levelling) or groups of general education schools;
- special education.

In 2007 it was 105 preschools providing special education services for 3904 children. Pupils with special educational needs are provided the support of special educators, speech therapists, psychologists and social pedagogues.

The measures implemented under the National Minority Integration into Lithuanian Society Programme for 2005-2010 create opportunities for migrant workers and immigrant families to learn the Lithuanian (state) language and facilitate their social and cultural integration. The social, cultural and educational integration of the Roma children takes place through the implementation of a national project. In the framework of this project the provision for children on pre-school and pre-primary age takes place alongside informal adult education (the same state language instruction groups include adults and children, who are also involved in joined cultural activities, etc.).

	2005	2006
Total	859	1059
By age group, years:		
0–3	196	313
4–6	155	204
7–9	111	146
10–14	235	214
15–17	162	182
By citizenship:		
Belarusian	39	23
Lithuanian	626	814
Russian Federation	70	82

	2005	2006
Ukraine	18	34
Stateless	27	105
Others	79	1
By sex:		
boys	417	533
girls	442	526

Tab. 10 Immigrated children (Data of declaration of residence of the Resident's Register)

	2005	2006
Total	2648	2274
By age group, years:		
0–3	394	404
4–6	474	426
7–9	436	353
10–14	855	708
15–17	489	383
By citizenship:		
Belarusian	22	23
USA	12	25
Lithuanian	2383	2084
Russian Federation	79	66
Ukraine	10	4
Stateless	96	62
Others	46	10
By sex:		
boys	1380	1189
girls	1268	1085

Tab. 11 Emigrated children (Data of declaration of residence of the Resident's Register)

The implementation of the Programme of Integration of National Minorities into Society for 2005-2010 (the programme is coordinated by the Department of National Minorities and Emigrants) is underway. Children of migrant workers and immigrant families receive targeted language instruction and get involved into social, cultural integration programmes. A separate national project is run for social, cultural and educational integration of Roma children. Under this project, the education of children of pre-school and pre-primary age is integrated with informal adult education.

Children who do not know the state language may receive language training at a special time, by the Lithuanian language teacher. This is an independent function of municipalities and staffing of language teachers depends on local policy and available resources.

The main parent involvement in early childhood education and care in the following: providing information to parents on different questions related with child education, organization of joint projects and holidays.

No purposive measures to involve parents of at-risk families are implemented at the national level. There are several individual projects running which lay strong focus on family involvement, namely 'Forward. Work and Family are Reconcilable', 'Step by Step' and others.

Some municipalities have socialization programmes for at-risk families, organized by religious communities and non-governmental organizations. Families are provided life skills, understanding of budget planning and parenting skills.

2.4. Main issues and trends impacting on early childhood policies and practices

To date there is no procedure designed for monitoring accessibility to early childhood education provision at the local (municipality) level, or ways to use the results of such.

Measures for the implementation of the National Demographic Policy Strategy for 2005-2007 are applied to solve demographic (low birth rate) problems at the national level. Measures for 2008-2010 are at the planning stage. Effort is made (though insufficient) to balance the activity in different spheres (economic, social, educational, development of infrastructure, etc.). The process of tackling demographic problems is controlled by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

An inter-agency working group is tasked to monitor the implementation of the measures and advice, based on the results, to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, on improvement of the existing measures. All other ministries (the implementers of these measures) report to the Government on the implementation process on three year basis.

Families are encouraged to keep their children between birth and one year at home. As established by the Education Law, pre-school education and care are provided only for children from the age of one.

Currently amendments to the Education Law are made to provide for pre-school education and care from birth. The Provisions of the State Education Strategy for 2003-2012 have established the development of the infrastructure of pre-school and pre-primary education in rural areas as priority. The already drafted Pre-School and Pre-Primary Education and Care Development Plan for 2007-2012 introduces diverse and flexibly adjusted to family needs forms of provision (e.g., several hours per day, several days per week, weekend and other types) better suited for child education and care from birth to the age of three. The draft includes complex models of services to child and family, e.g, pre-school curriculum for the child coupled with different informal adult education programmes: language instruction, computer literacy, and similar, also pedagogical counselling on child education. The Plan will include the fostering of administrative and managerial skills of municipality administrative staff in order to facilitate more expedient establishment of pre-school and pre-primary education needs and prioritizing leading to more diverse forms of provision in response to the needs of different families.

Currently in a draft stage, a Model for Bettering Child's Living and Education Conditions from Birth till Compulsory School Age will be applied to tackling problems of children in families of social risk or in social exclusion from 2008. The model founded on inter-agency cooperation will enable earlier identification of children at-risk and their inclusion, in the order of priority, into schemes of pre-school and pre-primary education and care, coupled with complex assistance to the family (social, psychological, health

care, etc.). From 2007, elderships were started to staff with social workers for the work with at-risk families.

The measures planned are going to broaden the participation of children from social risk and social exclusion families in pre-school and pre-primary education and reduce social differences (children will receive free meals and specialist service, supplied with clothing and footwear and taken to the education facility).

III. Data on personnel

3.1. Preschool staff

As at the end of 2006, the teaching staff in the institutions of pre-school education stood at 12227. According to the educational level it was: university – 59,2%, higher education – 39%, secondary education – 1,8%. The teacher/learner ratio was 1 to 9.6.

Individuals with vocational or higher education and meeting the qualification requirements for the teacher of children of pre-school age established by the Minister of Education and Science may be employed as pre-school teachers. The training to acquire qualification requirements takes from three to four years. Individuals with vocational or higher education and meeting the qualification requirements for the teacher of children of pre-school age and/or pre-primary teacher established by the Minister of Education and Science may be employed as pre-primary teachers (pedagogues).

The implementer of the pre-school education curriculum is the teacher of pre-school education establishment. Pre-primary education curriculum is implemented by pre-primary education teacher-pedagogue. Pre-school education teachers work with teacher assistants.

Pre-school and pre-primary education institutions may employ psychologists, specialized pedagogues, teachers of languages and music, social pedagogues, nurses, kinesic therapists and other specialists.

Pre-school and pre-primary education teachers are responsible for the development and safety of children. Other specialists provide for specialist help to the child or family. Teacher assistant has duties of cleaning and feeding the children and bears no responsibility for their care and education.

The relationship of adults (pre-school and pre-primary education teachers) and children in the group is monitored and controlled by the Hygiene Centre and Government representative in the county. Upon establishment of violations, the founder is informed and the time to eliminate violations set. The staffing of other specialists depends on the policy of the founder and available financial resources.

3.2. Training system

The training to acquire qualification requirements takes from three to four years. Until 2008, both universities and collegiums are authorized to run curricula for pre-school and pre-primary education teachers.

From 2008, the training system switches over to non-university study programmes provided by collegiums. Students of non-university study programmes will graduate with a bachelor degree in their profession. Currently the proportion of staff with vocational and university education teaching pre-school and pre-primary curricula is the following: 42.9 percent have higher education and 51.0 percent – vocation education. The rest have higher education but in other than pedagogical field, and are presently pursuing pedagogical training.

No education or qualification requirements apply to teacher assistants. Psychologists, specialized pedagogues, teachers of languages and music, social pedagogues, nurses,

kinesic therapists and other specialists have to meet the requirements established by the Minister of Education and Science and/or Health Minister.

The training of pre-school and pre-primary teachers seeks a balance of theory and practice, yet currently the programme is dominated by theory (theory and practice ratio is $\frac{3}{4}$). It is expected that the reorganization of teacher training system from 2008 will influence the non-university studies and provide for balance between theory and practice.

All pre-school and pre-primary teachers are required to have at least five days of annual professional training when they are involved in some kind of professional development programmes. These requirements apply to other specialist staff except teacher assistants. Professional development programmes are offered to specialists of all qualifications, however, the education institutions fail to plan and support this process in a sufficiently targeted manner.

A purposive professional development programme for pre-primary education teachers implemented at the national level from 2004 until 2007, has clearly defined objectives, duration and outcome assessment criteria. Social pedagogues are trained to work with at-risk children, yet the training is tailored for work with older children. There are different professional development programmes available in assistance to pre-school and pre-primary teachers and psychologists working with at-risk children, yet they are not compulsory.

The training for teachers of children of pre-school age and the training of primary school teachers is similar in duration and graduation assessment to that of subject teachers who teach basic school and secondary school curricula (duration is four years, students write a graduation paper and take state examinations). Early childhood educators (pre-school and pre-primary) receive a slightly lower salary than subject teachers, yet it, just like the salary of the latter, depends on education, the achieved qualification category granted upon assessment of teacher's practice, and the work experience.

3.3. Quality of teachers practice

The quality of teacher's practice is ensured through the attestation system of pedagogues. The same procedure is applied when the teacher is seeking a higher qualification status, that of a senior teacher, teacher methodologist, and teacher expert. All teachers must go through attestation process. The results of every teacher's practice are assessed every five years on basis of criteria established by the Minister of Education and Science yet the teacher may select which qualification category he or she pursues. The assessment is performed by an attestation commission, set up by the educational institution or the founder. Upon the commission's approval that teacher's practice meets the requirements associated with a particular category, the teacher receives a respective qualification and has to prove his or her compliance to its requirements every five years or seek a next higher step of qualification.

The quality of teacher training is assessed by the Centre of Quality Assessment in Higher Education responsible for the assessment and accreditation of study programmes. The international inspection of the training for teachers of children of pre-school age took place in 2002-2003. Universities and collegiums conduct employer surveys. The Ministry of Science and Education commissions parent opinion surveys on pre-school and pre-primary education.

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