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Country profile prepared for the  
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*Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*

**The former Yugoslav  
Republic of Macedonia  
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)  
programmes**

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## THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

### Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) programs

#### **A. GENERAL INFORMATION, STATISTICS AND INDICATORS**

##### **Starting age of compulsory education (if applicable):**

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) the compulsory education age range is 6-14 years.

#### **1. ISCED 0 PROGRAMS (USUALLY, PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION)**

(ISCED = International Standard Classification of Education)

##### **1.1. National definition of ISCED 0 programs:**

Pre-primary education (kindergarten)

*Note:* Care and upbringing of pre-school education children is a form of child protection that includes stay, care, nutrition, upbringing, education, sports and recreational and cultural-entertainment activities, measures and activities for health promotion and health protection and improvement of the intellectual, emotional, physical, mental and social development of the child until the age of 7 or until enrolment in primary. Law on Child Protection, (Official Gazette of RM No 98/00, 17/03, and 65/04)

##### **1.2. Normative age group(s) covered by ISCED 0 programs:**

3-6 years of age

##### **1.3. ISCED 0 programs: statistics and indicators (source: UIS)**

###### *1.3.1. Enrolment:*

	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Year</b>
Gross enrolment ratio	32.1	2003/04
Net enrolment ratio	30.1	2003/04
Percentage of children entering primary education with previous preschool experience	<i>Not available</i>	

1.3.2. *Enrolment ratio by age group, 2002/03 (percentage, also including the first years of primary education when applicable):*

Less than 3 years of age	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6	Age 7
0.0	11.3	13.1 0.0(*)	24.0 0.0(*)	58.1 19.5(*)	6.3 92.0(**)

UIS estimation. (\*) Enrolled in primary education. (\*\*) Primary education enrolment ratio.

*Note:* Net enrolment ratio:

Up to age 2- 4, 6%

Age 3-6 – 19.8%

Age 6-7- 53.7%

First graders that have attended kindergarten: 57.8%

(Source: State Statistical Office, 2004.)

1.3.3. *Teachers, 2003/04:*

Total number of teachers	Of whom female (%)	Percentage of trained teachers (all)	Percentage of trained teachers (males)	Percentage of trained teachers (females)
2,934	99.3	...	...	...

1.3.4. *Funding: Not available*

	Percentage
Public current expenditure per pupil as percentage of the Gross National Product per capita	...

1.3.5. *Main source(s) of financing:*

Government, municipalities, parents, donations, etc.

## **2. OTHER ECCE PROGRAMS**

*(Generally preceding ISCED 0 programs)*

### **2.1. National definition of other ECCE programs:**

Not available

## **2.2. Normative age group(s) covered by other ECCE programs:**

*Not available*

## **2.3. Estimate number of children covered by other ECCE programs:**

5,000 children 0-6 years

## **B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING ECCE PROGRAMS (INCLUDING ISCED 0)**

### **3.1. Legislation concerning ECCE:**

The pre-school education in Macedonia is regulated with the Law on Child Protection (Official Gazette of RM No 98/00, 17/03, and 65/04), respective sub-laws and regulations, and annual programmes for child protection. According to the law, care and upbringing of pre-school education children is a form of child protection that includes stay, care, nutrition, upbringing, education, sports and recreational and cultural-entertainment activities, measures and activities for health promotion and health protection and improvement of the intellectual, emotional, physical, mental and social development of the child until the age of 7 or until enrolment in primary education, and as of 1 September 2005 until the age of 6 or until enrolment in primary education. (As of September 2005, the reception year became part of the compulsory primary education).

The service is provided and realized in kindergartens and certain aspects can be provided by legal entities and individuals. Legal entities are registered as agencies that provide services for care and stay of pre-school children. Individuals can provide such services for maximum three children of pre-school age and not less than 2 hours, including children with physical and mental disabilities.

Care and upbringing of pre-school children is realized in accordance with special programmes prepared by the Bureau for Education Development. The Pedagogical Service then submits the programme for approval to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. According to the length the programmes can be: full day, half-day, abridged, pilot programmes and programme for out-of-institution activities. There is a possibility for kindergartens to extend their working hours in accordance with the working hours and the needs of the parents. Pre-school education is provided in the Macedonian language and in the languages of the minorities. The kindergartens provide care and upbringing for children with physical and mental disabilities according to the level of disability with special programmes.

The existing groups for children from 6-7 years in the kindergartens as of 1 September 2005 continue to work in kindergartens as reception year groups as part of compulsory primary education in accordance with the law.

If in the place of residence there is no public kindergarten or there is no room in the existing kindergarten, and based on the expressed interest by the parents, the kindergartens can organize pre-school education (in line with norms and standards) in other facilities as per abridged programmes, but also counselling for children and parents.

The full price of the service is 4,508 MKD (87 USD) and parents participate with 1,490 MKD (29 USD) or 30% of the price and the rest is subsidized by the state. The children that benefit from this highly subsidized service are still those from better off families.

### **3.2. Official body/bodies in charge of supervision or coordination:**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy remains responsible for overall coordination of pre-school education. The Ministry of Health is responsible for the health promotion and health protection and the Ministry of Education and Science for implementation of programmes and standards. As per the Law on Local Self-Governance, establishment, financing, investments and maintenance of kindergartens are responsibility of the municipality.

### **3.3. Other entities involved in the provision (e.g. municipalities, local governments) and main types of providers (e.g. public, private, mixed, community-based, etc.):**

The service is provided and realized in kindergartens and certain aspects can be provided by legal entities and individuals. Legal entities are registered as agencies that provide services for care and stay of pre-school children. Individuals can provide such services for maximum three children of pre-school age and not less than 2 hours, including children with physical and mental disabilities.

### **3.4. Type of personnel involved:**

As per the law pre-school education is provided by expert workers (pedagogues, psychologists, defectologists, logopedists, doctor, paediatrician and dentists); educators, caregivers and expert for cooperation (music pedagogue, arts pedagogues, physical education pedagogue, medical nurse, social worker).

In 2005, there were in total 4,065 kindergarten employees (2,866 expert workers and experts for cooperation).

### **3.5. Type of staff training (requirements):**

- Experts' workers: university education
- Experts for cooperation and educators: university or higher education (two years of post-secondary education)
- Care-givers: secondary education

### **3.6. Recent national policies and reforms:**

Based on the National Strategy for Development of Education (2004), a draft programme for pre-school education was developed and recently released by the MoES for public review and debate. It is expected that this programme will be adopted by the Parliament early 2006. This programme emphasizes the need for

increasing access to pre-school education and recognizes and promotes the importance of alternative forms of pre-school education for children from 3-6 years, to be implemented at the local level (see: Draft National Programme for Development of Pre-school Education in RM 2005-2015, Programme plan for development of preschool education, working group: Suzana Kirandziska, Liljana Samardziska Panova, Florina Shehu, MA, Lena Damovska, Ph.D, Tatjana Atanasovska, Ph.D.). The programme also calls for using all resources available at the local level, expanding opportunities (institutional, non institutional and alternative) and mobilizing all partners, private sector, NGOs and individuals.

### **3.7. Efforts targeted at vulnerable or disadvantaged children:**

UNICEF-supported Lifestart project reaches 1,270 parents (303 Roma, 654 Albanian and 313 Macedonian) of children 0-3 years. Parents learn about characteristics of their children's development and ways on how to better stimulate and support this development in a home environment; 2,505 children (858 Roma, 975 Albanian and 672 Macedonian) from 3-6 years engage in learning and recreational activities which support and stimulate their physical, cognitive and emotional development. The project "Education for Roma children in the year before starting school" is implemented with the support of UNICEF. Its main aim is to enable Roma children to learn the Macedonian language, to improve their social skills, habits and knowledge necessary for school.

The project "Inclusion of children with special needs into the regular schools and kindergartens" continues to be implemented. It aims at diminishing the concealed selection and exclusion of certain groups of children from the educational system (for reasons of poverty, ethnic background, cultural status, place of residence etc.) However, certain selectivity still continues, manifested in a separate system of schools for children with special educational needs; unjust separation and grouping of children, etc. The "inclusion" project aims at changing beliefs and attitudes of parents, teachers and other people involved in the education of children with special needs. Therefore, the project has been introduced into more schools.

### **3.8. Special projects/programmes aiming at expanding or improving ECCE:**

The changes in programming and organizing educational practice are related to the pre-service education and professional development of the child minders and teachers.

Thus, besides interventions in the pre-service training, the implementation of the programme "Step by Step" supported by George Town University, Washington, and the Open Society Institute-Macedonia has played a considerable part in the reform of in-service training of pre-school child minders and teachers. The "Step by Step" programme aims at creating conditions for children, to choose activities within their educational process, to solve problems, to work creatively, to socialize and play together, to take care of the community and the local environment.

The programme for interactive learning in the pre-school institutions, which is supported by UNICEF and by Bishop Grosseteste College from Lincoln, Great Britain, aims at the improvement of the quality of the educational process, in order to build self-confidence and to promote the individual development of children. In 2003, this project - together with the programme "Step by step" - included all the children from

the pre-school educational groups in the elementary schools and the kindergartens, in total about 18,600 children.

“Mozaik Project” implemented by the international NGO Search for Common Ground (SCG) – started in 1998, this is a multicultural education project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. By organizing classes for pre-school children from various ethnic backgrounds (Macedonian and Albanian), Mozaik strives to break the cycle of segregation and prejudice while at the same creating an environment in which all children are considered as equal. The project is currently implemented in nine public kindergartens in 5 cities. The NGO is lobbying with the BDE/MoES for official endorsement of the Mozaik learning curriculum and its use in all public kindergartens.

### **3.9. Information concerning the curriculum (if applicable) or the contents of ECCE programs**

Programmes and standards for pre-school education have been developed for different age groups: up to 18 months; from 18 months to 2 years; 2-3 years; 3-4 years; 4-5 years and 5-7 years. They are developed by the BED in co-operation with other institutions. Several measures have been introduced to ensure the openness of the pre-school education system towards innovation and towards greater activity of both, teachers and children:

- planning of the instructional process is based on the age and the developmental characteristics of the children;
- the needs and interests of children are the basis for the instructional methods, which presupposes creating flexible educational situations in which children can find opportunities to learn, socialize, and play;
- the educational practice with children is more open towards the child's experience (in connection to their family and the local environment, with free access and possibilities of involvement of parents and other adults in the work of pre-school institutions);
- the organization of space, time and the way of grouping the children is becoming more a matter of agreement and planning according to the conditions, needs and possibilities of the children;
- the educational process can not be restricted to verbal transfer of ready made content matter (the instructor can not be a transmitter of a designated program, but an active participant in the educational process, who together with the children and other adults is creating the curriculum);
- the evaluation and the self-evaluation are the bases for introducing professionalism and professional development of the child minders and teachers, as well as for the creation of favorable conditions for educational practice.

The non-formal pre-school education is not regulated with any law or sub-law. It is only mentioned as a possibility in the law on Child Protection. There is a need to revise existing standards to ensure they support the overall child development (physical, cognitive, emotional and social) and are implemented and applicable for all forms of pre-school education regardless of the settings (formal or non-formal). In 2005, UNICEF supports the MoES in this activity.

### *3.9.1. Objectives and aims:*

Not available

### *3.9.2. Learning areas and teaching-learning methods:*

Physical and health education, introduction to the environment, speech development, elements of mathematics, art and music education are the main subjects of the programme. Greater attention is paid to children one year before going to school, in order to facilitate their successful start in the first grade.

Macedonian is the language of instruction, while separate educational groups in kindergartens and infant schools are organized for children of other nationalities. For these groups, education is provided in their mother tongue (mainly Albanian, Turkish, and Serbian).

### *3.9.3. Average number of hours per week and average amount of weeks per year:*

Not available

## **3.10. Any other relevant and pertinent information**

Pre-school education in Macedonia is provided in the existing network of 184 facilities of 51 public kindergartens with capacity of 25,000 children which is 11% of the total pre-school age population in the country. In 2004, 20,910 pre-school age children were included. Existing kindergartens could include 6% of the total pre-school age population with short programmes (Draft National Programme for Development of Education in RM 2005-2015, Programme plan for development of preschool education, working group: Suzana Kirandziska, Liljana Samardziska Panova, Florina Shehu, MA, Lena Damovska, Ph.D, Tatjana Atanasovska, Ph.D.)

In 2004, preschool education in Macedonia included a total of 36,177 children aged up to 7, or 20,517 in preschool institutions and 15,660 in reception groups within primary schools. It accounts for approximately 20.43% of the total number of children, (177,050 aged up to six). The inclusion of children in the year before starting school in 2004 was 82.23% (Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Ministry of Education and Science, October 2004).

As per the new territorial division (August, 2004), in Macedonia there are in total 84 municipalities and kindergartens are available in 40 of them. The total number of kindergartens is 51, out of which 17 are in the Municipality of Skopje and the others are in other municipalities in the country.

The decentralization process had its official start on the 1 July 2005. As per the Law on Local-Self Governance, municipalities have competencies over kindergartens in terms of ownership, financing, investments and maintenance. The competencies are transferred to the municipalities as per the annual programme for child protection for 2005 and in two phases: 1) establishment of the network of kindergartens; and 2) transfer of employees, archive, equipment, documentation and resources from central to municipal level.

Because of the urban location of kindergartens and high cost of service pre-school education coverage in the country remains very low. Possibilities envisaged with the law are not implemented and fully utilized. The annual programme for child protection for 2005 emphasizes the need to increase pre-school education coverage in the context of decentralization.

**C. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION REGARDING ECCE (TO BE COMPILED IN COLLABORATION WITH UNICEF OFFICES WHERE POSSIBLE)**

**4.1. Parenting programmes are usually addressed to parents and families of children less than 6 years of age. Please provide information about any parenting programmes in your country according to the table below:**

Type of programme	Yes or No (note for each programme)	Please estimate the number of beneficiaries (if possible)
Parenting education through early learning centres and child care centres	Y	1,270 parents (303 Roma, 654 Albanian and 313 Macedonian) of children 0-3 years, learned about characteristics of their children's development and ways on how to better stimulate and support this development in a home environment;
As component of health and nutrition programmes, such as information about child development included in health and nutrition visits	Y	Packages "welcome to life" distributed in maternity hospitals
Parent groups that meet to discuss issues of their young children, including health, nutritional status, and development		
As component of adolescent, livelihood or literacy programmes		
Media broadcast, such as <i>Sesame Street</i> , with media for and with children	N	Sesame project is planned to begin in 2006
Other (please specify)		

**Are any of these programmes targeted specifically toward the vulnerable, poor, disadvantaged or excluded? If so, which ones? (Please provide/attach any additional and relevant information if available).**

UNICEF-supported Lifestart project targets communities selected based on vulnerability criteria (poverty, non-employment, access to basic services, and infrastructure-availability of kindergartens). The project focuses primarily in poor suburban and rural communities.

**4.2. Is there a national-level system for monitoring children’s development or school readiness prior to entering primary school?**

Growth monitoring is the responsibility of the health system, i.e. the child dispensaries within the primary health care unit. Although the pre-school education focuses on cognitive development there are no systems or mechanisms in place for measuring and monitoring this or other aspects of development. School readiness assessment is undertaken at age 6-7 years, prior to enrolment in primary school. There is no standard test that is used across the country.

**4.3. Is there a policy on early childhood (ECCE, ECD, etc.) that has been accepted? If not, is there one under development?**

There is a National Strategy for Development of Education for the period 2005-2015. Pre-school education is highlighted as a priority of high importance in the context of better preparation of children for school. Based on this strategy, a Programme for Development of Pre-school Education was drafted. The programme highlights the importance of increasing pre-school education coverage through both formal and non-formal pre-school education and emphasizes the also the importance of parenting education.

In December 2005, UNICEF organized an ECD strategy meeting which brought together all ministries, institutions, practitioners, experts, NGOs and donors working in the area of ECD. The recommendations and conclusions of this meeting will inform the finalization of the draft plans and the meeting will serve as a first step towards future strategic developments in ECD and pre-school education in Macedonia.

In lieu of a conclusion, a wide array of strategic questions was raised, to nurture future actions and discussions:

- What is the funding situation in the country for ECD?
- What are the most cost-effective actions to take in order to have the biggest impact on the greatest number of children?
- What does scientific research tell us? Let us “think outside the box”, and use an evidence base for our priorities and strategies in ECD.
- How can we increasingly include parents, since they themselves know their children’s needs best? With a little bit of facilitation, we can get crucial inputs and ideas from parents and communities. Therefore, we should combine bottom-up and top-down approaches and be sensitive to the “voice” of local communities.

- When setting-up bodies/steering committees, we should be very well prepared and have a very good plan, in order to be able to keep motivation and accountability. Setting up new bodies is not enough in itself.
- In addition to external funding from the donor community, other financial sources should be explored as well, such as in-kind contributions from the government or the communities themselves.
- Look at what other countries in this region have achieved in ECD and learn from them. UNICEF can assist in sharing good practices from other countries.

*[Information revised and additional data provided by UNICEF, January 2006.]*