



NATIONAL AUDIT
OFFICE OF LITHUANIA
• BRINGING BENEFITS •

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC AUDIT REPORT

DO WE USE THE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE A MORE SUCCESSFUL FUTURE FOR CHILDREN

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SUMMARY

The Importance of the Audit

It is proven¹, that out of all the steps of education the investments to early education from birth to 5 years old give the highest economic returns. Quality early education, especially in an unfavourable environment in which the children live, determine their better achievements, help create a better carrier, raise economy and decrease social expense². Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights the importance of high quality early education in order to reduce social exclusion.

The European Commission³ indicates that the foundation of effective and just education system is high quality early education and maintenance. This is how the children prepare for primary education and achieve better learning results in all later steps of education. This way, the children from unfavourable social and economic environment, as well as migrant families, are influenced positively. Based on the data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the risk of fifteen years old youth that did not attend pre-school education institutions to learn poorly is three times higher than those who attended such an institution for more than one year. When investments are made into early education and maintenance, fewer expenses are needed in later steps of education, where the decrease of split between good and poorly learning pupils costs more.

The investments to pre-school education recoup the best, however a place in institutions, which carry out the pre-school education program, is not ensured for everyone wanting to attend, the pre-school education educators working with children under five years of age have few non-contact hours, work in overfilled groups and receive the least pay out of all schoolteachers.

In order to establish the factors, which determine the inequalities of pre-school education access, and evaluate whether the conditions to provide quality education services are made, the Supreme Audit Institution has included the pre-school education audit in to the 2018 activity program.

The Purpose and Scope of the Audit

The purpose of the audit is to determine whether the preconditions for a child under 5 years of age (inclusively) were made to receive quality pre-school education.

¹ James Heckman. The Heckman Curve. Internet access: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>.

² James Heckman. 4 Big Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Development. Internet access: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/4-big-benefits-of-investing-in-early-childhood-development/>.

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *School Development and Excellent Teaching for a Great Start in Life*, 30-05-2017. Internet access: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/ALL/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A248%3AFIN>.

The key questions of the audit:

- Whether the accessibility of pre-school education is ensured;
- Whether the children are educated by having regard to their individual needs;
- Whether engaging work conditions of pre-school education educators are ensured;
- Whether the pre-school education quality ensurement system is developed.

The entities being audited:

- The Ministry of Education and Science – it shapes the pre-school education policy;
- 60 municipalities – they organize pre-school education (we questioned all of the municipalities and visited 15 of them);
- Out of 1,295 institutions, which carry-out the pre-school education program, we chose and audited 66 (56 municipality, 3 state and 7 private institutions).

The audited period – 2015-2017. In order to more correctly determine the fluctuation of indicators, we used the data from other years.

The audit was carried-out in accordance to the Public Auditing Requirements and the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions. The scope of the audit and applied methods are more thoroughly described in Annex 2 “The Scope and Methods of the Audit” (p. 30).

The Main Results of the Audit

It has not yet been ensured that the pre-school education would be accessible for all of the children, especially those raised in an unfavourable environment; the work conditions of pre-school education educators are complex: they work in overfilled groups and often are not capable of showing attention to every child; the wage is the lowest out of all schoolteachers; the quality of education is unevaluated.

1. Not All Who Want Can Receive a Place in Pre-School Education Institution

In different municipalities, 14-67 percent of children up to 5 years of age (inclusively) attend the institutions, which carryout pre-school education program. The institutions of nine municipalities lacked vacant places, 30 municipalities lacked vacant places in the institutions chosen by the parents, and however, there were vacancies in other more remote institutions. The transportation of remotely living children could incite the accessibility of pre-school education; however, 37 out of 60 municipalities transport only those children that have special education needs or those who were assigned mandatory pre-school education. Other remaining municipalities do not transport pre-schoolers. Thus, the accessibility of pre-school education is not ensured in every municipality (Sub-Chapter 1.1).

2. The Pre-School Education of Children Raised in an Unfavourable Environment is Not Ensured

More than a third (36 percent) of children, who are raised in social risk families, up to 5 years of age (inclusively) did not participate in the pre-school education process, because the municipalities did not assign mandatory education and did not organize the transportation to the institutions carrying-out the pre-school education program. These children need the pre-school education the most: by not participating, they lose the possibility to achieve better results in the future and a risk that they will be dependent on social benefits and will remain excluded increases (Sub-Chapter 1.2).

3. The Pre-School Education of Children Having Special Education Needs is Not Encouraged

35 percent increase in education voucher's value for 4 education hours per day was allocated for children with special education needs. A child with special education needs may spend approximately 10 hours per day in the institution carrying-out pre-school education program and he needs the help of education help specialist. Such financing does not motivate the development of inclusive education.

The institutions carrying-out pre-school education program have approximately 74 percent of children with determined special education needs, however, only 2 out of 50 institutions had teacher's (educator) assistants and only in special groups. Even though early intervention and help for children with special needs is effective, if the special education needs are not determined on time or if there is a lack of specialists who grant these needs, the children with special needs do not receive full help (Sub-Chapters 1.3 and 2.2).

4. The Unused Monitoring Results of the Progress that the Child Has Made

Not all pre-school education educators can use the monitoring results of the child's progress. After completing the pre-school education program, the progress reports should be handed over to the pre-school education educators, however children progress reports of approximately 12 percent of institutions carrying-out the pre-school education program end up in the archive and approximately 20 percent of reports are given to the parents. Thus, an uninterrupted education of the child in the higher education level is not ensured in accordance to his/hers needs (Sub-Chapter 2.1.).

5. The Work Conditions of Pre-School Education Educators do not Create Preconditions to Provide Quality Education Services and Decreases the Appeal of the Profession

Approximately third (32 percent) of the audited institutions breaches the hygiene norms regarding the number of children in groups – the groups are overfilled. One pre-school education educator usually works with 20 children at once. The educators must work 33 contact and only 3 non-contact hours per week. If the institutions lacks educators, those 3 non-contact hours are eliminated as well, the educators finish their assignments after work hours. More than a third of institutions could not ensure the necessary improvement of qualification of pre-school education educators as it is indicated in the statutes of law. 35 percent of institutions indicated that they lack the funds for this, thus, there are times when the educator pays for qualification improvement from his/hers own expenses. Out of all the

schoolteachers, the wage of pre-school education educators is the lowest. Thus, for young educators the work in pre-school education institutions is unappealing (Sub-Chapter 3.1).

6. There is a Lack of Pre-School Education Educators and Managers

Every year, there is a decrease in 30-49 year old⁴ educators in institutions carrying-out pre-school education program. Upon announcing the tender to take on the position of an educator, 40 percent of institutions received only one candidate and upon announcing the tender to take on the position of the manager 13 percent of institutions received one candidate. The questioned pre-school education educators indicated that a higher wage (34 percent), lesser groups (31 percent) and the work of two educators at one time for at least 4 hours (19 percent) would mostly motivate them to work in the institutions carrying-out the pre-school education program. Approximately 8.4 percent of educators indicated that they are planning to resign. Without ensuring renewal, the educators need to work in overfilled groups and this does not ensure the quality of education (Sub-Chapter 3.2).

7. The Quality of Pre-School Education is Unevaluated

The external evaluation of activity of institutions carrying-out pre-school education program has not been developed. Only 5 (out of 60) municipalities carried-out independent evaluations of institutions, which carryout pre-school education programs. Third of municipalities did not evaluate the pre-school education programs for children of their own institutions. The pre-school education programs of private institutions are not evaluated, even though the state allocates the funds from education voucher for them. Without knowing the quality of education, it is hard to purposefully plan the improvement of qualification of educators, provide help to the institution managers and ensure quality education for every child according to their needs (Chapter 4).

Recommendations

For the Ministry of Education and Science

1. In order for at least two educators to be able to work with children for at least part time, the norms should be amended by establishing a ratio of children and educators, but not the number of children in the groups (the fifth main audit result).
2. In striving for education quality, as much as possible competent specialists should be attracted to work in the institutions carrying-out the pre-school education program and that their work conditions would not be worse than the primary grade teachers:
 - 2.1. To equate the wage of pre-school education educators to the wage of primary grade teachers in order for the educators to choose work in the institutions, which carry-out the pre-school education program (the fifth main audit result);
 - 2.2. To increase the number of non-contact hours for educators in order for them to be able to prepare for education and similar activities (the fifth main audit result).

⁴ 23-12-2013 Decree of Seimas No.: XII-745 "Regarding the Confirmation of 2013-2022 National Education Strategy"

3. In order to educate the children with special education needs integrated, the training of pre-school education educators, which are meant for identifying the special education needs of children, should be ensured (the third and fifth main audit results).
4. To carry out measures, which are meant to change the understanding of society and parents regarding inclusive education (the third main audit result).

For Municipalities

In order to create conditions for every children, especially for those living in an unfavourable environment, to achieve better education results and create a more successful carrier, as well as reduce social expenses, the municipalities should ensure that more children would be able to receive quality pre-school education services. Because of this, we have sent the audit results to the municipalities, in order for them to be able to ensure the transportation of children to education institutions, take-up means to attract children in to the institutions carrying-out pre-school education programs and ensure the evaluation of their own and private institutions' pre-school education programs.

The measures for implementation of recommendations and their deadlines are provided in the report section "The Implementation Plan of Recommendations" (p. 28).