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SLOVAK EDUCATIONAL CENTRES IN WESTERN EU COUNTRIES

Problems and perspectives

Soňa Kariková a kol.





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Praha, 2018

This publication is an outcome of the KEGA 012UMB – 4/2017 research project titled “*The Concept of Educating Children of Contemporary Migrants in the Western EU Countries*”.

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INTRODUCTION

This publication summarises the findings in the area of children's education living temporarily or permanently abroad with their parents. It is an outcome of the KEGA 012UMB – 4/2017 research project titled “Koncept vzdelávania detí novodobých migrantov v západných krajinách EÚ/The Concept of Educating Children of Contemporary Migrants in the Western EU Countries”.

Slovakia is a member state of the European Union and the single labour market, which requires respective amendments to the Slovak legislation. Currently, this is reflected in two areas:

- Creating conditions for EU member state citizens to stay in the SR;
- Taking into consideration the rights of our citizens while they stay or live in other EU member states, especially the conditions related to their return to the SR. Other facts related to the integration of Slovak citizens who share certain characteristics with foreigners must also be taken into account, e.g. their children born abroad possess only a limited ability to speak Slovak.

These children represented the focus group in the research project due to the fact that providing conditions for their optimal education abroad and preparation for their commission examinations is problematic in several areas; each of them is addressed in a separate chapter.

Since the Faculty of Education at Matej Bel University has a history of research in the area of compatriots' life abroad, the first chapter explains the genesis of the interest in this topic. Based on the previously collected information, one of the issues faced by compatriot children is preparation for and performance of the commission examinations, therefore the following chapter analyses the relevant parts of the School Act. Specific proposals are hereby listed for their amendment with the aim to unify the approach and increase the quality of the process for both children and their parents. Since the preparation for commission examinations takes place mostly in educational centres, the third chapter provides details on their operation. It also discusses the examples of good practice and describes the activities performed by selected centres. In this chapter, the operation of the Czech School without Borders is explained as a model of education used by the country considered to be the closest one to the SR in terms of both culture and society. Since all children studied within the research are growing up in a bilingual environment, this topic was addressed in a special chapter. Although bilingualism has not been included in the project goals explicitly, it is closely interconnected with the research topic and provides a more complex insight into the issue. The final chapter presents the specific results which serve as background material for a follow-up and further research.

Prof. PhDr. Soňa Kariková, PhD.
Head of the research team

1 GENESIS OF THE PROJECT – INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

Following the lead of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, several departments of the Faculty of Education take part in reinforcement of the support and identity of Slovaks living abroad – temporarily or longer term. Our research activities focused on the topic of education, which is a dominant part of this issue. The basics of the issue and current problems, which are based on the research results, are shown in the text. The presented research findings formed the genesis of the completed project KEGA 012UMB-4/2017 – “Koncept vzdelávania detí novodobých migrantov v západných krajinách EÚ/The Concept of Educating Children of Contemporary Migrants in the Western EU Countries”.

1.1 Trends in the migration policy of Slovaks and education

The issue of Slovaks living abroad is still developing. According to several internet sources (e.g. <http://www.uszz.sk>, http://www.usvz.de/Konferencia_MS-Martin_2013), about 2.7 million foreign Slovaks are living around the world. The Law no. 474/2005 Coll. on Slovaks living abroad regulates the status of a foreign Slovak, his/her rights and duties in the territory of the Slovak Republic, as well as the procedure of granting the status of a foreign Slovak and competences of the central government regarding foreign Slovaks.

Under art. 2 of the Act No. 474/2005 Coll.:

- a Slovak living abroad is a person, who is not permanently resident in the territory of the Slovak Republic and is a citizen of the Slovak Republic or is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic, but maintains his/her national awareness, and he/she or his/her direct ancestor is of Slovak ethnic origin,
- national awareness means active demonstrations of being part of the Slovak nation and recognition of values representing the Slovak language, Slovak cultural heritage and traditions,
- state support of the Slovaks living abroad means a system of measures of the Slovak Republic as part of the state policy of care for the Slovaks living abroad focused on the support of national awareness and the cultural identity of Slovaks living abroad, on the support of their institutions to achieve this purpose, and on the support of relations between the Slovak Republic and the Slovaks living abroad.

This law distinguishes two categories of people described as:

1. Slovak citizens living abroad without having permanent residence in the territory of the Slovak Republic. It applies to persons who married a foreigner and moved abroad, where they have their permanent residence, but they retained their Slovak citizenship. It applies less to those Slovak citizens who have their permanent residence abroad due to work related reasons.
2. Citizens of other countries who are of Slovak origin. It applies to the members of all the emigration waves of Slovaks and their direct descendants.

The Slovak community living abroad is gradually changing. On the one hand, migrant communities which emigrated for work within the open market of the EU (mostly after 2004) have increased in numbers, on the other hand, generational exchange is on the rise, mostly in traditional overseas communities and organisations. The numbers of citizens of Slovak origin

living abroad are published on the website of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, but they are not accurate, because they do not differentiate between the categories mentioned below. For our research purposes, we divided the community into four basic groups:

1. Historical emigration – this term describes migration of Slovaks from the end of 17th century until 19th century. This emigration was a long-term migration movement within Austria-Hungary. The dissolution of the Austria-Hungarian monarchy and formation of successor states meant that the Alföld Slovaks were separated and divided between Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Bulgaria. The inhabitants and their descendants have the status of national minorities. These are minorities with deep cultural traditions, their own national heritage and a diversified system of associational life. This group is termed as a native national minority. Until now, Slovak ethnic and language regions with a developed Slovak subculture and national identity are mostly preserved in Serbia, Romania and Croatia (Filadelfi, 2012). There are accurate statistical indicators concerning native national minorities, because this cultural and educational sphere is intensively supported by the Slovak Republic.

2. Economic emigration – this term emphasizes the motive of this emigration wave. It was the economic crisis. Slovak overseas emigration (mostly to the United States of America) became a mass movement from the 1880s till the beginning of World War I. However, Slovaks leave for overseas countries even today. According to the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, ca. 800,000 citizens of Slovak origin lived in the U.S.A. in 2001.

3. Political emigration is related to the end of World War II and the beginning of the Slovak political emigration after the Czechoslovak coup d'état in February 1948 as well as to events of 1968. Partially, Slovaks started to migrate to one of aforementioned countries after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the formation of successor states – the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Family links, permanent residence and work related reasons meant that after the split in 1993, the largest community of Slovaks or citizens with Slovak nationality was formed in the Czech Republic.

4. Work emigration begins after 1989. The biggest group is comprised of seasonal workers or citizens with long-term work staying abroad. A new wave of migration was caused by the Slovak's accession to the EU, the open labour market, the euro adoption, reforms having an impact on social situation of population and new job and study opportunities abroad.

According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the number of Slovaks working abroad increased by 19.3% last year. Today, there are 135,700 people and in 2012, there were 118,000. Updated official data indicate that about 300,000 Slovaks live in Western Europe and overseas – the so called “modern migrant workers”. E.g. there were 238,308 Slovak citizens living in the Czech Republic, Britain, Germany and Austria in 2013. According to the Business Alliance of Slovakia (2015), 300,000 Slovaks abroad are divided between: 40% in the Czech Republic, 25% in Great Britain, 15% in Austria and Germany (total 80%) and the remaining 20% in Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, France, Sweden and elsewhere (e.g. 9,000 in Switzerland). In 2014, more than 2,800 people deregistered their residence from Slovakia. The number of Slovaks living abroad almost tripled from 2000 to 2014. According to B. Devínsky (2015), the accession to the European Union in 2004 caused dramatic quantitative and qualitative

changes in the emigration of Slovak citizens. Moreover, it mostly applies to relatively young citizens, because they might start a family, or they often go abroad with their children. It is therefore required to explore the phenomenon in a more complex and careful manner and to elaborate relevant measures, policies and strategies for the present and future.

In the last few years, the numbers have increased and the issue of their support from home is more relevant, because Slovaks belong to traditional European emigration nations. Together with members of Slovak national minorities living abroad, they amount to ca. 2.7 million people of Slovak origin.

Comment: Even now, there are no accurate statistical data about the number of compatriots and their children living in other countries, or even about the relationships of parents to the SR. The mentioned data are official, but come from various sources.

Figure 1 Updated numbers of Slovaks living in Western Europe

Country	According to the official data	Compatriots' estimates
England	90,000	110,000
Ireland	24,000	30,000
Germany	21,000	32,000
France	8,500	10,000
Italy	3,000	4,500
Spain	1,200	2,000
Austria	3,800	5,500
Belgium	6,000	7,000

Figure 2 Updated numbers of Slovaks living in western countries

Number of Slovaks living in overseas countries		
Country	Official data	Compatriots' estimates
Argentina	24,000	28,000
Canada	50,800	56,000
Australia	15,400	25,000
U.S.A.	560,000	750,000

Source: Concept of the State Policy of the Slovak Republic in relation to Slovaks Living Abroad for 2016–2020.

Today, migration is more often considered to be a temporary phenomenon and not an act of definitive departure from one's country. A trend known as **transnationalism** is characterized by more intensive contact of migrants with their home country. It follows from the idea of returning to the home country. It is related to the increased and more intensive effort of migrant communities in the Western Europe to improve conditions for the activities regarding satisfaction of cultural and spiritual needs and the educational needs of their children in their mother tongue. The issue of migration in Western Europe is explored and solved by the European Parliament. The European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on educating the children of migrants builds on relevant documents of the European Council, the Merger treaties and calls on member states. They state that migration within and into the European Union has grown in recent years and in several places, it caused a change in class composition. It supports

community activities and suggests increased care for the education of migrants' children. In the resolution, the European Parliament:

- supports the member states in developing a partnership among school and communities. It makes it possible for children whose parents work abroad to benefit from support programmes, support and community counselling,
- insists that migrants and their children must not only have the opportunity to learn host-country languages, but also want to use them, if they are to integrate fully,
- calls on member states' governments to provide legal migrants' children with education including official language teaching and support of their mother tongues and native cultures,
- is persuaded that maintenance and support of multilingualism must be embodied in the syllabus of all schools. It insists that preschool children should be encouraged to learn languages. The aim is to ensure that they will not be excluded from society and help them to integrate into the school environment.
- proposes that legal migrants should be provided with sufficient financial and administrative support regarding language courses led by trained staff who also understand the migrants' language,
- insists that migrant children are taught their mother tongue and languages spoken in the country of their stay. Preschool children should acquire reading and writing skills,
- supposes that the syllabus of schools visited by migrants' children should focus on their needs and teachers should be trained in intercultural skills so that they could better deal with diversity in schools.

As a reaction to the resolution and the current educational situation, the Government Office of the Slovak Republic created a document **“Concept of the State Policy of the Slovak Republic in relation to Slovaks Living Abroad for 2016-2020”**.

This document takes into consideration suggestions which emerged from meetings of the Department for the Western Europe in pursuance of the Education Committee of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad in 2014 and 2015. The policy concept meets the basic obligations of the SR to support Slovak national minorities and communities in their effort to maintain and develop language, cultural and national identity. Nowadays, the state policy focuses on upbringing and education, education system and research activities. The policy concept (see 3.2.2 Slovak communities in the Western Europe and over the sea) lists the tasks, which the Slovak Republic is required to fulfil:

- Support the teaching of Slovak language, Slovak studies and other subjects, which are necessary for compatriots' children to pass educational progress tests.
- If there are enough pupils and parents are interested in the application of the Council Directive 77/486/EEC on the education of the children of migrant workers.
- Look for ways in which to provide student volunteers and pedagogically oriented graduates with stays in compatriots' environment and organize educational and leisure activities there.
- Initiate and support certification of Slovak educational facilities established in Western Europe and overseas. This enables them to issue certificates needed for enrolment to further classes in compliance with Slovak laws and regulations. Moreover, to seek ways of securing work for qualified Slovak teachers in these facilities. Provide educational facilities with textbooks, periodicals, literature and methodological tools.

1.2 Research objectives of the Faculty of Education at Matej Bel University so far

The importance of this issue is reflected in the **research objectives** of the Faculty of Education of MBU in Banská Bystrica. They are supported by the International Cooperation and European Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Since 2009, the Faculty of Education of UMB has taken part in two research projects:

1. “Situation and needs analysis of Slovak education system abroad (Analýza stavu a potrieb slovenského školstva v zahraničí)” (project finished in 2013);
2. “Impact of educational and sociocultural factors on formation of national identity (Vplyv edukačných a sociokultúrnych faktorov na utváranie národnostnej identity)” (project started in 2015).

The following text offers a closer look at genesis of research findings, which resulted in the current research goals. They were carried out in recent research and became the basis for an intensified solution to the issue of Slovak communities living abroad.

Implementation of the “Analysis of the Condition and Needs of the Slovak Educational System Abroad” research

The project goal was the analysis of educational needs in the selected European countries. The research is focused on:

1. Identification of the current condition and needs of the Slovak educational system and education in the Slovak language in the Slovak communities abroad;
2. Drawing up proposals for the implementation of educational activities in the Slovak language for compatriots (their offspring) who live temporarily/permanently abroad.

The analysis, the following research and the interpretation of the results and measure proposals were made using **self-designed questionnaires** as the basic research method. There were several types of questionnaires that were designed with a focus on these subjects:

- representative data of the Slovak Republic in the selected countries,
- representative state bodies that are responsible for the educational policies in the particular country;
- representatives of the various compatriot associations, which provide cultural, educational and awareness raising activities in the particular country.

The research sample was the aforesaid subjects or more precisely respondents. The selection of the respondents was determined by the assumed concentration of the citizens of Slovak origin in the particular country. These countries were selected by **the intentional subjects’ selection method** from the list of countries available on the Internet website of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad. The selection criteria were the assumed concentration of the Slovaks in the particular country based on:

- existence of a Slovak national minority recognized by the state,
- assumed concentration of the Slovaks from the historical emigration waves,
- assumed concentration of the Slovaks who live permanently or temporarily abroad after the year 1989.

The Selected Countries:

The countries were selected from the list of the EU countries based on the website of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad by the members of the research team by using the stratified sampling method. That means that countries were selected according to the concentration of the Slovaks who live there or more precisely according to the inhabitants of Slovak origin. The assumption was that the inhabitants of these countries would be interested in education in the Slovak language. The analysis was implemented in the form of qualitative research with a focus on free answers because each selected country and its respondents have specific needs regarding the motives and length of stay. One important group of citizens is those with temporary or permanent residence in the mentioned countries with school-age children to which the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic should pay attention. For this reason, there are presented several results, which were also the reason for the further focus on this topic.

Note: These findings are a result of data processing provided by the mentioned institutions in the years 2010 – 2011.

Research Results - European Countries

Belgium:

Estimated number of compatriots: permanent residence 4,200; temporary residence 6,000.

The interest in the education is for children whose parents have a long-term residence in the country. The form and the requirements were not specified. Those children whose parents work in the various offices of the EU are educated in the European Schools of Brussels, where the Slovak language is taught. Other educational activities were not discovered. There are two associations – The Society of Slovak Compatriots in Belgium and the Slovak Catholic Mission.

The Czech Republic:

Estimated number of compatriots: permanent residence 350,000; temporary residence 60,000.

Even though the greatest number of Slovaks within the EU lives in this country, there are no schools with Slovak as the language of instruction. However, the contacted authorities consider this education necessary. The education is provided in a non-organized form, which is based only on the grants received. The concrete requirement is to establish a kindergarten with Slovak as the language of instruction. The demand is from the Slovak families living in Prague. There are 12 registered compatriot associations in the Czech Republic.

France:

Estimated number of compatriots: 13,000

There is no available information provided by the contacted authorities even though a relatively high number of citizens of Slovak origin live there. There are four Slovak or Czech-Slovak associations based on the information from the websites.

Ireland:**Estimated number of compatriots: 30,000**

There is a relatively high number of Slovak citizens (according to the embassy about 25,000) who have school-age children and are interested in education in the Slovak language. Education is provided by compatriots on a voluntary basis. The Educational Centre for Slovak Children in Dublin has provided this weekend education since 2008. The pupils from this centre are registered in the School for Extremely Gifted Children in Bratislava. The teacher from this school gives them final exams at the end of the school year, so that children can complete the school year properly.

The “weekend schools” are also established in other towns and children take their final examination in Slovakia.

Germany:**Estimated number of compatriots: 60,000**

The representative office has given the questionnaires to the representatives of five compatriot associations, but with no replies. Although relatively high number of Slovaks live in the country, the embassy has not received any requests concerning education.

Austria:**Estimated number of compatriots: 30,000**

Only representatives from two compatriot associations provided information and they support the education in the Slovak language. According to the information, education in the Slovak language is provided in kindergartens and primary schools with a minimum of 15 children because citizens of Slovak origin have the status of a specific national minority. One kindergarten, one primary school and one high school with Slovak as the language of instruction as well as schools with Slovak as an optional subject or foreign language are established in Austria. Informal education in the Slovak language is provided by the compatriot associations SOVA (Slovak Educational Association in Austria) and RSKS (Austrian Slovak Cultural Association).

Note: Austria is a specific case partly because there is a system of national education, but there are also other informal approaches to the education in the Slovak language. Austria is a country where a higher number of Slovak families with school-age children have been moving mainly to the border region in the last few years. It is necessary to research further into this specific group of Slovak migrants in the future.

Switzerland:**Estimated number of compatriots: permanent residence 4,000; temporary residence 1,500**

Based on the information from the embassy a more systematic education in the Slovak language is provided for ca. ten children in the Association CENTEURO Geneva. It is provided by the compatriots with pedagogical experience on a voluntary basis. The kindergarten was established for compatriot's children in 2009. There are five compatriot associations in the country, whose representatives support the idea of education in the Slovak language.

Sweden:**Estimated number of compatriots: 5,000**

According to the local legislation education in the mother language is provided when there are a minimum of five children in the district whose parents claim this requirement. Based on the information from three compatriot associations further interest in the education in the Slovak language is required for the offspring who live there long-term, as well as for their parents. They would welcome the distribution of Slovak course books.

Italy:**Estimated number of compatriots: permanent residence 10,000; temporary residence 5,000**

According to the information from the embassy, the Italian citizens who have professional or familial connections with Slovakia, show interest in education in the Slovak language. Based on the information of the representatives of two compatriot associations, ca. 260 Slovak citizens are registered in them and they are interested in the education for children in the Slovak language. It is only implemented on a voluntary basis by the Slovak citizens with the pedagogical experience, and it is organised by the compatriots themselves. Five compatriot associations are registered in Italy.

Great Britain:**Estimated number of compatriots: permanent residence 60,000; temporary residence 200,000**

The representatives of the embassy as well as the compatriot associations support the systematic education for children in the Slovak language, and mainly for those children whose parents have permanent or temporary residence in the country. The education is provided only within so-called Sunday schools or during the weekends. It is provided by the mothers - teachers and is attended by the children aged from five to nine years. This information is provided by the two associations (Slovak Circle in Great Britain and Slovak Centre London). These two associations participate in the education for children in the Slovak language, History and Slovak Studies. They point out that even though the bilateral agreement about cooperation is signed, it is only partly put into practice. They would welcome the methodical instruction for the education for volunteers as well as the establishment of a Slovak Cultural Institute in London, which would cover the educational area in the Slovak language.

Although, part of the research was also the analysis of these issues in overseas countries (US, Canada, South America, Australia), these results are not presented because the current research is focused on the Countries of the Western Europe.

Recommendations from the Research Evidence:

The proposals proceed from the fact that a relatively high number of children regularly retake exams in the Slovak Republic and that there are many children who are at the age of mother language acquisition. These are mainly pre-school age children or children in Grades 1 to 4 at Primary Schools.

1. To prepare a study program for the Accreditation Commission with an emphasis on the preparation of the pre-primary and primary education teachers oriented on the specific needs of children temporarily living abroad.
2. To adjust the Amendment of the Act No. 245//2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education in the section adjusting the process of performing differential exams (§ 25). According to Article 5 of referred paragraph “acc. to § 23 (b) and (c) the student, who performs a special form of education has to pass the exams in school subjects determined by the school principal in the school in the Slovak Republic generally every school year...”. Proposal for the adjustment is concerned with the exhaustively determined subjects, from which the differential exams should be performed as they were under the previous edition of the law (Slovak language and literature, knowledge about historical, geographical, natural and other knowledge about the homeland country (vlastiveda), Slovak geography and history). Many primary school principals require a retaking of exams in these subjects, which the pupils have already passed abroad or even in all subjects.
3. To create a unified system of retake exams, so that these exams could also be taken abroad in the presence of qualified Slovak teachers of the corresponding stages of education and qualification.
4. When the parents live in a country where the systematic education for children in the Slovak language could not be given, teaching materials and methodology should be created by the University educationist of the Pedagogical faculties in the Slovak Republic.

According to these findings and under the governance of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic another research project has already been implemented. In it, some of the aforesaid recommendations are carried out. Therefore, other research is focused more on the educational centres with an aim to support and develop the Slovak language in children as well as adults.

Implementation of the “Influence of Educational and Sociocultural Factors in Shaping the National Identity” research

The main goal of the project was to increase the quality of the educational centres in the countries of Western Europe and overseas, where children are preparing for retake exams taking place in the Slovak Republic. Based on the identification of the critical points in this area, there is an effort to suggest a concept for the education in the educational centres, and to provide relevant data for the executive bodies in the Slovak Republic which are responsible for the education of Slovaks living abroad.

Partial Goals of the Project:

- The identification of the conceptual intent of the educational centres (content, forms), its organization, educational intent (maintaining the Slovak language versus preparation for the retake exams);
- The identification of the conditions in the educational centres - spatial and material facilities, the number and content of the lessons, the teachers’ qualification, the number and age of the children;
- The survey of the compatriots’ needs (parents, teachers) for the processing of the content of educational courses and methodical-didactic materials for voluntary teaching. In the

foreground stand the motives for the education for children and the length of their stay in the country;

Research results:

The research was implemented through a self-designed questionnaire, which was sent to those educational centres with available contact information (20 centres). The educational centres provided educational and leisure activities for more than 1,000 children in 2016. 348 children attended regular lessons in the Slovak language and Slovak Studies, and several children were preparing for the retake exams. 45 teachers, 36 qualified (80%) and 29 with pedagogical experience in the Slovak Republic (64%), 16 with pedagogical experience in the particular country (35%) provided activities in the centres.

The Department of Elementary and Preschool Pedagogy MBU has created methodical material “Hráme sa o Slovensku po slovensky” (Plays about Slovakia in the Slovak language) for the support of the activities in these centres. The material is intended to extend the children’s competence in the language and Slovak Studies through didactical devices and activities.

The paragraphs of Education Act concerning the implementation of retake exams and modification proposals were analysed in detail. The proposals were sent to the corresponding department of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Various educational activities were created for the teachers and volunteers who work in the educational centres. The content of these activities arose from the concrete requirements.

The results of the existing research show that some of the proposals have already been implemented. The important factor, in the whole problem of compatriot’s children who live abroad, seems to be help and support from the educational centres in Western Europe and overseas. The current project is a result of these findings and the project is dedicated to the needs and current problems of the centres with the focus (based on available information) on the educational centres in Western Europe.

KEGA 012 UMB-4/2017 research project titled “Koncept vzdelávania detí novodobých migrantov v západných krajinách EÚ/The Concept of Educating Children of Contemporary Migrants in the Western EU Countries”.

The concept and project intentions proceed from the existing knowledge of the issue. The project tries to identify the current problems and difficulties concerning education for children of Slovaks living abroad. Therefore, **the project goal** is the identification of the current condition of the educational centres in Western Europe, and it is focused on the establishment of the unified educational concept of those children who are preparing for the retake exams in the Slovak Republic. The project outputs will serve as a base for the specialized departments in the Slovak Republic which are responsible for the given issue (The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, The National Institute for Education in the Slovak Republic, Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, The Methodology and Pedagogy Centre). The project results will be the proposals for improving the quality of the educational centres.

The results should be:

- The establishment of the model of evaluated preparation and education for children in the educational centres in Western Europe, which could be also used in other countries outside the EU.
- The improvement of the quality of the educational centres and the establishment of the unified model of education according to the grades and thematic areas.

- The improvement of the quality of the practice for qualified employees who work in the educational centres.
- The materials for the creation of the content of retake exams being taken in the Slovak Republic and their organization and implementation.
- The establishment of the area to provide information to the specialized public alongside an area for discussion.

The existing research findings, implemented activities and other topics connected with this issue are presented in the following chapters.

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2 EDUCATION OF THE MODERN SLOVAK MIGRANTS AND POSSIBILITIES OF RETAINING COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OUTSIDE THE TERRITORY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

A new phenomenon of so-called *Transnationalism* has appeared in Slovak regional education with the entry of the Slovak Republic (referred to as SR) into the European Union. This term is associated with the modern migrants – Slovaks, who have travelled abroad for long-term educational and living purposes and are interested in maintaining intense contact with their home country. This thesis focuses mainly on families with school-age children. Apart from the fact that children are attending schools abroad (primary or high schools), many parents want them to be educated in Slovakia as well, so they have the ability to communicate in the Slovak language and know the Slovak culture. It is assumed that this decision has a two-fold rational basis: (1) it can be a temporary phenomenon and families may decide to return to Slovakia after some time; (2) to develop and maintain in their children an interest in the Slovak language and national identity while living abroad through the contact with ¹ the registering school in Slovakia and (3) to satisfy the needs in the so-called “federal life” abroad.

From the legislative point of view, the school-age children living and educated abroad are considered to be children retaining their compulsory school attendance (referred to as CSA) in a specific way outside the territory of SR. The mentioned statute is connected with the processes reflecting the current legislation whose participation is an obligation for the applicant – in this case the school-age children's (pupil's) legal representatives and registering school directors, who manage the requests and decide on the subject matter. There is a 10-year compulsory school attendance in the Slovak republic. In certain circumstances, students may finish it at the registering primary school (in case of repeating a school year) but usually in the 1st year of secondary school after reaching the age of 16.

The essential questions based on the above mentioned and to which the answers are in this chapter searched for are: (1) how are the children's legal representatives (primary and high school pupils) supposed to proceed, if they want their children to remain registered at school in Slovakia while living abroad?; (2) how are the registering schools supposed to proceed in this process?; (3) how to keep records of these children?; (4) how to control these processes?; (5) what kind of activities should be taken by the competent institutions to make this more effective on a national level?

2.1 Special compulsory school attendance

The educational legislation of the Slovak Republic allows school-age children to maintain their compulsory school attendance in a specific way (also outside the territory of the Slovak Republic) and defines this option in many legislative standards on multiple levels. From all the above mentioned legislative standards specific requirements arise for (1) legislative representatives of children (usually primary school pupils) and (2) registering schools. Maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the territory of the Slovak Republic (abroad)

¹The registering school – to which the children has been accepted based on the admission decision.

is carried out in accordance with various provisions especially within the following legislative norms²:

- (1) **Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter NCSR) no. 596/2003 Coll. on State Administration in the School System and School Self-government** and amending and supplementing certain acts as amended.
- (2) **Act of the NCSR no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (School Act)** and amending and supplementing certain acts as amended.
- (3) **Act No. 597/2003 Coll. governing the financing** of primary and secondary schools and school facilities as amended.
- (4) **Slovak Government Regulation no. 630/2008** laying down the details of funds from the state budget for schools and school facilities.

As amended by **the Act of the NCSR no. 596/2003 Coll. on State Administration in the School System and School Self-government** and on the amendment and supplements to certain Acts, it is important to work with the information that primary schools and school facilities are managed by the school director (§5) who performs the government administration at first instance. The director decides over: (1) the permission to maintain the compulsory school attendance outside the territory of SR, (2) the permission to take the commission examinations as well as over (3) the pupils' individual education abroad (so far used rarely). At the same time, the municipality in which the school operates keeps records of children and pupils at the age of compulsory school attendance with their permanent residence there. The municipality keeps records of the schools abroad which they attend (§6). In terms of §8 of the Act, the pupil maintains their compulsory school attendance at primary school in the school district of his permanent residence unless the pupil's legal representative decides under §4 of this Act. The pupil can attend compulsory school at a primary school outside the school district of his permanent residence with the permission of the primary school director to which the pupil is applying for. A primary school director to which the student was accepted notifies the director of the primary school in the district of the pupil's permanent residence, as well as the primary school founder to which the pupil was accepted. The municipality, which is the founder of this primary school, shall notify the municipality where the pupil has his/her permanent residence and his admission to the primary school in the relevant school district. **Based on that:** *An authorized department of the municipal council should have an overview of pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way including outside the territory of SR (abroad).*

According to **the Act of the NCSR no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (School Act)** and on the amendment and supplements to certain Acts (§20), the legal representative of the child is obliged to register a child for compulsory school attendance at primary school. Registration takes place within the period from 1 to 30 April preceding the beginning of the school year in which the child should start compulsory school attendance (at 6 years old). Usually the pupil attends school at a primary school in the school district of his/her permanent residence (catchment school), unless a legal representative of child chooses a different primary school. The pupil can maintain their compulsory school attendance in another catchment school after admission to primary education by the director (this school becomes the

² Educational issues are included in: Decrees of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic no. 320/2008 on primary school and no. 65/2015 on high school as well as Methodological guidelines for pupil assessment at primary and high schools (available at www.minedu.sk).

registering school for the pupil based on the decision on admission to education). Based on the director's admission, the pupil can use a specific way of maintaining the compulsory school attendance, thus also in a school outside the territory of SR (abroad). Details of the pupil's education according to § 23 let. b) "outside the territory of the Slovak Republic" or letter e) "individual education abroad" are provided in § 25 of the cited law.

Based on that:

(1) The legal representative is obliged to enrol a child who reaches the statutory age limit (6 years old by the end of August 31) for primary school education. Every child must have his/her "registering school" where he/she registers while solving all problems associated with maintaining compulsory school attendance abroad (up to the end of CSA according to the Education Act provisions and up to 16 years old).

(2) If the obligations resulting from the law on school attendance outside the SR are not fulfilled by children younger than 16 years, it is considered to be a neglect of compulsory school attendance and the school is required to proceed within the meaning of the current legislation and inform the competent authorities.

Information about pupils' education (among other data) are important in the breakdown of funds from the state budget and serve for the calculation and adjustment of normative contributions. The funding of schools and school facilities is carried out in accordance with **the Act No. 597/2003 Coll. governing the financing of primary and secondary schools and school facilities** as amended and with the **Slovak Government Regulation No. 630/2008 Coll.** as amended based on information from the data collection for normative funding. Since 2016, there are *pupils who maintain compulsory school attendance outside the Slovak Republic* noted in the *data collection statement for the normative funding* as well. It is important to note that the normative³ to a regular primary school pupil is 1430.36 euro in 2018 (the school does not receive the full amount, part is retained by the founder). Pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the territory of SR belong to the category of "*other pupils*". Normative for this group of pupils is 143.00 euro (usually 10% of the normative). The majority of the respondent directors consider this amount of money as woefully low in the context of the legal acts which the school must undertake together with the legal representatives and their pupils during their study abroad.

2.1.1 Maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the territory of SR in the context of the registering school and legal representative's obligations

The Education Act lays down (§23) **specific multiple forms of maintaining compulsory school attendance (CSA)**. The work concentrates on: (1) education outside the territory of SR and (2) individual education abroad. The director of the registering school decides on the authorization of the CSA in a specific way (§25) based on the legal representatives (or full-aged students) written request. In practice, there are cases when the pupil fulfils the ninth and tenth grade of compulsory school attendance outside the SR. The school is obliged to instruct the legal representative about their duty to apply to high school. High school in the second round of

³ The amount of the normative changes every year.

entrance exams keeps records about pupils maintaining their ninth year of compulsory school attendance outside the SR.

The pupil's legal representatives are obliged to:

- (1) Inform the school in advance about maintaining their CSA in a specific way (the best is to visit the school in person). Cooperate with the school, communicate on a regular basis and provide them with the necessary information and documents.
- (2) Request the delivery of the foreign school educational documents (syllabus, educational programme, curriculum etc.) that a pupil attends abroad and deliver it to the registering school.
- (3) Fill out the application form in which the child's legal representative requests the permission for maintaining their CSA in a specific way. The school should prepare the application for parents so all the following necessities according to the article 2 §25 of the Educational Act are included:
 - pupil's name, surname and address in the Slovak Republic,
 - pupil's identity number,
 - pupil's address of the permanent and temporary residence abroad,
 - the name and address of the pupil's school abroad, or the name and address of the school established by other States within the territory of Slovak Republic (if the school is not known in advance, the legal representative is obliged to inform the Slovak school within the specified period),
 - contact details (e-mail, phone) of both legal representatives to communicate,
 - expected duration in the case of a long-term visit abroad,
 - the written request of the legal representatives to receive the textbooks and workbooks for the school year.
- (4) According to § 23 let. b), the child's legal representative or student (if adult) is obliged to register the pupil at school within 15 days from his/her arrival to the country of residence and within 30 days submit to the registering school director a document stating the name and address of the school confirming that the pupil is attending the school abroad. If the pupil continues his/her education according to § 23 let. b), the legal representative of the child or student (if adult) shall submit this document on September 15 of the relevant school year.
- (5) The law does not specify precisely the requirement to present a certificate of school attendance only “a document”, therefore it is not needed. Only a statement of the child's legal representative about attending the school abroad with the exact name and address is needed. If the school requires an official document, it should be on letterhead paper, authenticated by a stamp and signed by the director of the school abroad. Documents can be sent via e-mail and the original by post. Part of the statement should be the curriculum of the school year (translated into Slovak if needed) with a content standard, so the registering school could compare it with the Slovak school and use it to set the subjects and content of the commission examinations.
- (6) After finishing the school abroad, the child's legal representatives are obliged to: (a) submit a certified photocopy of the school certificate to the School Council no later than 31 August of the relevant school year after finishing the school abroad and (b) the pupils are obliged to pass the commission examinations on compulsory subjects according to the School Council decision and the School Act by 31 August of the relevant school year.
- (7) The registering school provides a pupil with a textbooks and workbooks based on the child's

legal representative's application. Other costs incurred in connection with a student's CSA in a specific way are not covered by state funds, and their legal representatives pay for them according to the registering school instructions (e.g. various supplementary study materials that pupils use).

- (8) The legal representatives are obliged to make a request to the registering school for permission to sit the commission examinations in the given subjects.
- (9) In the case of termination of compulsory school attendance outside the territory of the SR where the pupils return to the registering school, the director's legal representatives will request in a written form the cancellation of maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way and specify the day of his/her arrival at the primary school.

The registering school is obliged to:

- (1) Publish legal obligations for the legal representatives in their information system if interested in maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way (the school's website, newsletter, parental meetings...).
- (2) Issue an authorisation decision of education or individual education abroad (usually for one school year) based on the pupil's legal representative's application for maintaining CSA outside the territory of SR.
- (3) Based on the pupil's legal representative's application (part of an application for permission to maintain CSA abroad), provide pupils with textbooks and workbooks from subjects that are expected to be part of the commission examinations.
- (4) Inform the legal representatives in advance about the obligation to carry out the commission examinations in subjects determined by the director of the registering school, after comparing documents with the content of the education abroad.
- (5) Agree with the legal representatives of pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the territory of SR about the dates of commission examinations well in advance of that school year in which the pupil wishes to complete the exam.

The abovementioned description of processes related to maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way is for laymen often difficult to understand, both in the wording of laws and the decrees for the pupil's legal representatives. This is one of the main reasons why most schools, especially those with many years of experience, have their **own internal guidelines and forms of relevant applications**. The directive is drawn up by the school director and contains all the information necessary for the proper way of maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way.

Schools that systematically and seriously progress in this area record the entire agenda in the *personal file of the pupil* who is maintaining compulsory school attendance abroad. The recap of the whole process described above:

- (1) **Written application** of the legal representatives maintaining compulsory school attendance in a specific way, including the application for the issue of textbooks of the relevant school year.
- (2) **The director's permission** to maintain compulsory school attendance in a specific way – outside the SR.
- (3) **The original of the school attendance certificate** (or the legal representatives statement) indicating the subjects with the content description the pupil is being taught in the curriculum abroad.

- (4) **Written application of the legal representatives to perform commission examinations** for the relevant period.
- (5) **An authorisation decision to perform the commission examinations** for the relevant period and notification of the date.
- (6) Commission members **letters of appointment, commission reports** for individual periods, tests, projects, other outputs resulting from evaluation requirements.
- (7) **Official certified statement from school abroad** as well as its Slovak translation.
- (8) **Consultation and communication overview** of legal representatives (via e-mail, telephone, in a written form together with a record and content date) with an authorized person from the registering school and relevant teachers during the time of maintaining CSA in the relevant school year.
- (9) And other relevant records.

In case of non-compliance with the deadline in pupils with compulsory school attendance up to the age of 16, the school is obliged to notify the competent authorities about *the neglect of compulsory school attendance*. In the case of non-compliance with study conditions abroad in pupils over 16 years of age, the director may decide to abandon the maintenance of compulsory school attendance and ask the pupil to submit a request for study interruption.

2.2 Commission examinations

Based on the written request of the pupil's legal representative, a pupil who maintains a compulsory school attendance in a specific way according to § 23 let. (b) and (c) may perform commission examinations. In the application, the pupil's legal representative indicates the school years for which the commission examinations will be carried out. Legal representatives are required to apply in writing form for the permission to undertake the commission examinations in the given subjects.

Pupils maintaining CSA in a specific way according to § 23 let. e) – individual education abroad – take the exams of all compulsory subjects determined by the curriculum of the registering school relevant school year, except for subjects based on upbringing. The subjects of the commission examinations are usually determined by the director based on an assessment of the pupil's curriculum from a foreign school. Subjects of the commission examinations on the 1st-4th grade (ISCED 1) are Slovak language and literature, mathematics, national history and geography and the compulsory subjects of the relevant primary school year not taught at the school abroad. Subjects of the commission examinations on the 5th-9th grade and on the secondary school are Slovak language and literature, history, geography (focused on Slovakia) and others determined by the comparison of the Slovak and foreign school curricula. The school directors tend to recommend legal representatives in their own interests to acknowledge the educational papers at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, to transfer marks to the Slovak classification (equivalence), as well as to submit the relevant documents to the registering school.

Based on the written request from the pupil's legal representatives, the director determines:

- subjects of the examination,
- the content of the exam and the expected performance in terms of the educational standard,
- the place and date of the exam (exact date and time, usually by 15 May of the calendar year in which the pupil is supposed to complete the exam) after consultation with the pupil's legal

representatives,

- a decision to authorize the performance of commission examinations on specific subjects no later than 15 days before.

The exam itself should be preceded by intensive communication between the pupil, or his/her legal representatives and the class teacher or teachers of individual subjects. Through regular communication, the optimal conditions for preparation and good handling of commission examinations are created. The content of the consultations is used to be determined by the relevant methodological body of the registering school (ISCED 1 - methodical association, ISCED 2, 3 – subject committee). Part of the consultation is to define the content and scope of the exam, enter various written (or oral, if technical options allow it) tasks, solve example tasks, give examples of solutions and to explicitly define evaluation and classification criteria.

A pupil may, because of serious reasons, in particular because of difficulty in travelling to the registering school, take the exam in a different school in the Slovak Republic. He can do that after the agreement between the legal representative of the pupil or student (if adult) with the registering school director and with the school director where the exams will be taken. The school gives the certificate to the pupil based on the results of the commission examinations.

A pupil who did not make a request to sit the commission examinations will take them after he finishes the individual compulsory school attendance. Based on the results of the commission examinations the school director will place the pupil into the corresponding grade.

The commission examinations are conducted according to legislative rules. A commission for the commission examinations has at least three members. The commission consists of the chairman who is normally the school director or authorised teacher, examiner who is normally the teacher of the given subject and another member of the commission who meets the classification criteria for the given subject or other related school subject. The school director may allow the presence of the child's legal representative at his commission examinations. The result of the commission examinations will be declared publicly by the commission chairman on the day of the exam. If the pupil takes the commission examinations in the registering school the results will be recorded in the pupil's class record and the school will give the certificate to the pupil. The protocol on the test results will be prepared and signed by the commission members.

The result of each commission examination is final for the pupil and based on the Decree No. 320/2008 about primary school, §11, the following text is stated in the additional clause on the certificate issued by the registering school: *“The pupil is evaluated on this certificate from the subjects from which he was not evaluated on the certificate issued in the school year....by the school....for.....grade.”*

Legal representatives of the pupil do not have to request commission examinations if they do not intend to be included in the educational system of the Slovak Republic. In this case, the pupil does not have any requirement to take the commission examinations.

The problem is that not all applicants respect the legal duty to apply for commission examinations and subsequently also to attend (more in the 2nd chapter). The step to improvement in this field could be a legislative change that allows commission examinations to be taken in the country of permanent residence in so called *educational centres* (a draft amending school act).

2.2.1 Pupils' records

A very problematic area in these processes is **the records of pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the SR** on the national level. Another issue is also the availability of results for further processing and for various professional purposes. According to the Act of the NCSR 596/2003 Coll. about state administration in education and school self-government and amending and supplementing certain acts as amended, the scope of the local government is also defined (§10). The District Office (referred to as DO) processes **data for the statistical processing of upbringing and education data** at schools and school facilities in its territorial scope. Also very problematic is determining the actual number of pupils that maintain school attendance outside the SR, because the legislative duty to report this number during the annual collection of statistical data about schools and pupils is not defined in the law. Based on the wording of the law according to which (§35) the schools and educational facilities included in the system are bound to provide statistical data during annual surveys to the ministry about:

- the number of classes, teachers and employees, highest achieved education and qualification at September 15,
- the number of children, pupils and listeners and their age structure broken down by educational language, nationality, field of study or study programme, special educational needs at September 15 of the school year,
- the number of diners in the canteen, children and pupils living in dormitories, the capacities and incomes of the canteens and dormitories at September 15 of the school year,
- injury rates of children and pupils for the previous school year,
- the school libraries at December 31 of the calendar year and
- the equipment of the schools and educational facilities at December 31 of the calendar year.

Based on that:

(1) According to the law, schools do not have an explicitly defined responsibility to provide statistical data during annual surveys about pupils maintaining specific school attendance to the ministry (or numbers, or countries, or particular schools or the length of the stay...).

(2) Pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the SR are submitted in the part X, in the data collecting processes about the school and pupils (as of September 15 of the corresponding school year; statement of the schools (MESRS SR) 3 – 01). Additional indicators in line 1004, the number of pupils exempted from the obligation to go to school. This line must be equal to the figure in the column “together” in its annex (more in section 3).

(3) There is an annex to this statement named Pupils exempted from having to go to school according to grade and reason of exemption, where pupils maintaining CSA abroad according to §23 letter b) and e) of the school act are the reason. Again, only the number is received not the structure of pupils.

Since 2016 **pupils that are educated outside of the SR** are also included in the statement **Data collection for normative funding** on the forms of the defined categories of the schools. The investigation includes:

- (1) *The number of pupils that the school has no information about.* If the school has pupils that missed more than 15 lessons without the reason at September 15 of the corresponding school year, that did not attend classes without the reason and they did not report the reason of their absence at September 15, the school enter the data about the pupils into individual column

“Number of pupils that school has no information about.” It also includes pupils who are educated outside the SR and did not submit the certificate about the school attended abroad.

- (2) *Number of students educated outside the SR.* The primary school that has pupils educated outside the SR and who submitted student certificate about school attended abroad, will enter this data into individual column “Number of pupils educated outside of the SR”. This includes students that are educated abroad individually.

Based on that:

(1) It is possible to find out the number of pupils maintaining school attendance outside the SR according to the form from the statistical statements eduzber.sk: data collection on the number of pupils in the corresponding school year and school establishments funded by the budget chapter of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the SR and by the budget chapter of the Ministry of Interior of the SR (www.eduzber.sk).

(2) It is possible to find information even about a specific school through the department of education of the district offices or department of the professional and methodological activities.

(3) The form is available on the mentioned web site, named: Form of the category PS1, PS2 (primary school – 1st a 9th grade). There are also separate forms for all types of high schools.

(4) For the completion of the forms the guide is annually updated in which the names of the specific competent persons at the district offices who can provide assistance in completing the forms are published.

These statements are always sent by the schools on September 20 to the department of education of the DO in the district of residence. There they are processed for the entire district and then for the whole SR in the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and in the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information in Bratislava. From the centrally processed data, it is possible to get this data for the whole SR down to a particular school, but only the numbers. Identification of the residence countries where pupils maintain their CSA outside the SR is not determined at any level. It can be obtained only from the founders who would be able to process that based on the instruction in the structure: year – number of pupils – residence country – name of the school (based on the confirmation that the legal representative is obligated to deliver to school) – issue date of confirmation + or other data needed in accordance with GDPR. List of schools, founders, instructions for filling out forms in the collection of data for normative funding in the current year, contacts and blank forms for printing are available publicly. The statements are processed only by electronic means based on the instructions of corresponding departments of education and relevant employees (according to the list in the contacts) should be able to provide information about their centralisation and availability in the central register. There is a department of administration of the department’s data at Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport in Bratislava.

Based on that: *Based on the analysis of the facts, it is stated that there is a possibility to obtain the data about the number of pupils maintaining CSA outside the SR. A holistic approach to data collection is needed for setting up effective legislative reform processes in order to rationalise commission examinations of the pupils that maintain CSA outside the SR in so called educational centres in the states where modern migrants from Slovakia live. There should not only be numbers but also the exact list of pupils with the identification of the country and school that the pupil attends.*

2.3 Supervision of the compliance with CSA

Compliance with legislative rules in the processes of maintaining specific CSA of pupils in the schools outside the SR is supervised by **the section of the inspection activity of the State School Inspection** with the seats in Bratislava. The aim of the school inspections is to ensure the maintenance of school attendance. (1) The issue of relevant authorisations decisions as provided in the law, (2) to secure the state of the commission examinations organization, (3) obtain data about number of pupils educated abroad, (4) obtain data about pupils that took commission examinations in the given subjects for a particular period and (5) monitoring conditions under which the directors of the schools obtained necessary data for authorisation decisions.

Another inspection was conducted in 2015 (State School Inspection, 2015). In comparison with the previous surveys in the past few years, inspectors found an almost 10% year on year increase of registered pupils maintaining compulsory school attendance outside the territory of the SR in the same monitored primary schools (hereinafter PS). In the school year 2014/2015 90 primary schools were registered which is 55% out of 165 inspected, 522 pupils who attended schools abroad. Pupils were predominantly in primary schools. School directors gave 481 authorisation decisions about maintaining CSA outside the SR based on the requests of legal representatives of the pupils. In almost every region there were schools that issued decisions also to pupils whose legal representatives did not inform them about the address of the school abroad even if after the expiry of the mandatory time limit the registering school was not informed. Almost half of the legal representatives of the pupils agreed with the directors of the registering school about the date of the commission examinations after finishing individual years of education or on a date after finishing the primary educational level or lower secondary education. More than 54% of parents did not agree on the exam date with the registering school. Occasionally it was because of the cancellation of the permanent residence of the pupil's family in the SR or because of their return from abroad or because of having completed CSA in the Slovak school abroad. Some legal representatives asked for a change of the exam date, others asked to take these exams only once every two years or they used the possibility of taking an overall exam after finishing fourth or ninth year of the primary school. The directors of the schools issued 204 decisions in the school year 2014/2015 permitting commission examinations based on written requests but also based on requests submitted via e-mail, post, fax or by phone.

Preparation and implementation of the commission examinations was based on the legislation (setting of the date, appointing a commission, preparation of the tests, working out the evaluation criteria). The appointed commission consisted of the selected subject teachers (occasionally members of the commission did not comply with the professional requirements for the teaching subject), the chairmen were deputy directors or the heads of the subject commission and of the methodological association. In general, legal representatives of the pupils were informed about the content and process of the examination in advance. In the 1st – 4th year of the primary school, pupils took commission examinations mainly in the subjects that they did not study in the schools abroad – Slovak Language and Literature, Natural Science, Homeland Study. In the 5th – 9th year in the subjects – Slovak Language and Literature, Hungarian Language, History, Civics, German Language, English Language. Directors of four other schools also added other obligatory teaching subjects to commission examinations (Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology). They justified their decision by the fact that most pupils educated in the schools outside the SR did not have any certificate about their achieved educational results except the certificate of school attendance. In most schools the pedagogical

employees were responsible for the relevant documentation connected to the commission examinations. The results of the exams were entered into pupil's catalogue list, and those pupils that successfully passed exams from the obligatory subjects were given a certificate and they were placed into the corresponding grade according to the achieved results. A number of pupils did not get satisfactory results although some of them were given positive written evaluations from the schools abroad. They were repeatedly placed back into the same grade from which they were given an authorisation decision about maintaining CSA outside the SR. 12 pupils did not come to the exams and did not state the reason and 1 pupil had health reasons.

Some of the findings obtained from the conversations with school directors were relatively negative and they pointed to the importance of solving problems connected to the education of the pupils and also with data collection about the pupils maintaining CSA outside of the SR. In the Prešov, Košice and Banská Bystrica region they reported during the summer time (often during the school year) a higher migration of the families of the pupils from the socially disadvantaged backgrounds (hereinafter SDB) and from the marginalised Roma communities (MRC) abroad. Mostly, legal representatives of those pupils did not communicate with the registering schools at all, also they did not provide information about leaving abroad. Pedagogical employees in various schools were forced to additionally collect important data about pupils (family address and address of the school abroad). They did not have any information about a number of individuals and also they did not receive any feedback from the municipality, town, the police department or the prosecutor. The directors of two schools have a suspicion that families exchange with each other copies of certificates from schools abroad in order to use the address of the school outside the SR and so formally fulfil the notification obligation.

Another negative phenomenon is the low success rate of some pupils from socially disadvantaged background and marginalised Roma communities in the commission examinations because of their ineffective and unsystematic preparation methods. Families of pupils usually came back from abroad just before the date of the exams (the last August week) and not all parents were responsible about preparing their children. Also, the school was not able to provide tutoring, consulting or other help to prepare pupils so that all of them could manage to pass the exams successfully. School provided textbooks for pupils for that school year and in some places they also informed parents about the content of the exams from the particular subject.

Based on these analyses, conclusions and findings, a number of important recommendations are stated for various levels of implementation.

The records of pupils who are maintaining CSA outside the SR and of the commission examinations

(A) On the level of MESRS of the SR

- (1) To define the rules of data collection in the context of GDPR.
- (2) To ensure, in cooperation with the competent office of the labour, social affairs and family a unified system of data collection for minor pupils that maintain CSA abroad.
- (3) Define whether it is necessary to keep track of children maintaining CSA outside the SR only on the level of the primary school or also of the high school (because of 10-year CSA). If it is necessary also in the high school (at least in the 1st year) it is necessary to include it in the form of a particular record as in primary school (see below).

- (4) In the statement of the school (MESRS SR) 3-01 *Statement about primary school*, to create space for more precise data collection about the number of pupils maintaining CSA outside the SR in its annex (in the framework of so called pupils that do not have to commute to school for reasons defined in the school act):
 - Not only the number classified by year but also: country where the pupil is educated; information whether the school has or does not have the foreign school certificate (legal representatives submitted or did not submit it to school); or if they are attending educational centres - if yes - it is necessary to submit also other data (in case of approval of the amendment of the School Act).
 - (5) Or to create a separate blank form for these records.
 - (6) To harmonize the collection of these data with EDUZBER (for normative funding).
 - (7) Agree with the relevant authorities in the EU on the method of data provision from the schools outside the SR for the registering schools in the SR about the achieved educational results of the pupils.
 - (8) To issue guidelines for school directors to secure a unified process of registration of the pupils who do not return to take commission examinations to allow them to finish lower secondary education after reaching 16 years (the age of completion of the CSA)
 - (9) Link data collection on the level of the MESRS on all levels and departments.
 - (10) Prepare legislative changes allowing for so called “educational centres” abroad which after the completion of the legal conditions could become accredited educational centres of the MESRS with the defined competencies included the possibility to set commission examinations.
- (B) On the level of founders** (towns and municipalities, higher territorial units and relevant departments of education)
- (1) Collect data in individual format in the structure: grade – number of students outside the SR – specific names – country – school – in case of submitted certificate of school attendance also its name, address, contact person – issue date of the certificate. This approach allows this information to pass from the town and municipality level to the district and counties up to the national level so as to compile a full list of the names – an overview of children (pupils) maintaining CSA outside the SR with the necessary variables for the next stage of relevant subjects.
- (C) On the level of school directors**
- (1) To cooperate with the local community centres and relevant departments of social affairs and family in order to underpin and monitor families of the pupils with SDB and MRC migrating abroad.
 - (2) To create conditions for good cooperation and communication with the legal representatives of pupils in order to secure maintenance of compulsory school attendance and to secure their participation at the commission examinations in accordance with the legislation.
 - (3) To secure for pupils from SDB and MCR appropriate tutoring, consultations or other help during their preparation for commission examinations in order for them to successfully finish primary education and then lower secondary education.

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3 EDUCATIONAL CENTRES ABROAD

Based on parents' interest, **educational centres** have been and are being created in their communities. There is a strong motivation, besides Slovak language-teaching and maintaining the Slovak language, to attend these centres and that is preparing children of school age for commission examinations – a prerequisite for their further education, for a higher level of education in Slovakia or for completing their compulsory education. Educational centres in Slovak communities are irreplaceable. Apart from educational activities regarding tuition and maintaining the mother language, they organize cultural events, meetings of parents who share their experience among each other, and also various lectures to provide information about life in the host country.

3.1 Activity of educational centres

Based on annual applications, educational centres' activity is partially funded by a grant system provided by The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad. The full amount of money, however, is not funded, parents must finance the centres too. For children's education, especially of those children preparing for commission examinations in Slovakia, educational centres until now faced many problems arising from the fact that:

- the centres are created on the basis of volunteers;
- their activity is not coordinated and does not follow a single methodology;
- the number of lessons on Slovak language, culture and geography varies, since meetings usually take place at weekends;
- some of the teachers are volunteers and not all of them are qualified teachers;
- parents' motivation for their children's education varies – from the maintaining of their Slovak language (parents do not return to Slovakia), up to the intentional preparation of children for differentiation examinations in Slovakia;
- there are no unified methodological guidelines on the part of the Slovak Republic regarding the individual grades and topic areas of education;
- there is no legal possibility of further education for teachers in the educational centres, since their teaching activity does not take place in the Slovak Republic.

Trying to resolve these problems, the representatives of Slovak communities and educational centres abroad initiated the establishment of a separate Section for Western Europe and USA within the Commission of Education of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad (OfSLA). The Section's activities, together with the founding of the International Slovak Educational Institution and Association (ISEIA), are one of the greatest achievements in the given area. The ISEIA, a voluntary association of Slovak educational centres abroad, was founded on **October 29, 2014 in Bratislava** by the compatriot community representatives from Argentina, France, Ireland, Canada, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, USA and Great Britain, the representatives of the OfSLA and of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (MoESRaS), aiming to support the education of Slovak children living abroad in their mother language and to support cooperation among the individual educational centres. The OfSLA, the national institutions for informal education

of the Slovak children living abroad, the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (MBU) and Radio International became partners in this group. In terms of its organization, it is composed of two parts: The first part is the ISEIA Association which plans, organizes and controls the cooperation among the individual members of the ISEIA and manages common projects. The most successful projects are for example: Ceruzky vo svete, Ahoj kamarát, Kráľ knižnice, Zápisník cestovateľov, Slovensko včera a dnes. The second part is the ISEIA Institution, in which three centres are established. The science and research centre is concerned with the state and development of education of the Slovaks living abroad, it conducts surveys, compiles statistics and collaborates with various educational institutions. The educational centre provides further education for Slovak language teachers working in informal educational centres abroad. The last one is the publication centre, which prepares methodological and didactical guidelines, publishes textbooks, activity books, children's fiction and a magazine: Ceruzky vo svete: <http://ceruzkyvosvete.iseia.eu/>.

Table 1 An overview of educational centres in the Western Europe united in ISEIA

Country	City	Name of the centre
Ireland	Dublin	
Great Britain	London	
Great Britain	Birmingham	Slovak Club
Great Britain	Cardiff	
Germany	Munich	
Switzerland	Zürich	
Italy	Bologna	Lectorate of the Slovak language and culture at the University of Bologna
France	Paris	Slávik
France	Paris	Margarétka
Sweden		
Belgium	Brussels	

The centres listed in the above table provided educational and leisure activities in 2015 for more than 1000 children, 348 of which attended regular classes of Slovak language, culture and geography in order to prepare for commission examinations.⁴

The Section for Western Europe and USA came in their discussions to the conclusion and suggested that the OfSLA, within their grant system and financial resources, provides yearly grants for the provision of the teaching aids, children's literature and magazines for Slovak

⁴ The data were provided by Jarmila Buchová (Munich) on the second meeting of the Section for the Western Europe and USA within the Commission of Education of the OfSLA on **October 29, 2015**.

community educational centres and pre-school educational institutions abroad supporting Slovaks living in Western European countries and in the USA. It also recommended and appealed to the MoESRaS:

- to be helpful in cooperation with the OfSLA in dealing with the current problems regarding the Slovak language-teaching within the Slovak community educational centres and pre-school educational institutions abroad;
- to address the issue of commission examinations systematically;
- to initiate the preparation and signing of the relevant international documents providing the possibility of sending the teachers and tutors specialized in Slovak language-teaching and awareness raising among the Slovak communities living abroad.

The members of the group undertake to be helpful in solving the problems related to the formation of new norms for Slovak pupils and students temporarily living and studying abroad. They are supposed to cooperate in validating the outcomes of the pilot project presented by MBU Banská Bystrica. They have recommended to the OfSLA that:

- it should, in cooperation with the competent authorities of the Slovak Republic, strive for the possibilities of improvement for Slovak teachers at the complementary educational institutions abroad.
- the MoESRaS should address the issues of the differentiation examination systematically. The members of the group will contribute to the solution of problems regarding the performance, the content, the extent and the place of the differentiation examinations⁵.

The intensification of ISEIA's cooperation with OfSLA has been one of the most important outputs of the project. The relevant contemporary activities of OfSLA were provided for the purposes of our research by PhDr. Vilma Prívarová from OfSLA, who states that:

1. The support of the educational centres activity through the grant system has been increased.

The OfSLA collaborates with several centres, or more precisely, with the heads of these centres. The collaboration is either direct or within the board of the National Institute for Education, through the Section for Western Europe and USA within the Commission of Education of the OfSLA. The members of this section have been attending meetings in Slovakia for several years. Regular consultations with the educational centres' representatives on the premises of the OfSLA, but also **the financial support in the form of grants** could be regarded as examples of specific cooperation. There is also a very active cooperation with the Education Centre in Dublin, with educational institutions in Great Britain, in the USA, in France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Iceland. The representatives of these centres are also members of the office section. Grant applications are being submitted by educational centres from all the above-mentioned countries, but also from Australia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand and Italy.

The OfSLA supports the organization of summer camps in Slovakia, which are attended by children of those compatriots living in Western European countries and overseas every year. In 2017, 108 children living in the aforementioned countries attended the camp.

⁵ **The conclusions from the first and the second meeting of the Commission of Education of the OfSLA, Section for Western Europe and USA.** Bratislava, April 1 – 2, 2014 and October 29, 2015.

In 2017, OfSLA in cooperation with MoESRaS provided funds for the purchase of textbooks for educational centres in these countries, according to the individual centres' demands.

Requests regarding the support of education clearly prevail in the individual applications, since the educational centres in Western European countries and in the USA have been created specifically for this purpose. The centres' representatives ask for funds mainly to pay for rent, to buy textbooks, teaching aids, school technical equipment, for the purposes of enhancing Slovak teachers' qualification, but also to organize extracurricular and cultural events on the occasion of some Slovak national and religious holidays. The support of the activities that stimulate the sense of belonging to the Slovak community, the appreciation of the Slovak traditions, the feeling of the Slovak national identity and the relationship to the native land are also very important.

Within the framework of its grant system, OfSLA provided the Slovak educational centres abroad with the sum of EUR 77,500 in 2016, in 2017 it was EUR 79,700 and in 2018 it granted EUR 98,485. Therefore, it is evident that the support tends to grow considerably.

The subsidies and the support of the activities are provided strictly in accordance with The Act on Slovaks Living Abroad. There is no other system of grants to support the educational centres abroad.

2. Cooperation and record keeping on centres in Western Europe and in the USA

Educational centres' representatives attend Permanent Conferences of the Slovak Republic and Slovaks Living Abroad, as well as other events organized by OfSLA. Regular consultations between centres concerning the preparation of educational standards, differentiation examinations, law amendments, and other relevant problems are being organized on the premises of OfSLA. At first, the OfSLA initiated the signing of the Memorandum on cooperation with The National Institute for Education, based on the interest in the issues declared mainly at the section's meetings. Subsequently, the problem issues reached the Ministry of Education. At the present time, the Ministry tries to resolve the given problem issues in the form of amendments to the School Act and to the Act on Teaching Staff and Vocational Training Employees.

OfSLA usually learns about new educational centres from the Section for Western Europe and USA, as their members have a good knowledge of the current situation in the individual countries and also keep track of the newly emerging centres. Afterwards, OfSLA adds these centres into its database and communicates with them. After such formal integration of the new centres into educational institutions of Western European countries and the USA, the second stage follows. The centres start to communicate with OfSLA, get acquainted with its functions and with the work of other centres abroad and usually apply for a financial support of their activities within OfSLA's grant system. However, the number of children studying and teachers employed at these centres changes yearly. The office appeals regularly to all known centres abroad to re-submit this information.

- Other specific activities apart from the grant system:

Besides the bilateral negotiations with the heads of the centres, the annual meeting of the Section for the Western Europe and USA is a regular and effective platform where the representatives of the individual centres discuss current problems regarding Slovak language-teaching in their corresponding countries. The Section's meeting takes place

in Bratislava once a year. The meetings bring new challenges, definitions of specific problems and also movement on possible solutions to these problems, which contributes to the improvement in quality of Slovak language-teaching in these countries.

As stated above, OfSLA, besides the financial support in the form of grants, provides finance for textbooks, organizes summer camps for compatriot youth, supports the competition *Prečo mám rád slovenčinu, prečo mám rád Slovensko*, provides the centres with relevant information regarding the increase of the Slovak education quality abroad and informs them about various competitions in Slovakia for Slovak children living abroad, as well as their teachers. OfSLA further cooperates with MoESRaS in organizing methodological seminars for teachers, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with Slovak representative offices abroad and with The National Institute for Education in solving problematic issues, such as concern of the countries for mother language education provided to the individual communities by their respective countries, educational standards, children's commission examinations, teachers in educational centres in the Western European countries and the USA, providing scholarships from the Slovak government for Slovaks living abroad etc.

The current data on the number of children and teachers in educational centres and in various institutions were taken from the OfSLA's source material of March 31, 2018. Based on these data, educational institutions have covered the educational activity for 1,620 children. The data are, however, only approximate, since they are related only to institutions applying for financial support of their activity. The most educational centres are active in Great Britain (14) and paradoxically, despite Brexit, even more educational centres are being created there, which we discovered on a personal visit in 2017.

3.2 Activities of specific centres

In order to outline the specific educational centres activities, we present statements provided by the heads of three different centres, chosen with regard to their own specifics, but also to the countries in which they are active. In describing the activities of the individual centres, we point out their successes, but also the problems they face.

FLAMINGOS – THE SLOVAK SCHOOL IN CYPRUS (Marieta Gundová Horský)

1. Motivation to found the educational centre

It was my personal motivation to found the educational centre because I have a son of school age and despite the fact that there are a comparatively large group of compatriots in Cyprus, until now there has been no concept of a Slovak school here. After considering the possibilities and with the help of questionnaires in social media we came to the conclusion that people are interested and we decided to go for it. It's a shame that despite great initial interest, some of the parents eventually resigned from the project, whether due to financial or logistical reasons. The centre started operating in the 2016/2017 school year, in which we taught 25 children in four different cities.

It was difficult for us to accept the school fees which have also been modified several times. Many people expressed their opinion that education in language schools for compatriots should be freely available or just at a minimal charge.

The Cyprus-Slovakia Business Association and also the local Ministry of Education helped us and provided us with premises for education.

2. Current conceptual purposes of educational centres

Our centre follows the ISCED 1 programme – primary education, the focus of which lies on Slovak language-teaching and other subjects are taught incidentally.

As the centre develops, so does our concept, especially in terms of the differences in language proficiency in pupils – children have different levels of communication and understanding of the Slovak language. Most children at school are trilingual (Greek, English, Slovak – in some cases also other languages).

Children, who have been preparing for commission examinations during the last school year, passed them successfully. All children, who moved back to Slovakia last year, entered school and continue their studies in the following years.

3. Conditions for the activity of educational centres

Our centre is active in various places because of the specific parameters of island of Cyprus. Slovak families live in every town, so we are widely available, because our teacher travels to our children's homes. We have a mobile school – every day in a different town. To ensure we have premises, we decided to ask the local Ministry of Education and Culture for help. The Ministry accepted our application due to our afternoon education schedule and provided us with classrooms in the local schools for free. Therefore, we don't have to pay costs for the rent of premises, but still we have enormous transport costs. We are sorry that OfSLA doesn't provide subsidies for the operation of the vehicle, because, due to the mobile concept of our school, these amounts are the largest of all our costs. Concerning the concept of our school, the subsidies for this budget item should be provided soon.

Financial costs needed for the school operation are covered by tuition fees, sponsorship and subsidies.

The promotion of our school is ensured mostly via social networks, The Embassy of the Slovak Republic and personal contacts.

In addition to the regular classes, our school also organizes after-school activities, which are attended also by those children and parents who don't attend the school for various reasons. Therefore, we raise the awareness of the compatriots in Cyprus. Despite our short operation (since 2016), we have already built a great reputation, because we help the compatriots to keep and to establish social relations and friendships. We actively create a database about the Slovaks living in Cyprus, we cooperate with the Embassy and with other compatriot organizations. We also organize an open door day and formal and informal meetings with compatriots.

Our material support consists of an office (sponsored rental) used for administration work connected with school operation. Teaching aids, textbooks, books and other things necessary for lessons are also stored there. The motor vehicle (sponsored rental) and an accommodation (sponsored rental) is available for our teachers, too.

Our sponsors have helped us a lot; it would be impossible for the school to be in operation without them.

4. Pupils

Our school is in its second year of operation, but it is not possible to make statistics in trends yet – the school is in the process of acquiring pupils – the number has increased since last year.

Based on the communication with parents, they have the following motives: they want their children to be in contact with other children and with the Slovak language in order to improve their vocabulary. They want them to read, write, understand and express themselves under the supervision of a qualified teacher according to a given programme. They want them to master their mother language to a similar level as pupils studying at home, in case they wish to return to Slovakia, study at secondary and high schools, or find a job or partners. They want them to meet other children with a similar language background. To know the Slovak culture and geography and to feel like Slovaks.

5. Lessons

To ensure the best availability for children, lessons take place every day a week in a different town (5 locations – range of up to 200 km). Pre-school children have one lesson a week, children in the first stage of the primary school have three lessons a week (one after another) and children in the second stage of the primary school have two and a half lessons a week. The classes are mostly aimed at Slovak language, literature and grammar, as well as Slovak culture and geography. Mathematics, geography and natural sciences are taught incidentally.

We have a qualified teacher of the Slovak language who has passed an interview. There was no qualified teacher in Cyprus, so we found our teacher in Slovakia and moved her to Cyprus. The school pays her monthly remuneration for social insurance in Cyprus, she has a budget for accommodation and her flight home. Due to the mobile concept of our school there is a vehicle available for her and also money for the operation of the vehicle. She has taught at the school since the school's opening (2016).

Our teacher's motives to work in Cyprus relate to personal development and new challenges. For her, it is not only a new experience, but also a whole new way of work – it includes continuous creativity, improvement and adaptation of a given competence to local conditions and individual needs of pupils.

6. Further education

A programme which would include methods and concepts about the way in which to teach children with Slovak as a second or third language would be welcomed. Teachers from the language schools should have specific skills as a language teacher for foreigners.

7. The greatest achievements

The school's opening is itself considered to be the greatest achievement, and it is followed by finding a teacher, the second year of successful operation and the reputation the school has gained over the last two years.

Cyprus is a small country in which to open a daily Slovak school. The current programme still does not fit some families due to various logistical and timing reasons. Ideally, finding a solution for them would be good.

It is potentially possible to have two teachers (and to divide their geographical activity on the island), and to divide lessons into shorter teaching blocks at least two times a week – this would help children to pay attention.

8. Demonstration of good practice

We are proud that we have a qualified and experienced teacher and that we managed to start a school with a complete educational programme for compatriot children in Cyprus. Furthermore, we are proud of our after-school programmes, which are increasingly growing in popularity among children and parents. We have also set up a library for children. The invitation to a Slovak children's theatre and an interactive show for children was our latest project.

9. Stimuli, ideas, inspirations and messages for Slovakia

It is appropriate to initiate a discussion about a coherent concept – an educational method for Slovak children living abroad.

We can imagine the discussion and subsequently the concept of education created directly for Slovak children abroad. In that concept, limited education time, initial differences in language levels, individual needs of children and the fact that education runs in groups of children at different ages and with different levels of general and language knowledge would be taken into account. The discussion about an alternative concept with thematical or project education would also be appreciated. This concept would include the education in the language, grammar and other subjects and it would be divided into topic units. Therefore, it would be better for children to acquire and develop the adequate vocabulary.

It would be appropriate to set up a complementary program of home-schooling for foreign children via online applications oriented at expanding the knowledge of vocabulary and Slovak culture and geography.

THE MARGARETKA SLOVAK SCHOOL (educational centre) – PARIS (Mgr. Zuzana Fodorová)

The educational centre (school, kindergarten and folklore group) Margarétka in Paris was set up in 2014 at the initiative of motivated teachers and folklorists. It is a non-profit organization which insists on an education in traditional Slovak culture. The aim of this organization is to bring children into the collective of Slovaks, where the Slovak language extends further than the family environment, so we try to help parents to cope with bi- or multilingual upbringing of their children. We try to use the concept of a small school with a “soul” where children have the possibility to actively develop their bilingualism. The number of children per teacher (three to four children) corresponds to this. The total number is always approximately 20 children. We maintain this number, because, according to our experience, the quality is reduced when the number is higher. Due to different levels of Slovak language, we would not then be able to fulfil our concept. Teachers with appropriate qualifications and experiences from bilingual environment are another condition. Mgr. Zuzana Thieux-s is an educational grant with certification for first degree 1 to 4 grade. Mgr. Laura Pacindová, PhD. and Mgr. Paulína Šperková are educational grants for second degree, both with the certification for History – French language. Mgr. Zuzana Fodorová is an educational grant in kindergarten with the certification for English and French language and Ing. Katarína Matušková, former dancer in a folklore group Poleno in Bratislava, is an educational grant for folklore. Our economist and assistant Ing. Ivana Fodorová is also a part of the team. In the school year 2017/18 three grades are being opened: the first, the second and the seventh. In a comparison to prior years, the number of pupils preparing for the differentiation examination has been increased – there are five students currently. All pupils are going to take the examination in Slovak language. The basic number of children in Margarétka has been unchanged during the last years, except for a few newcomers and two older pupils, who have had to leave our educational centre because of their French school. The French educational system is not unified, and some higher grades also have lessons on Saturday, which is counter-productive for us.

The language school “Europa formation” has helped us while founding Margarétka. They gave us premises for free for a whole year. Thanks to our persuasiveness, other people and institutions have also helped to realize our dream (Mr. Daage, Mrs. Bensoussan, ISEIA,

MBU, OfSLA, Ministry of Education and parents, whose help is invaluable). The increasing attendance rate is remuneration for us. Currently we are settled in two locations: in Paris and, thanks to our teacher Laura, in beautiful rented premises in Vincennes, close to Paris. There are three rooms available for us – two classrooms and one big dancing hall, which also serves for kindergarten when necessary. The rental of premises requires strenuous efforts in France; it is hard to achieve it without appropriate contacts. School funding is another brainteaser. The rent is covered by the money from tuition fees; our textbook, books for library and folk costumes fund was set up thanks to subsidies from OfSLA and a gift of textbooks from MoESRaS. Teachers don't get a salary. The non-existent storage space in institutions where we rent premises, is another unsolved problem. It means that the teachers must bring all teaching aids, materials and textbooks to every lesson; it is hard for them due to the long distances in Paris and the travelling time to Margarétka (approximately one hour).

The lessons take place two Saturdays each month, each 3.5 hours. The accent is on subjects like reading – writing and Slovak language. The topics from homeland study are sometimes added to these subjects. We try to proceed according to the teaching plans. We begin with the work with texts, where the vocabulary is developed by story retelling. In this way we can find out how much children comprehend from the given text. Then, we use this text as a source material for practising new topics. Last time it was searching for a hard consonant in a reading book. This method was used also in practicing vowels etc. We also work with textbooks full of material. The advantage is the combination of various textbooks. Less pupils means a greater possibility to print materials and therefore to diversify the source materials. The question is, how to ensure that the children develop. Will we create half-grades? How would it reflect on the children's results from commission examinations? We must find answers to these questions. The teaching plan in kindergarten is also rich and similar to the plan in Slovakia. Nursery children handle many topics aimed at vocabulary development and facts about Slovakia over a year. For example: autumn and harvest of fruits, migratory birds, weather and seasons of a year, clothing and winter sports, universe, fairy-tale characters, plants and animals, spring, professions, life in a town and in the countryside, Slovakia and many others. Due to our orientation to traditional culture and to the fact that almost all the children dance in our folklore group, we have set up a subject called "the source of our ancestors' culture", where the historical, literary and folklore projects are discussed.

Our other achievements are the performance of the folklore ensemble Margarétka in London, the invitation of the children's folklore group DFS Sovička in Bratislava and DFS Čečinka, the performance at the 65th anniversary of the Nádej folklore group in Paris, the performance for The Czech School without Borders in Paris, at Sant Nicolas Day in Slovak associations and school performances. Children also dance at the Summer School of Traditional Culture in Banská Bystrica, which is organized for Slovak children by MBU Methodological Centre for Slovaks living abroad in Banská Bystrica. In the school year 2017/18 we organized with The Czech School without Borders from Paris a Czecho-Slovakian recitation competition on the hundredth anniversary since the foundation of Czechoslovakia. We have a good relationship with this school and we organize thematic meetings together. Our pupil Miriam made us proud as she graduated with honours in her differentiation examination.

The teachers from Margarétka work with children with different levels of Slovak language and we have language-teachers, who are used to be in contact with foreign language and children, but with little experience with Slovak as a foreign language. Within the last few years we have acquired all our knowledge in this field directly "on the ground" while working

with Slovak children abroad. It would be beneficial if a study field “Slovak as a foreign language for children” would be established or methodical seminars within continuous education would be organized in teaching children Slovak as a foreign language.

USA – NEW YORK STATE, ASTORIA, QUEENS, NEW YORK (Ingrid Sivčová Kuzma)

1. The Slovak school was officially founded in 2000. “Officially” because back in 1960 a small group of Slovak children attended the Bohemian Citizens’ Benevolent Society of Astoria (BCBSA). Those children and Czech children attended the Czech school. After 2000 a group of Slovak female enthusiasts established a folklore group, which further inspired parents to ask for Slovak language courses for their children. So, the Slovak part has grown and in 2017 there were 71 children and five qualified teachers. Since 2013 it bears the name The Czech and Slovak Cultural Centre (educational centre), as the name “school” would have to meet different criteria. There were no problems with its foundation, because it is the only financially self-sufficient weekend school as it is a part of BCBSA. The premises are situated in the building of BCBSA in New York, Astoria, the urban area called Queens.

2. The conceptual changes go hand-in-hand with the requirements for children’s education. The synergy between the methodology of Slovak schools and our education is obvious. The important part of our education is not only the Slovak language, but also Slovak culture and geography and music. The music is emphasised as it helps children to be aware of terms in a language they don’t know. The commission examinations are not the most important focus in our centre. The reason for that may be that parents do not plan to return to Slovakia.

3. As already mentioned in the first section, the school has good conditions. But when the number of pupils is high, e.g. on Friday lessons, two classes have their lessons in the gym due to the insufficient number of classrooms. The gym is a part of the building, so the children do not have to leave the school and after lessons they have a dance rehearsal.

4. There are 60 – 70 Slovak pupils every school year. It depends on the number of pupils in the population grade. Five years ago, there were many new born children as the women, who were giving birth for the first time, or as those around 35 – 38 decided to have another child. It can be said that another numerous group of children has gathered; it will be a base for the next years of the Slovak part of the school. A similar group of Slovak children arose ten years ago, but they are leaving the centre now. The most important thing in New York is not the commission examination, but the regular contact with the Slovak language itself. Parents want their children to read in Slovak language with comprehension, to respond to the Slovak pronunciation challenges correctly in terms of logopaedics, and to be in an environment in which they must express themselves in the Slovak language.

5. The lessons take place every Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. It is divided into 60-minute-long teaching blocks with 20-minute-long break. The structure of the lessons is not always the same, but the lessons start every time with the Slovak language. Then the schedule proceeds with the subjects determined by teacher and her preparation. In the grades with pupils aged six to eight it is mostly the subject of a first introduction to natural sciences. Older pupils continue with the homeland study and history. The motives for our teachers are the love of their profession as all of them are teachers with appropriate qualifications. They must pay tax on their salary. There is a very low rate of fluctuation; two of our teachers have been teaching there for 17 years.

6. It would be beneficial for our teachers to be included into an accredited programme that would be a result of a new methodology prepared for certain educational centres.

7. The greatest achievement is that the results can be seen after one year. It's worth it when you hear children speak in the Slovak language. The vision is always the same: to keep the number of children who study Slovak as high as possible.

8. It would be useful to set up a file of special preparation materials for classes, where it is impossible to work only with Slovak textbooks. The children from those classes come from mixed families and there is no methodology for them. Doing the crosswords, special audio exercises or exercises aimed at the production of individual genus and its comprehension would be helpful.



9. The unified methodological guidelines created according to the competences of children would be welcomed, too. The centres would then proceed in the same way. The methodology should be designed in a cooperation with teachers from the centres.

3.3 The Czech school without borders

The success of the Česká škola bez hranic/Czech School without Borders (hereinafter “CSWB”) can serve as inspiration and a good example for our country since the Czech Republic (hereinafter “CR”) is considered the closest to Slovakia in terms of culture, legislation, society, and history.

This non-profit organization is led by MUDr. Lucie Slavíková-Boucher who began establishing the school for Czech children in Paris. She states that the legislative rather than financial support of the state administration and the ministries of education and foreign affairs was provided.

The first school without borders was established in Paris in 2003 with the support of the Czech Centre and the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Paris. The project was initiated mainly by Czech parents (mothers) who moved to Paris and wanted their children to continue learning in the Czech language. Besides, the Czech legislation required children to travel to the Czech Republic to take commission examinations in order to comply with their compulsory school attendance. Due to this fact, it was necessary to establish a school that would prepare children for these exams. Thanks to the initiative of Dr. Slavíková, international support was acquired and a network of schools was gradually emerging in London (2007), Berlín (2008), Zürich (2008), Munchen (2009), Brussels and Geneva (2010), Dresden (2011), and Frankfurt (2012).

All these schools operated under the auspices of the Czech School without Borders civic association. At the beginning the civic association focused on increasing the quality of education in these schools; with this goal in mind, their own framework educational programme in compliance with the Framework Educational Programme of the Czech Ministry of Education was created. The CSwB followed the programme and the association provided regular consulting. The organisation was voluntary, independent and its members associated based on common interests. Its aim was to provide assistance to those Czechs and their children living abroad.

The main goal of CSWB was to bring up a Czech speaking young generation growing up abroad that would be able to speak, read and write in Czech as adults. At the same time, they would be aware of their roots and maintain a sense of fellowship with the Czech country and nation.

CSWB pupils' background is diverse and determined by the type of the Czech community abroad they live in. Most pupils come from mixed marriages and one of their parents is Czech. These children are used to bi- or even trilingual communication since their infancy.

Another large group consists of children whose parents are both Czechs living abroad, some of them represent the third or fourth generation of compatriot children, i.e. their parents are citizens of another country, but one of them has Czech ancestors (parents); these children speak Czech actively. The last group of students come from non-Czech families who lived in the Czech Republic and wish to maintain their language skills acquired during their stay in the CR.

Further goals and activities of the CSWB include:

Maintaining and spreading the use of the Czech language and culture among the compatriots living abroad in cooperation with the CSWB and similar organisations in other countries.

The CSWB coordinates individual schools and affiliated organisations in order to ensure that they follow a single concept in terms of activity.

The association ensures that the CSWB name is only used by organisations primarily focusing in working with children, which provide pre-school education (since 18 months of age) and school education in compliance with the Framework Educational Programme of the Czech Ministry of Education for grades 1 to 9. The pupils study the Czech language and literature, history, and geography. Organisations can offer additional educational programmes for adults.

The association promotes long-term cooperation between individual CSWBs and related organisations, initiates common projects and helps implement them.

The association prepares and offers extended education for teachers working with Czech children living abroad and creates methodological aids.

The association inspires cooperation among the internal institutions, mainly the authorities responsible for education such as the Czech Ministry of Education.

It also coordinates common procedures in the contact with the ministries and state administration authorities in the CR and acts on behalf of the CSWBs during negotiations.

The association works efficiently around the world and the network of schools is expanding. There are approx. 100 schools without borders and recently they have signed an agreement with the Czech Ministry of Education. To achieve better control and cooperation, both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are involved. CSWBs require an expert guarantee for the first and second levels of primary schools. These experts have to meet qualification criteria and they can provide a “distance” guarantee from another country. The responsible expert prepares educational plans, schedules and school organisation. Once a year they are obliged to submit a report on the cooperation with the given school to the Ministry of Education.

In accordance with these requirements, since 2012 commission examinations have been legally organised in the CSWBs. The obligation of the Czech parents to enlist their child into the registering school and attend commission examinations was lifted and substituted by the obligation to report. After completing their compulsory education, children living abroad can attend high schools in the CR.

Besides expert guarantee, specific professional requirements have to be met by the CSWB teachers. CSWB teachers:

Have to meet qualification criteria;

They are paid by the school in which they work according to the tariffs of the given country;

The curricula are based on the Framework Educational Programme of the Czech Ministry of Education. In comparison to European schools which aim mainly to develop language in children living abroad, CSWB focuses on educating the Czech children in the Czech language, history, and geography.

The Czech School without Borders is funded through tuition fees and state grants; the Czech Ministry of Education strives to follow the officially prepared plan to maintain the Czech culture and heritage abroad.

Besides the activities performed by the CSWB network schools, there are also friendly schools which cooperate; however, so far, they have not succeeded in resolving the basic aspects such as the extent of education, teachers' education, and other school administrative issues. Currently there are 53 friendly schools and educational centres abroad.

The activity of the Czech School Without Borders provides an inspiration for our project in terms of intentions and activities targeted at the competent authorities and institutions in the SR.

4 BILINGUALISM: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT

For a long time, monolingualism has been regarded as a natural state and as such has been an object of scientific research. The most recent literature, however, considers monolingualism to be a unique phenomenon. Today, different forms of multilingualism are natural because more than half of the world's population lives in some form of bi- or multilingualism. It is an interplay of historical, economical and geographical factors, but also a result of globalization and it all stimulates the increased mobility of people all around the world. Nowadays, it is a necessity to have a command of at least two languages. Neither an individual nor a society as a whole can develop further without it.

Naturally, multilingual societies are not only heterogeneous from the perspective of linguistics, there is also a difference in culture, ethnicity and religion. Such "grouping" imposes many challenges on the individual members of the given society: bilingualism, biculturalism, language-switching, adaptation to different cultural frameworks conveyed by the given languages, adaptation to different cultural standards and rules. All these daily life situations represent a problem and a subject for various scientific researches in linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, history, demography, neurology, but also hybrid sciences, such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

Today, there exists an integrative science which addresses the phenomenon of bilingualism from different points of view – the psychology of bilingualism (Göncz, 2005).

The psychology of bilingualism is an interdisciplinary science concerned with the study of bilingualism from the psychological perspective. It is related to developmental psychology, pedagogic psychology, pedagogic sciences etc. The following questions represent the subject of the psychology of bilingualism: who and under what conditions becomes a bilingual person, how do various types of bilingualism come to exist, what are the psychological aspects of bilingualism and biculturalism, how do early bilingualism and other aspects of development relate to each other, how do the different types of bilingualism influence cognitive development and personality development and what are the pedagogic effects of bilingualism. The psychology of bilingualism also deals with the phenomena such as: anomie, bilateral semilingualism, surface and cognitive linguistic competence, bilingual education, language code-switching, language minorities and language majorities etc.

According to Göncz (2005), the psychology of bilingualism has four research areas:

1. Psychological analysis of bilingualism types, study of relations between the two linguistic systems used by a given bilingual person.
2. Study of bilingualism in terms of developmental psychology and psychology of personality.
3. Social psychology of bilingualism which deals with the notion of biculturalism and the psychological aspects of contact linguistics.
4. Pedagogic psychology of bilingualism which addresses the questions of pedagogy in linguistically heterogeneous society from the psychological point of view.

4.1 Definitions of mother language and bilingualism

The definition of bilingualism is closely connected with the definition of mother language. For many scientists, monolingualism represents a standard and a natural state. Therefore, monolingualism is employed as a referential point for defining and in comparison to bilingualism. Table 1 presents summarized definitions of mother language introduced by Göncz (in print).

Table 1. *Definitions of mother language (Göncz, in print)*

Criterion	Mother language
1. Age	the language that they have learned first / language of continual communication
2. Competence, level of linguistic competence	- the language of which they have the best command
3. Function (frequency of language usage)	- the most frequently used language
4. Attitudes (how do we identify ourselves and how do other people see us)	- the language which we identify with / language which other people identify us with
lay understanding: the language in which we dream, think, count...	

From the given overview of the definitions of mother language it can be stated that a mother language cannot be regarded as something with stable, invariable characteristics, but as a set of processes where changes are permissible. This fact is also applicable in defining bilingualism. A summarized overview of definitions of bilingualism is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Definitions of bilingualism (Göncz, in print)*

Criterion	A bilingual person is a person who...
1. Age	- has learnt two languages in a family of native speakers from the very beginning
2. Competence, level of linguistic competence	- is completely competent in both languages - has a native-like command of the second language - has an equally good command of both given languages - can produce meaningful utterances in the second language - is familiar with and employs a certain level of linguistic structures of the second language - is in contact with the second language

3. Function (frequency of language usage)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uses both languages alternately - is capable of using two or more languages alternately in different situations, accordingly to their own choice or to the given social requirements, both orally and in writing
4. Attitudes (how do we identify ourselves / how do other people see us)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regards themselves as a bilingual person and identifies themselves with two cultures (to some extent) - is regarded by others as a bilingual person / as a native-like speaker of two languages

Definitions by linguistic competence are many and varied. It should be possible to accommodate them at points along a continuum extending from the moment of an individual's first contact with a foreign language to the state of full bilingualism (if such state actually exists).

As an example of the “less rigorous” definitions, Macnamara (Skutnab- Kangas, 1991) lists the four areas of language skills (understanding, speaking, reading, writing) and further subdivides each area into four levels. According to him, a person is bilingual when they possess at least one of the language skills listed above even to a minimal degree. Coming more to the middle of the continuum, we may take as an example Haugen's definition in which he says that bilingualism begins at the point where the speaker of one language is capable of producing meaningful utterances in the other language. As an example of a strict definition, we present the classic definition cited by Bloomfield (Skutnab- Kangas, 1991), where bilingualism is described as a native-like control of two languages. Other equally rigorous definitions describe bilingualism as an active, complete equal mastery of two or more languages (Braun); or as a complete mastery of two different languages without interference between the two linguistic processes (Oestreicher).

4.2 Types of bilingualism

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon including variations at various individual and social levels. Many attempts at the division of bilingualism types on the part of the sciences interested in bilingualism, such as sociology, psychology and linguistics, are to be found in current literature. For the purpose of this text, we have chosen one of the divisions often referred to. We will deal with the description of the following types of bilingualism (Šimonji-Černak, 2015):

1. elite/folk
2. individual/social
3. coordinated/compound/subordinated
4. productive/receptive
5. asymmetric
6. simultaneous/sequential
7. natural/school
8. additive/subtractive

9. infant/childhood/adolescent/adult
10. balanced/dominant

With regard to a bilingual person's social status, we distinguish **elite and folk bilingualism**. Elite bilinguals learn their second language according to their own choice, mostly to raise or to confirm their social status. Second language learning at school can also be regarded as a lighter form of elite bilingualism. On the other hand, folk bilingualism emerges when the second language is learned is not a result of one's own choice, but a necessity. A typical example can be found in migrants who need to learn the language of another country, while their own language could be seen as less prestigious. Members of the autochthonous language minorities can also develop some form of folk bilingualism. Autochthonous minorities are groups of people who, without changing their place of residence, became language minorities under the given political, military or other circumstances. Their national identity is determined by their language and culture, not by the country they live in. In their understanding, the word "nationality" is an ethnonym, not a politonym. As an example serves the Slovak minority in Serbia, Hungary, Romania or Croatia. The members of the autochthonous minority are forced to learn the second language, the majority language of the given country, just to be able to live there. For them, there is no possibility of choice.

According to some authors, **individual and social bilingualism** are so closely interrelated that it is very difficult to draw a distinction between them (Štefánik, 2005). Social bilingualism develops from individual bilingualism and cannot exist without it. The existence of individual bilingualism, however, doesn't imply the existence of social bilingualism. For example, in a state with one majority nation and language and with several minority nations and languages, only the members of the minorities would be bilingual, but rarely the members of the majority.

Weinreich (1953) distinguishes **three types of bilingualism** according to the organization of linguistic codes and the cognitive representation of language units in the brain: **compound, coordinated and subordinated bilingualism**. Compound bilingualism develops when a person learns two languages simultaneously, in the same social context (for example in a family). This way, two different groups of language units are linked with the same semantic definition, in other words, with the same representation in the mental dictionary (Šimonji- Černak, 2012). This situation results in a type of bilingualism called additive bilingualism. Coordinated bilingualism develops, when a person learns two languages in two different social contexts. As a result, each lexical unit in both given languages has its own mental representation. Foreign language learning at school is a typical example of this kind of situation. Subordinated bilingualism differs from the coordinated bilingualism in the method of image grouping in the mental dictionary.

There exist two types of language skills: **passive and active language skills**. The passive skills include the ability to comprehend the spoken and written form of language. The ability to produce utterances in both spoken and written form is a part of the active language skills. In the case of receptive bilingualism, a person is able to comprehend the spoken and/or written form of language. An alternative term, passive bilingualism, can also be used in this situation. This state of bilingualism is easy to achieve, particularly in the case of adults. On the contrary, productive bilingualism develops when a person is not only able to comprehend the second language, but also to speak and write in two (or in more) languages. This kind of bilingualism doesn't necessarily imply an equally good speaking and writing ability in both languages. If a person is

to be classified as a productive bilingual, nothing is yet said about the level of his linguistic competencies in both languages.

Based on the time when a person becomes bilingual, we can distinguish between **simultaneous and sequential bilingualism**. A simultaneous bilingual person is a person who has been under the influence of two languages from their birth or during their first three years of life. Thereafter we apply a term sequential bilingualism, within the framework of which we further subdivide the time of the second language acquisition: childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The context within which a person learns the second language is the main criterion for the division of bilingualism into **natural and school (cultural) bilingualism**. Natural bilingualism develops spontaneously in a bilingual environment. A person learns two languages simultaneously or gradually in a bilingual environment, in a day-to-day contact with the native speakers of both languages. Examples include life in a bilingual family or in linguistically heterogeneous environments. In the case of school bilingualism, the second language is taught at school, but there is little possibility to use it in real life. The difference between natural and school bilingualism lies within the environment, but also in the way of learning: spontaneous learning or learning within an artificially created school environment.

The terms additive and subtractive bilingualism are closely connected with a bilingual situation. The additive and subtractive bilingual situation is related to the characteristics of an ethnically, linguistically and culturally heterogeneous social environment. An additive bilingual situation represents an environment in which the ethnic societies, their languages and cultures are of approximately the same status, while in the case of subtractive situation, the individual persons are hierarchically structured in terms of their ethnical, linguistic or cultural affiliation (Šimonji- Černak, 2013a). These terms were first introduced by Canadian social psychologists to explain the effects of early bilingualism on the cognitive and language development. The two concepts deal with the question whether the heterogeneous societies and groups are hierarchically structured in terms of their language, nationality, culture and religion. Lambert (Skutnab- Kangas, 1991) noticed the effects of the relative status of two languages on their internalization and the cognitive effects of this internalization on children.

If a monolingual ideology prevails and represents a standard in a country, the members of this country who speak another language are pushed towards giving up their language and using only the dominant language of the majority. This kind of situation results in the development of subtractive bilingualism, as a type of individual bilingualism. It can be graphically illustrated as follows:

$$L1 + L2 - L1 = L2$$

Figure 1.

Subtractive bilingualism (according to García, 2009)

The first language is put aside and substituted by the second language. As a result, a person uses only the majority language and loses the linguistic abilities in their first language. So, it could be stated that subtractive bilingualism develops if:

1. language skills in the first language are seen as less prestigious with regard to the second one,
2. a child has not mastered the cognitive functions in the first language before the beginning of education,
3. a child has only mastered the cognitive functions in the language of which they have not a good command yet.

In linguistically heterogeneous environments, subtractive bilingualism often leads to the extinction of minority languages. In most cases, a language of lower status is substituted by a language of higher status. Language substitution may also negatively influence an individual's intellectual, emotional and social development or their educational achievements. It can also lead to bilateral semilingualism, in which a person's command of one language is better than of the other language.

The effect of mastering two languages is desirable in additive situation. There exists a relevant stimulation for the language learning, because the second language is added to the first one. This process is to be graphically illustrated as follows:

$$L1 + L2 = L1 + L2$$

Figure 2.

Additive bilingualism (according to García, 2009)

Language replacement is not a characteristic feature for additive situation because the goal in this case is to master both languages. The first language does not represent a problem in the second language learning, it is not put aside, but progresses and develops further. The second language is seen as an addition to the first one and as a result, the person has two languages instead of one available in their language repertoire. Empirical researches confirmed that there exist a different linguistic and cultural stimulation in an additive situation which enables the realization of cognitive potential. There are no barriers in the socio-emotional development, the ethnocentrism is reduced, and the linguistic and cultural tolerance grows.

The notions of additive and subtractive situation are not terms of conflicting/opposing categories, but two extremes within one dimension, between which there exist numerous transitions. That means that there can simultaneously exist elements of both additive and subtractive bilingual situation in every heterogeneous society and they further determine the formation of a specific type of bilingualism.

Based on the time of the second language acquisition we distinguish: **infant, childhood, adolescent and adult bilingualism**. The age at which we learn the second language plays a special role in the linguistic, neuropsychological, cognitive and sociocultural development of the bilingual person. It can be also combined with other spheres of the individual's biography, such as the context of the language learning and the usage of both languages. These two contexts are usually interrelated, for example: an early second language learning takes place within the family environment, while later, the second language is normally taught at school, which is a considerably different situation.

In the case of early bilingualism, the following types can be distinguished:

1. simultaneous early bilingualism: both languages are learned simultaneously, mostly in a bilingual family,
2. sequential early bilingualism: a child learns the second language at an early age, but not until they have mastered the basic competencies in the mother language. It can take place in the school environment under informal conditions without deliberate intent.

In terms of language proficiency, we distinguish **balanced and dominant bilingualism**. It cannot be expected that a bilingual person will have a native-like command of both languages. A balanced bilingual is a person who approaches the level of language proficiency natural for a native speaker of the corresponding age in both of their languages. The language balance, therefore, means that a person has an equally good command of both given languages. A real

state of balanced bilingualism is, however, relatively rare. A dominant bilingual's linguistic skills are on a higher level in one of the two languages.

The most relevant types of bilingualism according to Göncz (2005) are listed in Table 3.

Table 3.

The most relevant types of bilingualism (Göncz, 2005)

Criterion	Social level	Individual level
	bilingualism	
1. Attitudes	additive subtractive situation	bilingual
2. Group	elite folk	
3. Effects		additive subtractive bilingual situation
4. Age of the second language learning		early adult
5. Parts of language		linguism glotism
6. Level of linguistic abilities		dominant, balanced receptive, productive
7. Semantics		coordinated compound

4.3 The benefits of bilingualism

The effect of the bilingualism on the cognitive development as well as on some aspects of the social development (socio-economic benefits, global and local interaction, relationship between language and culture) will be discussed in the following part.

Cognitive development

There are many researches which show the positive influence of the bilingualism on the following elements of the cognitive development:

1. general cognitive development,
2. divergent thinking,
3. metalinguistic abilities,

4. sensibilization of some elements of feedback and nonverbal communication.

The classical study from Peal and Lambert in 1962 (Skutnab- Kangas, 1991) represents the turning point in observation of the effect of the bilingualism on general cognitive development. This study brought an end to the period of opinions about the negative effect of the bilingualism on cognitive development and on personality development, because the results showed positive relationship between bilingualism and general intelligence. Bilingual French-Canadian ten-years-old children achieved better results in verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests than monolingual children; the intelligence profile was more differentiated according to different subtests. Repeated study has shown that the bilingual children achieved better results in tests requiring manipulation with symbols and mental agility. Language structures are becoming more visible under the influence of the ability to use two languages. Children are aware that system of one language is only one of many, and therefore they are able to see hidden language structures much more easily and to approach language analytically.

According to researches, bilingual children realize the arbitrary nature of the words sooner; this can be characterized by the context of nominal realism. According to Piaget, it is characteristic for children's thinking in the pre-operational phase of intelligence development, when a child understands the object and its name as an inseparable unit. They realize that the names “dog” and “cat” could be interchanged without the change of the characteristics of the animals. They realize the possibility of separation of the name from the object earlier than monolingual children.

Divergent thinking is the base of creativity; it is the ability to reorganize and to find more potential solutions for a certain problem. A number of studies have shown that bilingual people achieve better results in divergent thinking tests (Skutnab- Kangas, 1991). Bilingual people have given more answers, which have been more diversified, more original and more elaborated.

Metalinguistic consciousness represents the ability of a child to rivet attention to formal characteristics of the language, when the language itself becomes an object of thinking, and, at the same time, the conveyed and contained meaning of the form is omitted. The child is not only aware of the meaning, but also of the toll or language form which is conveyed by the meaning. The language is no longer used merely as a communications system, but its elements are observed on a more abstract level.

Regarding elements of language influenced by metalinguistic activities, the following types of the abilities can be distinguished (Kodžopeljić, 2007):

1. phonetic analysis ability – the phonetic consciousness,
2. formulation of the concept of the word – the consciousness of words,
3. grammar inference ability – the consciousness about the syntax,
4. manifestation of the metalinguistic abilities in communication – pragmatic consciousness and
5. metatextual consciousness.

Consciousness about the specific nature of the language as a system and the methods of language analysis are studied in monolingual and bilingual children. Leopold, Vigotskij and Imedadze were the first who drew attention to the effect of bilingualism on metalinguistic abilities; this issue then became an object of many empirical studies.

Ianco-Worrall (1972) found that bilingual children (Afrikaans-English language) achieved better results in a test about sensitivity to features of the words; their consciousness about the arbitrary nature of the words was more developed too (children had to decide if they can call the

same thing by different names). Ben-Zeev (García, 2009) found that bilingual children were superior in utterance construction. Bialystok (1991) concluded that bilingual children evaluate, independently from the meaning, the grammatical correctness of utterances more precisely. It can be said that bilingual children were more advanced in distinguishing form-meaning than monolingual children. Based on the latest research, Baker (2001) concluded that bilingual children shift the attention from the products of thinking to its running processes. According to Bialystok (García, 2009) metalinguistic abilities influence children's reading acquisition. Bilingual children are able to understand the symbolic representation of the written word as they see it written in two different ways.

The research studies performed by Hajduk, Šimonji a Marinkov were focused on the problem of influence of early bilingualism (pre-school age) on some aspects of metalinguistic abilities (knowledge about the phoneme and knowledge that a word is a phonetic sign and a unit of the language). The research was carried out on a group of Hungarian-Serbian, Slovak-Serbian and Russian-Serbian bilingual students. The research results, although not always clear, indicate that increased language experience gained under natural and uncontrolled conditions has an influence on some aspects of the metalinguistic abilities. The positive effect appeared in terms of a consciousness that words have phonological characteristics independent from the meaning conveyed by words. According to research, it is also important to consider the level of language proficiency and the level of similarity of two languages.

The authors tried to explain the obtained results in various ways. As stated by Imedadze (Genc, 1981), the linguistic problems and the effort of the bilingual children are the reasons why the language becomes a specific object of attention. Ben-Zeev (Genc, 1981) explains the obtained results as an effort of children to have two separate language systems in order to avoid interference (transfer). Lambert and Taker (Genc, Kodžopeljić & Majstorović, 1989) suggest that children start to compare the grammatical structures and the vocabulary of two languages at the time they sufficiently acquire the second language. This contrast makes them more aware of some aspects of the language than monolingual children. They are focused on language phenomena analysis, which enables greater realization of cognitive potentials in terms of general intelligence and divergent abilities.

Bilingual children must often switch language codes and additionally be able to know when it is required. They are more sensitive to details in feedback and nonverbal communication. They must often notice small nonverbal signs to adapt to the situation, especially when language substitution is required. That's why they follow changes in the communication situation more carefully and, like adults, are able to respond "more maturely" in contrast to monolingual children.

Bilingual people, as they have two different language abilities, have also increased their ability to learn a third language and are more experienced at language learning than monolingual people. It is a "mastering language learning" concept or the acquired value of bilingualism, when the processes obtained in acquisition of bilingualism are transferred to learning the third language. It can be said that bilingual people are more capable of learning a third language than monolinguals.

It is worth mentioning that there are some theoretical concepts which try to explain the effect of bilingualism on various aspects of cognitive development.

1. The increased language experience hypothesis: unlike the monolinguals, a bilingual child is exposed to more diversified language experience and to increased stimulation, which positively influences cognitive development.

2. The reconnecting hypothesis or different perspectives hypothesis: bilingual children observe the world from two, to a certain extent, different perspectives. This influences the decrease of rigidity, because the person sees the problem in a different way with the change of the perspective.

3. The objectification hypothesis: it is related to processes that enable an object to become the centre of attention. Children hear two names for the same object, which makes them focus their attention on the meaning of the word rather than on the word itself, presented by the meaning. Bilingual children overcome the phase of nominal realism earlier and understand that the name of the object is not inextricably linked to the object – it is not its attribute. At that moment, the word becomes an object of special attention and child starts to think about objects and experiences in a more abstract way (Genc, 2007).

4. The language development interdependence hypothesis: analyses the relationship between the development of the first and the second language. According to this hypothesis, linguistic competence that could be acquired in the second language relates to the linguistic competence in the first language. If the first language competence is low (development is not stimulated adequately) and intensive second language-learning starts at the same time, the second language development can be disabled, and the first language future development can be influenced. If the linguistic competence in the first language is high, and there are appropriate conditions for its development in the future, intensive second language-learning is the best way to functional bilingualism and to the benefits of cognitive development.

5. The threshold hypothesis: the first and second language competences of a bilingual child can act as intervening variables, which convey the effect of the bilingual experience on the cognitive development. To ensure that the bilingualism has a positive influence on cognition, a certain level of competence existing in both languages must be reached. Cummins (Bialystok, 1990), the author of this hypothesis, calls this level a threshold. He also states, that the child must achieve a certain level of competence in both the first and second language. He assumes that this level should be high in order to expect a positive influence on cognitive development. The author even suggests, that if the level of the language competences is high enough in both languages, the bilingualism can have negative consequences too. Children with a very high level of competence (initial or almost initial) in both languages are expected to be part of a group with positive effects on cognitive development. Children, who reach initial competence only in one language (mostly in mother language), and also use this language most often at the same time, have a weaker command of the second language (Šimonji Černak, 2016). In such a case, no positive or negative effects show; no distinction will be made between them and bilingual children. Children, who have not reached the initial level of competence in both languages and have to use the less-learned language for a long time at the same time, mostly in the cognition developing situations, might show a negative effect; they may also get less success with monolinguals.

Interaction between the bilingualism and the cognitive development can be summarized as follows (Bialystok, 1991):

1. Bilingual children constantly show better results in verbal and nonverbal abilities tests,
2. Bilingual children have better results in terms of metalinguistic abilities, especially in language processing control,
3. Cognitive and metalinguistic advantages occur in bilingual situations, where systematic use of both languages, simultaneous proficiency in two languages or bilingual education is needed.
4. The cognitive effects of bilingualism occur relatively on time in the process of acquisition of bilingualism.

Social benefits

Bilingualism is also very important for the acquisition of socio-economic benefits. For example: if a worker speaks English, he may demand a higher salary; or an immigrant can find a better paid job more easily. Language proficiency enables better global and local interaction among people.

We can also look at bilingualism from the perspective of culture and cultural values. Bilingual people have the possibility to interact with two cultures; to adopt the values of both cultures and to identify with them. This increases their intercultural competence, because bilinguals have more possibilities for intercultural communication.

As different languages explain the reality in many ways, it can be said, that if someone has a command of two languages, he can also see reality from different perspectives. A command of one or more languages enables a person to be aware of cultural products of different cultures and societies (Šimonji Černak, 2013a). Moreover, bilingualism makes it impossible for ethnocentrism to develop and also lowers its impact; it can be an ally in the fight against stereotypes and enables language and cultural tolerance. Bilingualism can also be a useful instrument in potential conflict situations, when two cultures impose different requirements on an individual. One should pay regard to the effect of the factors - some can minimize and others maximize the benefits from bilingualism. These benefits depend on the sociocultural and socio-political context in which a person lives and learns.

4.4 Speech development of bilingual children

In this section some characteristics of the speech development of children who learn two mother languages since birth will be discussed.

The child is creative in the learning process of their mother language, as shown by the differences between the speech of a small child and the speech of people around him. The child adapts the phonetical form of the words to his own articulatory abilities, and moreover makes the frames that help him to organize the vowels and consonants. Children memorize what they hear and at the same time they derive language rules from the heard information because they have the ability and are naturally (in early childhood) programmed to process something they hear.

The creativity in the process of language acquisition is more visible when the child has the possibility to listen to language patterns of different language systems since birth, i.e. when a child learns two mother languages. This happens in mixed marriages, where both parents communicate with the child each in his or her own mother language. The child, who learns two mother languages, faces more difficult tasks while learning the language rules than the child, who learns only one mother language. The plasticity of the young brain enables the child to handle these tasks easily. The bilingual child is inventive and creative; there are structures in his speech which he cannot have heard from the people he is talking to. The derivation of the language rules is based on samples of two language systems, and is applied in the speech independently from the derived language rule. The bilingual child learns the word production rules in both languages. He also has the possibility to discover more rules than a monolingual child and to use them in both languages according to his will. His individual word production is therefore livelier and more visible.

The child learns the meaning of the words in both languages in the same way. The meaning of the word in the case of children does not necessarily need to be the same as the meaning of adults, as children see reality from a different perspective. The word acquisition is

connected to the situation, in which the specific word appears, and in a bilingual setting, it is connected also to the people who use those words. Children do not have the opportunity to learn certain words in both languages since they come across them only in one of the languages. Some researchers have noticed the lack of individual words with the same meaning in both languages in the speech of a child who acquires two languages at the same time. The theory of the three-stage early bilingualism development was based on that idea (Mikeš, 2000). According to the theory, the child does not acquire the words with the same meaning in both languages in the first phase, since he does not have two lexical systems. In the second phase the words with the same meaning in both languages begin to appear, but two grammatical systems still do not exist. In the third phase the child starts to distinguish two languages.

Mikeš (2000) claims, that if the supporters of three-stage theory were right, the child would not be able to transfer the rules from one language into the second language at the beginning of the early bilingualism acquisition. Based on experience it can be said that a child applies some rules of one language into the second language and follows the principles of one language while speaking in the second language. The fact that a child can transfer language rules from one language into another means that he adopts the rules of both languages and he is not only learning a language-undifferentiated system. The child does not normally learn the language rules in both languages at the same time. It depends on the conditions of the bilingual situation and on the nature of the language principles itself. If the use of Slovak language dominates in a family, the child discovers its principles and then applies them in communication in the second language. The complexity of the language rule itself is a large part of this process while the simpler rules are discovered first.

The child in a communication situation in two languages finds out that there is more than one way of saying one information, because he sees that the people he is talking to convey the same information by means of various words.

Children compare language utterances in two languages and based on a simple logic it can be summarized: if the people he is talking to convey the same message in utterances, which are linguistically different, the utterances have the same meaning. This is the way in which children discover the means of translation from one language into another. The responses of communication partners, the communication situation itself, past experience and the empathy of the people he is talking to are an essential for this process. The child can discover the meaning of the words also by means of the feedback about his speech, in terms of facial expressions, gestures or words.

It can therefore be said that children are small linguists. They analyse the language utterances they hear in the family; they discover the rules and meanings of the words in both languages and then contrast and translate them from one language into another.

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5 IDENTIFICATION OF THE CURRENT PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE EDUCATIONAL CENTRES IN WESTERN EU COUNTRIES

The aim of the project was to identify the current problems experienced by the educational centres and, based on the conclusion, propose specific actions that need to be taken. The information collected can be divided into two basic groups:

The first group includes information and conclusions regarding children's preparation for the commission examinations. It was related to the creation of the commission examinations preparation model and proposal of a single model of education according to grades and thematic areas.

The second group included proposals related to the specialised staff at the educational centres, their position within the Slovak legislation, and improvement of their continuous education during their stay abroad.

Based on the results of the source material analysis, conclusions were drawn and recommendations proposed; quantitative data were collected using questionnaires designed by the research team and qualitative analysis was performed by interviewing teachers in the educational centres, parents, Slovak Ministry of Education representatives, ISEIA representatives, and analysis of relevant documents (e. g. ISEIA).

5.1 Children and pupils

Children and pupils – data collection

In order to ensure objectivity, it was necessary to collect data on the number of children living abroad. It was found that no single system exists in the SR that would address the statistical indicators regarding the Slovak children living abroad temporarily/permanently, or children preparing for their commission examinations. This results from the fact that the data collected about Slovak citizens living abroad are insufficient as well as the related statistical analysis, as pointed out in the introductory chapter.

The lack of an accessible platform storing the data about the number of pupils taking an alternative form of compulsory education in or outside the SR territory posed a problem in terms of our research goals. A complex set of source materials was provided by the State School Inspection for the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 school years – the Report on Alternative Forms of Compulsory Education regarding primary school pupils outside the SR territory. According to the report, in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, 424 and 522 pupils were registered respectively, which represents a 10% increase. The report also provides recommendations addressing the lack of a single database of these pupils in the SR territory. It also recommends concluding an agreement using the relevant EU authorities regarding the provision of data by schools outside the SR territory to the respective registering schools. These data related only to pupils who took the commission examinations.

Current data on the number of children and teachers in the educational centres and other institutions were also taken from the source material provided by the Office for Slovaks who live abroad as of 31/3/2018. Based on these data, under the auspices of the educational institutions in Western EU countries and in the USA, 1,620 children were educated; however, these data are approximate since they only relate to the institutions applying for financial support. The largest number of educational centres operates in Great Britain (14). Paradoxically given the Brexit

issue, further educational centres are continuously emerging in this country as we discovered during our visit in 2017.

The Special Registrar's Office at the Ministry of Interior of the SR represents another source of data about the Slovak children born abroad; it issues birth certificates upon the parents' request. Based on these data, more than 47,000 birth certificates were issued in 2012–2016 to children of Slovak parents living or working abroad. Approx. 11,000 birth certificates have been issued to newborns born in Great Britain, 5,000 in Austria, almost 3,500 in Germany, 1,700 in Ireland, and 822 in France (available at <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/457336-obetujsi-slovensko-buducnost/>). It is assumed that these children represent the potential for future education in Slovak in the educational centres in the EU and USA.

Within the project, a questionnaire survey was performed to identify the number of children/pupils and teachers/volunteers working in these centres.

Tab. 1. Current number of pupils and teachers in the researched Western EU centres.

	Kinder garten childre n	teachers/vol unteers PSCH	Level 1 pupils/ (CE)	Teacher s/volunt eers Level 1	Level 2 pupils/ CE	Teacher s/volunt eers Level 2	Adults	Teachers /volunte ers
Birmingham	28	3/7	22/13	3/3	1/1	0/1	8	1
London Mima	25	1/2	15/0	1/1	0	0	0	0
London CIC	35	2/5p	35/6	6/7p	0	0	7	1/2
Cambridge	15	1/2p	10	1/1	2/1	1/1	0	
Berkshire	20	2/2	20/3	2/2	0	0	0	
Brighton	13	2/0	4/0	1/0	0	0	5	
Bristol	6	1/2	8/1	1/1	0/0	0/0	0	
Great Britain	162	12/20	114/23	15/15	3/2	1/2	20	2/2
Margarét ka	12	2/1	8/3	3	0	0	3	1
Slávik	23	1/3	23/3	2/1	0	0	8	1
France	33	2/4	30/6	5/1	0/0	0/0	11	1
Munich	10	2/2	18/2	2	6/6	2	5	2
Sweden	25							
Cyprus	8	1/0	17/17	1	1	1/1	0	
Ireland	3	1/0	45/37	5	17	7	3	1
Total	223	19t/22p	225/85	28t/16p	27/8	11t/3p	39	7/ 4
Children total	424	Teachers total	65	CG pupils	93			
Educate d total	457	Volunteers total	44					

Abbreviations: *PSCH* – pre-school children; *1 level* – children attending grades 1–4; *2 level* – children attending grades 5–9; *t* – teachers; *v* – volunteers; *CE* – students preparing for commission examinations.

The surveys were distributed to all educational centres registered with ISEIA (29) with a return rate of 50% (13). Centres, which are not registered with ISEIA, were not addressed since their contacts are unknown.

Currently, (the 2017/2018 academic year) these centres are educating 424 children and 39 adults. There are 65 qualified teachers and 44 volunteers, mostly parents. It is interesting that half the children (223) are pre-schoolers, which indicates their education will continue in Slovak, which will result in higher demands regarding the organisation of these centres. The communication competence development in Slovak among pre-schoolers is addressed by 19 teachers and 22 volunteers.

236 pupils attend levels 1 and 2 of primary education; 93 children are preparing for the commission examinations in the SR under the supervision of 39 qualified teachers and 19 volunteers.

All the qualified teachers have teaching experience from Slovakia, most of them are also teaching in the country where they are currently living.

The number of educated adults is rising (currently 39, mostly children's relatives). Their education is provided by 7 qualified teachers and 4 volunteers.

These data do not represent all educational centres in the Western EU. However, it can be stated that the number of children/pupils attending the educational centres (ECs) is relatively high.

To supplement these data, the numbers of pupils and teachers in the US and Canada are listed. Based on the data, it can be stated that these ECs are interested in maintaining and developing the Slovak language and culture in weekend schools attended by 295 persons (275 children). Most children at the 1st level of primary school are in New York and Chicago. 65 children in ECs are preparing for their commission examinations in the SR.

Children and pupils – educational needs

Particular educational needs of children and pupils were identified using a questionnaire distributed among the EC teachers. Both teachers' and children's needs regarding Slovak as a second or foreign language are country-specific. Through the survey the answers of respondents living in countries where English, German and French are spoken were collected. In terms of phonetics and phonology, Slovak pupils abroad need to improve their pronunciation of consonants: č, d', dz, dž, ľ, ň, r, ť, ž. They find the voiced and voiceless consonants difficult to pronounce in words as well as de, te, ne, le, di, ti, ni, li syllables and similar pronunciations. In terms for lexicology and semantics children in all three language environments need to improve their vocabulary. In terms of syntax and morphology, Slovak pupils need to improve their ability to distinguish word classes, identifying them in the text, producing complex sentences and grammar. The teachers request methodological guidelines regarding reading comprehension, mainly prose, both fiction and non-fiction. They also request simple texts which

can be translated by pupils. These text should be interesting and attractive for the children and relate to their lives (Babjaková, 2017).

Teachers' requirements, mainly those related to the Slovak language development are legitimate; their position is difficult since in this context Slovak is regarded as a foreign language. However, these teachers have not been trained to teach in this form in the Slovak educational system. Their effort to continue their training therefore deserves appreciation.

Summary:

1. A methodological and didactic material named "Hráme sa o Slovensku po slovensky/Let's Play a Game about Slovakia in Slovak" has been created to teach Slovak language and culture. It consists of three parts: Rozprávky o Slovensku/Tales about Slovakia (a set of 9 tales about Slovak regions including exercises), fun card game – Naše Slovensko/Our Slovakia (a set of 80 playing and 80 explanatory cards aiming to develop communication competence and provide Slovak culture + didactic material) and interactive tools – Hláskovo/Spellingville (autocorrecting cards, games and tasks aimed at training language phenomena in the early stages of learning). The material is based on the National Educational Plan for primary education and follows the principles of active learning, individualisation, cooperation and autocorrection. It is currently being edited and continuously printed.
2. The proposal of a single educational model for the individual grades and thematic areas is designed in close cooperation with ISEIA and the Specialised Commission for Slovaks Living Abroad at the National Institute for Education in Bratislava.
3. The specific proposals regarding preparation and performance of commission examinations have been submitted to the Ministry of Education in terms of the consultation regarding the amendment to the School Act. Proposals and amendments were submitted with the aim to include the educational programmes for the educational centres outside the SR territory (hereinafter "supplementary educational programme") in Section 5. The supplementary educational programme as a part of preparation for the commission examinations was also added into other relevant sections. Further proposals related to the commission examinations, specifically the possibility to take them outside the SR territory; see the chapter on commission examinations.

5.2 Teachers

Teachers' educational needs

In the reporting period (2014–2018), surveys and interviews were performed with 65 teachers working in the educational centres, which responded to our call.

It was found that teachers focus mostly on the Slovak language, culture, history and geography. The educational needs are subject-specific. Medium to high demand for self-development was reported by respondents in the area of language didactics for pre-school and primary school aged children. These needs include mainly activation strategies in language learning, correct pronunciation of Slovak sounds and words, and vocabulary development. Insufficiencies were reported in the selection of language games and learning activities for pre-schoolers, Slovak grammar and writing in a foreign learning environment and Slovak children's

books. More than half of the respondents reported a significant lack of functional, didactic and methodological materials as well as audio-visual tools that significantly increase the quality of education. Of course, the educational programme and learning projects for children who spend their weekends at school instead of having free time is difficult. It requires great invention as well as new and interesting impulses to motivate children towards learning. The most frequently reported areas that need methodological guidelines with practical demonstrations and exercises include Slovak grammar, vocabulary development, culture, history, and geography. There is a lack of theoretical and methodological educational activities for teachers that would increase their own knowledge about Slovakia. Understandably, continuous education is in demand; modern didactics is reported as more important than learning the content specified in the National Educational Plan as compulsory for the commission examinations.

The need for continuous education was referred to also in the extracurricular activities, specifically regarding the creation of attractive and fun ways of working with children, and activities related to art and culture – all performed in Slovak. The respondents state they need methodological guidelines on free-time activities and a collection of Slovak children's folk songs. The accessibility of materials about Slovak children's songs and folklore was not identified as problematic, as the availability is wide.

In terms of pedagogical, psychological and didactic capabilities, the respondents preferred mostly education related to active and experiential teaching methods, developing creativity in children and diagnosing their individual differences. Medium to high demand was reported in relation to working with hyperactive and talented children, multimedia educational programmes, project creation and teaching children with learning disorders. All respondents expressed their interest in an innovative type of short-term (1–2 day) courses; longer and more complex courses are not acceptable since they are time-consuming and interfere with their other activities.

Teachers' position – the legislation

The Slovak legislation specifies the status of a “posted” teacher. Teachers of the Slovak language and academic subjects are posted abroad by the Ministry of Education based on the international agreements between the ministries pertaining to the respective countries. The agreement specifies the conditions under which the teacher is posted, their material and financial needs, technical equipment, and accommodation. The teacher is posted for a minimum of one year with the possibility to extend the stay to the maximum of four years; they are posted if accepted by the receiving country. Currently, Slovak teachers are posted to Hungary, Romania and Ukraine – countries with a nation specific educational system. However, the educational activity in the ECs in Western Europe and the US is provided more or less thanks to volunteer teachers. Since ECs are not listed in the system of schools and educational institutions of the SR, these teachers are not recognized as officially posted, nor is their experience abroad recognized; upon their return to the SR they are not given the opportunity to participate in continuous education and collect credits based on which teachers are financially compensated.

The fact that the SR does not provide systematic aid in the solution of this problem is a significant problem.

Luckily, it was possible to provide at least partial support for continuous education. Based on these requirements, on several occasions supporting educational activity was organized. It took place in the SR or directly at the educational centres. Contents, forms and methods of

education addressed the teacher's educational needs as well as our analysis. The activities followed the principles of experiential learning and the dominant ones included games and teachers' own engagement. For example a three-day training named "Tvorivá dramatika – cesta učenia a poznávania/Creative Workshop – The Way of Learning" was organised (Birmingham, 2017). Its main goal was to provide a complex thematic presentation of creative drama as a specific activity following the basic principles of experiential learning. Another course addressed current childrens' literature and interpretation of selected works for children (Dublin, 2017). In Munich (2017) a methodological seminar for teachers was organised along with a creative workshop called "Hráme sa o Slovensku po slovensky/Let's Play a Game about Slovakia in Slovak". These events were attended by teachers from all ISEA educational centres.

In October and November 2018 two more educational courses will take place in Paris and Dublin focused on the activating forms of education in Slovak as a foreign language.

Summary:

1. Act No. 317/2009 on the teaching staff is currently under consultation. Comments were submitted to the appropriate department of the Ministry of Education regarding the integration of these teachers into the Act. The opportunity to join continuous education was requested for these teachers so they can collect credits that precondition their further professional development; the request was granted. In case teachers working in the ECs are listed among the teaching staff as provided in the comments, we have prepared a basic curriculum of the specialised educational programme. The accredited programme would focus on teaching children for whom Slovak is a foreign language. The theoretical background of bilingualism will be emphasized.
2. Within the project, five educational courses were organised whose contents and methods corresponded with the specific requirements. These requirements drew from our analysis as well as the coordination meetings annually organised by the Section of International and European Affairs at the Ministry of Education of the SR. The current requirements pertained to the methods and forms of teaching Slovak as a foreign language since the children in question predominantly communicate in another language.

The main goal of the project was to improve the quality of ECs activities in those Western European countries where children are preparing to take commission examinations.

Data will be provided to:

- Ministry of Education of the SR – Section of International and European Affairs at the Ministry of Education of the SR;
- National Institute for Education – Board of the The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad – as a source material for the task regarding monitoring and supporting teaching Slovak language and literature to children permanently living abroad;
- Commission for Education at the International Slovak Educational Institution and Association (ISEIA);
- Commission for Education at the Slovak children living abroad
- Relevant institutions will be provided with detailed information about the educational centres abroad: The educational centre have an organisational structure – provider, director (head), teachers and volunteers. All ECs focus mainly on education in Slovak; the contents take into

account children's motivation – maintaining Slovak or preparation for commission examinations.

- ECs perform their activities in rented premises, often provided by a church. Certain ECs have several rooms and some of them are used as classrooms for preschoolers, primary and secondary level pupils. Certain ECs provide space for free-time activities, mostly related to folklore. Most ECs have their own library. Rent is funded by parents and grants from the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad.
- Lessons are taken during weekends (mostly Saturdays) or on Friday afternoons. In almost all ECs pupils take 4–5 lessons a week. The contents are based on the given level of education – reading and writing in Slovak, geography and culture (primary level); Slovak language and literature, geography and history (secondary level) in accordance with the National Educational Plan of the SR. At the end of each grade, ECs perform final examinations using oral and written testing.

Based on the detailed research of the issue, it must be stated that the explained problems need to be continually addressed. The two-year duration of the project and limited financial support allowed for a probe into the issue of educating Slovak children living abroad. Therefore in cooperation with the ISEIA Commission for Education, Specialised Commission of Office for Slovaks who live abroad, Ministry of Education – Section of International Cooperation and European Affairs and the Section of Regional Schools and selected ECs, the project titled “SLOVENSKÉ VZDELÁVACIE CENTRÁ VO SVETE/SLOVAK EDUCATIONAL CENTRES ABROAD” was implemented. The objective of the project is the proposal of a single concept for the improvement of education provided by educational centres outside the SR territory and the means of its implementation in the Western Europe and the US. Its outcome will provide materials for the specialised departments in the SR with the competency to address the issue (Ministry of Education, National Institute for Education, Methodological-Pedagogical Centre, Ministry of Interior, local authorities and providers of primary and high schools, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad).

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Act No. 317/2009 Coll. on teaching staff and vocational training employees

SLOVAK EDUCATIONAL CENTRES IN WESTERN EU COUNTRIES

Problems and perspectives

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