

## Implementing the Primokiz methodology in Slovenia

Primokiz is a methodology developed by the [Jacobs Foundation](#) in Switzerland to promote the quality holistic development of preschool children. The Jacobs Foundation has sublicensed the methodology to the International Step by Step Association who have piloted the approach in Slovenia and Romania.

*Slovenia Grows with You*, which began in 2020, pilots new ways for designing, planning and delivering responsive and demand-driven services for the youngest children and their families through enhanced cooperation and coordination at local and national levels.

### Primokiz in Slovenia

The Primokiz approach was piloted in 8 municipalities in Slovenia between 2020 and 2022 with the aim of establishing integrated support systems for families with young children by developing local strategies approved by the respective municipal councils. In Slovenia, a priority of the Primokiz program is to improve the quality of life in municipalities through creating and implementing strategies and improving facilities to make these municipalities more liveable.

The program was managed nationally by the Education Research Institute (ERI) and the [Step by Step Centre for Quality Education](#), and internationally by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) who have been sublicensed by the Jacobs Foundation to implement the methodology.

The piloting process began with the selection of a coordinator, facilitator, and a local action team (LAT) for each participating municipality. These teams worked to create situation analyses — documents reviewing the state of affairs of services that interact most often with young children and families, namely education, health, and social care. These services were evaluated on the basis of the Primokiz model which considers early childhood policy to be primarily a joint responsibility of the education, healthcare and social services systems. The situation analyses were then used to guide the development of the municipalities' local strategies' titled, "A municipality friendly to families with younger children."

### The importance of participation

One of the key elements of the Primokiz model is participation. As such, it was important to ensure that the widest possible range of families contributed to the process to ensure that the ensuing document addressed the widest possible range of needs in order to benefit the most number of people. The principle of participation was also reflected in the fact that the situation analysis involved the joint work of the local coordinator, facilitator, and LAT members.

### Carrying out the situation analysis

The development of this starting document took place in several steps. To begin the process, municipalities collected various statistical data related to families with younger children (including settlement density in the municipality, number of inhabitants, birth rate, share of children enrolled in kindergarten, etc.). This was followed by the development of a list of services available to families

with children up to the age of seven. The municipalities obtained this data through questionnaires sent to the providers they identified. Next, information was gathered about the needs of families through questionnaires, and in one municipality via a face-to-face focus group.

All of the facilitators and local coordinators participated in creating a common draft of the questionnaire for parents, which was later adapted by each municipality to its specific context. This was followed by the analysis of all the information obtained and by the development of a document. Throughout the process, ERI researchers intensively supported facilitators and local coordinators with various trainings and joint and individual reflective meetings, as well as creating a learning community among the facilitators and coordinators to support them.

### **Analysis of the local strategies**

Analysis of the documents showed that the most "undernourished" area of services is the one aimed at the youngest age group (up to three years, and especially from birth to enrolment in kindergarten). There is a lack of more specialized healthcare services (e.g. dentist, paediatrician, speech therapist, child psychiatrist etc.), but this is linked to systemic deficits throughout the entire country. Additionally, the analysis highlighted that the fewest programs exist for specific groups of children and their parents, for example, for children with autism, foreign language families etc.). In all municipalities, the majority of programs and services are offered by the education sector, with less participation from the social care and health sectors — therefore one of the objectives of the strategy is to identify measures to fill this gap. Housing issues for young families were also highlighted in all municipalities.

### **Successes and challenges of the pilot**

Interviews carried out with local coordinators, facilitators, and mayors at the end of the pilot showed that one of the key successes of the program so far, was raising awareness of the importance of early childhood and strengthening cooperation between different sectors and stakeholders with an interest in the field. Additionally, the situation analysis and local strategy was deemed a success in that, according to one local facilitator, "the document reflects the real needs from the field" as opposed to projections by professionals working in the field. This survey enabled the development of specific measures based on these needs, such as more activities for children aged 0-3.

However, the municipalities also faced different challenges along the way. One of the key challenges was the COVID-19 pandemic as it inhibited the types of activities and cooperation that could take place within the pilot — including making it more challenging to work with the health sector and reach vulnerable families. Another common challenge experienced by LATs was balancing the work of the Primokiz process alongside the workload of their regular jobs which at times negatively impacted the efficiency and motivation of LAT members. Over-work and a lack of incentives may also threaten the continuity of the LATs.

In their closing interviews the coordinators suggested that in order to ensure the sustainability of the LATs after the completion of the pilot it would be necessary formalize and allocate financial resources for the position. Additionally, one of the municipalities recommended the establishment of an advocate or ombudsman to oversee the issues and priorities in the field of early childhood.

## Links to supporting documents for Slovenia Grows with You

Click here to learn about the [role of local facilitators and coordinators in the Primokiz process](#)

Click here to learn more about [carrying out the situation analysis](#)

Click here to learn more about the [development of local strategies](#)

Click here to learn from the [experiences of local facilitators](#)

Click here to learn about the [experiences of local coordinators](#)

Click here to learn about the [experiences of local mayors](#)