Pre-Primary Education and Care of Children with Special Educational Needs

Children with disabilities are included in the regular programme or the programme of public needs in the pre-primary education. Working programmes are carried out for children with disabilities from the age of 6 months to school age, by including children in educational groups with regular programme, educational groups with special programme and special institutions.

Pursuant to the opinion of the expert Committee (established by the regulations in the field of social welfare), the opinions of experts (educators, psychologists and experts in education and rehabilitation), senior nurse and director of the kindergarten, and in accordance with the appropriate medical and other findings, opinions and decisions of the competent authorities, institutions and experts, the following children are included in the educational groups with regular programme:

- Children with minor disabilities, who, according to the type and degree of disability, with the provision of the required specific conditions can master the basics of the programme along with other children in the group, and who besides the primary disability have no additional difficulties, apart from minor disturbances in the voice-speech communication;
- Children with severe disabilities by providing the necessary specific conditions, if there is an insufficient number of children to organize an educational group with a special programme.

The educational group with special programme in kindergarten includes children with disabilities, whose type and degree of disability is determined according to the regulations in the field of social welfare.

Children with disabilities, in accordance with their abilities, needs and interests, have the right to take part in regular, special and alternative programmes along with other children. The decision on the inclusion of children is taken by a team of experts (professional assistants, senior nurse and director) in kindergarten. A team of experts in kindergarten, for the purpose of exercising the right of the child to participate in regular, special and alternative programmes along with other children, creates inclusion programmes for each child, adapted to their abilities, needs and interests.

Special institutions for the implementation of the working programme with children with disabilities from the age of 6 months to the school age are kindergartens established for the work with children.
with disabilities, educational institutions, social welfare institutions and healthcare facilities.

The special educational institutions include children with disabilities if the institutions have met the spatial and personnel requirements for the formation of educational groups with special programme.

The social welfare institutions include children with disabilities who, according to the law that regulates relations in the field of social welfare, have been ordered separation from family members and accommodation in a social welfare institution providing pre-primary education. The healthcare facilities include children with disabilities who, due to health reasons, need accommodation in healthcare facilities that provide pre-primary educational programmes to children with disabilities.

In accordance with the National Pedagogical Standards for Preschool Education and Care (Official Gazette No. 63/2008 and 90/2010), the following children are considered children with disabilities:

- children with visual impairment,
- children with hearing impairment,
- children with speaking and vocal disorders,
- children with personality changes caused by organic factors or psychosis,
- children with behaviour disorders,
- children with motoric impairment,
- children with decreased intellectual ability,
- children with autism,
- children with multiple disabilities,
- children with health related difficulties and neurological damage (diabetes, asthma, heart condition, allergies, epilepsy, etc.)

The following are considered to be milder disabilities:

- nearsightedness,
- hard of hearing,
- speach difficulties,
- changes in personality caused by organic factors or psychosis,
- behaviour disorders and neurotic disturbances (agression, motoric hyperactivity, nutrition disorders, enuresis, encopresis respiratory affective crisis), motoric impairment (partial mobility not requiring assistance by others),
- children with decreased intellectual abilities (milder mental retardation)

The following are considered to be heavy disabilities:

- blindness,
- deafness,
- complete lack of speaking ability,
- motoric impairment (ability to move requires assistance by others or use of electro-motor assistance device),
- children with significantly decreased intellectual abilities,
- autism,
- multiple disabilities (any combination of the abovementioned heavy disabilities, combinations of mild disabilities or any mild disability combined with mild mental retardation)

The programmes for children with disabilities are carried out with children from the age of 6 months to the age of primary school enrolment, by including the children into:

- educational groups following regular programmes.
educational groups following special programmes,
special institutions.

**Pre-Primary Education and Care of Gifted Children**

Kindergarten ensures the implementation of special pre-primary education programmes for gifted children. Early detection and identification of gifted children is carried out by a psychologist in collaboration with other professional associates in kindergarten. Special pre-primary education programme for gifted children is made by the psychologist in collaboration with other professional associates and experts in the field of natural sciences and humanities with the prior consent of the ministry responsible for education.

The programme is conducted by educators and professional associates in collaboration with other educational personnel in kindergarten, and, if necessary, with the relevant expert and scientific institutions. Programmes for gifted children are implemented in:

- all kinds of programmes and in all educational groups in kindergartens, and
- shorter programmes specially tailored to fit the abilities, needs and interests of children and in consultation with their parents.

Programmes designed for gifted children are based on:

- individual abilities, preferences and interests,
- additional programme contents,
- ongoing collaboration with parents,
- monitoring the child's progress,
- ongoing collaboration with experts and scientific institutions.

Special pre-primary educational programmes for gifted children are implemented through the following:

1. extended regular programmes that are partially adapted to the children's expressed interests, preferences and abilities, and are realized within the regular programmes of pre-primary education;
2. working programmes realized in small groups of children with the same or similar abilities, preferences and interests by organizing special activities (projects, demanding logical and didactic games, working on a multimedia PC, etc.);
3. specially adapted programmes complemented with contents that stimulate the development of specific areas of talent, with respect to developmental specificities of the gifted children, are realized as the following: playgroups for gifted children of similar intellectual abilities and interests (up to 15 children), programmes with specific contents for children with similar abilities, interests and talents (music, art, sports, language, creative playroom) and individual mentoring.

**Special Educational Programmes in ECEC**
Pre-Primary Education of Children of Croatian Citizens Abroad

Pre-primary educational programmes establish gradualness of the education and care of children of Croatian citizens abroad as the preparation programmes for supplementary primary schools and include children from the age of 3 years to the school age.

Pre-primary educational programmes for children of Croatian citizens abroad include the preschool children in order to acquire the knowledge about the social and cultural conditions of life in the Republic of Croatia, to preserve the national identity by adopting, developing and promoting the Croatian language and culture in the country where the children reside, and to facilitate the inclusion into the supplementary primary school.

Pre-primary education and care for children of Croatian citizens abroad is promoted and stimulated by the Republic of Croatia. The stimulation on the expert level refers to providing material support in organizing seminars, lectures, expert workshops and language exercises for pre-primary school educators and teachers who provide the children with shorter supplementary programmes and in the procurement of expert literature and handbooks.

The ministry responsible for education is obliged to encourage and provide technical and material support to the Croatian national minority abroad in organizing pre-primary education for children of Croatian citizens abroad.

Pre-Primary Education in the Language and Script of the National Minority

The education in the language and script of the national minorities is organised in accordance with the Act on Education in the Language and Script of the National Minorities (Official Gazette No. 51/2000 and 56/2000) as well as with the National Pedagogical Standards for Preschool Education and Care (Official Gazette No. 63/2008 and 90/2010)

Pre-primary education programmes may be organized in the language and script of the national minority or bilingual, and are implemented in the educational groups of a particular national minority and in pre-primary education institutions established for children belonging to national minorities.

Bilingual programmes are the programmes that are implemented in the Croatian language and in the mother tongue of a national minority.
A part of the pre-primary education programme in the language and script of a national minority must be performed in Croatian for at least 10 hours a week per educational group.

Pre-primary education institutions for children belonging to national minorities are established under the conditions stipulated by the Act on Preschool Education (Official Gazette No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013) (Official Gazette, No. 10/97, and 107/07) and the Act on Education in Languages and Scripts of National Minorities (Official Gazette, No. 51/00).
Religious Education in Pre-Primary Educational Institutions

Religious education of preschool children in pre-primary educational institutions can be organized under the provisions of the Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, No. 10/97.) and the Agreement on Catholic Religious Education in Public Schools and Religious Training in Public Pre-Primary Institutions in force as of 29 January 1999. The religious education encompasses 19,700 (12.9%) of preschool children (whose parents decided on behalf of their children to include them in the programme) of the total of 152,284 (64%) children who participate in pre-primary educational programmes in the Republic of Croatia. The number of kindergartens which are founded by religious communities is 50, 48 of which have been established by the Catholic Church, one is Protestant and one Jewish.

Educational Programmes for Children with Health Problems

Preschool education programmes can be carried out as shorter programmes for children of early and preschool age (playhouses) within libraries, healthcare, social care, cultural and sports institutions, organisations, other legal entities and physical entities.

Six programmes for preschool age children with health related problems were established in Zagreb, Sisak, Zadar and Rijeka within hospitals, in partnership between kindergartens and hospitals. (BUKOVAC Kindergarten in partnership with "REBRO"University Hospital, as well as IZVOR Kindergarten in partnership with “KLAIĆEVA” Children's Clinical Hospital, have established programmes for children with health problems. Such programmes are also carried out by two kindergartens in Sisak - SISAK STARI and SISAK NOVI – in partnership with “Dr. Ivo Pedišić” General Hospital.)

In the programme for children with special health problems, the following important tasks are realised:

- creating a positive socio-emotional surrounding, i.e. educational environment which satisfies children’s needs in specific hospital conditions,
- along with motoric and cognitive development, influencing all other fields of development whose significance increases as the child grows up, thus establishing a balance between a child’s needs and abilities,
- appropriately and timely acknowledging and satisfying personal needs by supporting the development of self-confidence and self-respect through strengthening social skills,
- taking into account the specificities of age, health condition and individual needs of children
- influencing the satisfaction of children’s needs for speaking expression, acquiring new knowledge and creativity, through appropriate contents
- enabling family members to be present and participate during the work with children

Alternative Programmes and Kindergartens
Montessori pedagogy

In the Republic of Croatia, there are five kindergartens that implement educational programmes with preschool children only by the principles and pedagogical approach of the Montessori pedagogy. Montessori programmes are implemented in 11 regular kindergartens. The approach of Maria Montessori, today as a hundred years ago, is to carefully observe the child in order to assess the child's personal needs. She was aware that the child's needs change along with the changes in the society. She thought that the most important thing is to be aware of these changes and enable the child to face them. The golden rule has remained the same - keep observing, listening, protecting and stimulating safe family community full of love - no matter to what extent these communities differ from family to family and in different periods of time ... That still remains the starting point.

Waldorf pedagogy

Waldorf pedagogy is an education system based on anthroposophic principles of Rudolf Steiner. In the daily, weekly and annual rhythm various activities take place: playing, eating, resting, art and working activities. The toys, furniture and didactic materials are of natural origin, shaped and coloured so as to provide mild and nuanced stimuli for a healthy development of senses. With this, an understanding for the ecological is “deeply” nurtured. All activities and contents aim at developing active, non-violent and creative play, stemming from the child’s inside. Such game corresponds to serious and creative work in adult world, arising from the total freedom of a human.

Agazzi pedagogy

This method was created as a result of the studying and educational work of Agazzi sisters, Rose and Caroline, their teacher Pietro Pasquali and the socio-cultural context in which they worked, at the end of 19th century. The basic feature of the Agazzi pedagogy is that it places the child I the centre and that the kindergarten is an organisation of children’s activities. The main value of Agazzi psychology is the development of the relationship between the child and the educator in a special way: the relationship is born from the first encounter with the child living with others, playing, working, speaking and acting on his/her own. ZRAKA SUNCA kindergarten in Križevci operates following the principles of pedagogy of the community of the Agazzi sisters, founded by Kiara Lubich.

Programs of Varied Duration

Programs of varied duration can be carried out on various locations, such as kindergartens (including programmes for children under the age of 3) – public, private, religious, within primary schools, children’s special care homes, as well as health, cultural, sports and art institutions. In accordance with the Act on Preschool Education, the preschool education programmes can be carried out:

- within primary schools,
- as shorter programmes for children of early and preschool age (playhouses) within libraries, healthcare, social care, cultural and sports institutions, organisations, other legal entities and physical entities.
It is necessary to acquire an approval by the Ministry of Science Education and Sports in order to establish a programme of shorter duration.

References:

- Law on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities, Official Gazette No. 51/00, 56/2000
- Curriculum for Croatian Classes Abroad, Official Gazette No. 194/2003
- Act on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, Official Gazette No. 83/2002
- Agreement on Catholic Religious Teaching in Public Schools and Religious Education in Public Preschool Institutions, Government of the Republic of Croatia, 29th January 1999
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Serbian Orthodox Church on Matters of Common Interest, Official Gazette No. 196/2003
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Evangelical Church in Croatia on Matters of Common Interest, Official Gazette No. 196/2003,
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Croatian Old-Catholic Church and Macedonian Orthodox Church, Official Gazette No. 196/2003
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Coordination of Jewish Communities in Croatia and Jewish Religious Community Bet Israel in Croatia, Government of the Republic of Croatia, 24th October 2008
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Coordination of Jewish Communities in Croatia, Official Gazette No. 4/2012
- National Pedagogical Standards for Preschool Education and Care, Official Gazette No. 63/2008. and 90/2010
- National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, Official Gazette No. 5/2015