

City of Ljubljana

Zoran Janković
Mayor



LIUBLJANA'S PLEDGE TO THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

A strong social Europe means the inclusion of everyone. Ljubljana is a city where we respect diversity and live together. Ljubljana is a social city that promotes social inclusion and human dignity. Through numerous programmes, services and activities, we strive for social equality, solidarity and openness, while paying special attention to vulnerable groups.

Commitment to principle 11 “*Childcare and support to children*”

- **Kindergartens and schools in Ljubljana are accessible to everyone, regardless of their social, ethnic or other background**

The accessibility of pre-school education and care for all, especially for vulnerable and socially deprived children, is one of the key goals of the City of Ljubljana. In 2019, 95.5 % of all children with permanent residence in the City of Ljubljana were included in quality kindergarten programmes. The proportion of participation was well above the national average, which was 81.2 % during the same year, and is the result of large-scale investments, through which we responded to constant growth in the need for vacancies in kindergartens, and strong subsidies from public funds. In 2020, there are 23 kindergartens in 105 locations in the City of Ljubljana, with 784 classes, in which 13,191 children are included during the 2020/21 school year. There are also 23 private kindergartens in Ljubljana that are co-financed from the city budget. Private kindergartens implement a publicly valid programme, and about half of them a programme according to special pedagogical principles, such as Waldorf and Montessori pedagogy. Amongst private foreign schools, the European School Ljubljana, the French School in Ljubljana and the Danila Kumar International School, Ljubljana also offers an international kindergarten in English and French.

In 2020, there are 47 public primary schools in the City of Ljubljana, including the Special Education Centre Janez Levec Ljubljana for children with special needs, as well as four private primary schools. They educate 26,369 primary school students in 1,154 classes. Of those children, 25,203 students or the vast majority are enrolled in public primary schools. In the period from 2009 to 2020, the number of primary school students in Ljubljana's public schools increased from 19,172 to 25,203, meaning that 6,031 more students attend our schools this year than eleven years ago.

Never before in the past has society invested in the development of pre-school and school children with such enthusiasm, knowledge and resources as today, and Ljubljana is in a leading position here: almost a third the city budget is spent on education each year, which is one of the highest proportions amongst EU cities. From 2006 to 2020, we allocated €276.2 million for investments, and received €17.1 million from national and EU funds.

- **We subsidize programmes in kindergartens and offer higher standards**

Care and pre-school education in kindergartens are accessible to all children in Ljubljana, through the subsidization of the price of programme. The parents' fee depends on the income class of the family and kindergarten programme. For the families with the lowest income programmes are free. City of Ljubljana provides parents who have permanent residence in Ljubljana with additional subsidies based on their income. The City of Ljubljana offers parents with a housing loan an extra subsidy of the price of programme. All parents have the opportunity to pay lower prices due to the holiday or medical absence of the child.

In public kindergartens, we also implement extracurricular programmes for children, which are additionally subsidized from the city budget, such as enrichment activities, short camps, and programmes during summer and winter holidays. Many of these are carried out in seven holiday homes, where children can spend several days in the country, at the coast or in the mountains. We co-finance these programmes with the aim of ensuring that as many children as possible can participate in the programmes, regardless of the possible financial obstacles that their families may have. Our goal in the future is that every child will be able to spend a subsidized week in a holiday home owned by the City of Ljubljana during pre-school and primary school education.

- **We pay particular attention to children with special needs**

As early as in kindergarten, children with special needs receive additional professional assistance within regular classes or are included in one of the thirteen special education pre-school classes in kindergartens that implement an adapted preschool programme. Children with more or less demanding forms of special needs are included in the primary school with an adapted programme in the scope of the Special Education Centre Janez Levec, which operates under the auspices of the Municipality of Ljubljana. We also work closely with two state institutions that include children from the wider region, namely the Ljubljana School for the Deaf, and Centre IRIS - Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted. In the future, we will strive to overcome the current state of inclusion in primary schools by including most children with special needs in regular primary schools. We will pay particular attention to the continuous transition of children from autistic and other special education classes from kindergarten to primary school, with individual adjustments for each individual according to their needs. By 2035, we will have one kindergarten and one primary school in each district authority that will organize inclusive classes. Later, we will include other schools in the network of schools with inclusive classes.

In order to achieve a higher quality of treatment of children with special needs in Ljubljana, we have developed the model of the PIKA Education Centre, which has been operating since 2013 in the scope of the Special Education Centre Janez Levec Ljubljana and is intended to support the education of children with special needs in the kindergartens and schools of the City of Ljubljana and beyond. According to its concept of operation, it is unique in Europe and operates based on five programmes: a professional development programme for special and social pedagogues, an individual counselling programme, a telephone and e-counselling programme for teachers and families, a programme of lectures and seminars for teachers and families, and educational programmes for parents/families. The functioning of the PIKA Education Centre is based on the linking of effective practices in kindergartens and schools, which are complemented with knowledge from academic literature. Various possibilities are checked and tested in the face of challenges, and experiences are exchanged. We have successfully filled a gap in educational programmes for teachers, which bypass the training of teachers for working with children with special needs. Thus, during the 2019/2020 school year, the second generation of professional staff of kindergartens and schools completed the two-year training.

- **We support inclusive programmes for children with autistic disorders**

In the City of Ljubljana, we promote inclusive programmes for children with special needs and, together with experts, develop special education classes for children with special needs, such as the new special education class for children with autistic disorders at the Pedenjped Kindergarten. The Chamber of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Slovenia, which rewarded the kindergarten with the Golden Pencil Award for Performance, also recognized both the architectural and content-inclusive design of the Pedenjped Kindergarten. Following this example, there are two new special education classes at the Vodmat Kindergarten and Miškolin Kindergarten starting with the 2020/21 school year. Teachers and parents prepare an individual programme for each child in this class, taking into account child's specifics, strengths and weaknesses in development. Through the programme, the child is trained for independent living and equipped with skills and abilities that will ensure his/her further success in the appropriate school programme. Inclusive educational practice is a fundamental direction of the City of Ljubljana and is an integral part of the Strategy for the development of education. Our goal is to establish and disperse a network of such inclusive classes in public kindergartens in each district authority. In this way, our aim is to facilitate the transition of children with special needs, especially with autistic disorders, between different kindergarten programmes, and enable the more successful transition of children from kindergarten to primary school, and thus equal initial conditions for all.

We want the state to recognize the importance of such early treatment and flexible practice of raising and educating children with autism and to listen to families and professionals in providing appropriate assistance from birth onwards. We estimate that, given the large proportion of people with autism, different concepts of working with children and people with autism in terms of social integration into society will be needed in the future. Through the new classes in kindergartens, we bring a new concept and take the necessary first step in adapting the organization of education for such persons.

- **We support students through subsidies for curricular and extra-curricular program**

The City of Ljubljana also supports economically and socially vulnerable children during primary and secondary school. We support children from lower-income families in primary and secondary school by partially covering the costs at the beginning of the new school year, covering the costs of school camps for primary school children and organized school lunches for children in primary and secondary school. The City of Ljubljana co-finances the costs of providing organized morning and after school programme for 2nd and 3rd grade students. In addition, Ljubljana schools have the option of hiring additional professionals co-financed by the City of Ljubljana: a second teacher in the first grade of primary school, science and sports teachers, additional counsellors, librarians, teachers in after school programmes and teacher assistants.

- **We co-finance programmes and projects for children and families**

The programmes and projects of public institutions also contribute to raising the quality of life of children, among which the "Mala ulica" Centre for Children and Families offers high-quality activities and programmes for children and parents. Through the co-financed programmes of non-profit organizations, we offer holiday care, which is free for children from socially disadvantaged families, after-school and leisure activities for children, as well as extra-curricular programmes in primary schools and kindergartens that follow the principle of equal opportunity. Every year, we also co-finance programmes aimed at preventing various types of addiction, intended for children and adolescents, as well as their parents and teachers. As in previous years, we will continue to develop quality programmes for children in cooperation with schools and strive to cooperate with promising non-profit organizations.

Through various projects we also cooperate in the promotion of equality in the preschool period. We constantly try to break down the barriers between support and encouragement on one hand, and various obstacles in the environment of the preschool child on the other hand. A good example

is the project for early inclusion of Roma children in the Šentvid Kindergarten. Even though this community represents only a small proportion of children who are severely deprived, the project gives us an insight into the importance of the early entry of children into pre-school institutions. The project is also a good example of successful cooperation with kindergartens and non-governmental organizations.

- **We continuously invest in the infrastructure of kindergartens and schools – we renovate existing facilities and provide additional space by building new premises**

The City of Ljubljana allocates extensive funds from the budget for investments. These costs are not included in the price of programmes. In the coming years, we will continue to carry out regular investment in kindergartens and primary schools. Our goal is static and fire safety in all facilities, which we will achieve through regular maintenance, especially through complete renovation of buildings (overall there are 193 locations) and by providing enough space in kindergartens and primary schools. The planned scope of investment is up to €25 million per year, depending on priorities and financial possibilities.

In the City of Ljubljana, permanent and extensive investments are being made in kindergartens and primary schools. Above all, we provide sufficient room: in 14 years we have provided additional space in kindergartens for over 3,000 preschool children, and in schools for over 6,000 students, which represents an increase of nearly 30 %. We ensure the highest possible safety by using children appropriate materials, by building seismic designed, fire safe and energy efficient buildings, as we pursue the goal of quality living conditions for children and employees.

In the period since 2006, we replaced all asbestos roofs in kindergartens, seismically and energetically reconstructed the buildings, renovated playgrounds and playrooms for children, and built new multi-purpose rooms for relaxed and safe children's play. We opened 104 new classes, so that by 2018, when most children were enrolled in kindergartens, we enabled an additional 3,028 children to enter kindergarten. Additional space in primary schools is provided by numerous investments in new classrooms and by repurposing the existing facilities owned by schools or local community authorities. We increased the capacity of schools by as many as 159 classes from 2008 to this year; 1,103 classes are in function this year.

- **We also provide children with space for innovative and active play**

New constructions of sports and children's playgrounds in kindergartens and schools are always in progress; this year alone, two schools and a kindergarten received completely new grounds for sports and play. Playgrounds are the part of the school that is the least connected to school program, and children are happy to visit them even after school and during the holidays. The importance of playgrounds is enormous, not only in terms of increasing the physical abilities of children, but also in terms of playing together and increasing social skills. Just as school buildings that were built in different periods and today show the spirit of the time of design and construction, so do playgrounds show their history. In renovations, we are faced with the question of whether compromises can be made in an over-regulated society when the demand for comprehensive safety and the desire for the greatest possible creativity of children is met. Thus, in recent years, we have been building innovative playgrounds with a variety of play equipment that thoughtfully increase children's skills and possibilities for socializing. Moreover, the concepts of forest pedagogy and other approaches are being implemented, which introduce learning and a genuine and positive attitude towards nature and the environment. The most popular holiday care programmes for children take place outdoors on Rakova Jelša, Tivoli and on any slightly larger plot of land where children are free to use land, grass, branches, trees and other materials for exploration and work.

In Ljubljana, we support a variety of projects that bring today's children closer to play, which offer them the opportunity to express and explore themselves and their feelings. The most interesting playgrounds are those where children have been active collaborators and not just passive observers since planning: when children draw their imaginary playgrounds, which are then actually created,

such as the one in the Najdihojca Kindergarten, or arrange the green areas with shrubs and spices or lettuce and strawberries, as they did at the Majda Vrhovnik Primary School, Kolezija, Zadobrova, Janče and many other schools. Various projects and the cooperation of experts with children show us that it is possible to overcome various obstacles, and that children can also creatively co-create playgrounds in the city, where they can be heard, and their ideas can be realized. More demanding work, of course, is left to experts.

Ljubljana is included in the network of Child-Friendly UNICEF Cities and the ISSA organization, where we strive to enable children to experience life through play, and their education should take place in the same way. The vast majority of children in the City of Ljubljana live in an urban environment, which poses great challenges for children, such as learning to live in residential areas, facing diversity, mutual respect and cooperation, and overcoming various hardships. Through various projects implemented by kindergartens and schools and various non-governmental organizations and in a child-friendly environment, we encourage children to develop their potential as easily as possible. Ljubljana will continue to be a child-friendly city for all children, regardless of their different social, ethnic, religious or linguistic background.

- **We are ready for the future**

During the coronavirus epidemic and the closure of schools in the spring of 2020, we in Ljubljana responded quickly to the most urgent needs of children and parents. We provided lunch for children from the socially disadvantaged families and childcare for those families where parents could not stay at home due to the nature of their professions. We provided some students with technical equipment so that they could join distance learning, which is again relevant during the autumn wave of the epidemic. Based on this experience, we will create a good contingency plan for the functioning of kindergartens and schools, and the provision of food to the most vulnerable groups in the City of Ljubljana.

Although the City of Ljubljana already provides a high-quality and inclusive public network of kindergartens and schools and offers support to children and parents in the form of financial assistance, adapted and complementary programmes and leisure activities, we do not lack ideas for further support to the youngest citizens. We will continue to strive for the wider inclusion of target groups. In particular, we want to offer more free-of-charge services for socially disadvantaged children and we will promote and upgrade existing content and programmes in order to achieve an even higher quality of services in response to the various needs of children and parents. We will continue to create the best possible conditions for achieving a quality general education, with the necessary support for the personal and professional development of professionals. We will therefore promote the education and professional development of teachers and other professionals. We will also promote activities aimed at strengthening respect for cultural diversity and intercultural cooperation, all of this with the aim of a closer connection and solidarity in society, to which the City of Ljubljana is committed in all of its policies.

Ljubljana, 25. 11. 2020

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