

## 2.3 EDUCATION

There have been no changes in the education sector that have influenced the functionality and quality of this sector between 2000-2002. According to a World Bank study<sup>38</sup>, the Slovak education sector has slowly adapted to the needs of a modern market economy. This is partly because the shifts in funding needed to reorient the system have been sluggish, continuing to generate excess capacity in terms of teaching staff and facilities.<sup>39</sup>

The debt in the education sector keeps growing. The government has attempted to find solutions throughout the year to reduce the debt; however, it has done so without taking any principal measures in refinancing. Despite salary adjustments in the public administration sphere and a certain acceleration trend with respect to income of educators compared to other non-production sectors (culture, public health), many teachers still leave due to financial reasons. In the majority of cases, this concerns higher quality staff. The professional standard and quality of teaching drops virtually at all levels and types of schools.

Certain shifts in statistical figures occurred in 2001 compared to 2000. Despite the relative growth of children enrolled in kindergartens (84.7 percent of the respective population), the absolute number of children has dropped as a result of demographic trends by 8.5 thousand. A similar decrease was reported in elementary schools; the number of pupils enrolled in state primary schools fell by forty-seven thousand. The real picture is documented by the drop in children entering compulsory schooling (first grade); their number fell by almost 10 percent (7,200 children) as compared to the year 2000. This fact, along with the continuing rationalization and reduction of schools due to economic reasons, has led to an overall decrease in the number of schools by three hundred in 2001. This decreasing trend, however, did not become reflected in the number of pupils in special schools. This alarming fact is very likely connected to the issue of education of Roma children and adolescents.

Despite an increase in the numbers of students enrolling at universities, the overall number of university students remains low compared with developed countries; post-secondary and non-university education shows signs of stagnation. A phenomenon important, from the viewpoint of prospects and quality, is the reduction of students in post-graduate study programs (Ph.D.). Table 2.6 indicates the development of school facilities.

**Table 2.6**  
*Network of Schools and Teaching Institutions*

Type of school	Number of schools		Number of pupils and students	
	1999/2000	2001/2002	1999/2000	2001/2002
Kindergartens	3,314	3,243	161,863	150,587
Primary schools	2,482	2,406	672,042	626,645
Elementary schools of art	194	175	95,561	96,887
Secondary grammar schools	209	217	76,662	86,239
Secondary vocational schools	348	339	89,542	91,820
Apprenticeships	361	374	102,522	106,775
Health care schools	24	31	7,252	9,384
Special schools	371	437	30,736	32,244
Universities (FTS) <sup>a</sup>	18	20	88,192	93,159

**Note:** a. Full time study.

**Source:** Statistical Yearbook of Education of the SR. Institute of Information and Forecasting in Education (2000, 2001).

The quality of education has also numerous factors. Experts agree that one of the greatest challenges of the Slovak education system is the change of its philosophy from emphasizing theoretical knowledge to focusing on its application in daily life (in particular, in preparing for the labor market). This challenge comprises of a number of complex reform policies and measures. A chance for higher quality and better adjustment to trends in developed countries lies in the so-called Millennium Project, comprising of the National Program of Educational and Training and the Development Concept of Education, as the main strategic tools of introducing educational reform. The Millennium Project determines 5 strategic priorities:

- ❑ adjustment of the teaching process and its content to the needs of a learning information society;
- ❑ creation and guarantee of quality management in education training under new conditions;

<sup>38</sup> Source: World Bank (2002).

<sup>39</sup> For example, while enrollments in state vocational and technical schools fell by 16 percent between 1990 and 2000, the number of teachers rose by nearly 20 percent and the number of schools by over 44 percent. Source: World Bank (2002).

- ❑ quality assessment and evaluation of effectiveness of education;
- ❑ improvement in quality, status, and recruitment of teachers;
- ❑ purposive support linking education and the labor market.<sup>40</sup>

According to the World Bank<sup>41</sup>, the system needs to be refocused in order to provide more general, higher-level skills that the economy needs (and students demand) by reorienting secondary education and by expanding access to tertiary education. This can be achieved by keeping public spending on education at its current level of under four percent of GDP, by taking advantage of the sharp drop in the school age population, by making efficiency gains in the present system, by increasing the role of private providers, and by generating additional resources from tertiary level tuition fees. This is conditioned by

**Box 2.2**

*Important Legislative Changes in Education*

The new Act on Training and Education was supposed to be one of the first steps in the transformation of the school system. This legal norm, falling under so-called euro-legislation, was however not discussed in the government. The Act on Financing Primary and Secondary Schools is effective from January 2002. The implementing provisions attempt to set cost- and output-related coefficients and hence to introduce greater transparency of financial flows. The act also regulates the entitlement of private and church schools for contributions from the State Budget, introducing equal conditions compared with state schools. The act, however, fails to create pressure on the rationalization and reduction of the school network and its adaptation to demographic trends.

The adoption of the Concept of Development of Universities and Colleges brought an increment in the funding of universities by 0.1 percent in GDP terms. After long-lasting discussions in the academic community as well as in political circles, the Act on universities and colleges was passed in 2002. The main changes include:

- ❑ transformation of state universities to public service organizations, which can own property;
- ❑ enlargement of possibilities for multi-source financing;
- ❑ programming and institutional diversification of tertiary education;
- ❑ change in the status of university teachers, introduction of functional positions for professors and associate professors assigned based on tenders;
- ❑ specification of the accreditation system;
- ❑ introduction of a new system of state support for students.

The aim of public administration reform in the area of education, similar to other areas, is a purposeful transfer of competencies and responsibilities from local state administration to local self-governments. The Act No. 416/2001 Coll. regulates the legal shape of reform. The most important change concerns the transfer of school founding competencies from district and regional offices to municipalities and self-governing regions.

the adoption of changes in financing education, which had been slowly and insufficiently introduced. The challenge of decentralization also suggests the need for new, more transparent mechanisms for funding and accountability. The measures to reorient the education system will include:

- ❑ consolidation of schools and teachers with the use of a new financing mechanism based on the capitation principle;
- ❑ reorientation of secondary education toward the requirements of labor markets by increasing the general academic content at all levels and expanding the number of students prepared for tertiary education;
- ❑ reallocation of savings from consolidation to raise quality of education at all levels and to gradually expand tertiary education (by means of introducing tuition);
- ❑ strengthening of accountability mechanisms, including establishing a system of national student assessments and accreditation processes of universities;
- ❑ ensuring equal opportunities and access to education, especially for Roma children at primary and secondary levels and for all students at the tertiary level.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3.1 Health-Related Activities within the Education Sector

School catering makes up a separate closed system within the education sector. Its role is to offer healthy, affordable food and beverages. Out of the total number of students (1,207,578) at kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, forty-three percent had meals at school cafeterias during the 2000/2001 school years. This represents a strong social group that concerns almost one in every two families.

<sup>40</sup> See also Chapter 2.4.3 Measures in the education sector.

<sup>41</sup> Source: World Bank (2002).

<sup>42</sup> Source: Ditto.

In 1999, the school catering system was publicly criticized because of audits conducted by the Slovak Trade Inspectorate. The media, parents, and students publicly criticized the shortcomings of school catering facilities; in particular, they noted the low-quality food and small portions served. Table 2.7 illustrates the evaluation of the conditions of the catering of children and adolescents conducted by the State Health Institute in 2000. The comparison shows that the most serious shortcomings were detected in special schools and homes for children (i.e., in facilities established mainly for socially disadvantaged children and adolescents).

**Table 2.7**  
*Evaluation of the Catering Facilities*

Type of facility	Total number of catering facilities	of which in %			
		meeting all requirements	small shortcomings without impact on health	shortcomings that may affect health negatively	grave shortcomings threatening health
Day care centers (DCC)	46	73.91	21.73	4.36	-
Kindergartens	2,534	50.75	34.67	12.67	1.91
Kindergartens & DCC	5	80.00	20.00	-	-
Elementary schools	1,449	55.07	30.71	11.25	2.97
Grammar schools	75	49.33	36.00	10.67	4.00
Secondary vocat. schools	110	51.82	32.73	12.73	2.72
Apprenticeships	166	54.82	35.54	9.04	0.60
Faculties of universities	26	88.46	11.54	-	-
Homes for 1-3-year-old children	13	69.23	30.77	-	-
Homes for 3-18-year-old children	66	33.33	56.06	6.06	4.55
Homes for the youth at sec. schools	88	57.96	32.95	7.95	1.15
Homes for the youth at universities	40	80.00	17.50	2.50	-
Special kindergartens	3	66.66	33.34	-	-
Special elem. schools	18	44.44	38.89	11.11	5.56
Special boarding houses	38	39.48	47.37	10.53	2.62

**Source:** State Health Institute, Bratislava, 2001.

### Leisure Time Activities

Activities of leisure time centers, school facilities, and civil associations have to be considered as part of preventive health promotion of children and adolescents. Programs and projects subsidized from public resources include:

- ❑ protective activities - primary prevention in children and youth against negative influences and the creation of conditions for integration of those with health-related handicaps;
- ❑ supportive activities - support of the provision of information and publishing activities, for work with children and youth;
- ❑ holiday and leisure-time activities - support of leisure-time and other events mainly during holidays;
- ❑ training and creative activities - creative and group activities and development of other amateur activities for children and youth.

#### **Box 2.3**

##### *The School Milk Program*

The School Milk Program was implemented in 1999 based on the Methodological Instruction of the Slovak Ministry of Education. The general objective of the program is to improve the health condition of the population and to strengthen prevention of civilisation diseases. The specific objective is to increase calcium intake by school-age children through consumption of milk in the so-called milky breaks at elementary schools.

### WHO Projects "Health Promoting Schools" and "CINDI"

The main objective of the project *Health Promoting Schools* within the field of primary prevention has been raising the health awareness of children from earliest age possible, and then leading their parents to live healthy lifestyles. Several kindergartens have been involved in the subproject, *Healthy*

*Kindergarten.* The objective of these activities has been to create favorable preconditions for correct mental, physical, social, and emotional development of pre-school age children. In addition, kindergartens of a new orientation have started appearing; e.g., facilities that care for autistic children, as well as integration centers (vision disturbances, allergic conditions, mental damage) and day care centers for children who suffer from various diseases (ophthalmologic diseases, diseases of the respiratory, digestive tract, diseases of the locomotion system, skin diseases).

The CINDI project's priority has been the prevention of biological and social risk factors. The educational and training activities at primary and secondary schools and universities run in the form of working meetings and case studies directly at the schools. The major focus is on the prevention of addictions, prevention of smoking, moral development of young people, healthy nutrition and exercise, sexual education, personality formation of young people, and stress management. In 2000, the following projects were implemented under CINDI: *Repeated Surveys of the Use of Legal and Illicit Drugs by Pupils and Students of Elementary, Secondary Schools and Universities in the Slovak Republic*<sup>43</sup>, *Survey of Physical Development of Children and Adolescents in the Slovak Republic*, and *Healthy Children in Healthy Families*.

Apart from the aforementioned conditions, health of children and adolescents is also influenced by the work/rest cycle and the hygienic situation in schools. Table 2.8 presents an overview of the hygienic situation in teaching facilities.

**Table 2.8**

*Evaluation of the Hygienic Standard in Schools and Teaching Facilities*

Type of facility	Total number of catering facilities	of which in %			
		meeting all requirements	small shortcomings without impact on health	shortcomings that may affect health negatively	grave shortcomings threatening health
Kindergartens	3,287	48.95	38.39	10.61	1.95
Elementary schools	2,473	44.84	40.80	13.27	1.09
Grammar schools	204	39.22	49.02	11.76	-
Secondary vocat. schools	321	47.35	46.42	5.61	0.62
Apprenticeships	302	47.35	44.04	8.28	0.33
Faculties of universities	123	45.59	47.97	2.44	-
Special kindergartens	13	61.54	38.46	-	-
Special elem. schools	147	26.53	46.26	21.92	5.29
Special boarding houses	44	40.91	50.00	7.14	1.95
Homes for 1-3-year-old children	14	64.29	35.71	-	-
Homes for 3-18-year-old children	69	21.74	63.77	12.31	2.18
Homes for the youth at sec. schools	231	42.42	48.92	7.80	0.86
Homes for the youth at universities	76	47.37	48.68	3.95	-
Homes of social care	104	45.19	47.12	7.69	-

**Source:** State Health Institute, Bratislava, 2001.

Health-related issues may significantly determine the functionality and quality of education and training in Slovakia. Among the most pressing problems with respect to the health condition of children and adolescents include the following:

- ❑ education to positive attitudes aimed at healthy nutrition, exercise, refusal of smoking, alcoholism, drugs, and stress management is not sufficiently incorporated into the curricula of elementary and secondary schools;
- ❑ there is an inadequate care of resource for maintenance, rehabilitation and the very operation of school facilities, determining shortcomings that may threaten or already do threaten the health of children and adolescents to keep growing;
- ❑ the recipes of meals at public catering facilities for children and youth do not reflect most recent knowledge concerning healthy nutrition of children and youth;

<sup>43</sup> See also National Human Development Report Slovak Republic 2000, Chapter *Education and Training*.

- ❑ children and youth from socially needy families, in particular Roma families, have less access to catering facilities;
- ❑ health professionals do not visit families with poor hygienic habits, in particular Roma families;
- ❑ the curricula of physical education at all types and levels of schools are more orientated toward sporting performances than toward general physical fitness;
- ❑ preventive influence has a low share, though prevention (clinical, hygienic as well as prevention based on the principle of health education) not only is able to maintain the health condition of the society at an optimal level but also represents the most efficient investments in also economical terms.

Based on the above, the following recommendations for adequate measures can be made:

- ❑ support for raising health awareness orientated toward the individual's own responsibility for his/her health and of parents for the protection of their children's health;
- ❑ provision for continuous preventive care within the whole population of children and adolescents, for medical supervision at school institutions, regular inspections at catering facilities;
- ❑ making the process of comprehensive health education orientated toward daily exercise, personal hygiene, fight against alcohol consumption, smoking and other addictions, toward a healthy lifestyle, more efficient;
- ❑ reinforce the share of preventive influence within the structure of care for children and adolescents;
- ❑ extension of primary health care of children and adolescents in their home environment (also through the existing network of home nursing agencies), thus enabling early identification of abused and neglected children.

