**Summary of the audit report *Reading literacy in children in the Republic of Slovenia***

#### The Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia implemented the audit to review whether *Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ministry of Culture, National Education Institute Slovenia and Slovenian Book Agency were partially efficient in developing reading literacy in children in the period from 1 January 2014 to 31December 2018*.

Reading literacy is recognised as a fundamental capacity that enables social inclusion, personal fulfilment and personal development of an individual. It represents the basis for the development of all other literacies. Namely, it focuses on the reading role of an individual's literacy and represents combination of different types of knowledge, skills, attitudes that start to develop already in the early childhood within the family environment and are later upgraded within the educational system and social environment.

The Republic of Slovenia cooperates in several international studies that assess the achievement of students in line with the international standards (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, ICCS, ICILS, TALIS and others) among which PIRLS and PISA are closely related to reading literacy development in children. PIRLS is monitoring trends in reading achievement every 5 years at the fourth grade (at the age of 10); while PISA measures reading performance of 15-year-olds every 3 years. In the Republic of Slovenia, the age of 15 represents the point when children complete compulsory primary school education and a milestone when they decide either to continue their education or to enter the labour market.

The Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 is an overall development and strategic document of the Republic of Slovenia and it incorporates the performance indicators directly linked to the achievements of Slovenian children as applied in the PISA international assessment that measures not only performance in mathematics and science but also reading performance.

The achieved level of reading literacy of the Slovenian 15-year-olds in 2018 was on average equal to the one in 2006. The average performance in reading literacy in 2018 compared to 2015 reduced mainly due to lower achievements at all 6 levels of the international scale, i.e. particularly at the second, third and fourth level.

There is a larger percentage of children who fail to meet 2 lowest levels out of 6, i.e. 18% of all, thus bringing us behind the objective of 15% set in the programme of the European Union Education 2020. Slovenia is the ninth out of 28 Member States of the European Union and thus fails to meet the performance indicator from the Slovenian Development Strategy 2030, i.e. to be ranked among the first quarter of the states.

In 2018, the reading satisfaction of children compared to data from 2009 was under the average regarding satisfaction levels of children from the Member States of the OECD. The Republic of Slovenia belongs among the states where the differences between children from different socio-economic background are smaller. Nevertheless, this does not apply to the achievements of the children with migrant background. The gender difference in the Republic of Slovenia is still quite evident and is one of the highest among the Member States of the OECD.

#### Care for language learning and reading literacy development reach into several areas, the largest scope of activities and the biggest financial share belong to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ministry of Culture, National Education Institute Slovenia and Slovenian Book Agency. At the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport the development of reading literacy falls within the Education Development Office, while the National Education Institute Slovenia provides for professional development and consultancy to professionals and senior staff of kindergartens and schools. Slovenian Language Service at the Ministry of Culture coordinates the Slovenian language policy while Slovenian Book Agency, at least according to its legal bases, provides for conditions pertaining to reading culture development. Reading culture is an important factor behind the reading literacy development, nevertheless the Court of Audit believes the term is not well defined. Furthermore, the conditions which could be observed by the Slovenian Book Agency in order to provide reading culture development were not determined.

In all national cultural programmes developed up to now, the Slovenian language received its own chapter which includes reading literacy as a well-recognised issue. The Resolution on the 2014-2017 National Programme for Culture considered reading literacy development within the field of libraries, the Slovenian language and culture and arts education. Language policy was in the period covered by the audit outlined in the Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2014-2018, the activities and objectives related to reading literacy development were included particularly in the Language Education Action Plan as an implementing document of the Resolution. In 2006, the first National Strategy for the Development of Literacy was adopted.

Common social and technological development has changed the requirements related to reading literacy of an individual, thus the strategy needed to be updated. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport organised thematic consultation in February 2014 bringing forward the process of preparation of the National Strategy for the Development of Reading Literacy, nevertheless it was not completed by the end of 2018. In December 2019, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the National Strategy for the Development of Reading Literacy 2019-2030 as multisectoral document of the development planning.

Secondary studies based on the data from surveys and projects showed that it is necessary to improve reading literacy in children by providing systemic conditions at the national level, such as accessible
pre-school education of high quality, public and free of charge primary school including school libraries and developed system of public libraries. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Ministry of Culture, National Education Institute Slovenia, and Slovenian Book Agency in the period covered by the audit failed to cooperate in planning of their activities by approaching towards the development of reading literacy in children in an integrated manner, namely to use available knowledge and experience and to set up efficient transfer of professional knowledge and recognised best practice.

In 2015, Act Amending the Librarianship Act was adopted whereby school libraries became an integrated part of the public service in the field of education and schooling and were transferred under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The purpose of the changes was to better involve school libraries into the school system, since school libraries are one of the most important elements in reducing differences among children in accessing reading materials. According to the results of the international studies, the Court of Audit assessed that the role of school libraries in the period covered by the audit was overlooked and all possibilities for systemic development of reading culture as well as reading literacy were not taken into account within the compulsory primary education, thus having an impact on the future career possibilities of children, regardless of their economic status. The network of school libraries in the Republic of Slovenia in the period covered by the audit did not meet the criteria set for public libraries, relating to geographic accessibility, quality and structure of collections, computer equipment, working conditions and available space for education and training purposes.

The Evaluation Strategy of the development of the Slovenian Public Libraries 2016 showed that poor conditions existing in the relations between public libraries and local communities presented a threat of collapsing of the public library network. A similar situation exists in the relation between the public libraries and the State since the legally set financial share as an obligation of the State for purchasing library materials was not determined.

The Court of Audit expressed an opinion that the Republic of Slovenia was *partially efficient* in developing reading literacy in children. It also proposed several *recommendations* to improve the operations in the future, but it did not demand the submission of a response report.

Ljubljana, 16 September 2020