



Educational Research Institute (ERI), Slovenia

The Educational Research Institute (ERI), Ljubljana, is seeking Horizon Europe partners for collaborative research and innovation projects focused on child poverty, equity, inclusion, early childhood education and care (ECEC), child well-being, and evidence-based policymaking.



Expertise relevant to the call

Equity, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children

- Educational equity and social inclusion across educational settings
- Access to quality education for disadvantaged and marginalised groups
- Inclusion of Roma children, migrant children and children at risk of exclusion
- Whole-system approaches to reducing educational inequalities

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

- Quality in ECEC systems and services
- Access to quality ECEC for disadvantaged children
- Integrated early childhood services and support systems
- Transitions from preschool to primary education

Child Well-being, Participation and Development

- Children's mental health and well-being
- Positive youth development and developmental pathways
- Child participation and democratic engagement
- Social, emotional and intercultural development

Professional Learning and Educational Environments

- Professional development of ECEC and school staff
- Professional learning communities
- Inclusive educational leadership
- Creating supportive and equitable learning environments

Educational Policy and Governance

- Comparative education policy analysis
- Evidence-informed policymaking
- Evaluation of educational reforms and initiatives
- Development of policy recommendations and implementation guidance

Research, Evaluation and Data Analytics

- Quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research
- Large-scale assessment and survey data analysis
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Stakeholder-centred and participatory research approaches

Project team

An interdisciplinary team combining expertise in education, psychology, policy analysis, inclusion, child well-being and advanced research methodologies.

Ana Mlekuž

MSc in Economics, PhD Candidate in Educational Sciences

Educational Leadership, Inclusion and Research Methodology

- Inclusive education and educational leadership
- School climate and equitable learning environments
- Positive youth development and migrant inclusion
- Large-scale assessment studies and data management
- Statistical analysis and evaluation research

Research on inclusive education, educational leadership, PISA data management, positive youth development and equitable learning environments.

Urška Štremfel

PhD in Political Science

Education Policy and Equity Research

- Education policy analysis: design, implementation, and evaluation
- Youth participation in policymaking
- European and global citizenship and civic engagement
- Qualitative research (focus groups and interviews)
- Development of evidence based policy recommendations

Extensive experience in education policy analysis, equity, youth participation in policymaking and European educational governance.

Jerneja Jager

PhD in Educational Sciences

Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

- Quality in ECEC
- Access and inclusion for disadvantaged children
- Integrated early childhood systems
- Professional development of ECEC staff
- Transition from preschool to primary education

Head of the Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education with extensive experience in ECEC quality, inclusion and integrated early childhood services.

Project team

An interdisciplinary team combining expertise in education, psychology, policy analysis, inclusion, child well-being and advanced research methodologies.

Manja Veldin

Psychologist, PhD Candidate in Psychology

Child and youth mental health
Social-emotional learning and competencies

- Evaluation of educational interventions
- Positive youth development
- Quantitative and mixed-methods research

Research at the intersection of psychology, education and well-being, including mental health, social-emotional competencies and programme evaluation.

Mateja Mlinar

MA in Early Childhood Education

ECEC Practice, Inclusion and Community Engagement

- Inclusion and diversity in ECEC
- Child-centred approaches and participation
- Social inclusion of vulnerable children
- Professional development and practitioner support
- Community-based and intergenerational approaches

Experience in projects addressing inclusion, vulnerable groups, Roma children, child participation, community-based learning and ECEC quality.

Petra Zgonec

MA in Inclusive Education

Early Childhood Well-being and Professional Learning

- Children's mental health and well-being
- Social inclusion and vulnerable groups
- Democratic participation in early childhood
- Professional learning communities
- Transition from preschool to primary school

Experience in projects focused on child well-being, social inclusion, democratic participation, transitions and professional learning in ECEC and primary education.

What ERI can contribute to a Horizon consortium?

- Conceptual and theoretical framework development
- Research design and methodology
- Quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods studies
- Stakeholder engagement with ECEC providers, schools and policymakers
- Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment
- Development and testing of evidence-informed interventions
- Policy analysis, policy briefs and recommendations
- Translation of research findings into practice and policy

Selected European and National Projects

Early Childhood Education, Inclusion and Equity

- CHAVORE – Mental Well-being of Young Roma Children (2025–2026)
- TOY4Participation – Promoting Meaningful Child Participation in ECEC (2025–2026)
- Empowering At-Risk Children through Community-Based Learning Hubs (2025–2028)
- Supporting Roma Children's Development and Inclusion in Education and Care (SREYN) (2017–)
- Together – Supporting Vulnerable Children through Integrated Early Childhood Services (2015–2019)
- Primokiz – Support for Comprehensive Early Childhood Services (2020–2023)

Educational Equity, Well-being and Inclusion

- ARISE – Empowering Schools to Break Barriers and Build Equitable Learning Environments
- Positive Youth Development in Slovenia: Developmental Pathways in the Context of Migration
- HEAD – Empowering School Principals for Inclusive School Culture
- HAND in HAND – Social and Emotional Skills for Tolerant and Non-discriminative Societies
- Empowering Teachers Across Europe to Deal with Social, Emotional and Diversity-Related Challenges

Policy and Evaluation

- UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report

Selected Publications

Jager, J., Režek, M., & Rutar, S. (2024). Pedagogical continuity in the transition from kindergarten to school. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 75(2), 10–33.

Jager, J., & Režek, M. (2020). Creating an integrated system of support programmes for children and their families: An example of two local environments. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 71(1), 64–82.

Mlekuž, A., & Požar Matijašič, N. (2022). *Transition from kindergarten to school: OECD review of policies and practices in education systems regarding children's transition from kindergarten to school – Slovenia in an international context*. Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Štremfel, U., Šterman Ivančič, K., & Peras, I. (2024). Addressing the sense of school belonging among all students? A systematic literature review. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 14(11), 2901–2917. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe14110190>

Mlekuž, A., Štremfel, U., & Žmavc, J. (2026). Respect for diversity in schools and positive youth development of migrant students: Insights from four upper-secondary schools in Slovenia. *Diaspora, Indigenous and Minority Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2026.2612721>

Building Knowledge for More Inclusive Early Childhood Systems

Educational Research Institute (ERI)
Ljubljana, Slovenia

ECEC | Inclusion | Child Well-being | Equity | Policy | Evaluation

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