

Chapter 1

School education in Austria

This chapter presents an overview of the economic and demographic context in Austria, including a description of the present governance arrangements and the distribution of responsibilities for the funding and administration of the system. It also provides a brief description of the Austrian school system for international readers. Finally, it presents evidence on the quality and equity of the Austrian school system.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Box 1.1. Proposal for education reform (November 2015)

This report reflects the situation of the Austrian education system at the time of the review visit in June 2015. The review team provided the Austrian Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBWF) with an initial draft report at the beginning of November 2015 to inform the negotiations of the education reform commission comprised of representatives of the federal government and the provinces. The negotiations of the education reform commission which were also informed by an Austrian expert group on school administration resulted in an education reform proposal that was presented 17 November 2015. The implementation of the education reform was to be prepared until June 2016. Details of the education reform proposal can be found in Annex 1.1.

This chapter provides the key contextual aspects – political, demographic and economic – for the subsequent analysis. It includes a detailed description of the Austrian education system, including its governance. In addition, it provides an account of recent developments and the main trends and concerns within the Austrian education system in terms of quality and equity.

Context

Situated in the Central European Alps, Austria covers a landlocked, mountainous territory of 83 879 km² and has a population of 8.5 million in 2014. It shares a border with Germany and the Czech Republic to the north, Hungary and Slovakia to the east, Slovenia and Italy to the south, and Switzerland and Liechtenstein to the west. Austria's largest cities are the capital Vienna (1.8 million inhabitants), followed by Graz, Linz and Salzburg (all under 300 000 inhabitants) (Statistik Austria, 2015c: 42, 44).

Governance and administration

Austria is a parliamentary republic. The federal constitution governs the separation of powers into the legislative (the National Council [*Nationalrat*] and Federal Council [*Bundesrat*]), the executive (the President as well as the federal government comprising the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and federal ministers), and the judiciary (the Constitutional, Administrative, Civil and Criminal Court Systems).

As a federal state based on the principle of local self-administration, Austria is divided into four administrative tiers: the federal, provincial, district and municipal levels. The federal government is divided into departments headed by their respective federal ministers. Below the federal level, Austria consists of nine provinces (*Länder*) (see Table 1.1). The provincial governments (*Landesregierungen*) are headed by governors (*Landeshauptmänner/frauen*) which are elected by the provincial parliaments (*Landtage*). Provinces are represented at the federal level by the members of the National Council. Provinces comprise 95 districts

Table 1.1. **Provinces of Austria**

Province	Capital	Area (km ²)	Population (2014)	Population density (people per km ² , 2014)
Burgenland	Eisenstadt	3 669	287 318	78
Carinthia	Klagenfurt	9 360	555 743	59
Lower Austria	St. Pölten	18 917	1 626 260	86
Upper Austria	Linz	11 717	1 425 980	122
Salzburg	Salzburg	7 050	534 185	76
Styria	Graz	16 251	1 214 930	75
Tyrol	Innsbruck	12 514	721 574	58
Vorarlberg	Bregenz	2 534	375 323	148
Vienna	-	395	1 765 580	4 467
Austria	Vienna	82 409	8 506 890	103

Source: OECD (2015a), *Population density (pop. per km²)*, *The Regional Database*, <http://dotstat.oecd.org/?lang=en>.

(*Bezirke*) and the authorities of these districts are organisationally integrated into the provincial administration (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 18).

At the lowest level of the administration, Austria is made up of 2 102 municipalities (*Gemeinden*), nearly 80% of which have fewer than 3 000 inhabitants (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 18). Each municipality is administered by a municipal office which is managed by a municipal secretary. They are politically represented by an elected municipal council (*Gemeinderat*) headed by a mayor. Municipalities have a constitutional right to self-administration and manage local affairs pertaining to the educational, social, environmental and cultural infrastructure as well as the execution of tasks devolved from the federal or province levels. Due to their limited resources and competences, many smaller municipalities are exempt from duties related to double accounting and controlling procedures (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 18).

Demographic characteristics

Population

In 2014, Austria had a population of 8.51 million inhabitants. It exhibits a low level of urbanisation with 45.1% of the population living in predominantly rural regions (well above the OECD average of 25.1%) and only 23.9% living in predominantly urban regions (compared to an average of 48.0% in OECD countries) (OECD, 2013f: 51). In 2014, Austria's average population density of 103 inhabitants/km² was above the OECD average of 37 inhabitants/km², but below the EU28 average of 117 inhabitants/km² and the lowest among all of its neighbours with the exception of Slovenia (OECD, 2015a; Eurostat, 2015). More than half of the Austrian population lives in mountainous regions (European Commission, 2015).

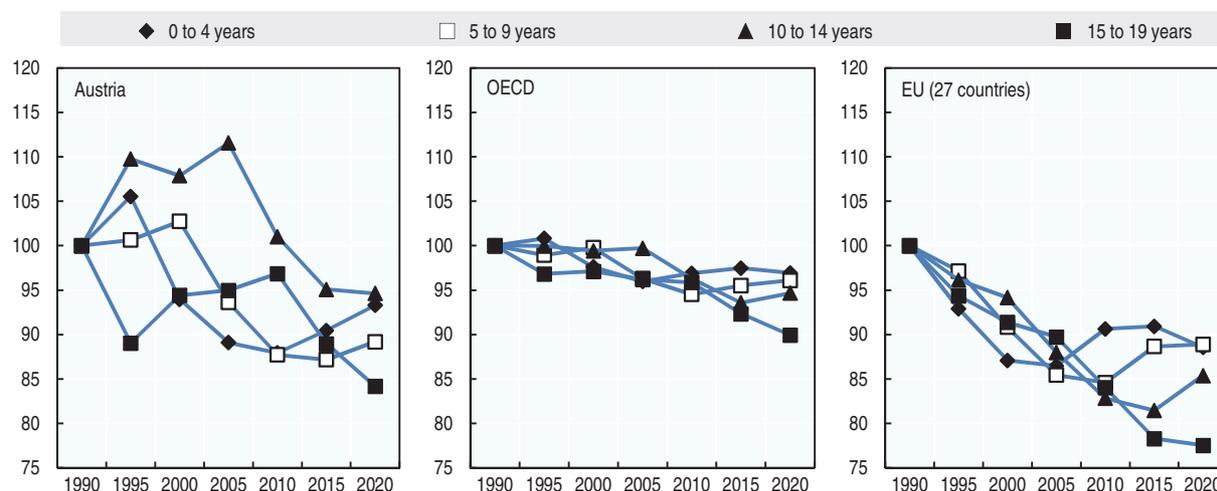
In contrast to most European countries, Austria's population has experienced phases of rapid growth in the early 1990s and 2000s, which exceeded even those of the 1960s. Since 1985, the population has grown by nearly 1 million (13.0%), mainly due to high levels of immigration between 1988 and 1994 and since 2000 (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 11). Positive natural growth in five out of nine provinces, mainly due to an increased life expectancy, explains about 6% of the population increase between 2001 and 2011 (Statistik Austria, 2013: 2). The remainder is accounted for by positive net migration into all of Austria's provinces (both from abroad and other parts of the country). Nevertheless, within provinces, population growth has been unevenly distributed with large cities and surrounding districts exhibiting the strongest growth rates. Meanwhile, continued

rural-to-urban migration among the young population and a correspondingly lower birth rate have led to negative growth in 35 primarily rural or post-industrial districts between 2001 and 2011 (Statistik Austria, 2013: 5).

Austria's population will continue to grow over the next decades, mainly due to immigration. The population is projected to reach over 9 million inhabitants by 2025 and increase to 9.41 million by 2040 (+10.6% compared to 2014) (Statistik Austria, 2014a). With an average of 1.43 children born to each woman, Austria's total fertility rate lay below the level of replacement and below the OECD average of 1.70 in 2011 (OECD, 2014c: 89). Without further immigration, the population would therefore, after a period of stagnation, decrease to 8.12 million by 2040 (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 12). Until 2020, the share of the working age population (20-64 year-olds) is expected to remain stable at around 61.8% before starting to decline to 57.1% in 2030 and 54.3% in 2040 (-12.1%). In the same period, the share of those aged 65 or older is projected to increase steadily from 18.2% in 2013 to 19.5% in 2020 and to reach 26.7% by 2040 (Statistik Austria, 2014a).

The recent decline in the school-age population is expected to reverse in the coming years. As can be seen from Figure 1.1, the 0-4 year-old population has been increasing significantly since 2010 and further growth is expected in the coming years. This increase in the pre-school population is expected to affect the number of children in primary education from 2016 and to eventually reverse the recent downward trend in the secondary school population.

Figure 1.1. **Variation in school-age population in Austria compared to the OECD and the EU27**
1990 = 100



Source: OECD (no date), *Historical population data and projections (1950-2050)*, statistical database, <http://stats.oecd.org/>.

In 2015, 825 500 Austrians (9.62% of the population) were aged between 6 and 15 years and therefore subject to mandatory schooling (Statistik Austria, 2015d). Having declined by about 10% over the last decade, the proportion of 6-15 year-olds is projected to drop further to 9.46% of the population until 2020 (-2.7% compared to 2013) and increase again thereafter until it reaches a share of 9.67% in 2030 (Statistik Austria, 2014a). These trends will vary across the provinces. While Vienna is set to experience a strong increase in the number of students due to its large share of relatively young immigrants, the size of the

student population is expected to stagnate in other parts of Austria and to continue to decline until 2030 in provinces such as Ca (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 13).

Cultural and language diversity

In 2015, 86.7% of the population had Austrian citizenship. Most of the non-Austrian residents were citizens of Germany (170 000), Turkey (114 000), Serbia (115 000) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (93 000). In recent years, there has also been a marked increase in the number of Bulgarian, Romanian and Hungarian citizens, which – taken together – now amount to 148 000 (a 114% increase since 2010) (Statistik Austria, 2015a).

Language is a central concern related to migration and school education in Austria. The official language of school instruction is German, although members of the Slovenian and Croatian minorities have the right to primary education in their own languages (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 13). In 2013, an estimated 19.0% of students in Year 4 and 18.3% of students in Year 8 had parents who were born in countries other than Austria or Germany (Schreiner and Breit, 2014a: 28; Schreiner and Breit, 2014b: 47). In 2010, 22% of all Year 4 students and 68% of those Year 4 students with a non-German background reported to speak German in addition to another language at home. On the other hand, 22% of first-generation immigrant students and 13% of second-generation immigrant students enrolled in the Austrian school system reported not to speak any German with their families (Vogtenhuber et al., 2012: 25). The proportion of children who speak languages other than German at home varies considerably among the Austrian regions. In Vienna, they accounted for more than half of the primary school population, compared to 30% in cities below 50 000 inhabitants and a mere 10% in municipalities and cities below 10 000 inhabitants (ibid.: 36).

Economic growth, unemployment and inequality

With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of USD 437.2 billion in 2014, Austria has the 19th biggest economy of the OECD area and a GDP per capita (at Purchasing Power Parity, PPP) of USD 45 800, placing it 16.8% above the OECD average of USD 39 200 (OECD, 2015c: 7). Austria has a very open economy and a large number of successful, export-oriented large and medium sized firms which have helped Austria to attain a high level of material well-being. Despite its resilience throughout the financial crisis, the Austrian economy has stagnated for the past three years with growth rates near the bottom of the EU. With real wages remaining below the pre-crisis level, domestic demand remains weak and falling labour productivity has weakened Austria's international competitiveness. Economic growth is expected to pick up and reach 1.7% by 2017, owing to the depreciation of the Euro, low interest rates and an ongoing income-tax reform which is expected to boost disposable household income and consumption (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 11; OECD, 2015c; OECD, 2015e: 65).

Austria's unemployment rate of 5.6% in January 2015 was higher than before or during the crisis and has been on the rise since 2012 while remaining well below that of the OECD area (6.9%) and the Eurozone (11.1%). At 9.5%, unemployment is particularly low among 15-24 year-olds when compared to the OECD and the Eurozone averages (14.3% and 22.6% respectively) (OECD, 2015d).

By international comparison, Austria enjoys low levels of income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, and a high level of redistribution (OECD, 2015c: 26). Nevertheless, income inequality has risen in recent years. Between 2007 and 2011, the real

incomes of the richest 10% increased while they fell for the bottom 10% (OECD, 2015f: 24). In addition, low-skilled workers and immigrants have been disproportionately affected by the recent rise in inactivity and unemployment, highlighting the need to improve their labour market integration and educational outcomes (OECD, 2015c: 28). With 61.7% of net private household wealth concentrated among the richest 10% in 2010, Austria had the second highest level of wealth concentration among 18 OECD countries after the United States (76.4%). There is also a persistently large gender pay gap, particularly among Austrian low-income earners. For low-income earners, the gender pay gap is the second largest among all OECD countries (OECD, 2015c: 75).

Structure of the education system

The Austrian education system is organised in five stages: early childhood education and care (kindergarten), primary education, lower secondary education and upper secondary education, and tertiary education (see Annex 1.2 for a diagram of the Austrian education system and Bruneforth et al., forthcoming, for further information).¹ Schooling in Austria is characterised by early selective transitions, a large vocational sector comprising more than half of the students at age 15, and a high degree of differentiation, particularly at the level of upper secondary education (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 22). To set the context, this chapter will provide a brief overview of the entire education system, but the remainder of the report will focus on primary and lower secondary education only. A recent OECD study analysed post-secondary vocational education in Austria (see Musset et al., 2013).

Non-compulsory day care (kindergarten) is available for children aged 3 to 5. Attendance at this age is typically subject to a fee which varies among provinces and providers. From the age of 5, half-day kindergarten has been compulsory and provided free of charge since 2010 (Eurypedia, 2015). As envisaged in the federal government's November 2015 reform proposal, a second kindergarten year should become compulsory from the age of 4 onwards, but with an option for parents to opt out (BMBF and BMWFW, 2015, see Annex 1.1). In recent years, participation in early childhood education and care has been increasing for children aged 3 and 4, but remains below the OECD and EU21 average for three-year-olds. In 2013, 71.3% of three-year-olds attended kindergarten (OECD average: 74.0%, EU21 average: 80.4%), compared to 47.5% in 2005; 91.0% of four-year-olds went to kindergarten (OECD average: 87.6%, EU 21 average: 91.2%), up from 82.5% in 2005; and 96.3% of five-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education and care in 2013 (OECD average: 94.8%, EU21 average: 95.2%) (OECD, 2015b).

Compulsory education lasts for 9 years, from age 6 to age 15, and begins with enrolment in a 4-year primary school (*Volksschule*, VS). Children who are considered "not ready" for primary education but have attained compulsory school age have to attend pre-primary school (*Vorschulstufe*, VSS) for one or two years, depending on the time they need to make the transition to regular primary school. In some schools, pre-primary and primary education is integrated in the same classes.

The completion of primary school (typically at age 10) is followed by four years of lower secondary education. During this first selective transition, students enter different types of lower secondary schools. In theory, the choice of track should depend solely on students' academic ability and interests, but, in practice, students' socio-economic background plays an important role in this transition. Only 29% of the differences in school choice can be explained by differences in student achievement (Bruneforth, Weber and Bacher, 2012: 203).

In the 2013/14 school year, 35% of primary school students transferred to a lower academic secondary school (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – Unterstufe*, AHS-U), and 64% to a general secondary school (*Hauptschule*, HS) or New Secondary School (*Neue Mittelschule*, NMS), with the remaining 1% entering international or special needs schools (Eurydice, 2015). The three main types of lower secondary school distinguish themselves as follows:

- **Academic Secondary School, lower level** (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – Unterstufe*, AHS-U) constitutes the first stage of the academic secondary school. Its in-depth general curriculum aims to prepare students for progression to higher education. Students are accepted by the AHS-U subject to a strong prior performance in German, reading, and mathematics or by sitting a school entrance exam. From the third year (Year 7) onwards, academic secondary schools are differentiated into three branches emphasising languages, science or economics.
- **General Secondary School** (*Hauptschule*, HS) was traditionally the most frequented type of lower secondary school, attended by 67.9% of Austrian students in Year 5 in 2000/01 (Statistik Austria, 2014c). It provided non-selective access to students and four years of instruction based on differentiated ability groups in the core subjects German, English and mathematics. The successful completion of the HS qualified students to transition to any upper secondary school type including the upper level of academic secondary schools (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule*, AHS-O). Considering the importance of vocational education in Austria, the vast majority of students went on to attend vocational tracks, some of which also provide the opportunity to attain a general qualification for university entrance (*Matura*) granting access to higher education. In 2013/14, 42.2% of all students achieving such a qualification had attended the HS (Statistik Austria, 2015b). The general secondary school type has been gradually replaced by the New Secondary School since 2008, and since the beginning of the school year 2015/16, all HS have been transformed into NMS.
- **New Secondary School** (*Neue Mittelschule*, NMS) was introduced in 2008 to provide a more inclusive alternative to general secondary schools, avoid early tracking and use innovative pedagogical methods. It has since become the new standard school and has replaced all HS since the school year 2015/16. In 2013/14, 53.1% of students in Year 5 already attended the NMS, compared to 34.1% attending the AHS-U and 8.8% remaining in the HS (Statistik Austria, 2014c). The NMS offers a general curriculum and competence-based approach. Unlike general secondary schools, students are not separated into different ability groups in core subjects, but the NMS apply a differentiated grading scheme depending on student ability in Years 7 and 8. Students are admitted to the NMS after completing their primary education without further pre-requisites except for some specialised schools conducting sports or musical aptitude tests, for example (Eurydice, 2015).

Upper secondary education covers Years 9 to 13 (typical ages 14 to 18) and comprises a range of general and vocational school types. Since compulsory education ends at the age of 15, typically one year after the completion of lower secondary education, students who did not repeat a year or enrol in pre-primary school are obliged to enter upper secondary education for at least one year (e.g. a pre-vocational school). Through this second selective transition, students enter one of the following school types:

- **Academic Secondary School, upper level** (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – Oberstufe*, AHS-O) is the continuation of the lower academic secondary school (AHS-U), leading to the general qualification for university entrance (*Matura*) after four years (Years 9 to 12).

Students who attended the AHS-U can enter the AHS-O without further requirements, while the access of former NMS students depends on their prior achievement.

- **Colleges for Higher Vocational Education** (*Berufsbildene höhere Schule, BHS*) last one year longer than the AHS (Years 9 to 13) and offer students a higher-level general and vocational education which, like the AHS-O, grants students a general qualification for university entrance (*Matura*) and qualifies them to enter higher education or higher-level professional occupations. According to the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) 2011 classification, Years 12 and 13 at the BHS are classified as a short-cycle tertiary education, and the BHS thus provides a more advanced education than the AHS-O (see Annex 1.3). Admission to the BHS is limited to students who obtained good grades at the end of lower secondary school.
- **Pre-vocational School** (*Polytechnische Schule, PTS*) lasts for one year only and is designed to prepare students for entering part-time vocational schools or an occupation with completion of compulsory education.
- **Part-time Vocational School** (*Berufsschule, BS*) provides part-time specialised education to complement students' company-based apprenticeships for a period of up to four years. Students entering a BS must have completed nine years of prior education and have typically completed Year 9 in a pre-vocational school. After successfully completing the BS, students have the option to gain access to higher education by sitting a series of general higher education entrance examinations (*Berufsreifeprüfungen*) which result in a qualification equivalent to the general qualification for university entrance (*Matura*).
- **Secondary Technical and Vocational School** (*Berufsbildene mittlere Schule, BMS*) provide one to four years (Years 9 to 12) of specialist vocational training providing students with the skills to enter occupations in such fields as engineering, commerce, the arts and crafts. Students can enter the BMS following four years of lower secondary education. As for the BS, students who successfully completed the BMS can gain access to higher education through the general higher education entrance examinations (*Berufsreifeprüfungen*).

Students diagnosed with special educational needs can receive integrated education in regular schools or attend a **Special Needs School** (*Sonderschule, ASO*) which covers nine years, parallel to primary and lower secondary school, followed by an additional pre-vocational year. In the 2013/14 school year, 5.3% of students in primary and lower secondary education (excluding AHS-U) had special educational needs. 61.3% of these students were integrated in regular schools while 38.7% attended one of 307 special needs schools. The proportion of integrated students varies considerably between the provinces, being as high as 80.2% in Styria and as low as 46.0% in Tyrol (Statistik Austria, 2014b).

Austria has a comparatively small private school sector. In 2012, only 7.5% of 15-year-olds attended government-dependent private schools (14.2% in OECD) and 1.1% attended independent private schools (4.1% in OECD), while the vast majority attended public schools (91.4% against an OECD average of 81.7%) (OECD, 2014a, Table C7.2: 417).

Higher Education is provided by public and private universities, universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and university colleges of teacher education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen, PH*). Since the Bologna reform, traditional five-year diploma programmes have largely been replaced by bachelor's degrees lasting 6-8 semesters and master's programmes lasting 2-4 semesters. They are open to students who passed the general higher education entrance examinations (*Berufsreifeprüfungen*) or completed the *Matura* at an AHS-O or BHS. For everyone else, there remains the option to sit a limited higher education entrance

examination (*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*) which grants access only to the chosen subject. Graduates from upper secondary programmes are also free to enrol in 1-2 year short-cycle tertiary programmes at technical and vocational institutions (*Kollegs, tertiäre Bildungseinrichtungen*) or schools for mastercraftsmen, foremen, and construction trades (*Werkmeister-, Meister- und Bauhandwerkerschulen*) leading to certificates and diplomas.

Main features of the school system

Policy development and implementation

The governance of school education in Austria is characterised by a complex distribution of responsibilities between the different tiers of government (for a detailed discussion of education governance, see Chapter 2). The federal government's Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBWF) bears the executive authority for all aspects pertaining to school education, including compulsory, technical and vocational, as well as higher-level secondary education. It develops and proposes legislation on education standards, curricula and teaching, including teachers' remuneration, training and retirement as well as private schools and educational authorities. The nine provinces are responsible for the implementation of all federal legislation pertaining to school education through the formulation of implementing legislation (Eurypedia, 2015).

Unlike in the federal systems of Germany and Switzerland, the vast majority of Austrian tax revenue is generated at the federal level (87% in 2014) rather than by the provinces themselves. Through the Fiscal Adjustment Act (*Finanzausgleichsgesetz*), these funds are then partially redistributed among the provinces and municipalities based on quotas which are renegotiated among the different tiers of government every four years. This system creates a split of financing and spending responsibilities, typical for Austrian federalism (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 15).

The distribution of governing and financing responsibilities differs between so-called federal schools and provincial schools:

- **Federal schools** (*Bundesschulen*) comprise academic secondary schools (AHS) as well as upper secondary vocational schools and colleges (BMS, BHS).
- **Provincial schools** (*Landesschulen*) include primary schools (VS), general lower secondary schools (HS), New Secondary Schools (NMS), special needs schools (ASO), the pre-vocational schools (PTS) and part-time upper secondary vocational schools (BS).

Federal schools receive their funding directly from the federal government while provincial schools are financed by provinces and municipalities using funds which are, however, to a significant extent raised at the federal level and transferred to provinces in accordance with the Fiscal Adjustment Act (for a detailed discussion of school funding, see Chapter 2).

The administrative responsibility for schools is formally divided between the nine provincial school boards (*Landesschulräte*) and the school departments of the offices of the provincial government (*Schulabteilungen in den Ämtern der Landesregierung*). The provincial school boards are responsible for administering federal schools which encompasses all aspects of their establishment, maintenance and closure, as well class sizes, staffing and teaching time. As federal agencies, the provincial school boards are under the constitutional authority of the federal minister. However, the provincial school boards' decision making bodies, the collegiate boards (*Kollegien*), are presided over by the provincial governor and composed of members nominated by political parties in proportion to their share of seats in

the provincial parliament. The school departments of the offices of the provincial government are responsible for administering provincial schools. In practice, however, this division of responsibilities is less clear-cut: five out of nine provincial governments have transferred some of their responsibility for provincial schools to the provincial school board. Furthermore, most tasks associated with the provision and maintenance of provincial schools, apart from teaching staff decisions, have in practice been devolved to the municipal level, including the provision of school buildings, infrastructure and non-teaching staff such as janitors. Provinces support municipalities in carrying out these duties by administering allocated funds and have retained their responsibility for vocational, agriculture and forestry schools (Eurypedia, 2015).

Austria's 95 districts (*Bezirke*) no longer have any administrative involvement in the school system since a reform (*Schulbehörden-Verwaltungsreformgesetz*) transferred their responsibilities to the provincial level in 2013 (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 33).

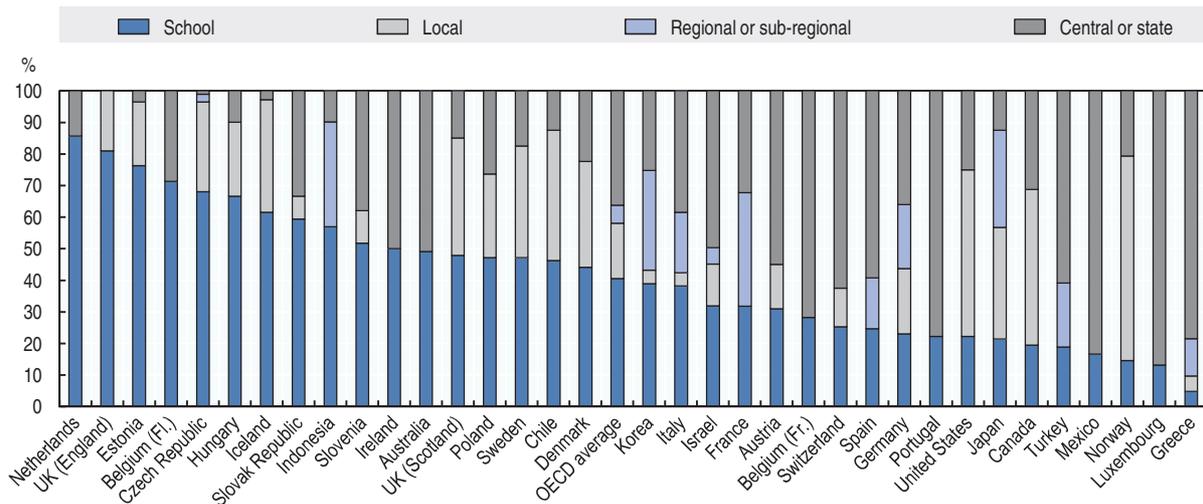
As envisaged in the federal government's November 2015 reform proposal, the responsibility for the administration of both federal and provincial schools should pass to a new federal-provincial authority, the education directorates (*Bildungsdirektionen*). These new directorates should hold all powers presently held by the provincial school boards and the school departments of the offices of the provincial government, including the organisation of the federal and the provincial teachers, the external school organisation, administrative staff and the school inspection (BMBF and BMWFW, 2015; see Annex 1.1).

School autonomy and school leadership

Austrian schools enjoy a relatively limited degree of autonomy, particularly in resource use and management (see also Chapter 2). As shown in Figure 1.2, lower secondary schools take 31% of key decisions (compared to an OECD average of 41%) while the central or provincial governments – the latter are referred to as the “state” level in Figure 1.2 – take 55% of decisions (compared to 36% across the OECD) in 2011. Another 14% of decisions are taken at the local level, compared to 17% across the OECD (OECD, 2012, Table D6.1: 512).

A closer look at the different domains of decision-making² reveals differences in decision-making power depending on the types of decisions considered (see Annex 1.3 for figures showing the distribution of decision-making responsibilities by domain). Decisions in the domain of personnel management are shared between the federal, provincial, municipal and school levels, although lower secondary schools only take 4% of decisions (compared to 31% across the OECD). Schools also have comparatively little say in the domain of planning and structures, taking 10% of decisions (compared to 24% across the OECD), while 70% of decisions are taken at the federal and 20% at the provincial level. Decisions on resource management – including the allocation of resources for teaching-staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenditure and professional development of principals and teachers – are relatively evenly distributed among the federal, provincial, municipal and school levels, with schools taking 21% of decisions (compared to 32% in the OECD). However, schools have little control over the staff plans which govern the financing of teaching personnel and are not normally permitted to select teachers themselves as they are allocated by the school departments of the offices of the provincial governments and provincial school boards. In contrast, schools have a high degree of autonomy when it comes to the organisation of instruction, taking 89% of relevant decisions in this domain

Figure 1.2. **Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011**



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of decisions taken at the school level.

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>, Table D6.1, See Annex 3 for notes.

(above the OECD average of 75%), while the remaining 11% are taken at the federal level (OECD, 2012, Table D6.2a/: 513f.).

Since the 1990s, schools have been granted increased discretion over the implementation of curricula and have been encouraged to develop pedagogical priorities and subject-related profiles. However, the still rather limited autonomy of schools overall has led schools to initiate numerous pilot projects which allow them to deviate from some standard regulations (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 27, 50). The federal government's November 2015 proposal for education reform foresees giving schools further autonomy in pedagogical, organisational and financial domains as well as a reduction in school pilots (see Annex 1.1).

Education goals, assessment and evaluation

Education goals

The Austrian national constitution defines the objectives of the education system, among others, to ensure a maximum level of educational attainment independent of an individual's family background, origin or social situation and to prepare students to contribute to society's economic and cultural life. Austria's constitution distinguishes between the goals of different school types, thus enshrining the diversified nature of its school offer.

The educational mandate of Austrian schools is regulated by the federal School Organisation Act (*Schulorganisationsgesetz*, SchOG) based on subject curricula, broad educational objectives and a list of goals pertaining to cross curricular competences formulated by the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBWF). In 2008, Austria introduced measurable national education standards to guide teaching, learning and assessment practices. They include attainment targets which define students' expected learning outcomes at the end of primary education (Year 4) for mathematics and German as well as the end of lower secondary education (Year 8) for mathematics, German, and

English. Following a baseline test in 2009/10, standardised national assessments with no stakes for students were implemented in 2011/12 to assess student performance relative to four pre-defined competence levels. The subjects are tested in five-year cycles with the first to be completed in 2016.

Student assessment

A central policy framework regulates the frequency of summative assessments, grading practices and how they are used to evaluate students' transition between years and levels of education. At the end of every school year from primary to upper secondary school, students receive formal reports which are based entirely on summative assessments. Until recently, Austria did not conduct any standardised central examinations affecting students' grades or certification (unlike 26 out of 37 OECD education systems in 2012) and student assessment was mostly implemented by individual teachers and schools (OECD, 2013d). In the years 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively, academic secondary schools (AHS) and colleges for higher vocational education (BHS) introduced compulsory standardised leaving examinations. These exams comprise a written pre-academic paper (AHS) or diploma work (BHS), standardised written tests in core subjects as well as oral exams and are intended to increase objectivity, transparency and students ability to move on to higher education. Formative assessment is expected to take place, but not regulated by a central policy framework (Eurypedia, 2015; OECD, 2015b; OECD, 2013d).

School evaluation

Up until 2012, Austria did not have a nationwide legal framework governing the evaluation of schools. External inspections were carried out by the school inspectorate at the province or district level, based on the schools' self-evaluation and the credibility of their internal quality development system. Due to a lack of common regulations regarding evaluation criteria and their frequency, however, the form and intensity of evaluations varied considerably among schools. It has also not been mandatory for schools to conduct self-evaluations. As a result, most schools did not benefit from regular feedback (Specht and Sobanski, 2012; OECD, 2013d). In the OECD 2008 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 35.2% of Austrian lower secondary teachers reported that their school had received neither an external evaluation nor self-administered an evaluation over the past five years – the highest figure across participating countries (OECD, 2009, Table 5.1: 174). And for the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012, only 20.3% of 15-year-olds were in a school whose principal reported the existence of external evaluations as a quality assurance and improvement mechanism, also the lowest value among OECD countries (OECD average: 63.2%) (OECD, 2013b, Table IV.4.32).

In 2012, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) introduced a coherent framework for external school evaluations and made self-evaluation compulsory (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, a 2013 initiative to enhance school quality (*Schulqualität Allgemeinbildung*, SQA) now requires schools to create development plans and implement periodic performance reviews. A corresponding initiative (*Qualitätsinitiative Berufsbildung*, QIBB) exists for vocational schools. The 2011/12 introduction of national standardised assessments without stakes for students of Years 4 and 8 has also added a new source of quantitative feedback at the school and system level. Schools now receive standardised feedback on their students' performance and teachers obtain the aggregate results of the students they teach.

Education system evaluation

Austria has strengthened its capacity for system-level evaluation and evidence-based policy making over the past years. Responsibilities for education system evaluation are now shared between the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBF) and the Federal Institute for Education Research, Innovation and Development of the Austrian School System (BIFIE). The BIFIE was created in 2008 and carries out the majority of evaluation activities by implementing educational standards, developing the centralised school leaving exam and establishing the ongoing system of educational monitoring.³ Since 2009, the BIFIE also produces a triennial national education report (*Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich*) providing data on the context, inputs, processes and outcomes of education in order to increase accountability and provide advice for future policy development (OECD, 2013d: 108).

Austria is a regular participant in most major international comparative studies of student performance, including TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA.⁴ Aggregate results from the national standardised assessments provide additional data to analyse the quality of the education system and factors associated with student performance.

Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013-18 and November 2015 education reform proposal

The 2013-18 federal government has defined its education reform priorities in its coalition contract (Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2013) as well as a six-point programme (Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2014). According to these programmes, by 2016/17, the last year of kindergarten (Early Childhood Education and Care, ECEC) should be connected with Years 1 and 2 of primary education to form a joint school-entry phase (*Schuleingangsphase*), following an initial trial and evaluation in 35 selected schools in 2014/15. This measure is designed to facilitate the transition from early childhood education and care to primary education and offer targeted support to students in need of German-language learning. In addition, the government has proposed to increase school autonomy with regard to the timing of instruction and break times, the creation of individualised academic profiles and the role of school leaders in selecting teaching personnel. In order to respond to parents' increased demand for day care and to promote equity, the government also aims to expand the offer of all-day schooling and establish criteria for the organisation of both instruction and leisure time (Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 29). Furthermore, the government announced that it plans to increase the frequency of physical exercise during the school day, introduce compulsory career guidance for students of lower secondary schools and alleviate teachers' burden of administrative work. The work programme further sets out to reduce the number of low-skilled adults by means of offering free educational programmes and the opportunity to catch up on compulsory school-leaving qualifications.

In November 2015, the federal government presented a proposal for comprehensive education reform which encompasses changes to early childhood education and care, steps to improve the transition from kindergarten to primary education through a school entry phase, greater school autonomy in pedagogical, organisational and financial domains, the creation of model regions in the individual provinces to facilitate the collaboration of different school types and to pilot comprehensive schooling for 6-14 year-olds, a new structure for the joint administration of federal and provincial schools and teachers, and measures to encourage innovation in education (BMBF and BMWF, 2015,

see Annex 1.1). This reform proposal was informed by the work of an expert group on school governance and administration (BMBF, 2015). The implementation of the reform proposed in November 2015 was still in development at the time of drafting this report.

Quality and equity of the school system

Access, participation and performance

Austria's performance in international student assessments is mixed and varies between the examined subjects and years. In Year 4 (age 10-11) of primary school, Austrian students take part in the IEA's (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In 2011, Austria's results in mathematics and reading were considered unsatisfactory when compared to 14 countries with similar socio-economic and political characteristics. In both subjects, Austria scored above the international average, but took the last place in its reference group for reading and the third-last for mathematics (BIFIE, 2012). In mathematics, 2% of students met the TIMSS Advanced and 26% the High International Benchmark respectively, compared to the international medians of 4% and 28%. In reading, 5% of students met the PIRLS Advanced and 39% the High International Benchmark. This placed Austria below the international medians of 8% and 44%. In science, Austrian primary school students continue to show good results, performing above the international benchmarks across all levels of achievement (see Table 1.2). Girls performed consistently worse than boys in mathematics and science, while the opposite was true for reading. There has been a worrying decline in both reading literacy scores since 2006 and mathematics since 1995 (Mullis et al., 2012a; Mullis et al., 2012b; Martin et al., 2012).

Table 1.2. Performance of Austrian students in mathematics, science and reading at the International Benchmarks of Achievement in primary education, TIMSS and PIRLS

Percentages of students reaching international benchmarks in TIMSS and PIRLS

	Austria	International median
Low international benchmark (400)		
Mathematics (TIMSS)	95	90
Science (TIMSS)	96	92
Reading (PIRLS)	97	95
Intermediate international benchmark (475)		
Mathematics (TIMSS)	70	69
Science (TIMSS)	79	72
Reading (PIRLS)	80	80
High international benchmark (550)		
Mathematics (TIMSS)	26	28
Science (TIMSS)	42	32
Reading (PIRLS)	39	44
Advanced international benchmark (625)		
Mathematics (TIMSS)	2	4
Science (TIMSS)	8	5
Reading (PIRLS)	5	8

Source: Mullis, I.V.S. et al. (2012a), PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading, http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/P11_IR_FullBook.pdf, p. 68; Mullis, I.V.S. et al. (2012b), TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics, http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2011/downloads/T11_IR_Mathematics_FullBook.pdf, p. 90; Martin, M.O. et al. (2012), TIMSS 2011 International Results in Science, http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2011/downloads/T11_IR_Science_FullBook.pdf, p. 86.

In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012, Austrian 15-year-olds performed above the OECD average in mathematics (506 vs. 494), at the average in science (506 vs. 501) and below the average in reading (490 vs. 496). In mathematics, the performance of Austrian students returned to the level of 2003 and 2006, performing better than Italy or the Slovak Republic, but below Switzerland and Germany, and comparable with Australia and Vietnam. In science, Austrian 15-year-olds performed around the OECD average, following stronger results in 2006. In reading, the performance of Austrian students has fallen below the OECD mean after having achieved average results in 2003 and 2006. Austria fares considerably worse than neighbouring Switzerland and Germany (almost 20 points behind), comparable to Italy, the Czech Republic or Hungary, and better than the Slovak Republic (OECD, 2014b, Table I.A: 19). Although many students assessed in PISA have already entered institutions of upper secondary education (which are not the main focus of this report), their performance at age 15 reflects, at least to some extent, the quality of education they have received throughout compulsory schooling until the age of 14.

Austria has comparatively small shares of students both at the bottom and top of the performance scale (see Table 1.3). In mathematics, Austria's share of low achievers is significantly smaller than that across the OECD (18.7% compared to 23.0%) and the picture is similar for science (15.8% compared to 17.8%). In reading, Austria has a higher share of low achievers than the OECD countries on average (19.5% compared to 18.0%). Between 2003 and 2012, Austria slightly narrowed the share of low performing students in all subjects. However, Austria has at the same time experienced a reduction in its share of top performers. In reading, the share of top performers significantly decreased by 2.8 percentage points since 2003 and is now below the OECD average. While Austria has maintained its share of top performers in mathematics around the OECD average, the share of top performers in science also decreased. The fact that 11% of Austrian 15-year-olds were considered "at risk" (below Proficiency Level 2) in reading, mathematics and science suggests that performance deficits are concentrated in a group of students which might leave school without the skills necessary to succeed on the labour market (OECD, 2014b; OECD, 2016).

Together with Hungary, Austria has the largest gender gap in mathematics performance with boys scoring 29 points higher than girls, taking programme level and designation into account. This constitutes a difference nearly twice as large as the OECD average of 17 points in 2012 and a dramatic increase since 2003 (OECD, 2014b, Table I.2.26).

Equity in education remains an important concern in Austria, given its steep socio-economic performance gradient, a high level of intergenerational reproduction and performance differences between immigrant and non-immigrant migrant students (see Table 1.3). 15.8% of the variation in mathematics performance in PISA 2012 is explained by students' socio-economic status (compared to an OECD average of 14.8%), and a one-unit increase in a student's economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) is associated with scoring 43 points higher in mathematics (compared to 39 points across the OECD, which is nearly the equivalent of an entire year of education). In reading, it is associated with scoring 42 points higher (compared to the OECD average of 38 points), and in science with a 46 point increase (compared to the OECD average of 38 points) (OECD, 2013a, Table II.2.1: 174f.). The share of resilient students remains below the OECD average. Students with an immigrant background are at particular risk of underperformance. In PISA 2012, students with an immigrant background scored an average of 33 score points lower in mathematics than non-immigrant students, controlling for their ESCS. This gap has remained unchanged since 2003 and remains well above the OECD average of 23 points (OECD, 2013a, Table II.3.4b: 229). Students

from a socio-economically disadvantaged background and students with an immigrant background are, furthermore, more likely to be low performers than their peers from advantaged and non-immigrant backgrounds. The difference between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students in the share of low performers in mathematics amounted to 27.5% (OECD average: 27.7%). For immigrant students and students without an immigrant background, the difference in the share of low performers in mathematics was 22.1%, significantly higher than on average across OECD countries (14.2%) (OECD, 2016). Parental background remains a strong determinant of children's educational trajectory and access to tertiary education. Based on analysis for the OECD 2012 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), children of parents with tertiary educational qualifications (ISCED-97 levels 5A, 5B and 6) have 5.1 times higher odds of attaining such a qualifications than those of parents with lower secondary qualifications or less, compared to 4.5 across the OECD (OECD, 2014a, Table A4.1b: 93). Only 29% of Austrian 35-64 year-olds have a higher educational attainment than their parents, which is the third lowest level of absolute upward mobility in the OECD. Mobility is particularly low for women (25%, compared to 33% for men) (OECD, 2014a, Table A4.4: 100).

Table 1.3. **Selected indicators of quality and equity in Austrian education, based on PISA 2012**

	OECD average (2012)	Austria (2012)	Austria (2003; for science, 2006)
Percentage of top performers			
Mathematics	12.6	14.3	14.3
Reading	8.4	5.5	8.3
Science	8.4	7.9	10.0
Percentage of low achievers			
Mathematics	23.0	18.7	18.8
Reading	18.0	19.5	20.7
Science	17.8	15.8	16.3
Difference in performance between the 90th and 10th percentiles (in score points)			
Mathematics	239	240	242
Reading	242	238	263
Science	239	240	255
Percentage of overall variation in student performance explained by students' socio-economic status			
Mathematics	14.8	15.8	15.1
Reading	13.1	15.3	n/a
Science	14.0	18.3	15.4
Percentage of resilient students			
Difference in mathematics performance between immigrant and non-immigrant students after accounting for ESCS (in score points)			
Between school variance in mathematics performance (as percentage of total)			
Within school variance in mathematics performance (as percentage of total)			

Note: Top performers = students performing at PISA level 5 and above; Low performers = students performing below PISA level 2; Resilient students = students in bottom quarter of ESCS who perform among the top 25% of students after accounting for ESCS.

Source: OECD (2013a), PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity (Volume II): Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201132-en>, Tables II.2.1, II.A, II.2.7b, II.3.4b, II.3.7, II.2.8b; OECD (2014b), PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en>, Tables I.A, I.2.1b, I.4.1b, I.4.3d, I.5.3a/d.

As can be expected in a highly differentiated and hierarchical school system, there are considerable performance differences between schools in Austria. The academic selectivity of schools is associated with a 36 point increase in mathematics scores among 15-year-olds,

compared to just 5.9 points across the OECD (OECD, 2013b, Table IV.1.12b: 240). These results are confirmed by national standardised assessments: among Year 8 students enrolled in the NMS or HS, 24% failed to reach the standards for mathematics and another 33% did not score above level 1 while only 1% of students enrolled in the AHS failed to meet the standard and only 12% failed to reach level 2 (Schreiner and Breit, 2013: 21). As a result, in PISA 2012, between school variance in mathematics performance stood at 48.1% of the OECD average total variation. In contrast, only 36.9% of performance differences are observed between schools across OECD countries. Accordingly, Austria has a low index of academic inclusion⁵ of 51.6, compared to the OECD average of 64.1 (OECD, 2013a, Table II.2.8a/b: 196ff).

Much of the between-school difference in performance is explained by students' choice of study programmes (65%, compared to 40% across the OECD), i.e. whether students were enrolled in programmes designed to give direct access to the labour market, further vocational studies or the next programme level, which highlights the stratification among Austria's different school types (OECD, 2013a, Table II.2.9a: 201). However, schools are also more socio-economically homogenous than in most other OECD countries (OECD, 2015c: 28) and school performance is correlated with their students' ESCS, giving rise to equity concerns. In particular, 17.4% of the between school variation is explained by schools' different socio-economic composition. Although this figure is lower than the OECD average of 27.8%, it indicates a clustering of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in under-performing schools or school types and corresponding educational gaps (OECD, 2013a, Table II.2.9a: 200).

Unlike in various other OECD countries in which students in schools located in towns (3 000 to about 100 000 inhabitants) outperform students in rural schools (fewer than 3 000 inhabitants), and students in city schools (more than 100 000 inhabitants) outperform students in town schools after taking socio-economic status into account, performance differences between students in rural, town and city schools in Austria are not statistically significant (OECD, 2013a, Table II.3.3a).

National data indicate that year repetition occurs at all levels of the Austrian school system, but that repetition is highest in upper secondary education, particularly in upper academic secondary schools (AHS-O) (Statistik Austria, 2015b: 55). For OECD PISA 2012, 11.9% of 15-year-old students in Austria reported having ever repeated a year, compared to 12.4% across the OECD. Year repetition in primary and lower secondary education in Austria as reported by 15-year-olds (5.1% and 4.9% respectively) is significantly lower than in Germany (10.3% and 12.8% respectively) and Switzerland (13.2% and 8.1% respectively), and also lower than on average across OECD countries (7.1% and 5.7% respectively). At the upper secondary level (3.6%), however, year repetition is higher than in Germany (0%) and Switzerland (0.5%) and on average across OECD countries (2.1%) (OECD, 2013b, Table IV.2.2). Year repetition is more frequent for boys than for girls and considerably more common among students with a non-German mother tongue. In 2012/13, 5.7% of students with a non-German mother tongue repeated a year in the NMS and 15.0% in the AHS-U, compared to overall rates of 3.2% and 8.1% respectively (BILDOK, cited in Bruneforth et al., forthcoming: 40).

In 2012, Austrian students reported the highest level of overall well-being as measured by an index of sense of belonging at school across all OECD countries participating in PISA 2012 (OECD, 2013e, Table III.2.3d: 252). However, there are relatively strong discrepancies between the experience of socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. For example, 85.9% of socio-economically advantaged students reported to be

satisfied with their school, compared to 79.1% of disadvantaged ones (OECD, 2013e, Table III.2.3c). Also, bullying, which can contribute to emotional and behavioural problems, including anxiety and depression, weak performance in school, and increased absenteeism and truancy, constitutes a significant problem in Austrian schools. According to data from the World Health Organization's (WHO) Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey for 2009/10, 40% of children aged 11, 13 and 15 reported having been bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months (UNICEF Office of Research, 2013).⁶ In 2008, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK) implemented a national strategy for preventing violence and bullying at school (*Nationale Strategie zur Gewaltprävention*), the effects of which are not yet reflected in the WHO data.⁷

Attainment, adult skills and labour market outcomes

The level of educational attainment in Austria has steadily increased over the past decades and is among the higher ones within the OECD area. Only 16% of adults have attained less than upper secondary education (ISCED 2011 levels 0, 1 and 2), compared to 24% across the OECD. The proportion of adults who have attained at least upper secondary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and higher) has steadily increased across cohorts and remains above the OECD average for all age groups, including 90% of 25-34 year-olds, 86% of 35-44 year-olds, 83% of 45-54 year-olds and 75% of 55-64 year-olds (compared to 83%, 80%, 74% and 66% across the OECD) (OECD, 2015b, Tables A1.1a, A1.2a: 39f.). A notable 48% of adults whose highest level of education is upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4) have completed a vocational programme, compared with 26% across the OECD (OECD, 2015b, Table A1.5a: 45). 30% of the adult population aged 25-64 held a tertiary qualification (ISCED 2011 levels 5, 6, 7 or 8) in 2014, compared with an OECD average of 33%. A comparatively large share of adults with a tertiary education in Austria has completed a short cycle tertiary programme (ISCED 2011 level 5): 15% of 25-64 year-olds have completed such a programme, almost double the OECD average of 8%. Only 13% of 25-64 year-olds have attained a bachelor's or master's degree or equivalent qualification (ISCED 2011 levels 6 and 7), significantly less than the OECD average of 27% (OECD, 2015b, Tables A1.3a and A1.1a: 39, 41).

In 2012, the proportion of women who only achieved basic education was 23.2% compared to 14.9% for men (Statistik Austria, 2015b: 91). This attainment gap has significantly narrowed compared to previous decades. In 2014, 89% of women aged 25-34 had completed at least upper secondary education (ISCED 2011 level 3 and higher) and 23% had attained a bachelor's or master's degree or equivalent (ISCED 2011 qualifications 6 and 7), compared to 91% and 18% of men (OECD, 2015b, Table A1.3b and A1.2b).

The OECD 2012 PIAAC indicates that the skills of Austrian 16-65 year-olds are lower than average in literacy (see Table 1.4), above average in numeracy and at the average of participating OECD countries for problem solving with fewer adults at the top, but also at the bottom of the distribution. Younger adults aged 16-24 years showed average problem solving and literacy skills and above average numeracy skills (OECD, 2013c). Compared to the skills of 15-year-olds assessed in the PISA 2012 test, literacy skills are better among the slightly older cohorts. This might indicate a good capacity of the Austrian labour market and adult education system to foster skills beyond compulsory education.

Like in other countries, educational attainment in Austria has a significant impact on success in the labour market. In 2014, the employment rates among adults with tertiary education (ISCED 2011 Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8) were 32 percentage points higher than those of

Table 1.4. **Adult skills, PIAAC 2012**

	Austria	OECD average
Mean proficiency score (16-65 year-olds)		
Literacy	269.5	272.8
Numeracy	275.0	268.7
Percentage scoring at Level 2 or 3 in problem-solving in technology-rich environments (16-65 year-olds)	32.4	34.0
Mean proficiency score (16-24 year-olds)		
Literacy	277.7	279.6
Numeracy	279.3	271.3
Percentage scoring at Level 2 or 3 in problem-solving in technology-rich environments (16-24 year-olds)	50.7	50.7
Proportion of low-skilled adults (16-65 year-olds) with skills at or below Proficiency level 1 (%)		
Literacy	15.3	15.5
Numeracy	14.3	19.0
Proportion of adults opting out of the computer-based assessment, failing the ICT core, or without computer experience (%)	24.9	24.4

Source: OECD (2013c), OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en>, Tables A2.1, A2.4, A2.5, A2.6a, A3.2, A2.10a/b.

adults with only below upper secondary education (ISCED 2011 Levels 0, 1 and 2), compared to a 28 percentage point difference across the OECD (OECD, 2015b, Table A5.3a: 107f.). Adults with tertiary education were also the least vulnerable in terms of unemployment (3.7% compared to 10.8% of those with below upper secondary qualification). This unemployment gap of 7.1 percentage points (compared to 7.7 in the OECD) was even more pronounced among young adults (25-34 years) whose unemployment rates differed by 13.3 percentage points among the two groups (compared to 11.6 in the OECD) (OECD, 2015b, Table A5.4a: 110f.). However, Austria has one of the largest gaps in labour market outcomes among different age groups. While 83% of younger adults (25-34 years) with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education were employed in 2014, only 44% of older adults (55-64 years) with the same educational level were (OECD, 2015b, Table A5.3a: 108f.). Like in other countries with a strong vocational education and training system, graduates from vocational programmes in Austria fare well on the labour market and often better than their peers from general programmes. In 2014, students who had attained a vocational upper secondary qualification had a lower risk of unemployment as opposed to graduates with a general qualification (4.3% vs. 6.0%) (OECD, 2015b, Table A5.5a: 113). Students completing a vocational course also had a higher employment rate than those who completed a general upper secondary education (ibid). The Austrian labour market is not only sensitive to qualifications, but also to skills. Employment rates are more than 10 percentage points higher among adults with literacy proficiency Levels 4 or 5 in PIAAC, compared to those who scored at Level 2, regardless of their educational attainment – one of the largest effects in the OECD (OECD, 2014a, Table A5.7a [L]: 127).

Regardless of educational attainment, there is a persistent gender pay gap. In 2013, 25-64 year-old women in full-time employment could expect to earn only around 80% of their male equivalents' salary, whether they have an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 level 3 and 4) or a lower qualification (ISCED 2011 levels 0, 1 and 2) (OECD average: around 75%). Women with tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5, 6, 7 and 8) in full-time employment, earned only 69% of what a man with the same qualification could expect, less than the OECD average of 73% and the EU21 average of 74% (OECD, 2015b,

Table A6.2a: 126). The gender disparity is even more pronounced when earnings from all types of employment are taken into account. In 2013, working age women (24-64 year-olds) with tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 5, 6, 7 and 8) reported incomes at 57% of men's earnings (69% in the OECD and in EU21 countries), women with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 2011 levels 3 and 4) received 61% (70% in the OECD, 72% in EU21 countries) and those with lower secondary qualifications or less (ISCED 2011 levels 0, 1 and 2) earned 66% (69% in the OECD, 72% in EU21 countries). These disparities have shown little to no sign of narrowing over the past decade (OECD, 2015b, Table A6.2b).

Notes

1. The following websites also provide further details: Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (www.bmbf.gv.at/enfr/school/schools.html) and Eurydice (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Austria:Overview>).
2. The four domains of decision-making defined by the OECD (2012) comprise the following areas: **Organisation of instruction:** student admissions; student careers; instruction time; choice of textbooks; choice of software/learningware; grouping of students; additional support for students; teaching methods; day-to-day student assessment. **Personnel management:** hiring and dismissal of principals, teaching and non-teaching staff; duties and conditions of service of staff; salary scales of staff; influence over the careers of staff. **Planning and structures:** opening or closure of schools; creation or abolition of a grade level; design of programmes of study; selection of programmes of study taught in a particular school; choice of subjects taught in a particular school; definition of course content; setting of qualifying examinations for a certificate or diploma; accreditation (examination content, marking and administration). **Resource management:** allocation and use of resources for teaching staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenditure, professional development of principals and teachers.
3. According to a bill of the federal government submitted to parliament in November 2015, responsibility for the central school leaving exam at the end of upper secondary education is going to be transferred to the Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBF) by the end of 2016.
4. Austria decided not to participate in the 2015 round of assessment for TIMSS.
5. Calculated as $100 \cdot (1 - \rho)$, where ρ stands for the intra-class correlation of performance, i.e. the variation in student performance between schools, divided by the sum of the variation in student performance between schools and the variation in student performance within schools.
6. The 2009/10 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey asked young people aged 11, 13 and 15 how often they had been bullying others and how often they had been bullied by others at school in the past couple of weeks. The children who took part in the survey were given the following definition of bullying: "We say a student is being bullied when another student, or a group of students, say or do nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a way he or she does not like or when he or she is deliberately left out of things. But it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight. It is also not bullying when a student is teased in a friendly and playful way."
7. For further information in German, see www.schulpsychologie.at/gewaltpraevention/nationale-strategie.

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ANNEX 1.A1

The November 2015 education reform proposal

In November 2015, an education reform commission comprising representatives of the federal government and the provinces presented a proposal for education reform in Austria. The education reform proposal was informed by the work of an expert commission in Austria that resulted in the paper *Freiraum für Österreichs Schulen: Empfehlungen zur neuen Steuerung* [Freedom for Austria's schools: Recommendations for new steering] (BMBF, 2015) and a draft report of the OECD school resources review of Austria. The November 2015 proposal suggested the following reforms.

1) Early childhood education and care: Strengthening kindergarten as an educational institution

- Introduction of a standardised national “education compass” for all children aged 3.5 and above (in analogy to the best practice “mother-child passport”).
- Second compulsory kindergarten year for everyone, with the possibility for parents to opt out.
- Development of a compulsory standardised national quality framework by the end of 2016 in consultation with the provinces.
- Continuing documentation of language levels and development using a portfolio system (“education compass”).
- Further development of educational institutions for kindergarten teachers (*Bildungsanstalten für Kindergartenpädagogik, BAKIP*).
- Recognition of (tertiary) qualifications for professional qualifications from the new BHS for Elementary Pedagogy (formerly BAKIP) with the appropriate proof of practical experience to facilitate side entry.
- Development of integrated further education opportunities at associate institutions (university colleges of teacher education, universities) and provincial academies for elementary pedagogues and primary teachers.
- Stronger research in the field of early childhood education and care and participation in international projects (e.g. OECD) on elementary pedagogy and supporting early childhood development.

2) Transition to school, primary education, and support for language development

- NEW Admission of students.

- Data exchange with the creation of a national basis for disclosure and use of formative student information and data between kindergarten and primary school.
- Further development and comprehensive expansion of co-operation between kindergarten and primary school teachers (network schools).
- Joint staff meetings with the school supervisors from the school inspection of early childhood education and care and primary education.
- Orientation and participation in the latest international research and development projects (OECD and EU), transfer of international expertise.
- Updating and further development of primary school curricula.
- Autonomous opportunity for teaching across school years with flexible internal differentiation.
- Autonomy for schools to implement alternative student assessments for primary school Years 1 to 3.
- Introductory language courses in schools.

3) School autonomy

- a) More pedagogical, organisational, staff and financial autonomy
- Greater flexibility to devise learning groups according to pedagogical targets and more opportunities for the flexible formation of classes and groups.
 - Greater autonomy for schools to determine their focus and curriculum timetables where this will enhance the quality of learning.
 - A massive reduction in the number of school pilots from 2017/18.
 - Benchmark of 200 to 2 500 students, with a range of 10% of fluctuation for autonomous schools or administrative bodies.
 - Ongoing partnerships between schools and boards like the school forum or the school community committee.
 - Development of a comprehensive long-term school concept that entails the school profile, mission statement, etc. by the NEW administrative bodies (school cluster), and production of annual pedagogical quality reports by individual schools.
 - Responsibility for the organisation of the work schedule for the school leadership.
 - Greater flexibility for the adaptation of school hours to meet the demands of the work schedules of parents and guardians.
 - Autonomy for school leadership to set aside time for quality development projects and annual planning with all staff outside of teaching hours.
- b) Greater autonomy for human resource management to increase the organisational potential and responsibility of school leadership
- Organisation of school leadership (principals, deputy principals and middle management) as a separate professional group (5-year contracts and a standardised job profile and recruitment process).
 - Selection of staff through school leadership in consultation with the education authority, with a veto right against new staff appointment for school leadership.
 - Responsibility for school leadership for staff development and performance evaluations (with support of middle leaders).

- Responsibility for further training arrangements and their approval, including exemptions, in the hands of the school leadership within the available resources (travel expenses). Availability of further training courses through university colleges of teacher education (PH).
 - Involvement of school leadership in decisions pertaining to the employment of staff, such as contract renewal.
- c) Greater financial autonomy to facilitate the efficient and needs-based use of resources
- Possibility to convert teaching staff positions into support staff positions, e.g. for pedagogical assistance (up to 5% of staff).
 - Autonomy for schools to deploy external teaching staff for special areas of focus within the scope of the resources provided.
 - Flexibility in assigning and planning the current regulations on administrative tasks in schools (e.g. updating of teaching materials and other ancillary services) in accordance with the needs of the individual school.
 - Depending on the school authority model, direct availability of certain financial resources to autonomous schools or school clusters (NEW administrative body) as part of a global budget for material expenditure (e.g. material expenditure for students, text books, missions, transportation, overheads, equipment, etc.).
 - Permission for third-party funding for schools within the legal framework.
- d) Evidence-based quality control and (pedagogical) monitoring of results to help schools develop
- Responsibility of the federal government for the central specifications of education targets, curricula, education standards, and for auditing resources and monitoring results.
 - Responsibility of the federal government for the entire strategic planning and result-oriented management of these areas.
 - Responsibility for autonomous schools for their operative implementation and pedagogical organisation.
 - Production of annual school-specific quality reports by autonomous schools (with the support of the NEW school inspections) in order to ensure ongoing quality control and transparent documentation (for the school partners and the central authorities).
 - Regular collection of data (indicators, figures and measurements) on learning progress, school climate, educational pathways and transitions, social composition, the result-oriented use of resources etc. through the federal authorities. Availability of these data to schools as well as the quality control body (NEW school inspection) in order to inform further development measures.
 - Self-evaluation and peer evaluation by schools to complement central quality control mechanisms.
 - Quality development within schools with clear written development plans and target agreements with the support of NEW school inspection.
 - Presentation of a national school quality report collecting the results of the school quality control areas to the parliament on a three-year basis.

4) Model regions: schools for 6-14 year-olds

The aim is to create a school in which students can enjoy optimal development of their individual abilities and to pilot comprehensive schooling for this age group. This requires a

supporting pedagogic, staff-related and organisational framework, which is provided by internal differentiation and individualisation, as well as a good mix of all children within one peer group. New Secondary Schools, academic secondary schools (lower level) and special needs schools are part of the region; primary schools and kindergartens or day nurseries can also participate. In a model region all schools within the region are integrated.

- Schools may be combined in a school association (“region”). The model region will be established on the basis of concepts developed by the provinces, subject to approval by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (BMBF).
- A model region may only extend across one province.
- The total number of individual schools in the model regions must not amount to more than 15% for each type of school and must not comprise more than 15% of all students of a given type of school. Schools already participating are excluded from these calculations.
- No infringement of the rights of any private school providers. No amendments to the Private Schools Act. Possibility for private schools to participate if they so wish.
- Equal distribution of federal and provincial teachers and students of all levels of achievement throughout the individual schools in the model regions. (All children who have successfully completed primary school; children with special needs only have to have attended primary school or a special needs school.)
- Availability of support staff and/or multi-professional teams to ease the burden on teaching staff. Possibility to deploy teaching staff as support staff.
- Consultation of school partners.
- A pedagogically inclusive concept (Strength-orientation, systematic involvement of parents in education, individualised learning for students, inclusion (optional), internal differentiation, skills orientation, vocational orientation, specific advanced teacher training in pedagogy, establishment of professional learning communities for teachers in the region, promotion of talent, advanced courses, permeability for advanced educational careers).
- No funding cuts for schools facing particular challenges (e.g. students whose first language is not German, students requiring special support).
- Development of regional networks for education between schools and all other education partners.
- Comprehensive scientific support and evaluation, nomination of experts by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and the provinces.
- Government-level working group tasked with developing, in consultation with the provinces, proposals for the prerequisite legislative changes for establishing a model region.
- Legislative implementation via the introduction of a new legal provision for model regions in the School Organisation Act (SchOG).
- No additional federal funds for the entire model region.

5) School organisation, education directorates

- The highest education authority is the federal minister.
- Each province has an education directorate as a joint federal-provincial authority. Provincial legislation may stipulate that the provincial governor or the responsible member of the provincial government can take on the role of president of the authority.

- The education directorate is headed by the director of education as a federal employee nominated by the responsible federal minister upon recommendation by the provincial governor. The director of education undertakes the general and specialist supervision of all employees of the education directorate. The director is appointed for a period of five years.
- This authority is responsible for the performance of the federal teachers, the provincial teachers, the external school organisation (cost-neutral), the federal administrative staff and the school inspection.
- The education directorate has all the powers presently held by the province education board or the education departments of the provinces.
- School principals are appointed in accordance with a national standardised selection procedure which is to be devised by the federal government together with the provinces.
- All teachers are to be paid via the Federal Computing Centre (*Bundesrechenzentrum*, BRZ) and integrated into the teaching information system (details to be agreed upon).
- Abolition of the executive president, the vice president and the collegiate boards.
- The internal organisation of the education directorates is governed by federal law in co-operation with the provinces.
- Title: Education directorate for “the federal state”.

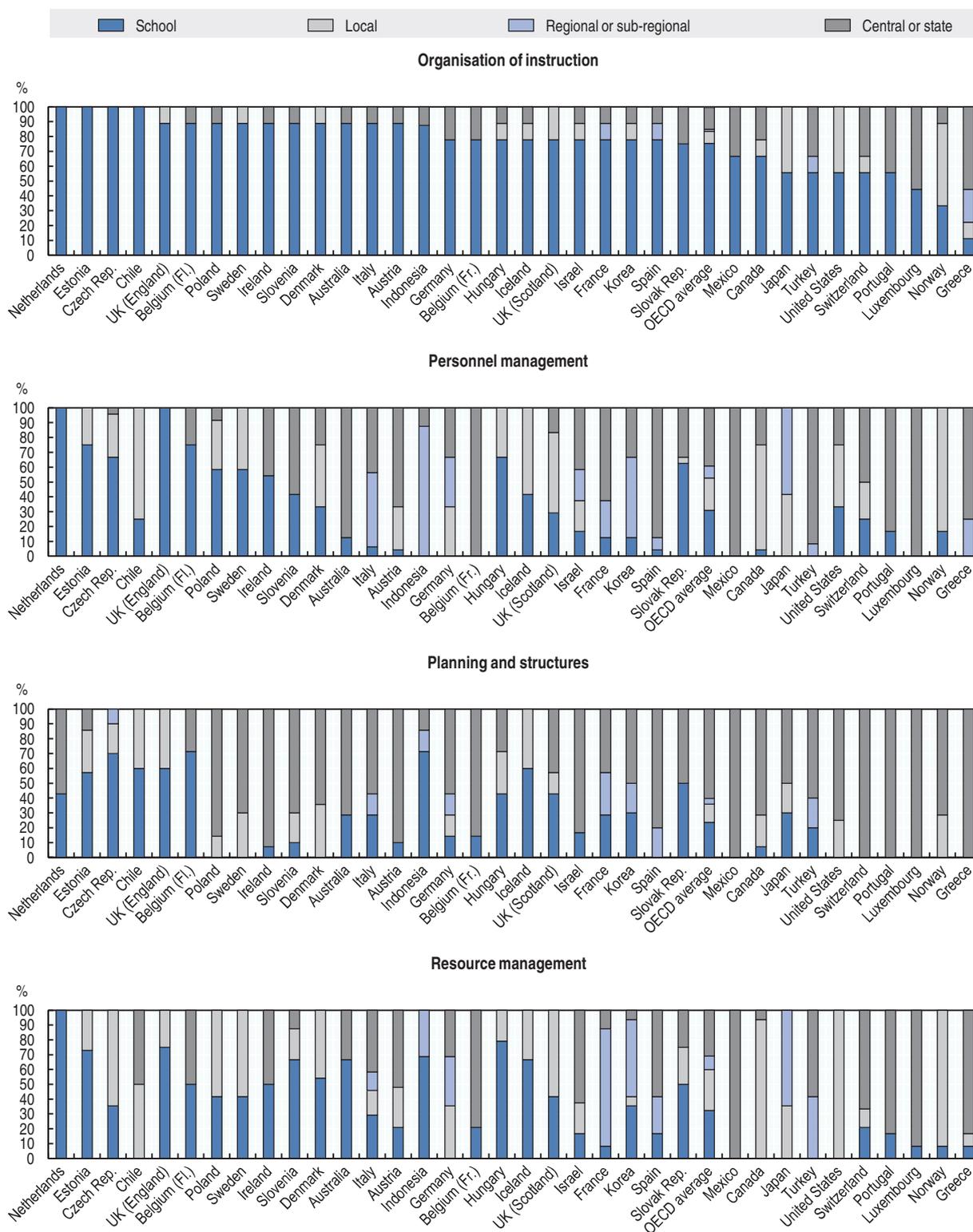
6) Innovation in education

- Comprehensive Internet access for schools by 2020.
- Establishment of a national education foundation.

ANNEX 1.A2

The Austrian Education System

Figure 1.A2.1. **The Austrian Education System**

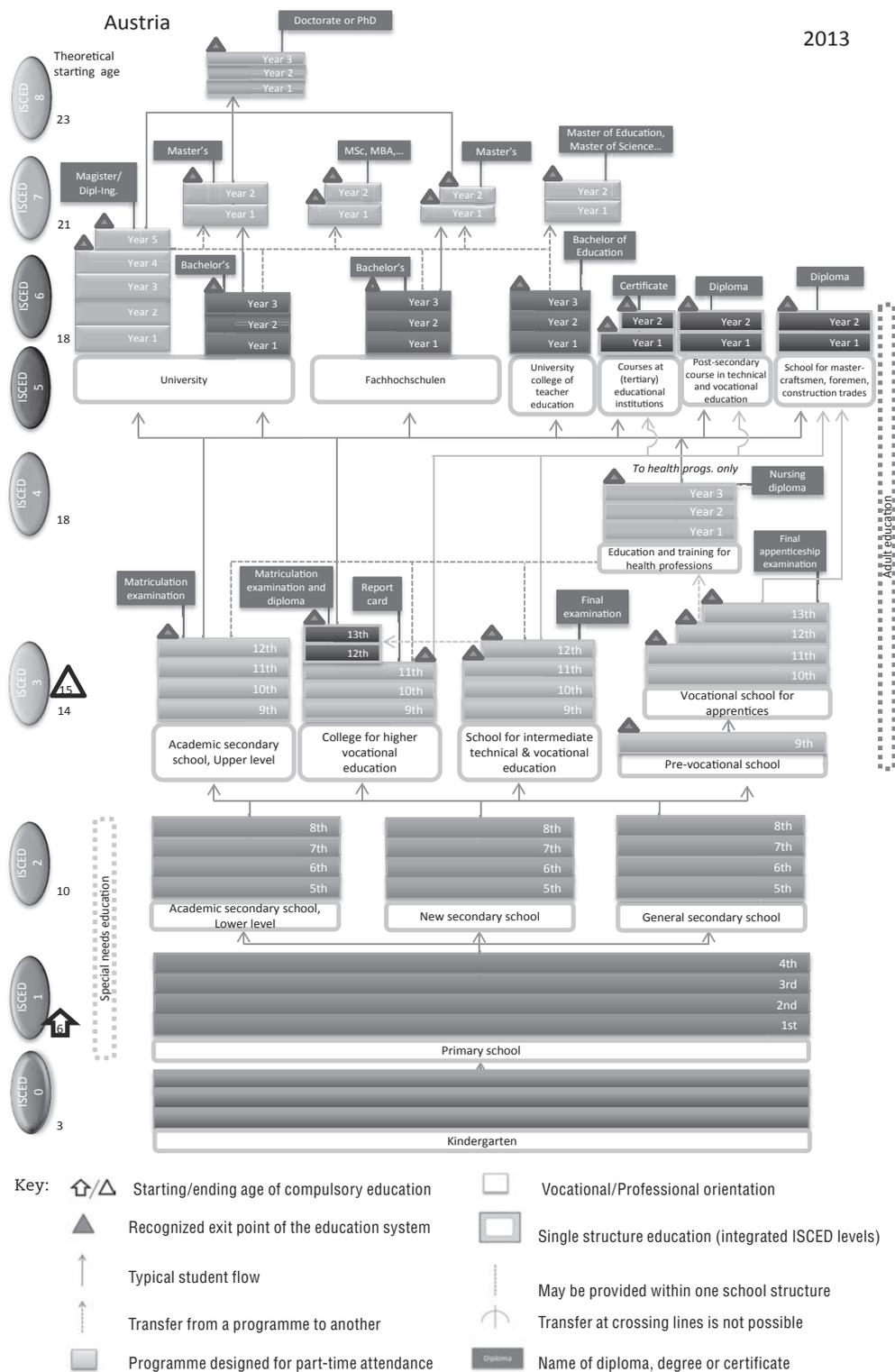


Source: OECD (no date), Education GPS, <http://gpseducation.oecd.org>.

ANNEX 1.A3

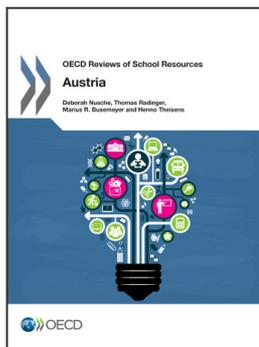
Distribution of decision-making in public lower secondary education

Figure 1.A3.1. Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, by domain, 2011



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of decisions about organisation of instruction taken at the school level.

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>, Table D6.2a and D6.2b. See Annex 3 for notes.



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