



National system overview on education systems in Europe

2011 Edition



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1. Education population and language of instruction

At the beginning of 2011 Austria had 8 404 252 inhabitants, 2 836 050 of them were aged between 0 and 29 years (33 %). In the academic year 2009/10, 776 000 pupils attended compulsory education and, approximately 80 % of all pupils aged 15 to 19 and 34 % of all pupils aged 20 to 24 were in education.

German is the language of instruction. In the mixed-language areas of Carinthia and Burgenland, bilingual primary schools have been set up, where both German and the language of the relevant ethnic group are used as language of instruction, i.e. Slovene for Carinthia, and Croatian, Hungarian and Romani for Burgenland.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In the academic year 2009/10, approximately 88 % of all pupils attended public educational institutions. Private institutions accounted for the remaining 12 %. School attendance is free, with the exception of private schools. The majority of private schools are denominational schools maintained by the Catholic Church.

Competence for legislation in education and its implementation is divided between the *Bund* (Federation) and the *Länder*.

At *Länder* level, the competent legislative bodies are the *Länder* parliaments (diets). Responsibility for implementation rests with the *Ämter der Landesregierung* (the administrative bodies of the 9 Austrian *Bundesländer*).

In specific matters enumerated in the Constitution, the Federation and the *Bundesländer* have a shared legislative competence. The Federation enacts framework legislation, while detailed implementing legislation is laid down by the *Bundesländer*.

However, the Federation has overwhelming responsibility for the system of education, which covers virtually all areas of school organisation, the organisation of school instruction, private schools as well as the service, remuneration and retirement law-governing teachers. These matters are all governed by federal legislation.

The Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is the supreme oversight body for primary and secondary education as well as for the University Colleges of Teacher Education. The Federal Ministry for Science and Research is the supreme oversight body for universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) ⁽¹⁾. The Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth is the supreme oversight body for company-based apprenticeship training.

The competence for training in health-care occupations, with the exception of the relevant tertiary sector programmes, lies with the Federal Ministry of Health.

The *Länder* are mainly responsible for the provision of teaching staff at public compulsory schools. Moreover, they support the municipalities in the construction and maintenance of these schools via dedicated school construction funds, which they administer. Kindergarten education is a responsibility of the *Länder*.

Schools enjoy some autonomy in budgetary management and, up to a point, are free to adapt the curriculum to local needs. Province school inspectors in each of Austria's nine *Länder*, assisted by district school inspectors for compulsory schools and subject inspectors for the upper secondary level, are responsible for school inspection.

The 2002 *Universitätsengesetz* (Universities Act) transformed universities from federal institutions into public-law entities which are no longer under federal administration. Federal funding is provided through three-year global budgets that are based on performance agreements. Being endowed with full legal capacity, the universities are free to tap other sources of funding. Territorial entities and private legal entities may run *Fachhochschulen*. At present, *Fachhochschule* study programmes are predominantly funded by the Federation in accordance with authorised study places.

3. Pre-primary education

<i>Krippe</i> (Crèche)	0-3 years
<i>Kindergarten</i>	3-6 years

Up to the age of 3, children may attend a crèche (*Krippe*), if available. They may attend a kindergarten when they are aged between three and six.

In the year 2010/11, 90.7 % (217 709) of all children aged 3 to 5 (age as at 1 September) attended pre-compulsory education.

The training programmes for kindergarten teachers have been aligned to respond to the growing number of children under the age of three now attending kindergarten. The provision of such facilities and decisions regarding fees are the responsibility of the *Länder* or of private institutions (providers).

⁽¹⁾ These institutions offer university-level study courses which intend to convey a scientifically based vocational education.

4. Compulsory full-time education

(i) Phases

Primary level <i>Volksschule</i> or <i>Grundschule</i> (primary school)	6-10 years of age
Lower secondary level <i>Hauptschule</i> (general secondary school) Neue Mittelschule (new secondary school, pilot schemes) <i>Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – Unterstufe</i> (academic secondary school – lower level) <i>Volksschuloberstufe</i> (upper level of primary school)	10-14 years of age
First year of upper secondary level	14-15 years of age
<i>Allgemein bildende höhere Schule (Oberstufe)</i> (academic secondary school – upper level) <i>Oberstufenrealgymnasium</i> <i>Polytechnische Schule</i> (pre-vocational school) <i>Berufsbildende mittlere Schule</i> (technical and vocational school) <i>Berufsbildende höhere Schule</i> (technical and vocational college) <i>Bildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik/Sozialpädagogik</i> (training schools for kindergarten school teachers and educators) <i>Berufsbildende Pflichtschule</i> (part-time compulsory vocational school)	

Education is compulsory for nine years and starts at the age of 6.

(ii) Admission criteria

Primary school pupils must have attained six years of age by 1 September in the year of admission. Children who have not yet attained the age of compulsory schooling and will reach the age of six by 1 March of the next following calendar year, may be admitted earlier, provided they are mature for schooling and have the required social competence for attending school.

Transfer to the lower secondary level is contingent on the successful completion of year four of primary school. Admission to *Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule* (AHS) is linked to achievement in year four or subject to admission testing.

Children of statutory school age living in a school district of a particular type of school must be admitted to that school. A pupil's application for admission to a school outside of his/her school district may be rejected.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises 180 days (with 5 days of schooling a week) and lasts, depending on a staggered timetable that varies between the *Länder* (from the first or second Monday in September to the Saturday between 28 June and 4 July) respectively between 5 July and 11 July. Some schools run a five-day regime, others a six-day regime. The number of lessons per week ranges from 20 (primary school) to 35 hours (secondary higher technical and vocational colleges). A lesson lasts 50 minutes. The minimum number of hours taught per year is around 630 for pupils aged 7, 750 for pupils aged 10, 870 for pupils at lower secondary level, and 960 for pupils at higher secondary level.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Since the academic year 2007/08, the number of pupils per class has been reduced at primary schools, *Hauptschulen*, AHS and *Polytechnischen Schulen*. The minimum number of pupils per class is 10 at primary level, and 20 for *Hauptschulen*. Pupils are grouped by age; at secondary level (*Hauptschule*, *Polytechnische Schule*) pupils are grouped by ability in German, Mathematics, and Modern Foreign Language.

At *Polytechnische Schule* pupils may also be grouped in these subjects by interest (subject areas).

As a rule, primary school pupils are taught by one teacher in all subjects except Religion and Handicrafts; in secondary education, instruction is provided by subject teachers.

(v) Curricular control and content

Based on proposals that are drafted by curricular task forces, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture sets up a framework curriculum in a consultation process that includes the authorities and bodies having responsibility for education at district and *Land* level, as well as the organisations which represent the interests of teachers.

The mandatory subjects at primary school include Religion, Local Geography/History/Biology, German, Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Music, Arts, Textile/Technical Work, Sports, as well as Modern Foreign Language (since 2003/04) and Road Safety as mandatory exercises (without grading).

At lower secondary level, pupils continue on the above-mentioned subjects which are complemented by other general, science, or technical subjects.

The Federal Ministry for Education, Art and Culture also approves textbooks. Schools are free in choosing textbooks and may to a certain degree adapt the curriculum to school-specific requirements.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

There is no formal external testing during compulsory education. Teacher assessment is based on classroom participation and the results of oral, written, practical and graphical work.

As a rule, progression to the next higher form depends on a positive assessment in all subjects. Exceptions apply at primary school level or if only one subject was assessed negatively.

Primary school pupils have to sit for written exams in grade 4 (school tests) in German and Mathematics. Pupils receive end-of-term and end-of-year reports.

5. Upper secondary education and post-secondary level

(i) Types of schools

Upper secondary level	age
<i>Allgemein bildende höhere Schule (Oberstufe)</i> (academic secondary school – upper level)	14-18
<i>Oberstufenrealgymnasium</i> (separate upper-level form of <i>Allgemein bildende höhere Schule</i> - AHS)	14-15
<i>Polytechnische Schule</i> (pre-vocational school)	14+
<i>Berufsbildende mittlere Schule</i> (technical and vocational school)	14-19
<i>Berufsbildende höhere Schule</i> (technical and vocational college)	14-19
<i>Bildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik/Sozialpädagogik</i> (training schools for kindergarten school teachers and educators)	15+
<i>Berufsbildende Pflichtschule</i> (part-time compulsory vocational school)	16+-19+/18+
<i>Ausbildungseinrichtungen sonstiger nichtärztlicher Gesundheitsberufe</i> (paramedical schools)	21+
Post-secondary non-tertiary level	
<i>Schulen für Gesundheits- und Krankenpflege</i> (health and nursing schools)	17+
<i>Kolleg</i> – post secondary training courses	18-20

(ii) Admission criteria

After grade eight, pupils may opt for one of many different routes that are offered by general or technical/vocational schools at upper secondary level. Transfer requires the successful completion of grade eight and is also based on achievement. The school can be chosen by parents. Candidates failing to meet the required achievement criteria must take an admission test.

Pupils, even without a leaving certificate from grade eight may attend a pre-vocational school. The aim is to convey the best possible support and skills for a later transfer to vocational training (dual system of education) or to a higher-level school.

Back-transfers from secondary higher general or technical/vocational schools to a pre-vocational school are allowed only until 31 December of the current school year.

For some training routes at secondary higher technical/vocational schools or the training schools for kindergarten teachers/educators, candidates must prove their physical or artistic aptitude, as well as social and communication skills.

At the training institutions for paramedical staff, admission is conditional upon the successful completion of compulsory schooling, good health, and in most cases on trustworthiness and an admission interview or admission test. Additionally, admission at health and nursing schools is conditional upon the successful completion of 10 years of schooling. Students at psychiatric health and nursing schools moreover must be at least 18 years of age. Admission for a bachelor programme in general health and nursing studies at a *Fachhochschule* is conditional upon good health, aptitude, and trustworthiness. Fulfilment of these conditions is to be verified through a standardized admission procedure. Evidence of general eligibility for university studies must likewise be provided by applicants.

After completion of nine years of compulsory schooling, pupils may enter into an apprenticeship contract with an employer; minors require parental consent. Apprentices then become automatically enrolled at a compulsory part-time vocational school.

(iii) Curricular content and control

At this level of education, the curricula depend on the training route chosen. However, German, Mathematics and one Modern Foreign Language are part of the general mandatory syllabus.

At pre-vocational schools, the focus lies on vocational orientation and basic vocational training in subject areas according to broadly-scoped occupational fields such as technical/commercial occupations, trade/clerical occupations, as well as the service-industry and tourism.

Technical and vocational schools offer a wide range of courses and special emphases. Consultation with industry and the social partners is all-important, since the curricula also include technical theory and practical instruction. Teachers are free in selecting didactic methods. The curricula focus on pupil-centred learning, project work, cross-curricular activities and the acquisition of key competences. Schools have responsibility for selecting textbooks and other teaching aids.

The curricular contents and other framework conditions governing training at health and nursing schools as well as training institutions for paramedical staff are laid down in training ordinances based on the pertaining acts governing the profession and training for the profession.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

AHS as well as *Oberstufenrealgymnasium* ends with a *Reifeprüfung* (matriculation examination or secondary school leaving examination). All candidates who have completed the last year successfully, or who have received a grade of 'insufficient' in no more than one compulsory subject, are entitled to sit the examination at the main examination date (within the last ten weeks of the instruction year).

Pupils who pass the school-leaving examination at the end of secondary higher academic school receive a matriculation certificate (*Reifeprüfungszeugnis*).

Apprentices receive a leaving certificate on completion of the last year of part-time compulsory vocational school (*Jahres- und Abschlusszeugnis*). They may take an apprenticeship certification exam before a board of examiners. The apprenticeship certificate grants access to certain trades, master craftsmen exams, vocational diploma exams and to courses for working adults as well as to the *Berufsreifeprüfung* and the *Studienberechtigungsprüfung* (university entrance examination).

The *Berufsreifeprüfung* entitles to enrol in study programmes at universities, higher education institutions, *Fachhochschulen* and *Kollegs*, and qualifies holders for level II posts in Federal employment. This opens up new career opportunities and prospects for school-leavers of the dual system (with an apprenticeship certification), of secondary intermediate schools of at least three years, of health and nursing schools, or paramedical colleges. Three of the four exam parts (German, Modern Foreign Language, Mathematics, and one subject area from the apprenticeship trade ok) for the *Berufsreifeprüfung* may be taken before the apprenticeship certification exam.

Pupils attending a one-to-two-year course at vocational intermediate schools receive a certificate. Pupils attending a three-to-four-year course at higher-level vocational schools must sit for a leaving exam (written/practical and oral). These certificates entitle them to exercise defined regulated occupations or trades and grant access to upgrading courses or to the *Berufsreifeprüfung* exam.

Five-year courses at a technical and vocational colleges end with a *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* that covers written, practical and oral parts and conveys double qualifications comprising general higher education access as well as professional qualifications for immediate entry into higher-level employment (EU diploma-level recognition).

The assignments for the *Reife- und Diplomprüfung* exam are set by the subject teachers following approval by the regional (province) school boards.

Students at post-secondary training courses (*Kollegs*) sit for a *Diplomprüfung* which certifies the attainment of specific vocational qualifications.

Students at health and nursing schools as well as training institutions for paramedical staff sit for a *Diplomprüfung* or take a school-leaving exam before a board of examiners, passing which they are entitled to exercise their respective occupations.

6. Higher education

(i) Types of institutions

Higher education is offered at:

- Universities (public and private after accreditation).
- *Fachhochschulen* (after accreditation of *Fachhochschule* study programmes)
- The Krems University of Continuing Education (Danube University Krems)
- University Colleges of Teacher Education (*Padagogische Hochschulen*).
- *Medizinisch-technische Akademien und Hebammenakademien* (colleges for higher-level paramedical professions and midwifery colleges; have all been transformed into *Fachhochschule* bachelor study programmes, except for two private paramedical academies)
- Moreover, there are a number of educational institutions which offer university-type study programmes.

(ii) Access

Admission to *Fachhochschulen* and universities as well as to the colleges for higher-level paramedical professions and midwifery colleges requires a *Reifeprüfungszeugnis* or a *Reife- und Diplomprüfungszeugnis* from a secondary higher school, or alternatively a *Berufsreifeprüfungszeugnis* or a *Studienberechtigungsprüfungszeugnis*, the latter being valid for a given study programme. Depending on the programme chosen, supplementary examinations may be required.

Admission tests are required for students wishing to enrol in studies of human and dental medicine, veterinary medicine and psychology where study places are limited. The same applies to study programmes for higher-level paramedical services and midwifery as well as general health-care and nursing training.

Admission to the arts universities is conditional on the passing of an admission test. Applicants to *Fachhochschule* study programmes, which generally require admission tests, must either have a *Reifeprüfungszeugnis* or equivalent certificate or relevant vocational qualifications. Additional examinations may be required. Austrians and students from EU countries currently do not pay tuition fees.

(iii) Qualifications

Graduates from colleges for higher-level paramedical services are entitled to use the following professional titles:

- *Physiotherapeutin/Physiotherapeut*
- *Biomedizinische Analytikerin/Biomedizinischer Analytiker*
- *Radiologietechnologin/Radiologietechnologe*
- *Diätologin/Diätologe*
- *Ergotherapeutin/Ergotherapeut*

- *Logopädin/Logopäde*
- *Orthoptistin/Orthoptist*

Graduates from midwifery colleges are entitled to use the professional title 'midwife'.

As of the academic year 2006/07, training for higher-level paramedical professions and midwives is also offered at *Fachhochschulen* in the form of bachelor study programmes. Except for two private paramedical academies, all academy and college programmes have been transformed into *Fachhochschule* bachelor study programmes,

Since the academic year 2008/09, bachelor study programmes at *Fachhochschulen* providing training in general health-care and nursing have been offered. Graduates of these study programmes are entitled to use the professional title *diplomierte/r Gesundheits- und Krankenschwester/-pfleger*.

University studies end with the following academic degrees:

- Degree programmes (***ordentliche Studien***):
 - o Diploma (Mag., Dipl.-Ing.) (240 to 360 ECTS points)
 - o Bachelor (minimum of 6 semesters, 180 ECTS points)
 - o Master (following the Bachelor, minimum of 120 ECTS points)
 - o Doctorate (following the Master or Diploma, minimum of 120 ECTS points)
 - o PhD (240 ECTS points)
- Non-degree programmes (***außerordentliche Studien***)
 - o University programmes ending with an international Master degree (e.g. *Master of Business Administration* MBA).
 - o University programmes ending with the designation *akademische/r* ... (minimum of 60 ECTS points).

Fachhochschule study programmes rarely end with a diploma (240 to 300 ECTS), overwhelmingly with a Bachelor (180 ECTS) and a Master (60 to 120 ECTS) degree, similar to the system at universities. *Fachhochschule* graduates may enrol in doctoral programmes at universities.

7. Special needs

Pupils with special educational needs may either attend a special school that caters to their needs or be taught in inclusive settings at primary schools and *Hauptschulen*. In the academic year 2008/09, over 50 % of all pupils with special educational needs opted for inclusive settings ('integration classes') while the other remaining pupils were enrolled in special schools.

Parents have the right to choose between one of these two organisational formats. Pupils are taught either according to special needs curricula or according to adapted curricula of primary or general secondary school.

All special schools with the exception of "special schools for children with severe disabilities" are divided into primary level I (years 1 and 2), primary level II (years 3 and 4) and a secondary level (years 5-8). If needed, a special school may be set up for year 9 as a vocational preparation year or pre-vocational school.

Special schools comprise specialised schools for physically disabled children, linguistically impaired children, for children who are hard of hearing, for deaf children, for visually impaired children, blind children, severely disabled children and for children with behavioural disabilities.

To be admitted to a special school, children require an official notice by which their special educational needs are assessed.

Class size/student grouping

For special schools, the maximum number of pupils per class is set as follows:

- Special schools for blind, deaf and severely disabled children: 8
- Special schools for visually impaired children, children who are hard of hearing, and ortho-therapeutic schools: 10
- General special schools: 13
- Other special schools: 15

Curricular control and content

The curricula for primary school and general secondary school or the lower cycle of academic secondary school apply, provided that pupils can basically reach the educational objectives without being overtaxed. In all other cases, the curriculum of a special school catering to the disability will be applied.

Special curricula exist for general special schools (for learning-impaired or under-achieving children), for special schools for blind children, special schools for deaf children, special schools for severely disabled children, and for special schools for behaviourally impaired children.

Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils with special educational needs at mainstream schools may progress to the next higher year, if this offers a better opportunity for their overall development. This is decided by the class conference. Pupils may attend instruction in the next higher or next lower form in German and Mathematics, if this is more appropriate for their individual learning situation.

In the absence of pertaining statutory provisions, instruction in an inclusive setting in the last year (year 9) of compulsory schooling is provided only in pilot projects for the time being.

The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs and Consumer Protection is providing funding for special measures of vocational preparation and insertion which are implemented in cooperation with the schools.

At post-compulsory education level, there are vocational training options for disabled or disadvantaged young. The *Berufsausbildungsgesetz* (Vocational Training Act) was amended in the summer of 2003, adopting the 'integrative vocational training' model. This amendment has improved the employment opportunities for young people with disabilities or at a disadvantage. Ever since, the number of young persons in integrative vocational training has risen steadily.

8. Teachers

Kindergarten teachers either complete five years of training from the age of 14 years onwards, or a two-year post-secondary course.

Teachers teaching in primary schools, *Hauptschulen*, *Sonderschulen* and *Polytechnische Schulen* are educated at University Colleges of Teacher Education (public and private) which end with a Bachelor of Education. Teachers for religion at compulsory general schools are educated at private University Colleges of Teacher Education.

AHS teachers must complete at least 4.5 years of university studies that end with a diploma. Depending on their subject area, teachers at vocational schools may be trained at universities. A

relevant professional background and experience is required for teaching technical theory and practice at technical and vocational schools.

Primary school teachers are generalist whereas lower and upper secondary school teachers major in two subjects. At technical and vocational schools and colleges, they may specialise on a group of subjects or subject area.

Teachers at training institutions for health-care and nursing occupations are trained in specialised courses for teaching tasks or in specialised university courses following a basic 3-year training programme. These specialised courses end with a final examination before an examination board. Teaching at health and nursing schools requires a special training course or university study programme covering 1600 hours.

Teachers are employed by the federation or the *Länder* (public employees).

English unrevised

Information provided by the Austrian Eurydice Unit.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult EURYPEDIA which provides descriptions of educational systems and policies in the Eurydice network countries:
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurypedia>