

# Austria



**41.4%** Population aged 25-34 with a tertiary degree <sup>a</sup>

**17.5%** Percentage of immigrant stock (% population) <sup>b</sup>

**13.9%** Population below the poverty line <sup>c</sup>

**8.5%** Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) <sup>d</sup>

**Average TIMSS/PIRLS scores (4th grade) <sup>e</sup>**  
Center point: 500

**541      539      522**

**Reading      Math      Science**

**Average PISA scores (10th grade) <sup>f</sup>**  
OECD average

**484      499      490**

**487      489      489**  
**Reading      Math      Science**

**5.2%** public spending in education as a % of GDP <sup>g</sup>

**4.5** billions allocated in NPRR <sup>h</sup>

18		Upper secondary school
17		
16	Compulsory schooling	General (31 %)
15		
14		Vocational (69 %)
13		
12		Lower secondary school (Common track)
11		
10		Primary school (Common track)
9		
8		
7		
6		
5		
4		Pre-school
3		

## General features

In Austria, compulsory education starts when students are 6 years old, and lasts for 9 years. It covers primary school, lower secondary school and part of upper secondary school.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the educational system is public, with only 8% of private schools<sup>3</sup>. Public education is free of charge for everybody. In primary school students follow a common curriculum and by the end of it (when students are 10 years old) they are asked to choose a track between (i) general education (*Mittelschule*) or (ii) in the lower grades of an academic school (*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule*). This decision of early tracking has been at the center of the debate on educational reforms<sup>4,5</sup>, since it might have a profound impacts on students' further educational development, and therefore the equity of the overall educational system<sup>6</sup>. After middle school, students have the option to enroll in (i) general education or (ii) vocational education and training (VET). Figure 1.1 summarizes the structure of the educational system. Immigrants represent roughly 17% of the population. The top three nationalities of newcomers in 2018 were (i) Romania, (ii) Germany and (iii) Hungary.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 (7.8%) is lower than the EU average (10.2%) and it has been slightly decreasing since 2009 (8.8%). However, there are important heterogeneities, with the majority of early school leavers concentrated among foreign-born students (19.2% versus 5.7% of natives). Tertiary educational attainment is higher than the EU average (41.4% versus 40.3%) and it is similar between natives and immigrants (respectively 43.5% and 40%).<sup>8</sup> Participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is quite high compared to the EU average (68.8% versus 48%). The percentage of youths aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) is lower than the EU average (8.5 % versus roughly 13%).

## Governance and funding

The responsibility for managing the educational system is shared between the Federal Ministry of

Education (which is responsible mainly for primary and secondary education and vocational education and training) and the Länders (which are responsible for the maintenance of the schools and staff in compulsory education). Decision making processes are shared at all levels of administration, from the central state to single schools.<sup>9</sup> Government expenditures in education remained stable in 2019, and are in line with the EU average (4.7%)<sup>10</sup>.

## Performance

According to the last PISA results available (2018), while 15-years old students scored similarly to the OECD average in reading and science (respectively 484 points in reading and 490 in science versus the OECD averages of 487 and 489), in maths the average score is significantly higher than the OECD average (499 versus 489).

The percentage of students who manage to achieve basic skills is close to the OECD average: 76% in reading, 79% in mathematics and 78% in science (compared to the OECD averages of 77%, 76% and 78%). While performance in reading and mathematics has been stable over the years, the performance in science started to decline.

Girls performed significantly better than boys by 28 points in reading, while in maths they were outperformed by boys, with a large and statistically significant gap of 13 points. In science, the performance gap is very small (only 2 points of difference) and statistically insignificant.

The gap in performance between socioeconomically disadvantaged and advantaged students is 93, larger than the OECD average of 89 points. 10% of disadvantaged students scored in the top quarter for reading (compared to the OECD average of 11%). Socio-economic status explained 15% of the variation in performance in mathematics and science, a number similar to the OECD average (14% for maths and 13 % for science).

In the PISA sample of 2018, 23% of students with an immigrant background in Austria. Roughly half of them comes from a socio-economically disadvantaged background. Native students scored

<sup>1</sup>Since 2010, compulsory kindergarten attendance was introduced for children who are 5 years old (Source: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/austria/overview>). Since 2016 students are required to engage in education or training up to the age of 18 (Source: <sup>2</sup>)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.migration.gv.at/en/living-and-working-in-austria/children-and-education/educational-systems/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dicereport109-rr1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.oecd.org/education/school/OECD%20Reviews%20of%20School%20Resources\\_Austria\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/school/OECD%20Reviews%20of%20School%20Resources_Austria_Summary.pdf)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.oecd.org/education/reform-of-austrias-school-governance-crucial-to-deliver-better-value-for-money.htm>

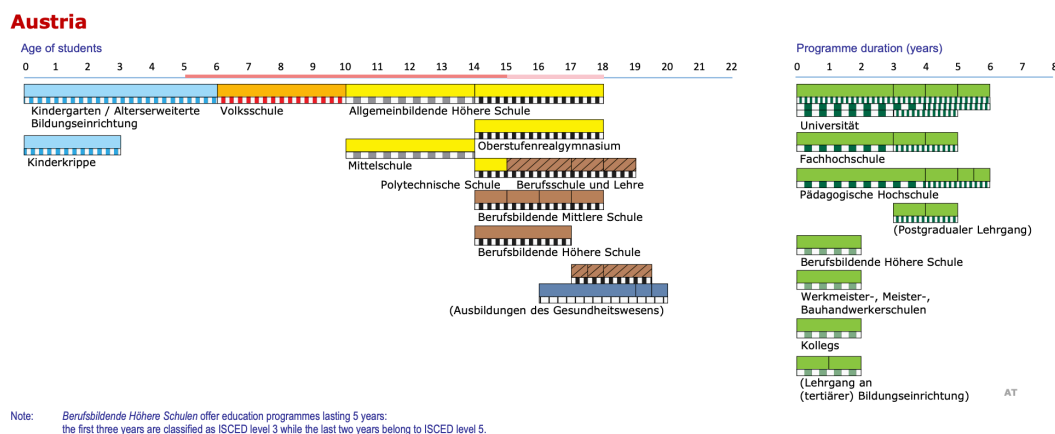
<sup>7</sup>International Migration Outlook, 2020

<sup>8</sup>Education and Training Monitor, 2020

<sup>9</sup>Education Policy Outlook, Austria Country Profile

<sup>10</sup>Education and Training Monitor, 2021

Figure 1.1: Educational system in Austria



Source: The Structure of the European Education Systems 2021/22, Eurydice. European Commission

on average 63 points more than immigrants, and even after having taken into account socioeconomic status, a smaller but significant persists (33 points). Only 11% of immigrant students scored in the top quarter of reading, compared to the OECD average of 17%.

Career aspirations strongly reflected gender stereotypes: among high-achieving students in mathematics and science, 10% of girls expected to work in an engineering or science job, compared to 20% of their male counterpart. 25% of girls wanted to work in the health-related sector (compared to only 11% of boys) and only 1% of girls expected to work in an ICT related job (compared to 7% of boys).

Expectations to go to university reflected socioeconomic differences: among high-achieving students, a high percentage of disadvantaged ones (50%) expected not to complete tertiary education, compared to roughly 20% of the advantaged students.

## Key policy challenges

**Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light a need to strengthen IT literacy skills.** Austria had approximately 20.6 weeks of distance learning during the pandemic<sup>11</sup>, a value in the mid-range of school closure days within the EU countries. In terms of digital literacy and teacher training, Austria was among the least prepared countries in the EU area to face distance learning and, according to some studies<sup>12</sup>,

both students and teachers lacked the necessary IT literacy skills to profitably follow and conduct distance learning. In 2018, 18% of school principals declared that insufficient digital equipment or internet access was still a barrier to quality education, less than half of the teachers received specific training on how to use digital technology for learning, and only a third of them used digital technology for school-related projects or classwork.<sup>13</sup> Despite this lack of training, Austrian pupils have been estimated to be at low risk of learning loss compared to other countries in the EU area<sup>14</sup>, since a low proportion of the population lacks technology resources.

**The National Education Report of 2018 recognizes as a significant challenge the need to replace in the subsequent years an aging teaching workforce.** The average age of teachers in the school system is higher than the EU average, with 47% of teachers aged 50 or older (versus 39% in EU on average).<sup>15</sup> The overwhelming majority of the workforce is female, especially in primary schools (92%). Despite catching up, females are still less likely to become school leaders, especially in non-academic tracks of secondary schools.<sup>16</sup>

## Recently enacted policies and investments

**During the difficult situation of the pandemic, several activities spurred, with the aim of help-**

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO data, 2021

<sup>12</sup><https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/5873>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/1d0bc92a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/1d0bc92a-en>

<sup>14</sup>Blasko et al. 2021

<sup>15</sup>[https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-austria\\_en.pdf](https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-austria_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>idem

**ing students in distress.** For example, to reduce students' isolation and provide entertainment, from March to May 2021, the project *Gönn' Dir* created a web portal where students could interact with their peers. Austria also stepped up the provision of online support during the pandemic (Rat auf Draht) and home visits to reach the most isolated and disengaged students.<sup>17</sup>

**In the context of the National Recovery and**

**Resilience plan, Austria plans to invest more than 15% of the 3.5 billion euros grant in education and skills.**<sup>18</sup> The strategic areas of focus are mainly (i) digitalization<sup>19</sup>, with the aim of easing access to digital education for student and schools and of promoting learning of digital skills and (ii) a remedial education package and (iii) development of elementary education.

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<sup>17</sup>Education and Training Monitor 2021

<sup>18</sup>Education and Training Monitor 2021

<sup>19</sup>[https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/en/Topics/school/krp/8\\_p.html](https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/en/Topics/school/krp/8_p.html)