Global Database on the Right to Education
Country Profile of Austria

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1. Constitutional framework


Whereas the Basic Law on the General Rights of Citizens and the European Human Rights Convention and its first protocol govern the fundamental rights of the individual in education, the state treaties mainly concern the rights of linguistic minorities (ethnic groups) to education.

The Federal Constitutional Act provides:

**Article 14**

(1) Save as provided otherwise in the following paragraphs, legislation and execution in the field of schooling and in the field of education in matters pertaining to pupil and student hostels are the business of the Federation.

(2) Save as provided otherwise by para 4 subpara a below, legislation is the business of the Federation, execution the business of the provinces in matters pertaining to the service code for and staff representation rights of teachers at public compulsory schools.

(5a) Democracy, Humanity, solidarity, peace and justice as well as openness and tolerance towards people are the elementary values of the school, based on which it secures for the whole population, independent from origin, social situation and financial background a maximum of educational level, permanently safeguarding and developing optimal quality. In a partnership-like cooperation between pupils, parents and teachers, children and juveniles are to be allowed the optimal intellectual, mental and physical development to let them become healthy, self-confident, happy, performance-oriented, dutiful, talented and creative humans capable to take over responsibility for themselves, fellow human beings, environment and following generations, oriented in social, religious and moral values. Any juvenile shall in accordance with his development and educational course be led to independent judgment and social understanding, be open to political, religious and ideological thinking of others and become capable to participate in the cultural and economic life of Austria, Europe and the world and participate in the common tasks of mankind, in love for freedom and peace.

(6) Admission to public school is open to all without distinction of birth, sex, race, estate, class, language and religion, and in other respects within the limits of the statutory requirements. The same applies analogously to kindergartens, day homes and student hostels. (6a) Legislation has to provide a differentiated school system which is organized according to the educational program at least in general educational and vocational schools and according to the level of education in primary and secondary schools, in which further adequate distinguishing shall be provided for the secondary schools.

(7a) The compulsory school attendance is at least nine years and also compulsory vocational school attendance exists.

In regard with languages, Article 8 states that

(1) German is the official language of the Republic without prejudice to the rights provided by Federal law for linguistic minorities.

(2) The Republic (Federation, provinces and municipalities) subscribe to its linguistic and cultural multiplicity having grown, expressed in the autochthonous ethnic groups. Language and culture, existence and preservation of these ethnic groups are to be respected, safeguarded and to be supported.”

(3) The Austrian sign language is recognized as independent language. Details are regulated by the laws. (BGBl I 2005/81).

The Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals provides that:

**Art. 2.** All nationals are equal before the law.

**Art. 17.**

[1] Knowledge and its teaching are free.

[2] Every national who has furnished in legally acceptable manner proof of his qualification has the right to found
establishments for instruction and education.

[3] Instruction at home is subject to no such restriction.

[4] The Church or religious society concerned shall see to religious instruction in schools.

[5] The right to supreme direction and supervision over the whole instructional and educational system lies with the state.

Art. 19.

[1] All the ethnic entities of the empire enjoy equal rights, and each ethnic entity has an inviolable right to the preservation and fostering of its nationality and language.

[2] The state recognizes the equal rights of all current languages in schools, administration and public life.

[3] In countries populated by more than one ethnic entity, public places of learning should be so organised that, without making the learning of a second national language compulsory, each member of an ethnic entity should have adequate opportunity to receive education in his/her own language.

2. Legislative and administrative framework

Laws governing School Education and Vocational Training

Compulsory Schooling Act (1985)
Provisions governing general full-time compulsory schooling of children residing permanently in Austria, and the compulsory schooling of pupils in an apprenticeship or training relationship at part-time vocational schools. This Act states that the attendance of school education is compulsory for every child irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, culture, religion or any other ground between the ages of 6 and 15 years. Refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to attend school.

School Periods Act (1985)
Provisions governing school periods and instruction-free periods (holidays) within the statutory school year, as well as the division of the instruction year into semesters, of the school time within the school day, and on the duration of lessons and breaks.

Act on School Education for Ethnic Minorities in Burgenland (1994)
Provisions governing the Croatian and Hungarian minorities and the language of ethnic minorities in Burgenland, in particular the right, under certain circumstances (basically a minimum number of registrations), to learn the Croat or Hungarian language as compulsory subject or to use the Croat or Hungarian language as the language of instruction in Burgenland.

Minority Schooling Act for Carinthia (1959)
Regulations governing the implementation of the schooling provisions for ethnic minorities as laid down in the Austrian State Treaty with regard to the federal province of Carinthia, in particular the right of every pupil to learn the Slovene language as a compulsory subject or to be taught in the Slovene language at primary school or secondary school, lower level in certain regions.

Private Schools Act (1962)
Provisions governing the establishment and running of private schools and on the granting of public-law status, as well as the granting of subsidies to private schools.

Religious Instruction Act (1949)
Provisions concerning religious instruction for all pupils who are members of a legally recognised church or religious community as a compulsory subject at public schools and schools enjoying public-sector status; religious education provided, conducted and directly supervised by the church or religious society; state school inspection as regards organisation and school-disciplinary matters, and the legal status of religion teachers. To ensure the basic rights of freedom of conscience and creed, the law also provides for an entitlement to withdraw from religious instruction.
**Religious Education Act (1985)**
Parents are free to decide on the religious education of a child, if they are responsible for their care and education. Children having completed fourteen years of age may decide for themselves which religious denomination they want to adhere to.

**School Organisation Act (1962)**
Provisions governing the external organisation of public-sector general and vocational schools and colleges (in particular: the schools’ tasks; structuring according to level and contents; general accessibility; freedom from tuition fees; curricula; pilot school projects, structure of the individual types of schools; admission requirements; forms of organisation, and the setting of the number of pupils per class.)

**Vocational Training Act (1969)**
Provisions governing the vocational training of apprentices; listing of apprentice able trades, authorised apprenticeship trainers, apprenticeship relationship and contract, period of apprenticeship, training regulations, pre-apprenticeship phase (to better include disadvantaged youths with placement impediments); subsidies for company-based apprenticeship training and training of apprentices at interworks training centres; crediting of school education for apprenticeship training.

**Federal School Inspection Act (1962)**
Provisions governing the competence of federal authorities in the administration and supervision of school education (federal school authorities), as well as the organisational set-up of federal school authorities in the provinces.

**School Education Act (1974, 1986)**
Provisions governing the internal organisation of schools. This law applies to, in particular: admission to school; school instruction regulations; educational work and pupil assessment; progression, repeating of grades, maximum duration of attendance; final exams; internal school regulations; tasks of teachers; school and pupils, school and legal guardians, procedures (for instance the right to appeal against certain decisions of the school)

**Schooling Allowance Act (1983)**
Provisions governing the requirements in order to be eligible for school and boarding home allowances and the calculation of the amount of grants.

**Education Documentation Act (2002)**
Provisions governing the use of data on pupils and students (according to the Data Protection Law) by the educational establishments in the field of schooling, education and health care in order to enable these institutions to fulfil their statutory tasks in the field of school and higher education administration, students’ support and representation matters.

This institute has been established to conduct studies in the field of applied educational research, to monitor the school system, to provide information for educational policy decisions and to monitor and implement educational policy actions as a legal entity under public law.

**Laws governing Higher Education**

**University Act (2002); English version**
Under the Universities Act, the currently 21 Austrian universities were granted full autonomy. They have the status of legal entities under public law. The federal state still plays a statutory supervisory role and is the partner for the performance agreement with each university. Contracts, business transactions and recruitment are managed by the universities on their own account. The senior bodies of the universities are the university council, the rectorate and the senate.
**Universities of Applied Sciences Studies Act (1993):** [English version](#)
Provisions governing the official recognition of study programmes as university of applied sciences ("Fachhochschule") study programmes and conferral of the designation University of Applied Sciences ("Fachhochschule") as university-level study programmes that provide a sound scientifically-based education with regard to certain fields of academic professions.

**Private University Act (2011):** [English version](#)
This law provides general rules for accreditation and maintenance of Private Universities.

**Teacher Education Act (2005)**
Provisions governing University Colleges of Teacher Education proving initial, in-service and continued training for the teaching profession.

**Agreement between Austria and Switzerland on the Mutual Recognition of Equivalences in Higher Education (1994)**
Provisions regulating the mutual recognition of equivalences in higher education between Austria and Switzerland.

**Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2011):** [English version](#)
The Act establishes the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria whose aim is to enable the external quality assurance, together with the internal quality management system of the educational institutions in higher education.

**Union of Students Act (1998)**
Provisions governing the tasks of the Austrian Union of Students (as a self-governing body): representation of the interests of its members and the material and non-material promotion of its members (students); technical support for students and counselling for prospective students.

**Students Support Act (1992)**
Provisions governing the granting of study grants and other supporting measures in order to provide a sound financial backing for students and to avoid the need for side-line employment.

### Laws governing Adult Education

**Federal Act on the Promotion of Adult Education and Public Libraries (1973)**
Provisions on the obligation of the federal state to promote adult education and to award government subsidies for the purpose of continuous further education.

**School Education Act for Working Adults (1997)**
Law governing the internal organisation of schools for working adults that is tailored to the specific needs of adults concerning instruction and education.

**Federal Law on “Berufsreifeprüfung” examinations (2011)**
This examination provides general higher education entrance qualifications for graduates of at least 3-year secondary technical and vocational schools, healthcare schools, schools for paramedical training and holders of the apprenticeship diploma. The *Berufsreifeprüfung* exam is designed as an external exam with preparation courses.

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### 3. Educational policies
3.1. General information

The Work Programme of the Austrian Government 2013 – 2018 comprises a section on education, whose key targets are:

- Education up to 18. All under-18-year-olds should as far as possible complete some form of education or training that goes beyond the compulsory school-leaving qualification
- Upgrade apprenticeships
- Increase the participation of all age groups in further education and training, and improve their basic competence and skills in professional life through further training, especially with those who have few skills and older employees
- Develop and strengthen the country’s elementary educational facilities as educational centres

3.2. Education content and quality

3.2.1. Curriculum

Curricula are decreed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs on the basis of the School Organisation Act. They specify the statutory educational tasks of the respective school type. Experts are consulted in the preparation and development of curricula. The following areas are covered by the curriculum:

- General educational objective
- Educational and teaching objectives for the individual subjects and teaching principles
- Teaching content
- Distribution of the content over the individual years
- Total number of lessons and number of lessons per subject (timetable)

According to the primary school curriculum, children should receive a basic and well-balanced education in the social, emotional, intellectual and physical spheres. On the basis of pupils’ individual backgrounds, primary school has to accomplish the following:

- arousing and nurturing eagerness to learn, skills, interest and talents
- strengthening and developing pupils’ faith in their own abilities
- strengthening or building social competence (responsible behaviour, team spirit, adjustment, development and acceptance of rules and norms, critical thinking)
- improvement of language skills (communication, expression)
- development and imparting of basic knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes with a view to the acquisition of the three R’s reading, writing, arithmetic (including the use of modern communication and information technologies in a manner suitable for children), of a sound attitude towards and understanding of the environment, as well as a general development of artistic, musical and technical skills, motor skills and physical skills
- gradual formation of appropriate attitudes towards learning and working (perseverance, care, accuracy, helpfulness, considerateness)
- transition to purposeful, independent and focussed learning (from the play-oriented forms of learning in pre-school education)

On 30 May 2012 the curriculum of new secondary school (grades 5 – 8) was announced. In addition to subject curricula a new learning culture is taken into account with increased orientation towards subject-related and interdisciplinary competence and potential. The following compulsory subjects are taught unless autonomous curricular provisions of schools apply: Religious instruction, German, Modern foreign language, History and social studies / political education, Geography and economics, Mathematics, Biology and environmental studies, Chemistry, Physics, Music, Art, Technical and textile shop, Physical education and sport, Domestic science and nutrition, career guidance.
Upper secondary schools and colleges are being modernised by introducing a new course system. As of 2017/18, the new system will be in place at all these schools from the 10th grade upwards. The core objectives are to ensure continuity of performance on the part of students throughout the school year, improve the learning atmosphere (smaller learning packages) and better prepare students for higher education by structuring the syllabus into competence modules. The semester-based syllabus, divided into competence modules, will increase the intensity of the learning/studying process, and will provide an improved overview of individual learning deficits. It is geared to continuous achievement and improved preparation for higher education.

The curricula of all types of colleges for higher vocational education have already been developed or are being developed and will enter into force as of the school year 2014/15. The new design of curricula is characterised by a division into semesters (splitting of syllabi over semesters) and competence areas (competence-oriented formulation).

In Austrian schools, ICT and digital competences are an integral part in the primary and secondary level’s curricula. The optimum, sustainable and widespread use of modern ICT in education is supported and promoted by the comprehensive initiative efit21 – digital education.

https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/efit21/index.html
http://www.efit21.at

3.2.2. Human rights education and learning environment

1. Education for Democratic Citizenship in Austria

Citizenship Education in Schools

Since 1978 Citizenship Education has been a cross-curricular educational principle in all Austrian schools. It applies for all schools at all levels. The decree regulating Citizenship Education is based on a broad interpretation of politics.

Furthermore, the subject “History and Social Science/Citizenship Education” was introduced in academic secondary schools in 2002 alongside the existing cross-curricular approach. Citizenship Education is also a compulsory subject in the curriculum of all vocational schools and colleges from the ninth grade upwards. Citizenship Education is mostly included in subjects such as economics, law, and history.

In order to promote democratic governance in schools, education laws, policies and strategies concerning decision making procedures are in place in Austria. Democratic participation of pupils in schools is guaranteed by specific legal regulations and support Citizenship Education.

Measures to promote the implementation of Education for Democratic Citizenship /Human Rights Education are supported by the Federal Ministry through the Unit for Citizenship Education. This unit provides a range of services (publications, online material, lectures, networking, and nationwide projects) offering information on current political, social and economic issues, as well as topics of contemporary history. Moreover, there is a range of information and teaching material available through the Austrian Centre for Citizenship Education in Schools (Zentrum polis – Politik Lernen in der Schule).

Cooperation with the Council of Europe

Austria actively takes part in the Council of Europe’s programme “Education for Democratic Citizenship” which is linked to UNESCO in the framework of the International Contact Group on Citizenship and Human Rights Education. The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted in 2010 by the Organisation’s 47 member states in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 is seen as an important international reference document and guideline for national activities.

2. Global Learning
Global Learning is understood as an educational response to the processes of globalisation. It is thus a very broad concept. It tries to enable learners to find out and reflect on their own location in the complexity of a worldwide society, and to grasp the causes and interrelationships of social and economic developments. Furthermore, students are expected to draw their own conclusions and develop their actions. Related seminars and events on Global Learning have been initiated and supported for several years by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, in cooperation with NGOs and university colleges of teacher education. Materials and concepts for in-service training of teachers have been prepared. All activities take place in the context of European and global developments in this field.

In the context of the international Global Education Week – organised in 36 Council of Europe member states –, various initiatives have been organised at national level by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, in collaboration with NGOs since 1999. Every year the GEW offers the possibility at the European level to deal with global developments in detail within the framework of events: globalisation, sustainable development, human rights, fair trade, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, gender, global environmental issues and intercultural learning are at the centre of this Council of Europe initiative. The overall objective of the GEW is to raise and deepen awareness of global issues.

3. Cooperation with UNESCO

The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) is a global network of more than 9,000 educational institutions in 180 countries. Schools belonging to this network support international understanding, peace, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and quality education in practice. The currently 83 Austrian UNESCO Associated Schools play a vital role as partners for the implementation of UNESCO goals. The Austrian Commission for UNESCO coordinates the national network. The Austrian Commission for UNESCO annually publishes the magazine of the Austrian UNESCO Associated Schools, FORUM, as well as the report of the annual network conference for teachers. Furthermore, the Commission runs a website to provide the members of the Austrian network with information and to foster exchange between schools.

3.2.3. Language of instruction

The language of instruction in Austria is German, except:

- Schools specifically designated for linguistic minorities (Croatian, Hungarian, Slovene)
- Private sector Schools selecting their students by language (e.g. Lycée française de Vienne, Vienna International School, American International School, Arabic, Czech, Slovak schools)
- Those schools which, upon approval by the school authority use a modern foreign language as their language of instruction (e.g. bilingual schools)

German as a second language:

The Austrian curriculum for Primary Schools contains an addendum, "German for pupils with a mother tongue other than German". This curricular addendum is not broken down by year, but is a multi-year teaching concept. In conjunction with the "German, Reading, Writing" curriculum, this addendum forms the basis for teaching and studying German as a second language.

The curricula for General and New Secondary Schools, Academic Secondary Schools, Pre-Vocational Schools, most Technical and Vocational Schools and most Colleges for Higher Vocational Education also contain guidelines for the teaching of German as a second language.

Mother tongue instruction:
The objective of the Optional Subject "Mother tongue instruction" in Primary Schools, Special Needs Schools, General and New Secondary Schools as well as in Academic Secondary Schools and Pre-Vocational Schools is to develop and strengthen bilingual competences. Today 25 languages are offered.

**Interculturality and Multilingualism:**

In the school year 2006/07, the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture launched the campaign “Interculturality and Multilingualism – an Opportunity” to assist teachers and pupils in dealing successfully with linguistic and cultural diversity.

### 3.2.4. Learning outcomes

The basis of *pupil assessments* are performance evaluations regulated by the School Education Act and the Ordinance on Performance Evaluation. Performance evaluations should be spread as evenly as possible over the evaluation period and should lead pupils to assess their own achievements based on objective criteria, without discouraging them or impairing their self-esteem. Assessments and evaluations are performed by teachers.

The following grades (marks) are used for assessing the achievements of pupils:

- Very good (1)
- Good (2)
- Satisfactory (3)
- Sufficient (4)
- Insufficient (5)

The assessment for pupils of statutory school age who have been admitted as extra-matricular pupils because of their lack of skills in the language of instruction needs to take their language difficulties into consideration.

A pupil's behaviour inside and outside school is irrelevant for the assessment.

The marks in the *end-of-year certificate* are an abridged opinion of a pupil’s achievements. At the end of the first semester, a school report is issued. In year 1 it contains only an overall mark, or an overall mark and verbal additions. The school reports for the following years contain marks for the individual subjects. At the end of the school year, pupils are given an end-of-year report. In the end-of-year report a pupil’s entire performance over the course of the respective school year is graded by a mark for every subject, with the latest level of achievement being given most weight.

**Education standards and skills-based instruction** are key quality assurance tools in education and are stipulated as such in the Austrian School Education Act. With the Ordinance on Education Standards these standards were introduced at primary and lower secondary schools as well as academic secondary schools throughout Austria. In May 2012 the first standard test was held in the eighth grade in mathematics, in 2013 it was held in English and in 2015 it will be held in German. The tests for the fourth grade were held in mathematics in 2013 and will be held in German in 2015. This will complete the first test cycle.

In summer 2012, the decision was taken to redesign secondary school leaving examinations and to introduce **standardised and competence-oriented matriculation exams and matriculation and diploma exams** at academic secondary schools (AHS) and colleges for higher vocational education (BHS). The new leaving examinations will be held at all AHS in Austria for the first time in the **2014/15 school year**, and at all BHS in **2015/16**. The candidates sitting for the matriculation examination will either take 3 written and 3 oral or 4 written and 2 oral exams. They will sit for the written exams at the same time throughout Austria and need to do the same tasks in the general education subjects. The oral exams, however, are not defined centrally. As part of the oral exams, pupils will present their "pre-academic paper" on a topic they have chosen themselves.
The Austrian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is currently in an early implementation phase. In the course of the development of the NQF, the following objectives were outlined consensually by all stakeholders:

- to increase the transparency of education systems in Europe and at national level for the benefit of citizens, based on a system of easily understandable and comparable qualifications;
- to facilitate the comparability of qualifications and education systems with the EQF (and the individual NQFs) and thus enhance understanding of the Austrian qualifications system in Europe;
- to further develop learning outcome-orientation;
- to introduce a credit transfer system based on the ECTS model;
- to promote the mobility of learners, students, teachers, academics/scientists and administrative personnel as much as possible;
- to promote permeability within and between the formal and non-formal areas of the education system in line with the principle of lifelong learning and thus strengthen the principles and methods of mutual recognition and credit transfer of qualifications;
- to promote the European dimension in the Higher Education (HE) sector.”

3.2.5. Quality

At central level many initiatives have been made to facilitate good governance within the school system. Recent initiatives include:

- New Matriculation Examination: competence- and learning outcomes-oriented and partly standardised (please see: 3.2.4 Learning Outcomes)
- Educational Standards: define which competences students finishing 4th/8th grade should have attained (please see: 3.2.4 Learning Outcomes)
- School Quality in General Education: compulsory measures of quality development and quality assurance;
- All-day schooling: The expansion of daycare at schools is intended to compensate for socioeconomically related educational disadvantages. The measure is agreed upon with the provincial governments as well as the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns.
- VET Quality Initiative: introduction of a comprehensive quality management system in the Austrian vocational education system to ensure and further develop quality of teaching and quality of administrative work at federal, provincial and institutional level;
- Platforms and services on Information, Advice and Guidance for Education and Work: career guidance pursues the goal of giving young people orientation aids for choosing their education and career pathways.
- Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training as well as Quality Management in Apprenticeship initiative
- New teacher training; (please see: 3.4.3 Teachers)
- National Report on Education (every 3 years): The report aims to provide bases for the educational policy discourse and especially targets members of the National Parliamentary Council and of the Federal Parliamentary Council.

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) responsible for the higher education sector based on the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Training is part of the ‘new teacher training’ scheme.
An agreement concluded between the Federal Government and the provinces forms the legal basis of the Quality framework for the adult education sector in Austria (Ö-CERT).

The Austrian Academy of Continuing Education provides a system for the qualification and recognition of adult educators by checking and validating skills according to defined standards by recognition of existing qualifications.

The Adult Education Initiative is based on an agreement concluded between the Federal Government and the provinces on the funding of basic education/basic skills programmes for adults and of programmes for adults to resume and complete compulsory schooling, therefore the initiative is a uniform funding scheme throughout Austria.

3.3. Education levels

3.3.1. Early childhood care and education

The governments of the nine provinces have full responsibility for the organisation, regulation and funding of ECEC services. Center-based services are crèches for children under 3 years, kindergartens for children aged 3-6 years, mixed-age groups - mostly situated at kindergartens for children from 1 to 6 years. Non center-based services are parent-toddler groups run by parent associations and family day care.

The legal basis for day-care facility providers is ruled by the Youth Welfare Acts and the individual Kindergarten Acts of the provinces with the respective implementation regulations.

The general objectives defined by the province laws are similar in nature. Crèches are supposed to complement and support the education provided within the family and to provide supervision, care, social rooting and educational development for children aged one to three years. Kindergarten is supposed to support and complement education within the family - special emphasis being placed on co-operation with parents and guardian. In addition Kindergarten is considered to promote individual development through appropriate measures as well as social interaction of peers and to prepare children for school life (by involving parents and primary schools). In several instances the law states explicitly that these aims are to be reached “by employing valid methods of early childhood education” and “by excluding any form of school-like instruction”.

The Federal Government as well as the provinces and the municipalities have made a number of efforts to improve childcare in Austria. The extension of institutional childcare was supported by the Federal Government: In 2009/2010, half-day attendance at kindergarten (20 hours per week) in the last year before school entry has been free of charge throughout Austria.

In 2009 a Framework Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Austria entered into force, which was commissioned by the province governments and the Federal Ministry of Education. It is defined as a play-based curriculum for ECEC institutions that encompasses twelve principles of learning processes

- integrated learning with all senses,
- individualization,
- differentiation,
- empowerment,
- orientation in the surrounding world,
- inclusion,
- teachers’ expertise,
- diversity,
- gender sensitivity,
- participation,
- transparency and
In line with the Barcelona objective of the European Union, the federation and the provinces agreed to promote the availability of childcare facilities. The Work Programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013-2018 sets objectives to improve quality in ECEC and to strengthen elementary education. Therefore, the federation, the provinces and municipalities, in unison, aim to work together to reach these objectives.

### 3.3.2. Primary education

In Austria, general compulsory schooling starts on 1 September following a child’s sixth birthday. Compulsory schooling is generally accomplished by attending Primary School during the first four years. Primary School is to provide a common elementary education for all pupils, giving due consideration to the social integration of children with disabilities.

All children permanently residing in Austria are subject to general compulsory schooling. Permanent residence means that a child resides in Austria for the duration of at least one assessment period (= one semester). Children residing in Austria for a shorter spell may attend an Austrian school, but are not obliged to do so.

Access to Public sector Primary Schools is guaranteed in all regions of Austria. By law, school providers are to ensure that there are sufficient primary schools that can be attended locally or within a reasonable travel distance.

The provinces are in charge of providing teaching staff for publicly maintained primary schools, however, the Federation refunds the total staff costs for all teachers according to the agreed plan of established positions. The school providers are mainly local authorities which are responsible for the construction and the maintenance of school buildings and the provision of non-educational staff (e.g. caretakers, cleaning personnel, supervision staff, medical care, etc.). The provinces support the expenditures of school providers, mainly by contributing to investments in school buildings (construction, adaptation, renovation).

Concerning the curriculum of primary school please see the chapter on Education content and quality (3.2.1 Curriculum).

### 3.3.3. Secondary education

Education is compulsory for nine years.

The **lower secondary level** (years 5 to 8) comprises:

- General secondary school (Hauptschule)

This school type will expire. By 2018/19 all general secondary schools will have been transformed into new secondary schools.

- New secondary school (Neue Mittelschule; NMS)

The NMS launched as pilot project in 2008 and introduced as a standard school form in 2012 is a school for 10- to 14-year-olds offering an advanced general education in accordance with individual abilities. Academic secondary schools are invited to switch to the NMS model. Curricula are decreed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs, school providers are the provinces.

- Lower level of academic secondary school (allgemein bildende höhere Schule, AHS)
Academic secondary school (AHS) is subdivided into a four-year lower level (for pupils aged 10 to 14 years) and a four-year upper level (for pupils aged 14 to 18). The school provider of AHS is the federal state.

As they are phases of observation and orientation, there is no differentiation into school types in the first and second classes of the lower level of academic secondary school.

- From the first year onwards, one modern foreign language is taught.
- From the third and fourth years, three types of school are distinguished:
  - Grammar school branch (Gymnasium) (with Latin or a modern foreign language);
  - Science branch (Realgymnasium) (with geometric drawing, more mathematics and technical shop);
  - Economics branch (Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium) (with more chemistry and technical shop).

The upper secondary level (from year 9) comprises a general education branch as well as a wide range of VET programmes (please see 3.3.4 Technical and vocational education)

General upper secondary education comprises pre-vocational school (9th year; career guidance year) and the upper level of academic secondary school (years 9 to 12). Academic secondary schools are completed with the matriculation examination and their graduates are entitled to access higher education.

Since the school year 2013/14 a new form of upper level is implemented (distribution of the syllabus over various semesters in competence modules). This new form will cover all Austrian AHS upper levels from 1 September 2017.

Concerning the new **standardised and competence-oriented matriculation exam** please see 3.2.4. Learning Outcomes.

### 3.3.4. Technical and vocational education

In upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education as well as short-cycle tertiary education a wide range of VET programmes are provided. Some 80% of Austrian young people at the age of 14 opt for the VET sector route:

- Part-time vocational school – in tandem with company-based vocational training (dual system) (years 10 to max. 13);
- Secondary technical and vocational schools (years 9 to max. 12);
- Colleges for higher vocational education (years 9 to 13);
- Schools and other education and training programmes in the advanced-level healthcare professions;
- Preparation courses for apprenticeship graduates to take the higher education entrance examination (*Berufsreifeprüfung*).

Schools and colleges specialise in: engineering, arts and crafts, business administration, management and service industries, fashion and clothing, tourism and schools of hotel and catering industries, social occupations, agriculture and forestry. For some years the focus has been on competence-oriented teaching. Competences play a major role in the VET sector as they are a prerequisite for the ability to exercise an occupation and the ability to take part in higher education programmes.

The new upper cycle will enter into force in the whole of Austria in 2016. This reform aims to step up individual learning support and provide remedial measures to students. By spreading learning content (competence modules) over semesters, students are supported in performing gradually and continually. In 2015/16 the partly standardized competence oriented matriculation and diploma exam will be introduced.
Cooperation with the business sphere plays a major role for all those involved in the VET school sector. On the one hand, curricula and special focuses are thus adapted to the requirements of the economy, on the other, companies offer subject-specific professional apprenticeship training and/or places for mandatory work placements.

For further details please see: [http://www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/upload/2218_E_02%20-%20BBS.pdf](http://www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/upload/2218_E_02%20-%20BBS.pdf)

### 3.3.5. Higher education

Tertiary education at Public Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) and at Private Universities is regulated by federal law, although these are organised as autonomous self-governing bodies. At central level the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy is in charge of almost all federal matters pertaining to higher education. However, the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs is responsible for all University Colleges of Teacher Education.

The 2002 university reform (*Universitätsgesetz 2002, UG 2002*) redefined the relationship between the Universities and the State. The Universities remain State institutions, and the State continues to finance them. Universities are, however, fully autonomous in terms of their statutes, their internal affairs and the curricula.

Higher education is provided by

- 22 Public Universities,
- 21 Universities of Applied Sciences,
- 13 Private Universities, and
- 17 University Colleges of Teacher Education

EU students and those who are accorded the same rights do not have to pay **tuition fees**. International students (i.e. non-EU and EEC students) at universities generally have to pay fees of EUR 726.72 per semester. Students from developing countries may be exempt from these fees according to a decision of the university.

In principle, providers of universities of applied sciences are entitled to charge fees up to the maximum amount of EUR 363.36 per semester. In the case of international students (i.e. non-EU and EEC students) the providers are entitled to charge cost-covering fees, which are usually higher than EUR 363.36 per semester.

Concerning student grants please see 3.4. Educational management (financing education).

Please also see the Austrian national diagram and information sheet at: 

### 3.3.6. Formal and non formal education

One of the objectives of the **Work Programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013-2018** is to further develop Austrian adult education by catching up on educational qualifications (basic education and compulsory school-leaving qualification) and improving the provision of information and advice about education in the area of adult education.

The **Adult Education Initiative** launched in 2011 is a joint cooperation project by the provinces and the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs to promote the acquisition of basic qualifications by adults. The initiative has two focus areas: training of basic skills and lower secondary education as a basic prerequisite for further education and enhancement of chances on the labour market. The main objectives therefore are:
equal opportunities and reduction of disadvantages,
- reduction of the number of persons without basic education,
- increase in the number of persons with basic educational qualifications and
- increase in the permeability of the education system.

The Strategy on Lifelong Learning in Austria (LLL:2020) adopted on 5 July 2011 by the Council of Ministers is an instrument to look at different actions at various stages of learning, from early childhood education and care to school and higher education, continuing/adult education and training and education in the post-professional phase of life. Within the framework of LLL:2020 different policy areas work together towards gradually implementing goals and actions identified.

In Austria, the educational activities referred to as "adult education" or "continuing vocational training" are mainly defined in terms of age and previously received education.

Initial school and vocational training usually falls within the competence of the Federation and the provinces, whereas many adult (further) training initiatives are organised by companies, private providers or non-profit institutions.

Depending on the objectives, there are either courses leading to an officially recognised certificate (often similar or equivalent to a school-leaving certificate or certificate of higher education), or programmes where students can generally acquire knowledge or skills without obtaining any specific certification.

Though there are many variations concerning organisation, legal status and providers, the main areas of adult learning in Austria can be identified as follows:

- in-service staff training organised by companies (provided in-house, by parent or production companies, by adult education institutions and other external providers, or through informal on-the-job training)
- continuing vocational and career-related training (offered by education institutions)
- skill-upgrading and employment promotion activities organised by the Labour Market Service as instruments of an active labour market policy
- general adult education (offered e.g. by adult education centres) and political education
- second-chance education (earning education certificates at a later point in life)

Public expenditure on general adult education and vocational training for adults started to rise strongly in 1995, and has continued to grow until today. The picture of how costs are covered is characterised by a mix of course fees paid by participants, plus funding from companies and subsidies from the Labour Market Service and other public agencies.

3.3.7. Literacy

As the subject of literacy is one of great complexity the following section focuses on the aspect of reading literacy. According to the OECD, reading is a basic skill for leading a satisfying life in personal, professional and social terms, and for active participation in social life.

Teaching to read is a curriculum subject and an integral part of education in primary as well as secondary schools. Reading skills are acquired and further developed in all school subjects.

Furthermore reading is a cross-curricular principle regulated by the Federal decree on Reading.
The School Quality in General Education Initiative contributes to the further development of learning and teaching towards individualisation and competence orientation. It aims to enhance the pupils’ learning conditions and support independent learning. One of the key aspects of the initiative is to promote reading.

The coordination point Reading initiated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs is a nationwide network of experts and stakeholders. This initiative aims at supporting a quality process for strengthening reading competence at school. The Austrian Youth Book Club is a network for promoting reading and reading education. It offers practice materials for primary and secondary school pupils.

Based on the Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government 2013 – 2018 the project Austrian framework plan on Reading is currently being developed. It will discuss pre-conditions for successful promotion of reading, propose policies and present various institutional approaches to foster and develop reading skills.

The results of comparative studies in the areas of reading, mathematics and science have led to essential reforms in the different education sectors including the following:

- Introduction of a compulsory year at kindergarten
- smaller class sizes with increased individualisation.
- intensification of German language support courses and
- New teacher training (please see 3.4.3 Teachers)

In this context the Austrian Language support courses (i.e. German as a second language courses) have to be mentioned: Pupils receive German as a second language lessons per week – either parallel to the lessons in the compulsory subjects or jointly with them (team teaching). They can attend these courses for a maximum period of two years. The aim is to acquire the language skills they need to follow lessons. Speech comprehension and the ability to communicate are crucial requirements to academic performance. Language support courses therefore help maintain the quality of education in the long term.

The Initiative for Adult Education enables adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from lower secondary education to continue and finish their education free of charge. The related joint funding programme developed by the state and the provinces is aiming to a reduction of the number of persons without basic education, increase in the number of persons with basic educational qualifications and increase in the permeability of the education system.

**3.4. Education management**

**3.4.1. Financing education**

Formal education institutions in Austria, from early childhood education and schools to higher education, are predominantly funded out of state funds. However, the private share in financing this sector has slightly increased over the past few years. In contrast to the formal education sector, adult education and continuing education are only partly funded by the government. About 30% of all costs are borne by the federation, the provinces and local authorities. Qualification measures within federal labour market development schemes account for the bulk of public funding. Around 40% of the total volume are borne by business enterprises in the framework of in-service staff training, and private households account for the remaining 30%.

Government funding of early childhood education focuses on the maintenance and development of institutional childcare and education establishments. Promoting the educational character of these establishments is the essential feature of funding. Increasing the equality of opportunities and improving early language development are educational objectives, in order to better prepare all children for the demands of school. In 2009/2010, half-day attendance at kindergarten (20 hours per week) in the last year before school entry has been free of charge
throughout Austria. Government funding of schools is to guarantee general accessibility of publicly maintained schools without discrimination on social, ethnic or religious grounds, and aims to impart the knowledge and skills needed in private and work life as well as for independent learning.

The provinces are in charge of providing teaching staff for compulsory general schools, however, the Federation refunds the total staff costs. The school providers of compulsory general schools are mainly local authorities. The provinces support the expenditures of school providers, mainly by contributing to investments in school buildings.

The Federation is the provider of general and technical and vocational upper secondary schools and colleges. It bears the entire costs of personnel, operating expenses and investments. Attendance of publicly maintained schools is free of charge. Students and apprentices for whom family allowance is collected may apply to a public transport authority for free transport on the route between their home and school or the training company. If no public means of transport is available, they may apply for a school or home commuting grant. Furthermore, many local authorities provide their own transport services for travel to and from public kindergartens. The necessary textbooks are provided to the pupils/students free of charge. Families with children with significant disabilities (degree of disability of at least 50% attested by a medical officer) are entitled to receive increased family allowance. Parents who are Austrian citizens are entitled to family allowance for their children until these come of age regardless of their income, if the centre of their interests is in Austria and the child is also a permanent resident of Austria.

The system of dual vocational education and training (apprenticeship) is financed by public and private funds. The students’ attendance at part-time vocational school, which is compulsory for apprentices to the extent of approx. 20% of their apprenticeship time, is predominantly government-funded, while the in-company part of the training is financed by the business enterprises. The initiative Apprenticeship and upper secondary certificate (Lehre mit Reifprüfung) aims to enhance permeability in the Austrian education system. Until 2008, passing the previous apprenticeship and upper secondary certificate scheme was possible for apprentices only after having successfully completed the apprenticeship and was associated with costs for those involved. Parallel preparation for the vocational qualification and upper secondary certificate is possible under the new scheme. With an additional funding programme, this preparation and also taking the exam are free of charge for apprentices. The funds are provided by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs.

The federal student grants can systematically be divided into two sections: direct study financing received in cash, and indirect study financing which the student may receive by a transfer payment to the students’ parents, or through non-cash benefits. Direct student support is paid out in monthly instalments up to EUR 8 952 per year. The amount is assessed on the basis of income and number of family members of the student, his/her parents and his/her spouse. The grants need not be paid back except when proof of academic achievement is missing after the first two semesters. Students' parents can receive family allowances (EUR 158.90 per month per child) and tax relief (EUR 58.40 per month per child) if the student is under 24 (in exceptional cases till 25 years of age) and is studying. No student loans exist.

The Labour Market Service has the statutory duty to ensure an initial training placement for those young people who wish to train for an apprenticed trade but cannot find an apprenticeship place. In order to be able to offer an apprenticeship place to all young people seeking one, initial training places outside companies are created and fully funded by government funds under labour market promotion schemes. The Initiative for Adult Education enables adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from lower secondary education to continue and finish their education free of charge. The related joint funding programme developed by the state and the provinces is aiming to a quantitative expansion and to a qualitative development of education programs regarding compulsory education certificates and literacy/basic education.

3.4.2. Private education

Crèches and kindergartens are not part of the school system in Austria, and parents can choose between public and private kindergarten institutions. About 40% of Austria’s kindergartens are privately run. Around 90% of all students
in Austria attend state schools, whilst 10% go to one of the approximately 600 private educational institutions. Under the Basic Law on the General Rights of Nationals 1867 Article 17 anyone has the right to set up a private school. Private schools exist at all levels of schooling, at primary and secondary level, and in both general and vocational education. Private schools may be maintained by legal entities or natural persons. The most significant provider of private schools in Austria is the Church, notably the Catholic Church. Within private (school) education the same regulations apply for every school – in particular the provisions and regulations of the Private Schools Act.

However, the biggest (financial) distinction in Austria in the private school system is made between denominational private schools and non-denominational private schools (maintained by associations and private persons and others). If the school is a denominational school 100% of the personnel costs are grant-aided by the state. Non-denominational schools can, but do not have to, be subsidised by public funds.

The Private Schools Act distinguishes further between two groups of private schools, i.e.:

- private schools that have a statutory counterpart in the public sector;
- private schools that do not have a statutory counterpart in the public sector (schools with an “organizational charter”).

If a private school corresponding to a school-type regulated by law is granted public-law status, the exams taken at the school have the same validity as those taken at its public-sector counterpart and no separate exams (before an external board of examiners) have to be taken.

The 12 Austrian Private Universities are regulated by the Private University Act as well as the provisions of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (effective for the process of accreditation as a private university and for study programmes at private universities). The authority for accreditation procedures is the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), which is a legal entity under public law.

21 Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen) are maintained and led either by the federal government, other corporate bodies, or private legal entities. In 1993, the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act was enacted, which allows public or private institutions to obtain accreditation as a University of Applied Sciences by the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria).

In 2005, the Act on Teacher Education was enacted which regulates the organization and accreditation of public and private University Colleges of Teacher Education (Pädagogische Hochschulen).

Adult education is provided by public education institutions (secondary schools, universities, non-profit organisations) as well as non-public organisations. Most institutions (even the non-profit organisations) charge fees to cover their course costs.

### 3.4.3. Teachers

Future kindergarten teachers complete a five-year programme from the minimum age of 14 years onwards (short-cycle tertiary education). In addition, there are two-year courses for graduates of academic secondary schools and colleges for higher vocational education. Teachers for general compulsory schools (primary school, general secondary school, new secondary school, special needs school, prevocational school) are qualified at university colleges of teacher education. The study programme (minimum duration 6 semesters) is completed with the degree "Bachelor of Education". Future teachers for academic secondary school are enrolled in teacher training courses at universities. Following a study of at least 9 semesters they are awarded the master’s degree. Future teachers for the school-based VET sector (part-time vocational schools for apprentices, secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges for higher vocational education) are trained differently depending on the school type and specialist area.
On 11 July 2013, the Federal Framework Law concerning the Introduction of the New Teacher Training Scheme created the legal foundations to implement "New teacher training".

The new teacher training scheme is based on the following cornerstones:

- Training is in principle geared towards the pupils’ age brackets (primary level, secondary level)
- Bachelor’s degree programme, 8 semesters, 240 ECTS points
- Master’s degree programme, 2-3 semesters, 60 to 90 ETCS points. The master’s degree programmes can be completed on a part-time basis.
- One-year professional entry phase (induction), supported by experienced pedagogues (mentors). During the induction phase, students can complete the master’s degree programmes.
- Supplementary study programmes for lateral entrants, with credits awarded for subject-related and pedagogical competences.
- Aptitude and admission procedure, which comprises several stages, at training institutions.
- Cooperation of university colleges of teacher education and universities while observing their existing spheres of competence.

A Quality Assurance Council was set up to provide quality- and needs-oriented academic support for the development of the new teacher training programmes. In Austria, all EU / EEA citizens and other persons who enjoy the right of free movement have access to the teaching profession. Vacancies are advertised. Teachers are employed by the federal government or provincial governments. Teachers are obliged to attend in-service teacher training events to ensure their teaching is state-of-the-art in terms of subject-specific didactics and pedagogy. In-service and continuing training events are mainly held at university colleges of teacher education.

The New Legislation on the Employment of Teachers becoming effective for new teachers as of 2015/16 is based on higher initial salaries and an increased teaching assignment of 24 teaching units (50 minutes) per week.

3.5. Inclusive education

3.5.1. Gender equality

In 1975 co-education in Austria became legal. Today in the vast majority of schools co-education is a matter of fact. Even in those subjects in which girls and boys were parted in former times, co-education was established and the subjects became compulsory for both sexes.

The integral educational principle “Education to equality between women and men” (federal decree) has been anchored in the curricula of different school types. It has to be seen as a temporary special measure in accordance with Article 4 of the “United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women” (Federal Law Gazette 443/1982) ratified by Austria in 1982.

Within the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs the Unit on Gender and Schools examines new laws and curricula and comments on them.

Special programmes were enforced to promote girls in non-traditional areas, like traditionally male professions, to implement gender mainstreaming into the quality management and to promote gender-sensitive education and instruction as well as gender-sensitive vocational training and career planning.

In Austria’s upper secondary schools and colleges, especially in VET, gender is still a strong factor for student’s choices of certain courses. In order to enable girls and boys to reach well reflected decisions schools provide support in teaching as questions concerning planning educational and vocational careers as well as future life in general are implemented in the curricula of various subjects. Furthermore information and counselling is provided by student’s
counsellors and educational career advisers, which are installed in every school. In addition to that specific initiatives have been implemented since years to encourage girls to go for a non-traditional vocation.

PISA and PIAAC data show an across average gender bias in performance in mathematics and reading.

This is underpinned by comparative studies which demonstrate that gender differences in choice of educational pathways are culturally rooted (gender stereotypes which effect self-esteem and efficacy), but that the structure of educational systems and the existence of early choices between different fields as science or language, which do effect the whole pathway/the whole educational career, play a decisive role.

Current policies and actions of the Federal Ministry for Education and Women’s Affairs aim at enhancing the self-concepts and perspectives of the sexes:

- Development of vocational orientation and educational guidance at grade 7 and 8 and integration of gender reflected career guidance (by gender modules for career guidance teachers)
- Elimination of the obligation to opt for either ‘textile handicrafts’ or ‘technical work’ at grade 5 through introduction of new subject ‘technical and textiles handicrafts’ for all students
- Specific offers to develop gender theory based competences, e.g. for teachers of STEM subjects (sience, technology, engineering and mathematics; e.g. project IMST – Innovations make schools top) or by establishing new professorships for gender education.
- Introduction of a gender perspective into quality assurance and development processes (pilot schools, evaluation instruments, specific module in the training course of school development consultants, etc.).

For further information please see:

www.bmbf.gv.at/gleichstellung-schule
www.gender.schule.at

3.5.2. Roma population

Concerning the situation of the Roma population in Austria, the national minority group of the autochthonous Roma has been legally recognized already in 1993 and an advisory council has been set up for this national minority to advise the Federal Government and the provinces. However, Austrian Roma do not constitute a homogeneous group. They form a heterogeneous group which includes not only members of the autochthonous Roma minority but also immigrant Roma from earlier periods and, occasionally, itinerant Roma, primarily from EU Member States. A characteristic feature of the group is the varying level of education, professional and social integration.

Austria is aware of the need to take resolute action in the field of integration, as is documented by the development and ongoing implementation of the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP.I). In addition, Austria is implementing the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies until 2020. In the field of education, Austria is focusing on measures to ensure equal treatment and secure the full access of Roma to good quality and mainstream education. In doing this, Austria, in general, does not separate Roma-focused interventions from broader policy initiatives and attempts to focus on Roma people as a target group not to the exclusion of other people who share similar socio-economic circumstances. This approach takes into account that general policy measures (e.g. free kindergarten, extension of all-day school classes, language support schemes, new secondary school etc.) that aim at equity and at improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged persons, also contribute to an increased participation of Roma in education and therefore improve their qualifications and chances on the labour market.

Within this broad education strategy, additional innovative, tailor-made measures for Roma pupils and adults are being supported. These include projects on Roma school assistants, providing learning support for children and
mediation, developed by Roma associations. Measures are also implemented regarding counselling and training of adults.

With regards to the autochthonous Roma population significant progress has been made what concerns the proportion of Roma-children in special schools by focused supporting measures after schools and a mobile classroom (“Rom-Bus”) in the province of Burgenland.

Special significance is attached to creating awareness for anti-racism at Austrian schools. Furthermore, Austria pioneers in the research and the dissemination of knowledge on the Holocaust and has elaborated teaching materials on the genocide against Roma and Sinti, which have been published in 2012.

For pupils whose first language is not German, as well as pupils who grow up bilingually, Austria offers - irrespective of their nationality, their length of stay in Austria and their German skills – the possibility to attend mother tongue education, including in Romanes (c.f. schule mehrsprachig. On this website also individual texts in Romanes as well as recommendations for children's books in Romani are available.

What concerns education in native languages the Act on Schooling for Minorities for Burgenland (FLG No. 641/1994, in the version of FLG No. 48/2014) and the relevant regional implementing acts provide for education in Romanes as well.

What concerns the recognition and promotion of the language of the Burgenland Roma, “Romany – the Language of the Burgenland Roma” has been integrated into the national list of intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO by way of a decision by the Technical Advisory Committee dated by 16 March 2011.

### 3.5.3. Students from minority groups

The official language in Austria is German, with due respect to the languages spoken by the indigenous ethnic minorities of Austria. In addition to German, Slovenian is the official language in the mixed language districts of Carinthia. Similarly, Hungarian and Croatian are recognised as equal to German official languages in some districts of Burgenland.

**Minority schooling** in Carinthia and Burgenland allows Austrian citizens of the Slovenian, Hungarian or Croatian minorities to receive education in their own language. In particular, in the mixed Slovenian-German settlement area of Carinthia instruction is bilingual in all four grades of the primary school. In practice, half of the courses are offered in Slovenian and the other half in German. In certain general secondary schools German is the primary language of instruction, but Slovenian is taught four hours a week. In the city of Klagenfurt there is an academic secondary school for Slovenes and a bilingual commercial college.

Similar rules apply to the Croatian and Hungarian ethnic groups in Burgenland. In the minority primary-level schools the language of instruction is German and Croatian or Hungarian throughout the four years of study. The number of courses offered in each language of instruction is equally divided between German and Croatian or Hungarian. The town of Oberwart (in Burgenland) runs a bilingual academic secondary school where instruction is held in equal parts in Croatian (or Hungarian) and in German.

When a child enters the state education system in Austria, no account is taken of his or her citizenship or migration background. The School Organisation Act expressly states that state schools are “open to all, irrespective of birth, gender, race, status, class, language or beliefs“. The selection of students on the basis of “language“, amongst other things, is only permitted for private schools in pursuance of the School Organisation Act. Like compulsory schooling (which requires, amongst other things, that the child be permanently resident in Austria), the option of (voluntary) school attendance for temporary residents is also not dependent on criteria such as citizenship, ethnic origin or migration background (according to the Compulsory Schooling Act). Several education-policy measures have been taken within recent years which aim at promoting children with a non-German mother tongue in integrating into the standard school system (e.g. language support courses, piloting of comprehensive models of language support).
The Austrian State and its legal system are religiously neutral guaranteeing, furthermore, religious freedom to all. That means that Church (and any other religious association) is distinct and separate from the Austrian State, and the latter does not discriminate in favour of any religious confession. Mutual acceptance, tolerance and dialogue among all religious communities are the cornerstone of Austria’s position towards religion. At the same time the right of all individuals to freedom of conscience and faith or non-faith is acknowledged and supported, irrespective of the legal status of a confessional community in Austria.

Maintaining a balance between the right of exercising one’s religious beliefs and the right to freedom of conscience and faith is fundamental in Austrian law.

3.5.4. Students with special needs

Pupils with special educational needs may be educated either in integrated classes or in special schools geared to their respective disablements. Parents have the right to choose between these two forms of organisation.

An amendment to school legislation in 1993 led to the implementation of integrative teaching in primary school at first. The newly created special educational centres in particular have a key role to play in the integrative care of disabled pupils. The legal bases for the integration of pupils with special educational needs in the lower secondary level (10- to 14-year-olds) at general secondary school and the lower level of academic secondary school were created with the amendments to school legislation in 1996. In another amendment in 1998, the introduction of a year 9 at special needs schools was agreed as a preparation year for work. In view of the importance of preparation for the world of work, the subject career guidance was also introduced at special needs school in years 7 and 8, at general secondary schools and also at the lower level of academic secondary school.

Status quo: integrative classes and integrative instruction at regular school enable children and young people with and without disabilities to have joint learning experiences. Pupils with special educational needs can be taught in integrated classes at primary school, general secondary school, new secondary school, the lower level of academic secondary school (AHS) and since 2012 at prevocational school and the one-year secondary home economics school.

In recent years, Austria has made intensive efforts to improve entry to the Austrian school system also for disadvantaged groups, improve the efficiency of counselling and career guidance as the key to successful educational and career decisions, raise educational attainment levels, make the education system more efficient and permeable, and ensure that transitions from training to the world of work are as smooth as possible. Special focus is on integrative measures for the following target groups: children and young people with a migration background and/or a mother tongue other than German, early school leavers, young people at risk of marginalisation / early school leaving, young people at the interface between training/school and the world of work.

Youth coaching mainly aims to strengthen prevention and intervention where pupils are at risk of dropping out of school or being marginalised. The goal is to provide young people (including young people with special educational needs) with more guidance related to their educational and professional career. New approaches to safeguard individual training success have also been pursued as part of dual training (apprenticeship training). Apprenticeship coaching, which was enshrined in law with the 2011 amendment to the Vocational Training Act, has made it possible since 2012 to establish counselling, support and assistance services for apprentices and companies in order to prevent dropouts from apprenticeships, among other goals. Supra-company apprenticeship training opens up the opportunity for young people who cannot complete company-based apprenticeship training to acquire high-quality specialist qualifications. Furthermore, integrative/inclusive vocational training is also offered, thus enabling young people to obtain a partial qualification or complete a prolonged apprenticeship period.