

15

Education and science

1559-1700

# Educational institutions

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tel. +41 58 463 60 60, fax +41 58 463 60 61,  
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## Introduction

This brochure presents Switzerland's educational institutions and provides an overview of how they are organised by educational level, responsible authority (public or private sector, government dependent or independent), size as well as linguistic and territorial distribution.

Most of the data are from the educational institutions statistics and the statistics on pupils and students. They are based on the academic year 2015/16.<sup>1</sup>

### **Educational institutions**

An educational institution is a permanent entity offering pupils/students one or several types of formal education, provided by teaching staff. Education is conducted on the basis of direct communication between the teaching staff and pupils/students.

An educational institution is defined by its administrative level (the management) and by the educational site(s) (buildings) under its authority.

The generic terms of «school» or «establishment» used in this publication correspond to educational sites.

The published figures concern educational institutions from primary<sup>2</sup> to tertiary level. With the exception of the higher education institutions<sup>3</sup>, they generally refer to actual educational sites. Tertiary level educational institutions, which are not uniformly defined across Switzerland, are only considered in this brochure in the overview below (see graphic G1).

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<sup>1</sup> Except for two independent private schools in the canton of Vaud that did not provide any data.

<sup>2</sup> Compulsory schooling lasts eleven years. It covers the primary and the lower secondary levels. The primary level takes eight years, including two years of kindergarten or the first two years of the first learning cycle.

<sup>3</sup> In education statistics, higher education institutions are only defined at the administrative level. As some of them are intercantonal, they cannot be presented by canton.

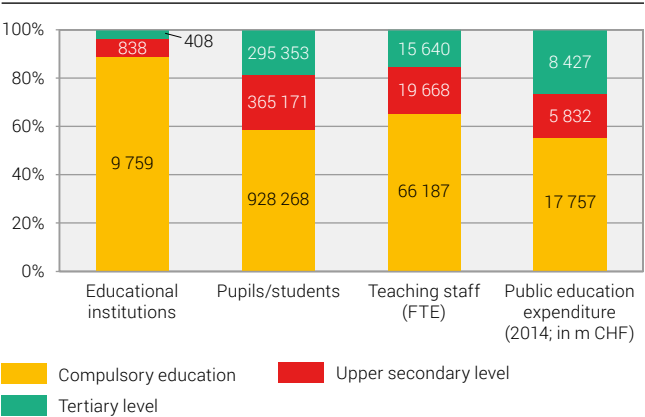
# Overview

In autumn 2015 there were 10,568 educational institutions in Switzerland including all levels.<sup>4</sup>

Most educational institutions are based within compulsory education (89%). They accommodate 58% of all people in education and 65% of teachers<sup>5</sup>. Roughly half of public expenditure on education is spent at this level (55%). Only 8% of schools are for upper secondary level: they accommodate 23% of all people in education and 19% of teachers for around a fifth of public expenditure on education (18%). At tertiary level, the proportion of educational institutions is 4%. They accommodate 19% of persons in education for 15% of teachers. A quarter of public expenditure on education<sup>6</sup> is spent at this level (26%).

Educational institutions, pupils/students, teaching staff and public education expenditure by educational level, 2015/16

G 1



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL, SSP, SIUS, ÖBA

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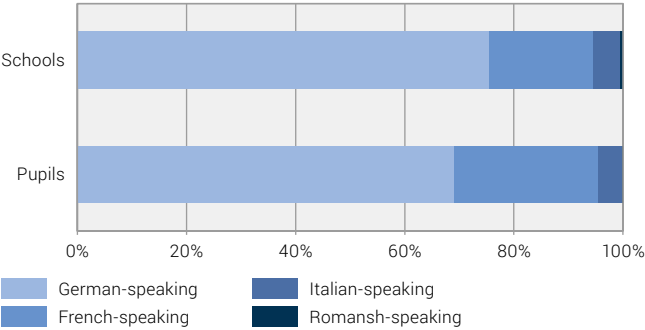
<sup>4</sup> without double counting; see explanation in the next chapter

<sup>5</sup> Excl. staff teaching a foreign teaching programme (3073 FTE). This concerns compulsory schooling and upper secondary level. This category is described in detail under «Definitions» at the end of the publication.

<sup>6</sup> excl. public expenditure on research

Three-quarters of schools, across all levels of education, are located in German-speaking Switzerland for 69% of pupils, nearly one in five schools in French-speaking Switzerland (19.1%) for over a quarter of pupils (26.6%), 5% in Italian-speaking Switzerland (4.3% of pupils) and 0.5% in the Romansh-speaking part of the country (0.2% of pupils).

**Schools and pupils by language region, 2015/16** **G 2**



# Educational institutions by educational level

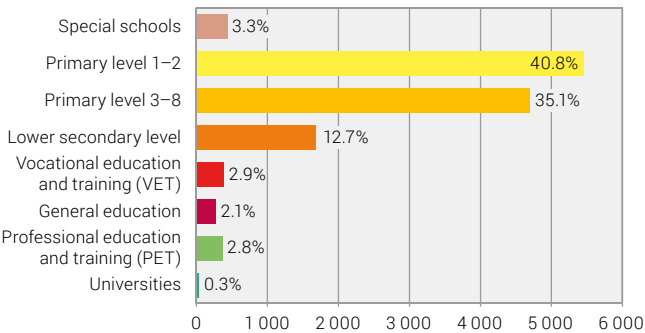
A school's educational level is defined by its student population and the educational programmes in which the students are enrolled. Thus one school that offers an educational programme over several educational levels may be counted several times depending on the level of detail required by the analysis (double counting principle).

The biggest share of schools within the compulsory education system is accounted for by primary level 1–2<sup>7</sup> with more than 40%. This is followed by primary level 3–8<sup>8</sup> (35%). Lower secondary level accounts for 13% of schools, while special schools make up around 3%.

The other 8% include post-compulsory education schools (vocational education and training (VET), general education, professional education and training (PET) and universities).

Schools by educational level, 2015/16

G 3



Source: FSO – SBI

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<sup>7</sup> Primary level 1–2: kindergarden, first learning cycle years 1–2

<sup>8</sup> Primary level 3–8: years 3–8

## In focus: special schools

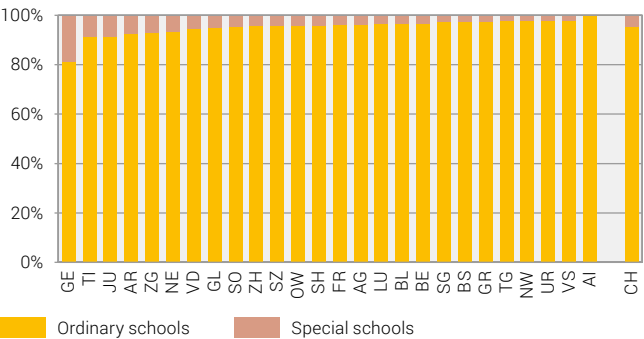
Special schools make up a minority of schools in the Swiss school system (3.3% of all educational institutions). They cover the primary and lower secondary level. They differ greatly from other educational institutions with regard to the authority that is responsible for them and regarding their distribution and organisation in the cantons. This is why they are considered separately here.

In contrast to an ordinary school, a special school is an educational institution for compulsory education that provides teaching that is adapted to different types of disability or to pupils with considerable learning difficulties or severe behavioural problems.

In 2015/2016 there were 443 special schools in Switzerland. The canton of Geneva had the greatest share of special schools (19%). In the three cantons with the highest number (GE, JU, TI), these schools are on average smaller than those in other cantons (fewer than 20 pupils per school). In eight cantons, the proportion of special schools was less than 3%. The canton of Appenzell Inner Rhodes did not have any. The distribution of pupils in special schools is to some extent intercantonal. In the canton of Appenzell Inner Rhodes, pupils attend mainly special schools in Appenzell Outer Rhodes, St. Gallen and Thurgau. Across Switzerland, the share of special schools in compulsory education is 4.5%.

Share of special schools in compulsory education by canton, 2015/16

G 4



Source: FSO – SBI

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# In focus: vocational education and training (VET)

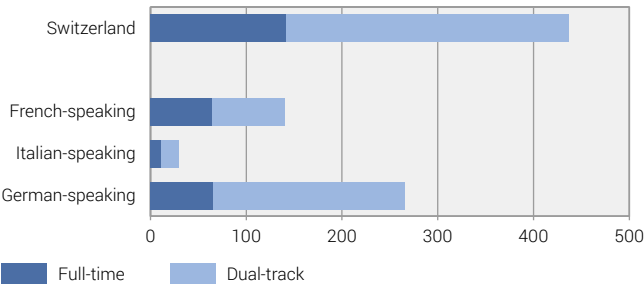
In Switzerland, the vocational education and training (VET) can be completed in a training company (dual-track approach) or in a full-time vocational school.

The dual-track approach combines practical training in a company and theoretical training in a vocational school. Switzerland's dual-track system stands out from the vocational education and training of other countries. At national level, the dual-track approach is the most common form of vocational training.

In French- and Italian-speaking regions, the share of schools offering full-time vocational education and training in school is greater than in German-speaking Switzerland: in 2015/16 this share was 46% in French-speaking Switzerland (24% of pupils), 38% in Italian-speaking Switzerland (27% of pupils) and 25% in German-speaking Switzerland (5% of pupils).

This observation is also reflected in public expenditure on education per person in education: it is higher when the share of schools offering full-time vocational education and training is greater. Private companies make a large contribution to the funding of dual-track education.

**VET schools by organisation of education and language region\*, 2015/16** **G 5**



\* Due to the limited number of VET schools in the Romansh-speaking region, the latter is not represented in the graphic G5. Two schools are concerned (one with the dual-track approach, one with full-time vocational education and training in school).

## Educational institutions by size

The average size of a primary level 1–2 school is 30 pupils, while a primary level 3–8 school has around 100 pupils and a lower secondary level school 150 pupils. Special schools accommodate an average of 40 pupils. At upper secondary level, there are approx. 600 pupils in a vocational school and 350 pupils in a general education school. Apart from special schools, the size of schools also increases with educational level.

### Size of educational institutions

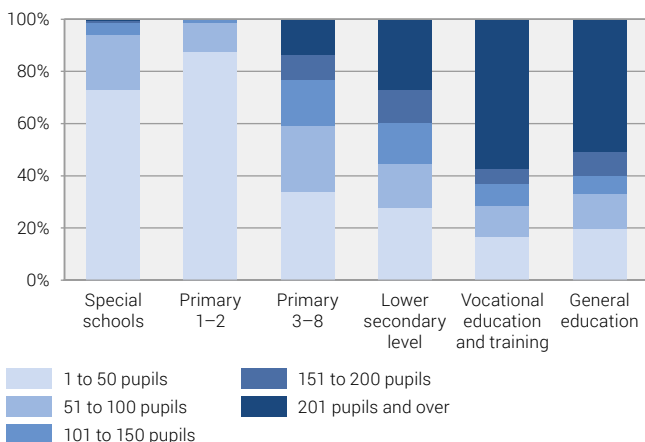
An educational institution's size is calculated by the number of pupils educated in the educational institution.

In compulsory education, more than 70% of special schools, 87% of primary level 1–2 schools and 34% of primary level 3–8 schools have 50 pupils or less as have a quarter of schools at lower secondary level. A further quarter of schools at this level have over 200 pupils.

At upper secondary level, around half of schools have more than 200 pupils (58% for vocational schools and 51% for general education schools). The remainder of educational institutions at this level are divided among the different sizes, following a similar trend.

## Schools by size and educational level, 2015/16

G 6



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL

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## Educational institutions by responsible authority

All levels combined, 87% of Swiss schools are public, 4% are government dependent private schools and 9% independent private schools (see graphic G 7).

### **Responsible school authority (status)**

Educational institutions are either public or private. Furthermore, private institutions are classified between government dependent private (public funding of 50% or more) and independent private institutions (public funding of less than 50%).

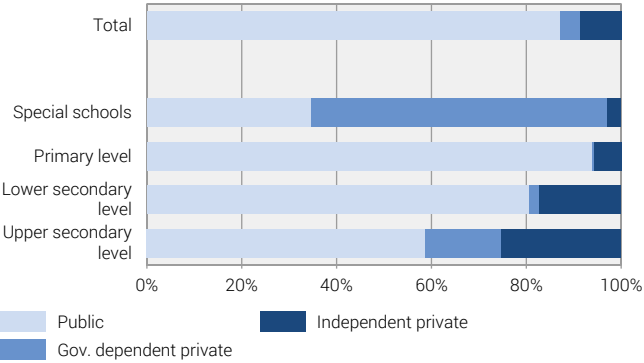
Public sector schools account for the majority of schools in compulsory education (primary level: 94%; lower secondary level: 81%). The share of the independent private sector is 6% for the primary level and 17% for lower secondary level. The share of the government dependent private sector is virtually zero (0.3% and 2%). Special schools differ from other levels with a majority of government dependent private schools (63%).

At upper secondary level, the share of the public sector is 59%, that of the government dependent private sector 16% and the remaining quarter independent private schools. The distribution by status of vocational schools and schools providing a general education is quite different: 71% of vocational schools and 54% of general education schools are public, 18% and 9% are government dependent private schools, 12% and 37% are independent private schools.

The share of the government dependent and independent private sectors increases with educational level, with the exception of special schools.

Schools by educational level  
and responsible authority, 2015/16

G 7



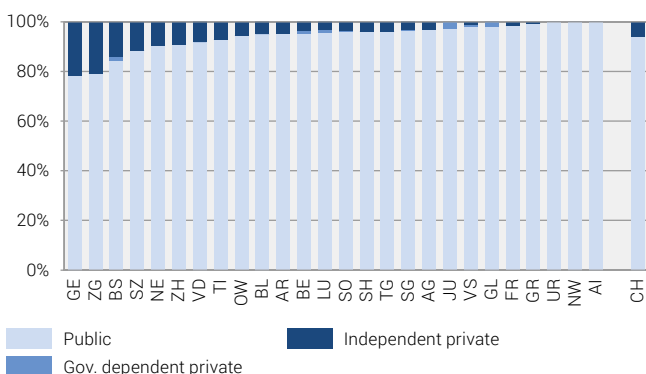
## In focus: cantonal diversity

The responsible authority of educational institutions varies not only with educational level but also by canton.

At primary level, the share of government dependent private schools in all cantons is very low (less than 3%) or zero. The share of independent private schools varies between 1% in Graubünden and 22% in the canton of Geneva. Five cantons do not have any schools of this type on their territory (JU, GL, UR, NW, AI).

### Primary level: schools by canton and responsible authority, 2015/16

G 8



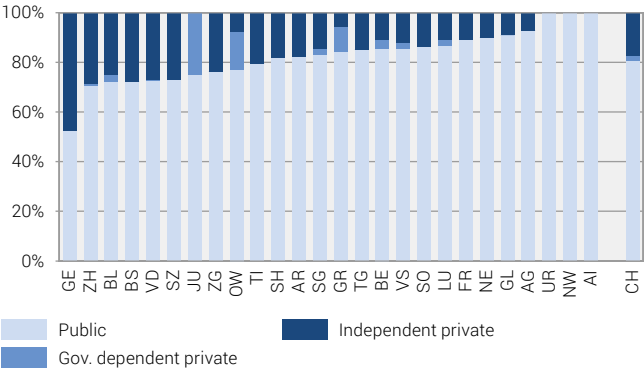
Source: FSO – SBI

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At lower secondary level, the share of government dependent private schools reaches or exceeds 10% in three of the ten cantons that collect this data: Graubünden (10%), Obwalden (15%) and Jura (25%). The canton of Geneva (47%) has the greatest share of independent private schools (see graphic G 9).

## Lower secondary level: schools by canton and responsible authority, 2015/16

G 9



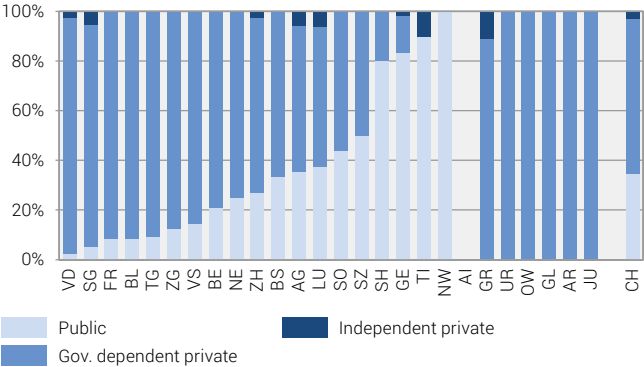
Source: FSO – SBI

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Special schools also have a particular position in the Swiss school system with regard to the responsible authority. In most cantons, the majority of these schools are government dependent private schools. Furthermore, in five cantons they have only this status. Only two cantons (TI, NW) do not have government dependent private special schools. In six cantons, there are no public special schools (GR, UR, OW, GL, AR, JU).

## Special schools by canton and responsible authority, 2015/16

G 10



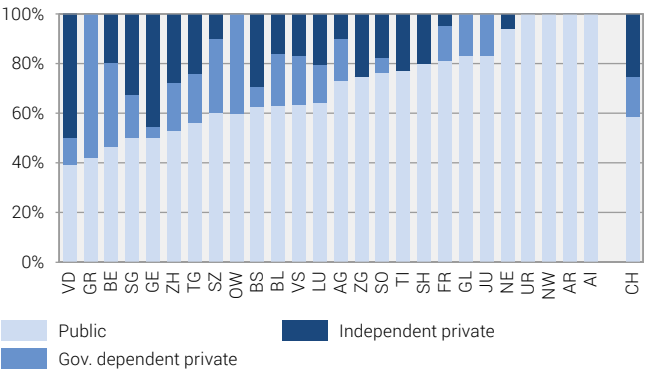
Source: FSO – SBI

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The majority of upper secondary level schools are public in all cantons except for Graubünden and the canton of Vaud. The share of independent private schools varies between 50% in the canton of Vaud and 5% in Fribourg. Eight cantons do not have any independent private schools at this level (GR, OW, GL, JU, UR, NW, AR, AI).

Upper secondary level: schools by canton and responsible authority, 2015/16

G 11



Source: FSO – SBI

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## Territorial distribution of educational institutions

The distribution of educational institutions on Swiss territory is based on the definition of larger urban zones and other urban area categories<sup>9</sup>. The main distribution criteria used are population density, the number of jobs, the link of continuity of the developed area and the minimum number of inhabitants and commuter flows.

Three urban area categories were created for the analysis in this brochure:

- The **urban centre areas**: communes with high population and employment density;
- The **area under the influence of urban centres**: communes with large commuter flows to urban centres;
- The **area outside the influence of urban centres**: communes with small commuter flows to urban centres.

In 2015/16 more than half of Switzerland's educational institutions were located in urban centre areas (57%), almost one quarter were under the influence of urban centres (23%) and the rest in the area outside the influence of urban centre areas (20%) level (see graphic G12).

The territorial distribution of schools varies by educational. Around half of the schools at primary and lower secondary levels (54% and 57%), 74% of special schools and 87% of upper secondary level schools are located in urban centre areas.

The remaining schools are equally dispersed in the areas under and outside the influence of urban centres (25% and 21% for primary level schools, 19% and 24% for lower secondary level schools, 14% and 13% for special schools, and 6% and 7% for upper secondary level schools).

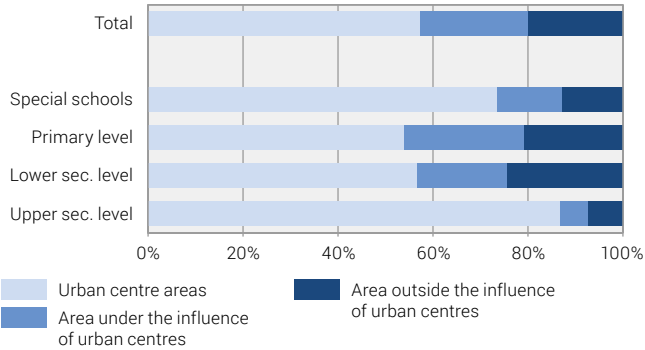
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<sup>9</sup> Urban area in Switzerland in 2012. FSO (2014)



# Schools by type of area and educational level, 2015/16

G 12



Sources: FSO – SBI, Geographical levels

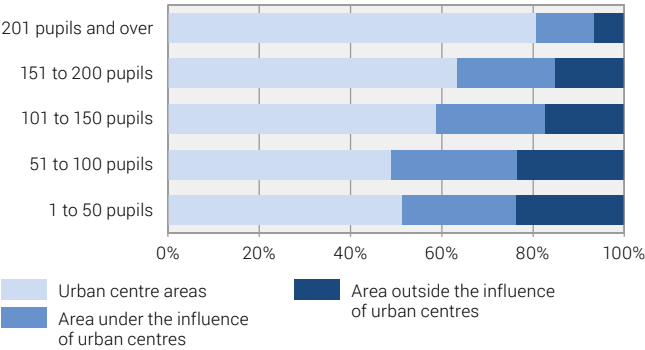
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All levels considered together, half of schools with 100 pupils or under and around two thirds of schools with 101 to 200 pupils are in urban centres (59% for schools with 101 to 150 pupils and 64% for schools with 151 to 200 pupils). The 81% of schools with more than 200 pupils are located in this area.

In the area under the influence of urban centres, each size category represents around one quarter of schools, apart from schools with more than 200 pupils (13%). In the area outside the influence of urban centres, the greatest share is of schools with 50 pupils or under (24%) and the lowest share is of schools with more than 200 pupils (7%).

# Schools by type of area and size, 2015/16

G 13



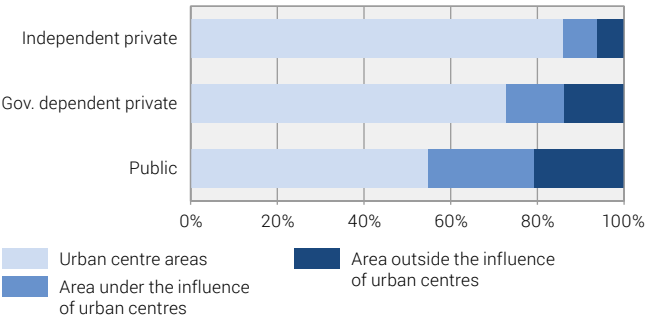
Sources: FSO – SBI, Geographical levels

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Dispersed by responsible authority, more than half of public schools (55%), almost three quarters of government dependent private schools (73%) and the vast majority of independent private schools (86%) are located in urban centres.

The remaining schools are almost equally dispersed between areas under and outside the influence of urban centres (25% and 21% for public schools, 14% for government dependent private schools, 8% and 6% for independent private schools).

**Schools by type of area and responsible authority, 2015/16** **G 14**



## Sources

### **Educational institutions statistics (SBI)**

The educational institutions statistics describe educational infrastructure by canton, from primary to tertiary level. All of the ordinary and special educational institutions, public and private with at least one pupil are part of these statistics. The data are collected using the statistics on pupils and students (SDL, SIUS) and are complemented by information from the Business and Enterprise Register (BER).

### **Statistics on pupils and students (SDL)**

The statistics on pupils and students group together pupils and students from primary to tertiary levels (excluding universities). All people who have followed an educational programme for at least half a year, either full or part-time, are surveyed. Private and public educational institutes are included in the survey.

### **School staff statistics (SSP)**

The school staff statistics collect information on those working in all public or private schools in Switzerland, from primary to tertiary level (excluding universities).

### **Swiss university information system (SIUS)**

The Swiss university information system's database contains data relating to students and personnel at higher education institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education). It provides information on the situation regarding courses of study, how they are run and on various socio-demographic factors concerning students and personnel.

### **Public expenditure on education (ÖBA)**

The statistics on public expenditure on education deal with the part of the federal administration's public expenditure listed under «Education». It includes expenditure by public authorities from compulsory education to institutions of higher education. It refers to the results of the most recent accounting year (2014).

## Definitions

### Educational institution

An educational institution is defined by its administrative level (the management) and by the educational site(s) (buildings) under its authority. An educational site usually consists of a single building. It may, however, consist of several buildings if these are only a short walking distance apart. In general, the terms «school» or «establishment» correspond to educational sites. An educational institution constantly receives teaching staff and pupils/students. It is founded on a communal, cantonal or federal law and implements an explicit educational mandate. The educational institutions are placed under the responsibility of either public authorities (the Confederation, canton, commune or other public body), or a private body.

### Teaching staff

In this brochure, teaching staff includes personnel who directly teach in the schools (excluding personnel teaching a foreign education programme) as well as the professors and other teachers in higher education institutions. To allow comparison with the pupils/students, the figures relating to the teachers correspond to full-time equivalents (FTE) and not persons.

### Double counting

In the statistics on educational institutions, a school that offers an educational programme over several educational levels may be counted several times, depending on the level of detail required by the analysis.

### Language region

The language regions are based on the national language spoken by the majority of a commune's population. In Switzerland there are four language regions:

- German-speaking region
- French-speaking region
- Italian-speaking region
- Romansh-speaking region

The other definitions, presented in this publication are available on the website of the Federal Statistical Office ([www.statistique.admin.ch](http://www.statistique.admin.ch)).

## Information

Educational institutions statistics:  
[schulstat@bfs.admin.ch](mailto:schulstat@bfs.admin.ch).

For further information concerning educational areas, see:  
[www.education-stat.admin.ch](http://www.education-stat.admin.ch).





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