

# **2** **Governing and funding the education system**

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This chapter covers the governance, organisation, and funding of school education in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. It analyses the distribution of responsibilities for financing and administering schools in the Community, the overall education budget and the distribution of funding across levels of education, school types, school networks and resource categories. The chapter also considers the role of strategic planning and the use of data to steer education policy in the Community. Finally, the chapter analyses the organisation and scope of the educational provision, the co-ordination between sectors (general and vocational education) and students' transitions across levels of education and into the labour market.

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## Context and main features

### **Governance of the education system and the school networks**

As described in Chapter 1, the organisation and funding of schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium is subject to a complex governance arrangement and, despite the Community's small size, distinguished by the co-existence of three separate school networks: The Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW), the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU), and the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU).

The legal framework for all three school networks is set by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community. The Ministry of the German-speaking Community (*Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, MDG) is responsible for developing education policy and overseeing its implementation in all schools, as well as distributing most of the public funding for education. The MDG has three departments responsible for the school sector: The department for education and the organisation of instruction (*Fachbereich [FB] Ausbildung und Unterrichtsorganisation*), the department for pedagogy (*FB Pädagogik*) and the department for school personnel (*Fachbereich Unterrichtspersonal*).<sup>1</sup>

Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector and beyond for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>) and the government's<sup>2</sup> working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>).

The Minister of Education and Scientific Research is one of four ministers comprising the German-speaking Community's executive government for the legislative period 2019-24. In addition to the minister's community-wide responsibilities, the Minister of Education and Scientific Research serves as the school provider (*Schulträger*) of the GUW school network. The nine municipalities serve as the providers of the OSU schools, while the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools (*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der DG*, BSDG) acts as the provider of the nine FSU schools.<sup>3</sup>

School providers are responsible for formulating an "educational project" (*Erziehungsprojekt*) that sets the framework for individual schools' projects. The providers are also responsible for the organisation of learning and pedagogical methods applied in their schools, for appointing the school council and for the construction and maintenance of school buildings. The providers also recruit staff for their schools, even though salaries are paid directly by the ministry (Eurydice, 2010<sup>[3]</sup>; Eurydice, 2020<sup>[4]</sup>). Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a comparatively high degree of autonomy in their choice of pedagogical and assessment methods, the organisation of instruction (e.g. the formation of class sizes), as well as their use of resources (see further below).

All recognised schools in the German-speaking Community are publicly funded through the Community budget, either directly (in the case of GUW schools) or subsidised (in the case of OSU and FSU schools). To be recognised and subsidised by the Community, schools must have their "school project" (including their school development plan, assessment concept and school-based curricula) approved by the ministry, having a minimum number of students, accepting supervision by the ministry, meeting hygiene and safety standards for their premises, observing the statutory teaching, holiday and public holiday periods and following regulations concerning the recruitment of teachers (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

A structure of councils permits teachers, parents and students to formally participate in school life. All schools need to appoint a school council (*Pädagogischer Rat*), consisting of the school leader, the deputy and at least five other members of staff (pedagogical, medical or socio-psychological staff). The school council is formed at every school for a period of three years for the pedagogically relevant decision. Parents or legal guardians of students can participate in and shape school life through parent councils (*Elternrat*) although there are no central rules on way in which parent councils' should be involved in school matters.

Although the formation of a parents' council is mandatory, not every school in the Community has a formal parents' representation, due to the difficulty of finding volunteers or other factors. Many of the existing parent councils are networked in the Community's Parents' Association (*Elternbund Ostbelgien V.o.G. / EBOB*). The establishment of an elected student council is compulsory in secondary education while primary schools can ensure students' right to participate in school life by other means (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is committed to the principle of “freedom of education”, to maintaining pedagogical diversity and – as part of a multi-lingual country – promoting multilingualism (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015<sup>[6]</sup>). Like the Flemish and French Communities, it constitutionally guarantees each parent the right to send their child to a school of their choice and allows any legal person the right to set up a school, recruit staff and determine its educational, religious or ideological principles. As a consequence, the German-speaking Community is home to a significant number of publicly-funded private schools (see Chapter 1). In September 2020, 49% of secondary students in the German-speaking Community attended one of the five private secondary schools. This was slightly below the share of private secondary schools in the other Belgian Communities (58%), but significantly above the OECD average of about 19%. At the primary level, which has been dominated historically by the municipal OSU network, private enrolment stood at only 8% in 2020, compared to 54% across the Flemish and French Communities and around 12% on average across the OECD in 2019.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the OECD review, there were no independent private schools (i.e. schools receiving less than half of their core funding from government agencies) in the German-speaking Community.

The public funding of private schools in the FSU network, in its current form, has its historical origins in the 1958 “School Pact”, which put an end to disputes between public and private providers that had flared up after the Second World War. The Pact constituted a compromise between Belgium's three major political currents and gave private providers of the FSU network the right to public subsidies (Schiffers, 1994<sup>[7]</sup>; Eurydice, 2020<sup>[4]</sup>; MDG, 2008<sup>[8]</sup>). The freedom of education has resulted in a dense school coverage, guaranteeing a high level of accessibility and short distances between students' schools and their homes, particularly in primary education (Eurydice, 2010<sup>[3]</sup>). Despite their pedagogical liberties, the educational offer of the three school networks is broadly similar and subject to centrally defined core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015<sup>[6]</sup>).

### **Funding of school education**

The government of the German-speaking Community receives funding for education from the federal government of Belgium and the government of the Walloon Region (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2014, p. 47<sup>[9]</sup>) (see Figure 2.4) as part of a lump sum allocation (*Globaldotation*). The German-speaking Community can freely allocate its resources across its areas of expenditure. Additional targeted funding is provided by the Walloon region, for example for digital equipment in selected schools as part of its *École Numérique* programme.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Overall level of expenditure on school education*

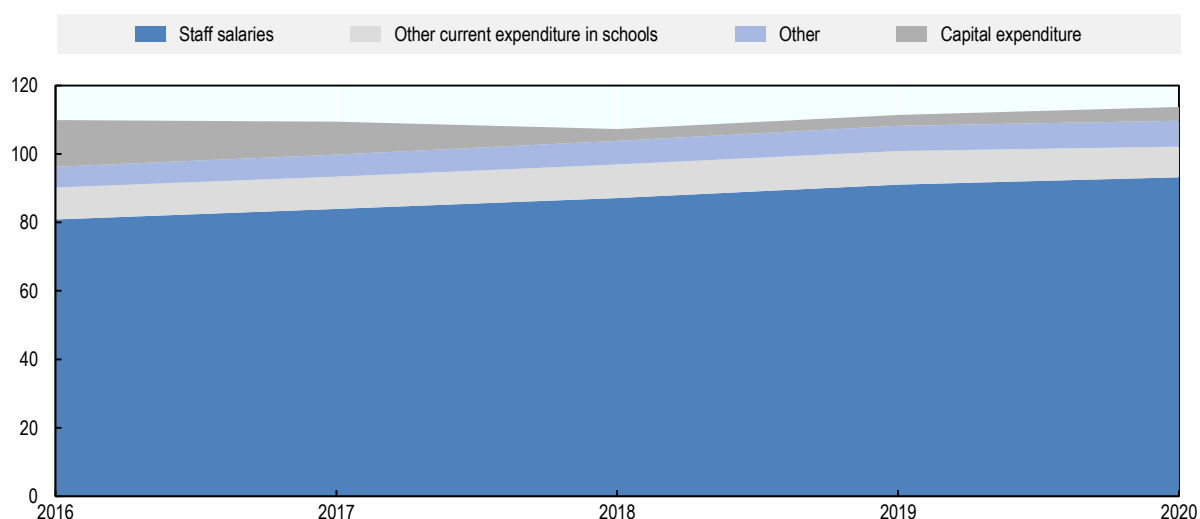
Based on national statistics, the total expenditure on education in the German-speaking Community in 2020 was EUR 119.7 million, of which EUR 113.7 million was spent on pre-primary to upper secondary education (see Figure 2.1). Around 7.3% of this expenditure on school education was undertaken by municipalities and 92.7% by the Community government. As in all OECD education systems, the largest share of the budget was spent on the salaries of teachers and other staff, which accounted for 81.9% of total expenditure. Although methodological differences mean that direct comparisons should be treated with caution, this share of staff expenditure was in line with the OECD average (77%) and slightly below those of the other Belgian Communities (89%) in 2018 (OECD, 2021, pp. 311, Table C6.2<sup>[10]</sup>).<sup>6</sup> School leaders, teachers, educators, secretarial staff, and other school staff in the German-speaking Community

are paid (or subsidised at 100%) by the ministry, according to a uniform salary scale across the three school networks, including the private FSU network.

Other current expenditure in schools, e.g. on support services, ancillary services like the preparation of student meals, rent for school buildings and other facilities accounted for 7.9% in 2020 (5.3% from the central budget and 2.5% from local budgets) (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Central and local capital expenditure, i.e. funding for school infrastructure and materials, accounted for 3.5% of overall expenditure in 2020 after accounting for as much as 12.4% in 2016 and 8.8% in 2017 (see Figure 2.1). The remaining 6.7% of expenditure in 2020 included targeted funding for pedagogical projects, student transportation, curriculum development, and the budget of Kaleido, the centre for the healthy development of children and adolescents (*Zentrum für die gesunde Entwicklung von Kindern und Jugendlichen*).


**Figure 2.1. Trend in expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education in the German-speaking Community, 2016-2020**

In EUR million



Note: Includes central and local expenditure; Staff salaries include salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff employed in pre-primary to upper secondary education and centrally deployed personnel; Other spending includes funding for pedagogical projects, student transportation, the development and revision of core curricula and funding for *Kaleido*; Expenditure is not adjusted for inflation.

Source: Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the overall expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education has increased from EUR 109.9 million in 2016 to EUR 113.7 million in 2020, with a brief decrease from 2017 to 2018 on account of the significant infrastructural investments in the preceding years. The number of pre-primary to upper secondary students has remained relatively constant during this period, decreasing only slightly from 12 281 to 12 159 (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). The budget increase over this time period was primarily driven by staff expenditure, while other current expenditure remained relatively constant.<sup>7</sup> Another, less significant, driver of expenditure during this period was the funding for *Kaleido Ostbelgien*, which rose from EUR 3.5 million to EUR 4.9 million and grew from 65 to 87 employees between 2017 and 2021<sup>8</sup> (see also Table 2.1). A similar development can be observed across OECD countries (Wolff, Baumol and Saini, 2014<sup>[11]</sup>; OECD, 2017, p. 34<sup>[12]</sup>). Even adjusted for inflation, total current expenditure per student in public institutions (ISCED 1-4) has increased by 1.7% per year between 2012 and 2018 on average across the

OECD. In the Flemish and French Communities, the inflation-adjusted rise in current expenditure per student was less pronounced, at 0.3% per year, and – as in the German-speaking Community – mostly driven by rising staff expenditure (OECD, 2021, pp. 309, Table C6.5<sub>[10]</sub>).

**Table 2.1. Expenditure on pre-primary to upper secondary education in the German-speaking Community, 2016-2020**

In EUR thousand (percentage of total spending in parentheses)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Central expenditure (Community)</b>					
Salaries pre-primary education	8 112 (7.4%)	8 301 (7.6%)	8 684 (8.1%)	9 603 (8.6%)	10 295 (9.1%)
Salaries primary education	19 596 (17.8%)	20 562 (18.8%)	21 482 (20.0%)	22 781 (20.5%)	23 494 (20.7%)
Salaries secondary education	36 752 (33.4%)	37 759 (34.5%)	38 561 (36.0%)	39 547 (35.5%)	40 214 (35.4%)
Salaries extra staff (all levels)	1 609 (1.5%)	1 739 (1.6%)	1 672 (1.6%)	1 606 (1.4%)	1 614 (1.4%)
Operating grants (pre-primary to secondary)	5 547 (5.0%)	5 559 (5.1%)	5 610 (5.2%)	5 597 (5.0%)	5 520 (4.9%)
Salaries SEN schools (all levels)	9 447 (8.6%)	10 048 (9.2%)	10 887 (10.1%)	11 486 (10.3%)	11 938 (10.5%)
Operating grants SEN schools (all levels)	419 (0.4%)	416 (0.4%)	435 (0.4%)	467 (0.4%)	422 (0.4%)
Salaries and operating grant Kaleido	3 490 (3.2%)	3 971 (3.6%)	4 271 (4.0%)	4 454 (4.0%)	4 890 (4.3%)
School transportation	1 268 (1.2%)	1 199 (1.1%)	1 214 (1.1%)	1 344 (1.2%)	1 396 (1.2%)
Pedagogical projects	259 (0.2%)	282 (0.3%)	409 (0.4%)	452 (0.4%)	207 (0.2%)
Supplementary funding for equipment and material	830 (0.8%)	577 (0.5%)	451 (0.4%)	623 (0.6%)	616 (0.5%)
Infrastructure	3 241 (2.9%)	6 484 (5.9%)	706 (0.7%)	1 234 (1.1%)	2 108 (1.9%)
<b>Local expenditure (Municipalities)</b>					
Salaries (all levels and staff types)	3 186 (2.9%)	3 265 (3.0%)	3 559 (3.3%)	3 578 (3.2%)	3 083 (2.7%)
Operating costs	3 306 (3.0%)	3 372 (3.1%)	3 608 (3.4%)	3 718 (3.3%)	2 894 (2.5%)
Infrastructure and material	9 574 (8.7%)	2 549 (2.3%)	2 293 (2.1%)	1 269 (1.1%)	1 288 (1.1%)
Other costs	1 044 (0.9%)	1 062 (1.0%)	999 (0.9%)	1 090 (1.0%)	1 070 (0.9%)
<b>Total expenditure (pre-primary to upper secondary)</b>	<b>109 956</b>	<b>109 478</b>	<b>107 263</b>	<b>111 375</b>	<b>113 701</b>

Notes: Adult education, higher education and funding for study scholarships are not included; Expenditure on part-time arts education in the music academy and curriculum development are not shown in the table but included in the total; Spending not adjusted for inflation; Data for the central level refer to actual expenditure, data for the local level refer to budgeted expenditure.

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

### *Education expenditure in international comparison*

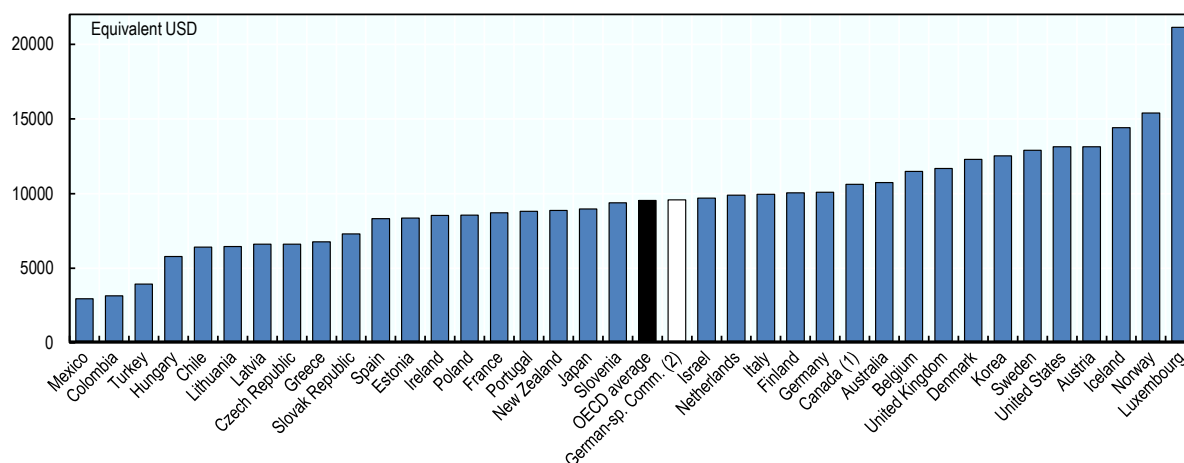
The German-speaking Community's lack of inclusion in the joint UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) data collection makes it difficult to provide an internationally comparable picture of its spending on school education. Comparisons based on the Community's national expenditure data need to be treated with caution due to differences in reporting standards. Nevertheless, available data suggest that per-student expenditure was close to the OECD average in primary education and about 15% above the OECD average in secondary education in 2018 (see Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.3).

At the national level (not including the German-speaking Community), expenditure on school education in Belgium is high by international standards. In 2018, expenditure on primary education institutions stood at USD 11 482 (equivalent USD converted using PPPs) per student, compared to the OECD average of USD 9 550 (see Figure 2.2). At the secondary level, Belgium spent USD 14 758 per student, the sixth largest amount among OECD countries and significantly above the average of USD 11 192 (see

Figure 2.3). On average, per-student expenditure in educational institutions was only slightly higher for vocational education (USD 14 522) than for general education (USD 14 935) (OECD, 2021, pp. 241, Table C1.1<sub>[10]</sub>). The per-student total expenditure on primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education in Belgium amounted to 25.3% of GDP per capita, compared to 23.2% on average across the OECD. This was above the level of spending in the Netherlands (21.9%), Germany (23.2%) and France (24.1%), but below the level of spending in the United Kingdom (26.6%), Austria (26.7%) and Norway (27.7%) (OECD, 2021, pp. 240, Table C1.4<sub>[10]</sub>).

## Figure 2.2. Total expenditure on primary institutions per full-time equivalent student, 2018

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, direct expenditure within educational institutions




1. Includes pre-primary programmes.

2. Comparability with other OECD jurisdictions is limited by methodological differences. Expenditures related to multiple levels of education (e.g. infrastructure investments) were adjusted in proportion to student enrolment at different levels; Expenditure on special needs education was assigned based on the proportion of SEN students in primary and secondary education.

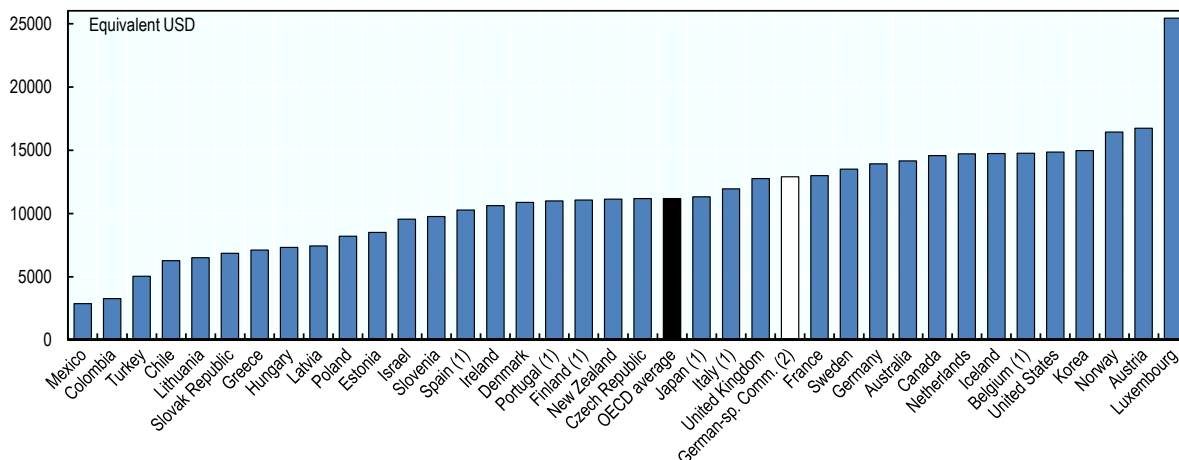
Note: The data include public and private expenditures; Data for Belgium as a whole excludes the German-speaking Community; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the level of per student expenditure.

Sources: OECD (2021<sub>[10]</sub>), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>, Table C1.1; Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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**Figure 2.3. Total expenditure on secondary institutions per full-time equivalent student, 2018**

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, direct expenditure within educational institutions



1. Includes post-secondary non-tertiary education.

2. Comparability with other OECD jurisdictions is limited by methodological differences. Expenditures related to multiple levels of education (e.g. infrastructure investments) were adjusted in proportion to student enrolment at different levels; Expenditure on special needs education was assigned based on the proportion of SEN students in primary and secondary education.

Note: The data include public and private expenditures; Data for Belgium as a whole excludes the German-speaking Community; Countries and economies are ranked in ascending order of the level of per student expenditure.

Sources: OECD (2021<sub>[10]</sub>), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>, Table C1.1; Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

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Although the levels of per-student spending across the three Belgian Communities are more homogeneous than, for example, across sub-national entities in the United States, Canada or Switzerland (OECD, 2021, pp. 232, Box C1.1.<sub>[10]</sub>), they are not identical. The amount of the central funding allocated to the Flemish and French Communities is linked to the evolution of the school-age population, but involves a degree of political negotiation (OECD, 2017, p. 257<sub>[12]</sub>). The German-speaking Community receives its lump sum funding through a separate mechanism. Although the allocation mechanism has been adjusted over time to mirror more closely the funding received by the other Communities (Bayenet and Veiders, 2007<sub>[13]</sub>), the German-speaking Community's accounts do not currently permit the identification of the amount of central funding intended for education, thus preventing a comparison with the allocations of the other Communities (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>). In addition, the Communities can complement their central funding with resources raised at the local level and are permitted to reallocate their central allocations for education across spending domains since they are not earmarked (OECD, 2017, p. 257<sub>[12]</sub>). Therefore, UOE expenditure data for the French and the Flemish Communities only constitute a rough approximation of expenditure in the German-speaking Community, even though they allow for more rigorous international comparisons.

Schools in Belgium are almost exclusively funded from public sources. After transfers, 98% of the expenditure on public schools (ISCED1-4) came from public sources in 2018 (97% on average across the OECD). Due to the widespread public funding of recognised private schools, they too received 95% of their expenditure from public sources, compared to just 54% across the OECD (OECD, 2021, pp. 242, Table C1.2<sub>[10]</sub>). On average across the OECD, private schools receive 38% less public resources than public schools and – in most systems – make up for this difference by raising a substantial part of their revenues from private sources, typically in the form of parental fees. On balance, the total per-student funding in

private schools exceeded that in public schools by 11% (OECD, 2021, pp. 242, Table C1.2<sub>[10]</sub>), although there are significant differences both within and between countries (Boeskens, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).

In comparison, private schools in Belgium (again, not including the German-speaking Community) receive more public funding (only 20% less than public schools). Since publicly-funded private schools in Belgium do not have the right to charge tuition fees though, their ability to make up for this difference is more limited, resulting in an overall level of per-student funding that is 18% below the public sector. The lack of school-level expenditure data in the German-speaking Community does not allow for direct comparisons of expenditure across the three school networks. Yet, as described in the following sections, prior to the 2020/21 school year, schools of the private FSU network received less funding for some types of expenditure than schools of the G UW network and – in the absence of tuition fees and financial support from their private network provider – had limited scope to compensate for this difference.

### *The governance of school funding and its major components*

Figure 2.4 shows the main funding flows in the German-speaking Community. The process for distributing funding to primary and secondary schools differs between schools of the Official and Free Subsidised Education Systems (OSU and FSU) and those belonging to the Community Education System (G UW) (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>). While the schools in the G UW network are fully funded by the Community,<sup>9</sup> schools of the OSU network can receive additional funding from their providers (the nine local municipalities), raised through local taxes. Since the municipalities are not required to inform the ministry about the funds they provide for schools, no data are available.

While schools of the G UW network are directly supervised by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research, schools of the OSU network are supervised by the school aldermen (*Schulschöffen*) of their municipal mayors. The exchange between the OSU network's schools and their aldermen are facilitated by a network co-ordinator (*Koordination OSU Netzwerk*) and schools of the FSU network are co-ordinated by the Catholic Education Secretariat (*Sekretariat des Katholischen Unterrichtswesens*). At the time of the OECD review, such a network co-ordination did not yet exist in the G UW network, which meant that the OSU and FSU networks had to seek agreements with the G UW network by contacting either individual schools or the minister as their immediate supervisor. By September 2021, a co-ordinator position for the G UW network (0.5 Full-Time Equivalent, FTE) had been created.

Compulsory schooling is free of charge in the German-speaking Community and no tuition fees may be charged until the end of compulsory schooling, including in the publicly-funded private schools of the FSU network. Pre-primary education is also free of charge for children from the age of three (Brusselmans-Dehairs, 2015<sub>[6]</sub>). Even though there is no data on private educational expenditure by parents in the German-speaking Community (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>), a number of regulations are in place to limit the extent of parents' contributions to non-tuition expenses. School transport has been free for students under 12 years since the school year 2008/09. For secondary school attendance, parents receive discounts on school transport or part of the costs are reimbursed (Eurydice, 2020<sub>[4]</sub>). If no adequate support can be guaranteed by the Walloon region's public transport network, the Community organises student transport. Schools at the pre-primary and primary level are prohibited from taking parental contributions for teaching materials and other items covered by the ministry's "funding to reduce school attendance costs" (see below). However, there is no central guidance on the types of costs that secondary schools can pass on to parents and evidence suggests that parental co-payments for school materials, school trips etc. at this level are higher.

Schools in the German-speaking Community receive their resources through several funding streams, which are described below:

- **Funding for teaching and non-teaching staff:** The ministry directly pays the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff in all recognised schools according to a uniform salary scale used across all three school networks. The number of full-time equivalent staff funded for each school



(*Stellenkapital*) is calculated based on a distribution formula (*Verteilungsschlüssel*) explained below. The government also directly funds release time for teachers to engage in non-instruction activities (special pedagogical assignments, *Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) as well as additional contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA) that are not employed directly by the schools but may be allocated based on requests.

- **Funding for operating expenditure and minor capital expenses:** The mechanism for funding operating and minor capital expenses (including rent, electricity, water, gas etc. and other goods and services for the day-to-day running of schools) differs across the three school networks:
  - Schools of the G UW network are fully funded by the ministry and receive an annual block grant, paid in 12 monthly instalments, to cover operating costs and minor capital expenses (*Funktionsdotation*). The value of the block grant is determined via annual negotiations. Schools in the G UW network prepare an annual financial plan and have a high degree of financial autonomy for the respective financial year. If, during a financial year, the funds first set out in the financial plan are not sufficient for a school, the school may receive a supplementary allocation (*Zusatzdotation*).
  - The monthly operating grant (*Funktionssubvention*) for schools of the private FSU network and of the OSU network is calculated annually based on a formula weighting the student numbers (see Box 2.1). In the case of OSU schools, the grants are allocated to municipalities in their role as school providers, which then distribute the funds to their schools and may choose to provide additional top-up funding from their own resources. The funds are earmarked, and they may not be used for non-school purposes. The ministry has the right to check the proper use of the funds. In the case of the private FSU schools, the funding is allocated directly to schools. Since the currently recognised FSU schools do not receive financial support from their Episcopal network provider, they depend exclusively on the public subsidy.
- **Funding for school infrastructure:** In the case of G UW schools, infrastructure expenditures are paid directly by the government. For schools of the OSU and FSU networks, the government covers 80% of the expenditure on infrastructure. The process for infrastructure funding is explained in more detail below. The ministry's department for infrastructure (*Fachbereich Infrastruktur*) is accompanying renovations or new constructions (Eurydice, 2020<sup>[41]</sup>). In a series of "campus projects" funded through public-private partnerships, infrastructural interventions with a focus on pedagogical synergies have led to the combination of multiple levels of education in the same school sites in order to facilitate co-operation, exchange and the transition of students across levels of education in a number of school sites, creating campuses on *Monschauer Straße*, *Lascheterweg*, and *Vervierser Straße* in Eupen.<sup>10</sup>
- **Additional funding for school equipment:** Additional funding is available to contribute to schools' expenses on moveable equipment, such as furniture and ICT equipment. In the case of the Community schools, the government covers 100% of these expenses. Schools of the OSU and FSU networks are only reimbursed for 60% of their costs and have to contribute the remaining 40% from their own resources (in the case of OSU schools, those of the municipalities) (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2014, p. 47 f.<sup>[9]</sup>). Schools have to submit requests for each reimbursement, which are examined and approved on a case-by-case basis by the minister.
- **Additional funding streams:** Schools of the subsidised OSU and FSU networks receive additional funding for a variety of purposes. The amounts are indexed annually. In the case of G UW schools, these expenses are intended to be covered in the main operating grant.
  - **Funding for pedagogical purposes:** The grant covers a variety of pedagogical expenses including teachers' professional learning activities, pedagogical materials, and out-of-school activities not covered by the core curricula. The amount of the grant is calculated on a per-student basis (in 2020/21: EUR 8.30 for each student in pre-primary and primary education, EUR 16.61 in secondary education and EUR 38.75 in Special Education Needs [SEN] schools)

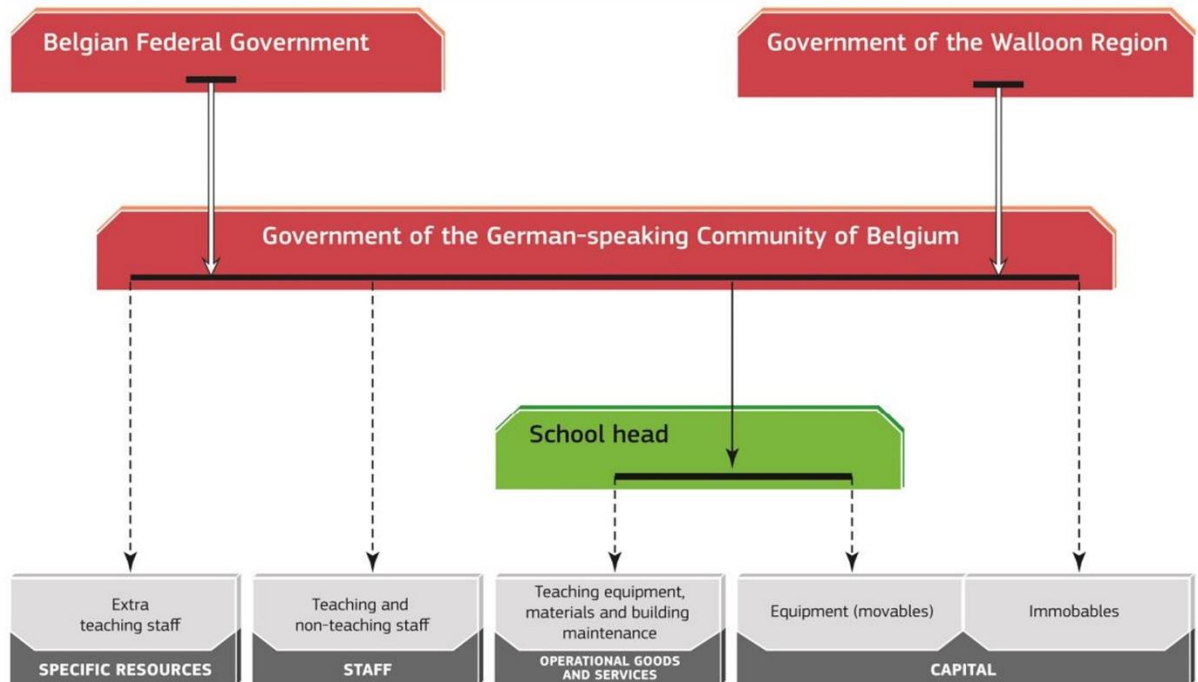
and, in the case of OSU schools, channelled through the municipalities. School leaders are free to decide which proportion of the grant for pedagogical purposes to devote to teachers' professional development.

- **Funding to reduce school attendance costs in pre-primary and primary education:** In pre-primary and primary education, these funds were introduced to absolve parents from contributing to the following: One-day cultural or sporting activities that take place during school hours in the school, swimming lessons and transport to the swimming pool, functional costs of the school, and costs for the diploma exhibition. The amount of the grant is calculated on a per-student basis (in 2020/21: EUR 27.33 for each student in pre-primary education and EUR 109.32 for each student in primary education). For activities taking place during school hours and materials not listed, the school may ask parents to contribute the cost price. No equivalent funding is distributed at the secondary level.
- **Funding for lunch break supervision:** OSU and FSU schools are entitled to be reimbursed for one lunch break supervision for each 75 students enrolled in the school (or 40 students in SEN schools). The amount of funding varies based on the qualifications of the supervising person). The costs are only reimbursed retrospectively after the end of the school year based on an application for reimbursement.
- **Funding for digital infrastructure:** The programmes "Internet Connection for All Schools" and "Internet connection for all classrooms" in the Community are currently pushing the expansion of the Internet-access for all schools. The bandwidth of the Internet connection is calculated according to the number of students. Currently, secondary schools and technical schools are being connected to the fibre optic network (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021, pp. 8, 82<sub>[2]</sub>). All schools in the different school networks benefit from these programmes.

Figure 2.4. Funding flows in the German-speaking Community’s school system

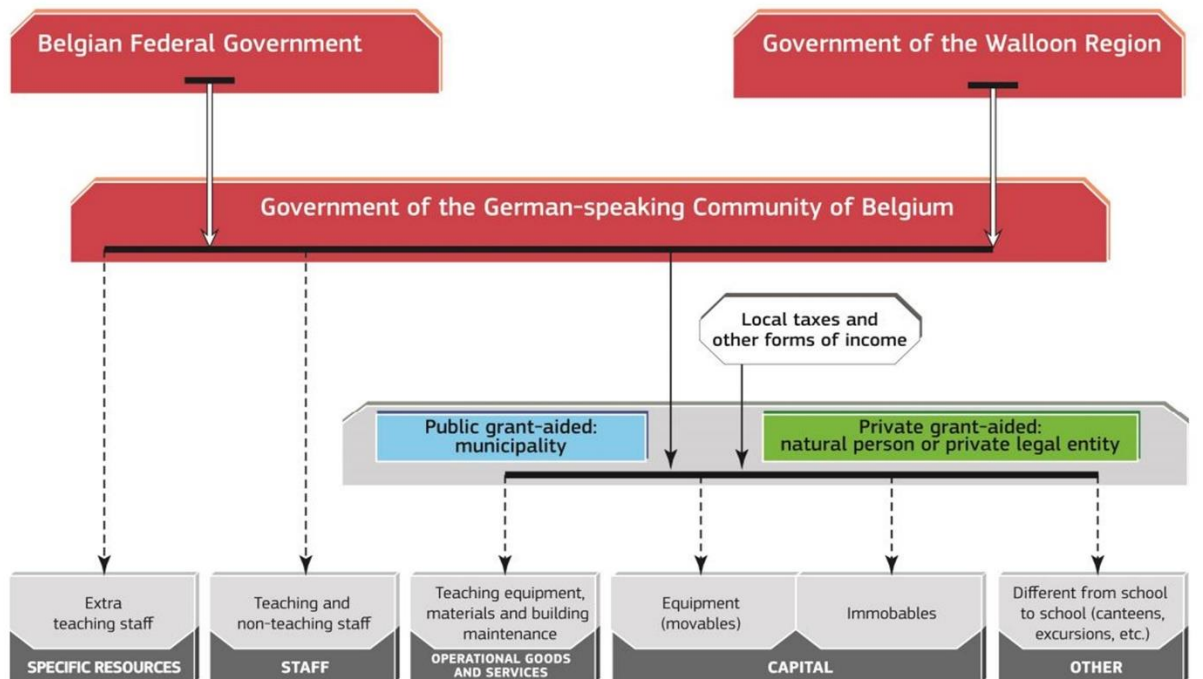
**BELGIUM – GERMAN SPEAKING COMMUNITY**

**Primary and general secondary schools (community education system)**



**BELGIUM – GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY**

**Primary and general secondary schools (grant-aided schools)**



Source: European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice (2014<sup>[9]</sup>), *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*, pp. 47-48.

### Box 2.1. Calculation of the operating grant in FSU and OSU schools, Sept. 2020

The monthly operating grant (*Funktionssubvention*) for schools of the private grant-aided FSU network and the public grant-aided OSU network is calculated annually based on the number of enrolled students and different weights. All values are tied to a basic index and a consumer price index, which is regularly adjusted. As of September 2020, the combined index was 1.4013 and students were assigned the following values for the calculation of the operating grant:

**Pre-primary education:** EUR 255 per student.

**Primary education:** EUR 343 per student.

**Secondary education:** depending on students' grade, programme type and subject.

- EUR 744 per **student in category A**: students in general secondary education and all students in the second and third stages of technical education in the following fields of study: commerce/commercial technology, economics, secretarial/administrative/computer science, languages/tourism, and sports).
- EUR 851 per **student in category B**: students in the first year of the assimilation stream and the second year of vocational education, students in the second and third stages of technical and vocational secondary education in the following fields of study: agriculture, social sciences, social services, home economics and nutrition, environmental studies, natural sciences, beauty care, clothing, nursing, and all forms of education or fields of study not mentioned in categories A, C and D.
- EUR 971 per **student in category C**: students in the second and third stages of secondary technical education in the following fields of study: electromechanics, electrical engineering, mechanics, woodworking (construction-furniture), electronics, architectural drawing and public works (second level); students in the second and third stages of secondary vocational education in the following fields of study: wood processing (construction-furniture), iron processing, machining mechanics, electrical engineering, motor vehicle mechanics, electronics, electrical engineering, electromechanics, shell construction.
- EUR 1 033 per **student in category D**: students in second and third stages of secondary technical education in the following fields of study: industrial electronics (third level only), automation, pneumatics, mechanics, construction drawing and public works (third level only); students in the second and third stages of secondary vocational education in the following fields of study: Automation, pneumatics, mechanics (CNC) (third stage only).
- EUR 5 605 lump sum for the digital resource library.
- EUR 77 076 lump sum to cover equipment for schools offering exclusively technical and vocational education.

**Part-time vocational education:** EUR 426 per student.

**SEN schools:** EUR 590 per student up to 13 years, EUR 605 per student over 13 years.<sup>11</sup>

**Boarding schools of the FSU network:** In addition to a EUR 27 697 lump sum, schools may receive the following subsidies for up to 126 boarders (EUR 834 per student in primary and SEN schools, EUR 692 per student in secondary school).

A decree passed in June 2021 raised the monthly operating grant for students in secondary education (categories A-D) and students in part-time vocational education in FSU schools by 15%, starting in

September 2021 (PDG, 2021<sup>[15]</sup>). In addition, as of September 2021, the combined index had been increased from 1.4013 to 1.4414.

Source: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (MDG) (2022<sup>[5]</sup>), *OECD Education Policy Reviews - Background Report of the German-speaking Community of Belgium*.

### *Distribution and use of staff hours*

Each school is granted a certain number of funded staff positions or hours, based on their student numbers and a complex set of quotas (see Box 2.2). The school providers are responsible for recruiting and selecting pedagogical staff to fill the positions allocated through the distribution formula before the start of the school year. Between October and January of each school year, the ministry verifies whether the allocated staff positions require adjustments based on the final numbers of enrolled students in that school year (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). In both primary and secondary education, school leaders are autonomous in their organisation of learning groups and the use their staff hours.

#### **Box 2.2. Calculation of staff positions/hours in the German-speaking Community**

Mainstream schools in the German-speaking Community are allocated a given number of staff positions (in primary education) or staff hours (in secondary education) based on their enrolment.

##### **Pre-primary and primary education**

The number of teaching staff positions in pre-primary and primary education is calculated preliminarily based on the number of students enrolled on 15 March of the preceding school year and re-calculated at the end of September. Due to rising enrolments over the course of the school year, staff positions in pre-primary education are re-calculated once more in April:

- Pre-primary centres receive 1 FTE **pre-primary teacher** position for up to 19 children, 1.5 FTE for 20-25 children, 2 FTE for 26-32 children, 2.25 FTE for 33-39 children and an additional 0.25 FTE for each five or six children above. In addition, since 2019/20, providers have been eligible for a number of **pre-primary assistant** positions. The resources for pre-primary assistants will be gradually increased until providers receive 0.5 FTE positions for each set of up to 25 children in their network by 2024/25 (when the entry age to kindergarten will be lowered from three to two and a half years).
- Primary schools receive 1.25 FTE **primary teacher** positions for up to 15 students, 1.5 FTE for 16-20 students, 2 FTE for 21-25 students and an additional 0.25 FTE for each additional five students above.

Each primary school (and connected pre-primary centre) receives funding for anything between a 0.25 FTE **school leader** position (50-99 students) to 1 FTE for schools with more than 180 students or at least 125 students spread across three school sites. In addition, school providers receive a quarter **head secretary** position for each 100 primary students in their school network. Other quotas apply for religion and philosophy teachers as well as additional roles, including accountants and staff for pedagogical projects (usually based on a system of quarter positions). Providers can redistribute the allocated staff positions across schools within their network.

##### **Secondary education**

The funded hours for teaching staff in secondary education is calculated based on student enrolment at the end of January in the preceding school year and re-calculated at the end of September in case

student numbers rose by more than 7.5%. The staff hours are not allocated on a simple per-capita basis but using a complex set of quotas. For each level of education (first, second or third stage) and type of education (general, technical or vocational), the number of students is associated with a given number of staff hours. In technical and vocational education, the formula further distinguishes between subjects with a higher and those with a lower number of associated teacher hours. For example:

- In the **A-stream of the first stage of secondary education**, each started group of 12 students is assigned 20 teacher hours. In addition, the first 40 students are assigned 1.4 teacher hours each and every student above that, 0.7 teacher hours. In the B-stream, more teacher hours are assigned.
- In the **second and third stages of general secondary education**, the first 40 students are assigned 3.2 teacher hours each and any student above that is assigned 1.4 teacher hours.
- In the **third stage of vocational education**, for lower-coefficient subjects, the first 20 students are assigned 3.2 teacher hours each and any student above that, 1.4 teacher hours. For subjects with higher coefficients, the values are 4.1 and 3.3 respectively.

In addition to the teaching staff, secondary schools can receive funding for a range of additional administrative and leadership staff (see Chapter 4).

Sources: Ministry of the German-speaking Community (MDG) (2022<sup>[5]</sup>), *OECD Education Policy Reviews - Background Report of the German-speaking Community of Belgium*; Government of the German-speaking Community (1997) *Programmdekret 1997 vom 20. Mai 1997*, Article 3 §2; Government of the German-speaking Community (2009<sup>[16]</sup>), *Dekret über das Regelgrundschulwesen (26. April 1999) [Decree on mainstream primary education]*.

Schools or school providers have several options to request resources for additional staff. For example, schools can submit requests for additional contract staff (*bezuschusste Vertragsarbeitnehmer*, BVA) or special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) to support school projects (e.g. *Ecole numérique* or the *Heterogenitätsprojekt*) or support individual students with SEN or gifted students.<sup>12</sup> The requests are evaluated and approved by the minister. Schools can also hire additional staff using their own resources. Although the employment of additional staff in schools is not monitored, it is understood to be practiced only in few cases (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

Over the past few years, schools have been provided with additional personnel resources through the creation of new staff positions. Since 2009, secondary schools with a recognised digital resource centre receive funding for a full-time resource librarian position (*Lehrer-Mediothekar*). In 2018, the position of head secretary (*Chefsekretär/in*) was created to support school leaders in primary schools with their increasing administrative workload. Starting with the school year 2021/22, each secondary school can receive resources for a full-time ICT co-ordinator (*IT-Beauftragte/r*) (see Chapter 4).

### *Funding for school infrastructure and material resources*

The German-speaking Community provides targeted subsidies to support constructions and renovations of school buildings. The Community covers 100% of the cost for constructions and renovations in schools of its own network (GUW) and 80% of the cost for other schools (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Infrastructural plans suggest that a total of EUR 140 million were invested in the construction of school infrastructure from 2009 to 2020, of which the Community contributed EUR 130 million.

Reports from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 suggest that school principals in the German-speaking Community were largely satisfied with both the quality and quantity of educational materials at their disposal. At least 95% of 15-year-old students attended schools whose principals reported that their capacity to provide instruction was hindered not at all or very little by inadequate or a

lack of educational materials (incl. textbooks, ICT equipment, library or laboratory material), compared to only two thirds on average across the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4<sub>[17]</sub>).

By contrast, around a third of 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal reported that instruction was hindered more than a little by inadequate or poor quality physical infrastructure (incl. building, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems) (30% vs. 35% across the OECD) or by a shortages of physical infrastructure (35% vs. 37% across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4<sub>[17]</sub>).

### *Governing the opening and closure of publicly-funded schools*

The German-speaking Community's primary education system is characterised by a relatively large number of small schools, mostly run by the municipal OSU network. In the school year 2020/21, 26 of the 55 primary schools had fewer than 50 students with one counting as few as eight students (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>). In small primary schools, especially in the more rural areas, students from different years are sometimes taught together. Small schools experience higher fixed costs and maintaining a fragmented school network with a large number of small sites can pose challenges for the provision of a high-quality education with limited resources (Echazarra and Radinger, 2019<sub>[18]</sub>; Ares Abalde, 2014<sub>[19]</sub>). At the same time, the role of schools for their local communities and their proximity to students' homes is considered an important feature of the Community's education system and the regulations governing the opening and closure of schools are designed to maintain small schools.

The initial and continued funding of schools at the pre-primary and primary level is conditional on the size of their student body. To first obtain public subsidies, newly founded primary schools need to have at least 75 students (counting only those that attend the closest school to their residence) and maintain this number over the first four years of their existence. Pre-primary schools need to have at least 25 students. Once established, schools can lose their public subsidy if their student numbers fall below 12 (for primary schools) or six (for pre-primary schools) in two consecutive years. If schools manage to reach the minimum number of students (12 or six) again within a space of three years, they can become eligible for public subsidies again (or reopen, in case they had closed).

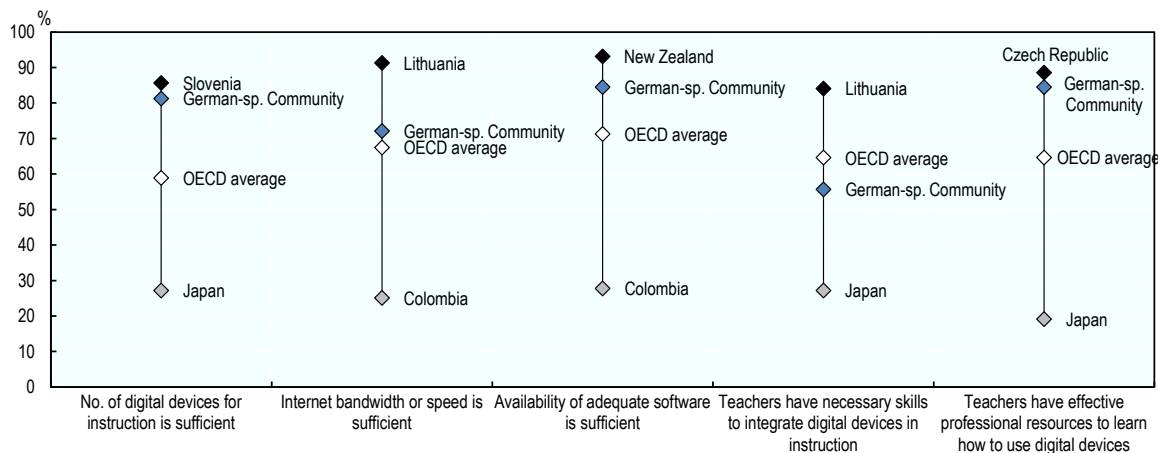
### **Digitalisation and ICT infrastructure**

The ministry has been working to reform the digital infrastructure in schools for some years, focusing on improving Internet connectivity in schools and hiring additional personnel to manage ICT resources in schools. In 2018, the needs and usage of ICT resources in schools and by teachers of the German-speaking Community were surveyed as part of the „*Baromètre Digital Wallonia*“ study conducted in the Wallonia and Brussels regions (Agence du Numérique, 2018<sub>[20]</sub>). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ministry draw on these results and accelerated its efforts to extend Internet connectivity in schools, prioritising the provision of laptops to teachers and secondary school students (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>). Since the first lockdown in 2020, efforts were made to provide all families that lacked the resources to permit their children to follow distance learning with laptops on a means-tested basis.

Yet, access to ICT resources alone is not sufficient to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Although the quality of ICT resources in schools has rarely been systematically measured, they are unlikely to support student learning if computers are old, educational software inadequate or the Internet connection is slow (Bulman and Fairlie, 2016<sub>[21]</sub>). As can be seen in Figure 2.5, on the whole, secondary school leaders in the German-speaking Community report above-average satisfaction with the adequacy of digital technologies available for learning and teaching in their schools.

**Figure 2.5. School capacity to enhance teaching and learning using digital devices, 2018**

Percentage of students in schools whose principal agreed or strongly agreed with the following about their school



Source: OECD (2020<sup>[17]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>, Tables V.B2.5.15 and V.B1.5.15.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/tnl94h>

An equally important condition for the successful use of ICT resources is teachers' preparedness to integrate them effectively into their instruction. In 2018, only little more than half of 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community (55.7%) attended a school whose leader considered that teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital devices in instruction, compared to 64.6, on average across the OECD. At the same time, school leaders were satisfied with the availability of professional resources that could help teachers learn how to use digital devices (see Figure 2.5).

Every municipality and secondary school in the German-speaking Community has a staff member responsible for ICT support and, by September 2021, every secondary school should have a full-time ICT staff member. The ministry plans to provide additional continuing professional development classes, webinars and online learning videos to teachers on subjects such as the use of office software, based on the requests of schools. The *Ecole Numérique* project, run by the Walloon region, provides additional resources in the area of ICT-based learning and supported 32 initiatives in the German-speaking Community with ICT hardware and network equipment in 2019/20 (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

### **System-level monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools**

The German-speaking Community has a number of processes in place through which it collects data on educational quality, including regular external school evaluations and standardised student assessments. As described in Chapter 1, the Community does not conduct central examinations at any level of education (i.e. standardised assessments with formal consequence for students or affecting students' grades or certification). Nevertheless, schools of all education networks regularly participate in large-scale student assessment. This includes the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15-year-olds' performance in reading, mathematics and science, a test for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF) to assess students' competency in French as a foreign language, and comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8). The VERA tests are not used for international comparisons, meaning that there is no international comparative evidence on school performance at the primary level. The Community's participation in both PISA and the VERA tests is



co-ordinated by the AHS (the latter in co-operation with the University of Koblenz-Landau) (AHS, Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien, undated<sup>[22]</sup>).<sup>13</sup>

The Community's process of regular internal and external school evaluations, which has been developed over the past two decades, is another important source of information on educational quality in the Community. Schools are required to carry out an internal school evaluation at least once every three years. The process is overseen by the external evaluation and managed by the school leader or pedagogical council. Since 2009, the internal evaluation is complemented by an external evaluation carried out every five years by the respective unit within the AHS. A number of additional actors and services contribute to the evaluation process and support schools in following up on its results, including the school inspectorate, the school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*), pedagogical advisory service (*Fachberatung*), the ZFP's competency centre (*Kompetenzzentrum des Zentrums für Förderpädagogik, ZFP*) and Kaleido (see Chapter 3). The school evaluation process and the role of support services is described in more detail in Chapters 1 and 4.

Information on the quality of education is disseminated through different channels in the German-speaking Community. The system-wide results of VERA, PISA and DELF are published in reports. School-level results are not made public, but they are shared with school leaders and teachers (Grünkorn, Klieme and Stanat, 2019<sup>[23]</sup>) (although it should be noted that PISA results are only representative at the level of the Community, not the school). Likewise, the external evaluation publishes system-level reports on their evaluation results in irregular intervals. Following a first report in 2010, a second report covering the period 2010-13 was presented in 2014 (Breuer, Müllender and Schieren, 2014<sup>[24]</sup>). The reporting lapsed during the period 2014-15 and resumed in 2021 with a report covering the period 2016-20 (Cormann and Goor, 2021<sup>[25]</sup>). Individual schools' evaluation reports are not made public. Kaleido and the AHS also publish regular reports describing their activities.

## ***Transitions across levels of education, between pathways and into the labour market***

### *Transitions across years and levels of education*

Although precise data on enrolment in early childhood education and care in the German-speaking Community is not available, the ministry estimates enrolment at age 3 to be around 96% (see Chapter 1). Every pre-primary school in the German-speaking Community is institutionally linked to a primary school and led by a shared school leader. In addition, many are located in close physical proximity to their primary schools, e.g. as part of a campus structure. This facilitates the collaboration between staff across levels of education and helps to ease children's transition from kindergarten to primary school (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 45<sup>[26]</sup>). Staff of both levels meet at the end of the school year to discuss students' transition to primary school and evaluate whether or not students display the requisite competencies to advance to the first year of primary education. Teachers, or the class council, which is comprised of the school leadership and all other personnel responsible for a given student, provide a recommendation, but the decisions to enrol their children in primary education is left to parents. Primary school staff may also suggest for Kaleido to conduct a school readiness test if parents agree. The testing of school readiness includes observations of the child in the kindergarten, the performance of a school readiness test and, if necessary, further specialised examinations (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

In primary and secondary education, students' progression to the next grade is decided by the class council. In primary education, grade repetition cases are discussed with parents, but there are no means to appeal the class council's decision. In secondary education, the class council can decide to let students re-sit exams (*Nachprüfungen*) in the subjects they failed before the start of the next school year. The class council can then decide to let students advance to the next year, to repeat a year, or to be conditionally promoted but repeat certain subjects (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of assessment practices). The

decision of the class council can be appealed at the board of appeal, which consists of several members of the ministry and one representative of the school provider.

The rate of grade repetition in the German-speaking Community, particularly in some schools, remains high. PISA 2018 data suggests that, among 15-year-old students, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school (OECD, 2020, pp. 308, Table V.B2.2.9<sub>[17]</sub>). This was below the share reported by the French Community (41.1%) but significantly above that of the Flemish Community (23.2%) and the OECD average of 11.4%. In 2018, 13.0% of 15-year-olds reported to have repeated at least one grade in primary education and 12.6% to have repeated at least once in lower secondary education (compared to just 6.7% and 5.5% respectively across the OECD). As in many other school systems, the probability of repeating a grade in the German-speaking Community is associated with students' socio-economic status, which raises concerns for equity (De Witte et al., 2018, p. 17<sub>[27]</sub>).

The German-speaking Community does not collect annual data on the number of students who repeated a year or the overall share of students who have, at some point, repeated a year. Ad hoc analyses conducted by the ministry suggest that, in 2020/21, 14.6% of students in primary education were enrolled in a grade that was one year below that typical for their age (*Schulrückstand*) and 1.4% were enrolled two or more years below the expected grade level. In secondary education, 20.4% of students were enrolled one year below the expected grade level and 9.4% two or more years.<sup>14</sup> However, it should be noted that a number of factors besides grade repetition can cause such discrepancies, including a deferred entry into primary school. Therefore, they do not allow direct inferences about the prevalence of grade repetition.

### *Tracking and transitions between educational pathways*

As described in Chapter 1, schooling in the German-speaking Community is comprehensive during the six years of primary education. At the start of secondary education (typically at age 12), students are tracked into an A-stream and a B-stream.<sup>15</sup> In 2020/21, 8% of students in the first year of secondary education attended the B-stream, which is primarily intended for students who failed to obtain a certificate for the successful completion of primary education and provides them with additional support to obtain their primary school certificate before pursuing further technical or vocationally-oriented pathways. Students can switch from the B-stream to the A-stream on recommendation of the class council (and, in case students have not successfully completed their primary school certificate, a positive evaluation from the admissions council and Kaleido) (MDG, 2022<sub>[5]</sub>). However, the Community does not collect data on the number of students who switch from the B-stream to the A-stream after their first year or on students' choices between different pathways after completing the A-stream or B-stream.

Following the first stage of secondary education (i.e. at the start of year 9), students can choose between three pathways offering school-based instruction (general, technical and vocational) and different specialisations (see Chapter 1). Switching between educational pathways remains possible throughout students' secondary education but, in some cases, requires students to repeat a year. To enter year 9 of the general track, for example, students who completed the B-stream need to first complete year 9 of vocational education. After completing the second stage of secondary education, students can switch from the vocational track to the technical or general tracks, although this is less common, requires a positive evaluation from the admissions council and requires vocational students to have completed two years in the second stage of secondary education (rather than one in the technical and general pathways). All three pathways permit students to go on to pursue higher education, although obtaining the certificate qualifying students for entry into tertiary education takes one year longer to obtain in the vocational track (13 years) than via the technical and general tracks (see Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1).

Students between the ages of 15 and 18 who no longer attend secondary school or complete an apprenticeship can enrol in part-time vocational education (*Teilzeitunterricht*), which combines three days a week of work-based learning with two days of school-based education at one of the two secondary schools specialising in technical and vocational pathways (the Robert Schuman Institute Eupen or the St.

Vith Technical Institute). The offer is primarily aimed at students at risk of dropping out and serves as a transitional solution to give students a new orientation and to enable them to integrate into vocational training or return to full-time school education. At the end of the first year of part-time vocational education, students can obtain a certificate of completion of primary education (in case they had not yet obtained it), or – depending on their success – a certificate that permits them to start an apprenticeship or transition to vocational secondary education. For students with learning difficulties or who are at risk of dropping out, the Community offers other several measures and career guidance which are described later in this chapter.

### *Transitions into the labour market, vocational education and career guidance*

The German-speaking Community has a well-established but comparatively small Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. While 52% of students in the third stage of mainstream secondary education were enrolled in general programmes in 2020 (compared to 58% across OECD countries in 2018), most of the remaining students were enrolled in technical pathways (41%). Only 7% of students were enrolled in the vocational pathway, which is significantly less than in the neighbouring Flemish Community (OECD, 2020, pp. 258, Table B7.1<sub>[28]</sub>; Nusche et al., 2015<sub>[29]</sub>).

The structure of vocational education and training in the German-speaking Community is similar to that of dual education systems like Germany, Austria or Switzerland (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2013<sub>[30]</sub>) and the willingness of local companies to offer opportunities for work-based training is high. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of new training contracts signed in 2020 (243) has not decreased compared to previous years and unemployment among under 25-year-olds stood at 8.1% in December 2019, significantly below the national rate of 19% (Arbeitsamt der DG, 2020<sub>[31]</sub>; IAWM, 2021<sub>[32]</sub>).

A key actor in the German-speaking Community's vocational education is the Institute for Training and Continuing Education in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (*Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, IAWM). Funded primarily by the Community, the IAWM assumes a co-ordinating, steering and monitoring role in its system for dual training and apprenticeships and is responsible for ensuring the quality of work-based learning. In addition, the IAWM organises opportunities for students to visit local employers offering apprenticeships in spring of each year (*Schnupperwochen*). The IAWM also funds and oversees the Centre for Training and Continuing Education (*Zentrum für Aus- und Weiterbildung des Mittelstandes*, ZAWM), which organises the training of apprentices, master craftsmen's courses and further training courses offered by SMEs (ZAWM, 2014<sub>[33]</sub>). The ZAWM's two sites Eupen and St. Vith were brought under a common management in 2021 to create synergies (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 88<sub>[26]</sub>).

Furthermore, since 2018, the IAWM offers a one-year pre-vocational programme (*“Anlehre”*) aimed at young people who have failed to qualify for vocational training, dropped out of an apprenticeship or who are enrolled in part-time vocational education and wish to prepare themselves to start an apprenticeship. The programme is run through the ZAWM as part of the European Social Fund-supported project “vocational integration through training guidance in dual education” (BIDA).<sup>16</sup> Similar programmes exist, for example, in Switzerland and Austria (Ebner, Graf and Nikolai, 2013<sub>[34]</sub>; Ebner, 2013<sub>[35]</sub>).

Besides the IAWM, a number of actors and institutions in the German-speaking Community provide career guidance to students. This includes the employment agency, which focuses on students' career guidance from the end of compulsory education, as well as Kaleido, which organises events in schools as well as individual guidance appointments that also cover students' choice of educational pathways and study subjects at the start of secondary education (Kaleido Ostbelgien, 2021<sub>[36]</sub>). Two youth information centres (*“Jugendbüro”*) in Eupen and St. Vith also offer free and confidential guidance to young adults on a range of issues including study and career choices.

Since 2018/19, the *“Wirtschaft macht Schule”* project offers learning materials for teachers and organises events in primary and secondary schools on entrepreneurialism and the local economy. The programmes

is jointly run by the Community's business development agency (*Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft Ostbelgiens*, WFG), the government, the chamber of commerce and industry and the "Study Group School and Economy" (*Studienkreis Schule & Wirtschaft*). The "Study Group School and Economy" (*Studienkreis Schule & Wirtschaft*) brings together education institutions, businesses, representatives of the ministry, private and public agencies in an effort to facilitate the co-ordination of initiatives and activities related to career guidance and work experience in the Community. In 2011, the Community has also released a core curriculum on career guidance, which was developed in co-operation with many of the stakeholders mentioned above and provides primary and secondary teachers of all subjects with guidance on how to integrate career guidance into their lessons (MDG, 2011<sup>[37]</sup>).

## Strengths

### ***The development of an overall vision has the potential to set clear goals for the education system and strengthen the coherence of future reforms and school improvement efforts***

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*) to guide reforms until 2030 and beyond in order to improve educational quality and equity. The development of the vision will be informed by a bottom-up diagnosis of the system's challenges based on stakeholder perspectives, which was carried out by VDI Technologiezentrum and completed in early 2020 (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>), as well as the OECD's education policy review, which provides a complementary analyses and recommendations from an international perspective. Based on the overall vision, the government intends to develop a Master Plan in 2023, laying out an implementation strategy for the reforms needed to achieve the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*, accompanied by indicators to measure progress towards them.

Particularly in light of the German-speaking Community's decentralised system, with three school networks and 11 school providers, reaching a consensus on core values of the system and establishing clear goals for its improvement is key to guiding policy improvements. The development of the overall vision could allow the government to formulate such goals, strengthen coherence across different reform areas and create synergies between them (such as the revision and implementation of the core curricula, school leadership and teaching, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation). The vision could also help to align initiatives developed at the central level with bottom-up planning and school improvement efforts at the local level. Furthermore, an overall vision could help to sustain the focus on long-term objectives and help in sequencing and prioritising the significant number of reform processes that have been planned or initiated in relative independence of each other over recent years, including the revision of the core curricula and the teacher service code, which had begun as part of the "good personnel for good schools" (*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen*, GPGS) initiative in 2015 (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016<sup>[38]</sup>).

During its stakeholder interviews, the OECD review team witnessed a widespread recognition of the need for further reforms and an impressive range of actors within and outside the school system who are engaging in debates and are invested in improving education in the German-speaking Community. This was reflected by the broad stakeholder engagement and discussions around the first diagnostic report (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>). This high level of engagement can provide a good basis to keep stakeholders closely involved throughout the development of the overall vision for the education system. This will be important to build ownership of the vision and the reforms derived from its implementation among teachers, leaders and other stakeholders. The development of an overall vision is also an opportunity to create a clear narrative about the goals that different reforms are aiming to accomplish, which can facilitate the communication of proposed changes and reduce the risk of reform fatigue.

### ***The investment in education supports favourable learning conditions***

The German-speaking Community's school system is underpinned by a sustained and, at the secondary level, above-average level of educational investment, which allows for favourable learning conditions, including comparatively small class sizes and student-teacher ratios (see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4). Most schools in the German-speaking Community are well equipped concerning school buildings and pedagogical materials and the ministry has undertaken efforts to further strengthen the ICT infrastructure in schools going forward. Secondary school leaders in the German-speaking Community report above-average satisfaction with the adequacy of digital technologies available for learning and teaching in schools.

Principals' responses to the PISA 2018 survey indicate that secondary schools in the German-speaking Community were well-equipped with computers for students (providing 9 per 10 students, compared to eight on average across the OECD), although they had fewer computers with Internet connectivity available for teachers (3 per ten teachers, compared to ten on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Tables V.B2.5.7/10<sub>[17]</sub>). Only 5% of 15-year-old students attended schools whose principals reported that their capacity to provide instruction was hindered by inadequate or a lack of educational materials, such as textbooks, ICT equipment, library or laboratory material (compared to a third of 15-year-olds on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.5.4<sub>[17]</sub>). This is notable since principals' reports of inadequate or poor quality educational materials are negatively associated with their students' reading performance in PISA 2018, even after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profile (OECD, 2020, pp. 115, Table V.B1.5.3<sub>[17]</sub>).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the ministry has provided students in need with laptops.<sup>17</sup> It also accelerated its efforts to expand Internet connectivity in schools and strengthen capacity by hiring additional personnel to manage ICT resources. Every municipality and secondary school in the German-speaking Community has a staff member responsible for ICT support and, by September 2021, every secondary school should have a full-time ICT staff member. Although teachers will need to be supported to use these resources effectively, there are generally favourable conditions for using digital resources to enhance teaching.

### ***The school funding system supports parental choice***

Free school choice is a core value of the German-speaking Community's school system and the school funding system supports this by ensuring that parents do not have to pay tuition fees regardless of which publicly recognised school (and school network) they choose. Combined with the level of resources invested in the school system, this provides a strong basis to further strengthen its performance. Yet, as previous OECD analyses have demonstrated, beyond a certain level of investment, translating additional resources into better educational outcomes critically depends on their effective use (OECD, 2017, p. 32<sub>[12]</sub>). To help the German-speaking Community accomplish its goals, resources will need to be directed to effective interventions and to the schools and learners that need them the most, underpinned by high-quality data to allow for the continuous evaluation of the system's inputs and outputs. Potential areas of efficiency gains and examples of effective interventions will be pointed to below and in the remainder of the report.

### ***School autonomy has the potential to facilitate innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches***

Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a high degree of autonomy. School providers are free to decide on the pedagogical methods used in their schools, as well as their choice of student assessment practices. Each school also has wide-ranging autonomy in their implementation of the core curricula, the use of their staff, as well as the organisation of instruction,

including the course offer and class sizes. Combined with free school choice, this autonomy has the potential to incentivise local innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches in the Community. The structure of the Community's school network and its strong geographical coverage, particularly at the primary level, also creates the potential for a high responsiveness to the characteristics and needs of local communities.

Whether school choice and a diversity of providers leads to innovation and a better match between the educational offer and local needs in practice, depends on a variety of factors, notably the capacity of school leadership (OECD, 2017<sup>[39]</sup>; Lubienski, 2003<sup>[40]</sup>). Although the capacity of schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community to capitalise on these opportunities can be further strengthened, the schools' autonomy provides them with a good basis to tailor their profiles to local needs.

### ***A range of efforts are undertaken to prevent school failure and facilitate students' transitions beyond school***

The German-speaking Community recognises the importance of addressing school failure and facilitating students' successful transitions across levels of education and into the labour market (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>). A range of initiatives and educational offers have been developed to prevent drop-out and provide students who are struggling to complete regular schooling with alternative pathways to educational and professional opportunities. This includes part-time vocational education, the supervision offered by the Time-Out centre, and the one-year pre-vocational programme offered by the ZAWM Centre for Training and Continuing Education.

The German-speaking Community has also been responsive to performance deficits that were detected, for example, in the context of international student assessments. In light of the decreasing share of top-performers in recent waves of PISA, the German-speaking Community's latest regional development concept (REK III) included several initiatives aimed at improving performance in reading and in the MINTH (mathematics, informatics, natural sciences, technology and crafts) subjects to be implemented in 2019-24 (MDG, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>). This included additional extra-curricular activities, such as competitions, for gifted students, additional training for MINTH teachers and improved equipment for school labs. Although the initiatives had not been evaluated at the time of the review, they signal a commitment to respond to deficits whenever they are detected.

In addition, as described above, a wide range of initiatives bring together actors from education institutions, businesses, the ministry, private and public agencies to provide students with career guidance. If well-delivered, career guidance services, both inside and outside of schools, can have a formative influence on young people's understanding of the world of work and improve their educational, social and economic outcomes (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). Providing strong guidance for students is particularly important in a system like the German-speaking Community, where students are faced with important decisions at multiple points in their educational pathways. Although there remains potential to evaluate more systematically the extent to which these services meet students' needs and to strengthen the link between guidance provided within and outside of schools (as discussed further below), the broad range of existing initiatives is testament to a commitment, shared by many actors in the system, to help all students succeed in their educational pathways.

## Challenges

### ***The education system lacks a clear vision to guide and lend coherence to reform initiatives***

The German-speaking Community currently lacks a widely known, clearly articulated vision for the education system that could help to guide, prioritise and lend coherence to reforms and foster a shared understanding of their goals among the various stakeholders concerned. Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>) and the government's working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>). Both list a series of reform projects for the education sector and the envisaged timeline for their implementation, although the projects detailed in the two documents only partially overlap and show little alignment. In interviews, the OECD review team confirmed the impression that there was some uncertainty among stakeholders about the relationship between the two strategic documents and which of the two should be seen as authoritative.<sup>18</sup>

It is common for public authorities in OECD countries to establish formal strategies setting out policy initiatives for a period of 5-10 years, often associated with timelines, milestones and budgets. A critical element of such strategic documents, however, is the articulation of the broader goals that these initiatives are intended to accomplish, as well as an explanation of why those goals are desirable (OECD, 2013<sup>[42]</sup>). Neither of the two strategic documents (LAP or REK III) clearly articulates the overarching goals for the education system that the proposed reforms are designed to accomplish.

The previous volume of the Community's regional development concept (REK II) in 2015 had included three broad goals for the education sector (educational equity, educational quality and practical vocational training) (MDG, 2015, p. 37<sup>[43]</sup>) as well as a two-page vision statement (the *Leitbild "Bildungsregion DG – Unser Zukunftskapital"*), which was developed in 2008 and comprises 19 statements of intent (MDG, 2009<sup>[44]</sup>). While this vision statement identifies important priorities, its 19 objectives are too numerous to be easily grasped, particularly since they are presented without clear prioritisation or overarching, structuring ideas (MDG, 2015, p. 25<sup>[43]</sup>). In addition, the 19 objectives formulated in the vision are highly heterogeneous. Some of the objectives are sufficiently general to be sustained over time and appear to reflect broad values that could guide policy making in a range of contexts (e.g. objective 6: "We enable the integrated education of students with special education needs" or objective 7: "We want to actively promote the ability to deal with conflict at all levels in order to understand a constructive culture of debate as enriching our everyday dialogues"). Others describe specific policy initiatives (e.g. objective 15: "We want to raise the quality and transparency of our continuing professional learning programs for teachers by employing a central partner for processing and co-ordination tasks"). By contrast, other OECD countries typically focus on a relatively small and more manageable number of fundamental goals. For example, in its Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, Estonia introduces a succinct vision of lifelong learning in 2020 and derives from this five strategic goals, with several "strategic measures" linked to each of them (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2014<sup>[45]</sup>).

While the REK II vision statement was intended to inform policy development until 2025, the OECD review team did not form the impression that it was widely known within the system or that it constituted a reference point either for policy development or for the day-to-day work of various stakeholders. It is not clear either in what sense the latest volume of the development concept (REK III) draws on the vision statement and the reform initiatives it presents are not linked explicitly to the three goals formulated in the REK II. Although the REK III proposes to prioritise the development of an overall vision (the *Gesamtvision* discussed above) to structure reform processes until 2030, it is not clear whether this overall vision, as it is currently planned could fill the vacuum left by the Community's lack of an effective statement on the system's goals, underpinning values or guiding principles (MDG, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>).

So far, the lack of a widely recognised vision and overarching goals for the education system has reduced the Community's capacity to lend coherence and direction to reform processes and mobilise actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations for the education system. It may have also created a sense of uncertainty about the direction of reforms among stakeholders and made it more difficult to communicate the rationale of planned reforms. Ideally, at the highest level, the vision for the education system should be broad enough to act a relevant reference point for various elements of the education system, including, of course, the curriculum, but also the evaluation framework and reform of the teacher competency framework (AHS, 2005<sup>[46]</sup>). In the absence of this widely recognised vision, different actors in the German-speaking Community have, over the years, developed their own implicit or explicit vision statements to guide their work in different education sectors and for different purposes in relative independent of one another. This includes, for example, the initial reflections on the GPGS teacher reform project, led by a steering group (Koordinierungsgruppe GPGS, 2016<sup>[47]</sup>), as well as the vision for the education system developed by the Economic and Social Council (*Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat*, WSR) informing the structural reform of vocational education.<sup>19</sup>

While the development of ad hoc visions by multiple stakeholders and sectors in the German-speaking Community is a testament to their high level of motivation and commitment to improving the system, these different visions appear disconnected from each other. The steering of education policy would benefit from a more coherent articulation of overarching priorities and high-level, broadly accepted goals or values that could create guide ongoing initiatives across the entire education system and allow different actors to rally around a shared cause. The development of the *Gesamtvision* thus provides a much-needed opportunity to create a strategy to lend coherence to future reform projects and school improvement efforts, but also to develop a long-term vision for the education system. For either to be successful and stand up to the test of time, they should be the outcome not only of a process of reflection and analysis, but also consultations and co-development processes involving a wide range of stakeholders including students, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff, school leaders, social partners, business, policy makers. As described further below, the success of a strategic vision is as dependent on its substance as it is dependent on the process by which it is developed, socialised and implemented (OECD, 2013<sup>[42]</sup>).

### ***The limited availability of data on student and school performance reduces transparency and makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate educational quality and equity***

In recent decades, many education systems worldwide have undertaken efforts to make their education policy, management and practice more evidence and data-based (Lawn, 2013<sup>[48]</sup>; Sahlberg, 2016<sup>[49]</sup>; Williamson, 2017<sup>[50]</sup>). In OECD countries, this trend has often been accompanied by the development or expansion of central data infrastructures and information management systems to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools. In addition, an increasing amount of digital data on schools are generated and can be managed, compiled and processed, for example in data dashboards or other management tools (Hartong and Förschler, 2019<sup>[51]</sup>). Collecting and disseminating data on educational quality, learning environments and resource use in schools can foster transparency and inform decision making at all levels of the system.

In comparison to other OECD countries, both the availability of data on educational quality and the capacity to analyse it at the central and school level are limited in the German-speaking Community. As described in Chapter 1, in contrast to most OECD countries, the German-speaking Community does not use standardised central examinations with formal consequence for students at the upper secondary level (OECD, 2013, p. 155<sup>[52]</sup>). Instead, students participate in a number of standardised assessments without stakes. This includes comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8), as well as international standardised assessments, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year-olds' performance in mathematics, science and reading, and tests for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF). In contrast to the French and



Flemish Communities, the German-speaking Community does not participate in international comparative assessments at the primary level (e.g. the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessments of 4th grade students in mathematics, science and reading).

Although school leaders and teachers appear to recognise the value of standardised assessment (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>), their capacity to use the results to drive school and system-level improvement could be strengthened. School leaders and teachers receive the results of their schools' VERA tests and the Community provides secondary schools with individualised reports of their PISA results, which are prepared in collaboration with the Université de Liège. However, school leaders are provided with little guidance on how to interpret this data and use it for school improvement. The PISA assessment is designed to provide representative results and policy-relevant insights at the system level. Although several countries participating in PISA have chosen to provide school leaders with PISA data for their schools (usually as a means to encourage and acknowledge the schools' participation in the survey), the relatively small samples in each school mean that, in many cases, results need to be interpreted with great care due to their large error margins. Given the methodological challenges and limitations involved in reporting these results, it is vital to ensure that school leaders are equipped to interpret them correctly and to complement them with other means of monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of learning in schools.

Besides the results of standardised assessments, very little data on educational performance and other relevant concepts is available, even at the central level, and the scope for international benchmarking is limited. For example, no data is collected on individual students' performance, school-leaving qualifications or socio-economic background, the incidence of grade repetition, average class sizes, or the number of vacant staff positions across the school network (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Likewise, the Community does not have a data infrastructure in place that would allow for the longitudinal analysis of students' pathways across primary and secondary education or a systematic data collection on school-to-work transitions (this is partly due to difficulties of tracking students leaving to enter tertiary education outside the German-speaking Community). This also means that there is no systematic monitoring of the number of students leaving school without a certificate. Monitoring students' educational choices and their movements across pathways is particularly important since they can be important sources of inequity in stratified school systems. In addition, the lack of a central education database makes it difficult for the ministry to relate school performance results to data on school characteristics, such as their financial resources, staffing, or social composition. Strengthening this evidence base would be an important condition for monitoring equity and efficiency in the school system more continuously.

As described above, the lack of an overarching longer-term strategy and widely agreed-upon goals for the education system makes it difficult for the Community to focus its very limited capacity on the collection and evaluation of data that matter the most. For example, one of the few additional measures available to monitor performance at the school level is the proportion of students who are enrolled below the year in which they would be expected, based on their age (*Schulrückstand*). However, as described above, this indicator is not equivalent to the incidence of grade repetition, which diminishes its value for system-level monitoring (and international benchmarking). Clear goals with associated indicators would enable the ministry to collect data that is well aligned to allow monitoring the progress towards the system's most important goals.

However, setting targets alone is not sufficient if they are not accompanied by a clear commitment to measuring progress and evaluating their attainment. This has not always been the case in the past. The Community's first regional development concept (2009-2014, REK I) had, for example, included the target to reduce the share of 15-year-olds enrolled below their age's typical grade level to the OECD average by 2020 (MDG, 2011<sup>[53]</sup>). Yet, there has been no systematic measurement and reporting on the target's attainment or decision on follow-up measures.

Several OECD countries have developed such embedded long-term strategies to collect, analyse, and disseminate data and research, linked to their systems' overall objectives (OECD, 2013<sup>[52]</sup>). Unlike the German-speaking Community, many OECD countries also regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective tools to track progress on key indicators once clear goals and measurable targets have been identified.

Despite the school system's emphasis on parental choice, little information on the quality and performance of schools is published. As a result, some parents reported to the OECD review team that they did not feel in a position to make a well-informed choice between different schools. While the external school evaluation regularly releases reports summarising their findings at the system level, the German-speaking Community does not publish external evaluation findings for individual schools. Publishing evaluation reports has become increasingly common among European school systems as it allows parents to use evaluation results when choosing a school and following quality developments once their children are enrolled (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2020<sup>[54]</sup>; OECD, 2013, p. 457<sup>[55]</sup>).

In countries like the Netherlands (Gouëdard, 2021<sup>[56]</sup>), the UK, the US or Australia, a range of school-level performance indicators are routinely collected and published on interactive websites. This can include the schools' latest evaluation reports and, in some cases, student assessment results. To contextualise this information, it is usually accompanied by a presentation of the schools' characteristics (e.g. student enrolments, students' backgrounds, the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff, secondary school outcomes and leavers' destinations etc.) as well as, in some cases, information on school finances (e.g. the income they receive from different sources).<sup>20</sup> Several federal states in Germany, including Hamburg and Berlin, have also started publishing performance data of their schools in recent years. In Berlin, a dedicated website shows the most recent inspection results for each school, alongside students' test results (e.g. higher education entrance exams or intermediate school-leaving certificates), and selected characteristics of the student body, including, for example, common places of residence, absenteeism rates and the share of students with a home language other than German (Helbig and Nikolai, 2017<sup>[57]</sup>).<sup>21</sup>

While the publication of school-level information on student performance can increase transparency and accountability in theory, publishing performance data can have unintended consequences since it can easily be subject to erroneous interpretation, particularly if the results are not adjusted for students' socio-economic background (Musset, 2012<sup>[58]</sup>; OECD, 2013<sup>[55]</sup>). The Community does not currently collect data on students' socio-economic background, which makes the contextualised presentation of school performance more difficult. As explained in Chapter 3, this also limits the Community's ability to put the outcomes of standardised tests into perspective or provide additional resources to schools serving disadvantaged students and those with the highest needs.

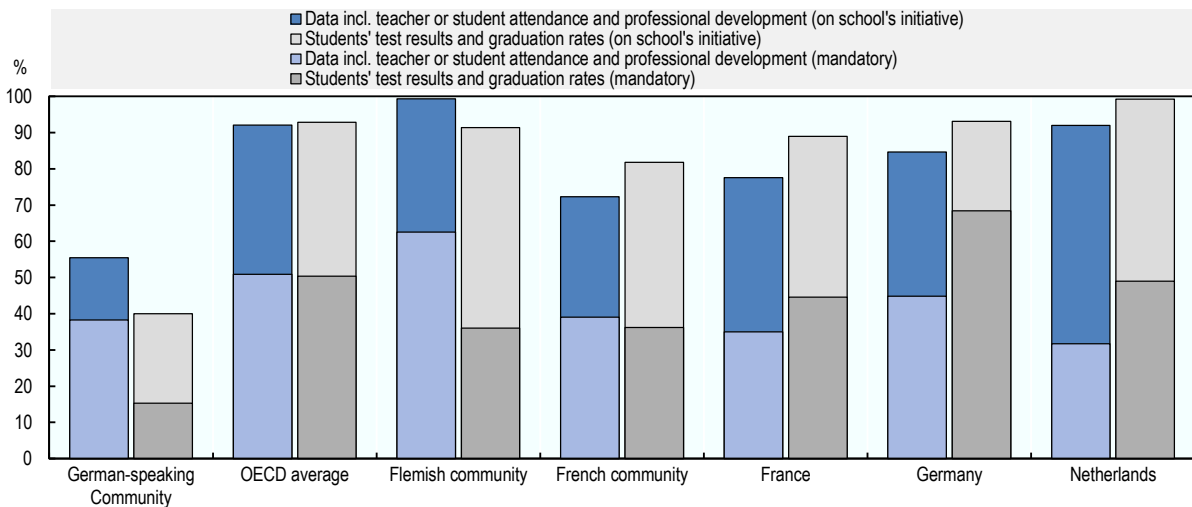
The limited collection of data not only reduces the capacity to monitor quality at the system level, but also at the school level. While schools engage in regular self-evaluations, only a minority systematically collect data for quality assurance and school improvement purposes. As can be seen, in Figure 2.6, only little more than half of 15-year-old students in the Community (56%) attended secondary schools whose principal reported to collect data, such as teacher or student attendance, and professional development (17% of them on their own initiative), compared to 92% on average across the OECD. Likewise, in only 40% of cases did secondary schools systematically record students' test results and graduation rates (the majority on their own initiative). This stands in sharp contrast to the proportion of students whose schools collected this important information on average across the OECD (93%), but also in the Flemish Community (91%), the French Community (81%), and neighbouring countries such as Germany (93%), France (89%), and the Netherlands (99%).

The need to further strengthen schools in their ability to understand and use data – both qualitative and quantitative – has also been confirmed in external evaluation reports (Cormann and Goor, 2021<sup>[25]</sup>). While schools are informed about their results in standardised assessments, like VERA, the results are not systematically followed up on or taken as a basis to inform school development (VDI Technologiezentrum,

2020<sup>[26]</sup>). Likewise, the results of both internal and external evaluations constitute an important source of data on the management and quality of teaching in schools. Yet, interviews with stakeholders suggested that many schools do not use the information generated during the evaluation process to its full potential and that some schools perceive the process primarily as an administrative requirement or an instrument of control, rather than a source of information that can inform their continuing improvement (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the school evaluation system).

**Figure 2.6. Recording student outcomes and other quality assurance data in schools, 2018**

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report to systematically collect data on the following



Source: OECD (2020<sup>[17]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>, Tables V.B2.8.11 and V.B1.8.11.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/4mqf3s>

An effective use of data in school systems also extends to the valuable knowledge that teachers and school leaders gain in their everyday work. Systematising, evaluating, codifying and sharing this knowledge, for example concerning promising practices or schools' experience with pilot projects, can be tremendously helpful for other actors in the system. The Community has made use of pilot projects when introducing several of its reform initiatives, including the provision of additional personnel for inclusive education in two mainstream primary schools, the provision of digital resources through the *École Numérique* programme, the introduction of the external evaluation starting in 2006/07 and bilingual instruction in primary education since 2011/12 (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Nevertheless, there is scope to further strengthen the use of pilots when rolling out reform initiatives (e.g. mentoring for new teachers, as described in Chapter 4), to more systematically engage in rigorous evaluations of these pilot projects and to ensure that the results are mobilised to the benefit of the entire system. The same goes for the evaluation of policy initiatives more generally, including the impact of services, like the Time-Out programme, that have not yet been evaluated.

### ***There is limited transparency over the levels of funding across schools and school networks***

There is no regular monitoring or central reporting framework covering all schools' overall revenues and expenditures in the German-speaking Community. While the ministry has the means to calculate the amount of funding that each school (or municipality, in the case of OSU schools) receives from the

Community budget, schools of the OSU and FSU networks are not required to systematically report on additional resources they receive from other sources. As a result, central authorities in the Community have no full visibility over the level of resources received by individual schools or systematic funding differences across schools and school networks. In combination with the limited data on students' and schools' performance discussed above, this limits the Community's ability to relate schools' inputs to outputs, to evaluate the effectiveness of their resource use and to detect potential mismatches between schools' resources and their needs.

While schools' staff expenditure is funded by the Community on the same basis for schools of all three networks, the mechanisms used to fund other expenditures differ between the schools of the G UW network and those of the OSU and FSU networks. G UW schools receive their remaining funding in the form of a negotiated block grant (*Funktionsdotation*) intended to cover operating expenditure and minor capital expenses, which can be renegotiated and increased over the course of the year if the original funding is not sufficient. Larger capital expenses in G UW schools (e.g. for infrastructure developments) are reimbursed by the Community at a rate of 100%. By contrast, schools of the OSU and FSU networks receive their funding for operating expenditure based on a formula and their capital funding based on individual requests that are reimbursed by the Community – if accepted by the minister – at a rate of 60% (for moveable equipment) and 80% (for larger infrastructural investments). Both OSU and FSU schools can receive additional resources from their school providers (the municipalities and the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools BSDG, respectively). Although FSU schools do not currently receive any supplementary financial support from the church, the OECD review team learned that municipalities are, in principle, obliged to compensate local FSU schools for some of the financial support they provide to their own OSU schools.<sup>22</sup>

Paired with the limited transparency on the levels of school funding, the differences in funding arrangements across the three networks have led to uncertainty among stakeholders over the relative levels of financial resources available to schools in the German-speaking Community. FSU and OSU schools receive less funding from the Community for capital expenditures than G UW schools since the Community covers only 80% of their infrastructure costs. It is not fully transparent whether and to what extent this difference is made up for by the amount of their formula-based operating grant relative to the negotiated block grant received by G UW schools. Likewise, there is no transparency (either to the public or the ministry) over the amount of funding that the different municipalities provide for their local primary schools, which could give rise to further discrepancies between the levels of funding received by OSU and FSU schools, as well as across OSU schools in different municipalities. Depending on the network they belong to, a primary or secondary school might therefore receive different levels of funding, although the currently available data does not permit to verify whether this is the case in practice.

In interviews with stakeholders, the OECD review team gained the impression that this lack of transparency risks fuelling mistrust and – among representatives of different networks – a sense of being placed at a financial disadvantage. In addition, stakeholders expressed concerns about potential imbalances in the amount of funding received by schools of different sizes. In light of the Community's commitment to maintaining a dense network of primary schools that includes smaller rural schools, having a more complete picture of per-student expenditure across these different schools will be important to assess whether all schools are adequately resourced to offer high-quality teaching.

### ***The school funding mechanisms serve overlapping purposes and create a high administrative burden for schools and central authorities***

As described above, schools, particularly those of the OSU and FSU network, receive their resources through a number of distinct funding streams. In addition to their formula-based staff allocation and operating funding, they receive earmarked funding per-student to cover expenses on pedagogical

materials and (in pre-primary and primary education) “to reduce school attendance costs in pre-primary and primary education”, i.e. to cover costs that would have previously been borne by parents.

In addition, schools can tap into targeted purpose-bound funding for additional contract staff (BVA), innovative projects, school equipment (such as furniture and ICT equipment), lunch break supervision and infrastructural investments. With the exception of infrastructure investments for GUW schools, which are covered directly by the government, schools need to submit reimbursement requests for each of these types of expenditure to be reviewed and approved directly by the minister. This creates a significant administrative burden for school leaders and central authorities alike.

Targeted funding streams are popular in many OECD countries since they give central authorities an opportunity to steer how resources are used and since they can be introduced flexibly to respond to needs and policy priorities as they emerge (OECD, 2017<sub>[12]</sub>). However, they can come at the price of administrative burdens – both on the part of schools who may need to apply for targeted funding – and on the part of authorities charged with monitoring and holding schools to account to ensure that the funding is used for its intended purpose. An administratively intense process can discourage schools – particularly those who may be most in need of additional resources – from applying for targeted funding. In interviews with the OECD review team, school leaders expressed their frustration with the time-consuming and burdensome process of applying for the approval even of minor capital expenditures.

A proliferation of targeted funds can also reduce the transparency of the funding mechanism and constrain school leaders’ ability to exercise discretion over the use of their funds based on their schools’ needs. School leaders in the German-speaking Community, for example, complained about the lack of flexibility when trying to hire additional or more qualified staff to engage in lunch break supervision, which they deemed to be important for the well-being of their students.

In addition, the different funding streams in the German-speaking Community do not always have clearly delineated purposes. For example, the types of expenditures that schools can use their main operating grant for, are not clearly defined.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the two formula-based grants intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contributions can, in practice, be used to fund similar types of expenditures. While this gives school leaders some more flexibility in the use of these funds, it calls into question the reason why they should be distributed separately from schools’ main operating grant, given the administrative burden that monitoring the use of targeted funding, at least in theory, entails.

### ***The main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage***

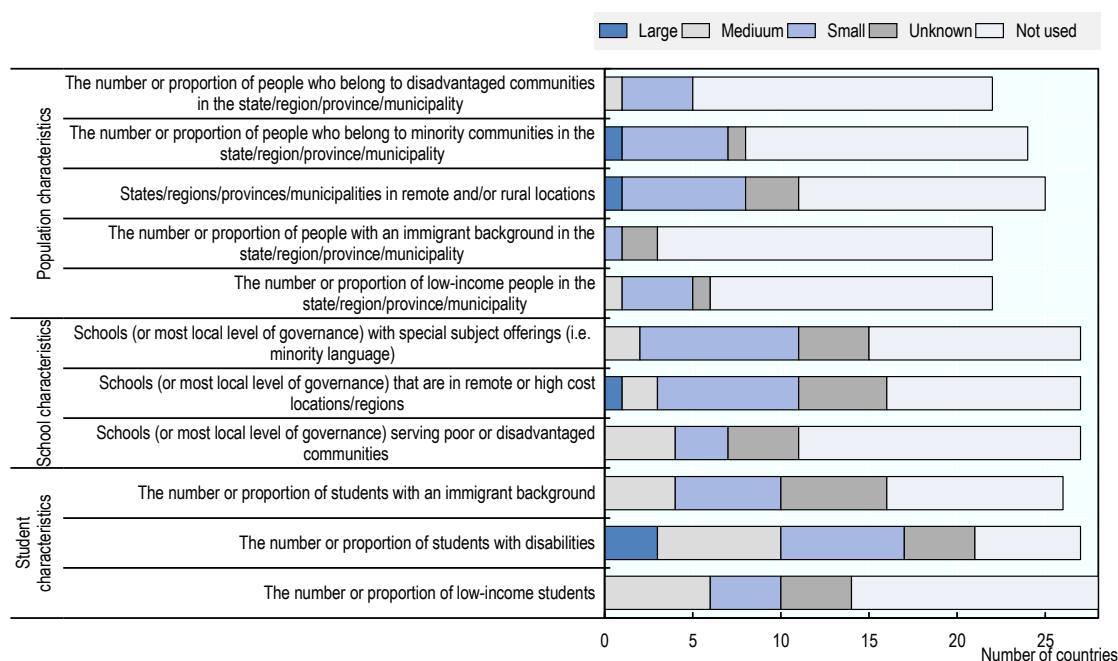
A key concern in the design of school funding mechanisms is to ensure that resources are allocated equitably. This requires attention to both horizontal equity (i.e. ensuring that similar levels of resources are allocated to similar types of provision) and vertical equity (i.e. allocating different levels of resources to student groups with different needs). Providing high-quality education to students with certain characteristics or schools in specific contexts may require more resources than it does to provide the same quality of education for another student in another school. PISA results indicate that the risk of low performance is significantly higher for students with certain characteristics related, among others, to their social and economic background, their gender, immigrant status or special education needs (OECD, 2019<sub>[59]</sub>). At the school and local level, the resources required to provide high-quality education can be affected by the level of urbanisation, the size of schools, their educational offer, as well as their capacity to raise additional revenues. Providing additional resources to disadvantaged schools or schools serving disadvantaged student populations can significantly reduce gaps in educational achievement and students’ economic outcomes (Jackson, Johnson and Persico, 2016<sub>[60]</sub>; Lafortune, Rothstein and Schanzenbach, 2018<sub>[61]</sub>). A key concern in promoting equity is therefore to design funding mechanisms that allocate resources equitably to schools that are most in need of additional support (OECD, 2017<sub>[12]</sub>).

The German-speaking Community is an outlier among OECD countries in that its main funding allocation mechanisms for staff resources and schools' operating grants do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage at the student or school level (De Witte et al., 2017<sup>[62]</sup>). Although some funding is available for language classes of immigrant students and schools can request additional staff resources, for example to support students with special education needs, the main funding mechanism for staff resources and schools' operating grant does not account for characteristics that may give rise to additional resource needs. Additional analyses and careful monitoring would be needed to evaluate whether the level of resources allocated for students with SEN and newly arrived immigrant students is sufficient and whether they reach the schools and students most in need of additional support (see Chapter 3). For students who do not belong to these groups, however, it is unusual that no compensatory funding is provided in the German-speaking Community at all.

Typically, OECD countries allocate equity funding using a mixture of targeted funding and resources channelled through their main allocation mechanism (e.g. by including weightings in the funding formula to systematically allocate additional resources to certain types of students or schools) (OECD, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>). As can be seen in Figure 2.7, countries use a range of criteria to allocate equity funding, which may be based on the population of the area the school is based in (state/region/province/municipality), the school itself or the students enrolled. Of the 26 countries and economies with available data on the allocation of equity funding by central and state governments, 25 use at least one criterion related to student characteristics, 23 use at least one criterion based on school characteristics and 14 use at least one criterion based on population characteristics (OECD, 2021, pp. 422, Table D6.3<sup>[10]</sup>).

**Figure 2.7. Share of total funding allocated by central and state governments to primary and lower secondary educational institutions by equity criteria, 2019**

Based on 31 OECD and partner countries and economies with available information



Source: OECD (2021<sup>[10]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>, Figure D6.4 and Table D6.3.

StatLink <https://stat.link/da4f3m>

Funding schools solely based on student numbers can have some unintended consequences that risk to undermine equity. Most importantly, it places schools with a higher proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds at a disadvantage since these students are, on average, more costly to educate (OECD, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>). In combination with free school choice, unweighted per-capita funding can set in motion a vicious cycle as schools in difficult circumstances and without adequate compensation may lose students to schools with a more advantaged student population, thus further reducing their funding (Weiß, 2012<sup>[63]</sup>). A socially indexed allocation of teachers and needs-based equity funding could be instruments to avoid such effects and to support schools serving heterogeneous student populations (Weishaupt, 2020<sup>[64]</sup>).

Another potential source of financial inequity are parental co-payments in secondary education. There is currently no central guidance on the types of costs that secondary schools can pass on to parents and evidence suggests that parental co-payments for school materials, school trips etc. at this level are higher than at the more regulated primary level. Particularly in vocational pathways, parents also usually need to cover some costs for equipment and stakeholders reported that, even in primary education, some parents face difficulties covering costs that accrue, e.g. for school materials, trips or even photocopying charges. A 2017 online survey of parents suggested that parental contributions were widespread and elevated at the less regulated secondary level and 10% of respondents reported that the costs were a source of financial pressure (Bertrand and Daron, 2017<sup>[65]</sup>). Despite the ministry's efforts to collect this data from schools, oversight remains limited and no precise picture of the costs that primary and secondary schools pass on to parents had been created at the time of the review (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>).

### ***A lack of systematic co-ordination and communication between key actors in the system limits synergies and the spread of good practices***

As described above, a wide range of actors and institutions are involved in the governance and evaluation of schools in the German-speaking Community, bringing together a significant range of competences and experiences. Key actors include the different departments within the ministry, the school development counselling service, the AHS with the external evaluation and the pedagogical advisory service, the ZFP's competency centre, Kaleido, as well as various groups representing key stakeholders of the system. Although many of these actors stand in frequent exchange with one another, the OECD review team noticed several instances where a lack of co-ordination and information flow between them was apparent. This concerned the exchange between different departments of the ministry in matters of mutual interest (e.g. between the department of youth and culture and the more strictly school-related departments), but also the involvement of relevant stakeholders in important projects, such as the revision of the core curricula. While the German-speaking Community's small size allows for personal relationships to be formed between a wide range of actors – a fact that was widely appreciated by the OECD's interview partners – there is a risk that the exchange of information and involvement of relevant actors occurs on an ad hoc rather than a systematic basis. For processes like the development and implementation of an overall vision, or the reform of the core curricula to be successful, these relationships might need to be further strengthened and institutionalised to ensure that relevant actors are systematically involved and information flows are ensured.

The organisation of schools in three separate networks also makes the exchange of experiences and good practices across schools an important priority for the German-speaking Community. While each of the school networks organises opportunities for their school leaders to exchange it will be important to further strengthen the exchange of good practices across school networks. The OECD review team encountered many examples of schools engaging in innovative and promising initiatives (e.g. schools introducing mentorship schemes for new teachers or engaging in project-based interdisciplinary work), but there appeared to be no effective mechanism to ensure that other schools and the system as a whole could benefit from them. The school development counselling service or the pedagogical advisory service could presumably play a stronger role in the diffusion of good practices if they were provided with sufficient

capacity (see Chapter 4). Several OECD countries have undertaken efforts to strengthen this kind of information sharing in recent years. In Iceland, for example, the “Education Plaza/ Menntamiðja” project organised by the ministry collects best practices and disseminates using social media (OECD, 2021<sup>[66]</sup>). Likewise, Denmark’s introduction of a corps of learning consultants, described in Box 2.3, could offer some inspiration on ways in which external support could help schools learn from each other’s experience.

### Box 2.3. Learning consultants supporting municipalities and schools in Denmark

The Danish Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality has introduced a national body of about 80 learning consultants in 2014 to provide support to municipalities and schools for quality development, to spread good practices, and to facilitate school networking and peer-learning. Both schools and municipalities can ask for the support of a learning consultant and schools can also work together in groups with a learning consultant. Learning consultants work in teams and analyse the challenges a school faces based on school data and information on student performance. They then develop a school development plan, a strategy for change management, and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Learning consultants collaborate with a ministerial research centre to learn about the latest evidence and to feed into the knowledge available in the research centre. They also collaborate with teacher training institutions to develop links between theory and practice.

Learning consultants have diverse backgrounds, from teaching and school leadership to local administration in a municipality. They receive training and capacity building for their role and meet on a monthly basis to learn about new methods and evidence and to reflect about their experiences and challenges. Learning consultants can work in different arrangements. For example, learning consultants can work for two days a week in their learning consultant role at the ministry and for three days a week in the field. Learning consultants are typically hired for two years after which they return to a school or municipality. This allows the ministry to adjust the number and profile of learning consultants depending on the demand and also helps spread knowledge more widely across the system. Some municipalities in Denmark, such as Copenhagen, have developed and implemented their own systems of learning consultants to facilitate leadership and specialist advice to schools from practitioners with high credibility.

Source: Nusche, D. et al. (2016<sup>[67]</sup>), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Denmark 2016*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264262430-en>.

### ***Students’ transitions across levels of education could benefit from a more systematic and sustained collaboration among educators***

As described above, the German-speaking Community has undertaken efforts to ease students’ transition from pre-primary to primary education and promote pedagogical continuity. Pre-primary staff is encouraged, for example, to review the core curricula and competency goals for the first year of primary education, just as primary school teachers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the developmental goals for pre-primary education (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Towards the end of the school year, some schools also organise joint activities involving children from the last year of pre-primary school and the first year of primary school. Particularly in the last year of the pre-primary education, this co-operation between the pedagogical staff in kindergarten and primary school is of great importance.

Nevertheless, in interviews with principals, teachers, and parents, the OECD review team gained the impression that a sustained collaboration of staff across levels over the course of children’s last year of pre-primary education was not institutionalised and systematic across all schools. Instead, collaboration across levels appeared to be primarily sustained by the initiative of individual staff members and the OECD team saw little evidence of professional exchange on best practices in other education systems or schools.



The Community has many promising examples of successful transition management practices, notably among its campus schools. Raising awareness of these practices and helping other schools adopt them could further strengthen students' transitions across the system (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 54<sup>[26]</sup>; Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sup>[2]</sup>).

In OECD countries with a successful transition management, this often includes sustained collaboration between educators and teachers of both levels, based on a plan that is prepared jointly and regularly updated, as well as the co-operation with parents in order to promote the development of children based on their individual needs (OECD, 2019<sup>[68]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[69]</sup>). In many European countries, this co-operation between kindergarten and primary schools has been strengthened and institutionalised over time (OECD, 2021<sup>[69]</sup>). (The transition of students with special educational needs and their integration in regular schools are described in Chapter 3).

***Despite a strong VET system, the status of vocational education remains low and there are concerns that students are oriented away from vocational training***

The German-speaking Community's school system is stratified and students are streamed into separate pathways at the beginning of secondary education, typically at age 12. This important inflection point occurs early in students' careers, compared to the majority of EU and OECD countries, which start tracking at age 15 or 16 (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2020<sup>[54]</sup>). Although the Community's students show good overall performance and socio-economic performance differences are relatively small, early tracking of students can have adverse effects on equality and student achievement, especially for those with an immigrant background (OECD, 2018<sup>[70]</sup>; Matthewes, 2021<sup>[71]</sup>; Hanushek and Woessmann, 2006<sup>[72]</sup>).

Unlike in some other systems with an early age of tracking, students in the German-speaking Community have the option to switch pathways as they progress through the school system. Nevertheless, the tracking of students into A and B streams, can have the unintended consequence of creating a hierarchy among educational pathways and stigmatising the attendance of the B-stream and further vocational education. Furthermore, no data is being collected on the number of students who successfully make these transitions in practice and, for example, move on to general upper secondary education after enrolling in the B-stream in lower secondary education. The extent to which the theoretical permeability of the system is realised in practice is therefore difficult to gauge. Yet, the experience of other OECD systems, such as Germany (Nikolai, 2019<sup>[73]</sup>) or Austria (Ebner, Graf and Nikolai, 2013<sup>[34]</sup>), suggests that the early sorting of students into hierarchically organised pathways always carries the risk of stigmatising those entering the "lower-ability" tracks. In addition, as in many other school systems, the probability of entering the general track in the German-speaking Community is associated with students' socio-economic status, which raises concerns for equity (De Witte et al., 2018, p. 16<sup>[27]</sup>). A more rigorous monitoring of students' pathway choices than is currently undertaken in the German-speaking Community would be necessary to identify equity challenges where they exist.

Although the German-speaking Community's tracking system allows for students to switch pathways later on, it is worth pointing out that many European education systems allow students to learn together for a longer period of time, i.e. allowing more time before they are divided into different pathways. After the Second World War and again after the upheavals in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989/90, most European countries established comprehensive school systems that separate students into different educational pathways only at a later stage in their school careers (Hörner et al., 2015<sup>[74]</sup>). Examples are countries in Scandinavia, but also the Netherlands, the United Kingdom or France, the southern European countries and some central and Eastern European countries such as Estonia, Poland or Slovenia. An early age of tracking comparable with that in the German-speaking Community also exists in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and in some Eastern European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic or Hungary (Hörner et al., 2015<sup>[74]</sup>). As discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3, high-performing

school systems increasingly recognise the importance of trying to support all students through differentiated forms of teaching, which can be realised in a comprehensive system without resorting to ability sorting.

In addition to the risk of stigmatising students, there are long-standing concerns about the status of vocational education in the German-speaking Community (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>; RdJ, 2020<sup>[75]</sup>). Despite the VET sector's close links to the labour market and a high level of engagement among local firms, there is a widespread perception that the status of VET in the Community remains low (lower, for example, than in Germany). Stakeholders expressed concerns that vocational training was still often regarded – by parents and teachers alike – to be a second-best option for weaker students – and the number of apprentices is decreasing (IAWM, 2021<sup>[32]</sup>). Between 2010/11 and 2020/21, the number of apprentices at the IAWM decreased by 35% (from 723 to 473), significantly more than the 16% drop in secondary students over the same time period (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Although 243 new apprenticeship contracts were signed in 2020, 125 positions remained unfilled, following 139 unfilled positions in the previous year (IAWM, 2021<sup>[32]</sup>).

The German-speaking Community's education system emphasises academic qualifications. All three of the upper secondary pathways allow students to enter higher education (OECD, 2018, p. 12<sup>[76]</sup>) and different stakeholders, including students and student representatives, reported that students in secondary education were sometimes oriented away from vocational pathways and not sufficiently supported in their choice of vocational fields. Multiple stakeholders suggested that the per-student funding system may create perverse incentives to keep students in academic pathways, even if transfers to a different school with a vocational track may more closely correspond to their interests and talents. Representatives of the business community echoed this concern and felt as though the opportunities offered by apprenticeships were not sufficiently communicated (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>).

### ***Career guidance could benefit from greater co-ordination among its providers and a better integration into schools***

According to the ministry, one of the greatest challenges for students' transition into the labour market is to navigate existing information and support services (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). In a 2018 survey conducted by the Community's Economic and Social Council, a third of 17 and 18-year-olds did not feel adequately informed about their options for further study and professional opportunities (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat, 2018, p. 24<sup>[77]</sup>). The perceived lack of guidance, particularly on vocational education, has been criticised by students, parents and businesses (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>) and confirmed in OECD interviews with stakeholders.

In 2018, 12.9% of apprentices in the German-speaking Community dropped out and terminated their contracts ahead of time (Wirtschafts- und Sozialrat, 2018<sup>[77]</sup>). This drop-out rate is comparable to that of Germany, where around 16% of students in VET tend to drop out of training or change their apprenticeship contracts. Nevertheless, it may point to a lack of effective career guidance. Most of those who terminated their apprenticeship contracts early had entered it with a “medium level of education” i.e. having completed at most the 4th year of general secondary education or the 5th year of vocational secondary education (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 85<sup>[26]</sup>). Of those who started their apprenticeship without a certificate of general qualification for university entrance (*Abitur*), almost one in two dropped out and around one third of those who did cited a wrong career choice as a reason (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020, p. 85<sup>[26]</sup>).

Career guidance, particularly in a system as diversified as that of the German-speaking Community, can help students navigate difficult choices about their educational pathways and future careers and help them to develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future based on their interests and talents (OECD, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>; Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[78]</sup>). Career guidance can also assist in countering socio-economic and gender imbalances in students' choices of educational pathways or courses, as well as their study and career choices (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). Although there are no evaluations of

socio-economic inequalities in students' pathways or career choices in the German-speaking Community, a lack of career guidance is known to affect disadvantage students most severely. Studies of teenagers show that they overwhelmingly turn to their parents to discuss their career plans (Baxter, 2017<sup>[79]</sup>; Oymak, 2009<sup>[80]</sup>). This is also the case in the German-speaking Community. In a 2021 survey conducted by the employment agency and Kaleido, 72% of graduates reported to have sought career advice from family members and acquaintances – the most frequently cited sources of information (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021, p. 13<sup>[81]</sup>).<sup>24</sup> While parents can play a critical role in guiding their children and developing their capacity to aspire, their advice and help is constrained by parents' experiences and networks (Blenkinsop et al., 2006<sup>[82]</sup>) and many young people, especially those in greatest need of support, do not draw on parental counsel at all (Rennison et al., 2005<sup>[83]</sup>; Mann, Denis and Percy, 2020<sup>[78]</sup>).

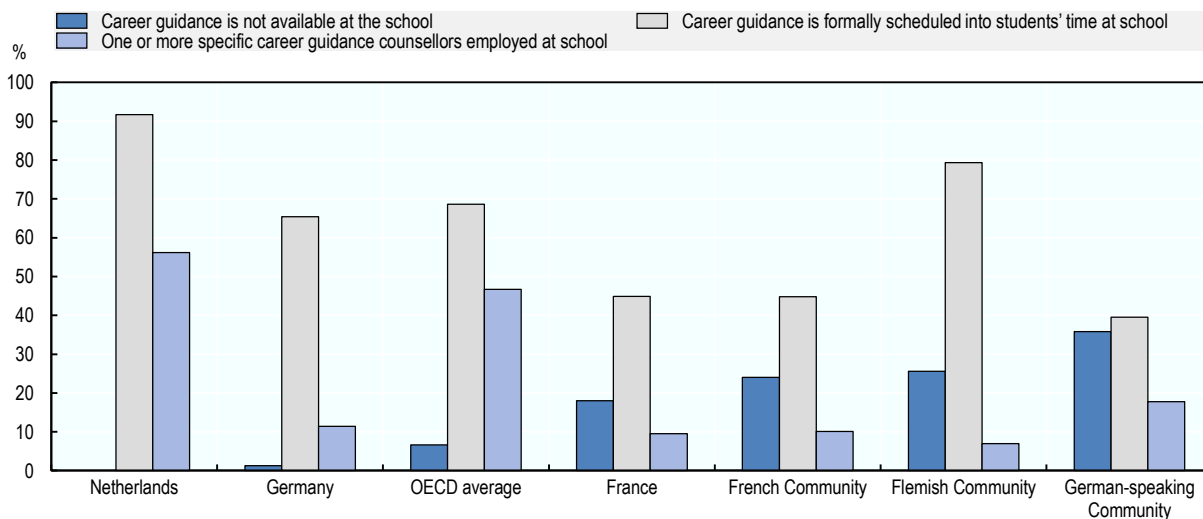
As described above, a wide range of actors in the German-speaking Community offer career guidance to students, including the employment agency, Kaleido, the IAWM, youth information centres, the business development agency and the chamber of commerce and industry. While the quantity of perspectives and information on careers in the German-speaking Community is therefore less of a concern, ensuring that relevant information reaches the students that need it the most remains a challenge. Given the various actors involved in offering career guidance, stakeholders have expressed concerns about the complementarity of the different forms of advice on offer. Although different actors have made attempts to co-ordinate their activities in this domain, for example through the Study Group School and Economy, the services offered are not always clearly differentiated, e.g. in terms of the age groups they target.

Another challenge is to ensure that all students obtain the career guidance support they need and are successfully exposed to the world of work. This requires schools to reach out to people in work and employers to engage with schools in order to link career guidance provided in schools with practical insights into the world of work (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). As it stands, despite the impressive range of motivated actors involved, much of the career guidance offered in the German-speaking Community requires students or their parents to take the initiative and actively seek out support. In the aforementioned 2021 survey, only 12% of graduates reported to have obtained career advice through information events and individual counselling, respectively, which suggests that a large part of the student population does not take advantage of these offers (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021<sup>[81]</sup>).

In-school career guidance, by contrast, is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions. In the aforementioned Community-wide survey, just 17% of graduates reported to have obtained career advice from teachers (Arbeitsamt der DG / Kaleido, 2021<sup>[81]</sup>). According to principals' reports in the 2018 PISA survey, 35.8% of 15-year-old students attended a school where career guidance was not available, compared to just 6.6% on average across the OECD (see Figure 2.8). It was less common for schools to have guidance counsellors employed at the school (17.8%) and more common – as in France and Germany – for counsellors to regularly visit the school (45.6%). Importantly, PISA 2018 suggests that the German-speaking Community relies heavily on students' own initiative to seek out career guidance (reported by the principals of 60.5% of students, compared to 31.4% across the OECD). Only 39.5% of students' schools formally scheduled time for career guidance, compared to 68.6% across the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.13<sup>[17]</sup>).

**Figure 2.8. School-based career guidance in selected OECD education systems, 2018**

Percentage of students in schools whose principals report the following practices



Source: OECD (2020<sup>[17]</sup>), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en>, Tables V.B2.4.13/16 and V.B1.4.13/16.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/hyns4d>

Complementing the guidance offered by employment services, trade unions, voluntary organisations, private sector organisations and employers with in-school career guidance is also important to expose students to a range of different perspectives. While the career advice provided by actors outside of schools may have better links to the labour market and offer more practical insights, they may have their own interests and priorities and may provide narrower perspectives than would be desirable to guide the career choices of young people (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). The German-speaking Community's development of an interdisciplinary core curriculum on school-based career preparation and orientation is a laudable effort to improve the connection between career advice within and outside of schools. However, stakeholders expressed concerns that the core curriculum is not sufficiently implemented in all schools. This is consistent with the challenges the Community faces in successfully implementing competency-oriented curricula and fostering the type of staff collaboration in schools that a concerted effort to career guidance would require. This challenge is addressed in more depth in Chapter 4.

## Policy options

### ***Use the development process of the Gesamtvision to provide a renewed vision for the education system, strategic guidance on education policy reforms and a basis for an actionable implementation strategy***

The development of the overall vision for the education system (the *Gesamtvision*) presents a unique opportunity to drive reforms that will shape the German-speaking Community's education system for the years to come. It has the potential to build a shared understanding of the system's overarching goals and underpinning values, identify the most important challenges that the system needs to address, point to a coherent set of policy options to achieve the system's goals and provide a basis for an actionable implementation strategy (the *Master Plan* to be developed in 2023). For the *Gesamtvision* to successfully

guide, prioritise and lend coherence to education reforms and to serve as a foundation for an implementation strategy that will lead to tangible improvements in the classrooms, it will need to be well-designed with these goals in mind.

*Articulate an overarching vision for the education system*

A key element in the design of effective strategy documents in education policy is the articulation of a clear vision for the system, i.e. the overarching goal that the *Gesamtvision* seeks to achieve. Such vision statements serve multiple critical purposes: They provide the overarching rationale for the development of the strategy, guide the selection of focus areas for reforms, align policy actions and help to mobilise the various actors in the system around a shared aspiration. Effective vision statements tend to be concise and focus on a small number of key aspirations, sometimes underpinned by a commitment to a set of high-level values that the system seeks to embody or impart (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[84]</sup>). Successful vision statements are also frequently developed through a process of wide-ranging consultations or co-development, in order to secure the ownership of the stakeholders they concern.

Several OECD countries have developed such visions as integral parts of their long-term or medium-term education strategies, often emerging from an inclusive process of reflection on the overarching goals and values for the education system. One example is included at the start of Iceland's recently developed *Education Policy 2030* strategy, which aspires “to accomplish high-quality education throughout life”, and build its policies around the core values of “resilience, courage, knowledge and happiness” (OECD, 2021, p. 46<sup>[66]</sup>). To be effective, vision statements need to be easily understood, widely known and embraced by stakeholders across the education system. In the view of the OECD review team, the vision (*Leitbild*) formulated for the year 2025 in the REK II does not effectively perform this function for the German-speaking Community and the development of the *Gesamtvision* should strive to fill this gap, laying the basis for a more effective vision to guide policy beyond 2025.

*Identify challenges in key policy areas and formulate specific goals aligned with the overarching vision*

To provide a strong basis for an actionable implementation strategy the *Gesamtvision* will need to identify the system's most important challenges, formulate specific goals, and propose policy actions to accomplish them. It can be helpful to structure these challenges and goals around a number of thematic areas for which more specific goals should then be formulated. These are many ways in which these thematic areas could be defined. In the case of Iceland's *Education Policy 2030* strategy, key issues were organised around five pillars: (A) Equal opportunities for all, (B) Superior teaching, (C) Skills for the future, (D) Putting well-being first and (E) Quality at the forefront). Estonia organised its *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* around five strategic goals (see Box 2.4). Likewise, following the extensive consultation of stakeholders, Ireland's National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy presented key performance goals alongside a narrative justification highlighting their importance (ibid.).

## Box 2.4. Strategic goals for education in Estonia and Ireland

### The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (LLS) served as the guiding document for the development of education policy and decisions on educational funding during the period 2014-20. The LLS was aligned with cross-sectoral reform programmes, including the National Reform Programme “Estonia 2020” and the Estonian national strategy for sustainable development (“Sustainable Estonia 21”). The LLS formulated five strategic goals:

- *Change in the approach to learning*: Implementation of an approach to learning that supports each learner’s individual and social development, the acquisition of learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship at all levels and in all types of education.
- *Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership*: The compensation of teachers and school leaders including their salaries are consistent with the qualification requirements for the job and the work-related performance.
- *Alignment of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market*: Lifelong learning opportunities and career services that are diverse, flexible and of good quality, resulting in an increase in the number of people with professional or vocational qualifications in different age groups, and an increase in the overall participation in lifelong learning across Estonia.
- *A digital focus in lifelong learning*: Modern digital technology is used for learning and teaching effectively and efficiently. An improvement in the digital skills of the total population has been achieved and access to the new generation of digital infrastructure is ensured.
- *Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning*: All individuals are granted equal opportunities to participate in lifelong learning.

For each of the five strategic goals, the LLS contains a set of four to seven associated indicators and targets to be attained by 2020. For a full list of indicators, see Table 2.1 in Santiago et al. (2016<sup>[85]</sup>).

### Ireland’s National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020

In Ireland, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, was developed following the extensive consultation of social partners, education agencies and various stakeholders. The strategy includes performance targets to be met by 2020:

- *Primary level*: In national assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing by five percentage points the number of students performing at Level 3 or above and reducing by five percentage points the number of students performing at or below the lowest level (Level 1);
- *Post-primary level*: In OECD’s PISA assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing the number of 15-year-old students performing at Level 4 by at least five percentage points and reduce by 50% the number of students performing at the lowest level (Level 1).

The strategy provides a detailed explanation why raising children’s literacy and numeracy skills matters, and how it connects with wider social goals, as well as evidence on where Ireland stands compared to its goals. The document sets out actions to be taken, specifying the responsible body, and an indicative timeline. In companion documents, the Department of Education and Skills sets out additional measures designed to support the strategy.

Sources: Santiago, P. et al. (2016<sup>[85]</sup>), OECD Reviews of School Resources: Estonia 2016, OECD Reviews of School Resources, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251731-en>; Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Co-operation Assembly and the Education Forum (2014<sup>[86]</sup>), The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, Tallinn, [www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian\\_lifelong\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf); The Department of Education and Skill (2011<sup>[87]</sup>), *Literacy and Numeracy for*

*Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, <https://assets.gov.ie/24520/defd56aec10946798ab2d32a42dc0d86.pdf>.

To ensure coherence across the goals formulated for the different policy areas covered by the *Gesamtvision*, they should be aligned with the overarching vision for the education system and a narrative that explains their selection. Several OECD countries, including Wales and New Zealand, have found the implementation of a new curriculum to provide a powerful narrative that helped to explain how the strategic goals formulated across different policy areas fit together and contributed to a single, broader goal. The implementation of the German-speaking Community's revised core curricula will be an important objective for the education system over the coming years. Its success will require a whole-of-system approach and synergies across a number of policy areas, including, but not limited to, teachers' professional learning, school leadership and the evaluation system (see Chapter 4). Bringing about the conditions that will need to be in place to implement a new curriculum successfully is therefore one example of a narrative that could help to link the Community's high-level objectives and the specific goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. It is also one that speaks to teachers as the professionals whose work will be at heart of implementing the revised core curricula, while at the same time remaining child-centred, since the ultimate goal of the curriculum reform is to improve students' outcomes. At the same time, the revised core curricula could be designed to reflect the Community's educational vision – once it has been formulated – and constitute an effective means to carry them into schools and classrooms (OECD, 2020<sub>[88]</sub>). As described further below, the development of the *Gesamtvision* and the revision of the core curricula should therefore be closely aligned.

*Link the goals to specific policy actions and turn the Gesamtvision into a implementation strategy based on meaningful stakeholder engagement*

In addition to an overarching vision for the education system and specific goals for key areas, education strategies developed by OECD countries often include a set of specific policy actions intended to realise the goals formulated for each of the key areas. To make the *Gesamtvision* actionable, it should therefore involve a review of the identified challenges and goals for key policy areas and associate them with specific policy actions that will be taken to address them. The description of policy actions should include a causal narrative explaining how specific measures are expected to contribute to realising the associated goals. Taking a comprehensive approach means that the *Gesamtvision* should include references to: (1) existing policies and assess whether they require evaluation or updating, (2) policies that are in the planning stage or currently being implemented, and (3) new policy actions that would need to be developed.

A number of reforms in the German-speaking Community are already underway that might benefit from a stronger alignment with the *Gesamtvision* and that could benefit from an adjustment of their timelines. First and foremost, this concerns the development and implementation of the revised core curricula, which should be seen an important opportunity to bring the aspirations formulated in the overall vision to life and into the classroom. It will therefore be important for the revised core curricula to reflect the overarching vision for the education system formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. This would also provide time to involve the teaching profession more closely in the revision process, which will be important to ensure their buy-in and sense of ownership over the core curricula. Likewise, the ongoing revision of teacher competency frameworks (discussed in Chapter 4), should be aligned with the competencies that teachers will need in order to implement the new curriculum and other policy actions formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Allowing more time for the development of the teacher competency framework would also provide an opportunity to involve the teaching profession more closely in their development and consider expanding them into a differentiated set of teacher standards applicable to teachers at different stages of their careers (see Chapter 4).

The German-speaking Community is planning to follow up on the development of the *Gesamtvision* with the creation of a Master Plan in 2023, which will lay out an implementation strategy for future reforms. The Master Plan should aim to operationalise the overall vision's goals and link them to measurable indicators to track progress towards their attainment. An effective implementation strategy may also include a description of follow-up actions and mechanisms to adjust policies if the progress is inadequate. To facilitate this process, intermediate milestones should be formulated that allow the Community to monitor whether adequate progress towards the targets is being made. Including a clear causal narrative in the *Gesamtvision* that explains how each of the proposed policy actions is envisaged to attaining the associated goals will make it easier to identify problems and take remedial actions in case intermediate milestones fail to be met. In addition, diagnostic indicators can provide further information to policy makers on why expectations are not being met. (For example, a target for students' labour market outcomes and associated policy actions related to career guidance might be linked to diagnostic indicators from existing youth surveys to provide insights into the reasons why students might continue to face obstacles transitioning into the labour market). Supplementing the Master Plan with effective indicators will require the Community to develop a corresponding strategy for data collection (see below).

Iceland's experience of developing its *Education Policy 2030* strategy also showed the importance of making roles and the division of responsibilities during the development of a strategic vision transparent and to develop a clear communication strategy to accompany the process (OECD, 2021, pp. 4, 42<sup>[66]</sup>). Another aspect that will be critical for the successful development of the *Gesamtvision* and the Master Plan is the purposeful involvement of stakeholders (OECD, 2020<sup>[89]</sup>)<sup>f</sup>. The German-speaking Community has already involved a wide range of relevant stakeholders during the first two diagnostic phases informing the *Gesamtvision* and it should continue doing so throughout the development and the implementation of its vision. Effective stakeholder engagement can take a range of formats but requires careful preparation and should involve a reflection on what constitutes "high-quality" engagement. Developing standards, even if they are high-level or informal, for the engagement of stakeholders during the *Gesamtvision* process could help to enrich discussions and further strengthen the policy implementation culture in the German-speaking Community more widely (OECD, 2021<sup>[66]</sup>). Innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement taken by other OECD countries, such as Finland's Education Experimentation Lab described in Box 2.5, can offer inspiration and opportunities for mutual learning.



### Box 2.5. The Finnish Education Experimentation Lab

#### Finnish schools and education government explore complexity together

In 2018, the Innovation Centre at the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) has launched the first iteration of its The Experimentation Lab, a year-long facilitated process to support teachers, school leaders and local education administrators to engage and work with one another in new ways to experiment and co-create local policy solutions to address challenges in education. The Lab's creation responded to a need to find a way to create the open, dynamic and strategic governance systems necessary for governing complex systems by developing a vehicle for improving interaction among diverse stakeholders and building feedback loops between national level steering and local level implementation. In its first iteration, the Lab recruited participants to form 12 teams to work on a wide range of local challenges, from developing approaches to foster students' well-being or social emotional skills, to teaching digital capabilities through playful adventures, to leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) to increase students' physical activity. The Lab had two main goals:

- Build capacity (skills, competencies, mind-sets) among teachers and school leaders to develop teaching and learning through experimenting, trialling and co-creating solutions at the local level.
- Explore, test and develop new approaches to enhance interaction, dialogue, and shared understanding between national level steering and local level implementation to better respond to the complexity of challenges in education.

The model for the Lab was developed with Demos Helsinki, a Nordic think tank, with prior experience in using experiments to inform national governance. It drew on a network of government innovation and experimentation organisations in Finland to provide benchmarking and peer support. The Lab evaluated the experiments using an approach developed with researchers from the Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT) and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. This initiative shows a way government can facilitate new forms of interaction and engagement among stakeholders and leverage bottom-up approaches and experimentation to support policy making. The Lab also helped Finland to create new ways for information to circulate within the education system and to shape how policy actors build on and share practices to drive system change.

Sources: OECD (2021<sup>[66]</sup>), "Iceland Education Policy 2030 and its implementation", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 32, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6e9d2811-en>; OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (2020<sup>[90]</sup>), *The Experimentation Lab – Finnish schools and education government exploring complexity together*, <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/experimentation-lab/> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

Finally, turning the *Gesamtvision* into an actionable implementation strategy will require the German-speaking Community to align specific policy actions with the resources needed to implement them. This should involve associating them with a budget, but also other forms of resources, such as institutional structures and capacity, staffing and incentives (Viennet and Pont, 2017<sup>[84]</sup>). The implementation strategy should also plan sufficient time for policies to be fully implemented and to start generating results (OECD, 2020<sup>[89]</sup>).

#### ***Align the revision of the core curricula with the development of the Gesamtvision and use it as a lever to implement the overall vision at the classroom level***

As described above, the revision of the core curricula can be an important lever to advance the overall vision for the German-speaking Community's education system. To fulfil this role, the timeline for the revision of the core curricula should be adjusted to permit their alignment with the overarching vision

formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Many of the policy options identified in this report would facilitate the implementation of the revised core curricula and vice versa. An emphasis on differentiated teaching and student guidance in the curricula, for example, could promote equity and facilitate inclusive education (see Chapter 3). In turn, a reform of teachers' working conditions and their professional learning as well as efforts to strengthen pedagogical leadership would help to create the collaborative environment in schools in which competency-based curricula can come to fruition (see Chapter 4). The revision and implementation of the core curricula is therefore intricately connected with the success of the overall vision and should be pursued in tandem to create synergies between them.

To ensure the successful implementation of the new curricula, it will also be critical that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are closely involved in their revision in order to build their ownership over the new core curricula (OECD, 2019<sup>[91]</sup>). As described in Chapter 1, teachers' involvement in the revision of core curricula is currently limited. A first draft each curriculum is developed by ministerial staff with the help of external experts and submitted for revisions to a working group comprised of only two teachers per school network (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). Although school leaders are invited to comment on the revisions and asked to solicit feedback from their teachers, this involvement of teachers occurs late in the process and it is not clear how teacher's meaningful involvement in all schools will be guaranteed. (At the time of the OECD review, few of the interviewed teachers were aware of the curricula's revision process).

In recent years, several OECD countries, including Estonia, Finland, Japan, Norway, and Wales (United Kingdom) have reviewed and revised their curricula (OECD, 2020<sup>[88]</sup>). The most successful examples of such reforms did not consider the revision process as a technical task for specialists, but as a collaborative "bottom-up" process based on broad stakeholder involvement (Gouédard et al., 2020<sup>[92]</sup>). The German-speaking Community should therefore, at a minimum, seek to create widespread awareness of the curricula's revision (and its purpose) and ensure that the feedback solicited from school leaders through the "impulse group" is based on a systematic consultation of teachers in all schools. The recent experience of Finland has also shown that a clear and widely accepted overarching vision and system-level goals provide an important basis for the development of new curricula since they can guide the actors involved in the curriculum reform and help them find a consensus (Lavonen, 2020<sup>[93]</sup>). This is another reason why the German-speaking Community's overall vision should be a key reference point during the curriculum reform. (More detailed country examples of curriculum reforms are presented in Box 4.2 of Chapter 4).

### ***Further strengthen the system's data management infrastructure and align the strategy for data collection with the Gesamtvision and Master Plan***

The German-speaking Community should strengthen its data infrastructure and information management system to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools and to promote evidence-based decision making at all levels of the system, from parents and schools to the central administration. In comparison to other OECD countries, the German-speaking Community suffers from limitations to both the availability of data (including comparative benchmarks with other Communities and countries) and the capacity to manage and analyse it. To address these shortcomings, the ministry should develop a central education database covering all schools, teachers and students that would allow the Community to monitor key school characteristics (related to their student body, resources, staffing and performance) as well as students' educational trajectories.

While a range of standardised tests provide the Community with valuable information on students' performance, international comparative evidence is limited to the secondary level. Furthermore, cross-sectional surveys alone do not permit the Community to monitor important sources of potential inequity, arising e.g. from students' transitions across school levels, or to enable different actors in the system to monitor students' progress and offer targeted support in real time (Helbig and Nikolai, 2017<sup>[57]</sup>). Systematically collecting data on students' needs and the social composition of schools is also an important

precondition to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage (see below) and monitor inequities across the system (see Chapter 3).

A central information management system should be designed with multiple purposes in mind. It could help schools manage their data and make informed decisions to better support their students in collaboration with external sources of support. At the same time, it would improve transparency and strengthen schools' accountability towards education authorities, parents and other stakeholders. It could also provide a much-needed basis for authorities to identify opportunities to make better use of resources to advance educational quality and equity.

The German-speaking Community's plan to introduce a new school-level data management system ("*Schulverwaltungssoftware*") by 2025 is an important step in the right direction.<sup>25</sup> The system will be introduced in voluntary pilot schools in the school year 2021/22 and allow school leaders to enter a range of data pertaining to their school in a standardised format. The goal of the system is to support school leaders in their decisions and planning (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021, p. 80<sub>[2]</sub>). The system should be designed with the input of school leaders to make it easier for both school leaders and the ministry to access relevant data in a comparable format, monitor students' achievement (and provide targeted support where needed), and track students' trajectories across schools. The ministry should consider adding data aggregation, analysis and visualisation functions that support monitoring and planning purposes, for example using dashboards that provide easy access to information tailored to the needs of stakeholders at different levels of the system.

If the new data management system is widely adopted by schools, this new school-level data management system could also support the administration in evaluating its education policies and reforms more systematically. Although it is currently anticipated that schools' contribution to this database would be voluntary, the Community should exert efforts to bring all schools on board in order to ensure consistency in both the level and quality of information across school networks and collect data efficiently. A unified service code for teachers could make it easier to gather comparable data on staff across networks (see Chapter 4).

Over the past few decades, several OECD countries, including Estonia and New Zealand, have developed powerful data infrastructures to monitor school-level data, which could offer relevant case studies and sources of inspiration for the German-speaking Community. In New Zealand, schools continuously collect data on their progress (including results in achievement tests such as the voluntary Electronic Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning [e-asTTle]) for their reports to their school boards. The national Ministry of Education has created *Education Counts*, an online platform where the public can access information on each school, including the composition of its student body, gender distribution, prior participation in early childhood education and the number of expulsions and repeaters. However, data on results in voluntary achievement tests or grades are explicitly not shown (Nusche et al., 2015<sub>[29]</sub>; Dabisch, Hartong and Nikolai, 2021<sub>[94]</sub>). A similar approach could help the German-speaking Community to foster transparency and encourage improvements without undermining weaker schools.

Estonia has successfully established a comprehensive integrated online information system that brings together data on schools, students, teachers, exams and qualifications and which is used by all stakeholders in the system to inform decision-making processes and systematically and transparently track progress on education priorities (see Box 2.6). The country's experience also highlights the importance of involving schools in the data collection process from the start and supporting them in using the data for school improvement purposes (Gouëdard, 2021<sub>[56]</sub>).

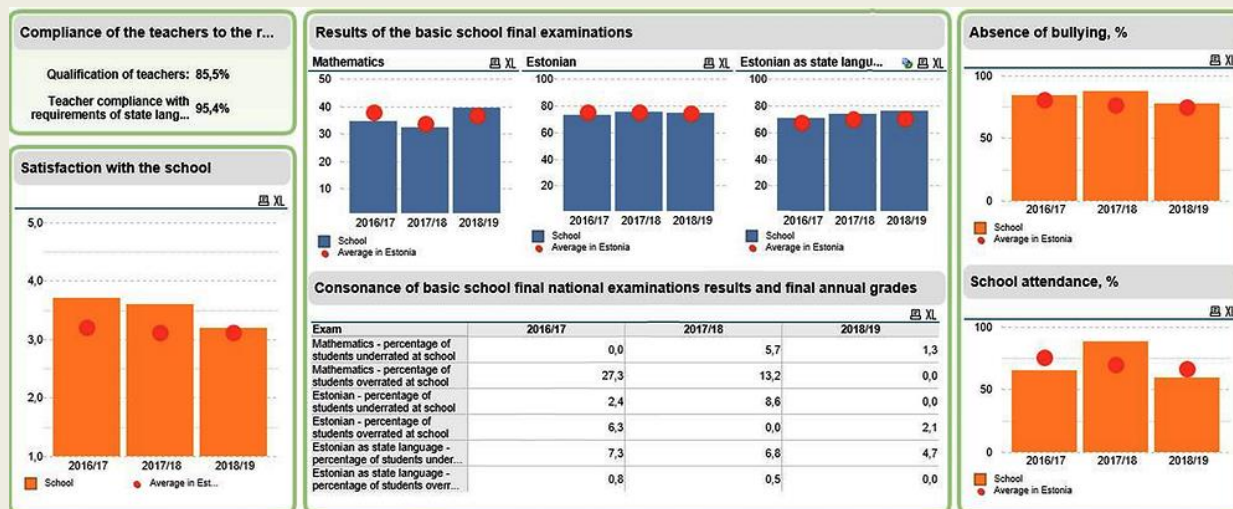
### Box 2.6. The Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)

The Estonian Education Information System (*Eesti hariduse infosüsteem*, EHIS) has been rolled out in 2005 and covers about 600 data fields. By law, all schools are required to enter data into EHIS and keep it up to date. The information is individual-based, which means that each student and teacher is registered with an individual identification number. EHIS collects information on students' grades as well as their performance, state exam results or need for special support. All teachers are registered in EHIS with an identification number, and the system collects information about their qualifications, teaching hours and which grades they teach.

A central role of EHIS is to facilitate evidence-based policy making. Interviewees explained that EHIS data are the basis for all educational policy decisions, with financing, quality control and monitoring processes all relying on EHIS data. Schools can use the EHIS interface to receive information on individual students and teachers and compare themselves with other schools. The public can use the system to compare schools based on a "school card" (*Koolikaart*) (see Figure below), which contains information on the type of school, the number of students, the language of instruction, the level of student satisfaction and average student performance.

The EHIS system is complemented by a range of online tools covering early childhood education (*ELIIS* for kindergartens and pre-schools), primary and secondary education (*eKool/eschool*, *Studium* and *e-koolikot/e-schoolbag*) and higher education (*DreamApply*). All schools in Estonia make use of such "e-school solutions" – some run by private providers, others by the ministry – for example to access digital learning materials or take advantage of web-based school management software. These tools and platforms can be connected to EHIS data.

Figure 2.9. Example of a school card and results (fictional) of the state exam in comparison to the average grades



Sources: Adapted from OECD (2020<sup>[95]</sup>), *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems. Lessons from Six OECD Countries*, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/298d6678-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/298d6678-en#>; Estonian Ministry of Education and Research; E-Estonia (2021<sup>[96]</sup>), *Estonian Education Information System*, <https://e-estonia.com/solutions/education/> (accessed on 15 December 2021); OECD (2021<sup>[97]</sup>), "Enhancing data informed strategic governance in education in Estonia", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 47, <https://doi.org/10.1787/11495e02-en>.

In light of the German-speaking Community's limited capacity, the development of indicators and the collection of data needs to be strategic and proceed with a view to support the monitoring of progress towards the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. As part of its implementation strategy (the Master Plan), the objectives and policy actions defined in the *Gesamtvision* should be linked to measurable indicators that can be used to track the system's progress. This will enhance the credibility of the overall vision and increase transparency while at the same time lending greater coherence and purposefulness to data collections across the system. The selection of indicators for the Master Plan should go hand in hand with the development of a data collection strategy for the whole system that takes stock of the data already collected across the system. The strategy should lay out what types of data the system uses for which primary purposes (e.g. which types of performance information is best suited to guide school improvement at the individual school level [such as the results of internal and external school evaluations] and which are best suited to inform improvements at the system level [such as PISA results]). On this basis, the strategy should identify priority gap areas where further types of data, more in-depth information or comparative benchmarks will need to be collected, in close consultation with its end users.

The German-speaking Community should consider aligning its data collections with international standards and contributing to the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) data collection. This would facilitate international comparisons, enable the ministry to benchmark itself against other OECD education systems and facilitate peer-learning. The Community should also consider addressing the lack of international comparative evidence on student achievement at the primary level, for example by participating in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Based on the Community's priorities, participation in the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) could strengthen the Community's data on teaching practices and inform policymakers on the challenges experienced at the frontlines of teaching.

A strategic approach to the collection and use of data in the German-speaking Community should go beyond the collection and management of quantitative data as part of a strengthened central data management system. It should also consider the capacity to record, evaluate and use data at the school level, including the tacit knowledge that teachers accumulate in their day-to-day work and innovative practices developed in schools (e.g. as part of pilot projects). Given the organisation of the German-speaking Community's schools in three separate networks, making effective use of this information generated at the school level requires additional efforts to not only systematically evaluate but also share success stories and challenges across schools and school networks to ensure mutual learning (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>).

As the German-speaking Community advances towards the realisation of its *Gesamtvision* it should consider to regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective way to track the system's progress and keep the wider public involved once clear objectives and measurable targets have been identified. Several OECD countries regularly publish such indicator-based reports, which could provide sources of inspiration for the German-speaking Community. In Germany, for example, the "*Bildung in Deutschland*" have brought together information on developments in early childhood education and care, schools, vocational education and training, higher education and adult education every two years since 2006. The report is freely accessible and accompanied by an online platform that offers additional education statistics (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2020<sup>[98]</sup>). Other examples of regular systematic reporting include the "*Repères et références statistiques*" published in France (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2021<sup>[99]</sup>).

### ***Develop a system-wide reporting framework for school funding to improve transparency over the resources available to schools and school networks***

In order to increase transparency and improve its ability to evaluate the school funding system, the German-speaking Community should develop a central reporting framework to regularly collect

school-level data on revenues and expenditures across all three networks. The lack of data on the levels of funding received by each school from the Community, from municipalities (in the case of OSU schools) and private sources, is severely limiting the Community's ability to analyse the effectiveness of its resource use and detect potential mismatches between schools' level of resources and their needs.

A more systematic monitoring of differences in funding levels across schools could enable the Community to evaluate the degree to which its funding system conforms to the principle of horizontal equity (i.e. the allocation of similar levels of resources to similar types of provision) across municipalities and providers. As described above, the Community's school funding system has the potential to create horizontal inequities across school networks (due to differences in the basis used to calculate their operating funding and their differential ability to supplement it from other sources) and inequities across schools (e.g. due to their different socio-demographic profiles or their unequal capacity to seek additional funding from the Community or their local municipalities). A better empirical picture of school-level revenues would enable education authorities to identify such discrepancies and address them where needed (providing an empirical basis for decisions such as the recent adjustment of operating grants for secondary students in FSU schools). It would also create greater transparency and help to foster trust in the system. The OECD review team heard multiple stakeholders express concerns about potential inequities in the funding system, which better visibility of funding streams might allay.

Case studies from the United States have demonstrated the feasibility of collecting and reporting high-quality school-level expenditure data as well as its perceived benefits for transparency, equity, and the efficient use of resources. However, the experience has also shown the importance of training local staff and building capacity in order to ensure consistency in reporting practices across schools (OECD, 2017, pp. 210, Box 5.3<sub>[12]</sub>; Atchison et al., 2017<sub>[100]</sub>). In the German-speaking Community, data on schools' financial resources could eventually be integrated into the school-level data management system discussed above, which would enable linking information on schools' inputs and outputs. This information could be collected in alignment with the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) reporting standards and integrated into its international data collection.

Combining a system-wide reporting framework for school funding with a strengthened data management system would also help to recognise opportunities for increasing the system's efficiency and to evaluate trade-offs in the use of resources. A typical example of such resource trade-offs concerns the merits of reducing class sizes compared with investments in teachers' professional learning, higher salaries or additional time for teachers to collaborate and prepare their lessons. In other words, the trade-off between investing in *more* human resources (i.e. lower student-teacher ratios) by maintaining small classes, and investing in *better* human resources and new approaches to teaching and learning (OECD, 2017, p. 38<sub>[12]</sub>; Dolton et al., 2011<sub>[101]</sub>). Empirical evidence suggests that, in many cases, the high costs of small classes mean that its benefits are outweighed by equivalent investments in the quality of teachers and teaching (Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain, 2005<sub>[102]</sub>; Hanushek, 2011<sub>[103]</sub>). Available data suggests that – although there are exceptions – schools in the German-speaking Community have low class sizes on average while teachers spend comparatively more time teaching than their peers in other OECD countries (see Figures 4.5 and Table 4.4 in Chapter 4). The Community should therefore collect data on class sizes and assess the scope for increasing efficiency by bringing them closer to those of benchmarking countries, for example, by introducing guidelines on minimum class sizes in Community.

### ***Explore the introduction of equity funding to compensate for schools' and students' disadvantage***

As described above, the German-speaking Community's main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for additional resource needs that may arise from factors related to the socio-economic composition of their student body. Allocating additional resources to schools that are most in need of support is an important step to promote vertical equity (i.e. allocating different levels of resources to student

groups with different needs). At the same time, it can raise the funding system's effectiveness by directing resources to where they have the biggest impact (OECD, 2017<sup>[12]</sup>). The German-speaking Community should therefore explore introducing equity funding, for example by adding weights to the student-based formula used to allocate staff resources or to the formula used to calculate the operating grants of FSU and OSU schools (an equivalent mechanism would need to be developed for GUW schools).

A considerable number of OECD countries compensate for the greater financial needs of disadvantaged schools, either by providing targeted funds outside the main funding mechanism or by providing additional funding for particular schools through the main allocation mechanisms. Many of the latter countries include weightings in their funding formula to systematically allocate additional resources to certain categories of students or schools) (OECD, 2017, p. 22<sup>[12]</sup>). Different forms of index-based equity funding are used in the Netherlands, England (United Kingdom), France, Australia, New Zealand as well as different parts of the United States, Switzerland and Canada (Morris-Lange, 2016<sup>[104]</sup>; Sendzik, 2018<sup>[105]</sup>; Dabisch, Hartong and Nikolai, 2021<sup>[94]</sup>). As described in Box 2.7, since 2008, the Flemish Community of Belgium has also been weighing schools' operating grants based on four indicators related to students' socio-economic status, two of which are collected from parents and two based on administrative data (Nusche et al., 2015, p. 55<sup>[29]</sup>). Unless equity funding is area-based and used to channel resources to a specific geographic location afflicted by concentrated or compounded socio-economic disadvantage, determining the needs of a school usually requires collecting information on its student population. Doing so requires agreed-upon, measurable criteria that can be collected reliably and in a uniform way across schools. The city of Hamburg (Germany) offers an instructive example of a school-level social index based on data from student and parent surveys, combined with structural data related to the school's location (see Box 2.7) (Groot-Wilken, Isaac and Schröpler, 2016<sup>[106]</sup>; Weishaupt, 2016<sup>[107]</sup>).

### Box 2.7. Indicators used to distribute index-based equity funding

#### Index-based equity funding for schools in Hamburg (Germany)

In 1996, the German city state of Hamburg introduced a “social index” (*Sozialindex*) for all public schools to distribute additional staff and funding to schools. The social index is calculated using eight indicators based on which schools are assigned to one of six Levels (Level 1 indicating disadvantaged student populations and Level 6 student populations from a favourable socio-economic background):

- The proportion of students with non-German family language.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs.
- The proportion of students receiving educational assistance (the “*Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket*”).
- The proportion of school leavers with general higher education entrance qualification in students’ areas of residence.
- The proportion of under-15-year-olds receiving social benefits in students’ area of residence.
- The proportion of eligible people receiving educational assistance in the areas in students’ areas of residence.
- The proportion of 15-65-year-olds who are unemployed in students’ areas of residence.
- Voter turnout in students’ areas of residence.

The eight indicators are merged from different data collections and data from the last three years is collated to mitigate the effects of annual fluctuations. The social index is updated every five years.

Schools at Level 1 and 2 receive more staff to form smaller classes. Primary schools at Levels 1 and 2 receive more funding and staff for special needs education. In lower secondary schools, funding and staff are allocated on a per-student basis and schools at Levels 1 and 2 receive more funding per student than those at Levels 3-6. The lower the social index of a school, the more staff hours they receive for language support and all-day care.

The social index is also used to draw comparisons between schools in comparative assessments (e.g. the KERMIT exams, Hamburg’s version of the VERA assessment) and to form comparison groups in the context of educational reporting. This serves to prevent schools with more difficult circumstances from being compared with more advantaged schools without considering the social context in which they operate.

#### Equity funding in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Since 2008, the operating grant provided to schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium has been adjusted to account for social differences in schools’ student populations. This adjustment applies to mainstream elementary and secondary education. The weighting of the operating grant is designed to deliver additional support to schools serving disadvantaged students and their communities. In the case of elementary education, this support represented about 14% of the total operating grant in 2014 and was projected to rise to 15.5% by 2021 at the time. In the case of secondary school, the corresponding figures are 10% rising to 11% in 2020. The pre-set budget to compensate for social differences between students is distributed among schools by adjusting school operating grants based on four indicators described in Table 2.2. In elementary education, the budget for equity funding is divided equally among the four indicators (i.e. 25% of the budget per indicator). In secondary education, however, the neighbourhood indicator (student’s place of residence) is allocated only 10% of the overall earmarked budget, with the other indicators weighing 30% each. The money value per student meeting a given



indicator is calculated by dividing the overall budget for the indicator by the number of students meeting the indicator, resulting in four different money values (see below).

**Table 2.2. Indicators of students' socio-economic status used to calculate school operating grants in the Flemish Community of Belgium**

Student characteristic	Indicator	Source of information	EUR per student (2013/14)	
			Elementary education	Secondary education
Cultural background	Educational attainment of the mother	Provided by parents	122.75	125.54
Financial capacity	Entitlement for a study grant	Flemish study grant administration	120.83	114.67
Linguistic and cultural capital	Language spoken at home other than Dutch	Provided by parents	146.69	276.47
Social capital	Student's place of residence	Flemish household administration	99.78	40.79

Sources: Schulte, Hartig and Pietsch (2014<sub>[108]</sub>), „Der Sozialindex für Hamburger Schulen“ [The social index for schools in Hamburg], in *Grundlagen für eine daten- und theoriegestützte Schulentwicklung*; Reproduced from Nusche et al. (2015<sub>[29]</sub>), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Flemish Community of Belgium 2015*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264247598-en>; Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015<sub>[109]</sub>), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, [www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm); Examples of budget letters sent to Flemish schools.

Until now, the availability of suitable data on students' socio-economic background or needs has been a barrier for the introduction of equity funding in the German-speaking Community. The introduction of a new school-level data management system (see above) may facilitate the collection of data on schools' student populations. First, however, it will be important, to reach an agreement on the concept of inequality or disadvantage that a social index should reflect, as well as a suitable set of indicators and weightings that could be used to construct it – aiming to include as much meaningful information as possible while avoiding redundancy. The search of appropriate indicators should be an integral part of the data development strategy discussed above. Finally, mechanisms will need to be put in place to ensure that schools cannot game the system and influence results in case they are to be charged with collecting the relevant data from parents (Weishaupt, 2020<sub>[64]</sub>).

### **Consider simplifying funding mechanisms and reducing their administrative burden**

In order to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools and central authorities and to provide greater clarity over funding streams, the German-speaking Community should consider whether there is scope for streamlining its funding mechanisms. Particularly in the OSU and FSU networks, schools receive resources through a variety of per-capita earmarked funding streams with overlapping and sometimes unclear purposes. In addition to their operating grant, they receive per-student funding intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contribution. In practice – not least since the use of the operating grant is not clearly defined – funding allocated through all three of these mechanisms can be used for similar purposes. While this gives school leaders additional flexibility in the use of these funds, it is difficult to justify the administrative burden that monitoring the use of this earmarked funding would require in theory. The German-speaking Community should therefore consider the advantages of distributing this funding through a single allocation mechanism.

Instead of using a separate mechanism to compensate schools for waiving parental contributions, the Community could integrate this funding into the main funding allocation mechanism for schools' operating grant through a corresponding increase in per-student quotas. Instead of monitoring the use of the grant, authorities could instead make the evaluation of schools' extra-curricular activities and the absence of

parental fees part of the regular inspections. The same principle could be extended to secondary education alongside clearer guidance on the types of activities that parents can be asked to contribute to (analogous to the rules established at the primary level) or a ceiling on parental contributions.

In interviews with the OECD review team, education stakeholders have also raised concerns about the administrative burden placed on schools due to the requirement to submit individual requests to cover expenses on school equipment, for additional contract staff (BVA), innovative projects or lunch break supervision. The Community should consider whether there is scope for integrating some of this funding into schools' regular budget for operating expenses and allowing them to manage it at their discretion (including e.g. the responsibility to decide for themselves how many and what kind of staff to hire to engage in lunch break supervision). This would free up capacity and reduce the delays that some schools reported experiencing in the approval of minor expenditures. A more needs-based approach to the allocation of staff hours or operating grants, as described above, could contribute to streamlining the funding mechanisms as it would alleviate the burden currently placed on disadvantaged schools to apply for additional resources to cover their needs.

### ***Explore the potential for a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public school networks***

For a school system of its size, the German-speaking Community's historical division into three distinct school networks creates a high level of complexity and the split of responsibilities for public primary schools across two levels of administration further complicates the picture. At the time of the review, three public primary schools were part of the GUW network under the authority of the minister while all other public primary schools were part of the OSU network and managed by their respective municipalities. The German-speaking Community should consider reforming this governance arrangement with a view to simplify the network structure and explore whether municipalities should be the exclusive provider of public primary schools.

Consolidating the authority over public primary schools in the OSU network could have a number of advantages. Across OECD countries, it is not uncommon for local authorities to be closely involved in the management or supervision of primary schools, given that most students at this level live near their schools and local authorities are thought to be in an advantageous position to identify and respond to local needs as they arise. Absolving the minister from overseeing schools at two distinct levels of education could allow a more efficient use of limited administrative capacity. In addition, creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public networks could facilitate the co-ordination between public primary schools whose structures currently exclude the GUW network's primary schools. Lastly, it would ensure that all public primary schools are funded based on the same funding mechanism (although evaluating the system's horizontal equity would require greater transparency on the extent to which different municipalities are able and willing to subsidise their schools).

### ***Strengthen career guidance and enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training***

Career guidance plays an important role in helping students to develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future and to navigate the difficult choices they face in differentiated school system. In the German-speaking Community, career guidance – especially for vocational training – is still primarily organised as an extra-curricular activity (VDI Technologiezentrum, 2020<sub>[26]</sub>) and although a wide range of actors offer advice, counselling is mostly provided on demand and relies on the initiative of students or their parents. By contrast, in-school career guidance in the German-speaking Community is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions (see Figure 2.8) (OECD, 2020, p. Table V.B2.4.13<sub>[17]</sub>). To raise the effectiveness of its career guidance system the German-speaking Community should strengthen the role of schools as a key access point for students to receive formal career guidance in a comprehensive and

systematic way. This would help to ensure that all students (especially those with learning difficulties or from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds) can obtain the guidance they need without relying on students' own motivation to seek out support. At the same time, the ministry should continue using its role in forums like the Study Group School and Economy to promote a better co-ordination among the Community's different career guidance services, for example by encouraging a clearer differentiation in terms of the age groups they target.

The German-speaking Community's core curriculum on career guidance is a laudable effort to strengthen the quality and coherence of school-based career advice. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, schools will need further support to implement these interdisciplinary curricula effectively. Effective in-school career guidance can take a range of forms, including career education in which students learn about the world of work and develop career management skills through classroom teaching and other activities such as work experience (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>). Although it is a resource-intensive intervention, research from the United States has also shown that the use of in-school career counsellors can increase students' school completion, higher education enrolment and persistence, especially among low-income and low-achieving students – with effects similar in magnitude to those of teachers (Mulhern, 2020<sup>[110]</sup>).

Early exposure to the world of work plays a key role in effective career guidance. Schools should also be encouraged to partner with external providers to offer career guidance and direct students to external support. Other countries in Europe have established specialised career guidance agencies that support teachers in organising guidance activities in schools. In Denmark, for example, youth guidance centres (*Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning*) co-operate closely with schools, companies, and public employment services, focusing on the transition from upper secondary education to tertiary education or into the labour market. The advantage of these agencies, compared to purely school-based career guidance, is that they have a clear identity, specialised staff and may be able to provide advice more objectively and with more coherence and continuity (Musset and Mytna Kurekova, 2018<sup>[41]</sup>).

Efforts to strengthen career guidance in the German-speaking Community should go hand in hand with raising the status of vocational education and training (VET). The Community's VET system benefits from strong ties with local industry and a high motivation of employers to offer opportunities for vocational training. Nevertheless, vocational education continues to be perceived as a less desirable pathway by many stakeholders. Other OECD countries have undertaken concerted efforts to better inform students about the opportunities afforded by VET, for example Denmark, which systematically involves VET students in career guidance programmes, including visits to secondary schools where they promote VET and serve as role models.

A strong dual education system has helped multiple OECD countries increase the attractiveness of their VET pathways, also among academically oriented students, which could provide opportunities for mutual learning for the German-speaking Community (Nikolai and Ebner, 2012<sup>[111]</sup>). In Berlin (Germany), for example, local businesses have been closely collaborating with the newly created integrated secondary schools to link school-based and practical training since the early 2010s (see Box 2.8). Several countries have taken a similar approach, creating the possibility for students to obtain a university entrance qualification at the same time as completing dual VET, for example in Switzerland since 1994 (*Berufsmatura*) and in Austria since 2008 (*apprenticeship with Abitur*). Beyond secondary education, the German-speaking Community's AHS offers two dual bachelor degrees in accounting and public and business administration in co-operation with the IAWM (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>). While its size imposes limitations on the number of dual degrees that the AHS can offer, the German-speaking Community should explore whether local businesses could build partnerships with higher education institutions outside the Community in order to further enhance the attractiveness of its vocational sector.

### Box 2.8. Dual learning in the Berlin (Germany) school system

In 2010/11, the German city state of Berlin introduced the integrated secondary school (*Integrierte Sekundarschule*) as a second school type alongside the traditional, academically oriented *Gymnasium*. The new integrated secondary schools resulted from the merger of the former lower secondary schools (*Hauptschule*), middle secondary schools (*Realschule*) and comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschule*). The new integrated secondary schools introduce dual learning in grades 7 to 10, linking school-based learning and learning at the workplace. The dual learning is intended to give students an early orientation for a later profession and to motivate and offer students who may be struggling at school new vocational perspectives.

Each integrated secondary school has at least one business partner and local businesses support dual learning by providing work experience placements for students. Further vocational and study orientation is provided by learning locations at own school workshops, student-run companies, vocational schools and public administrations, company workshops and external company training centres. All integrated secondary schools decide autonomously which dual learning measures are offered. Participation in at least one measure is compulsory for all students at a school.

Students who are not expected to graduate from school after grade 8 due to their low performance or ambition can participate in practical learning groups during grades 9 and 10. These learning groups are run by an independent education institution and provide students with intensive social and pedagogical support on up to three days a week to ensure their regular school attendance.

Sources: Neumann et al. (2017<sup>[112]</sup>), *Zweigliedrigkeit im Deutschen Schulsystem: Potenziale und Herausforderungen in Berlin*; Bartels and Nix (2010<sup>[113]</sup>), *Duales Lernen: Handreichungen für die Praxis*, [https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule-und-beruf/berufs-und-studienorientierung/duales-lernen/berliner\\_schule\\_duales\\_lernen\\_ansicht.pdf](https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule-und-beruf/berufs-und-studienorientierung/duales-lernen/berliner_schule_duales_lernen_ansicht.pdf).

Another reason why vocational education – despite its many strengths – continues to have a relatively low status in the German-speaking Community may be the structure of educational pathways. The German-speaking Community's school system affords a relatively high degree of permeability and students have the possibility to switch tracks at different points throughout secondary education in theory. Nevertheless, there is little empirical insight into how many students switch tracks in practice and the early sorting of students into A and B streams risks to create a hierarchy among educational pathways and – as an unintended consequence – devalue further vocational education. As the German-speaking Community further strengthens its data management infrastructure and capacity, particular attention should be paid to monitoring students' pathway choices and identifying inequities and hurdles where they exist. In light of these results, the Community should also seek to learn from the experience of systems that have implemented more comprehensive systems and consider the advantages of having all students learn together for a longer period of time.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the organisation chart of the Ministry <https://ostbelgienlive.be/DownloadCount.aspx?raid=189695&docid=52808&rn=f8553429-b606-4735-92ee-aec32060a497> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, references are to the government of the German-speaking Community, not the federal government of Belgium.

<sup>3</sup> All schools in the FSU network are Catholic (the only non-Catholic school in the FSU network, a Waldorf school, was closed in 2000) (Eurydice, 2010, p. 30<sup>[3]</sup>). They can be characterised as government-dependent private schools since they receive more than 50% of their funding from the state, but are privately managed (see Koinzer, Nikolai and Waldow (2017<sup>[114]</sup>) for definitions).

<sup>4</sup> Authors' calculations based on OECD (2021) *Education at a Glance Database*, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=108594#> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The neighbouring Belgian province of Luxembourg also provides some funding, particularly towards special education, to account for students from the province attending schools in the German-speaking Community (Eurydice, 2020<sup>[4]</sup>).

<sup>6</sup> The OECD data do not include expenditure on pre-primary education.

<sup>7</sup> In the German-speaking Community, teacher salaries as well as operating grants in OSU and FSU schools, are linked to a consumer price index, which is regularly adjusted to reflect the rising cost of living (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

<sup>9</sup> The GUW network comprises three schools with integrated pre-primary, primary and secondary levels, one stand-alone secondary school, one centre for part-time vocational education, as well as the centre for special needs pedagogy (ZFP) (MDG, 2022<sup>[5]</sup>).

<sup>10</sup> Bildung Ostbelgien (2021), *PPP: Schulsanierung und Schulneubau mit privaten Partnern*, [https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2344/4664\\_read-32703/](https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2344/4664_read-32703/) (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>11</sup> At the time of the OECD review, the only special needs school in the grant-aided sector was a primary school in the FSU network (see Table 1.2 in Chapter 1). All other special needs schools were part of the GUW network.

<sup>12</sup> In the school year 2020-21, 86 FTE BVA were employed in the Community's schools, an increase from 67 FTE in 2016-17.

<sup>13</sup> Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien (2020), *Vergleichsarbeiten - VERA*, <https://www.ahs-ostbelgien.be/hochschule/forschung-und-entwicklung/forschung-an-der-ahs/vergleichsarbeiten-vera/> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Data provided by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community.

<sup>15</sup> Tracking, also known as streaming or ability grouping, refers to the separation of students into different types of schools or classes, usually structured hierarchically based on students' performance.

<sup>16</sup> BIDA stands for “*Berufliche Integration durch Begleitung in der dualen Ausbildung*”. For more information, see ZAWM (2021), *BIDA*, <https://www.zawm.be/projekte/bida-berufliche-integration-durch-begleitung-in-der-dualen-ausbildung/> and ZAWM (2021), *Die Anlehre, ein duales Vorbereitungsjahr*, [https://www.zawm.be/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Bida/Praesentation\\_Anlehre.pdf](https://www.zawm.be/fileadmin/user_upload/Bida/Praesentation_Anlehre.pdf) (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Going forward, the ministry is planning to offer laptops to all teachers who wish to obtain one (it is estimated that laptops will be available for all teachers in 2022), and to all secondary students, starting with those in year one and two of secondary education in Q1 2022, year 3 and 4 in Q3 2022, and the remaining years by Q3 2023.

<sup>18</sup> While neither of the two steering documents necessarily takes precedence over the other, the government's working programme (LAP) can be continuously revised and therefore – in contrast to the regional development concept (REK) – allows for new priorities and initiatives to be integrated as they arise.

<sup>19</sup> The WSR's vision statement (“*Strukturreform in der Ausbildung: Leitbild*”) had not been published at the time of writing, but was received by the authors. It reflects the WSR's aspirations for a student-centred education system and emphasises equality of opportunities and supporting students in finding the educational path that is right for them.

<sup>20</sup> An example for such a platform is the Australian “My School” website, which publishes nationally consistent school-level information with the goal to support transparency and ensure that schools are accountable to parents and the broader community (<https://www.myschool.edu.au/>).

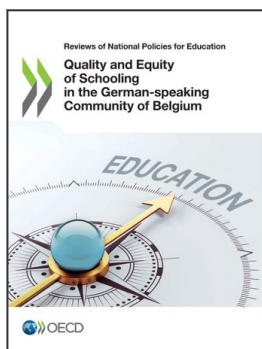
<sup>21</sup> Berlin Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family (2021<sub>[115]</sub>), *Schulverzeichnis [School registry]*, <https://www.bildung.berlin.de/Schulverzeichnis/> (accessed on 15 December 2021).

<sup>22</sup> This equalisation mechanism was introduced by the 1958 “School Pact” and applies to “social advantages” (*Sozialvorteile*) that municipalities provide to students in OSU schools. These “social advantages” were not further defined, which created some uncertainty over the extent to which municipalities would need to compensate FSU schools. An amendment introduced in September 2021 proposes to change this.

<sup>23</sup> The *Dekret zur Festlegung des Betrages der Funktionssubventionen für das subventionierte Unterrichtswesen* (18. April 1994) [Decree on the determination of the operating grant for the subsidised education system] (PDG, 2015<sub>[117]</sub>) specifies that the operating grant can be used to cover – among others – the schools' “functional and equipment costs”, but does not further define these terms.

<sup>24</sup> The figures were obtained directly from the employment agency.

<sup>25</sup> The project is included in the government's working programme for 2019-2024 (“*Schülerdaten und Schulverwaltung*” [Student data and school administration], LAP 2019-2024 - OB70PR26 – 67) (Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens, 2021<sub>[2]</sub>).



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