

# 2021



15

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and science

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## Educational institutions

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## 1 Introduction

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

Most of the data are from statistics of educational institutions and from the statistics on pupils and students. They refer to the academic year 2019/20.

### **Educational institutions**

An educational institution is a permanent entity with professional teaching staff where one or several types of formal education for pupils/students are organized. Education is provided through direct communication between the teaching staff and pupils/students. An educational institution is defined by its administrative level (the management) and by the educational site(s) (buildings) under its authority. The generic term of "school" used in this publication corresponds to an educational site.

The published figures cover educational institutions from primary<sup>1</sup> to tertiary level, with the exception of higher education institutions<sup>2</sup>, which generally refer to actual educational sites. The degree of detail of the data collected on educational sites (buildings/school centres) and administrative units (administrative level) varies according to the cantonal school organisations.

Tertiary level educational institutions are not uniformly defined throughout Switzerland. Therefore, in this publication, they are only included in graphs that provide an overview of all levels of education (see graphs G1 and G3). However, institutions providing advanced professional education and training are included in the totals and graphs which do not consider the level of education. Further education institutions and places of informal learning are not considered in these statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> kindergarten/first learning cycle years 1–2 included; see details in chapter "Educational levels"

<sup>2</sup> In education statistics, higher education institutions are only defined at the administrative level. As some of them are inter-cantonal, they cannot be presented by canton or by language region.

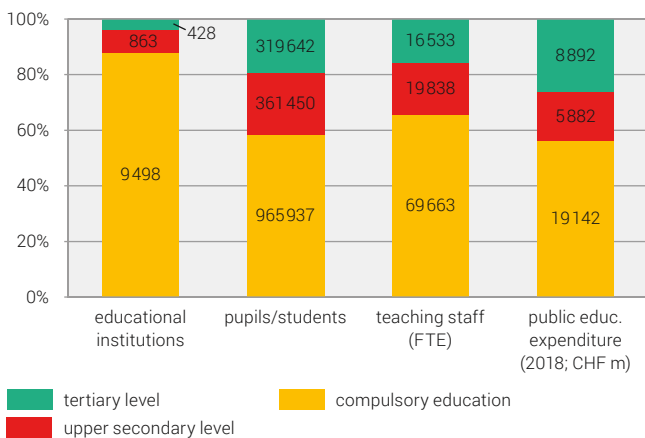
## 2 Key figures of educational institutions

At the start of the academic year 2019/20, there were 10 327 educational institutions at all levels of education in Switzerland.<sup>1</sup>

Compulsory education accounts for the majority of educational institutions (88%). They accommodate 59% of all people in education and 66% of teachers<sup>2</sup>. More than half of public expenditure on education is spent at this level (56%). Only 8% of schools are at upper secondary level. They include 22% of all people in education and 19% of teachers for about a fifth of public expenditure on education (17%). At tertiary level, the proportion of educational institutions is 4%. They accommodate 19% of all the people in education and 16% of teachers. About a quarter of public expenditure on education<sup>3</sup> is spent at this level (26%).

### Educational institutions, pupils/students, teaching staff and public education expenditure by educational level, 2019/20

G1



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL, SSP, SHIS-studex, ÖBA

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<sup>1</sup> without double counting; see explanation in the next chapter

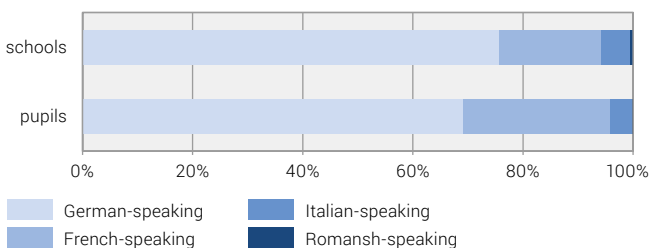
<sup>2</sup> excl. staff teaching a foreign teaching programme (2990 FTE). This concerns compulsory schooling and upper secondary level. This category is described in detail under "Definitions" at the end of the publication.

<sup>3</sup> excl. public expenditure on research

The geographical distribution of schools varies according to language region. Taking all levels of education<sup>4</sup> together, three-quarters of schools and 69% of all pupils are located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Almost one in five schools (19%) and around a quarter of the pupils (27%) are in French-speaking Switzerland. 5% of schools and 4% of pupils are located in the Italian-speaking part of the country and 0.5% and 0.2% of pupils are in the Romansh-speaking part.

## Schools and pupils by language region, 2019/20

G2



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL

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<sup>4</sup> excluding higher education institutions, which cannot be allocated to a particular language region

### 3 Educational levels

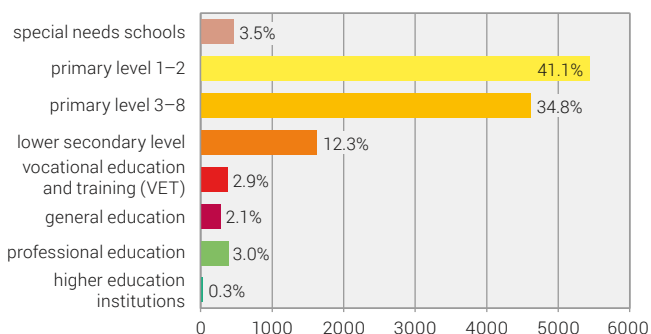
The educational level of a school is defined by its student population and by the educational programmes in which the students are enrolled. A school that offers an educational programme over several levels of education may therefore be counted several times, depending on the level of detail required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

In Switzerland, compulsory education lasts eleven years and includes primary level and lower secondary level. It generally starts at the age of 4 with kindergarten or the first learning cycle (primary level 1st and 2nd year) and continues at primary level 3–8 (3rd to 8th year). All cantons offer at least one year of kindergarten. In most cantons, two years are compulsory.

In the academic year 2019/20, there were 5451 schools at primary level 1–2 and 4614 at primary level 3–8 spread throughout Switzerland. At lower secondary level, 1629 places of education have been identified nationwide.

Upper secondary level follows compulsory education. Young people either choose an initial vocational education and training and attend one of 382 vocational schools, or opt for a general education (284 educational institutions). Finally, the tertiary level (professional education and higher education institutions) completes Switzerland's education and training offerings with 428 educational institutions.

#### Schools by educational level, 2019/20

**G3**


Source: FSO – SBI

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## 4 In focus: special needs schools

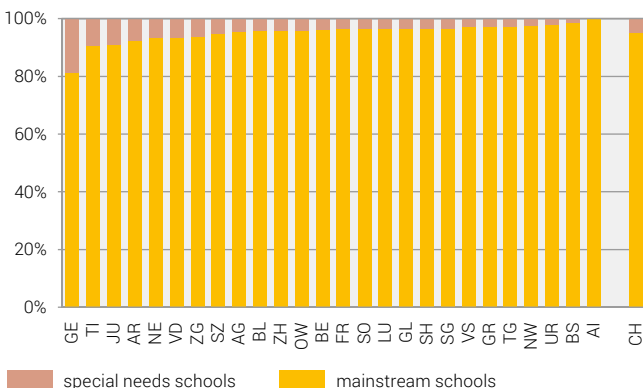
Special needs schools represent a minority in the Swiss school system (3.5% of all educational institutions). They belong to both the primary and lower secondary levels. They differ from other educational institutions with regard to the authority responsible for their funding, their geographical distribution and their organization within and between cantons. For this reason, they are considered separately here.

In contrast to a mainstream school, a special needs school is an educational institution for compulsory education that provides teaching that is adapted to different types of disability or to pupils with major learning difficulties or severe behavioral problems within the framework of compulsory education.

In 2019/20 there were 466 special needs schools in Switzerland. The proportion of special needs schools in compulsory education is highest in the cantons of Geneva, Ticino and Jura. In these three cantons, these schools are on average smaller than in the other cantons (fewer than 20 pupils per school). In five cantons, the proportion of special needs schools was less than 3% (GR, TG, NW, UR, BS). The canton of Appenzell Inner Rhodes did not have any. Pupils from the canton of Appenzell Inner Rhodes mainly attend special needs schools in the cantons of Appenzell Outer Rhodes and St. Gallen. Some pupils are therefore enrolled in schools outside their canton of residence. In Switzerland, the proportion of special needs schools in compulsory education is 4.9%, catering for 1.8% of pupils.

### Percentage of special needs schools in compulsory education by canton, 2019/20

G4





## 5 In focus: vocational education and training (VET)

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

The dual-track approach comprises practical training in a company combined with theoretical training in a vocational school. This dual-track system also exists in Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein. In Switzerland, it is the most widespread form of vocational education and training (68%), making our country stand out in international comparison.

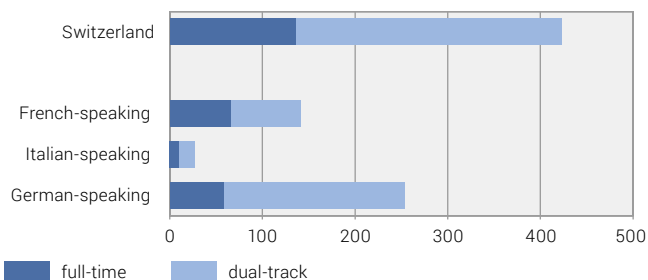
All cantons offer dual-track VET programmes in their territory although not all have a vocational school. In Appenzell Inner Rhodes, for example, where there is no such school, almost 90% of students trained in a local business attend school in the cantons of St. Gallen or Appenzell Outer Rhodes for their theoretical training.

Full-time vocational education and training in a school is more common in French and Italian-speaking Switzerland than in German-speaking regions. In 2019/20, the percentage of full-time vocational schools was 47% in French-speaking Switzerland (24% of students), 37% in Italian-speaking Switzerland (28% of students) and 23% in German speaking Switzerland (4% of students).

A similar trend can be observed in public expenditure on education per person in education: it is higher when the proportion of schools offering full-time vocational education and training is high. Private companies make a large contribution to the funding of dual-track education.

### VET schools by organisation of education and language region<sup>1</sup>, 2019/20

G5



<sup>1</sup> The Romansh-speaking region is not represented in this graph due to the limited number of vocational schools, with only one school providing dual education.

## 6 Size of educational institutions

The average size<sup>1</sup> of a school is 30 pupils at primary level 1–2, 110 pupils at primary level 3–8 and 160 pupils at lower secondary level. Special needs schools accommodate an average of 40 pupils. At upper secondary level, there are approx. 600 students in a vocational school and 360 students in a general education school.

### Size of an educational institution

The school size is determined by the number of pupils attending. In this brochure, it takes into account the total number of pupils enrolled by level of education. The size of the school may also be defined by the total number of pupils, without taking into account the level of education (see example under “Definitions” at the end of the publication).

In compulsory education, 74% of special needs schools and 85% of primary level 1–2 schools have a size of 50 pupils or less. At primary level 3–8, 31% of schools have this size. At lower secondary level, the proportion of schools in this size category is 28%, the same as for schools with more than 200 pupils (see graph G6).

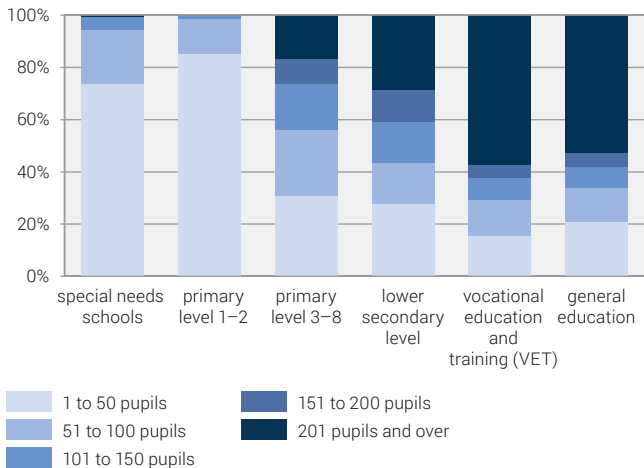
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<sup>1</sup> To calculate the average size of a school, the total number of pupils enrolled at a given level of education is divided by the total number of schools offering this educational level.

At upper secondary level, around half of the schools accommodate more than 200 students (57% at vocational schools and 53% at general education schools). In the other size categories, the distribution of vocational schools and general education schools is similar.

## Schools by size and educational level, 2019/20

G6



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL

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## 7 Authority responsible for educational institutions

In Switzerland, most schools are managed by public authorities: across all levels of education, 87% of schools are public, not including double counts based on the level of education. About one third (35%) of private schools are subsidised by the public sector.

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

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

The organisation and the location of private schools differ from public schools.

In compulsory education, more than 90% of private schools, whether dependent or independent, accommodate fewer than 100 pupils, while this is the case for 72% of public schools.

More than three quarters of independent private schools offer two or more education levels, compared to a quarter of public schools.

At upper secondary level, private schools account for 44% of educational institutions but educate only one sixth of the students, with the majority of private schools having fewer than 100 pupils.

With regard to location, 81% of private schools are located in an urban commune compared to 56% of public schools.

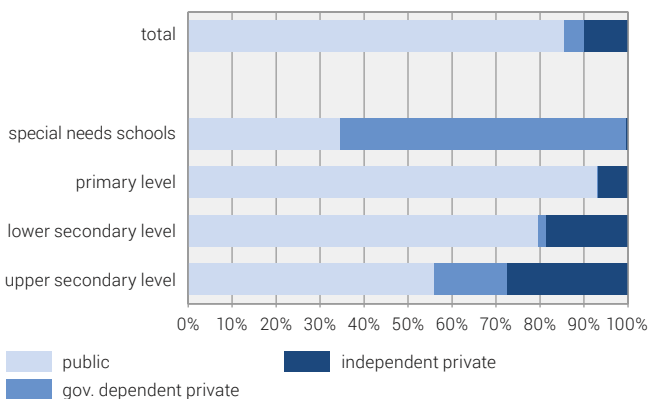
Of all the schools from primary to upper secondary level, public schools in compulsory education account for the vast majority of schools (primary level: 93%; lower secondary level: 79%). At upper secondary level, more than half (56%) of the schools are public.

The proportion of the independent private schools is 7% for the primary level and 19% for the lower secondary level. The proportion of the government dependent private schools is almost zero (0.3% resp. 2%). Special needs schools differ from other levels of education, with a majority of government dependent private schools (65%). At upper secondary level, 17% of schools are dependent private and 27% are independent private schools.

The distribution of vocational schools by status differs from schools offering general education: 71% of vocational schools and 52% of general education schools are public, 16% and 7% respectively are government dependent private schools, 13% and 40% respectively are independent private schools.

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

## Schools by educational level and status, 2019/20 G7



Source: FSO – SBI

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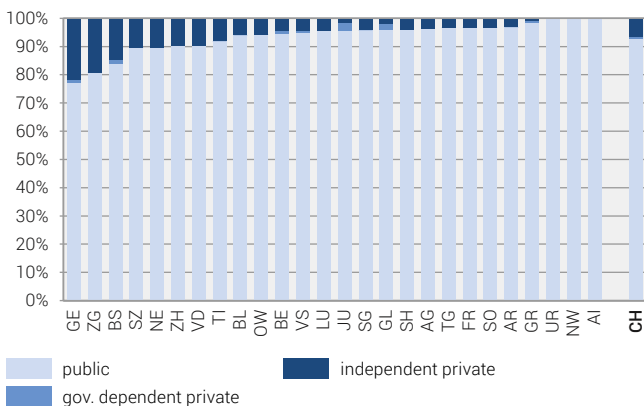
## 8 In focus: cantonal diversity

The status of an educational institution, defined by the authority responsible for funding, varies not only by educational level but also by canton. Almost half of all private schools at all levels of education are located in three cantons (BE, VD, ZH). The comparison of public and private schools by level of education and by cantons reveals rather contrasting trends.

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

### Primary level: schools by canton and status, 2019/20

G8



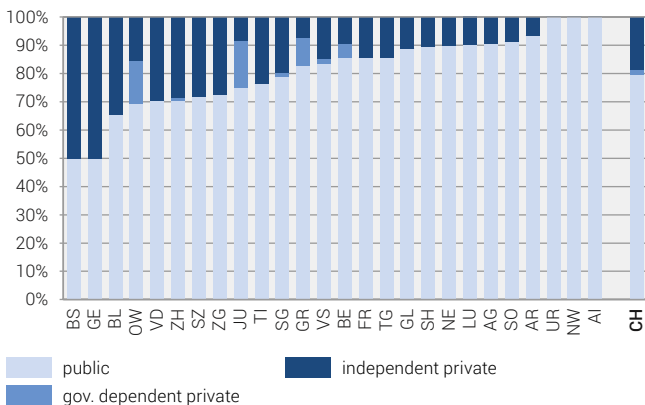
Source: FSO – SBI

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At the lower secondary level, the proportion of government dependent private schools reaches or exceeds 10% in three of the seven cantons that collect this data: Jura (17%), Obwalden (15%) and Graubünden (10%). The cantons of Basel-Stadt and Geneva have the highest proportion of independent private schools (50%; see graph G9).

## Lower secondary level: schools by canton and status, 2019/20

G9



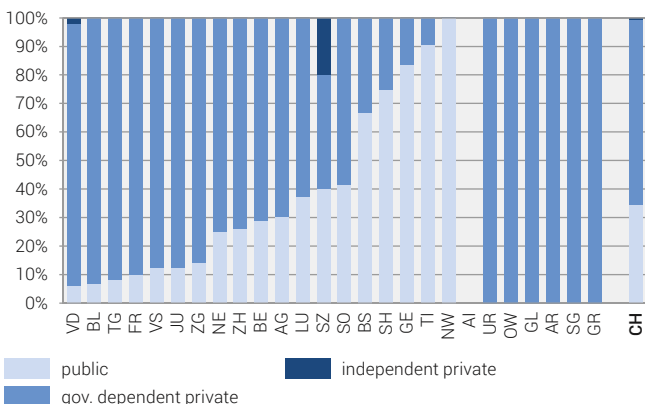
Source: FSO – SBI

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Special needs schools have a particular position in the Swiss school system with regard to the authority responsible for their funding. In most cantons, the majority of these schools are government dependent private schools. In six cantons (UR, OW, GL, AR, SG, GR) they are all government dependent. Only one canton (NW) has no government dependent private special needs schools.

## Special needs schools by canton and status, 2019/20

G10



Source: FSO – SBI

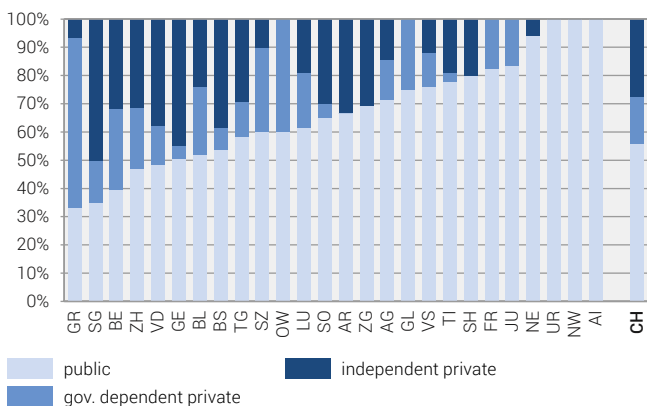
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The majority of upper secondary level schools are public in most cantons. The cantons of Graubünden, St. Gallen, Bern, Zurich and Vaud are exceptions with a majority of private schools (dependent or independent private) at this level. The participation of the cantons in the financing of private vocational schools and of private general education institutions varies widely from one canton to another.

The proportion of independent private schools varies between 50% in the canton of St. Gallen and 6% in the canton of Neuchâtel. Four cantons do not have any independent private schools at this level (OW, GL, FR, JU) and three cantons only have public schools (UR, NW, AI).

## Upper secondary level: schools by canton and status, 2019/20

G11



Source: FSO – SBI

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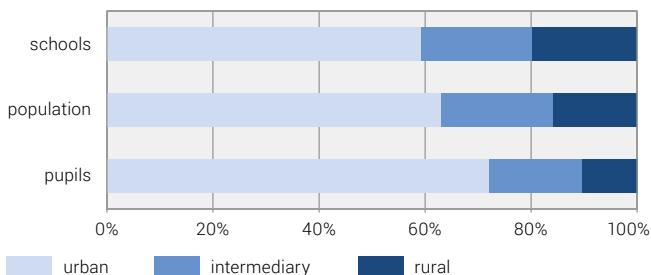
## 9 Territorial distribution of educational institutions

The distribution of educational institutions on Swiss territory presented in this chapter is based on the urban-rural typology, which classifies the Swiss communes, mainly by the criteria of density and size. This typology consists of three categories: urban, rural and intermediary (with the latter having both urban and rural characteristics).

In the academic year 2019/20, 59% of schools from primary to upper secondary level were located in urban commune, accounting for 63% of the population<sup>1</sup> and 72% of pupils. In turn, 21% of schools were located in intermediary communes, with 21% of the population and 17% of the pupils. Finally, rural communes accommodated 20% of schools with 16% of the population and 10% of the pupils.

### Schools, population and pupils by commune type, 2019/20

G 12



Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL, STATPOP, Switzerland's geographical levels

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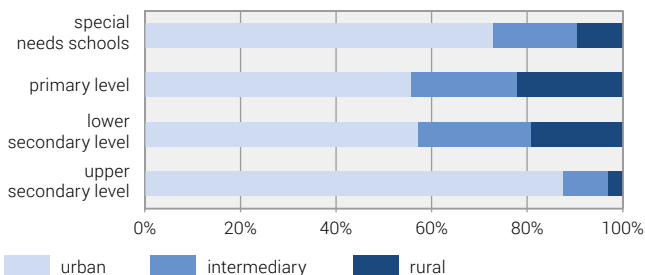
The territorial distribution of schools varies by educational level. While about half of the schools at primary and lower secondary level are located in urban centres (56% and 57%), the proportion of special needs schools in this commune type amounts to 73% and that of upper secondary level schools to 87% (see graph G13).

In intermediary and rural communes, primary schools are distributed in a similar manner (22%). For the other levels of education, schools are more represented in intermediary than in the rural communes (24% and 19% for lower secondary level schools, 18% and 9% for special needs schools, 10% and 3% for upper secondary level schools).

<sup>1</sup> Population and household statistics (STATPOP) on 31 December 2019

## Schools by commune type and educational level, 2019/20

G13



Sources: FSO – SBI, Switzerland's geographical levels

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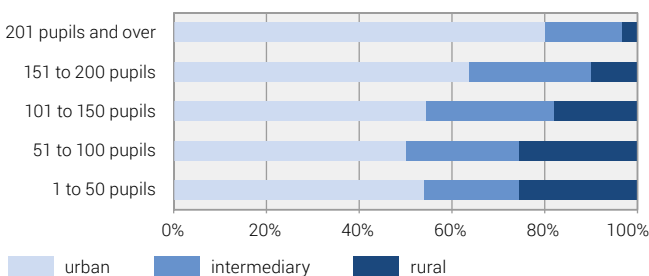
Considering all levels of education together, about half of the schools in a size category with 150 or fewer pupils are located in an urban commune (between 50 and 54%). This proportion is 64% for schools with 151 to 200 pupils, and 80% for schools with more than 200 pupils.

In the intermediary communes, there are about a quarter of schools in each size category between 51 and 200 pupils. This proportion amounts to 20% for schools with 50 pupils or less and to 17% for schools with more than 200 pupils.

In rural communes, schools with a maximum of 50 or 100 pupils are the most common (26%) and schools with more than 200 pupils are the rarest (3%).

## Schools by commune type and size, 2019/20

G14



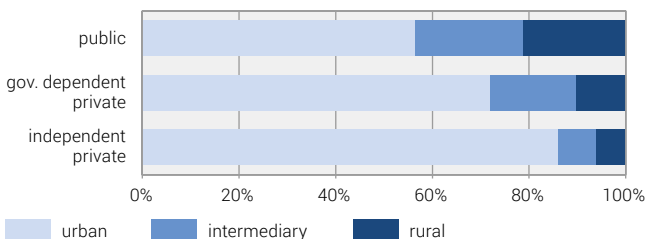
Sources: FSO – SBI, SDL, Switzerland's geographical levels

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Distributed by status, more than half of the public schools (56%), almost three quarters of government dependent private schools (72%) and 86% of independent private schools are located in an urban commune.

In the intermediary and rural communes, the proportion of public schools is similar (22% and 21%). The same applies to independent private schools (8% and 6%). With respect to government dependent private schools, 18% are located in an intermediary and 10% in a rural commune.

## Schools by commune type and status, 2019/20 G 15



Sources: FSO – SBI, Switzerland's geographical levels

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## 10 Accessibility of schools

The results presented in this chapter for schools in compulsory and upper secondary level education are taken from the services for the population statistics. The accessibility of schools for the population is measured in terms of the distance travelled by road from the place of residence to the place of education.<sup>1</sup>

The graphs G16 and G17 show the distribution of the accessibility distances to schools<sup>2</sup> across the Swiss territory. The pattern of distribution of accessibility distances reflects, more or less distinctly the distribution of population across the territory.<sup>3</sup> Less densely populated regions, such as rural areas, have greater accessibility distances than more densely populated regions, such as urban areas. This pattern of distribution is particularly noticeable with regard to schools in compulsory education (see graph G16). Upper secondary level schools are primarily concentrated in densely populated regions and serve a large catchment area (see graph G17). Accessibility distances thus increase considerably for people living outside of urban areas.

According to the results of the services to the population statistics, accessibility distances in urban areas are roughly half those in rural areas. In intermediate regions, these distances lie between the values for urban and rural areas and are generally higher than the national average. An analysis by the typology of communes shows that variations between the different commune categories are particularly marked for upper secondary level schools. To access these schools from a rural commune, the distance required is six to ten times longer than from an urban commune. As far as schools in compulsory education are concerned, they are located within a close radius and the average accessibility distance is less than one kilometre.

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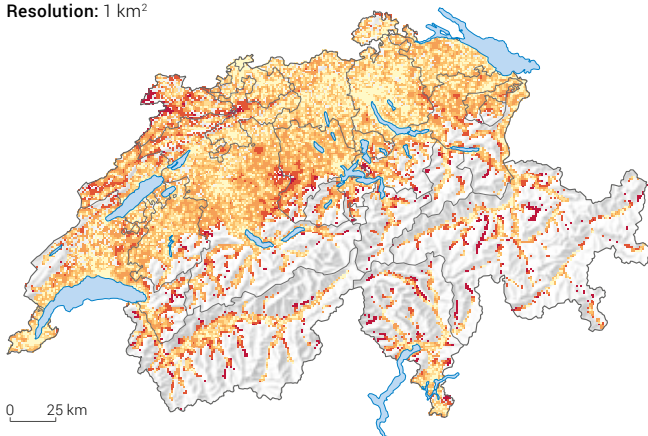
<sup>1</sup> see under "Sources" and "Definitions" at the end of the publication. For more information (in French and German): [www.statistique.ch](http://www.statistique.ch) → Trouver des statistiques → Analyses territoriales → Services à la population

<sup>2</sup> defined by the NOGA codes 851000 to 853200 from the structural business statistics (STATENT). Data as on 31.12.2018

<sup>3</sup> according to the population and household statistics (STATPOP). Data as on 31.12.2018

## Accessibility of compulsory education schools<sup>1</sup>, 2018

G 16

Resolution: 1 km<sup>2</sup>

**Distance<sup>2</sup> to closest school, in metres**  
(percentage of population)

0 – 500 (58%)	2 001 – 4 000 (3%)
501 – 1 000 (28%)	4 001 – 8 000 (1%)
1 001 – 2 000 (9%)	> 8 000 (0%)

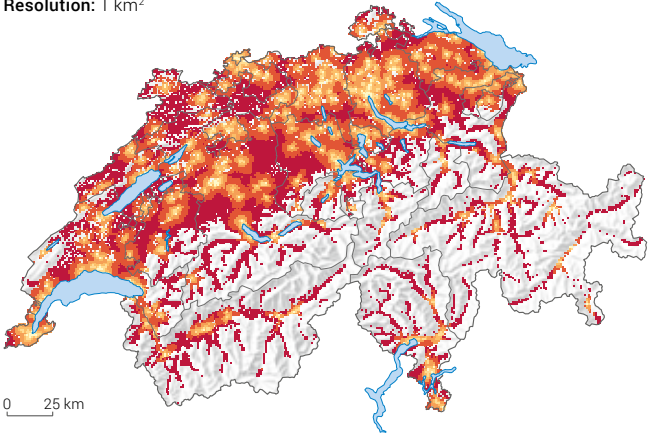
**CH:** 634 m (average distance)

<sup>1</sup> According to NOGA 2008, codes 851000 to 853101

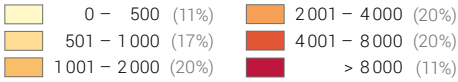
<sup>2</sup> Calculated using the road network (swissTLM3D) weighted by the resident population

## Accessibility of upper secondary level schools<sup>1</sup>, 2018

G17

Resolution: 1 km<sup>2</sup>

**Distance<sup>2</sup> to closest school, in metres**  
(percentage of population)



**CH: 3 578 m (average distance)**

<sup>1</sup> According to NOGA 2008, codes 853102 to 853200

<sup>2</sup> Calculated using the road network (swissTLM3D) weighted by the resident population

## 11 Sources

### **Educational institution statistics (SBI)**

The educational institutions statistics describe educational infrastructure from primary to tertiary level by canton. All of the mainstream and special needs educational institutions, public and private, with at least one pupil are included in these statistics. The data are collected using the statistics on pupils and students (SDL, SHIS-studex) and are supplemented by information from the Business and Enterprise Register (BER).

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

The statistics on pupils and students include pupils and students from primary to tertiary levels (excluding higher education institutions). All people who have followed an educational programme for at least half a year, either full or part-time, are counted. Both private and public educational institutions are included in this census.

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

The school staff statistics collect information on persons working in public or private schools from primary to tertiary level (excluding higher education institutions) in Switzerland.

### **Swiss Higher Education Information System (SHIS)**

The Swiss Higher Education Information System's student and graduate database (SHIS) contains data relating to students and degrees (SHIS-studex) as well as on personnel (SHIS-PERS) at universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education. It provides information on the study situation, the course of study and on various socio-demographic factors concerning students and staff.

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

The statistics on public expenditure on education cover the part of the federal administration's public expenditure listed under "Education". It includes expenditure by public authorities from compulsory education to institutions of higher education. It refers to the results of the most recent accounting year (2018).

## **Switzerland's geographic levels**

The geographic levels include the territorial typologies and subdivisions whose basic unit is the commune. They enable spatial analyses and representations based on various territorial divisions, each having their own utility depending on the topics covered or questions asked.

## **Population and Household statistics (STATPOP)**

The Population and Household statistics are part of the annual population census system. They provide information on the size and structure of the resident population at the end of a year as well as the movements of the resident population during the calendar year (31 December).

## **Statistics on services for the population (SPOP)**

The services for the population statistics measure the territorial distribution of the supply of services the Swiss population may use across a commune's territory, as well as accessibility to those services by distance travelled by road from a person's home to the closest public service. The analyses cover around thirty services, including schools in compulsory and upper secondary level education. The statistics are based on the results of the most recent structural business statistics (STATENT) (2018).



## 12 Definitions

### Double counting

In the statistics on educational institutions, the same school offering an educational programme over several level of education may be counted several times, depending on the level of detail required by the analysis.

### Educational institution

An educational institution is defined by its administrative level (the management) and by the educational site(s) (buildings) under its authority. An educational site usually consists of a single building, although there may be several if a few minutes' walk separates them from each other. In general, the terms "school" or "establishment" correspond to educational sites. An educational institution has permanent teaching staff and a permanent pupil/student population. It is founded on a communal, cantonal or federal law and fulfils an explicit educational mandate. The educational institutions are placed under the responsibility of either public authorities (the Confederation, canton, commune or other public body), or a private body.

### Language region

The language regions are based on the national language spoken by the majority of the population in a commune. There are four language regions in Switzerland:

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

### Size

A school's size is determined from the number of pupils attending. The pupils considered in this calculation vary, however, depending on the perspective chosen for the analysis (see double counting principle). The size of the school may thus be calculated on the basis of the total number of pupils enrolled in the school (perspective A) or on the basis of the number of pupils enrolled in a level of education offered by the school (perspective B). For example: a school has 110 pupils with 10 pupils at primary level 1–2 and 100 at primary level 3–8. According to perspective A, this school is classified in the

category “101 to 150 pupils” because the entire school population is taken into consideration. According to perspective B, it is classified in the category “1 to 50 pupils” for primary level 1–2 because only the 10 pupils enrolled in primary level 1–2 are counted, and in the category “51 to 100 pupils” for primary level 3–8. In this brochure, the size of the institution is generally calculated according to perspective B.

## **Statistics on services for the population: databases and NOGA for education**

The databases used for the analysis of education as a service for the population are: the structural business statistics (STATENT), based on the General Classification of Economic Activities (NOGA 2008), the population and households statistics (STATPOP) as well as Swisstopo’s road and path network.

The NOGA codes for education used in the scope of these statistics are 851000 to 853101 for schools in compulsory education and 853102 to 853200 for upper secondary level schools.

## **Teaching staff**

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

## **Urban-rural typology**

The urban-rural typology is derived from the typology of communes in nine categories and consists of three categories: urban, intermediary and rural. The differentiation into nine categories is based on criteria of density, size and accessibility.

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

## Information

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

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

**Online**

[www.statistics.admin.ch](http://www.statistics.admin.ch)

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