

Education in Finland: international and national perspectives

Kristiina Volmari, PhD

Former head of statistics and international affairs

Finnish National Agency for Education

Kvolmari@gmail.com

Underlying educational understanding is based on equity

Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. The public authorities shall guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship.

(Constitution of Finland)



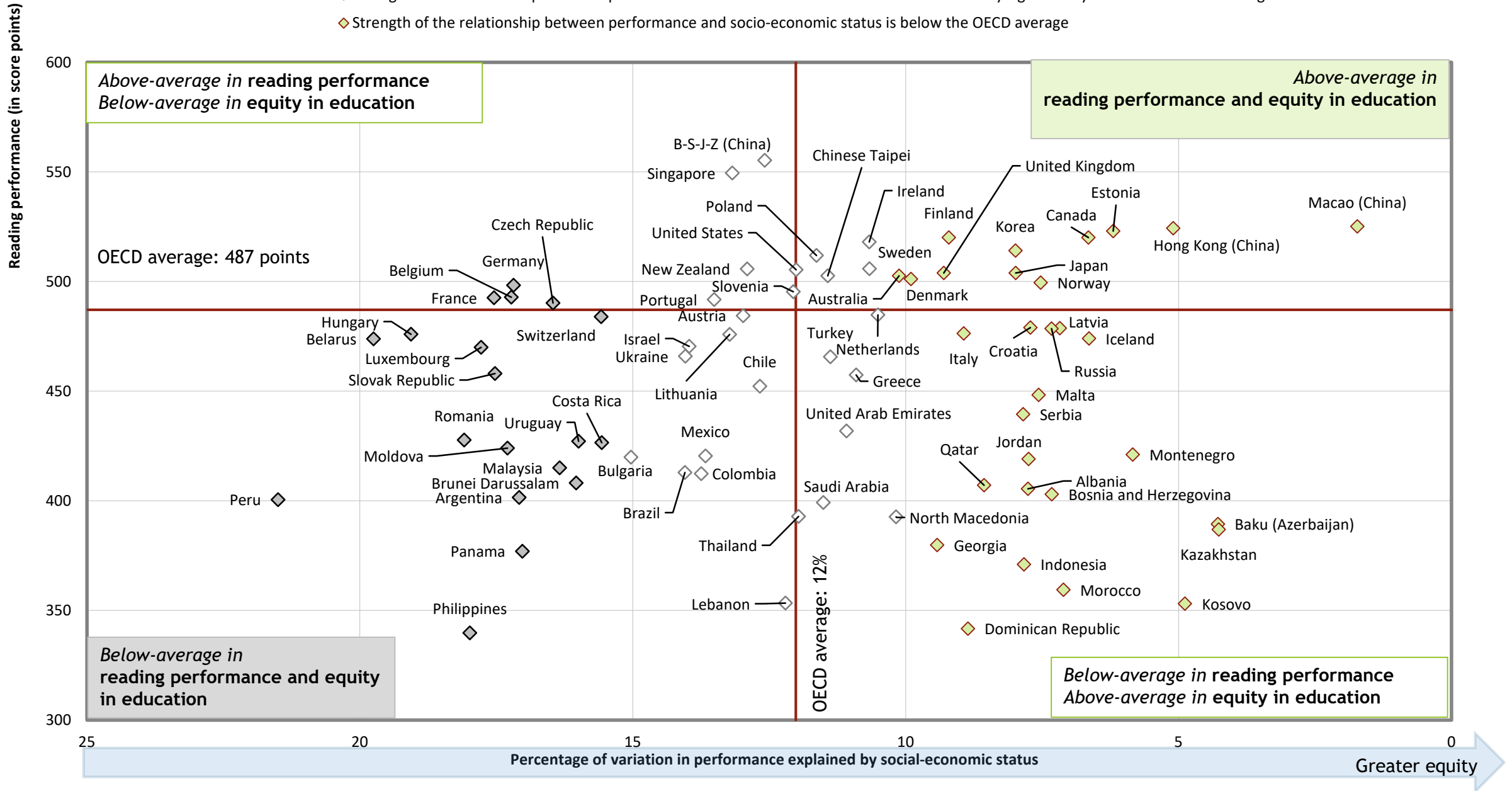
PISA 2018:
differences
between
schools
smallest



- OECD average 29 %
- Finland 7 %

Variance of performance between schools as a proportion of total performance across OECD countries

- ◆ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is above the OECD average
- ◇ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is not statistically significantly different from the average
- ◇ Strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is below the OECD average



Education developed in partnership

National & local
authorities

Teachers' union

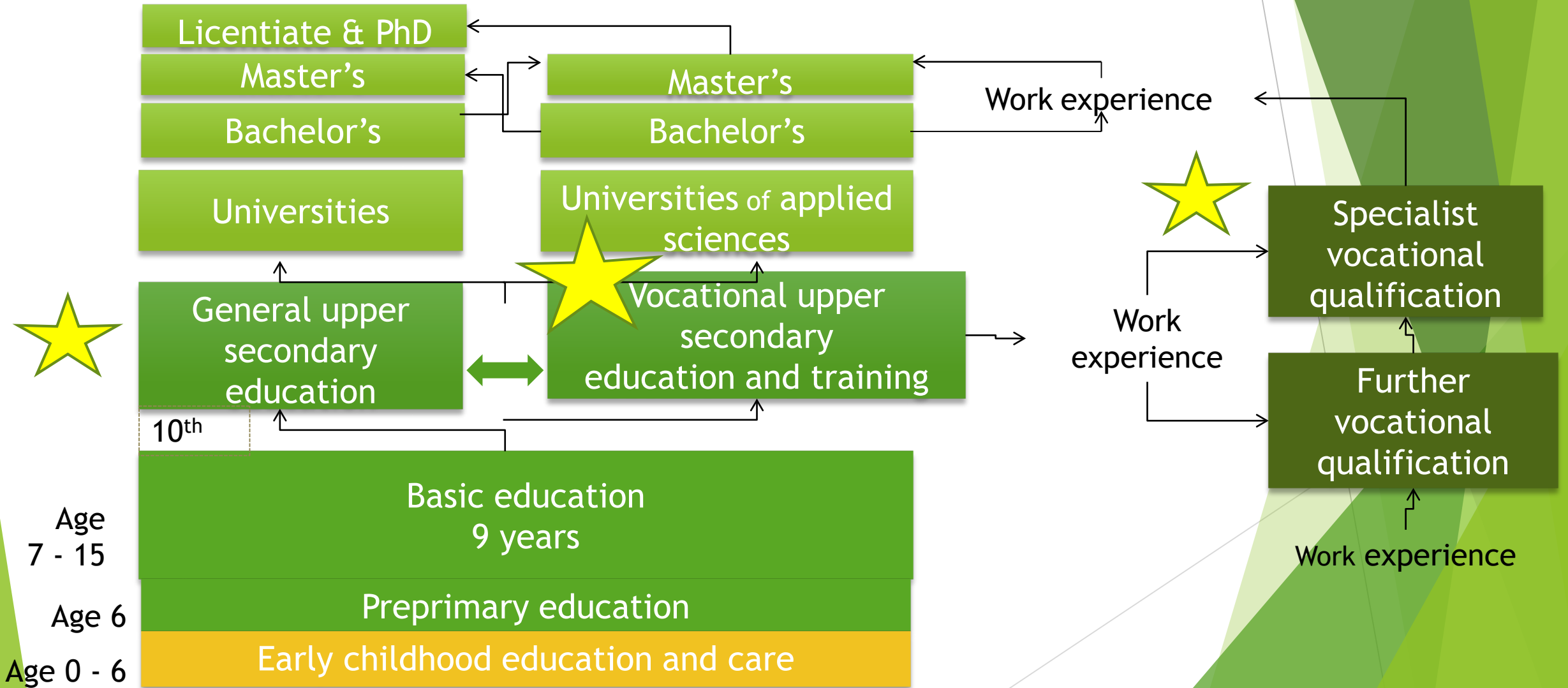
Social partners

Parents

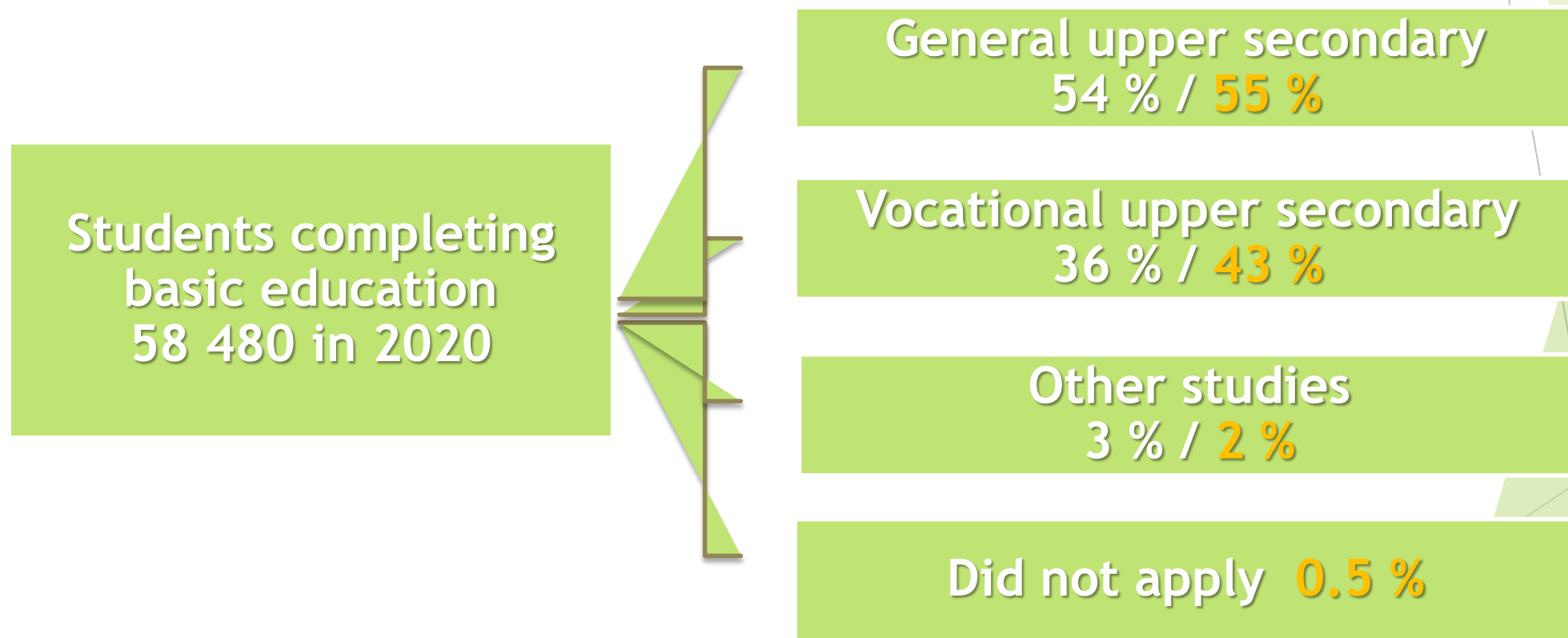
Pupils and
students

Research
institutions

No dead-ends in the education system



Where do pupils apply to immediately after compulsory education? 2001 / 2020



Students completing
basic education
58 480 in 2020

General upper secondary
54 % / 55 %

Vocational upper secondary
36 % / 43 %

Other studies
3 % / 2 %

Did not apply 0.5 %

Specificities of the Finnish education system

Teachers highly trained			Teaching attractive profession		
Annual instruction time low					
Focus on learning rather than testing			No ranking		
Focus on support					
Non-selective			Flexible grouping		
Basic education starts at age 7					
Evolution	Public funding	Free education			
Central steering	Local decisions	Co-operation			
Education a priority	Decentralised	Trust			

Compulsory instruction time in general education 2021

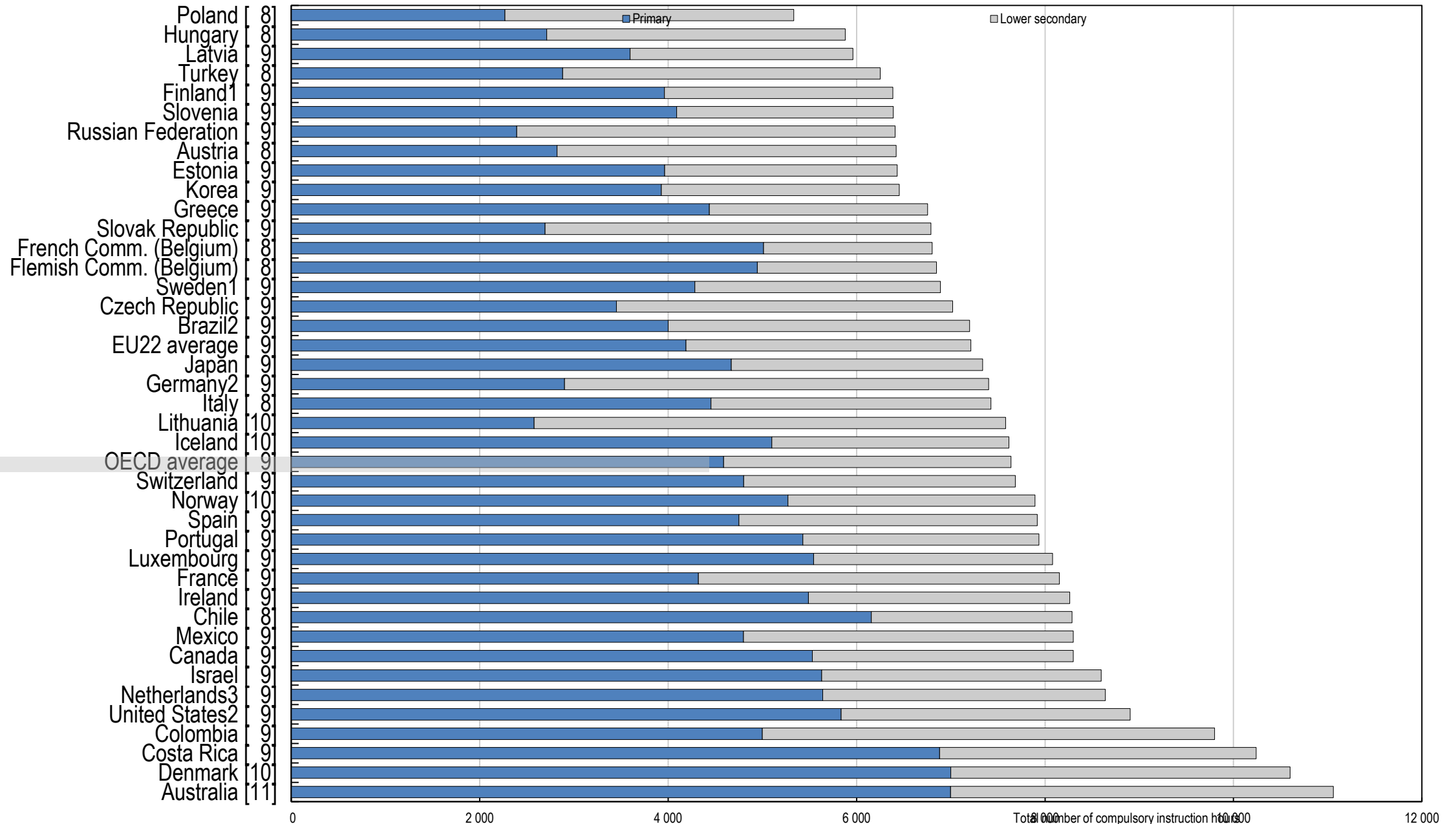
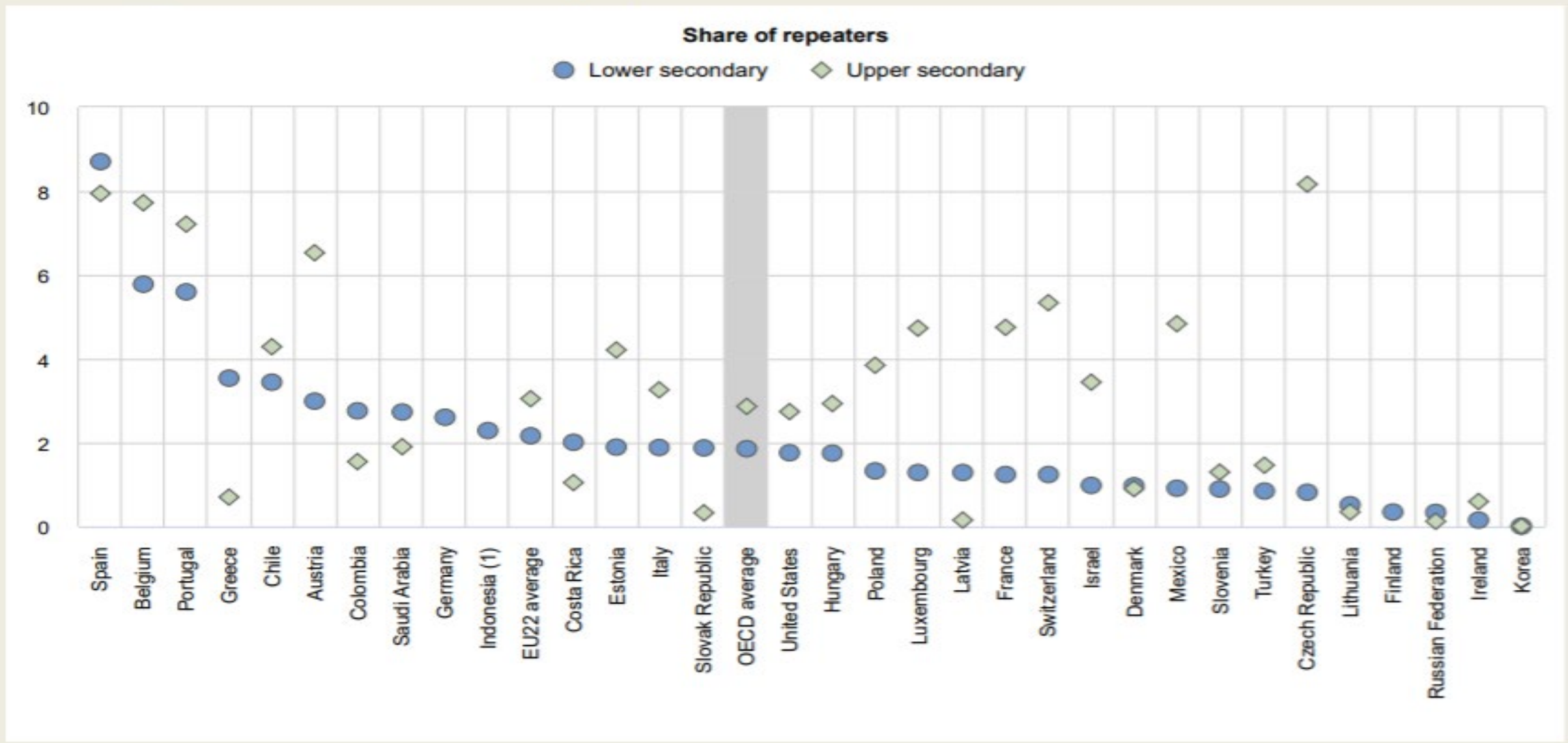


Figure B1.2. Share of repeaters and share of boys among repeaters in lower and upper secondary education (2019)

General programmes in initial education only, in per cent



Central steering



Central

- ▶ Educational priorities
- ▶ Minimum time allocation
- ▶ National core curricula
- ▶ Size of state subsidies

Local decisions



Local

- ▶ Educational priorities
- ▶ Local curricula
- ▶ Allocation of subsidies
- ▶ Class size
- ▶ Recruitment
- ▶ Teacher "evaluation"
- ▶ Quality assurance

Basic education is free for
pupils and families

Education is mostly publicly funded

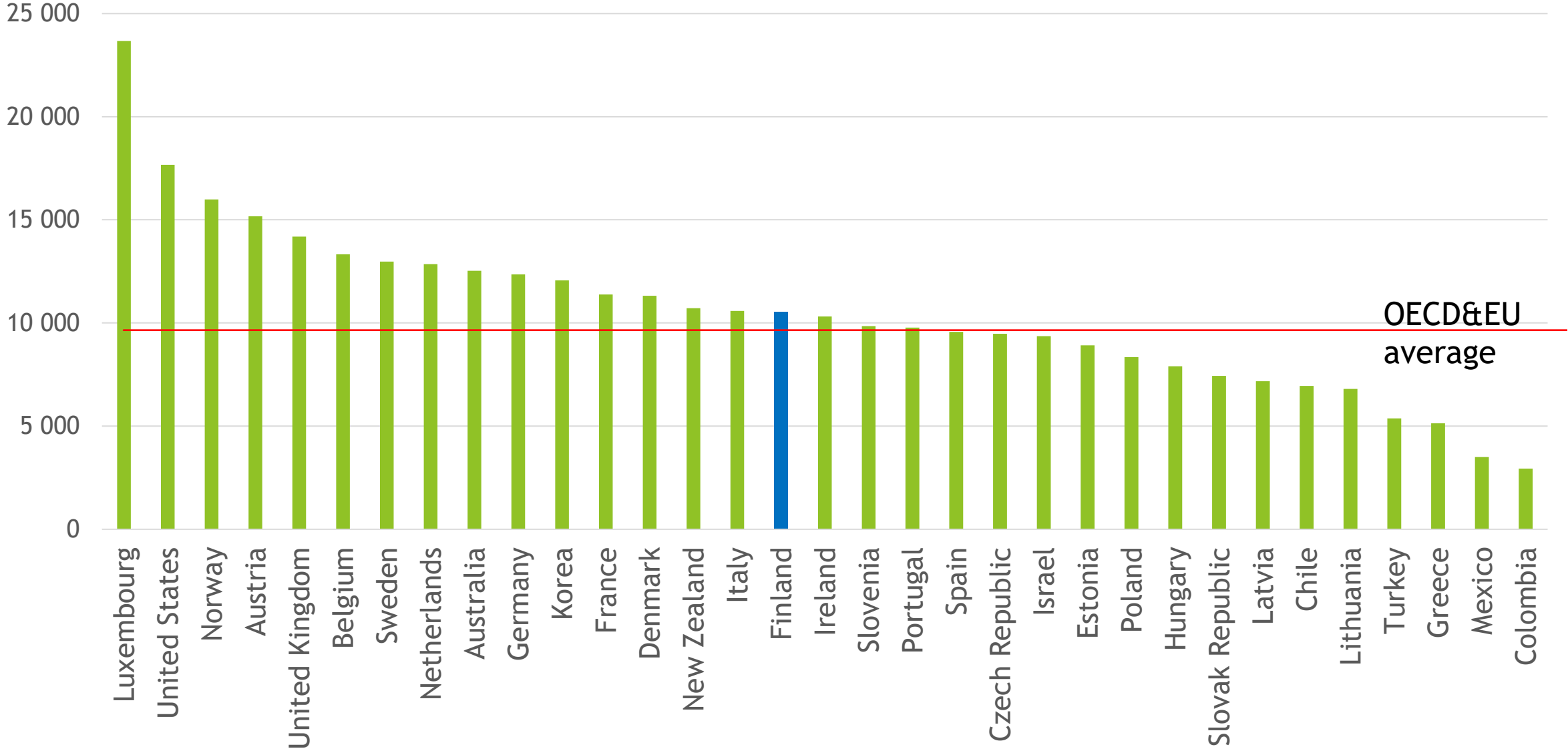
- ▶ Mostly funded locally
- ▶ State subsidies on average 25%
- ▶ Compensation for local conditions

Expenditure on education 2020



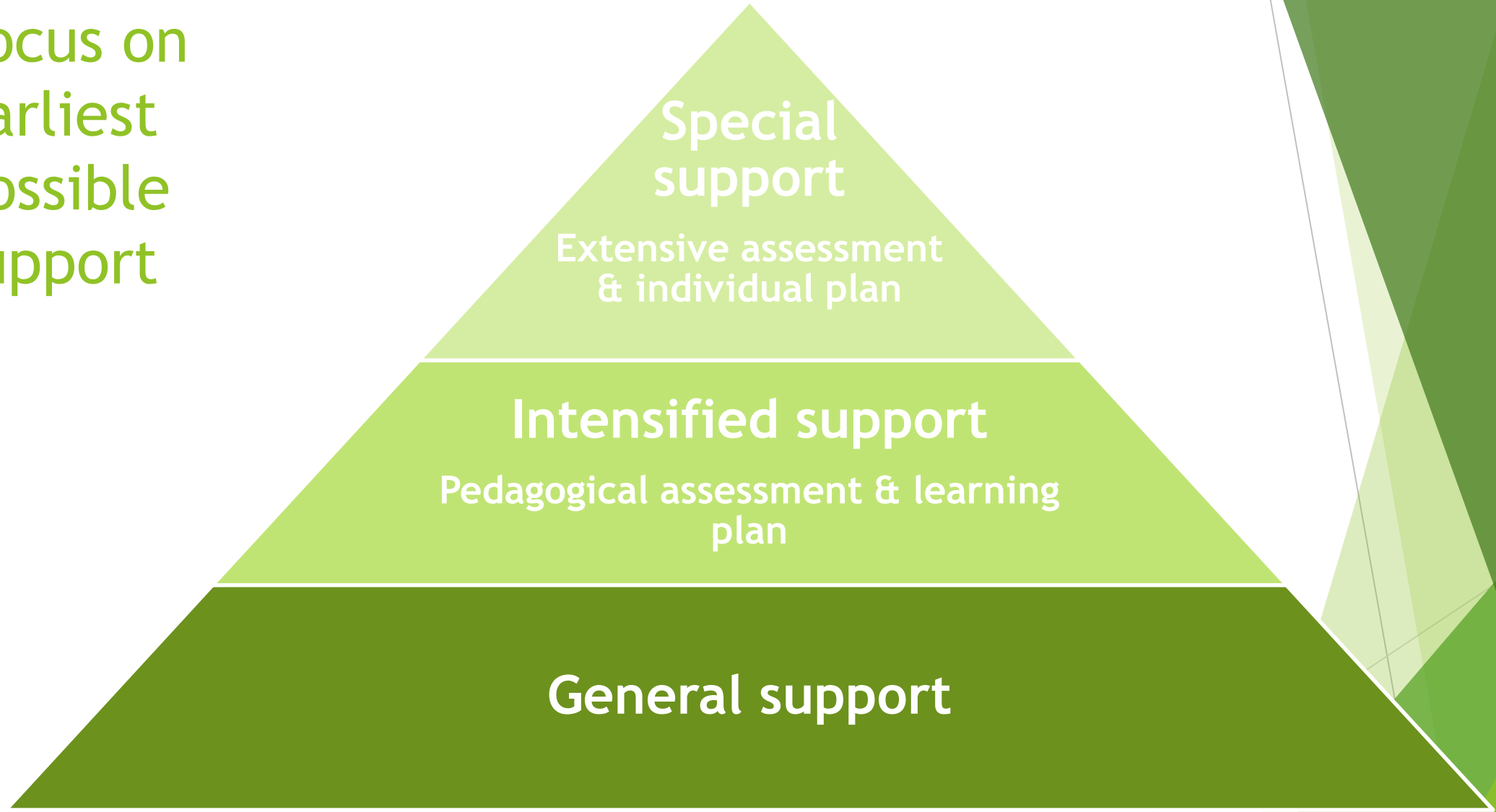
- ▶ **Operative costs per pupil/student**
 - ▶ pre-primary education 6 341 €
 - ▶ basic education 9 597 €
 - ▶ general upper secondary 7 961 €
 - ▶ vocational upper secondary 10 393 €

Costs internationally average



well-being promotes learning

Focus on
earliest
possible
support



Pupil and student welfare

Collective
and
individual
approach

Health care

School meals

Safety

School meals

School meals generally consist of typical Finnish foods.
A good school meal consists of:



warm main course



vegetables



bread and table spread



drink

water



Guidance and counselling



- Subjective right
- Part of the curriculum
- Collective and individual approach
- Develops learning skills
- Supports self-confidence, participation and personal growth
- Focus on transition points

Quality assurance is

a tool for development

Education providers have main responsibility for quality

Self-evaluation

A tree diagram with a brown trunk and several green, rounded branches. The top branch is the largest and contains the text 'Self-evaluation'. Below it, there are four smaller branches. The left side has two branches: the top one contains 'Skills demonstrations' and 'Competence-based qualifications', and the bottom one contains 'System & thematic evaluations'. The right side has two branches: the top one contains 'National evaluations of learning outcomes' and the bottom one contains 'International assessments'.

Skills
demonstrations
Competence-based
qualifications

System & thematic
evaluations

National evaluations of
learning outcomes

International
assessments

Evaluation of learning outcomes function as traffic lights

National evaluation
plan

Sample-based

Stratified

Mother tongue and
mathematics regularly

Other subjects
according to policy
priorities

Child's overall development
and joy of learning
emphasised in Early Childhood
Education and Care

Pre-primary education at the age of six

- ▶ free and compulsory
- ▶ provided in ECEC centres or schools
- ▶ minimum 700 hours per year
- ▶ promoting child's prerequisites for growth, development and learning
- ▶ a continuous learning path from ECEC to school
- ▶ integrative education
- ▶ learning through play, joy of learning



ECEC plans and curriculum

National core
curriculum
for ECEC

National core
curriculum
for pre-
primary
education

Local
curricula &
plans

Child's overall well-being in focus

Integrative education

Individual ECEC plan, no learning standards

Learning through play essential

Language, physical activity, exploration, artistic experiences and self-expression

ECEC partnership

Basic education:

Every pupil is unique and

has the right to

high-quality education

Maximising
potential:

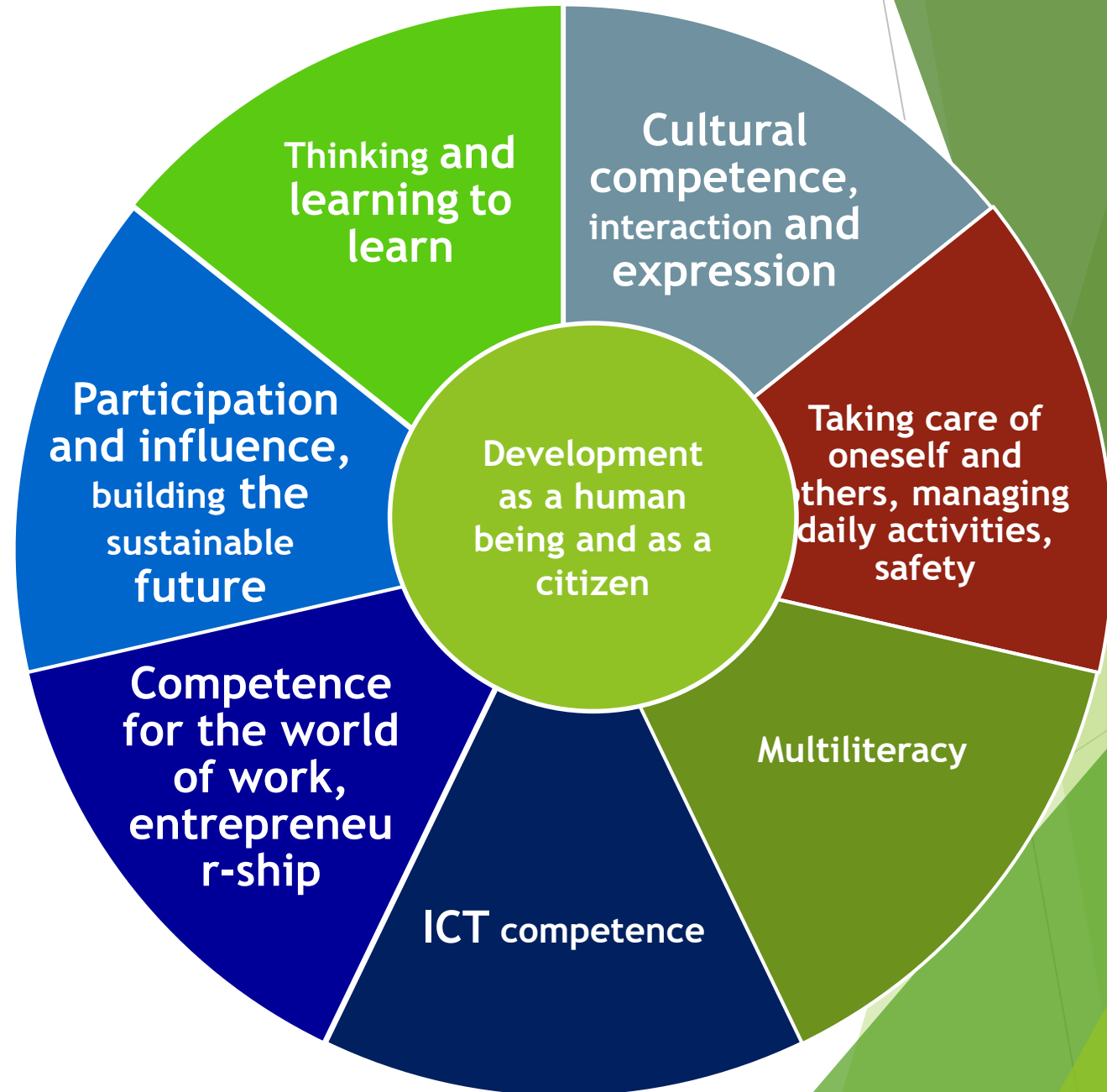
every
child is
unique



Rethinking competences

National Goals for Basic Education and transversal competences

- ▶ knowledge
- ▶ skills
- ▶ values
- ▶ attitudes
- ▶ will



National minimum time allocation sample of subjects (annual weekly lessons¹)

Forms	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
Mother tongue & literature	14	18	10	42
Mathematics	6	15	11	32
A language (1st foreign language)	2	9	7	18
B language (2nd national language)	-	2	4	6

Forms	1-6	7-9	Total
Environment and science	14	17	31
History & civics	5	7	12
Arts, crafts & sports			62
¹ Total annual no of lessons x 38		Total min	224

Conception of learning

Learner's active role

- Sets targets
- Reflects & analyses
- Solves problems

Interaction

- Learns with others and in different environments
- Understands consequences

Learning to learn

- Recognises own way of learning
- Applies this to promote learning

Self-conception and confidence

- Helps setting targets
- Receives feedback

General upper secondary education

aims at

broad-based knowledge

Upper secondary education

Flexible

Personalised

Modular/course structure

Combining general & vocational studies

Eligibility for higher education



Distribution of lesson hours in general upper secondary education


Compulsory studies	150 points
Optional studies	20 points

1 study point= 19 x 45 minutes

Distribution of study points sample of subjects

Subject	Compulsory	Optional
Mother tongue & literature	12	6
A-language	14	4
B-language	10	4
Other languages		16+16
Mathematics	12/20	4/6
Science	10	32
Humanities & social sciences	24	32
Arts, crafts & PE	10	14

Matriculation examination

- 
- Minimum 5 tests
 - Mother tongue + 4 of the following:
 - 2nd national language
 - foreign language
 - Mathematics
 - one subject in sciences and humanities
 - One or more optional tests possible
 - Biannual

vocational education
and training:

focus on competences and
individual learner



Vocational education and training (VET)

Close cooperation with the labour market

Work-based learning

Flexible learning pathways

Open pathways from VET
to higher and further education

**Key competences
for lifelong
learning**

Entrepreneurial competence

Digital competence

Societal competence and citizenship

Competence of sustainable development

Cultural competence

**Mathematical, natural scientific and technical
competence**

Development of competences

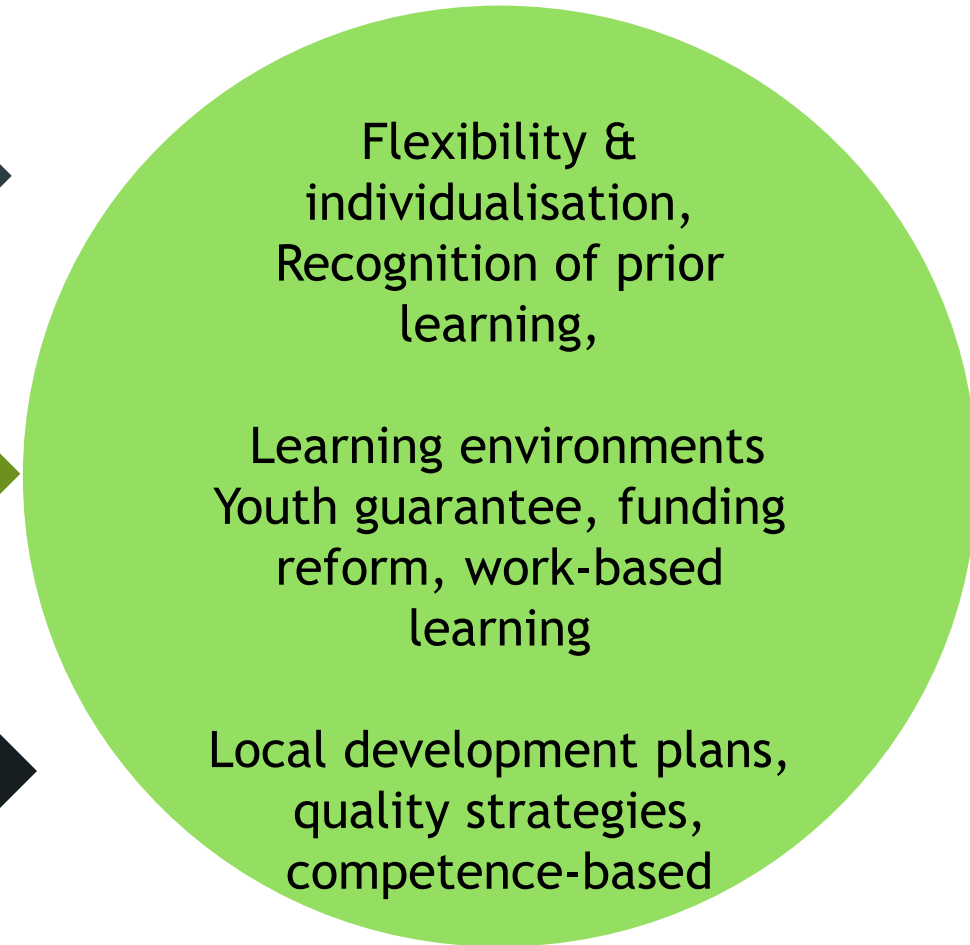
Communication and interaction competence

Developing VET

Improving effectiveness

Drop-out & exclusion

Quality improvement



Funding of vocational education and training (2022)

Strategy funding Maximum 4 % of total funding

50%
Core funding
Student years

35%
Performance-based funding
Qualifications and qualification units

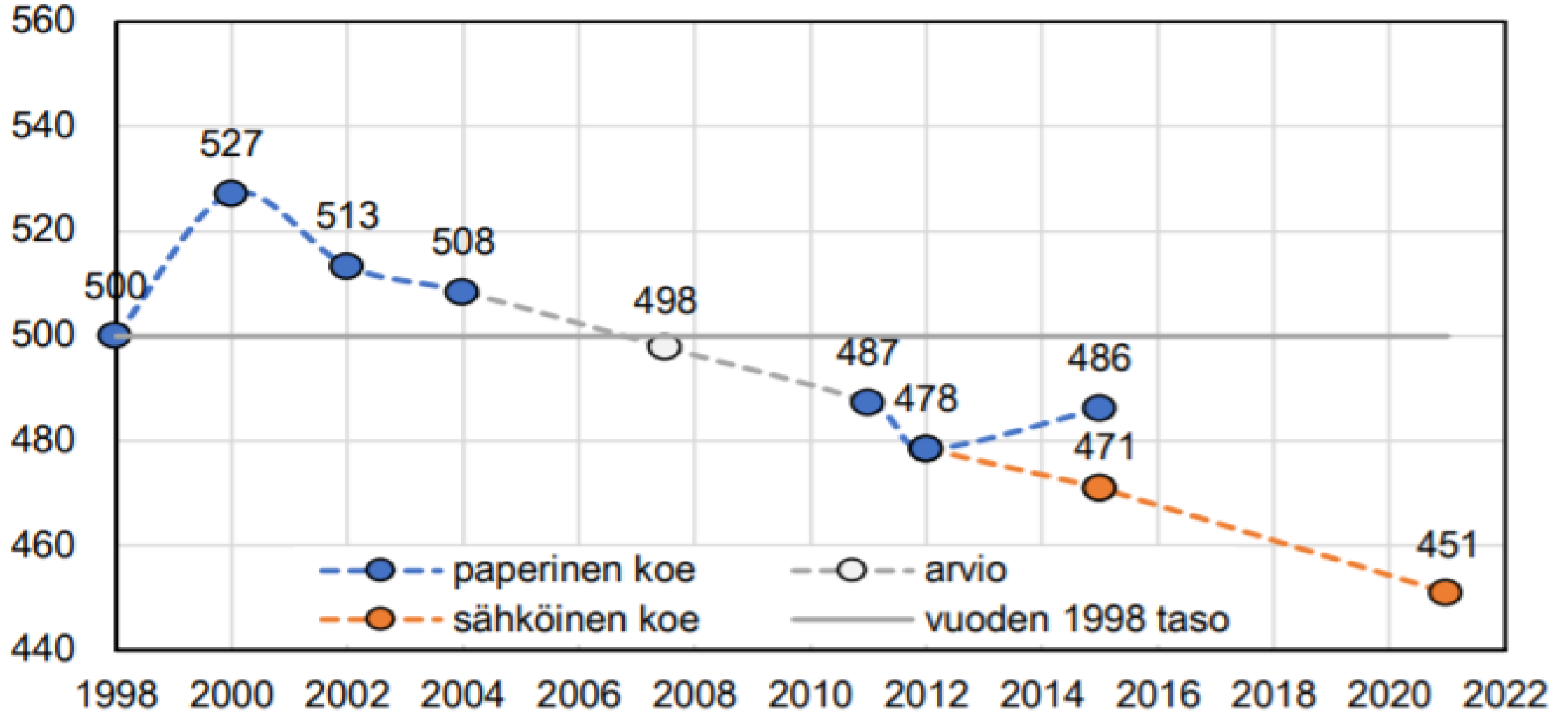
15 %
Effectiveness-based funding
Employment and further studies

Current issues

- ▶ learners with migrant background
- ▶ extending compulsory education
- ▶ maths results show a downward trend



Trend in mathematics' national assessments 1998-2021



Paper test

Computer-based test



Estimate

Some good news as well

- ▶ Differences between schools have not grown in the last 11 years
- ▶ No notable differences in learning outcomes between boys and girls, Finnish- and Swedish-speakers
- ▶ Pupils think maths is useful

Finnish teachers are
trusted professionals

..... in 50 years a lot has changed in school

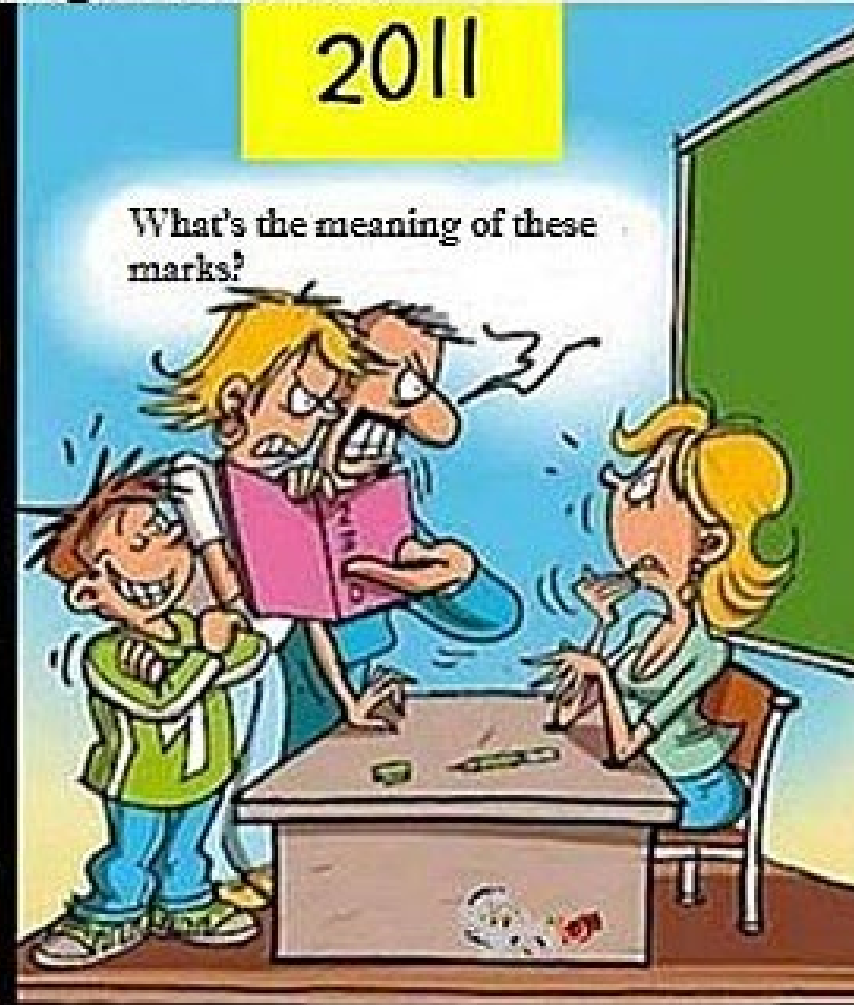
1961

What's the meaning of these marks?



2011

What's the meaning of these marks?



Finnish teachers are supportive

Finnish teachers believe in:

- ▶ **equity and encouragement**
- ▶ **individual support**
- ▶ **strengthening the pupils' thinking skills**
- ▶ **developing the pupils' self-confidence and tolerance**

Source: From goals to interaction.
Evaluation of pedagogy in Finnish basic education 2008
(National Council for Evaluation in Education in Finland)



Most teachers are required a master's degree

Kindergarten teachers
180 ECTS (3 years)

Class teachers
300 ECTS (5 years)

Subject teachers
300 ECTS (5-6 years)

**Teachers
of vocational
studies:**

**Master's , Bachelor's
+ work experience+
pedagogical studies
of 60 ECTS
(1 year)**

Principals:
teacher education
+ e.g. certificate
in educational
administration

Teacher training institutions can select heavily

Intake into teacher education 2020 (% of those who applied)

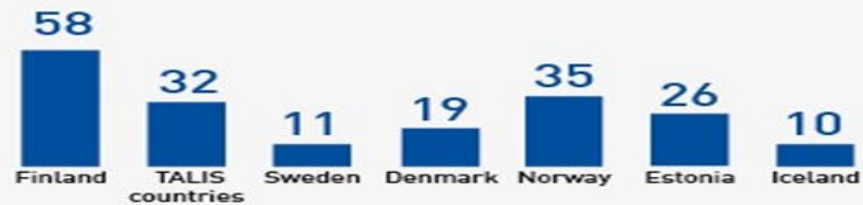
Class teacher education **16 %**

Subject teacher education **10 % - 53 %**

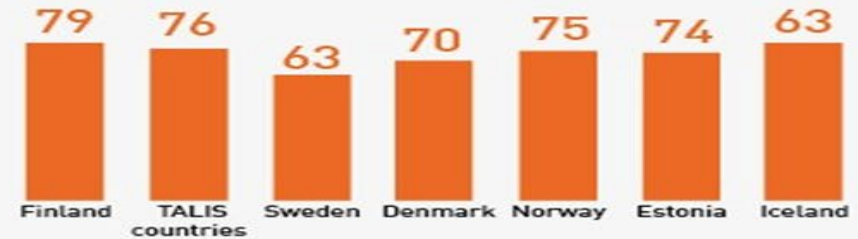
Vocational teacher education **38 %**

Finnish lower secondary (ISCED2) teachers are satisfied with their career choice

Percentage of teachers (%) who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements



I think that the teaching profession is valued in society

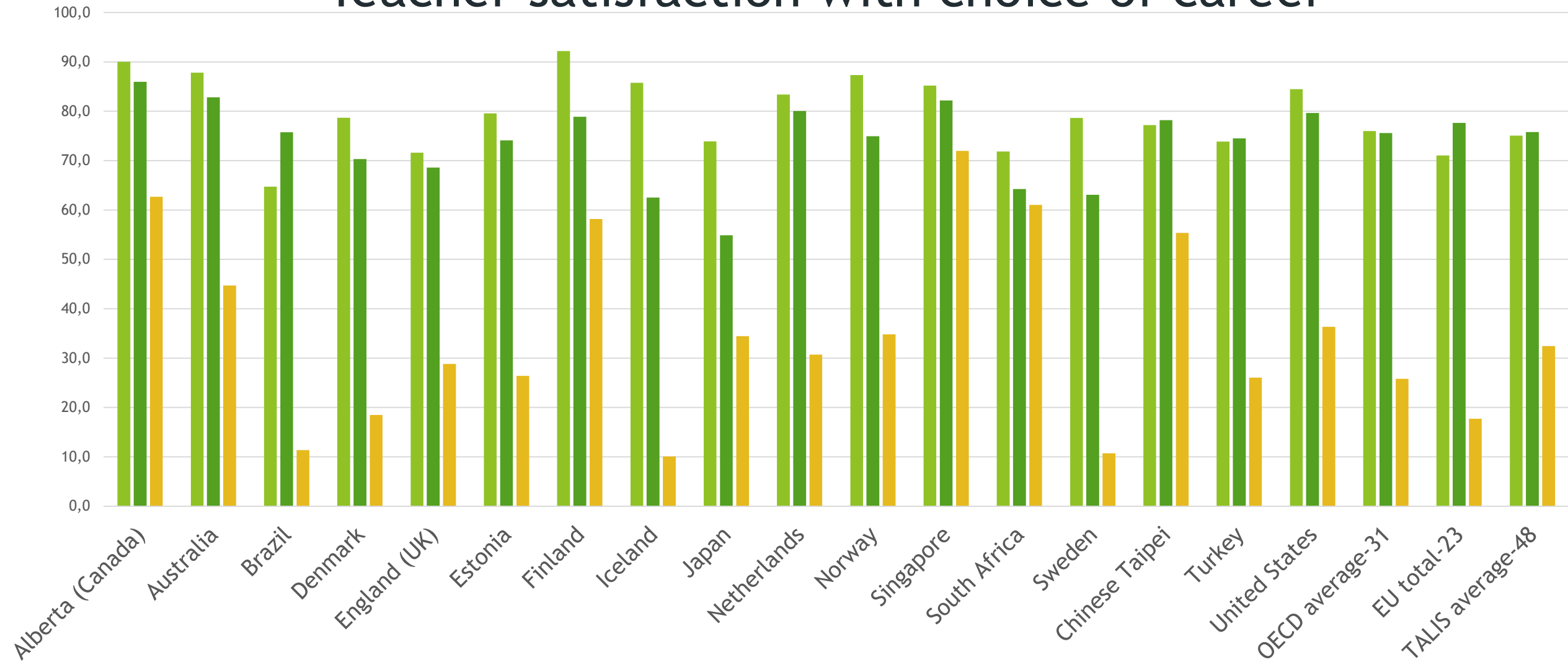


If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher



The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages

Teacher satisfaction with choice of career



- The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages %
- If I could decide again, I would still choose to work as a teacher % ⁵³
- I think that the teaching profession is valued in society %

Teacher and principal salaries in Finland

(permanent contract, average actual gross salaries per month 2020)

▶ Preprimary teacher	2 800 €
▶ class teacher, primary education	3 700 €
▶ subject teacher, lower secondary	4 100 €
▶ subject teacher, general upper secondary	4 600 €
▶ vocational studies teacher (VET)	4 300 €
▶ principal, basic education	5 700 €
▶ principal, general upper secondary	6 200 €

Median salary in the municipal sector in Finland 2020: 3 200 €

Teachers' actual salaries relative to earnings of similarly educated workers 2020

	<i>Pre-pri</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Lower sec</i>	<i>Upper sec*</i>
Australia		0,87	0,89	0,87
Chile	0,64	0,63	0,65	0,68
Czech Repub	0,79	0,72	0,72	0,73
Estonia	0,78	0,93	0,91	0,90
Finland	0,74	0,76	0,85	0,95
France	0,80	0,78	0,84	0,95
Germany		0,85	0,94	0,99
Greece	0,75	0,75	0,78	0,78
Hungary	0,62	0,61	0,61	0,57
Israel	0,81	0,80	0,81	0,89
Latvia	1,14	1,46	1,44	1,57
Netherlands	0,80	0,80	0,89	0,89
New Zealand		0,87	0,88	0,92
Norway	0,76	0,82	0,82	0,82
Slovenia	0,79	0,82	0,84	0,84
Sweden	0,77	0,82	0,76	0,76
United States	0,52	0,52	0,54	0,56
Flemish Com	0,92	0,90	0,89	0,92
French Comn	0,89	0,86	0,81	0,87
England (UK)	0,79	0,79	0,86	0,86

What are the main differences to
your education systems?

Finnish education in international comparison

**Instruction
time low**

**Differences
between schools
small**

**Education issues
not politicised**

**Moderate
costs**

**Socio-economic
effect moderate**

**Teachers feel
highly valued**

FOR A FAIR SELECTION
EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE
THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE
CLIMB THAT TREE

