

Performance

- **Decline in PISA** performance in Iceland is **steeper** than on average in Nordic countries and OECD
- Lower PISA scores among **boys** and students with a **migrant background**
- Indicators of **increased well-being** in school
 - 83-84% of children in compulsory school report **feeling well** at school
 - Students in Iceland experience a higher **sense of belonging**, **less bullying** at school and have a more **favorable view** of teachers compared to the OECD average according to PISA

The Icelandic School System

Key features

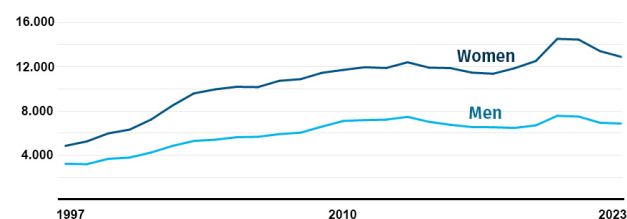
In Iceland, 97% of young children attend preschool (ISCED 02) before starting compulsory education. Although not mandatory, preschool is legally defined as the first school stage. Compulsory education (ISCED 1-2) lasts 10 years, from ages 6 to 16. Municipalities manage preschool and compulsory education, often running schools in a single building where different school levels are housed together. Children usually attend their local neighbourhood schools during the whole schooling period. After age 16, 95% of students in Iceland enrol in non-compulsory upper secondary school (ISCED 3), choosing either vocational education and training (VET) or general upper-secondary education, leading to matriculation or VET exams around age 19.

The Ministry of Education and Children oversees the general education strategy, legislation, and policy for all school levels from preschool to upper secondary education, including VET. The Ministry manages and funds upper secondary schools and VET, while municipalities operate and fund education for preschool, primary and lower secondary education.

Gender gap

- **Women comprise:**
 - **58%** of graduates from **upper secondary school** (55% in OECD)
 - **89%** of new undergraduate students in **medical** and **health** fields
 - Only **31%** of graduates in **vocational** education
 - **64%** of new entrants to **tertiary** education, compared to the OECD average of 56%
- **Tertiary** educational attainment rate of women is **58%** and **31%** for men

No. of men & women in higher education '97-'23



The Icelandic word for preschool is "leikskóli" which means "playschool", emphasizing the importance of play as a means of learning, understanding one's environment and developing social relations.

Education policy

Iceland's Education policy to 2030 rests on five pillars:

1. Equal opportunities for all
2. Superior teaching
3. Skills for the future
4. Putting well-being first
5. Quality at the forefront

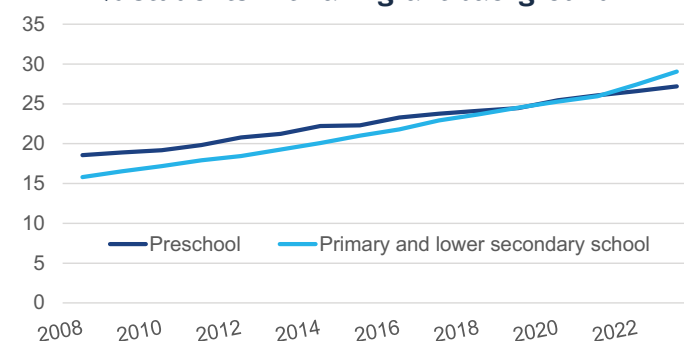
Iceland in a nutshell

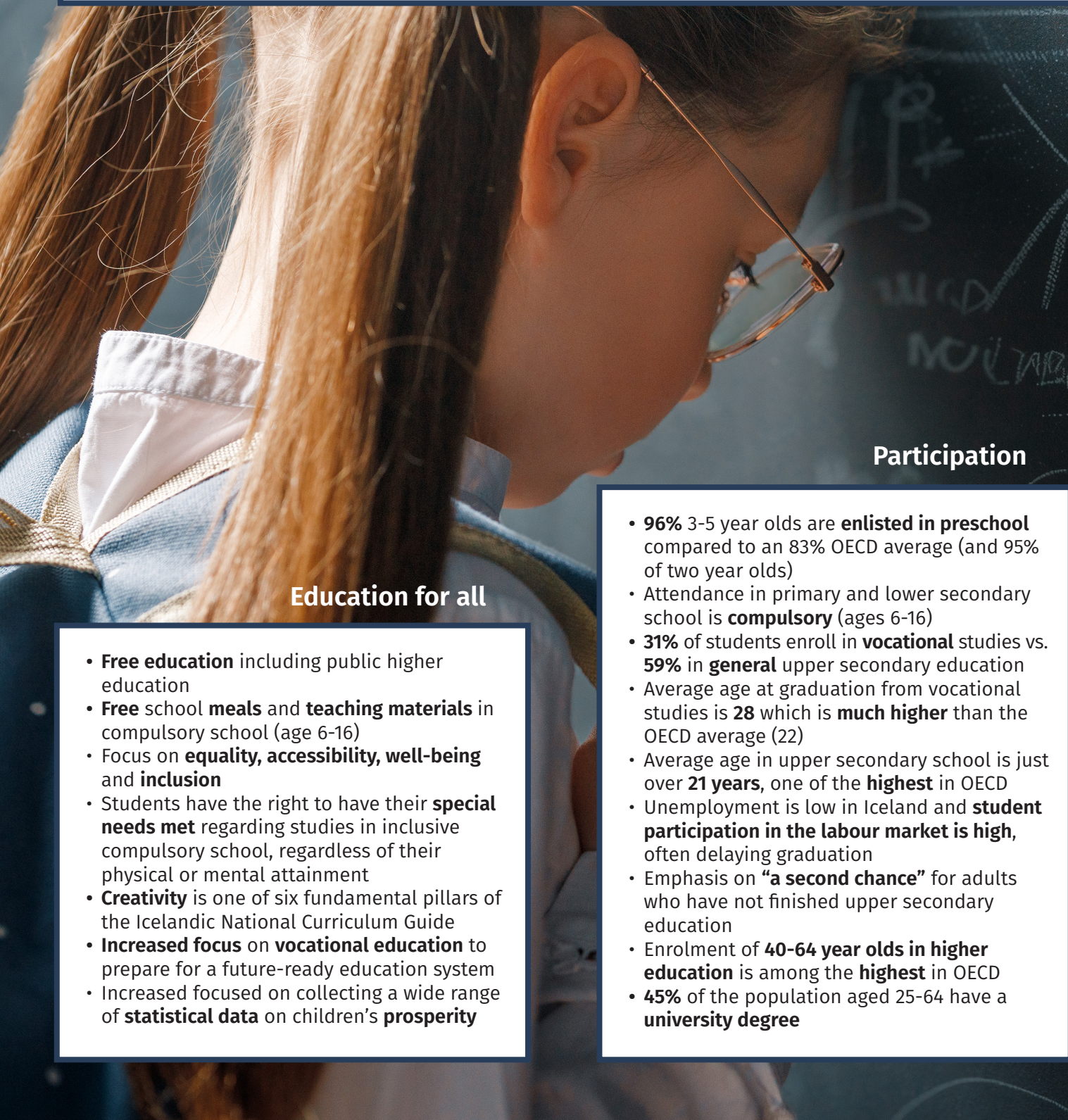
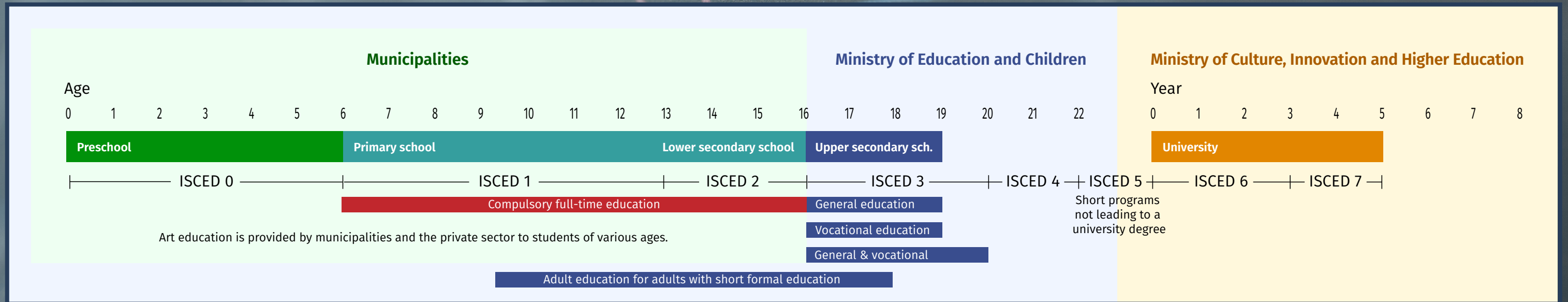
Iceland is a constitutional republic with a population of just under 400,000. The 1944 constitution is the foundation of Icelandic democracy, guaranteeing citizens' rights such as personal freedom, freedom of speech, assembly, and association. It ensures free education for all children of compulsory education age. Icelandic is the official language, but English is compulsory in primary and secondary education, and many higher education institutions offer courses in English. Danish is also mandatory in primary and lower secondary education.

Demographic changes

- **More** students, assistants, and teachers with a **migrant background**
- Signs of **language barrier** affecting education
- **Shortage** of preschool assistants **fluent in Icelandic**
- Teachers must fulfil requirements in Icelandic (C1 of the Common European Framework of References)
- **Fluency benchmarks** for preschool assistants in preparation

% students with a migrant background





Education for all

- **Free education** including public higher education
- **Free school meals** and **teaching materials** in compulsory school (age 6-16)
- Focus on **equality, accessibility, well-being and inclusion**
- Students have the right to have their **special needs met** regarding studies in inclusive compulsory school, regardless of their physical or mental attainment
- **Creativity** is one of six fundamental pillars of the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide
- **Increased focus on vocational education** to prepare for a future-ready education system
- Increased focused on collecting a wide range of **statistical data** on children's **prosperity**

Participation

- **96%** 3-5 year olds are **enlisted in preschool** compared to an 83% OECD average (and 95% of two year olds)
- Attendance in primary and lower secondary school is **compulsory** (ages 6-16)
- **31%** of students enroll in **vocational** studies vs. **59%** in **general** upper secondary education
- Average age at graduation from vocational studies is **28** which is **much higher** than the OECD average (22)
- Average age in upper secondary school is just over **21 years**, one of the **highest** in OECD
- Unemployment is low in Iceland and **student participation in the labour market is high**, often delaying graduation
- Emphasis on **"a second chance"** for adults who have not finished upper secondary education
- Enrolment of **40-64 year olds in higher education** is among the **highest** in OECD
- **45%** of the population aged 25-64 have a **university degree**

School system

- **Four levels:**
 - 450 preschools with 19.756 students
 - 175 compulsory schools (primary and lower secondary) with 47.507 students
 - 30 upper secondary schools with 22.000 students
 - 7 universities with 19.772 students
- **Few private schools**, all receive public funding
- Active after school programs
- Active adult education and continuing education
- Preschools, primary and lower secondary schools are run and financed by the **62 municipalities**
- Upper secondary schools are run and financed by the **Ministry of Education and Children**
- Established in 2024 to promote student well-being and prosperity, the **Directorate of Education and School Services** aims to provide **centralized, harmonized and comprehensive support** to schools and teachers nationwide. It will offer modern schoolbooks, testing materials, and hands-on assistance to schools with students in need
- Universities are **State funded but independently managed** and fall under the **Ministry of Culture, Innovation and Higher Education**

Teachers

- Teacher education requires a master's degree: **5 years of university education**. This applies to preschool teachers as well
- **Shortage** of licensed teachers
- The number of **teachers graduating** from initial teacher education has **doubled** in the last few years through a **national action plan**
- **Few students per teacher** - among the **lowest** in OECD
- Staff-child ratio in preschool ranges from **4-6 children per staff member**
- Ratio of students to teacher and academic staff at primary and lower secondary level is 10 children per staff member
- **Fewer teaching hours** than the OECD average at all school levels
- **Higher salaries** than the OECD average, especially starting salaries
- Good job **security**
- More teachers are aged 50 or older compared to the OECD average (39% vs. 36%)
- More hours dedicated to employee **training and development** than in most countries

% education staff without teacher's license

