

## European Day of Languages

# English studied as a foreign language by 95% of pupils at upper secondary level in the EU27 in 2009

## Greater diversity in second most common foreign language studied

In the **EU27** in 2009, 82% of pupils at primary and lower secondary level<sup>1</sup> and 95% of those in upper secondary level general programmes<sup>1</sup> were studying **English** as a foreign language. The second most commonly studied foreign language at primary and lower secondary level was **French** (16% of pupils), followed by **German** (9%) and **Spanish** (6%), while at upper secondary level it was **German** (27%), followed by **French** (26%) and **Spanish** (19%).

On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> European Day of Languages<sup>2</sup>, celebrated each year on 26 September, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes data on language learning of school pupils. The general objectives of this event are to alert the public to the importance of language learning, to promote the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe and to encourage lifelong language learning in and out of school.

### French second most commonly studied foreign language in primary and lower secondary level...

In 2009, at primary and lower secondary level, **English** was the most commonly studied language, with shares as high as 100% in **Malta**, 99% in **Spain** and **Italy** and 98% in **Austria**. **French** was the most commonly studied foreign language in **Belgium**, **Ireland** and the **United Kingdom**, while in **Luxembourg** it was **German**. There was more diversity in the second most commonly studied language with **French** and **German** recorded in seven Member States each, **Russian** in four, **Spanish** in three, **Italian** in two and **Dutch** and **Swedish** in one each.

### ... and German in upper secondary level

In upper secondary education, **English** was also the most commonly studied language, with over 90% in all Member States, except **Hungary** and **Malta**. **French** remained the most commonly studied language in **Ireland** and the **United Kingdom** and **German** in **Luxembourg**. The second most commonly studied language in upper secondary education was less diverse than in primary/lower secondary with **German** and **French** recorded in ten Member States each, **Russian** in three, **Spanish** in two and **Swedish** in one.

## The most commonly studied foreign languages, 2009

% of pupils

	Primary and lower secondary				Upper secondary, general			
	Most studied		2 <sup>nd</sup> most studied		Most studied		2 <sup>nd</sup> most studied	
	%		%		%		%	
<b>EU27</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>German</b>
<b>Belgium*</b>	28	French	20	Dutch	95	English	49	French
<b>Bulgaria</b>	77	English	15	Russian	100	English	41	German
<b>Czech Republic</b>	75	English	16	German	100	English	61	German
<b>Denmark</b>	79	English	29	German	92	English	35	German
<b>Germany</b>	80	English	17	French	92	English	28	French
<b>Estonia**</b>	78	English	33	Russian	96	English	65	Russian
<b>Ireland***</b>	19	French	6	German	58	French	16	German
<b>Greece**</b>	96	English	37	French	95	English	8	French
<b>Spain</b>	99	English	18	French	94	English	27	French
<b>France****</b>	43	English	15	Spanish	100	English	65	Spanish
<b>Italy</b>	99	English	29	French	97	English	20	French
<b>Cyprus</b>	72	English	36	French	91	English	41	French
<b>Latvia</b>	78	English	31	Russian	97	English	54	Russian
<b>Lithuania</b>	86	English	41	Russian	91	English	35	Russian
<b>Luxembourg*****</b>	100	German	90	French	100	German	100	French
<b>Hungary</b>	49	English	28	German	79	English	49	German
<b>Malta**</b>	100	English	31	Italian	36	English	5	French
<b>Netherlands</b>	:	:	:	:	100	English	70	German
<b>Austria</b>	98	English	2	Italian	98	English	43	French
<b>Poland</b>	81	English	17	German	92	English	54	German
<b>Portugal</b>	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
<b>Romania</b>	71	English	53	French	98	English	85	French
<b>Slovenia</b>	65	English	14	German	93	English	66	German
<b>Slovakia</b>	67	English	20	German	98	English	68	German
<b>Finland</b>	79	English	36	Swedish	100	English	92	Swedish
<b>Sweden</b>	86	English	16	Spanish	100	English	43	Spanish
<b>United Kingdom</b>	39	French	11	Spanish	29	French	11	German
<b>Iceland</b>	78	English	42	Danish	73	English	44	Danish
<b>Norway</b>	100	English	9	Spanish	45	English	21	Spanish
<b>Croatia</b>	93	English	31	German	99	English	63	German
<b>former Yug. Rep. of Macedonia</b>	91	English	22	French	:	:	:	:
<b>Turkey</b>	62	English	-	-	82	English	15	German

Source: UOE (UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat data collection on education and training systems, Eurostat specific tables)

\* In Belgium, the official state languages are Dutch, French and German; notably French is considered as a foreign language in the Belgium Flemish Community and Dutch is considered as a foreign language in the Belgium French Community.

\*\* 2008 data: Estonia and Greece, 2007 data: Malta.

\*\*\* All students in Ireland study Irish in primary and secondary schools. Irish and English are official languages in Ireland.

\*\*\*\* France: primary education not covered.

\*\*\*\*\* Although the official languages in Luxembourg are French, German and Luxemburgish, for the purpose of education statistics, French and German are counted as foreign languages.

: Data not available

- Not applicable

1. **Primary education** (International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED - level 1): Depending on the country, primary education begins at between 4 and 7 years of age and generally lasts 5 to 6 years. Programmes are designed to give pupils a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics along with an elementary understanding of other subjects.  
**Lower secondary education** (International Standard Classification of Education level 2): The contents of education at this stage are typically designed to complete the provision of basic education which began at ISCED level 1. The end of this level often coincides with the end of compulsory education where it exists.  
**Upper secondary education** (International Standard Classification of Education level 3): Depending on the country, upper secondary education normally starts at 15 or 16 years of age, at the end of full-time compulsory education. **General programmes:** covers education that is not designed explicitly to prepare participants for a specific class of occupations or for entry into further vocational or technical educational programmes. Many programmes enable access to tertiary education.
2. See website: <http://edl.ecml.at>

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