

European Day of Languages

In the EU, nearly 80% of children were studying a foreign language at primary school in 2008

In the **EU** in 2008, 79% of pupils at primary level¹ and 83% of those in upper secondary level general programmes¹ were studying a foreign language. At both levels, **English** was the usual first foreign language. A second foreign language was studied by 10% of pupils at primary level and 39% at upper secondary level, with **French** and **German** the most common.

On the occasion of the European Day of Languages², celebrated each year on 26 September, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes data³ on language learning of school pupils and perceived language skills of adults. 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.

Almost all primary pupils study a foreign language in Luxembourg, Sweden, Italy and Spain

The highest shares of pupils in primary education studying a foreign language in 2008 were found in **Luxembourg** and **Sweden** (both 100%), **Italy** (99%) and **Spain** (98%), and the lowest in **Ireland** (3%), the **Netherlands** (32%) and **Hungary** (33%). The proportion of pupils in primary education studying a second foreign language was highest in **Luxembourg** (83%) and **Greece** (24%).

Almost all students in upper secondary education general programmes in the **Czech Republic**, **France**, the **Netherlands**, **Finland** and **Sweden** were studying a foreign language. The lowest shares of students studying a foreign language were found in the **United Kingdom** (32%) and **Ireland** (58%). More than 80% of students were studying a second foreign language in **Finland** (92%), the **Netherlands** (86%) and **Romania** (83%).

30% of adults in the EU declare themselves as being proficient or good in a foreign language

In the **EU** in 2007, when adults aged 25 to 64 were asked to assess their level of proficiency⁴ in their best known foreign language, only 13% declared themselves as being proficient, 16% as being good, 30% as having a fair or basic knowledge and 38% as having no knowledge of a foreign language.

The share considering themselves as being proficient⁴ varied significantly between Member States, with the highest shares in **Latvia** (55%), **Slovenia** (45%) and **Slovakia** (44%) and shares of less than 10% in **France**, **Romania**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Poland**, **Bulgaria**, the **United Kingdom** and the **Czech Republic**.

The proportion of those declaring themselves as being good⁴ was highest in **Sweden** (40%), **Estonia** and **Slovenia** (both 33%), **Finland** and **Cyprus** (both 32%). Shares of less than 10% were found in **Romania**, **Hungary** and **Bulgaria**.

The share of pupils studying a first and second foreign language, 2008

	Primary				Upper secondary, general			
	1 st language		2 nd language		1 st language		2 nd language	
	%		%		%		%	
EU*	79	-	10	-	83	-	39	-
Belgium	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Bulgaria	70	English	8	Russian	87	English	37	Russian
Czech Republic	55	English	12	German	100	English	58	German
Denmark	67	English	-	-	92	English	35	German
Germany	56	English	4	French	91	English	27	French
Estonia	67	English	21	Estonian**	96	English	65	Russian
Ireland***	3	French	1	Spanish	58	French	17	German
Greece	93	English	24	French	95	English	8	French
Spain	98	English	5	French	94	English	27	French
France	:	:	:	:	99	English	64	Spanish
Italy	99	English	2	German	94	English	20	French
Cyprus	56	English	2	French	90	English	34	French
Latvia	67	English	12	Russian	97	English	51	Russian
Lithuania	64	English	-	-	88	English	39	Russian
Luxembourg****	100	German	83	French	:	:	:	:
Hungary	33	English	19	German	78	English	49	German
Malta	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Netherlands	32	English	-	-	100	English	86	German
Austria	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Poland	67	English	13	German	81	English	49	German
Portugal	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Romania	41	English	18	French	96	English	83	French
Slovenia	44	English	2	German	97	English	72	German
Slovakia	45	English	5	German	98	English	69	German
Finland	68	English	5	Swedish	99	English	92	Swedish
Sweden	100	English	5	Spanish	100	English	42	Spanish
United Kingdom	69	French	19	Spanish	32	French	8	Spanish
Iceland	64	English	16	Danish	73	English	44	Danish
Norway	100	English	-	-	98	English	24	German
former Yug. Rep. of Macedonia	56	English	-	-	:	:	:	:

Source: Unesco/OECD/Eurostat data collection on education systems

* EU average based on available Member States

** Estonian is counted as a foreign language when it is taught in a school where it is not the main teaching language.

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

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

: Data not available

- Not applicable

Self-perceived skill levels⁴ in best known foreign language among adults aged 25-64, 2007 (%)

	Proficient	Good	Fair / Basic	None known	Best known foreign language
EU*	13.3	15.9	29.6	38.3	English
Belgium	18.3	20.7	27.3	32.5	English
Bulgaria	6.5	8.7	40.7	44.1	English
Czech Republic	7.5	15.2	45.4	31.9	English
Denmark	:	:	:	:	:
Germany	21.3	16.9	33.3	28.6	English
Estonia	28.0	33.3	25.1	13.6	English
Ireland	:	:	:	:	:
Greece	10.5	18.7	25.7	43.4	English
Spain	15.6	14.2	23.2	46.6	English
France	5.1	13.8	26.6	41.2	English
Italy	6.0	15.0	34.6	38.6	English
Cyprus	26.2	32.0	27.2	14.6	English
Latvia	54.7	24.7	15.2	5.1	Russian
Lithuania	41.6	28.1	27.7	2.5	Russian
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:	:
Hungary	5.8	7.2	12.2	74.8	English
Malta	:	:	:	:	:
Netherlands	:	:	:	:	:
Austria	23.0	24.2	27.8	24.8	English
Poland	6.2	13.7	42.7	37.4	Russian
Portugal	10.1	16.2	22.4	51.3	English
Romania	5.2	4.9	14.3	75.0	English
Slovenia	45.4	32.7	14.2	7.7	English
Slovakia**	44.3	23.7	23.9	7.8	Czech
Finland	18.2	32.4	32.9	16.1	English
Sweden	39.3	39.8	15.8	5.1	English
United Kingdom	7.4	10.4	46.7	35.5	French
Norway	41.2	38.6	15.8	4.3	English
Croatia	14.5	18.1	33.9	32.1	English
Turkey	1.9	3.0	19.6	75.5	English

Source: Adult Education Survey

The rates might not add up to 100% due to "non response".

: Data not available

* EU average based on available Member States

** Slovakian not recorded as a foreign language in Czech survey whereas Czech is recorded as a foreign language in the Slovakian survey.

- Primary education** (International Standard Classification of Education 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.

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.
- See website: <http://edl.ecml.at>
- Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, 49/2010, "**More students study foreign languages in Europe but perceptions of skill levels differ significantly**", available free of charge in pdf format on the Eurostat web site.
- Proficient:** Ability to understand and produce a wide range of demanding texts and use the language flexibly.

Good: Ability to describe experiences and events fairly fluently and able to produce a simple text.

Fair / Basic: Ability to understand and use the most common and every day expressions in relation to familiar things and situations.

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