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European Day of Languages

Two-thirds of working age adults in the EU28 in 2011 state they know a foreign language

English studied as a foreign language by 94% of upper secondary pupils

In the **EU28** in 2011, 83% of pupils at primary & lower secondary level¹ and 94% of those in upper secondary level general programmes¹ were studying **English** as a foreign language. The second most commonly studied foreign language at both primary & lower secondary level and upper secondary level was **French** (19% of pupils in primary & lower secondary level and 23% in upper secondary), followed by **German** (9% and 21%) and **Spanish** (6% and 18%).

The importance of English as a foreign language in the EU is also confirmed amongst working age adults. In the **EU28**, **English** was declared to be the best-known foreign language in 2011 amongst the population aged 25 to 64. Among those stating **English** to be their best-known foreign language, 20% responded that they spoke it at a proficient² level, 35% at a good² level and 45% at a fair² level. Considering all languages, two-thirds of the total population aged 25-64 stated they knew at least one foreign language.

On the occasion of the European Day of Languages³, celebrated each year on 26 September, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes data 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.

French studied by over half of pupils at primary & lower secondary level in Luxembourg and Romania

In 2011, at primary & lower secondary level, **English** was the most commonly studied foreign language, with shares above 90% of pupils in **Malta** and **Austria** (both 100%), **Spain** and **Italy** (both 99%), **Greece** (97%), **Croatia** (95%), **France** (93%) and **Poland** (91%). Among the Member States for which this data is available, **French** was studied by more than half of pupils at this level in **Luxembourg** (90%) and **Romania** (51%), while **German** was studied by more than a quarter in **Luxembourg** (100%), **Croatia** (32%), **Denmark** (28%), **Hungary** and **Slovakia** (both 27%).

German is the second most studied language at upper secondary level in ten Member States

In upper secondary education, **English** remained the most commonly studied language, at over 90% of pupils in all Member States, except **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Hungary**, **Malta** and **Portugal**. The second most commonly studied language in upper secondary education was **German** in ten Member States, **French** in nine, **Spanish** in four, **Russian** in three and **Swedish** and **Italian** in one each.

The most commonly studied foreign languages, 2011

% of pupils

	Primary & lower secondary				Upper secondary, general			
	Most studied		2 nd most studied		Most studied		2 nd most studied	
	%		%		%		%	
EU28*	83	English	19	French	94	English	23	French
Belgium**	26	French	20	Dutch	95	English	49	French
Bulgaria	79	English	13	Russian	88	English	34	German
Czech Republic	80	English	14	German	100	English	67	German
Denmark	79	English	28	German	91	English	34	German
Germany	86	English	17	French	93	English	27	French
Estonia***	78	English	33	Russian	96	English	65	Russian
Ireland****	19	French	6	German	57	French	16	German
Greece	97	English	33	French	91	English	7	French
Spain	99	English	18	French	97	English	22	French
France	93	English	19	Spanish	100	English	66	Spanish
Croatia	95	English	32	German	99	English	62	German
Italy	99	English	28	French	98	English	18	French
Cyprus	71	English	34	French	89	English	36	French
Latvia	75	English	29	Russian	99	English	58	Russian
Lithuania	89	English	43	Russian	93	English	33	Russian
Luxembourg*****	100	German	90	French	100	German	100	French
Hungary	48	English	27	German	79	English	44	German
Malta	100	English	31	Italian	66	English	12	Italian
Netherlands	:	:	:	:	100	English	43	German
Austria	100	English	3	French	99	English	43	French
Poland	91	English	25	German	93	English	50	German
Portugal	52	English	22	French	47	English	8	Spanish
Romania	72	English	51	French	99	English	86	French
Slovenia	66	English	15	German	100	English	68	German
Slovakia	79	English	27	German	99	English	61	German
Finland	78	English	35	Swedish	100	English	92	Swedish
Sweden	85	English	17	Spanish	100	English	45	Spanish
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	25	French	9	Spanish
Iceland	79	English	41	Danish	73	English	40	Danish
Liechtenstein	100	English	45	French	100	English	100	French
Norway	100	English	9	Spanish	42	English	22	Spanish
former Yug. Rep. of Macedonia	100	English	20	French	:	:	:	:
Turkey	63	English	-	-	99	English	1	German

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

* The EU28 aggregate includes only Member States for which data are available

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

*** 2008 data

**** 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 Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics, French and German are counted as foreign languages.

: Data not available

- Not applicable

In half of the Member States three quarters of the working age population state they know a foreign language

Among adults aged 25 to 64, the proportions of those stating that they knew at least one foreign language differed greatly among the Member States, with the highest shares recorded in **Luxembourg** (99%), **Lithuania** (97%), **Latvia** (95%), **Denmark** (94%), **Slovenia** and **Sweden** (both 92%), and the lowest in **Hungary** (37%), **Bulgaria** (39%) and **Spain** (51%).

Lowest share of adults stating they have a proficient level of English in Italy, France and Germany

Among working age adults, the perceived level of language knowledge varied significantly between Member States. In Member States where **English** is considered to be the best-known foreign language, the highest shares of adults aged 25 to 64 perceiving themselves as being proficient² in **English** were observed in **Malta** (53%), **Sweden** (43%), **Cyprus** (41%), **Denmark** and the **Netherlands** (both 36%), and the lowest in **Italy** (10%), **France** (13%) and **Germany** (16%).

Adults' self-perceived² language knowledge, 2011
(persons aged 25 -64)

	Foreign language stated as the best-known in the country	Breakdown by level of knowledge for persons speaking the language stated as the best-known in the country (%)			Share of the population aged 25-64 stating they know at least one foreign language
		Proficient	Good	Fair	
EU28*	English	20	35	45	66
Belgium	English	25	41	33	58
Bulgaria	English	21	35	45	39
Czech Republic	English	22	42	37	69
Denmark	English	36	36	28	94
Germany	English	16	34	50	78
Estonia	Russian	29	45	26	86
Ireland	:	:	:	:	:
Greece	English	19	38	43	58
Spain	English	19	42	40	51
France	English	13	38	49	59
Croatia	:	:	:	:	:
Italy	English	10	26	64	60
Cyprus	English	41	34	25	84
Latvia	Russian	68	25	7	95
Lithuania	Russian	47	29	24	97
Luxembourg	German	77	14	10	99
Hungary	English	25	31	44	37
Malta	English	53	27	20	89
Netherlands	English	36	45	19	86
Austria	English	24	39	37	78
Poland	English	17	34	49	62
Portugal	English	23	36	41	58
Romania	English	17	32	52	74
Slovenia	English	31	41	28	92
Slovakia	Czech**	42	35	24	85
Finland	:	:	:	:	:
Sweden	English	43	36	21	92
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	:
Norway	English	47	39	14	96
Switzerland	English	19	67	14	88
Serbia	English	23	34	44	63

Source: 2011 EU-Adult Education Survey

* The EU28 aggregate includes only Member States for which data are available

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

: Data not available

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. **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: Ability to understand and use the most common and every day expressions in relation to familiar things and situations.
3. See website: <http://edl.ecml.at>

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