

European Day of Languages

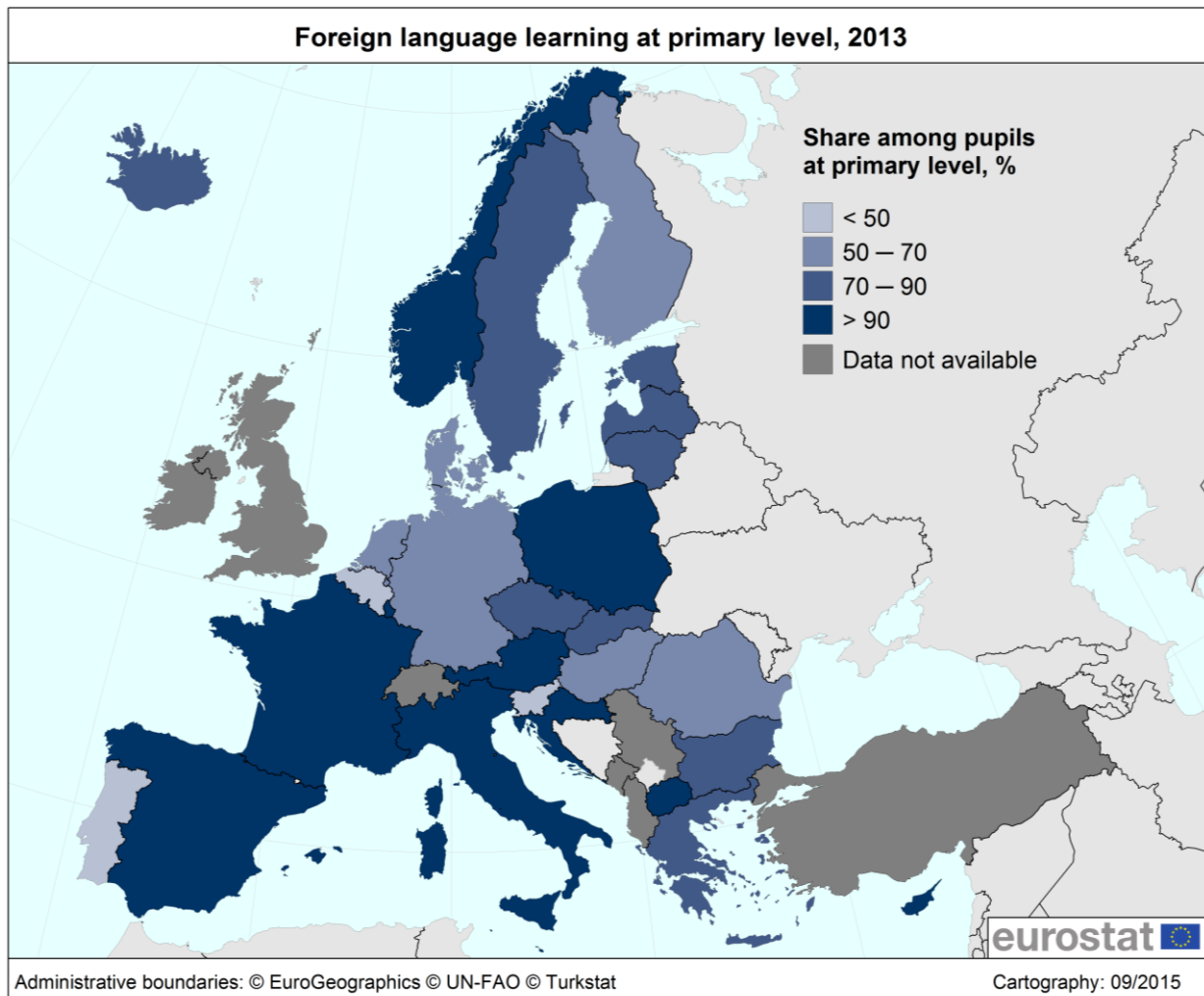
More than 80% of primary school pupils in the EU were studying a foreign language in 2013

English clearly dominant

In 2013, 17.7 million primary school pupils (or 81.7% of all the pupils at this level) in the **European Union (EU)** were studying at least one foreign language, including 1 million (4.6%) studying two foreign languages or more. At primary level, English was by far the most popular language, studied by 16.7 million pupils.

The dominance of English is confirmed at the lower secondary level (pupils aged around 11-15 depending on the national educational system) with 17.1 million pupils in the **EU** learning English as a foreign language (95.6% of all the pupils at this level) in 2013. French (4.9 million or 27.4%) came second, followed by German (2.9 million or 16.3%), Spanish (2.1 million or 11.6%), Russian (0.5 million or 2.7%) and Italian (0.2 million or 1.0%).

On the occasion of the European Day of Languages, celebrated each year on 26 September, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes data on language learning at school. An infographic is also available on the Eurostat website. Currently there are 24 official languages recognised within the **EU**. In addition there are regional languages, minority languages, and languages spoken by migrant populations. It should also be noted that several EU Member States have more than one official language.



Less than half of primary pupils study a foreign language in Portugal, Belgium and Slovenia

All or nearly all pupils at primary level in 2013 attended foreign language classes in **Cyprus** (100.0%), **Luxembourg** (100.0%), **Malta** (100.0%), **Austria** (100.0%), **Croatia** (99.9%), **Italy** (99.7%), **Spain** (99.6%), as well as in **France** (98.8%) and **Poland** (97.3%). At **EU** level, this share stood at 81.7%. In some Member States, young pupils were studying two or more foreign languages, particularly in **Luxembourg** (83.8%), followed at a distance by **Estonia** (32.8%) and **Greece** (25.9%). In contrast, less than half of primary school pupils were studying a foreign language in 2013 in **Portugal** (35.2%), **Belgium** (38.1%) and **Slovenia** (49.8%).

English is the most common foreign language studied at primary level in every EU Member State, except **Belgium** and **Luxembourg**, both multilingual countries. The second most common foreign language gives a more varied picture. German, which is the most learnt foreign language in **Luxembourg**, was the second main foreign language studied by primary school pupils in eight other Member States, with the highest shares of learners recorded in **Hungary** (20.4%) and **Croatia** (20.2%). French occupied this position in seven Member States, with the largest proportions being recorded in **Luxembourg** (83.8%), **Belgium** (15.9%), **Greece** (14.8%) and **Romania** (10.8%).

Foreign language learning at primary level (% of pupils), 2013

	Total	of which:		Most common foreign language		Second most common foreign language	
		1 language	2 or more languages				
EU	81.7	77.1	4.6	English	77.1	German	3.2
Belgium	38.1	38.0	0.1	Dutch*	16.7	French*	15.9
Bulgaria	82.9	81.4	1.5	English	73.5	Russian	6.2
Czech Republic	71.9	71.1	0.8	English	71.2	German	1.3
Denmark	56.9	56.9	0.0	English	56.9	-	-
Germany	67.9	66.6	1.3	English	62.4	French	3.7
Estonia	77.0	44.3	32.8	English	68.9	Estonian*	22.3
Ireland	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Greece	75.5	49.6	25.9	English	74.6	French	14.8
Spain	99.6	93.8	5.8	English	99.0	French	5.4
France	98.7	97.2	1.5	English	92.2	German	5.7
Croatia	99.9	81.5	18.4	English	92.3	German	20.2
Italy	99.7	97.3	2.4	English	98.8	German	2.0
Cyprus	100.0	92.2	7.8	English	98.0	French	2.0
Latvia	73.1	58.2	14.9	English	71.2	Russian	11.1
Lithuania	74.9	74.6	0.3	English	73.7	German	0.6
Luxembourg	100.0	16.2	83.8	German*	100.0	French*	83.8
Hungary	59.0	57.7	1.3	English	40.4	German	20.4
Malta	100.0	98.3	1.7	English*	100.0	Arabic	0.6
Netherlands	52.2	52.2	0.0	English	52.2	-	-
Austria	100.0	97.8	2.2	English	99.7	Slovenian	0.5
Poland	97.3	84.9	12.4	English	94.0	German	6.7
Portugal	35.2	35.0	0.2	English	34.9	Spanish	0.1
Romania	56.5	55.3	1.2	English	45.3	French	10.8
Slovenia	49.8	49.4	0.4	English	48.0	German	1.7
Slovakia	84.8	79.5	5.3	English	81.0	Slovak*	6.9
Finland	68.8	55.7	13.1	English	66.3	Swedish*	4.6
Sweden	78.0	67.2	10.8	English	77.9	Spanish	5.2
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Iceland	71.8	53.9	17.9	English	71.5	Danish	17.4
Liechtenstein	100.0	100.0	0.0	English	100.0	-	-
Norway	100.0	100.0	0.0	English	100.0	-	-
FYR of Macedonia	100.0	98.2	1.8	English	100.0	German	1.7

* An official language of the country, see country notes.

: Data not available - Not applicable

The source datasets can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Data for the EU exclude Ireland and the United Kingdom.

French ranked second at lower secondary level

English, which is mandatory in several countries, was studied in 2013 by an overwhelming majority of pupils at lower secondary level in almost all EU Member States. Only in **Belgium** (46.1%), **Luxembourg** (53.2%), **Hungary** (68.5%) and **Bulgaria** (86.8%) was the share of pupils learning English below 90%.

French was the second most popular foreign language studied at lower secondary level in the **EU**. The highest proportions of pupils learning French as a foreign language were registered in **Luxembourg** (100.0%), **Cyprus** (90%), **Romania** (85.0%), and **Italy** (68.7%). French was widely studied as a foreign language also in **Portugal** (63.3%), **Ireland** (61.6%) and the **Netherlands** (57.8%).

German – the third most popular foreign language in the EU at lower secondary level – was particularly taught in **Luxembourg** (100.0%), **Denmark** (73.6%), **Poland** (69.0%), **Slovakia** (57.7%) and the **Netherlands** (51.7%).

Spanish was popular in **Sweden** (43.5% of lower secondary school pupils), followed by **France** (37.0%), **Portugal** (24.1%), **Italy** (21.3%) and **Ireland** (14.4%), while Italian was mainly taught in **Malta** (63.7%) and **Croatia** (11.1%).

Russian, the most popular non-EU language at lower secondary level in the EU (almost 500 000 learners), was most commonly studied in the Baltic Member States – **Lithuania** (66.9%), **Estonia** (64.9%) **Latvia** (61.6%) – as well as in **Slovakia** (20.5%) and **Bulgaria** (17.8%).

Foreign languages studied at lower secondary level (% of pupils), 2013

	English	French	German	Spanish	Russian	Italian
EU	95.6	27.4	16.3	11.6	2.7	1.0
Belgium*	46.1	52.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bulgaria	86.8	3.1	7.2	1.5	17.8	0.5
Czech Republic	96.5	3.3	32.4	1.7	7.7	0.1
Denmark	100.0	9.1	73.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Germany	97.8	24.4	-	3.7	1.5	0.3
Estonia	97.1	2.7	14.5	0.3	64.9	0.0
Ireland	-	61.6	20.9	14.4	0.0	1.0
Greece	99.0	49.4	44.9	0.1	0.0	1.3
Spain	99.4	38.7	3.1	-	0.0	0.1
France	98.4	-	14.4	37.0	0.1	3.0
Croatia	97.6	1.4	42.7	0.1	0.0	11.1
Italy	100.0	68.7	8.6	21.3	0.0	-
Cyprus	99.7	90.0	1.3	0.9	0.4	0.9
Latvia	95.8	1.0	11.3	0.0	61.6	0.0
Lithuania	97.1	3.4	11.4	0.0	66.9	0.0
Luxembourg*	53.2	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hungary	68.5	0.5	31.7	0.1	0.1	0.1
Malta*	100.0	35.1	9.1	7.5	0.3	63.7
Netherlands	96.6	57.8	51.7	1.9	0.0	0.0
Austria	99.8	5.2	-	1.2	0.2	2.5
Poland	96.3	3.7	69.0	1.4	7.7	0.3
Portugal	93.4	63.3	0.7	24.1	0.0	0.0
Romania	99.2	85.0	10.3	0.4	0.2	0.4
Slovenia	100.0	3.2	19.1	2.4	0.0	2.9
Slovakia	94.9	2.6	57.7	0.7	20.5	0.1
Finland	99.4	5.9	10.5	1.7	1.9	0.0
Sweden	100.0	15.6	19.3	43.5	0.0	0.1
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	:	:
Iceland	99.8	1.8	2.5	2.9	0.0	0.0
Liechtenstein	100.0	97.2	-	0.0	0.0	0.0
Norway	100.0	14.0	24.4	31.0	0.1	0.0
FYR of Macedonia	99.9	50.4	44.9	0.0	1.4	1.5

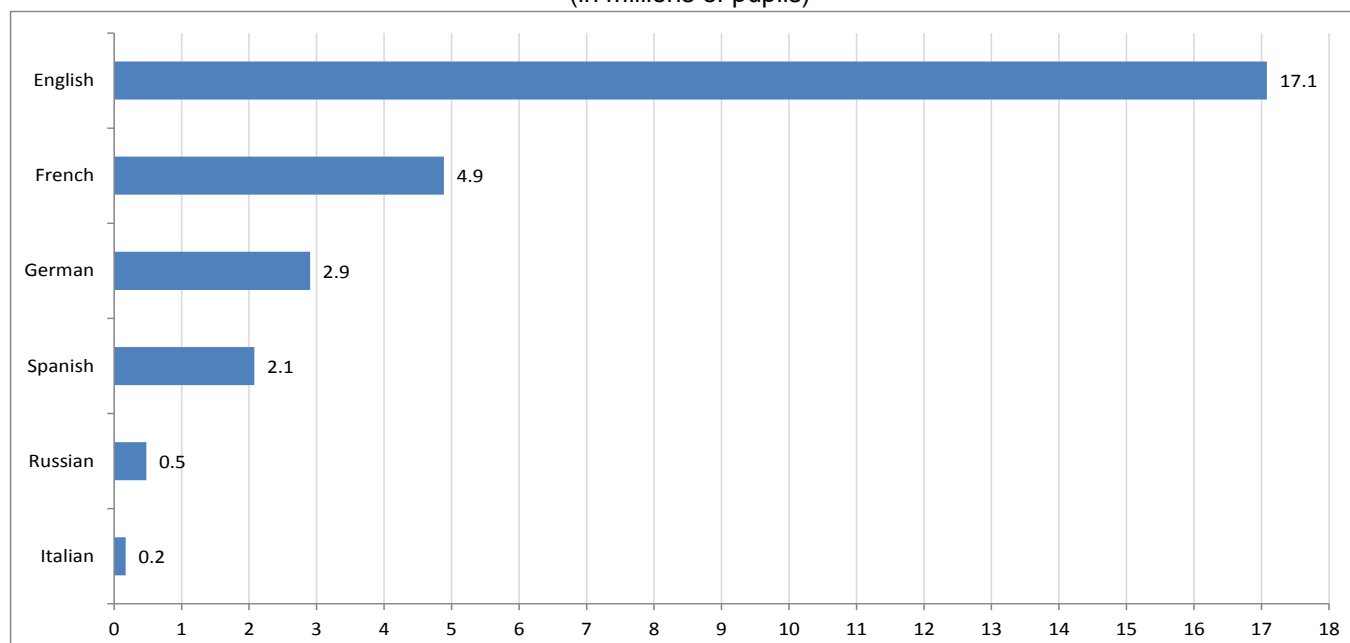
* See country notes

: Data not available - Not applicable

The source dataset can be found [here](#).

Data for the EU exclude the United Kingdom.

Foreign language learning in the EU at lower secondary level, 2013 (in millions of pupils)



Methods and definitions

Primary education (International Standard Classification of Education level 1) begins between five and seven years of age, is generally the start of compulsory education and covers six years of full-time schooling.

Lower secondary education (International Standard Classification of Education level 2) continues the basic programmes of the primary level, although teaching is typically more subject-focused. Most often, pupils enter lower secondary education at the age of 11 or 12, and the end of this level coincides with the end of compulsory education.

The main source of data is the Eurostat specific questionnaire on foreign language learning closely linked to the UOE (UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat) data collection on education statistics.

Country notes

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

Luxembourg: although the official languages are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics, French and German are counted as foreign languages.

Malta: English is an official language alongside Maltese, but for the purpose of education statistics, it is counted as a foreign language.

Finland: Swedish is an official language alongside Finnish, but for the purpose of education statistics, it is counted as a foreign language.

Estonia: in schools where Estonian is not the language of instruction, Estonian is counted as a foreign language for statistical purposes.

Slovakia: in schools where Slovakian is not the language of instruction, Slovak is counted as a foreign language for statistical purposes.

More information

The European Commission's [European Day of Languages events 2015](#).

[European Commission's study](#) on comparability of language testing in Europe (conducted by Cambridge English).

[Eurydice report](#) "An Overview of National Tests in Europe" on languages in secondary education.

[Report](#) from the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) on languages and employability.

The Council of Europe's [website](#) of the European Day of Languages.

Eurostat's [Statistics Explained](#) article on foreign language learning statistics.

Eurostat's [infographic](#) on language learning at school.

[Metadata](#) of foreign language learning statistics.

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