## eurostat

## Foreign language learning

# 60\% of lower secondary level pupils studied more than one foreign language in 2014 

## French: second most popular after English

Learning a foreign language at school is very common in the European Union (EU), with around 18 million lower secondary school pupils (or $98.6 \%$ of all pupils at this level) studying at least one foreign language in 2014. Among them, nearly 11 million ( $59.9 \%$ ) were studying two foreign languages or more.

English was by far the most popular language at lower secondary level, studied by more than 17 million pupils ( $97.3 \%$ ). French ( 5 million or $33.7 \%$ ) came second, followed by German (3 million or $23.1 \%$ ) and Spanish ( 2 million or $13.1 \%$ ).

These data come from a report issued by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. 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.

Foreign language learning in the EU at lower secondary level, 2014
(\% of pupils)


## Luxembourg, Finland and Italy on top for learning several foreign languages

In 2014, all or nearly all lower secondary school pupils learnt at least two foreign languages in Luxembourg ( $100 \%$ ), Finland ( $98.5 \%$ ), Italy ( $98.4 \%$ ), Estonia ( $96.3 \%$ ) and Romania ( $95.6 \%$ ). In contrast, fewer than $10 \%$ of pupils were studying two or more languages in Hungary (6.3\%), Ireland (7.9\%) and Austria (9.5\%).

## English, French and German: top 3 foreign languages studied in the EU

English is by far the main foreign language studied during lower secondary education in the vast majority of Member States. In particular, all pupils attend English classes in Denmark, Spain, Italy, Malta and Sweden.

French is one of the two main foreign languages studied in Luxembourg and is also the top foreign language studied in Ireland (by $60.0 \%$ of pupils) and Belgium (51.9\%). In addition, French is the second most popular foreign language studied at lower secondary level in seven Member States, with the highest shares of learners recorded in Cyprus (88.1\%), Romania (84.6\%), Italy (67.7\%) and Portugal (64.7\%).

Besides being studied by all pupils in Luxembourg, German ranks second in eight Member States, with the highest shares being registered in Denmark (73.6\%), Poland (69.0\%) and Slovakia (55.2\%). Learning Spanish is notably popular in France (37.8\%) and Sweden (43.9\%), while Russian, the only commonly studied non-EU language, came second in the three Baltic States - Lithuania (66.7\%), Estonia (64.7\%) and Latvia (60.4\%) - as well as in Bulgaria (17.9\%).

Foreign language learning at lower secondary level (\% of pupils), 2014

|  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Number of } \\ & \text { pupils (in } \\ & 1000 \text { ) } \end{aligned}$ | Learning foreign language | of which: |  | Most common foreign language |  | Second most common foreign language |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  | 1 language | 2 or more languages |  |  |  |  |
| EU* | 17726.2 | 98.6 | 38.8 | 59.9 | English | 97.3 | French | 33.7 |
| Belgium | 254.7 | 97.3 | 71.2 | 26.1 | French** | 51.9 | English | 46.3 |
| Bulgaria | 219.0 | 99.8 | 82.8 | 17.0 | English | 87.2 | Russian | 17.9 |
| Czech Republic | 367.0 | 98.1 | 40.8 | 57.3 | English | 97.1 | German | 41.7 |
| Denmark | 242.4 | 100.0 | 17.2 | 82.8 | English | 100.0 | German | 73.6 |
| Germany | 4621.1 | 97.2 | 58.1 | 39.1 | English | : | French | 24.3 |
| Estonia | 35.2 | 99.2 | 2.9 | 96.3 | English | 97.3 | Russian | 64.7 |
| Ireland | 181.2 | 89.7 | 81.8 | 7.9 | French | 60.0 | German | 21.4 |
| Greece | 314.7 | 100.0 | 6.0 | 94.0 | English | 98.1 | French | 48.5 |
| Spain | 1426.7 | 100.0 | 54.3 | 45.7 | English | 100.0 | French | 41.1 |
| France | 3337.7 | 99.8 | 44.4 | 55.3 | English | 98.6 | Spanish | 37.8 |
| Croatia | 165.4 | 99.8 | 44.6 | 55.2 | English | 97.6 | German | 43.8 |
| Italy | 1761.1 | 100.0 | 1.6 | 98.4 | English | 100.0 | French | 67.7 |
| Cyprus | 27.8 | 99.9 | 11.0 | 88.9 | English | 99.9 | French | 88.1 |
| Latvia | 54.8 | 98.3 | 25.9 | 72.3 | English | 96.8 | Russian | 60.4 |
| Lithuania | 189.0 | 97.5 | 17.3 | 80.1 | English | 97.4 | Russian | 66.7 |
| Luxembourg | 18.2 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | German** | 100.0 | French** | 100.0 |
| Hungary | 386.6 | 96.5 | 90.2 | 6.3 | English | 69.3 | German | 31.1 |
| Malta | 12.8 | 100.0 | 5.7 | 94.3 | English** | 100.0 | Italian | 59.8 |
| Netherlands | 763.7 | 97.1 | 22.8 | 74.3 | English | 95.2 | French | 57.2 |
| Austria | 319.5 | 99.9 | 90.5 | 9.5 | English | 99.8 | French | 5.3 |
| Poland | 1112.2 | 98.3 | 4.7 | 93.7 | English | 97.1 | German | 69.0 |
| Portugal | 361.2 | 97.1 | 11.7 | 85.4 | English | 95.4 | French | 64.7 |
| Romania | 790.3 | 99.8 | 4.2 | 95.6 | English | 99.4 | French | 84.6 |
| Slovenia | 53.6 | 100.0 | 42.9 | 57.1 | English | 99.7 | German | 47.8 |
| Slovakia | 243.2 | 98.0 | 17.4 | 80.6 | English | 95.9 | German | 55.2 |
| Finland | 176.0 | 99.5 | 1.0 | 98.5 | English | 99.4 | Swedish** | 92.3 |
| Sweden | 290.9 | 100.0 | 22.1 | 77.9 | English | 100.0 | Spanish | 43.9 |
| United Kingdom |  | : | , |  |  | : |  |  |
| Iceland | 12.8 | 99.2 | 1.6 | 97.6 | English | 99.2 | Danish | 96.6 |
| Liechtenstein | 1.6 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | English | 100.0 | French | 100.0 |
| Norway | 189.4 | 100.0 | 28.8 | 71.2 | English | 100.0 | Spanish | 32.0 |
| FYR of Macedonia | 83.3 | 100.0 | 1.9 | 98.1 | English | 100.0 | German | 48.0 |

* Data for the EU exclude the United Kingdom.
** An official language of the country, see country notes.
: Data not available
The source datasets can be found here and here.


## Methods and definitions

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.
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.

## 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.

## More information

Eurostat website section on education statistics.
Eurostat database on education and training.
Eurostat metadata of foreign language learning statistics.
Eurostat Statistics Explained article on foreign language learning statistics.

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