

European Day of Languages

English, French and German still most common foreign languages studied at lower secondary level in the EU28 in 2012...

... but Spanish learning has increased more

In the **EU28** in 2012, **English** was still the most commonly studied foreign language at lower secondary level¹, with 96.7% of pupils learning it, far ahead of **French** (34.1%), **German** (22.1%) and **Spanish** (12.2%). The importance of English as a foreign language in the EU is also confirmed by its leadership in nearly all Member States.

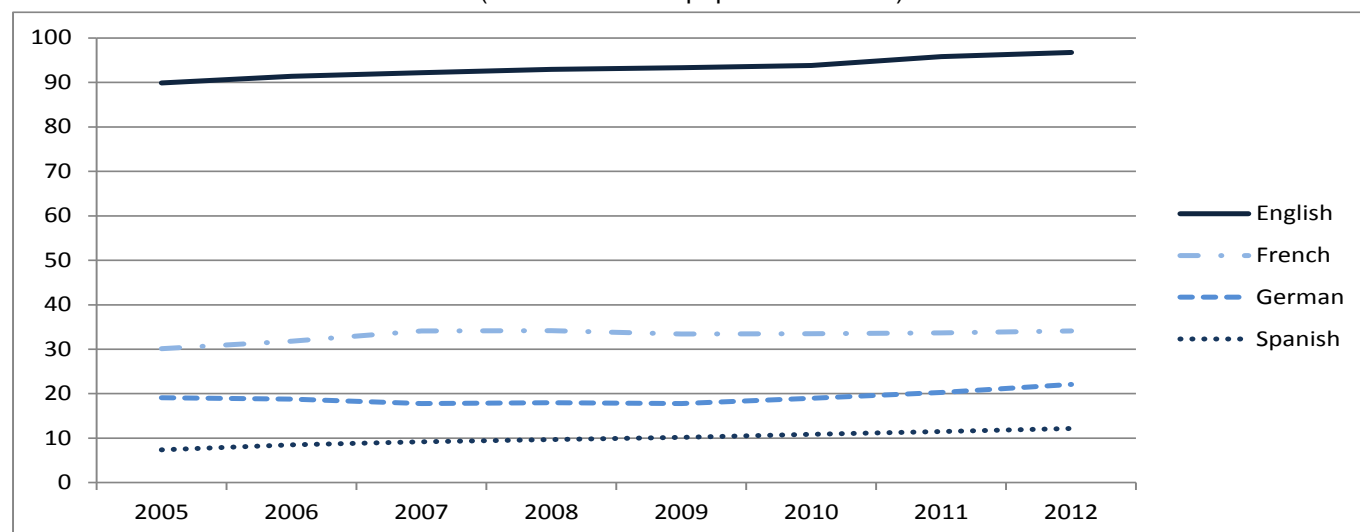
Since Croatia's accession, there are 24 official languages recognised within the EU. In addition there are indigenous regional, minority languages and languages that have been brought into the EU by migrant populations.

On the occasion of the European Day of Languages², celebrated each year on 26 September, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes data on language learning at school. 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.

More and more pupils learn Spanish at lower secondary level in the EU

The proportions of pupils at lower secondary level studying **English, French, German** or **Spanish** as a foreign language have each increased between 2005 and 2012 at the EU level, albeit in different ways. The most remarkable increase in relative terms during this period was recorded for the learning of **Spanish**, from 7.4% of the total pupils at lower secondary level learning it in 2005 to 12.2% in 2012.

English, French, German and Spanish learning at lower secondary level in the EU, 2005-2012
(as % of the total pupils at this level)



French studied by 34% of pupils at lower secondary level in the EU28, German by 22%

In 2012 at lower secondary level, **English** was the most commonly studied foreign language in the **EU28**, with shares above 90% of pupils in all Member States except **Belgium** (45.4%), **Luxembourg** (54.4%), **Hungary** (62.6%), **Bulgaria** (86.2%) and **Portugal** (86.4%). Between 2005 and 2012, the proportion of pupils learning English at lower secondary level increased in nearly all Member States, except **Portugal** (from 98.3% in 2005 to 86.4% in 2012), **Spain** (from 98.4% to 98.1%) and **Latvia** (from 96.2% to 96.1%).

French was studied by more than half of pupils at this level in **Luxembourg**³ (100.0%), **Cyprus** (91.7%), **Romania** (85.7%), **Italy** (69.9%), **Ireland** (63.5%), the **Netherlands** (57.7%) and **Portugal** (57.4%). Among Member States for which data are available, the proportion of students at lower secondary level learning French as a foreign language decreased between 2005 and 2012 in fourteen Member States, increased in nine and remained stable in **Luxembourg**.

At least half of the pupils at lower secondary level were studying **German** as a foreign language in 2012 in **Luxembourg**³ (100.0%), **Denmark** (73.5%), **Poland** (69.2%), the **Netherlands** (51.5%) and **Slovakia** (50.2%), while **Spanish** was studied by more than a fifth in **Sweden** (42.3%), **France** (36.2%), **Portugal** (21.6%) and **Italy** (20.5%). The learning of Spanish has increased or remained stable between 2005 and 2012 in all of the Member States for which data are available.

Foreign language learning at lower secondary level, 2005-2012 (% of pupils)

	English		French		German		Spanish	
	2005	2012	2005	2012	2005	2012	2005	2012
EU28*	89.9	96.7	30.1	34.1	19.1	22.1	7.4	12.2
Belgium ³	42.2	45.4	-	-	0.7	0.8	0.0	0.0
Bulgaria	64.1	86.2	10.8	3.3	16.2	7.9	1.1	1.4
Czech Republic	71.7	95.6	2.4	3.5	28.5	32.2	0.5	1.7
Denmark	100.0	100.0	11.6	9.1	90.1	73.5	0.0	0.0
Germany	94.8	100.0	23.2	25.1	-	-	1.8	3.7
Estonia	92.9	97.1	2.0	2.6	19.9	15.9	0.1	0.6
Ireland ³	-	-	68.8	63.5	23.0	19.9	7.4	13.6
Greece	99.0	99.0	59.4	49.3	35.7	44.1	0.0	0.0
Spain	98.4	98.1	38.8	38.4	2.4	2.8	-	-
France	95.9	98.4	-	-	14.4	14.4	33.7	36.2
Croatia	85.1	97.1	1.0	1.5	32.1	42.3	0.0	0.1
Italy	89.1	100.0	46.3	69.9	4.9	8.5	3.6	20.5
Cyprus	98.6	99.9	92.9	91.7	1.1	1.1	0.1	1.5
Latvia	96.2	96.1	0.8	1.1	17.2	10.4	0.0	0.0
Lithuania	88.7	96.6	4.5	3.4	25.5	11.9	0.0	0.0
Luxembourg ³	52.9	54.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
Hungary	54.3	62.6	0.6	0.5	41.4	32.4	0.1	0.1
Malta	100.0	100.0	42.4	35.0	8.4	7.7	2.4	7.4
Netherlands	:	96.3	:	57.7	:	51.5	:	1.9
Austria	99.1	99.8	5.2	5.1	-	-	0.4	1.2
Poland	72.0	95.2	1.7	3.7	30.5	69.2	0.1	1.1
Portugal	98.3	86.4	88.1	57.4	0.6	0.5	1.1	21.6
Romania	93.1	98.7	86.1	85.7	10.9	9.8	0.5	0.5
Slovenia	93.1	99.8	1.6	2.6	27.4	41.3	0.3	2.5
Slovakia	65.2	91.4	1.8	2.5	37.3	50.2	0.1	0.6
Finland	99.2	99.4	7.5	6.2	15.8	10.7	0.0	1.7
Sweden	100.0	100.0	17.7	15.6	26.6	19.6	28.8	42.3
United Kingdom	-	-	:	:	:	:	:	:
Iceland	99.3	99.8	2.1	1.3	5.3	1.9	1.0	3.8
Norway	100.0	100.0	17.8	14.2	29.9	24.1	3.5	30.0
FYR of Macedonia	92.7	99.9	40.5	52.3	14.9	43.0	0.0	0.0

* EU28 aggregates including 2005 estimates for the Netherlands but excluding the United Kingdom for both 2005 and 2012

: Data not available

- Not applicable

1. **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 (primary education). The end of this level often coincides with the end of compulsory education where it exists.
2. See website: <http://edl.ecml.at>
3. 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. The percentage of pupils learning French at lower secondary level in the Belgian Flemish Community was 95.4% of the total pupils at this level in 2005 and 99.0% of the total pupils at this level in 2012.
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.

Issued by: **Eurostat Press Office**

Vincent BOURGEAIS
Tel: +352-4301-33 444
eurostat-pressoffice@ec.europa.eu

For further information on data:

Sorin-Florin GHEORGHIU
Tel: +352-4301-350 73
estat-educ@ec.europa.eu

Eurostat news releases on the internet: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
Follow Eurostat on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/EU Eurostat](http://twitter.com/EU_Eurostat)