

Foreign language learning statistics

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in September 2024.
Planned article update: 26 May 2025.*

Highlights

" All or nearly all (99% to 100%) primary school pupils in Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Austria and Poland were learning English as a foreign language in 2022. "

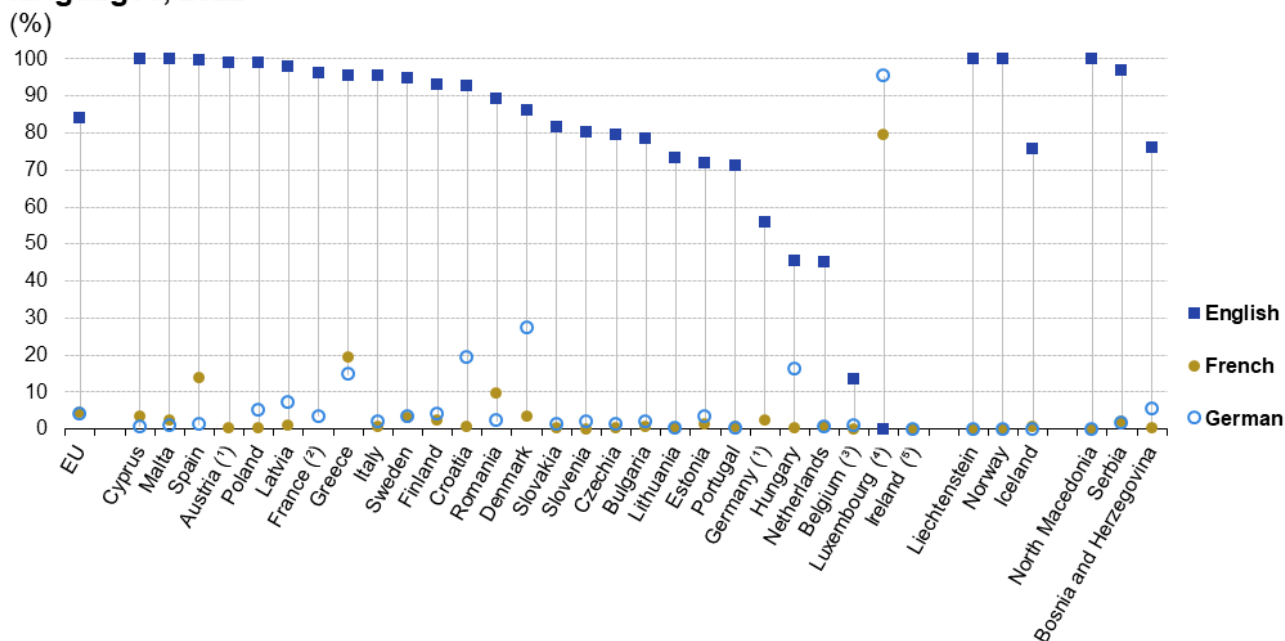
" In 2022, 87% of pupils in upper secondary education in the EU were learning English as a foreign language: this share was 96% in general programmes and 76% in vocational programmes. "

" Nearly half (49%) of all pupils in upper secondary education in the EU were learning 2 or more foreign languages in 2022. "

Linguistic diversity is actively encouraged within many educational establishments and workplaces. Schools and other [primary and secondary](#) educational institutions provide the main opportunity for the vast majority of people to learn languages. This article presents statistics on language learning in primary and secondary schools of the [European Union \(EU\)](#) countries as well as [EFTA](#) and [enlargement](#) countries. It forms part of an [online publication](#) on *Education and training in the EU*. Currently there are 24 [official languages](#) recognised within the EU which has been the situation since the accession of Croatia. There have always been fewer official languages than EU countries, as some EU countries share common languages, for example in Belgium where the official languages are Dutch, French and German, while in Cyprus the majority of the population speaks Greek. There are also a number of indigenous regional and minority languages found within the EU, as well as many other languages that have been brought into the EU by [migrant](#) populations, notably Arabic, Turkish and Chinese. Some regional languages, such as Basque, Catalan and Galician, have gained a status as co-official languages of the EU.

Primary education

Proportion of pupils in primary education learning selected foreign languages, 2022



Note: ranked on English.

(1) German: not applicable.

(2) French: not applicable.

(3) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German. Excluding the Flemish Community in Belgium.

(4) Although the official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics French and German are counted as foreign languages.

(5) English: not applicable.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_lang01)

eurostat

Figure 1: Proportion of pupils in primary education learning selected foreign languages, 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_lang01)

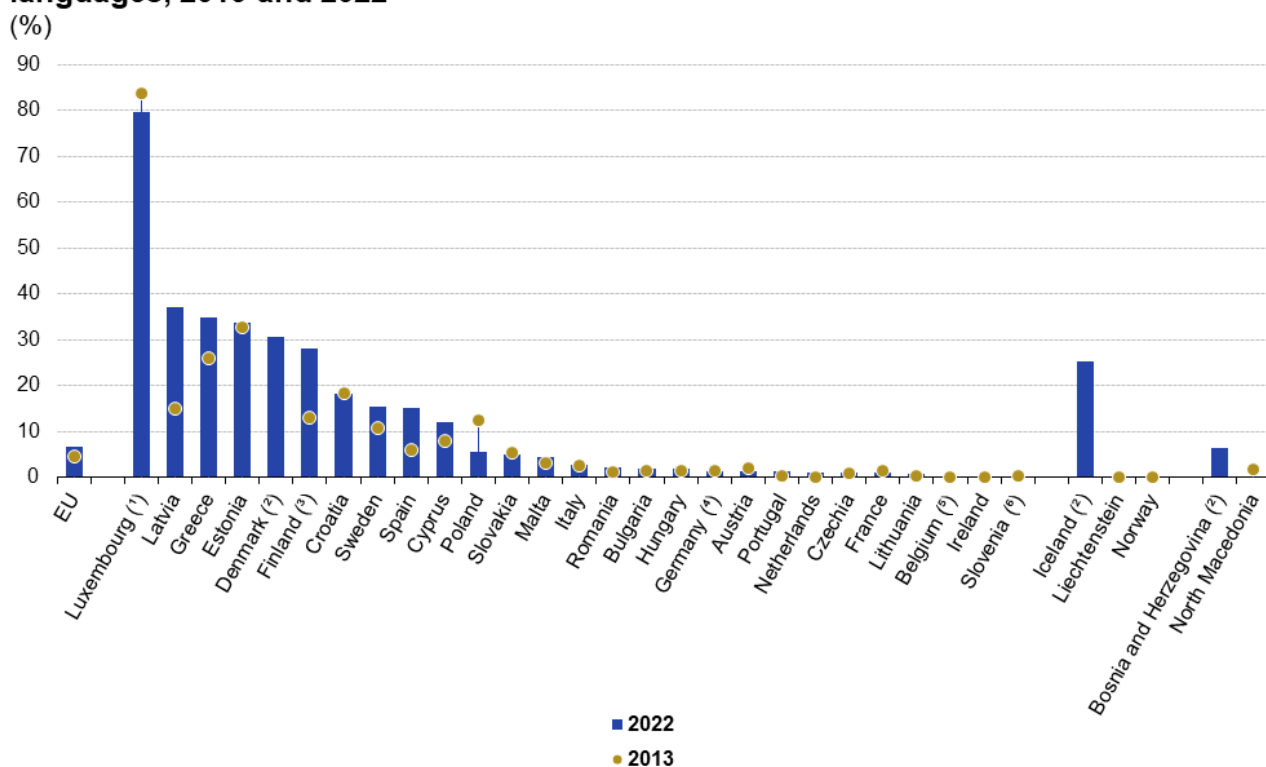
Within [primary education](#), 83.9% of pupils in the EU were learning English in 2022. Learning English is mandatory within primary education institutions in several EU countries, and so a number of them have all (or nearly all) pupils learning this language, as shown in Figure 1. Note that the relative importance of English as a foreign language may be further magnified because pupils tend to receive more instruction in their 1st foreign language than they do for any subsequent languages they study.

- All or nearly all (99 to 100%) primary school pupils in Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Austria and Poland were learning English as a foreign language, as was also the case in Liechtenstein, Norway and North Macedonia. Between 90% and 98% of primary school pupils were learning English in Latvia, France, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Finland and Croatia.
- In all but 2 of the EU countries, at least two fifths of primary school pupils were learning English.
 - In Belgium, the percentage of primary school pupils learning English was 13.3%, reflecting a focus on learning other official state languages (Dutch, French and German, depending on the community and/or region).
 - In Luxembourg, English was generally not taught in primary school, also reflecting a focus on instruction in several official state languages (French, German and Luxembourgish).

Within primary education, 4.5% of pupils in the EU were learning French in 2022, while 4.1% were learning German. For both of these languages, Luxembourg reported the highest shares (79.6% and 95.4%, respectively); in Luxembourg, French and German are both official national languages, but for the purpose of education statistics they are considered as foreign languages.

- A relatively high proportion of primary school pupils were learning French as a foreign language in Greece and Spain (19.5% and 13.8%, respectively), while this share was around one tenth (9.8%) in Romania; elsewhere the share was 3.5% or less.
- A relatively high proportion of primary school pupils were learning German as a foreign language in Denmark (27.3%), Croatia (19.3%), Hungary (16.3%) and Greece (14.7%); elsewhere the share was 7.3% or less.

Proportion of pupils in primary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022



(1) Although the official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics French and German are counted as foreign languages.

(2) 2013: not available.

(3) Depending on their mother tongue, students have to choose between Finnish and Swedish, both considered as foreign languages for the purpose of education statistics. Break in series.

(4) 2013: for some of the federal Länder the data on the number of foreign languages studied may include ancient languages.

(5) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German. Break in series.

(6) Break in series.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_lang02)

eurostat

Figure 2: Proportion of pupils in primary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022 (%)
Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_lang02)

In 2022, 6.5% of primary school pupils in the EU were learning 2 or more foreign languages – see Figure 2. Note that this indicator includes all modern foreign languages, not just the selected languages shown in Figure 1.

- Luxembourg was the only EU country where a majority of primary school pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages, with a share of 79.6%.
- Relatively high shares of primary school pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages in Latvia (37.2%), Greece (34.9%), Estonia (33.6%), Denmark (30.6%) and Finland (28.0%); the next highest share was recorded in Croatia (18.3%).
- In 17 EU countries, 5.6% or fewer of all primary school pupils were leaning 2 or more foreign languages, with the lowest shares in Belgium and Slovenia (both 0.0%), as well as in Ireland (where no foreign languages are currently taught at primary level; there are plans to introduce modern foreign language teaching from 2025).

Between 2013 and 2022, the share of primary school pupils in the EU learning at least 2 foreign languages increased from 4.6% to 6.5%. In **percentage point** terms, the biggest gains were recorded in Latvia, Finland (note that there was a break in series), Spain and Greece, where the shares increased by 22.3, 14.9, 9.2 and 9.0 percentage points, respectively. The large increase in Spain, which had the 3rd highest number of primary school pupils in the EU (12.5% of the EU total), contributed strongly to the increase observed for the EU as a whole. Elsewhere, increases were more modest, not exceeding 4.7 percentage points. In 9 EU countries, the share of primary school pupils learning at least 2 foreign languages decreased, down less than 1.0 percentage points in all except Luxembourg and Poland (falls of 4.2 and 6.8 percentage points, respectively).

Lower secondary education

Proportion of pupils in lower secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2013 and 2022

	2013 (%)				2022 (%)				Change 2013 to 2022 (percentage points)			
	English	French	German	Spanish	English	French	German	Spanish	English	French	German	Spanish
EU	96.7	33.9	22.6	12.6	98.1	29.8	22.4	18.4	1.4	-4.1	-0.2	5.8
Belgium (*)	46.1	52.9	0.8	0.0	68.2	56.3	0.6	0.0	22.1	3.4	-0.2	0.0
Bulgaria	86.8	3.1	7.2	1.5	89.9	1.2	4.6	2.1	3.1	-1.9	-2.6	0.6
Czechia	96.5	3.3	32.4	1.7	98.3	2.5	48.3	3.8	1.8	-0.8	15.9	2.1
Denmark	100.0	9.1	73.6	:	100.0	9.1	75.9	:	0.0	0.0	2.3	:
Germany (*)	97.8	24.4	-	3.7	99.3	21.3	-	6.1	1.5	-3.1	-	2.4
Estonia	97.1	2.7	14.5	0.3	95.3	2.7	9.5	0.6	-1.8	0.0	-5.0	0.3
Ireland	-	61.6	20.9	14.4	-	45.2	17.2	23.0	-	-16.4	-3.7	8.6
Greece	99.0	49.4	44.9	0.1	99.0	47.5	47.1	0.2	0.0	-1.9	2.2	0.1
Spain	99.4	38.7	3.1	-	99.2	38.4	4.7	-	-0.2	-0.3	1.6	-
France	98.4	-	14.4	37.0	99.5	-	14.0	55.8	1.1	-	-0.4	18.8
Croatia	97.6	1.4	42.7	0.1	97.6	1.1	39.7	0.2	0.0	-0.3	-3.0	0.1
Italy	100.0	68.7	8.6	21.3	99.9	59.1	9.5	26.1	-0.1	-9.6	0.9	4.8
Cyprus	99.7	90.0	1.3	0.9	100.0	82.0	2.9	1.1	0.3	-8.0	1.6	0.2
Latvia	95.8	1.0	11.3	0.0	97.4	1.5	13.7	0.4	1.6	0.5	2.4	0.4
Lithuania	97.1	3.4	11.4	0.0	98.0	5.4	13.4	0.3	0.9	2.0	2.0	0.3
Luxembourg (*)	53.2	100.0	100.0	0.0	53.0	90.1	80.0	0.0	-0.2	-9.9	-20.0	0.0
Hungary	68.5	0.5	31.7	0.1	76.6	0.4	26.8	0.2	8.1	-0.1	-4.9	0.1
Malta	100.0	35.1	9.1	7.5	100.0	26.7	12.0	14.7	0.0	-8.4	2.9	7.2
Netherlands	96.6	57.8	51.7	1.9	97.5	56.3	49.5	2.0	0.9	-1.5	-2.2	0.1
Austria	99.9	5.1	-	1.2	99.8	3.6	-	1.4	-0.1	-1.5	-	0.2
Poland	96.3	3.7	69.0	1.4	98.5	1.6	54.3	5.2	2.2	-2.1	-14.7	3.8
Portugal	93.4	63.3	0.7	24.1	96.4	72.1	1.3	20.0	3.0	8.8	0.6	-4.1
Romania	99.2	85.0	10.3	0.4	100.0	80.2	13.7	0.6	0.8	-4.8	3.4	0.2
Slovenia	100.0	3.2	19.1	2.4	100.0	1.4	18.0	2.4	0.0	-1.8	-1.1	0.0
Slovakia	94.9	2.6	57.7	0.7	96.3	0.9	32.3	1.1	1.4	-1.7	-25.4	0.4
Finland (*)	99.4	5.9	10.5	1.7	98.8	4.6	9.3	5.0	-0.6	-1.3	-1.2	3.3
Sweden	100.0	15.6	19.3	43.5	100.0	15.0	17.8	46.0	0.0	-0.6	-1.5	2.5
Iceland	99.8	1.8	2.5	2.9	99.1	1.9	0.3	1.6	-0.7	0.1	-2.2	-1.3
Liechtenstein	100.0	97.2	-	0.0	100.0	100.0	-	0.0	0.0	2.8	-	0.0
Norway (*)	100.0	14.0	24.4	31.0	100.0	11.3	22.3	33.9	0.0	-2.7	-2.1	2.9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	:	:	:	:	99.2	2.4	79.7	0.0	:	:	:	:
North Macedonia	99.9	50.4	44.9	0.0	100.0	34.2	63.7	0.0	0.1	-16.2	18.8	0.0
Serbia	:	:	:	:	98.4	25.0	50.2	2.0	:	:	:	:

(-) not available.

(-) not applicable.

Note: the published change between 2013 and 2021 may differ from the apparent change due to rounding.

(*) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German.

(*) Over-coverage: includes double counting for pupils additionally taking voluntary courses or native-language courses.

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

(*) Break in series.

(*) Undercoverage: approximately 9 000 students for which the breakdown by number of languages is not available are not included.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uae_lang01)

eurostat 

Table 1: Proportion of pupils in lower secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2013 and 2022 Source: Eurostat (educ_uae_lang01)

Within **lower secondary education**, 98.1% of pupils in the EU were learning English in 2022 – see Table 1.

- All (100.0%) lower secondary pupils in Denmark, Cyprus, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden were learning English as a foreign language, as was also the case in Liechtenstein and Norway.

- In all but 4 of the EU countries, at least 90.0% of lower secondary school pupils were learning English.
- In Bulgaria, almost 9 out of 10 lower secondary school pupils were learning English (89.9%), while lower shares were recorded in Hungary (76.6%), Belgium (68.2%) and Luxembourg (53.0%). Note the comments in the section on primary education about the atypical nature of foreign language learning in Belgium and Luxembourg.

Within lower secondary education, 29.8% of pupils in the EU were learning French in 2022, 22.4% German and 18.4% Spanish.

- Luxembourg reported that 90.1% of lower secondary pupils were learning French, the highest share among EU countries. In Cyprus, Romania, Portugal, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, more than half of lower secondary pupils were learning French.
- In 13 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of lower secondary pupils were learning French.
- Luxembourg also reported that a large proportion (80.0%) of lower secondary pupils were learning German; again, the highest share. Denmark and Poland were the only other EU countries where a majority (75.9% and 54.3%, respectively) of lower secondary pupils were learning German, with somewhat lower shares – between 40.0% and 50.0% – in the Netherlands, Czechia and Greece.
- In 8 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of lower secondary pupils were learning German.
- France was the only EU country where a majority (55.8%) of lower secondary pupils were learning Spanish, while Sweden (46.0%) had the next highest share.
- In 19 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of lower secondary pupils were learning Spanish.

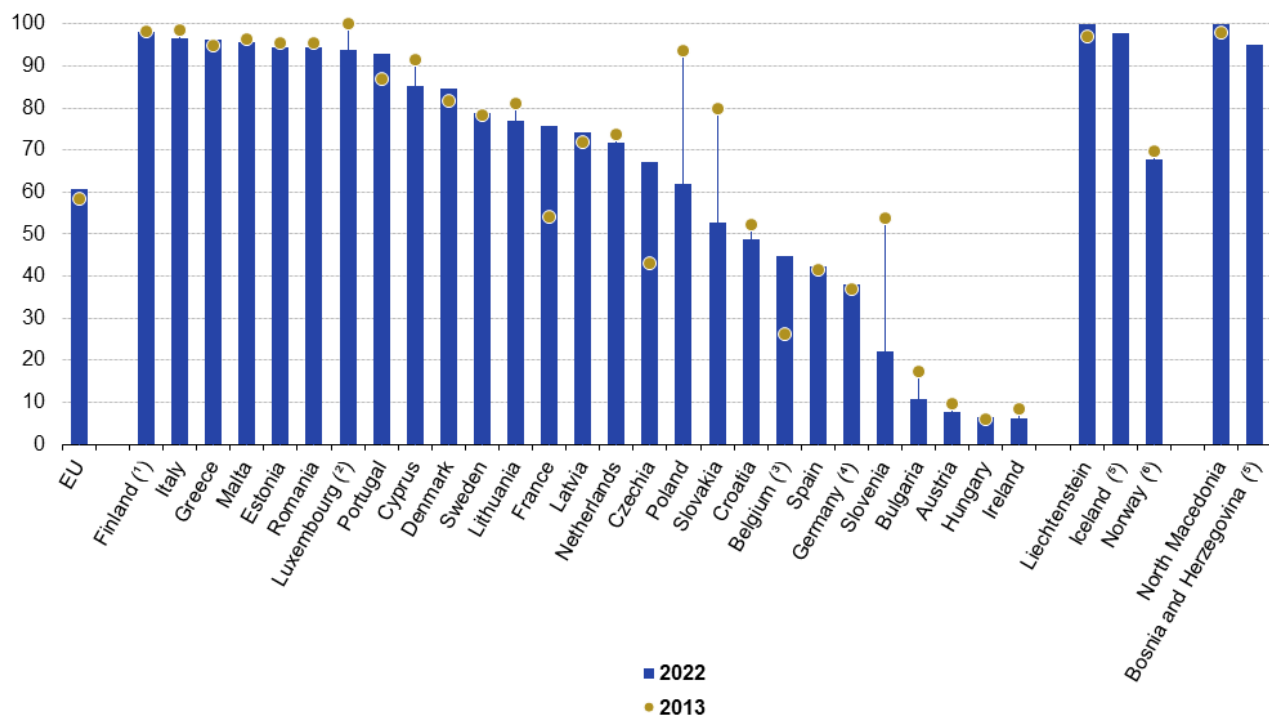
The share of lower secondary school pupils in the EU who were learning English was already high in 2013 (96.7%) but was 1.4 percentage higher in 2022 (98.1%). A larger increase was observed for the share of lower secondary pupils learning Spanish (up 5.8 percentage points to 18.4% in 2022). Decreases were observed for the share of lower secondary pupils learning German (down 0.2 percentage points to 22.4% in 2022) and French (down 4.1 points to 29.8% in 2022).

Among the EU countries, the largest changes (+/- 10.0 percentage points) between 2013 and 2022 in the share of lower secondary pupils learning specific languages were

- an increase of 22.1 percentage points for pupils learning English in Belgium
- a decrease of 16.4 percentage points for pupils learning French in Ireland
- an increase of 15.9 percentage points for pupils learning German in Czechia
- decreases of 25.4, 20.0 and 14.7 percentage points, respectively, for pupils learning German in Slovakia, Luxembourg and Poland
- an increase of 18.8 percentage points for pupils learning Spanish in France.

Proportion of pupils in lower secondary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022

(%)



(*) Depending on their mother tongue, students have to choose between Finnish and Swedish, both considered as foreign languages for the purpose of education statistics. Break in series.

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

(*) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German.

(*) 2013: for some of the federal Länder the data on the number of foreign languages studied may include ancient languages.

(*) 2013: not available.

(*) Undercoverage: approximately 9 000 students for which the breakdown by number of languages is not available are not included.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_lang02)

eurostat 

Figure 3: Proportion of pupils in lower secondary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_lang02)

In 2022, 60.7% of lower secondary pupils in the EU were learning 2 or more foreign languages – see Figure 3. Note that this indicator includes all modern foreign languages, not just the selected languages shown in Table 1.

- In Finland, 98.0% of lower secondary pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages, the highest share among the EU countries.
- Relatively high shares of lower secondary pupils – in the range from 92.9% to 96.6% – were learning 2 or more foreign languages in Italy, Greece, Malta, Estonia, Romania, Luxembourg and Portugal.
- In 9 EU countries, fewer than half of lower secondary pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages. Among these, the lowest shares were observed in Austria (7.7%), Hungary (6.6%) and Ireland (6.1%).

Between 2013 and 2022, the share of lower secondary pupils in the EU learning at least 2 foreign languages increased from 58.4% to 60.7%.

- In percentage point terms, the biggest increases among the EU countries were recorded in Czechia (up 24.1 percentage points to 67.2%), France (up 21.8 points to 75.8%) and Belgium (up 18.5 points to 44.7%).
- More modest increases, up no more than 6.1 percentage points, were recorded in 8 other EU countries.
- In 16 EU countries, the share of lower secondary pupils learning at least 2 foreign languages decreased. In 13 of these EU countries, the decreases were no more than 6.7 percentage points.
- Much larger decreases were observed in Slovakia (down 26.9 percentage points to 52.9%), Poland (down 31.7 points to 61.9%) and Slovenia (down 31.8 points to 22.1%).

Upper secondary education

Proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2022

(%)

	Upper secondary				General upper secondary				Vocational upper secondary			
	English	German	French	Spanish	English	German	French	Spanish	English	German	French	Spanish
EU (*)	87.0	19.5	18.2	17.8	96.3	21.4	21.9	27.1	76.3	17.2	15.2	6.8
Belgium (†)	84.4	14.0	52.9	2.7	95.5	22.6	48.6	5.1	72.7	5.0	57.5	0.2
Bulgaria	82.0	29.4	7.6	6.7	91.2	35.3	9.8	12.1	74.2	24.4	5.7	2.1
Czechia	94.2	36.5	3.6	6.3	99.9	63.1	11.2	16.2	92.0	26.9	0.9	2.7
Denmark	50.5	16.4	4.7	10.2	77.9	27.1	7.8	17.0	9.7	0.4	0.0	0.1
Germany	70.3	–	11.3	12.0	94.6	–	20.7	21.7	42.5	–	0.6	0.8
Estonia	82.1	11.2	3.6	2.4	97.8	18.3	5.8	4.1	58.6	0.8	0.3	0.0
Ireland	–	–	–	–	–	17.2	46.7	20.2	–	–	–	–
Greece	91.5	20.9	22.6	0.1	98.5	31.1	33.2	0.1	77.3	0.1	1.1	0.0
Spain	81.6	1.9	16.7	–	97.9	2.7	23.2	–	40.2	0.0	0.2	–
France	99.0	15.1	–	59.3	99.9	20.1	–	73.0	96.8	3.6	–	27.8
Croatia	93.5	32.8	3.6	1.8	99.7	60.2	5.0	4.8	90.7	20.8	3.0	0.4
Italy	89.9	7.5	20.0	13.6	96.8	8.2	13.8	15.2	83.3	6.9	25.8	12.2
Cyprus	99.0	1.3	29.3	4.1	99.6	1.5	28.6	5.0	96.3	0.2	32.8	0.0
Latvia	87.8	19.9	4.0	1.7	96.4	27.0	5.4	2.4	75.5	9.8	1.9	0.7
Lithuania	84.5	5.3	2.1	0.5	97.1	6.9	2.9	0.8	53.3	1.1	0.1	0.0
Luxembourg (‡)	77.1	72.5	72.3	2.0	85.4	81.2	80.7	5.6	73.1	68.3	68.3	0.2
Hungary	78.7	39.4	4.2	3.4	91.2	56.6	8.3	7.0	67.6	24.1	0.5	0.2
Malta	100.0	6.8	12.2	7.5	100.0	9.5	16.8	10.3	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Netherlands	79.5	19.8	–	–	100.0	38.8	28.2	6.1	68.7	9.7	–	–
Austria	98.3	–	12.2	12.0	99.1	–	28.0	23.2	97.9	–	4.8	6.7
Poland	95.2	62.7	6.4	9.4	96.1	54.3	11.0	17.5	94.5	69.9	2.5	2.5
Portugal	71.2	0.7	3.4	9.0	67.9	1.0	1.9	10.9	76.3	0.2	5.7	6.1
Romania	99.3	11.7	84.9	1.2	99.6	16.5	80.4	2.3	99.1	8.1	88.3	0.4
Slovenia	95.5	36.1	2.1	6.2	97.1	62.2	6.8	17.3	94.7	24.8	0.1	1.4
Slovakia	97.8	36.2	3.5	4.8	99.8	58.6	8.0	12.4	96.9	25.0	1.3	1.0
Finland	95.6	5.1	3.0	5.0	99.2	13.0	7.7	12.7	93.4	0.2	0.2	0.4
Sweden	100.0	13.6	10.4	28.9	100.0	19.7	15.1	42.1	99.9	0.7	0.3	1.2
Iceland (†)	57.7	15.1	6.5	17.5	72.7	20.9	9.0	24.2	20.9	0.7	0.2	1.1
Liechtenstein	100.0	–	90.0	0.0	100.0	–	90.0	0.0	–	–	–	–
Norway	29.8	10.0	3.2	11.5	36.5	20.9	6.7	24.1	23.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	92.8	37.4	2.5	0.1	99.5	78.4	6.4	0.2	91.0	26.5	1.5	0.0
North Macedonia	100.0	30.2	20.2	0.0	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Serbia	97.4	17.7	10.3	0.5	100.0	44.3	25.0	1.6	95.8	7.6	4.8	0.1

(-) not available.

(–) not applicable.

(†) Upper secondary and vocational upper secondary: excluding Ireland. French and Spanish: excluding the Netherlands.

(‡) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German.

(§) Although the official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics French and German are counted as foreign languages.

(*) 2019.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uoe_lang01)

eurostat 

Table 2: Proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2022 (%)
Source: Eurostat (educ_uoe_lang01)

Table 2 presents information on the proportion of pupils in [upper secondary education](#) (ISCED levels 3, 34 (general) and 35 (vocational)) learning 4 selected foreign languages.

Approximately 9 in 10 (87.0%) upper secondary students in the EU were studying English as a foreign language in 2022.

- All (100.0%) upper secondary pupils in Malta and Sweden were learning English as a foreign language, as was also the case in Liechtenstein and North Macedonia. Shares of at least 99.0% were also reported in Romania, France and Cyprus.
- Denmark (50.5%) was the only EU country where less than two thirds of upper secondary pupils were learning English.

Among upper secondary pupils across the EU following a general programme, the share learning English was 96.3% in 2022, while for those pupils following a vocational programme, the share was lower, at 76.3%. In most EU countries, the share of upper secondary pupils studying English as a foreign language was higher within general programmes than within vocational programmes.

- In 5 EU countries, the share of upper secondary pupils learning English within general programmes was more than 35.0 percentage points higher than the share within vocational programmes. The largest differences were 68.2 percentage points in Denmark, 57.7 points in Spain and 52.1 points in Germany.
- In Malta, the share of upper secondary pupils learning English was the same for general and vocational programmes (both 100.0%).
- In Portugal, the share of upper secondary pupils learning English was higher for vocational programmes than for general programmes (a difference of 8.4 percentage points); it was the only EU country to record a higher share for pupils studying within vocational programmes.

Slightly less than a fifth of upper secondary pupils in the EU were learning German (19.5%), French (18.2%) or Spanish (17.8%) as a foreign language in 2022. Note that the analysis for the EU countries below excludes Ireland, for which data on learning German, French and Spanish aren't available; it also partially excludes the Netherlands, for which data on learning French and Spanish aren't available.

- A majority of upper secondary pupils in Luxembourg (72.5%) and Poland (62.7%) were learning German as a foreign language. In 7 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of upper secondary pupils were learning German.
- A majority of upper secondary pupils in Romania (84.9%), Luxembourg (72.3%) and Belgium (52.9%) were learning French as a foreign language. In 13 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of upper secondary pupils were learning French.
- A majority of upper secondary pupils in France (59.3%) were learning Spanish as a foreign language. In 18 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of upper secondary pupils were learning Spanish.

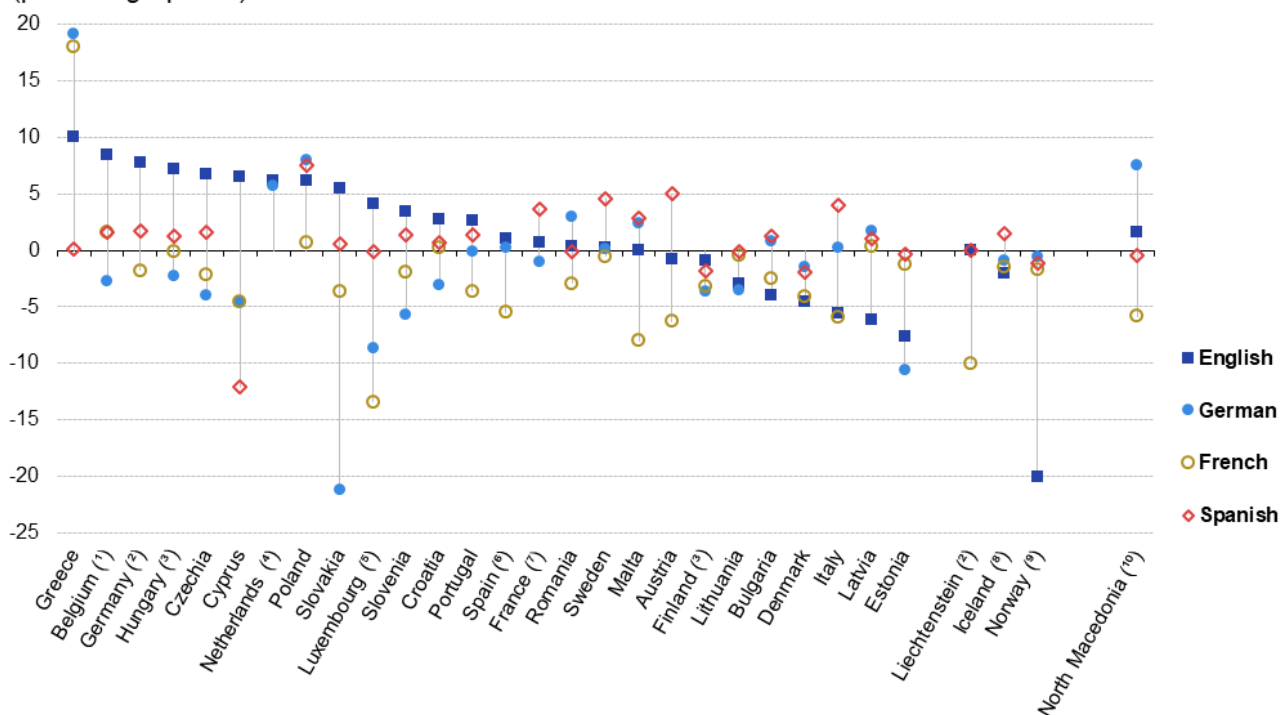
The share of upper secondary pupils in the EU following a general programme that were learning German was 21.4%, compared with 17.2% for those following a vocational programme. In most EU countries, the share of upper secondary students learning German as a foreign language was higher within general programmes than within vocational programmes. The only exception was Poland, where the share of upper secondary pupils learning German as a foreign language was higher within vocational programmes than within general programmes.

Among upper secondary pupils in the EU, the share learning French was 21.9% within general programmes and 15.2% within vocational programmes. In Greece, 33.2% of upper secondary pupils in general programmes were learning French, whereas 1.1% were doing so within vocational programmes. Differences of at least 20.0 percentage points, with higher shares within general programmes, were also observed in Austria, Spain and Germany. By contrast, the share of upper secondary pupils learning French as a foreign language was higher within vocational programmes than within general programmes in Italy (12.0 percentage points difference), Belgium (8.9 points difference), Romania (7.9 points difference), Cyprus (4.2 points difference) and Portugal (3.8 points difference).

The difference between general and vocational programmes was most notable for upper secondary pupils learning Spanish. Across the EU, 27.1% of pupils within general programmes were learning Spanish as a foreign language, compared with 6.8% within vocational programmes. A higher share of pupils learning Spanish within general programmes was observed in all EU countries for which data are available, with France (45.2 percentage points difference) and Sweden (40.9 points) recording the largest differences. France (73.0%) and Sweden (42.1%) were the only EU countries to record shares within general programmes that were above the EU average. France (27.8%) and Italy (12.2%) were the only EU countries to record shares within vocational programmes that were above the EU average.

Change in the proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2013–22

(percentage points)



Note: ranked on English. Ireland: not available.

(1) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German.

(2) German: not applicable.

(3) Break in series.

(4) French and Spanish: not available.

(5) Although the official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics French and German are counted as foreign languages.

(6) Spanish: not applicable.

(7) French: not applicable.

(8) 2013–19.

(9) 2014–22.

(10) 2013–21. 2013: definition differs for Spanish.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uae_lang01)

eurostat

Figure 4: Change in the proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning selected foreign languages, 2013–22 (percentage points) Source: Eurostat (educ_uae_lang01)

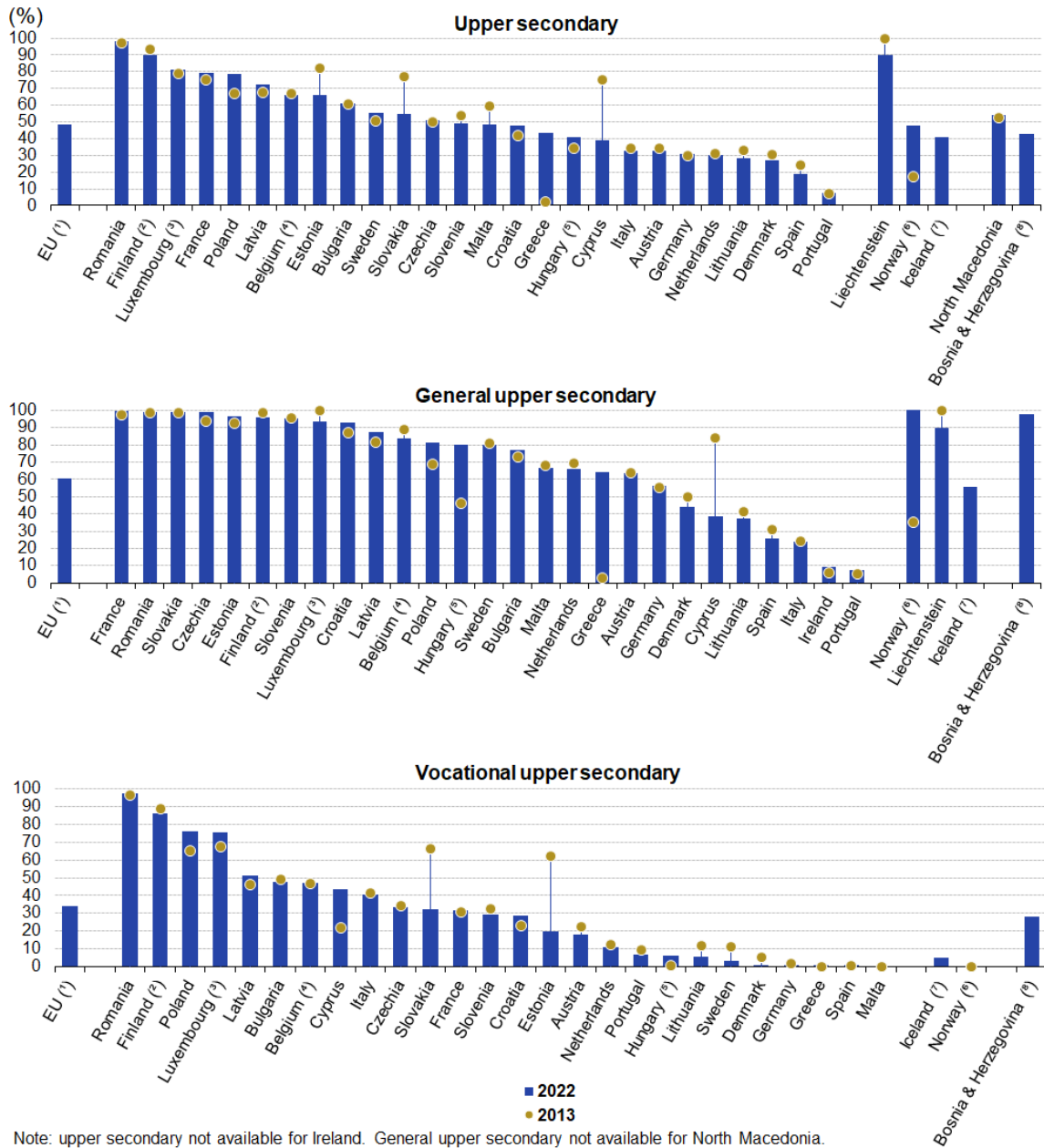
Among the EU countries, the largest increase between 2013 and 2022 in the share of pupils in upper secondary education who were studying English was recorded in Greece (up by 10.1 percentage points). The next largest increase was observed in Belgium, up 8.5 points. Increases of at least 5.0 percentage points were also observed in Germany, Hungary (note that there was a break in series), Czechia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia.

For upper secondary education pupils studying German, the share increased between 2013 and 2022 in 10 out of the 24 EU countries for which data are available/applicable (Germany and Austria, not applicable; Ireland, not available) and fell in the remainder. The biggest increase was recorded in Greece (up 19.2 percentage points), while the largest falls were in Slovakia and Estonia (down 21.2 and 10.6 points, respectively).

Between 2013 and 2022, the share of pupils in upper secondary education learning French as a foreign language fell in all but 5 of the 24 EU countries for which data are available/applicable (France, not applicable; Ireland and the Netherlands, not available). A relatively large increase was observed in Greece (up 18.0 percentage points), with modest gains – within the range of 0.2–1.6 points – in Belgium, Poland, Latvia and Croatia. The largest fall was recorded in Luxembourg (down 13.4 points).

The situation for Spanish was almost the opposite of that for French. The share of upper secondary education pupils learning Spanish increased between 2013 and 2022 in 17 of the 24 EU countries for which data are available (Spain, not applicable; Ireland and the Netherlands, not available). The biggest increase was recorded in Poland, up 7.5 percentage points. The largest fall was recorded in Cyprus (down 12.1 points).

Proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022



Note: upper secondary not available for Ireland. General upper secondary not available for North Macedonia. Vocational upper secondary not applicable for Liechtenstein and not available for Ireland and North Macedonia.

(1) 2013, comparable data not available. Upper secondary and vocational upper secondary, excluding Ireland.

(2) Depending on their mother tongue, students have to choose between Finnish and Swedish, both considered as foreign languages for the purpose of education statistics. Break in series.

(3) Although the official languages of Luxembourg are French, German and Luxembourgish, for the purpose of education statistics French and German are counted as foreign languages.

(4) The official state languages of Belgium are Dutch, French and German.

(5) Break in series.

(6) 2014 instead of 2013.

(7) 2019 instead of 2021. 2013: not available.

(8) 2013: not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: educ_uae_lang02)

Figure 5: Proportion of pupils in upper secondary education learning 2 or more foreign languages, 2013 and 2022 (%) Source: Eurostat (educ_uae_lang02)

In 2022, almost half (48.7%) of all upper secondary pupils in the EU were learning 2 or more foreign languages – see Figure 5.

- In Romania, nearly all (97.9%) upper secondary pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages. The only other EU countries to record shares over 80.0% were Finland (89.9%) and Luxembourg (81.3%).
- In total, there were 12 EU countries where at least half of all upper secondary pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages.
- In Spain, fewer than 1 in 5 (18.6%) upper secondary pupils were learning 2 or more foreign languages and this share was below a tenth in Portugal (7.3%).

Between 2013 and 2022, the biggest decreases (in percentage point terms) in the share of upper secondary pupils learning at least 2 foreign languages were recorded in Cyprus (down 36.1 percentage points), Slovakia (down 22.4 points), Estonia (down 16.4 points) and Malta (down 10.8 points). Smaller decreases (at most down 5.5 points) were observed in 9 other EU countries. Elsewhere, increases between 2013 and 2022 were less than 10.0 points, with 2 exceptions: in Poland, there was an increase of 11.5 points; a much greater increase was recorded in Greece (up 41.4 points).

The share of upper secondary pupils studying 2 or more foreign languages confirms a more widespread learning of foreign languages within general programmes than within vocational programmes. In 2022, 60.8% of upper secondary pupils following general programmes in the EU were learning 2 or more foreign languages, compared with 33.8% for pupils following vocational programmes.

- Practically all (at least 98.8%) upper secondary pupils following general programmes in France, Romania, Slovakia and Czechia were studying 2 or more foreign languages. A further 10 EU countries had shares that were at least 80.0%.
- In 7 EU countries, fewer than half of all upper secondary pupils following general programmes were learning at least 2 foreign languages. Among these, 2 had shares below 20.0%: Ireland (9.4%) and Portugal (7.5%).
- The share of upper secondary pupils following vocational programmes who were learning 2 or more foreign languages peaked in Romania at 97.1%. Only 4 other EU countries – Finland, Poland, Luxembourg and Latvia – reported that a majority of their upper secondary pupils following these programmes were learning at least 2 foreign languages.
- In 9 EU countries, fewer than 10.0% of upper secondary pupils following vocational programmes were learning at least 2 foreign languages. Among these, the lowest shares were in Spain (0.2%) and Malta (0.0%).

Between 2013 and 2022, the share of upper secondary pupils following general programmes who were learning at least 2 foreign languages increased most in Greece (up 61.5 percentage points), Hungary (up 34.0 points; note there was a break in series) and Poland (up 12.4 points). The largest decrease was observed for Cyprus, down 45.3 points.

Cyprus recorded the largest increase in the share of upper secondary pupils following vocational programmes who were learning 2 or more foreign languages, up 21.6 percentage points between 2013 and 2022. A relatively large percentage point increases was also observed in Poland (up 11.0 points). The largest decreases, by far, were recorded in Slovakia (down 34.1 points) and Estonia (down 42.7 points).

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Foreign language learning statistics: tables and figures](#)

Data sources

Source

Unlike most of the statistics about education that are published by Eurostat, the information on foreign language learning does not come from a [joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat \(UOE\) data collection](#). Rather, statistics on foreign language learning are collected separately by Eurostat. More information about the data collection is available on Eurostat's website, see [Education and training – reference metadata](#) (with individual national reports providing

more detailed information).

Classification

The [international standard classification of education \(ISCED\)](#) is the basis for international education statistics, describing 9 different [levels of education](#). The statistics presented in this article refer to primary education (as covered by ISCED level 1) and secondary education (as covered by ISCED levels 2–3).

Key concepts

The reference period for data on foreign language learning is the school/academic year. Data labelled as 2022 refer to the academic year during the period 2021/22.

Data on the number of pupils studying foreign languages are related to the corresponding numbers of students enrolled; students enrolled in special schools are excluded.

The data refer to all pupils in primary and secondary education, even if the teaching of languages doesn't start in the 1st years of instruction for the particular ISCED level considered. These statistics concern all modern languages that are taught as foreign languages. Each student studying a foreign language is counted once for each language they are studying. In other words, students studying more than 1 language are counted as many times as the number of languages studied.

The educational curriculum drawn up in each country defines the languages considered as foreign languages in that country and this definition is applied during data collection. Regional languages are included if they are considered as alternatives to foreign languages by the curriculum. Only foreign languages studied as compulsory subjects or as compulsory curriculum options are included. The study of languages when the subject is offered in addition to the minimum curriculum isn't included. Non-nationals studying their native language in special classes or those studying the language(s) of the host country are excluded.

Context

The [European Day of Languages](#) is an annual event that is held on 26 September; it was established in 2021. Many language and cultural institutes, associations, universities and, in particular, schools take part each year.

Learning a foreign language is considered to be an important factor for participation in society: foreign languages can unite people, make other countries and their cultures more accessible, and strengthen intercultural understanding. Poor or low levels of foreign language skills may potentially lead to businesses losing international contracts, while also potentially hindering the mobility of skills and talent.

Language skills are at the heart of the ambitious vision to create a [European Education Area](#). For several decades, it has been mandatory for most children in the EU to learn at least 1 foreign language during their compulsory education. In 2002, the Barcelona [European Council](#) recommended that at least 2 foreign languages should be taught to all pupils from a very early age.

A [Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#) (2019/C 189/03) was adopted in May 2019, while a European Commission [staff working document](#) (SWD(2018) 174 final) provides some scientific and background information relating to the Recommendation.

Among the recommendations are the following:

- Explore ways to help all young people to acquire competence in at least 1 other European language and to encourage the acquisition of an additional (3rd) language;
- Apply comprehensive approaches to improve teaching and learning of languages;
- Ensure that all sectors of primary and secondary education are addressed, starting as early as possible, including initial vocational education and training;
- Support the development of language awareness in schools and vocational education and training institutions. Support teachers, trainers, inspectors and school leaders in the development of language awareness;

- Encourage research in and the use of innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies.

Explore further

Other articles

- [Education and training in the EU – facts and figures](#)

Database

- [Education and training \(educ\)](#) , see

Languages (educ_lang)

Language learning (educ_uae_lang)

Thematic section

- [Education and training](#)

Selected datasets

- [Education and training \(t_educ\)](#)

Methodology

Metadata

- [Education and training](#) (ESMS metadata file – educ_uae_enr_esms), see
 - national quality reports for each country; each of these contain an annex about the provisions regarding language learning

Manuals and other methodological information

- [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\) 2011](#)
- [ISCED 2011 Operational Manual – Guidelines for classifying national education programmes and related qualifications](#)

External links

- [European Commission – European Education Area](#) , see
 - [Multilingualism](#)
 - [Multilingual classrooms](#)
- [European Education and Culture Executive Agency \(EACEA\)](#)
 - [Eurydice](#) , see
 - * [Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2023 edition](#)
 - * [The Teaching of Regional or Minority Languages in Schools in Europe – 2019 edition](#)

Legislation

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 452/2008](#) of 23 April 2008 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning
 - [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 912/2013](#) of 23 September 2013 as regards statistics on education and training systems
 - [Summaries of EU Legislation: statistics on education and lifelong learning](#)