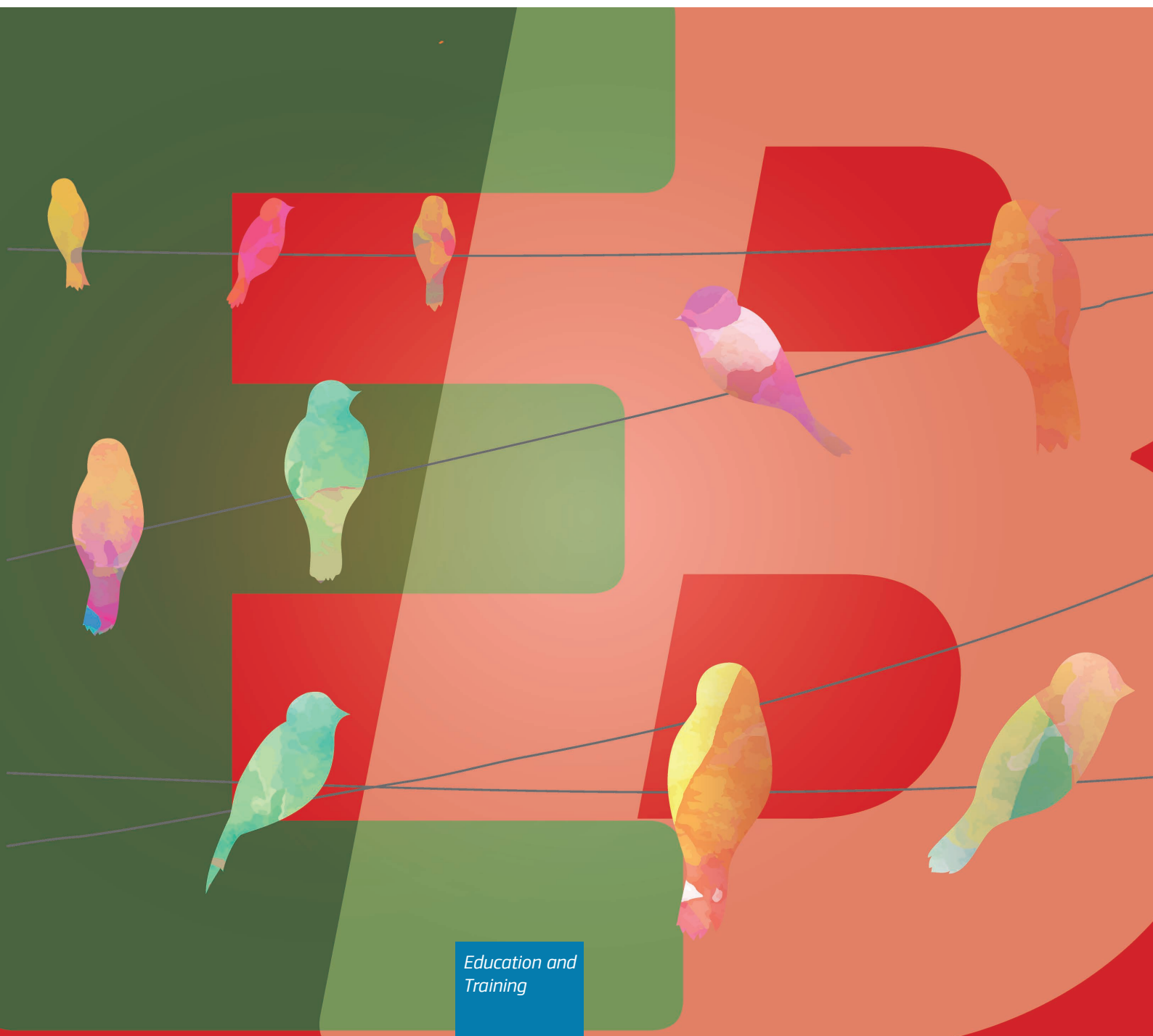


# Eurydice *Brief*

Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe







## **Eurydice Brief**

# Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2017 Edition

This executive summary succinctly explains the main contents of *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe – 2017 Edition*, a report published by Eurydice in May 2017, and researched and written under the auspices of the European Commission. Additional input has been obtained from selected external research reports and through a programme of expert workshops and peer learning activities carried out by the European Commission.

### **Authors EACEA**

Nathalie Baïdak (coordinator)  
Marie-Pascale Balcon  
Akvile Motiejunaite

### **Layout and graphics**

Patrice Brel

### **Contacts**

Wim Vansteenkiste  
Communication and Publications  
Tel: +32 2 299 50 58

ISBN 978-92-9492-587-9 (printed version)  
ISBN 978-92-9492-586-2 (PDF)

doi:10.2797/456818 (printed version)  
doi:10.2797/828497 (PDF)

© Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2017.

# WHY SHOULD EUROPE'S EDUCATION SYSTEMS REINFORCE THEIR LANGUAGE TEACHING?

Linguistic diversity is part of Europe's DNA. It embraces not only the official languages of Member States, but also the regional and/or minority languages spoken for centuries on European territory, not to mention the languages brought by the various waves of migrants. Therefore, learning several languages is a necessity for many people and an opportunity for everybody.

*Open, diverse, democratic and prosperous societies require ambitious education policies with regard to foreign languages.*

From its inception, respect for linguistic diversity has been seen as a key principle of the European Union and is inscribed in its most fundamental law – the Treaty of the European Union. In education, this key principle has guided the development of many EU policies and actions promoting the teaching and learning of languages. In this respect, the Conclusions from the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002 can be seen as the cornerstone of many policy developments in the last fifteen years at EU level. In these Conclusions, the EU heads of State and Government called for further action 'to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age' and for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator (Council of the European Union 2002b, p. 19). In 2012, the publication of the results of the European Survey on Language Competences was another significant milestone in European cooperation promoting efficient foreign language learning and teaching.

The arguments supporting ambitious education policies with regard to foreign languages are plentiful and have been laid down in various Commission policy documents <sup>(1)</sup>. For individuals, learning languages creates personal and professional opportunities, especially as EU citizenship guarantees freedom of movement. For society, it fosters cultural awareness, mutual understanding and social cohesion. For companies, workers with language and intercultural competences are a vital resource for helping businesses succeed and grow in global markets. In short, developing competences in more than one language is essential to maintain open, diverse, democratic and prosperous societies in Europe. Lacking ambition in this area might prove very costly democratically and economically, and endanger the core values and principles of the European Union.

---

<sup>(1)</sup> 'Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment' (COM (2008) 566 final);  
'Language competences for employability, mobility and growth' (SWD (2012) 372 final).

### Foreign languages as defined in Eurydice reports:

Languages described as 'foreign' in the curriculum laid down by the central (or top level) education authorities. The description is based on an education-related definition, unrelated to the political status of a language. Thus certain languages regarded as regional or minority languages from a political perspective may be included in the curriculum as foreign languages. In the same way, classical languages may be considered as foreign languages in certain curricula, while in others, the term 'modern languages' is used to clearly distinguish living languages from classical ones. Elsewhere, the term 'first language' may be used to describe the language of schooling, with other languages being referred to as 'second' or 'third' languages – this is often the case in countries with more than one state language.

This Eurydice Brief builds on the *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2017* report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017) <sup>(2)</sup>, which provides a wide range of data on foreign language policies directed at school level in European education systems. This Brief summarises the report's main findings, linking them to recent research works and EU policy documents. It aims to increase policy makers' understanding of the latest policy developments in the area of foreign language teaching across Europe and help them make new policy proposals to address the current challenges. This Brief is structured around five key EU and national language policy themes:

- The European Council Conclusions on foreign language teaching, the so-called Barcelona objective;
- The range of the foreign languages learnt by students;
- The quality of foreign language teaching with a particular focus on teachers and their visits abroad for professional purposes, and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as a teaching approach;
- The expected levels of attainment in foreign languages;
- Language support measures to facilitate the integration of newly arrived migrant students.

---

<sup>(2)</sup> Please consult the report at this address:

[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL\\_2017\\_internet.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/0/06/KDL_2017_internet.pdf)

## THE BARCELONA OBJECTIVE

*'Teaching two foreign languages from an early age' is the ambitious aim which is sometimes referred to as the Barcelona objective.*

It is a common view among parents and educators across Europe that an early start in foreign language learning brings better results in terms of language proficiency. Parents are indeed eager to see their children start learning languages from an early age, an opportunity most of them were not offered when they were young themselves (Celaya, 2012). As we have seen, this view was also adopted by the EU heads of State and of Government gathered in the Barcelona European Council in 2002, with the specification that this should apply to 'at least two foreign languages' (Council of the European Union, 2002b).

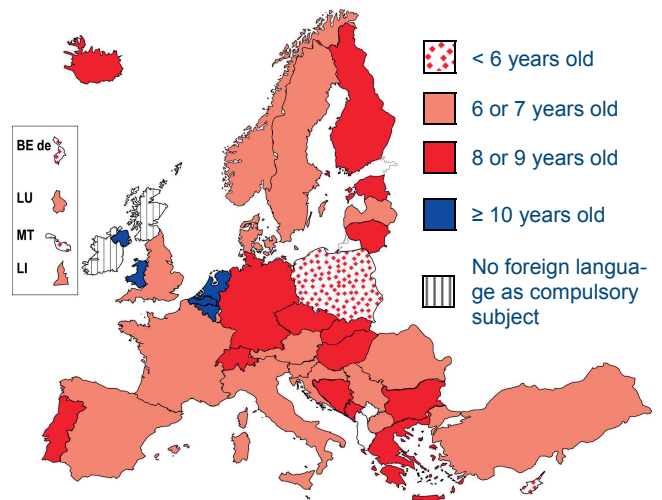
### First foreign language from an early age

At the turn of this century, the teaching of two languages from a very early age was far from a reality in most European countries. In fact, 15 years ago students started learning their first foreign language as a compulsory subject from between 9 and 11 years old in most countries (Eurydice, 2000). In 2016, the picture is markedly different. In most countries, compulsory foreign language learning now starts before the age of eight, i.e., at the beginning of primary education, and in some countries it even starts in pre-primary education. Cyprus and Poland have recently introduced a reform which makes language learning compulsory for all children attending pre-primary school.

The available statistical data reflect this trend. In 2005, at EU level, the percentage of all students enrolled in primary education, learning at least one foreign language was 67.3 %; in 2014, it had risen to 83.8 %. This 16.5 percentage point increase can essentially be explained by the lowering of the age at which a foreign language becomes compulsory for all primary education students.

*Students start learning their first foreign language before the age of eight in most countries.*

Figure 1: Starting age of the first foreign language as a compulsory subject, 2015/16



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 30).

Source: Eurydice.

### Case study: Poland – Making two foreign languages compulsory from an earlier age

In recent years, Poland has been engaged in a number of reforms concerning foreign language teaching which have resulted in substantial changes in relation to when, for how long and to whom foreign languages are taught. The starting age was first lowered in 2008, from grade 4 (10-year-olds) to grade 1 (7-year-olds). Then, in 2014, compulsory foreign language education was introduced in pre-primary education. The position of the second foreign language in the curriculum was also subject to reform: from being a compulsory subject only for students in general upper secondary education, in 2008 it also became compulsory for all students in lower secondary education. Over recent years key organisational and teaching principles have also been laid down such as:

- freedom of choice in the languages learnt
- continuity in the first language learnt
- some flexibility for schools to allocate instruction time for foreign languages
- freedom of choice in teaching methods
- use of standardised and defined learning outcomes
- opportunities to learn foreign languages as options and to benefit from CLIL.

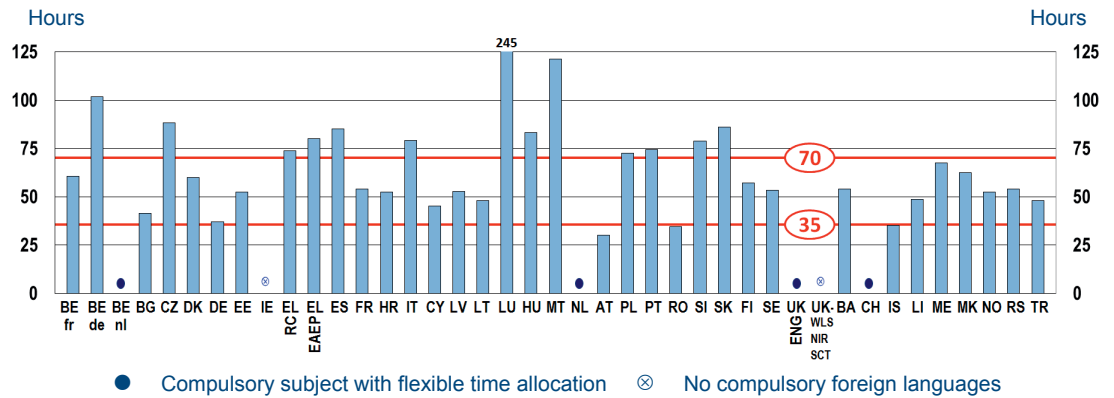
Starting a foreign language at an early age is only one aspect of effective language learning. Other factors such as the quality of the input (and notably contact with native speakers) and cumulative exposure to the languages learnt, are of crucial importance in developing language proficiency (Muños, 2014). The Eurydice network has been collecting data on the duration, in years, of compulsory foreign language learning and on the instruction time dedicated to it. These data are useful to build a more complete picture of students' exposure to foreign languages in educational settings.

At primary level, the amount of instruction time dedicated to foreign languages as compulsory subjects is still rather modest. Figure 2 shows the intensity with which primary education students are taught the first foreign language as a compulsory subject. In the majority of countries, the number of annual hours dedicated to its teaching varies between 35 and 70. This corresponds roughly to one or two hours per week, based on an average of 34 weeks that, for example, students in grade 4 spend in school. However, in Luxembourg the situation is somewhat different – Luxembourgish is the first language of the native population and as such is used in pre-primary education; nevertheless, in the first year of primary school, all students start to learn German, one of the three national languages. This language quickly becomes the language of instruction, requiring from students a high level of proficiency, which explains the exceptionally high number of taught hours.

*The teaching of the first foreign language is rather modest at primary level: roughly between one and two hours per week on average.*



Figure 2: Average recommended minimum number of hours per year of teaching for the first foreign language as a compulsory subject in primary education, 2015/16



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 108 and 111).

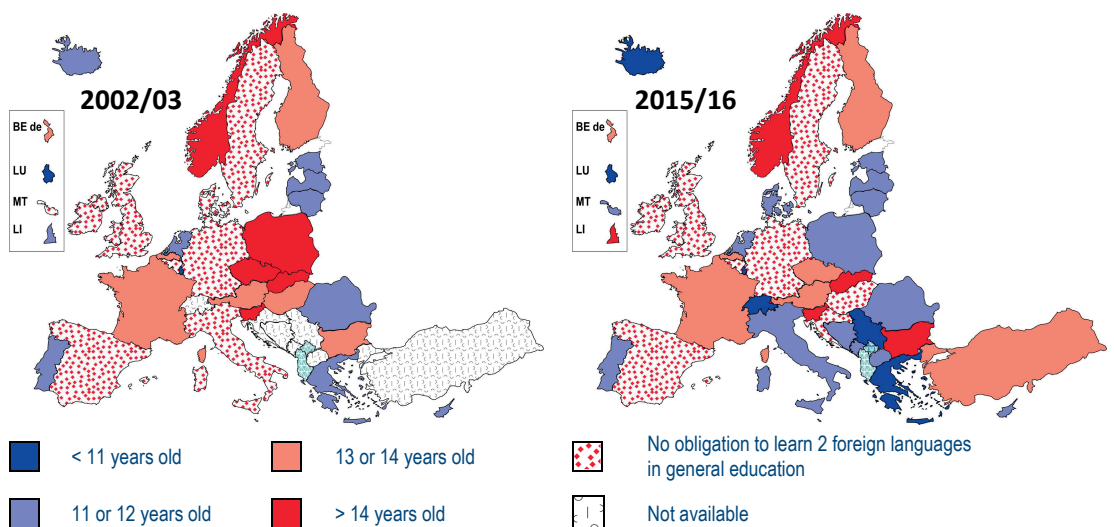
Source: Eurydice.

### Second foreign language from an early age

The Barcelona objective does not only refer to an early start in foreign language learning; it also indicates the minimum number of foreign languages that students should start learning. Ideally, all European students should learn two or more languages in addition to their first language.

In 2016, in the majority of countries, all students must start learning a second foreign language before the end of compulsory education. In many, this learning starts at the end of primary education or at the beginning of secondary education. Eurydice data show that since 2003 some countries have introduced reforms either to make this second language a compulsory subject and/or to lower its starting age. However, policy reforms in this area are not as wide-ranging as for the first foreign language.

Figure 3: Starting age of the second foreign language as a compulsory subject, 2002/03 and 2015/16



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 35).

Source: Eurydice.

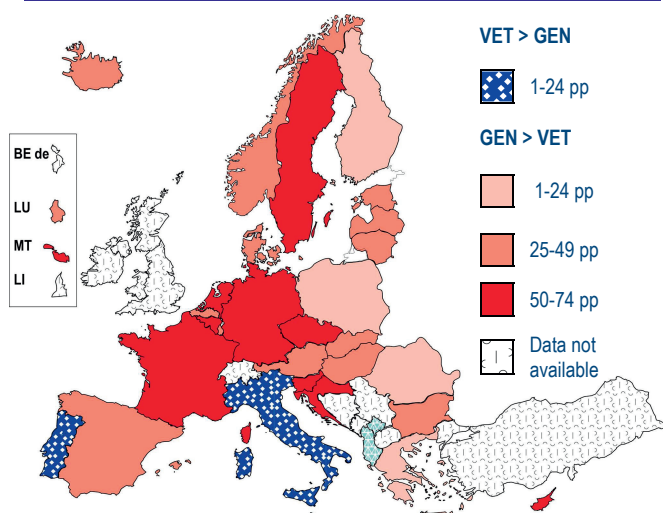
In four countries, learning two languages simultaneously is now compulsory for all students, while previously it was not an obligation. In Denmark, Italy, and Malta, it is now mandatory for all students to learn a second foreign language from the age of 11. This obligation for all, however, stops when students move to upper secondary school. In Turkey, the second foreign language becomes compulsory for all students aged 14 when starting upper secondary general education.

Three countries have adopted reforms that have substantially lowered the starting age of the second foreign language as a compulsory subject. In the Czech Republic, France and Poland, all students must start learning a second foreign language in the early years of lower secondary education; previously, this obligation applied primarily to students in upper secondary education. In the 2016 reference year, in a small group of countries, children start learning a compulsory second foreign language before the age of 11: in Greece, Switzerland, Iceland and Serbia, they begin at 10; and in Luxembourg at age 7.

In some countries, learning a second foreign language is not an obligation for all students, but only an entitlement. In other words, all schools across the country must offer a second language in the curriculum, but students are free to take it or not. This situation is found in all grades of lower secondary education in Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Sweden and Norway. Statistics show that in Spain, Croatia and Slovenia, about half of the students in lower secondary education study at least two foreign languages. In Sweden and Norway, this percentage amounts to 77.9 % and 71.9 % respectively.

*Across Europe, policy reforms with regard to the second foreign language are not as wide ranging as for the first.*

Figure 4: Percentage point (pp) difference in participation rates between VET students and general education students learning two foreign languages, ISCED 3, 2014



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, Chapter C).

Source: Eurostat.

of students enrolled in VET programmes where learning two languages is compulsory is much higher than the proportion of general education students in programmes with such an obligation. At EU level, the participation rate for learning two foreign languages is 34.5 % in VET compared to 51.2 % in general education.

The above description mostly refers to lower secondary education. At upper secondary level, the position of foreign languages in the curriculum greatly differs depending on the type of education (general education versus vocational education (VET)). In fact, in most countries, by the time they finish secondary education, VET students will have spent fewer years learning two languages than their peers in general education. In all countries except Italy (24.4 pp) and Portugal (1.8 pp), the VET student participation rate for learning two languages or more at upper secondary education is lower (or significantly lower) than that of general education students (see Figure 4). In Italy, the proportion

*The percentage of VET students learning two foreign languages is substantially lower than that of general education students.*

## FOREIGN LANGUAGES LEARNT

*English is a compulsory subject in 18 education systems.*

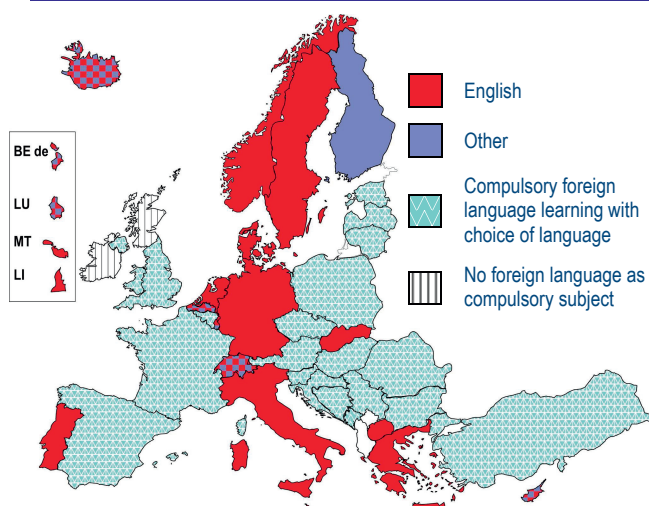
EU policy guidelines do not specify which foreign languages students should learn. At national level, however, such guidelines do exist in some countries. In 18 education systems, English is a compulsory language that all students must learn at one point during their compulsory education. In most of these education systems, this is not a new policy as this obligation was already prevalent in 2002/03. Only four countries have introduced reforms to make English a compulsory subject since then: Portugal and Slovakia, in 2013/14 and 2011/12 respectively; and Belgium (German-speaking Community) and Italy some years earlier.

When a language other than English is mandatory, it is often one of the official state languages. French is one of the state languages in Belgium and a compulsory language in the German-speaking and Flemish Communities. Similarly, in Luxembourg, French and German, two of the three state languages, are compulsory subjects for students. In Finland, Swedish is compulsory in schools where Finnish is the language of schooling, while Finnish is mandatory in schools where Swedish is the language of schooling. In Switzerland, depending on the Canton, German, French, Italian or Romansh, the four state languages of the country are mandatory. Only two countries make languages other than English or state language(s) compulsory for students: Danish in Iceland and French in Cyprus.

The participation rate for learning English does not, however, differ much between the education systems where English is designated a compulsory language and those where there is freedom of choice in the languages learnt. Indeed, in nearly all countries, at least 90 % of all students in lower secondary education study English.

In the majority of countries, top level education authorities provide lists of languages schools can choose from to include in their curriculum. Most commonly, the number of languages that can be offered in schools ranges from seven to ten. Usually, the higher the

Figure 5: Mandatory foreign languages during compulsory education, 2015/16



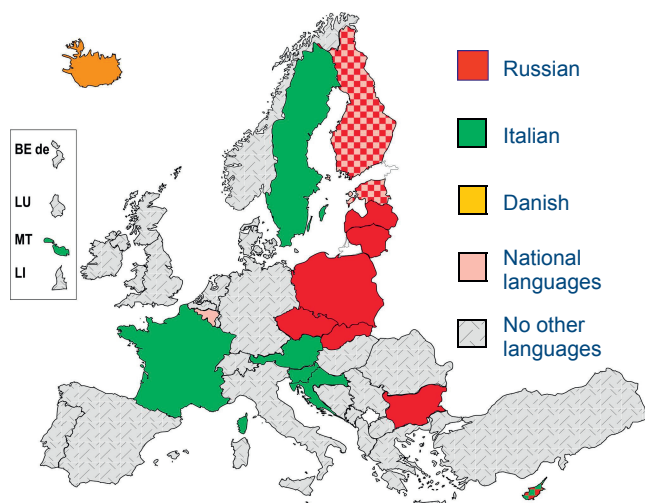
Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 44).

Source: Eurydice.

education level, the more diverse is the list of languages. In some countries such as France, for example, students' choice of languages is potentially very great, as numerous regional languages such as Basque and Breton, can be included in the curriculum as 'foreign languages'. This wider choice of languages is certainly a precondition for making foreign language learning more diverse; however, it is not the only factor involved. As Figure 6 clearly shows, in upper secondary general education, where the choice of foreign language is usually broader, the percentage of students learning languages other than world languages is very low across Europe.

In 2008, at the request of the European Commission, a high level group of intellectuals, chaired by Amin Maalouf, made ambitious proposals to address the issue of linguistic diversity in Europe (European Commission, 2008). Every European should be encouraged to study a lifelong language that would become like a second mother tongue (a 'personal adoptive language'). This language would be learnt in addition to a language of international communication. For instance, for Europeans, it could be the national language of one of their neighbouring countries, the language of their parents/ancestors and, for those moving abroad, the language of their new host country. For immigrants with a mother tongue from outside Europe, their personal adoptive language would naturally become the language of their new host country.

Figure 6: Foreign languages other than English, French, German and Spanish learnt by a minimum 5 % of students, general upper secondary education (ISCED 3), 2013/14



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, Chapter C).

Source: Eurostat.

*Less than 5 % of students learn languages other than English, French, German and Spanish in most countries.*

# QUALITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The starting age for learning compulsory foreign languages (designated or not) and the instruction time dedicated to them are important structural issues to be decided. However, on their own they do not ensure teaching quality or students' high level of proficiency in the languages they study. Effective teaching methods, high quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development are key factors in making students' learning experiences successful. Providing comparable information in these areas is difficult as, in most countries, teacher training institutions enjoy a great deal of autonomy, as do teachers themselves in choosing appropriate teaching approaches. An empirical survey at EU level or beyond such as the European Survey on Language Competence (European Commission, 2012) or the TALIS survey (OECD) <sup>(3)</sup> can shed some light on the variety of practices in use across Europe.

This section focuses on education policies related to two very specific aspects of high quality of foreign language teaching: visits abroad by foreign language teachers for professional purposes and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a teaching approach.

## Foreign language teachers' visits abroad

The ELLiE (Early Language Learning in Europe) study, published in 2011, provides useful research-based recommendations for improving the quality of foreign language teaching in schools, especially at primary level (British Council, 2011). This study acknowledges the trend for an earlier start to foreign language learning in many European countries and attempts to identify the policy developments needed to support this change and make it successful. One of the key recommendations of the ELLiE report was to ensure that teachers have the necessary foreign language skills and knowledge of suitable methods for teaching young children; this is achieved through appropriate teacher education both in initial education and continuing professional development.

*Through spending time in a country where the target language is spoken, language teachers will gain understanding of the 'everyday culture' of that country.*

Language proficiency is indeed a key dimension of the skills and expertise needed to be a foreign language teacher. Vold (2017) examined foreign language teachers' sense of preparedness for teaching their subject and concluded that their perception of competence derived from a combination of university studies, teacher experience and stays abroad. Visits abroad play an important role in developing prospective foreign language teachers' oral language skills. It also greatly contributes to their knowledge and understanding of the 'everyday culture' of the country where the target language is spoken – as opposed to knowledge of the 'Culture with a capital C' which is provided during their initial teacher education (Vold, 2017). In its Conclusions of 12 May 2009, the Council of the European Union highlighted the need to gradually expand transnational mobility, notably for teachers, with a 'view to making periods of learning abroad – both within Europe and the wider world – the rule rather than the exception' (Council of the European Union 2009, p. 3).

<sup>(3)</sup> See: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm>

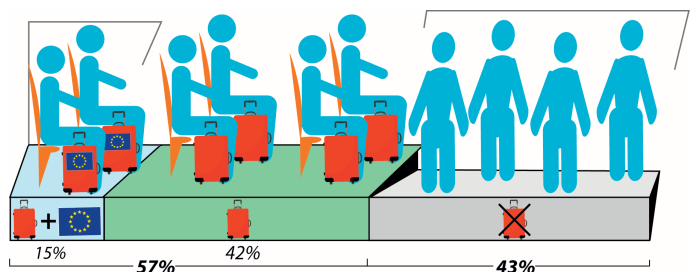
The Eurydice data show that out of 18 countries providing recommendations on the content of initial teacher education, only three (France, Austria and the United Kingdom) recommend or require that prospective foreign language teachers spend a certain period in the target language country before completing their teaching qualification.

Case study: United Kingdom (Scotland) – Requirements for spending time abroad

Applicants for Modern Foreign Languages Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses need to fulfil a certain number of requirements in order to be accepted on a course. These include having spent some time in a country where the languages they will be teaching are spoken. This must happen before they start the ITE programme.

For the first foreign language, the stay must be a duration of six months. Applicants must normally live in the relevant country in blocks of at least three months. For the second foreign language, the duration must be three months minimum – this must either be a continuous period or in blocks of at least four weeks. While living abroad, the applicants must have taken full part in the language and culture of the relevant country.

Figure 7: Proportion of modern foreign language teachers in lower secondary education who have been abroad for professional purposes with support from a transnational mobility programme, 2013



Source: Eurydice, on the basis of TALIS 2013.

(56.9 %), compared to 19.6 % for other subject teachers. This percentage varies a great deal between countries: just over 70 % of foreign language teachers do so in Spain and Iceland while it is below 40 % in Croatia (37.4 %), Portugal (35.1 %), Romania (30.0 %) and Slovakia (39.6 %). It should be noted that on average in the 19 countries/regions, 26.1 % of foreign language teachers who went abroad did so with funding from an EU programme, such as Erasmus+.

Data from the 2013 TALIS survey provides an insight into foreign language teachers' actual practice of going abroad for professional purposes (during initial teacher education or while in service). On average, in the 19 countries/regions participating in the survey, only a little more than half of foreign language teachers at lower secondary level report having been abroad at least once for professional purposes

*Only 56.9 % of all foreign language teachers at lower secondary level report having been abroad at least once for professional purposes.*



## Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

The Commission's Communication 'Promoting Language Learning and Language Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006', published in 2003 states that 'Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, has a major contribution to make to the Union's language learning goals' (European Commission 2003, p. 8). Arguments in favour of CLIL are laid down in several EU documents <sup>(4)</sup>. CLIL is seen as a teaching method that can help motivate young people to learn languages – especially those not performing well in mainstream language instruction – and increase their level of self-confidence. This methodology provides real opportunities for students to use the language they learn in meaningful and rich communication situations, which is a core principle of the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages. Finally, CLIL increases learners' exposure to the language they learn without taking additional time from the curriculum. EU documents also stress the need for teachers to be adequately prepared for this kind of teaching – notably by being proficient in the foreign language used in the classroom – and to have adequate teaching materials.

### CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as defined in Eurydice reports:

A general term to designate different types of bilingual or immersion education. This umbrella term encompasses

- provision where some or all non-language subjects are taught through a language designated as a foreign language in the curriculum;
- provision where some non-language subjects are taught through a regional and/or minority language or a non-territorial language or a state language (in countries with more than one state language). In this case, non-language subjects are always taught through two languages.

*Only in a handful of countries is CLIL provision available in all schools at some stage of education.*

In nearly all countries, some schools offer CLIL provision. There is no internationally comparable data at EU level to show the extent of this type of educational programme in each country. However, it is quite clear that it is not very widespread (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012) except in a handful of countries. Only in Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria, Malta and Liechtenstein is CLIL provision available in all schools at some stage.

<sup>(4)</sup> See for example: European Commission, 2012. *CLIL/EMILE The European Dimension. Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential*. [Online] Available at: [https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/47616/david\\_marsh-report.pdf?sequence%20=1](https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/47616/david_marsh-report.pdf?sequence%20=1); European Commission, 2014. *Improving the effectiveness of language learning: CLIL and computer assisted language learning*. [pdf] Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/clil-call\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/studies/clil-call_en.pdf).

#### Case study: Italy – CLIL for all in upper secondary education

The introduction of CLIL was implemented in all *Licei* and *Istituti Tecnici* (upper secondary education) in 2014/15 as part of a comprehensive school reform. In practice, one non-language subject must be taught in a foreign language in the final year at *Licei* and *Istituti Tecnici*. In the latter, the subject must be chosen from the specialist areas. In the final three years of *Licei linguistici*, two different non-language subjects must be taught through two different foreign languages.

The Ministry of education has defined the competences and qualifications teachers need to teach CLIL classes. They concern the target languages, the non-language subjects and issues relating to methodology and teaching approaches. In particular, CLIL teachers must have attained a C1 level of competence on the scale defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In order to help potential CLIL teachers acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills, the education authorities are financing specific continuing professional development activities. For instance, in 2016, within a new school reform, they launched a National Teacher Training Plan which established a wide range of training programmes in CLIL methodology, which also included teachers from primary, lower secondary and vocational schools.

CLIL practices vary considerably in schools across Europe. As Hüttner and Smit (2014) observe, CLIL practices are informed by local teaching methodologies and more broadly by the educational characteristics and context in which they take place. Therefore, any assessment of such practices must take careful consideration of the specificities of each experience, including factors related to the education system (such as early tracking, etc.) or to how CLIL is provided locally (non-language subjects taught through CLIL, how the focus on language and content works, etc.).

Regulations on specific qualifications for teaching CLIL exist in the majority of countries offering these educational programmes. They usually concern teachers who are not qualified as foreign language teachers and refer to the knowledge of the language(s) targeted by the programme. Teachers are either required to have an academic degree in the target language – alongside a degree in the subject they intend to teach – or they have to provide evidence that they have sufficient knowledge of the target language. The minimum level of foreign language competence required is often expressed in terms of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). It generally corresponds either to the level B2 ('independent user with vantage') or to the level C1 ('proficient user with effective operational proficiency'). In addition, central recommendations may also refer to specific language certificates/examinations, which can be used as evidence of sufficient knowledge of the target language (e.g. the State Language Examination in Slovakia).

*Any assessment of CLIL practices should take careful consideration of the educational characteristics and context in which they take place.*



## EXPECTED LEVELS OF ATTAINMENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

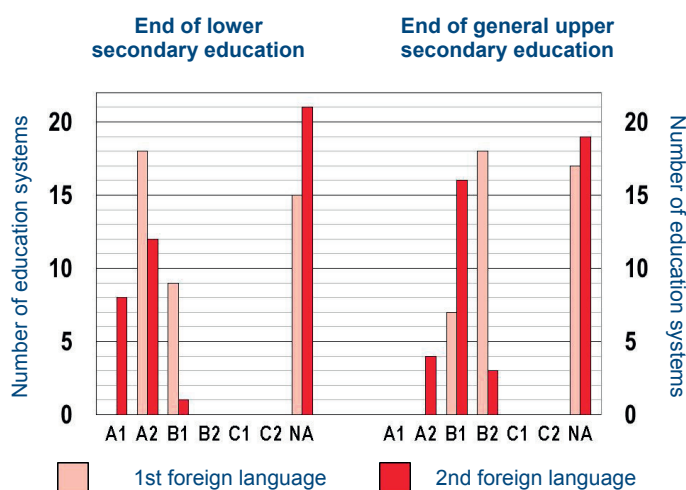
Attainment targets are commonly set by education authorities. They specify the knowledge and the skills that students are expected to have acquired at the end of an educational programme. Currently, two thirds of European countries use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to establish the minimum attainment levels in foreign language proficiency at the end of lower secondary and/or at the end of general upper secondary education.

*At the end of lower secondary education, most countries define A2 or B1 as the minimum level of attainment for the first language.*

This framework of reference provides a scale that supports the evaluation of the outcomes of foreign language learning in an internationally comparable way. The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2 (basic users), B1 and B2 (independent users), C1 and C2 (proficient users). The scales are accompanied by a detailed analysis of communicative contexts, themes, tasks and purposes as well as scaled descriptions of the communication competences. Based on empirical research and widespread consultation, this scheme makes it possible to compare tests and examinations across languages and national boundaries. It also provides a basis for recognising language qualifications, thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility. In February 2002, a European Union Council Resolution (Council of the European Union, 2002a) recommended the use of the CEFR in setting up systems for the validation of language competences. In May 2014, the Council reiterated this recommendation so that national tests assessing language competences are compatible and comparable at EU level (Council of the European Union, 2014).

When comparing the expected levels of attainment for the first and the second foreign languages at the same reference point, it is generally expected that student attainment is higher for the first foreign language than for the second. At the end of lower secondary education, the minimum level generally varies between A2 ('waystage') and B1 ('threshold') for the first language; and between A1 ('breakthrough') and A2 ('waystage') for the second. At the end of upper secondary education, most European countries define B2 ('vantage') as the minimum level of attainment for the first foreign language and B1 ('threshold') for the second foreign language. None of the European education systems set the minimum attainment at advanced or proficient language user levels (C1 or C2).

Figure 8: Expected minimum level of attainment based on CEFR for the first and second foreign languages at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and general upper secondary education (ISCED 3), 2015/16



Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 123).

Source: Eurydice.

attainment level expected in any European country at the end of lower secondary education. Regarding the second foreign language, 20 % of students tested did not reach level A1, the lowest expected minimum level of attainment in any European country.

Admittedly, these comparisons are quite crude, notably given the difference in the reference years and the averaging at EU level of the (expected) attainment results in the different language skills for all participating countries. However, they seem to indicate that students' actual attainment levels are well below what is expected.

All countries currently have or have recently had national tests in foreign languages for some or all students, at least at one point during secondary education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). Using these national tests to compare students' results across Europe is, however, not feasible given the great variation in these tests (European Commission, 2015). A comparison of European students' proficiency level in foreign languages thus requires a (new) EU survey providing comparable data across Europe. Such a survey would be helpful in monitoring students' progress in learning foreign languages, especially since many countries have recently introduced reforms in this area (see the first section of this Brief).

The latest comparable data at European level on students' actual attainment levels in foreign languages date from 2012 and come from the European Survey on Language Competence (European Commission, 2012). In nearly all of the 16 education systems participating in the survey, the students tested were in the last year of lower secondary education. On average, across the 16 education systems, 42 % of the students tested did not achieve level A2 in the first foreign language. As Figure 8 shows, level A2 is the lowest minimum

*A test carried out in 16 education systems showed that, on average, 42 % of students at the end of lower secondary education did not achieve level A2 in their first foreign language.*

## LANGUAGE SUPPORT MEASURES FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS

Europe has long been a destination for migrants. In the last few years, wars in neighbouring countries have pushed an increasing number of people to seek refuge in Europe. Migration trajectories are well documented and show a high degree of diversity and complexity. Indeed, before reaching a final destination, children may often have stopped over and been schooled for several months in various countries. (Le Pichon, 2016). Beyond the coordinated efforts at EU level to address this multi-dimensional issue, at national level, education systems are faced with the responsibility and the challenging task of teaching and integrating newly arrived migrant students.

Generally, these students do not have any knowledge of the language of schooling, which is a major barrier to education and more generally to integration in the host society. The European Handbook on Integration (European Commission 2010, p. 160) states: 'Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential...' Although this Eurydice Brief focuses on language teaching, and more precisely on foreign language teaching, it is of the utmost importance to underline the fact that language learning, although crucial, is only one aspect of integration: other factors are social, intercultural, psychological and academic dimensions. Consequently, support measures for newly arrived migrants need to be comprehensive and encompass all these issues <sup>(5)</sup>.

*Only three countries recommend that the language skills of all newly arrived migrants should be tested.*

Determining the types of support newly arrived migrant children need is certainly the first step to be taken. Generally, schools are free to determine their own assessment procedures and methods to identify students' needs. With regard to language skills, only a minority of countries have established central guidelines to support schools in this task or to ensure that similar practices are carried out in all schools. Three of these countries, (Latvia, Sweden and Norway) recommend that the language skills of all newly arrived migrants are tested.

Case study: Sweden – Part-time introductory classes and the compulsory assessment of newly arrived pupils' competences

In January 2016, Sweden introduced important regulations to help children from a migrant background improve their performance at school, which has been reported as poor in comparison to their peers from a Swedish background. The regulations refer to the concept of part-time introductory classes and the compulsory assessment of children's knowledge.

<sup>(5)</sup> See forthcoming Eurydice report on 'The integration of migrant students in schools in Europe' (provisional title).

Each school should organise a comprehensive assessment for every newly arrived child. This diagnostic assessment, which covers knowledge and skills in various school subjects, is intended to help decide which grade the child should be placed into. Language skills are part of this assessment - it measures proficiency, not only in the language of schooling, but also in the child's mother tongue and any other languages s/he might speak. The aim is to develop the most appropriate study plan tailored to each individual.

According to these regulations, newly arrived children can be taught in introductory classes, but should at the same time be integrated into a mainstream class, where they should take part in the ordinary teaching according to their proficiency level. After a maximum of two years, pupils should be accommodated in mainstream classes, receiving additional educational support if needed.

In Europe, schools have a lot of autonomy in how they support the integration of newly arrived migrant students. In the majority of countries, however, top level education authorities issue some recommendations on how this integration should be brought about. Two main models exist: direct integration into mainstream education accompanied by additional support measures; and separate preparatory classes for a limited period of time before entering mainstream education. These preparatory classes may also be termed 'introductory', 'transition' or 'reception' classes.

In nearly half of the countries with such recommendations (i.e. Belgium, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Sweden and Norway), newly arrived migrants may be taught in preparatory classes. In some cases, education authorities issue further recommendations on the time students may stay in these classes and the curriculum they should follow. For example, in Belgium (French Community), 15 hours per week should be devoted to the language of schooling (together with history and geography) and not less than 8 hours to mathematics and science teaching. National reports on existing practices show that students attending these preparatory classes may also be integrated into mainstream education for some subjects that do not require a very high level of competence in the language of schooling.

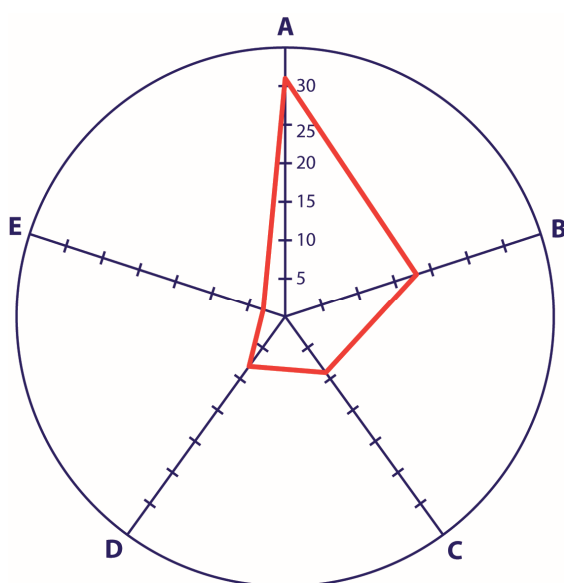
Most European education systems, however, do not put newly arrived migrants into separate classes, but place them directly into mainstream education. In this case, additional support measures are provided.

Whatever the approach, newly arrived migrant students should benefit from appropriate support tailored to respond to their linguistic, cognitive and social needs. Nearly all countries provide additional classes in the language of schooling either during or outside school hours (see Figure 9). For example, in France, during the first year, newly arrived migrant students attend intensive French lessons for a minimum of 9 periods per weeks in primary education and 12 periods per week in secondary education (class periods usually lasting 55 minutes).

Other language support measures take different forms depending on the country. Individualised teaching or a personalised curriculum are also popular support measures, adopted by half of the countries studied. In Norway, for instance, all school students who have neither Norwegian nor Sami as a mother tongue are entitled to an 'adapted education' in Norwegian until they reach a proficiency level allowing them to follow the normal curriculum.

Individualised teaching or a personalised curriculum is a measure of support for migrant students that has been adopted by half of the countries.

Figure 9: Language learning support measures for migrant students in mainstream education, 2015/16



Nine countries provide mother tongue tuition or bilingual subject teaching for migrant students.

		Number of education systems
<b>A</b>	Additional classes	31
<b>B</b>	Individual teaching	18
<b>C</b>	Teaching assistant in class	9
<b>D</b>	Classes in mother tongue	8
<b>E</b>	Bilingual subject teaching	3

Country specific notes: See the full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 137).

Source: Eurydice.

Employing teaching assistants is an option recommended by a minority of countries in Europe. In some cases, these assistants may share the language and culture of the newly arrived migrant students and play the role of mediators in the classroom as well as between school and parents, facilitating communication and cooperation with the family.

Mother tongue tuition is a sensitive topic. It raises many issues, notably organisational ones such as how to provide such instruction for more than 30 languages in small- or medium-size local authorities. Those advocating such measures highlight the positive impact on students' ability to learn the language of schooling and on students' cognitive skills in general (European Commission, 2016). Unesco has been advocating mother tongue tuition in pre-primary and primary education since 1953<sup>(6)</sup>. This type of support, however, is currently being implemented in eight countries only (the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Turkey). An even more limited number of countries (i.e. Germany, Sweden and Norway) provide bilingual subject teaching (mother tongue + the language of schooling).

Whatever the model chosen (preparatory classes or direct integration) or the language and other pedagogical and social support measures provided, research emphasises the need for flexibility in education systems as well as good communication and cooperation between all major stakeholders (European Commission, 2016).

<sup>(6)</sup> See: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/languages-in-education/multilingual-education/>

# CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The momentum created by the Barcelona European Council (2002), as well as the European Survey on Language Competences published ten years later, led to significant reforms in many countries especially with regard to starting the first foreign language early. However, the position of the second foreign language within the curriculum is still rather weak in many countries. In 2014, at EU level, only 59.7 % of students enrolled in lower secondary education were learning two foreign languages or more. The figures are much lower for VET students than for general education students. In most countries, the VET curriculum does not offer the same opportunity to learn two languages as the general education curriculum.

Nearly all students in Europe study English. In nearly half of the education systems, it is a compulsory subject. Those who learn a second language tend to add other world languages such as French, German, Spanish, Italian or Russian. The same applies to countries where a broader range of languages is offered.

Research shows that cumulative exposure to the languages learnt and the quality of the language input are crucial factors in effective foreign language learning. In many countries, however, the instruction time dedicated to foreign languages at primary level is relatively modest. Even if the curriculum could be adapted, the school timetable cannot be stretched ad infinitum. Consequently, innovative pedagogical approaches and school organisation must be sought and put in place. CLIL programmes where in addition to foreign language classes, non-language subjects are taught in a foreign language can be seen as a potential way of overcoming this problem.

Recent and comparable data at EU level on the quality of foreign language teaching and the attainment levels reached by students is scarce. Yet, with the available information, it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions. Substantial efforts need to be made to close the gap between the actual attainment in foreign language competences (European Survey on Language Competences – European Commission, 2012) on the one hand, and the expected attainment levels set by education authorities on the other. New data on students' foreign language competences is, however, needed to carry out more in-depth and refined analyses.

In recent years, several European countries have been forced to seek and implement emergency policy measures to accommodate the high numbers of newly arrived migrant students. In education, this increasing level of school multilingualism brings specific and new challenges; it also gives a high profile to more long lasting ones, namely the issues of diversity and inclusiveness.

The existence of schools with diverse linguistic competences provides opportunities to reflect on education policies. This can become an impetus to see what needs to be changed to make our schools more inclusive and respectful – if not supportive – of linguistic diversity.

The following avenues may be further explored:

- **Acknowledging each learner's specific needs and responding to them:** given the highly diverse cultural, linguistic and educational background of newly arrived migrant students, schools in most education authorities are designing individualised curricula to respond to each student's particular learning and psychosocial needs. This practice could be extended to all students so that they can learn and develop at their own pace, with due regard to their own inclinations, away from a standard line of progression.
- **Building language friendly schools:** many classrooms and schools are now multilingual. Unfortunately, this linguistic capital is too often ignored or even sadly devalued against other languages, notably the language of schooling. Specific pedagogical approaches can make use of this language diversity in schools to increase cultural and language awareness. Furthermore, this favourable climate for languages – all languages – could help improve traditional foreign language learning in schools. It might also encourage students to study lesser used languages – their friends' languages for example.
- **Building bridges between all languages in the curriculum:** currently, each category of languages (ancient languages, languages of schooling, other state language(s), foreign languages, regional/minority languages) is given its own instruction time and curriculum, and the respective qualified teachers often work independently. A more transversal approach to teaching languages – all languages – can contribute to developing stronger meta-linguistic skills, which in turn can be beneficial to language learning in general and foreign language learning in particular.
- **Supporting teachers in their efforts to reach the highest level of competence:** responding adequately to the specific needs of each student requires teachers to have a high level of knowledge and skills, be confident in their ability to find innovative teaching methods, and be sufficiently flexible in their approach. Teachers can be encouraged to continue their education and training; in particular, support could be provided to foreign language teachers (and also to their associations and schools) so that they can spend more time abroad honing their language skills and broadening their knowledge of the everyday life and culture of their target language country. An increase in the number of foreign language teachers benefiting from visits abroad could also contribute to building more language-friendly schools and raising cultural awareness within the school community.

In our globalised, connected and rapidly evolving world, an increasing number of people in Europe want or need to learn languages. Education authorities must live up to the challenge to turn schools into language friendly environments where all children can learn at least two foreign languages and develop the aptitude for learning other languages in the future.

Democratic and open societies cannot really develop without nurturing respect for diversity and inclusiveness in education. In this context, teaching and learning a wide range of languages may be a powerful tool at the service of integration and free movement for the benefit of all Europeans.



# REFERENCES

British Council, 2011. *ELLiE. Early Language Learning in Europe*. Edited by Janet Enever. [pdf] Available at:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/B309%20ELLiE%20Book%202011%20FINAL.pdf> [Accessed: 19 July 2017].

Celaya, M. L., 2012. 'I wish I were three!': Learning EFL at an Early Age. In: M. González Davies and A. Taronna, eds. *New Trends in Early Foreign Language Learning: The Age Factor, CLIL and Languages in Contact. Bridging Research and Good Practices*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 2-12.

Council of Europe, 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [pdf] Available at: [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf) [Accessed 14 July 2017].

Council of the European Union, 2002a. *Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001*, OJ C 050, 23.02.2002, p. 1. [Online] [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32002G0223\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32002G0223(01)) [Accessed 14 July 2017].

Council of the European Union, 2002b. *Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002*. [pdf] Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download\\_en/barcelona\\_european\\_council.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/barcelona_european_council.pdf) [Accessed 19 July 2017].

Council of the European Union, 2009. *Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET2020')*. 2941th Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting. Brussels, 12 May 2009. [pdf] Available at: [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf) [Accessed 19 July 2017].

Council of the European Union, 2014. *Conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences*. Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting. Brussels, 20 May 2014. [pdf] Available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142692.pdf) [Accessed 25 August 2017].

European Commission, 2003. *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social committee of the Regions*. COM(2003) 449 final. [pdf] Available at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:en:PDF> [Accessed 19 July 2017].



European Commission, 2008. *A rewarding challenge. How language diversity could strengthen Europe*. [pdf] Available at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7f987cdd-dba2-42e7-8cdf-3f4f14efe783/language-en/format-PDF/source-33997141> [Accessed 19 July 2017].

European Commission, 2010. *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners*. Third edition. [pdf] Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/handbook-on-integration-for-policy-makers-and-practitioners-3rd-edition---2010>. [Accessed 19 July 2017].

European Commission, 2012. *First European Survey on Language Competences: Final Report*. [pdf] Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/language-survey-final-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/language-survey-final-report_en.pdf) [Accessed 19 July 2017].

European Commission, 2015. *Study on Comparability of language testing in Europe*. Final report. September 2015. [pdf] Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/library/documents/edl-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/library/documents/edl-report_en.pdf) [Accessed 19 July 2017].

European Commission, 2016. *Reception of newly arrived migrants, and assessment of previous schooling. Highlight report from the Peer Learning Activity in Stockholm 5-7 April 2016*. [pdf] Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/migrant-school-peer-learning\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/migrant-school-peer-learning_en.pdf) [Accessed 14 July 2017].

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012 Edition. *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015. *Languages in Secondary Education: An Overview of National Tests in Europe – 2014/15*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017. *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurydice, 2000. *The position of foreign languages in European education systems (1999/2000)*. Brussels: Eurydice.

Hüttner, J., Smit, U., 2014. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning): The bigger picture. A response to: A. Bruton. 2013. CLIL: Some of the reasons why... and why not. *System*, 44, pp. 160-167. [pdf] Available at: [http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0346251X14000463/1-s2.0-S0346251X14000463-main.pdf?tid=273ff876-68a1-11e7-b1e8-00000aab0f6c&acdnat=1500042881\\_5e879dd9531ca10198b6ad93241628f0](http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0346251X14000463/1-s2.0-S0346251X14000463-main.pdf?tid=273ff876-68a1-11e7-b1e8-00000aab0f6c&acdnat=1500042881_5e879dd9531ca10198b6ad93241628f0) [Accessed 14 July 2017].

Le Pichon, E., 2016. *New Patterns of migration. New needs*. Draft Input Paper for Thematic Panel on rethinking literacies and language learning in Brussels 11 July 2016.

Muños, C., 2014. Contrasting Effects of Starting Age and Input on the Oral Performance of Foreign Language Learners. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(4), pp. 463-482.

Vold, E, Th., 2017. Qualifying foreign language teachers: Is teacher training enough? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 82, pp. 40-53.





The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is co-ordinated by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. For more information about Eurydice, see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurydice>.

