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Foreign language learning

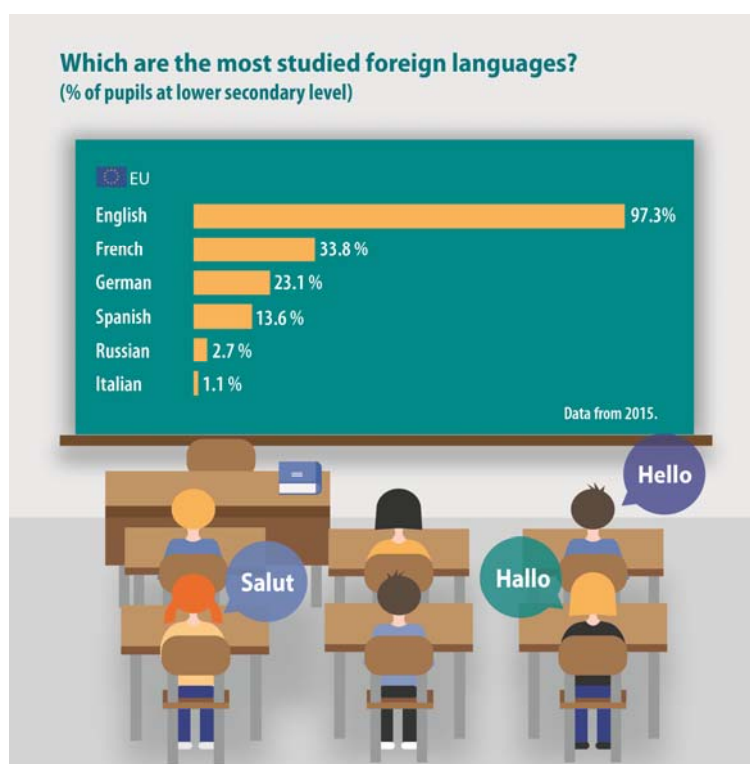
60% of lower secondary level pupils studied more than one foreign language in 2015

French: second most popular after English

Learning a foreign language at school is very common in the **European Union** (EU), with more than 17 million lower secondary school pupils (or 98.6% of all pupils at this education level) studying at least one foreign language in 2015. Among them, more than 10 million (58.8%) were studying two foreign languages or more.

English was by far the most popular language at lower secondary level, studied by nearly 17 million pupils (97.3%). French (5 million or 33.8%) came second, followed by German (3 million or 23.1%) and Spanish (2 million or 13.6%).

These data are issued by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. Currently there are 24 official languages recognised within the **EU**. In addition there are regional languages, minority languages, and languages spoken by migrant populations. It should also be noted that several EU Member States have more than one official language.



ec.europa.eu/eurostat 

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

In 2015, all or nearly all lower secondary school pupils learnt at least two foreign languages in **Luxembourg** (100%), **Finland** (98.4%), **Italy** (95.8%), **Estonia** (95.4%) and **Romania** (95.2%). In contrast, fewer than 10% of pupils were studying two or more languages in **Hungary** (6.0%) and **Austria** (8.8%).

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

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

French is one of the two main foreign languages studied by all pupils in Luxembourg and is also the top foreign language studied in Ireland (by 60.4% of pupils) and Belgium (52.8%). In addition, French is the second most popular foreign language studied at lower secondary level in nine Member States, with the highest shares of learners recorded in Cyprus (89.2%), Romania (83.6%), Portugal (66.6%), Italy (65.4%) and the Netherlands (55.6%).

Besides being studied by all pupils in Luxembourg, **German** ranks second in eight Member States, with the highest shares being registered in Denmark (73.6%), Poland (69.2%) and Slovakia (53.6%). Learning **Spanish** is notably popular in Sweden (43.7%) and France (39.0%), while **Russian**, the only commonly studied non-EU language, came second in the three Baltic States – Lithuania (66.2%), Estonia (63.6%) and Latvia (59.7%) – as well as in Bulgaria (16.9%).

Foreign language learning at lower secondary level (% of pupils), 2015

	Number of pupils (in 1000)	Learning foreign language	of which:		Most common foreign language		Second most common foreign language	
			1 language	2 or more languages				
EU*	17 635.7	98.6	39.8	58.8	English	97.3	French	33.8
Belgium	248.1	99.6	72.3	27.3	French**	52.8	English	47.8
Bulgaria	215.2	99.8	83.3	16.5	English	87.0	Russian	16.9
Czech Republic	370.4	98.1	33.2	64.9	English	97.3	German	46.4
Denmark***	242.4	100.0	17.2	82.8	English	100.0	German	73.6
Germany	4 543.3	97.9	63.4	34.5	English	:	French	24.0
Estonia	35.7	98.5	3.1	95.4	English	96.5	Russian	63.6
Ireland	183.7	88.3	75.6	12.7	French	60.4	German	23.9
Greece***	314.7	100.0	6.0	94.0	English	98.1	French	48.5
Spain	1 437.3	99.7	53.9	45.8	English	99.3	French	42.5
France	3 365.2	99.7	43.0	56.7	English	98.8	Spanish	39.0
Croatia	159.9	99.8	43.3	56.5	English	97.3	German	45.6
Italy	1 772.8	97.6	1.8	95.8	English	98.1	French	65.4
Cyprus	27.1	98.0	10.0	88.0	English	98.7	French	89.2
Latvia	55.3	98.5	25.7	72.8	English	97.4	Russian	59.7
Lithuania	179.4	98.3	18.2	80.1	English	97.3	Russian	66.2
Luxembourg	17.9	100.0	0.0	100.0	German**	100.0	French**	100.0
Hungary	385.3	96.5	90.5	6.0	English	70.0	German	30.0
Malta	12.4	100.0	7.1	92.9	English**	100.0	Italian	57.2
Netherlands	764.5	97.8	23.9	73.9	English	94.0	French	55.6
Austria	319.9	100.0	91.2	8.8	English	99.9	French	4.9
Poland	1 080.7	98.5	4.5	94.0	English	97.7	German	69.2
Portugal	363.6	95.9	9.1	86.8	English	93.9	French	66.6
Romania	774.7	100.0	4.8	95.2	English	99.5	French	83.6
Slovenia	53.5	98.4	46.9	51.5	English	99.5	German	44.8
Slovakia	239.5	97.8	19.8	78.0	English	96.5	German	53.6
Finland	175.7	99.5	1.1	98.4	English	99.4	Swedish**	92.2
Sweden	297.3	100.0	22.1	77.9	English	100.0	Spanish	43.7
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Iceland	12.7	98.5	0.5	98.0	English	99.5	Danish	96.9
Liechtenstein	1.5	100.0	0.0	100.0	English	100.0	French	100.0
Norway	188.1	100.0	28.0	72.0	English	100.0	Spanish	32.4
FYR of Macedonia	84.1	100.0	0.4	99.6	English	100.0	German	49.2

* Data for the EU exclude the United Kingdom and are based on 2014 data for Denmark and Greece.

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

*** 2014 data : Data not available

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

Geographical information

The **European Union** (EU) includes Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In this News Release, the EU aggregates exclude the United Kingdom for which data are not available.

Methods and definitions

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

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

Country notes

Belgium: the official state languages are Dutch, French and German; notably French is considered as a foreign language in the Belgian Flemish Community and Flemish (Dutch) is considered as a foreign language in the Belgian French Community. The most popular foreign language at lower secondary level in the Belgian French Community is Dutch (52.3% of pupils), and in the Belgian Flemish Community, it is French (99.0%).

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

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

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

More information

Eurostat [website section](#) on education statistics.

Eurostat [database](#) on education and training.

Eurostat [metadata](#) of foreign language learning statistics.

Eurostat [infographics](#) on foreign language learning.

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