

Foreign language learning

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

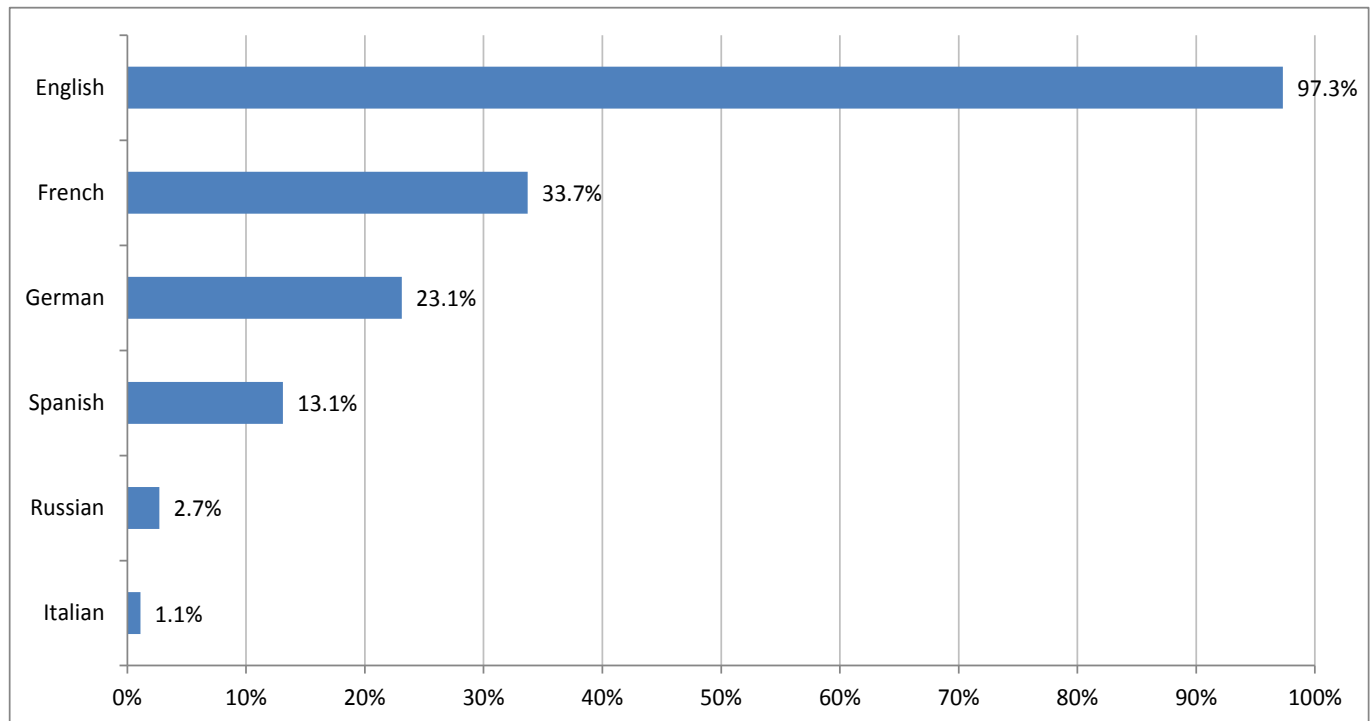
French: second most popular after English

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

	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*	17 726.2	98.6	38.8	59.9	English	97.3	French	33.7
Belgium	254.7	97.3	71.2	26.1	French**	51.9	English	46.3
Bulgaria	219.0	99.8	82.8	17.0	English	87.2	Russian	17.9
Czech Republic	367.0	98.1	40.8	57.3	English	97.1	German	41.7
Denmark	242.4	100.0	17.2	82.8	English	100.0	German	73.6
Germany	4 621.1	97.2	58.1	39.1	English	:	French	24.3
Estonia	35.2	99.2	2.9	96.3	English	97.3	Russian	64.7
Ireland	181.2	89.7	81.8	7.9	French	60.0	German	21.4
Greece	314.7	100.0	6.0	94.0	English	98.1	French	48.5
Spain	1 426.7	100.0	54.3	45.7	English	100.0	French	41.1
France	3 337.7	99.8	44.4	55.3	English	98.6	Spanish	37.8
Croatia	165.4	99.8	44.6	55.2	English	97.6	German	43.8
Italy	1 761.1	100.0	1.6	98.4	English	100.0	French	67.7
Cyprus	27.8	99.9	11.0	88.9	English	99.9	French	88.1
Latvia	54.8	98.3	25.9	72.3	English	96.8	Russian	60.4
Lithuania	189.0	97.5	17.3	80.1	English	97.4	Russian	66.7
Luxembourg	18.2	100.0	0.0	100.0	German**	100.0	French**	100.0
Hungary	386.6	96.5	90.2	6.3	English	69.3	German	31.1
Malta	12.8	100.0	5.7	94.3	English**	100.0	Italian	59.8
Netherlands	763.7	97.1	22.8	74.3	English	95.2	French	57.2
Austria	319.5	99.9	90.5	9.5	English	99.8	French	5.3
Poland	1 112.2	98.3	4.7	93.7	English	97.1	German	69.0
Portugal	361.2	97.1	11.7	85.4	English	95.4	French	64.7
Romania	790.3	99.8	4.2	95.6	English	99.4	French	84.6
Slovenia	53.6	100.0	42.9	57.1	English	99.7	German	47.8
Slovakia	243.2	98.0	17.4	80.6	English	95.9	German	55.2
Finland	176.0	99.5	1.0	98.5	English	99.4	Swedish**	92.3
Sweden	290.9	100.0	22.1	77.9	English	100.0	Spanish	43.9
United Kingdom	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Iceland	12.8	99.2	1.6	97.6	English	99.2	Danish	96.6
Liechtenstein	1.6	100.0	0.0	100.0	English	100.0	French	100.0
Norway	189.4	100.0	28.8	71.2	English	100.0	Spanish	32.0
FYR of Macedonia	83.3	100.0	1.9	98.1	English	100.0	German	48.0

* Data for the EU exclude the United Kingdom.

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

: Data not available

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

Methods and definitions

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

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

Country notes

Belgium: the official state languages are Dutch, French and German; notably French is considered as a foreign language in the Belgian Flemish Community and Flemish (Dutch) is considered as a foreign language in the Belgian French Community.

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

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

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

More information

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

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

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

Eurostat [Statistics Explained article](#) on foreign language learning statistics.

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