

European Day of Languages

In the EU 60% of students in upper secondary studied at least two foreign languages in 2007

Among the adult population 28% speak at least two foreign languages

In the **EU** in 2007, 60% of students in upper secondary education studied two or more foreign languages and one third studied one foreign language, while 6% did not study any foreign language.

Based on their own assessment of their linguistic skills¹, 28% of the **EU** population aged 25 to 64 in 2007 said they spoke two or more foreign languages and 36% one foreign language, while 36% said they could not speak any foreign language.

The European Day of Languages² is celebrated each year on 26 September. The general objectives of this event are to alert the public to the importance of language learning, to promote the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe and to encourage lifelong language learning in and out of school. The EU recognised improving language learning in the European Union as a key factor in the Lisbon strategy and the Barcelona European Council in 2002 set the objective of ensuring that all pupils study at least two foreign languages from an early age.

On this occasion, **Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities** publishes data on language learning of students and perceived language skills of adults.

All students in upper secondary education study two or more foreign languages in the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Finland

The highest proportions of students studying two or more foreign languages in 2007 were found in the **Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Finland** (100% of students in upper secondary education each), **Slovenia** and **Slovakia** (both 98%) and **Estonia** (97%).

The largest shares of students studying one foreign language were observed in **Greece** (92% in 2006), **Italy** (74%), **Ireland** (73%), **Spain** (68%), **Malta** (60%) and **Hungary** (57%).

More than half (51%) of students in upper secondary education in the **United Kingdom** did not study any foreign language, followed by **Ireland** (19%).

In all Member States for which data are available, English is the most studied foreign language in upper secondary education, except for **Luxembourg**, where English, French and German are equal and **Ireland** and the **United Kingdom**, where French is most common.

In two-thirds of Member States English is the most commonly spoken foreign language

In 2007, the highest shares of the population aged 25 to 64 who perceived they spoke two or more foreign languages were found in **Slovenia** (72%), **Slovakia** and **Finland** (both 68%), **Lithuania** (66%), **Estonia** (56%) and **Latvia** (55%).

The **United Kingdom**³ (65%), **Cyprus** (59%), **Austria** (50%), **Greece** and **Sweden** (both 45%) had the largest proportion of those declaring they speak one foreign language.

The highest shares of those speaking no foreign language were found in **Hungary** (75%), **Portugal** (51%), **Spain** (47%), **Bulgaria** (44%) and **Greece** (43%).

In fourteen of the twenty one Member States for which data are available, English is the most commonly spoken foreign language among adults aged 25 to 64 years. Russian is most common in **Bulgaria**, the **Baltic States** and **Poland**.

Language learning among students in upper secondary education* in 2007 (%)

	No foreign language	One foreign language	Two or more foreign languages	Most studied foreign languages
EU**	6.4	33.4	60.1	English
Belgium	0.9	10.6	88.5	English
Bulgaria	0.4	22.7	76.9	English
Czech Republic	0.0	0.0	100.0	English
Denmark	0.0	39.2	60.8	English
Germany	:	:	:	English
Estonia	0.5	2.1	97.4	English
Ireland	18.8	73.0	8.2	French
Greece***	1.4	91.8	6.9	English
Spain	3.9	67.8	28.3	English
France	0.0	10.0	90.0	English
Italy	1.5	73.9	24.6	English
Cyprus	:	:	:	English
Latvia	1.5	22.7	75.9	English
Lithuania	1.0	42.8	56.2	English
Luxembourg	0.0	0.0	100.0	English/French/German
Hungary	1.0	57.2	41.8	English
Malta	3.0	59.9	37.1	English
Netherlands	0.0	0.0	100.0	English
Austria	1.5	22.4	76.1	English
Poland	0.8	19.9	79.3	English
Portugal	:	:	:	:
Romania	0.0	7.9	92.1	English
Slovenia	1.4	0.4	98.3	English
Slovakia	0.0	1.7	98.3	English
Finland	0.0	0.2	99.8	English
Sweden	0.0	8.4	91.5	English
United Kingdom	51.4	42.5	6.1	French
Croatia***	0.0	10.1	89.9	:
Iceland	14.5	22.2	63.4	English

Source: Unesco/OECD/Eurostat (UOE) data collection on education systems

: Data not available

* Based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), only including general orientation and therefore excluding vocational training

** EU data exclude Germany, Greece, Cyprus and Portugal

*** 2006 data

Self-perceived language knowledge of adults (25-64 years), 2007

	No foreign language	One foreign language	Two or more foreign languages	Best known foreign language
EU*	36.2	35.7	28.1	English
Belgium	32.1	16.3	51.5	English
Bulgaria	44.1	30.0	25.9	Russian
Czech Republic	31.9	34.6	33.5	English**
Denmark	:	:	:	:
Germany	28.6	41.3	30.2	English
Estonia	13.6	30.4	55.9	Russian
Ireland	:	:	:	:
Greece	43.4	44.8	11.9	English
Spain	46.6	35.4	17.9	English
France	41.2	35.9	22.9	English
Italy	38.6	33.8	27.6	English
Cyprus	14.6	59.3	26.0	English
Latvia	5.1	40.0	54.9	Russian
Lithuania	2.5	31.5	66.1	Russian
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:
Hungary	74.8	17.6	7.7	English
Malta	:	:	:	:
Netherlands	:	:	:	:
Austria	20.3	50.4	29.3	English
Poland	37.3	39.0	23.7	Russian
Portugal	51.3	22.3	26.4	English
Romania	:	:	:	:
Slovenia	7.7	20.5	71.8	English
Slovakia	7.6	24.4	68.0	Czech**
Finland	16.1	16.0	67.9	English
Sweden	5.0	44.6	50.4	English
United Kingdom³	35.1	64.9	:	French
Croatia	31.4	39.7	28.9	English
Norway	2.9	22.4	74.7	English

Source: Adult Education Survey (AES)

: Data not available

* EU average based on available Member States and excluding the United Kingdom

** Slovakian not recorded as a foreign language in Czech survey whereas Czech is recorded as a foreign language in the Slovakian survey

1. The Adult Education Survey (AES), which is a pilot exercise, was carried out by Member States in the EU, EFTA and candidate countries between 2005 and 2008. The survey covers participation in education and lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning), as well as self-reported skills including foreign languages and IT.
2. See website: <http://edl.ecml.at>
3. The questionnaire for the United Kingdom only distinguishes "no foreign language" and "one foreign language". Therefore the answer "one foreign language" could also include the knowledge of more languages.

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