



New Eurobarometer shows Europeans' positive attitude towards language learning

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A vast majority of Europeans (86%) believe that everyone should speak at least one foreign language, and almost three out of five (59%) can have a conversation in one. These are some of the results of the [new Eurobarometer on "Europeans and their languages"](#) that the Commission published today.

Coinciding with the world day for cultural diversity, the survey highlights a growing recognition of the importance of linguistic diversity in enhancing cultural understanding, economic opportunities, and social cohesion within Europe. With 24 official languages and around 60 regional and minority languages spoken in the European Union, multilingualism is a vibrant example of European cultural diversity.

Conducted twelve years after the last survey on this topic, the Eurobarometer shows that citizens have very positive attitudes towards multilingualism:

- **86% of respondents consider that everyone should speak at least one other language other than their mother tongue** and 69% say more than one language;
- 76% think that improving language skills should be a policy priority; and
- 84% believe that regional and minority languages should be protected.

The Commission promotes [Linguistic Diversity in the European Union](#) through **projects funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and Creative Europe**.

Regarding knowledge of foreign languages, the Eurobarometer survey shows **positive**, although modest, progress since the [last survey in 2012](#).

- **Three out of five Europeans can have a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue**, up 3 percentage points (pp) since 2012.
- The proportion rises to **four out of five among young Europeans** (79% among 15 to 24 years old), with an increase of 5 pp.

This brings the EU closer to its target for youth set out in the [2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#), namely acquiring proficiency in the language of schooling and knowledge of two other languages before the end of upper secondary education.

On the other hand, there is less progress on the **second foreign language**: 28% of Europeans (+1 pp) and 39% of young people (+2 pp) can have a conversation in more than one foreign language. Among Europeans who speak at least one other language other than their mother tongue, 31% use their first foreign language daily (+8 pp).

English is spoken by almost half of Europeans (47%) as a foreign language. That is a notable increase of 5 pp since 2012. 7 out of 10 young Europeans can have a conversation in English, which is 9 pp more than the 2012 survey. It is perceived as the most important language for children to learn for their future (by 85% of the survey participants), followed by Spanish, German, French and Chinese. **After English, French (11%), German (10%) and Spanish (7%) are the most often spoken foreign languages in the EU.**

These findings are in line with the results of the [2023 Eurydice Key data report on teaching languages at school in Europe](#), which showed that 98,3% of European students in lower secondary school and increasingly from an earlier age are learning English.

According to the respondents, the main benefits of learning a new language include job opportunities (51%), to be able to understand people from other cultures (45%), getting a better job in the country where they live (42%), using it on holidays abroad (42%), and using it at work (including travelling abroad on business; 40%).

The results are in line with a recent OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) study, supported by the Commission, [on how 15-year-olds learn English](#). This study shows that young people are increasingly learning languages outside of the classroom by using internet, social media or watching content in the original language. A majority of Europeans (53%), in particular youth (65%), now prefer subtitled to dubbed content. This has changed considerably compared to 2012 (+11 pp).

On average 11,5% of students in the EU speak a different language at home than at school, showing that multilingual classrooms are a reality in Europe.

Background

Fostering language competences is at the heart of the EU's role in education and of the vision to create a [European Education Area](#).

[Multilingualism is also one of eight key competences](#) needed for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship, and social inclusion, as outlined in the [2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning](#).

The survey was conducted across the 27 EU Member States from September to October 2023. 26,523 respondents aged 15 and above and from diverse demographic backgrounds were surveyed in their native languages. In all countries interviews were conducted face-to-face, supplemented with self-completion interviews in Czechia, Denmark, Malta, and Finland.

For More Information

[Special Eurobarometer on "Europeans and their languages"](#)

[Commission's initiatives promoting multilingualism and language learning](#)

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Quotes:

"This Eurobarometer survey underscores the vital importance of multilingualism in fostering a united and culturally rich European Union. It is heartening to see that Europeans recognise the value of learning languages. This not only enhances their personal and professional opportunities but also strengthens our collective identity and mutual understanding. The Commission is committed to promoting linguistic diversity through initiatives such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe."
Iliana Ivanova, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth - 21/05/2024

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