



Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012

Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012 provides a complete picture of the language teaching systems in place in 32 European countries. More precisely, the report combines statistical data with qualitative information to describe the context and organisation of foreign language teaching, student participation levels as well as the initial and continuing education of foreign language teachers. In addition to giving a snapshot of the situation today, the report also presents several time series which are particularly helpful in identifying trends in language teaching over recent years and past decades.

The 61 indicators contained in the report are mainly drawn from four distinct sources: Eurydice, Eurostat, the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), and the OECD's PISA 2009 international survey. By combining these sources, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012* provides comprehensive information that can serve to improve the quality and efficiency of language learning across Europe. Improving language learning has not only become one of the key objectives of the strategic framework for Education and Training (ET 2020), but also a means to facilitate cross-border mobility of EU citizens as highlighted in the European Union's overall strategy – 'Europe 2020'.

Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012 is a joint Eurydice/Eurostat publication and has been produced in close cooperation with the European Commission. Reference years and country coverage of the report depend on the data source. Eurydice data cover all countries of the European Union as well as countries of the European Economic Area, Croatia, and Turkey, and take the reference year 2010/11. Eurydice indicators mainly provide insight into the policies and recommendations in place in European countries which influence foreign language teaching. Key Data indicators derived from the ESLC 2011 survey cover 15 education systems. Eurostat has the same country coverage as Eurydice, but its data take the reference year 2009/10.

This leaflet provides a glance of some of the report's key findings.

What is Eurydice

The **Eurydice Network** provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. As of 2011, it consists of 38 national units based in all 34 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EFTA countries, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey) and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

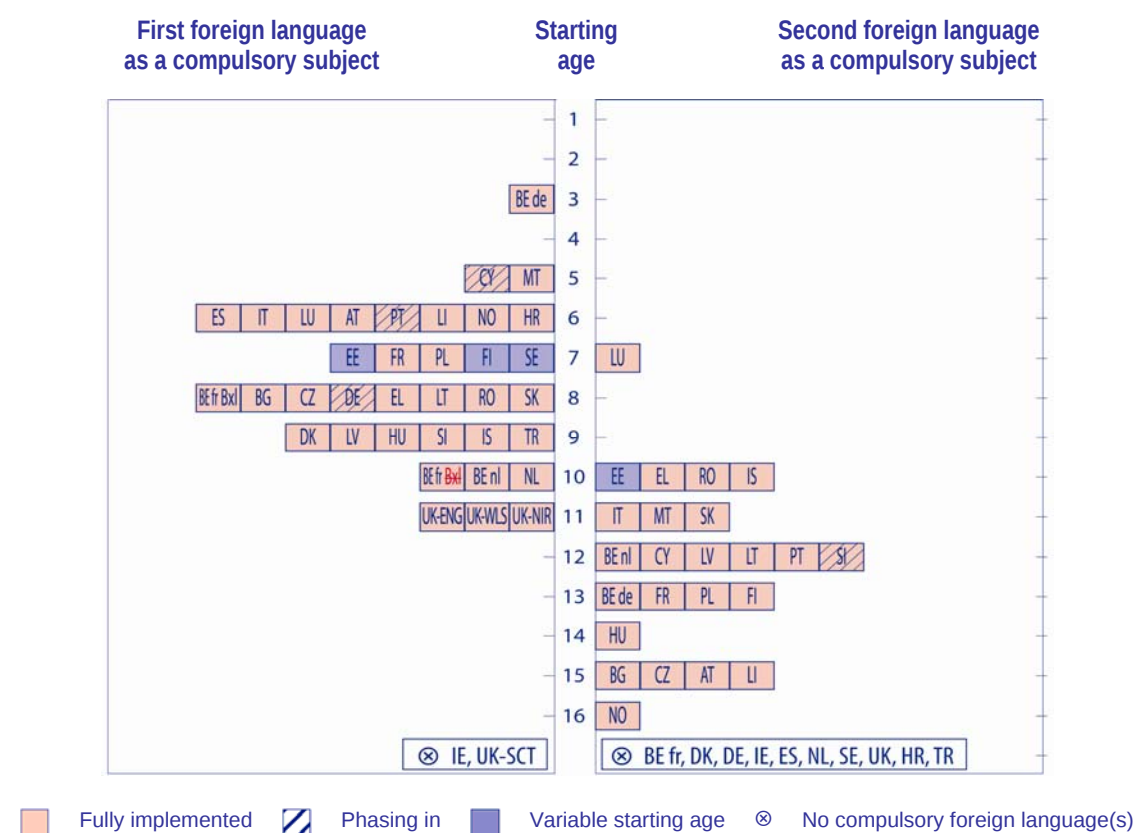


STUDENTS START LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT AN INCREASINGLY EARLY AGE

In Europe, students are generally between 6 and 9 years old when they have to start learning a foreign language. In Belgium (German-speaking Community), students are even younger and start their first foreign language in pre-primary education from the age of 3. Indeed, many countries have in recent years introduced reforms which initiate foreign language learning at an earlier age.

From 2004/05 to 2009/10, the percentage of students enrolled in primary education not learning a foreign language dropped from 32.5 % to 21.8 %. However, it is worth mentioning that while the age of students starting to learn a foreign language has decreased, the amount of taught time has not significantly increased. Indeed, taught time dedicated to foreign languages is rather low compared to other subjects.

Starting ages for the first and second foreign languages as compulsory subjects for all students in pre-primary, primary and/or general secondary education, 2010/11



Source: Eurydice.

MORE STUDENTS LEARN TWO FOREIGN LANGUAGES

In the majority of European countries, learning two foreign languages for at least one year during compulsory education is an obligation for all students. On average, in 2009/10, 60.8 % of students enrolled in lower secondary education in Europe were learning two or more foreign languages. This is an increase of 14.1 percent compared to 2004/05.

In upper secondary education, in most countries, there is a significant difference between the percentage of students learning two or more foreign languages in general education (59.4 %) and in pre-vocational/vocational education (39.4 %).

ENGLISH IS BY FAR THE DOMINATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN EUROPE

English is by far the most taught foreign language in nearly all countries, starting at primary level. Trends since 2004/05 show an increase in the percentage of students learning English at all educational levels. In 2009/10, on average, 73 % of students enrolled in primary education in the EU were learning English.

In lower secondary and general upper secondary education, the percentage exceeded 90 %. In upper secondary pre-vocational and vocational education, it reached 74.9 %. Overall, English is a mandatory language in 14 countries or regions within countries.

Specific mandatory foreign languages as specified by central education authorities
(at one point during full-time compulsory education), 1992/93, 2002/03, 2006/07, 2010/11

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
2010/11		▲●	▲●			●	●		⊗	●			●	●▲			■▲●	
2006/07		▲	▲●			●	●		⊗	●			●	●▲			■▲●	
2002/03		▲	▲●			●	●		⊗	●				●▲	●		■▲●	
1992/93		▲	▲●			●	●		⊗	●				●			■▲●	

	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK-ENG/ WLS/NIR	UK- SCT	IS	LI	NO	HR	TR
2010/11	●	●							fi/sv	●		⊗	● da	●▲	●		
2006/07	●	●							fi/sv	●		⊗	● da	●	●		
2002/03	●	●							fi/sv	●		⊗	● da	●	●		
1992/93	●	●							fi/sv	●			da ●		●		

● English ▲ French ■ German ⊗ No compulsory foreign languages ■ No specific mandatory languages

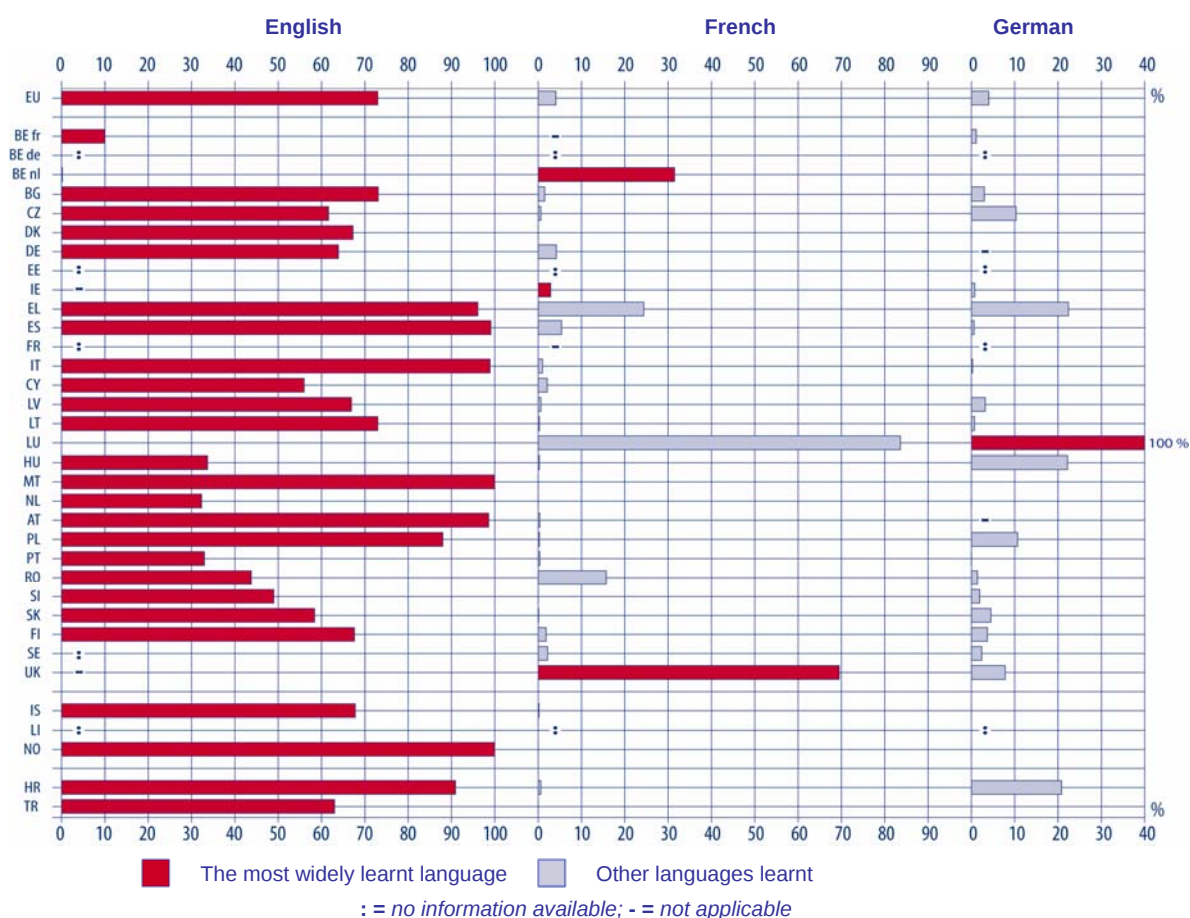
fi = Finnish ; sv = Swedish ; da = Danish

Source: Eurydice.

In most countries, English is followed by either German or French as the second most widely taught foreign language. Spanish occupies the position of the third or fourth most widely taught foreign language in a significant number of countries, especially at upper secondary level.

The same goes for Italian but in a smaller number of countries. Russian is the second most widely taught foreign language in Latvia and Lithuania where large communities of Russian speakers live, and also in Bulgaria in lower secondary education.

Percentage of all students in primary education who are learning English, French and/or German.
Countries in which one of these languages is the most widely learnt, 2009/10



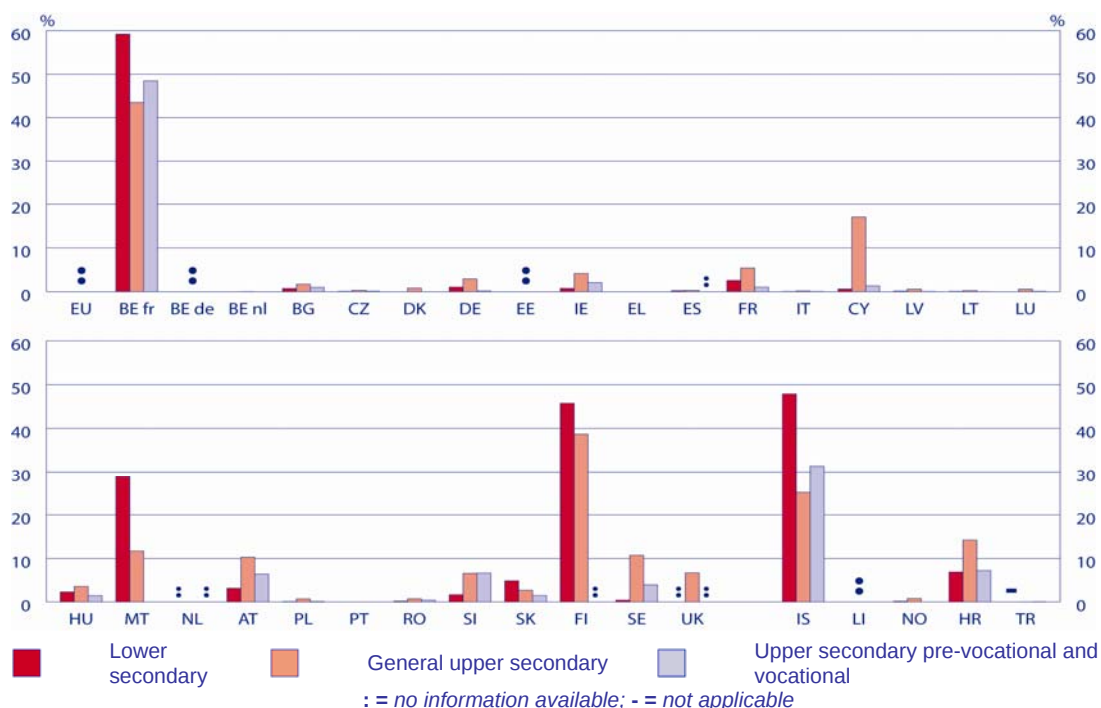
Source: Eurostat, UOE.

VERY FEW STUDENTS LEARN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH, GERMAN OR RUSSIAN

In 2009/10, the percentage of students learning languages other than English, French, Spanish, German or Russian was below 5% in most countries, and in a significant number the percentage was less than 1%.

The countries with the highest percentages of students learning a language other than the main five were those where the alternative language was a mandatory language. These included Swedish or Finnish in Finland and Danish in Iceland.

Foreign languages other than German, English, Spanish, French and Russian learnt by students in secondary education, as a percentage of all languages learnt at this level, 2009/10



Source: Eurostat, UOE.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE USEFULNESS OF A LANGUAGE IS A MOTIVATING FACTOR FOR LEARNING – AND ENGLISH IS SEEN BY FAR AS MOST USEFUL

Students' perception of the usefulness of the languages they learn can clearly contribute to increasing their motivation. In the 15 of the participating countries or regions covered by the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), on average, the percentage of students who consider it useful to learn English for their future education, work or for getting a good job is higher than the percentage of those who consider English useful for their personal life. These percentages drop quite significantly for other languages.

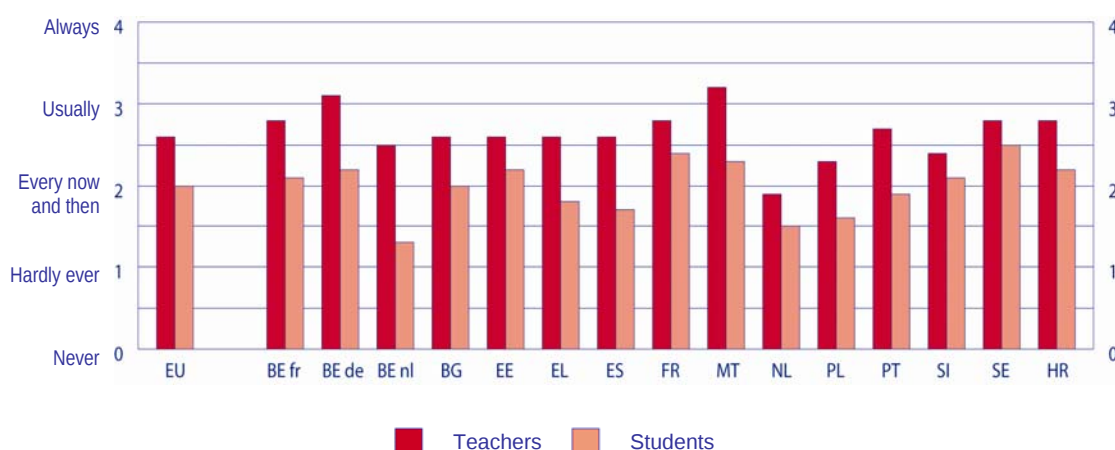
Besides the perception of usefulness, organising field trips or excursions related to foreign language education can also be a way to stimulate students' motivation to learn foreign languages. On average, only 28.1 % of students in the 15 ESLC participating countries or regions within countries say that they have participated in such activities in the last three years. The highest percentages are found in Belgium (French Community) and the Netherlands (38.5 %), and the lowest in Sweden (13.2 %).

TEACHING GUIDELINES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES PLACE EMPHASIS ON ALL COMMUNICATION SKILLS – YET BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS MAKE INFREQUENT USE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Curricula in a dozen countries or regions recommend teachers to put more emphasis on oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking skills) when they start teaching foreign languages to younger students. At the end of compulsory education, though, the four communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) have equal standing in nearly all curricula.

Despite evidence suggesting that the more foreign language input students receive, the greater their proficiency, in nearly all countries or regions within countries participating in the ESLC, according to students, teachers do not 'usually' use the target language in the classroom, although they still use it on some or frequent occasions.

Frequency of use of the foreign language in the classroom by teachers and students, 2010/11



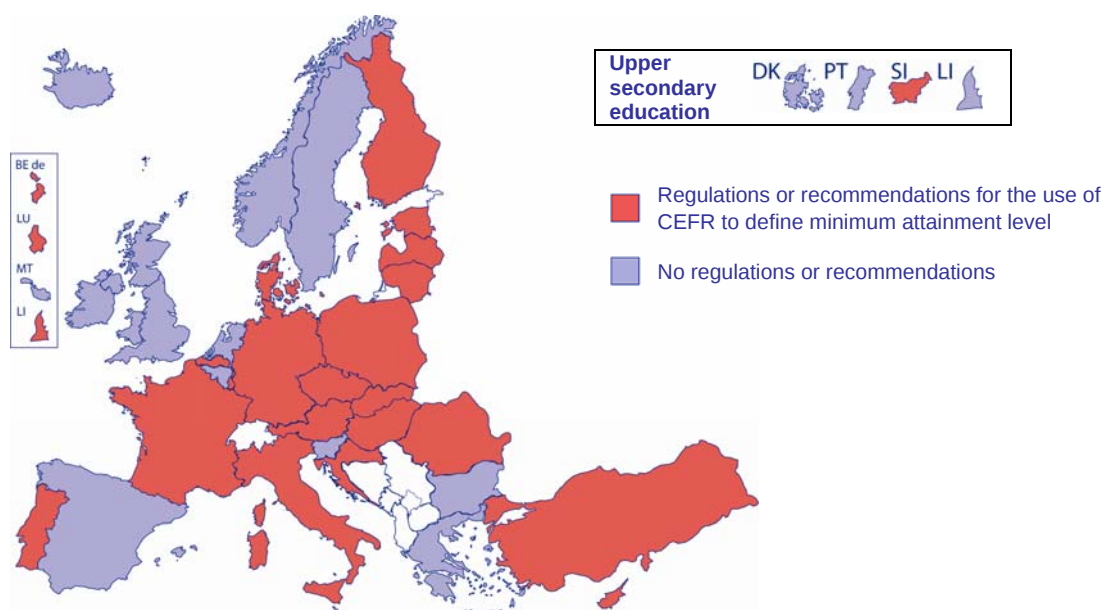
Source: ESLC 2011.

THE COMMON EUROPEAN REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (CEFR) IS BECOMING A MAIN TOOL FOR DEFINING STUDENT ATTAINMENT LEVELS

In the majority of European countries, official guidelines for language teaching fix minimum attainment levels for both the first and the second foreign languages. These levels correspond to the six proficiency levels defined by the Common European Framework of Reference published by the Council of Europe in 2001.

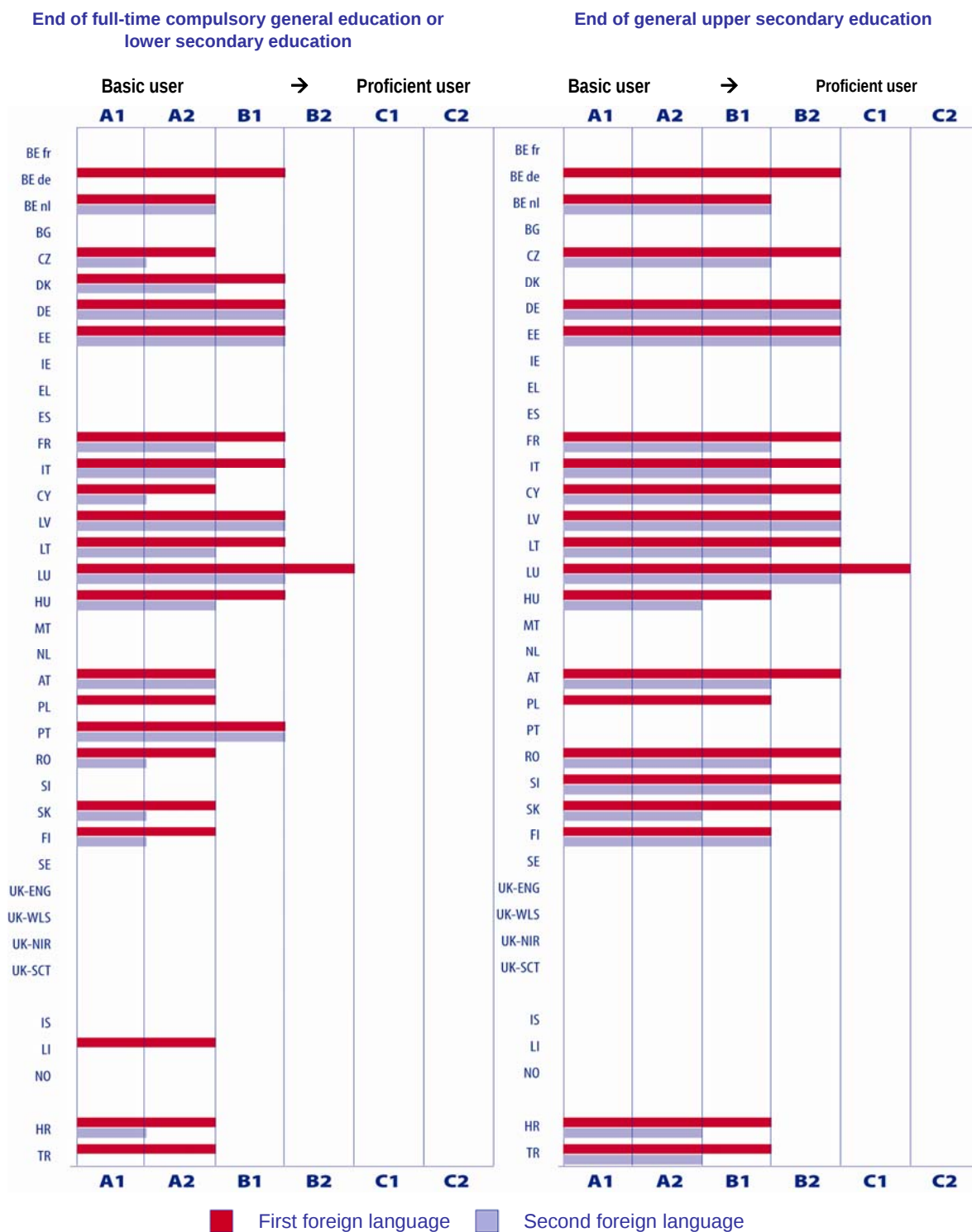
The CEFR defines six levels of proficiency (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), where A corresponds to basic user, B to independent user and C to proficient user. At the end of compulsory general education, official guidelines in most countries set the minimum level between A2 and B1 for the first foreign language and between A1 and B1 for the second.

Existence of recommendations on the use of the CEFR to define minimum levels of attainment for the end of full-time compulsory general education or lower secondary education and for the end of general upper secondary education, 2010/11



Source: Eurydice.

Expected minimum levels of attainment based on CEFR for the first and second foreign language(s), 2010/11



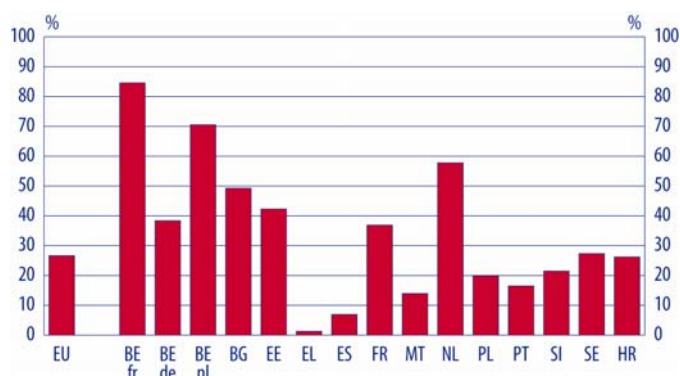
Source: Eurydice.

SCHOOLS HEADS REPORT DIFFICULTIES IN FILLING TEACHING VACANCIES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

On average, in the ESLC participating countries, around 25 % of students attend a school where the school head reports experiencing difficulties in filling teaching vacancies or covering for absent language teachers.

This average, though, hides huge differences between countries. The most critical situation is found in Belgium (French Community) where 84.6 % of students attend a school where the school head claims to have difficulties.

Percentage of students attending a school where the school head reported having difficulties in filling teaching vacancies or covering for absent teachers of the tested foreign language during the past five years, 2010/11



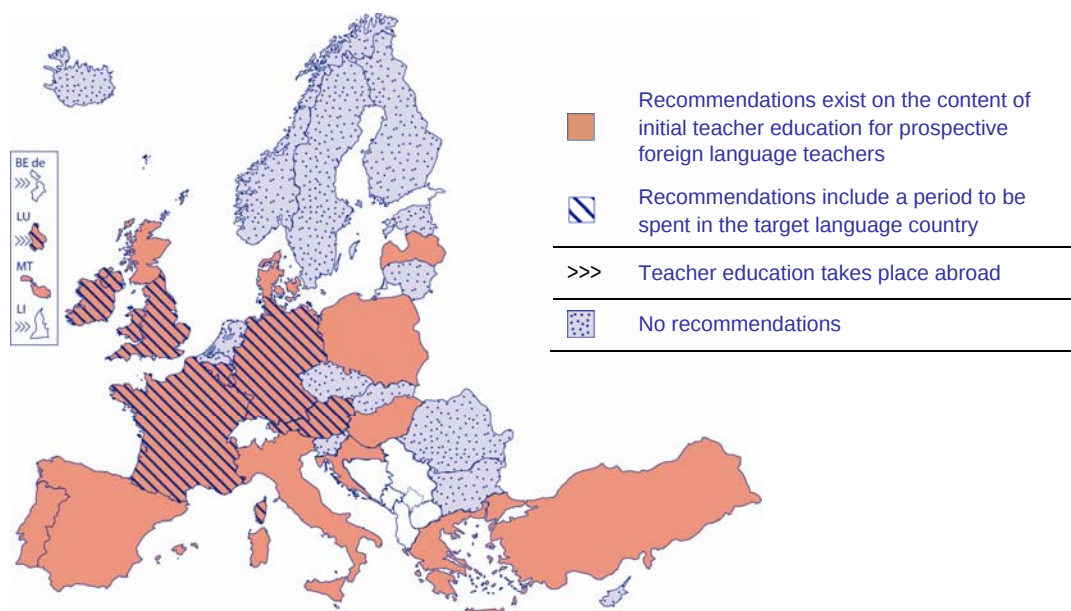
Source: ESLC 2011.

FEW COUNTRIES REQUIRE FUTURE TEACHERS TO SPEND AN IMMERSION PERIOD IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE COUNTRY

Only in a few countries do official regulations recommend that future language teachers spend a period of training in the country where the language they will be teaching is spoken. On average, 53.8 % of foreign language teachers participating in the ESLC state that they have already stayed more than one

month for the purposes of study or a course in a country where the language they teach is spoken. This average, though, hides wide variations between countries: 79.7 % of Spanish teachers have done so, while in Estonia the figure is only 11 %.

Existence of recommendations on the content of initial teacher education and the immersion period spent in the target language country, 2010/11



Source: Eurydice.

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