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Language competences for employability, mobility and growth

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Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes

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LANGUAGE COMPETENCES FOR EMPLOYABILITY, MOBILITY AND GROWTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS

Language competences are a key dimension of modernising European education systems, and this Staff Working Document is part of a larger policy initiative contributing to Europe 2020. It offers analysis and insight to support the Commission Communication on “Re-thinking Education: a blueprint to invest in the skills of the future for better economic and social outcomes.”

Raising the language competences of children, young people and adults will foster the mobility of workers and students and improve the employability of the European workforce. Therefore, improved language competences will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy of growth and jobs.

Language competences should be useful in real life and match, in particular, labour market needs. This applies for national and European labour markets, and the work of EU enterprises operating on an international scale. Poor language skills are a serious obstacle to seizing professional opportunities abroad and in enterprises or organisations active at international level.

This SWD presents ground-breaking evidence. It draws on the new European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), which assesses pupils' knowledge of the first and second foreign languages at the end of lower secondary education. It provides, for the first time ever, empirical evidence on the ability of young Europeans to communicate across borders, their attitudes, expectations and exposure to foreign languages, as well as teaching methods and approaches in this field. The SWD uses, in addition, the outcome of a special Eurobarometer on languages and the 2012 edition of EACEA/Eurydice's *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*.

The key findings are:

1. **The outcome of foreign language learning in Europe is poor:** only four in ten pupils reach the ‘independent user’ level in the first foreign language, indicating an ability to have a simple conversation. Only one quarter attains this level in the second foreign language. Too many pupils — 14% for the first language and 20% for the second — do not reach the ‘basic user’ level which means that they are not able to use very simple language, even with support. At the same time, almost half of Europeans report that they are unable to hold a conversation in any language other than their mother tongue.

2. **There are considerable differences in Member States' performance:** the new data show that the share of pupils reaching the level of 'independent user' in the first foreign language varies from 9% (England¹) and 14% (France) to 82% (Malta and Sweden).
3. English is becoming *de facto* the first foreign language. It is the most taught foreign language, both in Europe and globally, and it plays a key role in daily life - but: **it is proficiency in more than one foreign language that will make a decisive difference in the future.** This calls for language policies and strategies inspired by a clear vision of the value of language skills for mobility and employability.
4. **Member States should make teaching and learning foreign languages significantly more effective** by action along the following lines:
 - **Quantity:** *more hours* need to be invested into the teaching and learning of languages (both in general and vocational education and training). Pupils should start *earlier in life* to learn foreign languages and *at least two* foreign languages should be taught to *all* pupils during compulsory education.
 - **Quality:** teaching should be improved with the help of *innovative methods*, including Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) where non-language subjects are taught through the medium of a foreign language, initial and in-service training of language teachers, increased opportunities for using language skills and the development of ICT-based language learning resources.
 - **Focus:** language learning outcomes must be *geared to support employability, mobility and growth*. Education systems have to respond better to pupils' learning and professional needs and work more closely with employers, chambers of commerce and other stakeholders, linking language teaching to the creation of EU-level career paths.
 - **Guidance:** in line with this focus, Member States should *provide adequate guidance* to pupils and their families.
 - **Monitoring:** developments in learning outcomes should be *monitored* to identify strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, to *improve the effectiveness* of the system.
5. The considerable variations in Member States' performance mean that **countries have different starting points** from which to develop the quality of foreign language teaching. Member States should make an assessment of their own needs and identify a tailored strategy to improve quality and efficiency.

¹ The ESLC tested foreign language competences in England, not in the whole UK. In total, 16 education systems participated in the ESLC.

6. **Member States already invest considerably in the teaching of foreign languages.** However, smarter approaches based on the specific needs of the country and drawing on best practice can increase the return on this investment. Further funding for language learning will pay back in the long term through increased capacity for growth and internationalisation of the economy.
7. To step up work on language competences, **the Commission proposes the first ever EU benchmark on language competences.** The proposal responds to a request by the Council. It is based on the results of the ESLC and has been elaborated in cooperation with Member States' representatives, namely the Advisory Board for the European Indicator of Language Competence, the OMC group on indicators and the OMC group on languages.
8. The Commission proposes a **benchmark that is based on a dual approach**, due to the current availability of data and the situation of language teaching in Europe. This dual approach combines two elements: the *outcomes* of learning in the first foreign language, and the *quantity* of pupils learning a second foreign language:
 - by 2020, at least **50%** of 15 year-olds should attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language (compared to the present 42 %);
 - by 2020, at least **75%** of pupils in lower secondary education should study at least two foreign languages (compared to the present 61 %).

1. INTRODUCTION

Language skills are a “must” for the modern economy ...

Europe’s vision for 2020 is to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. Therefore, improving the outcomes of education and training and investing in skills in general—and language skills in particular—are important prerequisites to achieve the EU goal of increasing growth, creating jobs, promoting employability and increasing competitiveness. The ambition is to achieve better functioning of EU labour markets, to provide the right skills for the right jobs and to improve the quality of work and working conditions.

In this context, foreign language proficiency is one of the main determinants of learning and professional mobility, as well as of domestic and international employability. Poor language skills thus constitute a major obstacle to free movement of workers and to the international competitiveness of EU enterprises.

The present Staff Working Document accompanies the Commission’s Communication on Rethinking Education and provides analytical support to the Commission’s initiative on language competences.

Supporting the current focus of European policies on growth, this document focuses on those measures that can help individuals to find better jobs either in their home country or abroad, and businesses to secure the linguistic resources needed to improve their competitiveness. It is clear, however, that the benefits of improved language learning go well beyond the immediate economic advantages, encompassing a range of cultural, cognitive, social, civic, academic and security aspects.

... and a fresh joint effort is needed to boost language competences ...

The guidance offered in this document is addressed to policy makers and practitioners responsible for drafting curricula, organising the training of teachers and more generally designing the path towards an improved acquisition of language competences. They are equally meant to stimulate debate and reflection among teachers, trainers, school managers and all those who are dealing with the challenging task of enabling successful communication between members of different language communities.

Preparing young people with the right mix of skills has never been easy, even less so in times of rapid change. Anticipating which competences will be required on the labour market in ten, twenty or thirty years’ time is a difficult exercise, but there is little doubt that the ability to speak and understand foreign languages will be an asset for the years to come. Moreover, to encourage lifelong learning, schools should teach pupils how to acquire new language skills according to their changing needs and interests.

Each individual might need to move from a passive competence to an active one, to complement written with oral skills, to learn a new language to follow his or her career opportunities, new partner or cultural interest. Learning to learn languages has to become an integral part of everybody’s education.

... with continued commitment at the EU level

In this context, one priority area for European cooperation in education and training for the period 2012-2014 (Education and Training 2020 – “ET 2020”) is to “promote learning mobility for all learners, within Europe and worldwide, at all levels of education and training, focusing on information and guidance, the quality of learning mobility, removing barriers to mobility and promoting teacher mobility.”² To overcome these barriers, the joint Council and Commission Report confirmed in February 2012 the need to “pursue work to improve language competences.”

In November 2011, the Ministers of Education proposed a series of measures for promoting the mobility of students and workers within the European Union through better language competences, observing that “learning and professional mobility continue to be severely hampered by a limited knowledge of foreign languages.”³

This concern was echoed in September 2012 by the European Parliament’s remark that “insufficient language knowledge continues to be an enormous obstacle to mobility for the purposes of education and training.”⁴

In the *Compact for growth and jobs* adopted in June 2012, the European Council underlined that, to promote economic recovery and fight unemployment, “labour mobility within the EU should be facilitated [...] the recognition of professional qualifications and language skills improved.”⁵

National and EU policymakers have long been concerned with the consequences of poor language competences. As far back as 1996, the White Paper *Teaching and learning – towards the learning society* argued that “proficiency in at least two foreign languages at school” should become a priority.⁶ In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council linked this aspiration to the need to create “a competitive economy based on knowledge,” calling for further action “to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two

² 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) ‘Education and Training in a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe,’ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:070:0009:0018:EN:PDF>.

³ Council Conclusions of 28-29 November 2011 on language competences to enhance mobility, OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, pp. 27-30, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:372:0027:01:EN:HTML>

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2012 on Education, Training and Europe 2020 (2012/2045(INI)), 11 September 2012, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2012-323>.

⁵ Council Conclusions of 28-29 June 2012, chapter ‘The contribution of European policies to growth and employment,’ point 3(1), page 14. <http://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/NewsPortal/Documents/2012/29062012councilconclusions.pdf>

⁶ White paper on education and training *Teaching and learning - towards the learning society*, 1995. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc409_en.pdf.

foreign languages from a very early age” and asking that a linguistic competence indicator be established.⁷

... accompanied by evidence-based analysis and practical guidance

The Barcelona objective is more relevant than ever. The progress of political and economic integration over the last decade makes improving language learning all the more urgent. Education and training systems need to reconsider the key role of foreign language competences and improve their efficiency in this respect (see Chapter 2).

For language skills to translate into better job opportunities, it will also be important to ensure a more accurate targeting of the language competences of young people. Rather than aiming at an unrealistic ‘native speaker’ level, what they learn must enable them to perform the tasks they are likely to face in further education or in professional life.⁸ The right mix of languages and skills will go a long way in preparing them for a brighter future at home or abroad (see Chapter 3).

To improve the quality and increase the quantity of language teaching, new efforts will be needed in terms of teacher training, development of new materials and approaches. Member States must realise that any investment improving the effectiveness of language teaching will have a substantial return, improving the efficiency of the whole labour market (see Chapter 4).

Efforts to improve language learning have so far been hindered by the absence of objective data for assessing the learning outcomes and the efficiency of education systems in this respect. In response to the invitation of the Barcelona European Council, the European Commission has developed a proposal for a European benchmark on language competences based on the findings of the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), the first enquiry ever conducted in the field on a European scale⁹ (see Chapter 5).

2. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

2.1. Analysis

Surveys show people feel learning languages is important ...

Public opinion supports the Barcelona objective and the EU policies, as confirmed by the recent opinion poll, the 2012 Eurobarometer: 77% of respondents believe that “improving language skills should be a policy priority” and 72% agree that “everyone in the EU should be

⁷ Presidency conclusions, 15-16 March 2002,

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf.

⁸ See e.g. Davies, A. (2003). *The native speaker: Myth and reality*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, and <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:084E:0333:0333:EN:PDF>

⁹ The European Survey on Language Competences was conducted in 2011. Its findings were published in June 2012. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>.

able to speak more than one language in addition to their mother tongue.”¹⁰ More than eight out of ten respondents consider that languages could be useful for themselves and almost all agree they might be useful for the future of their children.

... but levels of competence and learning on the ground do not match this¹¹

On average, the ESLC reveals a low level of competence. Only 42% of tested pupils overall reached the level of ‘independent user’¹² in the first foreign language, and merely a quarter of pupils did so in the second foreign language. This means that after several years of studying at school, the majority of young Europeans are not able to have a simple conversation in the foreign languages they have learned.¹³

An additional source of concern is that a considerable percentage of pupils—14% for the first language and 20% for the second—do not even reach the ‘basic user’ level.

Furthermore, the ESLC results confirm significant differences between Member States. The share of pupils reaching the level of ‘independent user’ in the first foreign language thus goes from a maximum of 82% (Malta and Sweden) to a minimum of only 9% (England) and 14% (France).¹⁴

Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide an overview of the assessment results, showing the huge variance in performance for the first and second foreign languages tested in the ESLC, respectively. Reflecting the lower scores in the second foreign language, the independent user level is set as the threshold level for the first foreign language in Figure 1, while the basic user level of A2 has here been adopted to show performance in the second foreign language, as shown in Figure 2.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_399_380_en.htm#386.

¹¹ See also ANNEX - FACTS AND FIGURES, p. 43

¹² Levels B1 and B2 of the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

¹³ In the CEFR, the broad B-level is designated as the level of ‘independent user’, and the broad A-level as the level of ‘basic user’. The former includes the levels B1 and B2. B1 level denotes ‘*an independent language user who can deal with straightforward, familiar matters.*’ B2 level refers to ‘*an independent language user who can express him/herself clearly and effectively.*’ The broad A-level includes A1 (‘*a basic user who can use very simple language, with support*’) and A2 (‘*A basic user who can use simple language to communicate on everyday topics*’).

¹⁴ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

Figure 1 First foreign language. Percentage of pupils reaching the level of independent user (B1 or higher)

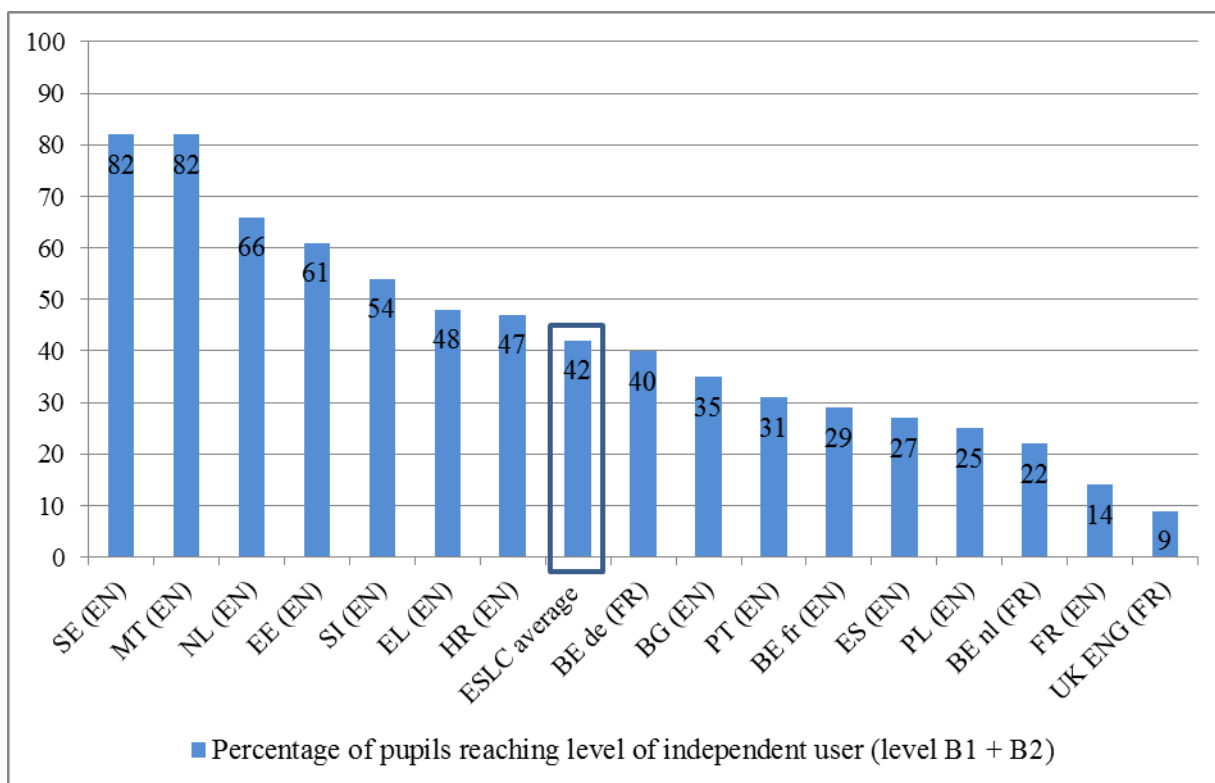
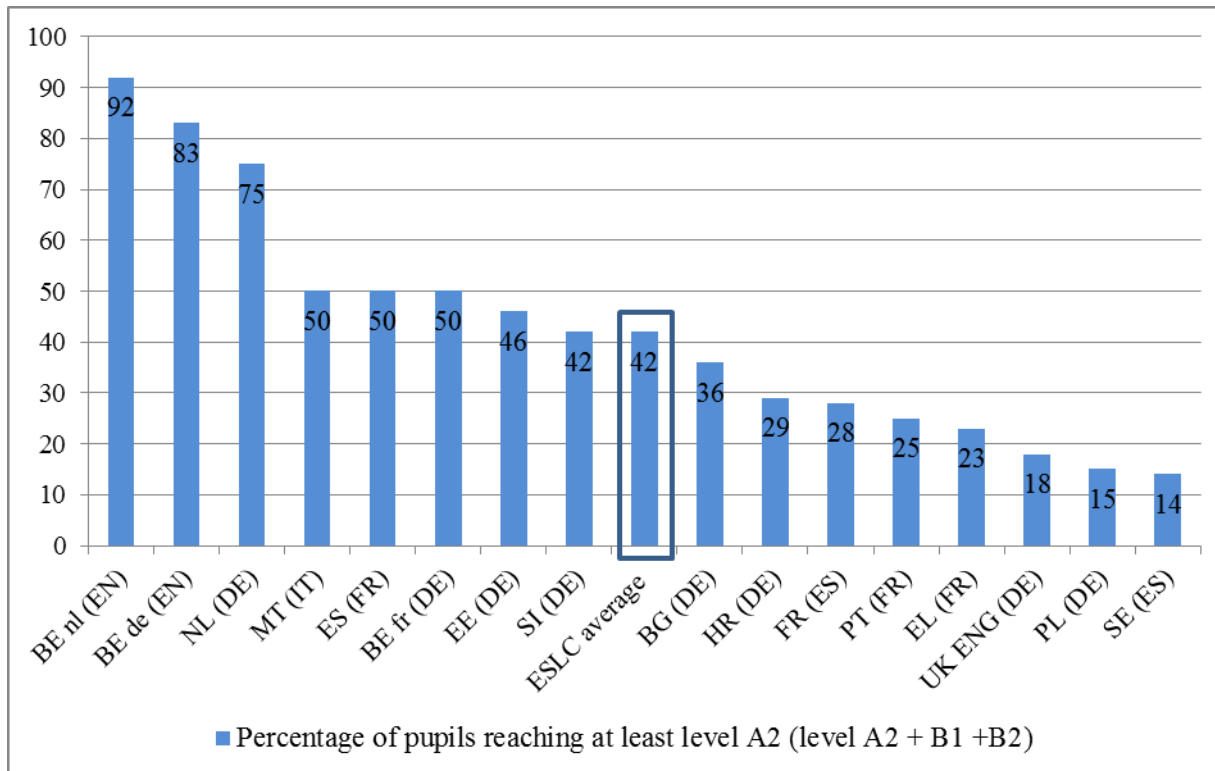


Figure 2 Second foreign language. Percentage of pupils reaching level A2 or higher



Source: European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on Language Competences: Final report (2012)*
http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-eslc_en.pdf

The picture emerging from the Eurobarometer survey, polling the entire EU population, confirms the findings of the ESLC.

Almost half of respondents (46%) declare themselves unable to hold a conversation in any language other than their mother tongue, and only one quarter (25%) say that they can hold a conversation in at least two foreign languages.

Regarding differences between Member States, less than 40% of Eurobarometer respondents in Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Ireland report that they can hold a conversation in a foreign language, whereas in Luxembourg, Latvia, the Netherlands, Malta, Slovenia, Lithuania and Sweden, more than 90% say they can.

Some promising signs of improvement are visible, since the percentage of 15-24 year olds who consider themselves able to hold a conversation in two languages in addition to their mother tongue is more than double the percentage for the 'over 55' age group (37% against 17%). Therefore, the generational trends are certainly encouraging.

Yet, it is clear that a significant effort is needed to improve this. As a matter of fact, in spite of the important efforts made by the Member States during the last decade, progress in the field of language teaching and learning has been fairly slow.

But the picture is varied across different Member States...

Figures on the average of the EU as a whole mask differences across countries. In the learning of foreign languages, these differences are significant and concern various aspects of language learning, from starting age to duration and intensity, from attitudes to learning outcomes.

Starting age: According to the Final report on the ESLC, “an earlier onset of foreign language teaching means a higher score on the language tests.”¹⁵ Whereas pupils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland start learning foreign languages as a compulsory subject at the age of 11, their fellow pupils in Spain and in the German speaking community of Belgium begin in pre-primary education.¹⁶

The typical age for starting to learn the first foreign language is between 6 and 9, whereas the second foreign language generally becomes compulsory between 10 and 15.

Overall, the tendency in the EU-27 is to offer foreign language learning from an earlier age than previously. In primary education, the percentage of pupils learning a foreign language thus went up from 67.5% in 2004/2005 to 78.2% in 2009/2010.

Some Member States achieve remarkable results in reducing the number of pupils not learning any language in primary education (Poland, United Kingdom, the Czech Republic) and/or increasing the percentage of pupils learning two foreign languages in lower secondary education (Poland, Czech Republic, Italy).

¹⁵ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

¹⁶ See also ANNEX - FACTS AND FIGURES

Most Member States have introduced changes into legislation on the onset of language learning; others, such as Cyprus, Germany, Slovakia and Latvia, are currently introducing reforms.¹⁷

Duration: The ESLC identified a link between exposure to foreign languages and proficiency. “Overall more lesson time for the target language per week,” says the Final Report, “means a higher score on the language tests.” The number of hours devoted to compulsory language learning in general, and to each of the languages taught, also varies greatly across Member States. In Luxembourg, pupils receive more than 4,000 hours of language teaching, whereas provision amounts to approximately 1,100 hours in Italy, 900 hours in France, 800 hours in Spain and 650 hours in Slovenia.¹⁸

No significant increase was registered in recent years concerning the amount of time or percentage of curriculum time reserved for language teaching as a compulsory subject. Thus, while foreign language learning is being introduced earlier in many countries, the time allocated to them is generally less than 10 % or even 5 % of the total taught time.¹⁹

Sector of education: There are still significant differences between language learning in general education and in prevocational and vocational education.²⁰ In the French Community of Belgium, almost all pupils in general upper secondary education learn one or more foreign languages, whereas only half of those in prevocational and vocational education do so. A gap of 30% and 20% exists in Greece and Hungary respectively between the two educational paths.²¹

Number of languages taught:²² Based on the findings of the ESLC, “more modern foreign languages learned means a higher score on the language tests.”²³

Eurostat data shows limited signs of improvement in the average number of foreign languages taught in EU schools. On average, EU pupils learn 0.8 foreign languages in primary education, 1.2 in vocational and prevocational training, 1.5 in lower secondary and 1.6 in upper secondary.²⁴

The percentage of pupils learning at least one foreign language in primary school is close to 80%, while in lower secondary school around 61% of pupils currently learn two or more foreign languages.

In prevocational/vocational upper secondary education, the percentage of pupils studying two or more languages is now close to 40%, compared to 60% in general upper secondary.²⁵

¹⁷ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*.

¹⁸ Data refer to countries where a minimum number of hours is recommended. In Luxembourg, between 320 and 440 hours per year are recommended from grade 1 to grade 10.

¹⁹ EACEA/Eurydice (2012) *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*.

²⁰ See Appendix, Figure 4.

²¹ See Appendix, Figure 5.

²² See also Annex ‘Facts and figures’

²³ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

²⁴ See Appendix, Figure 4.

²⁵ See Appendix, Figure 6.

Reflecting the degree national policies correspond with the Barcelona objective, Figure 3 provides an overview of the percentages of pupils learning two or more foreign languages in lower secondary general education (ISCED level 2) across Member States.

Lower secondary education is the most appropriate level to assess whether the Barcelona objective is actually implemented across Europe since this level in the vast majority of Member States constitutes the last stage in compulsory education.

As Figure 3 shows, the current picture is one of contrasts. Several countries already ensure that virtually all pupils are learning two or more languages. This is most notably the case in Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, and Finland.

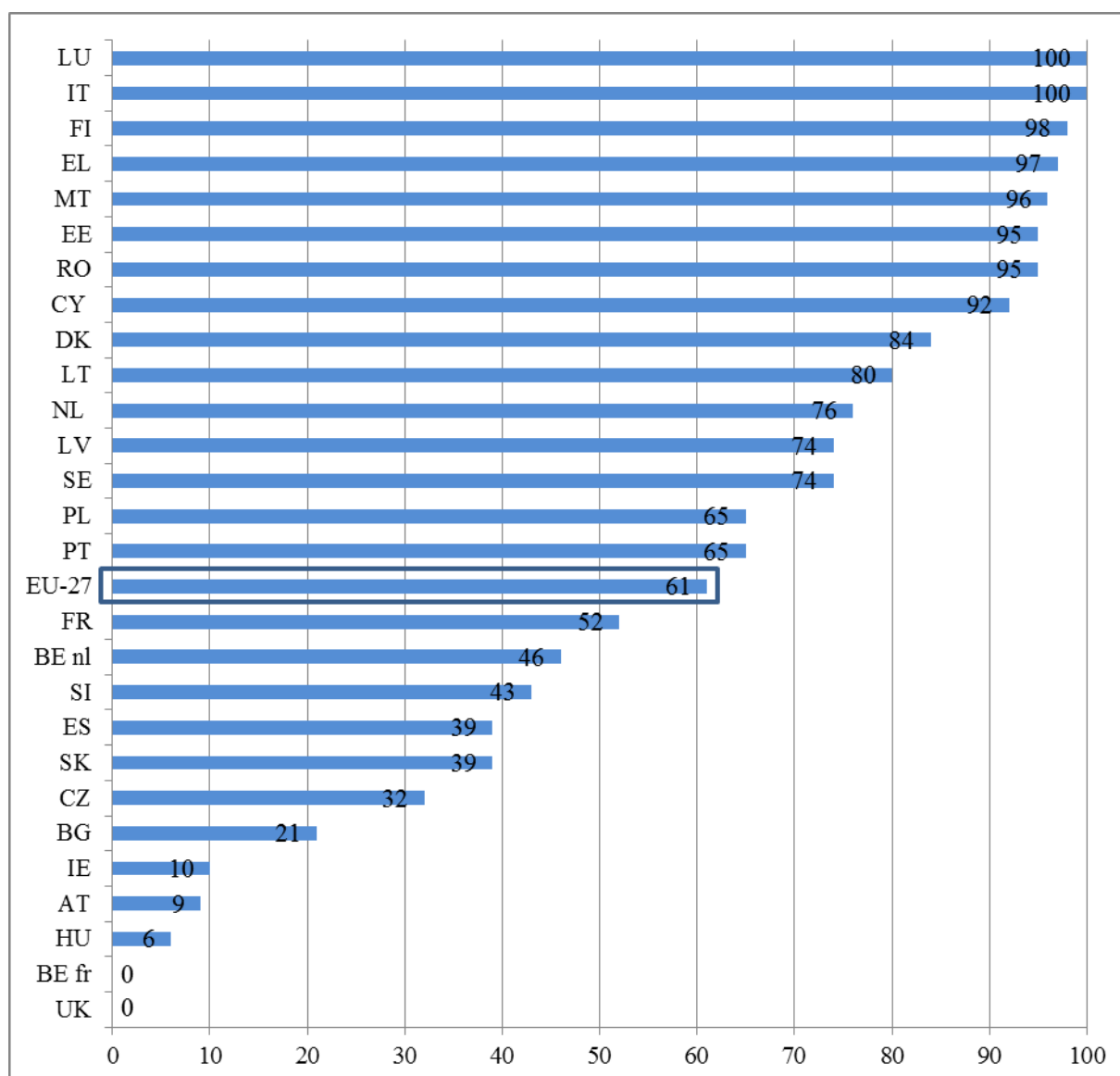
In the remaining countries, less than 85% of pupils are learning two or more foreign languages. One reason for the low values of some education systems in Figure 3 is the fact that learning a second foreign language is currently not compulsory in a number of education systems, like in the French Community of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands, Sweden and United Kingdom. Figure 3 reflects this in varying degrees.

It should be stressed that the data presented in Figure 3 only represents pupil participation in the learning of foreign languages included in the curriculum drawn up by the central education authorities. Languages taught outside the curriculum as optional subjects are not included, and regional languages are included solely when the curriculum designates them as alternatives to foreign languages. Thus, in some education systems, not least in the French Community of Belgium and United Kingdom, the actual participation rates of pupils learning two foreign languages will be higher than shown in Figure 3. Nonetheless, the figures highlight the large variances in the provision of language learning in Europe, as well as the different modes of offering languages either as compulsory or optional subjects.²⁶

While the EU-27 is far from reaching the Barcelona objective as a whole, there has been considerable progress during the last 5 years. As Table 1 shows, the EU-27 average has increased remarkably by 14 percentage points in the five year period between 2005 and 2010. These figures reflect a trend concerning the onset of learning two foreign languages in schools across Europe during the latest decade. Whereas the percentage of general upper secondary pupils (ISCED level 3) in the EU learning at least two foreign languages has levelled off and in some cases even decreased, the proportion of lower secondary pupils (ISCED level 2) learning at least two foreign languages has been steadily increasing (See Appendix, Figure 6).

²⁶ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, p. 29-30.

Figure 3 Percentage of pupils learning two or more foreign languages in lower secondary education (ISCED 2)²⁷



Source: Eurostat, UOE

Table 1 Percentage of pupils learning two or more foreign languages in EU-27 in 2005, 2007, 2010²⁸

2005	47%	2007	54%	2010	61%
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²⁷ Rounded values, on the basis of Figure C7a, page 67, in EACEA/Eurydice (2012) *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe 2012*. See Appendix, Table 6 **Error! Reference source not found.**, for original values. *Explanatory note:* Data from BE de and DE not available. Value from Estonia is from 2007. The percentage of students learning 0, 1, 2 (or more) foreign languages is calculated with respect to all students in all years of lower general secondary education. The number of students learning 0, 1, 2 (or more) foreign languages is divided by the corresponding number of students enrolled at the ISCED level concerned.

²⁸ Rounded values on the basis of EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*. See Appendix, Table 6, for original values.

Examples of good practice:

- Italy and Malta introduced reforms in the last few years to make the learning of a second foreign language compulsory. In the Netherlands the obligation to study a second foreign language has instead been abolished.
- In other countries, such as the Flemish Community of Belgium, Greece and Poland, the onset of compulsory learning of a second foreign language has been brought forward. Slovenia and Slovakia are currently implementing similar measures. In France the study of a second foreign language has been made compulsory in general upper secondary education.

Provision of learning opportunities: With the exception of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, where the duration of compulsory foreign language learning was shortened, all Member States adopted measures in the last few years to increase the provision—and uptake—of foreign language learning opportunities. These can be divided into two main categories:

- a. Advancing the onset of language teaching and/or increasing the number of hours devoted to the teaching of foreign languages
- b. Combining the teaching of languages with the teaching of other subjects (the so-called Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL)

Classrooms are becoming multilingual environments: a challenge, but also an opportunity ...²⁹

According to the 2009 PISA study, on average 9.3% of 15 year old students belonged to immigrant families³⁰ in the participating EU-27 countries in 2009. This average figure masks very different situations, with proportions ranging from less than 1% (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) to 40% (Luxembourg). On the EU level, approximately half of immigrant students speak a language different from the language of instruction when they are at home.³¹

However, those defined as immigrant students only account for some of those speaking a language, other than the language of instruction, at home. Altogether 7.1% of 15 year old students in the EU-27 countries in 2009 spoke another language than the language of instruction at home, a 1 % increase since 2006. In the French and German speaking Communities of Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria, more than 10% mainly speak another language at home than the language of instruction. In Luxembourg, Spain and the French and German speaking Communities of Belgium, the relative large figures reflect regional variations in the language of instruction.

²⁹ This section is based on EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*.

³⁰ According to the OECD definition, children are classified as ‘immigrants’ if both their parents or guardians were born abroad.

³¹ 44% of immigrant students stated that they spoke the language of instruction at home, the same percentage stated that they spoke another language at home, and 12% did not provide information on this issue.

The presence of pupils speaking different languages in the classroom can be enriching and stimulate language awareness, but can also be a source of difficulties for the children belonging to the minority group, for the rest of the class and for the teachers.

Two models have been established in Member States to deal with this challenge: on the one hand, there are education systems where the newcomers are integrated with the mainstream, but provided with extra language support; on the other, certain Member States prefer to establish special groups or classes where language support is provided.

Provision of non-language subjects through the medium of a foreign language (CLIL) is common, Denmark and Greece being the only Member States where it is not available. Its systematic usage, however, is not widespread and remains at the stage of pilot projects in various countries.

CLIL has been introduced in Italy for all pupils in the last year of upper secondary education in 2010.

In Austria the first foreign language is used to teach one curricular subject one lesson per week to pupils aged six to eight years.

As a rule, no special admission criteria are foreseen at national level for pupils attending CLIL classes. In some Member States, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Finland, schools are allowed to adopt their own criteria.

Examples of good practice³²

In Austria, the ‘*Interkulturelle Pädagogik im Kindergarten*’ project was launched to support children and kindergarten teams in a multicultural/multilingual group setting and to integrate parents into this work. More than 60 specially trained Intercultural Advisors who themselves have a migrant background provide advice to staff of 350 kindergartens.

In the Czech Republic, the ‘*Odmalička – Von klein auf*’ project focuses on one of the neighbouring countries’ language, favouring contacts and mutual discovery from a very early age.

...and increasing exposure to foreign languages helps to improve learning outcomes...

In view of the aim to improve the learning outcome and the effectiveness of language teaching, it is important to take into account the fact that language acquisition is heavily influenced by exposure outside the classroom. The large differences shown by the ESLC indicate the rich potential for peer-learning among European countries in language policy and learning.

Other measures can be equally important such as promoting the distribution of audio-visual and cultural works in the original language version (e.g. with the addition of subtitles). According to a recent study, “subtitling helps to improve the mastery of foreign languages [and] can raise awareness and provide motivation for language learning, in both formal and

³² <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/ellp-handbook.pdf>.

informal contexts, and consequently contributes to creating an environment that encourages multilingualism.”³³

...while innovative methods can increase motivation and foster positive attitudes

To equip young Europeans with a varied repertoire of foreign language competences, and meet the needs of employers for qualified staff able to perform a range of work-related tasks in a number of foreign languages, it is important to provide high-quality and diversified language teaching at all levels across all sectors of education.

Although in the ESLC an impressive 90% of foreign language teachers report that they are fully qualified to teach foreign languages, a serious rethink of the traditional way of teaching foreign languages at school, based on more innovative methods and approaches, is needed. The results of the study also suggest that in-service training can positively impact pupils’ language learning.³⁴

Pupils who find learning languages useful for other areas of life – either socially or for work - score higher on language tests, proving the powerful effect of motivation on the success of any language learning activity.

It is therefore essential to focus action not only on the skills, but also on the attitudes towards languages and language learning. Attempts to improve the quality and quantity of language learning opportunities should also actively consider pupils’ motivation in order to actually help improve learning outcomes.³⁵

In this respect, it is a promising sign that curricula in a dozen countries or regions within countries now put emphasis on oral skills (i.e. listening and speaking skills) in the first years of foreign language learning, later to be followed by an equal standing of the four communication skills at the end of compulsory education.³⁶

Another key issue in relation to teaching methods is that the pupils tested in the ESLC think that they and their teachers often do not use the foreign language in the classroom. Especially in languages other than English this is a problem since pupils rarely come into contact with the language outside school either.³⁷

Non-formal and informal education can be significant influences...

Acquisition of any language—be it the mother tongue, a second or a foreign language—is of course influenced by a number of factors that have little to do with the intrinsic efficiency of the education system. The immediate environment of the family, the geographic location, the

³³ See http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/lp/studies/documents/study_on_the_use_of_subtitling/rapport_final-en.pdf

³⁴ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

³⁵ For further discussion of the impact of motivational factors with regard to language learning, see Della Chiesa, B. (2012). Learning languages in a globalising world, pp. 37-51, in Della Chiesa, B., J. Scott and C. Hinton (eds. 2012). *Languages in a Global World: Learning for better cultural understanding*. OECD. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264123557-en>

³⁶ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*.

³⁷ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

socio-economic conditions, exposure to languages in the everyday life and many other factors determine the attitudes of the learners towards the language in question, their motivation to learn it and their likelihood of success.

Non-formal and informal education plays a key role for language learning. This does not mean, however, that there is little that education policies can do to help people learn languages. It is just a reminder of the importance of ensuring an accurate match between what happens inside the school and what goes on outside.

Curricular and extracurricular activities involving the use of the foreign language (twinning, films, trips in the countries where the language is spoken, meeting speakers of the language studied in non-educational contexts) can prove extremely useful. On average, less than one third of students tested in the ESLC had recently participated in such activities. In Slovenia, 42% of pupils took part in collaboration projects in the last three years. In the French and German speaking Communities of Belgium, Estonia, Spain, France, one third or more of the students had taken part in field trips over the same period.³⁸

...and use of tools such as the European Language Portfolio can be useful for both teacher and learner

Another tool that can play a significant role in motivating teachers and also learners by developing their ability to assess their own competences and their autonomy is the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio. According to the ESLC Final report, "Between 17% and 73% of the teachers report having had some training in the use of a language portfolio."³⁹ Hence, language teachers should be trained to use the European Language Portfolio⁴⁰ and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages⁴¹, which provides guidance not only for assessment, but also for developing new materials and designing curricula.

2.2. Guidance to Member States

An early start for learning languages, increased offer and provision in both general education and VET, teaching of at least two foreign languages to all pupils as a part of compulsory education, increased exposure at school and through the media, reinforced motivation of pupils and special attention towards monitoring results can make the difference.

Increases in efficiency via the quality and quantity of learning are needed, alongside ongoing monitoring of effectiveness...

Based on the analysis in section 2.1, and taking into account the situation of each Member State, national education systems should increase their efficiency in giving young Europeans the language competences they need, focusing on:

³⁸ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

³⁹ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>

⁴¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/Linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

1. Quantity, through early start, increased provision in both general education and VET, teaching of at least two foreign languages to all pupils, increased exposure at school and through the media
2. Quality, through innovative methods and approaches, initial and in-service training of language teachers, increased opportunities of using language skills, CLIL, development of ICT-based language learning resources
3. Monitoring of learning outcomes to identify strengths and weaknesses.

It will be important to establish a link between language competences acquired at school and career opportunities at home or abroad. Partnerships with stakeholders and guidance to schools, teachers, families and pupils are other measures which will contribute to a positive outcome.

... and several areas must be targeted to achieve increased levels of language competences

An early start: This is by far the most widely adopted answer to the need to accommodate a second foreign language in an already crammed timetable and to improve the level of learning outcomes.

The European Commission recently published a Policy Handbook⁴² based on the contributions of national experts and containing guidance on the benefits of early language learning, as well as on the essential conditions for ensuring its success.

An early onset of foreign language acquisition takes advantage of a highly dynamic developmental stage and can thus provide multiple direct and indirect benefits.

- On the one hand, it can be used to increase the number of hours of language learning before the end of compulsory education, leading to a better proficiency in the foreign language studied and/or to the introduction of additional foreign languages.
- On the other, it has positive effects in term of cognitive skills, comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving.

At the same time, care must be taken to guarantee that the proper conditions are met, in particular as concerns staff training, developing adequate materials and ensuring continuity between the various stages of education.

Teaching practice: Quality must be ensured through innovative methods and approaches, initial and in-service training of both language teachers and other teachers involved in CLIL, increased opportunities of using language skills, development and use of ICT-based and interactive language learning resources, in particular open educational resources.

Training of teachers: Initial and in service training of staff plays a central role, particularly when adopting new approaches and methods, advancing the onset of language education or

⁴² European Commission (2011). *Language learning at pre-primary school level: making it efficient and sustainable: A Policy Handbook*. SEC (2011) 928 final, http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/ellpwp_en.pdf.

involving teachers of other subjects in language education. Linguistic and pedagogical skills are equally important for a successful learning outcome.

Number of hours: It is difficult to provide general guidance as to the number of hours that should be devoted to language learning in compulsory education. A rough indication can be obtained from the estimates of the Association of Language Teachers in Europe (ALTE). While stressing that it is impossible to give any accurate indication on the number of guided learning hours needed to reach each level of the CEFR, Cambridge ESOL suggests the rough estimate given in Table 2.

Table 2 Hours of study and proficiency levels⁴³

CEFR Level (our definition)	Hours of guided learning
A2 ('elementary')	180-200
B1 ('pre-intermediate')	350-400
B2 ('intermediate')	500-600
C1 ('upper intermediate')	700-800
C2 ('advanced')	1000-1200

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): CLIL can be extremely useful for intensifying language exposure and improving motivation, linking language acquisition to themes that have a concrete relevance for the learners.⁴⁴ As is the case for early language learning, introduction of this methodology should be adequately prepared through training of the teachers involved and development of adequate materials. CLIL teachers need to be proficient in the language used in the classroom.

2.3. Support at EU level

Foreign language competence is one of six key objectives in the new “Erasmus for All” programme...

The European Union’s future programme for education and training “Erasmus for all” includes language learning and linguistic diversity as one of its six objectives, acknowledging in particular the central role of foreign language learning in promoting the mobility of students and people in vocational education and training and their future employability.

The first pillar of the programme will be devoted to mobility. Within this activity, the European Commission will provide systematic linguistic preparation mechanisms. Linguistic preparation will become a key aspect of learning mobility in all sectors, thus improving the outcome of exchanges and the efficiency of EU funding. Different levels of competence will be established for teachers, staff, youth workers and higher education students. Language courses will be offered to those who cannot demonstrate a sufficient competence to make their mobility a worthwhile experience.

⁴³ Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)
<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/about/standards/can-do.html>

⁴⁴ See e.g. Marsh, D. (2002). *CLIL/EMILE - The European dimension. Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential.*
http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc491_en.pdf.

The second pillar of “Erasmus for all” will support cooperation and partnerships between organisations having innovation as the main goal. As transnational projects encourage openness and excellence, and facilitate the exchange of good practice between institutions, the Commission will support strategic partnership projects in the field of languages promoting new/innovative methodologies for teaching foreign languages, particularly with the aim to link the language skills to the needs of employability and linguistic diversity. Languages interact with numerous policy objectives in education, from early childhood education and care to ICT, where language learning should play a central role.

The third pillar of “Erasmus for all” will support policy reform. Hence, the European Commission will also provide assistance to Member States willing to proceed to an in-depth analysis of their offer of language learning opportunities, by organising peer learning activities and exchanges of good practices.

...and peer learning, progress monitoring and on-going cooperation will continue to provide valuable support for Member States

For promoting exchange of good practice between Member States in the field of language teaching, the OMC working group “Languages in education and training” will contribute to the country-specific analysis and peer learning/review in the framework of the European semester exercise.

Monitoring of progress at EU level will be ensured through the creation of a European benchmark of language competence, as requested by the Council (See chapter 5 below).

Cooperation with the Council of Europe will be strengthened, in an effort to fully exploit the European value added of the tools developed by its language policy unit and of the network and expertise available, in particular in providing country-specific analysis.

3. BETTER TARGETING OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCES TO ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY, MOBILITY AND GROWTH

3.1. Analysis

There is a mismatch between the supply of and the labour market demand for language competences...

Poor foreign language competences are a serious handicap for young Europeans entering the labour market today, as well as for companies who want to sell their products and services in the global marketplace.

The European Commission recently published a report by the OMC working group, ‘Languages for Jobs,’ providing a compendium of good practices and guidelines for modernising education systems and reducing the mismatch between supply and demand of language competences.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ European Commission (2011). *Languages for Jobs - Providing multilingual communication skills for the labour market*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/languages-for-jobs-report_en.pdf.

The group insists on the importance of raising the general level of language competences, broadening the range of languages taught, re-orienting teaching contents towards professional purposes, and improving the training of staff.

... and limited language abilities seriously limit free movement across the EU, which affects economic competitiveness

The problem of limited language ability becomes even bigger when the issue of mobility is considered. In particular, a professional who wants to exercise a regulated profession in another Member State needs to have knowledge of the languages necessary for practising the profession in the host Member State.⁴⁶ According to a recent study, “Just over half of Europeans expect that a lack of language skills will be a difficulty they encounter when working abroad.”⁴⁷

Research on the main obstacles to mobility in Europe confirms that poor language and intercultural skills are seriously limiting the free movement of workers in the EU.⁴⁸ A study conducted for the European Commission in 2008 found workers’ mobility across Member States to be around one per cent each year between 2000 and 2005, just one third of the comparable rates across the US. According to the study, a large part of this difference could be explained by the diversity of languages, cultures and institutions across Europe:

“Language and cultural barriers are extremely important when explaining the limited level of geographic mobility in Europe. [...] The effect of language is direct as well as indirect. Directly, it reduces the language barrier, which is negatively associated with cross-border mobility propensities. Indirectly, it appears to reduce the cultural barriers preventing migration.”⁴⁹

In 2006, the Council remarked that “foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union economy.”⁵⁰ Mobility in turn is essential to foster further language learning and improved intercultural skills – thus developing some extremely appreciated skills in today’s labour market.

⁴⁶ Article 53 of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, OJ L 255 of 30.9.2005

⁴⁷ Special Eurobarometer 337 (2010). *Geographical and labour market mobility*.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_337_en.pdf

⁴⁸ See for instance Broyer, S., Caffet, J.C., and Martin, V.D. (2011). Low labour mobility is more than ever an obstacle to euro-zone cohesion, in *Flash Economic Research*, no. 24, 11 January 2011.
<http://cib.natixis.com/flushdoc.aspx?id=56192>.

⁴⁹ Bonin, H. *et al.* (2008). *Geographic Mobility in the European Union: Optimising its Social and Economic Benefits*, IZA Research Report no. 19, p. 9.

http://www.iza.org/en/webcontent/publications/reports/report_pdfs/iza_report_19.pdf.

On the differences between EU and US, see also European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006). *Mobility in Europe: Analysis of the 2005 Eurobarometer survey on geographical and labour market mobility*.

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/59/en/1/ef0659en.pdf>

⁵⁰ Council conclusions of 19 May 2006 on the European Indicator of Language Competence, OJ C 172, 25.7.2006, pp. 1-3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:172:0001:0003:EN:PDF>

Another study on cross-border commuting equally identified languages as the main issue to be addressed: “language barriers and lack of information—the latter partially related to the first—bear most problems for cross-border worker’s mobility.”⁵¹

However Europeans are aware of the value and relevance of foreign languages...

The importance of language competences for employability and mobility is widely acknowledged by people across the EU. 53% of respondents in a recent Eurobarometer⁵² mentioned the possibility of using the language at work (including travelling abroad) as one of the main benefits of language skills and 45% said that learning a new language could help them to get a better job in their own country; 61% saw the opportunity of working abroad as the key advantage of learning a new language.

At the same time, respondents perceive a gap between their language skills and those requested by the labour market – and have little confidence in their ability to overcome it. The Eurobarometer thus found that “problems in learning a new language” are a disincentive for 19% of Europeans, in particular “those who finished education aged less than 20.” Language issues are seen as the “most likely difficulty encountered if working abroad” and “a key obstacle to overcome when moving to work in another country.”

The Eurofound study ‘New Mobility Trends in Europe’ comes to the same conclusion: “Cultural differences and language barriers are from an individual perspective the most important factors explaining the limited mobility within the EU.”⁵³

...although general perceptions vary for each language

For a vast majority of pupils, English is the first and sometimes the only foreign language studied. Within the EU-27, learning English is mandatory for pupils to learn in 11 countries or regions within countries. In 2009/10, 73% of pupils in primary education, 93.7% in lower secondary education, 92.7% pupils in upper secondary education and 74.9% in prevocational and vocational upper secondary education studied English as a foreign language.

French is studied by one third of EU pupils in lower secondary, one quarter in general upper secondary and one fifth in prevocational and vocational education.

German shows a different trend, with less than 17% of EU pupils learning it in lower secondary, 20.7% in prevocational and vocational education and almost 24% in general upper secondary.

Spanish is studied by 11.4% of EU pupils in lower secondary, 19.1% in general upper secondary and only 3.6% in prevocational and vocational education.⁵⁴

⁵¹ MKW Wirtschaftsforschung and Empirica (2009). *Scientific Report on the Mobility of Cross-Border Workers within the EU-27/EEA/EFTA Countries: Final report*.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3459&langId=en>. See Appendix, Table 5.

⁵² Special Eurobarometer 386 (2012). *Europeans and their Languages*.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf

⁵³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *New mobility trends in Europe - A preliminary analysis for further research*, 2011, p. 13.

(<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/docs/areas/populationandsociety/labourmobility2011.pdf>).

Numerous other languages are offered in schools across Europe. However, besides the four languages mentioned above, and Russian, which is especially studied in Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria, the percentage of pupils learning other languages was below 5 % in most countries in 2009/10. In a significant number of countries, the percentage was less than 1 %.⁵⁵

Concerning the perceptions of various languages, the ESLC results confirm that pupils see English as the most useful foreign language to learn. Performance in this language tends to be higher than in other foreign languages. The independent user level is achieved in English by about 50% of tested pupils in any skill, compared to only 21% in German and French and 8% in Spanish.⁵⁶

Two thirds of Eurobarometer respondents also indicated English as the most useful language for their own personal development and 79% said that it was the language that their children should learn for their future. The perceived usefulness of German, French and Spanish is 50 percentage points lower.⁵⁷

Finally, the Eurobarometer found that just a small percentage of Europeans consider themselves able to speak French (12%), German (11%) or Spanish (7%) as a foreign language, and 33% to 50% of them assess their competences as ‘basic.’⁵⁸

Several countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Greece) have introduced pilot projects for increasing the number of languages over those already required or for advancing the starting age.

But to increase the competitive edge, the labour market needs to work in a wide range of languages ...

The Business Platform for Multilingualism, established by the European Commission to debate and improve the contribution of language knowledge to economic growth, published in 2011 a report formulating suggestions and proposals,⁵⁹ emphasising in particular the usefulness of partnerships cutting across traditional boundaries between education and employment to involve all relevant stakeholders.

The special status of English should not lead to disregard the importance of other languages. The Report of the Business Forum for Multilingualism points out that “it is other languages that will make the difference between mainstream and excellence and provide a competitive edge.”

⁵⁴ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*. See Appendix, Figure 7.

⁵⁵ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, p. 73

⁵⁶ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. In Italian, the independent user level is achieved by 35% of pupils but as Italian was tested only in Malta this result is not very representative at the European level. See Appendix, Figure 8 and Figure 9

⁵⁷ See Appendix, Figure 10.

⁵⁸ Special Eurobarometer 386 (2012) *Europeans and their Languages*.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf

⁵⁹ Business Platform for Multilingualism - Report for the period September 2009-June 2011,
http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/business_en.pdf.

This conclusion is supported by the reports of the OMC thematic working group ‘Languages for Jobs.’ Their recently published report ‘Languages for Jobs’⁶⁰ documents the rising demand for language and communication skills and the need to reduce the gap between offer and demand of language skills. “Since these skills can be acquired or enhanced through spending a study exchange or work placement abroad,” says the report, “mobility of both learners and teachers needs to be further increased and supported.”

The OMC group also puts special emphasis on partnerships between educational institutes and businesses, as well as to vocational education and training – an area where the approach to language teaching must be reconsidered to increase motivation and relevance. The report also recommends widening the choice of languages taught in general education and in VET.

For people entering today’s enlarging labour market, where mobility and international business require an ability to use several languages—and to pick up more languages and competences throughout one’s professional career—diversified language competences will be essential. The reports developed by the CELAN platform⁶¹ on the sector-specific language needs (ICT, manufacturing, retail, distribution and other services) provide a good example of analysis that could inform education authorities concerning the language needs of the labour market.

The education authorities of several Member States define which languages should be taught at school in addition to English.

...learning languages can increase employability, but people from all socio-economic backgrounds must have equal opportunity to learn languages

Improving employability of young people through their language skills is also an equity issue. In certain sectors, like tourism, language skills are a pre-requisite to find a job. European policies should avoid the creation of a ‘linguistic divide’ between young people from richer families, who can afford private tuition and opportunities to study abroad, and their less well-to-do peers, which would increase discrimination against the latter in the labour market.

The formal education system has a central role to play in empowering all children with the language skills they need, providing equal access to mobility and avoiding that a disadvantaged background translates into further discrimination. Given the correlation between geographical and job mobility, there is a risk of growing inequality, since people who do not have the initial resources or skills (including languages) will be less mobile.

Some of the measures that could contribute to improved proficiency—such as increasing the use of ICT-based teaching—do not require huge additional funding. Other measures, however, such as reducing class sizes, improving teacher training and promoting exchanges, do imply a cost, as well as a trade-off with other priorities and subjects in school policies and curricula (See also Chapter 4).

⁶⁰ European Commission (2011). *Languages for Jobs: providing multilingual communication skills for the labour market*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/languages-for-jobs-report_en.pdf

⁶¹ <http://www.celan-platform.eu/>

Increasing and re-orienting investments in this field can certainly prove worthwhile, given that private tutoring, remedial tuition and certification of competences in languages represent today a considerable cost for families. Improved provision would also introduce an element of equity, ensuring that all young people are equally able to seize interesting employment and mobility opportunities.

Host Member States and employers could be more active in providing training in the language of the host Member State to incoming workers. The economic sectors benefiting from improved supply might be asked to support the effort by providing additional funding and advice on the competences needed. The European Commission's programmes, and in particular *Erasmus for All*, will support mobility and exchanges at all levels.

Insufficient language skills can seriously affect not only the professional perspectives of people interested in finding jobs abroad, but also their well-being, as happens with workers who do not fully understand the safety rules in the construction business, or in other sectors, as witnessed by several complaints in the health care sector.

3.2. Guidance to Member States

Language learning outcomes must be carefully targeted on the basis of an accurate analysis of the future learning and professional needs of pupils

Member States should in particular consider the following:

1. Proficiency in more than one foreign language will make a decisive difference in the future. The choice of languages and emphasis on competences should be inspired by a clear vision of their value for mobility and for work in enterprises and organisations active at the international level, with a focus on practical, communicative skills.
2. Education systems need to develop this targeted approach through closer contact with employers, chambers of commerce and other stakeholders, linking language teaching to the creation of EU-level career paths.
3. In the light of this cooperation, Member States should provide a broader offer of languages and adequate guidance to pupils and their families.

3.3. Support at EU level

In the next few years, EU support will be primarily organised around the following:

- Innovative tools and methods for language learning will be developed in the framework of the strategic partnerships of Erasmus for All, making full use of the existing platforms to bring together representatives of the civil society and the world of business.
- The OMC working group 'Languages in education and training' (see section 2.3) will identify and analyse good practices for up-scaling language skills for jobs.
- Multilingualism policy conferences give a broader perspective to the EU multilingualism policy as well as a strong orientation to international commercial and cultural exchanges.

Practical support will also be provided through European tools:

- The EU Skills Panorama will help forecast skills needs, including language skill need, in countries and sectors;
- Europass and the European Skills Passport will support self-assessment and recording of language skills, using the well-established Common European Reference Framework for Languages. This helps individuals on the one hand to plan their further language learning, on the other hand to seek validation of their skills, which in turn lead to their better use in working environments.

4. LANGUAGES: SMART INVESTMENT PAYS

Member States already put significant investment into language teaching. This investment is mainly focused on the initial and in-service training of teachers, but can also cover assessment and certification activities, school trips abroad, the purchase of technological tools and development of up-to date materials. Smarter use of this funding can significantly increase the return on investment in language teaching.

In many cases, the reforms suggested in this document do not involve significant additional spending, but rather aim at making current spending more cost-effective, through careful targeting and monitoring of the learning outcomes. Measures such as the adoption of CLIL or early language learning rely primarily on staff already working for the national education systems, and thus additional costs would be limited to training these teachers in the relevant languages and in the use of these new methodologies.

Both early language learning and content/language integrated learning also require the development of new, tailored materials. The development of these could be sponsored by educational authorities, at reasonable cost, until the market has reached the critical mass needed to make it sustainable. In the case of language lessons, on the contrary, teaching subsidies and real-life materials (newspapers, TV programmes, audio and video podcasts, VOIP connections)⁶² are becoming cheaper or free as well as being more easily available. Greater use of open educational resources and ICT-based learning can also increase efficiency of learning and provide low or no-cost resources.

More than any other competence, language learning does not lend itself to a 'one size fits all' solution. National and local peculiarities will require specific solutions taking into account historical connections, current expectations and visions for the future. The situation of each Member State is clearly different dependant on many factors, ranging from the current achievement in language teaching, the international status and perception of the main language of instruction, the geographic proximity of the foreign language(s) studied and the availability of film/TV/Internet content in the original language. Every Member State will therefore have to find its own solution, bearing in mind the priority objective of furthering EU integration and stimulating sustainable growth and economic development.

⁶² Voice Over Internet Protocol

Increasing the investment in foreign language teaching is necessary if Member States are serious about their intention to provide all pupils, and not just the affluent élite, with an ability to speak two or more foreign languages. There is little doubt that such investment will bring concrete returns to society in general, to the EU economy and to each individual pupil. Well targeted language skills responding to the requests of the labour market mean reduced unemployment, increased mobility of students and workers, better integration, accrued employability and increased capacity for internationalisation of markets.

5. ASSESSING LANGUAGE SKILLS: THE EUROPEAN BENCHMARK ON LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

5.1. The issue to be monitored

There was a significant lack of data on actual language skills in the EU...

A policy aimed at preparing young Europeans for entry in the labour market and at providing EU enterprises with qualified staff, as described in chapters 2 and 3, must be based on evidence of the effectiveness of education systems in improving language teaching and learning.

This is the reason why, as already mentioned, in 2002 Heads of State and Government in Barcelona set the objective of making European Union education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 and not only called “*for further action ... to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age...*” but also required the “*establishment of a linguistic competence indicator.*”⁶³ This decision arose from the lack of data on the actual language skills of people in the EU and the need for reliable systems to measure progress towards the Barcelona objective.

Current data shows that language skills are unevenly spread across countries. Yet, learning a foreign language is already part of curricula in all Member States, involving real efforts by authorities, teachers and learners. This clearly indicates that not only do more languages have to be learnt, but they must also be taught more effectively (see chapter 2).

....which is crucial for identifying good practice and enabling peer learning

Progress towards this objective can only be measured using reliable data on the outcomes of foreign language teaching and learning based upon objective tests of language ability. Analysis of such data will facilitate a more productive comparison of language policies, and language teaching methods between Member States, with a view to identifying and sharing good practice within the Open Method of Coordination in the field of education and training.

Until recently such data was not available, and to fill the gap it was decided to launch the European Survey on Language Competences. The data collected within the Survey constitute a valid assessment of functional foreign language proficiency towards the end of compulsory education. The ESLC thus provides a sound basis for establishing European benchmarks (reference levels) which will serve as a tool for European governments in developing their

⁶³ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc4794_en.pdf

language learning policies and improving national standards in accordance with the Barcelona objective.

5.2. Laying the foundation for the benchmark on language competences

Strengthening the evidence base led to the development of the European Survey on Language Competences...

The first European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) was launched in 2008, conducted in 2011, and the results were published in June 2012. The ESLC provided participating countries with data on foreign language skills and filled the gap in the existing information on foreign language skills, supplementing the input data compiled by Eurydice and Eurostat and public opinion polls like the Eurobarometer.

The Survey, completed to international education survey standards similar to PISA,⁶⁴ PIRLS⁶⁵ and TIMSS,⁶⁶ provided comparable data of foreign language competences across skills, languages and countries of more than 52,000 pupils at the end of lower secondary education (ISCED 2).⁶⁷

Fourteen countries took part in the survey: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and UK-England. Belgium's three linguistic communities participated separately to give a total of 16 education systems.

Pupils were tested in their first or second foreign language to be chosen from the five most widely taught EU official languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The language tests covered three language skills: listening, reading and writing. The results of the survey are reported in terms of the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*. Each pupil's achievement was assessed according to four levels from basic (A1) to advanced independent user (B2). In addition, the "pre-A1" level denotes achievement below A1.

Along with the language skills assessment, contextual information was collected through questionnaires filled in by all tested pupils, and more than 5,000 foreign language teachers and 2,300 school principals. Furthermore, information on the education systems was collected through National Research Coordinators.

...and the results of the first survey were published in 2012

Chapters 2 and 3 of the present document have referred to the main findings of the ESLC:

- an overall low level of competences in both first and second foreign languages tested
- a wide range of ability across countries in Europe

⁶⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

⁶⁵ <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/index.html>

⁶⁶ <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2011/index.html>

⁶⁷ The exceptions to test at ISCED 3 were for duly justified reasons accorded to: Belgium NL (second language), Belgium FR (both languages), Belgium DE (second language), Bulgaria (both languages) and England (both languages).

- that English is the language most widely learnt as the first foreign language and the language perceived by pupils to be most useful and easy to learn
- that better language competences are positively correlated with the use of the foreign language by teachers and pupils in meaningful communication; an early start in foreign language learning; learning more foreign languages; the use of the foreign language through media outside of school; and the perceived usefulness of language learning.

Furthermore, secondary analysis of the datasets undertaken by CRELL⁶⁸ confirms that language competences are positively associated with the parents' socio-economic status. Finally, girls in general achieve better results than boys.⁶⁹

The survey results thus confirm the mismatch between the language competences of young Europeans at the end of compulsory education and those required for a dynamic, unified labour market. Some Member States are already close to the EU objective of "mother tongue plus two," but the majority remains far from this target. The need to improve language competences significantly is obvious.

The Advisory Board for the European Indicator of Language Competence was set up to work more closely with member state experts...

In 2006, on the basis of the Commission's Communication "*The European Indicator of Language Competence*," the Council concluded on a number of key issues concerning the European Indicator of Language Competence and asked for the establishment of an expert group with the mandate to advise the Commission on "*policy issues, technical matters and all forms of the technical support and to monitor progress regarding the practical use of the Indicator.*"⁷⁰

The Advisory Board for the European Indicator of Language Competence was set up in October 2006. Composed of experts from all Member States, the candidates' countries and a representative of the Council of Europe, the Board has thus been closely involved in the preparation and monitoring of the ESLC from the very beginning, providing expertise and strong support for the Commission. The Board has, for example, contributed with input for the Communication "*Framework for the European survey on language competences*"⁷¹ (April 2007) where the Commission reported back to the Council on the progress of work.

The Board also gave advice to the Commission when the terms of references for the call for tender were prepared. The call concerned the selection of contractors in charge of

⁶⁸ The Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL) was established in 2005 in order to provide expertise in the field of indicator-based evaluation and monitoring of education and training systems. See: <http://crell.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

⁶⁹ Costa, P. & Araujo, L. (2012). *Analysis of SurveyLang Data by Gender and Socio-Economic Status*. June 15th, 2012

⁷⁰ Commission decision of setting up the European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board; 19 October 2006.

⁷¹ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc662_en.pdf

implementing the Survey. In 2008, the contract was awarded to the Consortium SurveyLang.⁷² An intensive four years work on the survey began.

...enabling their involvement in the development of the European survey

The Board provided its expertise at all stages and for all aspects of the development of the Survey: language tests, contextual questionnaires, testing tool, testing design, sampling procedures, translation procedures, linking to the CEFR, field operations, specification of responsibilities of the National Research Coordinators and scheme for the data analysis. It also offered detailed and very valuable comments to the final and technical report from the Survey. Finally, the Members of the Advisory Board, as well as of the Council of Europe, CRELL and Eurydice, have contributed to the Commission's proposal for a European benchmark on foreign language competences.⁷³ In the discussions on this issue at the plenary meetings, the representatives from non-participating countries were also very active (e.g. Denmark, Germany). This shows that the interest in a benchmark extends well beyond the surveyed countries.

5.3. The approach to setting a European benchmark on foreign language competences

The benchmark will be a crucial tool in both encouraging and monitoring progress...

Education and training lie at the heart of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy. As a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges "European benchmarks" form a series of reference levels of European average performance which support the strategic objectives outlined in the Council Conclusions of May 2009.⁷⁴ The Council clearly set out the role that benchmarks should play:

"They should not be considered as concrete targets for individual countries to reach by 2020. Rather, Member States are invited to consider, on the basis of national priorities and whilst taking account of changing economic circumstances, how and to what extent they can contribute to the collective achievement of the European benchmarks through national actions. Such benchmarks are reference levels of EU average performance; they are less directive than the headline targets within the overall Europe 2020 strategy which are translated into national targets."

The Council specified that these benchmarks should be based solely on comparable data and take account of the differing situations in individual Member States. Moreover, the Council gave a mandate to the Commission to develop a benchmark on languages by stating:

⁷² The Consortium "SurveyLang" was composed of the following partners: University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (which was the coordinator), Centre International d'Etudes Pédagogiques (CIEP), Goethe-Institut, Instituto Cervantes, National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO), Gallup, Universidad de Salamanca and Università per Stranieri di Perugia.

⁷³ In addition to the plenary meetings, a special meeting of the subgroup on a language benchmark was held. The representatives of the following countries took part in the meeting: Belgium FL, Estonia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and UK (representatives of England and Scotland).

⁷⁴ Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (May 2009): http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf

“In view of the importance of learning two foreign languages from an early age, as highlighted in the March 2002 Barcelona European Council conclusions, the Commission is invited to submit to the Council – by the end of 2012 - a proposal for a possible benchmark in this area, based on the on-going work on language competences.”⁷⁵

In accordance with the Council request, the Commission—in close collaboration with the Advisory Board and researchers from CRELL—elaborated a proposal for a European benchmark on foreign language competences. It is this proposal that is presented in this document. Once the benchmark is adopted, it will become part of the ET 2020 framework of indicators and benchmarks within the Open Method of Coordination in Education and Training.

...still providing flexibility on which foreign languages should be the priority in national or regional contexts

For this proposal, the European Commission adopts the following definition of a foreign language as established by Eurydice:

“A language described as ‘foreign’ in the curriculum laid down by the central (or top-level) education authorities which is based on an education-related definition, unrelated to the political status of a language. Thus certain languages regarded as regional or minority languages from a political perspective may be included in the curriculum as foreign languages. In the same way, certain classical languages may be considered as foreign languages in certain curricula. Foreign languages may be described as modern languages (as opposed to classical languages) in some curricula.”⁷⁶

Considering this conceptual complexity, it should be stressed that the implementation of the language benchmark in Member States calls for decisions on the definition of ‘first’ and ‘second’ foreign language to be taken at the education systems level.

The benchmark is a tool to assess the efficiency of education systems...

First of all, incentivising *efficiency* is the very *raison d’être* for the benchmark: the primary objective is to set up a tool that helps to make national education systems in Europe more efficient in teaching and learning foreign languages. In this respect, the Advisory Board experts reached the conclusion that the benchmark should be based on simple values, as expressed by the average attainment of CEFR levels in participating countries, rather than on weighted values. By choosing this approach, the Commission’s proposal for a European benchmark on language competences should be understood as a tool to assess European education systems and their ability to enhance linguistic competences.

⁷⁵ Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (May 2009): http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf

⁷⁶ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, p.138. Original emphasis.

Acknowledging the Council Conclusions⁷⁷ of May 2009 on the role of benchmarks, the benchmark on foreign language competences defines a strong collective ambition at the European level. The benchmark should thus not be confused with national targets. In this respect, ESLC provided evidence that the range of language competences across Europe is indeed wide. The European benchmark could therefore be accompanied by recommendations to Member States on how they might set their national targets and contribute to the benchmark. Such recommendations should also mention the possibilities for Member States to draw up targets in each of the three skills tested in 2011, namely listening, reading and writing.

...will be established for both first and second foreign languages...

Second, the proposal for a European benchmark must take into account the ESLC *evidence* that achievement in the second foreign language tested is lower than in the first foreign language. In effect, there will be a separate benchmark for the first and second foreign language learnt. By having two separate targets the proposal presented in this document recognises the evidence on the current state of play in foreign language learning in Europe.

...but most importantly will be clear and simple to understand

Third, regarding *communicability*, the European benchmark on foreign language competences, as all other benchmarks in the ET 2020 strategy, has to be simple and clear. Only such a benchmark will give a strong message and thereby serve the benchmark's primary objective of promoting efficiency. For the first foreign language in particular, a global benchmark, taking into account the combined level of competences in the three tested skills is a reasonable proxy which will make the political message easy to convey to policy-makers, professionals and the wider public.

5.4. Benchmarking the first foreign language

The experts of the Advisory Board concluded that the level of independent user (the broad B-level)⁷⁸ is the most appropriate proficiency level to incorporate in the benchmark. This choice considers the ESLC evidence as well as the ambition that young people should have a sound basis of foreign language competences, preparing them for further studies and the labour market.

Importantly, in a majority of European countries, official guidelines for language teaching have already established minimum levels of attainment which correspond with the CEFR. In this respect, a European benchmark referring to the proficiency level of B1 for the first foreign language appear well in line with the existing ambitions on national level. Out of the 19 countries or regions within countries which have adopted the CEFR, 11 have thus set the

⁷⁷ Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"); May 2009. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/107622.pdf

⁷⁸ The broad B-level includes the levels B1 and B2 level of the CEFR. B1 level denotes 'an independent language user who can deal with straightforward, familiar matters.' B2 level refers to 'an independent language user who can express him/herself clearly and effectively.'

level of B1 (or B2 in the case of Luxembourg) as the minimum level of attainment for the first foreign language at the end of compulsory general education, while 8 refer to level A2.⁷⁹

Figure 1 (see Chapter 2) highlighted the huge differences in attainment between education systems. Against this background, **Table 3** shows the ESLC average results of achievement in the first foreign language tested as well as the average of the three best performing countries. The percentages refer to how many pupils reached the independent user level (B1 level or higher):

Table 3 ESLC average, and best performing countries in first foreign language tested
Percentage of pupils achieving the level of independent user (level B1 or higher)⁸⁰

ESLC average 2011 (average of 16 education systems)	Average for three best performers 2011 (Malta, Sweden, Netherlands)	Proposed benchmark level for 2020
42%	77%	50%

The Commission's proposal for a benchmark sets the ambition that at least 50 % of pupils overall in Europe should be independent users in the first foreign language. This considers the evidence on the current performance of lower secondary pupils and the time horizon to 2020. Thus, **Table 4** shows that about one third of education systems participating in the survey are already performing above the proposed benchmark: Malta, Sweden, Netherlands, Estonia and Slovenia. Moreover, one third is not far behind and could reasonably be expected to reach the benchmark before 2020: Greece, Croatia, German Community of Belgium and Bulgaria. The remaining ones whose performances are far from a satisfactory level should be encouraged to set ambitious national targets: England, France, Poland, Spain, Flemish Community of Belgium and Portugal.

Table 4 Achievement in first foreign language tested by country
Percentage of pupils achieving the level of independent user (level B1 or higher)⁸¹

Country/education system	Language	% at level B1 or higher
Malta	English	82
Sweden	English	82
Netherlands	English	66
Estonia	English	61
Slovenia	English	54
Greece	English	48
Croatia	English	47
<i>ESLC average</i>	-	42
German Community of Belgium	French	40

⁷⁹ EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, pp. 130-131.

⁸⁰ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

⁸¹ European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>

Bulgaria	English	35
Portugal	English	31
French Community of Belgium	English	29
Spain	English	27
Poland	English	25
Flemish Community of Belgium	French	22
France	English	14
England	French	9

In the formulation of the benchmark, attention should be given to the term referring to the group of pupils or young people. Terms (e.g. ISCED level, lower secondary education, compulsory education, or age levels) are bound to involve a degree of ambiguity, given the diversity of European education systems. Such ambiguity may turn out to be an obstacle in the operationalisation of the benchmark.

With regard to the first foreign language, the Commission proposal refers to the group of '15 year-olds' because it is the most consistent, clear and strong option. In addition, age levels are also used in definition of other benchmarks within the coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks ET 2020⁸². Finally, even if the typical age of pupils tested in the ESLC was 14 or 15 (except Bulgaria (16 for both languages), and Belgium NL and DE (13 in first target language), a benchmark using the term of '15 year-olds' will leave a room for testing pupils slightly younger.

Therefore, the proposed benchmark for the first foreign language is formulated as follows:

By 2020, at least 50% of 15 year-olds should attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language.⁸³

5.5. Benchmark for the second foreign language

The Barcelona objective that all children should be taught at least two foreign languages provides the political background for the Commission also proposing a benchmark for the second foreign language. This document has presented evidence (see Chapters 2 and 3), with respect to the current teaching and learning of the second foreign language across Europe as well as the need to improve the current situation so that all young people learn at least two foreign languages because of the decisive difference it makes for mobility and growth.

In this respect, the Commission's proposal for a benchmark targeting the second foreign language should be seen as complementary to the proposed benchmark on skills in the first foreign language. Together, they are meant to encourage European education systems to prepare pupils better for our globalised world.

As presented in the previous section, the benchmark on the first foreign language focuses on the *outcomes* of language learning in terms of proficiency levels. The benchmark for the

⁸² E.g. "The share of 15-year olds with insufficient abilities in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%."

⁸³ The proficiency level of independent user covers level B1 or higher of the CEFR.

second foreign language targets the *input* in terms of the quantity of pupils learning at least two foreign languages, in accordance with the Barcelona objective.

The EILC Advisory Board and the Thematic Working Group "Languages in Education and Training" have shown great commitment to include the second foreign language in the benchmark. In particular, they have expressed interest in explicitly targeting the level of proficiency also for the second foreign language. However, the input-focused approach adopted in this proposal seems more realistic for the time being, considering that a benchmark promoting the quality in the teaching and learning of the second foreign language would be more complex than for the first foreign language.

The main reason is that collecting homogeneous and comparable data is made difficult by the broad differences among education systems, in particular because in the majority of countries only a limited proportion of the pupil population is actually learning a second foreign language.⁸⁴

In addition, due to specific country situations, for several education systems participating in the ESLC, their second most widely taught language is not one of the five languages assessed within the Survey.⁸⁵

Therefore, the proposed benchmark for the second foreign language is focused on the goal of progressively extending the teaching of a second foreign language teaching to the great majority of pupils during lower secondary education.

The setting of the benchmark's reference level must consider two significant trends which were highlighted in Chapter 2 of the present document:

- The variation between Member States regarding the emphasis on learning two foreign languages during lower secondary education;
- The increasing emphasis on an earlier start in learning a second foreign language across Europe as a whole

First, the current EU-27 data conceal large variations across Europe (see Figure 3, Chapter 2), underlining the large scope for enhancing the learning of two foreign languages in the majority of Member States.

Supporting this argument is the fact that in the period 2005-2010, the percentage of pupils learning two languages in lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) *decreased* in half of the countries, while in the other half the percentages *increased*. With a few exceptions, the decreases are quite small, while the increases in several countries are significant.⁸⁶

Second, the present paper (see Table 1) shows that the EU-27 average regarding the share of pupils in lower secondary education learning two foreign languages increased remarkably by 14 percentage points from 47 % to 61 %, in the five year period between 2005-2010. 75 %

⁸⁴ See Figure 3, and Appendix, Figure 5 and Table 6

⁸⁵ This was the case in Bulgaria, Estonia, the French- and German-speaking Communities of Belgium, and Spain.

⁸⁶ See Appendix, Table 6

provides a realistic prospective percentage for 2020, keeping some of the current momentum in the field.

Against this background, the Commission proposal for a benchmark regarding the second foreign language is expressed in the following way:

By 2020, at least 75% of pupils in lower secondary education⁸⁷ should study at least two foreign languages (compared to the present 61 %)

Whereas the benchmark for the first foreign language relies on the ESLC for the production of relevant data, the assessment of the benchmark on the second foreign language will be conducted using Eurostat data. The practice for collecting the relevant data sets is already in place for nearly all EU-27 education systems.⁸⁸

5.6. An important supplementary indicator: the share of “low-achievers”

Policy and practice should give particular incentives for countries to reduce the proportion of lower-achieving pupils. Corresponding to similar indicators in the field of education and training which refer to 'insufficient abilities' (in reading, mathematics and science), the Commission proposes to establish a supplementary indicator assessing the proportion of low achievers who do not reach the level of basic user:

The percentage of 15 year-olds who do not achieve the level of basic user in the first foreign language⁸⁹

5.7. Future action

The quality of data must be improved to better assess progress...

In order to monitor progress towards the “mother tongue + two” Barcelona objective, it will be necessary to continue improving the collection of data in order to assess where Europe stands regarding the language competences of young people.

To ensure the validity of such data, the European Survey on Language Competences must be repeated on a regular basis, like other international education surveys. It must also be extended to cover speaking skills, other languages and more countries in future rounds.

When endorsing the framework for the European Language Indicator, the Council stressed in its conclusions that:⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Lower secondary education equals ISCED level 2. Mode of calculation: The percentage of students learning 0, 1, 2 (or more) foreign languages is calculated with respect to all students in all years of lower secondary education. The number of students learning 0, 1, 2 (or more) foreign languages is divided by the corresponding number of students enrolled at ISCED level 2.

⁸⁸ See Figure C7a: Percentage of students learning 0, 1, 2 or more language(s) in lower secondary education (ISCED 2), in Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, pp.67-68.

⁸⁹ In the CEFR, the lower threshold for the proficiency level of basic user is level A1

- *because respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union, the Indicator should be based upon data concerning the knowledge of **all the official languages** of the European Union taught as foreign languages in the Union; but for practical reasons it would be advisable, in the first round of data-gathering, for tests to be made available in those official languages of the European Union that are most widely taught in the Member States, to the extent that they provide a sufficiently large sample of testees;*
- *the Indicator should assess **competence in the four productive and receptive skills**; but for practical reasons it would be advisable, in the first round of data-gathering, for tests to be made available in the three language skills which may be assessed most readily (i.e. listening comprehension, reading comprehension and writing);*
- *the tests should be “administered to a representative sample of the target population in **each Member State**;”*

...and more member states must participate in the ESLC to provide this data

The Members of the Advisory Board fully agreed on the requirements to be fulfilled in securing the validity and the relevance of the benchmark. Based on their countries' experience in participating in other international surveys, they supported the view of the Council and the Commission that the next round of the Survey would need to include the development of tests for more taught foreign languages in the EU and instruments assessing speaking competences. Another major challenge will be to convince more, hopefully all, Member States to participate despite the economic crisis.

Once adopted, the new benchmark can improve outcomes through increasing levels of evidence-based policy-making...

The European benchmark on language competences will provide a strong incentive for national governments to seek to improve learning outcomes and achievements of pupils.

Experiences with European benchmarks in fields like early school leaving or number of graduates in Math, Science and Technology have shown positive effects. A European benchmark on languages is therefore likely to be a significant step forward towards the Barcelona objective of “mother tongue + two foreign languages.”

...alongside the Open Method of Coordination to enable exchange of good practice and provide a forum for reflection

According to the Education and Training 2020 strategy, the Open Method of Coordination is the appropriate working method for the exchange of best policy practice among Member States in the area of Education and Training.

The OMC requires exchanges and identification of good practices on the European level based on valid comparable data. A benchmark on languages, as part of the coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks will support the realisation of the Education and

⁹⁰ Council Conclusions on the European indicator of language competence (July 2006).
http://ec.europa.eu/languages/documents/doc662_en.pdf.

Training 2020 strategy. The exchanges and mutual learning will provide EU added value to the efforts of national policy makers.

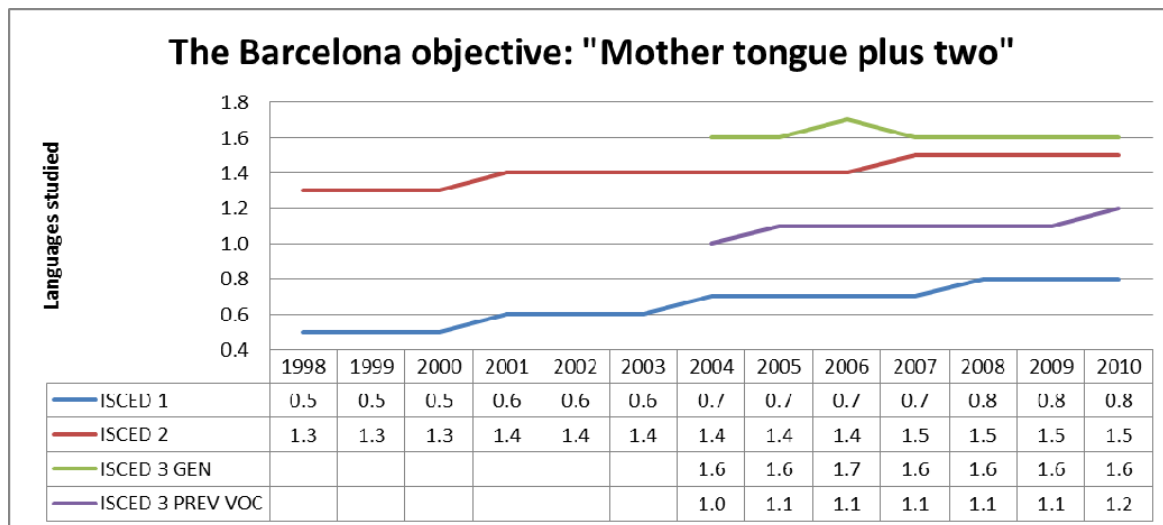
In this context, the Commission will lead the on-going reflection on how to improve policies for better language learning through the work of the Advisory Board for the language indicator and the OMC working group “Languages in education and training” established by the Council.

The use of the benchmark on languages in all those contexts will ensure that exchanges within the OMC are evidence-based, signalling the EU’s determination to tackle the education challenges highlighted within Europe 2020. Helping young Europeans to acquire the skills needed to succeed in the EU labour market is more essential than ever for their employability and mobility. Good knowledge of foreign languages is one of the basic skills in today’s Europe. Therefore, language learning policy needs to tackle the major challenge of improving the efficiency of education systems in delivering language competences.

Once adopted, the new benchmark will be taken up in the new Education and Training Monitor.

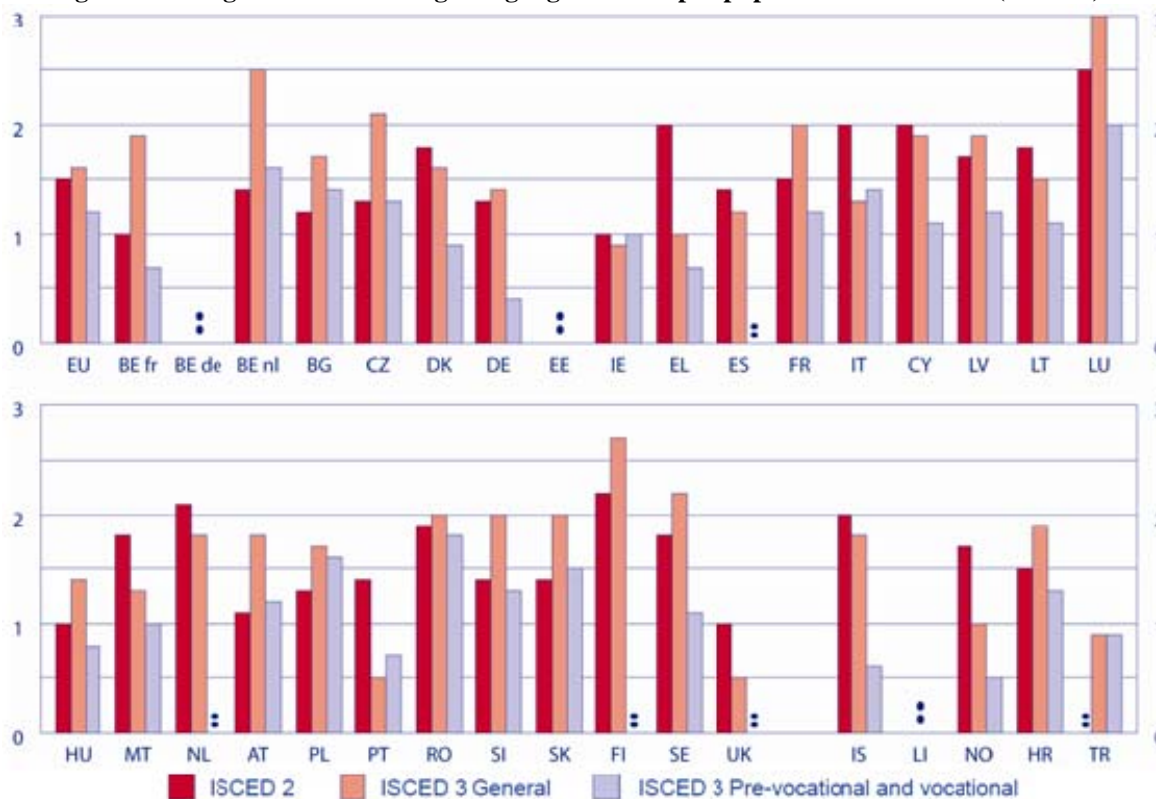
APPENDIX

Figure 4 Number of languages studied per pupil at ISCED 1, 2 and 3, EU average (1998-2010)



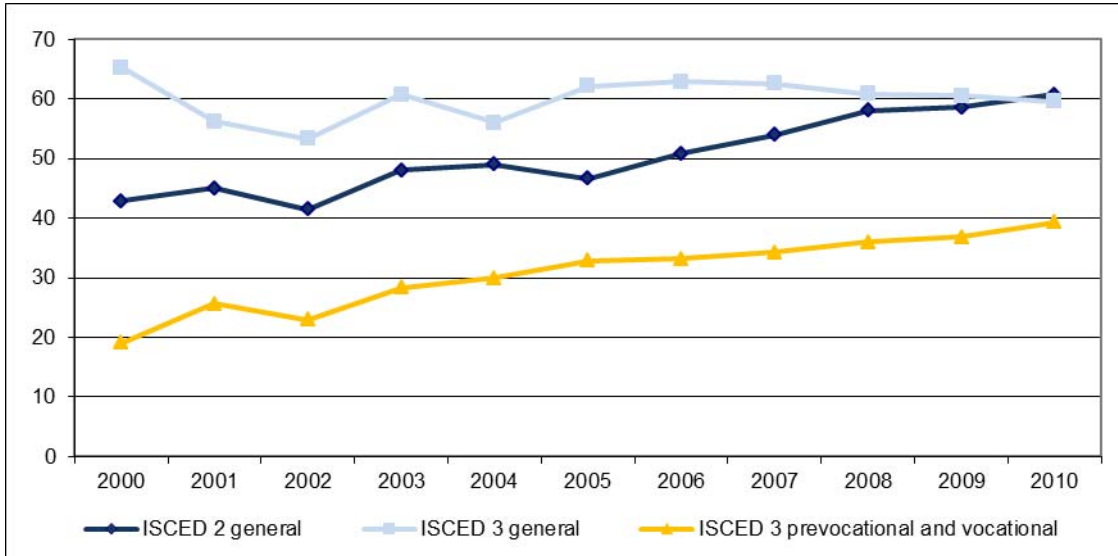
Source: Eurostat (UOE)

Figure 5 Average number of foreign languages studied per pupil at ISCED 2 and 3 (2009/10)



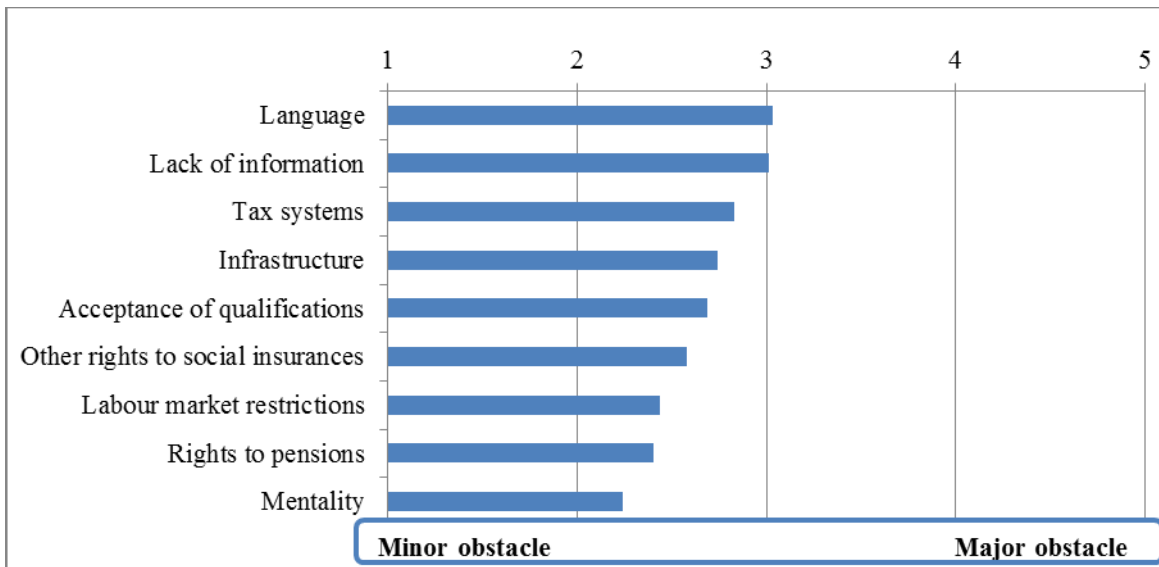
Source: EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, p.65.
 Note: Value for Turkey, ISCED level 2, corrected compared to original figure in Eurydice report.

Figure 6 Percentage of pupils learning at least two foreign languages in EU, 2000-2010



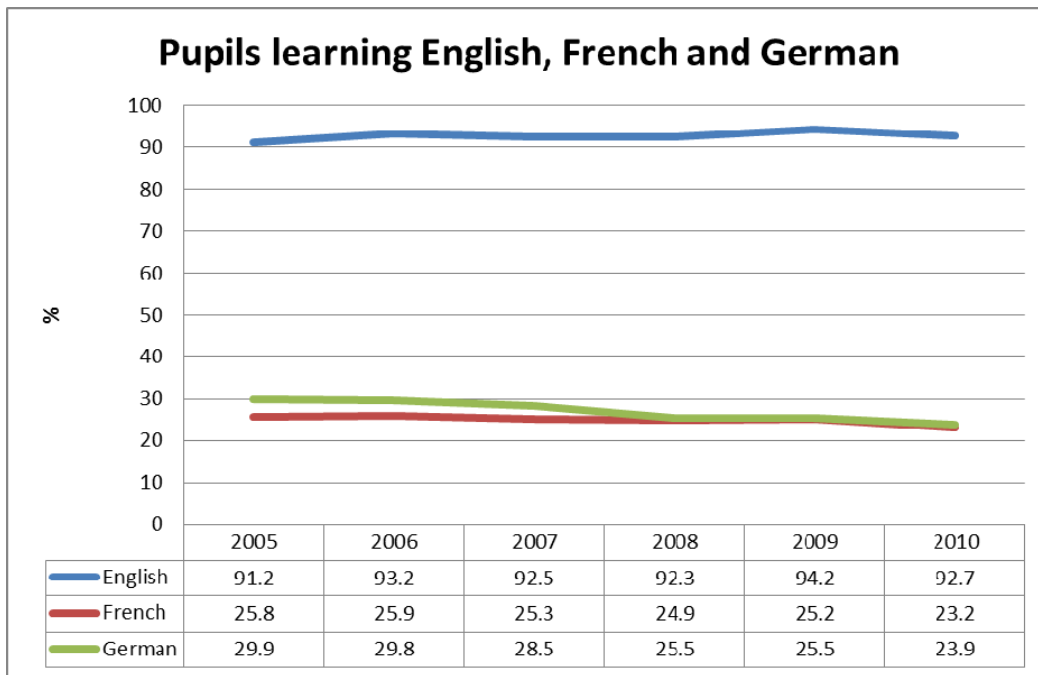
Source: Eurostat (UOE)

Table 5 Obstacles to cross-border mobility in EU-27/EEA/EFTA countries



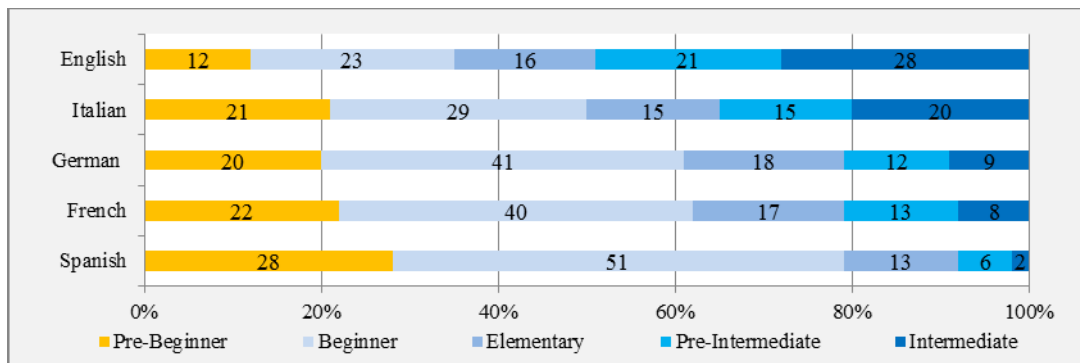
Source: Scientific Report on the Mobility of Cross-Border Workers within the EU-27/EEA/EFTA Countries, January 2009, page 43. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3459&langId=en>
 Explanatory note: Table based on online survey involving 440 cross-border labour market experts in the EURES network, government departments, universities, and trade unions. The experts assessed the significance of obstacles on mobility, using numbers from 1 (minor obstacle) to 5 (major obstacle). The table shows mean values of the experts' responses.

Figure 7 Percentage of pupils learning English, French and German at ISCED 3/upper secondary education (general) (2005-2010)



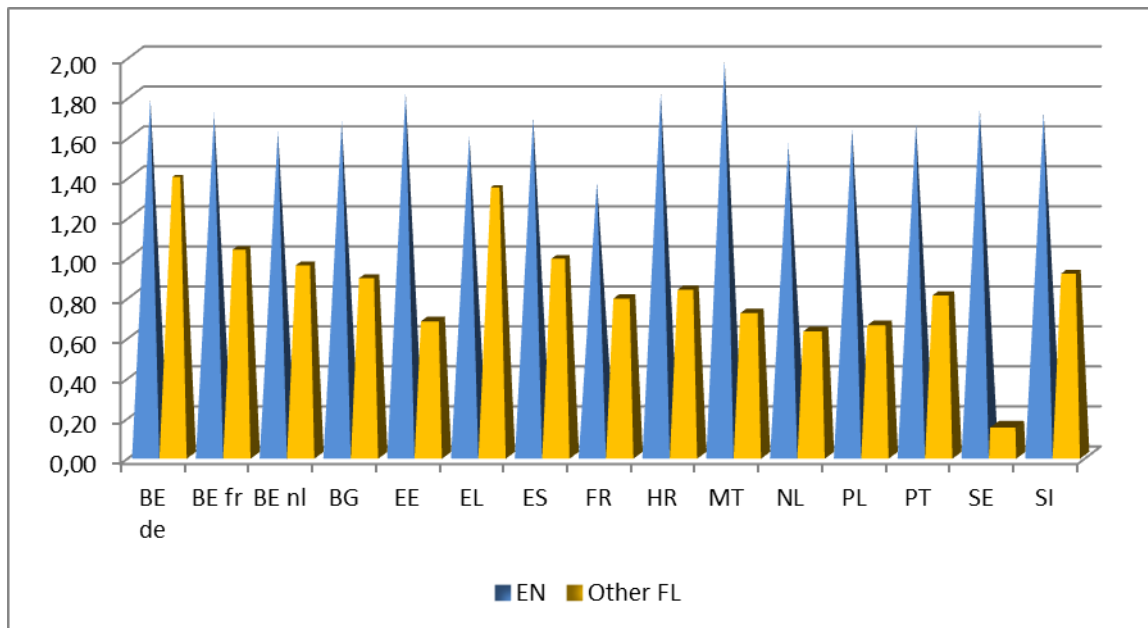
Source: Eurostat (UOE)

Figure 8 Global scores for pupils by language tested in the ESLC



Source: European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-eslc_en.pdf

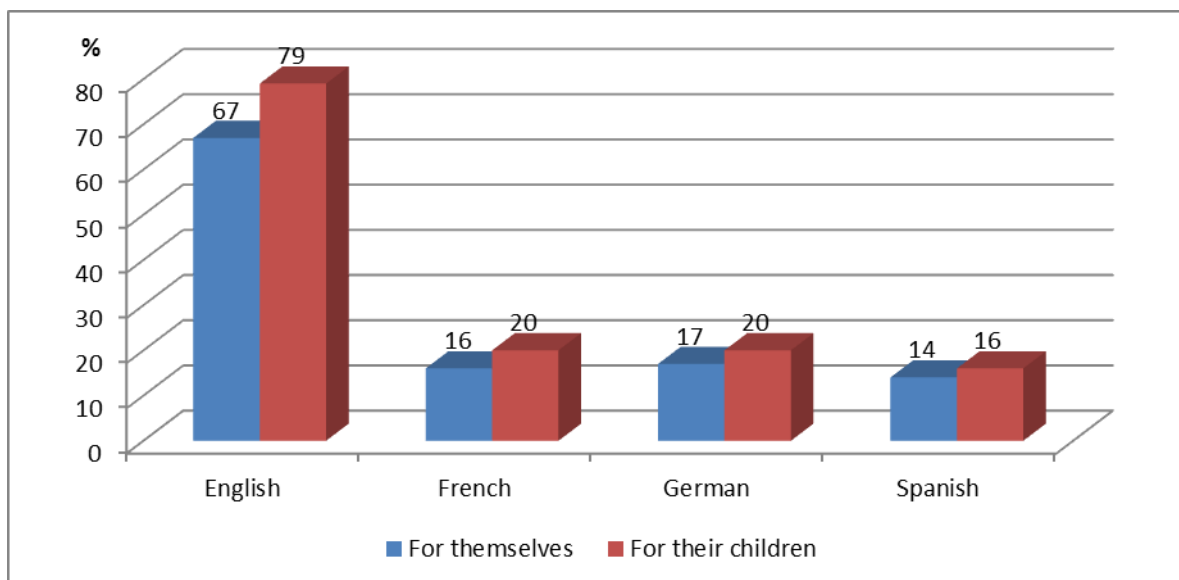
Figure 9 Perceived usefulness of foreign languages (ESLC 2012)



Source: European Commission (2012). *First European Survey on language competences: Final Report*. http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf

Explanatory note: The scale is based on pupils' responses in the ESLC with regard to their perception of the usefulness of languages. Three topics were covered: How useful pupils find the language for different purposes; how much they like the language as a school subject; and how useful the pupils report the language as a subject is in general. Pupils' answers were ordered on a scale from 0 to 3, depending on the degree pupils reported they found the language useful and liked it as a subject. The graph shows the mean of this index for each of the education systems participating in the ESLC.

Figure 10 Perceived usefulness of foreign languages (Eurobarometer 2012)



Source: Eurobarometer 386, *Europeans and their languages*, June 2012, p. 69-75.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf

Explanatory note: Eurobarometer respondents were asked to name the two languages, apart from their mother tongue, that they believed to be most useful for their personal development, and to name the two languages they believed to be most useful for children to learn for their future.

Table 6 Percentage of students learning zero, one, or two or more languages in lower secondary education (ISCED 2), 2004/05, 2006/07, 2009/2010

	NO foreign language			ONE foreign language			TWO OR MORE foreign languages		
	2005	2007	2010	2005	2007	2010	2005	2007	2010
European Union	1.2	1.2	1.8	52.0	44.8	37.4	46.7	54.0	60.8
Belgium (fr)	0.2	0.2	0.7	99.2	99.6	99.3	0.7	0.2	0.0
Belgium (de)	0.0	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Belgium (nl)	4.3	6.0	7.1	47.5	46.0	46.7	48.1	48.0	46.2
Bulgaria	1.9	0.2	0.2	74.7	72.0	78.6	23.4	27.8	21.2
Czech Republic	2.7	3.3	2.4	91.5	83.8	66.1	5.8	12.9	31.5
Denmark	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.7	16.5	99.4	99.3	83.5
Germany	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Estonia	0.1	2.0	:	16.5	3.4	:	83.4	94.6	:
Ireland	12.3	12.7	11.9	75.6	76.6	78.0	12.0	10.7	10.1
Greece	0.2	:	0.1	5.5	:	2.7	94.3	:	97.2
Spain	0.9	1.7	0.9	58.6	58.3	59.7	40.5	40.0	39.4
France	0.3	0.2	0.2	50.5	49.0	48.0	49.2	50.8	51.8
Italy	0.0	0.2	0.0	56.1	2.8	0.5	43.9	97.0	99.5
Cyprus	0.0	0.0	0.1	:	:	7.8	:	:	92.1
Latvia	1.7	2.1	0.9	37.6	24.4	25.4	60.7	73.5	73.7
Lithuania	1.4	1.5	2.5	21.2	20.1	17.9	77.5	78.4	79.6
Luxembourg	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Hungary	:	5.6	4.6	:	88.6	89.9	:	5.8	5.5
Malta	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.9	0.0	4.2	95.1	100.0	95.8
Netherlands	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.8	20.8	24.1	79.2	79.2	75.9
Austria	0.3	:	0.3	90.4	:	90.8	9.3	:	8.9
Poland	:	1.9	1.8	:	89.5	32.9	:	8.5	65.3
Portugal	0.7	:	24.0	10.5	:	11.6	88.8	:	64.4
Romania	1.4	0.0	1.3	3.7	3.7	4.1	95.0	96.3	94.7
Slovenia	1.8	0.0	0.0	73.3	64.6	57.0	24.9	35.4	43.0
Slovakia	1.0	1.2	1.4	86.4	82.4	60.1	12.6	16.4	38.5
Finland	0.6	0.6	0.7	2.0	1.7	1.2	97.4	97.7	98.2
Sweden	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.9	27.0	25.6	72.1	73.0	74.4
United Kingdom	0.4	0.4	3.0	99.6	99.6	97.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: EACEA/Eurydice (2012). *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe 2012*, p. 67

ANNEX - FACTS AND FIGURES

1. LANGUAGE TEACHING, LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EUROPE

- In primary education, the percentage of pupils learning a foreign language went up from 67.5% in 2004/2005 to 78.2% in 2009/2010
- The average number of languages studied by EU pupils in primary school went up from 0.6 in 2002 to 0.8 in 2010
- In lower secondary education, the same average increased from 1.4 in 2002 to 1.5 in 2010
- Upper secondary pupils attending general education studied on average 1.6 languages in 2010, the same level as in 2004
- In vocational and prevocational training, the average improved from 1.0 to 1.2 over the same period.

2. STARTING AGE

- Due to the reform of 2008/09, Poland reduced the percentage of pupils not learning any foreign language in primary school from 45.5% in 2006/07 to 2.3% in 2009/10.
- In the United Kingdom, the same percentage went down from 59.9% in 2004/05 to 25.5% in 2009/10.
- In the Czech Republic, only 29% of primary school pupils did not learn a foreign language in 2009/10, compared to 53.5% in 2004/05.

3. NUMBER OF LANGUAGES TAUGHT

- In lower secondary education, the percentage of pupils learning two or more foreign languages went up from 46.7% in 2004/05 to 60.8% in 2009/10.
- In upper secondary prevocational/vocational upper secondary education, the percentage of pupils studying two or more languages increased from 32.9% in 2004/05 to 39.4% in 2010
- A slight decrease (from 62.2% in 2004/05 to 59.4% in 2010) was registered in general upper secondary.
- In Poland the number of pupils learning two foreign languages in lower secondary education figure rose from 8.5% in 2006/07 to 65.3%
- In the Czech Republic the percentage increased from 5.8% in 2004/05 to 31.5% in 2009/10
- In Italy, 43.9% of pupils studied two foreign languages in 2004/05; they became 99.5% five years later.

4. LEVEL OF COMPETENCES

- Almost half of those surveyed (46%) declare themselves unable to hold a conversation in any language other than their mother tongue.
- Only one quarter of respondents (25%) say that they can hold a conversation in at least two foreign languages.
- Just one in ten individuals stated they are able to hold a conversation in at least three foreign languages.
- For the first of the two languages tested in each country, only 42% of tested pupils reach the level of ‘independent users’ (levels B1 and B2 of the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR – see Appendix, Table 8)
- For the second language tested, only 25% reach the same level
- A source of concern is that a consistent percentage of pupils—14% for the first language and 20% for the second—do not even reach the basic user level (level A1 of the CEFR).
- In Malta and in Sweden, more than four fifths (82%) of pupils tested in the ESLC reach the level of ‘independent user’ in the first foreign language (English)
- At the other end of the spectrum, only 14% of pupils tested in France (for English) and only 9% of pupils tested in England (for French) reach the same level
- In countries such as Luxembourg, Latvia, the Netherlands, Malta, Slovenia, Lithuania and Sweden, more than 90% of Eurobarometer respondents feel confident in their ability to hold a conversation in at least one foreign language
- In Hungary, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Ireland the corresponding percentage does not go beyond 40%
- In a group of eight Member States (Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Malta, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia), more than half the population can speak at least two foreign languages
- In another group of eight Member States (Hungary, Portugal, United Kingdom, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Bulgaria and France) less than one fifth of the population can do the same.

5. SPECIFIC LANGUAGE ISSUES

- French is studied by 32.7% of EU pupils in lower secondary, 23.2% in general upper secondary and 20.6% in prevocational and vocational education
- German is more popular at ISCED 3 level than at ISCED2: only 16.9% of EU pupils learn it in lower secondary, compared to 23.9% in general upper secondary and 20.7% in prevocational and vocational education

- Spanish is studied by 11.4% of EU pupils in lower secondary, 19.1% in general upper secondary and 3.6% in prevocational and vocational education.
- Only 20% of students tested in French and German in the ESLC reached the ‘independent user’ level (B1 and B2)
- 12% of Europeans polled in the 2012 Eurobarometer consider themselves able to speak French (14% in 2005). Of these, one in two assess their competence as ‘basic’
- German is mentioned among the foreign languages spoken by 11% of individuals interviewed (14% in 2005). Of these, 40% describe their competences as ‘basic’
- Spanish is the only foreign language registering a slight increase, being mentioned by 7% of participants (6% in 2005). Almost one third (32%) however say they only have a ‘basic’ command of it.
- Several countries have introduced pilot projects for increasing the number of languages over those already required or for advancing the starting age.
 - In Latvia pupils aged 6 to 11 will learn English, French and German.
 - Lithuania is launching the teaching of German in 26 pre-primary institutions.
 - In Greece, 800 primary schools are introducing the teaching of English for children between 6 and 8 years. The programme should be generalised in 2013.
 - A choice of language alternatives to English classes (generally French and German) is being offered to pupils in Denmark from age 12, in the Netherlands already at primary level, in Portugal at age 10 and in Finland, starting with 7 year olds.

6. THE NEEDS OF THE LABOUR MARKET

- In Denmark, all schools must offer classes of German and may in addition propose French, to pupils from the age of 13
- In Sweden, curricula in all schools must include a second foreign language (French, Spanish or German)
- Upper secondary schools in Cyprus must offer French, German, Italian, Spanish, Turkish and Russian
- Lower secondary schools in Malta must offer Italian, French, German, Spanish, Arabic and Russian
- Lithuanian pupils in primary education have a choice between French and German,
- Schools in England and Wales have a good deal autonomy and can offer any major European or world language