

EUROBAROMETER REPORT 54

EUROPEANS AND LANGUAGES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

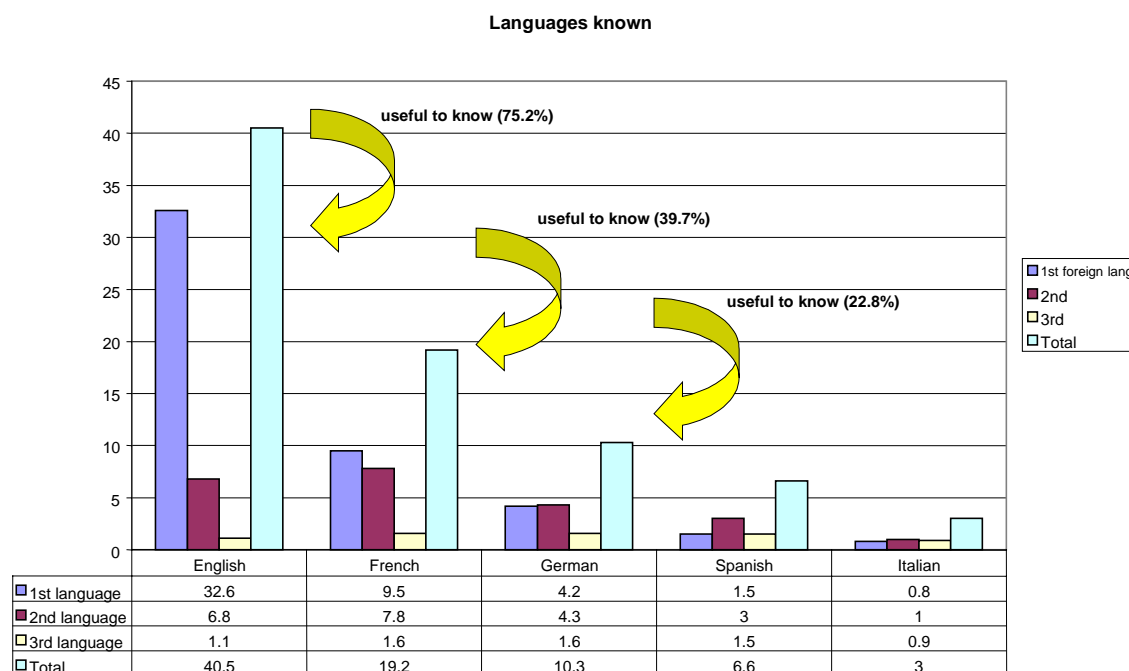
This special Eurobarometer survey was fielded in all EU15 Member States between 6th December and 23rd December 2000. In all countries, a representative sample of the population was interviewed. In total, more than 15,900 people gave their views on and experience with the complex topic of languages¹.

1. Mother tongue

Obviously, in each country, the language designated most often as the respondents' mother tongue is the (or one of the) national language(s). Highest figures were in Portugal, where 100% of respondents said that their mother tongue was Portuguese; in Greece, 99% said their mother tongue was Greek and in Italy 99% said their mother tongue was Italian.

2. Foreign Languages known and usefulness

53% of Europeans say that they can speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue. 26% say that they can speak two foreign languages. Besides their mother tongue, people in Europe tend to know English (41%), French (19%), German (10%), Spanish



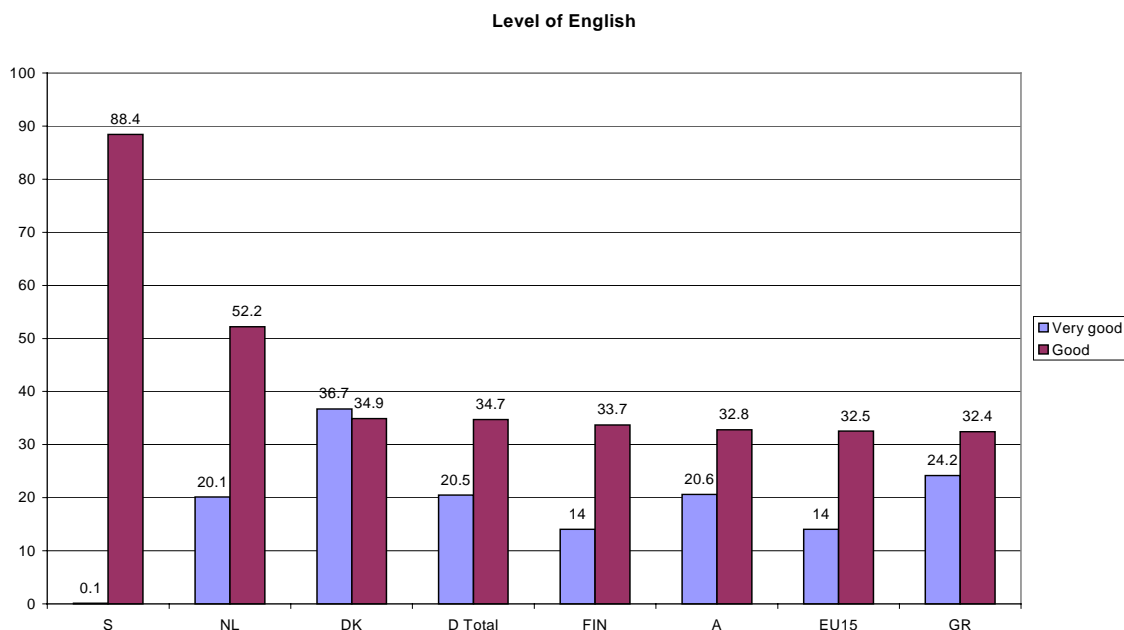
¹ Figures are rounded up in the whole text. Exact figures can be found in the graphs and tables.

(7%) and Italian (3%). Overall, the language most often spoken as a first foreign language in Europe is English (32.6%) followed by French (9.5%).

In the UK and in Ireland², the first foreign language is French. In France, Spain and Italy, the foreign language which comes first is English. Overall, English and French (or German to a lesser extent) are designated as the two most useful languages to know.

Whether people know other languages than their own or not, a majority tends to believe that knowing foreign languages is / would be useful for them (72% of 'very' or 'fairly' useful). However, 39% of respondents in the new Länder of Germany do not think so (against EU15 average, 22%).

In countries where English is the first foreign language, people tend to state that their knowledge of it is good (32.5%). In Sweden, there are 88% who believe it, and in Denmark, more than one third of the people even consider it to be very good (37%).



3. Use of foreign languages

English is the language which is most likely to be selected as that used occasionally on trips abroad or with foreign visitors (35%), for at least one hour per week (15%) and for at least one hour per day (14%).

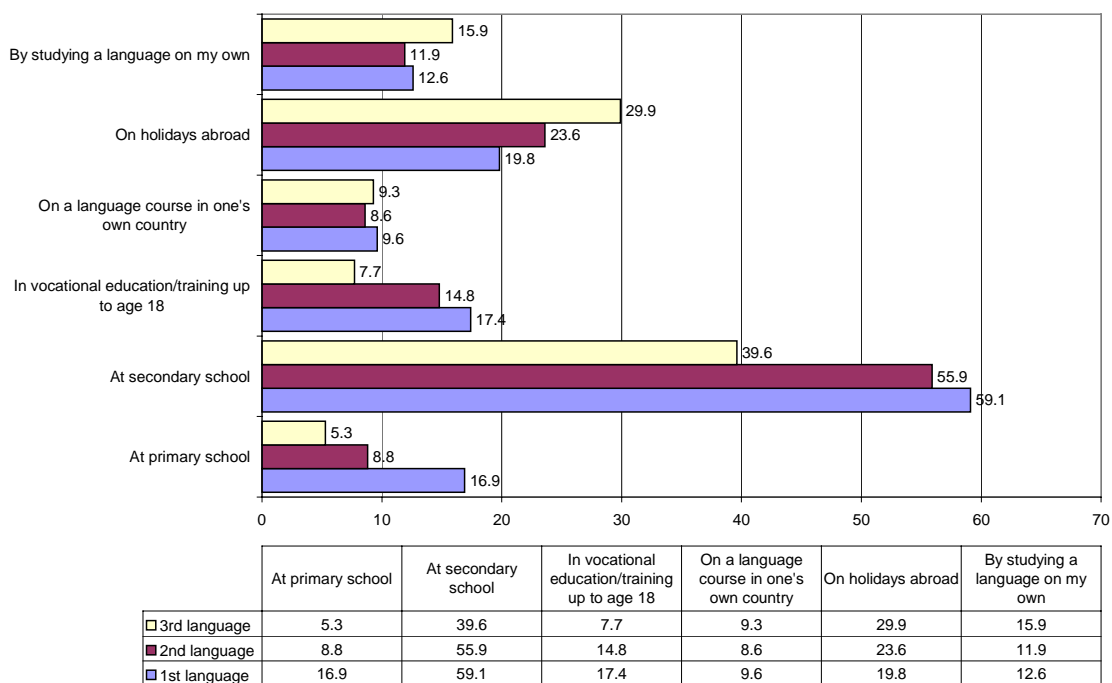
The first foreign language is mainly used on holidays abroad (47%), for watching films (23%) and for conversations at work either face to face or by phone (21%). The same pattern applies for the second foreign language. A close-up at the different countries shows that in Ireland the first non-mother tongue language is mainly used for communicating with friends (25%), family and watching films (24% both)

² In Ireland, Irish is designated as a 'foreign' language by 38% of the people.

4. Learning or improving languages

People in Europe are likely to have learned or improved their foreign languages at secondary school and on holidays abroad. However, in Austria it happened mostly at primary school, and in Greece, on a language course. In addition, people are likely to have learned or improved the third foreign language they know by studying it on their own.

The most likely way of learning languages is to attend group languages with a teacher (46%). 'Talking informally with a native speaker' is the second way chosen by 17% of respondents. A third way, tried by 15% of Europeans, is 'long (or frequent) visits to a country where the language is spoken'. Danes confirm this tendency (33%). Portuguese, on the other hand, are far to be convinced by the usual ways as 57% rejected all the items.



Although a great majority of Europeans consider all these ways to be effective, three ways come forth: 'long or frequent visits to a country where the language is spoken' (94%), 'talking informally to a native speaker' (92%) and 'one to one' lessons with a teacher' (90%).

The ways which are most likely to be seen as convenient are: 'group language lessons with a teacher' (31%) 'one to one' lessons with a teacher' (20%), 'long or frequent visits to a country where the language is spoken' (17%).

The most likely places where people would look for information about language learning opportunities are: the nearest adult education school (35%), friends (19%) and a private language school (14%).

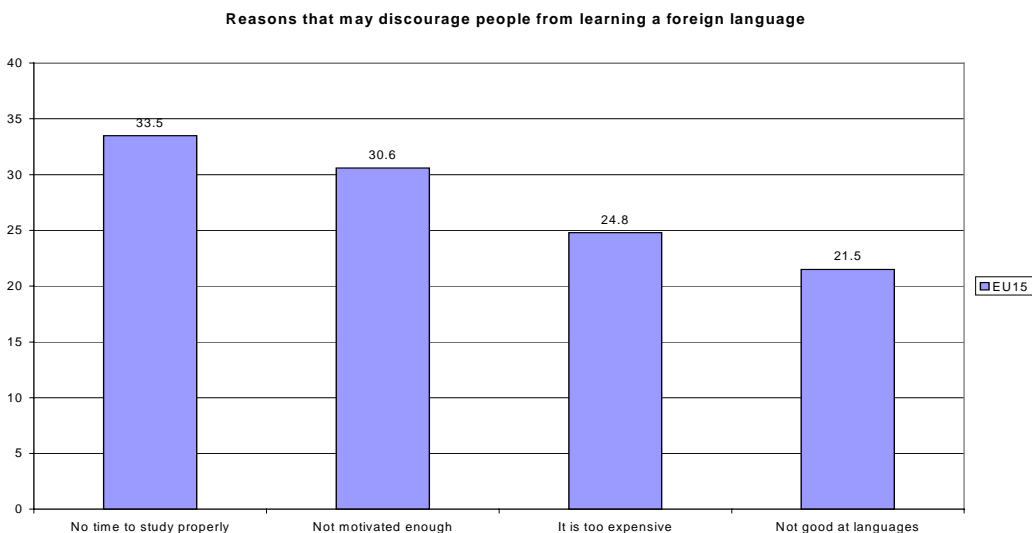
5. Motivation to learn languages

If they were to learn a foreign language additional to the one they know already, people's first motivation would be to use it on holidays abroad (47%). This is mainly the case for Germans (59%), people from Luxembourg (58%) and the Dutch (57%). Personal satisfaction is also an important motivation for learning a language (37%), especially in Luxembourg (59%), in Portugal (51%) and in Italy (41%). Moreover, 26% of Europeans declared that they would be motivated to learn another language if they could use it at work, 24% if it enabled them to understand people from other cultures and 22% if they could get a better job in their country.

As regards parents of children aged under 20 in Europe, 93% say it is important that their children learn other European languages. Parents were most favourable to their children learning foreign languages in the new Länder of Germany (100%), Greece (98%) and Spain (96%). 22% of Belgian and 15% of Austrian parents say that language learning is not important, compared to a European Union average of 7%.

When asked for what reasons they think that it is important that their child(ren) learn other European languages at school or university, parents tend to answer first because they want them to improve their job opportunities (74%). This is especially the case for parents in Luxembourg (91%), and Germany (88%), and around 80% of parents in Portugal, Spain and Greece; the reason is given by only 54% of parents in the Netherlands.

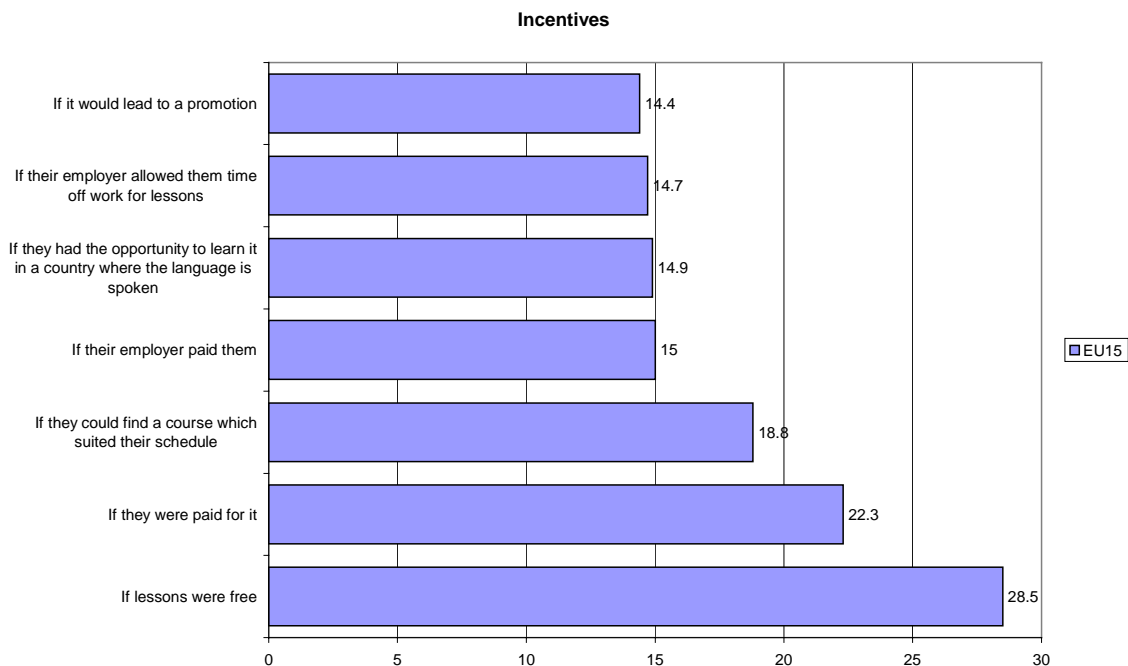
The other reasons given by parents are: 'because the language is widely spoken in the world' (39%) or 'widely spoken in Europe' (36%). 34% of parents say 'because they want their children to be multilingual'; Luxembourg and Sweden confirm this tendency with 67% and 54% of parents.



The main reason that may discourage people in Europe from learning or improving a foreign language is that they do not have the time to study properly (34%). This is especially the case in Luxembourg (42%), in Spain (40%) and in Italy (38%). The lack of motivation is also a reason put forward by 31% of Europeans. In the southern countries, more than three people out of ten feel discouraged by the cost that would be implied in order to learn a foreign language: Portugal (36%), Spain (31%), Greece (30%) and Italy (29%). Finally, 22% of respondents do not consider themselves good at languages.

On average, 28% of people would be willing to devote 1-2 hours per week to learning languages, if good opportunities were available, in a convenient location, and at a reasonable price. However, one third of the population (34%) is not willing to devote any time to learning a foreign language.

Incentives which would be effective in motivating people to learn other languages would be: free lessons (29%), if they were paid for it (22%) and if they could find a course which suited their schedule (19%).



6. Importance of speaking a foreign language

Interviewees were presented with a series of statements. For each one, they had to say whether they tended to agree or disagree with it.

First, 71% of Europeans consider that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European language in addition to their mother tongue. Almost the same proportion of respondents agrees that this should be English.

Moreover, four respondents out of ten declare that the availability of language courses is good in the area where they live. This is particularly true in Denmark, in Luxembourg (both 73%) and in Greece (68%).

A large majority (63%) believes that it is necessary to protect their own languages more as the enlargement of the European Union is envisaged. This view is shared by 90% of the people in Greece and in Finland.

<i>(These questions were put to all respondents)</i>	Agree %	Disagree %	Don't Know %
<i>Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European Union language in addition to their mother tongue</i>	71.1	20.2	8.7
<i>Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak English</i>	69.4	22.5	8.1
<i>The enlargement of the European Union to include new member countries means that we must protect our own languages more</i>	63.4	22.6	14
<i>The availability of language courses is good in the area where I live</i>	40.4	29.7	30
<i>The enlargement of the European Union to include new member countries means that we will all have to start speaking a common language</i>	38	46.8	15.2
<i>In my region, people are good at speaking foreign languages</i>	34.3	39	26.7
<i>Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak two European Union languages in addition to their mother tongue</i>	32.4	53.4	14.1
<i>I prefer to watch foreign films with subtitles, rather than dubbed</i>	29.8	59.6	10.6
<i>If there were a language centre close by, I would use it</i>	29.6	46.8	23.6

7. Difficulties of learning a foreign language

A large majority of those European citizens who do *not* speak a foreign language believes that learning an additional language would be too difficult (65%) and too time consuming (64%).

Moreover, 54% of this same group declare that they would not learn another language if they had the chance; in Finland 48% (against 38% generally) say that they would learn one if they had the chance.

49% do not regret the fact that they do not speak additional languages (against 39% who do have regrets).

63% of people who do not speak a foreign language do not think that it would give them better employment prospects. People in the UK, in Ireland, in Italy, in Portugal and in Greece confirm this tendency, but to a lesser extent (average below 60%).

<i>(These questions were put to people who do not speak a foreign language)</i>	Agree %	Disagree %	Don't Know %
<i>Learning an additional language would be too difficult for me</i>	64.6	23.5	11.9
<i>Learning an additional language would be too time consuming for me</i>	63.6	25.4	10.9
<i>I often wish I could speak additional languages</i>	39.2	49	11.8
<i>I would benefit from learning an additional language</i>	33.6	54.9	11.5
<i>If I had the chance, I would learn another language</i>	31.2	53.7	15.1
<i>Learning an additional language would give me better employment prospects</i>	22.9	63.3	13.9