Compulsory Education in Europe 2020/21

Eurydice – Facts and Figures
This publication provides concise information on the duration of compulsory education/training in 43 European education systems covering 38 countries participating in the EU’s Erasmus+ programme (27 EU Member States, the United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey). Detailed information on the structure of education systems is available in The Structure of the European Education Systems 2020/21: Schematic Diagrams (1).

In most European education systems, compulsory education starts at the beginning of primary education (ISCED level 1), often at the age of 6. However, attending at least the last year of pre-primary education (ISCED level 0) is compulsory in 19 education systems. France and Hungary report the earliest starting age for compulsory education (3 years old). By contrast, in Estonia and Croatia, compulsory education starts at the age of 7.

Full-time compulsory education/training, as defined in this publication, refers to a period of full-time education/training that is compulsory for all students. This period is regulated by law and often determined by students’ age. Usually, full-time compulsory education/training is provided in educational institutions/schools. However, in some education systems, certain compulsory education/training programmes can combine part-time school-based and part-time workplace courses (dual system). In such cases, students are assessed for the work they do in both places (workplace and school). In some countries, under certain conditions, compulsory education/training can be provided at home.

In slightly more than half of European education systems, full-time compulsory education/training lasts 10-11 years and ends at the age of 15-16, except in Romania where the leaving age is 17. In the Netherlands, students aged 16 who have not obtained a basic qualification (Startkwalificatie) have to continue their education/training until they turn 18 or get a senior general secondary (HAVO) or pre-university (VWO) or VET (at least MBO 2) diploma. In eight education systems (Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Montenegro and Serbia), the duration of full-time compulsory education/training is 9 years.

Education/training is compulsory for more than 11 years in 11 education systems. In Luxembourg, Portugal, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) and Turkey, the duration of full-time compulsory education/training is 12 years, while in Belgium (the three Communities), France and Hungary 13 years’ attendance is mandatory for all students. In France, since September 2020, two more years of training have become compulsory between 16 and 18 years old, but different forms of training are eligible. In Germany, the duration of compulsory education varies between the Länder: It is 12 years and 13 years in 12 and 4 Länder respectively. In North Macedonia, the duration varies between 11 and 13 years depending on the programme followed during upper secondary education (see Country-specific notes).

In all countries, the full-time compulsory education/training period includes at least primary and lower secondary education levels (ISCED levels 1 and 2). In some countries, it also contains one or more grades of upper secondary education (ISCED level 3). In four education systems (the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and the United Kingdom – England), full-time compulsory education/training is followed by additional compulsory part-time education/training. In the United Kingdom (England), for instance, after the end of full-time compulsory education (age 16), young people still have to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday. However, full-time attendance at school or college is not mandatory. Young people can also fulfil this obligation by participating in part-time education or training combined with full-time work or volunteering, or in work-based learning.

## Duration of compulsory education/training and student’s age-groups, 2020/21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Starting age</th>
<th>Leaving age</th>
<th>Duration (in years)</th>
<th>Ending age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE fr</td>
<td>3 4 5</td>
<td>14 15 16 17 18 19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE de</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14 15 16 17 18 19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE nl</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14 15 16 17 18 19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>5 6</td>
<td>15 16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>5 7</td>
<td>15 16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>6 15 16</td>
<td>10 18 18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE (12 Länder)</td>
<td>6 16 17 18 19</td>
<td>12 13</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE (4 Länder)</td>
<td>6 16 17 18 19</td>
<td>12 13</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td>15 16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>3 4 6</td>
<td>15 18 (18) (15) (15)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CY</td>
<td>5 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>5 6</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LU</td>
<td>4 6</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>3 5 6</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18 18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>17 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>6 7 8</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>6 7 8</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK-ENG</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK-WLS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK-NIR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK-SCT</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>4 5 6</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>5 6 7</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>8 5 6</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>6 7</td>
<td>15 18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK</td>
<td>5y7m 6y8m</td>
<td>17 19y6m 11-13</td>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>6 7 8</td>
<td>16 18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>5y6m 14y6m 15y6m</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TR</td>
<td>5y6m 17y6m 19y6m</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting age in ISCED level 0
Starting age in ISCED level 1
na Not applicable
Explanatory note

Additional compulsory part-time education/training after completing full-time compulsory education/training means that until a certain age, students are required to participate in part-time school or workplace education/training.

Starting age refers to the official age at which students start compulsory education/training.

Leaving age refers to the age at which students are expected to complete compulsory education/training.

The starting and leaving ages presented in this report are notional; early or late entry, grade retention or other interruptions to schooling are not taken into account.


Country-specific notes

Belgium (All communities): In March 2019, the Belgian federal parliament passed a law to lower the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 5 years, including one year of ECEC. The law came into force in September 2020.

Germany: 12 Länder: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Hamburg, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringen; 4 Länder: Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen and Nordrhein-Westfalen. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the duration of full-time compulsory education is nine years for the Gymnasium, and ten years for other general education schools.

Greece: Since school year 2018/19 and according to law 4521/2018, the starting age of compulsory education has been lowered from age 5 to 4. Hence, nipiagogeio (pre-primary school) has become compulsory for all 4-year-old children and lasts two years. School year 2020/21 foresees the implementation of the measure in the few remaining municipalities.

France: Since September 2020, training has become compulsory for students aged between 16 and 18. Young people will be able to fulfil this compulsory training by several means: schooling, apprenticeship, training courses, civic service, and support system or social and professional integration measures.

Croatia: The pre-primary programme (program predškole) is compulsory part-time education for all children one year before primary education, which starts at the age of 7.

Switzerland: In most Cantons, compulsory education starts at age 4 (in a few of them at the ages 5 or 6).

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Education between 5 and 6 is only compulsory on a part-time basis in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District. In Republika Srpska, it is implemented on the same basis, although it is not mandatory.

North Macedonia: The leaving age for compulsory education may vary from 17 to 19 years and 6 months, depending on the type of programme. The lowest leaving age (17) applies to students attending the two-year vocational programme strucno osposobuvanje, while the ending age of 18 applies to those attending the three-year vocational programme strucno obrazovanje za zanimanja. The highest leaving age of 19 years and 6 months applies to students attending general secondary education (gimnazisko obrazovanje) or a four-year programme of vocational education (chetirigodishtno struchno obrazovanje).

COUNTRY CODES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BE</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>CY</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE fr</td>
<td>Belgium – French Community</td>
<td>LV</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>UK-ENG</td>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE de</td>
<td>Belgium – German-speaking Community</td>
<td>LT</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>UK-WLS</td>
<td>Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE nl</td>
<td>Belgium – Flemish Community</td>
<td>LU</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>UK-NIR</td>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>UK-SCOT</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Nederland</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Liechtenstein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>RO</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Montenegro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>MK</td>
<td>North Macedonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EDUCATION, AUDIOVISUAL AND CULTURE 
EXECUTIVE AGENCY

Education and Youth Policy Analysis

Avenue du Bourget 1 (J-70 – Unit A6) 
B-1049 Brussels 
(http://ec.europa.eu/eurydice)

Managing editor
Nathalie Baïdak

Authors
Jari Matti Riiheläinen (coordinator), Agathina Sicurella

Graphics and layout
Patrice Brel

Cover
Virginia Giovannelli

Production coordinator
Gisèle De Lel
Eurydice National Units

Albania
Eurydice Unit
European Integration and Projects Department
Ministry of Education and Sport
Rruga e Durrësit, Nr. 23
1001 Tirana
Contribution of the Unit: Egest Gjokuta

Austria
Eurydice-Informationsstelle
Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung
Abt. Bildungsstatistik und Monitoring
Minoritenplatz 5
1010 Wien
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Belgium
Unité Eurydice de la Communauté française
Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
Direction des relations internationales
Boulevard Léopold II, 44 – Bureau 6A/001
1080 Bruxelles
Contribution of the Unit: Sanne Noël

Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ministry of Civil Affairs
Education Sector
Trg BH 3
71000 Sarajevo
Contribution of the Unit: in cooperation with experts from the Ministries of Education of Republika Srpska, 10 cantons in Federation of B&H and Divisions for the Education of the Brokho District

Bulgaria
Eurydice Unit
Human Resource Development Centre
Education Research and Planning Unit
15, Graf Ignatiev Str.
1000 Sofia
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Croatia
Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes
Frankopanska 26
10000 Zagreb
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Cyprus
Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education and Culture
Kimonos and Thoukydides
1434 Nicosia
Contribution of the Unit: expert: Antonis Antoniou

Czechia
Eurydice Unit
Czech National Agency for International Education
Dům zahraniční spolupráce
Na Poříčí 1035/4
110 00 Prague 1
Contribution of the Unit: Andrea Turynová

Denmark
Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Higher Education and Science
Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education
Haraldsgade 53.
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Estonia
Eurydice Unit
Analysis Department
Ministry of Education and Research
Munga 18
50088 Tartu
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Finland
Eurydice Unit
Finnish National Agency for Education
P.O. Box 380
00531 Helsinki
Contribution of the Unit: Hanna Laakso

France
Unité française d’Eurydice
Ministère de l’Education nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports (MENJS)
Ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche et de l’Innovation (MESRI)
Direction de l’évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP)
Mission aux relations européennes et internationales (MIREI)
61-65, rue Dutot
75732 Paris Cedex 15
Contribution of the Unit: Anne Gaudry-Lachet

Germany
Eurydice-Informationsstelle des Bundes
Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt e. V. (DLR)
Heinrich-Köenig Str. 1
53227 Bonn
Eurydice-Informationsstelle der Länder im Sekretariat der Kultusministerkonferenz
Taubenstraße 10
10117 Berlin
Contribution of the Unit: Thomas Eckhardt
GREECE
Hellenic Eurydice Unit
Directorate for European and International Affairs
Directorate-General for International and European Affairs, Hellenic Diaspora and Intercultural Education
Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs
37 Andrea Pапandreou Street (Office 2172)
15180 Amarousion (Attiki)
Contribution of the Unit: Nicole Apostolopoulou

HUNGARY
Hungarian Eurydice Unit
Educational Authority
19-21 Maros Str.
1122 Budapest
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

ICELAND
Eurydice Unit
The Directorate of Education
Víkurhvarfi 3
203 Kópavogur
Contribution of the Unit: Hulda Skogland

IRELAND
Eurydice Unit
Department of Education and Skills
International Co-operation Unit
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1 – D01 RC96
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

ITALY
Unità italiana di Eurydice
Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE)
Agenzia Erasmus+
Via C. Lombroso 6/15
50134 Firenze
Contribution of the Unit: Erica Cimò

LATVIA
Eurydice Unit
State Education Development Agency
Valju street 1 (5th floor)
1050 Riga
Contribution of the Unit: Viktors Kravcenko

LIECHTENSTEIN
Informationsstelle Eurydice
Schulamt des Fürstentums Liechtenstein
Austrasse 79
Postfach 684
9490 Vaduz
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

LITHUANIA
Eurydice Unit
The National Agency for Education
Katkaus str. 44
09217 Vilnius
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

LUXEMBOURG
Unité nationale d'Eurydice
ANEFORE ASBL
eduPôle Walferdange
Bâtiment 03 - étage 01
Route de Diekirch
7220 Walferdange
Contribution of the Unit: national expert: Patrick Hierthes (MENJE)

MALTA
Eurydice National Unit
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability
Ministry for Education and Employment
Great Siege Road
Floriana VLT 2000
Contribution of the Unit: Joanne Bugeja

NETHERLANDS
Eurydice Nederland
Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap
Directie Internationaal Beleid
Rijnstraat 50
2500 BJ Den Haag
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

NORTH MACEDONIA
National Eurydice Unit
National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility
Boulevard Kuzman Josifovski Pitu, No. 17
1000 Skopje
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

NORWAY
Norway Eurydice Unit
Diku - Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education
Fortunen 1
P.O. Box 1093
5809 Bergen
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

POLAND
Polish Eurydice Unit
Foundation for the Development of the Education System
Aleje Jerozolimskie 142A
02-305 Warszawa
Contribution of the Unit: Magdalena Górowska-Fells and Michał Chojnacki in consultation with the Ministry of National Education
Compulsory Education in Europe – 2020/21

This publication focuses on the duration of compulsory education/training in Europe. It highlights the starting and leaving ages and distinguishes the notions of full-time and part-time compulsory education/training. The information is available for 43 European education systems covering 38 countries participating in the EU’s Erasmus+ programme.

The Eurydice network’s task is to understand and explain how Europe’s different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is coordinated by the EUN (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). For more information about Eurydice, see http://ec.europa.eu/eurydice.