



## Special Eurobarometer 386

# EUROPEANS AND THEIR LANGUAGES

## SUMMARY

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This survey has been requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, Directorate-General for Translation and Directorate-General for Interpretation and co-ordinated by Directorate-General for Communication.

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)

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**Special Eurobarometer 386 / Wave EB77.1 Special Eurobarometer**

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**Europeans and their  
Languages**

Conducted by TNS Opinion & Social at the request of  
Directorate-General Education and Culture, Directorate-General  
for Translation and Directorate-General for Interpretation.

Survey co-ordinated by the European Commission,  
Directorate-General for Communication  
(DG COMM "Research and Speechwriting" Unit)

## INTRODUCTION

The EU is committed to safeguarding the linguistic diversity that exists within Europe, where there are 23 officially recognised languages<sup>1</sup> and more than 60 indigenous regional and minority languages, and many non-indigenous languages spoken by migrant communities. It is also committed to promoting knowledge of languages, encouraging all citizens to be multilingual, with the long-term objective that every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue. It does so for reasons of cultural identity and social integration and cohesion, and because multilingual citizens are better placed to take advantage of the economic, educational and professional opportunities created by an integrated Europe, with a mobile workforce key to the competitiveness of the EU economy.

A previous Eurobarometer survey in 2005 highlighted that almost three fifths of Europeans (56%) were able to speak a language other than their mother tongue, although only a minority (28%) were able to speak at least two languages<sup>2</sup>. It also showed that citizens generally supported the Commission's multilingualism policies. A new wave of the survey was commissioned to see if and how Europeans' behaviour and opinions about multilingualism have changed. As well as spoken ability, the study examines the level of understanding and use of other languages, learning behaviour, attitudes towards learning or improving language skills, perceptions of the most useful languages, views on EU policy in relation to language use and the role that translation has.

This summary report presents the most important findings from this latest wave at EU level and highlights only the most significant national and trend over time variations. A full report, presenting a more thorough analysis of results, is also available. The survey was commissioned by the DG Education and Culture, DG for Translation and DG for Interpretation. It was carried out by TNS Opinion & Social network with fieldwork conducted between 25th February and 11th March 2012. The methodology used is that of Eurobarometer surveys as carried out by the Directorate-General for Communication. A technical note on the manner in which interviews were conducted by the Institutes within the TNS Opinion & Social network is appended to this report. It indicates the interview methods and the confidence intervals<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_243\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The results tables are included in the annex. It should be noted that the total of the percentages in the tables of this report may exceed 100% when the respondent has the possibility of giving several answers to the question.

Note: In this report, countries are referred to by their official abbreviation. The abbreviations used in this report correspond to:

ABBREVIATIONS			
BE	Belgium	LV	Latvia
CZ	Czech Republic	LU	Luxembourg
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary
DK	Denmark	MT	Malta
DE	Germany	NL	The Netherlands
EE	Estonia	AT	Austria
EL	Greece	PL	Poland
ES	Spain	PT	Portugal
FR	France	RO	Romania
IE	Ireland	SI	Slovenia
IT	Italy	SK	Slovakia
CY	Republic of Cyprus***	FI	Finland
LT	Lithuania	SE	Sweden
		UK	The United Kingdom
		EU27	European Union – 27 Member States
		EU15	BE, IT, FR, DE, LU, NL, DK, UK, IE, PT, ES, EL, AT, SE, FI*
		NMS12	BG, CZ, EE, CY, LT, LV, MT, HU, PL, RO, SL, SK**
		EURO AREA	BE, FR, IT, LU, DE, AT, ES, PT, IE, NL, FI, EL, EE, SI, CY, MT, SK

\* EU15 refers to the 15 countries forming the European Union before the enlargements of 2004 and 2007

\*\* The NMS12 are the 12 'new Member States' which joined the European Union during the 2004 and 2007 enlargements

\*\*\* Cyprus as a whole is one of the 27 European Union Member States. However, the 'acquis communautaire' has been suspended in the part of the country which is not controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. For practical reasons, only the interviews carried out in the part of the country controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus are included in the 'CY' category and in the EU27 average.

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*We would like to take the opportunity to thank all the respondents across the continent who gave their time to take part in this survey.*

*Without their active participation, this study would not have been possible.*

## EUROPEANS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MULTILINGUALISM

Around nine in ten Europeans (88%) think that languages other than their mother tongue are useful for personal development<sup>4</sup>. Two thirds of Europeans (67%) consider English is one of the two most useful languages, and less than one in five mention German (17%), French (16%) and Spanish (14%). Much smaller proportions mention Chinese (6%), Italian (5%) and Russian (4%). There has been a decrease since 2005 in the proportion of Europeans thinking that French and German are important (-9 percentage points and -5 points respectively) and an increase in the proportion believing that Chinese is an important language (+4 points).

EU15 is much more likely than NMS12 to consider Spanish (20% vs. 3% respectively), French (22% vs. 12%) and Chinese (17% vs. 3%) as important for personal development, and less likely to rate German (15% vs. 38%) and Russian (3% vs. 9%) as important in this respect.

Almost every European (98%) thinks that foreign languages are useful for children to learn for their future<sup>5</sup>. Again, English is perceived to be the most useful language in this regard, with eight in ten Europeans (79%) thinking this. One in five mention French and German (20% each), slightly smaller proportions Spanish (16%) and Chinese (14%) and a small minority Russian (4%) and Italian (2%). The proportion of Europeans thinking that French and German are important for children to learn has dropped since 2005 (-13 percentage points and -8 points respectively), while the proportion perceiving Chinese to be important in this respect has increased significantly (+12 points).

In all Member States respondents are as likely or more likely than in 2005 to believe Chinese is useful for personal development and for children to learn. The most notable increases in the view that it is useful for personal development are in Spain (+11 percentage points) and the UK (+9 points) and, that it is useful for children, in Denmark (+25 points), Spain and France (+23 points in each) and Ireland and the UK (+18 points in each).

There is a broad consensus among Europeans that everyone in the EU should be able to speak at least one foreign language<sup>6</sup>. More than four in five of Europeans (84%) agree, and more than two in five (44%) 'totally agree' with this view.

<sup>4</sup> Q1a. "Thinking about languages other than your mother tongue, which two languages do you think are the most useful for your personal development? (DO NOT SHOW CARD – MAX. 2 ANSWERS) Czech, Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Irish/Gaelic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh, Other, None – don't think any other languages are useful, Don't know"

<sup>5</sup> Q1b. "(Thinking about languages other than your mother tongue, which two languages do you think are the most useful) And for children to learn for their future? (DO NOT SHOW CARD – MAX. 2 ANSWERS) Czech, Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Irish/Gaelic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh, Other, None – don't think any other languages are useful, Don't know"

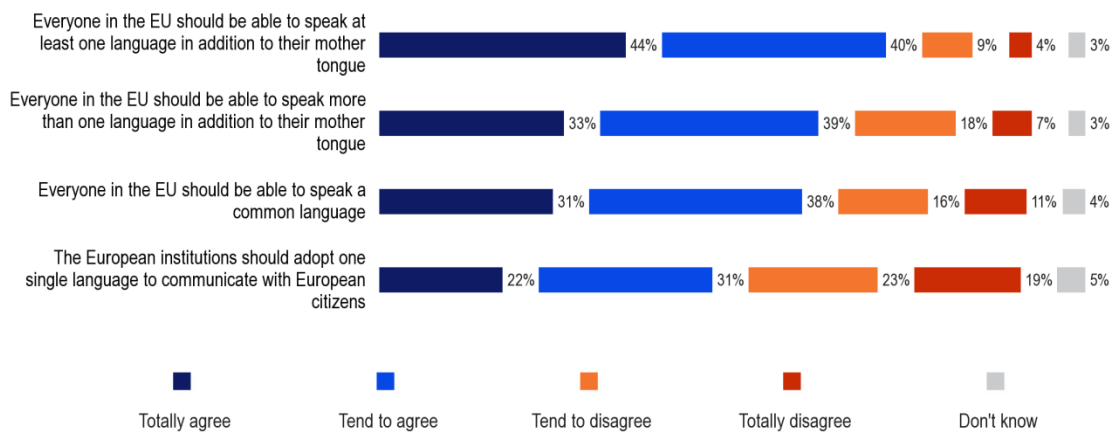
<sup>6</sup> Q7. "Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (SHOW CARD WITH SCALE) Totally agree, Tend to agree, Tend to disagree, Totally disagree (READ OUT –ROTATE) The European institutions should adopt one single language to communicate with European citizens, Everyone in the EU should be able to speak a common language, Everyone in the EU should be able to speak at least one language in addition to their mother tongue, Everyone in the EU should be able to speak more than one

Indeed, more than seven in ten Europeans (72%) agree that people in the EU should be able to speak *more than one* language in addition to their mother tongue, with a third (33%) saying that they 'totally agree'. Hence Europeans, for the most part, support the EU's vision that EU citizens should be able to speak at least two foreign languages.

Europeans are also widely in favour of people in the EU being able to speak a *common* language, with around seven in ten (69%) respondents agreeing with this viewpoint, and three in ten (31%) saying that they 'totally agree'.

Europeans are more evenly divided on whether EU institutions should adopt a single language to communicate with European citizens, although the balance of opinion is in favour of this approach. Just over half of respondents (53%) agree that EU institutions should adopt a single language to communicate with European citizens, with just over one in five (22%) strongly agreeing with this view. The balance of opinion on this issue is similar to that in 2005.

QE7. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each the following statements.



EU27

EU15 is more likely than NMS12 to express strong support for people speaking foreign languages and to agree that everyone in the EU should be able to speak a common language. Opinions on whether or not European institutions should adopt a single language to communicate with citizens are broadly similar in EU15 and NMS12.

Overall agreement that the European institutions should adopt a single language to communicate with European citizens is highest in Slovakia (77%), followed by Spain and Cyprus (66%), and lowest in Finland (24%) and Estonia (32%).

More than seven in ten respondents in every Member State agree that everyone in the EU should be able to speak at least one language in addition to their mother tongue, with respondents in the UK (72%), Romania and Bulgaria (73%) least likely and those in Luxembourg (97%) and Cyprus (96%) most likely to agree.

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language in addition to their mother tongue, You prefer to watch foreign films and programmes with subtitles, rather than dubbed, All languages spoken within the EU should be treated equally, Improving language skills should be a policy priority"

The majority of respondents in 26 Member States agree that everyone in the EU should be able to speak *at least two* languages in addition to their mother tongue, although levels of agreement range from 56% in Ireland and Denmark to 91% in Luxembourg and 94% in Spain. Finland is the only country where a minority (37%) agree with this view.

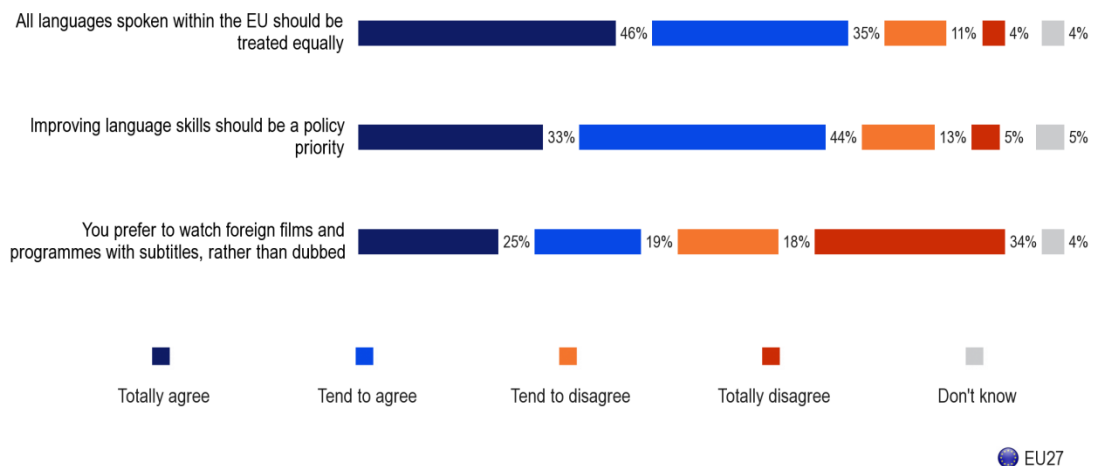
The view that everyone in the EU should be able to speak a common language is most widespread in Italy (82%), Malta (79%), Portugal and Slovakia (77%) and Luxembourg (76%), and least widespread in Finland (40%), Latvia (46%) and Estonia (48%).

Although most Europeans support the notion that everyone in the EU should be able to speak a common language, this view does not extend to believing that any one language should have priority. Eight in ten Europeans (81%) agree that all languages spoken within the EU should be treated equally, with nearly half (46%) saying that they 'totally agree' that this should be the case. The results suggest that support for the view that all languages within the EU should be treated equally may have strengthened since 2005, when around seven in ten respondents (72%) held this view<sup>7</sup>.

More than three-quarters (77%) of respondents think that improving language skills should be a policy priority, with a third (33%) saying that they 'totally agree', reflecting the widespread support for multilingualism that other results have demonstrated.

A small majority of Europeans (52%) prefer to watch foreign films and programmes dubbed, rather than with subtitles. However, the balance of opinion appears to have shifted slightly in favour of subtitles since 2005, with 44% of respondents saying that they prefer subtitles in 2012, compared with 37% in 2005.

QE7. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each the following statements.



National variation is greatest in relation to preferences for watching foreign films and programmes, with respondents in Sweden (96%), Finland (95%), Denmark (93%) and the Netherlands (93%) particularly likely to favour subtitles and those in the Czech Republic (21%), Germany (22%), Spain (24%) and Slovakia (25%) least likely to do so.

<sup>7</sup> The 2012 findings are not directly comparable with those from 2005 because of the move from a two-point to a four-point answer scale

The view that all languages spoken within the EU should be treated equally is more widespread in NMS12 (89%) than in EU15 (79%). This view is held by the majority of respondents in all Member States. It is most widespread in Greece (96%), Cyprus (95%), Latvia (93%), Malta (92%), the Czech Republic (91%) and Poland (91%), and least so in the Netherlands (56%).

The majority in every Member State also agree that improving language skills should be a policy priority for the EU, with support for this view most widespread in Cyprus (91%), Belgium (88%), Hungary (87%), Denmark (86%), Luxembourg (86%) and Spain (85%) and least widespread in Latvia (58%).

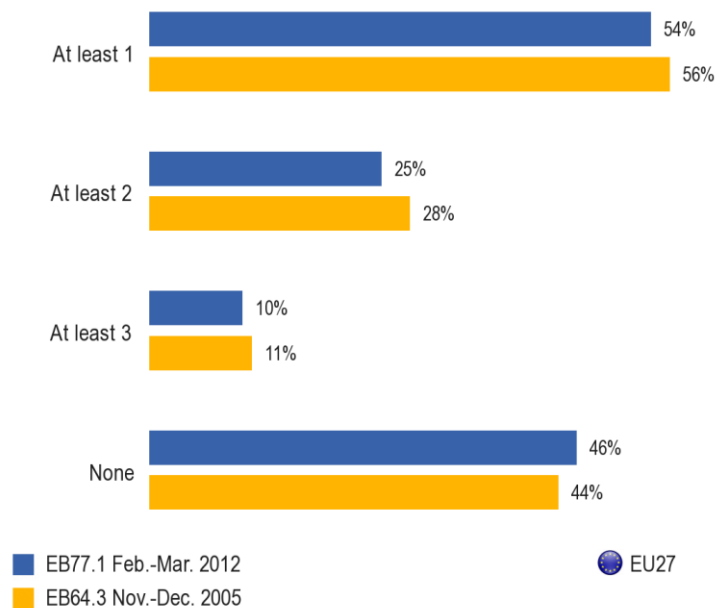
The only attitude that shows notable differences in opinion among the socio-demographic and behavioural sub-groups is that relating to preference for watching foreign films and programmes with subtitles, rather than watching dubbed versions. Here those groups with a greater tendency to agree are 15-24 year olds; those finishing their full-time education aged 20+; managers; daily internet users and those who position themselves high on the social positioning staircase.



## LANGUAGE COMPETENCES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The majority of Europeans (54%) are able to hold a conversation in at least one additional language other than their mother tongue, a quarter (25%) are able to speak at least two additional languages and one in ten (10%) are conversant in at least three<sup>8</sup>. Just under half of all Europeans (46%) are not able to speak any foreign language well enough to hold a conversation.

D48T2. Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL



There are no signs that multilingualism is on the increase. The proportions have decreased slightly relative to those reported in 2005, although the overall picture remains similar. These small drops may be explained in part by questionnaire changes<sup>9</sup>, and by some significant shifts in the pattern of languages spoken within some individual Member States.

<sup>8</sup> D48b,c and d "And which other languages, if any, do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation? (DO NOT SHOW CARD – CODE MOTHER TONGUE IN D48a AND UP TO 3 OTHERS IN ORDER OF FLUENCY IN D48b FIRST OTHER LANGUAGE , D48c SECOND OTHER LANGUAGE and D48d THIRD OTHER LANGUAGE) Czech, Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Irish/Gaelic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh, Other, None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

<sup>9</sup> In 2005 the list of languages recorded was different and "Other regional languages" were separately identified and recorded from "Other" languages which may have affected the way in which regional languages were recorded.

Whilst there is little difference in the number of foreign languages spoken between EU15 and NMS12 there is widespread national variation. In terms of the long-term EU objective that every citizen has practical skills in at least two foreign languages there are only eight Member States in which a majority are able to do this: Luxembourg (84%), the Netherlands (77%), Slovenia (67%), Malta (59%), Denmark (58%), Latvia (54%), Lithuania (52%) and Estonia (52%). Those countries where respondents are least likely to be able to do so are Portugal and Hungary (13% in each), the UK (14%) and Greece (15%).





























There have been some noticeable national shifts since 2005. The proportion of respondents able to speak at least one foreign language has increased most markedly in Austria (+16 percentage points to 78%), Finland (+6 points to 75%) and Ireland (+6 points to 40%). It has decreased notably in Slovakia (-17 points to 80%), the Czech Republic (-12 points to 49%), Bulgaria (-11 points to 48%), Poland (-7 points to 50%) and Hungary (-7 points to 35%). Within these post-Communist countries the proportions of respondents able to speak foreign languages such as Russian and German have declined notably since 2005<sup>10</sup> - the likely result of a 'lost' generation, with many who were able to speak German (following the Second World War) or who learnt Russian at school (it is now much less commonly taught) now deceased, or, as time has elapsed, forgetting how to speak these languages.

The highest proportion able to speak at least two languages can be found in Luxembourg (84%) compared to 13% in Portugal and Hungary. The most noticeable improvement in the proportion of respondents able to speak *at least two* foreign languages is in Italy (+6 percentage points to 22%) and Ireland (+5 points to 18%). Ten Member States show a significant drop of more than 5 percentage points: Belgium (-16 points to 50%), Hungary (-14 points to 13%), Bulgaria (-12 points to 19%), Poland (-10 points to 22%), Portugal (-10 points to 13%), Malta (-9 points to 59%), Luxembourg (-8 points to 84%), Denmark (-8 points to 58%), the Czech Republic (-7 points to 22%) and Estonia (-6 points to 52%).

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the proportion able to speak Russian has dropped in Bulgaria (-12 points), Slovakia (-12 points), Poland (-8 points) and the Czech Republic (-7 points). Similarly, the proportions speaking German are down in the Czech Republic (-13 points), Slovakia (-10 points) and Hungary (-7 points)

## D48T Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL

	At least 1	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	At least 2	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	At least 3	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3	None	Diff. EB77.1 - EB64.3
 EU27	54%	<b>-2</b>	25%	<b>-3</b>	10%	<b>-1</b>	46%	<b>+2</b>
 LU	98%	<b>-1</b>	84%	<b>-8</b>	61%	<b>-8</b>	2%	<b>+1</b>
 LV	95%	<b>=</b>	54%	<b>+3</b>	13%	<b>-1</b>	5%	<b>=</b>
 NL	94%	<b>+3</b>	77%	<b>+2</b>	37%	<b>+3</b>	6%	<b>-3</b>
 MT	93%	<b>+1</b>	59%	<b>-9</b>	13%	<b>-10</b>	7%	<b>-1</b>
 SI	92%	<b>+1</b>	67%	<b>-4</b>	34%	<b>-6</b>	8%	<b>-1</b>
 LT	92%	<b>=</b>	52%	<b>+1</b>	18%	<b>+2</b>	8%	<b>=</b>
 SE	91%	<b>+1</b>	44%	<b>-4</b>	15%	<b>-1</b>	9%	<b>-1</b>
 DK	89%	<b>+1</b>	58%	<b>-8</b>	23%	<b>-7</b>	11%	<b>-1</b>
 EE	87%	<b>-2</b>	52%	<b>-6</b>	22%	<b>-2</b>	13%	<b>+2</b>
 SK	80%	<b>-17</b>	43%	<b>-5</b>	18%	<b>-4</b>	20%	<b>+17</b>
 AT	78%	<b>+16</b>	27%	<b>-5</b>	9%	<b>-12</b>	22%	<b>-16</b>
 CY	76%	<b>-2</b>	20%	<b>-2</b>	7%	<b>+1</b>	24%	<b>+2</b>
 FI	75%	<b>+6</b>	48%	<b>+1</b>	26%	<b>+3</b>	25%	<b>-6</b>
 BE	72%	<b>-2</b>	50%	<b>-16</b>	27%	<b>-26</b>	28%	<b>+2</b>
 DE	66%	<b>-1</b>	28%	<b>+1</b>	8%	<b>=</b>	34%	<b>+1</b>
 EL	57%	<b>=</b>	15%	<b>-4</b>	4%	<b>=</b>	43%	<b>=</b>
 FR	51%	<b>=</b>	19%	<b>-2</b>	5%	<b>+1</b>	49%	<b>=</b>
 PL	50%	<b>-7</b>	22%	<b>-10</b>	7%	<b>-9</b>	50%	<b>+7</b>
 CZ	49%	<b>-12</b>	22%	<b>-7</b>	6%	<b>-4</b>	51%	<b>+12</b>
 RO	48%	<b>+1</b>	22%	<b>-5</b>	8%	<b>+2</b>	52%	<b>-1</b>
 BG	48%	<b>-11</b>	19%	<b>-12</b>	4%	<b>-4</b>	52%	<b>+11</b>
 ES	46%	<b>+2</b>	18%	<b>-1</b>	5%	<b>-1</b>	54%	<b>-2</b>
 IE	40%	<b>+6</b>	18%	<b>+5</b>	4%	<b>+2</b>	60%	<b>-6</b>
 UK	39%	<b>+1</b>	14%	<b>-4</b>	5%	<b>-1</b>	61%	<b>-1</b>
 PT	39%	<b>-3</b>	13%	<b>-10</b>	4%	<b>-2</b>	61%	<b>+3</b>
 IT	38%	<b>-3</b>	22%	<b>+6</b>	15%	<b>+9</b>	62%	<b>+3</b>
 HU	35%	<b>-7</b>	13%	<b>-14</b>	4%	<b>-16</b>	65%	<b>+7</b>

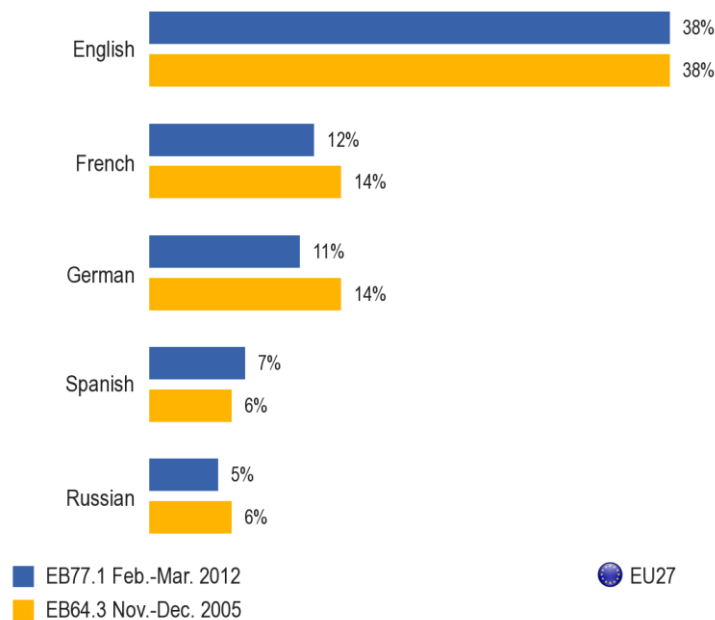
The socio-demographic groups most likely to be able to speak **at least two** foreign languages are younger people, in particular 15-24 year olds; those who finished their full-time education aged 20 or more; those holding management occupations; daily internet users; those who 'almost never' struggle to pay household bills; and those who place themselves high on the self-positioning social staircase.

## D48T2 - Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL

	At least 1	At least 2	At least 3	None
EU27	54%	25%	10%	46%
<b>Age</b>				
15-24	74%	37%	12%	26%
25-39	64%	31%	12%	36%
40-54	55%	25%	10%	45%
55 +	38%	17%	7%	62%
<b>Education (End of)</b>				
15-	22%	6%	2%	78%
16-19	48%	20%	7%	52%
20+	76%	42%	17%	24%
Still studying	86%	45%	16%	14%
<b>Respondent occupation scale</b>				
Self-employed	63%	33%	14%	37%
Managers	77%	38%	14%	23%
Other white collars	62%	31%	12%	38%
Manual workers	51%	22%	8%	49%
House persons	38%	15%	6%	62%
Unemployed	48%	22%	8%	52%
Retired	36%	16%	7%	64%
Students	86%	45%	16%	14%
<b>Use of the Internet</b>				
Everyday	70%	35%	14%	30%
Often/ Sometimes	49%	21%	8%	51%
Never	25%	7%	3%	75%
<b>Self-positioning on the social staircase</b>				
Low (1-4)	42%	17%	6%	58%
Medium (5-6)	52%	23%	9%	48%
High (7-10)	66%	35%	15%	34%
<b>Activity as language learner</b>				
Very active	91%	62%	37%	9%
Active	87%	51%	21%	13%
Inactive	45%	18%	7%	55%

Similar to the picture presented in 2005, the five most widely spoken foreign languages are English (38%), French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%).

D48T1. Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL



EU15 is more likely than NMS12 to speak French (14% vs. 6%) and Spanish (8% vs. 2%) and **less** likely to speak German (10% vs. 15%) and Russian (2% vs. 16%).

At a national level English is the most widely spoken foreign language in all but six Member States where it is not an official language (i.e. excluding the UK and Ireland). English and Spanish show notable increases since 2005 in the proportion of respondents saying that they know them well enough to be able to hold a conversation with the biggest improvements for English in Austria (+15 percentage points to 73%), Finland (+7 points to 70%), Latvia (+7 points to 46%) and Lithuania (+6 points to 38%); and, for Spanish, in Italy (+7 points to 11%) and Spain (+6 points to 16%).

There are some notable drops since 2005 in the proportion able to speak French, German and Russian. For German these are in Luxembourg (-19 points to 69%), the Czech Republic (-13 points to 15%), Denmark (-11 points to 47%), Slovakia (-10 points to 22%), Slovenia (-8 points to 42%), Hungary (-7 points to 18%) and Estonia (-7 points to 15%). For French the biggest declines are in Luxembourg (-10 points to 80%), Portugal (-9 points to 15%), Romania (-7 points to 17%), Bulgaria (-7 points to 2%) and Malta (-6 points to 11%). For Russian, the most significant drops are in Bulgaria (-12 points to 23%), Slovakia (-12 points to 17%), Estonia (-10 points to 56%), Poland (-8 points to 18%) and the Czech Republic (-7 points to 13%).

The majority of Europeans who speak English, German, Spanish and Russian as a foreign language believe they have better than basic skills<sup>11</sup>. A quarter (24%) of those who speak Spanish as a foreign language rate their ability as 'very good' as do around a fifth of those who speak English (21%), German (19%) and Russian (18%). Those who speak French as a foreign language are evenly split between those who rate their ability as 'basic' (49%), and those who believe they have better than basic skills (50%). Skill levels are broadly similar to those seen in 2005. EU15 is more likely than NMS12 to rate their ability at speaking German and Russian as 'very good' (23% vs. 10% and 24% vs. 16% respectively).

There has been a marked increase since 2005 in the proportion of respondents rating their skill level in English as 'very good' in Malta and Luxembourg (+11 percentage points in each to 52% and 33% respectively), Slovenia (+7 points to 28%), Romania (+7 points to 22%), Hungary (+7 points to 21%) and Latvia (+7 points to 15%)<sup>12</sup>.

## USAGE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

There is a clear relationship between the order in which a language is mentioned (i.e. perceived fluency) and the frequency with which that language is used. A quarter (24%) of respondents use their first foreign language every day or almost every day, a similar proportion (23%) use it often and the remainder (50%) use it on an occasional basis. Around one in ten respondents use their second language every day or nearly every day (8%), with respondents much more likely to use it on an occasional basis only (65%). Similarly, only 6% of respondents who speak a third foreign language use it on an 'everyday' basis, around one in eight (13%) use it often but not daily, and around seven in ten (69%) use it occasionally<sup>13</sup>.

English is the language most likely to be used on a more than occasional basis, with just under half (47%) of respondents who speak it saying that they do, and a fifth (19%) saying that they use it every day or almost every day. EU15 tends to use foreign languages more frequently than NMS12, and, in particular, to use them every day or almost every day, most notably Spanish (22% vs. 3% respectively).

<sup>11</sup> For each foreign language (up to three) that a respondent said they were able to speak well enough to be able to hold a conversation they were asked D48f1, f2 and f3 FOR EACH ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MENTIONED AT D48b,c and d "Is your (FIRST /SECOND/ THIRD ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MENTIONED) very good, good or basic? (SHOW CARD WITH SCALE – ONE ANSWER PER LINE) Very good, Good, Basic, Don't know"

<sup>12</sup> There is only scope at a national level to examine self-assessed skills in English, as French, German, Spanish and Russian are only widely spoken in a small number of countries

<sup>13</sup> SD3. FOR EACH ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MENTIONED AT D48b, D48c and D48d "How often do you use your.....? (ONE ANSWER PER LINE) First additional language, Second additional language, Third additional language? Every day/almost every day, Often but not on a daily basis, Occasionally, Don't know"

Foreign languages are most commonly used on holidays abroad (50%), when watching films/television or listening to the radio (37%), using the internet (36%) and communicating with friends (35%)<sup>14</sup>. Since 2005 there has been a notable increase in the proportion of Europeans who regularly use foreign languages on the internet (+10 percentage points) and when watching films/television/listening to the radio (+8 points). EU15 is more likely than NMS12 to regularly use foreign languages for the majority of activities.

## PASSIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS

Just over two fifths (44%) of Europeans say that they are able to understand at least one foreign language well enough to be able to follow the news on radio or television<sup>15</sup>. English is the most widely mentioned foreign language, with a quarter (25%) of respondents saying that they can follow radio or television news in English. Only a small minority of Europeans say they understand French (7%), German (7%), Spanish (5%), Russian (3%) and Italian (2%) well enough to be able to do so.

A similar proportion (44%) of Europeans are able to read a newspaper or magazine article in a foreign language. Again English is the most widespread foreign language, with a similar proportion of Europeans (25%) able to read a newspaper or magazine article in the language and correspondingly smaller proportions able to do so in French (7%), German (6%), Spanish (4%), Russian and Italian (2% each).

Europeans are slightly less likely to be able to communicate online in a foreign language (e.g. using email, Twitter, Facebook etc.) with two fifths (39%) saying that they can. Again, English is the most widely cited language, with a similar proportion of respondents (26%) understanding it well enough to use it in this way and much smaller proportions able to use French (5%), German (5%), Spanish (3%), Russian and Italian (1% each).

<sup>14</sup> SD4a. and SD4b. FOR FIRST AND SECOND ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MENTIONED AT D48b and D48c "When do you regularly use (FIRST/SECOND LANGUAGE MENTIONED)? (SHOW CARD – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) Conversations at work, either face-to-face or by telephone; Reading at work; Writing e-mails/letters at work; Travelling abroad on business; While studying languages; While studying something else; Communicating with members of your family; Communicating with friends; On holidays abroad; Watching films/television/listening to the radio; Reading books/newspapers/magazines; On the Internet; Other (SPONTANEOUS); None (SPONTANEOUS); Don't know"

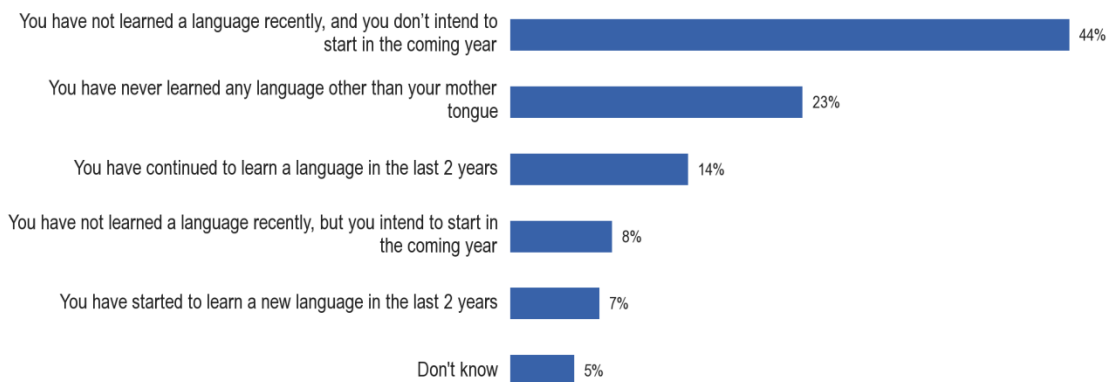
<sup>15</sup> New to the 2012 survey SD5a, b and c. FOR EACH ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MENTIONED AT D48b, D48c and D48d "The previous questions were about the languages that you speak well enough to be able to have a conversation. Which languages other than your mother tongue do you understand well enough .....SD5a. to follow the news on radio or television?.....SD5b. And to read newspaper or magazine articles? ....SD5c. And to communicate online (email, Facebook, Twitter, etc)? (DO NOT SHOW CARD – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) Czech, Arabic, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Galician, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Irish/Gaelic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Urdu, Welsh, Other, None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

The demographic groups most likely to understand a foreign language well enough to undertake these passive activities<sup>16</sup> are similar to those most likely to speak at least two foreign languages, i.e. those aged 15-24; those finishing full-time education aged 20+; daily internet users and those who place themselves high on the social positioning staircase.

## WAYS OF LEARNING A LANGUAGE

The majority of Europeans are not learning languages<sup>17</sup>. Just over two fifths (44%) have not learnt a language recently and do not intend to do so in the next year; around a quarter (23%) have never learnt a language other than their mother tongue; and around one in seven (14%) have continued learning a language in the last two years. Less than one in ten (7%) have started learning a new language in the last two years and a similar proportion have not learnt a language recently, but intend to start in the coming year (8%).

QE3. Which of the following situations apply to you?



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These results can be summarised into three categories of language learner. The majority of Europeans (75%) are inactive language learners<sup>18</sup>; a fifth (20%) are active language learners<sup>19</sup>; and only a very small minority (1%) are very active language learners<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> This analysis is based on respondents who say they know one foreign language well enough to be able to undertake the activity

<sup>17</sup> Q3. "Which of the following situations apply to you? (SHOW CARD – READ OUT – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) You have started to learn a new language in the last 2 years; You have continued to learn a new language in the last 2 years; You have not learned a language recently, but you intend to start in the coming year; You have not learned a new language recently, and you don't intend to start in the coming year; You have never learned any language other than your mother tongue; Don't know"

<sup>18</sup> Inactive is defined as people who have not learnt a language recently and may or may not intend to start in the coming year or who have never learned any language other than their mother tongue

<sup>19</sup> Active is defined as people who either started learning a new language in the last 2 years or continued to learn a new language in the last 2 years

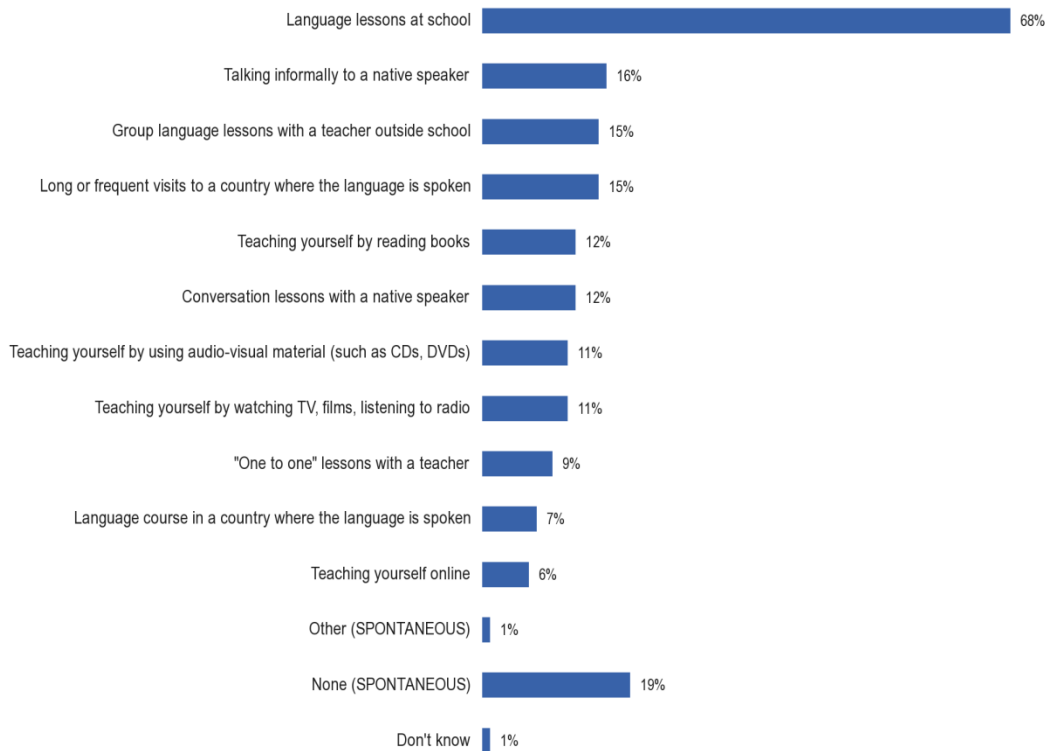
<sup>20</sup> Very active is defined as people who started learning a new language in the last 2 years and have continued to learn a new language in the last 2 years



EU15 is more likely than NMS12 to never have learnt any language (26% vs. 12% respectively).

The most widespread method used by Europeans to learn a foreign language is through lessons at school<sup>21</sup>, mentioned by just over two thirds of Europeans (68%). Other learning methods are much less widely adopted. A fifth (19%) of Europeans say they have not used any of the methods for learning a foreign language.

QE4a. I am going to read out several ways of learning a foreign language. Please tell me which of these ways you have ever used.



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<sup>21</sup>Q4a. "I am going to read out several ways of learning a foreign language. Please tell me which of these ways you have ever used. (SHOW CARD – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) Language lessons at school, Group language lessons with a teacher (outside school), "One to one" lessons with a teacher, Conversation lessons with a native speaker, Talking informally to a native speaker, Long or frequent visits to a country where the language is spoken, Language course in a country where the language is spoken, Teaching yourself by reading books, Teaching yourself by using audio-visual material (such as CDs, DVDs), Teaching yourself by watching TV, films, listening to the radio, Teaching yourself online, Other (SPONTANEOUS), None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

School lessons are the most common way of learning in every Member State, most widespread in Slovenia and Sweden (92% in each), Malta and the Netherlands (91% in each), Denmark and Latvia (90% each) and least widespread in Portugal (33%) and Spain (48%). Reflecting this, language lessons at school are the method most likely to be mentioned, by 46% of Europeans, as the most effective way in which they have learnt a foreign language<sup>22</sup>.

Respondents in Portugal (55%) are most likely to spontaneously say that they have never used any of the methods to learn a foreign language, followed by those in Spain (35%), Italy (31%), Greece (28%), Ireland (27%) and Bulgaria (25%).

Respondents in Malta (69%) are particularly likely to say that school lessons are the most effective method of learning a language they have used, followed by those in Portugal (54%), Denmark (52%) and Germany, Poland and the UK (51% in each). In contrast, respondents in Greece are least likely to perceive language lessons at school as the most effective method they have used (13%) and much more likely to cite group language lessons with a teacher outside school (51%).

## MOTIVATIONS TO LEARNING LANGUAGES

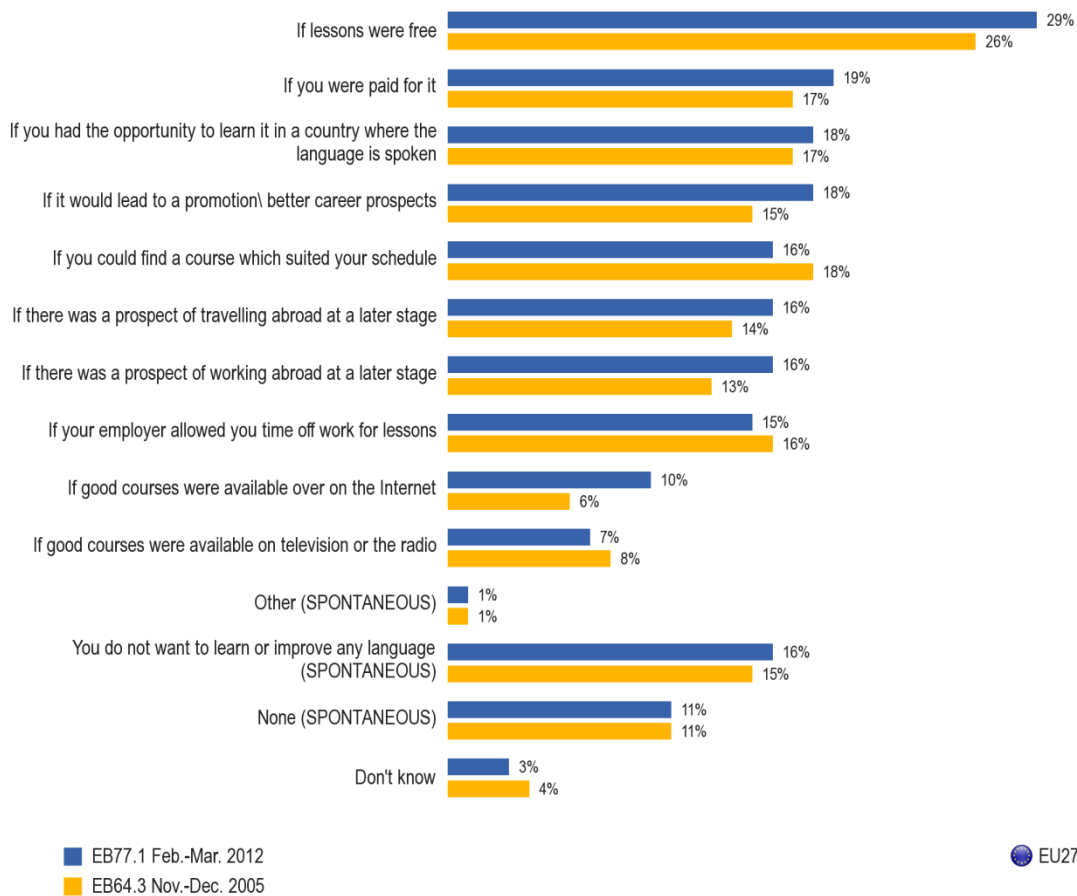
Three fifths of Europeans (61%) think that a key advantage of learning a new language is that it enables working in another country<sup>23</sup>. Just over half (53%) cite using the language at work (including travelling abroad on business) and a slightly smaller proportion using it on holidays abroad (47%). Over two fifths of respondents think that learning a new language would help them get a better job in their own country (45%) and study in another country (43%). Just under two fifths (38%) believe it would help with understanding people from other cultures.

<sup>22</sup>Q4b. (ASK FOR EACH WAYS CHOSEN IN Q4A) "Which way did you find the most effective? (SHOW CARD – ONE ANSWER ONLY) Language lessons at school, Group language lessons with a teacher (outside school), "One to one" lessons with a teacher, Conversation lessons with a native speaker, Talking informally to a native speaker, Long or frequent visits to a country where the language is spoken, Language course in a country where the language is spoken, Teaching yourself by reading books, Teaching yourself by using audio-visual material (such as CDs, DVDs), Teaching yourself by watching TV, films, listening to the radio, Teaching yourself online, Other (SPONTANEOUS), None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

<sup>23</sup> Q2. "In your opinion, what are the main advantages of learning a new language? (SHOW CARD – READ OUT – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) To use on holidays abroad, To use at work (including travelling abroad on business), To be able to study in another country, To be able to work in another country, To meet people from other countries, To be able to understand people from other cultures, To feel more European, To be able to use the internet, Other (SPONTANEOUS), None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

Three in ten Europeans (29%) say that free lessons would make them significantly more likely to learn or improve skills in a language; and around a fifth that they would be encouraged if they were paid to learn (19%), were able to learn it in the country where it is spoken (18%) and if it improved career prospects (18%)<sup>24</sup>. The results are broadly similar to the 2005 survey. Respondents in Portugal (31%) and Hungary (30%) are most likely to say spontaneously that they do not want to learn or improve any language (31% and 30% respectively), followed by those in the UK (24%), Bulgaria (23%), Austria (22%) and Malta (20%).

QE6. Which of the following, if any, would make you significantly more likely to learn a language, or improve your skills in it?

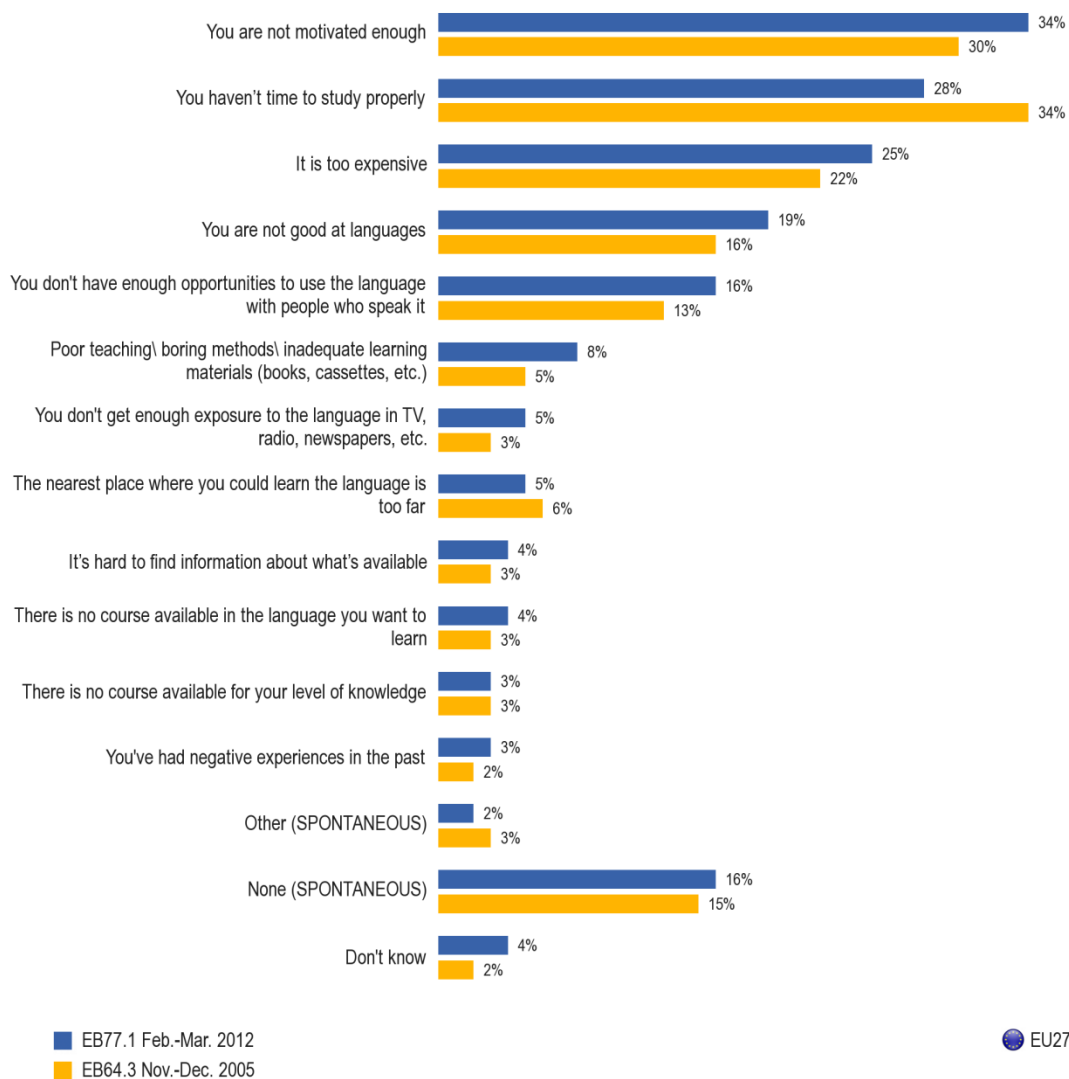


<sup>24</sup> Q6. “Which of the following, if any, would make you significantly more likely to learn a language, or improve your skills in it? (SHOW CARD – READ OUT – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) If you were paid for it, If your employer allowed you time off work for lessons, If lessons were free, If good courses were available on television or the radio, If good courses were available over the Internet, If you could find a course which suited your schedule, If it would lead to a promotion/better career prospects, If you had the opportunity to learn it in a country where the language is spoken, If there was a prospect of travelling abroad at a later stage, If there was a prospect of working abroad at a later stage, Other (SPONTANEOUS), You do not want to learn or improve any language (SPONTANEOUS), None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know”

### BARRIERS TO LEARNING

The most widely mentioned barrier to learning another language is lack of motivation, with a third (34%) of respondents saying this discourages them<sup>25</sup>. Around a quarter of Europeans cite lack of time to study properly (28%) and cost (25%) as barriers; a fifth (19%) not being good at languages; and a sixth (16%) lack of opportunity to use the language with people who speak it. The results are similar to those from 2005.

QE5. I am going to read out a list of different reasons that may discourage people from learning another language. Which, if any, of these would apply to you?



<sup>25</sup> Q5. "I am now going to read out a list of different reasons that may discourage people from learning another language. Which, if any, of these would apply to you? (SHOW CARD – READ OUT – MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) It's hard to find information about what's available, The nearest place where you could learn the language is too far, It is too expensive, There is no course available in the language you want to learn, There is no course available for your level of knowledge, You haven't time to study properly, You are not good at languages, You are not motivated enough, You don't get enough exposure to the language on TV, radio, newspapers, etc, You don't have enough opportunities to use the language with people who speak it, Poor teaching/boring methods/inadequate learning materials (books, cassettes, etc.), You've had negative experiences in the past, Other (SPONTANEOUS), None (SPONTANEOUS), Don't know"

Lack of motivation is most likely to be cited as a barrier in Sweden (52%) and least likely to be seen as a barrier in the UK (21%), Portugal (24%) and Estonia (25%). Not having enough time to study properly is most widely cited as a reason for not learning languages in Malta (43%) and Sweden (40%) and least widely mentioned in Portugal (15%). Cost is most likely to be seen as a deterrent in Bulgaria (46%), Greece (45%) and Hungary (44%), with respondents in Finland (6%) least likely to cite this as a reason. Lack of ability at languages is most likely to be mentioned as a barrier in the Czech Republic (33%) and least likely to be discouraging those in Cyprus (8%).

## ATTITUDES TO TRANSLATION

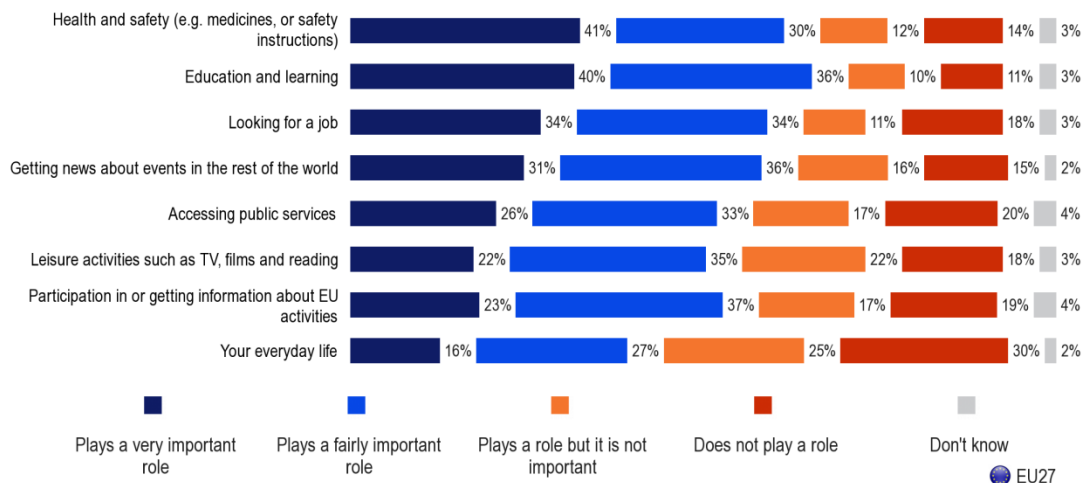
In seven of eight areas that respondents were asked to think about, a majority think that translation has an important role to play<sup>26</sup>. The exception is in people's everyday lives where just over two in five Europeans (43%) say that translation has an important role to play, and just under one in six (16%) consider this role to be very important. Three in ten Europeans (30%) say that translation plays no role at all in their everyday lives.

Europeans are most likely to perceive translation as playing an important role in health and safety (71%) and in education and learning (76%). Around two thirds of respondents (68%) think that translation plays an important role in job seeking and a similar proportion (67%) that it plays an important role in relation to getting news about events in the rest of the world. Slightly fewer respondents - around six in ten - view the role of translation as important in relation to getting information about or participation in EU activities (60%), accessing public services (59%), and leisure activities such as TV, films and reading (57%).

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<sup>26</sup> Q8 "Translations between different languages are used for many reasons. Please tell me to what extent you believe the translation from and into foreign languages plays an important role in each of the following areas..." (SHOW CARD WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER PER LINE) Plays a very important role, Plays a fairly important role, Plays a role but it is not important, Does not play a role (READ OUT) "Your everyday life; Getting news about events in the rest of the world; Leisure activities such as TV, films, and reading; Health and safety (e.g. medicines, or safety instructions); Accessing public services; Education and learning; Looking for a job; Participation in or getting information about EU activities"

QE8. Translations between different languages are used for many reasons. Please tell me to what extent you believe the translation from and into foreign languages plays an important role in each of the following areas.



Respondents in EU15 and NMS12 have similar perceptions of the importance of the role of translation in their daily lives and in leisure activities, such as television, films and reading. In relation to the other activities, respondents in EU15 are slightly more likely than those in NMS12 to think that translation plays an important role, as follows:

- In relation to getting news on events in the rest of the world (68% in EU15 vs. 62% in NMS12)
- in health and safety (72% vs. 67% respectively)
- in accessing public services (62% vs. 55%)
- in education and learning (78% vs. 69%)
- in looking for a job 69% vs. 63%)
- in obtaining information about or participation in EU activities (61% vs. 55%)

Opinions on the importance of translation in relation to each of the activities vary considerably by country, although to a broadly consistent pattern. Respondents in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark and Finland express consistently positive views about the role that translation has to play across all of the activities, with large majorities of respondents in each of these countries perceiving the role of translation to be important across the range of areas.

In contrast, respondents in Ireland are the least likely to perceive translation as important in all eight of the areas, and are considerably less likely than those in any other country to do so. The proportion of respondents in Ireland who consider translation to be important in the different areas ranges from 15% in relation to leisure activities to 21% in relation to education and learning. Respondents in Bulgaria also tend to have consistently less positive views on the importance of translation than most other countries.

However, the proportions of respondents in Bulgaria who consider translation to be important in the different areas is still significantly higher than in Ireland, ranging from 28% in relation to everyday life and accessing public services to 41% in relation to health and safety. Apart from Ireland and Bulgaria, respondents in Austria emerge as tending to have less positive perceptions of the importance of translation than those elsewhere in the EU.

The one area in which the pattern of results by country departs somewhat from the norm is in relation to the role that translation plays in looking for a job, where the highest levels of agreement are found in Greece (83%), Italy (83%) and France (82%), perhaps reflecting the economic backdrop against which the survey was conducted.

Broadly speaking, socio-demographic differences in opinions about the role of translation reflect those found elsewhere, with more positive views tending to be expressed by younger people (those aged 15-24), those who finished their full-time education aged 20+ and regular internet users.