



Compulsory Education in Europe 2021/22

Eurydice – Facts and Figures



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Compulsory Education in Europe

2021/22

Eurydice – Facts and Figures

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This publication provides concise information on the duration of compulsory education/training in 39 European education systems covering 37 countries participating in the EU's Erasmus+ programme (27 EU Member States, 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 2021/22: 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 21 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 less than half of European education systems, full-time compulsory education/training lasts 10-11 years and ends at the age of 15-16. 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 12 education systems. In Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Finland and Turkey, the duration of full-time compulsory education/training is 12 years, while in Belgium (the three Communities) 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, which makes young people remain in some kind of education/training for 15 years (see country-specific notes). 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 two education systems (Austria and Poland) full-time compulsory education/training is followed by additional compulsory part-time education/training.

⁽¹⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2021/22: Schematic Diagrams*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Duration of compulsory education/training and students' age-groups, 2021/22

	Full-time education/training											Additional compulsory part-time	
	Starting age					Leaving age						Duration (in years)	Ending age
	3	4	5	6	7	14	15	16	17	18	19		
BE fr			5							18		13	na
BE de			5							18		13	na
BE nl			5							18		13	na
BG			5					16				11	na
CZ			5				15					10	na
DK				6				16				10	na
DE (12 Länder)				6						18		12	na
DE (4 Länder)				6							19	13	na
EE					7			16				9	na
IE				6				16				10	na
EL		4					15					11	na
ES				6				16				10	na
FR	3									18		15	na
HR					7		15					8	na
IT				6				16				10	na
CY			5				15					10	na
LV			5					16				11	na
LT				6				16				10	na
LU		4						16				12	na
HU	3							16				13	na
MT			5					16				11	na
NL			5					16				11	na
AT			5				15					10	18
PL				6			15					9	18
PT				6						18		12	na
RO			5						17			12	na
SI				6			15					9	na
SK			5					16				11	na
FI				6						18		12	na
SE				6				16				10	na
AL				6			15					9	na
BA				6			15					9	na
CH		4					15					11	na
IS				6				16				10	na
LI				6			15					9	na
ME				6			15					9	na
MK			5y7m						17		19y6m	11-13	na
NO				6				16				10	na
RS			5y6m			14y6m						9	na
TR			5y9m						17y6m			12	na
Starting age	at ISCED level 0					Starting age	at ISCED level 1					na	Not applicable

Explanatory notes

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.

For more information on the ISCED classification, see <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf> [accessed July 2021].

Country-specific notes

Germany: 12 *Länder*: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Hamburg, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thüringen; 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.

France: Since September 2020, training has become compulsory for students aged between 16 and 18. Young people can fulfil this obligation in different ways: 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.

Hungary: From 2021/22, every student under 18 who has completed compulsory education, but dropped out afterwards without completing any other courses has to continue her/his education and training until the acquisition of at least one partial VET qualification.

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.

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 obrazovanie za zanimanja*. The highest leaving age of 19 years and 6 months applies to students attending general secondary education (*gimnazisko obrazovanie*) or a four-year programme of vocational education (*chetirigodishno strucno obrazovanie*).

COUNTRY CODES

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

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Compulsory Education in Europe – 2021/22

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 39 European education systems covering 37 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 co-ordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

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