

Metadata: Explanatory text



Recommended annual instruction time in full time compulsory education in Europe

Concept Name

Description

A

Data description (metadata)

Data description

This domain covers administrative data on the recommended instruction time (intended instruction time) of compulsory education from the first year of primary education until the end of full-time compulsory education for all students (i.e., compulsory education within primary education (ISCED 1), and grades in general lower and upper secondary education (ISCED 2.4 and 3.4), which are full-time compulsory for all students. Pre-primary education programmes, even if compulsory, are not within the scope of the present data collection.

The standards on international information/statistics on recommended annual instruction time are set by the two international organisations jointly administering the annual update of this data collection:

- Unit A.6 – ‘Platforms, Studies and Analysis’ of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA),
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Data are collected jointly via two networks managed by these organisations:

- The Eurydice network for EACEA,
- The OECD/NESLI correspondents for the OECD.

The following topics are covered:

1. **Total** recommended minimum instruction time for the compulsory curriculum, in hours (60 minutes), per notional school year
2. Recommended minimum instruction time **by subject** for the compulsory curriculum, in hours (60 minutes), per notional school year.

Both are currently available:

- by ISCED level (1; 24; 34)
- by grade.

The subjects defined are the following:

- **Reading, writing and literature (L1):** Covers skills such as spelling, reading, and writing in the language of instruction and includes subjects such as grammar, language of instruction and literature. It can be considered as the first language taught to students. If there are two languages of instruction in almost every public school, then hours allocated to reading, writing and literature in both languages of instruction are reported.
- **Mathematics:** Covers all numeracy skills and subjects such as arithmetic, algebra, geometry, statistics, etc.
- **Natural Sciences:** Includes subjects such as science, physics, chemistry, biology, environmental sciences and ecology.
- **Social Sciences:** Includes subjects such as history, geography and all related studies. May also include community studies, social and political instruction, philosophy or civics education.
- **Languages (L2-L5):** Includes subjects that develop students' knowledge of a language viewed in the curriculum as 'foreign' (or modern) languages, other national languages and/or regional and minority languages. This definition of languages in the curriculum is educationally based and unrelated to the political status of languages.
- **Physical Education and Health:** Includes subjects such as education in sports and health enhancing physical activities, as well as time devoted to instruction in competitive and traditional games, gymnastics, swimming, athletics, dance or other activities that develop pupils' physical and social competences (including knowledge, skills, psychomotor coordination, cooperation and leadership) and an active healthy lifestyle.

- **Arts Education:** Includes subjects such as arts, history of arts, music, visual arts, drama, music and dance performance, photography, and creative handicraft.
- **Religion/Ethics/Moral education:** Includes subjects whose aim it is to teach the principles and history of one or more religions and subjects such as ethics whose aim it is to determine how to live and behave in accordance with human and social principles.
- **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT):** Includes subjects such as informatics, information and communication technologies or computer science. These subjects include a wide range of topics concerned with the new technologies used for the processing and transmission of digital information, including computers, computerised networks (including the Internet), microelectronics, multimedia, software and programming, etc.
- **Technology:** Includes subjects that provide knowledge on the practical use of scientific or technological discoveries that use specific instruments and processes. For example, construction, electricity, electronics, graphics and design, etc.
- **Practical and vocational skills:** Includes vocational skills (preparation for a specific occupation), accountancy, entrepreneurship education or business studies, career guidance, clothing and textiles, driving and road security, home economics, nursing, secretarial studies, tourism and hospitality, woodwork, metalwork and sewing.
- **Other subjects:** Includes different subjects that cannot be classified within the other groups or which specifically reflect national concerns. The following subjects could be included in this category: Latin, ancient Greek, classical studies, minority languages which have not been reported in Language 2, 3, 4 or 5, environmental education, personal development and well-being. The 'other subjects' must be part of the compulsory curriculum to be provided by schools. Form time, assemblies and tutoring should only be included if they are compulsory, have an educational component and are aimed at all the students.

Further definitions are available in Section 2 of the [Joint data collection manual on instruction time](#).

Statistical population	Full-time students in compulsory education in public (or government-dependent schools) at ISCED levels 1, 24 and 34. The main focus of this joint data collection is the intended instruction time that students are entitled to receive in public schools. However, government-dependent private schools are included in countries where they enrol a large proportion of the student population. If so, it is indicated in a country specific note.
Reference period	Data refer to the school year.
Frequency of dissemination	Biennial.
Geographical reference area	The information is available for the 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 Türkiye). For Belgium, information is provided by education system (French, German-speaking and Flemish Communities).
Unit of measure	The minimum instruction time is disseminated in hours (60 minutes) per notional school year. Number of instruction days per school year: The minimum number of days that schools are open and pupils/students receive instruction. Days when schools are closed for festivities, such as national holidays, and days when students are not expected to be at school because of teacher development days or examination periods are excluded. Teacher development days refer to the days that regulations and official documents may provide for all teachers to participate in CPD activities during the instruction days of the school year when students do not have the obligation to attend school. These days are excluded even if the school may offer other activities to students on a voluntary basis. The information may be provided as minimum instruction time by week or year, and by hour (60 minutes) or period (usually between 45 and 55 minutes). All data are converted into number of hours per school year. More information on the calculation methodology is provided in Section 1.4 of the Joint data collection manual for instruction time.
Basic statistical concepts and definitions	Countries participating in this data collection are compiling their data according to the concepts and definitions of the Joint data collection manual for instruction time. Compulsory curriculum refers to the amount and allocation of instruction time that has to be provided in almost every public school and must be attended by almost all public sector students. The compulsory curriculum may be flexible in various ways as local authorities, schools, teachers and/or pupils may have

varying degrees of freedom to choose the subjects and/or the allocation of the compulsory instruction time.

Intended instruction time includes the time a public school is expected to provide instruction to students/pupils on all the subjects integrated in the compulsory and non-compulsory curriculum in the school premises or in out-of-school activities which are formal parts of the compulsory programmes. The instruction time excludes: Breaks between classes or other types of interruptions; Non-compulsory time outside the school day; Time dedicated to homework activities; Individual tutoring or private study; Days when schools are closed for festivities, such as national holidays, and days when all students (of indicated ISCED level or grade) are not expected to be at school because of teacher development days or examination periods.

Grade: Each education level is composed of a series of grades or classes that must be taken in a consecutive way by the pupils/students making normal progress (i.e. who has not had to redo a year) and where they are taught together in the same course of instruction. Grade 1 corresponds to the first year of compulsory primary education (ISCED 1).

Theoretical age: Refers to the theoretical age, determined by central education authorities, at which a child would normally attend a specific grade in compulsory primary education (delays, grade retention are not taken into account).

All subjects are clearly defined (see above).

The top-level authorities may partly delegate the organisation of the curriculum to the local authorities and/or the schools. Four main types of flexibility exist:

- **horizontal flexibility:** Curricula only specify the subjects and the total instruction time per grade, without specifying the time to be allocated to each subject. In such cases, schools/local authorities are free to decide how much time should be assigned for specific compulsory subjects.
- **vertical flexibility:** Curricula only indicate the total instruction time that has to be taught for a specific subject for a certain number of grades, or even the whole of compulsory education, without specifying the time to be allocated to each grade. In such cases, schools/local authorities are free to decide how much time should be assigned for each grade.
- **compulsory subjects with flexible timetable** include the total amount of instruction time indicated by the top-level authorities for a given group of subjects, which regional authorities, local authorities, schools or teachers allocate to individual subjects. There is flexibility in the time spent on a subject, but not in the subjects to be taught. For example, central authorities may define the total number of hours that students should be studying reading, writing and literature, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages per year and schools may choose how to distribute this time between these individual subjects.
- **compulsory flexible subjects chosen by schools** includes the total amount of compulsory instruction time indicated by the central authorities, which regional authorities, local authorities, schools or teachers allocate to subjects of their choice (or subjects they chose from a list defined by central education authorities). For example, schools may be able to choose between offering religious education or more science, or art, etc., but to offer one of these subjects is compulsory for the school and students must attend it.

In addition, there may also be **compulsory options chosen by students**. This includes the total amount of instruction time on one or more subjects that pupils have to select (from a set of subjects that are compulsory for schools to offer) in order to cover part of their compulsory instruction time. This only applies if students have a choice between different subjects (as categorised above) and not a choice within a subject category. For example, students may be able to choose between studying a second foreign language or computer science or economics, but to attend one of these options is compulsory.

Besides, the above defined subjects may be defined in different ways in national curricula:

- **as subject in its own right:** Subject devoted exclusively to work on a single area or group of topics. This concept is to be distinguished from integrated subjects.

- as **integrated subject**: Topics that are not necessarily learnt as ‘subjects in their own right’, but in the course of other subjects for which they may even serve as a tool, as in the case of ICT (Information and Communication Technology). To be considered an integrated subject, it must have its own learning objectives in the official curriculum.

Explanations by country are available in the country-specific notes.

Classifications used [ISCED 2011 International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\)](#).

Statistical Confidentiality [Regulation \(EC\) No 223/2009 on European statistics](#) (recital 24 and Article 20(4)) of 11 March 2009 (OJ L 87, p. 164), stipulates the need to establish common principles and guidelines ensuring the confidentiality of data used for the production of European statistics and the access to those confidential data with due account for technical developments and the requirements of users in a democratic society.

B Data quality

Relevance In its [2018 Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning](#), the Council recommended that Member States support the development of key competences paying special attention to raising the level of achievement of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills), fostering the acquisition of competences in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), increasing the level of language competences in both official and other languages.

Existing evidence suggest that the quality of instruction and the time available for learning can have a positive effect on student achievement and can compensate for weaknesses in other areas such as students’ capabilities or willingness to learn.

Key users of these data are decision-makers in the field of education, trade unions and researchers.

The data sent by participating countries are overall complete and match the requirements set out in the [Joint data collection manual on instruction time](#). Nevertheless, some national datasets are not always fully matching the expected format because some content is missing or is not applicable:

- Data missing is displayed as ‘not available’ (‘.’ or ‘m’). It means that the country could not collect the variable for some reason.
- Data not applicable is displayed as ‘not applicable’ (‘-’ or ‘a’). It means that the concept does not exist in the country.

Timeliness Published at the end of the reference school year

Accuracy and reliability The data collection is based on a common manual and a common questionnaire at European level. Data collected by national providers come from regulations or standards of the top-level authority responsible for education. The top-level authority is usually the state, but in some countries the competence lies (or is shared) with sub-state entities (e.g., regions). Any deviation to the common definitions specified in the [Joint data collection manual on instruction time](#) is indicated in a country-specific note. To ensure a high quality of data, all data provided by the Eurydice and the OECD/NESLI networks undergo a joint cleaning phase by EACEA.A6 and the OECD. Following this process, the pre-final cleaned data are checked by the two respective networks to ensure that all corrections have been integrated in an appropriate manner.

Accessibility and clarity **Publications:**
This data set is analysed every two years in a report available in PDF format. For the first time in 2023, this PDF publication is supplemented by an Excel file providing in open format all data presented in the comparative report.

- Recommended annual instruction time in full-time compulsory education in Europe – 2022/2023 (PDF report) is available on the [EACEA/Eurydice website](#) and on the website of the [Publications office of the European Union](#).
- Data used for the report are available in Excel format are available on the [EACEA/Eurydice website](#).

A web-based interactive presentation of data with more varied possibilities of visualisation and download is planned for the next update of this data collection (2024/2025 school year).

Quality documentation:
The Joint data collection manual on instruction time and the questionnaire used for the data collection are available on the [EACEA/Eurydice web-site](#).

Coherence and comparability

Over time: No comparable time series have so far been published in the yearly reports. However, time series will be available in a future web-based development.

Geographical: The organisation of the education systems differs between countries. The [ISCED 2011 classification](#), the notions of grades and theoretical age are therefore used.

C Contact and update

Contact organisation	European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)
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