



Compulsory education in Europe 2022/2023

Eurydice – *Facts and Figures*

In Europe, compulsory education starts at the beginning of primary education (ISCED level 1) or at the end of pre-primary education (ISCED level 0).

The most common age to start full-time compulsory education is 6 years. Children in France and Hungary are the earliest starters, being required to begin compulsory education at 3 years old. In contrast, children in Estonia and Croatia are not obliged to start education before they reach the age of 7.

In all countries, the full-time compulsory education/training period includes primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 1 and 2). In most countries, it also contains one or more grades of upper secondary education (ISCED level 3). Attending at least one year of pre-primary education (ISCED level 0) is compulsory in about half of the education systems.

Full-time compulsory education/training refers to a period of full-time education/training that is regulated by law as compulsory for all students. This period is often determined by students' age. Usually, full-time compulsory education/training is provided in educational institutions/schools. In addition, some systems apply a dual education system, where certain compulsory education/training programmes combine part-time school and workplace courses. 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 Europe, full-time compulsory education/training usually lasts 10-11 years and ends at the age of 15-16. The shortest duration (8-9 years) is set in Estonia, Croatia, Poland, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, Montenegro and Serbia. Some of these countries may require children to attend pre-primary education programmes part-time (250 or less hours per year). In a quarter of European countries, education/training is compulsory for more than 11 years and usually lasts until age 18. The requirement to attend full-time compulsory education/training until the age of 19 is rare, but occurs in 5 *Länder* in Germany and in some educational programmes in North Macedonia.

The longest duration of full-time compulsory education/training is set in France, where it lasts 15 years (from the ages of 3 to 18 years). 13 years' attendance is mandatory for all students in Belgium (the three Communities), Hungary and Romania. In Romania, the extension of full-time compulsory education/training until the age 18, introduced by an amendment of the Education Law (56/2019) was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and came into force this year.

Some countries have introduced certain extensions of compulsory education/training. In Austria and Poland, full-time compulsory education/training is followed by some period of additional compulsory part-time education/training. In Hungary and the Netherlands, where the leaving age is set at 16, students who have not obtained certain basic qualifications are required to continue their education/training until the age of 18.

Duration of compulsory education/training and students' age-groups, 2022/2023

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

Starting age: at ISCED level 0 at ISCED level 1

Explanatory notes

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.

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.

For more information on the ISCED levels, see the International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED 2011](#).

Country-specific notes

Germany: 11 *Länder*: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Hamburg, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein; 5 *Länder*: Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Nordrhein-Westfalen and Thüringen. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the duration of full-time compulsory education is nine or ten years, depending on the duration of the course of education.

Ireland: education is compulsory for children from the ages of 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of post-primary education.

France: young people aged between 16 and 18 can fulfil the obligation for compulsory training 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: 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.

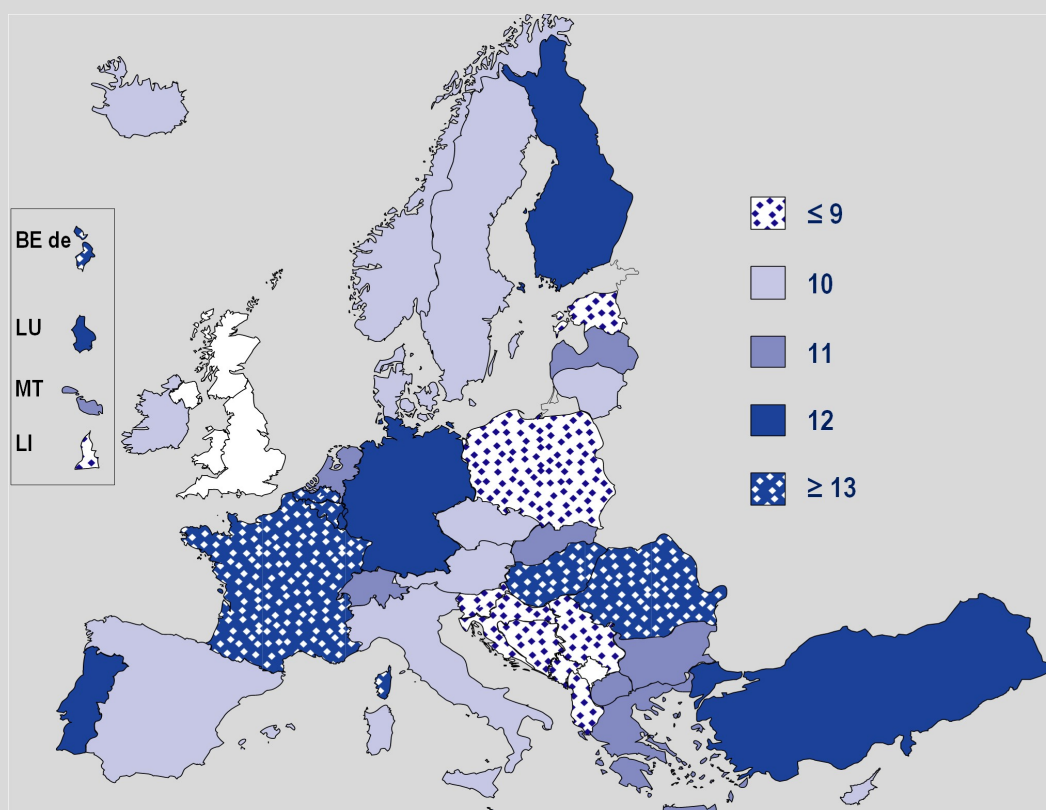
Netherlands: students who have not obtained a basic qualification (*Startkwalificatie*) have to continue their education/training until they turn 18 or get a senior general secondary (HAVO) or pre-university (VWO) or VET (at least MBO 2) diploma.

Switzerland: in most Cantons, compulsory education starts at age of 4 years (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*).

Duration of compulsory education/training in Europe, in years, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

Note: when the duration varies within the country, the shortest is shown in the map.

Compulsory education in Europe – 2022/2023

This fact sheet 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.

Detailed information on the structure of education systems is available in the report: [The structure of the European education systems 2022/2023: schematic diagrams](#).

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