



Compulsory education in Europe 2023/2024

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 work-based courses. In such cases, students are assessed for the work they do in both places (workplace and school). In some education systems, compulsory education/training can be provided at home under certain conditions.

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 slightly less than one-third of European education systems, 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 four *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.

Few 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, 2023/2024

	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 (4 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			4y8m					15y8m				11	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						17y9m			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: in Nordrhein-Westfalen (Land not mentioned in the table), the duration of full-time compulsory education is nine or ten years, depending on the duration of the education course. The 11 Länder are: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Hamburg, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein; the four Länder are: Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen and Thüringen.

Ireland: formal 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.

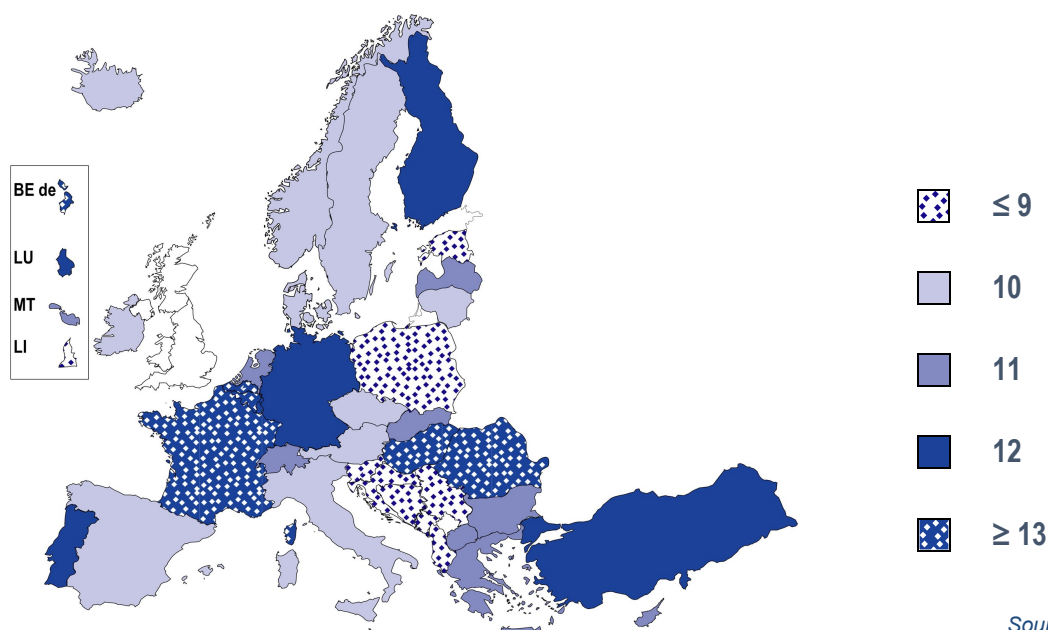
Netherlands: students who have not obtained a basic qualification (*Startkwalificatie*) have to continue their education/training until they turn 18 or get a senior general secondary (HAVO) or pre-university (VWO) or VET (at least MBO 2) diploma.

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 full-time compulsory education/training in Europe, in years, 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice.

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

Compulsory education in Europe – 2023/2024

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 2023/2024: schematic diagrams](#).

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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