Compulsory Education in Europe 2019/20

Eurydice – Facts and Figures
This publication provides concise information on the duration of compulsory education/training in 43 European education systems covering 38 countries participating in the EU's Erasmus+ programme (28 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 2019/20: 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 16 education systems. France and Hungary report the earliest starting age for compulsory education (3 years old). By contrast, in Estonia, 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 more than half of European education systems, full-time compulsory education/training lasts 10-11 years and ends at the age of 15-16, except in Romania where the leaving age is 17. 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 (HAO) 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 11 education systems. In Belgium (the three Communities), Luxembourg, Portugal, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) and Turkey, the duration of full-time compulsory education/training is 12 years, while in France and Hungary 13 years’ attendance is mandatory for all students. In France, as of September 2020, compulsory education and training will last 15 years. In Germany, the duration varies between the Länder: It is 12 years and 13 years in 11 and 5 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 four education systems (the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and the United Kingdom – England), full-time compulsory education/training is followed by additional compulsory part-time education/training. In the United Kingdom (England), for instance, after the end of full-time compulsory education (age 16), young people still have to remain in education or training until their 18th birthday. However, full-time attendance at school or college is not mandatory. Young people can also fulfil this obligation by participating in part-time education or training combined with full-time work or volunteering, or in work-based learning.

## Students’ starting and leaving age for compulsory education/training. Duration of compulsory education/training, 2019/20

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Explanatory note

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.


Country-specific notes

Belgium: In March 2019, the Belgian federal parliament passed a law to lower the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 5, including one year of pre-primary education (ISCED level 0). The law will come into force in September 2020.

Germany: 11 Län der: Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bayern, Hamburg, Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein; 5 Län der: Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Nordrhein-Westfalen and Thuringen. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the duration of full-time compulsory education is nine years for the Gymnasium, and ten years for other general education schools.

Greece: Since school year 2018/19 and according to Law 4521/2018, the starting age of compulsory education has been lowered from age 5 to 4. Attending pre-primary school (Nipiagogeio), which lasts two years, is compulsory. The implementation of this measure will take place within a three-year period.

France: As of September 2019, compulsory education will start at the age of 3 (when it used to be 6). As of September 2020, training will become compulsory for 16-18-year-old students.

Croatia: The pre-primary programme (program predškole) is compulsory part-time education for all children one year before primary education, which starts at 7.

Netherlands: At 16, students who have not obtained a basic qualification (Startkwalficatie) 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.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Education between 5 and 6 is only compulsory on a part-time basis in the Federation of BiH and the Brčko District. In the Republika Srpska, it is implemented on the same basis, although it is not mandatory.

Switzerland: In most Cantons, compulsory education starts at age 4 (in a few of them at the ages 5 or 6).

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 years vocational programme strucno osposobuvanje while the ending age of 18 applies to those attending the three years vocational programme strucno obrazovanje za zanimanja. The highest leaving age of 19 years and 6 months applies to students attending general secondary education (gimnazisko obrazovanje) or a four years programme of vocational education (chetirigodishno struchno obrazovanje).

COUNTRY CODES

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Compulsory Education in Europe – 2019/20

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 43 European education systems covering 38 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 coordinated by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. For more information about Eurydice, see http://ec.europa.eu/eurydice.