



# Flash Eurobarometer 466

Briefing note

## The European Education Area

Fieldwork  
April 2018  
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Survey requested by the European Commission,  
Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture  
and co-ordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication

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Flash Eurobarometer 466 – TNS Political & Social

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(DG COMM "Media monitoring, media analysis and Eurobarometer" Unit)

<http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion>

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## INTRODUCTION

The primary responsibility for education, training and culture policies lies with the Member States, at national, regional and local levels. Yet, the European Union plays an increasingly important and complementary role in these areas, particularly in the case of cross-border initiatives such as the Erasmus programme, (Erasmus+ since 2014), which has enabled 9 million people to study, train, teach, or volunteer in another country.

In recent years, the EU has developed a range of 'soft policy' tools to support Member States in the reforms of national education and training policies. The Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training, in operation since 2000, has set common objectives and benchmarks, allowing the Member States to assess the development of their education systems. Furthermore, in 2010 the EU set itself two education targets under the Europe 2020 Strategy, resulting in real progress. Early school leaving has been reduced from 14.7% in 2010 to 10.7% in 2016, targeting 10% by 2020, while tertiary educational attainment is up to 39.1% in 2016 from 31.1% in 2008, targeting 40% by 2020<sup>1</sup>.

In the meantime, education, training and culture have been placed high on the Union's political agenda. In the Rome Declaration of March 2017, EU leaders pledged to work towards a *Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity*. The European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in November 2017 and establishes the right to quality education, training and lifelong learning as its first principle.

At the November 2017 Gothenburg Summit, education and culture became the first topics for debate under the new Leaders' Agenda, which focuses on key issues for Europe's future. As input for this discussion, the Commission set out its vision for a European Education Area by 2025, for *"a Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders. A continent, where spending time in another Member State – to study, to learn, or to work – has become the standard and where, in addition to one's mother tongue, speaking two other languages has become the norm. A continent in which people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity."*

As the Commission has clarified in its Communication of 22 May 2018 on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies, the European Education Area has three main components:

- promoting cross-border mobility and cooperation in education and training;
- helping to overcome unjustified obstacles that make it more difficult to learn, train or work in another country with the aim of realising the "free movement of learners" and creating a genuine European learning space;
- supporting Member States in improving the inclusive, lifelong-learning based and innovation-driven nature of their education and training systems.

The Area will be underpinned by the lifelong learning continuum, and concern all education sectors from early childhood education and care, through school and vocational education and training to higher education and adult learning.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8113874/KS-EZ-17-001-EN-N.pdf/>

In December 2017, the European Council identified a number of concrete work strands to take work forward on priority issues such as:

- stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ programme;
- strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions and encouraging the emergence by 2024 of some twenty 'European Universities', consisting in bottom-up networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities;
- enhancing the learning of languages, so that more young people will speak at least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue;
- promoting student mobility and participation in educational and cultural activities, including through a 'European Student Card';
- promoting cooperation of Member States on mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas at secondary education level in the appropriate framework;

Against this background, a Flash Eurobarometer survey was carried out among young people aged 15 to 30 in all 28 Member States.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

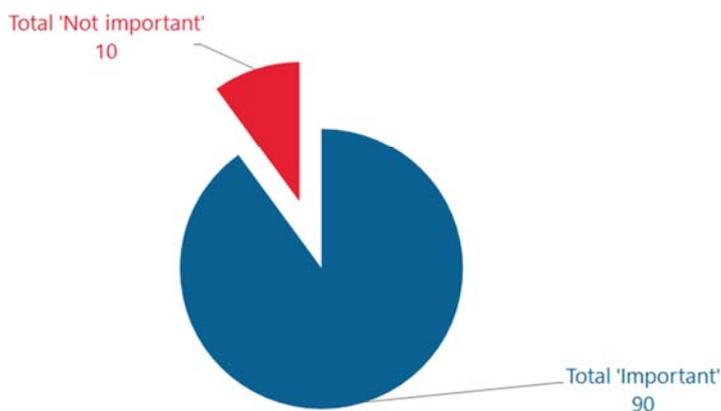
- **90%** of young Europeans consider it **important to have an experience abroad**.
- **91%** agree that **automatic recognition of academic qualifications and learning periods abroad** would be useful to young people.
- **93%** think that it would be **useful to create EU degrees delivered by networks of European universities**, offering students the chance to study in different EU countries, with a flexible choice of courses or modules offered within the network.
- **97%** of young Europeans polled agree that it would be useful to give students the chance to **work on innovative projects alongside academics, researchers and companies** from different countries. They would also welcome more opportunities to study and work together across disciplines and departments.
- **At least nine in ten (90%) young Europeans** think that a range of services provided by **a European Student Card would be useful**.
- One third of all respondents declare themselves unable to study in more than one language. Yet, **77% of young Europeans say they would like to learn a new language**, while **84% would like to improve the knowledge of a foreign language** they have previously learnt.

## I. MOBILITY AND RECOGNITION IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

### A vast majority of young Europeans think that having an experience abroad is important

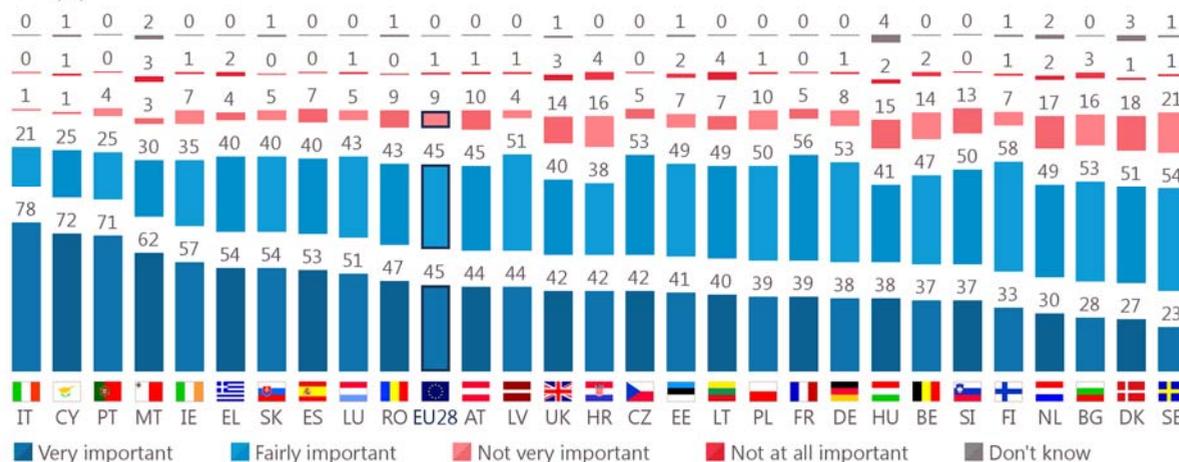
On average, nine in ten (90%) young Europeans say that it is important for young people to have experiences abroad, and nearly half (45%) of them think that this is "very" important<sup>2</sup>. The proportion who feel it is "very" important varies substantially from 23% to 78% across countries. Still, in every Member State, a clear majority of respondents think experiences abroad for young people are important.

**Q1** Young people can have experiences abroad as pupils, students, trainees, apprentices, volunteers or youth workers, as young professionals or on youth exchanges. How important or not do you think it is for young people to have an experience abroad? (% - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

**Q1** Young people can have experiences abroad as pupils, students, trainees, apprentices, volunteers or youth workers, as young professionals or on youth exchanges. How important or not do you think it is for young people to have an experience abroad? (%)



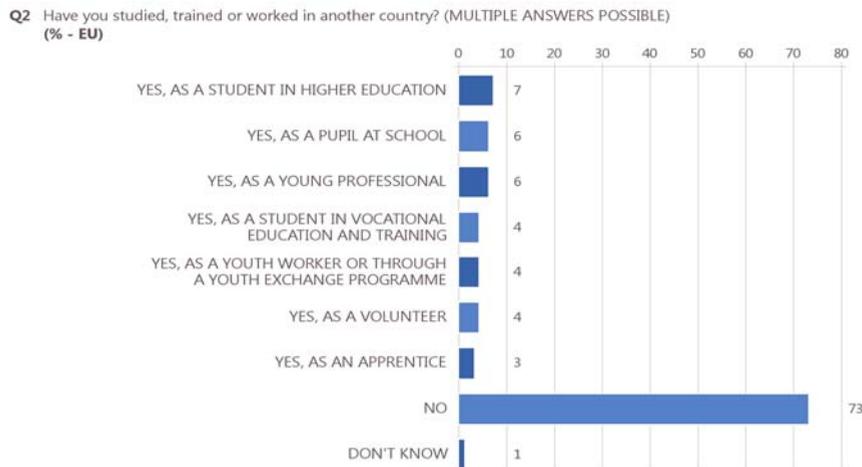
Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

<sup>2</sup> Q1 Young people can have experiences abroad as pupils, students, trainees, apprentices, volunteers or youth workers, as young professionals or on youth exchanges. How important or not do you think it is for young people to have an experience abroad? ONE ANSWER ONLY Very important; Fairly important; Not very important; Not at all important; Don't know.

There is a clear link between linguistic competence or having had an experience abroad and the tendency to think that such experiences are very important. Nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents who have had experiences abroad consider this to be very important for young people, compared with less than four in ten (39%) of those who have not had an experience abroad.

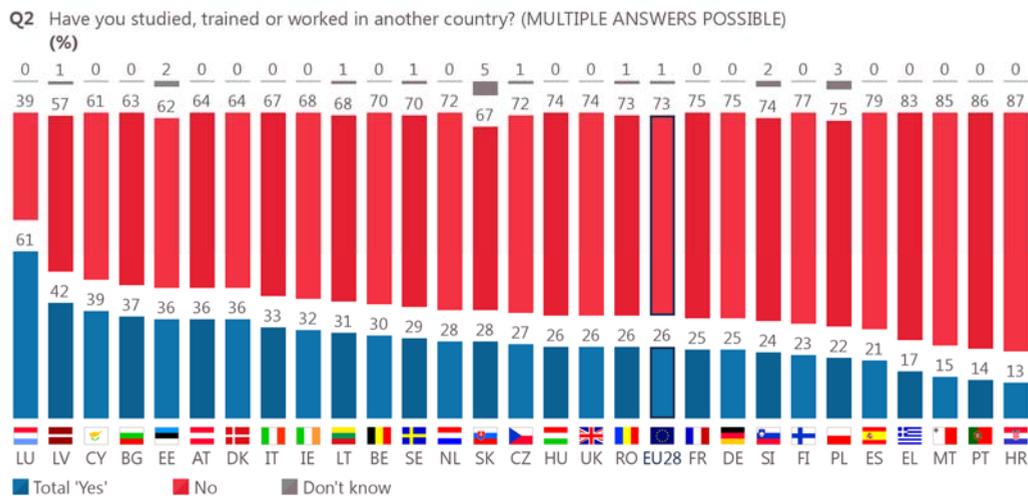
**Over a quarter (26%) of young Europeans have had an experience abroad**

26% of respondents have studied, trained, worked or volunteered in another country<sup>3</sup>. For most of them, the experience abroad occurred when they were higher education students (7%), as pupils at school or as young professionals (both 6%). Other types of mobility experiences were mentioned by a smaller proportion of respondents.



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

Over a third (37%) of those with the highest levels of education have had experiences abroad, compared with less than a fifth (15%) of those with the lowest levels of education. In Luxembourg, six in ten (61%) have had such experiences abroad, compared with just one in ten (13%) of those polled in Croatia.



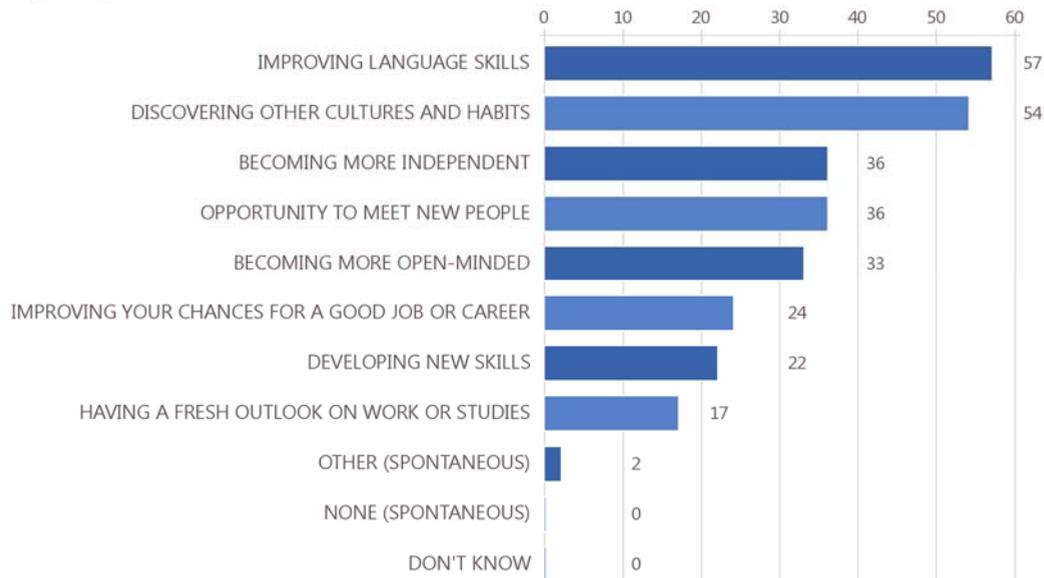
Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

<sup>3</sup> Q2 Have you studied, trained or worked in another country? MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE Yes, as a pupil at school; Yes, as a student in higher education; Yes, as a student in vocational education and training; Yes, as an apprentice; Yes, as a volunteer; Yes, as a youth worker or through a youth exchange programme; Yes, as a young professional; No; Don't know.

### Over half of young Europeans who have had experiences abroad improved their language skills and benefitted from discovering other cultures and habits

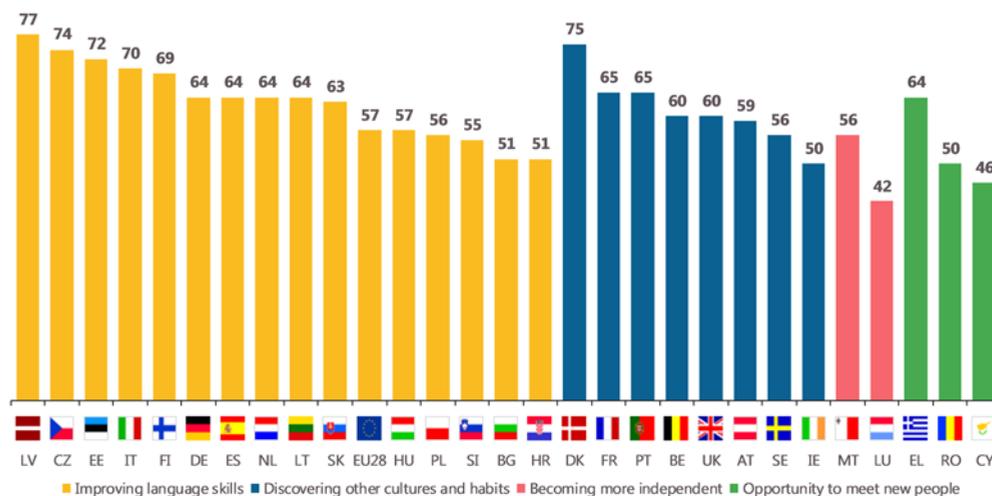
The most frequently mentioned benefits are improving language skills (57%) and discovering other cultures and habits (54%)<sup>4</sup>. Large proportions of respondents also mention the benefits of becoming more independent, the opportunity to meet new people (both 36%), and becoming more open-minded (33%). Fewer mention improving job and career chances (24%), developing new skills (22%) and gaining a fresh outlook on work or studies (17%).

Q3 What do you think were the three main benefits of your experience abroad? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS) (% - EU)



Base: Respondents who had an experience abroad (N=2,127)

Q3 What do you think were the three main benefits of your experience abroad? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS) (% - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY)



Base: Respondents who had an experience abroad (N=2,127)

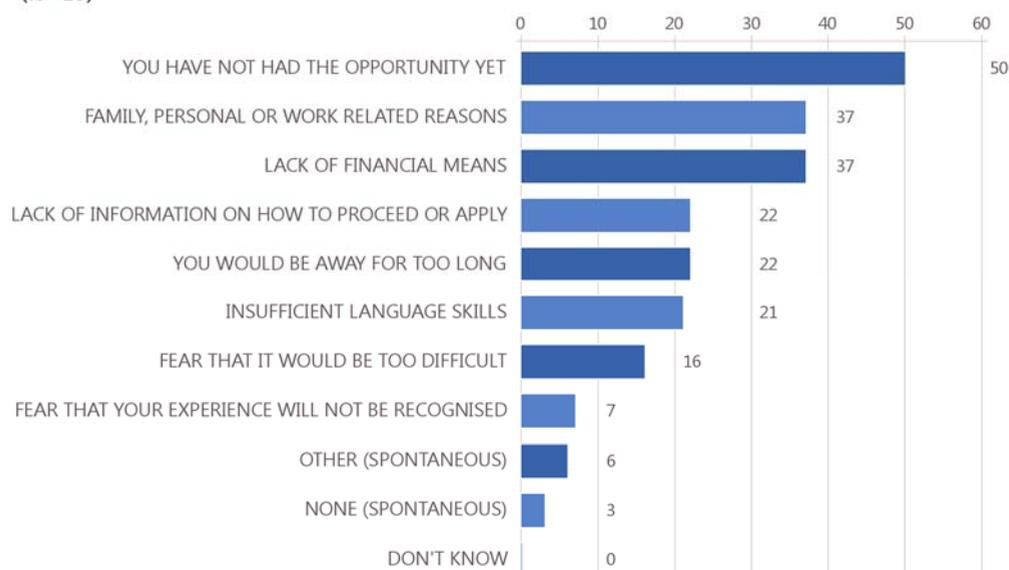
<sup>4</sup> Q3 What do you think were the three main benefits of your experience abroad? MAXIMUM THREE ANSWERS Opportunity to meet new people; Discovering other cultures and habits; Becoming more independent; Developing new skills; Improving your chances for a good job or career; Having a fresh outlook on work or studies; Becoming more open-minded; Other; None; Don't know.

## Half of young Europeans who have not had an experience abroad say it is because they have not had the opportunity yet

The survey figures also indicate that nearly three quarters (73%) of young Europeans have not had any personal longer-term experiences abroad (studying, training, working or volunteering in another country), although this varies significantly across Member States.

Among those young Europeans who have not had an experience abroad, half (50%) say this is because they have not yet had the opportunity to do so. Over a third mention family, personal or work-related reasons (37%), or lack of financial means (37%)<sup>5</sup> as an obstacle to going abroad.

**Q4** For which of the following reasons have you not had an experience abroad? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)  
(% - EU)

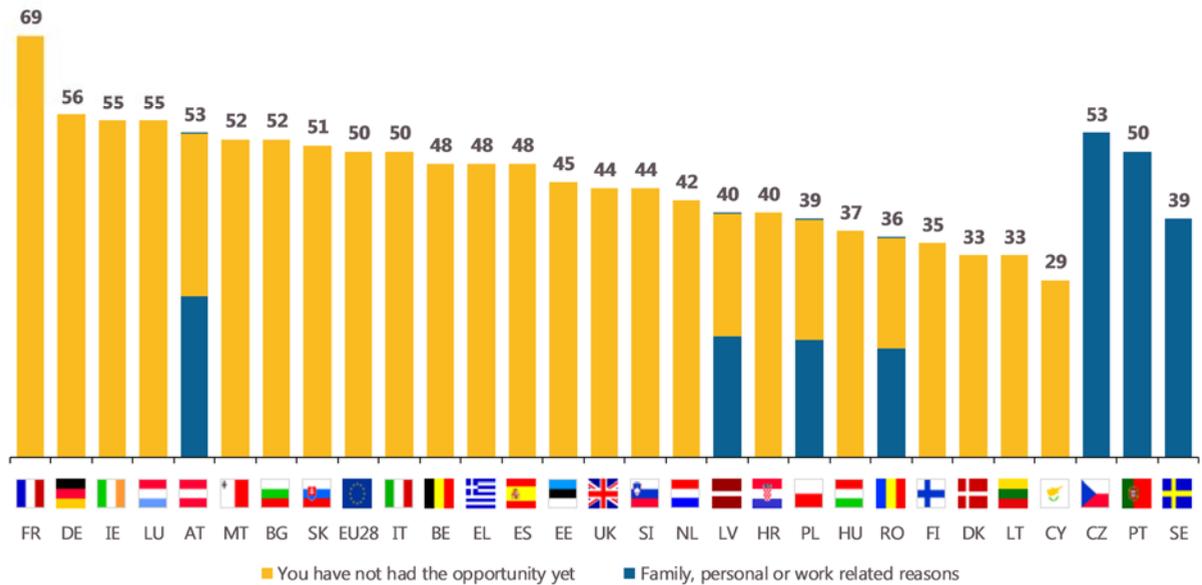


Base: Respondents who have not had an experience abroad (N=5,985)

The youngest respondents (between 15 and 19) are more likely to say that they have not had the opportunity yet (66%) compared with 38% of those between 25 and 30. The latter more often refer to family, personal or work-related reasons refraining them from having an experience abroad (45%, compared with 23% among the youngest respondents).

<sup>5</sup> Q4 For which of the following reasons have you not had an experience abroad? MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE Lack of financial means; Insufficient language skills; Lack of information on how to proceed or apply; Fear that it would be too difficult; Fear that your experience will not be recognised; You would be away for too long; Family, personal or work-related reasons; You have not had the opportunity yet; Other; None; Don't know.

**Q4** For which of the following reasons have you not had an experience abroad? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)  
 (% - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY)

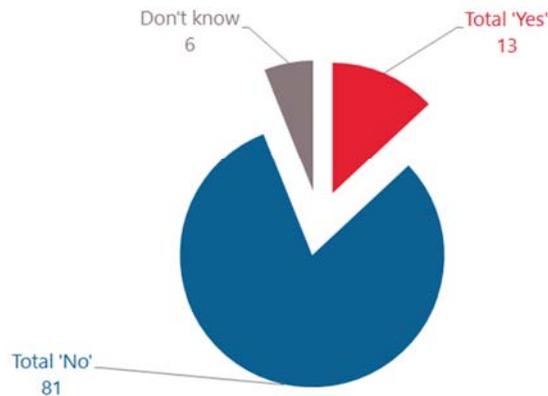


Base: Respondents who have not had an experience abroad (N=5,985)

**Most young Europeans have not had substantial difficulties with the recognition of their qualifications abroad, but nevertheless approve of a system of automatic recognition**

In all of the 28 Member States, a large majority of respondents who have had an experience abroad (81%) have not encountered many difficulties with the recognition of their qualifications<sup>6</sup>.

**Q5** Did you have any difficulties with the recognition of the qualifications, degrees, credits or learning outcomes obtained during your experience abroad?  
 (% - EU)



Base: Respondents who had an experience abroad (N=2,127)

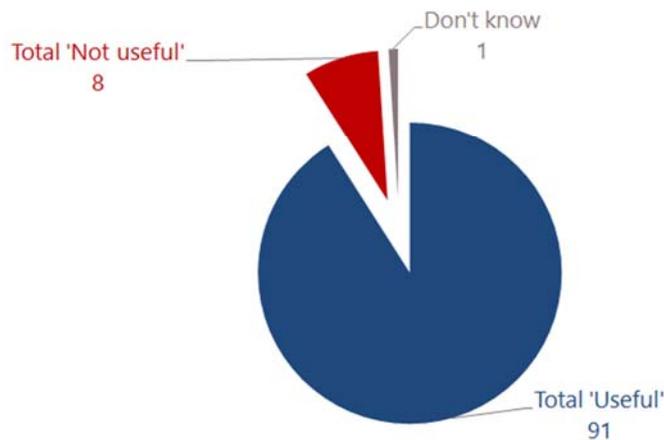
<sup>6</sup> Q5 Did you have any difficulties with the recognition of the qualifications, degrees, credits or learning outcomes obtained during your experience abroad? ONE ANSWER ONLY Yes, a lot of difficulties; Yes, some difficulties; No, not many difficulties; No, no difficulties at all; Don't know.

65% of respondents say that they have experienced no difficulties at all with the recognition of their qualifications, while 16% experienced not many difficulties. Only 3% experienced a lot of difficulties, but 10% had some difficulties with the recognition of qualifications.

There is very strong support for the creation of a system of automatic recognition of qualifications, with nine in ten (91%) agreeing that this would be useful to young people<sup>7</sup>.

**Q7.1** For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU?

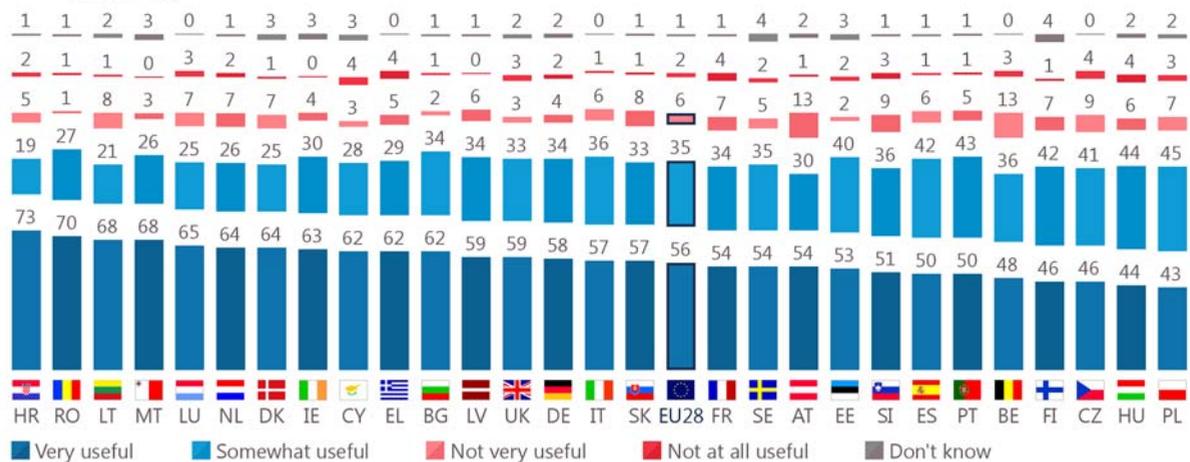
**A system of automatic recognition of diplomas or credits obtained at other schools and universities within the EU**  
(% - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

**Q7.1** For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU?

**A system of automatic recognition of diplomas or credits obtained at other schools and universities within the EU (%)**



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

<sup>7</sup> Q7.1 For each of the following options, please tell me whether you think it would be useful for young people in the EU? A system of automatic recognition of diplomas or credits obtained at other schools and universities within the EU. SINGLE ANSWER ONLY Very useful; Somewhat useful; Not very useful; Not at all useful; Don't know.

## II. TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

### Nine in ten young Europeans support the initiatives aimed at building a European Education Area supportive to teaching and learning

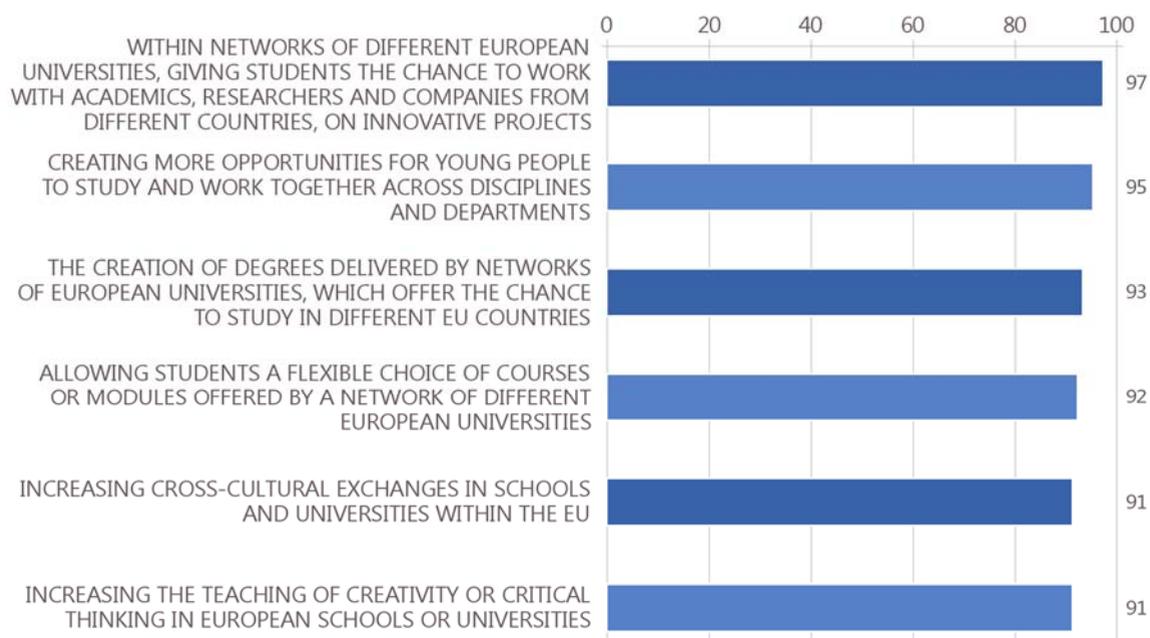
The vast majority of respondents (over 90% in all cases) agree that the proposed initiatives would be useful for young people in the EU<sup>8</sup>.

Well over 90% of young Europeans surveyed think that it would be useful to create **degrees delivered by networks of European universities** that would offer students the chance to study in different EU countries (93%), or offer students a **flexible choice of courses or modules** by a network of European universities (92%).

Almost all young Europeans polled (97%) agree that it would be useful to give students the chance to **work on innovative projects** alongside academics, researchers and companies from different countries. They would also welcome more opportunities for young people to study and **work together across disciplines and departments**.

There is very strong support for each of these initiatives in all countries, with some variation in the proportion of respondents who consider these initiatives as 'very useful'.

**Q7T** For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU?  
(% - TOTAL 'USEFUL' - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

Those with the highest levels of education are more likely than those with the lowest levels of education to agree that a flexible choice of courses or modules (53%, compared with 43%) or degrees delivered by networks of European universities (55% vs 44%) would be very useful initiatives.

<sup>8</sup> Q7 For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU? ONE ANSWER ONLY Very useful; Somewhat useful; Not very useful; Not at all useful; Don't know.

**Q7.2-3-4** For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU?

**Very useful (% - EU28)**

	Within networks of different European universities, giving students the chance to work with academics, researchers and companies from different countries, on innovative projects	The creation of degrees delivered by networks of European universities, which offer the chance to study in different EU countries	Allowing students a flexible choice of courses or modules offered by a network of different European universities
EU28	64	54	52
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	62	49	49
Female	66	59	55
<b>Age</b>			
15-19	62	57	54
20-24	65	55	50
25-30	64	52	52
<b>Education (End of)</b>			
15-	65	44	43
16-19	59	51	51
20+	66	55	53
Still studying	67	57	53

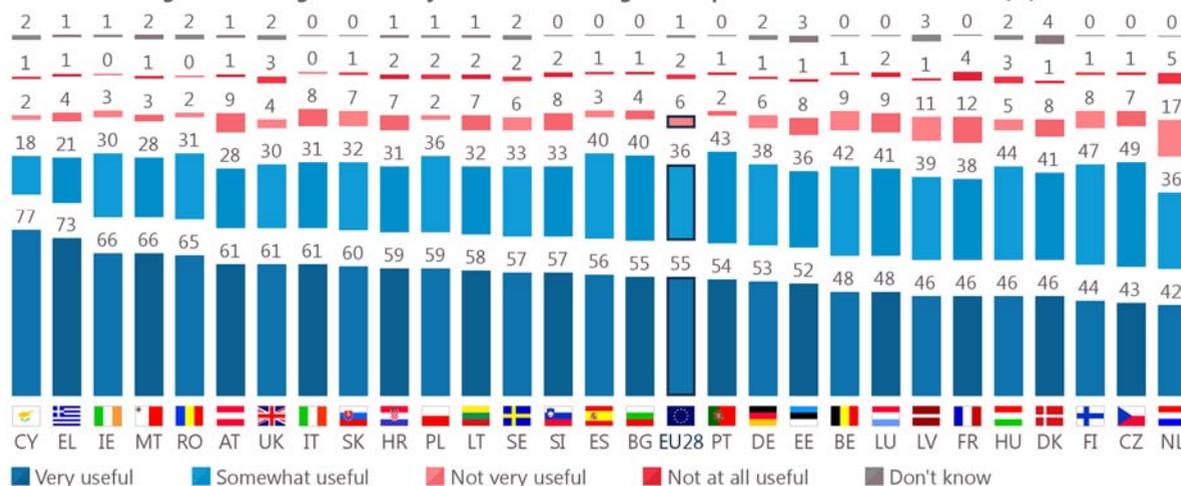
Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

**Young Europeans consider it a good idea to promote cooperation across disciplines in European schools and universities and to increase the emphasis on the teaching of creativity and critical thinking.**

A majority of respondents in all Member States think that increasing the teaching of **creativity or critical thinking** in European schools or universities would be useful. Similarly, in all countries, a majority of respondents agree that it would be a good idea to promote cross-disciplinary curricula by creating more opportunities for young people to study and work together across departments and disciplines.

**Q7.5** For each of the following options, please tell me whether or not you think it would be useful for young people in the EU?

**Increasing the teaching of creativity or critical thinking in European schools or universities (%)**

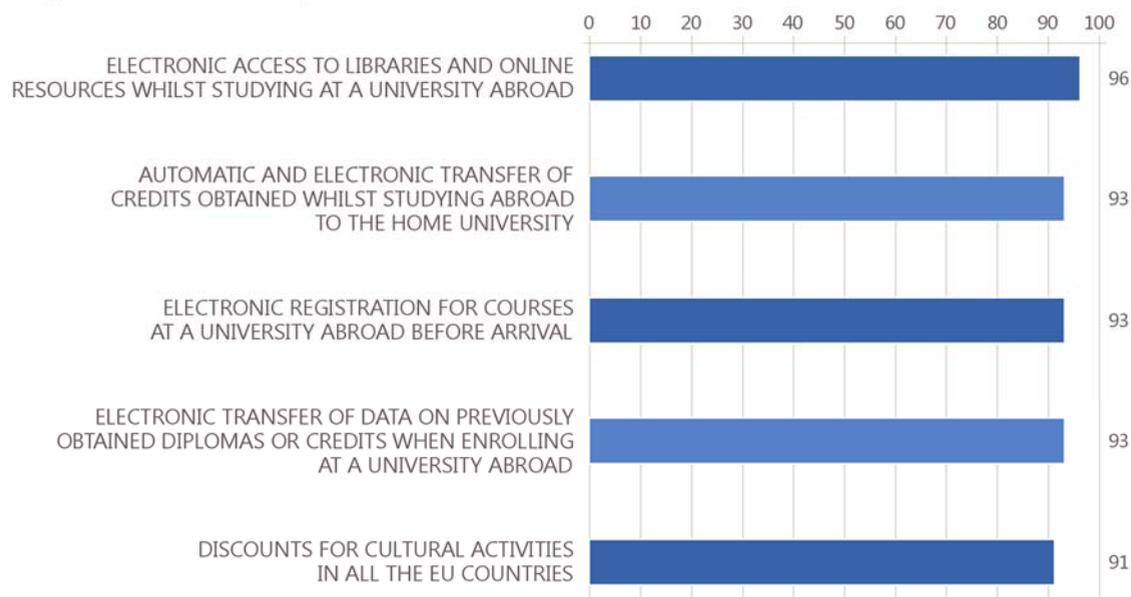


Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

## Nine in ten young Europeans think that the electronic services of a European Student Card would be useful

The services associated with a European Student Card (providing a range of electronic academic services) are also strongly supported by a large majority of young Europeans, with 90% agreeing that each of these services would be useful, and almost everyone (96%) supporting electronic access to libraries and online resources<sup>9</sup>.

**Q8T** Imagine that students at universities in Europe could receive a European Student Card offering a range of services. How useful or not do you think each of the following services would be?  
(% - TOTAL 'USEFUL' - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

Again, these initiatives are supported by a large majority of respondents in all Member States, but attitudes vary across countries on the extent of their usefulness. In most countries, at least half of the students consider most of the services offered by a European Student Card to be very useful.

Those with the highest levels of education are much more likely than those with the lowest levels of education to think that these services would be very useful. For example, twice as many of those who finished their education at or after the age of twenty (64%) think that electronic transfer of data on diplomas or credits would be very useful, compared with those who finished their education at or before the age of 15 (32%).

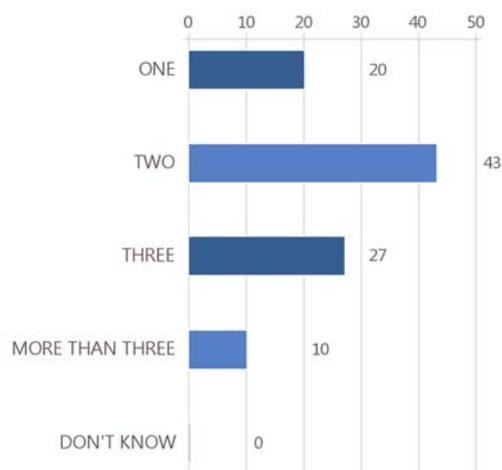
<sup>9</sup> Q8. Imagine that students at universities in Europe could receive a European Student Card offering a range of services. How useful or not do you think each of the following services would be? 1. Electronic transfer of data on previously obtained diplomas or credits when enrolling at a university abroad. 2. Electronic registration for courses at a university abroad before arrival. 3. Electronic access to libraries and online resources whilst studying at a university abroad. 4. Discounts for cultural activities in all the EU countries. 5. Automatic and electronic transfer of credits obtained whilst studying abroad to the home country. ONE ANSWER ONLY Very useful; Somewhat useful; Not very useful; Don't know.

### III. KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING OF LANGUAGES IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

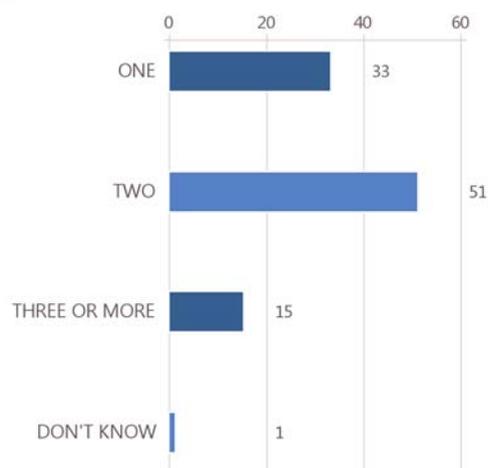
**Most young European citizens can read and write in more than one language, but only two thirds say they would be able to follow a course of study in more than one language.**

Eight out of ten respondents can read and write in more than one language<sup>10</sup>, while two out of three (66%) say they would be able to follow a course of study in more than one language<sup>11</sup>.

**DX9** In how many languages can you read and write? This includes your mother tongue, meaning the first language(s) you learnt as a child.  
(% - EU)



**DX11** In how many languages do you believe that you are comfortable enough to follow your studies? This includes your mother tongue.  
(% - EU)



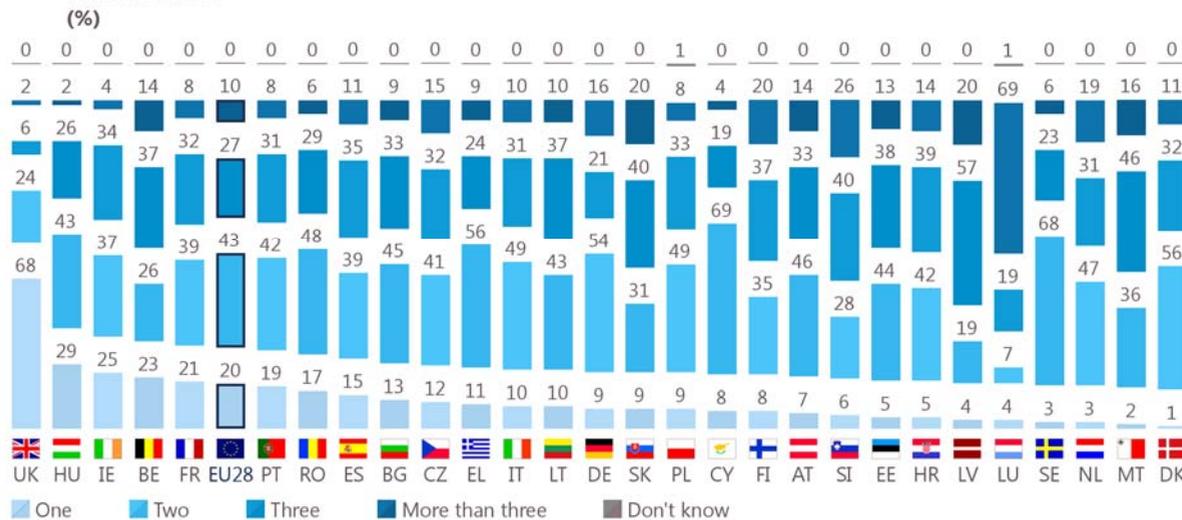
Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

There is large variation in answers between countries. In Luxembourg, over two thirds (69%) can read and write in more than three languages, while in the United Kingdom a similar proportion (68%) can only read and write in one language.

<sup>10</sup> DX9. In how many languages can you read and write? This includes your mother tongue, meaning the first language(s) you learnt as a child. ONE ANSWER ONLY One; Two; Three; More than three; Don't know.

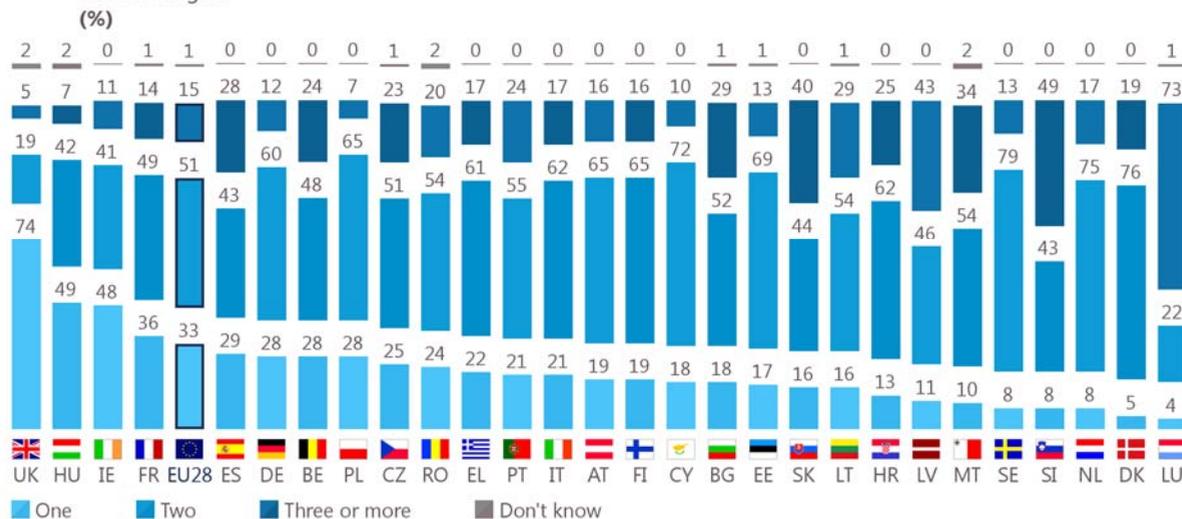
<sup>11</sup> DX11. In how many languages do you believe that you are comfortable enough to follow your studies? This includes your mother tongue. ONE ANSWER ONLY One; Two; Three or more; Don't know.

**DX9** In how many languages can you read and write? This includes your mother tongue, meaning the first language(s) you learnt as a child.



Similarly, while nearly three quarters (73%) of respondents in Luxembourg would be comfortable following their studies in three or more languages, in the United Kingdom a similar proportion (74%) would only be comfortable doing this in one language.

**DX11** In how many languages do you believe that you are comfortable enough to follow your studies? This includes your mother tongue.

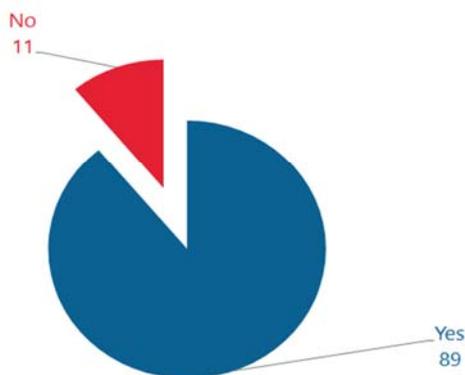


Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

## Most young Europeans are currently studying, or have studied, in their mother tongue

Nine in ten (89%) respondents are currently studying, or have studied, in their mother tongue<sup>12</sup>.

**DX10** Are you currently studying or have you studied in your mother tongue?  
(% - EU)

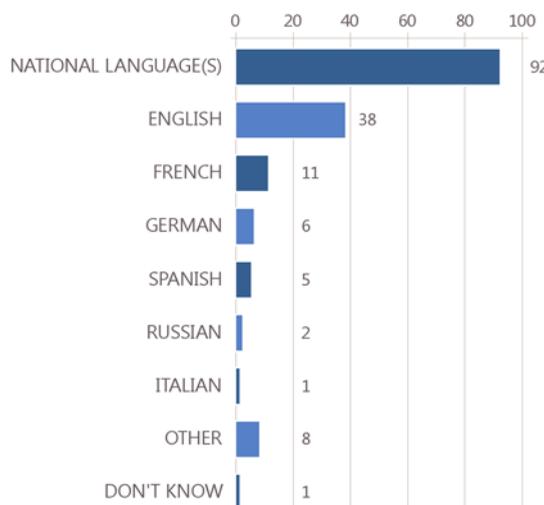


Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

Aside from the national language(s) of the country in question, English is the most frequent language of study, as mentioned by four in ten respondents (38%)<sup>13</sup>. While use of English varies from country to country, it is the most frequently mentioned second language of study in all Member States, excluding those where it is an official language.

Regional languages are mentioned by significant proportions of respondents; Basque (13%), Catalan (46%), Valencian (24%) and Galician (15%) in Spain; Czech in Slovakia (87%); Slovak in the Czech Republic (67%); Portuguese in Luxembourg (36%); and Welsh in the United Kingdom (24%).

**Q9A** In which language(s) have you studied at school or university?  
(MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)  
(% - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

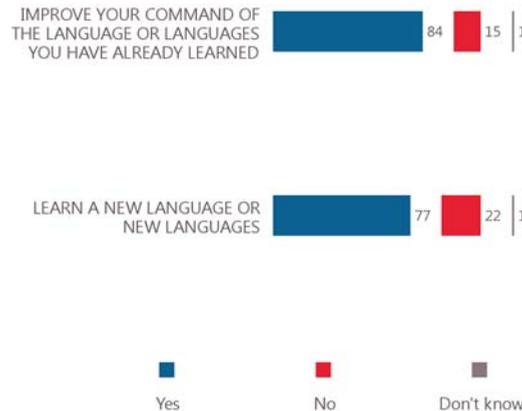
<sup>12</sup> DX10. Are you currently studying or have you studied in your mother tongue, meaning the first language you learned at home? ONE ANSWER ONLY Yes; No; Don't know.

<sup>13</sup> Q9A. In which language(s) have you studied at school or university? MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE English; French; German; Spanish; Russian; Italian; Other; Don't know.

### A large majority of young Europeans would like to improve the languages they already know, or learn new ones

Over three quarters (77%) of young Europeans would like to learn a new language<sup>14</sup>, while over eight in ten (84%) would like to improve their command of a language they already have some knowledge of<sup>15</sup>.

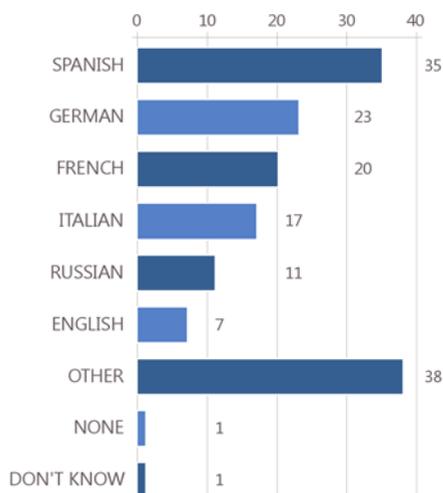
Q10 Would you like to...? (% - EU)



Base: All respondents (N=8,153)

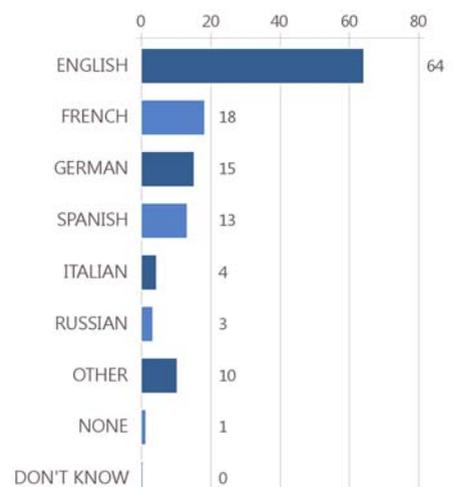
Although there is a lot of variation, a majority of respondents in all countries give these answers. Spanish is the language most frequently mentioned (35%) by those who would like to learn a new language, while English is the language that young Europeans would like to improve the most (64%) .

Q11 Which new language(s) would you like to learn? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) (% - EU)



Base: Respondents who would like to learn a new language (N=6,288)

Q12 Which language(s) would you like to improve? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE) (% - EU)

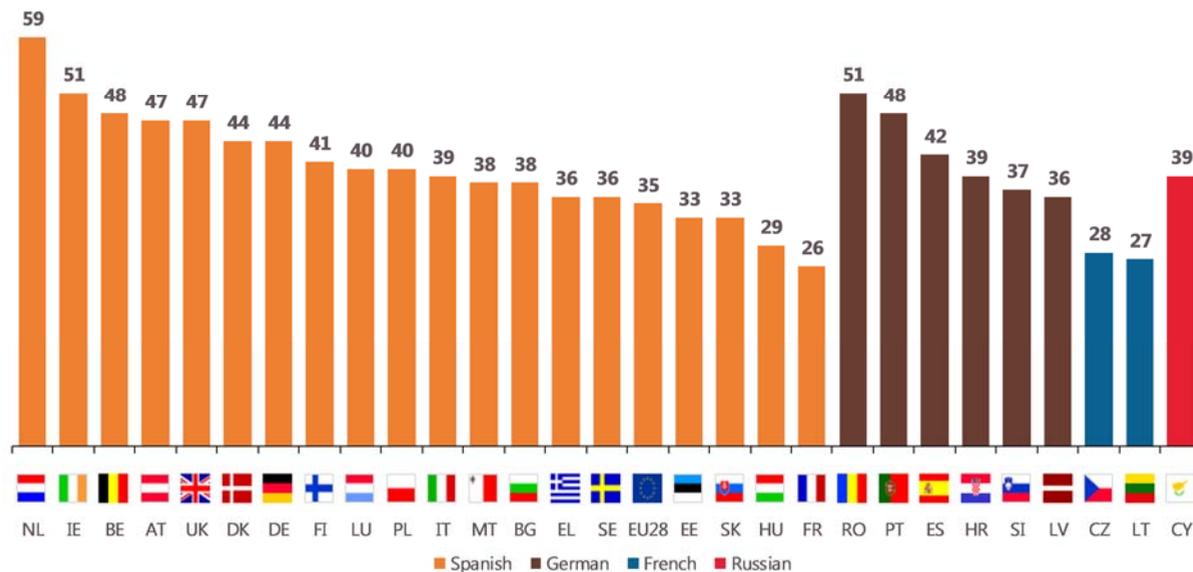


Base: Respondents who would like to improve their command of a language they have already learned (N=6,879)

<sup>14</sup> Q10. Would you like to...? 1. Learn a new language or new languages? 2. Improve your command of the language or languages you have already learned? ONE ANSWER ONLY Yes; No; Don't know.

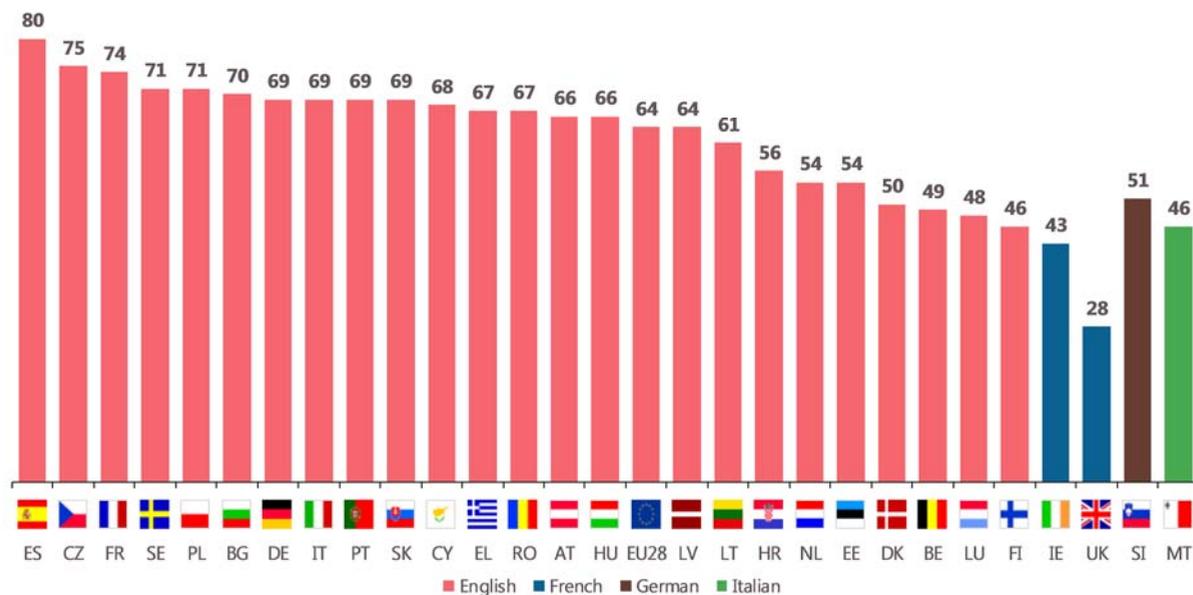
<sup>15</sup> Q12. Which language(s) would you like to improve? MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE English; French; German; Spanish; Russian; Italian; Other; None; Don't know.

**Q11** Which new language(s) would you like to learn? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)  
 (% - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY)



Base: Respondents who would like to learn a new language (N=6,288)

**Q12** Which language(s) would you like to improve? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE)  
 (% - THE MOST MENTIONED ANSWER BY COUNTRY)



Base: Respondents who would like to improve their command of a language they have already learned (N=6,879)