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Yann Fournier, Anne Gaudry-Lachet

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## Learning modern foreign languages in the European Union: Initial Teacher Education and mobility in lower secondary education

► The European Council resolution of 14 February 2002, on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning, prompts European Union (EU) member states to promote innovative teaching methods through teacher training and to encourage teachers to participate in **transnational mobility** so as to enhance their knowledge of the language they teach.

The fourth edition of the **Eurydice** Report, **Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe** (2017) gives a comparative look at the developments in systems and practices for teaching foreign languages in 37 European countries since 2003.

Regarding **Initial Teacher Education** (ITE), a master's degree is required to teach in the majority of cases, and the teachers of modern foreign languages (MFLs) at **ISCED level 2** are **specialists** in their subject matter. In the 2013 **TALIS** survey, only 27% of all EU teachers at ISCED level 2 declared that they had been abroad for professional reasons, whereas 57% of European MFL teachers had done so. Among the latter, language learning was quoted as the first purpose for their travel (60%).

Lastly, although European MFL teachers declared that they travelled abroad more than teachers taken as a whole, they didn't apply more, on average, for support from transnational mobility programmes – be they European, national or local.

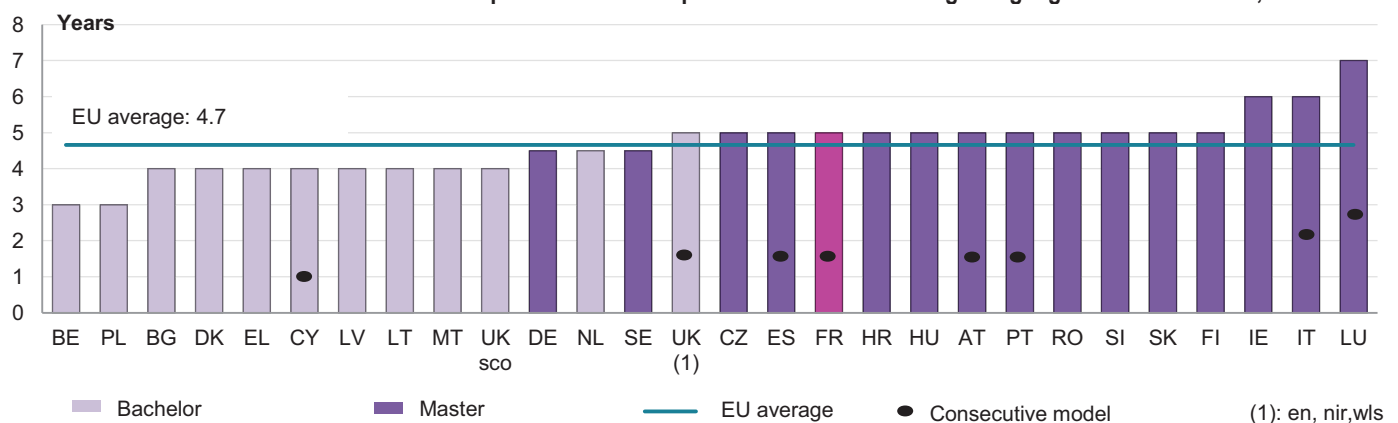
Yann Fournier, Anne Gaudry-Lachet, DEPP-MIREI

### ► In the majority of cases the master's degree is the main access to the profession at ISCED level 2 in Europe

In 2015 (the latest year available for Eurydice data, cf. "Methodology"), 16 of the 28 European Union's (EU) countries required a master's degree for teaching modern foreign languages (MFLs) at ISCED level 2 (**figure 1**). In

the EU, the average time required for **Initial Teacher Education** (ITE) was 4.7 years, varying from 3 years in Belgium and Poland to 7 years in Luxembourg. In 13 countries, including Austria, Finland, France and Spain, the ITE time lasts 5 years. The educational systems in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are exceptions with only a five-year bachelor's degree being required.

1 - Minimum duration and education level of specialist or semi-specialist teachers of foreign languages in ISCED level 2, 2015



Note: In Hungary, English and German teachers' ITE lasts 6 years whereas other MFL teachers' lasts 5.  
Source: Eurydice.

In the EU, there are two distinct ITE models which can coexist within the same country. In the first, future MFL teachers (as with teachers of other subjects) begin with academic studies in a specific field, then specialise as teachers (the model known as "consecutive"). In the second model, they follow a professional path from the start of their studies to qualify as teachers (the model known as "concurrent"). Of the countries presented in **figure 1**, the consecutive model is the least common. Indeed only 8 countries (including Austria, France and Spain) offer this ITE model to MFL teachers. Overall the simultaneous model is shorter. Cyprus is the only country with a consecutive model where ITE lasts 4 years and is limited to a bachelor's-degree level.

In the EU educational systems, **ISCED 2 MFL teachers** are mostly **specialists**. Only 4 countries differ from this pattern. In Greece and Hungary MFL teachers may be specialists or **semi-specialists**. In Denmark and Sweden regulations exclusively require semi-specialists. Lastly, in contrast to ISCED 1 where MFL teaching is most commonly provided by **generalist teachers**, no EU MFL teacher is a generalist from ISCED level 2 onwards.

**MFL teachers declared they had been abroad for professional purposes more often than other teachers**

Traveling to the target-language country and getting first-hand experience in its culture seems to be an inherent process in the training of MFL teachers. According to the 2013 **TALIS** survey, 57% of EU MFL teachers at ISCED level 2 declared they had travelled abroad for professional reasons (here called **transnational mobility**) compared to 27% of all teachers (*i.e.* a 30 percentage point difference) (**figure 2**).

However in some countries, the mobility gap between these two teacher categories was narrower (9 percentage points in Denmark, 13 in Finland). The gap was much greater in Spain, France and Italy (40, 38 and 39 percentage points respectively), which indicates that in these countries transnational mobility was more the prerogative of MFL teachers than the entirety of teachers, whose mobility rate was among the weakest in the EU.

The rate of MFL teachers declaring they had travelled abroad for professional reasons varied between 30% in Romania and 74% in Spain. In France, Italy and Latvia, the rates of transnational mobility of MFL teachers were among the highest in the EU. Only four countries (Croatia, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia) had fewer than 40% of their MFL

teachers declaring they had travelled abroad for professional reasons. It is likely that for this group of countries financial constraints played a role.

**EU MFL teachers mainly travelled abroad to learn the language and study as part of their training**

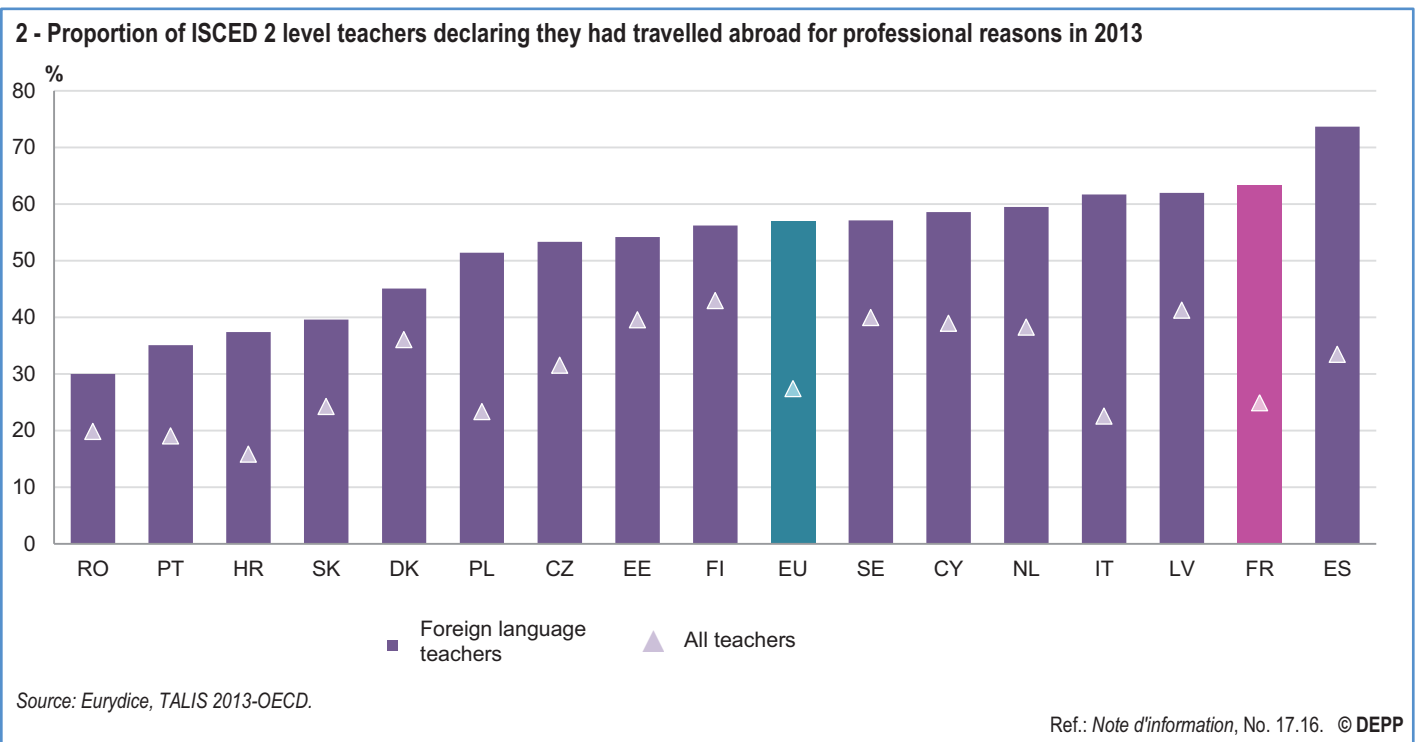
Although ISCED 2 MFL teachers stated that they had travelled abroad for professional reasons more often than the entirety of teachers, the many reasons for this travel seem to vary from country to country. The main reason – language learning – was shared on average by 60% of the MFL teachers of the 19 EU member states which participated in the 2013 TALIS survey (**figure 3**). This learning was done within the framework of an educational institution (*cf.* "Methodology"). Among the countries presented here, this response rate ranged from 34% in Latvia to 74% in Spain. Only half of the MFL teachers questioned in Finland and France declared they had travelled abroad to learn the country's language (51% and 49% respectively).

The second most quoted reason for transnational mobility was the study period as part of **Initial Teacher Education (ITE)**. On average 52% of MFL teachers of the participating European countries declared they had studied abroad during their ITE. Although Spain was again an exception with a higher rate than the average (61%), the rates for Finland, France and Latvia were comparable to and lower than the EU average.

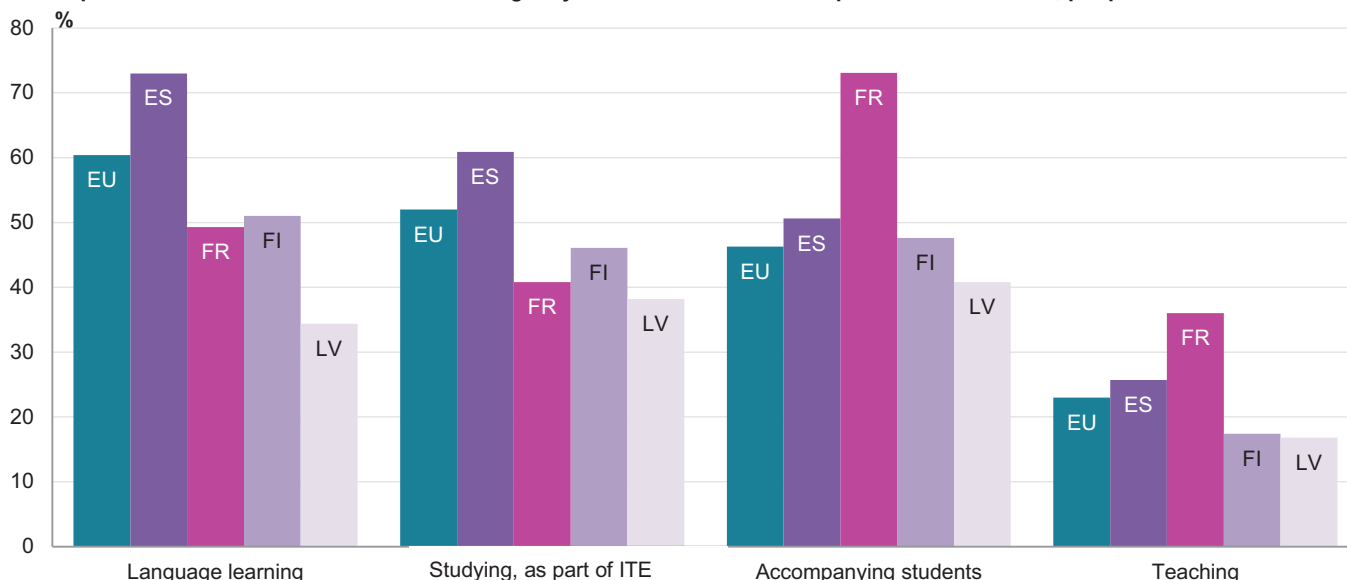
The third reason cited – accompanying students – put France at the high end with 73% of MFL teachers. On average in the EU countries participating in the TALIS survey, 46% of MFL teachers declared they had travelled abroad for this reason, which is in line with the rate of the three other countries presented here.

Lastly, French MFL teachers were more numerous than the European average (36% compared to 23%) in declaring they had taught abroad. This finding can be explained by the various international or bilateral partnerships that France has established for teachers' transnational mobility (the CODOFIL programme in Louisiana, Jules Verne, exchange programmes with Germany, French Teaching Assistants, etc.), whereas Latvia does not offer national funding programmes to its language teachers.

Teachers surveyed in the participating countries also quoted two other reasons for their travel that do not appear in **figure 3**, *i.e.* direct contact



**3 - Proportion of ISCED 2 MFL teachers declaring they had travelled abroad for professional reasons, per professional reason in 2013**



Reading key: In France, language learning has been quoted by 49% of ISCED 2 MFL teachers as a reason for their mobility.

Note: The response proposals were not mutually exclusive; respondents could choose as many answers as they wished. All the countries presented here had over 50% of their MFL teachers declaring they had travelled abroad for professional reasons.

Source: Eurydice, TALIS 2013-OECD.

Ref.: Note d'information, No. 17.16. © DEPP

with foreign schools (32% on average for the EU countries and 22% for France) and the learning of other subjects (7% on average for the EU countries and 4% for France).

**The use of European mobility funding was as common among MFL teachers as for other teachers**

Teachers may have applied to a public programme for transnational mobility, which could have been European (Erasmus or Comenius), national (*aide à la mobilité internationale*, etc.) or local (regional, county or municipal scholarships). The purpose of these subsidies is to act as an incentive by limiting the material barriers inherent in transnational mobility.

On average in the EU, teachers' participation in European mobility programmes was relatively substantial (25%) and systematically higher than national or local programmes with the exception of Croatia (figure 4). Indeed, the ratio of participation rates in European programmes and the rates of participation in national or local programmes was often two to one (Finland, The Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, etc.). These gaps may be explained by various factors such as the existence or absence of local subsidies or a lack of information for the people involved. The Croatian situation can be linked to the country's

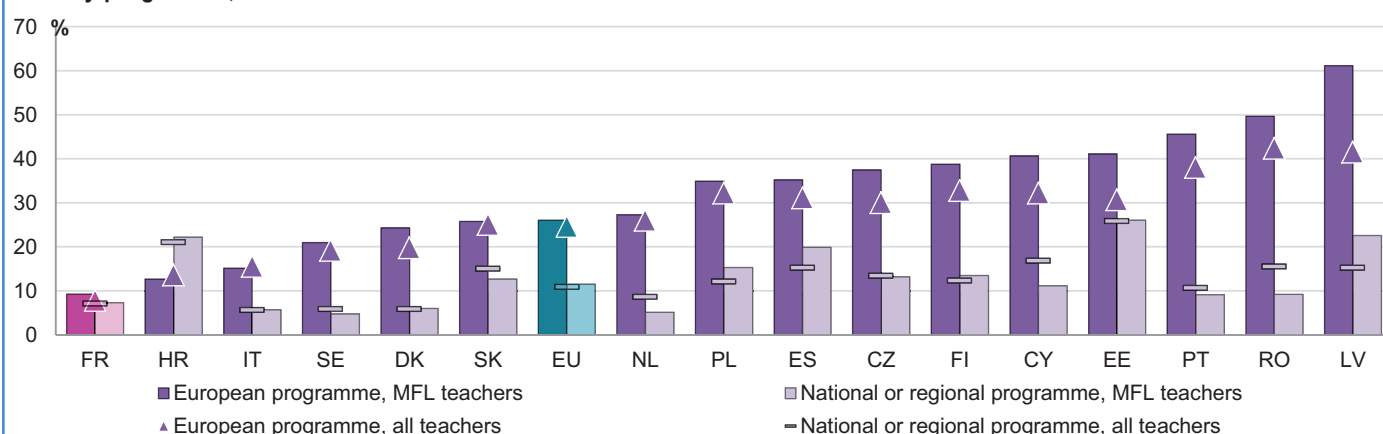
accession to the EU in July 2013, which had not yet enabled Croatia to take full advantage of the European mobility programmes.

Even though MFL teachers declared they had travelled abroad for professional reasons more often than the entirety of teachers, they did not apply more for funding programmes. On average in the EU countries having participated in TALIS 2013, 26% of MFL teachers applied to a European programme (25% for all teachers), and 12% applied to a national or local programme (11% for all teachers).

Of the 19 EU countries covered by the 2013 TALIS survey, France had the lowest participation rate of its MFL teachers in mobility programmes (9% travelled with a European subsidy, 7% with local support), in contrast to the highest values which were found in the Baltic countries (61% in Latvia and 26% in Estonia respectively).

Several professional reasons often quoted by French respondents (cf. figure 3) may explain their weak participation rates (figure 4). Indeed, accompanying students abroad is not necessarily part of a funding programme. Moreover, teachers may have travelled "on their own" without financial support to teach in a foreign school for which they received a salary. ■

**4 - Proportion of ISCED 2 teachers traveling abroad for professional reasons with support from a transnational mobility programme, 2013**



Reading key: In 2013, 61% of the MFL teachers in Latvia declared they had help from a European transnational mobility programme, and 23% from a national or local transnational mobility programme, whilst the percentages for all teachers were 42 and 15 respectively.

Source : Eurydice, TALIS 2013-OCDE.

Ref. : Note d'information, No. 17.16. © DEPP

**AT:** Austria. **BE:** Belgium. **BG:** Bulgaria. **CY:** Cyprus. **CZ:** Czech Rep.  
**DE:** Germany. **DK:** Denmark. **EE:** Estonia. **EL:** Greece. **ES:** Spain.  
**EU:** European Union. **FI:** Finland. **FR:** France. **HR:** Croatia. **HU:** Hungary.  
**IE:** Ireland. **IT:** Italy. **LU:** Luxembourg. **LT:** Lithuania. **LV:** Latvia. **MT:** Malta.  
**NL:** Netherlands. **PL:** Poland. **PT:** Portugal. **RO:** Romania. **SE:** Sweden. **SI:**  
Slovenia. **SK:** Slovakia. **UK en:** England. **UK nir:** Northern Ireland.  
**UK sco:** Scotland. **UK wls:** Wales.

## for further information

- "Key data on Languages at School in Europe", *Eurydice Report*, European Commission, 2017.
- "The teaching profession in Europe, Practices, Perceptions and Policies", *Eurydice Report*, European Commission, 2015.
- "Education in Europe: Key figures 2016", Department of National Education, Higher Education and Research, 2016.

French edition on line:

[www.education.gouv.fr/statistiques](http://www.education.gouv.fr/statistiques)

## SOURCES, DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

### Sources

**Eurydice** is the information network on education for the European Union. It includes 42 national units in the 38 countries participating in the EU's programme in the fields of lifelong education and training (EU member-states, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Norway, Lichtenstein and Switzerland). The operator in France is the DEPP.

**TALIS:** The purpose of the TALIS (*Teaching And Learning International Survey*) international survey is to gather declarative data on the teaching environment and the working conditions of teachers in ISCED level 2 schools. Each country's sampling is composed of at least 20 teachers from 250 schools (public and private). In 2013 the findings came from 34 countries, including 24 members of OECD and 19 members of the European Union. The operator in France is the DEPP.

### Definitions

**Generalist teacher:** Qualified to teach all subjects of the curriculum, including MFL.

**Initial Teacher Education (ITE):** The training period in which future teachers follow vocational training (either consecutively or simultaneously) so as to acquire the knowledge and skills to become a teacher.

**International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED):** Adopted by Unesco in 1978, the ISCED ranks educational programmes and levels. The 2011 nomenclature, taking effect from the 2014 reference year, defines the following levels: **ISCED 01:** early childhood educational development; **ISCED 02:** pre-primary education; **ISCED 1:** primary education; **ISCED 2:** lower secondary education (minimum duration of 3 years); **ISCED 3:** upper

secondary education (minimum duration of 2 years); **ISCED 4:** post-secondary non-tertiary education; **ISCED 5-8:** tertiary education. On ISCED 2 and ISCED 3 levels programme orientation may be presented with a second figure, *i.e.* 4 signifies general education programmes, and 5 signifies vocational programmes. In this *Note d'information*, only ISCED level 2 has been used.

**Semi-specialist teacher:** Qualified to teach at least three subjects of the curriculum, including at least one MFL.

**Specialist teacher:** Qualified to teach one to two subjects of the curriculum, including at least one MFL.

**Transnational mobility:** Travel to another country other than the one of residence for professional reasons, which excludes any personal, non-professional journey. What's more, travel to attend conferences, prepare a doctorate or work in a school in the home country is not part of the definition.

**Transnational mobility programme:** Programmes for local, national or European public funding for transnational mobility.

### Methodology

The Eurydice Report, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, highlights the recent developments in teaching languages in the entire Eurydice network with the exception of Albania. It relies on institutional data (organisations, regulations, programmes, etc. with 2015 as the reference year) and statistical data (the OECD TALIS survey, the reference year of which is 2013). The indicators presented here are limited to elementary and secondary general public and subsidised private education. For clarity's sake, certain graphs of this *Note d'information* show only a selection of countries in the Eurydice network.

TALIS questions regarding transnational mobility only involve travel greater than one week in foreign schools and do not enable forming an idea of frequency or the date of travel.