

European Day of Languages

The European Year of Languages in 2001 was so successful that the Council of Europe and the European Commission decided to make it an annual event, celebrated every year since on the 26th September and known as the European Day of Languages.

The European Day of Languages celebrates diversity in language and culture and promotes the ability to speak languages (the more the better!) Events and activities around Europe are designed to encourage and maintain range of languages including those that come through migrants. People of all ages are encouraged to expand their linguistic skills and try out a new language.

There are 225 native languages in Europe but the number of languages spoken in Europe is much higher due to influxes from migration – there are 300 languages spoken in London alone! The most common native language in Europe is Russian with 150 million people speaking it as their mother tongue. But English is the most common foreign language to learn with 38% of European citizens speaking it as a second language.

56% of EU citizens speak 1 language in addition to their native language, and 28% speak 2. The main reason people speak additional languages are because they are students, managers or because they are being raised in a country their parents have migrated to.

You might hear of languages being related, also known as ‘language families’. This means one had developed from another or they have developed from the same routes. This might make it easier to learn other languages because there’s some familiarity to the words and the sentence structures. Mostly we use the Latin alphabet which also makes it easier but some cultures have their own alphabet such as Greek or Yiddish, adding an extra challenge to learning their languages.

Everyone is encouraged to extend the range of languages they learn, meaning those in non-English speaking countries are not only encouraged to learn English. Those who provide language teaching and resources are encouraged to consider how they can make learning more accessible. The EU spends €30 million every year in promoting language learning.

The European Commission and Council of Europe believe that encouraging an understanding of languages reinforces understanding and appreciation of the differences between cultures. This in turn allows us to overcome divides created between cultures, particularly of different languages.

The official European Day of Languages website is full of great resources and activities you can try out in your units, including games and posters – there's even an app version! Why not challenge your unit to learn part of a new language? You could also explore the cultures of countries that speak that language.

Although you’re never too old to learn a new language the optimum age is under 10, so don’t feel bad if your Rainbows or Brownies are picking it up quicker than Guides and Leaders.

Goodbye! Au revoir! Arrivederci! Auf Wiedersehen! Adios! Yasou! Doviđenja!