



European  
Commission

#### What is Eurydice

The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 40 national units based in all 36 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

## Eurydice Highlights

# Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe



Physical education at school not only contributes to pupils' immediate fitness and good health, but also helps young people to perform and understand physical activity better with positive lifelong repercussions. Moreover, physical education at school brings about transferable knowledge and skills, such as teamwork and fair play, cultivates respect, body and social awareness and provides a general understanding of the 'rules of the game', which students can readily make use of in other school subjects or life situations.

Because of its numerous benefits, the promotion of physical activity has received increased attention at European level. The 2009 EU Lisbon Treaty has given the European Union a legal basis to call for action to develop the European dimension in sport and to contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues.

In view of these policy developments, and to better understand the situation of physical education in Europe today, a report, entitled Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe, has been produced by the Eurydice network. The report aims at mapping the state of play of physical education and sports activities at school in 30 European countries. The report can be regarded as the first attempt by the European Commission to identify key concerns and strengths regarding physical education at school in Europe. This brochure summarises key findings of the report.

#### The full study

'Physical Education and Sport at School in Europe'

can be found in English on the Eurydice website

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic\\_studies\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php)

#### Printed copies of the report

are available upon request at: [eacea-eurydice@ec.europa.eu](mailto:eacea-eurydice@ec.europa.eu)

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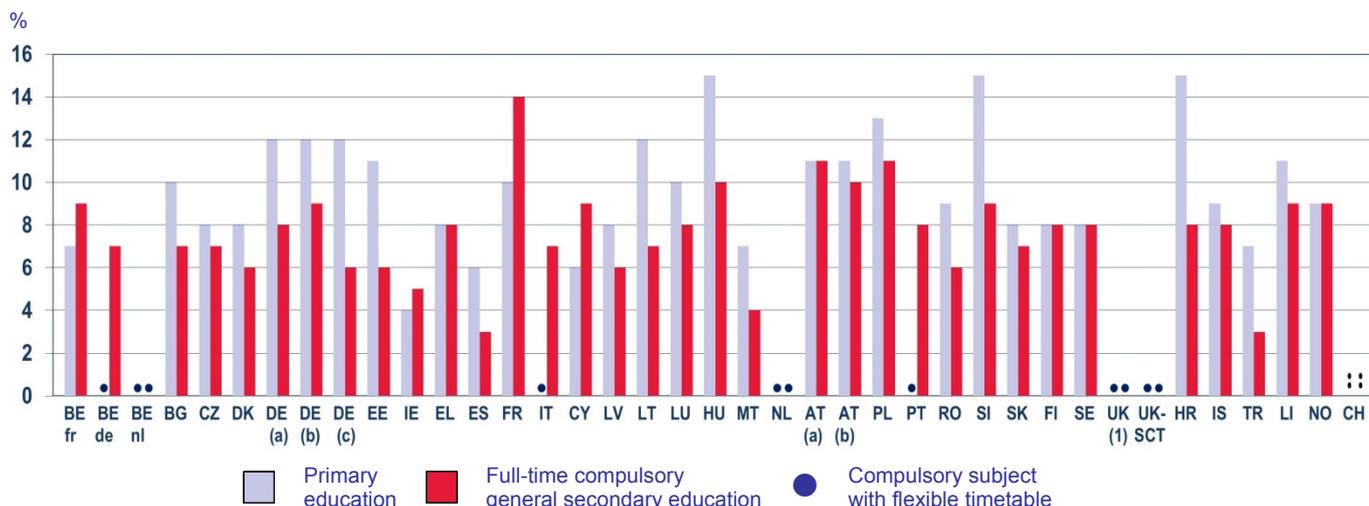


### Taught time of physical education is low compared with that of other subjects

Prescribed taught time of physical education varies significantly from one country to another as well as between education levels. Moreover, some countries fix the minimum hours of physical education at central level, while others leave this decision up to schools. For example, for the 2011/12 school year, the recommended minimum average taught time at primary level varied between 37 hours in Ireland and 108 hours in France. At secondary level, time spent ranged from 24 to 35 hours in Spain, Malta and Turkey to 102 to 108 hours in France and

Austria. In general, the share of taught time recommended for physical education is rather low compared to that of other subjects – a fact that reveals that the subject is commonly perceived as less important. This difference is especially striking during primary education. Here, the proportion of taught time devoted to physical education is only around half of that dedicated to mathematics. Overall, there have been no major changes in the taught time for physical education since the 2006/07 school year.

### Minimum time allocated to physical education as a compulsory subject, as a proportion of total taught time in primary and full-time compulsory general secondary education, 2011/12



Source: Eurydice.

UK (1) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

### Extracurricular physical activities and sports are widespread in Europe

Extracurricular physical activities offered outside of school time, such as competitions or health-related activities, are designed to make physical activities even more accessible and attractive to young people. Their main purpose is to broaden or complement activities undertaken during school time. Extracurricular physical activities are organised at national, regional, local and very often at school level. While extracurricular activities are available for all pupils, they also target children with disabilities or special

educational needs. Some extracurricular activities even take place during the school day. Indeed, in some countries physical education is not limited to physical education classes, but is integrated into the daily school routine. In many Danish schools, for example, students practice 'morning running' before school starts. Other countries use extended school breaks to include physical activities on the playground or in the gym.

### Physical education is assessed as other subjects

In most countries, pupils' progress in physical education is assessed like it is in any other subject. Only a few countries do not assess pupil's physical education skills in a formal way. This is the case in Malta and Norway at primary level and in Ireland at both primary and lower secondary level. Most European countries issue clear recommendations on which assessment methods to use. Only in Belgium and Iceland are educational institutions free to choose their

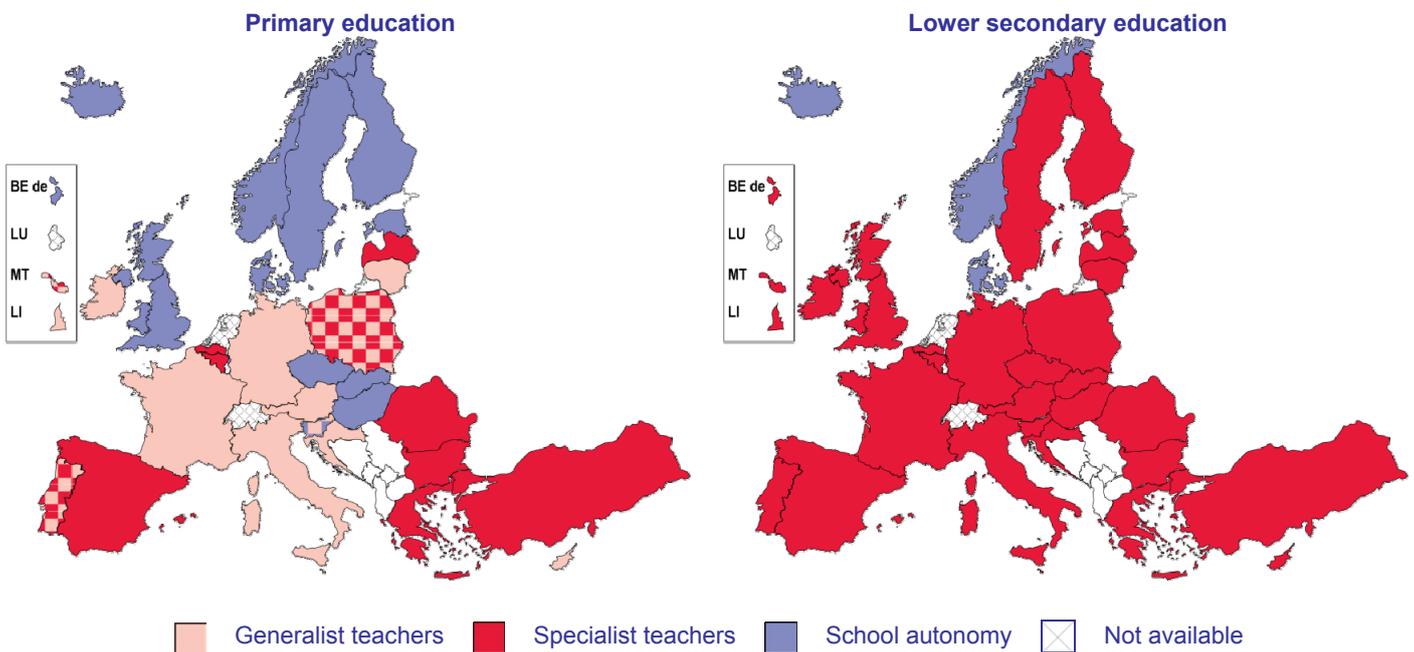
own assessment methods. Most countries issue a final report at the end of each year which contains results of physical education along with those of other subjects. Some countries have developed central assessment scales in order to provide teachers with harmonised tools to assess pupils' achievement within a country. These scales, in turn, also allow for national level comparisons of learning outcomes.

## Physical education teachers are often subject specialists

In most countries, the decision of whether a generalist or a specialist teacher is put in charge of physical education classes depends on the education level. As a general rule, the higher the education level the more likely it is that a specialist teacher will teach the subject. At primary level, physical education is taught by both generalist and specialist teachers while at lower secondary level, physical education teachers tend to be subject specialists.

Regarding qualification requirements, specialist teachers at primary level generally hold a Bachelor's degree. At secondary level, however, teachers either hold a Bachelor's degree, or, as is already the case in 15 countries, a Master's degree. Continuing professional development opportunities are offered to both generalist and specialist teachers throughout their careers.

### Recommendations regarding the specialisation required to teach physical education in primary education (ISCED 1) and in lower secondary education (ISCED 2), 2011/12



Source: Eurydice.

## Reforms in physical education under way in many countries

Around one-third of respondent countries are currently planning reforms relevant to physical education. Portugal and Finland, for example, are intending to raise the profile of physical activities directly by increasing the minimum taught time. Greece and Hungary intend to diversify the

provision of organised physical activity at school. National reforms in many countries are also seeking to improve the conditions under which the subject is taught and to promote the training of those who teach it.