

Between Regulation and Freedom of Choice: Home Education in the Countries of the European Union – a Comparative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Home education, as an alternative to compulsory schooling, is present in nearly all European countries; however, its definitions and legal frameworks vary significantly across national contexts. **Research Aim:** This article aims to compare the legal regulations that determine the possibilities and modes of implementing home education, to examine the degree of state control, and to classify European Union member states according to specified regulatory categories. **Method:** The study employs a qualitative comparative analysis of legal regulations concerning home education in 27 EU countries. The analysis draws on data from the Eurydice report and supplementary national documents. Based on these sources, the levels of state oversight and the diversity of home education models were identified. **Results:** The results reveal substantial differences in how home education is defined, regulated, and monitored. Four categories of regulatory intensity were distinguished: high, moderate, low, and no regulation. The study also identifies countries situated at the boundaries of these categories, where educational policies are either inconsistent or subject to dynamic legislative changes. **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that while some countries impose highly restrictive regulations limiting home education to exceptional circumstances, others grant parents considerable autonomy in designing and implementing educational programmes. The analysis highlights significant variation in legal frameworks and in the availability of home education as an alternative means of fulfilling compulsory schooling. In several EU countries, particularly Belgium (Flanders) and Poland, a marked increase in the number of home-educated students has been observed, reflecting broader post-pandemic trends and growing parental interest in alternative forms of education.

Keywords: **home education, legal regulations, European Union, education policy**

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Między regulacją a swobodą wyboru: edukacja domowa w krajach Unii Europejskiej – studium porównawcze

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie: Edukacja domowa jako alternatywna forma kształcenia jest obecna w prawie wszystkich krajach europejskich. Nie oznacza to jednak, że wszędzie jest ona tak samo definiowana i uregulowana prawnie. **Cel badań:** Celem artykułu jest porównanie regulacji prawnych decydujących o możliwościach i sposobie realizacji edukacji domowej, wyznaczenie zakresu kontroli państwa oraz zakwalifikowanie poszczególnych krajów Unii Europejskiej do wytypowanych grup. **Metoda:** Artykuł przedstawia jakościową analizę porównawczą regulacji prawnych dotyczących edukacji domowej w 27 państwach członkowskich Unii Europejskiej. Zostały w nim wykorzystane dane z raportu przygotowanego przez europejską sieć informacji o edukacji Eurydice oraz dodatkowe raporty z poszczególnych krajów. Na tej podstawie wyznaczono stopnie kontroli edukacji domowej w poszczególnych państwach. **Wyniki:** Wyniki wskazują na znaczące różnice w definiowaniu, regulowaniu i monitorowaniu edukacji domowej. W badaniu wyróżniono cztery kategorie intensywności regulacji: wysoki, umiarkowany, niski oraz brak regulacji, a także opisano państwa funkcjonujące na styku tych kategorii z powodu niespójnych lub dynamicznie zmieniających się przepisów wryzujących się podwyższonym poziomem kompetencji kooperacyjnych przy przeciętnych wynikach w pozostałych obszarach. **Wnioski:** Część państw wprowadza silnie restrykcyjne przepisy, ograniczając możliwość skorzystania z edukacji domowej do sytuacji wyjątkowych, podczas gdy inne zapewniają rodzicom znaczną autonomię w projektowaniu i realizacji programów kształcenia. Analiza przepisów regulujących funkcjonowanie edukacji domowej ukazuje zróżnicowanie ram prawnych oraz dostępność edukacji domowej jako alternatywnej formy realizacji obowiązku szkolnego. W kilku państwach UE, szczególnie w Belgii (Flandrii) i Polsce, odnotowano wyraźny wzrost liczby uczniów objętych edukacją domową, co wpisuje się w szersze, postpandemiczne tendencje oraz rosnące zainteresowanie rodziców alternatywnymi formami kształcenia.

Słowa kluczowe: **edukacja domowa, regulacje prawne, Unia Europejska, polityka oświatowa**

1. INTRODUCTION

Home education, understood as an alternative form of schooling for children and adolescents, is present in nearly all European countries. This phenomenon, although often perceived as a pedagogical innovation, has historical roots that predate the widespread institutionalisation of formal schooling, when responsibility for children's education rested primarily with the family (Racewicz, 2021; Stevens, 2009).

The most used terms in the English-language literature describing this phenomenon are *homeschooling* or *home schooling*. Both expressions incorporate the term *schooling*, which conceptually refers to education within a formal school setting (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). In the present study, however, to maintain terminological clarity, the term *home education*, as proposed by Roland Meighan (England), has been adopted. This terminology emphasises the locus of the educational process rather than its institutional framework (Roland, 1992).

From a legal perspective, home education in the countries of the European Union is defined as the fulfilment of compulsory education or school attendance requirements outside the formal school institution. This implies that full responsibility for the educational process lies with parents or legal guardians. Depending on the country, this process is subject to varying degrees of regulation and oversight by national legal frameworks (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018).

Although its fundamental premise—the individualisation of the educational process—remains common to most models, the way it is defined, regulated, and implemented varies significantly depending on the legal, cultural, and administrative context of a given country (Petrie, 2001). According to a report produced within the Eurydice network for the European Commission in 2018, in ten European countries, the concept of home education is defined as individual instruction, which is granted to a child in cases where participation in regular school activities is not possible due to broadly understood health-related conditions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). Under such circumstances, education takes place within the home environment; however, it is delivered by teachers from the school the student formally attends, rather than by the parents (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z Dnia 9 Sierpnia 2017 r. w Sprawie Indywidualnego Obowiązkowego Roczego Przygotowania Przedszkolnego Dzieci i Indywidualnego Nauczania Dzieci i Młodzieży, 2017).

In recent years, home education has become a significant component of the broader discussion on alternative schooling reforms in Europe. While its popularity increased markedly during the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in this educational model has persisted beyond the pandemic period. Statistical studies conducted in Poland, based on data from the Educational Information System, indicate that in 2022 the number of children educated outside the formal school system exceeded 22,000, representing a year-on-year increase of approximately 80% (Edukacja domowa w Polsce, 2022). Similar trends can be observed in other countries where home education is legally permitted, including France and the Netherlands (Watson, 2024). As the number of families choosing home education continues to rise, legislative changes have also become more visible. Many of these legal adjustments aim not only to address emerging social expectations but also, in numerous cases, to maintain state oversight over the educational processes of young citizens.

Across the European Union, home education operates within diverse legal systems. Some countries adopt a highly liberal approach, granting parents substantial autonomy in organising their child's education. Conversely, other states have implemented stringent regulations, limiting or even prohibiting home education altogether.

This article focuses on identifying differences in formal requirements and regulatory models governing home education as of 2025 in the 27 member states of the European Union: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Hungary, and Italy.

2. METHODS

The article employs a comparative analysis of legal regulations concerning home education in the 27 member states of the European Union. The study aimed to identify similarities and differences in the legal frameworks governing home education, as well as to develop a typology of the relationship between the level of state control and the scope of parental autonomy.

The scope of the analysed material included data from the Eurydice network report, information provided by the international organisation Home School Legal Defence Association (HSLDA), and data obtained from official sources and websites related to legal regulations of home education in individual European Union countries. Based on these sources, the levels of regulatory control over home education in each country were identified, considering criteria such as the degree of parental autonomy, the form of supervision over the educational process conducted outside formal schooling, and the formal procedures required by relevant authorities.

Based on the obtained findings, a classification of countries was developed according to a typology of regulatory stringency.

3. TERMINOLOGICAL AND INTERPRETATIVE ISSUES IN THE DISCOURSE ON HOME EDUCATION

The analysis of the diversity of approaches to out-of-school education across individual states is based on the report prepared by the European Education Information Network "Eurydice". Established in 1980, this institution consists of 40 national units operating in 36 countries, created by the Ministries of Education of the respective states, as well as a European unit formed by the European Commission. The purpose of "Eurydice" is to provide education policymakers at the European, national, and local levels with analyses and information that support informed decision-making (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). The exchange of knowledge among states concerning education systems, their structures, governance models, and information on the dynamics and direction of reforms is intended to facilitate the shaping of educational policy on both national and European levels. The Eurydice network is therefore tasked with publishing descriptions of national education systems, comparative analyses of key educational issues, as well as data and visualisations covering a wide range of educational topics. The information produced is intended to support educational policy-making processes, facilitate the formulation of recommendations and strategic initiatives at the level of the European Union, and provide a comprehensive database utilised by individual member states (*What Is Eurydice?*, 2026).

In 2018, the European Commission requested that "Eurydice" undertake a review of home education systems in all European countries. The results were published in the report "Home Education Policies in Europe," which compiled data from 40 European states, including those that are not currently members of the European Union. To date, it remains the only report addressing the subject of out-of-school education. Despite its substantial scope, the report lacks substantive coherence and clear criteria that would allow individual countries to present information on home education in a unified manner. This inconsistency is likely a consequence of the autonomy of each national Eurydice unit and the absence of unified guidelines for preparing national reports. This issue is evident, for example, in the varied grammatical and stylistic constructions found in the documents from individual countries, as well as in the inclusion or omission of certain information related to out-of-school education. This is particularly evident in the conceptualisation of home education, understood as educa-

tional provision delivered outside formal schooling institutions, as defined across different national contexts. An analysis of individual national reports shows that in many states, home education is equated with individual instruction provided to children who, for health reasons, are unable to attend school. The primary criterion determining eligibility for home education thus becomes the child's health status, rather than parental freedom of choice. Notably, in a significant number of these cases, children are taught at home by their parents rather than by teachers from the school they are formally enrolled in. This creates a terminological challenge. In the Polish education system, no such definition exists to describe this situation. "Home education" is understood as teaching provided by parents or persons designated by them, regardless of health considerations. When a child is unable to attend school due to health conditions, they are placed under "individual instruction", which is provided by teachers, not parents (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z 9 sierpnia 2017 r. w sprawie indywidualnego obowiązkowego rocznego przygotowania przedszkolnego dzieci i indywidualnego nauczania dzieci i młodzieży, 2017; Ustawa – Prawo oświatowe, 2016). It is therefore concerning that out of the 40 countries listed in the report, as many as 10 equate home education with individual instruction. Germany and the Netherlands provide clear examples of this phenomenon (*Edukacja domowa w Holandii: Prawo, wyzwania i historie rodzin*, 2023). In these countries, learning at home is allowed only for children who cannot attend school for health reasons. In such cases, these children may receive individual home instruction. The report refers to this process as home education, even though it is not home education in the formal sense. Out-of-school learning is not available as a parental choice but as a medical accommodation in exceptional circumstances. The process is organised by the school in cooperation with educational authorities, and the instructors are teachers employed by the child's school (*Lernen in Freiheit Ermöglichen*, 2025).

A similar situation is observed in other European Union countries. In Greece, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, and Romania, only children with medical conditions preventing school attendance may receive home-based instruction delivered by teachers. In three additional countries (the German-speaking region of Belgium, Bulgaria, and Estonia), a child's illness is one of the factors that may allow parents to apply for home education. In all these countries, such arrangements typically require medical documentation, specialist evaluations, and approval from local authorities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; *Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Single-Structure Education*, 2025). Sweden adopts a comparable approach. Home education is generally prohibited, but health-related exceptions exist, although they are rare and strictly regulated (*Edukacja domowa w Szwecji: Czy jest legalna i jakie są alternatywy?*, 2020). Decisions in these countries are made individually, and instruction is delivered through highly personalised curricula or special education.

Since the publication of the 2018 report, two countries have changed their legal regulations concerning home education. The first is Malta, which in 2022 introduced new provisions allowing parents to choose this alternative form of education. Parents may now apply for home education, but they must justify it based on health conditions, special educational needs, or exceptional circumstances such as family situation or international mobility (*HSLDA Malta*, 2025). This places Malta between individual instruction and traditional home education.

The second country is Lithuania, which – according to the Eurydice report – previously did not permit home education in any form (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). However, in 2020, amendments to the education law introduced the possibility of home education after meeting specific requirements (Pieszko, 2020; *Rząd Litwy w końcu wdraża edukację domową*, 2021).

Finally, only 19 countries currently offer all citizens the option of participating in home education.

4. DIVERSITY OF HOME EDUCATION MODELS IN SELECTED EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The differences observed in this area can be illustrated by comparing Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, access to home education is highly restricted. It requires the demonstration of exceptional circumstances, typically related to the child's health condition, which prevent regular school attendance. Moreover, the process is subject to continuous supervision by the Municipal Education Board, which is the local authority responsible for education at the municipal level. In addition, parents are required to submit an educational plan and ensure the child's participation in standardised national assessments (*Homeschooling in Sweden*, 2023).

In contrast to this model, home education in Finland is based on full parental autonomy. This autonomy is reflected in the complete responsibility of parents for the educational process, without the obligation to undergo formal control procedures or standardised examinations (*Homeschooling Regulations in Finland*, 2025). A comparison of these two cases reveals fundamentally different approaches to the relationship between family autonomy and state control.

Another example illustrating differing approaches to the regulation of home education concerns parental qualifications, which can be observed by comparing Slovakia and Denmark. In Slovakia, parents who provide home education are required to hold formal pedagogical qualifications, the level of which depends on the child's stage of education. At the pre-primary level, parents must possess at least upper secondary education. When the child is at the primary school level, a higher education degree is required (*Slovakia Home Education Requirements 2026*, 2026). This requirement reflects a strong belief

in the necessity of professional preparation for fulfilling educational functions. In contrast, no obligation to hold pedagogical qualifications exists in Denmark. The limited degree of state intervention in this respect reflects a more liberal approach to the role of the family within the education system (*Homeschooling in Denmark, 2026*).

The presented examples confirm that regulations governing home education in Europe reflect diverse conceptions of the roles of the state and the family in the educational process, the structure which is determined by differing legal frameworks.

5. THE STATE'S APPROACH TO HOME EDUCATION: LEVELS OF OVERSIGHT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Based on the information presented in the Eurydice report, all countries can be classified according to the level of control exercised over home education. The classification is as follows:

- states with high levels of regulation (the strictest control),
- states with moderate regulation,
- states with low regulation,
- states with no regulation (no state control over home education).

The groups are characterised below, with the most important criterion highlighted for assigning countries to each category. The need to identify a primary characteristic resulted from discrepancies in the data presented in the report. Consequently, the indicators differ between groups.

The first group consists of states with high regulation, meaning the strictest control over home education. The key indicator is the requirement that parents hold teaching qualifications to educate their child at home. In such countries, parents must follow the national curriculum, and pedagogical authorities monitor their work. Children undergo assessments more frequently than once a year.

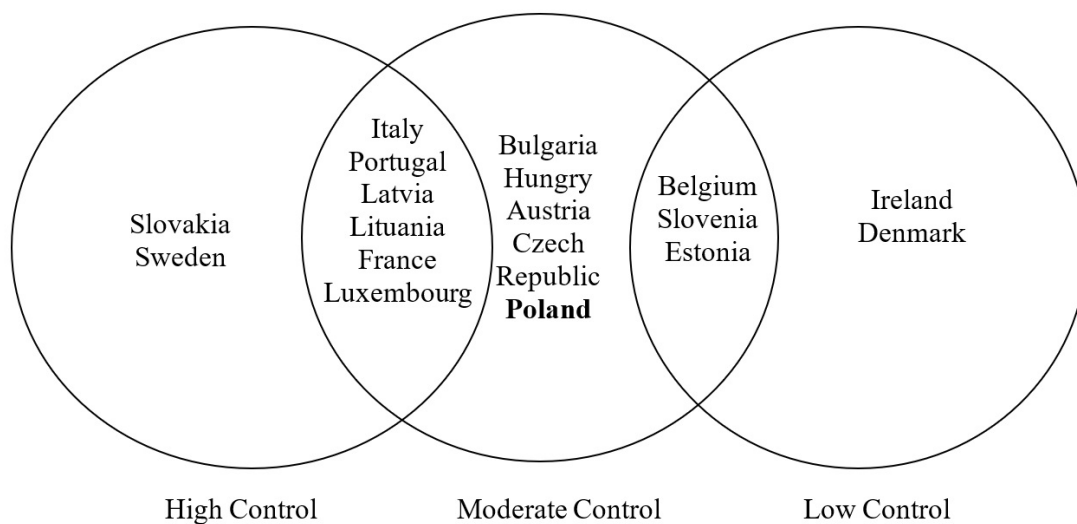
The second group comprises states with moderate regulation. Here, the defining indicator is the requirement to obtain approval from a relevant educational authority—ranging from the school principal to the municipality or even the ministry. As in the highly regulated group, parents must follow the national curriculum, and children are assessed once a year or less frequently.

The third group includes states with low regulation. In these countries, the key indicator is the ability to choose the curriculum. Parents decide which learning content is most appropriate for their child. They may choose from ministry-approved curricula, co-create or modify an existing curriculum, or develop their own educational program. Examinations are voluntary and serve as a form of self-evaluation rather than formal classification. Parents do not need teaching qualifications but must obtain permission from the authorities to provide home education.

The final group consists of states with no regulation, where the state exerts no control over home education. Parents hold full responsibility for organising learning, determining its scope, and evaluating progress.

Using this classification, most European countries can be assigned to a specific group. However, in some cases, categorisation is not straightforward. In certain states, the legal provisions governing home education place them at the intersection of overlapping categories. The diagram below (Figure 1) illustrates the placement of countries according to the degree of regulation and the overlapping boundary areas.

Figure 1 *Classification of countries according to the strength of state control and overlapping boundary areas*



Within the group identified as exercising high levels of regulation, Slovakia occupies a distinct position. Parents who provide home education are required to hold teaching qualifications, which vary depending on the educational stage. To educate a preschool-age child, the parent must have completed upper-secondary education, whereas for a child at the primary school level, a second-cycle higher education degree is required (*HSLDA, Słowacja, 2025*).

In the case of Sweden, the decisive factor that places the country in the high-regulation category is the requirement of an exceptionally specific situation that prevents a child from attending school. The conditions imposed by the state are extremely stringent. Parents must document the reasons why school attendance is impossible and submit a formal application to the municipal education board. In addition, they must prepare an educational plan that complies with the national curriculum. Approval for home education is granted for one year only, and extensions require the entire procedure to be repeated. The municipality maintains continuous oversight of the educational process, and children must take national assessments. It should be noted that although home education is technically legal in Sweden, it is practically non-existent (*Homeschooling in Sweden, 2023*).

In the diagram above, several countries occupy overlapping areas of the classification. At the boundary between high and moderate regulation, six countries appear whose regulatory frameworks fluctuate between these two categories, making it impossible to assign them definitively to one group. In Italy, for instance, parents must possess “competences” in pedagogy to homeschool their child, yet they may also design their own curriculum if it aligns with the national educational framework. Portugal presents a similar situation. Although parents are required to have teaching qualifications at least one level higher than that of the child, there are no examinations assessing the progress of home-educated pupils (*Edukacja domowa. Zaczynamy przygodę z ED w Portugalii, 2021*).

In Latvia, home education approaches a model resembling individual instruction; however, instruction is provided not by teachers but by parents. Parents are not required to hold teaching qualifications, yet schools retain the right to impose the number of examinations a child must complete (*Expat Exchange – Homeschooling in Latvia, 2025*).

Lithuania—having only recently legalised home education—continues to refine its regulatory framework. At present, approval for home education may be granted only after an assessment of the family’s educational environment. This evaluation is carried out by the Child Rights Protection Service and municipal authorities (*Rząd Litwy w końcu wdraża edukację domową, 2021*). For this reason, Lithuania is classified as a country at the intersection of high and moderate regulation.

France also falls within this overlapping subset. Until 2022, it was positioned between low and moderate regulation due to the freedom parents had in selecting curricular content from a ministry-approved database. However, in 2022 and again in 2023, authorities introduced strict restrictions governing home education. At present, there are seven categories of cases in which parents may apply for home education, including health-related reasons, disability, artistic or athletic commitments, homelessness, geographic isolation, specific child circumstances, and safety concerns. While parents are not required to possess teaching qualifications, the educational process they conduct is subject to dual inspection. Compliance with prescribed curriculum frameworks is also mandatory (*Homeschooling we Francji: Nowe ograniczenia i przepisy, 2025*).

Luxembourg is the final country within this subset. Parents must obtain approval from the regional director of education. Once approval is granted, the parent is assigned a school inspector responsible for monitoring the child’s academic progress. Parents are not required to hold teaching qualifications; however, they are subject to systematic oversight, and the child must participate in regular examinations (Rao, 2024).

Countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, Czechia, and Poland are classified as exercising moderate regulation in their oversight of home education. What these states share in common is the requirement that parents obtain permission from the school principal or local municipality, the obligation to follow the official national curriculum, and the requirement for children to take annual examinations (*HSLDA, 2025*).

Poland is placed in the moderate-regulation group primarily because parents are not required to possess teaching qualifications. As in other countries within this group, the curriculum must be aligned with the national core curriculum. Although parents must obtain the school principal’s approval, no appeal to higher authorities is necessary. Compared to Denmark, Poland benefits from a unified national procedure for applying for home education. Unlike Hungary, Poland does not require regular consultations. Classification examinations take place once per year (*Ustawa o zmianie ustawy – Prawo oświatowe, 2021*). Poland thus aligns closely with the midpoint of the moderate-regulation spectrum.

A second overlapping category includes Belgium, Slovenia, and Estonia. In Belgium and Slovenia, parents merely declare their intent to homeschool by notifying the appropriate institutions (*Expat Exchange – Homeschooling in Slovenia, 2025*). Estonia lies at the boundary between moderate and low regulation: parents may design their own curriculum based on the national core curriculum, and although school approval is not required, parents must notify the educational institution of their decision (*Home Education in Estonia: What Parents Should Know, 2025*).

The final group consists of countries such as Ireland and Denmark, which exhibit low levels of regulation. In Ireland, parents register their intent to homeschool with the relevant organisation (TUSLA), which assesses whether conditions are suitable for home education. Parents may design their own curriculum if it meets minimum educational standards. Students are not required to take annual classification examinations, though they may take national exams upon completing their education (*Teaching Your Child at Home, 2023*). Denmark follows a similar model.

Table 1 *Regulatory stringency of home education in EU countries*

Country	Level of Regulatory Stringency	Examination	Parents' Pedagogical Qualifications	Approval of Authorities	Health Criterion
Croatia	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Greece	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Spain	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Germany	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Romania	Not permitted	—	—	—	—
Malta	Very high	Annual, audits	Required	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Very high	Nationwide tests	Not required	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	High	Semester-based	Required	Yes	No
France	High/Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	High/Moderate	Periodic	Not required	Yes	No
Luxembourg	High/Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Latvia	High/Moderate	State examinations	Not required	Yes	Yes
Portugal	High/Moderate	Annual	Required	Yes	No
Italy	High/Moderate	Annual	Required	Yes	No
Austria	Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Bulgaria	Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Czech Republic	Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Poland	Moderate	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Hungary	Moderate	Semester-based	Not required	Yes	Partially
Belgium	Moderate/Low	Certification-based	Not required	Yes	No
Estonia	Moderate/Low	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Slovenia	Moderate/Low	Annual	Not required	Yes	No
Denmark	Low	Annual	Not required	Notification only	No
Ireland	Low	None	Not required	Notification only	No
Finland	No regulation	None	Not required	No	No

Countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and Germany do not recognise home education as a legal form of schooling. A very high and high level of regulatory stringency is represented by Malta, Sweden, and Slovakia. This model is characterised by strong supervision over the educational process, manifested through frequent examinations or audits. The process itself is highly institutionalised. Parents are required to possess pedagogical qualifications, which indicates the dominance of a state-centred model in which responsibility for the educational process largely remains with public institutions.

Countries situated at the intersection of high and moderate regulatory stringency (France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Portugal, and Italy) represent a hybrid model. They combine elements of institutional control with partial parental autonomy while maintaining systemic regulatory frameworks. A clear attempt can be observed to balance responsibility between the

family and the state in relation to the child's education. Parental autonomy is reflected in the possibility of curriculum individualisation, whereas state control is exercised through verification mechanisms, particularly in the form of examinations.

The moderate model is based on a compromise between parental freedom and systemic requirements. In countries such as Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, home education is formally recognised as an alternative form of education outside the school institution. In all these countries, pedagogical qualifications are not required, which indicates a greater level of trust in the educational and parenting competencies of parents. It should be noted, however, that home education remains closely linked to the formal education system through the obligation to follow the national curriculum.

The final group consists of countries that adopt a highly liberal approach to home education. These include Belgium, Estonia, Slovenia, Denmark, and Ireland. In all of these countries, home education is based on a high degree of family autonomy and is treated as equivalent to education within the classroom-based system. Formal state supervision is largely limited to the monitoring of compulsory registration or general oversight of educational progress.

Finland is the only country in the European Union that fully transfers responsibility for the child's education to parents without introducing additional monitoring or control mechanisms.

6. DISCUSSION

The observed discrepancies between highly regulated systems and more liberal models reflect a fundamental tension between institutional control frameworks and the concept of family educational freedom. On the one hand, strong regulatory approaches—characteristic of countries such as Sweden, Malta, and Slovakia—may be interpreted as mechanisms ensuring equal access to education and maintaining its quality (Dwyer & Peters, 2021). Proponents of this perspective argue that state supervision is necessary to safeguard the child's right to education. Moreover, such oversight is believed to prevent potential educational neglect that may arise from insufficient pedagogical competencies of parents (Reich, 2001). Within this framework, particular emphasis is placed on the child's agency and educational autonomy. Authors adopting this perspective identify significant risks associated with home education, including social isolation, potential deficiencies in educational quality, and the lack of effective monitoring of curriculum implementation.

On the other hand, the literature emphasises the importance of family autonomy as an essential component of the right to choose an educational pathway in accordance with parental beliefs (Stevens, 2009). In contrast to Dwyer and Reich, Stevens highlights the social dimension of home education. According to his perspective, the reduction of institutional control may act as a catalyst for civic engagement and the development of civil society, including in the field of education. Liberal models, such as those found in Finland and Ireland, align with pedagogical approaches centred on the individualisation of the learning process and the subjectivity of the learner. Limited state intervention supports didactic flexibility and enables education to be tailored to the individual needs of the child (Gray, 2015).

An important issue identified in the analysis concerns terminological and interpretative inconsistencies associated with the concept of home education. Comparative research indicates that the lack of consistent implementation of definitional assumptions at the national level leads to difficulties in data analysis and comparison, and may contribute to misinterpretations of legal regulations (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). This phenomenon confirms that home education remains an ambiguous category both in legal and pedagogical terms.

7. SUMMARY

Home education within the European Union is a phenomenon marked by significant diversity in terms of legal regulations, the extent of state control, and its accessibility to citizens. The analysis demonstrates that although most countries allow compulsory schooling to be fulfilled outside traditional school institutions, the degree of parental autonomy varies considerably depending on national legislation. Home education remains marginal in states with restrictive regulations, whereas in more liberal countries, a growing trend is observed. Global reports indicate that the annual post-pandemic growth rate of home education ranges from 2% to 8%, with sharp increases during periods of pandemic lockdowns (Jasperson, 2024). Among EU member states, the highest growth in the number of home-educated students was recorded in Belgium (Flanders), where statistical data indicate an increase of over 300% in the past five years (*Homeschooling Sees Fourfold Increase in Five Years*, 2025). Similar tendencies have been reported in other countries, though comprehensive statistical data remain limited.

A comparable trend is visible in Poland. In 2021, approximately 20,000 students participated in home education, whereas by January 2024, the number had risen to about 54,000 (Konczal, 2024). This represents a 170% increase in the number of families choosing this educational alternative.

The analysis of legal frameworks across individual countries reveals the absence of unified standards within the European Union regarding access to home education, highlighting the strong ties between national cultural contexts and educational policies. As emphasised in the UNESCO report *Homeschooling through a Human Rights Lens*, the debate on home education should be additionally situated within the framework of the international right to education, which simultaneously safeguards

Despite significant differences in national approaches to home education, the broader trend driven by parental autonomy, educational policy shifts, digitalisation, and globalisation suggests that this alternative form of schooling will continue to be a dynamic and, at the same time, persistent gaps in knowledge indicate the need for further comparative research and more in-depth reflection on the role of home education within pluralistic education systems.

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