

# Measuring the vitality of languages in Catalan society.

## Survey on Language Use in Catalonia 2018



Directorate-General for Language Policy, Government of Catalonia

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The Directorate-General for Language Policy of the Government of Catalonia has just published the **Survey on Language Use of the Population 2018** (EULP, in its Catalan acronym), the latest official statistics regarding the use of languages in Catalonia. The report is published jointly by the Department of Culture of the Catalan Government (through the Directorate-General for Language Policy) and the Catalan Institute for Statistics. The primary goal of the report –published every 5 years since 2003– is to measure the health and vitality of Catalan and Occitan in the Aran Valley (both official languages of Catalonia, along with Spanish) as well as the use of other languages by the population of Catalonia. These data are crucial as they act as a thermometer of the strength of Catalan and Occitan as well as the use of *lingua francas*, such as English or French, along with the presence of the languages brought to Catalonia by migration. It is, in sum, a useful tool needed to develop a sound language policy and planning.

This is a succinct analysis of the main findings<sup>1</sup>, which revolve around the following axes:

- 1 – A rapidly changing society. Stagnant birth rates versus high migration rates
- 2 – Linguistic consequences of an increasingly heterogeneous society
- 3 – Use and knowledge of Catalan on the rise
- 4 – Changes in the day-to-day linguistic repertoires of the Catalan population
- 5 – Intergenerational language transmission



<sup>1</sup> For a full version of the report, click [here](#) (available in Catalan and Occitan)

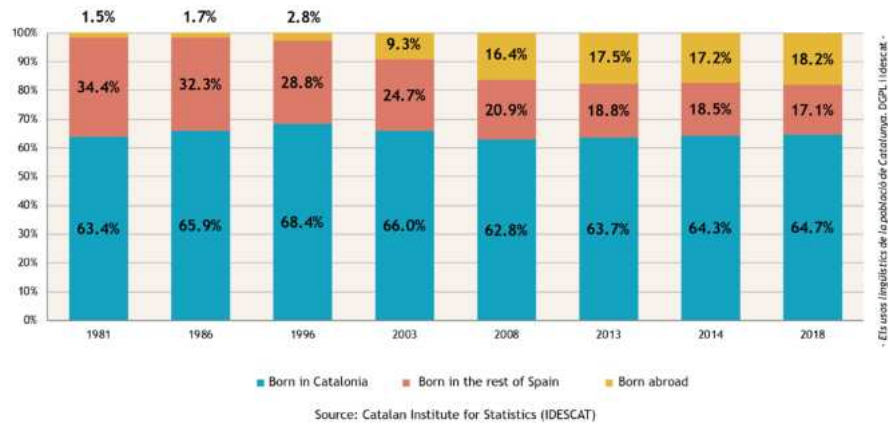
## 1

### A rapidly changing society. Stagnant birth rates versus high migration rates

The current population of Catalonia is 7,600,065 inhabitants. A historical perspective leads us to state that the Catalan population growth is due almost exclusively to immigration. The following figures help us understand the current population patterns in Catalonia:

- The population born in Catalonia has stagnated over the 1981-2018 period, representing around 63-64% of the total population throughout these four decades.
- The population of Catalonia born in the rest of Spain has decreased notoriously, dropping from 34.4% in 1981 to 17.1% of the population.
- The migrant population has increased exponentially, going from 1.5% in 1981 to 18.2% in 2018, the main countries of origin being Morocco, Romania, Pakistan and China.

The following figures help us illustrate this point:

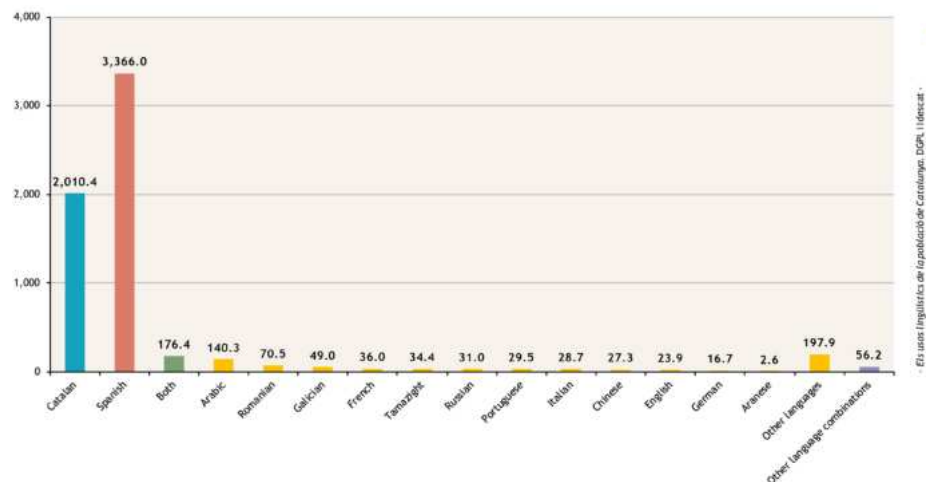


Population by place of birth. Percentages 1981-2018

## 2

### Linguistic consequences of an increasingly heterogeneous society

These demographic changes in a relatively short period have had a profound impact in terms of languages used on a daily basis: a new linguistic paradigm including languages such as Tamazight, Chinese, Arabic or Russian, to name only a few, as shown in graph 2 below.



Initial language. Languages other than Catalan and Spanish (in thousands). 2108



## 3

### Knowledge of Catalan on the rise

Despite these demolinguiistic changes, the use of Catalan has continued to grow, as shown in table 1 below. These data show the vitality of Catalan in society. Despite this positive trend, the absolute numbers show that Spanish continues to predominate.

An important element that also highlights the vitality of the Catalan language is the remarkable growth in terms of knowledge. From a longitudinal perspective (2003-2018), there has been a clear growth in terms of knowledge of Catalan in all four competences – Understanding, Speaking, Reading and Writing, as shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1.**  
Knowledge of Catalan.  
Absolute values.  
2003-2018

	2003	2013	2018	2003-2018
<b>Understands</b>	5,423,600	5,899,400	6,028,019	+ 604,419
<b>Speaks</b>	4,583,500	5,027,200	5,187,117	+ 603,617
<b>Reads</b>	4,999,500	5,152,400	5,463,121	+ 463,621
<b>Writes</b>	3,303,800	3,776,300	4,170,457	+ 866,654

Source: Survey on Language use by the Catalan Population.  
Directorate-General for Language Policy. IDESCAT. Catalan Institute for Statistics

## 4

### Changes in the day-to-day linguistic repertoires of the Catalan population

The use of Catalan on a daily basis goes up to 76.4%, a slightly higher percentage than in 2013, when it was 74.6%. As for Spanish, 93.2% claim to use it throughout the day, whereas 18.6% claim to use a language other than Spanish or Catalan, as shown in graph below.

**% of language use throughout the day. 2018**



The Survey also identifies the different domains in which languages are used:

- a) In the local and Catalan Administration, Catalan is the most widely used language with an average of 62.6% and 58.5%.
- b) In the banking and health domains, Catalan, Spanish or a combination of both are used interchangeably.



c) In shops and small businesses, Catalan is used only or mainly by 37.9% of the population, whereas in big stores, the Catalan-Spanish language combination is more common.

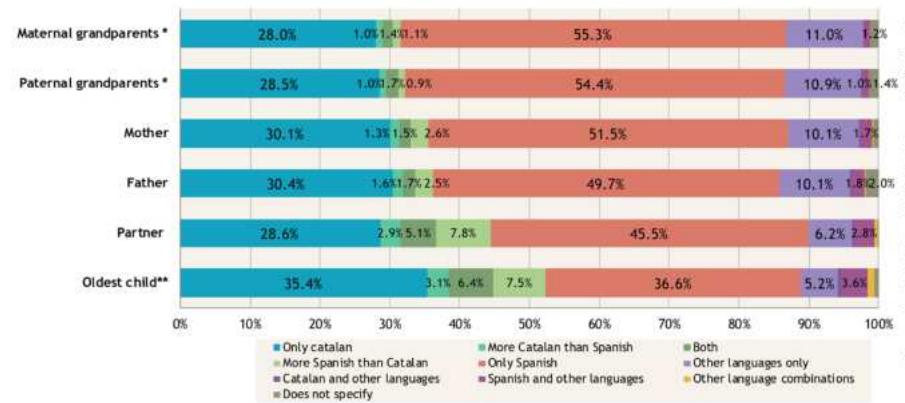
d) In the State Administration, the use of only Spanish is more frequent (38.9%), whereas Catalan is used, to a greater or lesser degree, by 54.2% of the population.

## 5

### Intergenerational language transmission

The intergenerational language transmission, measured as the difference between the percentage of the population who use Catalan with their mother and with their own offspring, has grown by 7.5%. This indicator was 6.2% back in 2013, which shows the willingness of many parents to speak Catalan to their offspring. This is particularly so with the population group ranging from 30 to 44 years old. Put in other terms, while this segment of the population tended to use Spanish with their parents, we observe a slight trend in reversing this pattern, as they are increasingly using Catalan with their offspring.

### Intergenerational language transmission, 2018



In sum, the arrival in Catalonia of more than one million people of foreign origin in less than a decade has not only caused a profound demographic change, but has also entailed a linguistic challenge for the Catalan language. The Catalan institutions have had to adapt their language policies to this changing reality to ensure that no segment of the population is left behind in terms of knowledge of Catalan as an extremely useful tool to integrate into Catalan society. In spite of the migratory intensity of these past years, the figures for enrolments on Catalan courses and willingness to learn demonstrate the high level of interest of the foreign-born population in familiarizing themselves with the Catalan language, the Catalan culture and Catalan society as a whole. //

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