

PLATA  
FORMA  
PER LA  
LLENGUA

L'ONG del català



# THE CATALAN LANGUAGE

# WHY THIS GUIDE?



Many people can find Barcelona, Valencia or Majorca on a map, but few know that the native language of these places is Catalan. Catalan is a thousand-year-old language spoken by more than 10 million people in four different states: Spain, Andorra, France and Italy. It is an active, modern language strongly present in administration, the media, education, cultural activity and on the internet.

Although Catalan is a dynamic language considered to be medium-sized in terms of its number of speakers, Catalan is subject to policies that minoritise it and limit its speakers' rights. This lack of international recognition for political reasons associated with the nationalism of States is particularly worrying in the European Union, a body which does not include Catalan as an official language despite the fact that it is the thirteenth most spoken language in the community.

This new edition of the guide *The Catalan Language, 2021*, is intended to publicise the situation of the language from different perspectives: the general features that define it, its legal status, its cultural profile, the sociolinguistic situation, its presence in the media and on the internet and its historical resilience. The guide therefore explains the Catalan language and points out the threats and challenges it has to face before it can be said to be in an entirely normal situation.





# THE CATALAN LANGUAGE



## CATALAN, A EUROPEAN LANGUAGE

The Catalan language is spoken in four European states (Spain, France, Andorra and Italy). In Spain, it is spoken in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, virtually all over the Valencian Country, in the eastern strip of Aragon and in the Carxe area of Murcia. It is also the only official language of the small Pyrenean state of Andorra. In addition, Catalan is spoken in most of the Pyrénées Orientales department in France – also called Northern Catalonia – and in the city of l'Alguer (Alghero) on the Italian island of Sardinia.

## TEN MILLION PEOPLE SPEAK CATALAN

According to estimations of linguistic use in Catalan-speaking areas, over 10 million people speak Catalan. This number represents 72.5% of the population (adults and children over two years old) in the Catalan-speaking territories (Catalonia, the Valencian Country, the Balearic Islands, Eastern Aragon, Andorra, Northern Catalonia, and the city of l'Alguer (Alghero)). As a whole, the linguistic scope of the Catalan language covers an area that is home to nearly 14 million people, and more than 12 million people understand it (over 90% of the population). This makes it comparable to other European languages of similar demographic weight, such as Norwegian and Danish. Furthermore, more than 25,000 people sign in the Catalan Sign Language, which is recognised by the Catalan Constitution.







## **CATALAN IS NOT A STATE LANGUAGE IN SPAIN**

Even if historically Spain has been a plurilingual land, Article 3.1 of the Spanish Constitution defines Castilian (also known as “Spanish”) as the State’s only official language. Moreover, the same article establishes that speaking Spanish is compulsory within the Spanish territory. With the exception of Bulgaria, no other national constitution in Europe mandates the use of a particular language. Therefore, Catalan can only be officially recognised in areas where it is the native and historical tongue, and the regional constitutions have made it an official language. By contrast, Spanish is compulsory everywhere, regardless of the volition of the Autonomous Regions and whether it is the region’s native tongue. For example, despite Catalan historically being the most spoken language and the historical one in Eastern Aragon, Spanish is the area’s only official language.

## **THE LEGAL SITUATION OF CATALAN IS INCONGRUOUS WITH THAT OF OTHER LANGUAGES WITH THE SAME NUMBER OF SPEAKERS**

Because of its non-official status at State level, Catalan cannot be used in the Spanish Parliament, unlike other multilingual states such as Belgium, where the French and Dutch languages are used interchangeably in federal parliamentary assemblies. The Spanish Parliament is the only one in the European Union that does not allow its members to speak in a language as widely used as Catalan. Furthermore, the embassies and consulates are only permitted to provide their documents and services in Spanish.

## **CATALAN CANNOT BE USED IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT OR IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

The same thing occurs in the European Parliament. Since Catalan does not enjoy official language status, members cannot speak it or use it in documents. Nor can it be used in the committees, the plenary session of the European Parliament or by citizens, who cannot present appeals to its Petitions Committee.



## **THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FAVOURS SPANISH OVER CATALAN IN MULTIPLE AREAS**

Linguistic legislation related to Catalan is scarce. In fact, compared to other languages with a similar demographic weight, Catalan is the most unprotected language in Europe. As we have already mentioned, it is not an official language in the Spanish State (only in those regions where it is the original language) or in the European Union. Instead, several state laws impose the obligation to understand Spanish and restrict or nullify the obligation to know Catalan, especially for civil servants working for the Spanish Administration in Catalonia, the Valencian Country and the Balearic Islands. Moreover, other rules impose the exclusive use of Spanish in different areas, such as labelling and official documents, etc. In the Catalan-speaking territories, Spanish and French are the only languages imposed by law. In fact, in 2020, the Spanish State adopted 63 legal provisions forcing the use of Spanish.

## **SPAIN DOES NOT COMPLY WITH THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES AND REFUSES TO INVESTIGATE REPORTS OF SERIOUS LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION**

In its last report published in 2021, the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages stated that Spain is failing to fulfil its commitments concerning the rights of Catalan speakers and recommended that the position of Catalan in the justice system and the state public authorities be improved immediately. Every year, this situation results in numerous cases of discrimination against Catalan speakers by the authorities, which go as far as breaking the law. Most of the discrimination cases involve Spanish government bodies and are neither investigated nor prosecuted. The contexts most likely to be involved in these cases are court hearings, healthcare settings and interactions with the police forces.

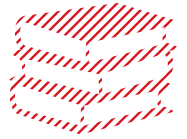
## **THERE IS NO PROSPECT OF CATALAN BEING RECOGNISED AT STATE LEVEL IN THE FUTURE**

Not one of the four main political parties in Spain: PP (conservatives), PSOE (socialists), Ciudadanos (liberals), and Podemos (left-wing), included a revision of Article 3.1 of the Spanish Constitution in their manifesto during the most recently contested Spanish Parliamentary elections (November 2019). The article says that “Castilian is the official language of the State, and all Spaniards have a duty to understand it and the right to use it”.





# CATALAN PROJECTION



## **CATALAN HAS AN IMPORTANT LITERARY HERITAGE**

Catalan literature is highly regarded and has been recognised since the Middle Ages thanks to the work of well-respected authors such as Ramon Llull and Joanot Martorell. Over 10,000 books are published in Catalan every year, and it is the 22nd most-translated language in the world, with a greater number of translations into other languages than those with similar demographics (for example, Greek). Furthermore, Catalan ranks 26th in terms of translations from other languages.

## **CATALAN IS TAUGHT AT 158 UNIVERSITIES WORLDWIDE**

During the 2019-20 academic year, a total of 158 universities taught Catalan language and culture studies outside of the Catalan native area via the Ramon Llull Institute and the Vives University Network. The countries offering the most comprehensive choice are the United Kingdom and Germany, with 22 and 21 universities offering Catalan Studies, respectively. France and Italy are not far behind, with 20 and 13, respectively. Spain, however, despite being home to 95 % of Catalan speakers, only offers Catalan studies at eight universities outside the language's native area. As for the remaining European countries, Catalan can be studied at five universities in Poland; three in Hungary and the Czech Republic; two in Austria, Ireland and Russia; and one in Croatia, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland.

## **CATALAN IS THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF MANY INFLUENTIAL PUBLIC FIGURES**

Catalan is the language of many well-known personalities whose work has had a global impact: architects such as Antoni Gaudí and Josep Puig i Cadafalch; painters like Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies and Miquel Barceló; musicians and singers such as Pau Casals, Montserrat Caballé, Josep Carreras, Jordi Savall, Joan Manuel Serrat, Kendji Girac, Rosalia and Bad Gyal; chefs, including Ricard Camarena, Ferran Adrià, and the Roca brothers; and scientists, namely Valentí Fuster, Joan Massagué, Anna Veiga and Josep Baselga. Moreover, several sports celebrities are native Catalan speakers, including Pep Guardiola, Rafael Nadal, Gerard Piqué, David Ferrer and the Gasol brothers. And last but not least, Catalan-speaking stars of the seventh art include director Agustí Villaronga, actresses Ariadna Gil and Ursula Corberó, and actor Sergi López.





## CATALAN HAS A POSITIVE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

According to the 2018 Survey on the Language Uses of the Population, there is a positive intergenerational transmission of the language, i.e., the percentage of people that speak Catalan with their children is higher than the percentage of people who speak Catalan with their parents. This demonstrates the usefulness and attractiveness of speaking Catalan.

## MOST FOREIGN RESIDENTS UNDERSTAND CATALAN

According to the last Spanish Population and Housing Census (2011), 83.0% of foreign residents in Catalonia understand Catalan. This represents an increase of 14.1% compared to the previous census, where only 68.9% of this population group declared any knowledge of the language. It should be noted that this increase has evolved concurrently with the growth of the foreign population: almost a million foreigners have taken up residence in Catalonia since the year 2000.

## CATALAN IS USED SUBSTANTIALLY BY LOCALS AND FOREIGNERS ALIKE

Overall, Catalan is the everyday language of communication for 43.5% of the population, and most of the rest of the population can also speak the language and use it frequently. Given that Catalonia received many migrants from all over Spain during the 20th century, this statistic is particularly relevant because it tells us that those migrants learnt Catalan. According to the last Spanish Population and Housing Census (2011), 40.4% of European residents (130,594 out of 323,255) in Catalonia speak Catalan. The percentage of Europeans that speak Catalan is higher than groups from other continents, such as Latin Americans (36.2%) and Africans (35.2%).

## CATALAN IS NOT A MINORITY LANGUAGE

Catalan is the 13th most spoken language in the European Union among 15–34-year-olds, which places it above official EU languages such as Danish, Finnish, Slovakian, Croatian, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Slovenian, Maltese, Irish, or even languages spoken by immigrants from outside Europe, such as Turkish or Arabic. Surprisingly, Catalan is the 7th most-learned language among young Europeans, just behind other more widely spoken languages such as English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Italian, and ahead of languages such as Dutch, Portuguese, Czech and Polish.

## EU LANGUAGES BY NUMBER OF SPEAKERS IN EU MEMBER STATES







### **THE CATALAN LANGUAGE HAS A STRONG MEDIA PRESENCE**

More than 100 newspapers, both printed and digital, and 150 magazines are published in Catalan. The most-watched TV channel in Catalonia is TV3, which broadcasts exclusively in Catalan. The two most listened-to radio stations, RAC1 and Catalunya Radio, also broadcast all their programmes in Catalan.

### **SIX OUT OF THE EIGHT MOST USED SOCIAL NETWORKS IN SPAIN HAVE A CATALAN LANGUAGE VERSION**

They are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Telegram and Tinder. In 2012, Twitter launched a Catalan language version. Of the top eight social networks, only Instagram and LinkedIn, the job-based network, are yet to launch a Catalan version, thus proving the viability and need for a Catalan-language version of these sites.

### **THREE OUT OF THE TEN MOST VISITED WEBSITES IN THE WORLD HAVE A CATALAN LANGUAGE VERSION**

However, it should be noted that seven of the top ten are Chinese-language websites like Baidu, Taobao and Qq. Even so, many large multinational companies such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia and Twitter have Catalan-language versions, thus demonstrating the viability and need for the use of Catalan on these sites.

### **WIKIPEDIA'S CATALAN WEBSITE IS ONE OF ITS TOP 20 LANGUAGE VERSIONS IN TERMS OF THE NUMBER OF ARTICLES**

In January 2019, the Catalan version of Wikipedia reached 600,000 articles. Catalan is amongst the 20 top Wikipedia languages, but it should also be noted that it has more than 350,000 registered users and that in 2013, the Catalan Wikipedia beat the records for page visits on several occasions.



NUEVA PLANTA  
DE LA  
REAL AUDIENCIA  
DEL  
PRINCIPADO  
DE  
CATALUÑA,  
ESTABLECIDA  
POR SU Magestad,  
CON DECRETO DE DIEZ Y SEIS  
de Enero de mil setecientos y diez y seis.



En Barcelona: Por JOSEPH TEXIDÓ, Impresor del Rey N. Sr.

*Se ballarà en su casa, en la calle de Santo Domingo.*



## THE SPANISH AND FRENCH STATES HAVE MADE REPEATED ATTEMPTS TO ERADICATE CATALAN

During the 17th century the Principality of Catalonia was part of the Spanish Monarchy, a composite empire. In 1641 Catalonia separated from that Monarchy with the help of the French, but, after a series of setbacks, the Spanish and French kings divided the Principality of Catalonia among themselves.

In 1700, Louis XIV banned the use of Catalan in any official capacity in the part that fell under French rule. During the French Revolution, Catalan was branded “counter-revolutionary” by the Jacobins. They supported the replacement of “local” languages with French, which they claimed was “national” and “universal”. This repressive mentality has been dominant in French politics ever since. During the 20th century, efforts by the education system to root out Catalan were mostly successful.

In the part of Catalonia that stayed within the Spanish Monarchy, Catalan was first stripped of its official status in 1716. After the surrender of Barcelona in 1714 in the War of the Spanish Succession, the victorious Bourbon king Philip V abolished Catalan institutions and laws. He also eliminated Catalan from the public administration and courts. Later in the century, the use of Catalan in educational contexts was banned.

Although there have been many other attempts since then, the most ambitious operation to eradicate Catalan came in 1939, in the wake of dictator Francisco Franco’s rise to power. Previous prohibitions were complemented by further measures: signage in Catalan was forbidden and fines were issued for speaking Catalan in public. This process formed part of an overarching policy to repress the Catalan national identity.

Since the end of the dictatorship, Catalan has enjoyed a degree of official status but Castilian is still treated as the sole official state language and its speakers are awarded special privileges. The Spanish Constitution imposes the knowledge of Castilian on all citizens, in a measure clearly aimed at the members of national minorities who do not speak it as their community language. This makes Catalan redundant even in its own territory, so immigrants do not need to learn it, and justifies the State operating solely in Castilian and passing interventionist legislation on its behalf.



## **BASIC FACTS ABOUT CATALAN**

- 10 million speakers
- Around 13.5 million people understand Catalan
- 94.3% of people in Catalonia understand Catalan, and 80.4% speak it.
- Spoken in four states: Spain, France, Andorra and Italy.
- 13th most widely spoken language in the EU.
- 3 out of the 10 most visited websites in the world have Catalan versions.
- 24th most used language on Twitter.
- 17th most used language on Wikipedia.
- 7th most studied language in the European Union.
- 22nd most translated language in the world.
- 158 universities all over the world teach Catalan.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

- Catalan diverged from Vulgar Latin during the 9th century, as some inscriptions show.
- Before the instauration of Franco's dictatorship, Nestlé labelled its products in Catalan. However, as with other brands, the regime forced the brand to change all its labelling to Spanish.
- During the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Catalan could be heard in the coastal region of Algeria, which was under French rule. Known as patuet, it was spoken by over 100,000 members of the immigrant communities from Alacant (Valencian Country), Perpignan and, above all, Menorca, including, for example, Albert Camus. In fact, Albert Camus translated several works from Catalan to French, such as the poems of the famous Catalan author Joan Maragall.
- The Book of the Consulate of the Sea is a compendium of maritime law that governed trade in the Mediterranean between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. Of Catalan origin, it was translated into many languages and served as the basis for current international maritime law.
- The globally renowned architect Antoni Gaudí was arrested on the 11th of September 1924 for speaking Catalan to a police officer.
- Several 'English' words are actually borrowed from Catalan, including barracks, paper and aubergine.
- Until the end of the 20th century, the descendants of Menorcan communities still lived in some areas of Florida and maintained their own dialect and folk songs.
- Catalan has been the official language of FC Barcelona since its inception more than 100 years ago.



# PLATAFORMA PER LA LENGUA: AN NGO FOR THE CATALAN LANGUAGE

We are the biggest language rights organisation in Europe. More than 24,000 members support our 28 year-long dedication to protecting and promoting the Catalan language throughout the linguistic domain.

We take a transversal approach to enhancing social cohesion by striving for our language to be fully instilled and firmly rooted in cultural, administrative and educational Settings, among others.

We campaign for Catalan speakers to have access to the same rights and services as other citizens of European language communities with a similar demographic weight to ours. We are working to ensure that the 13th most spoken language in Europe gets the recognition and respect it deserves.

We want to see Catalan become **our common language.**



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In collaboration with:



**Generalitat  
de Catalunya**

**Plataforma per la Llengua**  
C/ Sant Honorat, 7. Principal 1a  
08002 Barcelona  
Tel.: 93 321 18 03  
info@plataforma-llengua.cat  
www.plataforma-llengua.cat

 @llenguacat

 /PlataformaxLlengua

 /plataformaperlallengua

 /PlataformaxLlengua