

2006 POPULATION AND HOUSING STATISTICS – PHS06-BASQUE

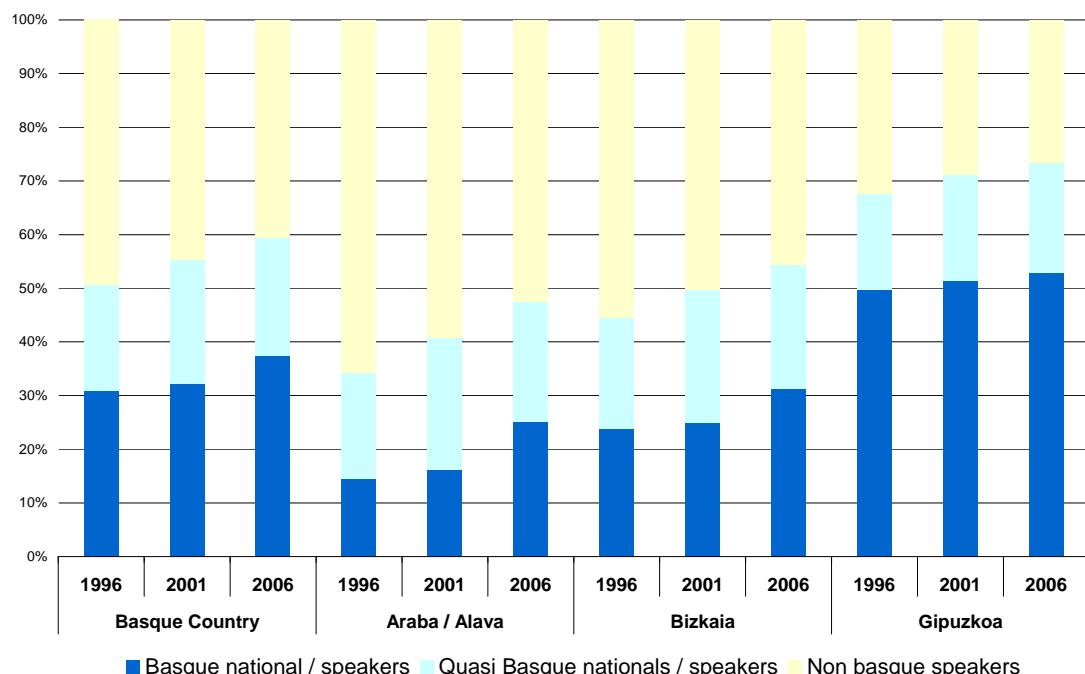
The number of Basque speakers grows by 118,000 between 2001 and 2006

Six out of every ten residents in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country understand or can speak Basque well or with an occasional difficulty

59.5% of the population aged over 2 in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country had some knowledge of Basque in 2006, a four percent increase with respect to 2001, according to data elaborated by Eustat, the Basque Statistics Office. In this population group, a distinction is made in terms of their level of knowledge between: 775.000 Basque speakers –who understand and speak Basque well– and 459.000 almost-Basque-speakers, with a good or medium level of comprehension but with difficulties when speaking. Basque speakers increased by 118,000 people with respect to 2001, whereas the number of almost-Basque speakers decreased by 11,000.

If an analysis is made of Basque speakers per territory, Gipuzkoa maintains itself in 2006 as the first territory with a majority of the population speaking Basque, totalling 52.9%, followed by Bizkaia with 31.3% and Alava with 25.1%. On the other hand, with respect to 2001, Alava turned out to be the territory with the biggest increase in Basque speakers, 8.9%, followed by Bizkaia with 6.4% and Gipuzkoa with 1.5%.

Graph 1 Population aged 2 and over per territory and global level in Basque. 2006. %



Births, deaths, geographic mobility and the introduction of Basque in education homogenise and spatially spread the knowledge of the Basque language

These global data on the level of Basque per territories, together with the accelerated progress of Alava and Bizkaia and the more moderate progress in Gipuzkoa, contribute to a process of dissemination and spatial homogenisation of the Basque language.

This balancing movement of the differences has two main reasons. On one hand, there is the natural movement of population, with its entries for births and deaths and, above all, the religious to geographical displacement, both to two external immigration and movement between municipalities of the Community itself, which disseminate the knowledge of Basque throughout the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. On the other hand, there is also the fact of linguistic mobility, motivated by the formal learning of Basque in the education system, which increases people's level of linguistic competence. Many such people start from scratch.

The districts with a higher presence of Basque speakers are, in this order: Greater Bilbao (207.659), Donostia-San Sebastián (133.389), the Alava plain (58.733) and Urola Coast (51.659), which are the ones with the highest amount of population. Besides, the tendency which had already been observed in the 2001 population census maintains itself: the highest increase in Basque speakers is observed in Alava districts with a smaller presence of Basque, whereas the districts with a majority of Basque speakers there is a generalised decrease. Specially noteworthy with increases above 10% are districts like Alava Valleys, Alava Plain and the Rioja region in Alava. In Bizkaia, the districts of Encartaciones and Greater Bilbao are those which experience of highest increase in Basque speakers, of almost seven points. The registered loss of Basque speakers, already detected in 2001, continues in the districts of Markina-Ondarroa (3.9%), Gernika-Bermeo (2.5%), Urola Coast (2.4%), Higher Deba (1.8%), Tolosa (1.8%), Goierri (1.4%), Lower Deba (1.3%) and Arratia Nervión (1.2%). In the Duranguesado area, has already happened in the previous five-year period, there is an increase in Basque-speaking population (1.4%).

Vitoria-Gasteiz is the capital with the highest percentage increase of Basque speakers (9.8%), although it registers on the increase of nearly Basque speakers (3.5%). If in 2001 14.9% of the inhabitants of Vitoria-Gasteiz were Basque speakers and 25.8% were nearly Basque speakers, in 2006 Basque speakers add up to 24.6% of the population and nearly Basque speakers amount to 22.7%. This is followed by Bilbao with them 8.8% increase in Basque speakers and a 2.6% decrease in nearly Basque speakers. Donostia-San Sebastian gains 5.6% in the first group and loses 1.6% in the second.

With the exception of Aramaio, the rest of Alava municipalities increase their percentage of Basque speakers

In Alava, only Aramaio loses Basque speakers in comparison with 2001, (-3.1%), whereas Ribera Baja, Leza and Navaridas the municipalities that gain the most Basque speakers with respect to the population with increases above 15%.

In Gipuzkoa there is practically a contrary tendency and only 11 of its 89 municipalities increase the proportion of Basque speakers and do so in quantities below 5%. Most noteworthy amongst them are Pasaia, Irun and Errenteria. On the other hand, in the 62 municipalities in which Basque speakers account for over 65% of the total population,

there is a decrease in the proportion of Basque speakers, as was already happening in 2001.

In Bizkaia, the revolution of municipalities is more heterogeneous: there are increases and losses of Basque speakers, but not a generalised as in Alava and Gipuzkoa. Amongst the municipalities that gain Basque speakers are Getxo (a 9.1% increase) and Barakaldo (8.5%) and, as happens in Gipuzkoa, in municipalities with a higher percentage of Basque-speaking population, there is a decrease in Basque speakers. Most representative of this trend are the municipalities of Meñaka (13%) and Maruri-Jatabe (11%).

One out of every seven inhabitants in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country only speaks Basque at home. Specially noteworthy is Gipuzkoa, were one out of every four only speaks Basque at home

36.3% of the residents of Gipuzkoa has Basque as their maternal language and one out of every four only speaks Basque at home. This percentage increases to 40% if you are those whose break of Spanish and Basque at home. In Bizkaia, Basque as the maternal language amounts to 13.1% and in Alava this reaches 4% whereas, as a spoken language, it reaches 6% in Bizkaia and 3.7% in Alava, and 15% and 6% if you add those who speak both Basque and Spanish.

The predominant profile of the Basque speakers is different pending on the territory. In Bizkaia (12.7%) and Alava (12%), this is a person aged below 35 who understands, speaks, reads and writes well in Basque, where as his or her maternal and spoken language is Spanish. On the other hand, in Gipuzkoa profile changes: in most cases (17.7%) this is a person aged between 25 and 60 who understands, speaks, reads and writes in Basque well and whose maternal and spoken language is Basque.

The extension of the educational models in Basque and the beginning of schooling in younger ages continues decreasing the presence of young people who have no knowledge of Basque. In 1996 33% of children aged between 2 and 4 have no knowledge of Basque; in 2001 this percentage is reduced to 18%, and is maintained for 2006. Between 4 and 15, this percentage is situated below 9% coinciding with the years of compulsory schooling, and with a 3% decrease with respect to the 2001 census.

Methodological note: The Population and Housing Statistics have been elaborated using various administrative registers as their main source, without carrying out the traditional massive information-gathering processes. This important methodological change is in line with those carried out by the main pioneering statistics offices, such as those in Sweden, Finland or Holland, which use similar treatments based on administrative registers. The date of reference in the Population and Housing Statistics is 1st November 2006.

For further information:

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