



Central Statistics Office
An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh

Press Statement
Preas Ráiteas

2006 Census of Population – Volume 9 – Irish Language

Almost 1.66 million people can speak Irish

Almost 1.66 million people aged 3 years and over were able to speak Irish in 2006 compared with 1.57 million in 2002. Putting this in percentage terms we see there was a slight decline from 42.8 per cent in 2002 to 41.9 per cent in 2006. Ability to speak Irish was higher among females (45.3%) than males (38.4%).

This information is contained in Census 2006 Volume 9 – Irish Language, which gives further detailed results of the census conducted on 23 April 2006. This report contains the final population figures classified by ability to speak Irish and frequency of speaking it for detailed territorial divisions in the country (see Editor's note).

Ability varies with age

Ability to speak Irish was highest among the school-going population with over two-thirds of 10-14 year olds recorded as being able to speak the language. The figure for 15-19 year olds dropped back from 66.3% to 64.7%.

Ability declines in the immediate post-education age groups but picks up again for 45-54 year olds.

Once again, females outperformed males in each age group in 2006 - the differential being most pronounced in the 15-19 age group.

An Daingean out on its own

Of the towns with a population of 1,500 or more in 2006, An Daingean in West Kerry had the highest proportion of Irish speakers (62.3%). There were proportionately fewer Irish speakers in urban areas (39.4%) compared with rural ones (45.6%).

Almost three out of four Gaeltacht residents speak Irish

Irish speakers accounted for 70.8% per cent of the population aged 3 years and over in Gaeltacht areas in 2006 – down from 72.6 per cent in 2002. The proportion of Irish speakers varied between Gaeltacht areas. It was highest in County Waterford (79.5%) and lowest in the part of the Galway Gaeltacht located in Galway City (50.7%). All Gaeltacht areas, apart from Meath and Waterford, experienced a decline in the proportion of Irish speakers between 2002 and 2006.

Teachers top of the class

The occupational groups with the highest ability to speak Irish were Teachers (77.9%), Gardaí (74.1%) and Religious (58.8%).

The higher the educational level attained, the more likely the ability to speak Irish. The relevant proportions for the population aged 15 years and over varied from 17.4 per cent in the case of people who left the education system with a primary education only, to 54.2 per cent for those with a degree.

More /...

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Majority of households have an Irish speaker

53.4 per cent of private households contained at least one Irish speaker in 2006. The corresponding figure for households in the Gaeltacht was just over 80 per cent.

Irish usage: A million persons who can speak Irish rarely or never speak the language

Of the near 1.66 million persons who indicated that they could speak Irish, just over 1 million (60%) either never spoke the language or spoke it less frequently than weekly.

485,000 (29.3%) spoke the language on a daily basis within the education system. However, the majority of these (453,000) did not speak the language outside the education system. Just over 72,000 persons, representing 4.4 per cent of all those who could speak Irish, spoke it on a daily basis outside education while one in four of these also spoke it daily within the education system.

A total of 36,500 Irish speakers living in the Gaeltacht, representing 56.8 per cent of all Irish speakers in Gaeltacht areas, spoke Irish on a daily basis around the time of the 2006 census. 14,000 (38.3%) of these daily speakers spoke the language within the education system only.

Nearly 19,500 (30.3%) of those able to speak Irish in the Gaeltacht either never spoke the language or spoke it less frequently than weekly.

Editor's note

The publication *Census 2006 - Principal Demographic Results*, released on 29 March 2007, contains a summary at State level of data from Volumes 1 - 4, 8, 11 and 12 of the detailed census reports. The publication released today, Volume 9, provides figures for the Irish language at a more detailed geographical level.

All published tables from Census 2006 are being made available on the CSO web site (www.cso.ie).

For copies of the publication contact:

Central Statistics Office, Information Section, Skehard Road, Cork. 021- 4535011

or

Government Publications Sales Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

Price: €15 [Copies can also be downloaded from the CSO website (see below)].

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4 October 2007

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