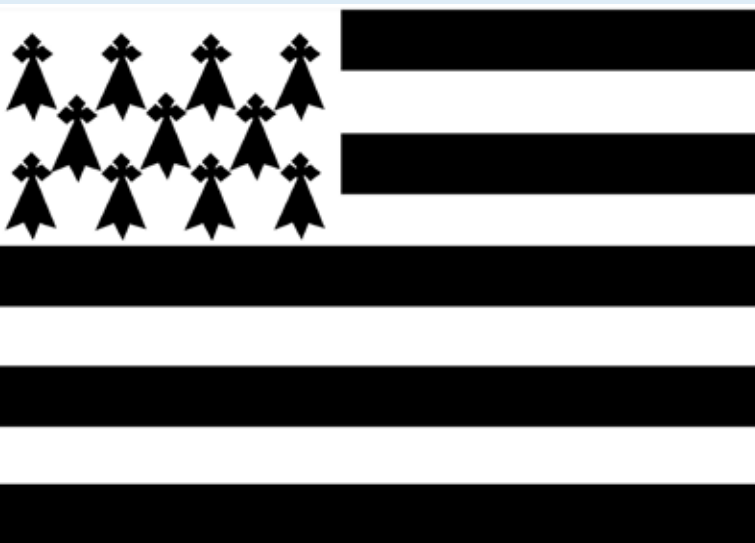


Brittany / Breizh / Bretagne / Bertègn

Having undergone intense government discrimination, followed by a brutal transmission shut-down, Brittany's indigenous languages are tardily being revived in education and public space. This has gone some way towards reversing sociolinguistic stigmas, but has so far failed to reverse language shift.



Brittany is home to the only extant Celtic language on mainland Europe: brezhoneg a.k.a Breton. As part of the Gallo-Brittonic subgroup, it is closely related to Kernewek (Cornish) and Cymraeg (Welsh). Despite its iconic role in shaping Bretons' distinct cultural identity, brezhoneg has long been dominated by Gallo-Romance, pushing from the east with an increasing share of Gallo and standardised French speakers. The highest number of Breton speakers recorded was in 1886, with just under 2 million people – 59 percent of the total population. This figure has shrunk considerably since then, and is currently estimated at around 200,000 predominantly elderly speakers, much similar to Gallo whose speakers have massively shifted to French after WW2.

Brittany was forcibly annexed by France in 1532. Its province and parliament were dissolved altogether by French revolutionaries in 1789, resurfacing only as late as in 1974 in the shape of a Regional Council with severely limited jurisdiction and budget compared to its European counterparts (under 2 billion euros in 2022). As a result of this so-called decentralisation reform, one fifth of Brittany's population and territory have been partitioned off, including its historic ducal residence and prime economic centre Nantes, henceforth administered by a distinct Regional Council (Pays de la Loire).

Like other minoritised language communities under French rule, Breton and Gallo speakers have suffered intense government discrimination. French has been enforced as the exclusive language of:

- court decisions (1620 onwards)
- administrative records (1794 onwards)
- forenames in civil registry (1803-1966)
- road signs (1835-1977 for Breton, onwards for Gallo)
- compulsory schooling (1881-1982 for Breton, onwards for Gallo)
- preaching and catechism in the Catholic Church (1890-1905)
- graphemes in civil registry – outlawing diacritics ã, á, í, ì, ñ, ò (1966 onwards + declared unconstitutional in 2021)
- 'the French Republic' as 'a fundamental component of France's identity and heritage' (1992 onwards)
- 'teaching, work, commercial exchanges and public services' (1994 onwards)

The humiliation of generations of speakers, as part of an explicit eradication campaign against their languages, ultimately led to parents no longer transmitting Breton and Gallo from the early 1950s – much like other minoritised language communities in metropolitan France. Since then both Breton and Gallo have brutally shifted to post-vernacular usage, which has coincided with a dramatic surge of suicides and alcoholism in the west.

Since the late 1970s, progress towards revitalising Brittany's indigenous languages has been significant for Breton but limited for Gallo, still perceived by many as a standard deviation from French. In 1982 a Breton-French curriculum finally came to be offered in a few State schools, after activists had successfully set up Breton-medium skolioù kevredigezhel as part of the Diwan network established in 1977. Although Breton-medium education has experienced a phenomenal and sustained growth ever since, it only caters for about 3 percent of pupils where popular demand is estimated at 32.5 percent. Demand is often higher in eastern Brittany, where indigenous Gallo is taught in far fewer schools, and only as a subject as opposed to a language of instruction.

