

Generation replacement is not guaranteed in the A.C. of the Basque Country

Fall in matrimonial fertility and increase in the number of single persons

The fall in the fertility rate in the A.C. of the Basque Country, which has continued since the eighties, has led to women ending their fertile life without the necessary number of children to guarantee the generational replacement.

According to the Eustat Demographic Survey, the generation of women born between 1951 and 1955, is the first in the century to fail to guarantee replacement, set at 2.1 children per woman, having 1.9 children on average. These data contrast with the 2.8 children that corresponded to generations born 15 years before.

Women from the following generation, born between 1956 and 1960, who have practically ended their fertile life, have hardly surpassed the figure of 1.5 children. The reasons that explain the failure in generational replacement are to be found in a drastic reduction in third and subsequent born, which fell from representing 36% of the total number of children born to women from the generations of 1941 to 1945, to only 9% for those born between 1956 and 1960. The consequence of this decrease in the total number of children is the concentration of the fertile period in a small number of years. If generations between 1936 and 1940 gave birth in an interval of 6.5 years, women born 20 years later gave birth over 3.4 years.

The fall in descendants below the level of generational replacement is something common in all European countries and, in general, among generations before 1950. However, in the case of Ireland, France and Sweden, younger generations that have completed their fertile life have kept a final number of descendants close to the replacement level.

The fall in fertility in the A.C. of the Basque Country has occurred among marriages, as the proportion of children born outside marriage does not reach 6% of the generations that have completed their fertile life more recently. If the final number of descendants among marriages held between 1956 and 1960 came to 2.8 children, for marriages held between 1981 and 1985 the figure fell to 1.6.

The reduction in fertility within marriage comes together with the fact that among generations over the age of 40, the number of people who have opted to remain single is higher. Thus, among the generations of 1941-1945 and those of 1956-1960, the percentage of single persons rose 6 points in both sexes, giving a proportion of definitive single persons in the latter generation of 16% for males and 12% for females. These proportions, however, are lower than those of Spain and the rest of Europe, where in neither case is the number of single persons below 20% for males and 15% for females.

Indicators of fertility in generations of females

Generations	Final Descendents	Third and subsequent children %	Average age on birth of first child	Average age on birth of las t child	Total fertile interval (in years)
1960-1956	1,54	8,69	26,25	29,62	3,37
1955-1951	1,87	17,27	25,38	29,41	4,03
1950-1946	2,25	25,19	25,54	30,39	4,85
1945-1941	2,42	31,15	26,07	31,64	5,57
1940-1936	2,76	35,63	26,31	32,83	6,52
1935-1931	2,68	37,23	27,29	34,04	6,75
1930-1926	2,6	39,53	27,94	34,67	6,73
1925-1921	2,42	38,45	28,56	35,07	6,51
1920-1916	2,32	38,51	28,35	34,89	6,54

Source: Eustat

Scarce hope for recovery in fertility

Everything indicates that younger generations of women, i.e. born after 1960, will not guarantee generational replacement, moreover, the number of descendants will be lower than that of the generations born between 1956 and 1960. Among the reasons for this appreciation are the following:

- The foreseeable proportion of single persons will rise and will not be compensated by stable non legalised unions, which in 2002 represented almost 5% of all couples, while in the rest of Europe it reaches much greater dimensions, especially in Nordic countries.
- The number of births to 30 year-old women born between 1971 and 1975 is slightly over a quarter the number of children of births to women the same age born between 1956 and 1960. Furthermore, the number of births to 35 year old women born between 1966 and 1970 is 0.8 children, 53% lower than the figure for women born between 1951 and 1955, which at the same age had 1.7 children.

This data shows that final number of children for generations that are still of a fertile age is lower still.

In this sense, when women aged between 15 and 40 were asked about the number of children they intended having (including those already born), the average was 1.4 children. 72% of the women at these ages wanted to have at least one child, but only 45% of those who already had a child showed any intention of having more in the future. Among those who already had two children, the percentage fell to 6%.

Children stay longer at home with parents and put back the formation of their own families.

These generations are the least fertile in recent history, but in some way compensate the reduced number of children by a longer length of time spent by children living with their parents. Over the period 1996 to 2000, offspring left home at the age of 29 on average, while twenty years before the average age was 24. In both cases the age of marrying coincides, which is the main cause for children leaving the parents' home,

although this reason has lost weight to leaving home to live alone or in unmarried couples.

The constitution of marriage presupposes having more stable economic and labour conditions, conditioned largely by the purchase of a home, but among 25 to 29 year-olds faced with the precariousness of these conditions (the unemployment rate is almost 17% and temporary workers are 55% of the total number of workers) the age of marriage is delayed, and therefore the number of marriages is falling. With regard to fertility, these more stable conditions are achieved at later ages and effort made by both sexes (female work outside the home is as much a female demand as a need to have better conditions), means that the number of children has fallen drastically in recent years.

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