

## Life expectancy increased in all districts of the Basque Country

***Even though the highest life expectancy continued to be in the rural districts of Álava, the differences had shrunk***

The life expectancy of the inhabitants of the Basque Country is very close, and even higher in the case of the women, to the most developed countries, according to data prepared by Eustat. Its increase has been spectacular, as it rose by just over 5 years between 1980 and 2000.

Throughout that period, the life expectancy in the districts of Álava surpassed those of Bizkaia or Gipuzkoa, particularly in the case of women. Yet it was the districts of Bizkaia that experienced the highest increases over those 20 years, even though they started out with the lowest values.

The district that registered the highest increase in the life expectancy in the case of men was Donostia-San Sebastián (6.4 years), while it was Llanada Alavesa (6.1 years) in the case of women. Yet this is also due to the fact that they had minimum indexes in 1980. The rest of the districts of Alava are the ones with the lowest increases over those 20 years in both sexes, with growth in the case of men from Valles Alaveses even being negative.

Nonetheless, the most important fact of the evolution of life expectancy between 1980 and 2000, apart from its increase, was the trend to its homogeneity between the different provinces of the Basque Country. This is obvious at provincial level and in the case of men, as the difference in life expectancy between Álava and Bizkaia of 2.8 years in 1980 fell to 1 year in 2000. It also fell in the case of women, but to a lesser extent, as it dropped from 1 year to 0.3 over that period.

If the difference between the district with the longest and shortest life expectancy over those 20 years is calculated, it can be seen that the one for men steadily decrease, falling from 8.4 years in 1980 to 2.5 years in 2000. On the other hand, the differences in the case of women was less notable, as it only fell by just over 2 years over that period.

Within the provinces, this trend to the adjustment of life expectancy was greatest in the districts of Álava, even though they started out from much greater inequality. This was clearer in the case of men, as it fell from a difference of 6.4 years in 1980 to 1.3 in 2000, while it only dropped by 1.6 years among women (from 5.9 years in 1980 to 4.3 in 2000), which meant that the difference between the districts with the highest and the lowest indexes is the highest for the provinces and for the sexes.

In the Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa districts, the differences at the start of the period was much more reduced and, specifically, the highest was among the men of Gipuzkoa with 2.9 years. Twenty years later, the difference was a little lower, except among the men of Bizkaia, where it increased by nearly one year.

***The birth rate continued to be low, even though there was a slight recovery***

The evolution of the birth rate in the districts continued along the same trend as for the Basque Country overall. Between 1980 and 1995, it fell in all districts to a lesser or greater intensity, while there was a slight recovery between 1995 to 2000. In 1980, no district exceeded 2.1 children per woman. The closest was Rioja Alavesa, with 2.05, while there were only 1.25 children per woman in Bajo Deba.

Up until 1995, the drop in the birth rate was so notable that it only exceeded one child per woman in seven districts, with Urola Costa having the highest rate, even though it only reached 1.2. It was followed by Tolosa and Plentzia-Munguia with 1.1. In that year, Valles Alaveses had the lowest birth rate for the whole period studied with 0.66 children per child.

In 2000, the birth rate increased with respect to 1995 in all districts, but in a minimal way. Urola Costa, which was the district with the highest index, barely reached 1.3 children per woman and Valles Alaveses continued to have the lowest birth rate, with 0.72.

Over this 20-year period, there were two districts where the birth rate fell by half, Valles Alaveses and Markina-Ondarroa, with Llanada Alavesa and the Gran Bilbao district were very close to that decrease. It is noteworthy that the drop in the birth rate in the districts of Gipuzkoa, except Donostia-San Sebastián, was lower than the average for the Basque Country, with Bajo Deba standing out with the birth rate dropping by just 14%.

A common characteristic to nearly all the districts in 2000 is the concentration of the births around the average maternity age, as more than seven out of every ten birth occurred when the mother was aged 30 to 39, while only 35% of births occurred to mothers in that age bracket twenty years ago.

On the other hand, the average age for giving birth, which was around 29 years old in all districts in 1980, had risen by over 3 years in most of them by 2000. The Valles Alaveses and Montaña Alaveses districts were the only ones where the average age had not increased by more than 2 years, but they had the highest rate in 1980.

***Number of marriages fell and people married later***

In 1980, practically a third of men and women in the Basque Country never married, while this increased to nearly half by 2000. This trend was more notable in the case of men, as their number of first marriages (**ISN**) fell by nearly 11 points over that period, while it was only 4.6 in the case of women.

The women of the Basque Country married on average 2.3 years earlier than men and this difference remained practically stable from 1980 to 2000. But the most important aspect is that the age when people married rose by over 5 years in the case of both sexes. The Valles Alaveses region had practically the highest average age during that period in the case of both sexes, while the minimum varied between the districts of Álava and Gipuzkoa for men and between Álava and Bizkaia for women.

With respect to the evolution, it is noteworthy that the regions in 1980 with very low ISN (Bajo Deba, Alto Deba, Goierri or Tolosa) did not follow the general downward trend and the marriage rate remained steady and even increased to the levels on a par with the other districts in 2000. Thus, while Arratia-Nervión, for example, doubled the ISN of Bajo Deba in 1980, there were 8% more marriages in the latter than in the former in 2000.

Another significant characteristic of the trend in the marriage rate is in the variation in the intensity by sex. In 1980, a significant number of districts had a higher ISN for the men, including Gran Bilbao and Donostia-San Sebastián even though the differences were reduced to such a point that first marriages were more common among women.

Finally, with regards to the districts where the capitals are located, while the Llanada Alavesa posted the highest indicator both in terms of men and women in 1980, followed by Gran Bilbao and Donostia-San Sebastián, while the latter registered the highest ISNs in 2000, while Llanada Alavesa fell to last place (even though the differences are not as wide as twenty years previously).

**Methodological note:** It should be noted that the indexes in question are calculated using five-generation groups, which means that they take into account the events of five years prior to and five years after the reference date. For examples, the deaths, birth and marriages between 1996 and 2005 are included in the 2000-2001 indicators for the five-year generations grouped as of 31 December 2000.

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***For further information:***

*Basque Statistics Office*

*C/ Donostia-San Sebastián, 1 01010 Vitoria-Gasteiz*

*Tlf: +34-945-01 75 00 Fax: +34-945-01 75 01 E-mail: [eustat@eustat.es](mailto:eustat@eustat.es)*

*Contact: Martín González Hernández*

*Tlf: +34-945-01 75 49 Fax: +34-945-01 75 01*

*Online press releases: [www.eustat.es](http://www.eustat.es)*