

Life expectancy has increased in all regions of the Basque Country

The rural regions of Álava still have the highest life expectancy but the differences have decreased

The life expectancy of Basque residents is very close to that of the most developed countries, even above it in the case of women, according to data prepared by EUSTAT. Its rise has been spectacular: between 1980 and 2010, the increase was nearly 8 years in the case of men and nearly 6 years in the case of women.

The life expectancy registered in the regions of Álava exceeded those of Bizkaia and Guipuzkoa throughout this period, especially in the case of women. But it was the regions of Bizkaia that experienced the greatest increases in these 30 years, though it is true that they started with the lowest values.

Among men, the region that saw its life expectancy grow most was Donostia-San Sebastián (9.1 years) and, among women, Llanada Alavesa (6.8 years). This is also due to the fact that they started with lower rates in 1980. The remaining regions of Álava present smaller increases over these 30 years in both sexes; in fact, the increase for men in Valles Alaveses is almost null.

However, the most important fact regarding the evolution of life expectancy between 1980 and 2010, apart from its increase, is the trend toward the homogenisation of life spans between the various provinces of the Basque Country. This is clear at provincial level and among men as the difference in life expectancy between Álava and Bizkaia fell from 2.8 years in 1980 to 1.6 years in 2010. It decreased among women as well, albeit to a lesser degree, falling from 1 year to 0.6 in this period.

If the differences between the regions with the highest and lowest life expectancies are calculated for each sex in these 30 years, a constant decrease is observed in that of men: falling from 8.4 years in 1980 to 3.8 years in 2010. On the other hand, the difference among women evolved somewhat less drastically, decreasing by 2.9 years during this period.

Within the provinces, the regions of Álava experienced this trend of life expectancy homogenisation to the greatest degree, though they started with much higher inequality. Among men, the decrease was slightly higher as a difference of 6.4 years in 1980 dropped to 2.9 in 2010. Among women, it decreased by 4.6 years (from 5.9 years in 1980 to 1.3 years in 2010). Despite this, the difference between the region with the highest and the lowest rate is the greatest, both by province and gender.

In the regions of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa the differences at the beginning of the period were much smaller; specifically, the highest was among men in Gipuzkoa at 2.9 years. Thirty years later, the difference was smaller, falling as low as 0.9 years among the men of the regions of both provinces.

Fertility rates remain at low levels, though there has been some slight recovery

The evolution of regional fertility rates has followed the same trend as the one observed in the Basque Country as a whole. Between 1980 and 1995, the rates decreased to greater or lesser degrees in all of the regions, showing some weak recovery between 1995 and 2010.

In 1980, no region exceeded 2.1 children per woman; the region that came closest was Rioja Alavesa with 2.05, while Bajo Deba reached only 1.25 children per woman. Up until 1995, the decrease in fertility was so drastic that only seven regions exceeded 1 child per woman; Urola Costa showed a higher rate but still only reached 1.2. In the same year, Valles Alaveses had the lowest fertility rate of the entire period studied with 0.66 children per woman. In 2010, all of the regions had more than 1.2 children per woman on average; the regions of Goierri and Tolosa stood out with 1.6.

In these 30 years, the three regions whose fertility rates decreased by around 34% are Gran Bilbao, Llanada Alavesa and Donostia-San Sebastián, where the capitals of the three provinces are located. It should be noted that in the regions of Gipuzkoa except for Donostia-San Sebastián, the decrease in fertility was less than the average of the Basque Country; Bajo Deba and Tolosa even recovered by 17.2% and 7.5% respectively.

On the other hand, the average maternity age, which in 1980 was around 29 in all of the regions, rose by around 4 years in most of them in 2010. In Valles Alaveses and Montaña Alavesa the average age increased by only 2.3 years, although they started with the highest values.

The marriage rate is decreasing and marriage is being delayed

In 1980, the region of Arratia-Nervión showed the highest marriage rates for both men and women with nearly 90% of people marrying; at the other extreme was Bajo Deba with percentages lower than 50%, revealing the great disparity in marriage trends between the regions. Thirty years later, these differences have decreased greatly due to the decrease in marriage rates across all of the regions: the highs are now among Alto Deba (more than 60%) and the lows in Valles Alaveses (less than 40%).

It is significant that the regions that in 1980 presented lower marriage rates (Bajo Deba, Alto Deba and Tolosa), instead of sharing the general trend of declining marriage rates, have maintained and even increased their intensity with respect to the other regions in 2010. In this manner, while in 1980 the marriage rate of Llanada Alavesa was 40% higher than that of Bajo Deba, in 2010 the residents of this region married 25% more than in the other.

Another significant characteristic of the evolution of marriage rates lies in the variation of intensity in terms of gender: in 1980, a significant number of regions presented higher rates for men, among them Llanada Alavesa, Gran Bilbao and Donostia-San Sebastián. However, the differences have reduced to the point that first marriages are now more frequent for women.

Women in the Basque Country get married on average more than 2.2 years before men. This difference has remained almost entirely stable from 1980 to 2010. But what is most significant is that the age at marriage has risen by almost 9 years for both

sexes. In 2010, the minimum age among men was registered in Encartaciones at 33.8 and the maximum in Markina-Ondarroa at 36.2. Among women, the minimum age is also in Encartaciones (31.3 years) and the maximum in Montaña Alavesa (33.7 years).

Methodological note

It should be noted that the rates presented here are calculated over groupings of five generations. It is the events 5 years before and 5 years after the reference date that are counted. For example, for the indicators of 2010-2011, the deaths, births and marriages that occurred between 2006 and 2015 are counted for the generations in groups of five years up until 1 January 2011.

For further information:

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