



The town of Gorliz on the Coast of Biscay



# Biscay, Basque Country, Spain

## General overview

The province of Biscay is located in the autonomous community of the Basque Country in northern Spain. Situated in the Bay of Biscay, its geography ranges from coastal areas along the Cantabrian Sea to mountainous terrain further inland.

With 1 142 842 inhabitants in a total area of 2217 km<sup>2</sup>, Biscay is one of the most populous provinces in the Basque Country. The province comprises 113 municipalities, which are home to a mix of urban and rural communities. Its population is culturally diverse and has a strong Basque identity. The capital city, Bilbao, serves as a major urban centre (1).

Historically, Biscay has been known for its industrial prowess, particularly in sectors, such as steel, shipbuilding and manufacturing. However, in recent decades, the economy has diversified, with a growing emphasis on services, tourism and technology.

The gross domestic product per capita is € 34 776 (2). Life expectancy at birth for males and females, respectively, is 80.4 years and 86.3 years (3).

Biscay has a rich cultural heritage rooted in Basque traditions and customs. The Basque language, known as Euskera, is spoken alongside Spanish. The Basque culture is celebrated through festivals, music, dance and cuisine.

Biscay is a popular tourist destination, offering a wide range of attractions for visitors. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is one of its most iconic landmarks, drawing art enthusiasts from around the world. The province is known for its rugged coastline, picturesque beaches, charming coastal towns and stunning natural landscapes in areas, such as the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve.

---

## Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards Universal

Health Coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



### Moving towards UHC

The health and social care system in the Basque Country is a comprehensive model based on collaboration between the Basque Government, the provincial councils and the municipalities, which have clearly defined competences for offering citizens comprehensive and efficient care.

The Basque Government, through the Department of Health, is responsible for planning, regulating, financing and providing health services, and the provincial councils and municipalities have a predominant role in social care. The Basque public health system is a single-payer national health system, which offers UHC to all residents and is mainly financed through taxation. The Department of Health of the Basque Government is responsible for policy-making, public health, and the planning, financing and provision of health care. In turn, there is only one public health-services provider in the region – Osakidetza. The services provided cover primary care, hospital care (both acute and long-term care), specialist outpatient clinics, emergencies and mental health.

The provinces are the main players in planning and financing secondary social care, in connection with which they provide specialized services that require more intensive intervention and specific resources. The city councils play a crucial role in primary social care as they are directly responsible for grassroots and proximity social services. The Basque Government, through the Department of Social Policies, also plays a role in establishing general policies and coordinating the health- and social-care systems.



### Promoting health and well-being

Biscay's Mandate Plan 2023–2027 is the highest-level planning and programming instrument of the Government of Biscay. It includes 11 priorities and 120 key projects, 4 of which relate to achieving better and more equitable health and well-being in: (i) addressing demographic challenges; (ii) aiming to reduce inequalities related to transitions between care systems; (iii) strengthening the community; and (iv) addressing climate-related ecological challenges (4).

The Basque Government's 2030 Health Plan establishes the general health objectives and priorities to be met with the resources available during its term, which define the health policies needed. It sets 7 general objectives, all aimed at contributing to the achievement of better and equitable health (5).



## Protecting against health emergencies

Osakidetza has a set of protocols in connection with which a series of prevention and response measures is being implemented to protect the population against health emergencies. Some of these include:

- development of contingency plans and response protocols for a variety of emergency scenarios, including infectious-disease outbreaks, natural disasters and industrial accidents;
- constant monitoring of the population's health to detect any unusual increase in the incidence of diseases, or events that may represent a risk to public health;
- promotion of vaccination and implementation of immunization campaigns to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, as well as the implementation of prevention and control measures in case of outbreaks;
- close coordination with other government agencies, emergency services, provincial governments, municipalities and international organizations to ensure an effective response to health emergencies.

---

## Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

The Government of Biscay's Mandate Plan foresees 120 projects aimed at tackling 11 regional challenges, the following four of which are those most directly linked to the EPW flagship initiatives.

- Point 1.8: creation of the Nagusi Intelligence Center (NIC) (Biscay's longevity center) (4,6);
- Point 2.4: support of dependent people in their own homes through the gradual extension of digital assistance (the etxeTIC project) (4);
- Point 2.14: increased digital-training activities to reduce the digital divide (4);
- Point 2.5: improved care of dependent people living in provincial nursing homes through the progressive implementation of a conviviality-based model (4).

---

## Initiative specific to the Biscay region

*NIC – Biscay's longevity center*

NIC is a space for public—private collaboration that aspires to transform the challenge of the ageing population into an opportunity for economic and social development. The convergence of

very different yet complementary aspects, such as technological innovation, innovation of health and social care and the guarantee of specialized and sustainable training related to ageing and longevity, represent a suitable commitment to specialization in Biscay (6).

---

## The three most important topics for collaboration with the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. integrated, value-based and personalized long-term care;
2. health in the well-being economy;
3. social sustainability and stability.

---

## Main partners and collaborators

- Basque Health Cluster
- Basque Food Cluster
- Spanish Association of Bio Companies
- University of the Basque Country
- London School of Economics – Care Policy and Evaluation Centre
- International Long Term Care Policy Network
- Global Observatory of Long-term Care

---

## Contact list

Iker Arrastio  
Head of the Cabinet Office  
Government of Biscay  
Bilbao, Spain  
Email: [iker.arrastio@bizkaia.eus](mailto:iker.arrastio@bizkaia.eus)

Naiara Artaza  
Adviser, Cabinet Office  
Government of Biscay  
Bilbao, Spain  
Email: [naiara.artaza@bizkaia.eus](mailto:naiara.artaza@bizkaia.eus)

---

## References<sup>1</sup>

1. Población de la C.A. de Euskadi por lugar de nacimiento, según territorio histórico y sexo. 01/01/2023 [Population of the C.A. of Euskadi by place of birth, according to historical territory and sex. 01/01/2023]. In: Eustat [database]. Bilbao: Basque Institute of Statistics; 2023 ([https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0013900/poblacion-de-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-lugar-de-nacimiento-segun-territorio-historico-y-sexo/tbl0013997\\_c.html](https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0013900/poblacion-de-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-lugar-de-nacimiento-segun-territorio-historico-y-sexo/tbl0013997_c.html)).
2. Producto interior bruto (PIB) de la C.A. de Euskadi por ámbitos territoriales. Precios corrientes. 2021 [Gross domestic product (GDP) of the Basque Country by territorial area. Current prices. 2021]. In: Eustat [database]. Bilbao: Basque Institute of Statistics; 2021 ([https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0011100/producto-interior-bruto-pib-de-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-ambitos-territoriales-precios-corrientes/tbl0011123\\_c.html](https://www.eustat.eus/elementos/ele0011100/producto-interior-bruto-pib-de-la-ca-de-euskadi-por-ambitos-territoriales-precios-corrientes/tbl0011123_c.html)).
3. La esperanza de vida en la C.A. de Euskadi disminuye en 2022 y se sitúa en los niveles de 2017 (Life expectancy in the Basque Country decreases in 2022 and at 2017 levels). Bilbao: Basque Institute of Statistics; 2023 ([https://www.eustat.eus/estad/id\\_14/ti\\_Indicadores%20para%20el%20an%C3%A1lisis%20de%20los%20fen%C3%B3menos%20demogr%C3%A1ficos/ultima-nota-prensa.html](https://www.eustat.eus/estad/id_14/ti_Indicadores%20para%20el%20an%C3%A1lisis%20de%20los%20fen%C3%B3menos%20demogr%C3%A1ficos/ultima-nota-prensa.html)).
4. Plan de Mandato 2023–2027 [Mandate Plan 2023–2027]. Bilbao: Government of Biscay; 2023 ([https://www.bizkaia.eus/documents/842933/17352503/BIZKAIA+DENONTZAT.+PLAN+DE+MANDATO+2023-2027\\_sin\\_formulario.pdf/78d51f4b-7827-55d1-908d-b3d899228297?t=1695935398463](https://www.bizkaia.eus/documents/842933/17352503/BIZKAIA+DENONTZAT.+PLAN+DE+MANDATO+2023-2027_sin_formulario.pdf/78d51f4b-7827-55d1-908d-b3d899228297?t=1695935398463)).
5. Plan De Salud EUSKADI 2030 [Basque Country Health Plan 2030]. Bilbao: Government of Biscay; 2023 ([https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/publicaciones\\_departamento/es\\_def/adjuntos/plan-salud-2030.pdf](https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/publicaciones_departamento/es_def/adjuntos/plan-salud-2030.pdf)).
6. NIC: Nagusi Intelligence Center. In: Bizkaia [Biscay] [website]. Bilbao: Diputación Foral de Bizkaia [Provincial Council of Biscay]; 2024 (<https://www.bizkaia.eus/en/web/nic/>).

1 All references were accessed on 28 May 2024.