

Flood-related costs associated with climate change for a city such as Bilbao (pictured past and present) are estimated at between €130 and 160 million.



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The Basque commitment to combat climate change

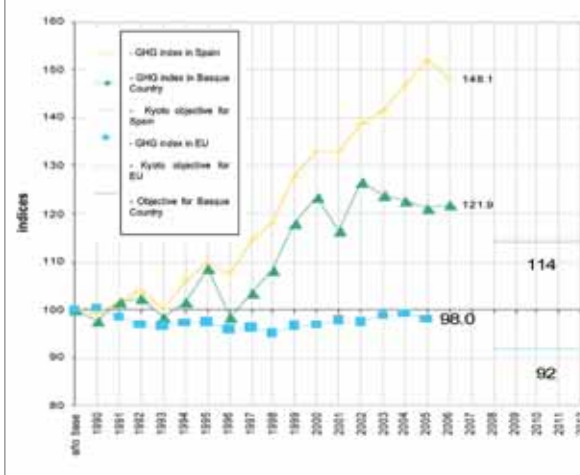
The Basque Country has a surface area of 7,000 square kilometres and just over two million inhabitants. Although its contribution to global climate change is small in quantitative terms, the Basque Government works to the basic principle that governs international policies on emissions reduction: shared responsibility, especially among industrialised countries. The Government has set up a policy based on two strategic axes: act against climate change and prepare for its consequences; and encourage a culture of innovation to work towards a sustainable Basque economy. In 2006, the Basque Office on Climate Change was set up and in autumn 2007, the Basque plan to combat climate change was completed, deploying specific actions to reduce and adapt to climate change in areas such as energy, industry, transport and the residential sector. Here, Esther Larrañaga Galdos, Minister for the Environment and Land Use, highlights the issues and outlines the Basque Government's plan to combat climate change.

The Basque environmental strategy for sustainable development has been in place since 2002. Based on a timeframe running to 2020, it is aligned with the premises and coordinates set by the European Union and the United Nations. Two particular priorities of the strategy are the struggle against climate change and the conservation of biodiversity.

BASQUE SOCIETY'S SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The environmental strategy also envisages two major commitments on the part of the public authorities. The first addresses developing countries and assumes Basque society's share of responsibility at international level. This is in the context of our position as joint president of the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, collaboration agreements with Latin America and initiatives to offset CO₂ emissions through reforestation in countries such as Kenya. The Government has, for example, agreed to plant a total of 232,475 trees in Kenya in the next three years through its agreement signed with the Green Belt Movement. This is to offset an estimated 23,400 tonnes of CO₂ emitted as a result of car and plane journeys. Our second commitment as public authorities is to strive for excellence in governance, ie the "good governance" that Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel

Figure: Trends in GHG emissions in the Basque Country, the EU and Spain 1990-2006.



Prize winner and Chair of the Green Belt Movement, has spoken of. This envisages environmental policy and the struggle against climate change as a contract with society based on transparency, participation, orientation towards results and accountability.



OBJECTIVES OF THE BASQUE OFFICE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

If asked to identify the biggest difference between the 2005 UN climate change conference in Montreal and the 2006 UN conference in Nairobi, I would say that while Montreal focused on whether climate change was real, Nairobi looked at how to tackle climate change and its consequences. Bali, in 2007, must look at this last question in greater depth.

The Stern Report (*The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*) has contributed substantially to this change of attitude by revealing that the cost of early action to adapt to climate change (around one per cent per annum of GDP by 2050) is substantially less than the costs arising from the adverse effects of that change, which are put at between five per cent and 20 per cent of GDP. This is precisely the philosophy underlying climate change work in the Basque Country. The Basque Office on Climate Change was set up in January 2006 with the remit of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), meeting the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol and minimising the effects of climate change.

The Basque Country is currently emitting 24 per cent more CO₂ than in 1990. Following the completion in autumn 2007 of the Basque Plan to Combat Climate Change, the goal is to bring that figure down to 14 per cent, one point below the limit set by Kyoto for 2012. The sectors in which most effort will be required are energy and transport, which account for 65 per cent of emissions, with emissions increasing by 199 per cent and 101 per cent respectively since 1990.

In this context we must stress our government's backing for and patronage of the Global Action Plan (GAP) set up under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Over 13,000 families in the Basque Country



have taken part in this programme, which sets out to encourage responsible consumption on a daily basis in the home.

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

We must adapt to the consequences of climate change, and understand how vulnerable the Basque Country is to its impacts. We must then design the most suitable policy to deal with the challenge accordingly.

The Basque Government is promoting the establishment of a multi-disciplinary working group to perform research on the most highly vulnerable areas (marine & land ecosystems, soil & agricultural resources and impact on energy infrastructures). Flood-related costs associated with climate change for a city such as Bilbao are estimated at between €130 and 160 million. This figure is for damage per annum envisaged up to 2080, though of course such damage is not expected to occur every year. The potential cost of flooding in such a city is expected to increase by 56 per cent as a result of climate change.

Reduction and adaptation is vital from the local to the global, or as the slogan for the Nairobi Summit so aptly put it: "Pulling together for our planet". We must do this for our own good, for our immediate surroundings, and out of solidarity and justice with other peoples and individuals.

Author

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Organisation

The Basque Country has a population of 2,082,587 and its own Parliament. The three governing councils of the historic provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa are in charge of collecting the main taxes and the high level of autonomy allows for direct government and administration of such matters as: treasury and tax collection, industry and economic promotion, research and innovation, transport, housing, the environment, education, public health and law and order. A multi-annual economic agreement regulates financial relations with the Spanish State.

Enquiries

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