



Mario Lecumberri is part of the leadership team of his Euskal Etxea, which he joined in 2022 after a professional career linked to management and community work.

With a clear understanding of the challenges faced by Basque institutions in the diaspora, he has promoted internal reflection processes focused on equality, participation, and organizational renewal.

1. Since when has the Euskal Etxea had women in positions of responsibility such as the presidency or vice-presidency? How has this influenced the role women have played and continue to play within the institution, especially in decision-making and management?

I have only been part of the Euskal Etxea for a short time, but the institution has a long history: it was officially founded in 1950, although it was already active by 1947. Like many organizations of that period, its beginnings were shaped by clearly sexist dynamics. The Board of Directors was composed exclusively of men, and women held roles that were more decorative than participatory; there was even a figure called the “Ladies of Honor,” present only at major celebrations.

Over time, the institution has undergone a deep transformation, both in the composition of the Board and in the participation of female members. In fact, one very revealing figure is that we have renewed 50% of our membership census—currently around 94 people—and 51% of those newly incorporated members are women who joined within the past three years. This shift was one of the triggers that led us to seriously reconsider the role of women within the governing bodies.

Still, the reality is not simple. Most women—though there are fortunate exceptions—work outside the home while also managing childcare and domestic responsibilities. This makes it extremely difficult for them to dedicate volunteer time to management spaces. This was one of the conclusions reached at a recent meeting on equality between several Basque centers, which we promoted.

In our specific case, the Board is made up of 12 people, only 3 of whom are women. With the reform of our Statutes, we will reduce the size of the Board and actively work toward increasing female representation. And I can already share that beginning next February, we will have a woman at the helm of the presidency, if, as everything indicates, the next ordinary assembly so decides.

2. Since having women in positions of responsibility, has your Euskal Etxea developed any programs, work plans, or specific actions incorporating gender equality? How do these contribute to the promotion of equality today?

This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the institution, an especially meaningful moment because we have begun a process of updating our Statutes. This process has been facilitated because the entity's Board itself has supported the need to update and work on activities related to equality, which has created the right space for proposals in this area. We have explicitly included issues of equality and non-discrimination. It was necessary: as with advances in LGBTB rights, laws tend to come first, then society pushes for change, and finally institutions adapt. Updating the Statutes to reflect a more balanced and egalitarian approach is the first step, but it must then be followed by activities that bring those changes into practice. By 2026, we want to have an Equality Plan and an Affective-Sexual Diversity Plan in place, which will enrich us as an organization.

We are still in an initial phase. We have yet to hold the first meeting with female members and a second, open meeting with the entire membership. The goal is that, by the time the February Assembly arrives, concrete proposals can be presented that genuinely respond to the interests and needs of participants.

I have a general sense of where this work might be headed after all, I was the one who introduced the initial proposal—but I cannot and should not anticipate what shape it will ultimately take. That is not my role. It must be the women themselves who define which actions are priorities, and later, the entire membership will decide collectively during the next phase of the program. Perhaps in a year I will be able to answer this question more clearly; today, what matters most is listening and giving space to those who must lead the way.

I believe that the combination of three elements—the Statute reform, the participatory meetings, and the incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a reference framework—will allow us to articulate a coherent discourse and, above all, move toward a more equal model.

3. What challenges does the Euskal Etxea face in terms of equality? How do you plan to address these challenges and future opportunities?

The main challenge is clear: we come from deeply traditional and heteropatriarchal social structures and reversing that inertia requires work-oriented work. One of the most evident challenges is the difficulty many women face in participating during certain life stages, particularly during child-rearing. Historically, Euskal Etxeak were not designed as spaces to attend with children, and the burden of care continues to fall largely on women.

That is why this year we are evaluating the creation of a childcare service that would allow mothers with young children to attend activities or meetings more easily. The idea is to set up a safe, adapted space within the institution where children can be looked after while their mothers participate on equal footing.

Another key challenge is overcoming the isolation between different Euskal Etxeak. Networking is essential, especially on cross-cutting issues such as equality. A specific funding line should exist to support joint initiatives and the sharing of experiences. The networking carried out to date has allowed us to observe the existing diversity: there are

Basque centers from which we must and can learn, as their practices in the field of equality are very advanced; and there are which have not yet considered the need to implement this area. Getting to know each other and exchanging experiences allows us to open to other perspectives and facilitates the necessary changes.

You don't always need money to travel; we can promote online meetings, joint projects, and activities led by women from different Euskal Etxeak, which can later be brought back to their local communities. This is exactly what we are trying to replicate: generating a shared experience that can then be communicated internally, so members perceive that something is moving, even if slowly.

Networking is essential—above all to help more traditional centers break out of stagnation and genuinely begin to prioritize participation and female leadership.

4. ¿Qué mensaje te gustaría transmitir a otros hombres de las Euskal Etxeak que, como tú, quieren contribuir a una comunidad más igualitaria y respetuosa?

My message is simple: advancing in equality and building more horizontal relationships within the Euskal Etxeak is, above all, a matter of common sense. It does not require large investments; it is more a question of willpower, of each and every one of us continuing to push forward from wherever we can, with consistency and commitment.

Every step, no matter how small, contributes to making our communities more respectful and inclusive.