



**Sonia Castañon Bedialauneta** is a member of the Basque Club of Utah, a Basque community that has grown since the 1970s thanks to the commitment of families who brought their culture to the American West.

Known for her sensitive yet firm perspective on equality, Sonia has witnessed firsthand the evolution of women's leadership within the club, where women today occupy the majority of board positions.

**1. Since when has the Euskal Etxea had a woman in leadership positions such as president or vice-president? How has this influenced the role women have played—past and present—especially in decision-making and management?**

The Basque Club of Utah was created in the 1970s—likely in 1974—thanks to a small group of Basque families who sought a place to gather and keep their culture alive. From the beginning, the club operated in a surprisingly egalitarian way for the time: men and women participated equally in its foundation, with no marked gender distinctions in decision-making.

For many years, a key figure was Mary Gaztambide, who not only served as president of the club but also—Sonia recalls—of the North American Basque Organization. After her passing, leadership has remained diverse: there have been two or three male presidents, but most board positions have been held by women. Today, both the president and vice-president are women, as well as the secretary. The accountant is a man.

The club has 227 members—119 women and 108 men—and approximately 75% of leadership positions, from the presidency to the dance director role, are held by women. In total, 73% of the leadership team is female, a figure that reflects the deep-rooted responsibility and participation of women in the organization.

**2. Since your Euskal Etxea has had women in leadership roles, have specific programs or initiatives been developed to incorporate gender equality? How does this currently contribute to promoting equality?**

Despite the strong presence of women in leadership, Sonia acknowledges that the Basque Club of Utah does not currently run programs specifically focused on gender equality. She explains that, within the broader U.S. sociocultural context, the most prominent conversations in community spaces revolve around sexual diversity and equality in terms of sexual orientation.

In her view, women in the club feel empowered and in a position of strength, so if awareness-raising activities were to be organized, they would likely focus more on LGBT+ issues than on gender. “It’s something positive that we could even share with the broader community beyond the Basque sphere,” she notes.

### **3. What challenges does the Euskal Etxea face in terms of equality? How might these challenges and future opportunities be addressed?**

Sonia has grown increasingly concerned about changes in the social and political climate in the United States. Recently, she has perceived “a strange underground current” in some men’s behavior within the broader Basque community. She is unsure whether these reactions stem from personal difficulties or whether they foreshadow a potential step backward in gender equality, but several women have voiced similar concerns.

In response, she advocates for staying alert, listening to these worries, and preventing potential tensions from undermining the progress achieved over decades. “It would hurt me to see us go backward,” she says. For this reason, she insists on the need to remain vigilant, speak up when necessary, and support one another.

### **4. What message would you like to share with other women who, like you, help build community in the Euskal Etxeak?**

Sonia’s final answer arrives filled with emotion. To her, the women of the diaspora descend from “a long line of witches—beautiful, powerful, magical”—and she claims that collective strength as a driving force for the present and the future.

Her message is clear and deeply heartfelt: to move forward together, with love, because love—not confrontation—is what will allow them to face today’s social challenges. “Together, we can do it,” she concludes.