

Glossary

challenges	desafíos
slowdown	desaceleración
newcomers	recién llegados
takes a look	echa un vistazo
in the mood	estar de humor
shatter	romper
tucked behind	escondido detrás
stalls	puestos
run by	gestionados por
package	paquete
deftly	con destreza
bustling	bulliciosa
foodies	aficionados a la comida
lazy	vago
intervening	intermedios
to join	juntarse
waves	olas
go through the roof	ponerse por las nubes
give it a go	probar su suerte
hustle	ajeteo
journalism	periodismo
four years on	cuatro años después
broke ground	invaron
to knock on	llamar a (una puerta)
pride themselves	se enorgullecen
willingness	voluntad
stakes	palos
economic downturn	recesión
to have had enough	estar cansado/harto de
fair portrayal	imagen justa
given that	dado que
deep roots	raíces profundas
a fair shake	tratamiento justo
shot	disparado
overnight	de la noche a la mañana

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

Despite the challenges of an economic slowdown, which normally puts newcomers at risk, Madrid's Ecuadorian community isn't slowing down at all. Patricia Dawn Severenuk takes a look at one of Madrid's largest immigrant populations

If you're in the mood to shatter some stereotypes about immigrants, you could do worse than to shop in Mercado de las Mostenes. Tucked behind Plaza de España, this municipal market is, even on a quiet day, an explosion of colour and flavour, with the majority of stalls run by guys like Marcos the Greengrocer. A five-foot-five package of strong arms, big black eyes and the calm of a Zen master, Marcos deftly handles the bustling Saturday crowds consisting of Chinese restaurant owners, Spanish foodies and cooks of all stripes.

Lazy immigrant? Not likely

An electrician in his native Guayaquil, Ecuador, Marcos came to Spain eight years ago and over the intervening years, has been joined by various family members, including his daughter Jenifer, who arrived in Madrid at the beginning of August and who is now cautiously watching her father from the side of the stall. Neither of them are planning to return to Ecuador any time soon, and they're not alone. Experts estimate that between 170,000 and 250,000 Ecuadorians call the Comunidad de Madrid home — a number that would increase if there were a way to calculate the number who are not here legally.

The first big waves of immigrants from Ecuador started arriving in the early 1990s, not long after the government decided to abandon the *sucre* currency in favour of the American dollar. Inflation went through the roof, and middle-class professionals such as engineers and medical staff started moving overseas in search of a better life.

Their numbers were augmented in the mid- to late 1990s as Spain's construction boom began to attract skilled workers such as carpenters and electricians — and then their wives and children. The joke now goes that if you need a babysitter, or a table fixed in Guayaquil or Quito, you're out of luck — the childminders and carpenters are all now in Ecuador's fifth province, Spain.

"I came over on a flight that originated in Bogotá; the woman who had the seat beside me was Peruvian and she was coming over to give it a go, to try her luck and, if things went well, she'd stay. And I thought, 'give it a go?', because I thought that I was going to be here for a while and then go back to *my* country!" Soraya Constanter laughs about it now, but when she first came to the cold and hustle of Madrid nearly four years ago, her plan was to do a postgraduate degree in international affairs — not practice journalism, as she'd done in her native Ecuador.

Four years on, she's now working for *Latino*, the largest-circulation newspaper directed at Spain's Latin American community. "My guess is that some 80 percent of those who come, stay. And I can tell you that most of those flights that come from Latin America are not filled with tourists," she says.

"The first Ecuadorians who came in the early 90s broke ground because they didn't have the doors to knock on; they didn't have the work contacts, they weren't able to get accommodation or credit or information as easily as recent arrivals do now," says Pedro Casado, coordinator of the Centro Hispano-Ecuatoriano, a resource centre for Ecuadorians run by the Comunidad de Madrid. Ecuadorians pride themselves on their willingness to work hard, something which may be reflected in the fields where they work, with men ending up in construction or the service industry, and women accepting jobs in domestic service and taking care of the elderly — jobs that Spaniards either don't necessarily want or won't accept. Increasing numbers of Ecuadorians are taking advantage of micro-credits and loan programmes to open their own businesses, such as market stalls, restaurants and internet cafés.

Unlike other communities of immigrants, such as Poles, who pull up stakes and head home after a couple of years, Ecuadorian immigrants who have friends and a permanent work contract aren't likely to pack it in and leave once they've got enough money saved to buy a car or build a house back home. "Your average Ecuadorian, who's got work and papers, usually takes about two to three years to settle in; it's a bit longer for those who aren't here legally. Most will usually stay for a long time, if not for their entire lives, and then return to Ecuador to retire," Pedro Casado explains.

Some do choose to become Spanish nationals; immigrants from Latin American countries who have a minimum of three years of legal residency are eligible to become Spanish citizens. But even if they do it out of a love for Spain, rather than doing it to make everyday life easier, they never let go of their love for their mother country, and the links with Ecuador always remain alive.

The recent economic downturn hasn't made the Ecuadorian community suffer as badly as other communities. Even though the Ecuadorian government is in the process of establishing a repatriation programme for immigrants who choose to return home, and the Spanish government offers assistance to immigrants who've had enough, only three thousand people have looked into going home.

With unemployment insurance, retraining programmes and health care, Spain offers a social safety net that can't be met back home. And, as Soraya Constanter points out, "Most Ecuadorians have chosen to stick it out, simply because they know that, as bad as it may get in Spain, it's still far better than what's going on in Ecuador. You still see Ecuadorians going on holiday and heading out to the summer sales, so it hasn't necessarily been all that bad."

A fair portrayal?

Given that the Ecuadorian community has such deep roots in the Comunidad de Madrid, people may soon stop referring to Ecuadorians as immigrants. That's not a bad thing, given that Ecuadorians don't necessarily get a fair shake in the Spanish media.

"Even good news doesn't always sell. Just look at [track-and-field athlete] Jackson Quiñones, who participated in the Beijing Olympics as a *Spanish* athlete. In one article, in the first paragraph, he's Jackson Quiñones; in the second, he's a 'naturalised Spanish citizen', and in the third, he's 'the runner of Ecuadorian origin!' And you know full well that if he'd shot someone, his being Ecuadorian would have been right up there in the headline: *ECUADORIAN MURDERER!*"

There are many ways in which Ecuadorians make life in Madrid richer," Pedro Casado says. "Undoubtedly, anyone whose roots are in a different place is going to bring a wealth of experience to his or her new culture. And that's not forgetting that immigration has been a very important part of Madrid's economy. They've upped the birth rate in the capital, which is a type of investment in the country's population."

Soraya Constanter underlines the durability of the community: "This is not a community that is going to disappear easily, or overnight. There's always been an interchange between Spain and the Latin American community, and there'll always be interaction on a cultural and economic level. Within 10 years, this kind of interaction will, hopefully, be given, and we'll move beyond the image of the Ecuadorian being the drunk guy sitting with beer in the park — and that within 10 years people will recognise all that we've brought to life in Spain."



Q

Try to answer these questions based on the story

- 1) What was Marcos' profession in Ecuador?
- 2) Is he planning to go back to Ecuador soon?
- 3) Why was there an increase in the number of Ecuadorians coming to Spain in the 1990's?
- 4) Why did Soraya Constanter come to Madrid?
- 5) What, according to the article, do Ecuadorians take pride in?
- 6) Can Ecuadorians become Spanish nationals?
- 7) Why have most Ecuadorians chosen not to go home, despite the current recession?