

# THE BIG ISSUE

## HOW IMMIGRATION IS CHANGING SPAIN

WORDS BY ALBERTO DÍAZ

BETWEEN 1998 AND 2007 SPAIN'S population rose by an astonishing 14%. Immigrants, according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), now account for 9.9% of the population as of January 2007. But more astounding than these figures is the sheer speed at which mass immigration has occurred. In 2000 there were 900,000 registered foreigners in Spain; by 2007 this had risen to 4.4 million - an increase that places Spain second only to the US in the world league for net immigration. ►



Of course, Spanish government figures on immigration are very conservative, as they are based only upon properly registered

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foreigners. They do not take into account the potentially huge numbers of unregistered immigrants residing in the country and some

commentators suspect the proportion of immigrants in Spain may be closer to 12-15% of the population.

Not surprisingly, immigration has now become a major political issue and one that is set to be considerably aggravated as the recession in Spain deepens. Unemployment is already rising and the jobs originally obtained by immigrants, particularly in the construction industry, are drying up. As work becomes increasingly scarce, there is a real danger that the underlying tension felt by the native Spanish about immigration could explode into a dramatic social problem. The first overt signs of this friction were seen in street battles last year between Spanish and Latin American youths in the Alcorcón district of Madrid.

Immigration has always been a complex subject in Spain, not least because many Spanish families have themselves experienced life, first hand, as an immigrant. After the Civil War (1936 - 1939) and during the 1960s

hundreds of thousands of Spaniards fled the Franco regime to live and work across Europe, particularly in France. Returning to Spain in the 1970s, they brought back a remarkable tolerance to foreign immigrants that has been notable, to Spain's credit, over the past twenty years.

In fact, Spain has desperately needed significant immigration, both to sustain its staggering economic boom over the past ten years and to fund its social security commitments. Without enormous quantities of cheap labour, the economic miracle of Spain over the past ten years would not have been possible. Plentiful (and very profitable to employers) low-cost labour has powered the construction industry, serviced the tourist sector and provided vital manpower for the brutally hard and intensive work involved in agriculture.

Perhaps more importantly, Spain has required a rapid increase in young, resident, tax-paying workers to prevent the catastrophic collapse of its pensions and welfare system. Although Spain's native population doubled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country's replacement fertility rate stalled after 1980 - resulting in one of the lowest birth rates in Europe. At 1.37 children per woman, Spain is well below the 2.33 figure that enables a population to replace itself. Indeed, a UN report in 1996 predicted that Spain's population would disastrously drop to 30 million by 2050. Further studies have concluded that unless Spain's immigrant population reaches 20%, the pensions system would be bankrupted as early as 2030.

It has therefore been in Spain's direct interest to encourage immigration. However, few countries could possibly hope to assimilate successfully the sheer numbers of immigrants that have come suddenly into Spain over the past ten years. The INE now even predicts that the population of Spain in 2050 will breach 52 million - a dramatic reversal of estimates from only a few years beforehand.

Of course, part of the assimilation process requires a high degree of toleration from the Spanish to large numbers of immigrants whose culture is sometimes very different to their own. In particular, the Spanish have



some difficulty with Moroccans and sub-Saharan Africans, who tend not to have the linguistic and cultural ties of Latin Americans nor the perceived similar values and lifestyles of Europeans. Further friction arises from the acute overloading of Spain's social infrastructure, particularly schools and medical centres, which are creaking under the strain of the rapidly increased numbers.

Another problem is that the actual monetary value that immigrants provide to the host state is not always easy to calculate, as the money earned does not always stay within the country. For example, in 2004 (according to wsws.org) the Moroccan economy received close to \$4 billion (€2.56bn) from its overseas workers - nearly offsetting Morocco's trade deficit. A year earlier, Latin Americans in Spain had sent some \$900 million (€5.77m) to their respective countries. Meanwhile, illegal immigrants pay neither tax nor social security payments.

Spain now faces the problem of how to effectively control immigration. In 2005 the socialist (PSOE) government under Zapatero, without consulting other EU leaders, provided a three-

month blanket amnesty to illegal immigrants. This resulted in 578,000 of them being legalised. However, it also created a 'pull-factor' encouraging further illegal immigration. Spain is now in fact perceived as a European 'gateway' for immigrants; it is estimated that a further one million illegal immigrants have entered Spain since the amnesty, to the considerable unease of other EU countries.

Sudden and mass immigration has had a tremendous impact on Spain - for both good and bad. However, native tolerance to immigration is notoriously fickle and dependent upon the wellbeing, at the time, of the country concerned. During an economic boom all parties tend to benefit from immigration. Periods of recession, on the other hand, can place appalling pressures upon immigrants, who see their dreams of a new life of prosperity collapse along with any possibility of work. Meanwhile, they make easy targets for disenchanted natives upset by cultural differences, the overloading of 'their' social infrastructure and any unwelcome 'foreign' competition for the few available jobs.

The next few years will be a test of Spanish tolerance and it would not be surprising if there was an unfortunate

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surge of nationalism against immigrants. Only time will tell, but it is hard not to come to the conclusion that too many diverse people - of all nationalities - have come to Spain in far too short a period. ▶

**“There is no wall that can obstruct the dream of a better life”**

Prime Minister Zapatero



**“23% of clandestine immigrants who enter Europe do so through Spanish territory”**

Immigration Secretary Consuelo Rimi





# THE FACTS

## TOTAL POPULATION OF SPAIN

1900	18,616,630
1998	39,669,394
2000	40,499,791
2007	45,120,000

## TOTAL RESIDENT FOREIGNERS

1998	580,195 (including 254,264 from the EU)
2000	923,879 (including 429,844 from the EU)
2007	4,480,000 (including 1,700,000 from the EU)

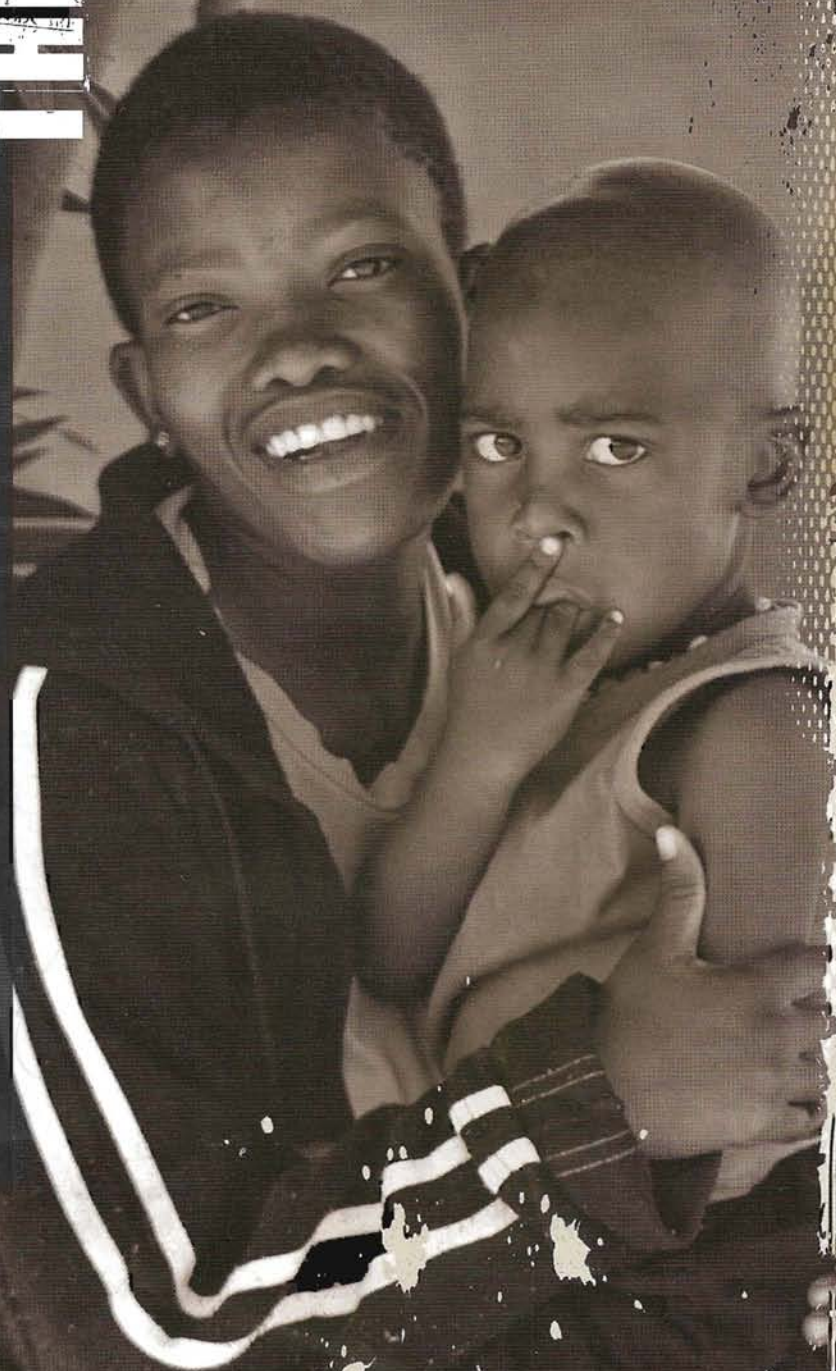
## MOST POPULOUS RESIDENT FOREIGNERS

	2007	1998
Moroccans	576,000	103,225
Romanians	525,000	2,260
Ecuadorians	421,000	3,745
British	314,000	69,818
Colombians	259,000	9,884
Bolivians	200,000	1,190
Germans	164,000	55,475
Italians	135,000	13,261

## AREAS WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENT FOREIGNERS

Balearic Islands	18.4%
Comunidad de Valencia	14.9%
Murcia	14.4%
Madrid	14.1%
Cataluña	13.4%

*Courtesy of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística*





# THE NEW SPANIARDS



## IMRE SZEMAN & DAGSO ZOLTAN

DEBRECEN, HUNGARY

Imre (24) and Dagso (48) are Hungarians from Debrecen who have lived in Spain for the past six years. Fully registered and legalised, they work together and enjoy a good reputation in their local area. Extremely competent and extraordinarily hard-working, they represent immigrants who have successfully integrated into Spain. Both speak excellent Spanish, radiating energy and enthusiasm.

"We are here for the foreseeable future," says Dagso, whose girlfriend is Imre's sister. "Whilst we miss our families in Hungary, Spain offers us a much better long-term option. We can build a secure and decent life here - that will not be possible in Hungary for maybe fifteen or twenty years."

"It's true," confirms Imre. "And we think of ourselves as Europeans, rather than Hungarians or immigrants. This is our home now. Spain offers us a much better life and one that is worth all the hard work involved in building a future from nothing. For us, life gets better every day here."

## ELIO

COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA

Elio (26) is an illegal immigrant from Cochabamba in Bolivia who has been in Spain for three years. He is well-educated and was a graphic designer working for magazines and newspapers in his home country. However, he now works in construction on the coast, after a brief spell in Sevilla. He has been joined in Spain by all of his six sisters, who now also live here. He is softly spoken and, despite his muscular build, mannered and thoughtful.

"Of course, making money here is much easier than in Bolivia, but I miss doing what I trained for - together with my friends at home, who were educated, lively and well-read. Most

of the other Bolivians I know just work and sleep and have no intellectual interest in life. The trouble is that when I do go back, I'll have to start from zero again and that will be hard.

I'll stay in Spain whilst I have work. Once that becomes a problem, I'll return. I love my country - it is beautiful and it is where my parents still live. I can't imagine living here permanently. On the whole coming to Spain has been a good experience though. It's been great to see the tourist attractions in places like Sevilla and Valencia, and wonderful to be beside the sea. But I've found the Spanish to be quite racist, which has made my life here less pleasant."



## YNGRID MOSTACERO FLORIÁN

PACASMAYO, PERU



Yngrid (24) is originally from Pacasmayo, a small fishing town in the north of Peru. She moved to Spain in 2005 with her English husband and now has full residency status. She has had several jobs in the retail industry during her time here and helps to support her mother, sister and baby niece back in Peru, hoping that they will one day join her in Spain.

"Arriving in Spain was like entering a whole new world for me. Peru is

just so different. Since being here I've discovered two sides to life: the good and the bad. On the one hand I've met some wonderful people who have made my time here very enjoyable; on the other I've discovered how difficult life can be and how much some people can upset you.

But whenever life gets tough, I think of my family and how much they need my support. I think that's true for most immigrants in Spain.

It's what gives us the strength to turn bad experiences into good ones. Coming to Spain has opened up the world for me. I've travelled around the country quite a bit and have also visited Morocco, England and Germany. This has made me realise how important it is to explore and respect other cultures. So I hope the Spanish can learn something from us, as well as us learning something from them."