

Do You Use Double Standards When Talking About Immigrants?

There are thousands of foreign workers in Alava but ECP coaches are rarely, if ever, called immigrants. Why not?

Before you read the article, look at this vocabulary from the text:

to be on the dole (UK): to receive money from the state when you are unemployed
benefit: a payment by the state to help a person in need (unemployment, housing etc)
welfare: a state system that protects the health and well-being of its citizens
to hire: to employ a person (or rent an object)

I emigrated to the Basque Country nearly 25 years ago and was made very welcome from day one, but when I refer to myself as an immigrant people disagree. "But you're not an immigrant Rob. Not like them anyway." "Them" refers to immigrants from non-European countries, generally of darker skin and different religions. "Your case is different," people always say. And they are right, our cases are very different.

I didn't leave my country of origin because of poverty or war. I wasn't being persecuted or marginalised. In fact, I had a well-paid job with good career prospects. I left Britain because I was bored and wanted a change of airs.

As a child I received excellent and free education and health care. I then emigrated and have never paid anything back into the system that had invested so much tax-payers' money into me and my future. Even so, no-one has accused me of being unpatriotic.

And in my first five years as a white, Northern-European immigrant in the Basque Country, I spent two summers **on the dole**, taking advantage of Spain's unemployment **benefit** system to take long summer breaks.

Nobody here ever accused me of being lazy or of abusing the **welfare** system. In fact, I did what I did because I was encouraged to do so by my employers and by local civil servants. I was told that I had earned the right to claim that money.

That was in the 1990s, before immigration into Euskadi from around the world began in earnest. But there had been plenty of immigration from other regions of Spain before then. When work started on the dams and reservoirs of the Zadorra river system in the 1950s, workers were **hired** to come to Alava from all over Spain as there wasn't enough manpower locally. Most came from Andalusia and Extremadura, and with them came their families. By the 1960s these people made up 19% of the population of an increasingly industrial Vitoria.

Certain opinions began to be voiced, including by the Mayor, about immigrants needing to "respect the traditions of the city" and having to "adapt to our customs". A minority of Vitorianos even began to use the derogatory term "Coreanos" to refer to this "invasion".

Over time, these initial concerns disappeared as people of different origins lived and worked together and built the modern city of Vitoria. This new, hybrid society now has the same challenge: accepting immigrants who have come from far and wide to work in the factories and fields of Alava (and in some cases to rebuild lives destroyed by conflict and poverty).

In the last few years, I've been told that these 21st-century immigrants "only come because of our generous welfare system", that they "make no effort to integrate", and that "our traditions and customs are in danger".

Thankfully, plenty of other people, including factory owners and Human Resources managers, have pointed out that "the local economy would collapse without them", that "local people don't want to do the work that they do", and that "they and their children will pay our pensions".

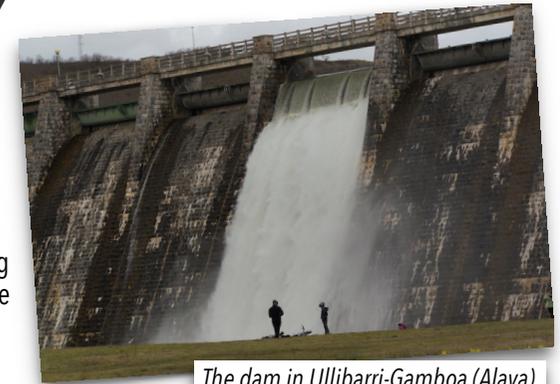
(I sometimes wonder which of those previous statements apply to the 300,000+ British and Irish people/immigrants resident in Spain, of which a third are retired and don't work in the local economy. And all those professional sports stars from abroad?)

It has been proven time and again that, despite the initial hostility, immigrants don't destroy economies or societies. They build them, contribute financially to them, and their children and grandchildren are the future of them. This grateful immigrant is sure Vitoria will rise to the challenge again and is convinced it will be a better place for it.

Written by ECP coach Rob Hextall More information about the 1950s: [El Correo](#)

Let's chat about that! Send an email to your ECP coach!

- Is anyone in your family originally from a different region or country?
- Has anybody you know emigrated? Talk about their experiences.
- What kind of jobs do immigrants do where you work?
- How do you think immigrant families combine different languages?
- What difficulties can immigrants have? Chat with your ECP coach about it.



The dam in Ullibarri-Gamboa (Alava), built in the 1950s by immigrants from all over Spain.



Two teams whose success depends on immigrants.

A wind turbine with components made in Alava by immigrants from all over the world.



Social Events In English

Real-Life English in Vitoria-Gasteiz



iLook, iThink, iSpeak

Real Language to Express Yourself Better

Next chat: Sat 2nd February

COFFEE SATURDAYS!



Come and socialise in English!

Every first Saturday of the month

Time: 11:00 to 12:30

Place: Panadería Bertiz, C/Francia

Price: Just bring enough for a cup of coffee!

Friends welcome!

WhatsApp Alison for more details on:
608 42 64 92

Every last Friday of the month

CINEMA NIGHTS!

Come and socialise in English!

Next film: Fri 25th January

Time: 19:30 to 21:30

Place: ECP Hub (C/San Ignacio de Loyola 15)

Price: Free! Friends welcome!

WhatsApp John for more details on:
657 73 13 54

And on Friday 1st February...

Come and enjoy an evening of social English with our student and coach speakers!

FRED talks

'19

Fun, Relevant, Engaging Discourse

Solmaz - "Unexpected Events that Change Your Life."

Igor - "Do You Know How Your Brain Learns?"

John - "I Speak Therefore I Am: My Dialect and Me."

As always, there will be snacks and drinks!

Starting at 19.00 FRIENDS WELCOME!



Talking about immigration

Chat about this quotes with your colleagues, friends and ECP coach

"Recognize yourself in he and she who are not like you and me." *Carlos Fuentes*

"A man who build walls, is a man who fears building bridges." *Jerome Montgomery II*

"Nihil humanum a me alienum puto, said the Roman poet Terence: 'Nothing human is alien to me.' The slogan of the old USA Immigration and Naturalization Service could have been the reverse: To us, no aliens are human." *Christopher Hitchens*

Translation activity 😊

Translate this quote (together with colleagues if possible) and discuss what Miguel Ángel Revilla means.

"La mayor parte de la gente es buena, es normal, con las lógicas debilidades humanas. Detesto a los que humillan a los más débiles y me irrita profundamente que algunos vuelquen sus iras contra los inmigrantes como causantes de los problemas que padecemos. Me duele que no tengamos un mínimo de memoria para recordar lo que hemos sido los españoles durante siglos."

Miguel Ángel Revilla