REVIEW ARTICLE

Quality of life of Latin American and Caribbean migrants in Madrid, Spain

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Abstract: This work analyzed the quality of life of Latin American and Caribbean migrants living in Madrid, Spain. The study included an analysis of subjective and objective well-being based on a survey of 135 people, taking into account factors such as access to basic services, housing conditions, overcrowding, income, access to education and health services, family viability, the exercise of culture, religious beliefs and traditions, social participation, respect for human and civil rights, mental health, job satisfaction and satisfaction with immigration projects. The results show that there are unsatisfied indicators such as salary, civic, and politician participation and mental health, while the satisfiers that show acceptance levels are found in the ability to practice culture including religion, festival celebration and ancestral traditions, as well as basic satisfaction such as food, home, and its equipment and health and educational services.

Keywords: Immigration; Latin America; Quality of life; Madrid

1. Introduction

From the perspective of income, Spain’s wage level is different from the average wage level of Latin American countries, which can help explain the persistence of migration, because according to the data of the World Bank (2017), Spain’s annual per capita income in 2015 was $27,580 (US dollars), while the average income in Latin America was only $9,082 (US dollars). However, authors such as Rapley (2003) and Rojas (2006) believe that income itself does not improve the quality of life and is meaningful only when basic needs are met.

Similarly, Tov and Diener (2009) pointed out that economic development may be a factor, but it does not affect welfare. More importantly, if such a development is to be achieved, immigrants must face social isolation, family division and long-term sadness, fear and depression caused by immigration.

In addition to income, quality of life is a concept that covers all environments for the development of an individual’s life and is therefore a multidimensional concept, as it covers the external aspects of an individual and the interrelationships in the areas of social, health, economic and environmental conditions that affect the development of life itself (Inter-American Development Bank, 2008; Ontario Social Development Council, 1997).

Given that Spain is the destination of some 2.2 million Latin American immigrants (second only to the United States), it is considered an appropriate subject for the study of the living conditions of Latin American immigrants living in Spain and their ability to develop social relations and exercise culture; access to health, education and information services, freedom of communication and expression, job satisfaction and the general conditions necessary for them to have a quality of life.

This is not a comparative study because it does not take into account the changes in the quality of life before and after immigration; this is a case study that measures the levels of the various components of the subjective and objective well-being of Latin American immigrants living in Madrid, Spain. However, at the end of the
analysis, the quality of life reported by Latin American immigrants in Madrid can be compared with that by local residents in Spain and Latin American countries as a whole based on the 2015 data provided by the world happiness database (Veenhoven, 2015).

2. Background

The history of migratory flow between the Iberian Peninsula and the current Latin America is the history of immigration rather than of emigration. During the centuries when there existed many colonies, about 750,000 Spaniards arrived in the United States (ACTIS, de Prada and Pereda, 2008); at the same time, between 1509 and 1790 alone, about 3 million Portuguese settled in Brazil. Moreover, the Spanish and Portuguese brought about 2.5 million slaves from different parts of Africa to the Americas at the end of the 18th century (Vitale, 1992).

After the slave uprising in Haiti in 1804 and Cuba’s independence in 1902, the independence process in Latin America did not prevent the coming of immigrants mainly from Spain. Even in the first half of the 20th century, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) ended with the failure of the Second Republic and the establishment of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, resulting in thousands of Spanish refugees in exile in Latin America. According to PLA Brugat (2007), some 36,200 exiles were welcomed in Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Chile alone.

When Francisco Franco died in 1975, Spain began a democratic transition, which led to the return of many Spanish exiles in Latin America, many of whom established family relations with people in their countries of origin.

Moreover, most Latin American countries faced a social, political and economic crisis in the late 1970s, which lasted until the 1980s when immigrants from the region began to flow into the United States and Spain.

Spain’s economic growth in the 1990s continued until the 2008 crisis, which required foreign labor and produced a large number of immigrants, mainly from South American countries; as shown in Figure 1, especially since 1998, the number of immigrants from Latin America to Spain has gradually increased, reaching a peak in 2007, with an inflow of 336,646 people. The crisis in 2008 led to a gradual decline in this number. Until 2013, only 95,588 people were registered.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Spain. Latin American immigrants registrations and annual variation rate of GDP (selected years).
Source: prepared by ourselves based on the information provided by INE (2015) and the World Bank (2015a).

However, although the intensity of migration from Latin America to Spain has decreased, with nearly 30% of them leaving the country, Latin Americans accounted for 5.1% of the country’s total population and 31.6% of the total foreign population in 2010 (OAS, 2011; INE, 2010; OECD, 2015), and since the recovery of Spain’s economy since 2014, migration rates continued to grow again. In this regard, as of 2015, Spain had about 2.2 million Latin American immigrants, most of whom were concentrated in the autonomous region of Madrid (Madrid Institute of statistics, 2015).
3. Quality of Life

3.1. Elements of Concepts and Theoretical Methods

Defining the quality of life is a very complex activity, because it itself includes concrete factors that can be measured and abstract factors that can only be perceived by people. In this context, it was discussed whether it was possible to establish a measurement standard and method on a global scale, and questioned whether there were general conditions that could improve the quality of life of different individuals and societies in the world, regardless of their social, cultural, economic and even historical backgrounds.

In principle, quality of life is an undefined term. On the contrary, there are various definitions and explanations. In the literature review of this subject, Schalock (2004) found that the concept of quality of life has more than 100 definitions. From 1985 to 2004, he published research reports and more than 20,900 articles in which the title contains the term of quality of life.

Cultural diversity and subjectivity determine everyone’s personal values for their own life and limit the establishment of a universal methodology and norms. However, despite the widespread discussion of areas and factors that may measure quality of life, different researchers seem to agree that quality of life is composed of a series of material, non-material or objective and subjective factors, and it is important to understand the status of all these factors when seeking to understand the quality of life of a person or a specific population. According to the same logic, Cummins (2000) recognized that the quality of life is a very broad structure, including a variety of meanings, which are generally for the pursuit of a better and happy life.

It seems to be the core of various elements of the quality of life in current literature to imagine human needs as the one that exceed the basic needs of survival. For example, Felce and Perry (1995) regard the quality of life as an overall sense of well-being, including objective indicators and subjective assessments of physical, material, social and emotional well-being and personal development, all of which are measured by a set of personal values. Haas (1999) believes that quality of life is a term involving the whole life, not just a part of it.

Therefore, from an objective point of view, housing and basic services such as water, electricity and drainage, as well as basic supplies such as stoves, refrigerators and televisions, are regarded as housing and basic services. Target welfare also includes social welfare, in which access to health and education services, respect for human and civil rights, facilitation of cultural practices (including religious and traditional practices), economic development capacity and all coexistence and social participation can be considered.

Subjective well-being consists of two main components the first is culture that largely determines identity and replicates unique prototypes in each social group; the second is Moreover, personality composed of psychological and genetic characteristics determines people’s response to events that may have a positive or negative impact on their lives (Diener, 2009). In this regard, researchers such as Stahl, Plchto, Sardi and Petica (2004) believe that personality has a greater weight in the assessment of subjective well-being, because it is the psychological center of quality of life and closely related to the extent to which everyone can make different choices.

Apart from that, religious teachings in each culture play a decisive role and may have an impact on the evaluation of the quality of life. In this regard, Kim-Prieto and Diener (quoted from Tov and Diener, 2009) pointed out that Christian countries reported higher happiness and lower guilt than Muslim ones.

Cultural differences have had a significant impact on the results of welfare studies and have been consistently reflected in various studies, including contradictions, that is, developed countries are not necessarily the most satisfied and happy countries, because Latin American countries are often listed as countries boasting of the highest level of happiness and satisfaction, although there are gaps in economic development and purchasing power (Diener, 2009).

Therefore, culture may be the main subjective factor determining people’s views on the quality of life, because it produces a worldview and, as a culture, enables people to have different views on the economic situation and social environment in different societies. Rapley (2003) pointed out that since people were born, culture has given them an identity, which depends on their relationship with others, as well as flora and fauna, in the same way, determined by customs, values, religions and meaning of their own lives.

In addition, if this concept is to be subdivided for understanding and research, the sum of these components should represent the whole structure, so the study of the quality of life is multidisciplinary and multidimensional.

3.2 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the quality of life of Latin Americans living in Madrid, Spain; to this end, the Survey on Quality of Life in International Latin American Migrants (SQLILAM) was designed and surveyed 135 people. Section I provides data on target benefits, such as access to housing and basic family services and supplies, overcrowding,
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income, immigration status and access to health and social assistance. In addition, the data contained in this section contribute to the establishment of a socio-demographic data table, including data on age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education level and occupation.

The second part consists of 20 reagents, including the adaptation of other tools used in subjective well-being measurement, such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985), with some questions raised in the World Happiness Database on happiness (Veenhoven, 2015) and a single question raised by Andrews and Withey (1976) to assess the overall living conditions, and the question designed by Cantril (1965), in which respondents assess their living conditions under the best and worst possible conditions.

As a personal contribution, some respondents provided information about their views on the future (optimistic or pessimistic); satisfaction with immigration programs, perceptions of respect for their human and civil rights, job satisfaction, emotional health and mental health during long periods of depression, stress, sadness, anxiety or fear.

For the response to the questionnaire, a scale with 0 to 10 was selected, in which 0 to 2 represent a “very low” quality of life, 2 to 4 a “low” quality of life, 4 to 6 a “medium” or “normal” quality of life, 6 to 8 a “good” quality of life, and 8 to 10 a “very good” quality of life (Figure 2).

A score from 0 to 10 was designed by Cantrell and first used in a study published in 1965. According to Cummins (2002), its advantage is that it is very easy to manage and understand, and minimizes the possibility of distorting respondents’ opinions by not adopting a series of categories. Moreover, the scale from 0 to 10 encourages respondents to briefly reflect on their lives and produce an answer as close to reality as possible.

The survey polled 135 men and women who met the conditions of being Latin American migrants, stayed in Spain for 5 years or more, and were 20 years old or older; the above considerations do not constitute an analytical category, but only enable a better understanding of the quality of life of immigrants. It is assumed that in most cases, new immigrants tend to report a lower level of quality of life due to the time spent on adaptation to the new society and assimilation into the new culture. In addition, since immigration usually involves the assistance of relatives or close friends, who temporarily house the new member and introduce him to a job to enable him to be independent. This process may take months or even years. Respondents aged 20 or older were surveyed, which showed that people below this level may not have questioned their quality of life and their assessment of the past, present and future, in part because they are young and the probable absence of commitments such as marriage and children.

The survey was conducted in two periods, the first from February to March 2015 and the second from July to August 2015, in several areas of the Madrid community, mainly in cities like Ciudad Lineal, Tetuán, Carabanchel, Fuencarral, Moratalaz and Puente de Vallecas.

4. Result

4.1 Sociodemographic Profile

The implementation of the survey initially enabled people to determine the social population percentage of the surveyed population. In the analysis by five-year age group, it was first emphasized that the proportion of the 35-39 age group was the highest. In this category, women accounted for 26.5% and men 24.4%, and the average age of men and women is 38 years.

In terms of gender composition, the proportion of men surveyed was slightly higher, 55% of the total, while women
accounted for the remaining 45%. In terms of the marital status, 57.3% said they were married or freely combined, 36% said they were single, 4% separated or divorced, and only 2.7% were widowed.

In terms of country of origin and immigration time, Ecuadorian nationals accounted for 40% of the total sample, followed by 18% born in Peru, 15% born in Colombia and 8% born in Bolivia.

The country with the least representation is El Salvador, which accounted for 1% of the total, Mexico, Cuba and Costa Rica each 3%, and Argentina and the Dominican Republic 4% and 5% respectively. By region, North America represented by Mexico alone accounted for only 3%, Central America and the Caribbean 12% and South America 85% (Figure 3).

With regard to the time of immigration, Figure 4 shows the corresponding relationship with economic growth, because 55% of the immigrants surveyed said they had immigrated for 6 to 10 years, which is equivalent to the decade from 2000 to 2010, when the Spanish economy created an all-time high in the recent period.

In a broader analysis of the 10-year immigrant population, Spain’s economic growth is consistent. Recent immigration to the country and changes in economic growth accounted for only 21% of the population who claimed to have an immigration history of 11 to 20 years, while the vast majority of 77% say they have an immigration history of 5 to 10 years.

In terms of immigration status and social security, Spain has a social security policy that covers at least health services for all the population, not excluding immigrant communities. The Madrid survey of Latin American immigrants shows that 100% of people have the access to health services.
In addition, during the years of economic prosperity, the Spanish government has provided many facilities to normalize the situation of immigrants, which has enabled 95% of Latin American immigrants to obtain documents for legal residence in the country, while only 5% of immigrants are in an abnormal state (Figure 5).

4.2 Target Welfare Performance

With regard to targeted welfare, this study is limited to measuring the level of basic household services and supplies and overcrowding, as the access to or lack of these services affects the quality of life, regardless of culture and tradition.

With regard to basic services and supplies, the survey shows that 100% of Latin American immigrants in Madrid have basic housing supplies and services, such as water, electricity, drainage, television, radio, stove, refrigerator and telephone.

With regard to overcrowding, institutions such as ECLAC (2012) believe that houses with five or more bedrooms were in a critical state, and that houses with three to four bedrooms were at the medium level. In view of the above, the survey shows that there is no serious overcrowding, that only 11% of respondents are in moderate overcrowding, and that the vast majority (89.3% of cases) are not overcrowded (Figure 6).
people; it was stressed that none of the respondents in this population group claimed retirement.

In terms of occupations, people engaged in construction, catering and elderly and child care (16% each) were equal in percentage. Those dedicated to commerce accounted for 10.7% and office employees 5.3%.

With regard to the level of education, the results showed that 33% of Latin Americans surveyed in Madrid said they had secondary education, 35% said they had upper secondary education, 11% said they had higher education, and none of them had no education.

In terms of income, the Ministry of Employment and Social Security of Spanish (2015) has an annual minimum wage of 21.62 euros per day or 648.60 euros per month. The World Bank (2017) pointed out that in 2015, Spain’s annual per capita income was 25,072 euros, or 2,089 euros per month; however, according to the Confederation of Trade Unions (2017), foreigners’ wages were 36% lower than Spanish nationals, i.e. 1,336 euros per month.

Consistent with the above, Figure 7 shows the income of the migrant population collected. Hegemony ranged from 1,001 euros to 1,500 euros, and 38% of the respondents received such a wage on average every month. Moreover, it emphasizes that 41% of the wages of migrant workers could not exceed 1,000 euros a month, and only 13% of the immigrant population surveyed had a monthly income of more than 2,000 euros.

The above data prove and confirm the signs of serious wage inequality between the immigrant population and the local population.

![Figure 7. Latin American and Caribbean immigrants from Madrid, Spain (percentage of euros by monthly income level in 2015). Source: self-compiled.](image)

Development and social participation are the basic elements of quality of life. Changes brought about by international migration may limit migrants’ ability to establish new social relations, family harmony and participate in the political and civil activities of host communities.

The results showed that in terms of perceived freedom of social interactions, Latin Americans in Madrid reported an average of 7.8 points between 0 and 10, which was equivalent to the “high” level; however, a more detailed analysis showed that 47% of the sample considered their social freedom “very high” (Figure 8).

On the other hand, contrary to the acceptable level of freedom of social interaction, the number of people participating in political and civic activities was very small. In this social development indicator, the average population surveyed in Madrid was 4.5, which was equivalent to “regular” participation. With regard to freedom of expression, the results showed that in the range of 0 to 10, the situation was “normal”, with an average of 4.7.

In the case of international migration, family coexistence is a key factor in the quality of life, as in almost all cases migration leads to at least temporary division of families. The survey results showed that the family living standard was acceptable in this category, because the recruited immigrants reported that they lived with their families “highly”, with an average of 7.12 people, ranging from 0 to 10. Similarly, immigration to a country with different customs and traditions challenges the ability to exercise culture. This mastery of the quality of life is crucial, because culture gives everyone a sense of existence, which is based on the ancestral customs and religious beliefs expressed in the celebrations of these customs and traditions.
However, the survey showed that Latin American immigrants had “very high” satisfaction with the freedom to hold celebrations and traditional celebrations, as they averaged 8.47 points between 0 and 10. Moreover, the exercise of religious and personal beliefs is a “high” satisfaction, with an average of 7.25 Latin American immigrants reported in Madrid.

Regarding access to information of common interest, a “high” quality was recorded; while in the capacity for recreation and leisure, it was positioned at a “very high” level, averaging 8.64 on the much-cited scale.

In short, Figure 9 shows the results of target welfare, especially the results corresponding to social welfare. It can be seen that the immigrants surveyed showed normal abilities, including freedom of expression, politics and civil participation, while emphasizing the very high ability to exercise religion and belief and entertainment and leisure. It is worth noting that none of the indicators had a low calibration level.

4.3 Subjective Well-being Results

As mentioned earlier, the measurement of objective well-being can only be based on people’s evaluation of their own lives, because according to Hamilton and Scullion (2005), this is the most effective standard of such evaluation, even if material conditions do not seem to be the best; Veenhoven (2006) pointed out that in order to evaluate subjective well-being, most people usually evaluate their lives in an emotional and cognitive way, and consider their past, present and even future.

Madrid’s study of Latin American immigrants showed that their life satisfaction was only close to the lower limit of
the “high” level, with an average score of 6.8 between 0 and 10 points. The survey, which included three reagents, compared the life satisfaction of Latin American immigrants in Madrid with that of the Spanish population and countries in the Latin American region based on the available information on various measures of happiness and quality of life in the world database (Veenhoven, 2015).

As can be seen from Figure 10, the living standard of Spanish society was the lowest, with an average of 6.08, which hardly reached the limit of “high” quality of life; the average number of Latin Americans in Madrid was 7.03, which was at the “high” level. The average number of countries in the whole Latin American region was 7.4, which is also at the “high” level.

Figure 10. Life satisfaction (selected populations, 2015).
Source: self-prepared according to Veenhoven (2015) and the survey results used in this study.

With regard to the subjective assessment considering complete life (overall), the results shown in the Figure 11 showed that the Latin American countries report a “high” degree of satisfaction with 7.1 on average; the situations of immigrants from Spain and Latin America were the same, with an average of 7.3 and 7.2, respectively.

Figure 11. Complete life satisfaction (selected population, 2015).
Source: self-prepared according to Veenhoven (2015) and the survey results used in this study.

The following analysis corresponds to the adaptation of the problem: assuming that the number “10” represents the best life you may have and the number “0” represents the worst life you may have, what number would you put your life on
now? The last question is whether it is just a method to measure subjective well-being. Although it was designed by Cantril in 1965, it is still one of the most commonly used tools, mainly used by researchers and institutions compiling global statistics of objective well-being, such as Gallup (2009), Venhoven (2015) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (2007).

Figure 12 shows the results of a survey of Latin American immigrants in Spain, contrasted with the country’s indigenous population and the group that makes up the Latin American region based on data available in the world database on migration and happiness (Veenhoven, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the average indigenous population of Spain was 6.3, reaching the “normal” level, the same as the average of 6.4 in all Latin American countries, while the average Latin American and Caribbean immigrants living in Madrid were 6.7 of 0 to 10.

The following emotional health issues were identified through the assessment: “How often do you have tension, depression, worry, sadness, anxiety or fear?” Among them, the answer closest to the number “10” (almost never) is that emotional well-being is very high, and the answer closest to “0” (very frequently) is that emotional well-being is very low.

![Figure 12. Assessment of life between the best and the worst possible (selected population, 2015)](image)

Data source: prepared by ourselves according to the data of Veenhoven (2015) and the survey results of this study.

The results showed that the emotional health status of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in Madrid was “normal”, with an average score of 4.6. Looking at the distribution of responses from a more detailed perspective, only 4% reported that they had almost never experienced a bad mental state during their stay in Spain, which was a “very good” emotional health. However, the highest proportion of this population was 37% who reported “normal” emotional health and 31% who reported “low” emotional health.

The average satisfaction with the achievements of the immigration project was 6.55, which put them at the “high” level of satisfaction, and their views on the future were at the same level, with an average of 7.2.

In addition, Latin American and Caribbean immigrants had “high job satisfaction” according to the consideration that the jobs they performed have seemed fair dignified, with an average of 7.5. Finally, from their views on respect for human and civil rights, their satisfaction is “high” with an average of 7.8.

In short, the subjective well-being level of the surveyed immigrants was slightly lower than that of local residents; The most significant change was emotional health; However, their ratio was also slightly higher than that of nationals who remained in their respective countries.

As an example, Figure 13 showed the comparison of subjective well-being levels of immigrants in Ecuador, which was the main group of Latin American immigrants in Spain and Madrid; it was worth noting that their satisfaction was higher than that of their compatriots.

5. Conclusion

In the process of this study, the quality of life was considered to be a favorable combination of objective and subjective conditions for the development of life itself. For this purpose, the variables to measure the quality of life were determined through investigation. With regard to targeted benefits, the data obtained show that the quality of life of Latin American and Caribbean migrants in Madrid in terms of housing was acceptable because they had basic family services and supplies
and were not seriously overcrowded.

![Figure 13. Subjective well-being (Ecuadorian immigrants in Ecuador and Madrid, Spain, 2015). Data source: prepared by ourselves according to the data of Veenhoven (2015) and the survey results of this study.](image)

However, in terms of income, the expectation that the wages of immigrants should be lower than the national average of Spain seemed not optimistic, because although the unemployment rate had rebounded in the past two years (2014 and 2015), the 26% unemployment rate reached in 2013 continued to affect the unemployment level of Spanish migrant workers (INE, 2016).

However, low income does not necessarily mean a decline in the quality of life, because it contributes to subjective well-being only in the provision of basic goods and services; beyond this level, the impact on the quality of life is gradually weakened. In this regard, remittances can be inferred that the income is not limited, because according to the data of the World Bank (2015b), the Latin American region received about $3.448 billion in remittances from Spain in 2015; on the other hand, despite the low wages of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in Spain, immigration remains a better option for cost-benefit weighting because wages in Latin America are still low.

In addition, the research of Cardenas et al. (2009) showed that although remittance might affect immigrants’ objective well-being, it would also increase their subjective well-being, because in most cases, immigration is a family project. Remittance can improve the quality of life of immigrant families, make them have a certain degree of satisfaction with immigration projects and improve their subjective well-being.

With regard to social indicators, research shows that there are some low-quality indicators, such as freedom of expression, politics and citizen participation; and it is conducive to the exercise of culture, tradition, religion and belief, as well as entertainment, leisure and family life. The information is essential to understanding the subjective part of quality of life, because authors such as Diener (2009), Rapley (2003) and Cummins (2000) point out that culture has a strong impact on the values that determine the quality of life, because cultural practices enable immigrants to live in their own world in another country in some way and to look at life from their worldview, even though they found themselves deprived of land and experienced it, they can still have a sense of subjective well-being.

In conclusion, the indicators of objective well-being that show low levels are focus on income, civil and political participation and emotional well-being, while relatively satisfied needs include food, health services and education, as well as housing and supplies and equipment for smooth operation.

In terms of subjective well-being, almost all variables considered in the survey showed acceptable levels, highlighting the exercise of cultural, customary and traditional celebrations and freedom of religious belief. Life values, views on a better future and satisfaction with immigration projects were also at an acceptable level.

**Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**References**


