



# The Economic Crisis and its Influence on the Food Habits and Customs of Ecuadorian Immigrants in Murcia

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** In recent years the impact of the economic crisis has modified the consumption habits and purchasing strategies of immigrants, who declare themselves hypersensitive to prices since they do not have sufficient resources to stock up on adequate food to cover their nutritional needs. **Objective:** To analyze whether the current economic crisis has influenced the access to food and eating habits of Ecuadorian immigrants in the Huerta de Europa (Murcia-Capital). **Methodology:** The research carried out was qualitative, in which a set of techniques and instruments very typical of this research paradigm were used. the methodology was based mainly on the use of techniques such as interviews and life stories. The present study was framed within the phenomenological perspective since it is intended to learn about a process and reality from the perspective of the informants. **Results:** Seventy-five percent of the informants owned residence and work permits, while the remaining 25% had Spanish nationality. Fifty percent of the informants received the contributory benefit also known as “unemployment”, 25% and 15% received social welfare benefits. 45% of those interviewed spend between 200 to 300 euros per month on food, which is not enough to cover their needs, so they are forced to resort to government aid and strategies to have easy access to food. **Conclusions:** The lack of employment, in addition to causing economic shortages, diminishes the quality of life of Ecuadorian immigrants, so they establish different strategies to “ration”, which forces them to modify their food purchase and consumption habits

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## Introduction

In recent years, the impact of the economic crisis has modified the consumption habits and purchasing strategies of immigrants, who declare themselves hypersensitive to prices, as they do not have sufficient resources to stock up on adequate foodstuffs to cover their nutritional needs. The crisis undoubtedly visibly affects immigrants, since the main economic support for their households is the income generated by work, which makes unemployment the most serious problem faced by

conditions and dependence on the welfare system. Precarious employment denotes the higher incidence of poverty among immigrants in a period of crisis. The loss of employment, besides causing economic shortages in households, leads to the loss of mental and physical health due to stress caused by major worries and the absence of basic and indispensable needs (food insecurity), which manifests itself as a constant deterioration of their quality of life and health.

this group, leading to increased inequality in living

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All these facts have forced this group to make cuts in the family budget, which affects them to adopt new strategies to manage the different types of aid granted by the state to the household economy (unemployment subsidies, aid in the form of food), which has been reflected in the culture and eating habits of this immigrant group. The development of these events makes evident the need to know through the present study, how the economic crisis has influenced the easy access to food and the food culture of Ecuadorian immigrants residing in Murcia-Capital or also known as the Huerta de Europa

### **Theoretical Framework Crisis And Food Security**

In the last 100 years, the world economy has suffered three major economic crises that affected Spain. The first occurred in 1929, and one of its effects was the well-known fall in exports and the increase in unemployment due to the recession in neighboring countries, which led to impoverishment, costing the country a civil war at the end of the 1930s. The second economic crisis occurred in the 1970s, a time of important political, economic and social transitions for Spain. The second economic crisis occurred in the seventies, a time of important political, economic and social transitions for Spain (1)

The consequences of the crisis for the immigrant population are similar to those suffered by the native population, with the loss of employment as one of the most significant (2). With the fall in employment, the situation of immigrants becomes more complex since these people do not have family ties in Spain and if they do, they find themselves in the same difficult situation facing the consequences of the crisis, relying only on the public sector aid, unemployment benefits, insertion aid and other social services, which, once terminated, turn them into potential victims of poverty and food insecurity (3) (4).

In this context, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) define food security as the existence of conditions that enable people to have physical and economic access to sufficient nutritious and safe food to satisfy their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life (5).

The definition of food security integrates four dimensions of food consumption: access, availability, biological utilization and stability and

in each country these dimensions can be measured at the national and household levels. These measurements have a continuum ranging from levels below a minimum threshold leading to undernutrition problems to levels above a maximum threshold (excess), leading to overweight problems; at both extremes, there are health problems, low productivity and in many cases death. The problems of malnutrition and food quality and safety are part of the biological utilization component. The concept of vulnerability, promoted by the World Food Program, is implicit in the stability component (6) (7).

Depending on the duration of the cases of food insecurity, they have been defined as chronic and transitory food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity is long-term and persistent, and occurs when people are unable to meet their minimum food needs for a prolonged period, as a result of lack of access to productive or financial resources. Transitory food insecurity is temporary and is short-term and occurs when food production suddenly falls concerning demand, often due to annual variations in national food production, prices and household income, which makes it unpredictable due to the difficulty of programming and planning different types of intervention (8) (9).

The dynamic nature of food security is included when talking about vulnerability to future food insecurity. Vulnerability is defined from the perspective of a direct effect, risk factors and the inability to manage such risks. People may maintain an acceptable level of food security in the present, but may be at risk of food insecurity in the future.

While poverty is undoubtedly a cause of hunger, lack of proper nutrition is, in turn, one of the underlying causes of poverty. All who are hungry are food insecure, but not all who are food insecure are hungry, as there are other causes of food insecurity, including insufficient intake of micronutrients. Deficiencies in micro- or macro-nutrient intakes can lead to malnutrition as an effect of being food insecure or can also be related to non-food factors, such as inadequate childcare practices, inefficient health services or an unhealthy environment (10).

### **Methods for measuring household food insecurity**

In 2002, the International Scientific Symposium "Measurement and Assessment of Food Deprivation and Undernutrition" was held in Rome with the idea of bringing together experts who are



scientifically concerned with methodologies for measuring hunger, to comply with the FAO's willingness to evaluate the goals set by the 1996 World Food Summit. Various methods for measuring food insecurity were discussed, the most important of which were the following:

The methodology proposed by FAO for estimating the prevalence of undernourishment based on the use of food balance sheets 2.

Conduct surveys on household income and expenditures.

Surveys of individual food intake.

Nutritional status based on anthropometric data.

Methods to measure households' perception of food insecurity (also known as "household experience-based scales").

Regarding the fifth method discussed, and based on the definition of food insecurity, the following methods are used to measure household food insecurity, which includes permanent access to an adequate quantity of safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food. A methodology has been developed to evaluate the intra-household experience, including components associated with sufficient quantity of food, adequate food quality, safety and predictability in food acquisition and social acceptability (11)(12).

### **Cambios en el consumo alimentario**

Consumption patterns are structurally conditioned by the economic situation of the families, being those people, whose economic situation is bad, and as such, it is in these where the behavior related to food consumption changes the most (13).

They have changed their consumption habits to cut down on expenses. Some 41.2% of people say they have changed their eating habits to economize; a significant figure, but which is considerably lower than other items such as water, electricity, gas, leisure and clothing.

The household budget survey conducted in 2012, shows that food spending -0.2% is below the average reduction in household spending -3.2%. Between 2006 and 2012, spending fell 18.9% more than the average reduction in total household spending -6.8% and household food spending -4.7% (14).

### **Strategies used in times of crisis**

In Spain, people in vulnerable situations first change the place where they usually buy their food. The main factor that determines in times of crisis

the purchase of food between one establishment and another is the price. In 2012, 62.7% of consumers mainly value a good price to choose the place to make the purchase, which was not the case in 2007 when 34.1% of people did not care about the price of groceries, although this figure increased between 2007 and 2012 dropped to 55.3% in 2013. The number of people who claimed to have changed the way they cook or shop to save increased by 44.4% in 2011 to 63.4% in 2013 (15)(16).

### **Eating Habits**

The food consumption of each population is conditioned by very marked aspects such as the rules or norms that are imposed by society, the inclination for the consumption of a certain food either by taste or texture or because the food is considered and represented as a symbol.

The food of immigrants is subject to changes or adaptations to the host culture according to local food customs that are usually temporary, the availability of products at points of purchase (17).

The variety and quality of food have been increasing, both in terms of food availability in the market and quality (18).

### **Methodology**

The research carried out was qualitative since, although it does not intend to offer generalizable results, it can allow the deepening and broadening of questions in many areas (health intervention, public health, nutrition) that facilitate subsequent interventions that are more effective. Any program can be evaluated from an emic perspective on the premise that the qualitative is never opposed to the quantitative, for the research a set of techniques and instruments very typical of this research paradigm were used, the methodology was based mainly on the use of techniques such as the interview and life stories, approaching the study from a phenomenological perspective. For the collection of information, 20 autobiographical accounts obtained through the application of a semi-structured interview with the individuals were used. These interviews are related to the life histories since the aim of each one was to find out whether the economic crisis has influenced the eating habits and customs of Ecuadorian immigrants living in Murcia.

### **Results**



**Sociodemographic Characteristics**

Of the people contacted for the study, 65% of those interviewed were male and 13% were female. 55% of the informants were between 41 and 50 years of age, 25% between 36 and 40 years of age and the remaining 20% were under 35 years of age, according to INE figures, most of this group is between 16 and 44 years of age.

Sixty percent of those interviewed had an average

of two to three children and most informants stated that their children were born in Murcia, except for 15% who took advantage of the family regrouping plan.

Seventy-five percent of the informants owned residence and work permits, while the remaining 25% had Spanish nationality.

**Table 1. Unemployment benefits and assistance received**

Unemployment benefits and assistance	Number of beneficiaries of the aid	%
Unemployment Benefit (UNEMPLOYMENT)	10	50
Prepara Plan	3	15
Family Assistance	5	25
Other assistance	1	5
None	1	5
Total	20	100

50% of the informants received the contributory benefit also known as “unemployment”, 25% and 15% have benefited from welfare benefits such as family aid and extraordinary aid and the “prepara” plan, which are given to those who have exhausted their unemployment benefit or have not contributed long enough to receive it and are still unemployed, and the remaining 10% is made up of maternity leave (Interview 8), and domestic workers (Interview 2), although 25% of the informants stated that they had at some point requested food aid from Caritas, a Spanish foundation, and immigrant associations.

**Income from unemployment benefits and allowances.**

**Table 2. Financial income from grants**

Quantity €	Number of Informants	%
< 300	1	5
300-400	12	60
500-600	4	20
700-800	2	10
> 900	0	0
0	1	5
Total	20	100

0% had monthly income from unemployment benefits or allowances of between 300 and 400

euros for welfare benefits and extraordinary allowances.

**Food aid**

Concerning this type of assistance, 25% of the informants mentioned having gone to Caritas to request food, driven by need and often motivated by comments from relatives or neighbors.

“Where I went to apply was Caritas because an acquaintance of mine did the procedure, so she told me what I had to do, but from there I have heard that the Red Cross also helps” ... (Interview 18).

“Caritas, because when we couldn't afford it, we went to queue up there” ... (Entrevista 4),

With regard to the facilities or impediments to applying for aid, the informants who were discharged before the first birthday did not encounter any type of difficulty when applying for aid (Interview 14,18), except in some cases in which some difficulties were encountered.

“They asked me for my unemployment card, a water, electricity and telephone bill to prove that we are living in the same town, because if you are from another place they don't give you a receipt” ... (Interview 4)

“They asked me how many of us were in the family, not to be receiving unemployment benefits and a form, and as far as I can remember, I don't think I had anything else” ... (Interview 18)

Some of those interviewed also mentioned having benefited from assistance such as that offered by the Asociación Hispano Ecuatoriana Rumiñahui,



made up of members who provide assistance such as training and legal advice, subsidized programs such as voluntary return for immigrants in vulnerable situations, and one of their programs includes the distribution of food to needy families, subject to registration and compliance with their requirements.

“You go with your ID card and they ask you how many people are in the family, then they fill out a form with all the data and give you the date to come, the only bad thing is that they only give you one time a year” ... (Interview 20)

Regarding the difficulties in applying for this assistance, the interviewees mentioned that it is necessary to apply several months in advance to present the requirements and separate their quota.

“You have to go many months in advance because if you don't, you will run out of places and then it is a problem to be there waiting for hours and hours in a line at the end of the year to see if there is anything left” ... (Interview 20)

As for the opinion on the quality of the food received, most of them agree that it is of good quality, and they also consider that in times of crisis one cannot be demanding in terms of the product received.

“They are good, but when you are in need, the last thing you think about is the quality of what they give you” ... (Interview 13)

“We were given basic foodstuffs that were not of poor quality, but not good either, but need is need and we had to feed our children” ... (Interview 4)

Most of the informants surveyed agreed that the food received met all the characteristics of the FEGA distribution lists, although some people reported having received perishable products more than once, and in some cases vouchers for the purchase of some products in supermarkets.

“They gave us fideo gallo, milk, a liter of oil, more or less two kilos of rice, macaroni, spaghetti, which is what came the most, in addition to the box of milk they gave us cookies, custard and things like that, but once a long time ago... (Interview 4)

“They give us pasta, milk, fried tomato, or sometimes a chicken, some yogurt, cookies, tuna, lentils, some fruits, vegetables, beans, things like that, which is not much, but it helps a little bit” ... (Interview 13)

200-300	9	45
400-500	5	25
>600	1	5
TOTAL	20	100

Forty-five percent of the informants stated that their food budget is between 200 and 300 euros per month, for a family of at least four.

Some of them have as a priority to allocate most of their income to pay for their own housing (mortgage) or rent, in addition to basic services (interview 15), limiting the budget for food, which often makes it impossible to make ends meet with the necessary food (Interview 4). They also consider it essential to cover the nutritional needs of their children first (Interview 8).

In some cases, immigrant families live in the same household with children of adult age, so they consider that the economic contribution of all is necessary when contributing to the food budget.

“We are not going to say that we are starving, but we do not have what we need, the situation is very difficult, and for a change my son is going to live with his girlfriend and the help he was giving to the house is ending” ... (Interview 2)

### Strategies used to get food

En lo referente a las estrategias que utilizan los inmigrantes ecuatorianos entrevistados para conseguir alimentos, cinco informantes consideran que no tienen otra opción que esperar el fin de mes para volver a cobrar las ayudas mientras tanto racionan al máximo el consumo de la despensa reduciendo comidas, porciones y evitando el desperdicio (entrevistas 2, 15, 1, 12,16), incluso muchas de las veces los adultos se saltan comidas para que sus hijos consuman una cantidad adecuada de alimentos y en algunos casos dejan de comprar alimentos nutritivos para los adolescentes, prestando más atención en poder cubrir las deficiencias de los más pequeños del hogar(entrevista 10) .

“Consume food little by little and hope it will last me the whole month before I get paid” ... (Interview 15)

“Many times we adults have to stop eating so that the children can have a little more” ... (Interview 8) Some informants often solve their food deficit by requesting a monthly credit in neighborhood stores, which in some cases are paid with the debtor's work (interview 4), it is also common for any member of the family to request an advance at work to cover this type of need (interview 19).

**Table 3. Food expenses.**

Monthly food expenses (€)	Informants	%
≥ 100	5	25



Similarly, to cover their food deficit, some people turn to the family, in some cases, this help is manifested with frequent invitations to participate in one of the meals that take place every day, and there is also the collaboration of neighbors who provide them with a little food and “leftover” food (interview 4).

“My brother-in-law also gave us a hand, the neighbors also gave us some little things, or sometimes they invited us to eat, also my neighbor sometimes gave us leftover food or sometimes the daughters did not like it, she brought me to the house, also luckily the butcher, the baker and the shopkeeper gave me some things on credit, sometimes I had to work in exchange for what I got when I could not pay, imagine how far we have come, something that makes me get a lump in my throat when I tell you this.....”( Interview 4)

### Food Purchasing Strategies

In 60% of the cases, the person in charge of doing the shopping was the interviewee, either because he/she was unemployed or because he/she had enough time to do so. The remaining 40% preferred to make shopping a family activity (interview 5).

With respect to the frequency of shopping, 50% of the informants do it weekly because they consider it a way to better ration food, since if something is missing, it can be acquired during the week. Also, 25% of the informants prefer to shop every 15 days, because this way they can avoid wastage due to food spoilage (interview 18). Similarly, three informants shop once a month, buying mostly non-perishable food, and alternating this with daily purchases of some products such as fruits and vegetables.

“We do it once a month, what is meats and vegetables we buy weekly, but the priority is to have some money for those expenses that the children have at school” ... (Interview 4).

All the interviewees go to supermarkets in search of non-perishable and packaged foods, while 20% of the informants buy perishable foods such as meats, fruits and vegetables in local markets, while 55% go to street markets and the remaining 25% go to Latin, Moroccan or fruit stores where they can often find typical products of their country.

As for the purchasing strategies used by the interviewees, one of the main determinants for the choice of products in times of crisis was the price.

“I worry about quality because sometimes the same milks that cost fifty cents are water and I have

found that they do not nourish anything, just buying a milk with some quality apart from nourishing you it lasts longer” ... (Interview 13)

### Meal preparation, number of meals per day

Eighty percent of the informants were in charge of the cooking tasks, of which 35% are men and 45% were women, while the remaining 20% are distributed among people who consider this to be an activity in which all members of the family collaborate (interview 14, interview 12). There are also cases in which this responsibility falls directly on the wife or mother of the family (interview 7, interview 16).

Breakfast generally consists of a cereal: a portion of cookies or a portion of bread such as toast or sandwich (interview 15, interview 4) in addition to some baked goods such as croissants, muffins and biscuits (interview 5, interview 19) which are accompanied by a milk drink that can be milk, chocolate or coffee in milk and a milk drink (interview 20, interview 20): milk, chocolate or coffee in milk and in very few of the cases yogurt, in addition to juices, tea and coffee, also, protein source foods such as sausages, eggs and in some of the cases tuna (interview 4), which are generally not consumed by all informants, along with the intake of fruit (Interview 17, interview 4).

The meal generally consists of: soups, a preparation in which the presence of vegetables and some legumes predominates, consumed by 55% of the interviewees as a starter, adapted to the time constraints for its preparation (interview 1, interview 20) and modified with local products, it is still considered an indispensable dish for the growth of children.

The second dish consists of a food source of protein such as red or white meats, beef, chicken and pork are the most consumed among this immigrant group, and are used in culinary preparations such as stews, lentils, meatball broths, grilled, sautéed and boiled meats, accompanied by a portion of white rice, boiled or fried potatoes, and mashed potatoes or pumpkin. They also eat cassava or plantains, as well as a variety of vegetable salads especially for children (interview 9), and most respondents prefer to drink juices and water, and some also include fruit for dessert (interview 7).

The meal of 55% of those interviewed was a two-course meal and the remaining 45% ate a single dish, which could be a soup or a combination dish. The informants mentioned as possible causes of this occurrence the excessive time involved in



preparing a two-course menu (interview 1). Eighty-five percent of those interviewed tend to eat the same menu as at lunchtime, sometimes supplemented with sandwiches, pasta, pizza, soups, salads or potato omelets, accompanied by bread and drinks such as coffee, tea, milk or juices. 15% relate dinnertime to the consumption of something light and not very hearty, so they prefer to eat a source of protein such as chicken, beef or fish accompanied by vegetables and rice.

When eating between meals, which is generally not usual for most informants, they eat light foods such as: toast, crackers, pastries, cheese sandwiches, cold meats and cold cuts, dried fruit, fruit and sometimes chips and sausages accompanied by juice, coffee, tea or a glass of milk.

Most of the informants expressed not consuming food between meals because it is not their habit to have lunch and snacks, generally neither do people who have lost their jobs and spend most of the day at home, since these intakes are associated with work activity, (interview 20, interview 1).

### Variety of food

Seventy percent of those interviewed consider that their diet is not varied, since they tend to eat the same pattern of foods most days, with one of the main causes being the inability to buy a wide variety of products due to their economic limitations, which often makes the menus of these people repetitive (interview 10, interview 5, interview 8). There are also cases in which the informants stated that they do not vary their diets because they are not very skilled in the kitchen and have little interest in learning about new culinary preparations (interview 11). The remaining 30% consider that their diet is varied, although to achieve this they have to alter the size of the portions of each meal (interview 7)

### Food provisioning (food insecurity)

Eighty percent of the informants experienced feeling worried before running out of food, which was due to some situations such as the role played by the interviewees as providers, being responsible for feeding their families.

“Of course, who is not going to worry, at least having children, sometimes when two weeks go by and you see that the food is running out, you get desperate” ... (Interview 1, 19).

“I have always been worried about that, you eat your head off looking for work, at least I always live

for tomorrow, I have seen many people who because of that worry get into depression” ... (Interview 6).

### Adjustments in food quality

Seventy-five percent of those interviewed stopped consuming foods they liked due to lack of economic resources, leaving aside the purchase of “whims”, for the acquisition of basic products (interview 13), there are also those who opted for cheaper brands (Interview 16), there are also those who buy in smaller quantities, thus giving priority to the provision of nutritious food for their children, leaving in second place the food of adults (Interview 4).

The remaining 25% do not present readjustments in the purchase of food, in some cases these people only modified their spending on travel and food consumption in restaurants on weekends (Interview 19).

### Quality limitations, quantity of food consumed and unsatisfied hunger

With respect to the limitations in the quality of food, 70% of those interviewed agreed that due to lack of money or other resources, their diets are monotonous, although in some cases people are happy to have something to eat, even if it is not with a wide variety of products (Interview 8),

“Yes, because with the little I have I have to pay for the basic services to be able to live, so I only buy what I need” ... (Interview 1)

Regarding the amount of food consumed, 65% of the interviewees mentioned that there is no need at the moment to reduce the size of the food portions served at each meal, while 35% have felt the need to do so as a strategy to better manage their food (Interview 13),

“Yes, we adults do, but for the kids there is no way to lower their portion size because they are growing” ... (Interview 12).

“We do, but we try to make sure that the children's portions are normal” ... (Interview 8).

Among the portions considered as normal we have 80 to 100 grams of animal protein, vegetables from 150 to 200 grams, fruits from 120 to 160 grams and 60 to 80 grams of cereals and their derivatives among others.

Seventy-five percent of those interviewed have not found it necessary to suspend or skip meals during the day because they do not have enough food, while the remaining 25% were forced to do so due



to lack of economic resources.

“Yes, because we have to cook only once, because butane is expensive, we cannot cook more” ... (Interview 4).

“Of course, because in my house as we are three adults and we eat more, sometimes there was nothing left for dinner” ... (Interview 2).

90% of the informants reported that they did not feel hungry at any time of the day or night, since they always have something to eat, even in small quantities (Interview 19), and in the remaining 10% of the cases, only the adults were hungry.

“More than one, my wife and I, at one time we even pretended that we were not hungry so that the children could eat because sometimes we did not have enough to have a snack” ... (Interview 19).

In 65% of the informants there was no reduction in the portions served, while in 35% of the cases they did, while the absence of situations of unsatisfied hunger was present in 90%, in addition, no case was identified in which hunger affected any child since in the remaining 10% there were some cases only in adults. Taking into account these results, the perception of the level of food insecurity present in most of the Ecuadorian immigrants who participated in the study is at a moderate level.

## Discussion

The FEGA, in its 2013 activity report, reflects that Spain is the second country after Italy in receiving the largest amount of resources from the European Union to implement this measure, according to this report for the aid plan for Spain no withdrawals of intervention products were established, only food was obtained through direct purchase from the market which caused a significant drop in the quantities distributed. The main charitable entities receiving this food are shelters such as soup kitchens, kindergartens, schools and immigrant centers, among the entities considered as consumer entities. Also, distribution entities such as aid centers for needy families, neighborhood associations and Caritas (19).

The Spanish Caritas Association grants this aid for an indefinite period as long as the requested requirements are met and the person is willing to receive it once a month. The mechanisms for requesting food are through the Social Services of the City Council and in the offices of Caritas Inter Parroquial, among the requirements requested are the DNI or NIE, family book, census registration, bank statements, certificates stating the amount of the contributory benefit and its duration, plus any

proof of payment of basic service to verify the place of residence. (20)

According to the list of food distributed by FEGA, these are mostly perishable and packaged products, including rice, macaroni, spaghetti, noodles, dehydrated vegetable cream, meat broth, canned fried tomato, cookies, soluble cocoa, flour, whole milk, fruit juice and milk, custard, processed cheese, semi-cured mixed cheese, infant cereals and follow-on milk among the main basic foodstuffs of the aid (21).

The low purchasing power and its effects on people in vulnerable situations can also be evidenced in some studies. The decrease from 1.2% to 0.9% of sales in products considered mass consumption in hypermarkets and supermarkets, according to data from the Household Budget Survey conducted by the INE, show that the expenditure allocated for food and consumption of non-alcoholic beverages in Murcia is 15.1% of the total budget allocated for the household, in 2013 was spent on food approximately 4.098 euros per family, about 341.50 euros per month, compared to 362.25 euros of food expenditure in the years prior to the crisis (2008-2009), spending for a family with a maximum of 3 members. Although this difference is not significant, it can be noted that as the economic situation worsens, the cuts made in food are greater (22) (23).

In addition, a study on the Asian economic crisis shows that families first tend to reduce spending on foods considered less economical, such as meat, dairy products, some fruits and vegetables, and when these savings are not enough, they deprive themselves of basic foods, followed by a reduction in the quantity of food consumed (24)(25).

Studies on the food industry in Ecuador show that the daily menu of most Ecuadorians consists of frequent intake of basic ingredients such as rice, oatmeal, wheat derivatives, potatoes, cassava, sugar, butter and oil, which according to the author shows that the consumption of these foods varies according to the inhabitants of each region and their frequency of consumption. For example, in the rural highlands, cereals, pasta and barley flour are more frequently consumed due to the custom of eating soups. In the urban highlands, some products such as beef, fruits, dairy products and milk are added to the diet, and in the rural coast there is a higher consumption of green plantains and fish than in urban areas (26).

Likewise a study of the Food Map of the immigrant population in Madrid reveals that, among the



products consumed in greater quantity in the same way according to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment, indicate that in the first place there are changes in the place where it is purchased, since the main factor that determines the place of acquisition of a food is the price. In the period 2012, 2013 most consumers stated that they have changed the way they cook and compare, valuing first of all “good prices” in order to choose the place where they can buy the cheapest food (27).

In the same way, studies on the nutritional value of the diet of the Ecuadorian migrant population in Andalusia and the diet of the Ecuadorian population in Spain show that the difficult access that immigrants have to the characteristic ingredients of their gastronomy has caused a process of restructuring of the menu according to Spanish food and customs (28).

In the daily menu of Ecuadorian immigrants, the presence of soup plays an important role in their diet, as it is considered a complete and nutritious preparation, it is served as the first course of the menu, even more so in those homes where there are children, since its consumption is related to good nutrition and child development, it is prepared either with vegetables accompanied with meats, tubers and sometimes with pasta or it is also prepared with flour also known as coladas (28).

The consumption of fruits and salads is relatively low in comparison to what is customary in their country of origin. On the other hand, the lack of economic resources and, in some occasions, the lack of time to eat, can lead to a lack of food.

Some studies, such as “Cocinas en migración” (Kitchens in Migration), show that among Latin Americans living in Catalan municipalities, there is a tendency to boil food in addition to frying it. These two techniques, together with the use of the oven and the grill, show an increase in their use after migration. Among other techniques used for cooking, the high frequency with which stews are mentioned stands out, where techniques such as boiling and frying are mentioned for their preparation, in the same way showing that the change in the lifestyle of the receiving society affects the culinary practices of the immigrants, Since a model of food preparation marked by speed and the desire to simplify tasks is imposed, there is a tendency to reduce some culinary techniques based on long preparations such as boiled foods and soups, replacing them with fast cooking techniques such as frying, grilling, griddling, among

others (29).

The results of the measurement of food security should be understood as the union of various indicators that complement each other, highlighting in these processes, the FAO methodology for estimating the prevalence of undernutrition based on food balance data; surveys of household income and expenditure; surveys of individual food intake; analysis of nutritional status based on anthropometric data and methods to measure the perception of food insecurity of households<sup>81</sup> (also called “scale based on household experience”). In general, the first four methods are quite extensive, costly and require a lot of time and resources for their application and analysis. In addition, they do not take into consideration the experience of households in facing food insecurity, and are based on causes or consequences of food insecurity without measuring the phenomenon directly (30).

Other studies, such as those from Trinidad and Tobago, also report the use of a scale based on the Household Food Security Supplementary Module (HFSSM), in which food insecurity was associated with low monthly income, low levels of schooling and ethnic/racial differences (29).

## Conclusions

It was possible to determine through this study that the loss of employment, in addition to causing economic deprivation, diminishes the quality of life of immigrants. Although the consequences of unemployment are multiple and influenced by different factors, it is easy to understand that not all people experience it or are affected in the same way, although most immigrants encounter some difficulties to make ends meet. The lack of work, the fear of eviction, the lack of social benefits and the impoverishment of their food, can become factors of personal and family destabilization of the individual, since the development of their children is associated with work and without it there are no great prospects for the future, contributing to the increase of vulnerability and social inequality that affects this immigrant group.

Because of the strategies established by the immigrants, it can be concluded that due to the need to “ration” they are forced to modify their food purchasing habits, which alters the quantity and quality of the daily intakes made by this group, in the same way the help provided by relatives and neighbors constitutes a complementary strategy to overcome moments of extreme need.

It was found that the diet of this immigrant group



presents characteristics typical of their country of origin in terms of the number of meals eaten, cooking methods and preparation of the daily menu. Our results show that their menu is based on the excessive consumption of carbohydrates, with a significant deficit in the intake of animal proteins, which could lead to the appearance of pathologies such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and a number of infections due to the weakening of the immune system. Likewise, it has been possible to verify that the diet of Ecuadorian immigrants who are in a situation of vulnerability presents an unbalanced diet, due to the lack and excess in the intake of certain nutrients, which together with the consumption of food in the wrong proportions are the main causes of nutritional disorders.

In addition, with the present study we have been able to verify that the scale based on household experience allows us to detect the underlying dimensions of food insecurity, since the categories present in our measurement instrument were present in the study population. On the other hand, this approach has also allowed us to distinguish the potential impact of food insecurity on the health and nutritional status of immigrants, especially those affected by economic crises in the receiving countries. The prediction for the future of Ecuadorian immigrants residing in Murcia is that this situation of vulnerability can only improve with a greater capital contribution to the household if the people currently affected manage to improve their employment situation in a short time, a circumstance that may become difficult due to the economic situation of the country.

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