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## From Mexico to Ireland: 'You have to be very resilient - but this is an amazing country'

Hosanna Boulter

7–8 minutes

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**At first, life in Dublin felt like going backwards for Ana Garmilla - living with others in an overpriced apartment. In Mexico, she was able to live on her own**



Ana Garmilla: 'We wouldn't have had the Help to Buy scheme in Mexico, and that was a game changer for us.' Photograph: Bryan O'Brien

Hosanna Boulter

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Ana Garmilla (32) and her Irish partner were able to buy a house together six weeks ago, something she doesn't believe would have ever been possible in her native [Mexico](#).

"We wouldn't have had the [Help to Buy](#) scheme in Mexico, and that was a game changer for us," she says.

Even when accounting for the difference in price for properties in Ireland and Mexico, Garmilla still thinks that she would have never been able to afford to buy a house back home, as the government there don't offer that kind of help.

“I think the Government [in Ireland] is taking a few steps to invite people to buy houses.”

Garmilla was born and raised in Puebla, a city in central Mexico. She studied Communications Sciences at university then briefly worked for a local newspaper before becoming a civil servant. By the time she was 24 she was the head of communications and citizens' affairs in the Department of Infrastructure for the Mexican state of Puebla.

However, at 27, Garmilla lost her job as “when you work for the government [in Mexico] and a new administration comes in, you might be out, especially if you have a good job”.

At about the same time, Garmilla's father, who she was very close to, died. Her sister spotted a business English course in [Dublin](#) and pushed her to take a career break to study and travel, but Garmilla was very unsure about what to do. Then one day her sister gave her a voucher for a one-way ticket to Dublin. She booked a flight to Dublin for March as she wanted to see the St Patrick's Day parade.

[ ['In Ireland I started missing the sun very soon, but I knew it was the place I wanted to be in'](#)Opens in new window ]

Garmilla landed in Dublin on March 12th, 2020, as Ireland went into lockdown.

“Everything was empty. The airports were empty. There was like three people on the plane. It was very surreal.”



Ana Garmilla: 'I think that Mexican and Irish cultures are very similar. We're very friendly and family-orientated and I like that.' Photograph: Bryan O'Brien

At first, life in Dublin felt like a big step backwards for Garmilla. "I was living with other Mexicans in an overpriced apartment. Back in Mexico I was living in my own apartment. I had a brand-new car."

Living with fellow Mexicans, Garmilla felt that she wasn't improving her English, so she found an Irish family in Blackrock, Co Dublin, looking for an au pair, and moved in with them. She ended up living with and working for two families.

"That's where I learned that an Irish person is a very kind and lovely person. I remember for example, if they met somebody rude, they would say, 'yeah they might be having a bad day', and I would never have thought of it that way. Where I come from, if somebody was rude to you, you'll be pissed off and you won't put yourself in their shoes."

Irish weather took some time to get used to. One day during her first summer in Ireland the father of the family she was working for told her: "It's a great day out there – we can't waste it indoors."

Garmilla was confused by this and thought, "He must be one of those overly positive or deeply religious people, grateful for every single day they're alive," as she didn't think the weather at the time was that remarkable. When she experienced her first Irish winter later that year, she began to understand his perspective a lot better.

“I learned to make the most out of summer. It’s still tough. Not even the weather, but it being dark at 4pm in the afternoon. I can’t get over that.”

I’m trying to make my own community here with work. It’s not easy

During this time, Garmilla met her partner Bryan McQuillan (36). “We met online because it was Covid. We couldn’t even meet each other for a few months because of the restrictions. I was living in Dublin and he was living in Drogheda – at some point he had to come to Dublin for work, and that was how we met.”

She described him thus: “Kind, very friendly, very open. I think that Mexican and Irish cultures are very similar. We’re very friendly and family-orientated and I like that.”

[ [‘Being pregnant here has made me appreciate the good things Ireland has to offer’Opens in new window](#) ]

Garmilla enjoyed her English course and made many friends while doing it. During this time she began to fall in love with life in Ireland.

“I realised that Dublin was a capital with the charm and pace of a village – everyone knows each other here and that wouldn’t be the case back home.”

When her course finished, she decided to try to find a job here.

“I felt like I had to start from scratch. I worked in a pub and in a Volkswagen dealership. They tried to sponsor my visa but it was denied twice.”

At 29, Garmilla decided to move back to Mexico.

“Ireland is a very expensive country to survive in, and I could only work 20 hours a week on my visa.”

But then, the unexpected happened – McQuillan came back to Mexico with her and proposed.

“We got married in Mexico and we didn’t have a party or anything because we just decided to start saving money for the house instead. We signed the papers and went for a nice dinner.”

The couple came back from Mexico, and Garmilla got a job with the Fórsa trade union.

Today the couple live in Drogheda.

“We tried to find a place in Dublin and then I saw that for the same three-bedroom house I would have to pay at least €100,000 more, and then I thought if I do have kids I don’t have anybody or any network here. The only network and family we have is his family, so why put myself under that financial pressure?”

Garmilla is very close to McQuillan's family, and admits she "wouldn't be able to live here if they weren't. They are the only people I can go to if Bryan isn't here."

Though she made great friends on her English course, she says most of them have since moved away.

"I'm trying to make my own community here with work. It's not easy, but I suppose I left everything back home, so missing your friend from here is not as tough as missing friends you've had for your whole life."

When asked whether she would recommend moving to Dublin to her friends back home she said: "I don't think it's for everyone in terms of weather. And I think you have to be very resilient – but it's an amazing country."

*We would like to hear from people who have moved to Ireland in the past 10 years. To get involved, email [newtotheparish@irishtimes.com](mailto:newtotheparish@irishtimes.com) or tweet [@newtotheparish](https://twitter.com/newtotheparish)*

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