

Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents:

Topline Results from Round 7 of the
European Social Survey

ESS Topline
Results Series

Issue

7

Accessing the European Social Survey Data and Documentation

The European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) provides free access to all of its data and documentation. These can be viewed and downloaded from www.europeansocialsurvey.org.

Specific initiatives have been developed to promote access and use of the growing dataset, including EduNet and NESSTAR, both of which are available via the ESS website.

EduNet

The ESS e-learning tool, EduNet, was developed

for use in higher education. It provides hands-on examples and exercises designed to guide users through the research process, from a theoretical problem to the interpretation of statistical results. Ten topics are now available using data from the ESS.

NESSTAR

The ESS Online Analysis package uses NESSTAR - an online data analysis tool. Documentation to support NESSTAR is available from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (www.nesstar.com).

The European Social Survey acts like a telescope for social scientists, allowing them to illuminate the attitudes of the people of Europe. The rigorous cross-national data collected by the ESS, and subsequent detailed analysis by academic scholars, highlights both differences and similarities across European countries, providing a context for single country findings.

This 7th in the series of ESS Topline Results sheds light on one of the topics most frequently analysed by scholars: attitudes towards immigration. Building on the design of the ESS Round 1 module on immigration, this repeat set of questions allows for

direct comparisons between 2002 and 2014 using the same measures. The 2014 module also includes some new concepts as well as detailed questions about specific groups of migrants.

I am certain that the module will attract significant attention both within and beyond academia. I look forward to seeing the many papers, chapters, presentations and press coverage that will stem from this timely work as well as the debate that will likely be stimulated by those outputs.

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Attitudes towards Immigration and their Antecedents

Topline Results from Round 7 of the European Social Survey

Anthony Heath and Lindsay Richards

Introduction

Immigration continues to be one of the most prominent political issues in Europe. Voters in many countries consider immigration to be one of the most pressing challenges facing their country, and 'radical right' political parties who oppose immigration continue to find support in many countries. With high levels of labour migration to many western European countries, as well as continuing pressure to accept refugees and asylum seekers from war zones around the world, this topic is unlikely to lose its significance in the foreseeable future.

In order to gain greater understanding of these issues, Round 7 (2014) of the European Social Survey (ESS) contained a module of questions exploring different aspects of public opinion about immigration. The ESS is the most highly regarded cross-national survey programme in the world, conducting rigorous representative surveys to the highest professional, methodological standards right across Europe. The module therefore provides some of the most authoritative data on support for - or opposition to - immigration across countries. Many of the questions fielded in the most recent round are a repeat of questions asked over one decade ago in the first round of the ESS (2002). This means we can use the ESS to chart trends over time in attitudes, and to compare developments in different European countries.ⁱ

The module of questions asked in this most recent round of the ESS addresses important debates about sources of the public's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, immigration. As well as documenting overall levels of support, or opposition, the module enables us to explore

attitudes towards different sorts of migrants, the criteria for accepting or excluding different sorts of migrants, the extent of contact with members of migrant communities, the perceived costs and benefits of migration, and the main drivers of these attitudes.

Here we provide topline findings on some of these questions, specifically: the overall levels of support, or lack of support, for immigration; the differences between European countries in their attitudes to immigration; the extent to which European publics differentiate between different types of migrant; the perceived costs and benefits of immigration, and the extent of polarisation within European countries. Note that fieldwork for this module was conducted largely before the most recent refugee crisis precipitated by the conflict in Syria. At the time when the module was designed, new refugee arrivals were rather low and therefore it was decided to only include a single item on this topic in the module. For both these reasons, we do not cover attitudes to refugees in this report.

ESS Round 7 data are available for 21 countries: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Nearly all of these countries (with the exception of Estonia and Lithuania) participated in ESS Round 1.ⁱⁱ Over 40,000 face to face interviews were conducted across the 21 countries with questionnaire translation and fieldwork carried out to a rigorous specification provided by the ESS Core Scientific Team.ⁱⁱⁱ

Levels of support for migration

To start with, we begin with a summary measure which allows us to get an overview of levels of support for immigration and how the 21 countries differ in this regard. We report answers to the question:

Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

Respondents gave their answers on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 indicating “a worse place to live” and 10 “a better place to live”. This question was asked, in identical form, both in the first and in the most recent round of the ESS, thus enabling us to chart change over time in support for immigration.^{iv}

Given the increasing levels of immigration in many of these countries since 2002^v, and the increasing political prominence of debates about immigration, we had expected to find that attitudes had become more negative. However, this is not what we found.

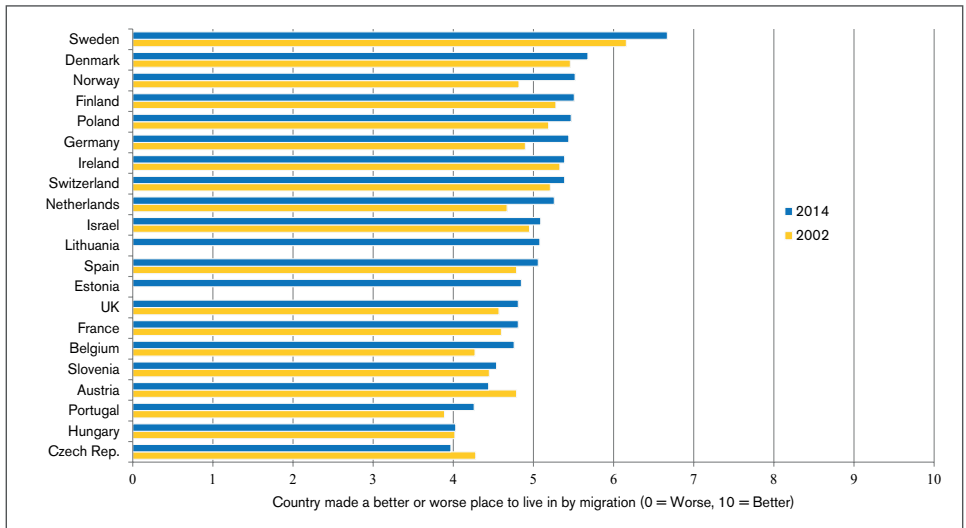
As Figure 1 shows, overall, European publics have become slightly more positive, not negative, about the effect of migration on their societies.^{vi} In 2002, the balance of opinion was slightly negative: thirteen of the countries had a mean score less than 5 (the midpoint of the scale).

But in 2014 four of these countries had moved into positive territory with mean scores just over 5, while only two countries – Austria and the Czech Republic – became less supportive towards immigration.

In most countries the overall changes were rather small and in some cases did not reach statistical significance.^{vii} So the topline finding is one of stability rather than of change in overall attitudes to immigration.

There was also considerable stability over time in the relative positions of the different countries: in both 2002 and 2014 a similar set of countries

Figure 1. Evaluation of whether country is made a better or worse place to live in as a result of migration in 2002 and 2014 (0 = Worse, 10 = Better)



Source: European Social Survey Round 1, 2002 and Round 7, 2014

Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Design weights have been applied for country-level analysis. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

were the most positive – Sweden, Denmark, and Finland – and in both years a similar set were the most negative – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Portugal. Again, in both years a number of countries had middling views – Germany, Netherlands, Spain. France and the UK were also similar in both years in being relatively negative.

Previous researchers have also observed this pattern for the Nordic countries to be more positive towards immigration, and for eastern European countries to be more negative.^{viii} However, there are a number of important exceptions to these generalisations – Poland for example is an eastern European country which appears to be relatively positive about immigration.

The stability in attitudes towards immigration is quite surprising. It may well be that contradictory forces have been at work. On the one hand, the influx of migrants may have been increasing competition for jobs and housing, leading to more negative attitudes. On the other hand, the increasing size of the migrant population means that people are likely to have had increasing contact with migrants and their children. Previous research has found that contact tends to promote more positive attitudes.^{ix}

The overall stability found in Figure 1 may also hide some contradictory trends. For example, while the overall average may have changed little, European publics may have become more polarised over time – some (perhaps those who are in more secure economic positions) may have become more positive, while others (perhaps those in more vulnerable positions) may have become more negative.

Another possibility is that attitudes towards some kinds of migrants may have become more positive while attitudes to other sorts may have become more negative. We will explore these issues in the next section.

Preferred types of migrant

There has been considerable debate in many western countries not only about levels of migration but about the kinds of migrants who come. A particularly contentious issue is whether low-skilled migrants from non-European countries should be restricted in number, or whether migrants with distinct cultural traditions – such as Muslims – should be restricted on the grounds that they may be less likely to assimilate to western values.

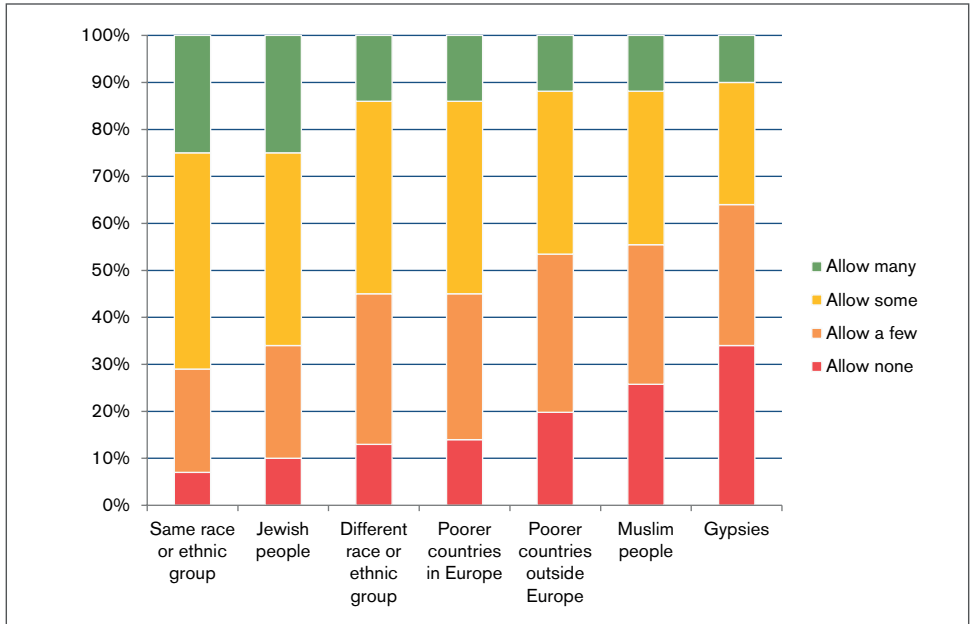
A number of questions were asked both in Round 1 and Round 7 about respondents' views on whether people from different countries or backgrounds should be allowed to come and live in the country.

In ESS Round 1 these questions distinguished between migrants from poorer European and non-European countries and between those of the same race or ethnic group as the majority population, or of a different group. In Round 7, these were supplemented by three new questions distinguishing attitudes towards Jewish people, Muslim people and Gypsies/Roma/Sinti.

For each group of migrants asked about, respondents indicated whether they would 'allow many to come and live here', 'allow some', 'allow a few' or 'allow none'.

Figure 2 show that there is a clear hierarchy of preferred type of migrant. The most preferred were people from the same race or ethnic group as the majority. Jewish people are much more welcome than Muslims, who in turn are more welcome than Roma. This hierarchy of preferred types of migrants was found in all 21 countries, although some countries – such as Israel and Hungary – made sharper distinctions between different sorts of migrant, while other countries – such as Sweden and the UK – made less distinction.

Figure 2: Attitudes towards different sorts of migrant in 2014



Source: European Social Survey Round 7, 2014 (all participating countries)

Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Both design and population weights have been applied. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

Responses concerning Muslims are very similar to those concerning people coming from poorer countries outside Europe. One reason for this may be that, in many countries, Muslim migrants will in fact be coming from poorer non-European countries (from Turkey, Pakistan and Somalia for example).

Looking across the four items asked in both ESS Round 1 and ESS Round 7, we find that the hierarchy of preferred migrants was very similar on both occasions.

Figure 3 shows that there was most support for migrants of the same ethnic group as the majority, and least support for those from poorer countries outside Europe.

As with the question on whether migrants make the country a better or worse place to live, we find only small changes in attitudes between 2002 and 2014. However, the changes were by no means uniform.

There was a modest shift in a positive direction in the case of willingness to allow migrants from the same race or ethnic group (as shown by the increasing length of the green and yellow sections of the bars in Figure 3).

There was little change overall in attitudes to migrants from poorer countries in Europe. And there was a marked shift in a negative direction towards migrants coming from poorer countries

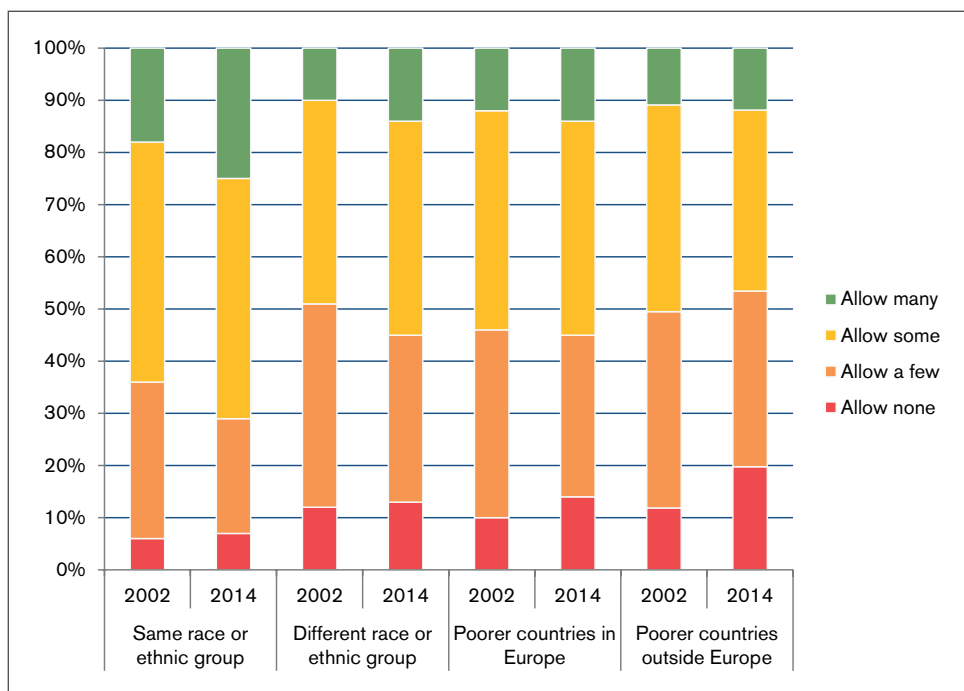
outside Europe. Thus European publics are quite nuanced in their attitudes towards migrants. The overall stability hides contradictory specific trends.

We also find, in the case of all four types of migrant, that attitudes became more polarised between 2002 and 2014. This is most striking in the case of attitudes towards migrants from poorer countries outside Europe: the proportion of European publics who felt that none of these migrants should be allowed to come increased from 11% to 20%.

At the same time, there was an increase (albeit only a small one) in the proportion who felt that many such migrants should be allowed entry (from 11% to 12%). In other words European publics are becoming more divided.

This increase in polarisation did not occur equally in all countries. It was quite marked in many of the western European countries which have seen large increases in migration, such as Austria, Finland, Spain, Sweden and the UK, but it also occurred in some eastern European countries such as Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.

Figure 3: Attitudes towards different sorts of migrant in 2002 and 2014



Source: European Social Survey Round 1, 2002 and Round 7, 2014 (all countries participating in both rounds) Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Both design and population weights have been applied. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

The costs and benefits of migration

There have been considerable debates about the costs and benefits of migration, for example debates about competition for jobs, pressure on services, or concerns about dilution of national cultures. We therefore asked a number of questions about people's perceptions of the effects of migration. We asked respondents the following four questions:

Would you say that people who come to live here generally take jobs away from workers in [country], or generally help to create new jobs?

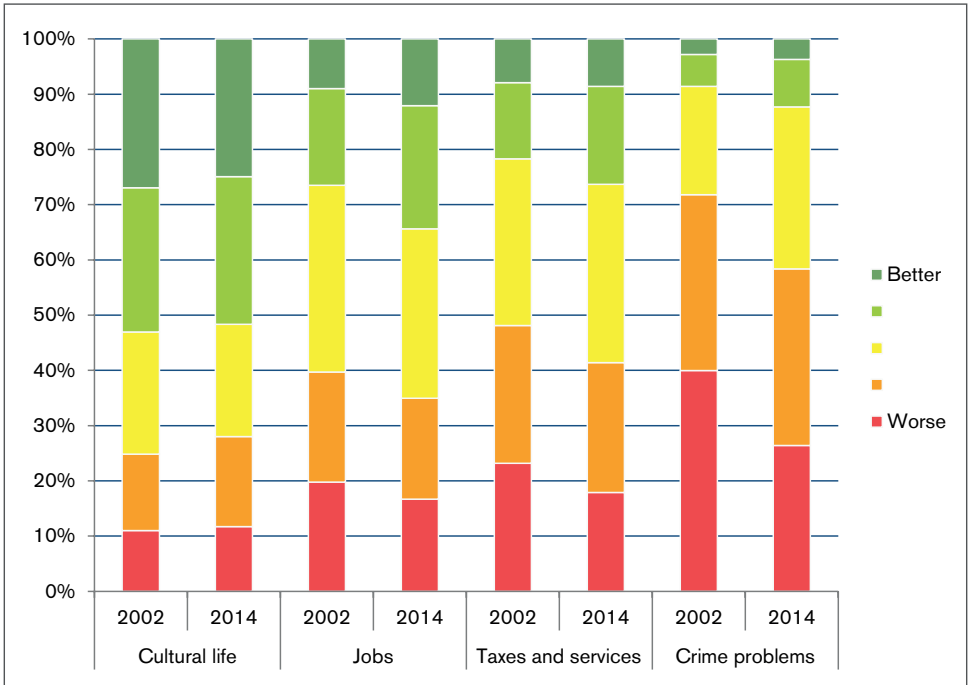
Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

Are [country]'s crime problems made worse or better by people coming to live here from other countries?

Most people who come to live here work and pay taxes. They also use health and welfare services. On balance, do you think people who come here take out more than they put in or put in more than they take out?

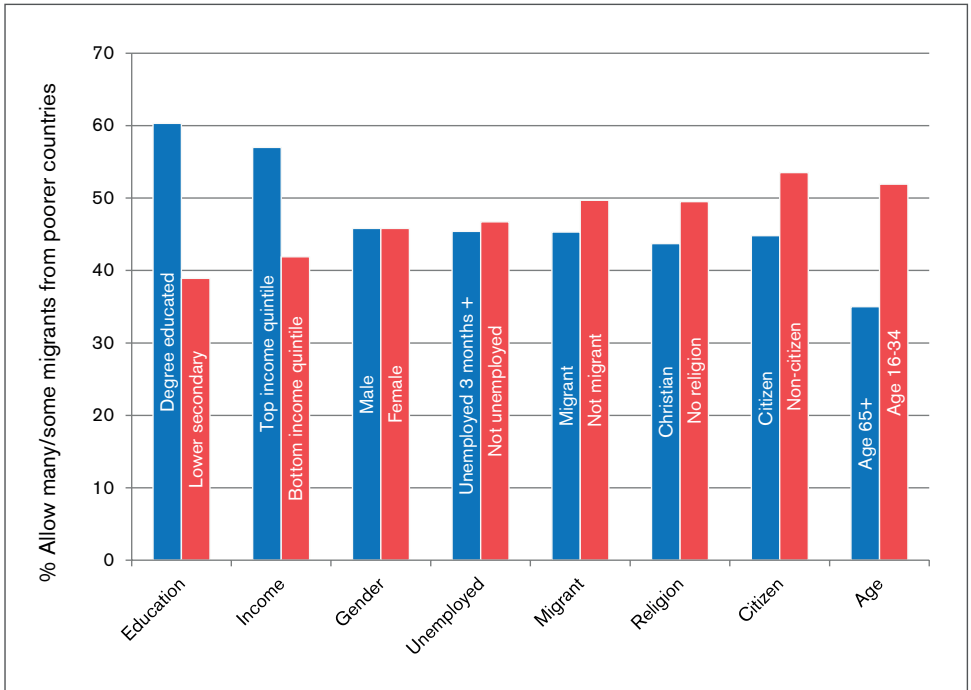
Respondents gave their answers on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 indicating a negative view of the impact of migration and 10 indicating a positive view. These four questions were asked, in identical form, both in the first and in the most recent round of the ESS and so we can examine the trends over time.

Figure 4: Perceptions of the effects of migration on cultural life, jobs, taxes and services, and crime in country in 2002 and 2014



Source: European Social Survey Round 1, 2002 and Round 7, 2014 (all countries participating in both rounds)
 Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Both design and population weights have been applied. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

Figure 5: Socio-demographic differences in willingness to allow many or some migrants from poorer countries outside Europe



Source: European Social Survey Round 7, 2014 (all participating countries)

Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Both design and population weights have been applied. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

Figure 4 shows the pattern of responses and the change over time. For greater ease of reading the table we group responses into five categories, the dark green being the most positive, yellow being neutral, and red being negative.^x Somewhat surprisingly, given the dominance of economic arguments in debates about migration, European publics perceive the most negative impact of migration to be on crime.

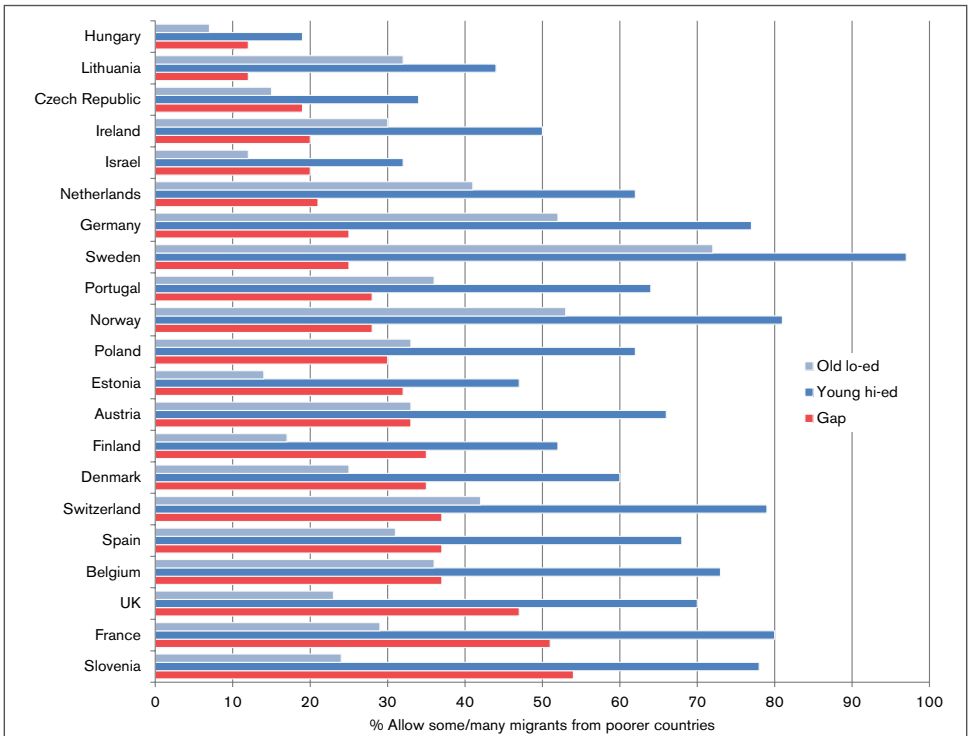
As we can see from Figure 4, perceptions about the impact of migration on crime are heavily weighted towards the negative pole. A clear majority in 2014 (60%) felt that immigration made crime problems worse. Perceptions were also quite negative on taxes and services. People who felt that migrants put in more than they took out (26%) were outnumbered by those who felt migrants take out more (42%).

In contrast, people were less negative about the impact of migrants on jobs and least negative about the cultural impact of migration. This suggests that practical and immediate issues to do with crime and pressure on services are particular concerns of European publics.

However, Figure 4 also shows considerable change over time in a positive direction for three of the four items. It is only in the case of the cultural impact of migration that we see a small shift in a negative direction. So while cultural concerns may not be the most pressing ones for the public, they are concerns which are becoming slightly more prevalent.

The general pattern of concerns about the impacts of migration were fairly similar in the different European countries. In all 21 countries perceptions were most negative about the impact of migration on crime, and least negative about its impact on cultural life. However, in some countries the impact on jobs was perceived to be greater than that on services. This was the case in Poland, Portugal and Slovenia, all of which have high unemployment rates. However, Spain, which has the highest unemployment rate of all, fits into the standard pattern.

Figure 6: Percentage point gaps between the young highly educated and the older less educated in support for allowing migrants from poorer countries outside Europe



Source: European Social Survey Round 7, 2014

Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. Design weights have been applied for country-level analysis. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

Sources of within-country disagreements over migration

European publics are by no means united in their attitudes to immigration, and we have already seen in Figure 3 that internal polarisation may be increasing. Previous research has shown that attitudes to immigration are strongly linked with age, educational level and economic situation.^{xi}

Findings from ESS Round 7 confirm this: Figure 5 compares the attitudes of people with different social characteristics and positions in society. We focus on their attitudes to migration from poorer countries outside Europe, but the pattern is very similar for the attitudes towards other groups.

Figure 5 shows that the greatest degree of polarisation is between the highly educated (graduates) and the less educated (those with lower secondary education or below), where the gap is 21 percentage points. Next comes age, where it is the younger people who are more favourable to immigration than older people. Age is followed by income, where the gap between the top quintile and the bottom quintile is 15 percentage points.^{xii}

Differences between men and women, Christians and people with no religion, and between migrants and non-migrants, are relatively small in comparison. There is however quite a large difference between citizens and non-citizens. This may reflect non-citizens' more cosmopolitan outlook.

It is probable that different mechanisms lie behind the different lines of social division. It is likely (although impossible to be certain) that generational differences lie behind the large age differences – generations who grew up in western countries before the years of mass migration are more negative than those who grew up more recently and for whom diversity has always been part of their experience.

It is probable that different formative experiences, rather than ageing itself, largely account for these age differences. In contrast, the educational and income differences may reflect the extent to which the less-educated and those on lower incomes feel greater levels of cultural and economic threat respectively.

The strength of these social divisions varies considerably between European countries. To explore these divisions we compare the size of the gaps between young highly educated people on the one hand and older less educated people on the other hand in support for migrants from poorer countries outside Europe. Figure 6 shows the cross-national differences.^{xiii}

As we can see, the degree of polarisation varies hugely across countries. The gaps are around 50 percentage points in Britain and France, for example, compared with 20 points or less in Hungary, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. The extent of polarisation tends to be smallest in countries like Hungary which are, as Figure 1 shows, the most negative about immigration.

But some of the countries which are overall quite positive about immigration – such as Denmark and Finland – are also quite divided in socio-economic terms. This suggests that issues of immigration have the potential to be politically divisive in Nordic as well as in western European countries like Britain and France.

Conclusions

In line with previous research from the first wave of the ESS, we find considerable differences between European publics in their attitudes towards immigration. Thus the question asking whether the country was made a better or worse place to live as a result of immigration suggests a rather neutral view overall in 2014, just as in 2002, but with a split largely between northern and western Europe on the one hand and southern and eastern Europe on the other hand, with more negative views in the latter.

While attitudes in some countries have shown small shifts in a more positive direction, the overall pattern in public attitudes is one of stability. However, this overall stability masks some contradictory trends in attitudes towards specific groups of migrant.

For example, European publics have become slightly more favourable towards migrants from the same racial or ethnic group as the majority. But at the same time they have become distinctly less positive about migrants from poorer countries outside Europe (who were also one of the least preferred migrant groups in the first place).

We also see contrasting changes in the perceived costs and benefits of migration. On balance there are negative perceptions of the consequences of migration for crime and public services, although these concerns were allayed somewhat between 2002 and 2014. At the same time, the perceived impact of migration on a country's cultural life has become slightly more negative.

There is also some evidence of increasing polarisation within societies. Particularly striking is the fact that an increased proportion of European publics felt that no migrants should be allowed to come from poorer countries outside Europe, while at the same time there was an increase in the proportion who felt that many such migrants should be allowed entry. We suspect that this polarisation has caught policy-makers by surprise and has contributed to the difficulty of managing the expectations of European publics.

Policy-makers may also be surprised by European publics' emphasis on the negative impact of migration on crime problems and on services. Much of the public debate has focussed on the overall economic impact of migration, but perhaps European publics are more concerned about day-to-day practical consequences of migration that affect their daily lives than about bigger, but perhaps more remote, issues.

Endnotes

ⁱ Details of the data sources are as follows:

ESS Round 1: European Social Survey Round 1 Data (2002). Data file edition 6.4. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.0. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

ⁱⁱ ESS Round 7 fieldwork also took place in Latvia but because of delays in collecting and depositing data, final data were not available for these topline.

ⁱⁱⁱ See www.europeansocialsurvey.org for further information including details of participating countries, sample sizes, questionnaires and response rates. Full details of the questions asked are available in: European Social Survey, (2002). ESS Round 1 Source Questionnaire. London: ESS ERIC Headquarters, Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University London and European Social Survey, (2014). ESS Round 7 Source Questionnaire. London: ESS ERIC Headquarters, Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City, University of London.

^{iv} Estonia and Lithuania did not participate in ESS Round 1: that is why there are no comparable data for those countries.

^v The OECD provides figures on the changing size of the foreign-born populations over the decade from 2003 to 2013 (or for shorter periods) for many of the ESS countries. Only in Israel was there a decline. There were particularly large increases of 20% or more in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK with smaller increases in France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland. See OECD, International Migration Outlook 2015, Statistical Annex, Table B4.

^{vi} Analysis was conducted on the full sample of ESS respondents. ESS design weights have been applied for country-level analysis. Both design and population weights have been applied for analysis pooling data across countries to give all countries weight proportional to population size. Results exclude DK and refusal responses.

^{vii} In Hungary, Ireland, Israel and Slovenia the changes in means scores between ESS Rounds 1 and 7 were not significant at the 5% level.

^{viii} See for example Sides, John and Jack Citrin (2007) European opinion about immigration: the role of identities, interests and information. *British Journal of Political Science* 37: 477-504. Semyonov, Moshe, Rebeca Rajjman and Anastasia Gorodzeisky (2008) Foreigners' impact on European Societies: public views and perceptions in a cross-national comparative perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 5-29.

^{ix} See for example Pettigrew, Thomas F. and Linda R. Tropp (2008) How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? *European Journal of Social Psychology* 38: 922-934. Schlueter, Elmar and Ulrich Wagner (2008) Regional differences matter: examining the dual influence of the regional

Endnotes

size of the immigrant population on derogation of immigrants in Europe. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 153-173.^x To reduce the scale to five categories we combined scores of 0, 1, and 2; 3 and 4; 6 and 7; 8, 9 and 10; and we retained the mid-point – 5 – as a single category.

^{xi} See for example Kunovich, Robert M. (2004) Social structural position and prejudice: an exploration of cross-national differences in regression slopes. *Social Science Research* 33: 20-44. Semyonov, Moshe, Rebeca Rajjman and Anastasia Gorodzeisky (2008) Foreigners' impact on European Societies: public views and perceptions in a cross-national comparative perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 49: 5-29.

^{xii} In a multivariate analysis, which enables us to identify the independent effects of particular socio-demographic characteristics whilst holding other characteristics constant, the effect of income is sharply reduced while the effects of education and age remain largely unchanged. It should be noted that there is high item nonresponse for the household income measure in the ESS (more than 20% in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Spain).

^{xiii} To construct the categories for young highly-educated and older lower-educated we use the same definitions as in Figure 5, that is, the young are defined as those aged 34 or less and the old as those aged 65 and over. Highly educated are defined as graduates and less educated as those with secondary education or less. The dependent variable, as in Figure 5, is the percentage willing to allow many or some migrants to come from poorer countries outside Europe. We should note that in some countries, such as Slovenia, the number of young highly-educated respondents in the sample will be quite small and the confidence intervals will accordingly be quite large. One should therefore be cautious in drawing conclusions about individual countries.

About the ESS

The European Social Survey is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) that provides freely available cross-national data about public attitudes and behaviour over time.

ESS is an academically-driven survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2001. Its dataset contains the results of nearly 350,000 completed interviews conducted every two years with newly selected, cross-sectional samples. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations.

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- Economic morality
- The organisation of the life-course

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Members:

Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, UK.

Observers:

Norway, Switzerland.

Other Participants:

Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Latvia and Spain.

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The ESS ERIC Headquarters, where its Director (Rory Fitzgerald) is based, are located at City, University of London.

The ESS ERIC Core Scientific Team includes GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Germany); Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium); NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Norway); SCP - The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Netherlands); Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain); University of Ljubljana (Slovenia).

The National Coordinators' (NC) Forum involves ESS NCs from all participating countries.

