



## Excerpts from “Transatlantic Trends: Immigration 2008”<sup>1</sup>

By The German Marshall Fund of the United States

[References to the UK in bold].

### Key Findings

*Crime rates:* Fifty-two percent of Europeans agree that immigration will increase crime in their society; 47% of Americans agreed.

*Economic concerns:* **Strong majorities in the United States and the United Kingdom believed that immigration will increase tax rates**, and over 50% in each country thought that immigrants take jobs away from natives.

*Temporary vs. permanent labour programs:* Sixty-four percent in Europe and 62% in the United States favoured permanent settlement over temporary migration schemes for legal immigrants.

### Section One - *Transatlantic Perceptions of Immigration*

*Immigration is “more of a problem” for all but the French and the Dutch*

The average European response was similar to U.S. opinion on whether immigration is “more of a problem” or “more of an opportunity,” with 47% in Europe and 50% in the United States saying it is “more of a problem.” However, the European average masked differing views among European countries on this issue. **The United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Poland all had majorities or pluralities defining immigration as “more of a problem,”** while pluralities in both France and the Netherlands said that it is “more of an opportunity.”

Chart 1

Do you see immigration as...

	...more of a problem?	...less of a problem?
FRANCE	35%	46%
NETHERLANDS	38%	42%
POLAND	41%	32%
EUROPEAN AVERAGE	47%	35%
ITALY	47%	30%
GERMANY	49%	38%
UNITED STATES	50%	33%
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>24%</b>

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.gmfus.org/trends/immigration/doc/TTI\\_2008\\_Final.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/trends/immigration/doc/TTI_2008_Final.pdf)

*Diverging opinions about the legal status of migrant populations across countries*

Respondents in all countries were asked whether they thought that the majority of the immigrants in their country are there legally or illegally. A plurality of Americans (48%) believed that most immigrants in their country are there illegally. In fact, illegal immigrants number about 11 to 12 million people or around one-third of the 39 million-strong U.S. immigrant population. Unlike in the United States, estimates of illegal immigrant numbers in Europe are generally imprecise or unreliable. Nevertheless, Europeans voiced strong feelings about the composition of their immigrant populations: 68% of Italians and 53% of Poles believed that most immigrants are in their countries illegally, while 77% of Germans, 60% of French, 68% of Dutch, and a **plurality of Britons (46%), thought that most immigrants are in their respective countries legally.**

*The British continue to be the most sceptical of immigration in Europe*

**The British public is anxious about immigration: 62% of British respondents regarded immigration as more of a problem than an opportunity. This is by far the highest level in Europe. Other data sources confirm this trend, which can be traced back to the latter half of the 1990s. In the 2008 Eurobarometer survey, 35% of British respondents (against an EU-27 average of 11%) named immigration as one of the biggest problems in their country. Net immigration to the United Kingdom has risen dramatically over the last decade. Several factors have contributed to unprecedented immigration levels: sustained economic growth, historically low unemployment rates, large increases in asylum applications during the 1990s, growing numbers of international students, increasing numbers of family reunification cases, and labour migration since the country opened to workers from EU accession countries in 2004. The foreign-born population in the United Kingdom now stands at over 10%, and the British government has adopted several new immigration policies, including a reform of the nationality law, reinforced border controls, and the introduction of a points-based immigration system.**

**COUNTRY PROFILE: UNITED KINGDOM**

**Immigrant population in the United Kingdom 6,116,400**

**Immigrant share of overall population 10.1%**

**Source: OECD International Migration Outlook 2008, data for 2006**

*Economic concerns are strongest in the United States and the United Kingdom*

**Respondents from the United States and the United Kingdom diverged from their counterparts in continental Europe in their concern for the economic effects of immigration. A strong majority (65%) of both Americans and Britons believed that immigration will lead to higher taxes as a result of increased demand for social services by immigrants, as compared to the continental European average of 50%. Economic concerns in the United States and the United Kingdom were not only linked to tax issues; 51% of Americans and 52% of Britons thought that immigrants are currently taking jobs away from native-born workers. These majorities starkly contrast with the continental European average of 34%. (See Chart 7) Also, the United States (56%) and the United Kingdom (51%) were the only countries with majorities against “encouraging immigration for employment purposes” in the face of baby boomers retiring (U.S.) or an aging society (U.K.). All other European countries were in favour of immigration to solve potential shortages in the work force.**

Chart 7

Respondents agreeing that immigrants take jobs away from native-born workers

FRANCE	24%
ITALY	27%
NETHERLANDS	27%
GERMANY	28%
EUROPEAN AVERAGE	34%
POLAND	47%
UNITED STATES	51%
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>52%</b>

## Section Two – Views of immigration policies

### *Immigration sways votes*

When asked whether political parties' agendas on immigration would influence their vote in the next election, Europeans (50%) and Americans (56%) answered "yes."

**In the United Kingdom, immigration seemed to have particular political salience, with 61% stating that it would influence their vote "a little" or even "a lot."** Of the surveyed countries, respondents in Poland attached the least amount of electoral importance to immigration.

### *Temporary labour schemes are not supported in any country*

While policymakers are increasingly proposing policies to admit workers on a temporary basis, support for these policies among the public was not found in this survey. Only 26% in Europe and 27% in the United States thought that legal immigrants should be admitted temporarily and then be required to return to their country of origin. In fact, 64% in Europe and 62% in the United States favoured giving legal immigrants the opportunity to stay permanently.

Chart 9

Respondents saying that legal immigrants should be given the opportunity to stay permanently instead of being admitted only temporarily

POLAND	52%
NETHERLANDS	56%
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>57%</b>
UNITED STATES	62%
EUROPEAN AVERAGE	64%
GERMANY	66%
ITALY	71%
FRANCE	72%

### *The United Kingdom and the Netherlands are sceptical of EU migration management*

Some common immigration policies, such as asylum regulation, already exist at the EU level, but national governments continue to have jurisdiction over most migration-related issues. The French, German, and Italian publics were ready to cede sovereignty to the European Union to formulate common immigration policies (58%, 62%, and 68%, respectively). **By contrast, only 28% of Britons would like to see the European Union set immigration policy.** The Netherlands and Poland were split on the issue, with 47% and 40%, respectively, leaning toward EU governance on immigration policy. (See Chart 10)

### **Section Five – Conclusion**

*Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* explores public opinion on a host of migration-related issues, but it also acted as a modest opinion experiment in and of itself. The survey also gauged how opinion about immigration would change after respondents had been asked about the issue over the course of their interview: some respondents were asked to define immigration as “more of a problem” or “more of an opportunity” at the beginning of the survey; some were asked the same question at the end; a third group was asked the question twice—once at the beginning and once at the end.

The result is a moderate shift toward defining immigration as “more of an opportunity” by the end of the survey. On average, the percentage of people saying that immigration was “more of an opportunity” at the end of the survey was seven percentage points higher than when they were asked at the beginning. The changes were most striking in the Netherlands, where the “opportunity” responses rose 11 percentage points and in Germany, where the figure rose 14 percentage points (for a total of 52%). The experience of talking about immigration issues during the survey interview therefore had an affect on respondents’ opinions.

Overall, Americans and Europeans agreed on many topics—they anticipated cultural improvements with increased migration flows, and they did not associate immigration with terrorism. Respondents in all countries were in favour of permanent, not temporary, migration programs for newcomers, and people on both sides of the Atlantic wanted their governments to act to stem illegal immigration.

Transatlantic and cross-country differences do emerge, however, especially in the types of concerns associated with ongoing migration. With the exception of the French, continental Europeans were worried about the effect that immigrants will have on crime levels, **whereas Americans and Britons expressed tangible concerns about their labour markets and tax schedules.**

Questions about what makes someone American, British, French, German, Dutch, Italian, or Polish revealed the complex nature of national identity issues. Respondents in all countries believed that knowing the national language and respecting political institutions and laws are important to embody a national identity, but they had differing views on how important birth, citizenship status, and “national feeling” are.

Several factors were seen to affect perception of immigration on both sides of the Atlantic: education, age, and political preference were all powerful predictors of opinion toward immigrants and immigration policy. Another important factor was contact with immigrants in personal and professional environments. For example, respondents claiming to have a friend or colleague who has come to their country to live permanently were less sceptical of Muslim culture in relation to their own.

Against the backdrop of changing demographic and financial landscapes, policymakers in both Europe and the United States will continue to grapple with immigration issues in the years to come. *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* shows, however, that publics in the countries surveyed do not have clear conceptions of migration as either a “problem” or an “opportunity.” Instead, scepticism about migration’s effects is mixed with optimism, and policy preferences on issues such as admittance criteria, illegal immigration, temporary worker programs, and integration policy, are interrelated and complex. Going forward, policymakers should look to the nuanced attitudes of their constituents as they formulate and modify national immigration and integration policies.