

How the World Views Migration

**Forthcoming IOM report based on data from the
Gallup World Poll**

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International Organization for Migration (IOM)

New Global Survey of Public Perceptions of Migration

IOM's forthcoming report – *How the World Views Migration* – provides a rare insight into public attitudes toward migration around the world. Drawing on data from the Gallup World Poll, the report details results from surveys conducted in more than 140 countries between 2012 and 2014.

The **Gallup World Poll** is the largest globally comparable data set in the world, featuring data from surveys in more than 160 countries that are home to more than 99% of the world's population. The scope of Gallup's World Poll uniquely positions it to get a truly global perspective on key issues that will continue to shape the world for years to come – including migration.

"How the World Views Migration" is based on interviews with 183,772 adults who were asked two questions about immigration: 1) *In your view, should immigration in this country be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?* and 2) *Do you think immigrants mostly take jobs that citizens in this country do not want (e.g. low-paying or not prestigious jobs) or mostly take jobs that citizens in this country want?* This summary focuses on initial findings of the study related to the first question.

Initial Findings

1. More of the world is in favour of migration than against it

- Worldwide, people are generally more likely to want immigration levels in their countries to either stay at their present levels (21.8%) or to be increased (21.3%), rather than to see immigration levels decrease (34.5%).
- Slightly more than one in five adults surveyed do not express an opinion on immigration levels, possibly reflecting that immigration is not seen as a significant issue in their country. These people are generally less educated, older, female, and live in rural areas. However, awareness varies from region to region, and from country to country.

In your view, should immigration in this country be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?							
Opinion on immigration levels	World ¹	Europe	Africa	Northern America	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia	Oceania
Present level	21.8%	30.2%	21.3%	34.2%	29.8%	17.7%	41.3%

¹ Total group results are weighted by population size.

Increased	21.3%	7.5%	26.0%	22.8%	18.5%	23.5%	28.0%
Decreased	34.5%	52.1%	40.3%	39.3%	39.1%	28.7%	25.5%
Don't know/Refused	22.4%	10.1%	12.4%	3.7%	12.7%	30.1%	5.2%

2. In every major region of the world, except Europe, people are more likely to want immigration levels in their countries to either stay at their present level or to increase, rather than to see immigration levels decrease

- People in **Europe** are the most negative toward immigration, with the majority (52.1%) saying immigration levels should be decreased. Yet in **Northern America**, which like Europe is also a major receiving region, the majority would like to see the status quo maintained (34.2%) or to see levels increase (22.8%).

3. Within Europe and other regions there are marked differences in attitudes between countries

- The majority of adults in nearly all Northern European countries (such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland) would like to see levels of immigration stay the same or increase. The **United Kingdom** is the sole exception, with the majority of people supporting decreased immigration.
- In contrast, residents in much of the **Mediterranean region**, which is an entry point to Europe for many migrants, would like to see immigration levels decreased. In fact, **adults in Greece are the most likely in the world to want immigration levels decreased**, with 84% saying this. This sentiment is shared by 56% in Spain, 67% in Italy, and 76% in Malta. In France, about half of residents (45%) would like to see immigration levels decrease, and the same number would like to see levels stay the same or increase.
- Residents in **Latin America and the Caribbean** generally want immigration levels to stay the same or increase, with some exceptions such as Costa Rica and Ecuador.
- **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries** with the highest percentage of temporary migrant workers in their populations are very positive toward immigration. Relatively small percentages of people want to see immigration levels decrease, and a high percentage want to see levels increase or stay the same. Again, there are differences by country; adults in **Kuwait** and **Bahrain** are much more negative to immigration.

In your view, should immigration in this country be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?

	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	Qatar	Kuwait	Bahrain
Present level	36.0%	49.3%	26.0%	32.9%	28.9%

Increased	31.5%	20.9%	46.9%	22.4%	13.4%
Decreased	23.5%	12.8%	16.0%	37.2%	50.3%
Don't know/Refused	8.9%	17.1%	11.1%	7.4%	7.4%
Note: Interviews in GCC countries were conducted with nationals and Arab expats.					

4. Attitudes toward migration vary by experience with migration

- **In countries with the highest percentages of migrants in their population, people are more likely to have an opinion about migration**, but not necessarily a negative one. Indeed in the Gulf Cooperation Council States where migrants can account in some countries for more than half of the population, as noted above, people are more likely to be in favour of immigration.
- **In the top 10 migration destination countries, opinions are divided.** Nearly half of adults (46.8%) believe that immigration levels should increase or stay the same, and about as many (47.5%) believe that it should decrease. Adults from top 10 destination countries are highly likely to have an opinion on the matter, with only 5.7% saying they don't know or refuse to answer the question.
- **Adults in countries with recent large increases in immigration levels are less likely to want to see immigration levels decrease.** People in these countries are more likely to be leaning toward increasing levels. The percentage in this group who don't have an opinion is quite large – 33.8% – so it will be essential to track whether opinions shift toward the negative or positive.
- **Adults in the top 10 origin countries** are less likely to have an opinion about immigration to their countries (30.3%), but at the same time, 30% want to see a decrease.

Should immigration in this country be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?					
Opinion on immigration levels	WORLD	G20	Top 10 origin countries ²	Top 10 destination countries ³	14 countries with large increases ⁴
Present level	21.8%	22%	15.8%	31.7%	20.1%
Increased	21.3%	21.4%	23.8%	15.1%	25.1%

² Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, United Kingdom

³ Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States

⁴ Angola, Chile, China, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey

Decreased	34.5%	31.4%	30.2%	47.5%	21.0%
Don't know/Refused	22.4%	25.2%	30.3%	5.7%	33.8%

5. People's economic perceptions may be the strongest predictor of their attitudes about immigration

- **People's attitudes toward immigration are related to their perceptions of their country's economic conditions.** Adults who believe economic conditions in their country are "fair" or "poor" are almost twice as likely to say immigration levels should decrease as those who say conditions are "excellent" or "good." Similarly, those who say conditions are getting worse, are nearly twice as likely to favour decreased immigration than those who say conditions are getting better (48.0% vs. 25.3%).

Opinion on immigration levels	Economic conditions in this country today		Are economic conditions in country getting better or worse?		
	Excellent/good	Fair/poor	Better	The same	Worse
PRESENT LEVEL	24.6%	21.2%	23.6%	21.3%	21.8%
INCREASE	26.5%	20.2%	26.5%	22.6%	16.9%
DECREASE	24.8%	41.8%	25.3%	40.3%	48.0%
DK/RF	24.1%	16.8%	24.5%	15.8%	13.4%

- In nearly all global regions, people who see conditions as "excellent or good" are more likely to have a positive outlook on migration than those who see it as "fair or poor." These gaps are quite large in several countries, including major economies such as **France** (46% vs. 29%), **Spain** (56% vs. 29%), **Canada** (41% vs. 21%) and **Japan** (17% vs. 10%).
- The exception to this is **Africa**, where attitudes toward migration are not much different among the "fair/poor" and "excellent/good" groups. In addition to Africa, in a few countries around the world there is no or very little difference in attitudes to immigration based on state of country economy, such as South Korea, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Philippines, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, Malta, Belgium and Venezuela.

6. Potential "change leaders" exist in every region and every country.

There are people in every region and every country who are more open to immigration in their countries, and who have the potential to become as "change leaders."

- **Business owners** – In Western Europe, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Eastern Asia, and Australia/New Zealand business owners are more positive about immigration levels

than non-owners. This includes G20 members such as China and South Africa. Further, this holds true regardless of the size of the business.

- **Young people** – Perhaps reflecting the increased globalization that has taken place in the past few decades, younger people (those younger than age 44) are more aware of immigration and they are more likely to favour increasing immigration levels. About one in four younger people (24%) favour increasing immigration levels, compared with 17% of those who are aged 65 and older.
 - **This “youth effect” exists in most receiving regions and countries.** The big exception is **Russia**. Young Russians are as negative about immigration levels in their country as older Russians are.
- **Educated people** – Adults with a college degree are more likely than those with less education to want to see immigration kept at its present level or increased. They are also more likely to have an opinion on the matter.

While “change leaders” are present in every country and region, there are also those who are more likely to resist immigration.

- **The unemployed** – Compared with others in the workforce, those who are not working, but actively looking for work and able to begin work, are considerably more likely to want immigration decreased (40.5% of the unemployed vs. 33.4% of those not unemployed).

Opinion on immigration levels	Employment status	
	Not unemployed	Unemployed
PRESENT LEVEL	22.8%	22.0%
INCREASE	22.1%	22.8%
DECREASE	33.4%	40.5%
DK/RF	21.7%	14.8%

Concluding Remarks

This study presents for the first time some preliminary information about what people worldwide think about migration. Contrary to the negative perceptions of migration often portrayed in the media in certain regions of the world, our findings suggest that most people around the world do not wish to see a decrease in immigration to their countries.

Countries that receive large inflows of immigrants tend to be split – with about half saying they would like levels to decrease and half saying they favour levels remaining the same or increasing. However, at the same time, people in receiving countries are more negative than other groups – like top origin countries and countries seeing recent large changes in immigration numbers. Economic conditions and prospects in a country are strong predictors of

opinions on immigration levels. Finally, perspectives on immigration vary by who is asked – business owners, young people and those who are more educated are more likely to favour higher levels of immigration.

However, the study also shows that attitudes to migration in certain countries, especially those in southern Europe can be very negative. Negative public perceptions of migration restrict the ability of policy-makers to manage migration effectively. There is a risk that migration policies in such countries will be increasingly shaped by fears and misconceptions rather than evidence. If we are to combat the worrying rise in discrimination against migrants and the general public's fears about migration, we need to continue to monitor on a regular basis public perceptions of migration. We need to understand better in which countries, and which sectors of society, fears about migration are greatest. This type of information is essential for policy-makers and practitioners who seek to influence public opinion. Such data can also contribute to the design of more effective information campaigns which seek to combat negative public perceptions of migration. Given the limited funds available to implement such campaigns, it is important that efforts to influence public attitudes are targeted at the right groups in society.

This study demonstrates the Gallup World Poll's potential to become a regular global barometer of public attitudes to migration. Currently, Gallup asks few questions about public perceptions of migration, but there is considerable scope to add further questions to the World Poll in the future.