

# More Eastern European immigration makes Britons happier with migrants, study shows

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UK citizens are more negative about immigration than any other Western European country except Greece, new research shows. But the more East Europeans who settle here, the more positive we become about it.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in London heard today [Wednesday 3 April 2013] that when asked about the economic and cultural impact of [immigrants](#) overall, UK citizens were the second most negative out of 15 [countries](#).

Anne-Marie Jeannet, of the University of Oxford, told the conference that she had examined responses by 95,685 people in 15 West European countries (including Greece) to the European Social Survey from 2002 to 2010.

When asked to rate the effect of immigration on their economy, on a scale of 0 (bad) to 10 (good), the average score in the UK was 4.7, which was lower than 13 countries – the highest was Luxembourg at 6.3. The only lower score was Greece at 3.8.

However, by examining the changes over time Ms Jeannet found that in the UK, as in every other country studied, the more Eastern Europeans that came over, the higher the score given by native inhabitants for their opinions on immigration as a whole.

She found that as the number of [migrants](#) from Eastern Europe in

Britain doubled, so the rating [Britons](#) gave for the economic benefits of immigration rose by 0.29 points (around six per cent), and for cultural benefits by 0.09 points. However, because other countries scores rose too, the UK still remained the second most negative of the 15 countries. These findings stand even when taking into account factors such as [economic conditions](#) and other immigration trends.

Ms Jeannet, of St Cross College, also found that women in the UK saw migrants as less beneficial for the economy than men, scoring an average of 4.3 (12%) lower.

Conservative voters had an average score of 4.4, 10% lower than those who voted for the Labour Party (with a score of 4.9) in assessing the economic benefits of migrants. In assessing the cultural benefits of immigration, Conservative voters scored 4.6, 15% lower than the Labour voter score of 5.4. Liberal Democrats voters had an average score of 5.3 for their opinion of the economic benefits of immigration and 5.9 for cultural benefits.

People in London had the highest score, 6.0, for their opinion on both the economic and cultural impacts of immigration, 26% higher than the lowest score of 4.4 for those in the north east.

University-educated respondents rated the [economic benefits](#) of immigration with an average score of 5.3, which was 24% higher than those without degrees or A levels, with a score of 4.0.

The 15 West European countries studied were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and UK. The eight East European countries the migrants came from were: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Looking at the European results overall, Ms Jeannet said: "Having a greater proportion of migrants from the eight East European countries is associated with people having more positive views about how immigration as a whole affects their nation's economy and culture.

"Although the enlargement was often portrayed in the media as a public outrage, the results of this study tell us the opposite. There is no evidence that increases in migration from the eight East European countries explain negative sentiments about immigration in Western Europe. This implies that policy-makers should not justify restrictive immigration policies with the concern that increasing immigration causes a negative public reaction.

"The results of this study have implications for European societies. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the results show a picture of tolerance in Europe, rather than intolerance as levels of immigration rise. This could be due to the fact that when a greater number of East European countries migrants enter the country there is an increased chance of inter-group contact and this improves the way that natives perceive immigration.

"It is unclear whether these findings are generalizable to other migrant populations. It might be that migrants from East European countries are not perceived as 'different' enough in Western European societies to increase resistance to immigration.

"This may be because Central and Eastern Europeans are not physically dissimilar to the natives in Western Europe. Furthermore, they share a certain general European norms and values. Given the similar shared characteristics, the findings of this study may not be applicable to migrant groups with greater cultural differences."

Provided by British Sociological Association

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