

ILLEGAL MIGRATION AS A RISK FACTOR AND POTENTIAL THREAT TO BULGARIAN NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract. The issue of illegal migration has escalated into a critical concern for numerous nations, including Bulgaria. This article examines the consequences of illegal migration on Bulgaria's national security, analyzing current data, policy measures, and socio-economic effects. The discussion highlights the diverse risks and threats associated with illegal migration and emphasizes the need for well-rounded strategies that address both security needs and humanitarian responsibilities.

Illegal migration poses substantial risks to Bulgaria's national security, affecting border integrity, economic stability, social cohesion, and international relations. A balanced approach that combines robust security measures with humanitarian responsibilities and international cooperation is essential for tackling these challenges. By implementing comprehensive strategies, Bulgaria can mitigate the threats posed by illegal migration while fulfilling its ethical and legal obligations.

Keywords: migration flow; threat; national security; measures; prevention

Introduction

Illegal migration presents significant security challenges, especially for nations located along major migration routes. Situated at the south-eastern frontier of the European Union (EU), Bulgaria acts as a vital transit point for migrants from regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia who are attempting to reach Western Europe. This article investigates how illegal migration endangers Bulgarian national security, focusing on border protection, economic consequences, social harmony, and international diplomacy.

Bulgaria's strategic position makes it a crucial entry point for migrants aiming to penetrate the EU. Over the past ten years, Bulgaria has experienced varying waves of illegal migration, with notable surges during global crises like the Syrian civil war and instability in Afghanistan. Statistics from the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior show a notable rise in the number of illegal migrants apprehended at the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

The analysis of the concepts of “security” and “national security” reflects their general essence – the state of the country in which the development of the individual, society and the state is ensured, and the protection of national interests from internal and external threats, but the concept of national security reflects -exactly and essentially the essence of the phenomenon under consideration.

Security should be understood as a set of conditions and factors that allow to respond effectively to the emergence of vital internal and external threats to the individual, society and the state, which ensures their state of protection from negative impact. New types of security are being in the process of identification against emerging threats to the country as well as to the entire region.

National security should be understood as the main direction of the state’s activity, ensuring the protection of the vital interests of the individual, society and the state, as well as the national values and way of life from a wide range of external and internal threats, different in nature, in which reflects its essence and social purpose.

It can be considered that national security is an indicator of the state of society and the state, characterizing their ability to withstand the impact of destructive factors and adapt to changing conditions. Currently, there is an extremely complex range of types of national security, and in this connection, in order to systematize and analyze, the threats that have an impact on national security – economic, social, cultural, health, and others – have been studied.

Border protection and control

Europe is a primary destination for migrants seeking asylum and better economic prospects, leading to significant flows of illegal migration. Bulgaria, located at a key crossroads between Europe and Asia, is a major entry point for migrants from conflict zones and unstable regions.

Illegal migration significantly impacts border protection. The Bulgarian authorities have invested in physical barriers, surveillance systems, and increased border patrols. Despite these efforts, the borders remain susceptible to exploitation by smugglers and human traffickers. The challenge of effectively securing extensive border areas is compounded by limited resources and the need for enhanced international cooperation.

European countries have implemented various strategies to combat illegal migration, including physical barriers, advanced surveillance technologies, and increased border patrols. Bulgaria has adopted similar measures, such as building a border fence along the Turkish border and deploying additional security forces. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these strategies is often hindered by limited resources and the evolving tactics of smugglers.

Technology plays a vital role in modern border management. European nations increasingly use technologies like drones, thermal imaging cameras, and automated border control systems to enhance their surveillance and detection capabilities.

Bulgaria has incorporated some of these technologies into its border security measures to improve monitoring and response. Scientific analysis shows that while these technologies enhance security, they also raise issues related to privacy and civil liberties.

Comprehensive border security measures may include the use of integrated surveillance technologies and improvement of the physical barriers and infrastructure. The construction and robust physical barriers along with increase of the secure measures at the high risk border areas may provide additional tool for handling illegal migration protection and also may serve as additional illegal migration incidents.

Social and economic impact and consequences

The economic effects of illegal migration are complex. On one side, the influx of undocumented migrants can strain public services such as healthcare, education, and social support. Conversely, illegal migration can fuel the informal economy, with migrants often engaging in low-paid, unregulated labor. This dual impact complicates the country's economic stability, posing long-term risks to sustainable development.

Economically, the increased costs of border security measures and providing services to undocumented migrants can strain public resources. On the other hand, politically – illegal migration often sparks polarized debates that influence elections and policy decisions. In Bulgaria, the presence of illegal migrants has led to social tensions to some extent under the impact of specific actions and development of actions conducted by migrants in Bulgaria (some of whom may have crossed the national border illegally).

The societal impact of illegal migration is significant. The presence of large numbers of undocumented migrants can lead to social tensions and xenophobic attitudes, driven by fears of cultural erosion, job competition, and perceived increases in crime. Public perception plays a crucial role in shaping national policies, potentially leading to polarized opinions and political instability.

International diplomacy and responsibilities

International migration is not the same throughout the world, but is formed under the influence of economic, geographic, demographic and other factors that lead to the emergence of different migration patterns in specific migration “corridors” created over many years. Typically, the largest corridors run from developing countries to more advanced economies such as the United States, France, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

So far, migration has mainly affected the countries of Western Europe, while the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have remained aloof from these processes. It should be noted that not all migrants go to economically strong countries, and many of them also go to developing countries.

This pattern is likely to remain unchanged for many years, especially as population growth is projected in some developing subregions and countries in the coming decades, putting migration pressure on future generations.

Bulgaria's approach to illegal migration is heavily influenced by its commitments as an EU member state. The country must manage complex relationships with neighboring countries, particularly Turkey and Greece, which are also key points along the migration route. Additionally, Bulgaria must comply with international human rights laws and EU regulations concerning asylum seekers and refugees, creating a delicate balance between security measures and humanitarian duties.

In the political aspect, illegal migration and the flow of refugees can act as a direct threat to the security of the country, its geopolitical interests and international authority. In the economic sphere, it can contribute to the expansion of the gray economy, the deterioration of the labor market situation and the displacement of workers from it among local residents.

Policy measures and possible suggestions

The problem of regulating refugee flows, as a possible threat to the country's national security, is becoming very relevant for a number of reasons. Some of them include:

- the scale of migration flows;
- exacerbation and increase of inter-ethnic conflicts;
- non-compliance by the refugees with the legislation of the host country and, as a result, the slow process of integration into the host community;
- increase in crime, worsening of the criminal situation in the country;
- non-compliance by the refugees with the established norms of behavior and cultural traditions;
- threat of terrorist acts;
- increasing social tension in the host society;
- loading the country's resources – providing the arriving people with food, housing, solving social problems;
- deterioration of the psychological climate and relations with other countries, etc.

Policy responses to illegal migration in Europe and Bulgaria are shaped by a mix of security concerns and humanitarian obligations. The EU has introduced initiatives like the European Agenda on Migration to coordinate efforts among member states. Bulgaria, as part of the EU, participates in these initiatives while also implementing national policies tailored to its specific challenges. However, the implementation of these policies faces obstacles such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and varying levels of commitment among member states.

To address the risks and threats associated with illegal migration, Bulgaria needs a multipronged strategy.

Key suggestions include:

1. **IMPROVED BORDER PROTECTION:** Continued investment in advanced surveillance technologies and increased collaboration with EU border agencies like Frontex.

2. **ECONOMIC INTEGRATION INITIATIVES:** Developing programs to integrate migrants into the formal economy, reducing the strain on public resources and enhancing their economic contributions.

3. **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Initiatives to promote social cohesion and address xenophobia, including public awareness campaigns and support for local communities.

4. **INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION:** Strengthening bilateral and multilateral agreements with neighboring countries to effectively manage migration flows.

5. **HUMANITARIAN APPROACHES:** Ensuring that security policies respect the rights and dignity of migrants, adhering to international standards for asylum and refugee protection. While addressing the security threats posed by illegal migration, it is crucial to uphold human rights standards. The treatment of migrants at borders, the conditions in detention centers, and the asylum processing procedures must comply with international human rights laws. Bulgaria and other European countries must balance security measures with the obligation to protect the rights and dignity of migrants.

Conclusion

The specificity of modern political processes is largely determined by migration flows from zones of armed conflicts and countries with an unfavorable political and socio-economic situation to more prosperous countries and regions.

Migration, which has acquired a complex multifactorial characteristic in recent years, is one of the most significant phenomena of modern political reality. This is clearly manifested in the development of the so-called European migration crisis, caused by mass migration flows to European countries from the zones of armed conflicts in the Middle and Middle East, as well as from the poorest African and Asian countries.

The process of globalization, which has reached a large scale in the XXI century, opens up new problems for the modern world community. Today, one of the strongest challenges to peace in the world is the problem of migration, which is the most pressing in Europe. When as early as possible, European countries manage to regulate the level of flow of migrants, the easier the situation will become and even it may begin to transform as currently at some point the migrant crisis at some point may hypothetically begin to get out of control.

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