



Migration Movement of the Bulgarian Population and Socio-Economic Effects under the Pressure of an Increased Refugee Flow

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Abstract: *The migration of the population is a very important element of demographic development. The current demographic situation in the Republic of Bulgaria is very difficult, migration processes are taking on increasingly serious dimensions. After the democratic changes in 1989, now more than thirty years, the demographic processes have a negative sign - negative natural increase, negative migration balance, strong aging of the population, and deterioration of the age structure, which leads to a permanent decrease of the population. There are different reasons - military, political, economic, and climatic problems led to increased refugee flows passing through the territory of the country, which further complicate the socio-economic situation. The employees of the security sector in the Ministry of Internal Affairs are facing huge refugee pressure. Their preparation and actions are extremely important for dealing with any problems that may arise on the territory of the country.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of demographic processes in the country began to occupy an increasingly wider place in public discussions. Extremely negative demographic processes such as negative natural growth, negative migration balance, aging of the population, as well as deterioration of age structures, become decisive for the future development and normal functioning of the socio-economic processes in the country.

The demographic situation at the moment continues to be critical. The population has continued to decline in recent years. The age dependency ratio continues to rise. As a result of the reduced birth rate and increasing mortality, there is a narrowed reproduction of the population (Bardarov & Petrova-Hristova, 2020).

Against the background of these negative trends, however, another serious problem appears - together with a negative migration balance in the country, we have an increased refugee flow, which is beginning to put pressure on public activities and, above all, security.

The last year has been marked by numerous incidents of refugees trying to cross the country illegally. That showed the insufficient readiness to deal with the problem and the training and efficiency of the personnel in the security sector.

Based on a personally conducted anonymous survey among employees in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), we can draw some basic conclusions regarding the preparation, technical security, and personal opinion of the surveyed employees.

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2. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POPULATION MIGRATION

The migration processes that have been taking place in the country for the past thirty years unfortunately have negative characteristics. After the democratic changes of 1989, the external migration of the Bulgarian population greatly increased, which, in turn, led to a drastic decline in the total number of the population in the country. If during the census in 1985, we recorded the absolute highest number in our demographic statistics of almost 9 million people, then at the present moment, the population in the country is slightly over 6.8 million people (2021) as the trends pointed out by specialists are for a continued decrease in the population (Figure 1).

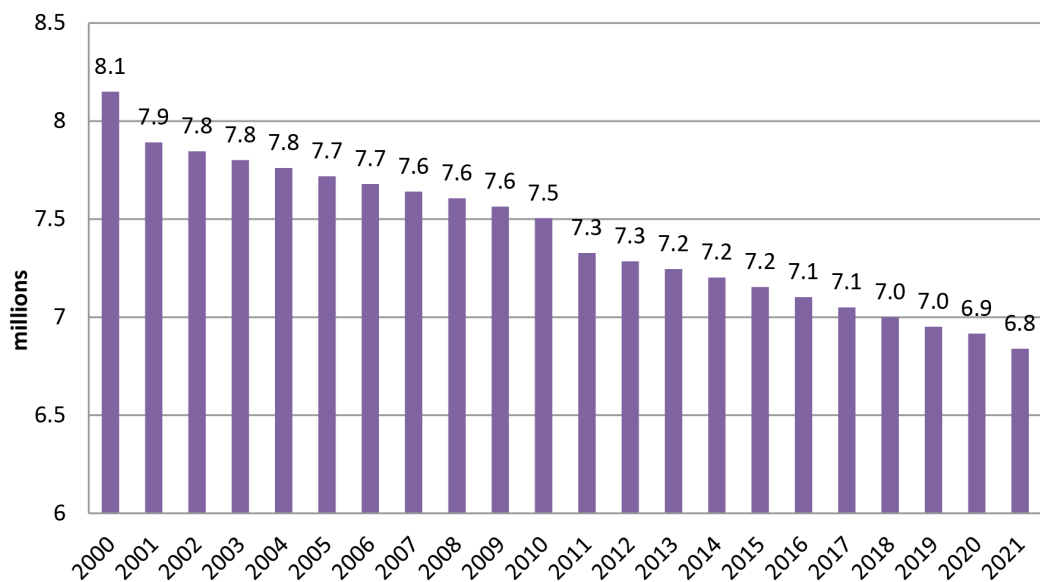


Figure 1. Dynamics of the population of the Republic of Bulgaria in the period 2000-2021

Source: NSI, n.d.

From the led statistics, we can follow the dynamics in the number of the population in the period of the last three national censuses. We have had a serious decline in the last twenty years.

Among the main reasons for this population decline, we can point out the high death rate in the first place. If in the period before the spread of the global pandemic of COVID-19, we had a mortality rate of 14-15‰ (according to the data from the current demographic statistics of the NSI), then this value increases a little in 2020 and 2021. The birth rate in the country has values within the framework of Western European rates, typical of countries that have gone through a demographic transition - about 8‰ (Figure 2).

Under these conditions, the reason we can point to the decrease in population is the high mortality rate and the corresponding deterioration of health care. But there is also another significant reason for the reduction of the population and deepening of the processes of depopulation - the migration processes of the population. After the democratic changes in the country since 1989, a huge part of the population migrated - the so-called "big excursion" is the emigration of over 300,000 people, part of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. From then until now, a huge part of the population has chosen to leave the country mainly for economic reasons - to find better-paying work, a higher standard of living, and better education and health care. Tracking the data from the mechanical growth statistics, we can see that in the period 2007-2019, we have

annual negative mechanical growth. The reason for these negative values is the possibility of free movement of the population after our admission to the European Union (EU). Our membership in the union favors opportunities for work and study outside the country, which leads to permanent population migrations to EU countries.

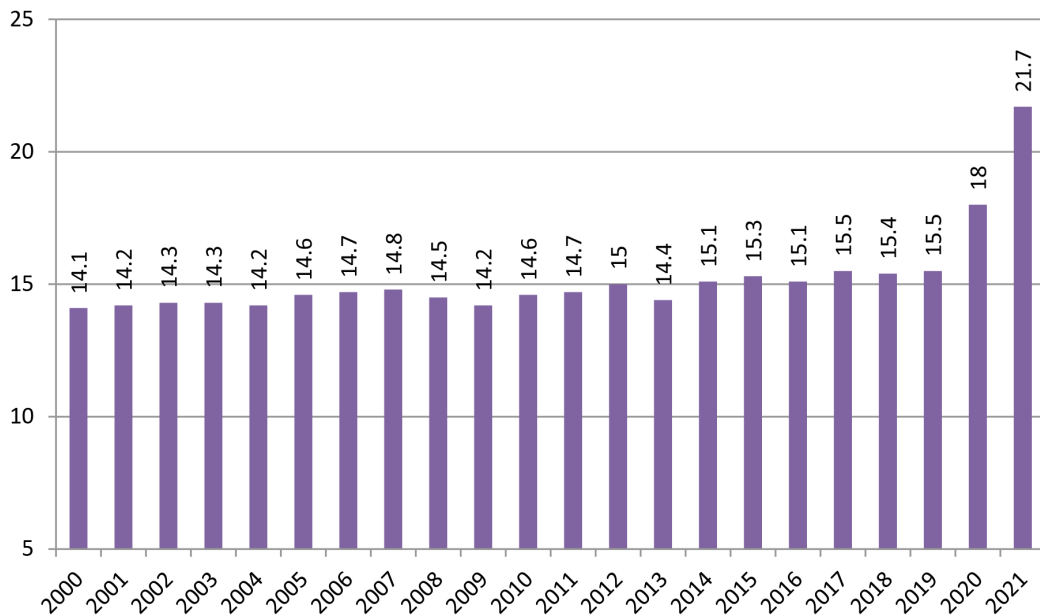


Figure 2. Mortality rate in the country in the period 2000-2021

Source: NSI, n.d.

As we mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact not only on the mortality rate values but also on the mechanical growth values - we have positive values for 2020 and 2021, i.e. those settled in the country are more than the emigrants. This is because a large part of the European countries, where there are large Bulgarian diasporas, seriously tightened the measures regarding the spread of the disease and, accordingly, a large part of the Bulgarians chose to return to the country (Figure 3).

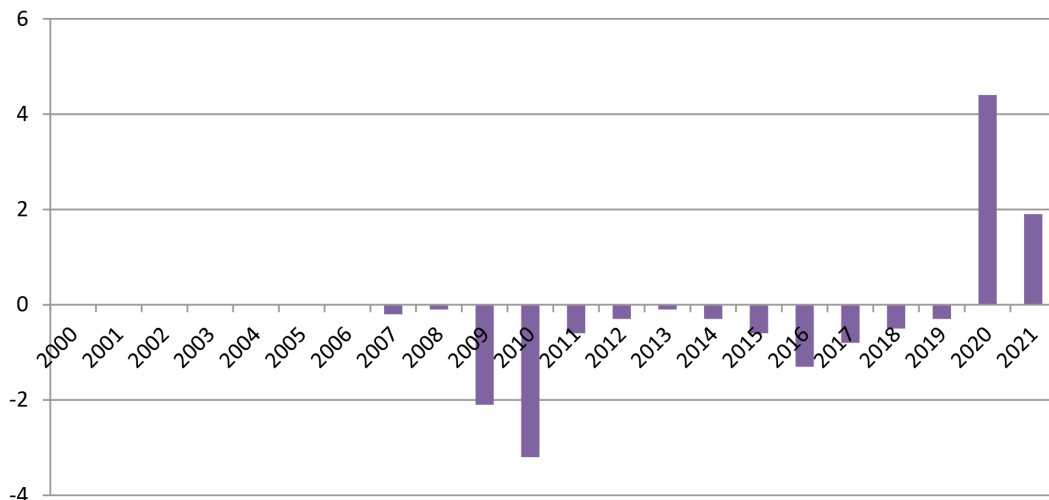


Figure 3. Coefficient of mechanical growth in the country for the period 2000-2021.

Source: NSI, n.d.

This return is extremely positive because of the lack of labor force that is felt in some sectors and especially because of the greatly deteriorated age structure.

Another problem that we can point to and for which immediate decisions and measures need to be taken is uneven internal migrations. They are characterized by population movement mainly from small settlements (villages and small towns) to large cities. This is a problem, as these processes lead to an increase in the depopulation of many areas in the country, which could subsequently face serious socio-economic difficulties.

The conclusions we can draw are that in the last two or three years, positive values of the migration balance have been observed in the country and there is an opportunity for a favorable development of the demographic processes in the future.

3. THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN BULGARIA AND EUROPE

In the last more than a year, an increased flow of refugees to Europe has been observed, with Bulgaria being one of the entry points for migrants to the European continent. The refugees who pass through the territory of the country are mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, but refugees from Ukraine are no exception, as well as many illegal emigrants from third countries (Iraq, Morocco, etc.).

Many European countries are facing the biggest wave of migration since the end of the Second World War, which seems to be a serious challenge not only to the smaller ones but also to the political leaders in the EU. The wars in Iraq and Syria, the political tensions and poverty in many parts of Africa and Asia, as well as the acute water shortages in these regions, seem to be intractable problems at the moment. By adding the population explosion, dysfunctional economies and high youth unemployment, we can gain an idea of the main factors determining emigration to Europe (Bardarov & Tsvetkov, 2017).

In nowadays' conditions of globalization, migration takes on a global scope. This complex socio-economic phenomenon affects a growing number of countries and regions, a significant percentage of the population of which is involved in migration flows for a variety of reasons. In this new and complex geopolitical situation, the protection of the state borders of each country and the territory of the EU as a whole becomes a priority of the security policy (Valcheva, 2014).

The refugee flow is a serious challenge for the internal and external policy of the Republic of Bulgaria. The government must draw serious conclusions from the events that have been going on for the past three years. The fact that Bulgaria remains on the periphery of the refugee influx must be thoroughly analyzed. The factors that redirect this human flow outside the national territory should be indicated. At the same time, unfortunately, the low standard of living is a major shield against the presence of refugees. However, it cannot be an eternal guarantee for our future. Every nation and country works for its prosperity and this will certainly attract people who would like to settle in our territory. The main problem is that of human potential, which remains unresolved and threatens to erode first the economy and then the statehood (Chukov, 2015).

In order to understand the reasons and motivations for undertaking migratory activity, we must examine and know in detail the factors that determine the refugee crisis. According to Bardarov and Tsvetkov (2017), the reasons for the wave of refugees are complex, complicated and accumulated over the years. The collapse of the colonial system led to the creation of many new independent countries in Africa and Asia, which began an independent path of development. Although many of them have sufficient natural and demographic resources, the majority remain dependent on their trade with the

former metropolises and find it difficult to find a way to enter the free market and develop their economies. During the years of their independent development, tension and a negative attitude began to accumulate from the forceful imposition of a new language, European values, Christianity and other cultural features not inherent in the colonized peoples in the past. Moreover, countries in Africa were not created along a natural historical and ethnic path, but according to the borders of the former metropolises. These artificially created countries live from several to dozens, sometimes radically different in language, religion, and way of life, communities. In many of them, due to a lack of democratic practices and history, and due to the economic interest of the former metropolises, extremely corrupt and tyrannical political regimes have been kept in power, which bully the local population.

It is for these reasons - historical, economic, climatic, as well as because of the military conflicts in the Middle East - that the emigrant and refugee flow has significantly increased in the last few years, and especially in the past year. The increased illegal migrant traffic showed how a serious problem Bulgaria has in the "Security" sector - insufficient human resources, necessary equipment, modern equipment, and tactical training. Unfortunately, it is precisely these deficiencies in the security system that have caused several serious incidents involving employees in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) system. For this reason, for the present study, we prepared an anonymous survey among the employees of the Ministry of the Interior. The surveyed employees are 57 people from the Sofia region and Sofia-city region.

The first group of questions in the survey are basic - gender, age, division and work experience in the MIA system. The average age of the police officers surveyed is over 40 years old. Here we should note that the age of the respondents overlaps with the range of work experience they have. From the results, we can conclude that there is aging among the ranks of Bulgarian police officers, which will prove to be a very serious problem in the future.

The second group of questions from the survey is directed towards the attitudes of the police officers regarding the measures taken to deal with the refugee flow, as well as the technical security and training of the officers. The conclusions we could draw from the answers received are highly negative. According to the prevailing answers, the training of the employees in the MIA system is "insufficient", and the technical support (weapons, aids, vehicle fleet, specialized equipment, etc.) is also "insufficient".

The last group of questions in the survey focused on the characteristics of the refugees encountered by the police - gender, age, and country of origin.

The refugees crossing the territory of the country are mainly male and are characterized by an extremely young age structure - between 15 and 30 years of age. These are people in the economically active group, with countries of origin mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Morocco, for whom it is necessary to take serious measures in the field of integration because a significant part of them remain in Bulgaria and it is extremely necessary to be integrated into the socio-economic life of the country.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that it is not possible to make any specific prediction about how the refugee issue will develop, as well as what impact it will have on the demographic processes in the country and especially on the internal and external migration processes. The conclusion we

reached from the conducted survey is that it is extremely necessary to take measures to increase the number of employees in the MIA system, ensure their additional training, and improve technical security. The additional training, explanations, and techniques would contribute to more effective work in the field, the security of the policemen themselves, and a change in the public attitude toward refugees.

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