

Anna Mantarova
Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Sofia, Bulgaria

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SOCIO-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES IN BULGARIA

Summary: The paper examines the perceptions and assessments of the refugee crisis in Bulgaria and the attitudes of the population towards refugees. The first part presents the situation in Bulgaria as a part of the refugee flow route to Western Europe – size and dynamics of the refugee flows and the socio-demographic profile of the asylum seekers. The state of society as a background in which assessments and attitudes towards refugees are formed is also outlined. The second part describes the attitudes of the population towards refugees and perceptions about the risks associated with their presence in the country. The differences of opinions between the country as a whole and the places with refugee camps are highlighted.

The analysis is based on statistical data provided by SAR and results of two empirical sociological surveys, conducted in December 2017 – one nationally representative and another one – in two areas with refugee camps.

Key Words: Refugees, Value Systems, Attitudes towards Refugees, Social Distances, Social Risks.

Introduction

Bulgaria's geographical location along the route leading from the Middle East to Europe has made it a path for migrants moving towards Western Europe in the last 5-6 years. And although this is not one of the most frequently used routes, the migrant pressure here being less than in some neighboring countries, Bulgaria has nevertheless been seriously affected by the immigration wave. In 2013, the number of asylum applications registered in our country grew dramatically, and continued at high rates in the next two years as well. After the agreement concluded between the EU and Turkey, the pressure on our southern border decreased considerably. Yet the total number of people applying for asylum in our country in the period 2011 – 2017 was 64,011. Refugee status was granted to 17,022 of them; and humanitarian protection status, to 6,834.

Among arrivals between the start of 2011 and the end of 2017, the largest numbers came from Syria (20,372), followed by Afghanistan (19,437) and Iraq (1,4191). As for the social-demographic characteristics of immigrants, the available information indicates a strong disbalance in each cross-section. More than half are aged from 18 to 34 years; second in proportion are those between 15 and 18. The structure by sex is also very asymmetrical: the share of men is between 68 and 84 percent. A differentiation by age indicates that the asymmetry between the two

sexes is especially strong in the age groups 14 to 18 and 18 to 34 – in the last three years, the men in these groups were between 83 and 95 percent. More than half have no education or only primary education, while those with higher education are approximately 4 percent.

In considering the quantitative parameters, however, we should have in mind that the statistics cover only the registered immigrants. The number of those who have entered the country illegally and have moved towards Western Europe remains unknown. It is a telling fact that in 2017, according to data presented in the media (dnes.dir.bg/news/migranti-bezhanskiat-natisk-evropa-26914215), 1,616 people were found staying in the country illegally, and 406 people who had not registered at entry were caught leaving the state boundaries. Thus, more than two thousand people had succeeded in entering Bulgaria without being noticed. Nobody can say how many more have similarly crossed the border and have been moving through, or have already left, the country. It also remains unknown how many of the registered have remained here and how many have continued on to Western Europe.

Regardless of how precise the indicated numbers are, the migrant stream has certainly engendered, and continues to engender, problems and is posing serious challenges for the country, including long-term risks. At present, when there are no pressing material issues connected with migrants, it is necessary to take a broader view on the integration of those who wish to remain in the country and those who will be obliged to come here under various decisions and relocation programs. The attitudes of the local population is of crucial importance for their acceptance and integration into society. It is thus imperative to know these attitudes, to identify their determining factors, to outline the profile of people holding different attitudes.

Theoretical framework

To define the concept of “refugee”, we must turn to official international and national documents. One fundamental international document relevant to refugees is the so-called Geneva Convention of 1951. It defines the refugee as a person who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or... is unwilling to return to it.” (UNHCR 2010: 14). It is a person who meets the criteria for refugee status of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the requirements for protection accorded by UNHCR, regardless of whether he or she comes from a country that has signed the Refugee Convention of 1951 or the Protocol for the Status of Refugees of 1967, or whether he or she is recognized as a refugee by the host country under some of these documents (International Organization for Migration 2004: 52).

In recent years, however, a looser usage of the term has become widely prevalent. Although imprecise, it is largely used to designate the immigrants coming to Europe from Asia and Africa regardless of whether they have the respective status

or at least meet the conditions for obtaining such status as defined by the Geneva Convention. In this text, our analysis is focused on the people who have entered Bulgaria without the documents required from citizens coming from countries outside the EU and who have applied for asylum; along with the widely used term “refugee”, we will also use the term “immigrant”, which is appropriate in this case.

Attitudes is a complex phenomenon consisting of a wide range of components. In this case, they are identified through answers to questions such as: “Should immigrants be allowed in the country and be permitted to stay, and under what conditions should this be done? What should the state provide for them? How do you assess the current immigration policy? Where should their children go to school? After obtaining the right to legal sojourn, should they have equal rights with local citizens? Should the use of hate speech and aggressive behavior towards them be permissible? Et cetera.

The question as to the determinants of attitudes towards immigrants is widely present in sociological research. These determinants are evidently dependent on the simultaneous effect of a number of stable and situational factors. In the literature related to attitudes towards immigrants (of whom refugees are a particular case), the *influential factors* include:

- the perception of threat connected with the arrival and presence of immigrants in the country;
- the local population’s experience of inter-group (inter-cultural) contacts;
- the socio-demographic characteristics of the population in the host country.

An overview of the relevant literature shows that the threats (expectation of negative consequences from the arrival and presence of immigrants) are generally divided into *real (economy-related)* and *symbolic (related to values)* (Riek et al. 2006; Scheepers et al. 2002; Sniderman et al. 2004; Stephan & Renfro 2002). The competition for resources between the national majority and minority groups, and the perception of this competition, are related to the *material threats* (Esses et al. 200; Quillian 1995; Sidanius & Pratto 1999). They include economic goods, political power, and the physical welfare of the majority. The *symbolic threats* include the perception that immigrants have different beliefs, worldview and moral values, and that this is a threat to the values and symbols of the majority (Stephan & Renfro 2002; Sears & Henry 2003).

In recent years, the so-called contact theories have become increasingly influential as regards the understanding of prejudices and the perception of symbolic threats involved in attitudes towards immigrants (Petigrew & Tropp 2011; McLaren 2003). As the number of immigrants in Bulgaria is not significant enough, the kind of questions about contacts with immigrants asked in other countries cannot be expected to yield enough information to establish correlations. Though we have asked questions about personal/professional contacts with immigrants, the objectively determined quantitative limitation of the answers asserting the existence of such contacts has not made it possible to draw grounded conclusions. Our interest is aimed at attitudes towards the immigrants coming from the Middle East and Africa (who are Muslims

in their large majority). In view of this specific context, our research sought to find somewhat different, but relevant information: the occurrence of contacts between the immigrants and local Muslims, and the reflection of such contacts on attitudes. Such interaction is possible and indeed inevitable in Bulgarian settlements that have a considerable local Muslim population. That is why we gathered information about the existing religious confessions and the religious homogeneity, or heterogeneity, in the respondents' settlements.

Socio-demographic characteristics are another group of factors pointed out in relevant literature as influencing attitudes towards immigrants. Of course, it is interesting to know the influence of sex, age, education, social-group affiliation, ethnicity, religious confession, place of residence, and material status. But in our study, assuming the hypothesis that a wider range of personal characteristics will also be influential, we included questions that bring information about the degree of the respondent's satisfaction with his/her material status and life in general, as well as a set of questions related to the life goals, life strategies, and value system of the respondents. We emphasized the importance attached by respondents to values fundamental to the EU and relevant to the topic of immigrants and refugees; the information obtained from this line of questions will be the focus of the analysis presented below.

Results

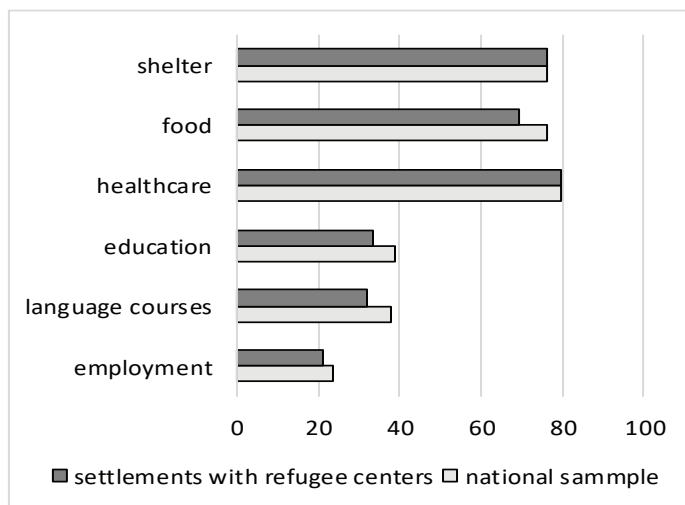
The large amount of information obtained from the survey cannot fully be presented and analyzed within the limits of this text. That is why, I will dwell only on some aspects of the attitudes towards immigrants, on their variations and correlation with basic EU values such as ethnic and religious tolerance, freedom of movement, equality of different cultures, solidarity, and equality between people. Comparison of variations in attitudes depending on the importance the respondents attach to certain values will be between the positions "very important" and "somewhat unimportant", because the extreme position "not at all important" has been indicated by a very small number of respondents and its inclusion in the analysis would be inappropriate.

In order to establish the stances regarding the state's commitments to immigrants, a number of services that the state can offer to satisfy various important human needs were presented for assessment.

The findings show that, despite the poor material situation of a large part of the local population (by self-assessment, 24.7 percent of the respondents evaluated it as "bad" and 37.2 percent as "satisfactory"), between three fourths and four fifths of the respondents support the view that the state should provide for the basic needs of refugees, including shelter, food, healthcare.

Figure 1

In your opinion, should the state provide:



But the share of positive answers falls drastically with regard to some additional services – language training, education, employment, although these are very important for the adaptation and integration of people in the host society. The comparison between information from the nation-wide sample survey and surveys in regions with refugee centers shows insignificant difference that are at the borderline of statistical significance.

Table 1

What should the state provide for immigrants and the degree of importance attached to basic values

	Shelter	Food	Healthcare
National sample	76,5	76,3	79,9
Ethnic and religious tolerance	V=0,065	V=0,059	V=0,099
very important	80,6	80,1	81,1
unimportant	73,5	73,9	86,4
Equality of different cultures	V=0,071	V=0,082	V=0,133
very important	80,8	82,4	83,4
unimportant	78,5	76,4	85,0
Solidarity	V=0,086	V=0,102	V=0,086
very important	82,6	83,6	83,1
unimportant	76,6	75,3	84,4
Equality between people	V=0,186	V=0,186	V=0,180
very important	85,5	84,8	86,2
unimportant	71,8	73,6	83,6

But there are differences in responses based on certain characteristics of the respondents, including some values and especially the importance they attach to equality between people (Cramer between 0,180 and 0,186). It is interesting to note that with regard to the provision of healthcare, there is no substantial correlation with values; evidently, general humane attitudes are decisive in this case.

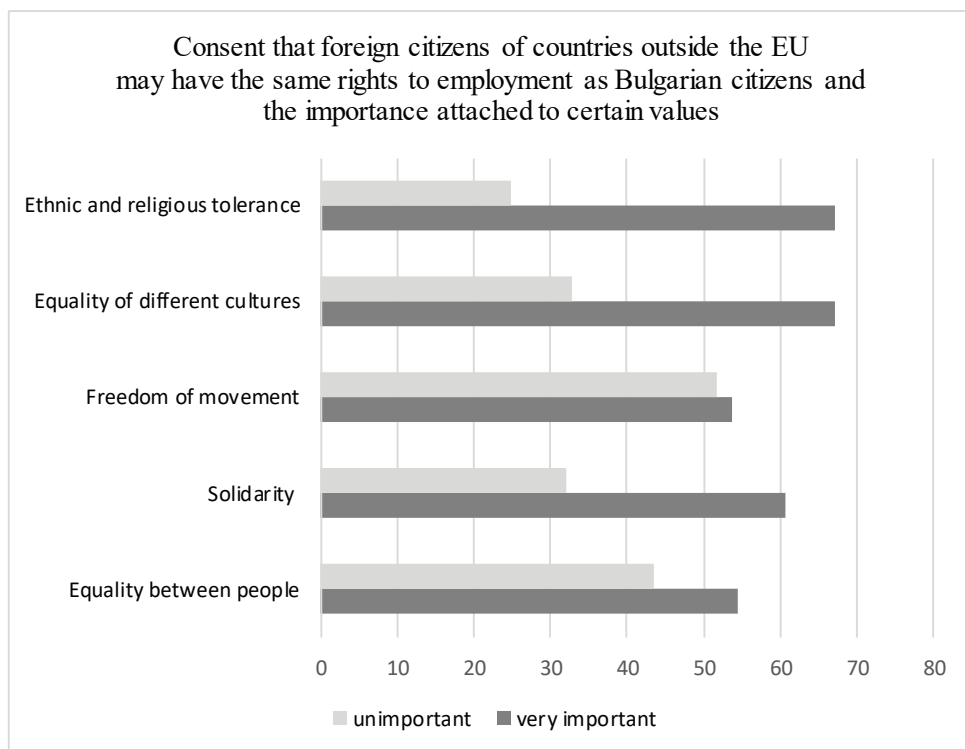
With regard to provision of additional services, the impact of values systems is considerable. The coefficients are quite high, especially for the correlation with solidarity (Cramer between 0,321 and 0,292), ethnic and religious tolerance (Cramer between 0,311 and 0,260), equality of different cultures (Cramer between 0,300 and 0,210). Respectively, the differences between the shares of people who have given one answer or the other amount to tens of percentage points. Those who support the Bulgarian state's providing education are 39.1 percent. Among people for whom solidarity is very important, the percentage is 59.2, and among those for whom it is unimportant, it is three times smaller, at only 18.2 percent. With regard to providing language training, the strongest support comes from people for whom ethnic and religious tolerance is very important – 62.1 percent, compared with only 21.6 percent among those for whom it is not very important. Regarding service least supported by respondents – state assistance for immigrants to find employment – 45 percent of those for whom solidarity is important are “for” it, while the positive answer is given by averages of 23.6 percent and 7,8 percent of those for whom solidarity is unimportant.

Table 2
 What should the state provide for immigrants
 and the degree of importance attached to basic values

	Education	Language courses	Employment
National sample	39,1	38,0	23,6
Ethnic and religious tolerance	V=0,260	V=0,311	V=0,292
very important	58,3	62,1	43,7
unimportant	23,5	21,6	11,7
Equality of different cultures	V=0,210	V=0,300	V=0,243
very important	49,7	56,3	36,3
unimportant	24,1	18,0	9,8
Solidarity	V=0,294	V=0,292	V=0,321
very important	59,2	57,8	45,0
unimportant	18,2	16,9	7,8
Equality between people	V=0,124	V=0,159	V=0,126
very important	46,0	46,2	29,4
unimportant	29,4	23,9	13,8

Regarding the right to employment in the country, it is justified to say that discriminatory attitudes are present here.

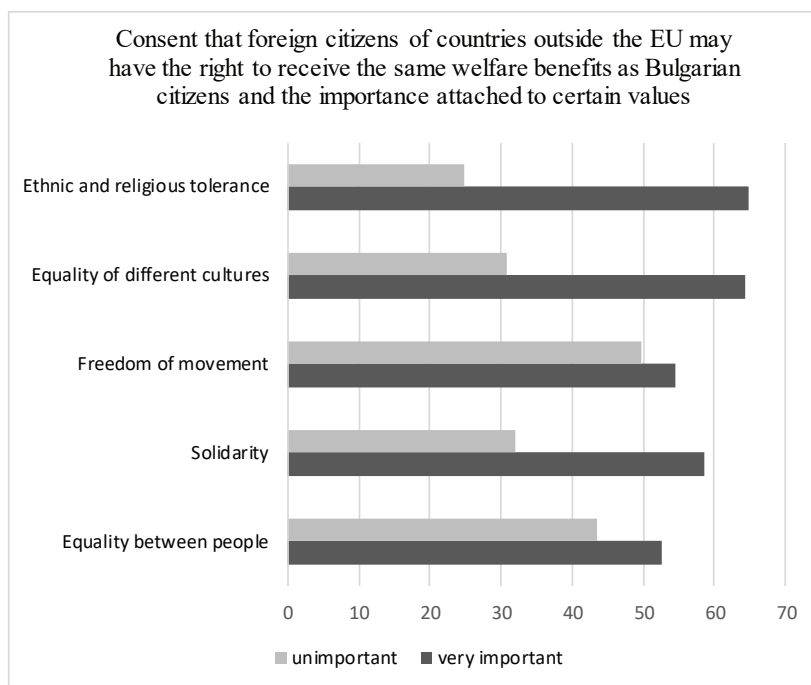
Figure 2



They are evident in connection with the question as to whether non-EU citizens legally residing in the country should have the same right to employment as Bulgarian citizens. A negative response was given by 48.1 percent of respondents in the national sample and by 61.7 percent in the regions where refugee centers are located. As for the correlation with values, they are distinctly present for ethnic and religious tolerance ($V 0,321$), equality of different cultures ($V 0,300$) and solidarity ($V 0,214$).

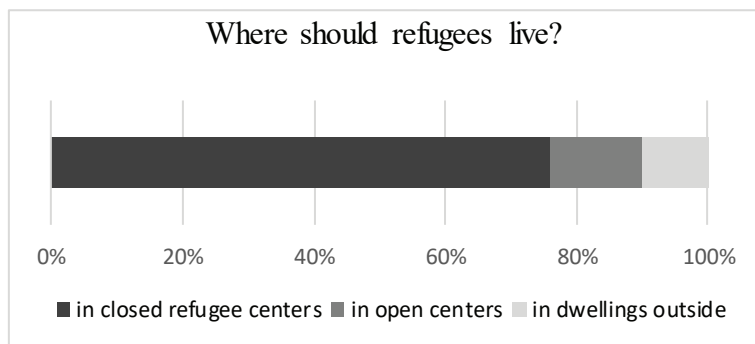
The question regarding the right to receive welfare benefits also yields strongly divided opinions. 50.3 percent of respondents support the idea that refugees should have as much right to this as Bulgarian citizens, while the other half are against it. In regions with refugee centers, the discriminatory attitudes are even more prominent. Only 37.6 percent of the respondents are in support of such equality of rights. The findings show considerable differences depending on supported values, especially the values of equality of different cultures, ethnic and religious tolerance, and solidarity.

Figure 3



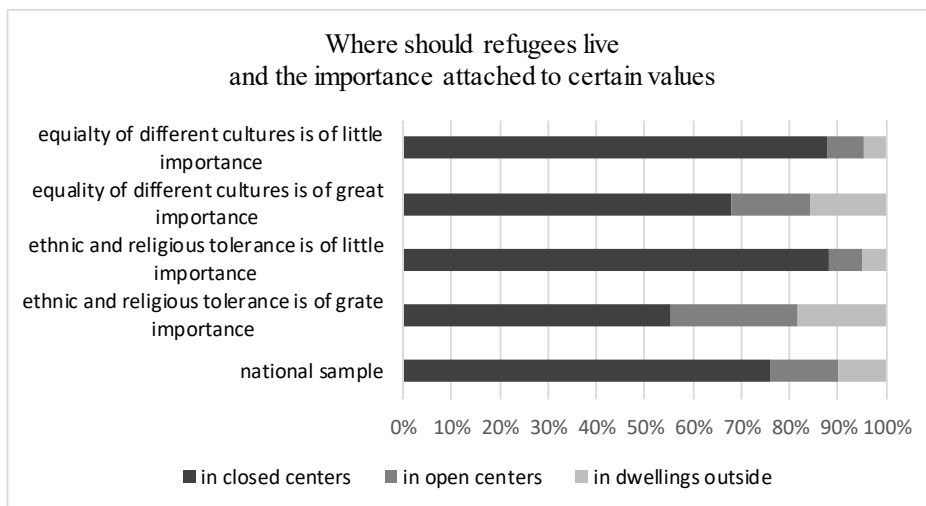
Regarding the question where refugees should live, the prevalent opinion is that they should reside in closed refugee centers.

Figure 4



A comparison between the results of the nation-wide survey and the surveys in settlements with refugee centers does not indicate statistically significant differences. As for the correlation with values, it is distinctly evident with regard to equality of different cultures and is particularly strong for the value of ethnic and religious tolerance.

Figure 5

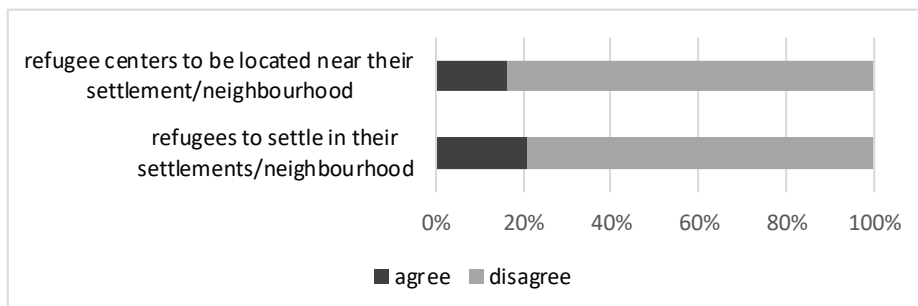


Among the respondents for whom ethnic and religious tolerance is not important, the share of people answering that refugees must live in closed centers is 88.3 percent, while among those for whom this value is important, the share is considerably smaller, 55.2 percent. The shares of those who support lodging immigrants in dwellings outside the refugee center are respectively 4.9 and 18.4 percent, where the average for the national sample is 10.1 percent.

Reluctance for spatial proximity is evident in the answers to the questions as to the respondent's willingness to have immigrants/refugees settle in the settlement (neighborhood) and for a refugee center to be established near to the respondent's place of residence. In the national sample, positive answers to these two questions were given by 20.7 percent and 16.3 percent respectively.

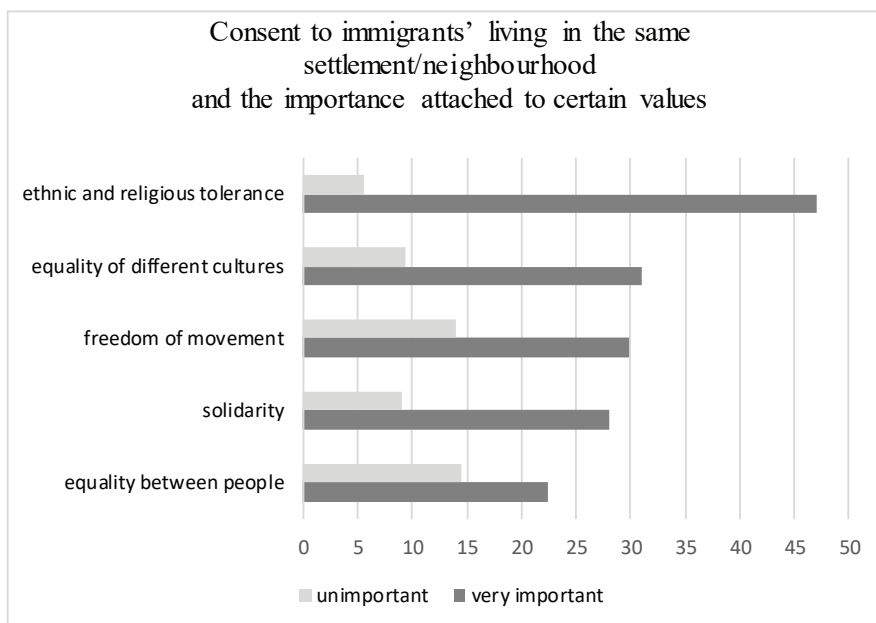
Figure 6

Consent to spatial proximity to immigrants



A discriminatory attitude is distinctly present with regard to living with immigrants in the same settlement/neighbourhood. The strongest determining factors for this are, in first place, the perception of a threat, especially threat to one's security. The correlation with values is prominent.

Figure 7



There are evident correlations between expressed attitudes and the acceptance of fundamental EU values such as ethnic and religious tolerance ($V=0,386$), equity towards different cultures ($V=0,210$), solidarity and free movement of people, goods and capital ($V=0,168$).

With regard to education for children of immigrants, the survey data indicate polarized opinions. According to 57.9 percent of the respondents, these children should study in separate classes. There is no significant statistical difference between the responses in the national sample and in the settlements with refugee centers. For this question, there is an evident correlation with the importance attached to free movement of people, goods and capital ($V=0,210$) and ethnic and religious tolerance ($V=0,175$). But even among those who support these values, over 40 percent of the respondents assert these children should study separately.

Significant differences depending on values can be also be observed in the approval of action in assistance to immigrants or action against immigrants. The data show that with regard to approval of action in support of the immigrants, its strongest connection is with the value of ethnic and religious tolerance. Nearly half the people for whom this value is very important support the collection of various donations, and more than one third are in favour of taking part in voluntary

activities for helping refugees. To the contrary, those for whom this value is not important respond positively nearly six times less often. In second place is the value of solidarity. Regarding action to prevent the entry of immigrants into the country, its highest correlation, though not as high, is with the value of equality of different cultures, and immediately following it, the value of ethnic and religious tolerance.

Table 3
Approval of actions in support of, or against, immigrants
and the importance attached to certain values

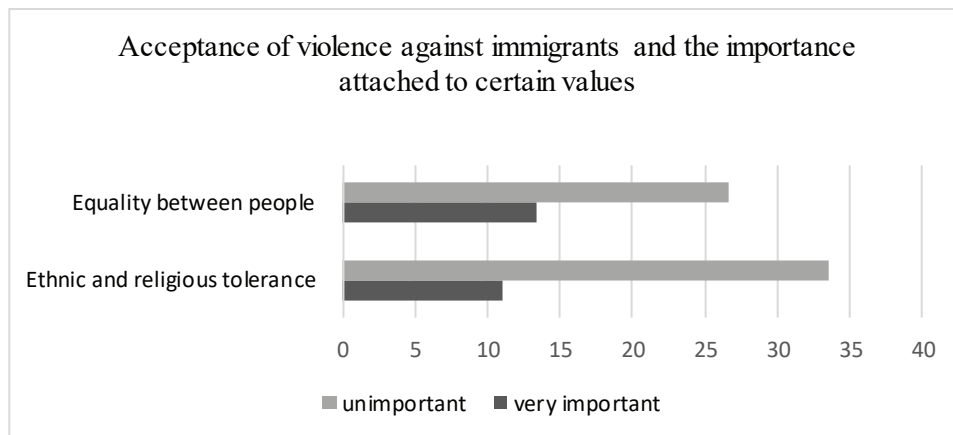
	Collecting donations for immigrants	Voluntary work to help immigrants	Petitions against the acceptance of immigrants	Peaceful action against the acceptance of immigrants
National sample	26,1%	21,1%	26,7%	31,0%
Ethnic and religious tolerance	V=0,209	V=0,283	V=0,142	V=0,144
very important	46,8%	40,4%	13,8%	18,7%
unimportant	6,8%	6,8%	38,3%	40,7%
Free movement	V=0,144	V=0,146	V=0,115	V=0,118
very important	36,7%	31,6%	24,9%	28,0%
unimportant	13,5%	10,1%	24,3%	27,7%
Solidarity	V=0,178	V=0,156	V=0,131	V=0,106
very important	43,1%	36,7%	19,4%	24,8%
unimportant	9,8%	8,4%	37,7%	39,9%
Equality of different cultures	V=0,155	V=0,147	V=0,150	V=0,154
very important	37,8%	31,6%	16,1%	22,3%
unimportant	12,8%	9,4%	33,6%	37,3%
Equality between people	V=0,078	V=0,078	V=0,103	V=0,110
very important	29,0%	22,3%	17,8%	22,0%
unimportant	21,1%	20,2%	34,9%	39,4%

The observed correlations lead to the conclusion that people's attitudes and actions are motivated by their perception and assessment of cultural (including religious) differences and their stance on the matter.

The respondents were asked to state their opinion on hypothetical cases: immigrants have been attacked and beaten in the street. The two proposed options were: "The immigrants are to blame – they should have stayed in their countries", and "Violence is never justified". The first option was supported by approximately one fifth (19.9 percent) of the respondents. A look at the values factor shows a connection with ethnic and religious tolerance (V=0,191) and equality between people (V=0,121). Among respondents for whom ethnic and religious tolerance are very important, nearly half fewer express chose the first answer. The more universal values evidently have a dominant role in this case.

Figure 8

Acceptance of violence against immigrants and the importance attached to certain values



Conclusion

Regardless of the EU summit meetings and the optimistic statements made there, the relocation of immigrants arriving in Europe remains an open question. It is not clear when and what decisions will be made and to what extent they will be implemented. But it would not be realistic to expect that no immigrants will arrive in Bulgaria. The example of Western Europe, where second and third generation immigrants have proved to be a problem, shows the great importance of the issue, and its relevance for the national security and integrity of societies. Hence, we should start thinking and acting now in a middle-term and long-term perspective. The existing discriminatory attitudes towards the recently arrived immigrants are a serious obstacle to their integration and may potentially lead to their isolation, encapsulation and marginalization, with all the risks that this involves, such as radicalization and extremism. In view of this, it is imperative to know the determining factors of these attitudes and to conduct purposeful policies and programs for the dissemination and internalization of universal values, of tolerance and good will towards the “others”, of respect for their legal rights.

Note

The data used in this article are drawn from the social survey “Social Aspects of Contemporary Migration Processes”, conducted in December 2017 in the framework of the project Social Environment and Deviations: Sustainable Correlations and Situational Influences. Deviations in the Context of Contemporary Migration Processes (team leader Prof. DSc A. Mantarova).

The survey is nationally representative of the population of people above the age of 18; for the sake of comparison a second survey was conducted in the town of Harmanli and Vrazhdebna (neighbourhood in Sofia) – two settlements where refugee centers are located.

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Анна Мантарова

СОЦИО-КУЛТУРНЕ ДЕТЕРМИНАНТЕ СТАВОВА ПРЕМА ИЗБЕГЛИЦАМА У БУГАРСКОЈ

Сажетак: У раду се истражује перцепција и процена избегличке кризе у Бугарској и ставови становништва према избеглицима. У првом делу рада представљена је ситуација у Бугарској као делу избегличког тога ка Западној Европи – обим и динамика тока избеглица и социо-демографски профил тражилаца азила. Описано је такође стање у друштву као основа на којој се формирају оцене и ставови према избеглицима. Други део рада описује ставове становништва према избеглицима и перцепцију ризика који се повезују са њиховим присуством у земљи. Истакнуте су разлике у мишљењима између земље у целини и места у којима су смештени избеглички кампови.

Анализа се заснива на статистичким подацима Државне агенције за избеглице и резултатима два социолошка емпиријска истраживања, спроведена у децембру 2017. године – једна на национално репрезентативном узорку и друго у две области у којима су смештени кампови за избеглице.

Кључне речи: избеглице, вредносни системи, ставови према избеглицима, социјална дистанца, социјални ризици.