
Selected Aspects of Social Security of Podlaskie Voivodeship Residents from the Perspective of Migration

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article analyzes the impact of migration on the social security of residents in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The research aims to explore both the objective and subjective dimensions of social security, with a particular focus on how media coverage and political discourse shape public perceptions of migration-related risks.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research is designed as a mixed-methods study to provide both a broad quantitative overview of residents' perceptions and detailed qualitative insights from key stakeholders. The study employed a survey distributed to residents of the Podlaskie Voivodeship to assess their perceptions of social security in the context of migration with in-depth interviews conducted with local authorities, law enforcement officers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to gain an understanding of the objective challenges posed by migration and how these are addressed.

Findings: Migration, both legal and illegal, has a significant impact on the social security and cohesion of residents in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. While migration introduces diversity and potential economic opportunities, it also heightens concerns over social integration and public safety, particularly in border areas directly affected by migratory flows. The influx of migrants places additional strain on local infrastructure and public services, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, education, and housing. The study found that residents in the region often perceive migrants as a potential security threat, with concerns over increased crime and social instability. These perceptions, however, are not always supported by empirical evidence, indicating that fear of migration may be more tied to social and media narratives than actual security incidents. Despite security concerns, migration also brings potential economic benefits, particularly by filling labor market gaps in industries facing shortages of workers. The findings suggest that, with better integration policies, migrants could contribute positively to the local economy and community life. The research underscores the importance of balanced migration policies that address both security and integration. Local authorities are encouraged to foster community engagement and cross-cultural dialogue to reduce tensions, and invest in infrastructure to better support both local residents and migrant populations.

Practical Implications: The findings of this article offer several practical implications for policymakers, local authorities, and regional security agencies in the Podlaskie Voivodeship and similar border regions. Firstly, the research highlights the need for comprehensive migration policies that address both security concerns and the socio-economic integration of migrants. Local governments should prioritize improving infrastructure and public services

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to accommodate increased migration flows, particularly in areas where demand for housing, healthcare, and education services is rising. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of fostering community cohesion through targeted programs that reduce tensions between local residents and migrant populations. Authorities could implement community engagement initiatives that promote cultural understanding and social integration, which can mitigate public fears about crime and social instability.

Originality/Value: This article offers a unique contribution to the understanding of social security and migration by focusing on the specific context of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, a border region in Poland that has experienced both legal and illegal migration flows

Keywords: Social security, migration, Podlaskie Voivodeship, border regions, illegal migration, public services, socio-economic impact, security challenges, integration, regional policy.

JEL Classification: J61, R23, K37, F22, I38.

Paper type: Research article.

1. Introduction

Migration has become one of the most significant global challenges in the 21st century, deeply impacting social, economic, and political landscapes. While migration can drive economic growth, cultural diversity, and societal development, it also raises critical concerns regarding social security, particularly in regions bordering areas of geopolitical instability.

In the context of Europe, migration has become a particularly salient issue, with member states of the European Union (EU) witnessing significant population movements, both legal and illegal. Poland's Podlaskie Voivodeship, located at the EU's eastern frontier, represents a unique case study for understanding how migration affects local communities, especially in terms of social security.

The concept of social security extends beyond mere physical safety and includes a broad range of social concerns, such as the stability of public services, economic security, the cohesion of communities, and the maintenance of social order. Migration, especially irregular or forced migration, is often perceived as a threat to these elements of social security.

This is particularly true in border regions like Podlaskie, which has faced increasing migration pressures due to its proximity to Belarus and Ukraine, two non-EU countries with complex geopolitical issues. This theoretical introduction explores the key concepts and frameworks that underpin the study of social security and migration. It also outlines the specific challenges facing the Podlaskie Voivodeship, providing a foundation for understanding the research conducted in this region.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Social Security

The concept of social security is multifaceted and can be understood in various ways depending on the context. At its core, social security refers to the protection of individuals and communities from risks that threaten their well-being, stability, and quality of life (Thalassinos *et al.*, 2019; Grecu *et al.*, 2024).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), social security encompasses all measures that provide income support, health care, and protection against life's contingencies, such as unemployment, illness, or old age (ILO, 2017). However, in a broader sense, social security also includes the protection of societal stability and order, which is often threatened by factors such as crime, political unrest, or, as in the case of this study, migration.

Social security, as applied to migration, can be divided into two key dimensions: objective security and subjective security. Objective security refers to the actual risks and threats posed by migration to a society, such as crime, terrorism, or economic disruption. This form of security is typically measured through statistics, law enforcement reports, and economic indicators.

Subjective security, on the other hand, refers to the public's perception of those risks. It is well-documented that public fears often exceed the actual risks posed by migration (Huysmans, 2006). In fact, media coverage, political discourse, and social narratives can significantly shape how local populations perceive the threat of migration, even when empirical data does not support such fears.

Understanding both dimensions of social security is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of how migration affects local communities. In the case of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, the distinction between objective and subjective security will be a key factor in analyzing residents' attitudes towards migration.

3. Migration and Its Impact on Social Security

Migration, in its various forms, has both positive and negative impacts on receiving countries and regions. On the one hand, migration can contribute to economic growth, fill labor shortages, and promote cultural diversity (Castles and Miller, 2009). On the other hand, migration, particularly irregular or mass migration, can lead to social tension, a strain on public services, and concerns about cultural integration.

From a social security perspective, migration-related challenges often arise when local populations perceive migrants as competing for resources, jobs, or public services. Moreover, in regions where migration is irregular or illegal, concerns about crime, terrorism, and border security become more pronounced. These concerns can be exacerbated by the media and political discourse, which may frame migration as a

national security threat rather than a humanitarian or economic issue (Triandafyllidou, 2018).

In border regions like Podlaskie, migration flows are often more intense and visible than in other parts of the country. The region has experienced an influx of migrants, particularly from Belarus and Ukraine, fleeing political repression or seeking better economic opportunities. This has raised concerns among local populations about the impact of migration on their social security, including the strain on public services, competition for jobs, and potential increases in crime. These concerns are compounded by the fact that many migrants enter the region illegally, crossing the border without proper documentation or oversight.

Podlaskie Voivodeship is situated in the northeastern part of Poland, sharing borders with Belarus and Lithuania. Its location at the external frontier of the EU makes it a critical point for managing migration flows, particularly from the east. Historically, Podlaskie has been a relatively homogenous region, with a strong sense of cultural identity rooted in Polish traditions. However, its proximity to non-EU countries has made it a transit point for migrants seeking to enter the EU, either legally or illegally.

The geopolitical situation in Belarus, marked by political instability and human rights violations, has contributed to an increase in migration pressure on Podlaskie's border. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has further exacerbated this issue, with many Ukrainians seeking refuge or better economic opportunities in Poland. While the Polish government has implemented strict border control measures to manage this influx, the presence of migrants has sparked public debate about the region's capacity to absorb new arrivals without compromising social security.

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of migration, particularly in regions like Podlaskie where migration is a visible and contentious issue. Studies have shown that media coverage of migration tends to focus on negative aspects, such as illegal border crossings, crime, and cultural conflict (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, 2016). This can lead to heightened fears among local populations, even when the actual risks posed by migration are minimal.

In Poland, the political discourse on migration has also been heavily influenced by concerns about national security and cultural identity. The ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has adopted a firm stance on migration, particularly in the context of the European migrant crisis.

Government officials have framed migration as a potential threat to Polish cultural and religious identity, as well as a security risk (Krzysztofek, 2019). This has contributed to a climate of fear and suspicion towards migrants, particularly those from non-European countries.

Several studies have examined the relationship between migration and social security in border regions. These studies typically focus on the ways in which migration affects local communities, both in terms of objective security threats and subjective perceptions of insecurity.

For example, research conducted in border regions of Germany and Italy has shown that local populations often perceive migrants as a threat to their economic and social well-being, even when empirical data does not support these fears (Czaika and Di Lillo, 2018). Similar findings have been reported in Poland, particularly in regions like Podlaskie that are at the forefront of migration flows.

The concept of "securitization" is particularly relevant in this context. Securitization refers to the process by which political actors and media outlets frame migration as a security issue, rather than a humanitarian or economic one (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998). In securitized discourses, migrants are often portrayed as threats to national security, public order, and cultural identity. This can lead to policies that prioritize border control and enforcement over integration and support for migrants.

In the case of Podlaskie, securitization of migration has been a key factor in shaping public attitudes towards migrants. The presence of migrants, particularly those entering the region illegally, has been framed as a threat to the region's social security, leading to calls for stricter border controls and increased law enforcement presence.

4. Research Methodology

Given the theoretical framework outlined above, the objective of this research is to analyze the impact of migration on the social security of residents in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The research aims to explore both the objective and subjective dimensions of social security, with a particular focus on how media coverage and political discourse shape public perceptions of migration-related risks. The study seeks to answer the following research question: How does migration affect the social security of Podlaskie residents, and to what extent are their perceptions of insecurity influenced by external factors such as media and political narratives?

The central hypothesis of this study is that the subjective perception of migration as a threat to social security in the Podlaskie Voivodeship is significantly higher than the actual objective risks posed by migration. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that media coverage and political rhetoric play a key role in shaping these perceptions, leading to heightened fears that are not necessarily grounded in empirical data.

The study's primary goal is to assess how migration impacts the social security of residents in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, both in objective terms and in terms of subjective perceptions. The study uses a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to capture a comprehensive picture of the social

security landscape in the region. The following section details the research methodology, including the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and analysis techniques.

The research is designed as a mixed-methods study to provide both a broad quantitative overview of residents' perceptions and detailed qualitative insights from key stakeholders. The study employed two primary data collection techniques:

- A survey distributed to residents of the Podlaskie Voivodeship to assess their perceptions of social security in the context of migration.
- In-depth interviews conducted with local authorities, law enforcement officers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to gain an understanding of the objective challenges posed by migration and how these are addressed.

The combination of these two methods allows for triangulation of data, providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between migration and social security in the region. To guide the study, the following research questions were developed:

- How do residents of the Podlaskie Voivodeship perceive migration and its impact on their social security?
- What are the objective security threats posed by migration in the region, according to local authorities and law enforcement?
- To what extent are residents' perceptions of migration-related insecurity influenced by media coverage and political discourse?

The central hypothesis of the research is:

H1: The subjective perception of migration as a threat to social security among Podlaskie residents is significantly higher than the actual objective risks posed by migration. H2: Media coverage and political rhetoric are key factors influencing the heightened subjective perception of migration-related insecurity.

5. Research Group and Sampling

The study was conducted in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, a border region particularly impacted by migration due to its proximity to Belarus and Ukraine. The region's unique geographical and political context makes it an ideal location for studying the relationship between migration and social security.

Survey Sample: The survey was distributed to a stratified random sample of 500 residents across five major towns and rural areas in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, including Białystok, Augustów, and Suwałki. The sample was stratified to ensure representation across various demographic categories such as age, gender, education

level, and employment status. The stratification aimed to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences with migration.

Interview Sample: In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 key stakeholders, including local government officials, law enforcement officers (border patrol and police), and representatives from NGOs involved in migrant assistance and support. This sample was selected through purposive sampling to ensure that individuals with direct experience and knowledge of migration and security issues in the region were included.

Survey Instrument: The survey consisted of 25 questions designed to measure respondents' perceptions of migration and social security. It included both closed-ended questions (using a Likert scale to gauge levels of concern) and open-ended questions (allowing respondents to elaborate on their views). The survey asked about personal experiences with migrants, perceived risks related to migration (e.g., crime, economic stability, public service burden), and the influence of media and political narratives on their views.

Interview Protocol: The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring key themes while ensuring that all relevant topics were covered. The interviews focused on three main areas: the actual security risks posed by migration, the measures in place to address these risks, and the role of media and political discourse in shaping public perceptions of migration.

Quantitative Data Analysis: The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of residents' perceptions of migration and social security. Cross-tabulation and regression analysis were employed to examine relationships between demographic variables (age, education, proximity to the border) and perceptions of security. The goal was to identify whether certain groups were more likely to perceive migration as a threat.

Qualitative Data Analysis: The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Key themes identified during the analysis included: the objective risks posed by migration, local authorities' response to these risks, and the perceived role of the media in shaping public opinion. Thematic coding was used to identify patterns and relationships in the interview data.

While the mixed-method approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue, there are limitations. First, the survey relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias, particularly in terms of how individuals perceive and report their fears. Second, while interviews with key stakeholders provide valuable insights, they may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives on migration and security within the region. Finally, the study focuses on a single region, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other border regions in Poland or Europe.

The results of the study are presented in two sections: quantitative findings from the survey and qualitative insights from the interviews. These findings will be followed by a discussion that integrates both types of data to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

6. Quantitative Results: Survey Analysis

The survey gathered data from 500 residents of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Below are key findings based on the analysis of the survey responses:

- Perceived Threats to Social Security Respondents were asked to rate the level of threat they believed migration posed to various aspects of social security, including public safety, economic stability, and social cohesion. The majority of respondents (68%) indicated that they perceived migration as a "serious" or "very serious" threat to public safety. However, when asked about specific experiences, only 15% had personally encountered or witnessed migration-related incidents that they felt compromised their security.

Table 1: Perceived Migration-Related Threats to Social Security

Threat	Percentage of Respondents Concerned (%)
Public safety (crime, terrorism)	68%
Economic stability	45%
Social cohesion	55%
Overload on public services	50%

(Chart 1 represents survey data on perceived threats)

Media Influence on Perceptions A significant finding from the survey was the role of the media in shaping perceptions of migration. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported that national television was their primary source of information on migration issues. Only 10% cited personal interactions or direct experience with migrants as the basis for their views. This suggests a significant disconnect between perceived and actual risks.

Table 2: Sources of Information on Migration

Information Source	Percentage of Respondents (%)
National television	48%
Social media	22%
Local newspapers	15%
Personal experience	10%

(Chart 2 shows media influence on perceptions)

7. Qualitative Results: Insights from Interviews

The qualitative interviews with local authorities, law enforcement, and NGO representatives provided additional context for understanding the objective risks posed by migration and the public's perceptions. Several key themes emerged:

Objective Security Threats: According to law enforcement officials, while illegal border crossings have increased in recent years, the number of incidents involving crime or violence associated with migrants is relatively low. Most migrants entering the region are seeking asylum or economic opportunities, and the security risks posed by these individuals are minimal. However, the perception of insecurity remains high, particularly among residents who have little direct contact with migrants.

Media and Political Rhetoric: Interviewees consistently pointed to the role of media in amplifying fears about migration. Local authorities noted that national media coverage often focuses on sensationalist stories of crime and illegal crossings, which contribute to a heightened sense of insecurity. One law enforcement officer remarked: "The reality on the ground is much more complex than what people see on TV. We are dealing with human beings, not just 'migrants.' But the narrative is often skewed toward fear."

8. Discussion

The findings from this research offer valuable insights into the relationship between migration and social security in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. By examining both objective data and subjective perceptions, the study sheds light on the complex ways in which migration is experienced and understood by residents in this border region. This section discusses the implications of the findings, explores how they align with or challenge existing literature, and addresses the research questions and hypotheses outlined earlier.

One of the key findings from the quantitative survey was the significant gap between the perceived and actual risks associated with migration. A substantial majority (68%) of respondents reported that they viewed migration as a serious or very serious threat to public safety, despite only a small percentage (15%) having direct experience with migration-related incidents. This supports the hypothesis (H1) that the subjective perception of migration as a threat to social security is significantly higher than the objective risks posed by migration.

The interview data corroborated this finding, as local authorities and law enforcement consistently emphasized that the actual security risks related to migration in Podlaskie were minimal. Most of the migrants entering the region were either refugees or individuals seeking better economic opportunities, and while there were instances of illegal border crossings, the number of crimes or violent incidents

associated with migrants was relatively low. This aligns with broader research on migration, which shows that fears of increased crime and violence are often disproportionate to the actual risks (Triandafyllidou, 2018).

The second key finding of the study was the crucial role that media and political discourse play in shaping public perceptions of migration. Nearly half of the survey respondents (48%) cited national television as their primary source of information on migration, while only 10% based their views on personal experience. This suggests that the media, rather than direct interactions with migrants, plays a pivotal role in shaping how residents perceive migration and its potential threats.

This finding supports the second hypothesis (H2), which posited that media coverage and political rhetoric are key factors influencing the heightened subjective perception of migration-related insecurity. Media narratives tend to emphasize sensationalist stories about illegal border crossings, crime, and terrorism, often without providing context about the broader, more nuanced realities of migration (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore, 2016). This pattern of media coverage has been observed not only in Poland but across Europe, where migration is often portrayed through a security lens rather than as a complex social and economic phenomenon (Huysmans, 2006).

Moreover, the qualitative interviews highlighted the impact of political rhetoric on public perceptions. Several interviewees, particularly those involved in law enforcement, noted that political discourse often frames migration as a threat to national security and cultural identity. This securitization of migration contributes to a climate of fear and mistrust, even when the empirical evidence does not support such a narrative. As one law enforcement official remarked, "People are scared because that's what they hear on the news—it's not about what they actually see in their daily lives."

The survey data also revealed that perceptions of migration-related insecurity varied based on demographic factors such as age, education level, and geographic location. Older respondents and those with lower levels of education were more likely to view migration as a threat to social security. This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that older populations and individuals with lower socioeconomic status are often more vulnerable to narratives that portray migrants as competitors for jobs, public services, and social welfare (Esses, Medianu, and Lawson, 2013).

Additionally, residents living in rural areas, particularly those closer to the border with Belarus, were more likely to express concerns about migration compared to residents in urban centers like Białystok. This may be due to the fact that rural areas are more directly affected by border crossings and may have less infrastructure to absorb new arrivals. However, it is also possible that rural residents are more influenced by media portrayals of migration, given their limited direct interactions with migrants compared to urban residents.

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and local authorities in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Given the significant role that media and political discourse play in shaping public perceptions of migration, efforts should be made to provide more balanced and accurate information about migration to the public. Media outlets, in particular, have a responsibility to avoid sensationalism and instead focus on providing nuanced, evidence-based coverage of migration issues.

Furthermore, local governments should consider investing in community engagement initiatives that promote direct interaction between residents and migrants. Research has shown that personal contact with migrants can reduce fear and anxiety, as it allows people to see migrants as individuals rather than abstract threats (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011). Programs that foster dialogue and cooperation between local residents and migrant communities could help to alleviate some of the fears and misperceptions that currently exist.

Additionally, policymakers should be cautious about framing migration as a security issue, as this can exacerbate public fears and contribute to social divisions. While it is important to address legitimate security concerns, particularly regarding illegal border crossings, these should be balanced with policies that emphasize integration, support, and cooperation with migrant communities. The securitization of migration, as seen in political discourse in Poland and other EU countries, risks alienating migrants and fueling xenophobia, which can undermine social cohesion and security in the long term.

While this study focuses specifically on the Podlaskie Voivodeship, its findings have broader relevance for other border regions in Europe that are experiencing similar migration pressures. The gap between perceived and actual risks, the influence of media and political discourse, and the socioeconomic factors shaping perceptions of insecurity are issues that transcend national borders. Policymakers across Europe can learn from the experiences of regions like Podlaskie when developing strategies to manage migration in ways that enhance, rather than undermine, social security.

One key takeaway from this study is the importance of addressing both the objective and subjective dimensions of social security. Policymakers must not only focus on managing the actual risks posed by migration but also work to address the public's fears and concerns. This requires a multifaceted approach that includes not only border control and law enforcement but also public education, media engagement, and community-based initiatives.

9. Conclusion

This study has explored the complex relationship between migration and social security in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, with a focus on both objective risks and subjective perceptions. The findings indicate that while migration does pose certain challenges to social security, particularly in a border region like Podlaskie, the

public's perception of these challenges is often exaggerated due to the influence of media and political discourse.

The research supports the hypothesis that subjective fears of migration-related insecurity are significantly higher than the actual risks. Furthermore, media coverage and political rhetoric play a critical role in shaping these perceptions, often amplifying fears that are not necessarily grounded in reality. These findings highlight the importance of providing accurate, balanced information about migration and fostering direct interactions between residents and migrants to reduce fear and promote social cohesion.

For policymakers, the challenge is to develop migration policies that address both the objective and subjective dimensions of social security. This requires not only effective border management and law enforcement but also efforts to counteract sensationalist media narratives and engage local communities in dialogue and cooperation with migrants. By taking a comprehensive approach to migration, regions like Podlaskie can better manage the challenges of migration while ensuring the social security of their residents.

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