

# **PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE IMPACT OF THE REFUGEE AND MIGRATION CRISIS IN 19 SERBIAN CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES**



July 2019

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## 1. Methodological notes

Survey performed by	CeSID Opinion Polling Agency in co-operation with UNDP Serbia
Fieldwork	Between 20 and 30 June 2019
Sample type and size	Random, representative sample of 800 Serbian citizens aged 18 and above living in the territories of 19 local authorities exposed to the wave of migration
Sample frame	Polling station catchment areas as the most reliable registration units
Selection of households	Random sampling without replacement – each second street address from starting point for each polling station catchment area
Selection of respondents by household	Random sampling without replacement: Respondents selected by date of first birthday in relation to survey date
Survey method	Face to face at home
Survey instrument	Questionnaire

This opinion poll, designed to capture *public attitudes towards the impact of the refugee and migration crisis in 19 Serbian local authorities*, was carried out by CeSid between 20 and 30 June 2019. The survey was performed as part of European Union (EU) support to migration management in the Republic of Serbia on a sample of 800 adult citizens of Serbia permanently residing in the 19 cities and municipalities that saw the greatest exposure to the migration wave. These local governments were **Palilula, Obrenovac, Savski Venac, Loznica, Sjenica, Tutin, Pirot, Bela Palanka, Dimitrovgrad, Subotica, Sombor, Šid, Lajkovac, Preševo, Vranje, Bujanovac, Bosilegrad, Kikinda, and Kanjiža**. The local authorities were divided into three categories depending on the extent to which they were affected by the migration crisis: **Group 1** comprised severely affected communities, namely Šid, Loznica, Obrenovac, and Palilula; **Group 2** was made up of moderately affected cities and municipalities, those of Subotica, Sombor, Savski Venac, Vranje, Pirot, Kikinda, Bujanovac, Lajkovac, Sjenica, Bosilegrad, and Tutin; whilst **Group 3** was composed of local authorities where reception and asylum centres had been closed in the intervening period, namely Bela Palanka, Dimitrovgrad, Preševo, and Kanjiža.

During enumerator training, instructors insisted on adherence to two important rules that, in addition to the sample, together have a major impact on the representativeness of the survey: *order of steps* and the *first birthday rule*. Adherence to the order of steps ensures that an enumerator can comprehensively cover each survey point, whilst the first birthday rule prevents responses only from members of the public who first answer the door when an enumerator visits. Enumerators were required to interview the member of each household aged 18 or above whose birthday came soonest after the date of the enumerator's visit. This also ensured the representativeness of respondents by gender, education, and age.

## 2. Description of the sample

The following categories of respondents were covered based on the methodology established for the survey:

<b>Structure by gender (%)</b>	Women	56
	Men	44
<b>Average age</b>	<b>48</b>	
<b>Structure by educational attainment (%)</b>	Elementary school or lower	13
	Two- or three-year secondary school	16
	Four-year secondary school	42
	College/university	25
	School/university student	4
<b>Occupation (%)</b>	Housewife	10
	Farmer	3
	Unskilled or semi-skilled worker	9
	Skilled or highly-skilled worker	21
	Technician	16
	Civil servant	9
	School/university student	7
	Professional	16
	Other	9
<b>Employment status (%)</b>	Employed full-time	48
	Employed part-time	10
	Unemployed, actively seeking employment	10
	Unemployed (school/university student)	4
	Unemployed (housewife, retired, etc.)	28
<b>Ethnicity (%)</b>	Serbian	77
	Montenegrin	1
	Croatian	4
	Hungarian	6
	Bosniak	4
	Albanian	2
	Other	5
Undeclared	1	
<b>Place of residence (%)</b>	Major city	34
	Rural area	21
	Small town/suburban area	45
<b>Total average household income (RSD)</b>	<b>57,950</b>	
<b>Average household size</b>	<b>3,2 members</b>	
<b>Communities by impact of migration crisis (%)</b>	Severely affected	36
	Moderately affected	52
	Asylum centres closed	12

### 3. Background

‘The migration crisis’ is a name given to the set of events that ensued following political upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa. This turmoil resulted in conflict, large-scale economic disruption, and major loss of life, and prompted many citizens of these nations to flee, initially with no aim other than saving their lives, but later also in search of greater economic opportunities. These flows, both legal and illegal, first appeared as early as 2010; the crest of the wave, however, was recorded in 2015,<sup>1</sup> when the largest number of migrants abandoned their erstwhile homes, mainly in the Middle East and North Africa. Today, nine years later, numerous people are still choosing to leave their countries in the hope of reaching the European Union and finding a better life for themselves and their families.

As the Balkans are situated at the intersection of these migration flows, the pathways – including the one through Serbia – were officially named the ‘Balkan Route’. The route was closed not long after the migrations peaked, in March 2016, but its closure did not stop the movement of people. The influx of migrants continued, mainly by way of Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, albeit with one major difference: as borders became impossible to cross legally, an increasing number of migrants turned instead to illegal activities, with human smuggling across frontiers and human trafficking growing more common.

Even though migrations are notoriously difficult to track due to their fluid nature and the illicit activity they involve, estimates put the monthly number of refugees and migrants in Serbia at around 4,000. However, UNICEF and its partners believe that some 18,000 people requiring assistance will transit through Serbia in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

According to UNHCR estimates, about 36,000 people have arrived in Europe since the start of 2019, most of whom (over 28,000) came by sea across the Mediterranean. About 660 people are also estimated to have died on the way. Most of the 2019 arrivals are originally from Afghanistan and Morocco, and 60% are men. Greece and Spain have borne the brunt of handling these new arrivals. Since in excess of 18,000 people have arrived in Greece since the beginning of this year, it is to be expected that most of them will continue their journey to Europe by travelling through Serbia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR estimates, one million migrants arrived in Europe in 2015. See [data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean).

<sup>2</sup> Source: [unicef.org/serbia/en/refugee-and-migrant-crisis](https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/refugee-and-migrant-crisis).

<sup>3</sup> See [data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean).

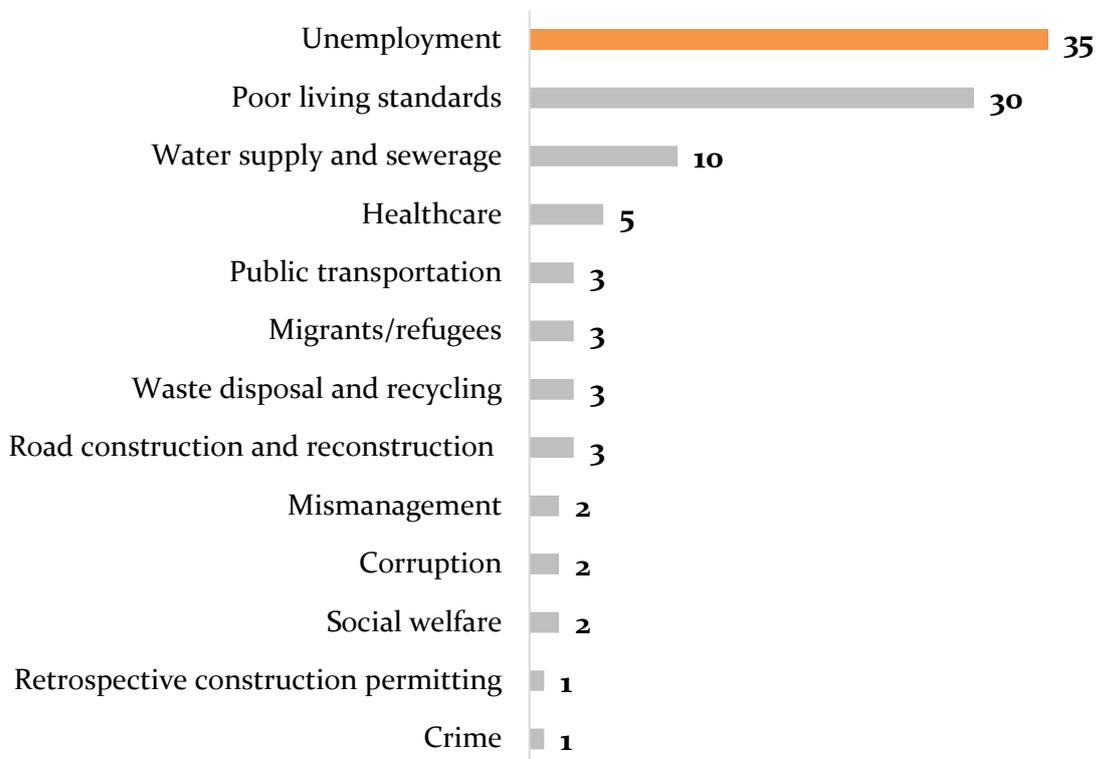
## 4. Survey findings

### 4.1 Living standards in the communities surveyed

The battery of general questions with which we opened this year's survey of attitudes towards migrants in Serbia included asking respondents to self-report their perceived living standards in 2019. The conclusion here is that over one-half of those polled (55%) feel their living standards are either 'good' or 'very good'. This finding reveals there has been an improvement in how respondents in the communities assessed perceive their quality of life, as in the previous survey (2017) the figure stood at 45%. At the opposite end of the scale, 30% believe their living standards are 'mostly poor', with another 7% seeing them as 'very poor', for a total of 37% who view their quality of life as below par. These data show fewer respondents are now dissatisfied with their living standards than at the time of the previous survey in August 2017, when 47% shared this opinion. Looking at the demographics, better-educated residents of urban areas (especially Belgrade) who hold full-time jobs are more likely to be satisfied with their own and their families' living standards than other respondents.

The vast majority of those polled (83%) reported having lived in the territory of their local authority for more than 10 years at the time of the survey.

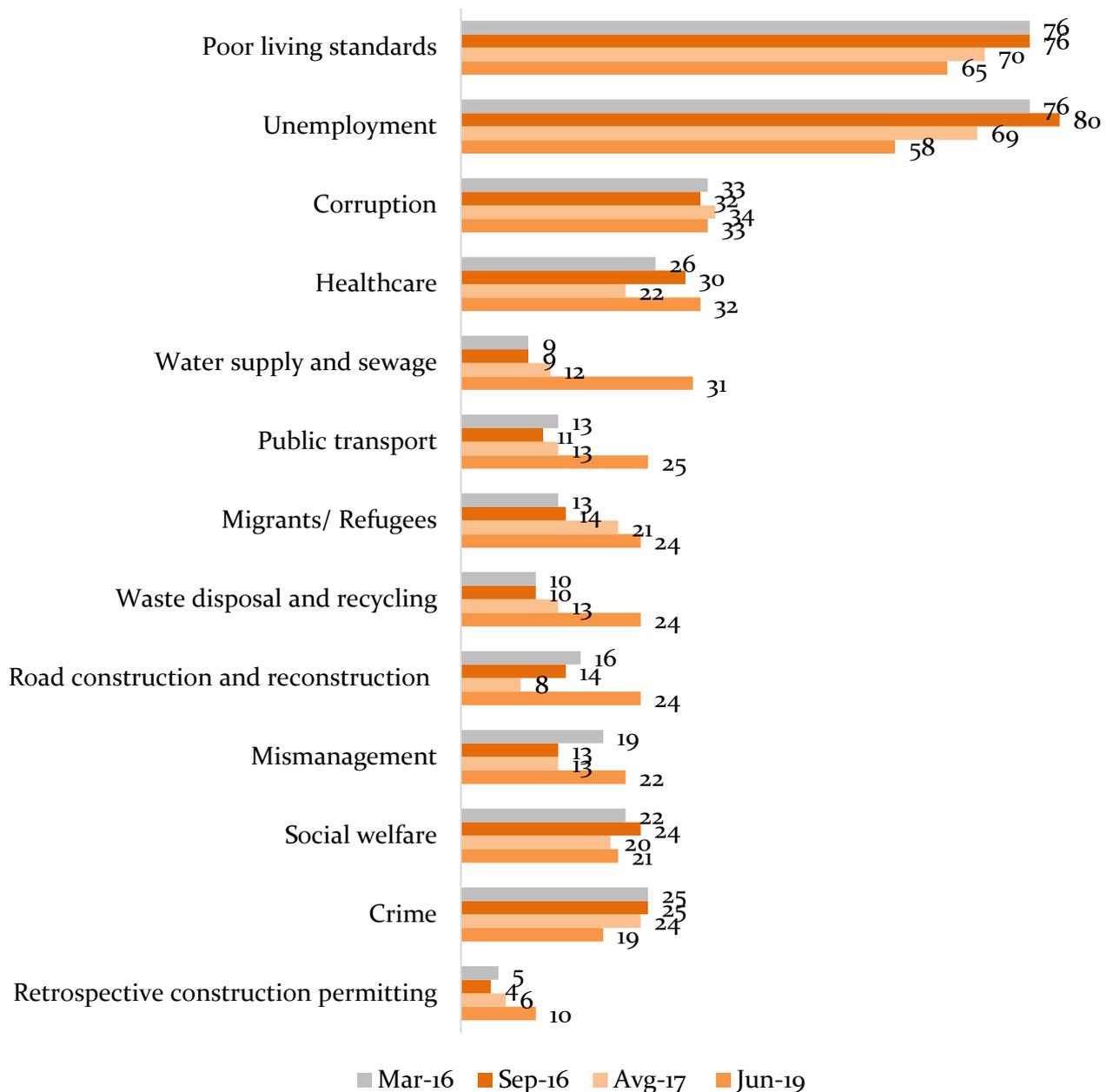
Chart 1. **Key self-reported issues facing the respondent's local authority (first choice)**  
(%)



We also asked the residents to say which day-to-day issues they were facing in their communities. Unemployment (at 35%) and poor living standards (30%) were cited as the principal problems here.

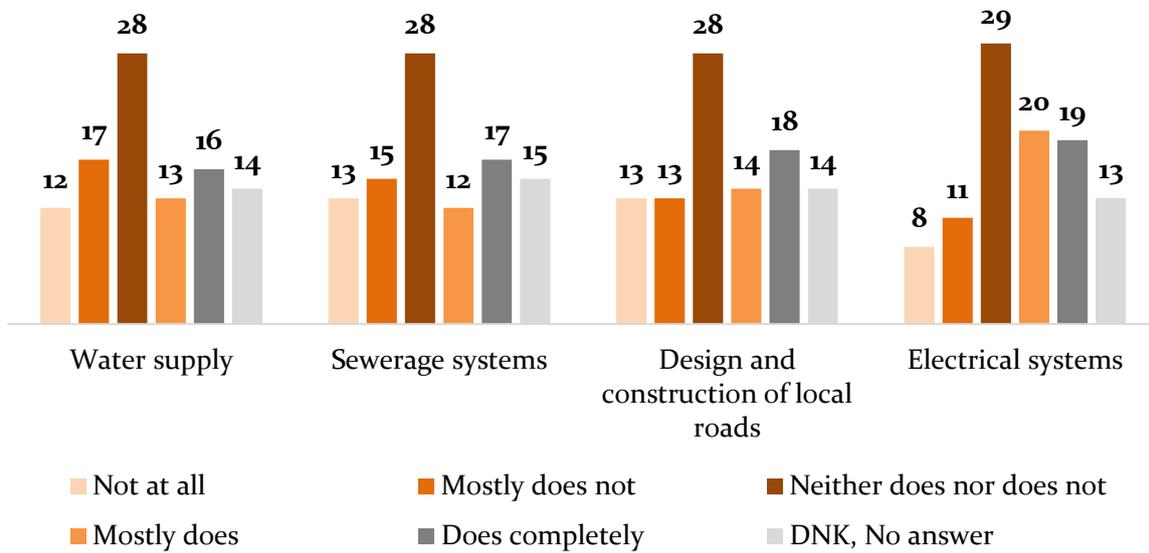
In aggregate, those polled still tend to highlight unemployment and living standards as the major problems they face, and a trend seems to be emerging of respondents choosing economic issues as their most pressing concerns. As few as 3% of those polled mentioned migrants as their first choice, a drop of 5 percentage points (pp) relative to the summer of 2017, when the figure stood at 8%. In aggregate, this percentage rises to 24%, a 3pp increase on 2017 (21%).

Chart 2. Key self-reported issues facing the respondent's local authority (aggregate) (%)  
Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings



Most respondents (39%) believe there is a ‘completely’ or ‘mostly’ sufficient supply of electrical engineers in their community, with 32% sharing this opinion for civil engineers qualified for local road building (32%), sewerage systems (29%), and, finally, water supply (29%).

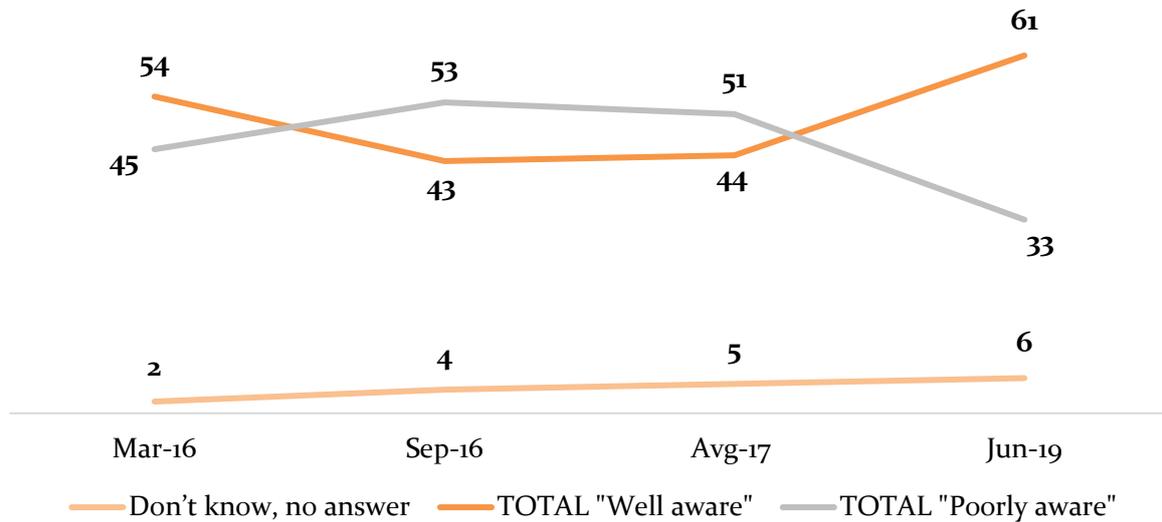
Chart 3. To what extent do you believe your city/municipality has a supply of qualified engineers able to do work in the following areas? (%)



## 4.2 General attitudes towards migrants

Awareness of the migration crisis declined in 2016 only to increase noticeably since the previous survey, with the figure rising from 44% in 2017 to 61% in 2019. The opposing view has seen a corresponding drop, to 33%.

Chart 4. **Public awareness of the migration crisis (%)**  
Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings



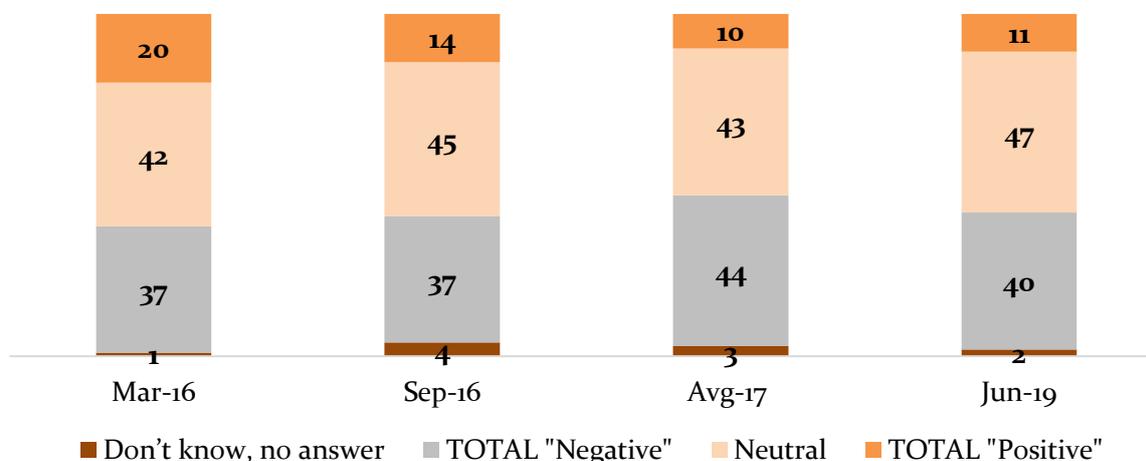
Residents of communities more exposed to the crisis are better aware than those of moderately affected communities, unlike in the previous survey, when the findings were reversed. In general, men are more likely to be better aware than women, as are respondents with higher educational attainment and residents of South-Eastern Serbia.

Table 1. **Public awareness of the migration crisis**

In general, how aware are you of the migration crisis? (%), June 2019	Total	Group 1 communities: Severely affected	Group 2 communities: Moderately affected	Group 3 communities: Asylum centres closed
<b>N</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>98</b>
Very poorly	5	4	6	8
Mostly poorly	27	23	29	31
Mostly well	53	56	50	53
Very well	9	12	6	7
DNK/No answer	6	5	9	1

Nearly one-half of those polled (47%) reported neutral views of migrants, whilst 40% shared negative attitudes towards migrants arriving in Serbia. In addition, one in nine respondents expressed positive opinions. A decline in positive attitudes was registered between 2016 and 2017, but these have risen by 1pp in 2019 relative to the preceding survey. Better educated respondents, residents of Central and Western Serbia, and those aged 60 and above were more likely to share positive views.

Chart 5. Evolution of attitudes towards migrants (%)  
Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings



Negative attitudes towards migrants correlate with the impact of the migration crisis on the community. Here, residents of severely affected municipalities and cities harbour more negative views, whilst those of moderately affected areas are much less likely to report adverse attitudes. Migrant attitudes indexes were obtained by subtracting the total percentage of positive views from the total percentage of negative views. A comparison of these indexes shows them to be negative in both groups of local authorities, but much more so in the severely affected cities and municipalities (-43 vs -17).

Table 2. Attitudes towards migrants by local authority group

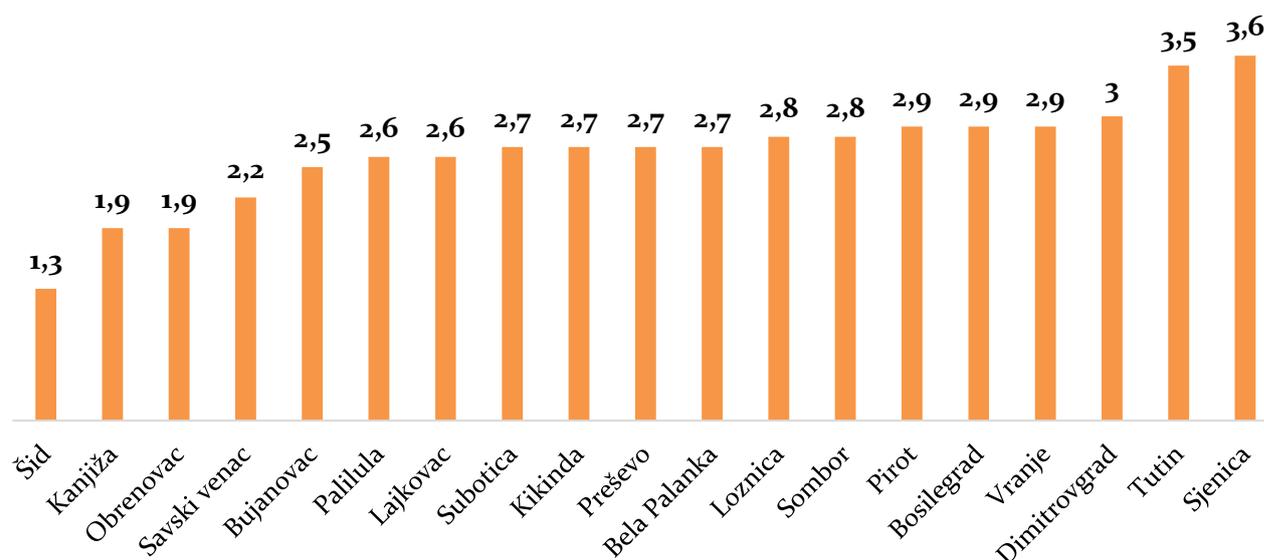
In general, what is your attitude towards migrants/refugees arriving in Serbia? (%), June 2019	N	Sum of negative ('Very' + 'Mostly' negative)	Neutral	Sum of positive ('Very' + 'Mostly' positive)	Index (positive - negative)
Total	800	40	47	11	-29
Group 1 communities: Severely affected	291	53	35	10	-43
Group 2 communities: Moderately affected	410	32	51	15	-17
Group 3 communities: Asylum centres closed	98	35	61	4	-31

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being 'very negative' and 5 being 'very positive'), the average score for the attitude towards migrants arriving in Serbia stands at 2.59. As in the previous survey, the lowest scores were awarded in Šid, with Vranje seeing the greatest improvement in attitudes towards migrants (from 1.88 in 2017 to 2.9 in 2019). Residents of Dimitrovgrad, Sjenica, and Tutin reported the most positive views, with their average scores exceeding 3.

A possible explanation for the decline in the average scores for attitudes towards migrants in some communities may lie in the fact that the media and social networks are increasingly depicting migrants as a threat to security, health, and ethnic identity. For Bela Palanka,

Dimitrovgrad, Preševo, and Kanjiža, the improvement in attitudes may be due to the closure of reception and transit centres in all four municipalities. A sense of being personally threatened may compound the impact of the hostile rhetoric common across mainstream and social media. The major increase in the average scores for Sjenica and Tutin may be attributed to the high degree of acceptance by the local population, who are also predominantly Muslim, which may have facilitated the integration of migrants there.

Chart 6. Average scores for attitudes towards migrants in the communities surveyed



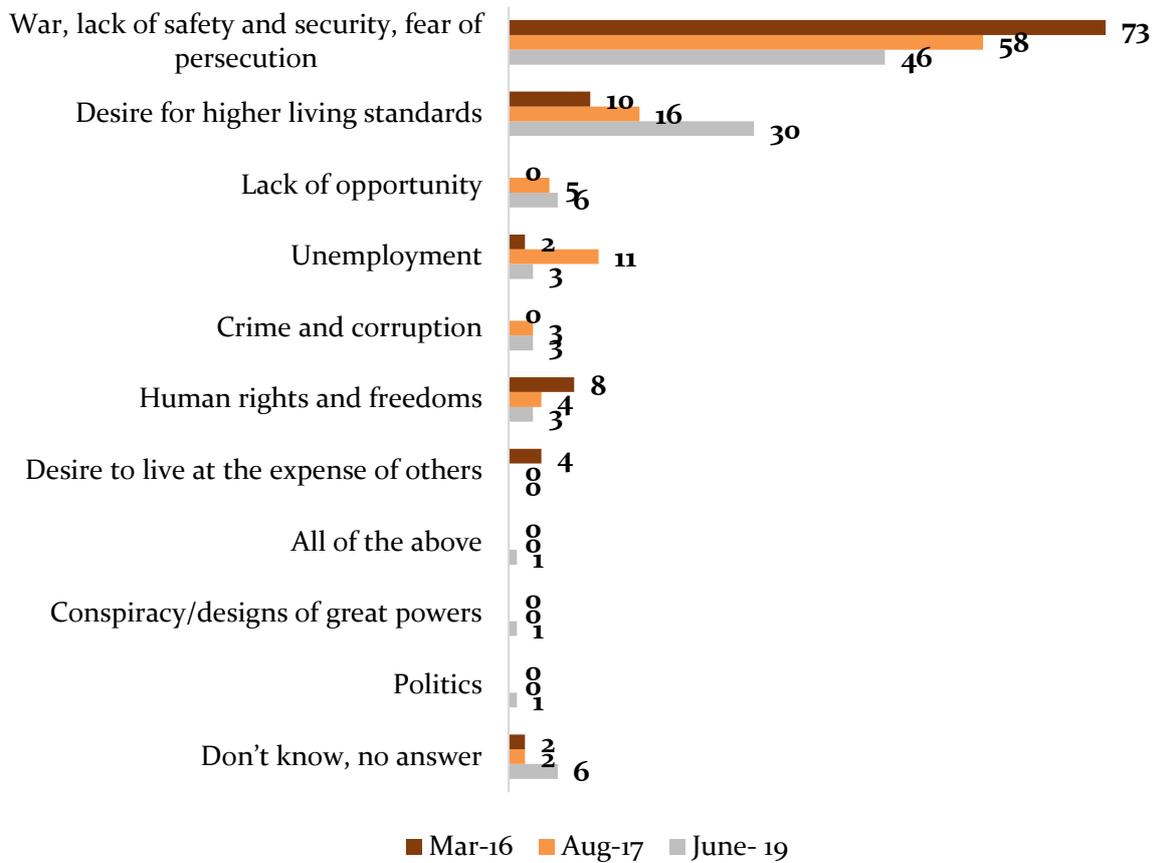
Public awareness of an issue shapes attitudes towards it. In this regard, we felt it was very important to determine whether there was a connection between awareness of migrant issues and public attitudes towards them. Here, it is noticeable that respondents who were better aware were also more likely to hold positive views of migrants, and vice versa.

Table 3. Attitudes towards migrants and awareness of the migration crisis  
Comparison of 2017 and 2019 findings

Attitudes towards migrants/awareness (%), June 2019	Poorly aware ('Mostly' + 'Very' poorly)		Well aware ('Mostly' + 'Well' aware)	
	August 2017	June 2019	August 2017	June 2019
Negative attitudes ('Very' + 'Mostly' negative)	50	42	40	41
Neutral attitudes	42	48	42	44
Positive attitudes ('Very' + 'Mostly' positive)	4	9	17	14
DNK/No answer	4	1	1	1

The greatest proportion of respondents (46%) still believe that migrations are primarily driven by war, lack of security, and fear of persecution.

**Chart 7. Key reasons why migrants leave their countries of origin (%)**  
*Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings*



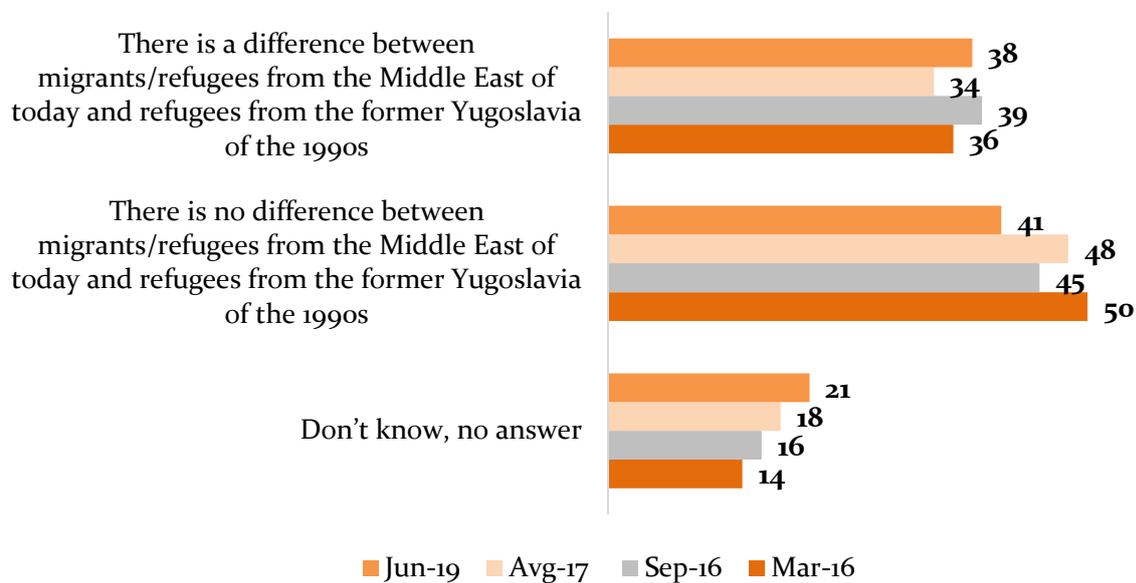
That said, there has been a major decline in the proportion of those polled sharing this view relative to 2017, when the figure stood at 58%. Even greater differences are observable relative to 2016, when as many as 73% of those polled shared the same opinion. This reduction has come on the back of a decline in the number of respondents who perceive socio-economic factors as the causes of migrations, from 16% in 2017 to 30% in 2019. The respondents also cited lack of opportunity (6%), unemployment (3%), and threats to human rights (3%). All other possible causes were reported by significantly smaller numbers of those polled.

A substantial decline has occurred since 2016 in the belief that there is no difference between migrants arriving from the Middle East and 1990s refugees from the former Yugoslavia, from 50% to 41%. This has resulted in a corresponding increase in the opposite view, with 38% seeing differences between these two categories. The percentage of undecided respondents has also grown (from 14% in 2016 to 21% in 2019).

The key distinction between these two groups is that the 1990s migrations are seen primarily as having been the consequence of conflict and persecution, with today's migrants perceived as motivated exclusively by economic considerations (26%). Another 20% of those polled felt that the difference was down to the fact that the refugees of the 1990s were Serbs, people of the same ethnicity, with the same proportion ascribing the contrast between those who arrived in the 1990s and the migrants of today to differences of religion, culture, and customs (20%). Another

14% believe that today's migrants from the Middle East face better conditions than those of the 1990s, with 4% claiming some of the most recent arrivals are potential terrorists.

**Chart 8. Differences between migrants/refugees from the Middle East of today and refugees from the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s (%)**  
*Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings*



### 4.3 Response by local authorities to the migration crisis

Respondents believe the situation in their communities is better than it was six months before the survey (as reported by 44%), but one-third still feel the state of affairs is poor (32%).

Differences in the perceived numbers of migrants in each local authority are driven by the degree to which the local government is affected by the influx of migrants. Residents of seriously affected communities are more likely to feel the number has increased (with 40% sharing this view). By contrast, the greatest proportion of respondents of moderately affected cities and municipalities believe the number of migrants has gone down.

Table 4. Perceived numbers of migrants

Do you believe the number of migrants/refugees in your municipality has increased, decreased, or remained the same? (%), June 2019	Total	Group 1 communities: Severely affected	Group 2 communities: Moderately affected	Group 3 communities: Asylum centres closed
<b>N</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>98</b>
<i>Increased</i>	29	40	26	7
<i>Decreased</i>	31	9	34	85
<i>Remained the same</i>	28	38	25	7
<i>DNK/No answer</i>	12	13	15	1

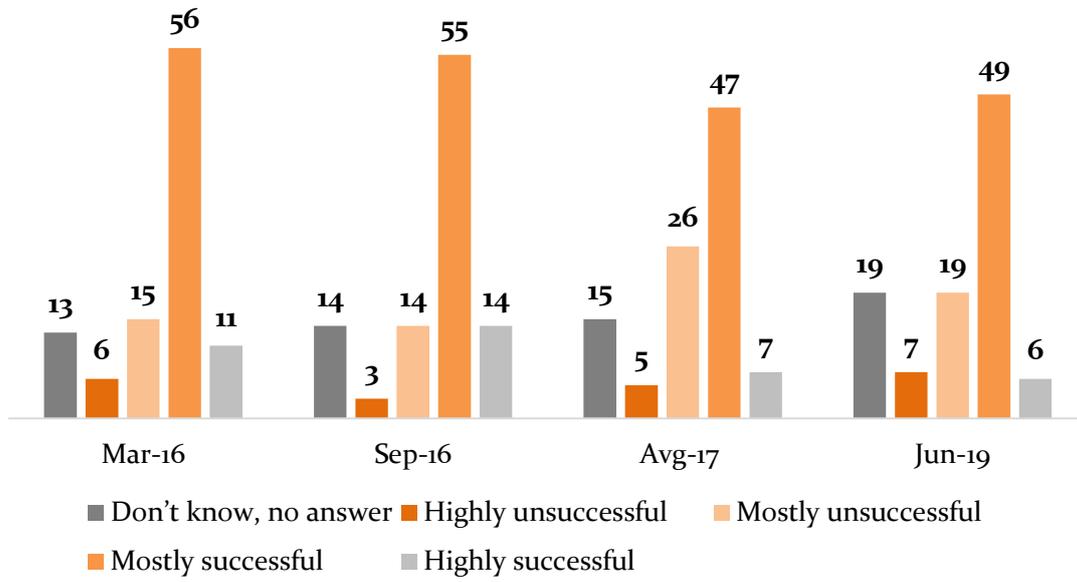
In addition, most respondents believe that the migration crisis has not affected the normal operation of their local authority and the regular provision of public services. That said, the adverse impact of the crisis was noted by larger numbers of those polled in severely affected communities.

Table 5. Attitudes towards local authority performance

In general, to what extent has the migration crisis affected the regular (normal) operation of your local authority? (%), June 2019	Total	Group 1 communities: Severely affected	Group 2 communities: Moderately affected	Group 3 communities: Asylum centres closed
<b>N</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>98</b>
It has had no impact at all, it is business as usual	51	37	59	58
It has had an adverse impact on regular operations/provision of public services	28	47	16	21
It has caused problems in the provision of services to migrants/refugees, but has had no impact on regular operations/provision of public services	9	6	10	13
<i>DNK/No answer</i>	12	10	15	7

Most of those polled are satisfied with how their local authority has handled the migration crisis (with 55% reporting response by local government was 'mostly' or 'highly' successful). There has been a drop in the percentage of respondents who feel their local government was up to the task, from 31% in 2017 to 26% in 2019. Satisfaction levels recorded in June 2019 are much lower than those observed in 2017.

**Chart 9. Attitudes towards the local authority's response to the crisis (%)**  
*Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings*



#### 4.4 Impact of migration crisis on local authority performance

The respondents voiced the most concern about sanitation, which they felt was very poor in all the cities and municipalities surveyed. Another reason for unease was the safety of children, young people, and women, as well as personal safety. A considerable number were also worried about the possible spread infectious diseases or uncommon illnesses, as well as fear of terrorism. Similar results were found in 2017, with the only exception being that sanitation was not regarded as an issue at the time; this is also the aspect that has seen the greatest increase in terms of negative attitudes relative to the previous survey. The most frequently reported beneficial effects of the migration crisis are the boost it has caused in retail sales, and the improvement of relations with adherents of other religions.

Table 6. **Self-reported challenges and benefits of the migration crisis (%)**  
*Comparison of 2017 and 2019 findings*

Survey	Negative		Neutral		Positive		DNK/No answer	
	Aug 17	Jun 19	Aug 17	Jun 19	Aug 17	Jun 19	Aug 17	Jun 19
Reputation/image of your city/municipality	27	38	45	37	23	14	5	11
Water supply and sewerage	24	33	49	40	17	10	9	17
Crime rate	39	44	39	32	14	11	9	13
Local economy	22	30	49	38	18	16	11	16
Jobs for local residents	24	30	49	41	17	14	10	15
Personal safety	41	53	39	26	16	14	4	7
Safety of women	51	57	30	24	13	12	6	7
Safety of children and young people	51	56	30	24	14	12	4	8
Sanitation	40	62	43	21	13	9	4	8
Spread of uncommon illnesses	35	54	39	24	14	9	12	13
Way of life in your city/municipality	34	42	49	35	14	12	3	11
Local culture and tradition	27	31	50	44	16	13	7	12
Relationship with other religions	24	26	53	40	18	21	5	13
Fear of terrorism	48	52	28	27	15	12	9	9
Transportation services	21	34	54	38	19	14	7	14
Accommodation services	21	27	49	41	22	17	9	15
Volume of retail sales	17	24	47	35	29	27	7	14
Media coverage of your city/municipality	22	24	47	44	24	18	7	14
Investment in your city/municipality	20	29	46	42	23	14	11	15
Access to healthcare	24	29	51	46	16	11	9	14

One-third of those polled (34%) do not know or cannot say how much migrants staying in their city or municipality spend on average each day. When respondents' opinions aggregated for all 19 local authorities are taken into account, the average perceived spending by a migrant in one day comes to about 25 euros. The sum reported in the previous survey (August 2017) was higher by as much as 19 euros; at that time, local residents estimated each migrant spent 43 euros daily.

**Table 7. Estimates of average spending by migrants**

In your opinion or to the best of your knowledge, how much does the average migrant/refugee spend in one day (on food, accommodation, transportation, etc.) during their stay in your community? (%), June 2019	Total	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
		communities: Severely affected	communities: Moderately affected	communities: Asylum centres closed
N	800	291	411	98
Up to EUR 10	17	11	21	17
EUR 11 to EUR 30	29	34	30	11
EUR 31 to EUR 50	6	7	6	8
More than EUR 51	2	3	1	2
Migrants do not spend anything	12	5	13	26
DNK/No answer	34	40	29	36

The reasons behind these rather marked differences between communities in their residents' perceptions of average spending by migrants should be sought in the closure of some asylum centres, which led to fewer local residents estimating how much money was being spent, and, alternatively, the often unrealistically low amounts estimated by respondents before the centres were closed.

As expected, the residents of communities severely affected by the migration crisis believe spending is somewhat higher than those of the other two groups of cities and municipalities. The large numbers of migrants in these areas has meant that as few as 5% of those polled there believe migrants 'do not spend anything' during their stay, whereas a slightly greater proportion than in the other two groups also believe larger sums are spent.

To assess the impact of the presence of migrants on local residents, we inquired as to how often the respondents actually encountered migrants. Most (38%) reported doing so 'every day', with an additional 24% reporting encounters with migrants 'several times a week'. A total of 16% reported seeing migrants 'once a week' (16%) and 'once a month or less frequently' (18%). Finally, as few as 3% claimed to 'never' encounter migrants. A significant proportion of those polled (61%) reported coming into direct contact with migrants. It ought to be noted that most respondents who claimed to have come into contact with migrants did not report any particular experiences related to this encounter, but, rather, remained neutral (as claimed by 48%). A total of 34% reported positive experiences in their contacts with migrants, with the remainder, or one in seven of those polled, describing their experiences as negative.

To understand the reasons why 13% of those polled report negative experiences in direct contacts with migrants, we went on to ask the respondents why they felt this was so. Here the main reasons for adverse impressions were because the migrants were allegedly aggressive and rude.

Finally, the greatest proportion of those polled (64%) feel the presence of migrants has had no impact whatsoever on their lives or the lives of their families. That said, residents of severely affected communities are much more likely to claim migrants have had an adverse impact on their lives (as reported by 49%) than in the remaining two groups of cities and municipalities.

**Table 8. Perceived impact of migrants on personal life (%)**

<b>Has the presence of migrants/ refugees had any impact on your personal life and the lives of your family and friends? (%)</b> , June 2019	Total	Group 1 communities: Severely affected	Group 2 communities: Moderately affected	Group 3 communities: Asylum centres closed
<b>N</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>98</b>
No impact	64	50	76	61
Positive impact	9	1	11	25
Negative impact	27	49	13	14

## 4.5 What kind of assistance should migrants receive?

Respondents' first choice in this regard was that migrants should receive food aid, whilst significantly fewer of those polled chose the provision of shelter/accommodation until the migrants were able to continue onwards to the EU. In aggregate, the greatest number believe it was necessary to give migrants the appropriate medical aid, which can be linked to many respondents' concerns about infectious disease. Ranked second and third are food aid and help with children.

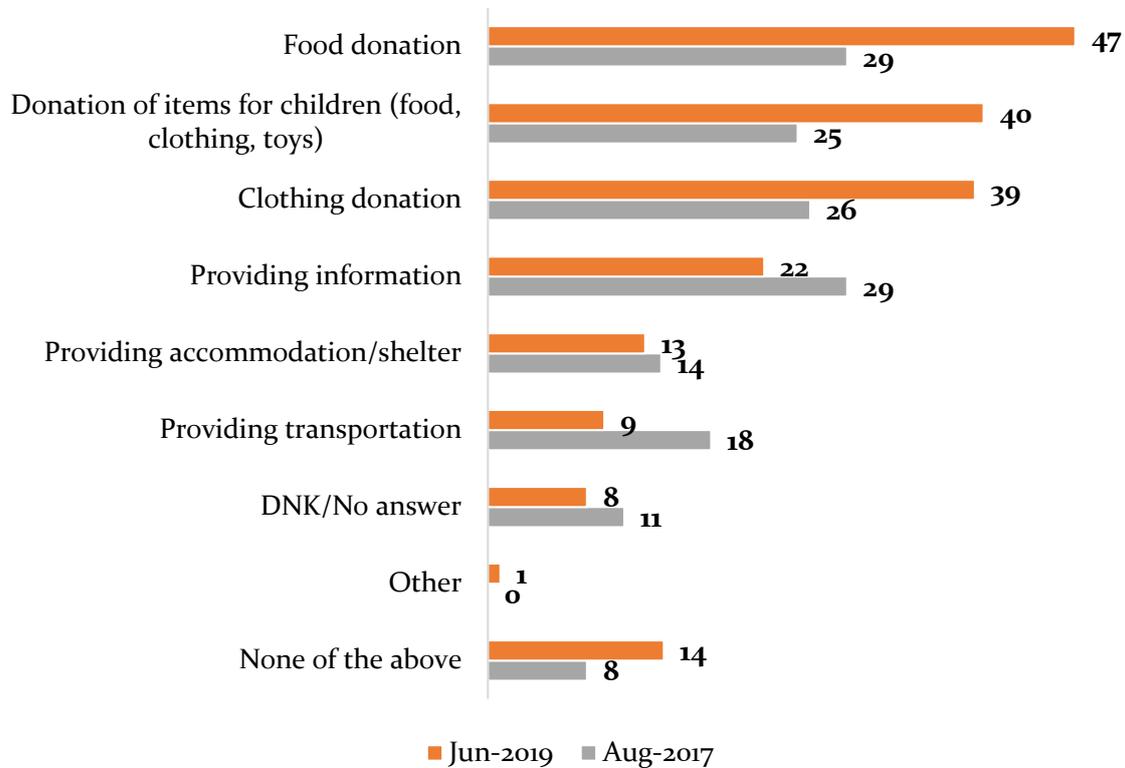
Table 9. **Migrants' perceived assistance needs (%)**  
*Comparison of 2017 and 2019 findings*

Survey	First choice		All choices	
	Aug 2017	Jun 19	Aug 2017	Jun 19
Work/employment	0	1	1	8
Clothing	3	1	32	35
Protection of women from violent men in the group	1	1	12	15
Help with children	4	5	27	39
Registration	11	8	24	19
Medical aid	7	8	39	42
Any assistance to shorten their stay in Serbia	11	10	27	30
Information	7	11	22	19
Repatriation to countries of origin/ previous country of transit	18	12	37	19
Shelter/ accommodation until continuing onwards to EU	14	17	36	32
Food aid	22	26	56	39

The respondents express willingness to help migrants and make their stay in Serbia more comfortable; see Chart 10. The extent of solidarity shown in this survey is significantly higher than that captured in 2017; it seems that a much greater proportion of those polled are ready to lead by example and engage to help migrants in their communities.

The key potential forms of assistance for migrants in local communities cited by those polled are food donation (47%), help for children through donations of food, clothing, footwear, and toys (40%), and clothing donation (39%). Support for these humanitarian activities is much more widespread in this survey than it was two years ago. By contrast, other efforts, such as providing information (22%), providing accommodation and shelter (13%), and providing transportation for migrants (9%), are now less commonly chosen, and respondents no longer seem to believe these constitute priorities.

**Chart 10. How would you personally help migrants/refugees (%)**  
*Comparison of 2017 and 2019 findings*  
*\* Multiple answers possible*



And yet, regardless of the readiness voiced by those polled to help migrants by engaging in humanitarian activities, the proportion of respondents who oppose the construction of accommodation centres remains extremely high. Currently, 58% of those surveyed are opposed to having such centres established in their municipalities and cities. This does constitute a 4pp drop relative to two years ago, when 62% were hostile to this idea, but is a marked increase relative to 2016, when one-third (33%) were against asylum centres opening in their communities.

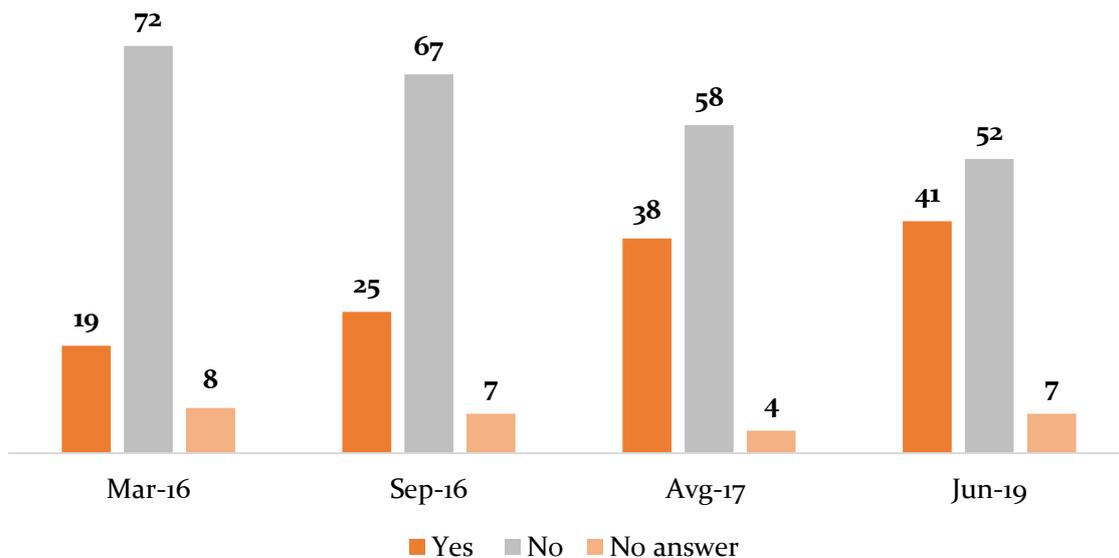
## 4.6 International relief efforts

The respondents are nearly unanimous in seeing the EU as the main source of support and donations for Serbia in tackling the migration crisis and its consequences: as many as 85% of those polled share this opinion. Much fewer (4%) reported Russia as a key donor. As in the previous survey, also mentioned were Germany, Norway, and the US.

Past years' surveys have revealed been a steady increase in the proportion of respondents who reported having heard about recent international financial assistance or donations to their communities aimed at addressing the migration crisis. The June 2019 findings show that 41% of those polled were familiar with this aid, although the majority (52%) remain unaware of such assistance. Nevertheless, although seemingly bleak, this result still shows that international assistance has become more recognisable if compared with the figure captured four years ago, when as many as 72% reported not being familiar with foreign aid.

Over three-quarters (76%) of those who claim to be familiar with international assistance believe it is useful, with one in ten seeing it as ineffectual.

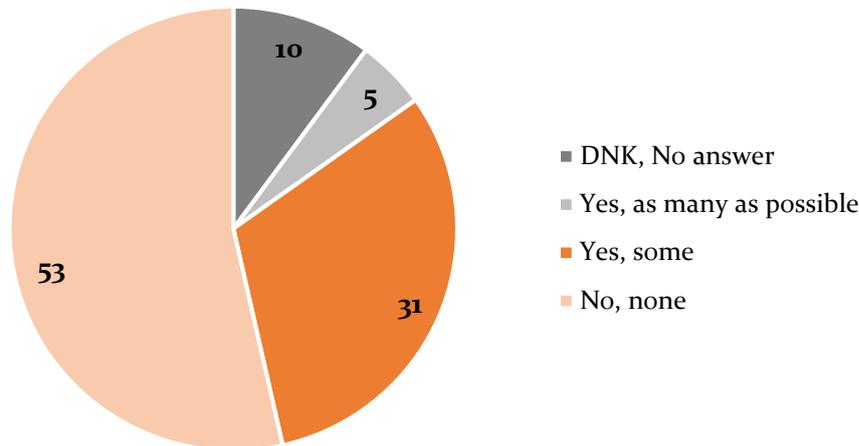
Chart 11. **Recognisability of international financial assistance for cities/municipalities**  
(%) Comparison of 2016, 2017, and 2019 findings



## 4.7 Social distance and respondents' attitudes

More than two-third of those polled (68%) are against having migrants as their immediate neighbours, a decline of 4pp relative to 2017 (when 72% of all respondents voiced this view).

Chart 12. **Should Serbia seek to permanently integrate migrants/refugees into its society? (%)**



Both the previous and this survey found more than one-half of those polled (53% in 2019) were opposed to the idea of Serbia seeking to permanently integrate refugees/migrants. Coupled with the increase in hostility to this idea from 47% in 2016 to 52 percent in 2017, this finding indicates there has been no change in public attitudes towards potentially allowing migrants to settle in Serbia.

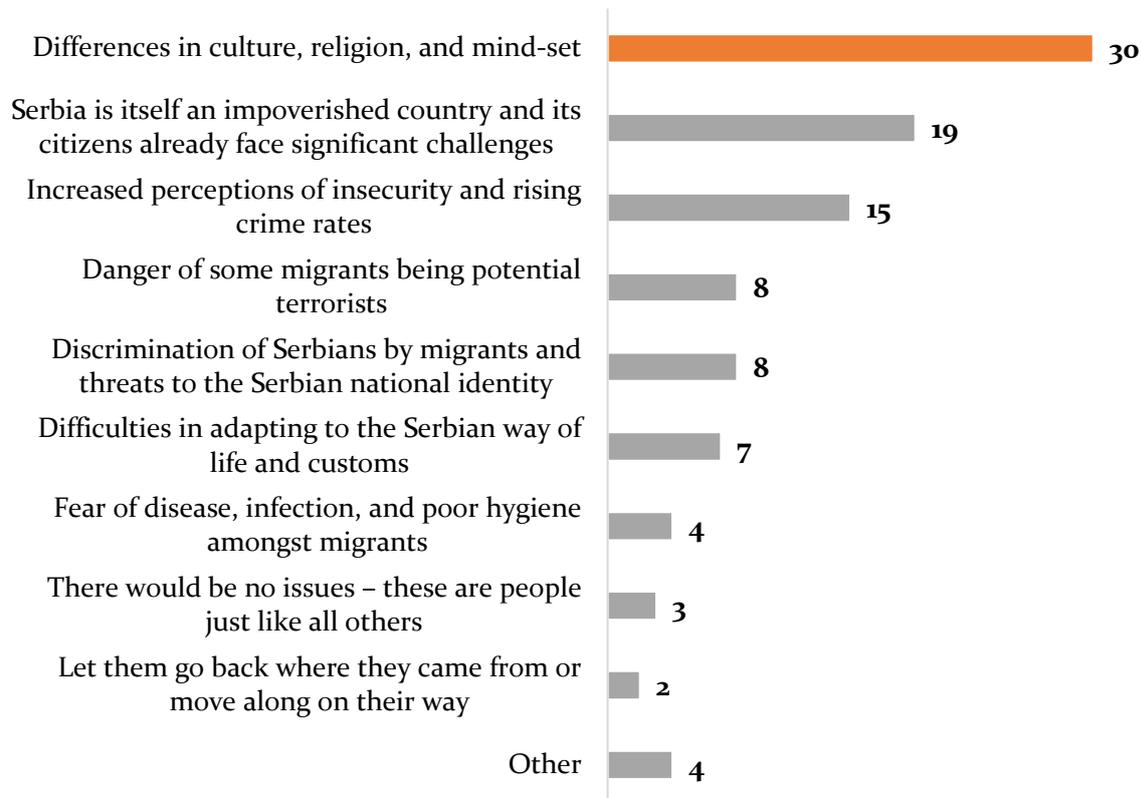
It should be pointed out that the greatest opposition to migrants remaining in Serbia permanently comes from communities severely affected by the crisis and those that formerly hosted asylum centres, where 62% of those polled reject the idea of having any migrants permanently remain in the country.

Even though resistance to the idea of integrating migrants has stagnated relative to 2017, no major changes were registered in support for this option, which has remained at the same level as two years ago, at about one-third of those polled (36%).

There are three key reasons why members of the public reject migrants: *differences in religion, culture, customs, and mind-set (30%); increased perceptions of insecurity and rising crime rates (15%); and perception of Serbia as itself an impoverished country already facing significant challenges (19%)*. See Chart 13.

Apart from these reasons, the respondents also justified their antagonism towards migrants by citing migrants' allegedly aggressive behaviour, rudeness, and poor manners.

Chart 13. What is the principal factor that precludes the integration of migrants/refugees in Serbia? (%)



This year's survey has revealed much less readiness on the part of respondents to interact with migrants than two years ago; see Table 10.

Support for all types of interaction with migrants has declined or stagnated relative to August 2017. The findings show an 8pp fall in the number of respondents ready to communicate with either a migrant man or woman, and an 1pp decline in the proportion of those polled who are ready to donate food or clothing to migrants.

Interestingly, even traditionally open types of interaction, such as receiving treatment in the same hospital, or having children attend the same schools, now meet with less support. Relative to 2017, the number of respondents who would countenance migrant children attending the same schools as their children has now declined by as much as 9pp, whilst the proportion of those prepared to allow migrants to be treated in the same hospital as themselves has plummeted by 17pp.

As in the previous survey, support for the idea of having migrants as neighbours or visiting their home has remained low, at under one-fifth of those polled. Similarly, 15% of all respondents report being ready to volunteer at migrants' centres.

**Table 10. Self-reported readiness to interact with migrants (%)**  
*Comparison of 2017 and 2019 findings*

Would you be ready to...	Survey	Not ready	Indifferent	Ready	DNK/ No answer
...talk to a migrant woman?	Aug 2017	25	20	53	2
	Jun 2019	28	25	45	2
...talk to a migrant man?	Aug 2017	30	19	48	3
	Jun 2019	34	24	40	2
...donate food and clothing to migrants?	Aug 2017	22	20	55	3
	Jun 2019	26	27	44	3
...volunteer at a migrant reception centre?	Aug 2017	59	21	17	3
	Jun 2019	62	20	15	3
...accept migrants settling permanently in your neighbourhood?	Aug 2017	62	21	15	2
	Jun 2019	58	22	16	4
...accept migrants settling permanently in your municipality?	Aug 2017	50	26	20	4
	Jun 2019	54	23	19	4
...accept migrants attending the same school as your children?	Aug 2017	38	22	35	5
	Jun 2019	44	27	26	3
...accept migrants receiving treatment in the same hospital as you?	Aug 2017	31	19	45	5
	Jun 2019	41	28	28	3
...invite migrants into your home?	Aug 2017	67	18	12	3
	Jun 2019	60	21	15	4

Although respondents are now less willing to interact with migrants, this finding does not fully correspond to the ‘agreement index’, a measure of the extent to which respondents agree with statements relating to migrants listed in Table 11.

*The agreement index is calculated as the difference between respondents’ agreement and their disagreement with statements that pertain to migrants. It allows us to compare the latest findings with those of past surveys.*

The difference between findings about interaction with migrants and the agreement index is particularly significant for negative statements, such as those that highlight potential security threats posed by migrants to the Serbian society.

A comparison of findings dating back to the start of this research project, in March 2016, reveals a highly significant decline in the agreement index for statements that pertain to: a) *safety and security of women in the event of migrants settling in the community*; b) *inability of migrants to fit into Serbian society*; and c) *some migrants being potential terrorists*.

This indicates a drop in support for negative statements, most of which reflect narratives that have sought to keep migrants separate from the majority population in nearly all countries along their migration route.

Nevertheless, even though these initial prejudices may have lost some of their force, there is increasing agreement with others, such as: a) *migrants have the money to travel yet expect benefits from the EU*, and b) *only migrants who are able to adjust to life in Serbia are welcome*.

**Table 11. Agreement index for statements pertaining to migrants**  
(Comparison of agreement index values for the four surveys)

	March 2016 Agreement index	September 2016 Agreement index	August 2017 Agreement index	June 2019 Agreement index
Respondents would be afraid for their security and safety, and especially the safety of women, if refugees/ migrants were allowed to settle permanently	63	62	60	53
Migrants and refugees could not fit into Serbian society as they are too different (they have disparate traditions, customs, religion, etc.)	61	56	59	44
There are potential terrorists amongst migrants and refugees	85	63	57	56
Migrants and refugees would never have set off on their journey without pressing need, and so we ought to be humane, show sympathy, and help them in whatever way we can	54	48	35	12
We should not feel sorry for them because they have the money to travel and still expect benefits from the EU	8	11	26	30
We ought to show more compassion to migrants and refugees who share our religion than to those of other faiths	17	13	10	-5
Only migrants and refugees who are assessed as being able to adjust to life in Serbia and fit in well should be accepted	2	4	-1	9
The Serbian population is declining and refugees and migrants can help to people some regions of the country	-40	-42	-37	-37

The increase in the agreement index for the statements listed above is accompanied by a corresponding drop in agreement with the statement that ‘Migrants and refugees would never have set off on their journey without pressing need and so we ought to be humane, show sympathy, and help’.

This is the reason why it comes as no surprise to see extremely limited support to the idea of permitting migrants to settle in some areas of Serbia, in spite of the country’s declining population.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Since most respondents perceive unemployment and poor living standards as the key challenges they encounter on a daily basis, with as few as 3% prioritising the issue of migrants/refugees, one could say that the migration crisis is a problem of secondary importance in the communities surveyed.

One positive finding is that awareness of the migration crisis has increased. Notably, knowledge of this issue is more widespread amongst respondents living in the cities/municipalities affected by the migration crisis to a greater extent.

Respondents' views of migrants are mostly neutral, but negative attitudes outweigh positive ones. Moreover, negative attitudes are more likely to be reported in communities more affected by the crisis. According to those polled, the main obstacle to accepting migrants concerns differences in culture, religion, customs, and language.

The prevailing view amongst those surveyed remains that conflicts and general insecurity are the key motives that cause migrants to leave their countries of origin, but there has been a significant increase in support for the opinion that social and economic issues are the primary driver of migration. More respondents now draw a distinction between migrants coming from the Middle East and those who arrived in Serbia in the 1990s, with the key perceived difference being that refugees from the former Yugoslavia were fleeing conflict and had been forced to abandon their homes, whilst today's refugees are mainly motivated by the poor economic situation in their countries of origin.

The greatest proportion of respondents believe the migration crisis has abated in their communities relative to six years ago, but those living in the more severely affected cities and municipalities still believe migrant numbers are on the increase. The dominant view in these communities is that the influx of migrants has adversely affected the performance of their local authorities, but satisfaction with how the local governments have handled the crisis is more pronounced than dissatisfaction.

The respondents also express some concerns about migrants who reside in their cities and municipalities, mainly with regard to alleged threats to sanitation and overall security. That said, the majority agree that migrants/refugees ought to be helped, primarily by donating food and providing accommodation until they again depart on their way to the EU. The European Union is also seen as the main financial donor in Serbia.

Even though respondents are less willing to interact with migrants, it ought to be emphasised that fewer of those polled now agree with the negative statements of which most reflect narratives that have sought to keep migrants separate from the majority population in nearly all countries along their migration route.

### 5.1 Recommendations to local authorities for addressing the migration crisis

-  Focus on raising awareness in communities less affected by the migration crisis;
-  Improve public knowledge of the reasons why migrants leave their countries of origin and the political and social environment in those countries;

-  Educate members of the public about the importance of accepting diversity and raise awareness of the value of interculturalism, which will reduce prejudice against migrants;
-  Enhance the scope of public utility services; and
-  Encourage members of the public to interact with migrants/refugees.