



Opinion Poll Report

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN SERBIA



September 2014

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1. Methodological notes

Survey carried out by	CeSID Opinion Polling Agency and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Fieldwork	Between 4 and 15 September 2014
Sample type and size	Random, representative sample of 600 adult citizens of Serbia, with sub-samples of 100 respondents in municipalities with asylum centres
Sample frame	Polling station catchment areas as the most reliable registry 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 next birthday in relation to survey date
Survey method	Face-to-face at home
Survey instrument	Questionnaire

This public opinion survey was carried out by CeSID and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) between 4 and 15 September 2014, and covered the territory of Serbia excluding Kosovo and Metohia. The survey involved a representative sample of 600 adult citizens of Serbia, with special sub-samples of 100 respondents each in Loznica (Banja Koviljača), Sjenica, Lajkovac (Bogovađa), and Obrenovac. The sub-sampled municipalities were selected because each has an asylum centre in its territory, and research work there was designed to capture the experiences of local residents in direct and close contact with asylum-seekers.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in direct contact with respondents. During interviewer 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 interviewer 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 interviewer visits. Interviewers were required to interview the member of each household aged 18 or above whose birthday came soonest after the date of the interviewer'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:

Structure of respondents by gender: 53 percent women, 47 percent men.

Respondent age: All respondents covered by this survey were aged 18 and above; the average age was 46.

Structure of respondents by education: primary school or lower, 13 percent; two- or three-year secondary school, 19 percent; four-year secondary school, 42 percent; college/university, 26 percent.

Respondent occupation: housewife, nine percent; farmer, three percent; unskilled or semi-skilled worker, seven percent; skilled or highly-skilled worker, 22 percent; technician, four percent; civil servant, two percent; school/university student, nine percent; professional, four percent; employer, two percent; retired, 38 percent.

Average monthly income per household member: Would not say, 21 percent; under RSD 10,000, 19 percent; between RSD 10,000 and 20,000, 26 percent; between RSD 20,000 and 40,000, 27 percent; between RSD 40,000 and 60,000, five percent; over RSD 60,000, two percent.

Respondent ethnicity: Serbian, 88 percent; Bosniak, four percent; Hungarian, three percent; other, five percent.

3. Key findings

Serbian citizens are clearly aware of the issues faced by asylum-seekers currently located in Serbia. **Although on average as many as 88 percent of those polled admit never having been in contact with an asylum-seeker, respondents are by and large aware of the problems faced by this social group.** Nearly 80 percent of all respondents were able to cite asylum-seekers' likely motives for leaving their countries of origin: most citizens of Serbia (50 percent) are convinced that the principal reasons for emigrating are **concerns for one's own safety and the safety of one's closest family members.** Those polled are also aware of which crisis-hit regions migrants leave in search of better living conditions and peace and security for themselves and their families.

For one-fifth of those polled (21 percent), the first things that come to mind when they hear the expression 'asylum-seeker' are a feeling of compassion and awareness of the fact that the people involved are in distress and need help. Yet, most respondents are rather reserved when it comes to helping and contacting asylum-seekers: 55 percent of those polled do not think about asylum-seeking migrants and the issues they face in Serbia at all, and as such have no particular desire to help improve their position.

In addition to respondents who empathise with asylum-seekers and are ready to help, **there are also those who harbour exceptionally negative feelings towards this group and articulate them by citing racial profiles perceived as undesirable**(such as 'mujaheddeen', niggers, or Gypsies) or very dangerous security stereotypes in terms of security (thieves, criminals, terrorists, and the like), and by voicing concerns – justified or otherwise – for the future and security of the Serbian people and state. And yet, even in this group of respondents who believe that asylum-seekers could threaten the state or launch a 'mass migration' to 'take Serbia over', there is awareness that **this country is nothing more than a transit point where asylum-seekers will remain only if they have no other choice.** More than two-fifths (44 percent) of those polled are convinced that European Union member states are the asylum-seekers' true destinations; a mere 18 percent feel that asylum-seekers will stay in Serbia if they fail to reach their primary objective.

The fact that asylum-seekers regard Serbia as little more than a transit country should not come as a surprise given the high migration potential shown by Serbian nationals themselves: 51 percent of those polled believe Serbia is not an attractive country to live in, and just as many respondents are considering emigrating.

There are regional differences in the perception of asylum-seekers, and even in their reception. **Asylum-seekers receive the warmest welcome in Sjenica, whilst residents of other areas show much more caution and restraint.**

Religion seems to offer an explanation for this difference, as people tend to communicate better and become closer with others who practise the same faith or follow the same or similar customs. On the other hand, differences in religious and cultural practices are the barrier that has been preventing closer contacts and better relations with Serbian citizens in other areas that neighbour asylum centres. The residents of these municipalities doubt the ability of asylum-seekers to adjust to local cultural patterns and customs in Serbia.

Yet regardless of these differences in accommodating asylum-seekers, citizens of Serbia are convinced that the country has both the moral and legal obligation to offer any and all assistance and protection this group needs. Most of those polled (44 percent) believe that the state accords as much help and protection as it is able to; respondents who live in communities that neighbour asylum centres believe that conditions in these facilities are satisfactory, or even quite good.

The **Serbian Government, Commissariat for Refugees, and international organisations dealing with issues of displaced persons** are the institutions expected to provide the bulk of assistance and support to asylum-seekers.

It is important to note that **88 percent of Serbian citizens have never had contact with asylum-seekers; eight percent were able to see them in passing ('superficial contact'); whilst a mere four percent have had the opportunity to spend some time with them.** Of the four communities we surveyed, the percentage of respondents who have never had any contact with asylum-seekers ranges from 13 percent in Bogovađa to as many as 73 percent in Obrenovac. At the level of the overall sample, most respondents hold neutral opinions of asylum-seekers, whereas residents of Sjenica and Bogovađa have the greatest number of positive experiences and few or no negative ones. At the other end of the scale is Banja Koviljača, where more than one-quarter of those polled (27 percent) say they have had negative experiences with asylum-seekers. Regardless of any of these issues, **residents find it hard to accept the fact that more asylum centres are needed, or to come to terms with the facilities already open in their communities.** Only Sjenica and the wider sample covering all of Serbia contain significant numbers of respondents who are in favour of any new centres, whilst opponents outnumber supporters in the other sub-sampled communities, with 56 percent of the total in Bogovađa, 51 percent in Obrenovac, and 34 percent in Banja Koviljača. **Residents of these areas are evidently dissatisfied with having asylum centres in their neighbourhood, although the perception of**

asylum-seekers is not markedly negative. The chief concerns voiced by those polled with regard to asylum-seekers' accommodation facilities are fear for their own safety and the safety of their families (reported by 25 percent of all respondents), followed by crime (10 percent) and unfamiliar cultural patterns and habits (eight percent). Safety is by far the greatest issue for residents of Obrenovac, whilst the people of Bogovađa fear sickness and contagious disease.

Most Serbians (36 percent) believe asylum-seekers are threatened in Serbia. Of the two-fifths who believe asylum-seekers do face particular issues, most (17 percent) claim government bodies are not interested in helping them. Whilst the overall sample, and sub-samples of Sjenica and Banja Koviljača, show most respondents would be ready to assist asylum-seekers personally, in Bogovađa and Obrenovac residents unwilling to help outnumber those prepared to do so.

Social distance is a precondition for discrimination; when social distance is present, so is discrimination. If one applies this axiom to the findings of this survey, one can conclude that a portion of the Serbian population is prone to discrimination against asylum-seekers. This gap between Serbian citizens and asylum-seekers is broad and continues to expand, particularly in comparison with similar research (see Chapter 9.1). A total of 32 percent of those polled oppose asylum-seekers settling in Serbia; 38 percent are against having asylum-seekers as neighbours; whilst 37 percent are opposed to having asylum-seekers as co-workers. **Opposition increases with the degree of social interaction:** 46 percent of all respondents oppose being friends with asylum-seekers; 49 percent are against having asylum-seekers teach their children; and two-thirds reject marriage or close family ties with an asylum seeker.

4. Introduction

This survey of the Serbian public's perceptions of asylum-seekers was carried out between 4 and 15 September 2014 on a random representative sample of 600 adult citizens of the Republic of Serbia, excluding Kosovo and Metohia, and on additional sub-samples of 100 respondents each covering areas adjacent to the four asylum centres – Bogovađa, Banja Koviljača, Obrenovac, and Sjenica.

The sample distribution as described above was designed to allow us to capture:

- a) Opinions of the population at large (i.e. those Serbian citizens who are not in direct contact with asylum-seekers and gain knowledge of their needs and problems indirectly, through the media or from friends and acquaintances); and
- b) Opinions of residents of municipalities/ localities/ communities directly adjacent to of asylum-seekers' temporary housing facilities.

By analysing these data, we attempted to determine:

- a) Differences between the two groups described and their relationship towards asylum-seekers; and
- b) Challenges faced by asylum-seekers in Serbia and options for improvement through co-operation with local residents and government authorities.

The findings of this survey have been presented through two matrices: the opinions of the broader Serbian population about the current position and problems faced by asylum-seekers, and comparisons between the views of the average Serbian citizen and those held by residents of communities neighbouring asylum centres (Bogovađa, Banja Koviljača, Sjenica, and Obrenovac).

Thus, wherever possible, we disaggregated the findings by respondent residence and likelihood of coming into contact with asylum-seekers.

The structure of the survey report mirrors that of the questionnaire. The following five chapters provide a detailed overview of respondents' opinions of asylum-seekers, their current position, and any options for improvement.

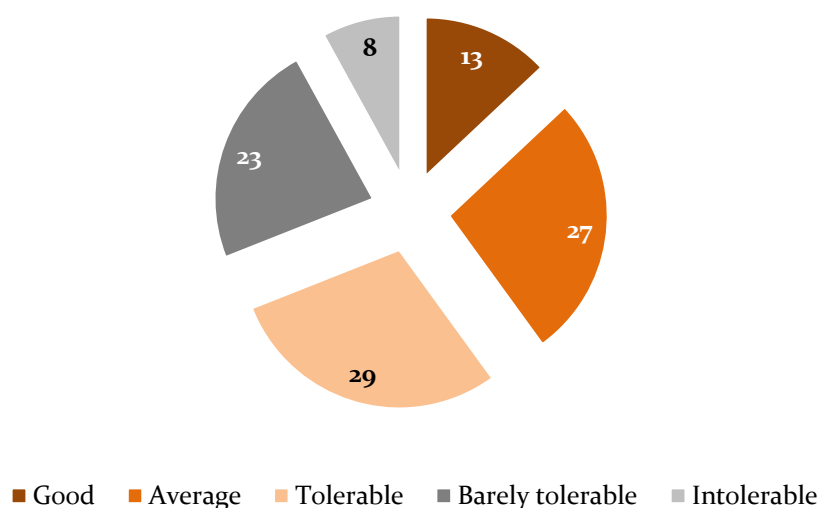
5. Perception of the quality of life and living standards in Serbia

This first chapter attempts to gauge Serbian citizens' satisfaction with their quality of life at two levels: personal (including their families) and broader national level, and to then use that information to determine respondents' migration potential, defined as their desire to leave their country of origin, as well as the reasons for wishing to emigrate.

Perceived living standards and economic conditions are crucial factors that are of major importance in interpreting answers to most questions from the questionnaire, including those that pertain to asylum-seekers and their position in Serbia.

At present, nearly one-third of all citizens of Serbia (31 percent) live below the threshold of what can be considered 'tolerable'.¹ Borderline cases, in which residents feel their living standards and those of their families are tolerable, account for 29 percent of the total. Slightly over one-tenth of those polled believe their standards of living are 'good' (as reported by 13 percent), whilst one-quarter feel they live in 'average' circumstances; see Chart 1.

Chart 1. What are the circumstances in which you and your family live right now like?(In %)

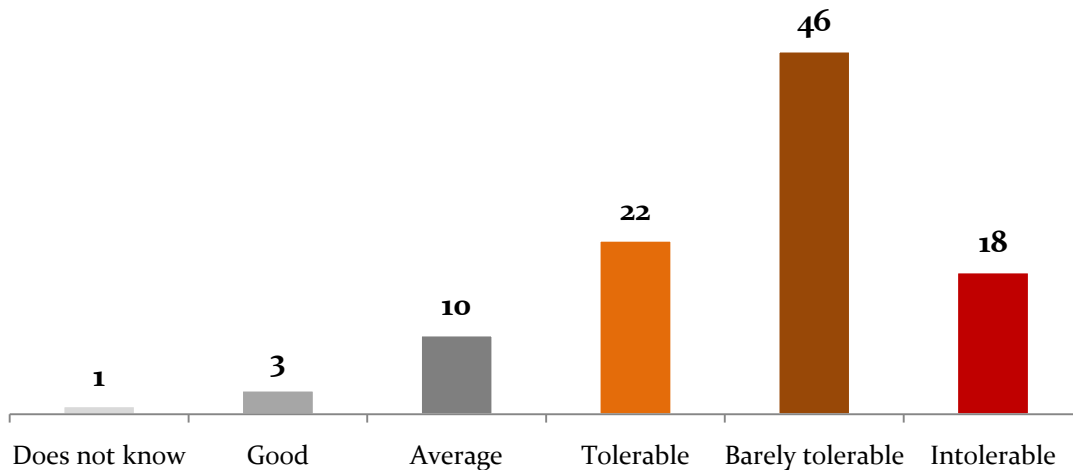


Living standards, as perceived by the respondents, are substantially better than their views of the current state of the Serbian society; see Chart 2.

¹This is the sum of respondents claiming their living standards are 'intolerable' and those reporting 'barely tolerable' standards.

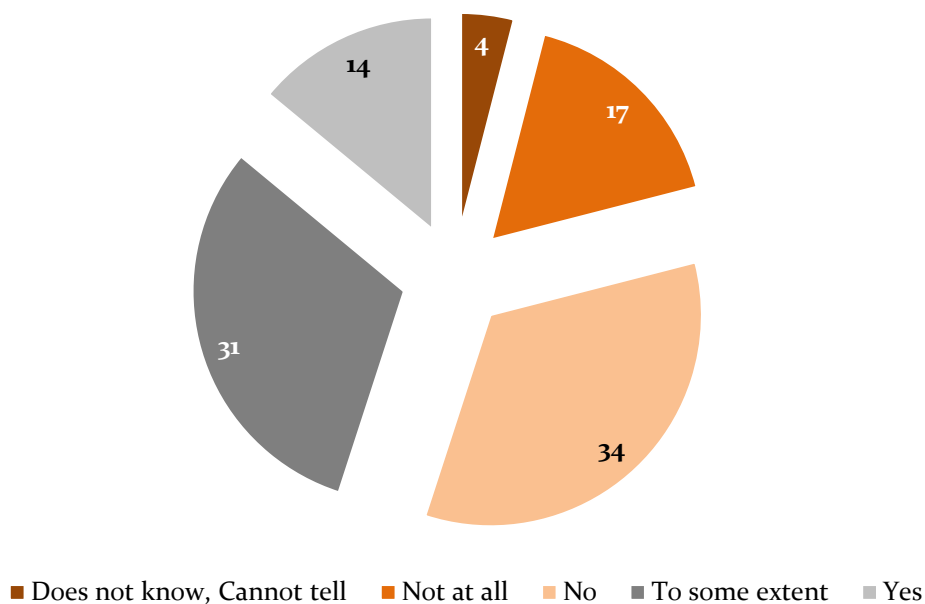
Whilst fewer than one-third of those polled are convinced their living standards are less than tolerable, the state of Serbian society as a whole is seen as ‘**intolerable**’ or ‘**barely tolerable**’ by as many as 64 percent of all respondents.²Nearly two-thirds of the population is dissatisfied with the situation that the Serbian society is in.

Chart 2. What is your perception of the current state of our society as a whole?(In %)



Slightly more than one-fifth (22 percent) of those polled see the state of Serbian society as tolerable; as few as one in ten respondents are satisfied with the current situation in the country.

Chart 3. Do you see Serbia as an attractive country to live in?(In %)

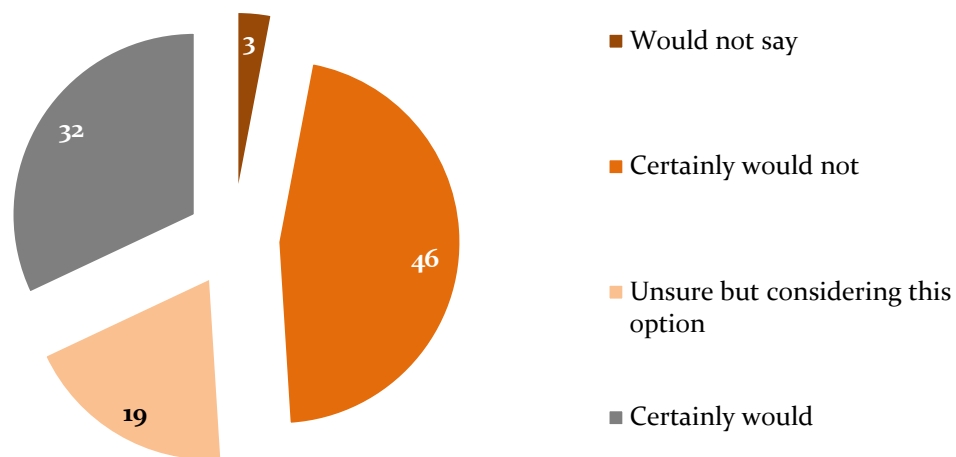


²The sum of respondents who see the overall situation in Serbia as ‘intolerable’ and those who believe it is ‘barely tolerable’.

The poor perception of the current state of the Serbian society has a significant impact on how attractive the country is considered as a place to live in; see Chart 3. More than one-half of those polled (51 percent) believe Serbia is either not an attractive country to live in (as reported by 34 percent of all respondents), or is not so at all (17 percent).

Slightly fewer than one-half of all respondents view the situation in a better light. As few as 14 percent of those polled believe their native land is an attractive country to live in, whilst another 31 percent feel Serbia is attractive, at least to some extent.

Chart 4. Would you leave Serbia and relocate to a different country?(In %)



The subjective feeling of dissatisfaction with the quality of life in Serbia and the state of Serbian society as a whole is certainly a key reason why more than one-half of those polled wish to leave Serbia; see Chart 4. Findings show that most of those ready to emigrate are aged between 18 and 39 and have secondary-school diplomas or college/university degrees, so perpetuating the ‘brain drain’ seen over the past decades. Another 19 percent of those polled say they are considering leaving Serbia (although not yet entirely certain); when this figure is added to the numbers described above, the sum shows that as many as **51 percent** of Serbian citizens are **potential future migrants**.

As is only logical, the group of respondents who do not believe the country is an attractive place to live in is dominated by those who wish to leave Serbia. More than one-half of this group (52 percent) are ready to relocate abroad, whilst another 16 percent are considering this course of action.

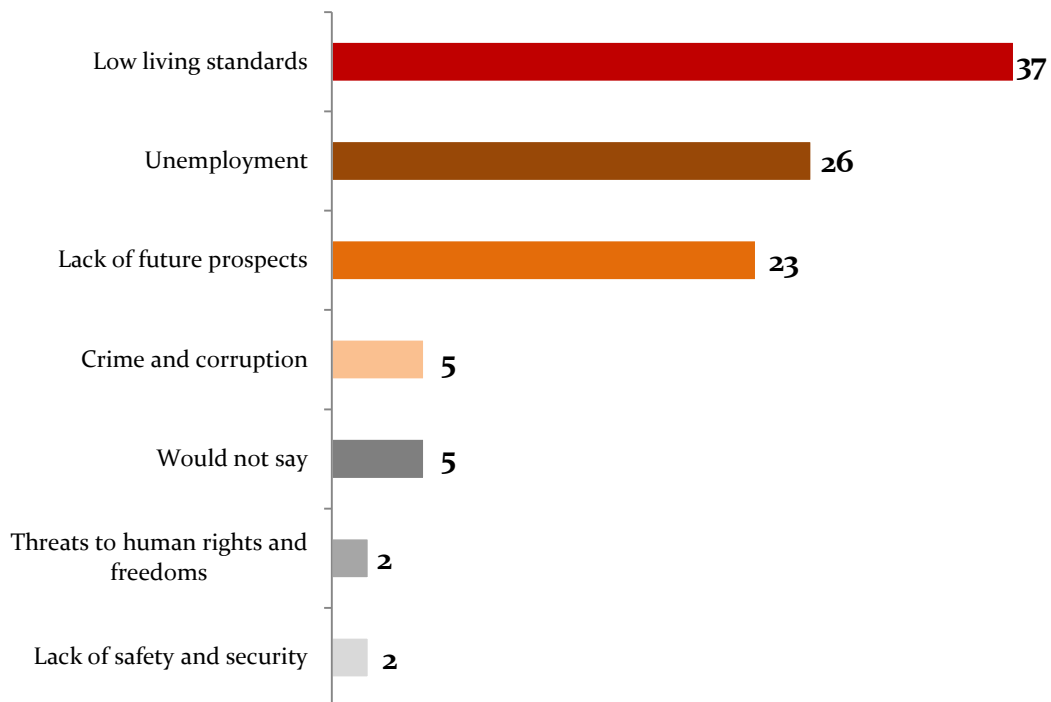
Nearly one-half of all Serbian citizens (46 percent) would not be willing to emigrate at this time.

The reasons behind this high percentage of disaffected citizens ready to emigrate should primarily be sought in adverse economic factors and long-term effects of the financial downturn.

Almost two-fifths of those polled (37 percent) are ready to emigrate in search of better living standards. More than one-quarter of all respondents (26 percent) would leave Serbia because of joblessness, whilst another 23 percent believe they lack any prospects for the future in their country of origin and that there are slight chances of things improving any time soon.

Interestingly, very few respondents would leave Serbia because of crime, lack of security, or threats to their human rights. This leads to the conclusion that the state of play in these fields is still under control, and feel that members of the public do not perceive these issues as threats that warrant emigration.

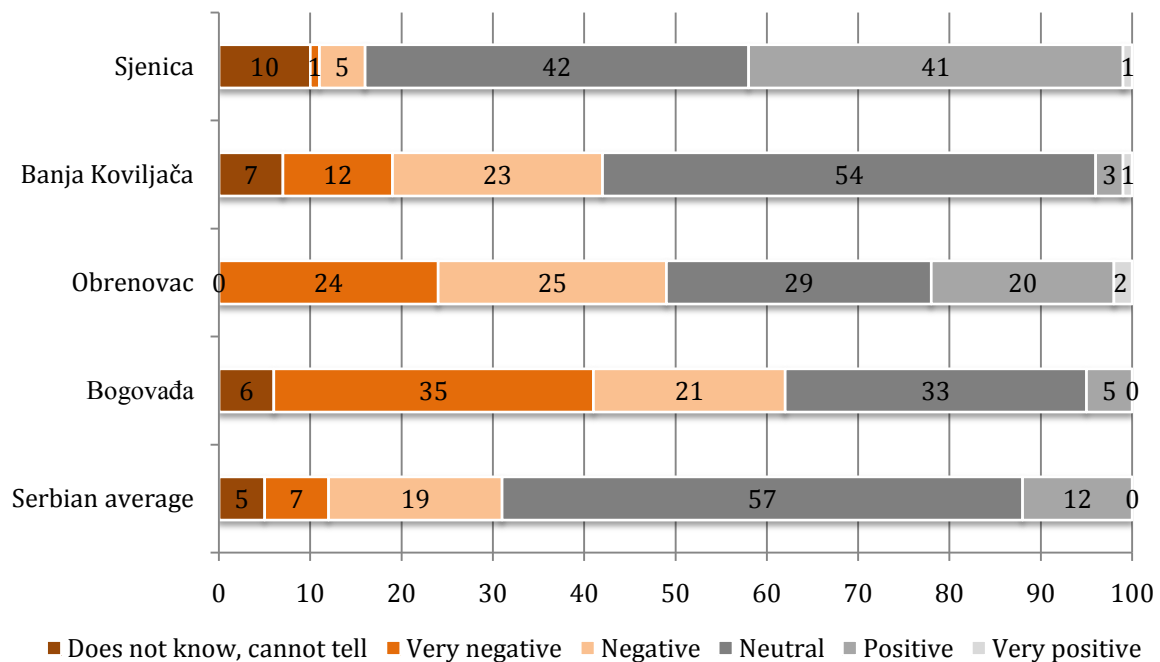
*Chart 5. What is the key reason that would make you leave Serbia for another country?
(In %)*



6. Perception of asylum-seekers by the Serbian public

Polls in Serbia quite often result in findings of diametrically opposed views of the same issue. This survey is no exception; the Serbian public's opinions of asylum-seekers are presented in Chart 6.

Chart 6. What is your opinion of the increasing number of asylum-seekers coming to Serbia?(In %)



A look at the findings obtained using the representative sample at the Serbian level will reveal that more than one-half of those polled (57 percent) have a completely neutral opinion of asylum-seekers in Serbia.

The chief reason for the average Serbian citizen's indifference is his or her lack of contact with asylum-seekers,³ as well as the fact that respondents are mostly preoccupied with their own problems and have little empathy for the plight of vulnerable groups in Serbia.

If one compares these two opposing poles, the positive and the negative, **one will see that, on average, Serbian citizens who hold negative opinions of asylum-seekers outnumber those who view them positively (26 to 12 percent).** Interestingly, none of our respondents making up the representative sample at the national level reported having a very positive opinion of asylum-seekers.

³As many as 88 percent of all Serbian citizens have never had any contact with an asylum-seeker.

On the other hand, findings obtained in the sub-samples clearly show differences in the public's views of asylum-seekers in temporary accommodation nearby.

Residents of Bogovađa report the most negative opinions, with more than one-half of those polled (56 percent) viewing asylum-seekers in a negative or very negative light. By contrast, as few as one in twenty respondents harbour positive views.

The situation is not appreciably better in any of the other communities that are home to asylum centres, with the exception of Sjenica. In Banja Koviljača, the percentage of residents who hold negative views stands at slightly more than one-third (35 percent), whilst this figure amounts to nearly one-half (49 percent) in Obrenovac. At the same time, more than one-fifth of those polled in Obrenovac (22 percent) see asylum-seekers in a positive context.

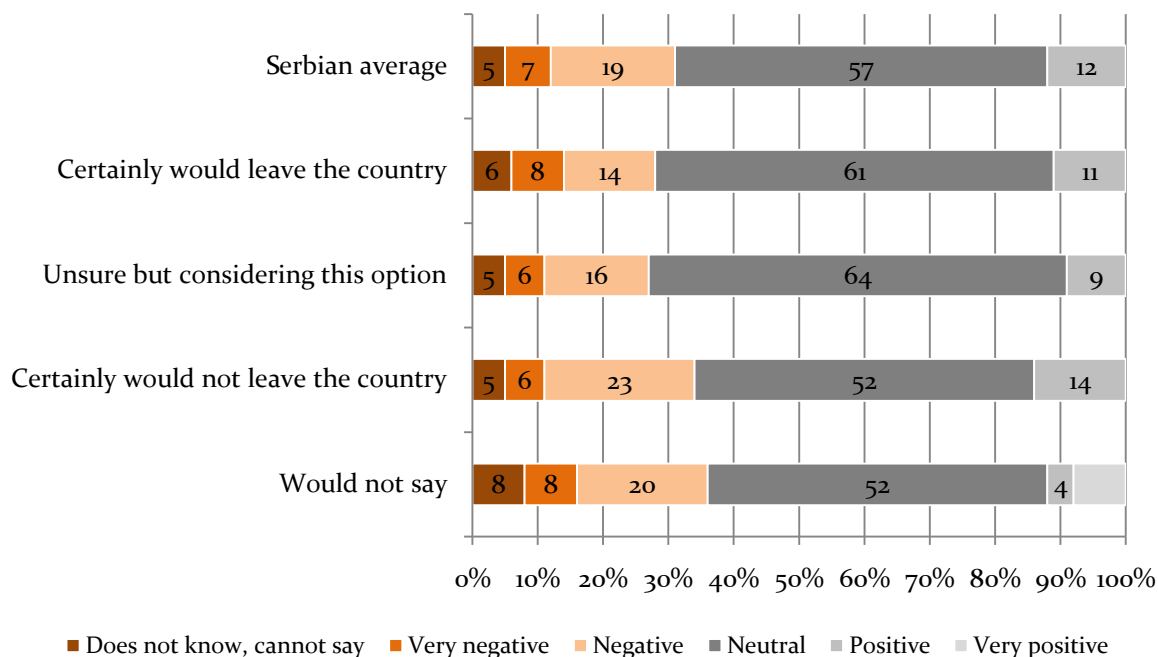
The situation in Sjenica is completely the opposite; by way of a reminder, the residents of this community themselves petitioned the government to open an asylum centre there. The hospitality for asylum-seekers exhibited by the people of Sjenica from the very outset is also reflected in their opinions of the new arrivals. As few as six percent hold negative views of asylum-seekers, whilst more than two-fifths (41 percent) see them as a positive factor in their community. An important consideration is the fact that residents of Sjenica and asylum-seekers share the same faith and associated customs, whilst religious differences may pose a problem in other parts of Serbia.

Besides using sub-samples, we compared respondents' opinions of asylum-seekers by cross-referencing this information with the reported readiness to emigrate from Serbia; see Chart 7.

The fact that many respondents are prepared to leave Serbia does not automatically mean their opinion of asylum-seekers will be more positive. Findings indicate that Serbian citizens who are prepared to remain in Serbia hold slightly more positive views of asylum-seekers than those ready to emigrate.

Although the differences are minute, it is nonetheless indicative to see that a good deal of respondents who mistrust asylum-seekers in Serbia do not believe that emigration may put them in a similar predicament.

Chart 7. Perception of asylum-seekers vs. desire to leave Serbia(In %)



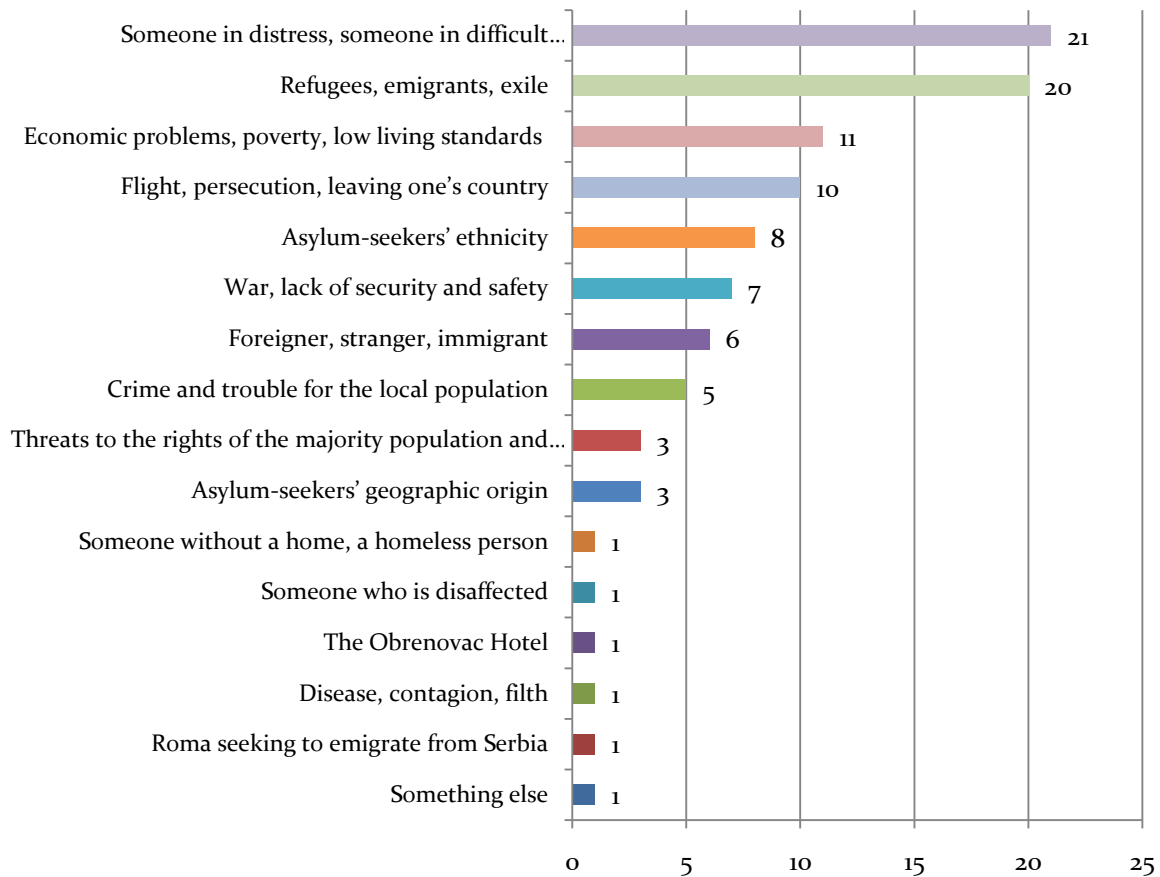
Although respondents' opinions are divided and their views of asylum-seekers rather indifferent, the findings still show Serbian citizens are able to interpret the expression 'asylum-seeker' quite appropriately.

Slightly more than one-fifth of those polled (22 percent) could not provide an immediate response to the expression 'asylum-seeker'. The remaining answers can be divided into positive, neutral, and negative; see Chart 8.

One-fifth of all respondents (21 percent) see asylum-seekers as people in distress, forced by adverse circumstance to leave their homes, and needing help. This group is the largest of all categories of those polled. **Slightly fewer respondents (20 percent) associate asylum-seekers with displaced persons, migrants, and the many refugee crises witnessed by Serbia late in the last century.** Eleven percent of those polled connect asylum-seekers with economic crises and the growing poverty that accompanies poor living standards, whilst for seven percent the appearance of asylum-seekers is a sure sign of warfare or instability in the country of origin.

It is interesting to note that one percent of those polled associate the expression 'asylum-seeker' with Roma attempting to emigrate from Serbia and claim asylum in Western Europe.

Chart 8. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the expression 'asylum-seeker'? (In %)

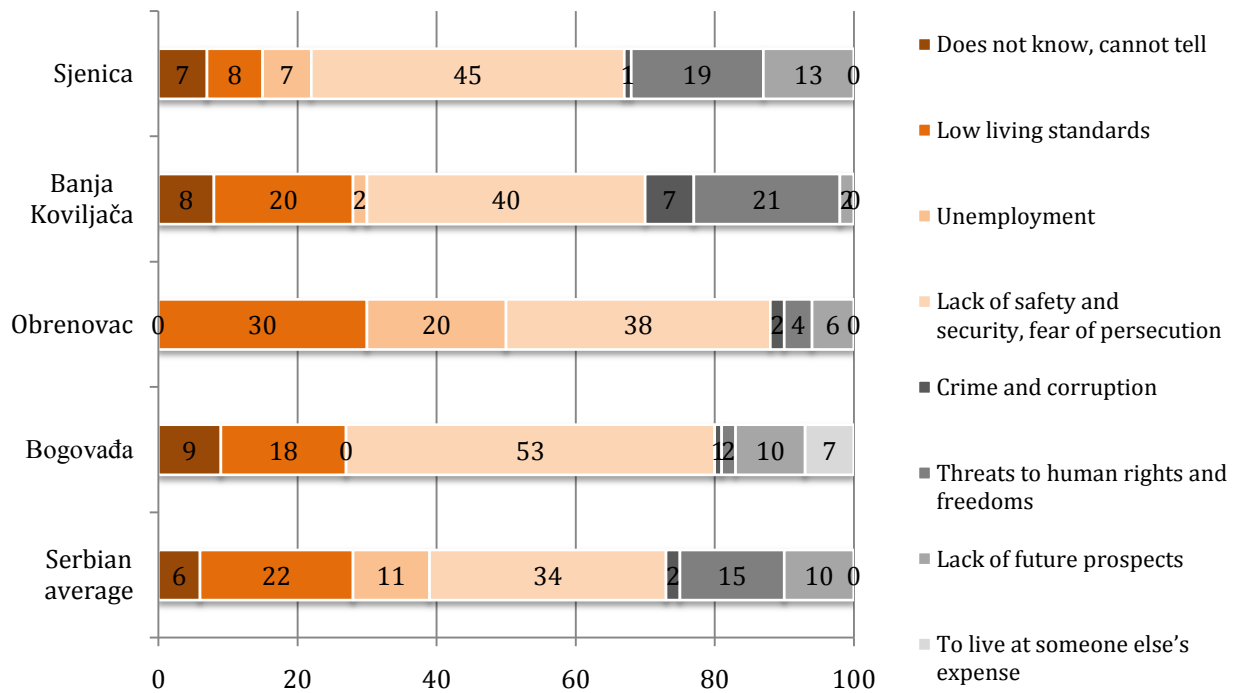


There are, on the other hand, many negative concepts that people associate with the notion of asylum-seeker. These are in large part reflected in the often derogatory names used to denote asylum-seekers' ethnic origin, such as 'mujahideen', niggers, Gypsies, chinks, Muslims... As many as 8 percent of all respondents placed asylum-seekers into one of these groups.

Local residents in somewhat more frequent contact with asylum-seekers also associate them with undesirable concepts, primarily petty crime (reported as a concern by five percent of those polled), as well as imaginary fear of disease, contagion, and filth (cited by one percent) allegedly brought into the community by the asylum-seekers.

Six percent of all respondents associate the expression 'asylum-seeker' with foreigners, strangers, and immigrants, whilst another three percent who feel uneasy about accommodating asylum-seekers believe this is another proof of *how threatened the rights of the majority Serbian people are* and that it constitutes *a direct assault against the Serbian state*.

Chart 9. What is the key reason why asylum-seekers leave their countries of origin?(In %)



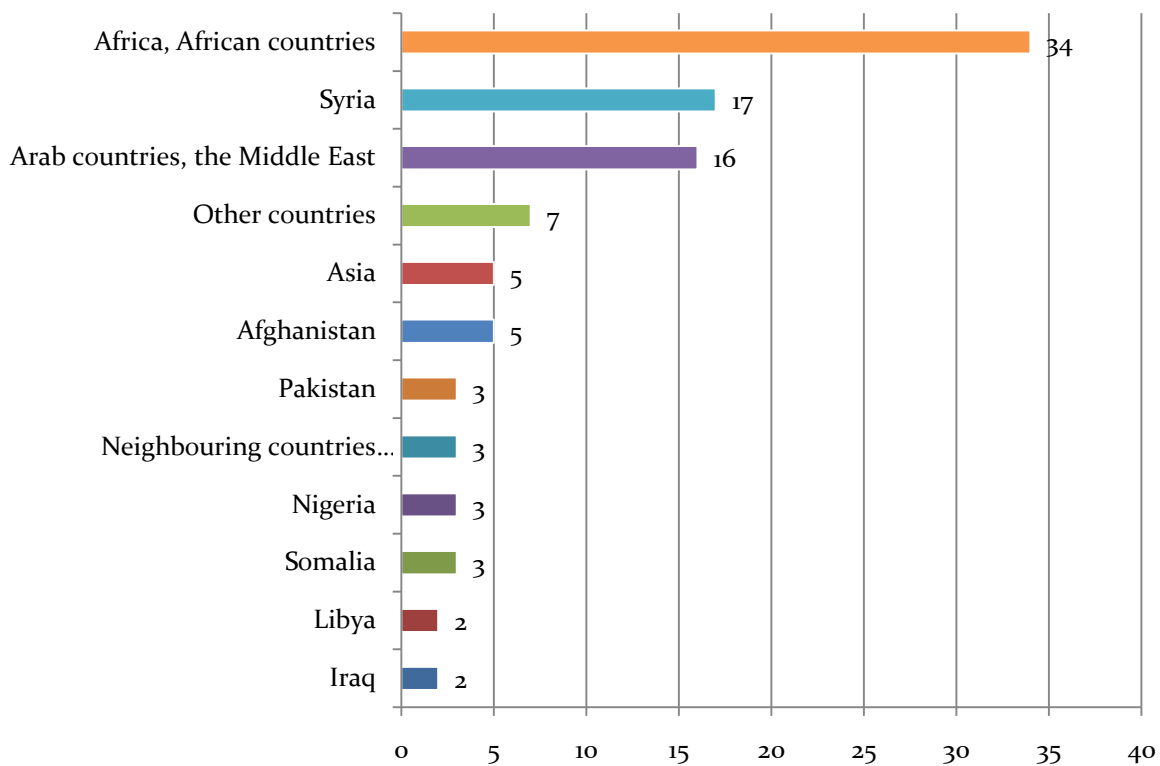
What are the key reasons why asylum-seekers leave their countries of origin?

Serbian citizens are, on the whole, quite well informed about the reasons why asylum-seekers leave their home countries: see Chart 9. The primary reason for emigrating should be sought in the lack of safety and security that asylum-seekers constantly face at home. Awareness of security issues is at its highest in Bogovađa, where **more than one-half of all local residents polled (53 percent) cite lack of security as the key motivation for leaving one's homeland**. In Sjenica, 45 percent of respondents are convinced asylum-seekers now in Serbia flee their homes because of threats to their security, whilst the figures are somewhat lower in Obrenovac (38 percent) and at the national level (34 percent).

Respondents are also generally well-informed when it comes to asylum-seekers' geographic origin; see Chart 10. **Nearly three-quarters of those polled (73 percent) were able to cite a country, or at the very least region, that asylum-seekers in Serbia come from.**

Most respondents associate asylum-seekers with predominantly Muslim African and Asian countries.

Chart 10. What are the most common countries/regions of origin of asylum-seekers located in Serbia?(In %)



One-third of those polled feel most asylum-seekers come from Africa, or ‘African countries’, without providing any details as to which countries those may be. Syria heads the list of perceived countries of origin: 17 percent of those polled identify it as the original home to most asylum-seekers now in Serbia. Middle Eastern nations come next, whilst other countries and regions are represented on the list to a far lesser extent.

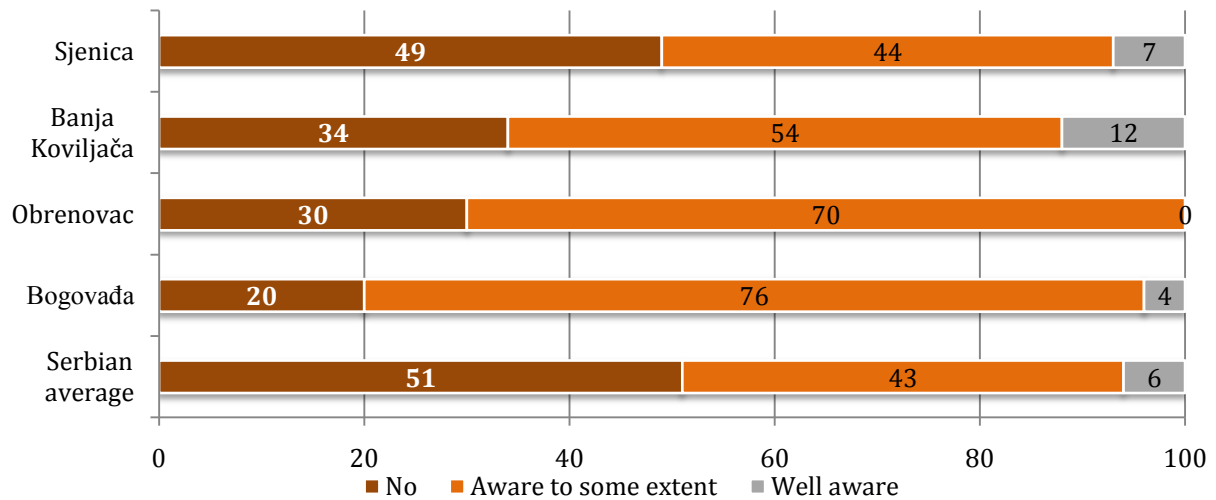
Individual countries that residents believe asylum-seekers originate from include Afghanistan (five percent), Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia (with three percent each), and Libya and Iraq (with two percent).

Interestingly, three percent of those polled feel asylum-seekers’ countries of origin are actually neighbouring countries from which they enter Serbia illegally.

The Serbian public is exceptionally well-informed about the situation in asylum-seekers’ countries of origin; see Chart 11.

On average, one-half of those polled claim to be ‘aware to some extent’ or ‘wellaware’ of the situation in these countries. As expected, awareness is higher in communities adjacent to asylum centres.

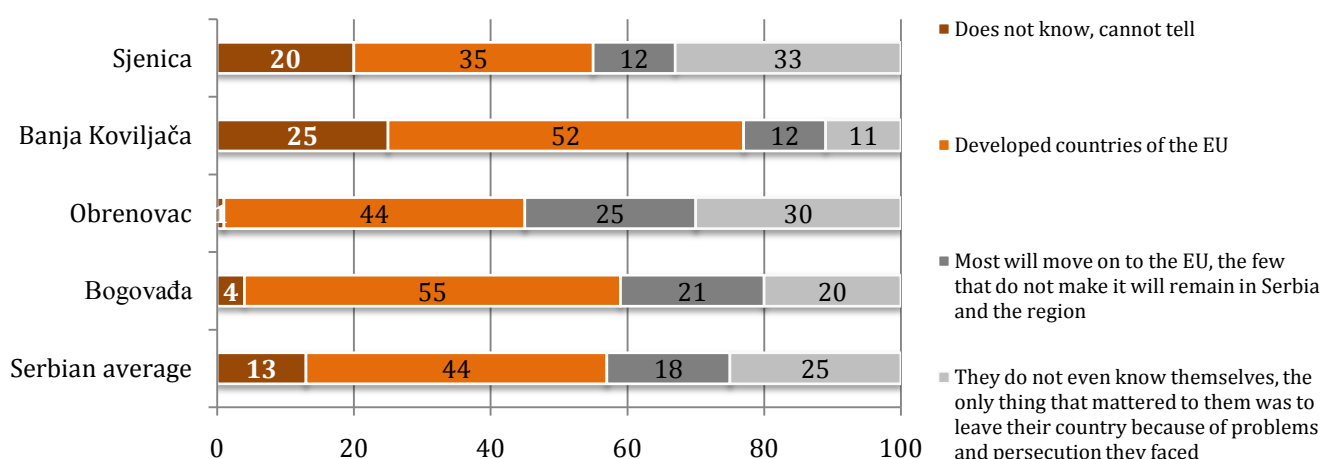
Chart 11. Are you personally aware of the situation in the countries/regions that asylum-seekers located in Serbia originate in?(In %)



As many as 80 percent of respondents in Bogovađa claim they are well aware of the situation in asylum-seekers' countries of origin, a view shared by 70 percent of those polled in Obrenovac. Residents of Banja Koviljača and Sjenica are also aware, to a better-than-average extent, of the situation in the countries whose nationals their community plays host to.

It seems that awareness of conditions in asylum-seekers' countries of origin increases in proportion to the degree of contact residents have with this group.

Chart 12. What is the final destination of asylum-seekers currently located in Serbia?(In %)



The respondents who took part in the survey are aware of the current economic situation in Serbia and convinced that the future seems bleak; they consequently doubt that asylum-seekers will elect to remain in this country. See Chart 12.

Most respondents believe that the primary objective of the average asylum-seeker in emigrating from a war-torn and economically underdeveloped country is to reach Western Europe. This view is shared by on average more than two-fifths of all respondents (or 44 percent) at the national level. As many as 55 percent of those polled in Bogovada believe Serbia is just a temporary halt on the asylum-seekers' way to European Union countries. In Sjenica, one-third (33 percent) of all residents are unsure about where the migrants will end up and feel that the main goal of their emigration is to find a safe place to live.

Table 1. Do you believe asylum-seekers could contribute to improving the situation in Serbia in the following respects?(In %)

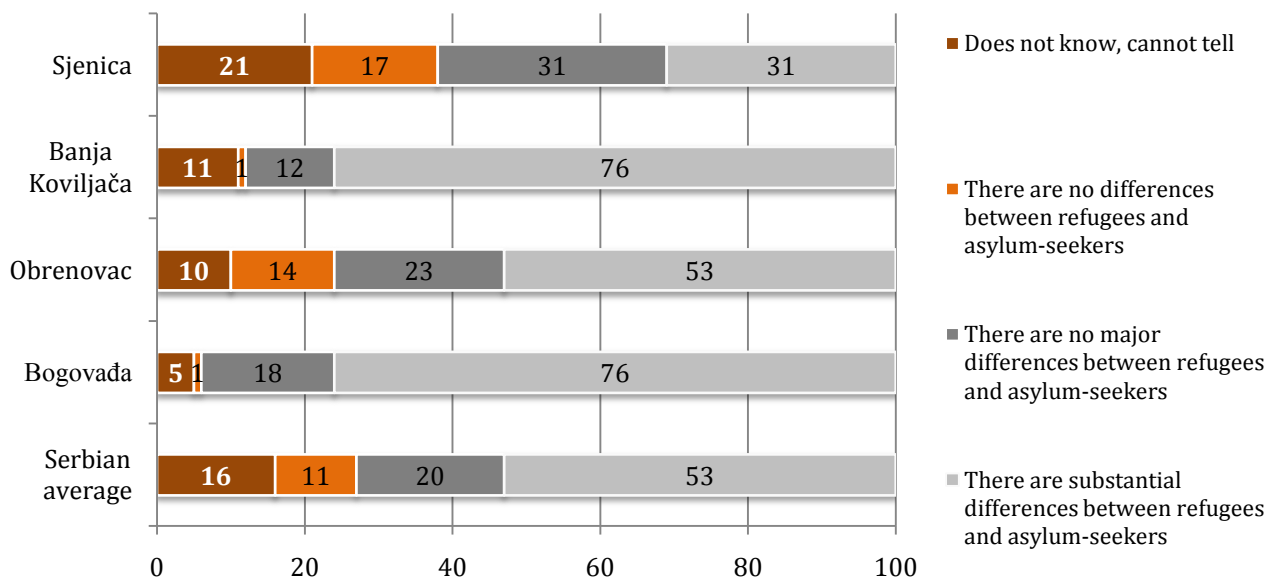
	Does not know	Could not contribute at all	Could contribute slightly	Neither could nor could not contribute	Could contribute	Could contribute a great deal
Re-populating depopulated regions of Serbia, particularly in the south and east of the country	11	32	13	15	15	14
Increasing the size and quality of the Serbian workforce	8	37	16	21	10	8
Enhancing tolerance and tackling racism and nationalism in Serbia	9	27	13	23	15	13
Improving relations between Serbia and asylum-seekers' countries of origin	13	25	11	22	17	12
Fostering multiculturalism and diversity in Serbia	11	22	13	25	14	15
Introducing new ideas into business, culture, and the arts	12	27	13	24	13	11

In general, Serbian citizens do not expect asylum-seekers to linger in Serbia long. This is why there are no particular expectations in terms of how asylum-seekers can contribute to improving Serbian society in any of the areas listed in Table 1 above. Most respondents believe asylum-seekers are unlikely to make any sort of contribution to Serbia. Support for the idea that asylum-seekers can improve the state of affairs in Serbia does not exceed 30 percent in any of the fields we offered the respondents as options.

7. Differences in the perception of asylum-seekers and refugees from former Yugoslav countries

In the 1990s, Serbia was faced with multiple waves of refugees seeking shelter from the conflicts that tore the former Yugoslavia apart. The arrival of refugees from territories that had once made up the Yugoslav federation did not bring about any substantial changes to the ethnic or religious make-up of Serbian society, chiefly due to the fact that by far the largest number of refugees shared the ethnicity and religion of Serbia's majority population. Their social integration was accomplished relatively painlessly and without serious obstacles, although it did take longer than had been expected.

Chart 13. Do you believe there are differences between refugees from the former Yugoslavia and asylum-seekers currently located in Serbia?(In %)



Conversely, asylum-seekers are people of different ethnicities, religions, and cultures, and the dominant population may react in different ways to their temporary or permanent residence, if any, in Serbia. See Chart 13.

Do asylum-seekers differ from refugees from the former Yugoslavia, and, if so, to what extent?

The findings presented in Chart 13 clearly demonstrate that differences do exist. On average, more than one-half of all respondents at the national level, most of them never having had contact with asylum-seekers, believe there are major differences between asylum-seekers and refugees. Another 20 percent feel that differences exist but are not as pronounced.

The perception of dissimilarity between asylum-seekers and refugees grows in parallel with the extent of resident contact with asylum-seekers. Thus, as many as 76 percent of those polled in Bogovada and Banja Koviljača are convinced that differences between the two groups are substantial. The figure is lower in Obrenovac but nevertheless stands at a high 53 percent.

Table 2. Perception of refugees and asylum-seekers (In %)

Statement	Does not know	Completely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Completely agree
<i>Asylum-seekers do not speak our language and are not familiar with our culture and customs; they could never fit into our society</i>	9	13	13	20	15	30
<i>There is no difference between citizens of Serbia and refugees from the former Yugoslavia: they are the same people and share the same cultural patterns</i>	7	19	8	18	22	26
<i>Asylum-seekers are mostly uneducated and lazy; their arrival will only increase the number of people on welfare benefits in this already impoverished country</i>	11	18	12	23	16	20
<i>Refugees from the former Yugoslavia were able to take care of themselves without any support or assistance from the state</i>	9	26	15	25	15	10
<i>Differences in ethnicity, religion, and even skin colour, between Serbian citizens and asylum-seekers are too great for them to ever fit into our society</i>	7	16	15	25	17	20
<i>Most refugees share the same religion and ethnicity with Serbian citizens and were therefore able to easily adjust to life in this country</i>	8	14	13	24	20	21

Residents of Sjenica are the least likely to perceive any differences between refugees and asylum-seekers, but even in this community that has proven very hospitable towards asylum-seekers nearly one-third of those polled admit there are dissimilarities between these two vulnerable populations.

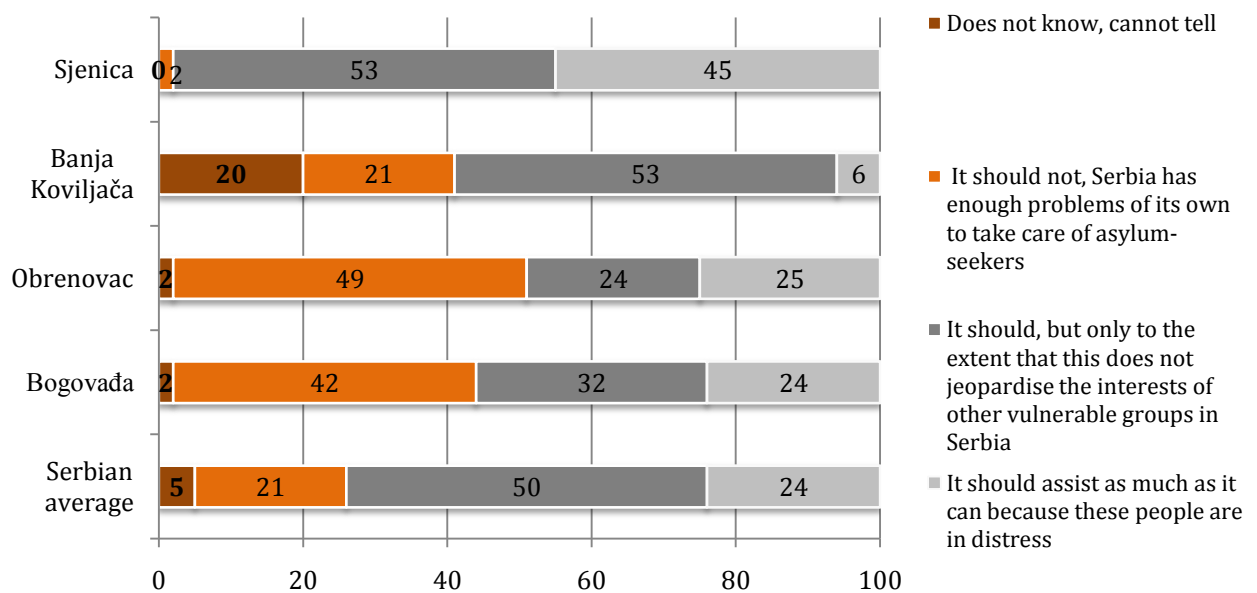
Nearly one-half of all respondents (45 percent) believe that asylum-seekers' ignorance of the local language, culture, and customs make it impossible for them to ever fit into the Serbian society, whilst 48 percent of all respondents claim there are no differences between Serbian citizens and refugees from the former Yugoslavia exactly because both groups share the same cultural pattern.

In addition, more than one-third of all respondents (36 percent) are concerned about the likelihood of asylum-seekers increasing the number of potential social welfare beneficiaries, particularly since they perceive Serbia as a country that is already impoverished.

8. Treatment of asylum-seekers by the state

Serbian citizens expect the state to assist asylum-seekers currently located in Serbia and aid them in improving their position; see Chart 14. Although a fair number of Serbians do not view asylum-seekers in a positive light, much more solidarity becomes apparent when the matter is cast as making an effort to help people in difficulties.

Chart 14. Should the Serbian state assist asylum-seekers currently located in its territory and aid them in improving their position? (In %)



On average, as many as three-quarters of those polled believe that the state should step in to aid asylum-seekers. One-half of all respondents advocate 'conditional' assistance, whereby any aid would depend on the resources available to the state and not be detrimental to the interests of other vulnerable groups in Serbia. One-quarter feel assistance extended to asylum-seekers, as with any people in straitened circumstances, should be unconditional.

Residents of communities neighbouring asylum centres have somewhat different views. Many more respondents believe that Serbia has enough problems as it is and that it should not devote any particular attention to asylum-seekers. In Bogovađa and Obrenovac, the number of respondents who share this opinion ranges from two-fifths to one-half (or 42 and 49 percent), respectively.

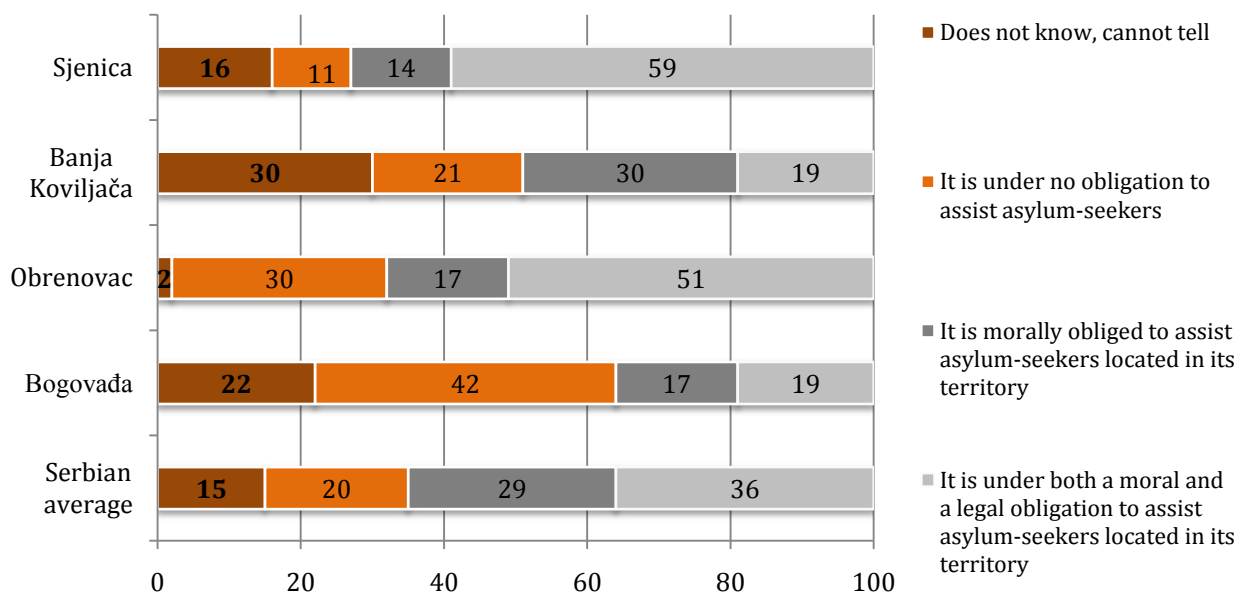
The people of Sjenica once again demonstrate their attachment to asylum-seekers: as few as three percent of those polled in this community believe that this vulnerable group should not be assisted; 45 percent feel as much help should be provided as

possible; and 53 percent advocate helping them but not at the expense of other people in need.

Respondents are aware of Serbia's obligations when it comes to assisting asylum-seekers. See Chart 15.

The belief that Serbia is under no obligation to aid asylum-seekers is dominant amongst respondents in Bogovađa and Obrenovac, although, encourage in gly, more than one-half of all residents of Obrenovac acknowledge that Serbia has both a moral and a legal obligation to assist asylum-seekers.

Chart 15. *Is Serbia under an obligation to assist asylum-seekers? (In %)*

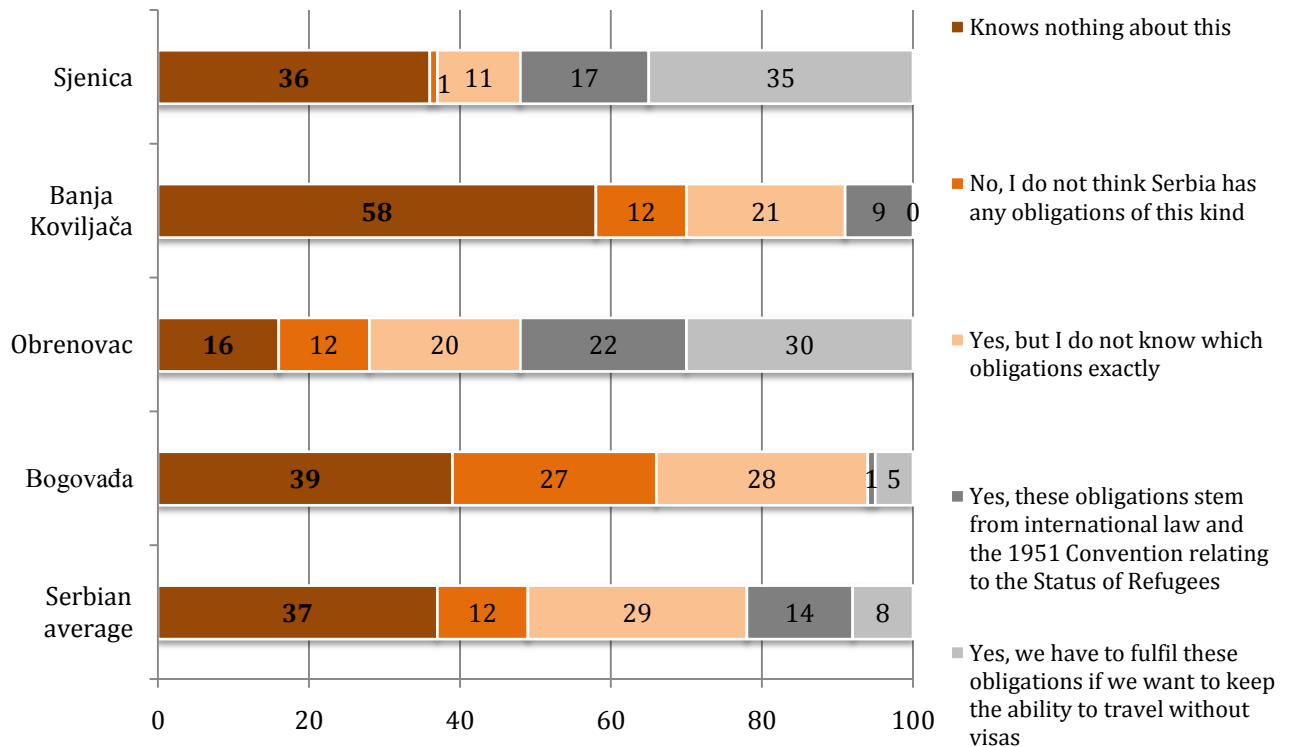


Although respondents mention legal reasons when describing Serbia's obligation to help asylum-seekers, **few are aware of the country's international commitments with regard to asylum-seekers and refugees in general**. See Chart 16.

Respondents either know nothing about the international obligations undertaken by Serbia (with 58 percent reporting this view in Banja Koviljača), **or believe that denying asylum-seekers access to aid will lead to restrictions on visa-free travel to the European Union** (cited by 35 percent of all respondents polled in Sjenica).

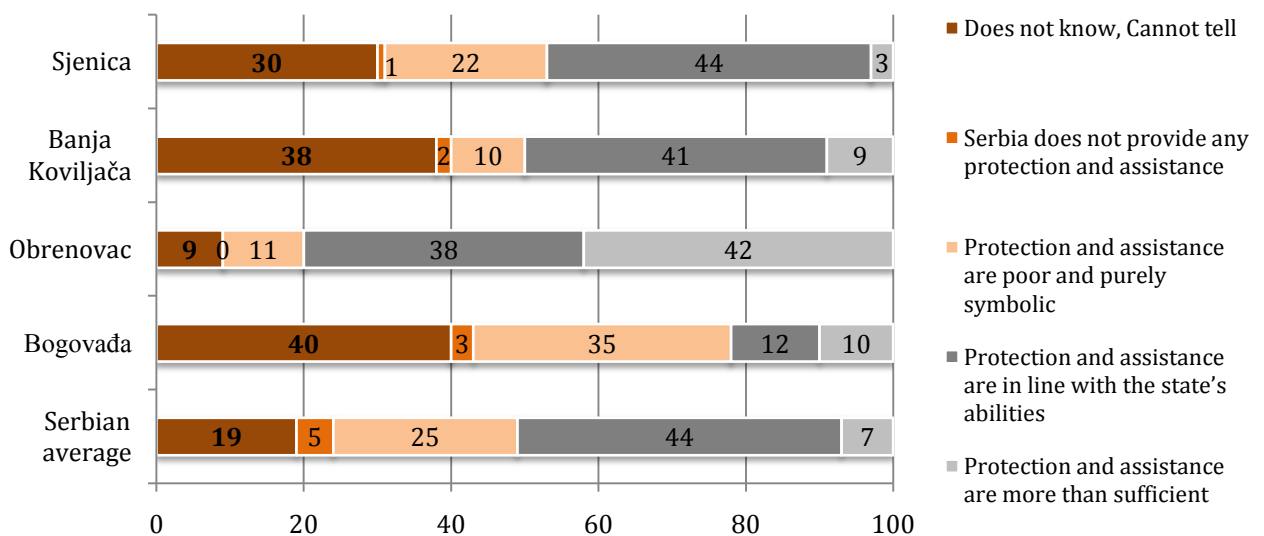
Only slightly more respondents are aware that Serbia is signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention (22 percent in Obrenovac, and 17 percent in Sjenica). At the national level, a total of 14 percent are familiar with this treaty.

Chart 16. Are you aware that the Republic of Serbia has undertaken certain international obligations with respect to asylum-seekers? (In %)



And yet regardless of what the state’s motives may be, and whether they are ethical or politically pragmatic in nature, respondents praise Serbia’s efforts to help and protect asylum-seekers; see Chart 17.

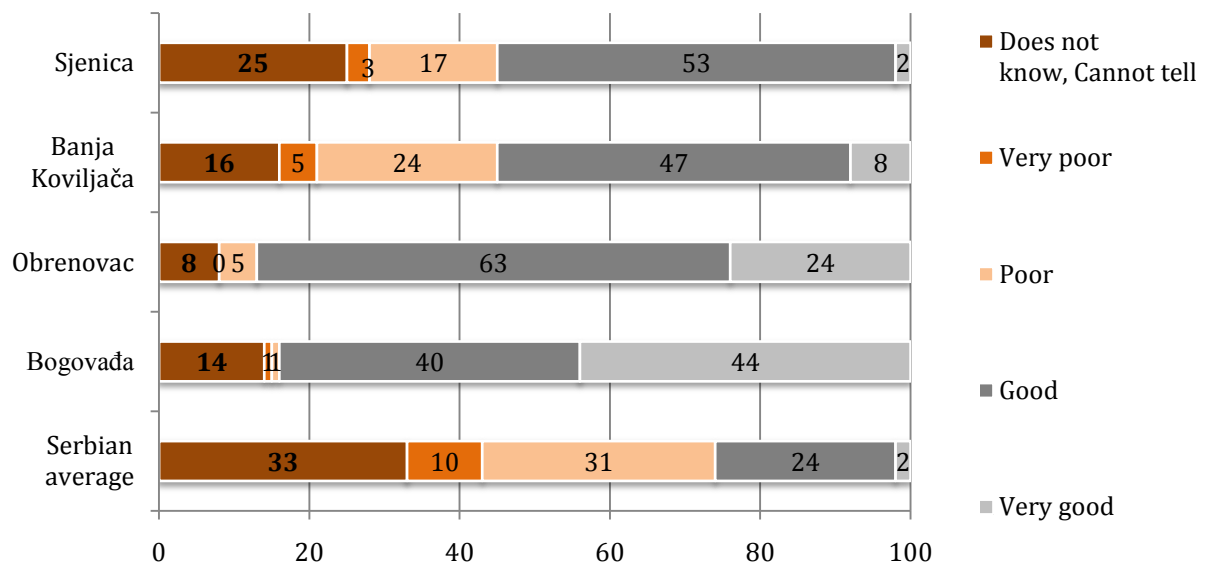
Chart 17. Do you believe that the protection and assistance accorded to asylum-seekers by Serbia are sufficient?(In %)



Most respondents, whatever their place of residence and extent of contact with asylum-seekers, admit that the state is endeavouring to provide this vulnerable group with any and all assistance necessary to the extent it is able to.

Residents of Bogovađa are the most critical: 35 percent believe that the state's assistance is poor and purely symbolic. On the other hand, two-fifths of those polled in Obrenovac (42 percent) feel that the aid extended by the state to asylum-seekers is more than sufficient.

Chart 18. Under what conditions are asylum-seekers housed in Serbia? (In %)



The success of efforts invested by the state in to improving the lot of asylum-seekers is also borne out by public perception of the quality of accommodation provided for them; see Chart 18. This piece of information is particularly important when one considers the fact that residents of communities where contacts with asylum-seekers are more common perceive housing facilities as 'good' or even 'very good'.

More than two-fifths of all those polled in Bogovađa feel asylum-seekers' accommodation is 'very good', whilst one-quarter of Obrenovac residents share the same view. More than one-half of respondents in Sjenica (53 percent) recognise housing conditions as being 'good', whilst another two percent believe this accommodation is 'very good'.

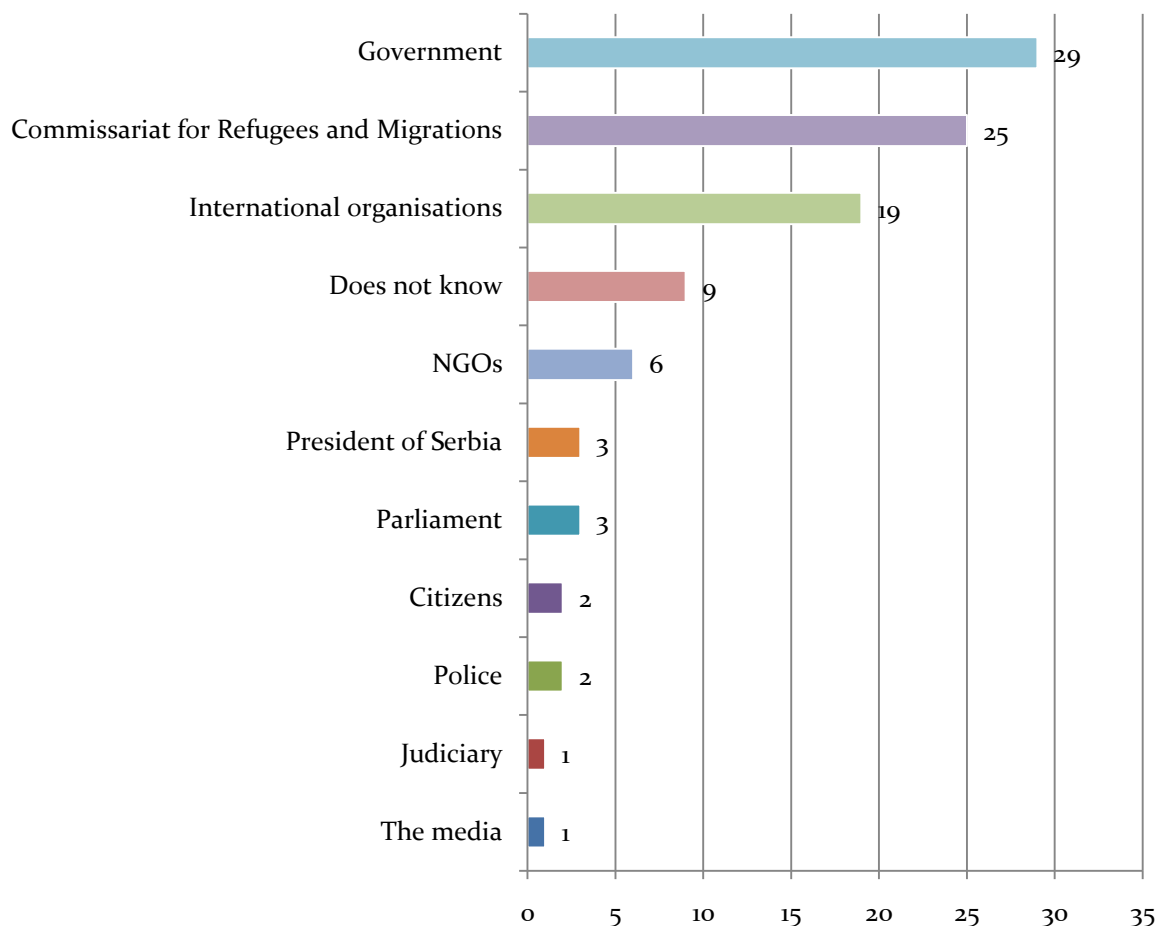
Respondents that make up the representative sample at the national level, who are at the same time the least aware of asylum-seekers' housing conditions, have the lowest opinion of asylum centre accommodation. A possible explanation is that the average member of the public may believe the state is weighed

down by more pressing issues and so unable to provide decent housing conditions for asylum-seekers despite its best efforts.

The central Government and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations (cited by 29 and 25 percent of those polled, respectively) are the institutions seen as best able to address problems encountered by asylum-seekers. See Chart 19.

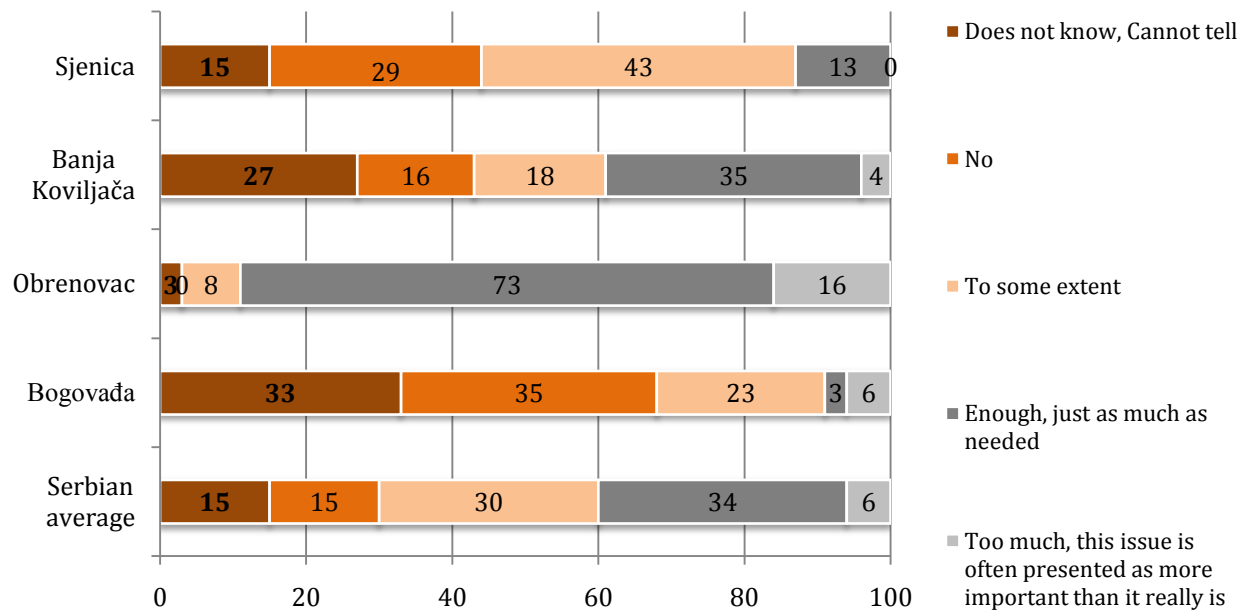
Besides the Government and the Commissariat, 19 percent of those polled feel that donation programmes implemented by international organisations can contribute a great deal to resolving asylum-seekers' issues.

Chart 19. Which institution is best placed to help address issues faced by asylum-seekers?(In %)



Respondents do not expect the media to aid in improving the position of asylum-seekers to any appreciable extent. The key reason why this view is so widespread is that the public does not seem to hold a clearly defined opinion as to whether the media focus on asylum-seekers' issues excessively or not enough – see Chart 20.

Chart 20. Do the media devote enough attention to asylum-seekers' issues?(In %)



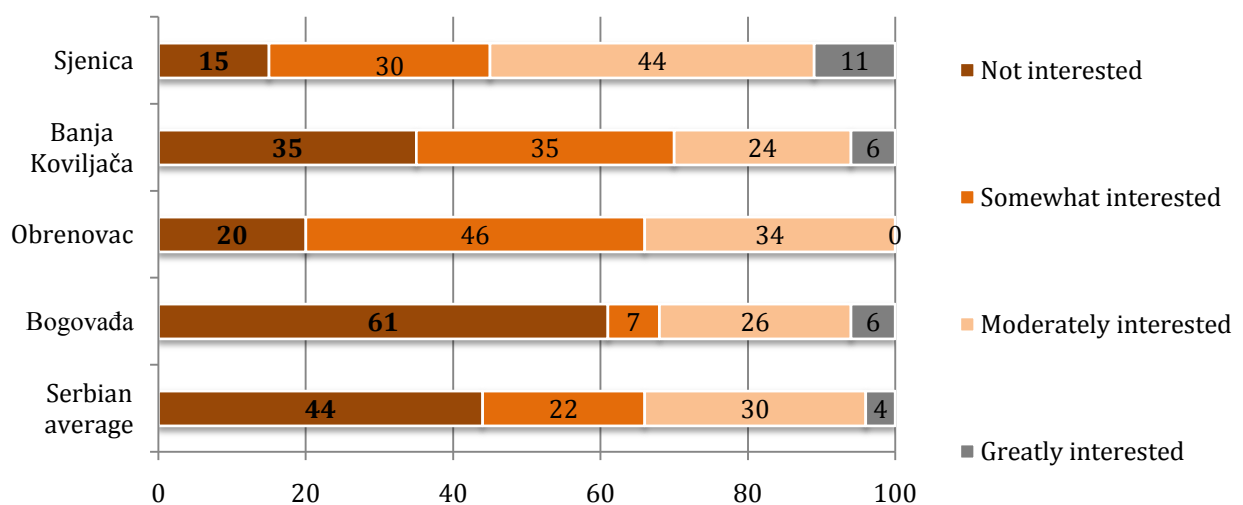
9. Personal relationships with asylum-seekers: contacts with asylum-seekers and social distance

This Chapter will present the findings of the battery of questions designed to capture the personal experiences of Serbian citizens with asylum-seekers, and to determine the social distance towards this group. It will also attempt to show all the differences between the responses given by respondents making up the general sample (covering all of Serbia) and those made in the four communities that asylum-seekers already live in.

To start with, we asked two questions intended to show **to what extent respondents are even interested in learning more about the situation asylum-seekers find themselves in, and whether they even know about any of the asylum centres in Serbia.**

At the national level, on average **one in three Serbian citizens (34 percent) are interested, either ‘moderately’ or ‘greatly’, in learning more about the position of asylum-seekers in Serbia.** If we add to this the 22 percent of those polled who report being ‘somewhat’ interested, the percentage of respondents who claim to be open to learning more about this group appears to be relatively satisfactory. That said, it should be understood that many respondents professing interest lack any true willingness to actually find out more about asylum-seekers (which will to some extent be demonstrated by findings of the analysis presented below). On the other hand, **44 percent of those polled are not interested at all in gaining any deeper understanding of the problems faced by this group,** and will be difficult to mobilise for any future action.

Chart 21. To what extent are you personally interested in learning more about the position of asylum-seekers in Serbia? (In %)

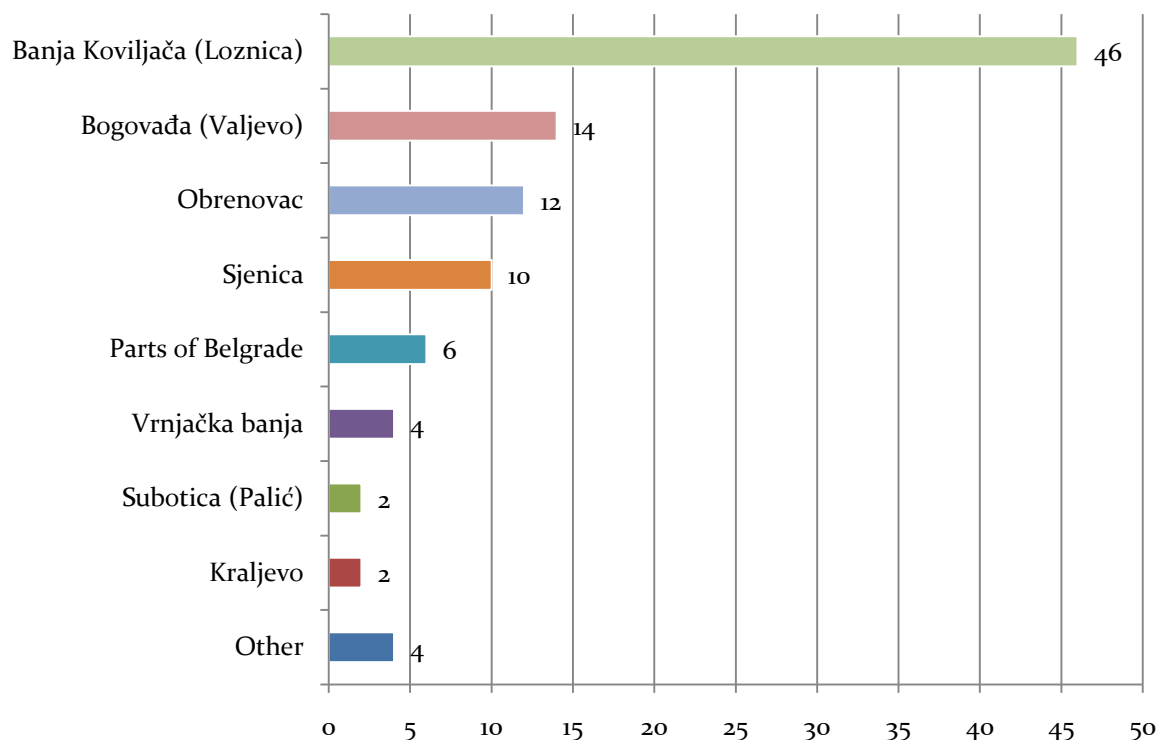


If we focus our analysis only on the four communities adjacent to asylum centres, the following findings emerge: residents of Sjenica are the most interested in the plight of the asylum-seekers (44 percent ‘moderately’ and 11 percent ‘greatly’), whilst respondents in Banja Koviljača show the least interest (24 percent ‘moderately’ and six percent ‘greatly’). There are no major differences between residents of Obrenovac and Bogovađa (one-third of those polled are interested), but the Bogovađa sample contains six percent of those polled who claim to be ‘greatly interested’.

We then asked respondents to name, if they could, a centre housing asylum-seekers (*one they could remember, the first one that came to mind*). Chart 22 shows the responses made at the national level (the assumption made was that all or most residents of communities neighbouring asylum centres already knew the facility was nearby, which is why we did not pose this question in the sub-sample groups).

One-half of the population at large could not name a single asylum centre. As expected, those able to cite a centre named Banja Koviljača or Loznica (a total of 46 percent); this facility is followed by Bogovađa (14 percent), Obrenovac (12 percent) and Sjenica (ten percent). As Chart 22 makes apparent, nearly one-fifth of those polled (of the 50 percent able to answer) also named other localities apart from the four largest asylum centres.

Chart 22. Can you name an asylum centre (or a town where such a facility is located) that is used to house asylum-seekers in Serbia? (Serbian average, in %)

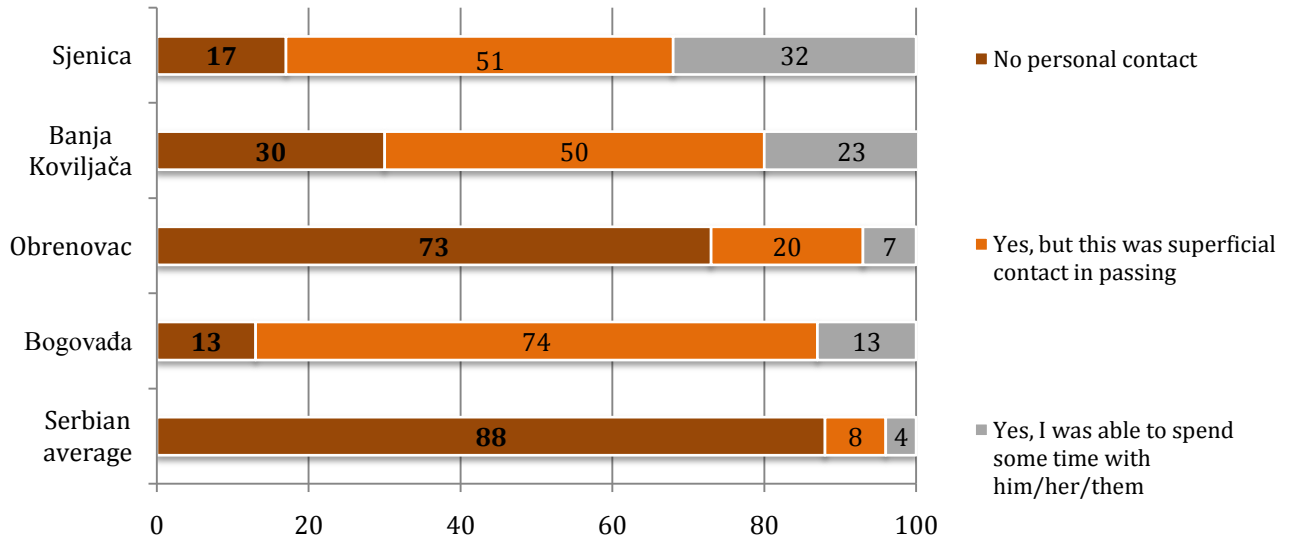


Have Serbian citizens been able to make contact (i.e. have a brief conversation, or spend some time) with asylum-seekers, and what have their experiences been? As expected, there are major differences between findings obtained at the national level and those seen in communities close to asylum centres.

A total of 88 percent of all Serbian citizens have never had contacts with asylum-seekers; eight percent were able to see them in passing ('superficial contact'); and as few as four percent of those polled were at some point able to spend some time with them.

In the four communities where the survey was carried out, the percentage of residents who have never had contacts with asylum-seekers ranges from 13 percent in Bogovađa to as much as 73 percent in Obrenovac. At the same time, residents of Sjenica (32 percent) and Banja Koviljača (23 percent) have had the most opportunities to become more acquainted with asylum-seekers in terms of time spent with them and intensity of contact. In Bogovađa, respondents who merely saw asylum-seekers in passing (74 percent) far outnumber those who were able to spend some time with them (13 percent).

Chart 23. Have you ever had personal contact with asylum-seekers? (In %)

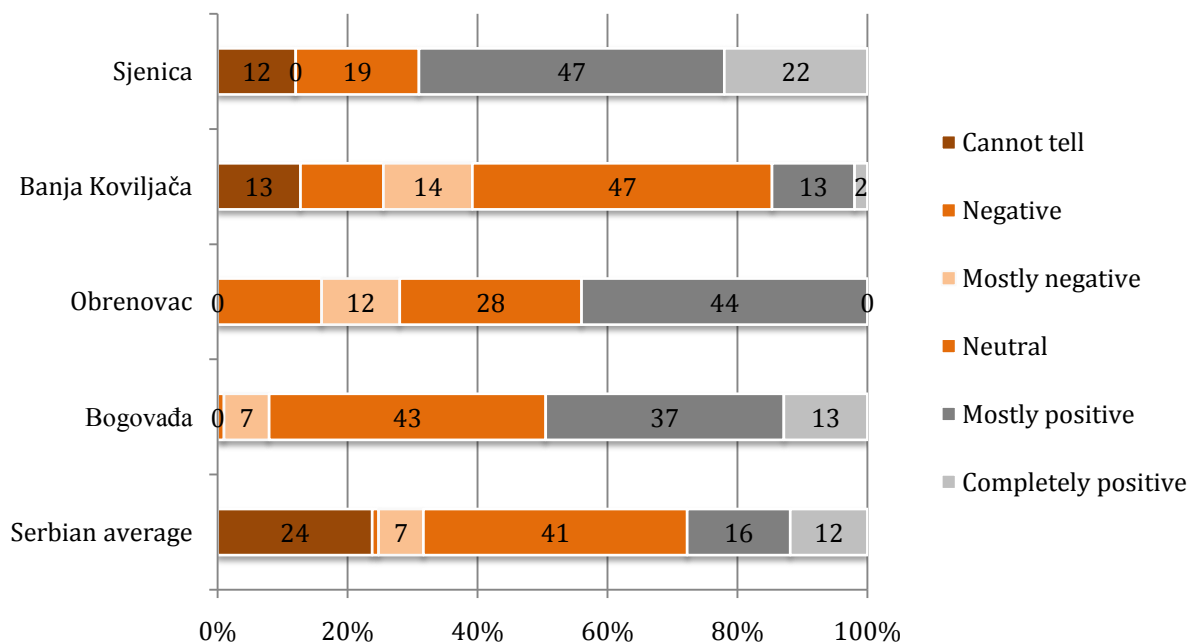


What have respondents' experiences been? (We considered only answers of residents who reported having had contacts with asylum seekers.) At the national level, most respondents were 'neutral' – 41 percent of those polled harboured neither positive nor negative views, whilst 24 percent had no opinion or could not say. With those who did report a particular opinion, **positive comments outnumbered negative ones (28 vs. eight percent)**. We should, though, exercise caution here: as few as 12 percent of

those polled claim to have had contacts with asylum-seekers, and these data should be viewed with some reservation.

There are some differences in responses made by residents of communities neighbouring asylum centres. So, for instance, **many residents of Sjenica and Bogovađa claim to have had positive experiences (as many as 69 percent in Sjenica, and 50 percent in Bogovađa), whilst adverse encounters are either completely absent or very few in number (none in Sjenica and eight percent in Bogovađa). The opposite is true in Banja Koviljača, where more than one-quarter (27 percent) reported having had negative experiences with asylum-seekers, as opposed to 15 percent claiming positive impressions.** The situation is somewhat better in Obrenovac than in Banja Koviljača, but is still worse than in Sjenica or Bogovađa: 28 percent of Obrenovac residents claim to have had negative experiences, whilst 44 percent report positive encounters.

Chart 24. What are your experiences with asylum-seekers?(In %)



How ready are Serbian citizens to see asylum centres established in their communities, close to where they live? Considering the problems and lack of resident understanding seen with all existing centres (with the exception of Sjenica), this seems to be a very important question for understanding the relationship between the Serbian public and asylum-seekers.

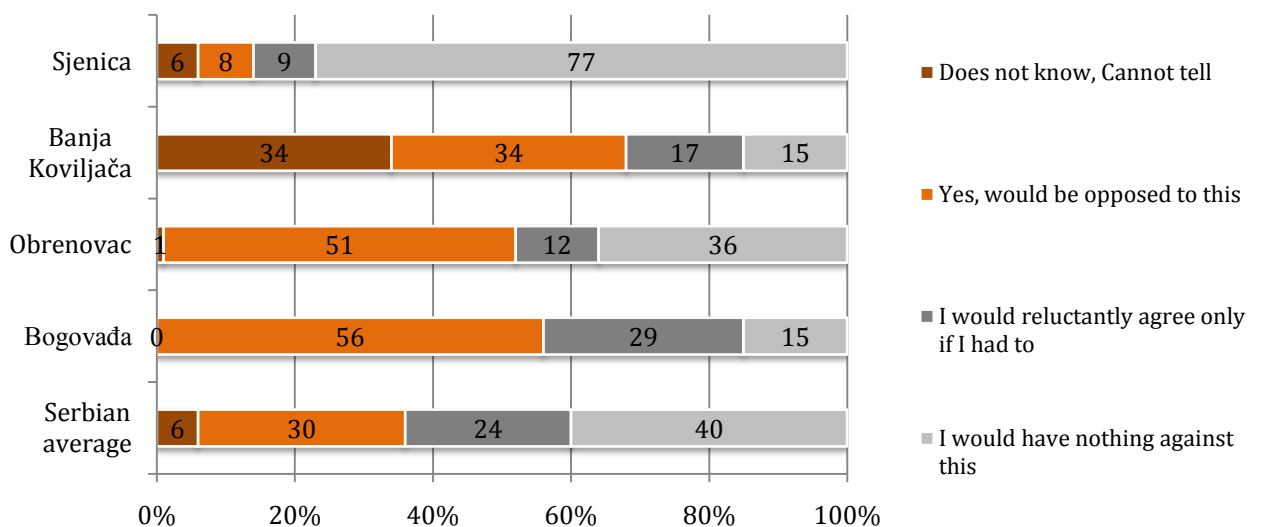
In Sjenica and at the national level, respondents in favour of asylum centres (either new or existing ones, such as in Sjenica) outnumber those opposed. As many

as 77 percent of Sjenica residents have nothing against the centre whilst a mere eight percent oppose it; in the overall sample, the figures are 40 and 30 percent, respectively.

Residents ready to object to asylum centres in their community outnumber those in favour in Bogovađa, Obrenovac, and Banja Koviljača, with 56, 51, and 34 percent, respectively. The Bogovađa sub-sample also contains the largest number of respondents who find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that an asylum centre has already been set up in their area. On the other hand, although the number of those polled in Obrenovac who oppose asylum centres is substantial, 36 percent of respondents there have no objections.

When these findings for each particular community are interpreted, it should be borne in mind that the questions were answered by members of the public who already live close to asylum centres, and that this fact has affected their responses, resulting in some answers contrasting with the general tone of the survey. This is in particular true of the large number of those opposed to asylum centres in Bogovađa (and Obrenovac), although other findings indicate they have not had any especially negative experiences with asylum-seekers. **It seems that residents of these communities are dissatisfied with having an asylum centre in their close proximity in spite of there being no particularly negative perceptions of asylum-seekers in general.**

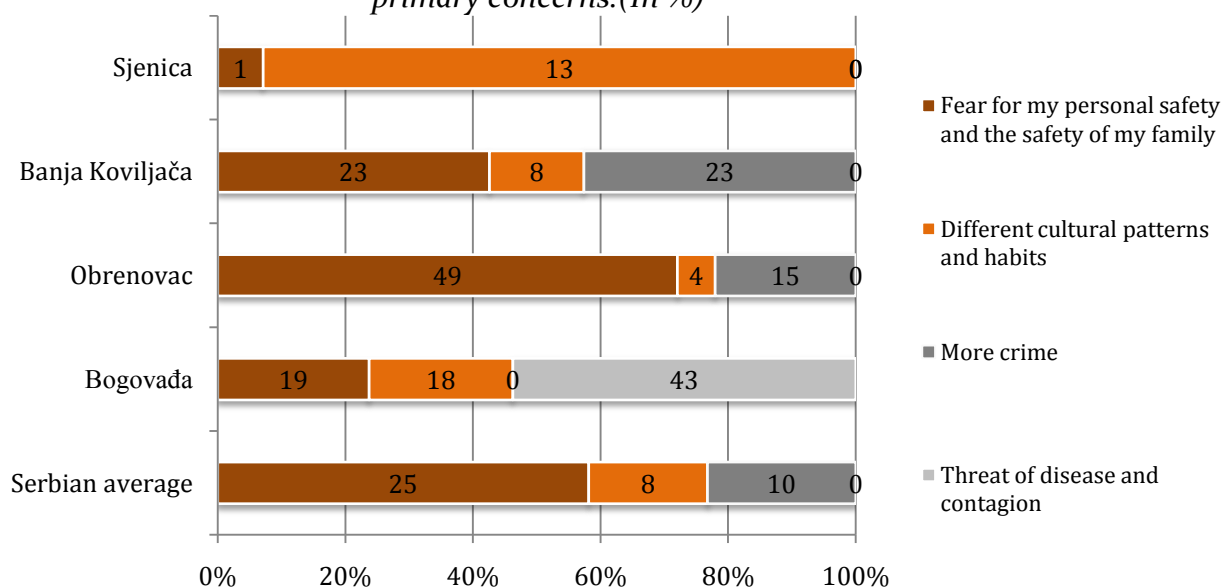
Chart 25. Would you object to having an asylum centre (housing facility for asylum-seekers) established in your community, close to where you live? Do you object to an existing asylum centre in your neighbourhood? (In %)



What makes local residents oppose new (or existing) asylum centres? Why are they concerned about these facilities? *Chart 26 shows the four most frequent answers.*

The chief concerns cited by Serbian citizens are fear for their own safety and that of their families (reported by 25 percent of those polled), followed by crime (ten percent) and different cultural patterns and habits (eight percent). Safety is by far the greatest issue in Obrenovac (cited by 49 percent of all respondents), whereas 15 percent fear an increase in the crime rate. The perception in Bogovađa is completely the opposite: their greatest fear (as mentioned by 43 percent of those polled) is disease and contagion (whilst 19 and 18 percent, respectively, are concerned for their safety and uneasy about unfamiliar cultural patterns). Findings from Sjenica again demonstrate that this community has no particular problems with asylum-seekers, with only 13 percent citing concerns about different cultural practices.

Chart 26. If you would object to having an asylum centre established in your neighbourhood (or object an existing centre in your neighbourhood), please state your primary concerns. (In %)



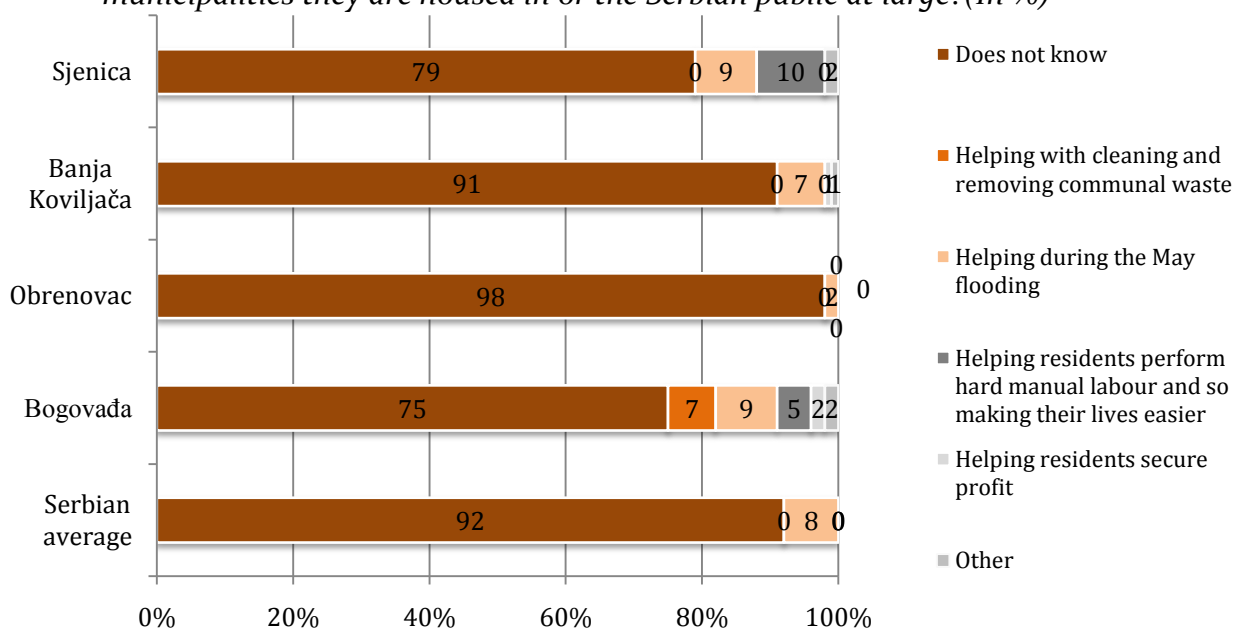
The following section will attempt to answer the questions of how much residents are aware of what asylum-seekers can do for the local community, whether asylum-seekers in Serbia are threatened, and whether residents would personally help them if they had the opportunity.

Firstly, are residents aware of cases where asylum-seekers were able to help the municipalities they are housed in, or the Serbian public at large? Responses to this question clearly show that Serbian citizens, even residents of communities where asylum-seekers are accommodated, have limited or no awareness of how asylum-

seekers live. Thus, for instance, 92 percent of those polled at the national level cannot cite a single instance where asylum-seekers assisted the local community, whilst in sub-sampled areas the number ranges between 75 percent in Bogovađa and as much as 98 percent in Obrenovac. The figure for Obrenovac must be viewed in the context of the May flooding, which left local residents very much focused on their own personal issues.

Respondents who believe asylum-seekers have helped the municipalities in which they are housed mainly feel this took place during May's disastrous floods. This view is reported by eight percent of those polled at the national level; at nine percent, the figure is higher in Bogovađa and Sjenica. Asylum-seekers are particularly recognised as having been useful to their local community in Bogovađa: residents of this municipality also cite assistance with waste removal (seven percent) and help with hard manual labour (five percent).

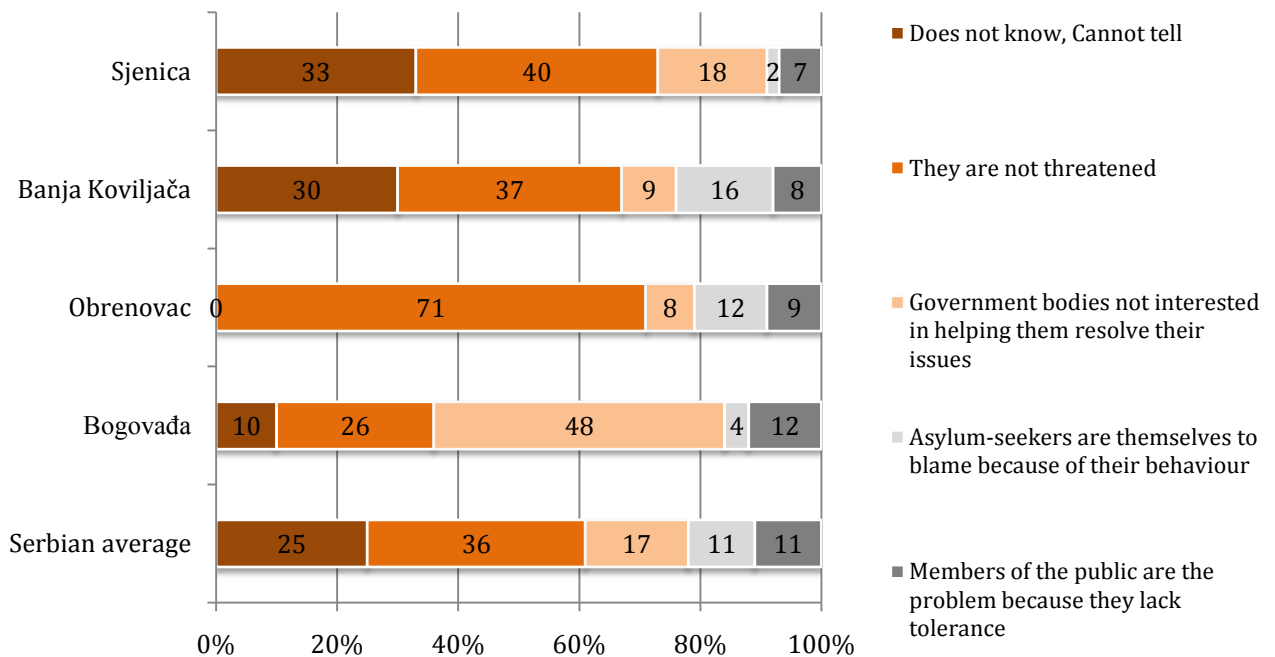
Chart 27. Are you aware of any cases where asylum-seekers were able to help the municipalities they are housed in or the Serbian public at large?(In %)



Most of those polled (36 percent) feel asylum-seekers are not threatened in Serbia. An additional 25 percent either do not know or have no opinion of this issue. Of the two-fifths of those who believe asylum-seekers are threatened, most (17 percent) claim this is due to lack of interest on the part of government authorities. On the other hand, 11 percent each believe that the blame rests on the asylum-seekers themselves and say resident intolerance is the reason.

The same question was put to residents of communities already housing asylum-seekers. Those polled in Obrenovac believe, to an above-average extent, that asylum-seekers are not threatened at all (as reported by 71 percent of all respondents). Asylum-seekers are also seen as not threatened by 26 percent of those polled in Bogovađa, 37 percent in Banja Koviljača, and 40 percent in Sjenica. The Bogovađa sub-sample also contains the greatest number of respondents who feel asylum-seekers do face threats – 64 percent in total (with 48 percent blaming the state, 12 percent the public, and four percent the asylum-seekers themselves). Banja Koviljača comes second (with one in three seeing the asylum-seeker population as threatened, of which one-half believing the asylum-seekers themselves to be responsible), followed by Obrenovac (29 percent, 12 percent placing the blame on the asylum-seekers), with Sjenica coming in last (with 27 percent).

Chart 28. Are asylum-seekers in Serbia threatened, and, if so, who is responsible? (In %)



The final issue dealt with in this section is whether members of the public would help asylum-seekers if they had an opportunity to do so. Encouragingly, at the national level, respondents prepared to help (64 percent: 41 percent would do so if able, 13 percent would provide assistance if told how, and another ten percent would help in any case) outnumber those unwilling to do so (28 percent: 16 percent are not interested at all, nine percent lack the time, and three percent believe no help is necessary).

Table 3. *Would you personally help asylum-seekers if you had the opportunity? (In %)*

	Does not know, cannot tell	No, I do not have the time	No, because this does not interest me, I mind my own business	No, because I do not feel they need help	Yes, if I were able to	Yes, if someone told me how I could help	Yes, I would help in any case because these people are in distress
Serbian average	8	9	16	3	41	13	10
Bogovađa	25	11	24	4	11	12	13
Obrenovac	0	43	11	1	20	2	23
Banja Koviljača	23	8	15	6	25	13	10
Sjenica	5	5	4	0	54	18	14

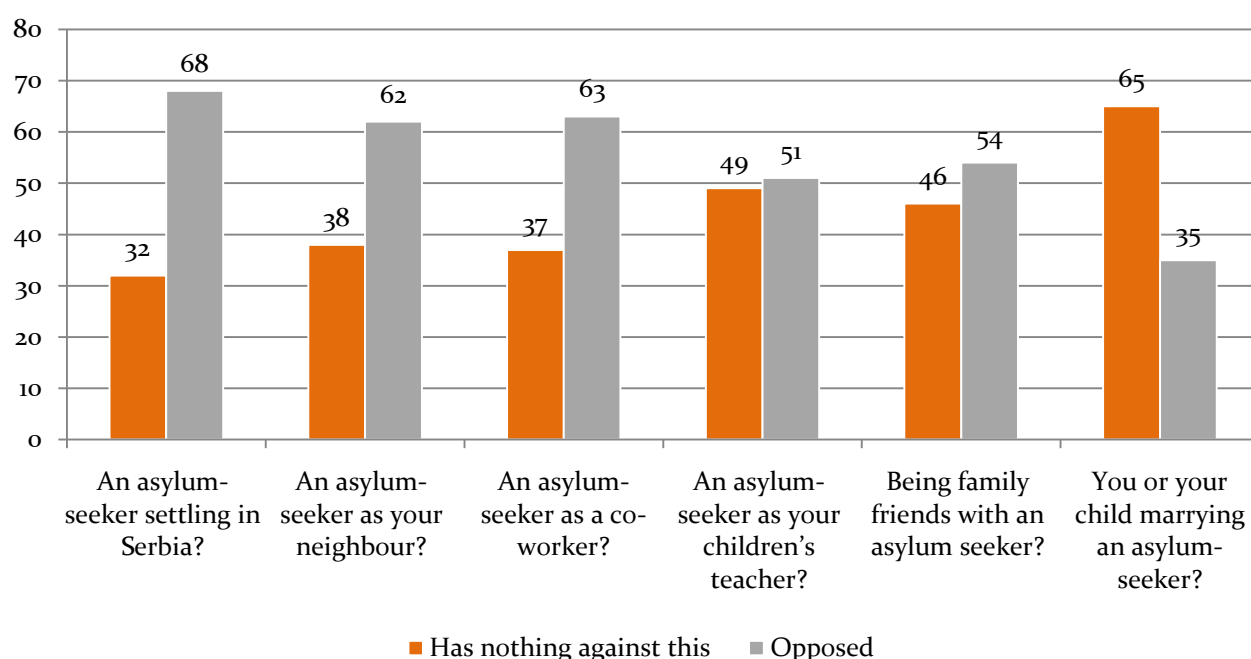
Of the sub-sampled communities, **respondents who would assist asylum-seekers outnumber those not ready to do so in Sjenica (86 vs. nine percent) and Banja Koviljača (48 percent vs. 29 percent)**. Interestingly, **in Obrenovac and Bogovađa respondents who would not help outnumber those who would**. For instance, in Obrenovac 55 percent of those polled claim they are not ready to help asylum-seekers (most citing ‘lack of time’), whilst the figure stands at 39 percent in Bogovađa (where 24 percent say they ‘mind their own business’).

9.1 Social distance

Evidence bears out the assumption that social distance is a precondition for discrimination; in that sense, distance towards other ethnic or social groups frequently precedes discrimination. The so-called Bogardus scale is best able to capture views of these issues and is as such generally used in research into the matter. This scale is used more often in studies of social distance between ethnic groups, but can be applied with equal success in measuring distance between social groups. The scale used in this survey was divided into six steps, starting from the most general forms of social interaction ('How would you feel about a member of a particular social group being) 1) a fellow citizen of Serbia; or 2) a neighbour'). Medium-intensity forms of social intercourse were tested next ('Would you accept such a person as) 3) a co-worker'). Finally, we examined the most intimate forms of social contact ('How about if this person were 4) a close personal friend; 5) your child's teacher; or 6) married to you or your child').

In this survey, the Bogardus scale was used only for views of asylum-seekers and the data were not compared to findings pertaining to other social groups. We will also present only results obtained from the national-level representative sample, since the size of the sub-samples does not allow analysis of this type.

Chart 29. Social distance (In %)



As Chart 29 shows, opposition to contact with asylum-seekers is weakest at the broadest level of social interaction, although the figures are rather high and remain a

cause for concern. A total of 32 percent of those polled are opposed to asylum-seekers settling in Serbia; 38 percent oppose having members of this group as their neighbours; and 37 percent prefer not to have them as co-workers. **Resistance increases with the intensity of social contact:** 46 percent of those polled would not be friends with asylum-seekers; 49 percent are against asylum-seekers teaching their children; **and two-thirds of all respondents come down against marriage or close family ties with an asylum-seeker.**

These findings show that prejudice against asylum-seekers remains widespread amongst the majority population, although the general public does not have a visibly negative view of this social group.

Additional research is available⁴ that deals with discrimination in more general terms; these studies examine the distance exhibited towards ethnic and social groups and provide some context for analysis of the Serbian public's opinions of asylum-seekers.

⁴See, for instance, findings of the CeSID and UNDP public opinion surveys on citizens' attitudes towards discrimination in Serbia carried out in the winter of 2012 and 2013, available at rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/citizens--attitudes-on-discrimination-in-serbia.