

Migration challenges, local policies and civic participation

2018.



FONDACIJA ZA OTVORENO DRUŠTVO, SRBIJA
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All relevant terms used only in male grammatical gender apply to all persons without discrimination and regardless of their gender, unless otherwise particularly specified.

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For the publisher

Vladimir Petronijević

Editor

Siniša Volarević

Authors

Jana Babić
Siniša Volarević

Associate - Researcher

Danica Ćirić

Translation

Dragana Pokrajac
Jelica Lepori

Design and layout

Marko Zakovski

Print

Dosije studio

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INTRODUCTION

About the project

The project *Civic participation in the development of local policies within the context of migrant influx – cases of four local communities* was implemented by Group 484 with the financial support of the Open Society Foundation Serbia. The main part of the project was the research carried out in the areas of four Vojvodina local self-governments – Šid, Sombor, Subotica and Ada. Most of the field research activities were conducted in the area of three local self-governments which – in different ways and in different scopes – have faced significant migration challenges related to the continuous movement of migrants and refugees along the Western Balkans route. On the other hand, only a small part of the research was conducted in Ada municipality, which did not experience such challenges in this period. The research was conducted in Šid municipality in March while in Sombor, Subotica and Ada in June 2018.

The project aimed to contribute to the development and improvement of local policies and practices which will create more favourable conditions for the inclusion of migrants in Serbian local communities. Guided by this goal, the research sought to provide for the collection and analysis of data which would then (also) serve as the empirical ground for further work on creating more favourable environment for the social inclusion of migrants and refugees. We believe that the rather extensive qualitative data collected by examining attitudes and opinions of “both sides” (migrants and citizens) – and the analysis presented in this report – can help define the guidelines for rational review and (re)defining of the actual interests of communities and citizens, for the constructive discussion on building new policies based on complete and authentic information as well as the active participation of citizens in developing those local policies.

Research methodology

The research was conducted using the focus group discussion (FGD) method. All the discussions were recorded, and the transcripts of those recordings were made afterwards. The research findings, hence, were obtained by a detailed qualitative analysis of transcripts of all individual focus group discussions. FGDs with migrants were conducted with the assistance of translators for Arabic or Persian language, whereas transcripts from these FGDs were indeed transcripts of recordings of the consecutive translation.¹

The research included four specific target groups: (a) citizens of local communities; (b) representatives of local governments and relevant institutions; (c) representatives of local business sector; and (d) migrants accommodated in transit centres. Special discussion guides were prepared for each of the four target groups. FGDs with citizens and FGDs with representatives of local governments and institutions have dealt with

¹ The parts of some focus group discussions were conducted in English and those statements were kept here in their original form (unedited).

the situation in a particular municipality or city – generally and regarding some specific areas (healthcare, labour market, security, etc.) – and then the issues related to the presence of migrants, integration opportunities and other migration challenges. Particular attention was paid to issues largely related to negative stereotypes and feelings of fear and concern, that is, issues which are usually the source of unfavourable attitudes towards refugees and migrants and the possibility of their integration into local communities. In addition, we discussed with representatives of local governments and institutions about their relevant competencies and cooperation with competent state institutions, and also about communication with citizens and their involvement in defining policies and solving problems. From the other point of view, this last topic was also discussed with the citizens. Discussions with representatives of the local business sector were mostly focused on the state of the local economy and the topics included both the overall situation and business climate, but also the arrival of migrants and the effect of this phenomenon on certain local economy sectors, and then the possibilities of hiring and employing migrants and refugees. Finally, discussions with migrants from the three centres covered by this research were mainly concerned with various aspects of their experience in Serbia, their opinions and attitudes about Serbia and the possibility of staying in this country.

Structure of respondents

Selection of the participants in focus group discussions was carried out in compliance with the standards of qualitative research and the objectives of this research. We aimed to include equal shares of men and women in all focus groups of citizens. In addition, in recruiting the respondents, we ensured that focus groups included town residents but also residents of certain rural settlements. Namely, when it comes to rural settlements, we intentionally targeted the ones located near the reception centres and the settlements where migrants were staying outside the centres, in connection to their attempts to irregularly cross the borders with Croatia or Hungary. Further to this, age and family status were two other socio-demographic characteristics taken into account when selecting the respondents. More specifically, separate FGDs were organized with the respondents aged between 18 and 39 and the respondents older than 39, and with regard to groups with younger respondents, we particularly ensured equal presentation of both parents of underage children and persons with no children. In total, eleven focus group discussions were conducted including 90 male and female citizens of Subotica, Sombor, Šid and Ada.

Focus groups with representatives of local governments and relevant institutions generally included individuals who, in professional terms, are mostly involved in issues related to migration, reception and stay of migrants. It was often the case that these individuals were members of the local migration councils, and the institutions and organizations from which they came, apart from the municipal or city administration, included health centres, social centres, primary schools, local Red Cross organizations and local affiliates of the National Employment Service. The discussions included 20 local officials and representatives of institutions in four focus groups.

Focus groups bringing together business sector representatives mostly comprised entrepreneurs, including representatives of business associations, but also representatives of large companies. All FGD participants were over 40, while women accounted for about one-third of the total number. While selecting the respondents, we especially endeavoured to choose people familiar with business operations (the way and the logic of business decision-making) and those from the sectors of business in which the arrival of migrants produced certain effects in terms of revenue growth, or from companies which (at least occasionally) have an actual need for new recruitments. Three FGDs were organized with the participation of eleven representatives of local business sectors.

Focus group discussions with migrants and refugees were conducted with the assistance of interpreters or cultural mediators. Special focus groups for women and special ones for men were organized. In addition to gender, three factors were also taken into account when selecting the respondents: country of origin, age and family status. In general, the composition of focus groups reflected, to the extent possible, the current structure of the population of women and men accommodated in a specific centre. A total of four discussions were held in the Principovac, Sombor and Subotica transit centres and these focus groups gathered 28 adults: 16 women and 12 men.

Table 1. Number of organised FGDs and number of participants from four target groups

Target group	FGD	Respondents
Citizens	11	90
Local officials	4	20
Business people	3	11
Migrants	4	28
TOTAL	22	149

**Migration challenges, local policies
and civic participation**

Case: Šid

Šid Municipality: local context and policies

General information. Šid Municipality is a part of the Srem district, with the area of 687 square kilometres, and it includes 19 settlements. Šid is the only urban settlement and municipal centre there. The municipality borders with two neighbouring states. While the border area with Bosnia and Herzegovina is rather small, there are as many as five official border crossings with the Republic of Croatia in the municipality located along the 110 kilometres of the state border.¹

Population. According to the 2011 census, the municipality population was 34,188, but the estimates of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia show that the declining trend from the previous decade has continued over the past few years, and that only 31,901 people lived in the area of Šid municipality in 2017. Decrease in the number of inhabitants was accompanied by an increase in the average age, aging index and the dependence rate of the population over 65.²

The newly settled, according to the latest census, account for the majority of population of Šid municipality (more precisely, slightly above 53%), while the majority of these newly settled inhabitants came from the area of Croatia (39.5%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (18.5%). About 40% of all immigrants came to Šid municipality within the 1991-1999 period.³

Labour market. Active population equals 38.5% of the total population, while the share of the unemployed is around one quarter. 2,987 unemployed and 7,504 employed persons were registered in 2017.⁴ In January 2018 there were 727 registered entrepreneurs and 398 companies (mostly small: 384). Registered employed persons accounted for 23.5% of the total population of the municipality. Main characteristics of the population of the unemployed include high share of unskilled and low-skilled workers (41.7%), high share of people over 50 (32.7%) and a rather high share of young people (23%).⁵

Migration challenges and local policies. Šid has been exposed to the current migration challenges concerning the movement of migrants and refugees along the Western Balkans route especially since mid-September 2015, when the Hungarian authorities took measures to completely block the entry of asylum seekers and migrants from the territory of Serbia. Immediately afterwards, a new humanitarian corridor was established, starting from Serbia and going through the territory of the Republic of Croatia, where Šid municipality became the main exit point and with more than 609,000 refugees and migrants passing over its territory during the period between 16 September 2015 and 8 March 2016.⁶ Throughout this period, the movement of refugees and migrants through Serbia, and also through the Šid area, took the form of a rather fast transit and the majority of refugees and migrants in Šid did not stay for longer than two or three days or even shorter. In September and October, transit was organized across the border crossing near Berkasovo settlement. Principovac transit centre was opened, but the reception and protection of refugees and migrants were mostly taking place in the open areas, in the immediate vicinity of the border crossing. Since the beginning of November 2015, in accordance with

the agreed bilateral protocol on cooperation, transit to the Republic of Croatia was organized by special trains, where refugees and migrants were transported from the railway station in Šid to the reception centre in Slavonski Brod in Croatia. For this transit to be organized efficiently, two additional transit centres were opened: one in the former motel in Adaševci settlement (next to the highway), and the other one in the immediate vicinity of the railway station in Šid. During this period, the rules on the movement of refugees and migrants along the Western Balkans route became more restrictive, and the retention in the Šid area became longer, and then the closing of the corridor at the beginning of March 2016 created an entirely new situation: Šid became the place where migrants and refugees stayed for months, even years, but also an area from which a significant number of migrants were constantly trying to enter the Republic of Croatia in various irregular ways. In certain periods of time, even more than two thousand migrants and refugees were continuously residing in the area of Šid.

In the meantime, the transit centre near the Šid railway station was closed, while the Principovac and Adaševci centres continued to provide care to migrants and asylum seekers. 284 people were staying in Adaševci and 108 in Principovac at the end of March 2018. In both centres, migrants from Afghanistan were individually the largest group, and adult men accounted for more than a half of the accommodated in the centre.⁷ However, by the end of August 2018, the situation changed considerably, so the number of people accommodated in Adaševci reached 516 and in Principovac 278, while the share of people from Afghanistan in both centres reduced significantly. On the other hand, the gender and age structure of persons accommodated in these centres did not change significantly, and the share of adult men in Adaševci was just slightly higher than in March.⁸

The Šid Municipal Assembly adopted on 23 November 2016 *the Local Action Plan for Improving the Status of Migrants in Šid Municipality for the 2016-2020 period*. Preparation process was carried out in the first half of 2016 and this LAP introduced significant novelties, but also relied on the previous Local Action Plan for the Improvement of the Status of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Municipality of Šid for the 2010-2014 period. Strategic framework for the new LAP for the first time also refers to asylum seekers and migrants in need, without a defined status, and four of the eight specific objectives defined within the LAP refer to these two categories of migrants. Two of these specific objectives are aimed at promoting and strengthening tolerance – one envisages activities to improve the quality of life and the quality of certain public services, and the other organization of educational, sports, cultural, artistic and other activities in which local citizens and asylum seekers and/or migrants would be jointly involved. The third of these specific objectives implies strengthening institutional capacities for drafting project proposals in the field of migration management and support to migrants, while the fourth one refers to improving awareness on the needs and problems of migrants. The remaining four specific objectives envisaged by the LAP relate to refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees under readmission agreements, and provide different modes of housing and economic empowerment. The municipality has already gained considerable experience regarding the activities of this type

through the implementation of the previous LAP in the 2010-2015 period. The main target group of these activities were refugees from former SFRY.⁹

Šid Municipality had already earlier established the Migration Management and Permanent Solutions Council, and this authority is responsible for managing the Local Action Plan implementation process, including monitoring and performance evaluation activities.

There are no other local policies – strategic or action-related documents – which, in any way, recognize the relevance of migration and migration challenges.

Methodological framework

During the research in Šid, five focus group discussions were held with the participation of citizens of Šid, representatives of the local government and relevant local institutions and organizations, a group of local entrepreneurs, and also a group of migrants accommodated in the Principovac transit centre. The research was conducted in the 12-14 March 2018 period.

Representatives of the local government and institutions. This focus group gathered eight people who, within their competences in the local government and relevant local institutions and organizations, participate in decision-making and carrying out tasks of importance for exercising the rights of migrants and implementing relevant local policies. The focus group consisted of the following participants:

- Municipal administration (Assistant to the Municipality President for Economic Development and Assistant to the Municipality President for Social Affairs);
- Branko Radičević Primary School (Pedagogue and Coordinator for Migrants);
- Primary healthcare centre (Director);
- Social Welfare Centre (Director and two representatives);
- Red Cross Šid (Secretary).

Citizens of Šid. Two focus group discussions with the citizens of Šid were organised, with the participation of a total of 15 people – eight women and seven men. Women and men were equally represented in both focus groups and we also took care that both focus groups include residents of Šid and residents of certain rural settlements of the municipality. Eleven participants were residents of the town of Šid, while four participants came from the villages of Adaševci and Batrovci. Further to this, the age of the respondents and their family status were two additional demographic characteristics taken into account when selecting respondents: the first focus group gathered people aged 18 to 39, while the participants of the second focus group were their older fellow citizens (aged 40 to 85). Eight participants were parents of minor children.

Migrants located in Principovac transit centre. This focus group discussion gathered seven men who were staying in the Principovac transit centre at given time and only those who speak the Persian language (Farsi or Dari). The focus group was composed to roughly reflect the structure of the current population of adult men who speak the Persian language in terms of age and family status. The discussion was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter for Persian. The list below presents each of the focus group participants through three types of data:

- 17 years old, from Afghanistan, in the centre with parents and brothers and sisters;
- 26 years old, from Iran, alone;
- 26 years old, from Iraq, alone;
- 28 years old, from Iran, in the centre with wife and father;
- 34 years old, from Iran, in the centre with two children and wife;
- 35 years old, from Iran, alone;
- 36 years old, from Iran, in the centre with daughter.

Businesspeople. This focus discussion is designed as a forum bringing together the citizens of Šid who represent the local entrepreneurial sector and small businesses. In addition, we were trying to include representatives of those companies which were already experienced in employing migrants and also companies from the industries in which the stay of migrants in Šid resulted in some concrete and significant consequences (positive or negative). Four people participated in the discussion, all of which were running their own small businesses:

- agricultural estate;
- nursing home;
- car repair workshop;
- bakery.

The participants included three men and one woman. All were older than 40, two lived in Šid and the other two in a village in the municipality of Šid.

Research findings: CITIZENS

Background – living in Šid

Low salaries, poor working conditions, low pensions, unemployment, poor system of values in the society are the basic problems the citizens of Šid are faced with. Major problems recognized in education and healthcare are secondary in importance and their origin can be seen in overall state of poverty, where only those individuals with enough money can benefit from quality and timely healthcare services and provide their children with the necessary textbooks and tools for their education. Cultural and social life is rarely the topic considered. The offer is perceived as poor and rarely affordable.

It is believed that such a situation is not necessary, but that it is rather designed to the benefit of those at high positions, that is, that there is a corruption system suitable for a small number of people. The description of the community in which they live is permeated by frequent indication of distrust in the institutions and the feelings of numbness, abandonment, fatigue and helplessness. Under these circumstances, many choose to go abroad. A lot of village schools are already closed or near closing.

“Disaster. Here in Šid now there is a ‘worker needed’ announcement. A worker is needed, but these are jobs with 20,000 dinars salaries, then they set you up some shortages and you don’t get anything. Or you don’t have working hours. [...] You go to work to finish at two, but you get out at four. For 20,000 dinars.” (older group)

“[...] ...it is horrible with employment. Politics is in all spheres, if you are not politically well-oriented at that moment, depending on which party is in power, at this moment the ruling one, you are already rejected at the start, you already have no chance to enter the second circle for a job... for a kindergarten for your child, for nursery... [...]” (younger group)

“Our entire municipality is very weak in terms of jobs... private sector is very poor, only in that state sector is so and so... Politics strongly affect everything, youth is leaving more and more and going abroad, all young people are leaving with their families, the population is reduced to a half.” (younger group)

“It’s like this. I don’t work, my wife works. At the moment we support two children going to school. I remember when I went to school, it wasn’t like this. Each year new books. For my fifth-grader, his schoolbag has more than 10kg, I can tell you [...]. And then they tell you, educate your children. But how? 40,000 dinars are the books. Now they introduced parental allowance. 2,500 dinars.” (older group)

“I was not on the priority list neither for the magnetic resonance imaging nor for other searches which they needed to see whether they could start the operation at all. [...] What I know is that two medical examinations totalled 60,000. And I was also a single parent. I couldn’t believe it. Luckily, there were, relatives mostly... what would I have done... [...]” (older group)

“Everything is holding up, if you are closer to the fire – you can get warm. As for the employers, they give stimulations as they want. Patients are received on political grounds, those who are directors, they go without scheduling, this puts me out of my shoes, because some people with diagnosis, they can sometimes wait the whole morning, then some of the patients become furious. When I say that there is a queue, he says `do you know who I am` [...].” (younger group)

“These are one and the same people every time... And family people, you will hardly see them every evening going with their children to dinner, for an ice-cream.” (younger group)

Migrant crisis

Consequences

In the context of the previously described problems, the influx of migrants is not seen as an event that has resulted in some significant changes in the lives of citizens. Certainly, certain positive and negative consequences are recognized, but not the essential ones. The following are stated as **positive**: cheaper goods which migrants trade in the markets when actually selling the surplus of humanitarian aid, using handyman services of migrants, creation of new jobs related to provision of care services to migrants, widening cultural horizons of children at school, support in terms of donations to schools and the primary healthcare centre (refurbishing children playgrounds, PVC windows for the primary healthcare centre, new appliances for the primary healthcare centre, TV and printer for elementary school). The stated **negative** consequences included: theft of agricultural goods from the fields and gardens, theft of sheep, arson, intercepting people in the street, burglaries, and also the overburdened teaching staff, who now must devote their attention to the migrant children as well, and the precedence which migrants have for medical examinations in the primary healthcare centre. When it comes to stealing and destroying property, it is pointed out that the material damage which was suffered, and which is often not a negligent one, has never been compensated to anyone. In addition, there are also two serious incidents mentioned related to violence allegedly caused by migrants.

“Yes, in part this was a problem, it has some benefits in part, but globally Šid is in a bigger problem. With migrants, without migrants, it doesn` t matter... Economic situation in Šid is bad even without migrants, and migrants can only bring us some benefits, but it all comes down to the same in the end.” (older group)

“While, for example, our amateur theatre where my daughter participates, yesterday had a play for migrants from Principovac and Adaševci in the motel... and they spent time together, danced, they sang along both with the migrant children and parents... and she returned home joyful, cheerful because she made someone happy, because she met Denise, who is in my class, I am her class teacher.” (older group)

“I have a friend who was invited to sew some screens there, she and her daughter are sewing those screens, this is what they do, they went there, they earned money.” (older group)

"Well yes, these from the children`s village SOS, many people are hired there... they have nice salaries. We also received those grants for schools, we took migrant children and our school children, we went to Pozorište na Terazijama theatre, therefore, our children also had some benefits. We`ve got a playground for children, I hear that the primary healthcare centre is also on this account, they got PVC windows, and some equipment... I think, there are lots of things to mention. People work in different NGOs and get salaries... It is true that this is not a permanent job, but what can you do... but you have nice income... And we, because of this, got a TV, a printer in our school, and we expect training of our teachers and so on..." (older group)

"I think that taxi drivers profited most... they earned great sums of money... They drive them there about ten times... And they, after returning all in mud, load them all over again." (older group)

"A lot of people started employment in some of those reception centres, I won`t discuss now whether it was through a political party or not, a lot of them prospered in some material way... Looking at all those things which were prepared for them, for example food, clothes, and the people who worked there also behaved like them, they brought, traded, I can tell a lot of examples, of people who traded, what they traded, took goods to their homes... this brought much benefits to them... a lot of them... This was not a secret... a lot of people from our village did this." (younger group)

"If Šid is already so heavily burdened and if you consider the material situation, then I don`t have anything against it, and that, in those reception centres people are employed from God knows where. Why aren`t then the people from Šid employed, directly, concretely, but they bring people instead. We have a girl from Smederevo, this one is from here, that one from there... [...] Some others are from Novi Sad, and people from Šid are knocked out." (older group)

"But this is not all if they took it for food... this is really rude." (older group)

"The things that he took: spoons, forks, axe, they took everything, I can`t tell why they need ladders, to climb the trucks, I can`t tell. I leave my bicycle in the village, there is no bicycle after 15 minutes, it is nowhere to be found, it`s over, nothing." (older group)

"Recently, a few months ago, they set fire to his shack, cattle, nothing was left... Everything burnt down... Luckily, the house is far away, otherwise it would also go down." (older group)

"In my shop they stole a bucket of Jupol paint. Why do they need this? There are so many strange people..." (older group)

"They stole things from my car. There was nothing special there, some USB with music, some hairpins, nothing special... nothing important, nothing valuable." (younger group)

"They broke into my mother-in-law`s house last month... [...] downtown... She didn`t report this to the police because she didn`t see them... [...] ...they didn`t take anything. Nobody else could have done that... [...] because they mostly move around the Partizan [sports centre] ...it`s very dark there, and there is also the railway station there." (younger group)

"I went out to buy cigarettes, my wallet in my hand, and there is this rather dark part where I was going to, and when I came to that place three migrants jumped on me, but there was, that corner has light and I just stood still. What they wanted, I cannot tell, because a woman I know came by, I screamed, and they just managed to pull my hair and carelessly continue their way. I experienced a kind of trauma and now I am afraid to go alone anywhere around the town." (older group)

"It was the beginning of August, they said: `they are robbing your car`... a young man ran after them, he suffered from heart disease, and, in the end, he died in the car... I don't know whether they stole anything from the car from him... He died... he was 40." (younger group)

"As for the healthcare, they are really highly privileged, they don't schedule, they don't pay for anything... For example, our man, I cannot examine him if his health card is not verified, except in case the ambulance brings him, while, for example, if a driver brings ten of them, they all enter without queuing. Neither do they schedule. I have to schedule all our people, pregnant women, everything... [...] And they must not wait... And if they wait, on the other hand, people object... Why are they waiting with us, they say, they stink... [...] And it is the same in paediatrics, which means, where we wait with babies, you will stand, and he will enter, pass by you." (younger group)

Now, almost two years afterwards, the situation is not taken as alarming, and the citizens are used to the presence of migrants, but they have a feeling that they suffered the worst situation of all. Namely, as they see it, the aid received on account of migrants is just a drop in the ocean of problems which need to be solved. On the other hand, they believe that the migrants staying in the centres are provided with all possible humanitarian aid, and they can even trade the exceeding quantities. It is clear that the greatest discontent among the citizens is caused by the situation with migrants staying outside the reception centres in Adaševci and Principovac. Citizens believe that the state evidently cannot or does not want to control this group of migrants, and it can also be seen that it is unclear to the citizens who is responsible for them. There were no official replies to the petitions addressed to the police and the Municipality. A lot of citizens feel cautious, if not afraid, when they move near the location known as Grafosrem, where there is a large number of `unregistered` migrants. They are also anxious when they are in the vicinity of the park and the railway station at night, which is also said to be a frequent shelter for `unregistered` migrants. In connection to this, there is a certain difference between different categories of respondents – younger ones and those from rural areas show a higher degree of fear and concern, and at the same time they are informed about greater number of delicts committed by migrants.

"What is the status of those in Grafosrem? Police come and take them away, and they come again... you can't stop this." (older group)

"I'm asking the question now if I could go, for example, to Vienna, sleep outside in the park for about 15 days, dirty and all of that, would somebody let me do that there in Vienna? Not to mention those 400 sleeping there. We don't go to for recreational cycling there and we cannot go by that Grafosrem, you feel uncomfortable and that is

all, and they are all lying there, you are uncomfortable, you can't tell when someone's going to jump out... [...] who is responsible for this?" (older group)

"[...] ...someone started this story, I can't tell whether this is true or not, I don't know... But there are a lot of them, a lot of them from Algeria, who are drug addicts... there are a lot of them, there are less of them now, as time goes by, there are less of them now compared to earlier times." (younger group)

"There were some attempts to report them to the police, to write petitions to Municipality, we in school wrote petitions... when a girl was attacked with an axe in her own house, when this happened, when that happened [...] but nothing." (older group)

When they themselves make assessments, the participants argue that it is difficult to say what is prevailing, good or bad consequences. Good consequences are, as it seems, more far-reaching and a lot of people benefit from them. Bad consequences, maybe greater in number, are mostly related to particular personal experiences. Also, some of the positive consequences, first of all the creation of new jobs, are at the same time negatively accepted, since these jobs, in the opinion of the respondents, are unjustifiably assigned to individuals and/or organizations which do not come from Šid. Finally, although the discussion indicated a whole series of positive consequences, the negative consequences associated with the fear for personal safety (or the safety of close people) bear an important emotional significance and, in the final assessment, create the impression that the negative consequences of the presence of migrants prevail to a large extent.

Sources of information

Apart from personal experience, people also learn about the events related to migrants from their friends and acquaintances. In general, the way of obtaining information about migrants is rather random and informal than official and systematic. Moreover, the statements received during the interviews repeatedly indicate that citizens hold the opinion that the relevant institutions informed them about the migrant issues in a rather reactive and delayed manner, namely, only after the problems have already occurred and at the last instance. Such perceptions of citizens do not only relate to the way of providing information but are also dominant when it comes to any other aspect of the way institutions involve citizens in dealing with the issues of their concern which are related to migrants and their stay in the territory of Šid.

"We are not coordinated, absolutely. We learn about the rumours from neighbours, friends, then there is gossiping, somebody hears something, on Facebook... It's a small place, you find out about everything." (older group)

"Well without any plan, in a manner which is not systematic... What happens now – happens now, its gets solved at that moment..." (older group)

"What we as citizens, who don't know anything, and those people working with them urgently need is somebody to address us in the media [disagreement in the

background: nobody will tell you anything] and give us guidelines, how to act in these circumstances.” (older group)

The media are perceived as an important factor in creating opinions, while their attitude towards the appearance of a large number of migrants in Serbia is irresponsible: they were initially `drummers of migrant cataclysms` and often stirred up anxiety by the manner of their reporting, but today this topic seems inexistent from their point of view.

“When it all started, there were print media with such sensational titles, like, I don` t know: The whole Syria will go across Serbia, then, I don` t know, I know that even this Aleksandar Nikolić also addressed the public saying that there were many military-trained people among the migrants... So, the media did a part of the job and then came the silence.” (older group)

Inclusion of migrant children in primary schools: providing information to citizens

Primary school employees also state that they were told in the last moment that migrant children would go to school and claim that the instructions received by the relevant ministry were vague and insufficient. In certain communities (settlements and schools) there were considerable resistance and tension. During the discussion there were claims that those who would refuse to receive migrant children to school would be dismissed and that the parents of local children who, in such a situation, refused to send their children to school were threatened as well.

“[...] Then we had a small seminar, something... [...] Because before September we just got the information we should... where Šid appeared in Blic, let`s not talk about it now, that`s irrelevant... but we were the ones who stood in front of parents at the parental meeting, who came there with their prejudices, and we needed to adapt the story to the parents who came to reprimand us... They know we are not guilty, but they need somebody to reprimand... Then there was a great fuss about that, then the media, so...” (older group)

“That`s right, we made the address last year, when in our municipality, here in villages, there was news like a bomb that migrant children would go to school together with our children, to all the classes, from the first to the eighth grade, for the purpose of the children`s inclusion. They were here for a year, nothing was mentioned, and suddenly – bam, they didn`t ask you about anything, and the parents objected. People gathered in all villages, petitions were written... Don`t get me wrong: these children as any other children have the right to education, don`t misunderstand me, that we now had something against their children, or their faith, religion, or something like that... we simply thought that they should not interfere with our children, first of all because of health... and hygiene... [...] And at one moment we, the parents, felt like we were convicted to public disapproval because we separated them from our children, that we were violating their right to life, to schooling, to education... We, as parents, only had a question, why weren`t we as parents warned earlier that these children would start going to school, just to prepare ourselves, to get ready, mentally... They just said, children are starting school. Nobody asked us... [...]” (younger group)

“Yes, it is true that a petition was written in Šid, and in Adaševci, and they opposed a lot, that side, and this side is a bit more northern, where children go to school in Sot and Bitići, that everything is correct, that there are no objections... Even we, when we have more food, milk, chocolate, we take it to the children there... and water and whatever we have... And they are simply delighted, those who are there, local parents of these children... So, where I am, the children play together and there are no problems.” (younger group)

“In Adaševci, yes, even a lawyer from Belgrade was taken, fight is in progress... Some of my friends want to go and get that, as I call it, justice, why we are not informed as parents, why we are not warned, and I can say that it is already in court proceedings, it turns into some lawsuit against the school principal. There, we are still in this fight that ended on the day when the children started going to school... We, for two days, all the parents, we banned our children from going to school... [...] In Višnjićevo parents organized a huge protest, the director resigned, that is not our school, it is a completely different school, and the man resigned there, and the migrants didn't come to school any single day... It is a village 30km away from Šid.” (younger group)

Responsibility for the initiative

Citizens do not see themselves as initiators in solving migrant-related problems in any ways. They say that these problems are important to them, but that it is not a priority, and at the same time they claim that they have not been explained how they would be able to deal with it. On the other hand, they are convinced that they are not in any way hindering nor endangering migrants. Resolution of the migrant issue is perceived primarily as an obligation of the state, and to a lesser extent of local authorities and non-governmental organizations.

“We live in a three-border area, and we don't pay attention who is who... We are people of different religions and we all get along well. As for them, there were some music events in the square, no one made them go away nor ignored them, nor anything... Perhaps there was somewhat stronger control by the police, but they danced here, sang, more than the locals... I know that there were no incidents.” (younger group)

“They walk around the town carelessly, in the most regular way, they enter cafes, every place... and they feel safe and welcome there.” (older group)

“I remember when someone, I can't tell whether it was the Red Cross or an NGO, when they went together with migrants, they gave them teas, they came there just to see how they were doing, and it was four times that the local population, from the first grade of the gymnasium, came to show them that they were not frightening... [...]” (younger group)

“Having in mind to what extent are people dealing with migrant, it is not possible that now there is no solution for our migrants... [...] There is some experience when they appear in a country, but he it looks like there isn't any with us...” (older group)

Proposals for local policies in the context of the influx of migrants

The first thing that citizens would suggest to decision makers is to prevent the migrants who are staying outside official centres from causing harm to citizens. It is also considered necessary to provide compensation to citizens who suffered the damage.

Secondly, if there is a certain number of newly created jobs needed in the process of providing assistance to migrants, citizens believe that these jobs should be given to the people from Šid. They see the greatest chance in food preparation, maintenance, and furnishing facilities in which migrants are accommodated. They are convinced that for a significant number of these jobs, without real justification, experts and companies outside Šid are engaged.

The third proposal comes from educators working in schools attended by migrant children. The proposal is not clearly structured, but it stems from the perceived need for structured and additional work with migrant children attending schools. According to statements of educators, these children have already socialized and made friends with local children, but in the absence of a clear plan for their education they spend their time in school without any meaningful objective. In doing so, educators are expected to invent by themselves, without any compensation, the teaching of these children. This is the task they definitively cannot fulfil as they are not properly trained for such a task. On the other hand, they believe it has been shown that the exchange between the two communities is the swiftest and most constructive among children. It was also observed that families which were at first distrustful of migrants became more tolerant exactly through the interaction of their children with the children of migrants. Fearing for their children at first, parents afterwards experienced relief exactly through the experiences of their own children.

Fourth, citizens believe that it is necessary to establish a systematic approach to information on migrant-related issues. In the first place, there is a particular need for information regarding the situation and supervision of migrants who do not reside in official centres. In addition, it is considered that migrants themselves need to be informed about the local culture and customs.

"If we could achieve these two things, we would already be well ahead – to limit the movements of the savages and employ the people from Šid." (older group)

"These are literally two separate stories: this one and the negative one. Those savages, so to say, they caused problems in their own countries too. The only thing that is required is to have them concentrated somewhere. Not to go to the streets, not to wander at night, not to rob and the problem is solved... [..]" (older group)

"The second part of the story is completely opposite... It is about the participation of a migrant for the Saint Sava school celebration... For the Saint Sava performance, where Serbian saint's day is celebrated, and where there is a Serbian wedding, he tells a part of the text, for instance. I want to say that each of these stories has this side and that side, and we are, almost all of us connected to healthcare and education and police, aware of this fact... [..]" (the older group)

"Here, say, this is the first and foremost. If the same children who will go to school, something should systemically be introduced... What can this one learn in the class of Serbian language with 22 other children speaking Serbian and where Serbian texts are read." (older group)

"[...] Children have socialized, and they are bored now, they don't have anything else to do, they don't understand the language, they can't speak Serbian, they spend time together during the breaks. They are bored in classes. And now, I need to make a plan of how to... do I need to do it? [...] Again, it all goes down to the state and local government... Otherwise, we will pat on the shoulder with 'How do you do today, Denis?' and that's it." (older group)

"Our small children, 6-7 years, were afraid of them... They were running away as soon as they saw them coming... and they stayed for a while and started playing football and children are not afraid of them anymore... Children made friends." (older group)

Further development of migrant crisis

Opinions on the course the migrant crisis will further take are divided. While some believe that it is fading, comparing it to the most intensive period of two years ago, others think that the crisis will not stop and that it is only an introduction to a more lasting phenomenon. However, the prevailing opinion is that migrants themselves do not want to stay in Serbia, seeing it as an economically underdeveloped country which cannot provide them with a better life they are seeking. The already existing experiences of the departures of those migrants who were here "temporarily integrated" prompts some entirely personal reflections. During their rather long stay in the reception centre a lot of children develop close emotional relationships with local children, which they reluctantly end, and their departures are often in sorrow. Also, another type of sadness can be sensed from the citizens' statements: by leaving, migrants have accomplished what everyone who stayed wished for – the opportunity for a better life. Then again, it seems that the citizens would have no objection if a certain number of migrants settled in Šid, under certain conditions though: if they do not impose their customs and if they master the Serbian language.

"I have a feeling that this is all slowing down. There was this fuss in the beginning, in the media, this and that, now that we are all accustomed, that they are here, even we don't know what is happening." (older group)

"They are yet to come. Šid remained half-empty. Therefore, you can buy a house for small money. I expect in the near future that all this will be inhabited. And I don't mind, nobody will ask me anything anyway. So, for some co-existence, it's ok, if you ask me, I wouldn't mind." (older group)

"If everybody were employed and had some normal regular income migrants would be the smallest problem... everyone would be happy... They feel great here... I talked to them... 'Wonderful people, wonderful food, but no money' He wouldn't stay here even for 500 euros... [...]" (older group)

"They are transiting, they are on the way to the EU and are staying here, accidentally, due to the circumstances, stuck... Now, when it will pass, nobody can tell. Everything depends, who has the money, he goes; who doesn't have, he stays... [...]" (younger group)

"They learn more from the workers and the way we talk... and they have some NGOs doing little work with them, but none of them wants to stay here, they prefer to learn English... because they mostly want to go abroad. [...]" (younger group)

"The laws which apply to us should apply to them too. And they must learn the language. I wouldn't mind if they lived next to my house, if they were normal and decent, like any neighbours, friends or something... And that fact, any country you go to, the first thing you are asked for is to speak the language... and that they have no privileges as they do now." (younger group)

"If they were to be settled here, not more than 30 families, houses, could be settled... I guessed the number, a smaller number could actually settle down, if somebody wanted to settle... normally, they should speak Serbian language." (younger group)

"Mojin is a boy who goes to the seventh grade, from Afghanistan. He cried when they woke him up during the night and told him to go, and he left alone, he left his mother, his dad and sister here, and cried and said, 'My mom has ruined my life, I wanted to stay here'. Because the kid is 14-15 years old, he speaks Serbian, he started to fall in love, and says, this is the first country I felt like a man. He's in Hamburg now, he's my Facebook friend and we send messages to each other. And he didn't want to go from here. And I say to him 'You'll be grateful to your mother for this in a year, that you left this place.' He's just a kid... He said several times that people were wonderful here... We're probably like that... He emphasized that every time. This doesn't have to do anything with the system. Mojin will never return to Serbia again, I am sure of that, because six days after he left the centre in Principovac, in which it stinks, he posted a photo from a gym, in a new training suit, sneakers, which I liked, and I am glad. What will he return to? Soul? He will not come back. And he'll be good there. And I could swear that he had a good time here too. He will have there what he will have... And really, I mentioned money in every sixth sentence, but yes, that is the source of the problem." (older group)

"I would like my child to be a migrant in Germany for one day. Really, from this country... When you want your only son to finish in Germany, to go, to have a better life, I think, well OK, migrations are really happening, we've all come from somewhere [...]" (older group)

Research findings: MIGRANTS

Background – why and where?

The only thing which is definite in the lives of our respondents is that they do not want to return to their home country. If that country is Iraq or Afghanistan, they left it in fear for their own lives. If it is Iran, they left due to the regime whose repression, as they say, affected their decision to leave more strongly than the sound economic situation could hold them back. The motive for securing a better life for them is powerful enough to keep some of them as many as four years on a migrant road. Very often without a precise travel plan and a predetermined goal. Those who already have relatives in some of the European countries were able to initially select their destination. The others decide about this on the move. The second certainty, less pronounced than the first, but clear, is that they want to find their place in one of the countries of the European Union.

“There are many reasons why we decided like this, the situation in the country is good, but unfortunately the government is not good. The laws we have [...] you can no longer stand it. Then you know yourself why we left... Some things which are completely normal to us, and it turns out that we have committed a criminal deed and now someone is trying and accusing us there – they ask, ‘Why is your daughter dancing?’ Each of us has a specific case. Of course, we left in order to have a better life, so that our daughter can be in a free environment and choose what she wants... and then we’ve been stuck here for two years, and yet we can’t go back, it’s too late now. We want to get there as fast as we can and to live like others.” (Iran)

“We wouldn’t have left if the situation had been better in Afghanistan. But war took place for years, and everyone should go. We left with the goal of getting a better life. The Taliban are there.” (Afghanistan)

“We left with the goal of finding a peaceful country where we can live quite normally.” (Iran)

“I would just like to move ahead, I don’t know in which country, it may be Italy, I like it.” (Iran)

“Me, with my family, of course to Switzerland, I already have a family there.” (Iran)

“We were planning for London. We heard it was a good place. Everything is good, economic situation, insurance, it’s very good. We asked around, it’s very difficult to get to London, so we’re in stage now anywhere in the EU countries.” (Afghanistan)

“I can’t tell myself, I left from the state of war, wherever they accept me in the EU.” (Iraq)

“I decided in Turkey to go for Austria. Mostly the smugglers, when they go from Turkey, no one wants to go to the southern part of Europe, but go to the western part of Europe, where most people are looking to go, and smugglers provide this route.” (Iran)

Sources of information

With a lot of negative experience accumulated during the journey, in search of the final destination, migrants still seem to have the greatest confidence in the smugglers. As they state, transport prices to a particular destination indicate its desirability – the higher the price, the more desirable the destination. Prices are set by smugglers, so their role in selecting a migrant route is important. Another important source of information are the migrants who managed to reach some preferred countries, from which the migrants “stuck” in one of the transit reception centres learn about the conditions for applying for asylum and other issues in that country. Thirdly, the Commissariat (for refugees and migration), and UNHCR and some of the non-governmental and international organizations active in the centre are mentioned as a source of information.

“From the smugglers, or from those who arrived earlier, we find out how much money you need to pay to get there. If it’s cheaper, then you know that the road is easier, it is easier to come, if it is more expensive, that it means that it is more difficult to reach that goal. You can tell by the price.” (Iran)

“I asked IOM. They explained that Commissariat for Refugees and Migration can provide us with accommodation and pay for us, for a year, but this was also disputable, it depends on the case... They cannot cover... It is no longer the same as before that most people went to Germany and that they were received there. We follow through our friends how things keep changing there. There is Dublin 4 now in preparation, where each state will determine where it will receive the migrants, so it’s no longer free, like you just arrived there in Germany. It is about the fact that they can send us to other countries [...]” (Iran)

“There are lots of problems there, there is a lot of trading of these places. I addressed Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and other organisations working with migrants, and their answer was ‘You need to find those particular persons who do this, you have to come with them to the police and do it with them’. [...]” (Iran)

However, despite the supply of humanitarian aid, migrants prevalingly suspect that they are really welcomed anywhere. Moreover, there are doubts in the authenticity of the desire to help everyone equally – money secures the advantage. On the top of that, it is believed that the countries which now do not grant them asylum, for their own benefit, contributed to the wars in the regions they are fleeing from. Therefore, disappointment and distrust among the migrants is deep and strong.

“Most of these great powers, which are quite involved and give money to migrants, help them stabilize, these same countries have intervened for their own benefit. For example, in Syria. They need these people, to benefit to their own state. They provide migrants with some support and some money, while they will take ten times more from this war.” (Iran)

“We left our countries because we saw that there was neither justice nor freedom, and that we can’t change that. We came to the countries we believed observed the laws. Unfortunately, we didn’t find what we expected.” (Iran)

Stuck in Serbia

Serbia, like any country on the route to it, is not a destination for any migrant. The main reason is, first of all, a perceived poor economic situation. With no desire to stay, migrants are inquiring about possible solutions to continue their journey, trying to move on. There are two basic options. The first is legal entry into Hungary, and the goal is, for those who are going this way, to finally come to the list of those who will be granted a border crossing permit that week (and entering one of the two “transit zones”). Regarding this list, objections about (from their point of view) inconsistencies, which no one explains to them, can often be heard from migrants. An alternative which many opt for is an irregular border crossing.

In the meantime, the experiences of migrants in Serbia have proved to be different. It is found, for example, that some migrants are victims of local criminal groups. Without protection, in distant places, they are an easy target for criminals who expect to find money and valuables on migrants which they use to finance their journey. On the other hand, migrants feel completely safe in the reception centres. They miss their food and spices; beds are creaking, they are sometimes broken; they would prefer a better hygiene. Some complain about rationalizing the amount of milk for families with children. However, conditions are described as significantly better than those in previous transit countries, specifically Bulgaria. They are treated in a more humane manner, and what they find especially important is the freedom of movement they enjoy in Serbia. Nevertheless, such freedom does not protect them against discrimination. Namely, it happens that they are not admitted to a hotel, to a hairdresser's, a cafe, stores, they are not allowed to try on clothes in shops. Despite these occasional negative experiences, migrants generally perceive people in Serbia as pleasant and benevolent, and they believe that the reasons for the previously described behaviour are incidents with some “problematic” migrants who cause trouble and because of whom citizens start to have a negative attitude towards all migrants.

“There are many organizations coming in here, everyone is asking the same questions, and nobody can answer. We all assume that this is done at a high level within the state. [...] People are stuck here somewhere; these lists are not working properly. People come here and leave in two or three days... How did they leave? Why have some of them been stuck here for two years, and some other left after two days? You have the money, you start – you arrive... You don't have the money, you wait.” (Iran)

“I had a very bad experience in Serbia because I was attacked by Serbian mafia, in some woods, they took away what I had in gold, money. It was near Belgrade, about 30 minutes from Belgrade.” (Iran)

“Beds are broken, mattresses are destroyed, these are military beds, it all creaks during the night and there are more people in the room, and if one starts creaking you cannot sleep because of the noise. We complain to the doctor about the pain in the back because of such beds, but the doctor says it is nothing.” (Iraq)

“It's much better here than it was in Bulgaria. At least you can go out here, go for a walk... In Bulgaria you can't get out... you will be attacked or hit... the Bulgarian police...” (Iraq)

"If one migrant makes a mistake, steals or does something, they blame all people. And the hosts here, there are good people, there are bad people, but if a migrant does something wrong, we will all be bad." (Iran)

"It is true that people here are quite kind, as a nation." (Iran)

Staying in Serbia?

In addition to not perceiving Serbia as an economically developed country, some migrants believe that the procedures for obtaining the necessary documents are unfavourable. It is particularly discussed how long it takes to receive a passport and this seems as one of the crucial factors.

Some negative experiences with the people from Šid are not the reason for not considering staying in Serbia. They are seen among migrants as a result of interaction in "unnatural" conditions – many migrants in a small town. There is an understanding for the fact that certain negative attitude on the side of the citizens was created due to irresponsible behaviour of some migrants. There is also awareness that they themselves lack the experience of living in Serbia under normal circumstances.

"I know what the asylum procedure in Serbia is. I would also be in a stage to get an asylum here, but then I don't want to wait for another 10 to 15 years to get that passport." (Iran)

"Romania gives passports in four years, England gives passports in six months to Iranians. In Switzerland in ten or fifteen years, but if I wait there ten or fifteen years, I know why I waited, I will be in a safe place. [...]" (Iraq)

"My experience is a positive case. Because I've been stuck here in Serbia for about two years. My mother from Iran came here. And because she had a passport and could be regularly registered, I also took an apartment in the vicinity of Belgrade and spent time with people, I went out to the park, my children played with other children. People did not look at me like a migrant, because there were no migrants in that community. I was thrilled. [...]" (Iran)

What in the meantime?

Until they resolve their status and arrive to the desired destination, and also without a clear idea on how and when this will be resolved, migrants feel like they live on an island. Shopping cards are an important link to the outside world² due to which they can afford to go out into the city and buy things of their choice. They often feel bored and depressed. They need to be more involved in the society they are staying in and use their time in a meaningful way. If they were given the opportunity to work, they say they would accept it. They would like their lives during their stay in Serbia to be as ordinary and as different from migrants' as possible.

² The cash cards are part of the programmes supported by certain international donors, and implemented by civil society organizations (for example, Covekoljublje). The amount paid (periodically) to the card is defined by the number of family members.

"Yes, you`ve just said it right, they`ve just given us cards for money, and now it is like that bridge which will lead us to the town, to Šid, to buy what we need, some essential things." (Iran)

"It would be a nice idea to gather people in the camp, to ask them what their interests were, where they were previously employed, to see if these people can be hired for some jobs, so that they can actually live instead of waiting for this card with hungry eyes." (Iran)

"I was in Austria and I saw the conditions in the camps there. When there are some holidays, when are some events, they always know how to gather people and organize transport to the city, and then they have more opportunities to learn, to see, to enter some stories. They organize some activities, like skiing that I went to, but that`s where the entire family is doing, not just someone from the family, for example, just kids. Everyone from the camp gathers, they go for two days to another city... [...] ...whatever is interesting there and whatever happenings are taking place there... [...] In Serbia, when something is happening, New Year or so, it is always happening in the camp, there is no contact with the community." (Iran)

"We would like to see some historical museums or some fortresses or some churches, to see the tradition of this country... To be involved in some of the sports activities... and of course it should be initiated at the level of the migrants themselves, and to involve other people from that town... We would like to go with our children to church on Sundays. We would feel less isolated if camps were closer to towns." (Iraq)

"Depression and boredom are what we feel. If there were more social events, to go to the city, to go to church, to socialize, to communicate, perhaps we would completely change the opinion about Serbia, perhaps we would say, Why wouldn`t we live here?" (Iran)

Research findings: ENTREPRENEURS

Background – doing business in Šid

Despite certain personal success, entrepreneurs claim that the state of uncertainty best describes the conditions for doing business, not just in Šid but in the whole country. They do not have any system support from state institutions, and they do business with the motto “rely only on yourself”. In this regard, they speak with disappointment of an earlier attempt by a group of successful entrepreneurs from Šid to jointly address the local government in order to gain support for further business development. It is believed that the authorities, regardless of the level we are talking about, are not interested to consider entrepreneurs as equal negotiators, and that the situation which lasted for years resulted in people being uninformed, outside global trends, poisoned with lies and various frauds. Business environment is described as biased, and in this regard, they are mostly talking about the large subsidies that the state grants to foreign investors, while new – higher and higher – burdens are introduced to local businesses. They wonder whether the state will continue to raise taxes, and whether foreign investors will be allowed to, as “big fish”, eat “small domestic fish”.

Without a state support, entrepreneurs are not able to cope with the demands of modern business, invest in modern technology and offer competitive prices on the market. Therefore, they do not see their future as bright.

“[...] I tried a number of times, let`s call businesspeople, since 1996 I`ve been trying to educate people, when I came back from America, to show them that things are done differently, then you can imagine the things I tried. With all Municipality Presidents. In the beginning I told what the problem was. People who were unsuccessful became state authorities. Who don`t know how to make money. They rule.”

“My opinion regarding granting of funds to foreign citizens to start a business here, which is not the case for ours – we, our people, would use it much better. We were born here, we live here. For example, US Steel was here until they melted a couple of strong companies, 5,000 military vehicles, and when they melted it, they took the capital and left. Where is US Steel now? [...] I have to make money. She has to as well, if she does not go into the greenhouse, she has nothing to take to the green market, she has no other source of support. And we were born here, we grow roots here, everything is here for us, I`m not going anywhere, I`m more motivated than any of the foreigners.”

“[...] We simply can`t organize ourselves, this is a wonderful country, we can do it all, produce, we can feed even more people, and now we are not capable to feed our population, because, she knows, how much even imported onions are on the market, from the Netherlands, she can`t sell her own onions, and at a much lower price. I`m not talking about the quality. Her products are of higher quality, and invests a lot, but it is no use when the others enter with cheaper prices.”

“The problem is that there are much more imported goods and we simply can`t survive anymore. And also, this deferred payment of two hundred days, we, as small enterprise, we

can't sustain it. I am very indignant. My family has lived here in this area for more than 200 years. We are here, we spend all our lives working. We fight. And then, you want to stay here, isn't that so, but.."

"If I managed to come from zero to 300, I am now at 300, but don't know whether I will be able to keep it, because the production costs for 14 years have gone far, far up. Not to talk about levies, VAT, controls, inspections."

"You see, private business is, we are all weak from the private sector, the whole country is weak when it comes to this issue. I have a lot of family abroad, my cousin, sister and their children. Their country follows them, with its tax policy, if they invest, it again doesn't take taxes, it deceases them, there isn't such a thing here, and there is uncertainty, the moment you started your own business you made some bills you have to pay. It's very difficult. And uncertain."

"Well, the state or some strong people stand behind someone who can grow, who has huge machinery worth 120-130,000 euros. How can a simple farmer afford such a thing? And what the man tells you about these special agricultural machines [...] We can only watch it on television."

"I think it is only getting worse. I don't see at all the light at the end of the tunnel. Darkness is endless. Large systems are entering Serbia through big door and, as Serbia opened its doors to them, they are choking small trading shops. Which will not be able to survive in such system [...]"

Migrant crisis

Contrary to the expected, the respondents link the concept of migration at first with the departure of the local population abroad. They say that especially in the past year or two nearly 1,500 inhabitants left Šid. Although they regret for such movements, they understand the people who are leaving: salaries are low, the conditions for change for the better are not great, there is a great fear of losing jobs. Everyone wishing to, and capable of earning, has gone abroad. The situation is such that even middle-aged people with relatively safe jobs in state institutions, if they get a chance, go away, taking their whole families with them. One of the consequences is a shortage of labour force, especially for agriculture and trades. There is nobody to pick the sour cherries sung about in a local traditional song. The wages in the seasons of picking fruits and tobacco, as high as they are, cannot match those offered in rich European countries. For this reason, a lot of people left for the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Poland. It is not easy to find good car mechanics or bakers. The ones applying for such jobs frequently prove to be bad workers.

"I would like, but I know that's impossible, no more young people to go abroad to work, I would like them all to stay here. I am aware that this is a dream, but I feel horrible and it hurts me very much because people, our relatives, friends, all young people, are going abroad."

"My relatives, this family, that family, they are everywhere round the globe. Everybody likes Serbia like me, but they are never coming back. [...]"

"These people from Erdevik who have orchards, they say that this year they don't know how they will pick the fruit, because they don't have workers. Lots of people left Erdevik, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, the village is half-empty now. The payment is not an issue, it's just that there is nobody to work. They are probably better paid than here, this is probably why they left."

"[...] A lot of people left. I can tell this by the market. Today we don't sell half the products we used to sell. [...]"

"[...] One of the factors is for example that my trade is directly connected to the population of this town. If I was selling 3000 of some products yesterday in my bakery, everything is now telling me that I will be selling 2000 a year [...]"

The entrepreneurs themselves, the respondents in our focus group, do not exclude their own emigration.

"We are a family business, we started 14 years ago, so to say, we started from scratch. [...] Now I came to the point that I am unsatisfied. Let's say that my company, employing maybe 25 people, I can earn about 2,000 euros. I sometimes wish to let everything go, to close it and to go to work to Germany for 2,000 euros. Not to have any more problems with the accountant, taxes, VAT, inspections. We are living in fear here."

"For already a year I have been seriously considering leaving abroad. Because, look at this, last year we lost 5,000 euros on 20 acres of soy, 5,000 just for soy. And how much did we work on this? My brother says, I worked so many times until 5 or 6 in the morning, I used to shake myself and slap on the cheek to stay awake on the tractor. What for?"

Requirements for employing migrants

Migrants are seen as people who saved their lives fleeing from war or people who just want to live better, and the entrepreneurs we talked to in Šid are familiar with both of these experiences. Either they themselves have been through this experience, or some of their friends or relatives have. Hence, there are no negative attitudes but, on the contrary, there is a significant degree of identification with them, and there is a great understanding for economic migrants too.

"Therefore, I personally have nothing against these people, moreover, I brought them food, I dressed them and bathed them, I gave them money, I never took pictures nor asked for any praise for this. [...]"

"A part of them is affected by the war, while the other bigger part is also for economic reasons. They are now using this moment to reach western countries. And a better life."

"They are people like we are, who want to be paid more for their work and to live better lives, that is so simple."

Faced with the lack of skilled labour, entrepreneurs are willing to engage migrants and even to offer them training. Some testify that they have initiated the process of formal recruitment of those migrants who proved to be good workers and that they have encouraged these persons to apply for asylum to the competent institutions. However, this ultimately resulted in the failure to establish formal employment relationship as it was not allowed by the competent institutions. Nevertheless, it is considered that only those migrants who do not have enough means to continue their (irregular) journeys to the desired destinations in Western Europe remained in Serbia. A lot of them, according to the participants of this focus group, come from countries which are economically (more) developed than Serbia (Syria and Iran are cited as examples). In search of a better life, and with the experience of solid wages, these people, as a rule, do not recognize Serbia as the ultimate destination of their journey. Hypothetically, entrepreneurs would be happy to offer work to migrants, and their main motive is lack of qualified and motivated workforce. However, there is insufficient awareness of the legal framework for the possible employment of migrants, and it should also be noted that the lack of knowledge of Serbian language is a major obstacle to work in many industries.

"I wouldn't mind if migrants became citizens of the Republic of Serbia, even tomorrow. Because there are no workers here. So many different nationalities live round the globe and in the western countries. Our people are also migrants there somewhere, they get citizenships, live somewhere there. So, I wouldn't mind if some normal people, families, stayed here tomorrow, to settle this displaced Serbia. And I'm ready to offer a job tomorrow to such people. Of course, they have to meet some basic criteria. First of all, human ones. As for their education, it is not a major problem."

"He says, your country is very beautiful, but your salaries are very low, he wonders, he says, when he hears that our average salaries are 200-250 euros. Therefore, he comes from a better environment, but he is caught by war."

"Agriculture and crafts. [...] Our people won't work here. Or they mostly left."

"Western countries are importing workforce from poorer countries. I think that Serbia should also import workforce from the countries poorer than our country. Because we are in the situation that we no longer have workforce here. I would be ready to hire someone in the bakery from another country. I could provide him with training for that job. I have needs too."

"He says, I won't stay here because you can't pay me 2,000 euros. I know you can't pay me 2,000 euros. And I'm going to my brother who works in Germany, who has 3,000 euros, I'm a mechanic, I can disassemble any car you want, I can do whatever you want. And they really work. It's a very simple story there. This has nothing to do with the politics. Economy is the most important thing. He wants to live better life."

"I had a man, who wanted to stay in Serbia, He submitted an application for asylum, isn't that so. [...] ...I let him work with me, and the man went on foot the whole winter to work every day, and he was very satisfied, and then he applied to stay. I told him I would give him 500-1000 euros; the boy was really doing the job. And he submitted the application. [...] ... he says, I received the information that I cannot let him work for you anymore. [...] ...he

cried. Žika, I can't come to your workshop anymore. Why? [...] Why did I apply in this stupid Serbia? [...] The man wanted to legally apply to stay here, to get work permit, I told him to do so, and you will go later."

Further development of migrant crisis

Under the current circumstances, the assumptions about the further development of migrant crisis are diverse. Some have gained the impression that the crisis will ease, having in mind that the number of migrants is decreasing, especially compared to the greatest wave of 2015, while others consider that the gap between the wealthy and poor societies is growing globally and that it is rather natural for the poor to migrate to the rich in search of a better life. Regardless of further development of the situation with migrants, the manner Serbia has so far dealt with it is seen as humane. Nevertheless, there are certain doubts about the autonomy of Serbia in choosing the way in which this problem will be addressed. It is believed that large funds are allocated by, above all, the European Union. This is recognized in numerous positive changes fostered due to the presence of migrants: school refurbishing, street lighting repair, etc. In return, participants in this focus group believe, Serbia has been told to act in a certain way. They believe that the attitude of the authorities towards migrants staying in Šid outside the reception centres is the only (but significant!) problem related to the presence of migrants.

"[...] I think that the local politicians implement policies of the state."

"I even think that the local politicians don't have any influence, everything comes from the state levels and they have to follow it. I was told so. [...]"

"I would also like to say that we are somebody else's province, they don't make any decisions, I don't believe they make decisions. All of our states, and we remember more than one, they are all recognised `there`."

"[...] They are going through this country. [...] And now, that world, the west, is setting the limits. Posting the wires. If they register here, mind you anywhere they go, they will return them to Serbia. And this is why there are the wild ones."

Migrants outside the official centres – unresolved or unsolvable problem?

Although it is stated that the majority of migrants peacefully reside in our country, a smaller group of them who are `out of the system` is the cause of strong negative reactions and deep misunderstanding for the country's failure to stop them. In particular, increased frequency of thefts has been observed, mostly with no culprits found, but with reasonable doubt that the offenders were migrants. Thefts include from house burglaries to stealing yields from orchards and fields and stealing cattle, mostly sheep and lambs. The consequences suffered by the affected parties are not negligent. In addition to the strong stress and anxiety such damage causes, material losses are sometimes so important that businesses of the owners of (agricultural)

property are thus jeopardized. Along with the bitterness towards migrants who are presumed to be the offenders in such events, there is even a greater resentment and misunderstanding which is reflected towards the state and state institutions. The right answer to the question of how the state cannot get in the way of this group of migrants is lacking, and it remains unclear who needs to provide this answer – police, local government, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, or Government.

“But who will deal with these people who are illegal, who have been here for two, three years. Just look next to the railway, there are certainly over 200 tents there. They’re all around our garden. What will become of this now when the spring comes? No one wants to deal with those people. I’m telling you about them. That’s no one’s problem. Whose problem is it? [...] I don’t know. Municipality, or the Commissariat, the one for refugees. Who’s responsible for them at all?”

“They really do us a lot of damage. They’ve torn off the nylon. When they leave Adaševci, when they go to the camp, or wherever they are, I’ve never been there, they don’t take the road which was made for them, in summer they go across the fields. Simply speaking, our greenhouses are there, 500 meters away, everyone wears black bags, those garbage bags, they take out clean ones from the pockets, and pick up for themselves. And do you know what it is, today 20-30 of them go by. You won’t see any women or children, only they go, they go and take. [...] Police was here so many times. Police comes, makes records... [...] Police says this is just a dead letter on paper. [...] ...and we also went to the Municipality, the people in the Municipality told us that they were looking for sponsors who would pay it, they know everything, and stand behind it, that the damage was done to us. Who will pay this? [...]”

“[...] You know what, they are even bored here during the day after all this time. They get their food, they go for a walk and then they come, sit under a walnut tree, are they can sit for two hours under the walnut, while we are there, we go to the other end, they enter, with those backpacks, fill them with peaches, and go. [...] We did not sell anything from the 600 trees of peaches... [...] They picked it all. They climbed even to these lower branches that they pulled away, they used rods to beat down the fruit from the high branches, there were roads made through the orchard. Roads. Clearly visible roads.”

“We are more resentful of our problems in Serbia than of migrants.”

Research findings: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Background – situation in Šid Municipality

There is a great similarity between the description of the situation in Šid as stated by the citizens and the descriptions provided by the representatives of the local government and local institutions. There is little work, salaries are low, more and more people are leaving cities and villages alike. Buildings in which institutions of public importance are located are worn out. The resources that the Municipality has at its disposal are extremely modest, much depends on donations, and often the basic needs can't be met. It is also noted that the Municipality of Šid is additionally burdened as it was at the forefront of refugee crisis of the 1990s and it suffered a great material damage during the recent floods.

"A lot of our people go to work abroad, there are many national minorities entitled to work permits in the EU countries. For example, a lot of Slovaks have left, people with Croatian passports, a lot of them have gone abroad. Our population literally fell down to 20 per cent less. Well, that's the situation in the country. Because of low salaries, because people can't live... That's all clear to everyone."

"There are more things to say, I can talk to you about it for hours. We are constantly in need of something... This building is from 1953 and everything is worn out, starting from the sewage system to water supply system, electricity, installations, and finally equipment. We got what was urgent, that is, some of the medical devices and defibrillators, but we need much more."

"To equip village schools, to stop leaking when it rains, to install heating, to repair doors, windows."

Migrant crisis

Having regard to the above-mentioned circumstances, migrant crisis has given a very strong blow to the municipal infrastructure, not only from the material but also from the point of view of personnel. The number of employees in public services has not increased despite the significantly augmented volume of work in connection with the migrant crisis. In addition, there is simply not enough (or not any) skilled staff for certain jobs. In spite of this, it is considered that the local response to the needs of migrants, due to its humanity and openness primarily, can serve as an example to many other countries.

"Nowhere in the world are migrants treated as here. You won't see anyone humiliating or offending them, regardless of the fact that they are different."

Consequences

A lot of events have taken place since the first arrival of migrants to Šid. This has brought about some **positive** changes, so this focus group mentioned, among other issues, creating jobs in the activities required for the protection of migrants, maintaining school departments in some rural schools due to the presence of migrant children, widening cultural horizons among children, renewal of obsolete equipment in healthcare facilities, and increased trade volume.

“On the other hand, the fact that we have a lot of migrant children who started attending schools, that such children are going according to an inclusive program and one migrant in Inclusive educational program 2 accounts for two children, because of this many classes were held, and people were working because of the migrant children there. I mean, on the one hand, it would be good to expect an influx, because people would stay at work: when I started employment, we had 120 first-graders only my school, now we have 120 first-graders in the entire municipality.”

“These children are cheerful and playful, and they bring in new culture, and our children learn from them and actually this could be a benefit for all of us.”

“We got some ambulance cars thanks to the migrants... [...] ...biochemical analyser [...] some equipment which we wouldn't have got if it had not been for the migrants, to be honest.”

“Employment of people through projects.”

“All the migrants spend some funds, in the shops, they simply increase consumption.”

When it comes to **negative** consequences of migrant crisis, they are reflected in the perception of the representatives of local government and institutions primarily through observations on the delicts of a group of migrants who do not reside in official centres. Municipal leaders consider such deeds unacceptable, both from the aspect of the function they perform and also their personal viewpoint. However, unlike citizens to whom it is not always clear who is responsible for the migrants, municipal leaders unambiguously name the Ministry of the Interior as, first and foremost, the competent authority. In addition, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is perceived as the institution with the highest competencies for all issues related to migrants in general. Nevertheless, municipal authorities fail to get in time some of the important information about the specific competencies of the Commissariat, according to focus group participants. An example is given of the event when it was necessary to send a special letter to the Commissariat in order to obtain clear information on whether, in what manner and to what extent, this body is accountable for migrants not staying in the centres. On the other hand, local government officials claim that in terms of damages caused by `unregistered` migrants, the municipal authorities did what was in their power: the list of complaints with estimated damage was sent `to higher instances, to multiple addresses` – the concrete reply has not arrived yet.

“You can feel some fear, say at night, where there are migrants who are not registered, who stay in parks, where parents take care not to send their children to: it happened that they were running after the girls and similar; there were no big incidents; there were some actually, but there were no rapes. There were some interventions, for example, when a child was running, a girl, there is some fear with the parents, I also escort my daughter and tell her to give me a call.”

“[...] As for the other contacts: there you have breaking into the orchards, gardens, sheep slaughter, local government is not competent, it doesn't have the right whip, there is MOI instead and our citizens are introduced to this fact. This means, whatever happens, you call the police, to prevent damage, to prevent anything which could cause damage... [...] We have a list of rather significant damages which the migrants incurred to our citizens, we even have an established municipal committee which takes such applications from the citizens, the only condition is that the police went to the spot, signed, issued a report that an unidentified migrant or migrant named Pero committed that offence. [...] We sent this document to higher instances and multiple addresses. [...] ...and here is the problem of lack of trust to the state.”

“[...] We addressed the application to them too, with the list of our household owners, specifying the type of violation of their property, amounts and conclusions of this committee. We still haven't received any answers, actually we did, they were working on it. That was, let's say, in September or October last year.”

“Grafosrem... is not municipal property, isn't it, we as Municipality are not entitled to enter there. The only authority which may enter there is the police.”

“[...] ...they wrote a reply to our attorney: Yes, the Commissariat is in charge of the migrants, but exclusively in the facilities of the Commissariat. They are not responsible after two meters in front of the reception centre.”

Health monitoring of this group of migrants poses a particular challenge for healthcare workers, since the official view is that healthcare is provided only when they are endangered, and those working in the field consider that a certain type of health control is necessary in order to protect the health of these migrants and prevent spreading of infectious diseases.

“The problem with illegal migrants, with no possibility for medical examination, is that they can bring along anything. There was a case with active tuberculosis, and with measles in jail in Sremska Mitrovica. The problem is that we don't know how to solve the issue of healthcare services with illegal migrants. This is a potential source of infection, and we have a meeting every Wednesday with all organizations providing health care, where the on-duty epidemiologist of the Public Health Institute of Sremska Mitrovica is present too, at which we discuss all problems, improve cooperation.”

Complicating factors for solving the issues regarding reception of migrants

Considering the consequences of the influx and stay of migrants in the area of Šid municipality, representatives of the local government and local institutions point out several negative circumstances and system constraints which make it more difficult

to solve problems arising from the arrival of migrants. In this respect, the following are particularly stated: 1) burden of the unresolved local social problems (which also includes strong emigration trends and incomplete integration of refugees from former SFRY); 2) local budget constraints (with insufficient funds and no special-purpose funds envisaged at all to support migrants); 3) lack of legal solutions to facilitate employment of migrants; 4) the criteria within the framework of the competition for incentive funds of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration; 5) exclusion of municipal authorities by some organizations which implement projects in the Municipality of Šid (which do not properly respect local interests, or ignore certain standards and regulations); 6) lack of appropriate staff (necessary for working with migrants and dealing with problems arising from the arrival of migrants); and 7) lack of understanding by the competent national institutions (for actual problems faced by people in the field).

Burden of unresolved social problems

There are some deeper unresolved problems, above all the problem of local population leaving the area, which make the social situation in the municipality rather difficult. In the event of refugees, there are still unresolved cases of accommodation of refugees from former Yugoslav republics.

"[...] I think that Municipality is rather dealing with this problem than actually trying to keep its population, and therefore these local governments, which were under significant pressure in this migrant crisis, need stronger support."

"Our task is, above all, to keep our population. We can help migrants as much as we are able to help them, but our people are even more important to us, to return, to live here. Our children are leaving, our best children are leaving."

"What is also a problem, we haven't solved the problem of our refugees, housing issues of our refugees [from the former Yugoslav republics]."

Local budget constraints

"And even if we had budget, there is not a budget item, and even if we had a budget item, we do not have budget potential, we do not even have the potential for our peripheral groups, let our disabled people, Roma, women, forgive me... We do not have budget for migrants, we have budget for our socially vulnerable people which we pay through the Social Welfare Centre. And then we again engage our capacities."

Lack of proper legal regulation

Certain solutions in terms of employment of migrants, which have proven practical in other European countries, are inapplicable in Serbia since there is no legal framework to implement them. In this regard, an example of social entrepreneurship seen in Hungary is mentioned here.

"Unfortunately, we in Serbia don't have a law on social entrepreneurship, but I spoke to the minister, he says no one can prevent you from starting with the registration and working on it."

Criteria according to which financial assistance is assigned to projects regarding migration

It is believed that the criteria in the competitions through which the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration grants municipalities and cities certain promotional funds for projects in the field of migration management unreasonably favour certain local self-governments. Focus group participants point out, first of all, to prioritising those municipalities where readmission returnees are located. They think it is unfair that the Municipality of Šid is thus prevented from accessing such funds and they emphasize that Šid has previously been affected by a refugee crisis, and later floods, and that it therefore 'deserves' support.

"German Development Bank (KfW) granted five million euros for infrastructure in local communities where migrants are located. Out of these five million euros, Šid Municipality got 50,000, for five projects, out of these five projects, they gave us the least valuable project. We aimed at schools and health centres. Essentially, the point of this competition is that in our municipality there are not many Roma or people returning from Western Europe. Local self-governments where readmitted people are located, and with readmission, they were considered."

"We had refugees, then we had NATO, then we had floods, and now again refugees... Therefore, we are in a state of some emergency all the time... which other municipalities didn't have, and what is needed here is just someone to recognize the burden which this municipality managed to undertake."

Avoiding local government by organizations implementing the projects

The local government believes that any organization implementing projects in Šid Municipality should consult the municipal administration beforehand. The underlying reason for such an attitude is largely the problem of unemployment, so it is considered as the only fair solution that the citizens of Šid should be employed as much as possible in providing assistance to migrants. In short, jobs for the people of Šid would be a sort of compensation for the burden they bear. The second reason lies in the fact that certain organizations, in the opinion of the representatives of municipal administration and institutions, carry out their activities without observing the regulations. More precisely, this was mentioned only about organizations which prepare and distribute food for migrants in conditions which do not meet the prescribed hygiene standards, and in doing so, it is believed, they also threaten the health of the migrants themselves.

"There are some organizations which skip the local government and go directly to the centres and enter negotiations with the Commissariat. Certain projects are carried out without the involvement of local government. Maybe it's not with bad intentions [...] Just like that, tomorrow, when there is a project task with a chance for our citizens to participate, one, two, fifty people, we have, apart from that state employment fund, we have some lists of people we can refer immediately, which is a huge assistance, because this man can have some benefit, there is a migrant centre in his neighbourhood or migrants are present there, but it does not have to be just a disaster, or I don't know what else... It is not the case that we are imposing anything, but we wish to participate. When we had three centres in Šid, about 120-

130 people worked in these three centres through local government and NGOs. Out of these 130 people, some 25-30 people were from the Šid Municipality. This means that some 100 people came from other areas. [...]

“The ecumenical humanitarians from Novi Sad provided a kitchen through the project. A mighty kitchen which can supply 50,000 meals. To this day, this kitchen hasn’t been put into operation because... there was always some reason. [...] The kitchen is standing there now, and these people cooked in Belgrade, imagine this, and the kitchen is there. They bought potatoes, onion and what not, took that to Belgrade, cooked meals and returned them to Adaševci. [...] Our goal is to bring that back to Adaševci in order to hire people. Only then would we buy all the raw materials, I don’t know which ones, potatoes, onions, cereals, fruit, apples, other ones... Here... if something can’t be found here, we’ll buy somewhere else. We have chefs, we have assistants, we have other people.”

“The food for migrants was a special program, and the Commissariat was involved in this selection, but we only asked, if there were 1,500 migrants in Šid at the time, three times a meal, that was 4,500 meals, was it possible that there was not a kilo of anything to be bought from Šid municipality, but everything had to be bought in Belgrade instead. We attacked, and we solved this problem. [...] Our agreement was – buy everything which was favourable, financially and economically, here. [...] At the moment a competition is taking place, the bid is out, seven organizations applied, we have the Army for the first time, Dedinje Military Institution, they want the whole system for migrants. The other ones are scared of losing now. We can say to NGOs, but I don’t know whether we can say to the Army tomorrow: Hey, go and buy from Šid.”

“We tried to get those anarchists away so that food wouldn’t be provided to them... So that they would be looking for food in the centre where the food is stored, sleeping in the centre where they should be sleeping, bathing, using health service, where healthcare is provided... [...] We tried to get in touch with these people, to make them understand that they can’t produce food in the way they do it and provide it to someone in the way they do it, in a place which is not planned for that. You have these two three centres, you are welcome to come in, to enter, help out there... They rejected this, raids were made, they were captured, detained, they paid fines, but they continued doing this. [...]

Lack of qualified staff

As the migrant crisis was a sudden phenomenon, it is not surprising that in many areas of its local treatment there is a lack of adequate staff. The problem is recognized already with the police forces. Nevertheless, the most significant is the lack of interpreters (for languages spoken by migrants and refugees), whereas in the education system there is also a lack of teaching staff trained to work with children whose mother tongue is not Serbian. Situation in schools is further complicated by the lack of proper guidance from the competent ministry regarding the methodology of work with migrant children. As regards interpreters, additional problem is that they are not available throughout the day (24 hours a day), which is required, especially in the healthcare institutions. In addition, languages spoken by the largest number of migrants are Persian and Arabic, but there is a considerable number of migrants who speak other languages (and do not speak any language other than their mother tongue). However, there

are no cultural mediators for those other languages (except Arabic and Persian). The school representatives consider the announcement of withdrawal of even the staff accompanying migrant children to school (so-called companions or assistants engaged by non-governmental organizations) as an additionally problematic issue.

"Look, the police of Šid were not made or shaped for a thousand migrants, it is made for 34,000 citizens."

"We need support when it comes to interpreters. [...] We have interpreters here provided by the Balkan Centre for Migration, for Farsi and Arabic, and of course English. We don't have any for Spanish. Especially those from Somalia and Rwanda, they can't speak anything but their own language, and then there is a huge problem of taking a health history, what to provide and how to provide healthcare. This is a huge problem for us. [...] Now we have there in Principovac a woman and a child from Vietnam who don't know anything; she doesn't speak English, only her mother tongue; how can we communicate with them? Here, let me read you the list of countries... [...] Disaster. It is necessary to find interpreters for all those numerous countries, which is a mission impossible."

"It is agreed that the police, the prosecution and we should use BMC services. They are, in fact, everywhere, in Principovac and everywhere. It sometimes happens that, say, if the interpreters are in the morning in court, we do not have an interpreter. It is very difficult, we have two, one for Farsi, one for Arabic, it is very difficult to be in four places, in the police and the prosecutor's office, in the Social Welfare Centre and in the Primary Health Centre."

"Our escorts stay at school, but now since we have more classes, say, ten children in ten classes, he can't be present at all the classes."

"We have an escort who learned Farsi, who actively participates, he participates every day, actively, for two classes, participates where the school is small, and classes are small."

"We got pedagogical profiles that don't match the picture. [...] And that thing with pedagogical profiles is not done properly."

"Well yes, we are finding our way round when it comes to socializing, but in terms of teaching... [...] There are children who come to the sixth grade, and don't have even a single day of formal education. And now what should I do with him?"

"I don't need stronger connectivity, I need a teacher trained for teaching Serbian as a foreign language."

Lack of understanding of the competent national institutions for the actual situation in the field

As the responsibility for policy-making in resolving the migrant crisis lies with the central authorities, above all the relevant ministries, they are expected to be open for descriptions of the situation in the field. Contrary to this, although it is not denied that state aid exists, it is clearly pointed out that communication with the competent institutions at the local level should be better. In this context, school representatives emphasize the need for providing teaching staff qualified to work with children

whose mother tongue is not Serbian, and to define two separate approaches – one for working with children whose parents intend to stay in Serbia, and others for working with children whose families are in transit through Serbia.

“We can’t say that the state hasn’t helped us, they invested a lot of money... through the Public Investment Management Office where big investments and big money are... and the state is withdrawing credits for the whole country, and it’s big money also.”

“They ask us from the Ministry: how many migrants do you have, twenty? We’ll send you twenty pupil booklets. Which are of no use to us.”

“We expect to be heard. I can really wrap everything, me and the team which is working, decorate it with a pink bow, we can write a report – like that they learnt everything – but that’s not the case at all. And I mind that gap, that the situation is like that is practice, and the people you send the report to have nothing to do with reality. [...] Initially it was like this: just let them get in, find their way round... and that’s really humane, that’s OK. [...]”

“[...] We are already making a new action plan... [...] ...now there is a very tense situation. It would mean a lot us to have two standards. Children whose parents did not apply for asylum, if they are in transit, meaning they are staying for a month or two or three, they will be provided with this kind of support in terms of socialization, that is not a problem at all. [...] ...we would need a list the pupils of parents who applied for the asylum, because in this case teaching Serbian as a foreign language should be organized, that is, these are two completely separate things.”

“[...] We cooperate with colleagues, it’s not a problem, but those kids when they are left at school, they are here now, and now they come to the teacher of the technical education, he can’t say anything, he has been learning Russian for his whole life, and it’s like ‘Do something’. What is it that I can do?”

Local policies and civic initiatives in the context of migrant influx

A lot has already been done, the problems have been mapped, and yet – the main impression is that local actors have their eyes fixed on the central government. On the other hand, the only civic initiatives seem to have been negative, in a certain way directed against migrants – last year’s protests over migrant children starting schools and previously the ones connected to the request to close a reception centre located in Šid itself (near the railway station). It is believed that lack of awareness leaves a major impact on the development of a negative public opinion, but the responsibility for an adequate provision of information is also shifted to the central government.

“Municipality has always been following state policy.”

“Local government is the extended hand of the state. And it stands somewhere in a corner. There is a vertical line, isn’t that so? From the top, it goes down...”

“In the Municipality we don’t have the possibility to compensate for the damage, the Municipality is not in charge here.”

"Maybe the problem is with the provision of information to citizens in the municipality; they consider this as something which is going to end. That is in fact the essence of everything."

"You shouldn't push it. Inclusion of children has also brought problems because it is rather unrealistic, it happened at one moment, without major preparation, without obtaining the information. Why isn't there any organisation providing information on behalf of the state and the state policy?"

Further development of migrant crisis

The answer to this question is seen as something far beyond the reach of local and even state policy. What is considered certain is that the vast majority of migrants will not stay in the territory of Serbia. However, migrants are still a reality. The discussion on the future development of the migrant situation easily and naturally turns into a discussion about the development needs and the future of Šid. Leaving aside the speculation about the number of migrants which will stay in the Šid area in future, representatives of local government and institutions state that future activities concerning the protection of migrants in the Šid area will be greatly assisted by: 1) solving major infrastructure and utility problems (roads, water supply, city waste disposal); 2) strengthening local human resources and organizational resources for dealing with migrant issues; 3) refurbishing schools attended by migrant children, and 4) procurement of specific (lacking) equipment in different public services (police vehicles, gynaecological tables for the Healthcare Centre, computers in schools).

"The question of what to expect is a difficult question because our country itself doesn't know how things will be solved. EU doesn't know, nobody knows about the status and what will happen to those migrants, whether they are here, in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria or the EU... We can't do anything here except to do what we do, we can't solve anything or seek anything, neither from the Ministry of Health or from the Ministry of Education, until something is resolved at a certain global level. [...]"

"[...] Basically, people choose to leave Serbia and even when they have a very fabulous picture, when their two children go to school, and the children are happy to spend time together with friends, to have attention, and their parents see it, then people from schools come to centres to spend time together, this means: the level of cooperation has been maximized, but he, on the fifth day the gate opens, he goes... he forgets about this."

"The state should pay a little more attention to us, the state, the province pays attention to us by helping us with some projects, infrastructural, more than it helped us before. And these are not some special things, these are the things necessary to live normally in the twenty-first century. [...]"

"We don't have a lot of organizations here. We have an organization which has broken down as far as the activists are concerned: it is present in the social part, in the centres and with the Roma, but no, we need much more. There is an organisation Centre for the Development of Srem, people are present, active, everything, but they do not exist on the

maps, because they are not close to Belgrade, to be near, know about grants, for this, for that... We need a wind to push us."

"Police have the same problem as all other organizations, there are not enough people to cover the field. Nor there are enough cars. Municipality bought vehicles to the police, so it could be more mobile, to come to the spot when you need it, you understand?"

"Jobs are a priority for us. Our priority is infrastructure, water supply systems that are not solved in the villages, road infrastructure, schools are important for us, to help these small schools."

Concluding remarks

By analysing the interviews and discussions conducted in all focus groups, seven specific topics related to the reception and residence of migrants in the area of Šid Municipality were identified. These topics will be presented here in the final consideration of the research findings. However, it is important to emphasize that during the analysis we did not seek to verify any information the participants of the focused group discussions stated. The agreement among the focus group participants or the stating of (approximately) the same information by different focus groups is the only verification of reliability and foundation of certain specific pieces of information obtained during the survey. Likewise, it is necessary to take into account the fact that human experiences and perceptions, opinions and attitudes were the primary subject of our qualitative analysis, and not any quantitative data. It is also important to note that some of the topics appear in interviews and discussions with different target groups, while others are more common and represented in focus group discussions with a particular target group of research (for example, local business representatives) while in other groups they were given significantly less importance (or did not appear at all). In addition, the analysis has shown that there is a strong consensus on certain topics, while in the case of others, more or less different opinions appear in different categories of respondents.

Impact of migrant influx on the situation in local community

Despite all the events, which occasionally took dramatic scopes, and the various consequences that the reception and stay of migrants caused, this is not seen as something that produced essential effects in the Municipality of Šid. Namely, it is estimated that the stay of migrants has not resulted in any substantial changes, and these issues today are not considered as a priority for the Municipality of Šid. It is recognized that the presence and stay of migrants are associated with certain positive changes and consequences, but it is considered that these have not produced any major changes in the main social trends. Moreover, it is important to point out that the topic of migration in focus group discussions has been primarily linked to the significantly present trend of emigration: the local population is leaving the Municipality of Šid to a large extent, temporarily or permanently, primarily searching for jobs (or better paid jobs) and largely going to some of the European Union countries.

Migrants in Šid appear to be just a second most important migration issue. Their stay in Šid is not associated with any long-term development plans, and this is also conditioned by a firm belief that migrants are not here to stay, that for none of them Serbia is a country they want to stay in, and that everything happening regarding this issue is only of a temporary nature. Interviews with migrants fully confirm the belief that migrants see Serbia only as a place where they are temporarily staying, and that they do not consider permanently staying in Serbia as a real option. Such attitude is primarily related to the fact that Serbia is perceived as an economically underdeveloped country, and for some of the migrants there are other factors which make some of the countries of the European Union incomparably more desirable (for

example, the fact that some of the members of their extended or immediate family, friends or compatriots live there).

However, although awareness of the positive consequences may not be widely present among the citizens of Šid, a whole series of positive effects and changes are clearly recognized. They could be grouped in three main categories: (1) donations in equipment and projects of refurbishment and reconstruction of certain public areas and facilities financed from the European Union funds and other international donors, with the aim of strengthening and developing certain public services and functions (in the field of healthcare and education, for example); (2) revenue growth in certain sectors of the economy (including retail and hospitality industry); and (3) new employment and creating new jobs regarding migrant reception, accommodation and care (within reception/transit centres and different projects mainly implemented by non-governmental organizations).

Generally, it is certain that donor support for the development of different local public services is well-accepted while both citizens and local institutions believe that migrant support projects need to be even more aligned with local interests, utilising and strengthening local resources as much as possible.

Interaction of migrants with the local population

Reception of migrants, during the period of field research, was a phenomenon lasting for two and a half years. Events related to the presence of migrants generally do not have a dramatic character anymore and have become a part of everyday life. In this respect, the usual social interactions, presence of migrants in some public areas and certain forms of spontaneous and informal integration are already largely present. The inclusion of migrant children in primary schools has further contributed to this. Overall, despite fears and prejudice, despite the resistance which existed and is still present, the processes in progress indicate that integration is possible and that it can be characterized as a form of temporary integration.

Such interactions are perceived as absolutely desirable with the migrants. Although Serbia is not their selected destination and they often feel stuck here, it is very important for them to have the freedom of movement in Serbia (not to be closed in the centres) and they can, in a certain way, be part of the community in which they are staying. They need a normal everyday life and they often express their desire to further participate in the life of the community they live in.

Discussions with the citizens of Šid on the possible permanent integration of a certain number of migrants in the territory of the Municipality of Šid indicate that such an idea is not dismissed as impossible or absolutely unacceptable. There was openness to discuss such opportunities, but there was also a certain concern and tendency for the integration to be arranged in a way that it would not jeopardize the local way of life. It is thus considered possible to accept only a very limited, small number of migrant families, and 'new neighbours' would be expected to master the Serbian language and in no way impose their customs and their culture.

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools started at the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year (in September 2017). There was some initial resistance, but now the dominating opinion is that this was primarily due to the fact that neither the school staff of specific primary schools nor the parents of local children were timely prepared or fully informed and involved, in terms of organising specific meetings in the local community and the like. However, the process of involving migrant children after this was carried out in a positive manner and without any significant resistance. The representatives of primary schools involved in focus groups discussions especially pointed to the different positive and beneficial consequences of including migrant children, as well as good relations between the local and migrant children. It is considered that the process of socialization and inclusion of migrant children into school communities was successful, and that the quality of this process and the way in which children built positive relationships between themselves have eliminated prejudices, concerns and doubts with many parents who initially opposed this process.

On the other hand, teaching staff in schools in which migrant children are included find that the support received from the Ministry of Education was insufficient, especially in terms of methodical guidelines for working with migrant children. It is also believed that the expectations of teachers working with these children are ungrounded and that the challenges and difficulties in working with migrant children are largely underestimated. In this respect, it is clearly emphasized that teachers are not usually prepared (trained) to work with children who do not speak Serbian, and that the support of interpreters of Persian and Arabic (who come to school with children and support their inclusion and participation in school activities) is actually very limited, while interpreters for other languages (spoken by migrants and refugees) do not exist at all.

Thus, the prevailing opinion among teachers is that, in terms of involving migrant children in school education, in respect of a more serious contribution to their education, much more work is required to solve the range of present difficulties. In connection to this, there is an opinion that it would be useful to build two different approaches for two different categories of children. The first approach would be primarily focused on the socialization of migrant children and would be intended for children from those families who remain in Šid for a short period. The second approach would imply stronger educational support for children who are staying in Šid for longer, which must involve greater support for teachers working with these children and teaching methodology aimed at achieving educational goals, that is, actual inclusion of children in the educational process.

Migrants staying outside official centres

There is an extremely high consensus that migrants living outside official centres in the Šid area are a problem for which no effective solution has been found. The lack of solution among citizens also causes strong dissatisfaction directed at the competent institutions, as well as the experience that state institutions do not deal seriously with this problem or deliberately ignore it.

It is clear that negative observations and attitudes about migrants in the Šid area are largely related to the presence of this category of migrants. Apart from the anxiety caused by their mere presence and certain behaviour, a particularly strong cause of negative reactions are different incidents and violations suspected or known to be committed by migrants, including primarily thefts and destruction of property, as they cause significant material damage (damage which is never compensated to the owners).

Among a certain number of Šid citizens, this phenomenon induces a wider negative attitude towards migrants in general, although with many Šid citizens there is a clear awareness that these are groups of migrants which cannot be identified with the entire migrant community. Furthermore, the awareness of such incidents and problematic behaviour also exists with migrants. On the one hand, they show understanding for the negative reactions of local citizens, but they also talk about how such negative reactions are often referred to all migrants without distinction.

It seems certain that it would be important to take additional measures regarding migrants living in the Municipality of Šid, outside the official centres (Principovac and Adaševci) in order to: (a) make citizens better informed about what official institutions are doing; (b) eliminate as far as possible the possibility that the presence of these groups of migrants disturbs the citizens' rights and public law and order; and (c) institute a genuine and effective compensation mechanism for material damage that the presence of these groups of migrants can cause on the private property of a number of Šid citizens.

Providing information on issues related to the arrival and presence of migrants

The research indicates that citizens are informed on issues related to migrants in the Šid area mostly through informal channels, namely through daily social interactions with acquaintances, neighbours, friends, family members, and the like. Media are perceived as an important factor which impacts the shape of public opinion, but the attitude towards the way media report about migrants are often critical, and it is generally considered that this topic (on migrants in Serbia) is now completely neglected by media outlets.

It is important to note that citizens perceive significant deficiencies in the way official authorities and institutions inform the citizens. It is generally considered that citizens were untimely informed on issues related to arrival or presence of migrants and that certain efforts in this direction were invested only in the light of the already present problems. The issue of information appears to be important in interviews with representatives of the local government and institutions as well, but also in interviews with migrants. Just like the citizens – everybody from their own perspective – they also notice certain problems and deficiencies. Local institutions and government consider that they are not informed in a timely manner by the competent institutions at the central level. In some cases, it was difficult for them even to obtain the requested information. Migrants, on the other hand, if they are looking for certain additional information, are often faced with the situation of not

knowing from whom such information can be obtained or simply not being sure who can be trusted (who serves as a reliable source of information).

Considering all the opinions gathered on this topic, it seems certain that there is a clear need to improve the official provision of information on various issues related to the stay of migrants in the Šid area (or in Serbia in general). Specific information mechanism should enable easy access to relevant official information, and that provision of information is timely, complete and objective. It is especially important to provide in this manner information with specific practical importance to citizens (or other actors), and with answers to specific burning issues.

Possibilities for employing migrants

Local labour market faces the lack of qualified workers in different areas. Current emigration trends further reinforce this problem. In this respect, entrepreneurs and small businesses are ready to hire migrants with appropriate qualifications, and even workers to whom they would previously provide appropriate training. However, it is noted that no migrants wish to stay permanently in Serbia, and there is the language barrier as well.

Although they do not find Serbia as a country in which would they seek any lasting solutions, there is still a need with migrants staying in centres for a longer period to organize their time in Serbia in a purposeful manner. To this end, they react positively to the proposals on employment.

Considering all the above stated, it is important to note that there is an obvious lack of knowledge about formal employment prerequisites or any kind of employment of migrants, which largely depends on their legal status in Serbia. However, it is obvious that employing migrants could bring significant benefits to migrants themselves and the interested local employers, as well as to wider local communities. In this regard, it would be useful to carefully consider this issue and possibilities of developing the programmes aimed at involving migrants and asylum seekers in work activities. Further to that, such activities can prove significant in suppressing the already observed tendencies of engaging migrants in the grey economy and undeclared work.

Further development of local policies and practices in working with migrants

There is a clear belief that Šid Municipality needs further external support in order to successfully deal with the current migration challenges. It is also clear that the Municipality is burdened with great local social problems and suffered different unfavourable events in the recent past it. This position especially appears with the representatives of local government and local institutions, who accurately elaborate on existing difficulties and capacity shortcomings. Further to that, potential future support to assisting migrants in the Municipality of Šid is explicitly linked to the development needs of the Municipality, especially in the field of road and communal

infrastructure, education and healthcare, but also support to police forces in the area of Šid Municipality is proposed (in terms of procurement of additional police vehicles). The idea that further development of local support to migrants should be used to develop local resources and competencies in this specific area (including the civil sector) was also emphasized.

External actors in decision-making positions are expected to show greater understanding of the problems faced by the 'people in the field'. There is a widespread belief that local actors have demonstrated a human and open approach through the activities of reception and protection of migrants. Also, in general, the impression is that there is openness for further development of policies and practices in the field of work with migrants and that the main challenges and needs have already been accurately mapped. However, and especially when it comes to long-term problems and more complex challenges, it seems that there are no harmonized and precisely defined operational measures, and in this respect, more significant progress can be achieved only in dialogue with a wider scope of relevant actors. Undoubtedly, there is a need for further development of cooperation with competent state authorities and institutions, and also with donors (bilateral and multilateral), foreign development aid agencies, international and domestic non-governmental organizations. Taking particular account of the negative social and demographic trends, it is of critical importance for Šid Municipality to align further development and implementation of different programmes of migrant support with the actual local development needs and interests of the citizens of Šid to the greatest extent possible.

**Migration challenges, local policies
and civic participation**

Case: Sombor

The Town of Sombor: local context and policies

General and geographic information. The Town of Sombor is the administrative centre of the West Bački district. Its territory includes 16 settlements and the area of 1,216 square kilometres. It is in the far northwest of the Republic of Serbia and borders with two neighbouring states: the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Hungary. There is a border crossing for road traffic to Croatia and a river crossing to Hungary in the Bezdán area, while the road border crossing towards Hungary is near Bački breg and Rastina.¹⁰

Population. According to the 2011 census, Sombor ranks the fourth largest town in Vojvodina. At that time, 85,903 inhabitants lived in that area, about 55% of which were in the area of the town settlement Sombor (which also includes 14 suburban farm villages). Slightly more than one third of the population consists of minority ethnic communities, while the most numerous ones include members of the Hungarian, Croat, Bunjevac and Roma communities.¹¹

However, since 2001 (when its population was 99,600) the town of Sombor has been recording a constant and pronounced tendency of population decline. This trend has also continued recently, and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia estimates indicate that in the middle of 2017 there were only 80,400 inhabitants in the area of the town of Sombor.¹² Apart from the negative population growth, the migration balance was also negative both in 2016 and 2017.¹³ In addition, the tendency of population decrease was accompanied by an increase in the aging index and average age (45 years in 2017).¹⁴

The immigrant population accounted for 43.5% of the total population of the Town of Sombor in 2011. Approximately 45% of all immigrants came to the Sombor area before 1981, and the same number of these people moved from other places in Serbia and from former SFRY republics and other countries. After 1990, 8,296 people from former SFRY republics came to Sombor, mostly from the territories of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the period from 1991 to 2000.¹⁵

Labour market. Almost two thirds of the population fall within the age group of working population, but (according to the 2017 data) the number of registered employees is slightly decreasing and makes less than 40% of persons of the working population. Average net salary for that year equalled RSD 38,695, which was significantly lower than the average net salary in the Republic of Serbia) (RSD 47,893).¹⁶

5,771 unemployed persons were registered in Sombor at the end of December 2017. Slightly more than one third among them were persons without qualifications, while the other main characteristics of the unemployed included high share of the unemployed for a long-term period (60%), high share of people over 50 (32%) and a rather high share of youth (22%).¹⁷

Migration challenges and local policies. Sombor Transit Centre was opened about three kilometres from the town centre in the suburban settlement of Šikara in November 2016. It was built on the territory of former military barracks. The

accommodation capacities of these new facilities provide for the stay and adequate care of 120 persons, in accordance with the relevant standards to the largest possible extent.

However, Sombor was significantly exposed to migration movements on the Western Balkans route also during 2015, and perhaps especially after the closure of the Hungarian border in mid-September, when the humanitarian corridor along which the refugees and migrants moved was in a small part also redirected to the Sombor area, that is, towards the Bezdan border crossing near Sombor. Such a development resulted in opening of a temporary reception centre in one of the warehouses of the military complex in that area and establishing checkpoints for providing humanitarian and medical assistance at the main bus station, where the majority of refugees and migrants stayed. Such activities required significant engagement of respective local capacities, in accordance with the previous decisions of the Emergency Staff. Within such context, the famous crisis situation on the bridge near Bezdan was also solved, when around 200 refugees and migrants remained on the bridge after closing the border crossing from the Croatian side.¹⁸ However, even after the opening of the Transit Centre, a considerable number of migrants who are trying to irregularly cross the border with Croatia or the border with Hungary, occasionally stay in the Sombor area. These migrant groups have also recently been in the immediate vicinity of the Transit Centre and in the difficult access points near the border. Responding to such a situation, the authorities occasionally organize relocation of these migrants into the official reception centres. Thus, on 22 May 2018, 76 migrants were transported from the Sombor area to three reception centres in the southeast Serbia.¹⁹

On the other hand, the Town of Sombor did not undertake any activities aimed at aligning local policies and plans with the challenges created by the new migration situation in the Sombor area. In 2010, the Working Group formed by the decision of the Town Council drafted the Local Action Plan for the Improvement of the Status of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Town of Sombor for the period from 2011 to 2016. However, this LAP has never been revised in accordance with the changes in the migration situation and no new action plan which would include measures and activities relevant to irregular migrants and/or asylum seekers has been developed. In this regard, it can be noted that, unlike the apparent involvement of local actors in addressing several aspects of current migration challenges, there have not been any attempts to define new or align the current local policies with the aim of considering and planning further activities related to the accommodation of migrants in Sombor area or solving other current migration challenges.

At the end of June 2018, 109 people were staying in the Sombor Transit Centre, most of whom came from Iraq (78%). There are a large number of children (49%) and an equal number of adult men and women.²⁰ Such situation was not significantly changed during July and August 2018.

Methodological framework

The research conducted in Sombor included nine focus group discussions with the participation of the citizens of Sombor, representatives of the local government and relevant local institutions and organizations, representatives of local entrepreneurs and of one big economic entity, as well as a group of migrants accommodated in the 'Sombor' Transit Centre, in Šikara settlement. The research was conducted in the period 12-15 June 2018.

Representatives of the local government and local institutions. Eight people who, within their competences in the local government and relevant local institutions and organizations, participate in decision-making and carry out tasks relevant for exercising the rights of migrants and implementing relevant local policies participated in the research. Two separate focus groups were established for practical reasons, and the participants were the representatives of:

- The Mayoral Cabinet (Deputy Mayor of the Town of Sombor);
- Town Administration (Mayor Assistant in charge of local government tasks, Mayor Assistant in charge of international cooperation, Commissioner for Refugees, Coordinator in charge of protection services for migrants);
- The National Employment Service (employment adviser and a person in charge of media cooperation);
- Sombor Red Cross (Secretary); and
- 'Ivo Lola Ribar' Primary School (School Principal).

Citizens of Sombor. Four focus group discussions were organised with the citizens of Sombor, including 35 persons in total – 21 women and 14 men. Nineteen participants were the residents of the Town of Sombor, whereas sixteen participants were from villages (Bački Monoštor, Bezdan, Bački Breg). Two more demographic characteristics taken into account when selecting respondents were their age and family status. Eight focus group participants belonged to younger generations, while 27 participants were over 39 years of age. 25 participants had children.

Migrants accommodated in the 'Sombor' Transit Centre. The two separate focus groups included five men and eleven women that were staying at the Transit Centre at the time. Both focus groups were composed to roughly reflect the structure of the current population of adult men and women, in terms of age and family status. The discussion was conducted with the assistance of a cultural mediator and/or an interpreter for Arabic language. Women from Somalia were also able to participate in the focus group composed of migrant women, which was enabled by having the interpretation into English. The list below shows features of both focus groups' participants, through the data on their age, country of origin and family status.

Men:

- 41 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with four children and a wife;
- 28 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with a child and a wife;
- 43 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with eight children and a wife;

- 34 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with four children and a wife;
- 28 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with a child and a wife.

Women:

- 43 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with three children and a husband;
- 30 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with four children and a husband;
- 32 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with four children and a husband;
- 34 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with four children and a husband;
- 36 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with two children and a husband;
- 28 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with one child;
- 28 years old, from Somalia, staying in the centre alone, left two children in Somalia;
- 30 years old, from Somalia, single, no children;
- 32 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with one child (her husband deceased);
- 36 years old, from Somalia, staying in the centre with one child, left two children in Somalia;
- 27 years old, from Iraq, staying in the centre with one child.

Businesspeople. This focus group discussion gathered citizens of Sombor that are representatives of the local business sector, more precisely, the entrepreneurs, and also one of the largest Sombor-based enterprises. These were people substantially involved in business decision-making process in the enterprises concerned. More precisely, a representative of 'Somboled' company and four entrepreneurs participated in the discussion (one of which was a secretary and two were representatives of the 'General Association of Sombor Entrepreneurs'). The participants included four men and one woman. They were all over 40 years of age and all of them lived in Sombor.

Research findings: CITIZENS

Background – living in Sombor

According to the residents of Sombor, living in Sombor has its many advantages – it is a quiet, safe town filled with the spirit of tolerance, full of well-arranged urban public spaces and cultural contents. Inhabitants of surrounding villages emphasise the rich nature that surrounds them, and a strong feeling of personal safety – many of them do not lock their houses at night, they all know each other, and children grow up feeling free and independent. The common people are described as benevolent and generous. Both the residents of Sombor and of the surrounding villages are utterly content with the quality of education and cultural and social life. Only the under-developed public transportation issue was spontaneously mentioned, particularly by the respondents with younger children.

Their impressions about the healthcare system are prevalingly negative. Regardless of the newly introduced system of scheduling doctor's appointments, one still needs to wait for a long time to be admitted and examined by a doctor due to the insufficient number of medical specialists and, for the purpose of timely diagnosis, each more complex analysis or examination finally needs to be done in private healthcare centres, at one's own expense. Furthermore, with regard to the labour market, absolutely all respondents agree that many people could not find a job, and jobs that are offered are mostly underpaid. Such circumstances have caused an increasing trend of leaving the country, particularly for the past two or three years, mostly among the Hungarians and Croats, two most numerous national minorities, who have an opportunity of acquiring passports of their motherlands that are EU Member States. There is an increasing number of cases of whole families leaving the country. There are also frequent cases of women going abroad for seasonal work, most frequently to Germany and Austria where they provide care services for the elderly and the sick. Numerous negative consequences of such emigration were brought up in the course of the discussion: the number of inhabitants is decreasing, the labour force is reducing (regardless of the qualification levels), the number of children at schools is reducing, and consequently teachers have fewer lessons which reduces their salaries, or even puts them at a risk of losing job. It is, however, considered that the social and economic regression is not typical just for Sombor. It is rather believed that this process is lasting for so long that it is not very likely to change soon so that we would not see improvements anywhere in the near future.

"[...] I, for instance, live in the town centre and do not lock my door at all. I often forget to lock my car, and no one has ever stolen anything from me."

"Sombor is a town of culture... It should be on the cultural map of Europe, not just of Serbia... it has theatres, museums, and the Sombor summer is approaching when there are some events organised every day... [...]"

"[...] If we want our child to take up a sport it means we will have to face the transportation problem. It should be solved. So, if you want your child to be successful, you need to have a car. Without a car, you can't live."

"I believe that the industry is very much underdeveloped, there are no jobs, and the major problem of Sombor is that there are no jobs. There are no big companies that would employ a larger number of people, which makes our financial situation very poor. All of those companies that existed in Sombor, today they are all gone, there is definitely nothing left. There are several foreign companies, foreign investors, that are not so great, you know. I mean, those people working for them can't brag about some high salaries nor about anything else, that is the main problem. We are facing the same problem in our village as well. So, the same case is in Monoštor, a big company that used to operate here, 'Brodoremont', for example, that employed 300 people, suddenly went bankrupt, stopped working. This means almost 300 families. Many people left abroad for this reason. [...] ...A lot of young couples with children left, which means they aren't coming back. It's not just women who leave to work as homecare professionals, providing care for some elderly women and men somewhere, but also there are whole families leaving, and they will come back just for their vacations. This is a huge problem."

"Well it's a specific situation here. Those with Hungarian or Croatian citizenship, they can leave legally. These include the Hungarians, Croats, Bunjevci, refugees, whereas the aboriginal peoples, well they are in a different situation, they want to leave, but do so under more difficult circumstances. And they also go working frequently to Slovakia, Hungary or so. But those with either Croatian passports or Hungarian ID cards, they take the whole family. So, families are leaving, young people, we are losing the youth, the number of children is reducing..."

"There are some constant changes, various political parties come and go, each of them comes for their own interest, to provide for themselves, together with their teams, to take some money, or a property, fortune, and become rich, and the rest of the people have no means of subsistence. I think it all boils down to poverty. Which means there is a great social stratification. The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. So, it's like 50 years ago."

"We just want equal conditions for us, nothing special. If a bully appears, when I have to use this expression, oh well, then even a judge can't do anything. And if I appear, everything ends up very quickly. [...] In the time of socialism, they were hornswogging, but things weren't so bad, now the country is like an unclaimed property everyone uses at their will."

Migrant crisis

Among numerous, spontaneously mentioned citizens' concerns, not once was the presence of migrants brought up. The incited discussions on this topic reaffirmed that this phenomenon was low at Sombor citizens' list of priorities. Moreover, a significant level of agreement on some aspects of migrant crisis was noticed.

The issue was in the focus of attention at its very beginning, during the influx of a great number of migrants into Serbia (2015-2016), whereas now it draws almost no attention at all. It is concluded that migrants now choose different routes due to the 'closure' of Hungarian and Croatian borders.

At first, the local population's reaction was a confusion, fear and antagonism, whereas today they are mostly indifferent and uninterested. The media were a relevant factor in creating the public opinion, but nowadays it seems that for the media this issue no longer exists, and for the citizens themselves this is no longer a topic of everyday conversations.

The citizens undoubtedly conclude that migrants do not wish to stay in Serbia and that they really aim at some of the western European countries.

However, the issue of migrants' presence and its consequences are complex enough that it may not boil down to just some typical views. There are contradictions noticed not just in the views of various respondents, but even in the views of a single respondent. It may be concluded that ambivalence prevails. As stated, Sombor is traditionally a multi-ethnic environment and citizens are used not only to the presence of diversity, but also to respecting it. Moreover, the diversity is seen as the wealth of the town. The respondents also gave some examples of providing help to refugees and internally displaced persons – more by the citizens than by public authorities. However, migrants are deemed to be much different with regard to cultural aspects and there are often doubts about the possibility of their adaptation to the environment where they are now. At the same time, the citizens of Sombor lack information about the cultures which migrants come from. Also, the citizens themselves do not show a particular interest in the culture of newcomers. Hence, it seems that the arguments for the abovementioned doubt are more based on prejudice than on a fact analysis.

Faced with the presence of a large number of people from remote and different parts of the world, which is something completely new for them, the citizens of Sombor tend to balance their positive and negative views. On the plus side, the citizens understand the migrants' misfortune, recognise that they suffer a lot and that it must be hard for them. On the minus side, there is a distinguished feeling of anger caused by the offences committed by some of the migrants. These offences are not numerous, but they leave a strong negative impression. In addition, on this minus side, they indicate that many of the migrants are not vitally endangered and that some of them dispose of unexpectedly (for many unrealistically) large amounts of money. This arouses doubts about motives behind their arrival to Europe, and also feelings of injustice, even of envy, since they conclude that migrants can afford themselves more than the local population – including the amount of goods they can buy at shops, frequent taxi rides and stays in private housing and hotels. The cases of breaking into holiday houses and stealing crops by migrants staying outside reception centres determine the attitude towards the whole migrant population to a considerable extent. Nonetheless, very positive attitudes are expressed towards families staying at the reception centre. Unlike the attitudes citizens have towards those who are seen as perpetrators of incidents, citizens believe that the migrants staying at the centre are discrete and unobtrusive, which is explained by their wish not to stay in Serbia longer than they have to. Therefore,

everything is just fine for as long as “nobody bothers and disturbs anyone”, and for as long as the migrants are here in ‘transit’.

“We have all arrived from somewhere, we are all going somewhere, but now it’s all just a bit faster. There was the Migration Period in which, within a few hundreds of years, the whole Europe changed. So, this is neither the first nor the last time people migrate. At least this is what I think.”

“I am sorry, very sorry. I think it is a dreadful fate, of refugees in general, just like in books by Remark, I imagine them. Generally, this institutional hypocrisy. The United Nations in all their glory on the one hand, and these people freezing, hungry on the other, and so they are puppets in the hands of destiny. I think that more people who feel inclination and empathy, could get involved and make their contribution... to make the situation satisfactory, if at all they can get in a satisfactory situation from the position in which they are now. On the other hand, yes, I have also noticed the huge discontent with the presence of [migrants].”

“I the beginning [...] I think people were scared and there were some minor incidents. For instance, some guys were whistling at girls, and that was all. I think they were taken to Preševo afterwards. It was these guys who were taken to Preševo. In the sense that they told them to get on the bus and they took them.”

“A few months ago, one of my friends saw 300 of them by the highway, from the direction of Belgrade. He had hard time convincing them to return because they would not be able to cross the border. I asked him what he thought of it. And these were only men. He said these were soldiers, not migrants. Now they were dressed as civilians, and it is just the matter of time when they would...”

“When it comes to migrants, I always have the same question on my mind – why? There were wars lasting for years there. And there have been wars for years, we have been watching it all on news. Whether it is true or not, who knows. But why did suddenly all these people started leaving only two or three years ago, so many people all at once?”

“They give the beggars in front of the shop two or three thousand dinars. He opens his wallet, leaves a shop here in town, and there is this beggar in front of the shop who does not buy bread but booze, and he opens his wallet and gives one red note, then one more, then another, gives the money to her, sits in his jeep, Belgrade licence plates, and leaves with two others. [Then I feel] like a beggar.”

Consequences

The influx of migrants is not perceived as an event that has brought any significant changes in the lives of the citizens. Positive changes are rarely acknowledged. Neutral to negative perception of consequences prevails.

The view of the consequences depends also on someone’s personal experience with migrants. An ordinary encounter with migrants in certain circumstances may cause fear of the unknown. Most frequently, however, the local population state that they have not had any direct encounters, and their conclusions on the consequences are mostly neutral.

Some of the concrete consequences of migrants' presence that are most frequently deemed as **negative** by the local population are as follows: disarray, rubbish, breakings into holiday houses, demolition of holiday houses, stealing boats, stealing agricultural crops from fields and gardens, and inappropriate behaviour towards girls and young women. With regard to the perceptions of migrants' presence, different attitudes may be noticed between the residents of Sombor on the one hand, and the residents of the surrounding villages and suburban areas, notably Šikara and Bački Monoštor, on the other. While Sombor citizens have barely felt the presence of migrants, the residents of Šikara and Bački Monoštor in particular, for a longer period of time and on daily basis, met groups of migrants, saw them rambling, hiding in surrounding forests, and witnessed their various attempts to cross the Danube. Such events provoke strong feelings of fear and disapproval with some people.

The greatest disapproval is, however, caused by the fact that nobody can stand in the way of the migrants staying outside the centres. Who is responsible for them is something that is not clear to the citizens. In this regard, some citizens believe that this situation has been solved to their detriment. As they see it, while on the one hand there is no way to apprehend and punish the offenders, on the other hand, the citizens do not have any possibilities to protect themselves. While some believe that the self-protection is only natural and justified, the others recognise the risks of taking the justice into their own hands. Also, some respondents feel a sort of offended – because migrants are provided with hospitality that they do not respect and misuse it by staying outside the reception centres. Those whose property has been damaged or stolen speak about significant material losses. Despite regularly reporting the recurring damage, it could not be prevented nor reimbursed.

“They broke into holiday houses, they made a mess there. In Bezdan.”

“And in Bački breg. A few of them, not hundreds of them. There are about over a thousand holiday houses. But several, yes. And as they say, these were mostly those closer to the border.”

“[...] And as for me, if I am to state the problems and such, well I have nothing against those people, it is not their fault for being where they are, brought by the destiny, but you don't get to see any women, to be honest with you. You don't get to see kids. So, they simply move in groups. And as this gentleman has said, when I pass by and there are five or six of them, you know, there in a group, well I can tell you I don't feel pleasant at all.”

“Yeah, right. You see, in Šikara, it's one part of the village, those people were really exposed, and children, to harassment, they attacked girls, and I went there once, we even made protests, television, newspapers, all kinds of stuff, and whether this was all really happening or not, I don't know. Those people from that part of the village, they have orchards, and he entered the orchards, and if you do anything, then it's your fault, on your own property, your possessions. You should just cross your arms, cover your head, and let them do whatever they like. That's not ok. Things need to be done differently. I am also having difficulties, he as well, but we need to respect each other, we need to follow the rules of the game. If I come to your house, I can't put my legs on the table, I need to act decently and see how things are done. After all, someone has shown some hospitality to you. That's my opinion.”

“Here, I have something to say about the refugees, because we had, so to say, some kinds of close encounters in our village Monoštor. First of all, they stole a boat that they took to the Danube to cross over, of course. And ok, a 300-euro boat was gone, we don’t know where it ended up, doesn’t matter.”

“Which is worse, you can’t fight it. As the man put it nicely, if somebody trespasses, you can’t do anything about it. So, if someone is making problems to you, and if they would introduce that you have the right to defend yourself against it so that you would not be held responsible for it, then it would be, sort to say, ok. Then the civilians, the people, could fight against their coming to your town or village.”

“The court will decide on the reimbursement. Justice cannot be in the hands of an individual.”

The **positive** consequences that were mentioned were the following: several new jobs in the Red Cross kitchen, donation for the Emergency Service, workshops for women migrants with children, apiculture workshops, exhibition of works of children from the reception centre, increased turnover in shops and increased income for taxi drivers.

“That’s right. Just as the madam mentioned, there are several people who found jobs in the kitchen, because now there is an increased need for this, as they prepare food for Šikara as well.”

“It is organised where I come from. There is this Vesna, she had a project that included us as the local population that were supposed to entertain them, to hang around with them a bit... [...] She had this project, and came to us to ask whether we would cooperate[...] I gave them a house to use, we made lunch for them, my friends who can do some knitting came, so we worked together with them, they prepared some dishes, we made together some home-made noodles. And so, we were hanging around with them... for a few hours, and these were women from the reception centre. And children were there playing with cats and a puppy, in the backyard, they were so eager to play. But you know, I think, we could see their worries, they wouldn’t like to stay for long... They said they were moving on, that they wouldn’t stay in Sombor...”

Sources of information

Unless in case of personal experience, people learn about these migrant-related events from their friends and acquaintances. In general, the way of obtaining information about migrants is rather random and informal than official and systematic. It is not quite clear to everyone that there are two different groups: migrants accommodated in centres set up by the state, who are, in a way, taken care of within the system, and on the other hand, there are migrants staying outside the centre, in a kind of an informal accommodation they organised themselves, without access to the services provided by the system. The situation is no longer seen as alarming, and the citizens are used to the presence of migrants. In the local media, there are rarely any news related to migrants in some ways. As if it proved this time as well that it was a three-day sensation.

Perhaps the best illustration of the lack of information on the presence of migrants was a spontaneously and directly expressed disappointment in one of the focus groups, in which the respondents said they expected to attend a lecture or a workshop where they would be provided with information on migrants and guidelines on “how to behave when we run into them”. They are uncertain even about who they might ask for such information.

“Have you come here just to ask for our opinion or to teach us something about it? Why didn't you come for this reason? [...] You should teach us something. [...] How should we behave, if we run into them, what should we do, how can we help them? This would be a topic for discussion and not just like this.”

Responsibility for the initiative

Citizens of Sombor do not hide that this issue is not among their priorities, and they think they have not been told in which way to tackle it. They do not deem themselves initiators for tackling the issue, at all. On the other hand, they are sure that they themselves do not disturb, nor jeopardise the migrants, in any way.

When one of the focus groups were asked about taking an initiative for tackling the issues caused by the influx of migrants, the respondents said they felt they were asked for something they expected to get from someone else. In other words, they thought they were asked questions that they would rather ask someone else, but they do not know who. Tackling the migrant issue is deemed to be primarily a responsibility of the state, and of the local authorities, to a somewhat lesser extent.

This kind of perception of responsibility for the initiative is not typical just with regard to migrants. Regardless of the issue, citizens do not believe there is any public space within which they could raise up the issues they are interested in. On the other hand, it is not unusual for the citizens to show an initiative if they feel at risk, but a proactive and constructive action is obviously more difficult to undertake.

“I have no time to sit down and do some research.”

“The leadership let them enter, so they should deal with them.”

“It needs to be a civil sector, where you could look for what you need, or on the internet, those who deal with this issue, who have the information, you for instance. It is always nice to talk about this, to find more about it, about who is coming, why they come and leave, and what awaits us.”

Proposals for local policies in the context of the influx of migrants

Based on the statements by FGDs participants, two proposals for some new activities tackling presence of migrants in their local communities could be derived. The first proposal of the citizens is to tackle the issue of the damage to private properties inflicted by those migrants staying outside the Centre in Šikara. They believe that

measures preventing occurrence of such damages should first be taken. In this regard, they think it is necessary to have some kind of control over the movements of larger groups (of young men), regardless of whether they are considered 'registered' or 'unregistered'. Secondly, the citizens have expressed the need to be thoroughly informed on migrants' influx and stay. This need again is particularly strong with regard to migrants staying outside the centre. In addition, it is considered that migrants themselves need to be informed about the local culture and customs.

"This is inevitable. It is happening, and we cannot turn a blind eye to it. Now, the only thing that could be done is to establish a better control in case there are criminals among them, people who are not registered, who have some hidden intentions. Because this is the problem. To find them, to question them more thoroughly, to see who did something wrong or intends to do something wrong."

"But people do not live with peaceful mind as before, they face problems, that's for sure. And now, I mean, I don't know, as you say, ok, they move forward and backwards, and they are, as far as I now, welcome to Serbia. They are, right? Ok, so in reception centres where the state determined they should be, right? Ok, so they have everything there, including food, accommodation, heating, even some school lessons organised there, right? Like some language courses or some leisure courses, some kind of training. There is even a guy from Monoštor who goes there to give them cricket training. Because in Monoštor we have a cricket club, one of the six in the country. And as they come from the areas where cricket is popular, so it means they provide them with these activities as well... However, the moment they leave, I don't know, the reception centre in Preševo, or, I don't know in Šid, or wherever they place them, they start wandering around the country, and regardless of how welcome they are, I think it is disrespectful of the hospitality. What is a migrant from Preševo doing in Monoštor forest? Where he came from 600-700 km distant base, from the centre where he is welcome, has heating, food and all they need? Well, this is the problem. And while waiting to find the way to cross the Danube and over to Croatia, in the meanwhile, so, he breaks into these holiday houses, which you know, bothers some people. And this is where the problems start, and I don't know, some kind of migrant-phobia happens."

"We need as much information as possible, to gather citizens, who is willing and wants to attend, if he gets to say what he thinks, whether this is good or not, to be there, to know what is going on."

Further development of migrant crisis

There is no common opinion on the further course of the migrant crisis. While some believe that it is fading, comparing it to the most intensive period of two years ago, others think that the crisis will not stop and that it is only an introduction to a more lasting phenomenon. However, it is believed that Serbia has no important influence on the further course of migration crisis and that all the decisions lie in the hands of great powers — which are at the same time considered to have contributed to the development of the migrant crisis. It is also clear to everyone that without the assistance of Europe and international institutions, Serbia would not be able to deal

with the migrant influx issue. In this regard, the question is to what extent Serbia is really independent in creating its own migrants-related policy.

"I think less and less. Because, let's say the war in general is calming down. Unless now a new, drastic war is started. Israel-Palestine relations, a lot could happen here. As far as I know, we do not have refugees from Palestine now. Let's say a situation in Syria is now much calmer than a year or two ago. It was the focal point of everything. [...] Well now, those who love their country will probably stay there."

"Or they will leave as well. Whole families, relatives have left. Some stayed, they won't have any life there for years, everything is collapsed there, devastated, and when they settle here, I do not mean in Sombor, but in Europe, of course they will encourage the others, and it will never stop, more and more of them will be coming here and that's it. It will take years and years for them to develop a new life, normal life, and everyone has some relatives, so those who settle here will pull the others, and they will prevail here. At least this is what I think."

"I, however, think that they first bombed them, and now they will help them rebuild again."

Research findings: MIGRANTS

Background – why and where?

Most of our respondents came from Iraq, which is officially no longer at war, but according to our respondents, places which they fled from are still, *de facto*, in a state of war. Bomb attacks are frequent and lethal, even in Baghdad. People leave in fear for their lives, led by desire for life in safety and for brighter future. Their migrant journeys last for as long as several years. Those who have relatives in some of the European countries were able to select their destination at the very beginning of the journey. The others decide about this in the course of the journey.

"I come from Baghdad and while I lived in Baghdad, when I had to leave my house for a while, I had to call home for 5-6 times just to check if everything was alright... My whole family died this way... My father died in front of our house door; a bomb had been planted."

Sources of information

For migrants, most important sources of information are family members and friends and acquaintances who already live in some of the EU countries. More educated migrants find useful information on the Internet, and information is frequently requested from the staff at reception centres, including interpreters. Regardless of their education, they claim to be content with the rights they enjoy during their stay at reception centres and they do not show any need for further information, since none of them wants to stay in Serbia.

Stuck in Serbia

Serbia is not a desired destination of any of the migrants. Most of them, when they set out, did not even know there was a country called Serbia. The main reason for which Serbia is not even now considered a country of destination is that they perceive the economic situation in Serbia as bad. Every migrant in the Sombor transit centre is waiting to see his/her name, and his/her family on the 'list' – a list of migrants who have been granted approval to cross the Hungarian border that week (i.e. to enter one of the two transit zones at the Serbia-Hungary border). They are forced to stay in some of the reception centres in Serbia until this goal of theirs is fulfilled. They describe the conditions in these centres as absolutely safe and certainly better than in the countries in which they stayed earlier. In this respect, Bulgaria is most frequently mentioned. They feel they are being treated in a more humane way here. It is particularly important for them that they have the freedom of movement in Serbia, and they see people in Serbia generally as pleasant and benevolent, while some of the migrants have made friends with local population and sometimes visit them at their homes. They are aware that the language is an obstacle to establishing closer relationships.

"We are waiting to cross over, and this is the place where we are waiting; when I was in Greece, I had my own apartment and I was pregnant and it was not enough for me, I want to go to Germany to settle there." (women, Iraq)

"Serbia gives me food, place to sleep, to have a bath... [...]...people are good here." (women, Somalia)

"There is a Serbian family that I visit... we visit them at their house, we are friends... we met here in Sombor while my wife was in hospital, when she was pregnant... and this woman was also pregnant, and this is how we met... since then, we have sat together sometimes, to have a coffee or something... the problem is when you do not speak the same language so you can't understand each other." (men, Iraq)

Staying in Serbia?

Migrants would stay in Serbia only if their entrance into the EU would be definitely disabled. This is the position even of those migrants who have made friends with the citizens of Sombor. They find out about the bad economic situation from the citizens themselves, on the Internet, or by observing the environment. They feel sorry that the economy is not better since they see people in Serbia as friendly and open. Even if some citizens of Sombor keep their distance from them, they understand this because they are aware of irresponsible behaviour of some migrants which makes local population be careful about the whole migrant population.

"[...]...I wish to be in Serbia. OK. But, in Serbia there is no job, no money, it is a very bad situation [...] I see how people work and how much money they get [...] I like the people. People are very, very friendly [...] I like the people... And life is not money, life is people... the way people treat you, how friendly they are, whether they respect you, talk to you. In Europe it's not like this... In Europe you only have your work, and nobody knows you..." (men, Iraq)

"When we came here, we saw the people and people told us this was a poor country and that they would rather leave and go abroad." (women, Iraq)

"You can see this on Google and Facebook." (women, Iraq)

"And when we arrived here, we found out that if we applied for asylum, we would get EUR 150 a month, and if we lived here it would not be enough." (women, Iraq)

"This is a poor country, but, you see, in Iraq, which is a country of oil, there are people who eat from garbage bins. So, it does not matter what the country is like, whether it is poor or rich, the most important is a person's psychological state and that there is no racism and such things. I have been here for three months and I have met only one person who is racist. It was very strange to me. [...] He had a small shop and as I found out, migrants have robbed him... and since then he stopped selling anything to us... This is the biggest problem in Europe, they think we are all the same... We are very different people who set out on a journey from there: some of us are very honest, and we work, have our jobs, work for the Government, as teachers, we are normal people... there are some psychiatric patients, some mentally ill

people... [...] *But for them, we are all just migrants... People should assess us when they get to know us, and not based on the fact that we are migrants.*" (men, Iraq)

What in the meantime?

Until they arrive to the desired destination, and without a clear idea on how and when this will happen, migrants are overwhelmed with a feeling of uncertainty. They have a need to be more a part of the society in which they are staying. They would like their life to be more ordinary, more common, less migrant; to obtain some skills, to learn German or English, to do sports... —and to work, not just in order to earn, but rather to feel they are doing something useful (to have a sense of purpose).

(M) What would you like to have an opportunity to do?

(11) To drive a car, to learn how to drive, I used to know, but I forgot, I haven't driven for a long time.

(12) To start working again.

[...]

(13) I would also like to work, to have any kind of job.

(14) And I would like to work.

[live discussion]

(M) Would you like to work in order to make money or to have a purpose?

[Out loud] *Both!*

Research findings: ENTREPRENEURS

Background – doing business in Sombor

A bad economic situation reduces the buying power, which significantly decreases the turnover of those companies doing business at the local level. On the other hand, the increasing number of citizens leaving for abroad leads to the situation that in Sombor it is increasingly difficult to find and employ qualified workers. This is why the issue of demographic and economic trends is brought up in discussions even when the business operations of a company are export-oriented, or when a company is a part of an international corporation. There is some ambivalence with regard to possibilities for improving such a situation, but businesspeople mostly do not recognise any kind of the will of state institutions to support changes that businesspeople may suggest.

“We are all entrepreneurs, and it is our goal to expand our system. If a system expands, then the need for labour force will increase, as well as for education and for the labour force with secondary education and for those without education, depending on the type of the work...”

“Now, the following is going on: there is no economy, and you cannot find a person to employ.”

“[...] and 500 women leave this Bački Monoštor every month to go abroad, stay there for two or three months, doing some work... But EUR 500.00 pours down into Bački Monoštor every month. Which means that these women earn about EUR 1000 every month. Well now, when this is multiplied by 12 months, we get EUR 6 million. Of course that a village in which EUR 6 million enters can have a shop, a pastry shop and a cafe and some terraces with gardens and you may start some small business and it can all work just fine... It is simple mathematics, EUR 6 million a year and of course a village can live. [...]”

“You see, when any kind of law is to be passed, we cannot participate in decision-making by giving suggestions... which means that a Law is mostly adopted to our detriment. So, this country depends on small businesses. We don't have a system to fight it.”

“Until in this country order and financial discipline is established, which means that when you do something and deliver it, the other party has to pay for it, there can't be any order. [...] Who should do this? As for the financial discipline, state authorities should do it.”

Migrant crisis

Sombor business people share critical attitudes of their fellow-citizens on migrant crisis. They believe that migrants have no intention to stay in Serbia, and that it would be difficult for them to integrate with regard to culture, although Sombor is a peaceful and multi-ethnic environment. However, a new idea has been put forward here – a belief that for the members of such different culture to integrate, even if the migrants wanted to, it is not just a good will of local population and newcomers that is necessary, but also a lot of money and a developed economy.

“Where there is no money, there is no football [...] They are here because they have to be... and they are waiting either to cross our border or to be received by someone in the west. 99.99 percent of them do not wish to stay here. I travel frequently and cross Croatian border, those 12km of the border... I was coming back around 12 -12.30 at night, and saw them in the dark... just wanting to run away to Croatia over the border...”

“Listen, we live in a multi-ethnic, multi-national environment, multi-cultural environment... which everyone should learn from... we were taught to respect both our neighbours’ and our own holidays and enjoy the same respect, and so on... [...] so, this is not strange for us here. I was recently in Vienna – more black people than the white ones. And of course, these people if they want to work they will get a chance and of course they need to start from somewhere. I personally don’t have an issue with the colour.”

“Well, I’m not competent to talk about this, I may only say as a layman... that it’s not possible to overcome cultural differences. Germany’s a huge system based on money, and we don’t have a lot of money. A lot, lot of money... [...] this system’s been functioning in the Western Europe for a long time now, and they already know the other cultures... France, for instance... football national team – all black people...”

“We all know what is the pain-in-the-neck issue of a country that faces such a migrant crisis. [...] After all, we should teach ‘em the language, integrate them in the education system; it’d take years for them to get to know us.”

Requirements for employing migrants

Although the lack of qualified labour force was identified as an issue, there are some doubts about migrants being the solution to it. Their qualification for the necessary jobs was questioned, the language barrier, as well as the lack of migrants’ intention to stay in Serbia were the indicated reasons. Business people said they did not have neither time nor money to invest in education of their future employees, but that they needed ‘ready-made’ workers. They claimed this was not about having resistance to a foreign culture, but rather that the conditions for doing business were already difficult, that they needed to develop their businesses on their own, and that there was no state’s support to employing migrants. In this regard it is clear that they have expectations from the state to set up system frameworks and to address the employers when it can offer them ready-made solutions.

“In 80 percent of cases, we need people with some kinds of qualifications, and there’s a shortage of them in the market; having qualifications from Syria and from Belgrade is of course not the same... despite all our good will.”

“I think that the assimilation of migrants can’t start by employing them first. Not just in our businesses, but in the economy in general... There-s the language barrier that is obvious, and we can’t tackle this, we don’t have time for this.”

“I am telling you, I would employ a man with an experience in roadworthiness test of vehicles, tomorrow. I do these roadworthiness tests, providing services. I would employ him

tomorrow. But, unfortunately, there are none of them. I don't care about his skin colour, I only care about whether he has the skills to do the job... Not to go into details, there is a new rulebook on the roadworthiness testing, a new Law entered into force, so that we need to increase the number of workers... and the Government does not fulfil their part of the promise to raise the minimal and maximal price... But not to get into further details: they do not want to stay. A person who owns a phone worth EUR 1000 doesn't want to work here for EUR 200. People don't want to stay here. They just want to leave."

"Of course that in Germany, Austria and Italy they need workers with qualities... But their systems function and they can pass as such, but should we now... What do you think, that they would turn a blind eye, and employ them even though they can't do the job...? No, no... if a man CAN do the work, a great employer DOES APPRECIATE this, and he will employ him, but this is a system that functions for instance in the EU, but we, that still need to develop, we cannot base our business on this..."

"[...] Business people are worried about their businesses, and staying on the market, and the state is worried about big expenses and the discontent of the citizens is a big problem. Shouldn't it then be logical that the initiative comes from the top, by making some strategies, by making records of the people, including their wishes and ideas about how these people could fit in in the local environment, to accept local culture, accept local rules of behaviour, not to disturb local population [...] So, try to make these people respect the local community, the local population."

"[...] How have they solved it in the West? We should copy from good students. [...] ...The state allocates huge funds per capita for migrants... Whether they have employed anyone, I don't know, they have courses organised for them, some lessons for children and alike. And now, if a state such as Germany doesn't have a solution, doesn't know the answer, how could we know it... And you know that Germany is an open country. [...]"

Further development of migrant crisis

Whatever the further development of migrant crisis, the respondents emphasised that migrants, regardless of their numbers, simply do not wish to stay in Serbia. Therefore, they believe that any plans of employers regarding the possible employment of migrants would be a 'bad investment'.

"Our children are leaving so that he, who owns a phone worth EUR 1000 and changes EUR 50 to 100 here every day..."

"They start living after 10 pm... sleep over day and nowhere to be seen, and around 10 pm they wake up and move... take taxi, vehicles and head towards the border. And regardless of all the fences and wires, they found the passage, made a whole in it."

"They are no longer here... their route now leads across Bosnia, and they do not linger here anymore."

Research findings: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Background – situation in the Town of Sombor

Representatives of the local government do not hide that the situation in the Town of Sombor is far from ideal. As it was the case with other focus groups, we could hear also from this group that the basic problems bothering the citizens is high unemployment level and what troubles them even more is – low salaries. Emigration of local population is considered a huge problem essentially caused by a long-term economic stagnation. They claim that the local authorities are trying to change the situation to the better and that they are fully aware that it takes years to make visible changes. Inclusion of citizens into this process is welcomed. In this regard, they emphasise that there is a large number of non-governmental organisations in Sombor, particularly in the field of working with the youth, but they also assess that the citizens themselves rarely exercise their right to act proactively to any kind of a problem, and this is believed to be a consequence of lack of belief in the purposefulness of such action, and of cultural heritage from the period of socialism when the state was the only initiator, decision maker and executor. Whatever the reasons, nowadays, the citizens complain about their problems to the authorities only when they find themselves in a trouble affecting them personally.

“And a low standard is a bigger problem here than the unemployment. Many people work for very low salaries, many work for the minimum wage, for 23-24 thousand... Well now, many have a few hectares of land, so they make some additional income and somehow they manage...”

“[...] a large number of young people are leaving in search of work, those who have qualifications, usually do not work in their field of expertise, but people simply get those citizenships. They take those EU citizenships.”

“I believe that the core of the problem is the fact that everything lasts for too long, and people cannot wait... Now you see the situation, life passes by, no more waiting. So, you would afford 10 years of good life somewhere abroad, you will try to create it somewhere there where there's perhaps some basis for it, but here you already lose hope, you don't see the solution.”

“We had a situation when people address you when they face a problem themselves. For as long as it's someone else's problem, the problem is not considered, nor is it defined, but when I find myself facing a problem, then it starts to exist.”

“I'd like the civil organisations to be stronger, to have a more proactive attitude, to propose some activities to us aimed at improving, for instance, the relation between the refugees and the citizens which is, as you could hear, not so bad, but it would be good for people to know who these people staying here are, and I'm sure they'd feel different here...”

"I suppose that [the citizens] do not have a clear idea about what it is that they could do to contribute with their own ideas... [...]...could it be perhaps that they don't believe it would have any effect, or maybe they are not interested..."

"It doesn't matter that we want to change it, during the time of communism, since 1945 to 1990s, it was clear what the state was, how to address the state and it seems it has remained... and we can say that we serve the citizens, but it's been instilled for generations and it's hard to change."

Migrant crisis

Representatives of the local government believe that the response to the first influx of migrants at the local level was quite satisfactory. A lot of efforts were invested, and it yielded results. Frequent personal contacts with migrants for the purpose of informing them about the risks of crossing the Danube on their own were also presented as a good example of effective response. It is believed that such a direct approach has saved many lives. At the time, there were no complaints by the citizens about the presence of migrants. Even the citizens themselves were addressing the Red Cross and offering volunteer assistance. Later on, the schools also responded in a well-organised manner. In general, institutional stakeholders are convinced that all local stakeholders did the best they could and that an admirable level of coordination was achieved. It is further believed that the biggest — and the only — mistake made was when a number of single migrants were transferred to Sombor. At that moment, the borders with Croatia and Hungary were still rather permeable, and the single migrants placed in Sombor were informing other migrants that Sombor was the right place for crossing over to the European Union. Then, the issue with single migrants is that they stay outside reception centres, hiding in the surroundings, moving at night, with an intent to increase their chances for an irregular border crossing towards Croatia or Hungary. Such a behaviour of complete strangers fills the local population with fear. At some moment (in the spring of 2017), the number of single migrants in Sombor increased so much that the protests of the citizens were inevitable.

In current conditions of reduced and stable influx of migrants, the local capacities for dealing with migrants are considered entirely sufficient. These issues no longer attract citizens' attention, nor do they require frequent engagement of competent local authorities.

"We were constantly addressed by the citizens offering assistance. Both volunteers and citizens. But what is really positive in all this, and I need to reiterate it, is that in our town, the crisis has shown that it is clear who is responsible for what, who has what task, and that we were all well-coordinated. It's really a fact that everyone who was supposed to be involved in tackling this crisis and to work, did their best."

"We have a 'rap hall' within the Centre, which is closed, and this was the largest mistake made by the Commissariat and the people who brought this to Sombor, and this is where all the problems began, and all of a sudden we had 300 migrants in Sombor and the single migrants prevailed, the people who might' ad been at a battle field until the day before yesterday and

this could make problems with regard to the local population. We overcame this by working together / the 'rap hall' has been closed... You know how it is, not everyone has an opinion on migration and on migrants and does not need to have one. Just not to have any conflicts."

Consequences

Representatives of the local government and institutions emphasised mostly **positive** effects of migrants' influx – from the profits for some private businesses, then material benefits for the whole town, to expanding the views of school children and secondary school children. Therefore, it was mentioned that taxi drivers and shops made most direct profits due to the increase of turnover, that they rebuilt playgrounds and basketball courts, and that the school would be renovated as well, as well as that there were some donations for the Primary Healthcare Centre and for the Emergency service.

"Taxi drivers, exchange offices and some shops. The turnover in some local shops, was increased."

"The UNDP renovated the playground and the basketball courts and there was some exercise apparatus for kids."

"Well, we are just in the process of signing a contract, thanks to the Embassy of Norway and Group 484, it will be the first school [that has been renovated] ...so far, we have not had any schools, we have equipped the Centre, the area in front of the centre, the Primary Healthcare Centre, Emergency Centre..."

"Eleven people employed by the Red Cross are working at the Reception centre, preparing and distributing food. In addition, we've been provided with a completely new and renovated kitchen area where the food for vulnerable population is prepared, which is something very important for us, we also got a new field vehicle and we got laundry equipment from one NGO. So, this is also something that will contribute to the activities carried out with the local population. I think this is a positive thing and it will contribute to the local community."

"Migrant children and our pupils have established friendships, boys who were eighth-grade pupils went for a banquet dinner with us at the final ceremony, and we even planned to include them in the organisation of excursions, but some technical issues occurred."

"The Gymnasium students made a glossary with some words."

"I think that a big plus of all this is that people have met some other people, other cultures, and what people saw, unfortunately, so to say, is that misfortune travels the world. Which means that it takes a lot of wisdom to prevent this misfortune from coming here... so, a wise behaviour in order to survive it..."

Among the **negative** effects, most frequently mentioned ones are citizens' agitation and protests because of the single migrants staying outside the Reception Centre. Moreover, some boat and fruit thefts were reported, as well as the cases of holiday home burglaries. The respondents estimated that the citizens' agitation was in disproportion with the migrants' delicts, i.e., that the citizens were more scared than they had reasons to be.

“About a year ago, or even less, they came to this Reception centre, at first there were only families, and the citizens of Sombor did not even know they were here, they didn’t bother anyone... the families were accommodated there, no one bothered anyone, everything was idyllic until May last year. It was all idyllic and no one said a word complaining about them staying there, however, the Commissariat sent two groups of 50 single migrants, young fellows, who some people believed to be army men, because they were all young guys. Well now, while there were about a hundred of them there were not too many problems, however, later, this place was heard about, because they are all connected to each other, and they found here a way to cross over to Hungary, and the news spread among them quickly, so more and more of them started coming, and there were almost 500 of them at one moment. About 100 of them were registered at the centre, and 400 were not... some were in the fields, seen by people and so... and it was already then that the citizens of this part of the town, Šikara, started feeling endangered a little bit and they started protesting, and that’s when the protests started there, and... There were also some individual incidents and citizens complained about their property being destroyed. Some holiday houses in Berg were destroyed, a lot of damage inflicted, then fruit stolen, while passing by they would eat all the fruits from the orchards, then troubles with the civilians, but you know it was all exaggerated more than the situation really was, but ok, it has all passed. And during the protests, there were Mayor’s deputy and assistant, and we went to these meetings and they were not so pleasant, but... We spoke, and the situation calmed down later, somehow... and their numbers reduced later...”

Information about migrants’ issues

Unlike the citizens who claimed that the local authorities did not try their best to inform the citizens more thoroughly about the migrants-related issues, the representatives of local authorities claimed that during the influx of a huge number of migrants, they organised a public discussion on migration-related issues. Although, the public discussion was targeting (only) pupils and students of Sombor schools.

“You forgot to mention that we in Sombor also had a public discussion, in the City Management hall, and it was about migration-related issues, and about 200 young people attended it, along with the representatives of the Town of Sombor, Commissioner for Refugees, Director of the Primary Healthcare Centre, Director of the Social Welfare Centre, representatives of the National Employment Service, and representative of the Sombor Police Department. 200 young people who came there interested in hearing... Schools received invitations and students applied on voluntary basis, and for over 2 hours they were listening and actively participated in the public discussion. So, this was something we wanted our citizens to hear.”

Proposals for local policies in the context of the influx of migrants

The current status of the “migrant crisis” is deemed to be satisfactory – the number of newly arrived migrants is not increasing, and the existing capacities are sufficient. It was pointed out that the Town Administration and local institutions acted in accordance with the legal framework defined by the state. On the other hand, those local stakeholders had no doubt that migrants have had no intention to stay in Serbia. This was the reason provided for the lack of a Local Action Plan related to migrants’

influx and reception. However, if a larger number of migrants express an intention to stay in Serbia, seasonal jobs in the field of agriculture are recognised as the jobs that the migrants could get most promptly since there is a constant lack of the labour force in that sector, and there are almost no qualification requirements.

"We have received some interpretations, from the Government... The law on Asylum and Temporary Protection came into force on 3 April, and on 3 July we got instructions on the manner of registration of migrants and on their rights. So that probably, if some of them decide to stay in Serbia, these are the preparations for it, related to their rights and obligations. [...] so that we will treat them as foreigners, we will apply the Law on the Employment of Foreigners, so that they will have employment and self-employment rights just like foreigners."

"They [migrants] can see what our standard is like..."

"Here they don't have anyone... I spoke to some of them, they say 'well we don't have anyone here', 'I have a cousin in Paris', the other one says 'I have a cousin in Berlin'... they will go to them, they don't want to stay with us..."

"Seasonal work, there's a huge shortage of labour force for these jobs... [...] We are looking for investors and there will be no one to work."

"[...] Maybe here somewhere, we heard that in some parts of the country migrants worked as seasonal workers, in the south of Serbia, in orchards, they might get included in these jobs, so they certainly have a chance there, and here there is a trend of increasing fruit production... People plant apple trees, cherries, so they have an opportunity here, but then again it is only for a few months... until our economy comes to life."

Further development of migrant crisis

All the respondents agree that no one knows how the crisis will further develop and that this is an issue to be tackled by huge global powers. For as long as the crisis is within this scale, the existing capacities in Sombor are sufficient and they do not see the need to plan any changes. Only if the circumstances change, in sense that there is a significant increase in the number of migrants seeking asylum in Serbia, some different solutions would be necessary, but 'all in good time'.

"It doesn't depend on us whether it would come, it depends on global policy... If there is a larger influx, we will adjust to it, if people do wish to stay here, several hundreds of them, we will adjust to it; as for children, we have plenty of schools, so one or two children could join each class..."

"Now we don't pay attention to it, none of us. Now, there is no such a big influx, they have a chance to cross the borders within two or three months."

"The number is decreasing, and it's well-known that they don't want to stay... [...] I think that they those who are still here will look for some other ways to get to the EU."

"[...] You see, just like this new Law was adopted to meet their requirements if they wish to stay, if they express such intention, and so that we could ensure some self-employment programmes just for them, so that they could start up a business activity, but now, there is no one we could offer the programmes to, now they do not intend to stay, so now we do not have such programmes."

Concluding remarks

By analysing the transcripts of interviews and discussions conducted in focus groups, seven specific topics related to the assistance for and residence of migrants in the area of Sombor Town were identified. These topics will be presented in this final chapter of our analysis. In doing so, it is necessary to bear in mind that human experiences and perceptions, opinions and attitudes are the primary subject of our analysis, and not any quantitative data. It is extremely important to emphasize that the analysis did not include any kind of verification of information the participants in the focused group discussions stated. Interpersonal agreement is the only verification of reliability and foundation of certain specific pieces of information obtained during the survey. Moreover, it is important to mention that some opinions and topics occurred in talks and discussions with only some target groups (for instance, with the representatives of local businesses), while the others were widely discussed (or at least mentioned) in all focus group discussions. In addition, the analysis has shown that there is a strong consensus on certain topics, while in the case of others, more or less different opinions appear in different categories of respondents.

Impact of migrant influx on the situation in local community

The reception of migrants is not an issue that a particular attention is attached to, and the migrant-related challenges are not listed among the most important problems facing the Town of Sombor. There is an awareness of the positive consequences of migrants' reception and stay in the area of Sombor, though it seems that it is much greater among the representatives of the local government and institutions than among the citizens. In the focus group discussions with the citizens of Sombor, in most cases, neither negative, nor clearly positive views were expressed. Anyway, it is certain that migration challenges are not seen as a crucially important issue, neither by the citizens nor in the local plans of the authorities. This attitude is justified by a strong conviction that there are no migrants who wish to stay in Serbia, and in such a situation it is perceived unnecessary to consider any major long-term plans related to the presence of migrants in Sombor. At least for now, such plans are considered needless.

On the other hand, similar as in other communities in which we conducted the survey, a significant number of local people who are leaving primarily for some of the EU countries is recognised as a serious local issue that already has some negative repercussions, and in this regard, the departure of a large number of young people and families, reduction of the number of children at schools, and a significant lack of qualified workers at the local labour market are particularly emphasised. Such emigration trends are doubtlessly deemed as a primary migration challenge.

With regard to positive effects of migrants' influx and reception in the area of Sombor, despite the prevailing negative attitudes, there are still many favourable changes and events that are underlined. These could be grouped into four categories: (1) investments of foreign donors in the renovation of infrastructural facilities and in the development of public services (public areas, healthcare, schools, social services); (2) increase of

income in some sectors of the local economy (trade, taxi services, exchange offices); (3) jobs related to the reception and protection of the migrants (Red Cross soup kitchen); and (4) development of new cultural contents by organising various social and cultural activities (for migrants and for the local population).

Interaction of migrants with the local population

Very similarly to what we found in other communities, in Sombor as well the interactions with migrant families staying in the transit centre are distinctly different to those that the local population have with groups of migrants (mostly young men) who often stay outside the centre, in some kind of an informally organised accommodation. As a rule, empathy is expressed towards migrant families, and their behaviour and presence are usually deemed inobtrusive and discrete. However, the number of citizens who have actually had any kind of direct contact with migrants is small, and the attitude that is distinctly noticeable in the focus group discussions we have conducted is that migrants come from culturally different environments and their integration in Sombor would be a difficult process despite the fact that (and this is also frequently stressed) Sombor is a multinational and a multicultural environment. Somewhat contrary to such a reserved attitude are the positive interactions that were enabled and promoted by various organised activities and a recent inclusion of migrant children in a local primary school, as well as the rare examples of spontaneously established friendships between local and migrant families.

Migrants staying in the Sombor Transit Centre are fully open for the possibility of interaction with the local population. Although Serbia is definitely not perceived as a country in which they would stay, the possibility to move freely outside the transit centre, being, to some extent, a part of the community in which they are staying, is doubtlessly very important for them and contributes to their aspiration to organise their life, while in Serbia, in such a manner that it looks like a normal, every-day life as much as possible.

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools

A school programme for children from migrant families has been organised in Sombor since 2017, at the Transit Centre, and the staff of four Sombor primary schools participated in this. The experiences were positive, and the cooperation between the Centre's and schools' administration is extremely good. By the decision of the Ministry of Education from the end of May 2018, this mode of operation was terminated, and migrant children were shortly included in formal classes of two town schools. Although the process of including children in schools was conducted without any major preparations, and within just a few days, according to the principal of one of the schools, there were no significant difficulties and no resistance. The migrant children were well accepted at the schools. They came to the schools mostly without any accompanying persons and attended lessons without the support of the

interpreters or cultural mediators, and it was expected that their integration into school would continue in the same manner the following year.

Migrants staying outside official centres

It may be concluded that migrants staying outside the official centre are the only source of negative comments and discontent caused by the presence of migrants in the area of the Town of Sombor. During the field research in Sombor, the number of these migrants was small, and the issue was not that serious at the moment, but the situation had been much different earlier. The number of migrants staying outside the Transit Centre in Sombor and the related problems, around spring 2017, were so big that they caused a widespread discontent and led to organised protests in Šikara settlement. Looking back, it is considered that setting up the so-called 'rubb halls' in front of the Šikara Centre was a serious mistake in a generally well-organised response to the migration situation in Sombor. The rubb halls served for the accommodation of a large group of young single male migrants, but such a situation, when the borders with Croatia and Hungary were still quite porous, became attractive for new informal groups of single migrants. Thus, according to some estimates, up to about 400 migrants stayed in the area of Sombor outside the reception centre in that period, and the problems typical for such situations occurred, including the damages inflicted to agricultural property, thefts of boats and alike. Moreover, it turned out in Sombor as well that an effective response to such situations is not easy to organise, and that there is no mechanism for providing compensation to private owners who suffered some damage. There is, hence, an impression that a solution was determined more by chance than as a result of some activities and measures. The rubb halls were closed, and the number of migrants in Sombor staying outside the centre reduced significantly, which was probably greatly contributed by the fact that migration routes towards Bosnia and Herzegovina became very active (which diminished the importance of the route passing through the territory of the Town of Sombor).

Nevertheless, when asked about the new measures and activities that could improve the situation related to the reception of migrants, the citizens of Sombor emphasised two proposals, and both related to migrants staying outside the official transit centre. The first proposal is to invest more efforts in monitoring and supervising the movement of migrants staying outside the centre, primarily in order to prevent the damage inflicted by these groups of migrants on the private property of the citizens of Sombor. The second proposal advocates better provision of information to the citizens, that is, the establishment of a mechanism of official and timely provision of information on all the issues related to migrants, but particularly to the migrants staying outside the transit centre.

Providing information on issues related to the arrival and presence of migrants

The citizens of Sombor get information about the local reception and residence of migrants mostly through a usual social communication, in conversations with

acquaintances and friends, for instance, and through other informal channels. The media are no longer a significant source of information, particularly with regard to the local situation in Sombor about which hardly any information can be found in the media.

It is important, however, to note that the citizens have a particular need to obtain competent information that would be useful for them in everyday life, for instance, when they run into migrants. Moreover, we have reaffirmed that the citizens require to be better informed on the situation and to get replies to their questions, and that they often do not know where they could get the reliable information and who they might ask for the necessary information. In this regard, it is certain that there is a need for establishing a certain kind of source of reliable and timely information on the local migrant-related situation. During the discussions, representatives of local institutions pointed out the organisation of a public discussion, intended primarily for schools, where competent representatives of local authorities and institutions spoke about various aspects of migrant situation in Sombor. According to their estimates, the level of attendance was high, and it fully achieved its purpose. This is certainly one of the possible models of providing information and conducting dialogue with the citizens, but the focus group discussions with the citizens assured us that a continuous and timely provision of information most probably requires an effective use of other communication channels and models as well.

Possibilities for employing migrants

The discussions with migrants reaffirmed here as well that they do not consider staying in Serbia and that all their plans are related to the possibility of continuing their journey towards destinations in one of the EU countries. On the other hand, it was equally confirmed that migrants react positively to employment proposals, seeing a possibility there to make their temporary residence in Serbia more purposeful and to make some money. On the contrary, possible employers mostly seem to be reserved regarding the possibility of employing migrants. At the same time, the issue of legal framework is not raised here, it is simply not in the focus, but this reserved attitude is primarily based on the estimation (or assumption) that migrants cannot really meet the real demands of the local labour market for qualified workers.

The lack of qualified workers doubtlessly exists, and that was noted with absolute certainty in the discussions with representatives of the local business sector. Negative demographic trends additionally emphasise this problem. However, the possibility of engaging migrants as a part of the solution to this issue is mostly rejected or doubted by the businessmen, relying on three arguments: (a) the assumption that migrants do not have appropriate qualifications; (b) the fact that they cannot speak Serbian language which makes a language barrier (important for doing various jobs); and (c) belief that migrants do not wish to stay in Serbia and that they are not motivated to find a job and work. Furthermore, the representatives of the local government assume that migrants could be engaged in this manner only for seasonal jobs in the field of agriculture, the jobs that do not require any qualifications at all.

It is also necessary to emphasise that representatives of the business sector recognise the lack of any state support for employing migrants and believe that the idea of employing migrants without such a support is simply not realistic. They also underline that employers mostly need experienced workers (the so-called “ready-made workers”), do not have resources necessary for training, and that training of someone who will not stay would be a waste of resources. In this regard, it seems that development of any migrant employment programmes, besides defining the necessary legal framework for such programmes, would need to be based on a real estimation of motivation and qualifications that migrants have, and on the support of relevant state institutions, including training programmes, if necessary.

Further development of local policies and practices in working with migrants

There is no clear attitude on how the migration situation in the area of Sombor might further develop, but it is recognised that the movement of migrants has been reduced, so the current situation is deemed stable and sustainable. Moreover, the existing local capacities for the reception of migrants are assessed as significant. In addition, local institutions and competent local civil servants mostly agree that a local response to the migration challenges even in most demanding days, was efficient and effective, that all the actors played their role adequately and that coordination between the involved institutions and organisations proved excellent. In this regard, the need for any new plans or policies has not been recognised, because larger challenges are not expected any soon, and there is a strong belief that Sombor authorities can adequately and without any difficulties tackle the challenges related to the reception of migrants at the level of current or similar situation.

**Migration challenges, local policies
and civic participation**

Case: Subotica

The Town of Subotica: local context and policies

General and geographic information. Subotica is the northernmost town in Serbia and the second largest town in AP Vojvodina. It is the administrative centre of the Northern Bački district. The pan-European transit route E-75 passes through Subotica and there are two large (road and rail) border crossings (Horgoš and Kelebija) and four smaller road border crossings towards the Republic of Hungary not far from the town.²¹

Population. The territory of the administrative unit of the Town of Subotica includes the urban settlement of Subotica and other 18 village settlements.²² During the last census, the Town of Subotica recorded 141,554 inhabitants, while the largest ethnic communities in its multi-ethnic population included the Hungarians, the Serbs, the Croats, the Bunjevci and the Roma.²³ The tendency of decrease in the population, which has been clearly visible ever since 2001, continued after 2011, and at the mid-2017, the Town of Subotica had almost four thousand inhabitants less than at the time of the last census (137,753).²⁴ However, the migration balance was positive in that period, but the population growth, as in most of Serbia, was negative. Decrease in the number of inhabitants was hence also followed by the general population aging: in 2017, the average age was 43, with the aging index of 137.²⁵

According to the 2011 census data, immigrants accounted for 41.37% of the total population in the area of the Town of Subotica (58,565). However, a closer analysis indicates that a vast majority of immigrants came from the areas of other settlements in Serbia (73.48%), mostly from Vojvodina. Somewhat more than one-fifth (22.57%) came from former SFRY republics, and only 4% of the total number of immigrants were from other countries. The share of immigrants who moved to the Subotica area after 1990 is 41.48%. Persons who came from the area of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1991-1995 period, however, equalled only 7.7% of all immigrants in the territory of Subotica.²⁶

Labour market. Somewhat more than two thirds of the population (67.1%) are of working age group. The number of registered employees is slightly growing (44,962). A little less than half (48.64%) of the working age population in 2017 were employed, while the average net salary for that year amounted to RSD 44,872 and was slightly lower than the average net salary of employees in Serbia (RSD 47,893).

The number of registered unemployed persons has been significantly decreasing over the past five years, and at the end of 2017, official register of the unemployed recorded 5,858 persons. The most prominent characteristics of this population are very high share of persons with no qualifications (51%), rather high share of long-term unemployed (60%), high share of people over 49 (39%) and a relatively high share of youth (21%).²⁷

Migration challenges and local policies. Subotica had been coping with the migration challenges regarding the movement of migrants and refugees from the Western Balkans route even before 2015, and the town went through different periods in this regard and faced various challenges in different ways. According to certain estimates, more than half a million migrants and refugees have passed through the area of

Subotica since 2011.²⁸ Even many years before the Western Balkans route came to the centre of attention during the so-called European refugee crisis, the Subotica old brick factory – an abandoned and ruined facility of a former factory and the surrounding area – became a well-known place of informal gathering of irregular migrants trying to cross the Serbian-Hungarian border and enter the ground of the European Union. In 2015, especially from June until the middle of September, a very large number of migrants and refugees was arriving daily to Subotica, and the main bus station became another important place for their informal gathering and stay. During that period, a special reception and transit centre was opened in the neighbouring Kanjiža, and afterwards the closing of the border by the Hungarian authorities on September 15, 2015 dramatically changed the situation. The humanitarian corridor, which had been taken by thousands of refugees and migrants only a few days ago, was then completely redirected towards Šid, that is, a nearby border crossing with the Republic of Croatia. At the end of September, the number of refugees and migrants in the Subotica and Kanjiža areas dropped down to around one hundred, and in mid-October 2015 UNHCR registered only about twenty persons in that area.²⁹ Nevertheless, even after that, the Serbian-Hungarian border remained a place which attracted a significant number of migrants and refugees. One of the reasons was also the establishment of the so-called transit zones on the Hungarian side of the border. In certain periods of time in 2016, there were as many as over a thousand people at the gates of the two Hungarian transit zones (Roszke and Tompa) in informal camps in the inter-border area, while more than 400 refugees and migrants stayed in the official transit centre in Subotica (well above its normal capacity).³⁰ However, and apart from that, instead of regular entering into one of the transit zones, a certain number of migrants continued to try to use the remaining possibilities of irregular entry into Hungary. Nevertheless, as the treatment of the Hungarian authorities, in terms of limiting the number of persons who could be admitted to transit zones in a single day, and also in many other ways, was becoming more restrictive, the number of migrants and refugees thus seeking the possibility of entering the European Union (and temporarily residing in the Subotica area) was decreasing as well.

Subotica Transit Centre opened on 16 November 2015. The centre is located on the outskirts of the town and not far from the old brick factory. The capacities of the centre enable the accommodation of up to 130 persons – in the long-term period and in accordance with the relevant standards. Although such capacities had been inadequate in some earlier periods (and a large number of migrants stayed in tents placed in the yard of the centre) now the accommodation capacities of the centre are quite appropriate.

At the end of June 2018, 62 persons resided in the Transit Centre in Subotica, mostly from Afghanistan (64%) and Iraq (32%). Slightly more than half (54%) of this number were children.³¹ The situation did not change significantly within the next two months.

In response to the new migration challenges, the Subotica Town Assembly on 28 December 2017 adopted a new LAP to improve the position of refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees under the readmission agreements for the 2017-2021 period. Although it cannot be concluded from the title, certain specific objectives

aimed at improving the position of asylum seekers and migrants whose legal status had not been established were clearly embedded in this action plan. As many as four specific objectives were related to these categories of migrants and aimed at promoting and strengthening tolerance, improving the quality of life in the local community and strengthening relevant local capacities. However, an important disadvantage of the plan was a complete lack of specific activities planned to achieve these specific objectives. Certainly, this action plan obviously relies on experiences from planning and implementation of the same previous local action plan which had been in force in the 2014-2016 period. In this regard, relevant local actors already gained extensive experience in implementing certain programme measures in the field of improving housing conditions and economic empowerment, which were mostly directed at refugees from the territory of former SFRY and internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. The Town of Subotica has the Migration Council, and this authority is responsible for managing the process of implementing the Local Action Plan.

Apart from this, there are no other strategic or action-planning documents which, in any way, recognize the relevance of migration and migration challenges.

Finally, it is important to note that the Local Sustainable Development Strategy of the Town of Subotica for 2013-2022 recognizes the value of civic participation in the process of creating strategic policies, but also that the experience of participatory planning of the town development is at the very beginning, and that the ways of institutionalized civic participation in the decision-making processes, which are envisaged by this strategy, are a completely new (and rarely applied?) possibility.³²

Methodological framework

Besides the focus group discussions with citizens, the survey in the area of the Town of Subotica also included representatives of the local government and schools, relevant representatives of the local business sector, and a group of migrant women accommodated in 'Subotica' Transit Centre. This survey encompassed a total of eight focus group discussions and it was conducted on 25-29 June 2018.

Representatives of the local government and local institutions. The focus group gathered eight people who, within the framework of their competences participate in decision-making and carrying out tasks of importance for exercising the rights of migrants and implementing relevant local policies. Besides two members of the City Council, the Roma inclusion coordinator for Subotica and a principal of one of the primary schools involved in organising educational programmes within the Transit Centre participated in the discussion. The list below contains more details on the participants in this focus group discussion:

- Principal of 'Matko Vuković' Primary School;
- Coordinator for Roma Inclusion in the Town of Subotica;
- a member of the City Council in charge of education;
- a member of the City Council in charge of social protection and healthcare (member of the Council for Migration of the Town of Subotica and a member of the Working Group for Monitoring Migration).

Citizens of Subotica and Ada. Four focus group discussions with the citizens of Subotica and one with the citizens of Ada were organised, with the participation of a total of 40 persons – 21 women and 19 men. Moreover, the care was taken to include in the focus groups the residents of the neighbouring rural settlements. In Subotica, these were the residents of Novi Žednik, Čantavir, Mali Bajmok, Bikovo and Ljutovo, and in Ada, these were the residents of Mol. In addition, two more demographic characteristics taken into account when selecting respondents were their age and family status: twenty participants of the focus groups were between 18 and 39, and twenty of them were older than 39; twenty-seven of them had children.

Migrants accommodated in the 'Subotica' Transit Centre. This focus group gathered five women from Afghanistan who were staying at the Transit Centre at the time. The discussion was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter for the Persian language. The focus group was composed so as to roughly reflect the structure of the current population of adult women who speak the Persian language, in terms of age and family status. The list below presents each of the focus group participants through three pieces of data:

- 35 years old, from Afghanistan, staying in the centre with a child, while her husband and four more children are already in Germany;
- 19 years old, from Afghanistan, staying in the centre with parents;
- 33 years old, from Afghanistan, staying in the centre with three children and a husband;

- 30 years old, from Afghanistan, staying in the centre with three children and a husband;
- 22 years old, from Afghanistan, staying in the centre with a husband and five children.

Businesspeople. This focus group discussion included only two persons due to a significant number of cancellations by the recruited respondents. Generally, the focus groups with the representatives of local business sector are envisaged as a forum gathering persons at managerial positions in certain enterprises, who are well familiar with the business operation of their enterprise. In addition, we tried to include representatives of those enterprises who have real needs for employing new workers and that could consequently, at least hypothetically, consider employment of workers among the migrant population accommodated at a concrete local community. In case of Subotica, the following took participation in the discussion: (1) a representative of a private engineering company and (2) a manager of a warehouse for fluid petroleum gas oil in 'NIS' company. They are both over 40 and live in Subotica.

Research findings: CITIZENS

Background – living in Subotica and Ada

Spontaneous descriptions of ordinary life in Subotica and Ada usually start by speaking about a poor economic situation. Salaries are low, unemployment high, while jobs offered are underpaid and quite often refused. For the most vulnerable ones, it is more beneficial to retain the status of a social aid beneficiary than to accept such a low-paid job. It is considered that the poor economic situation is the main reason for the increasing number of people leaving the town to work abroad. The citizens able to obtain a Hungarian or a Croatian passport frequently decide to permanently move abroad. These are not just young people, but whole families as well. According to the respondents, although most of them are not at the margins of the society, people opt for such a step because they cannot see the real opportunities for a quality life in Serbia. There is understanding for people who are leaving but, on the other hand, respondents realise that local communities, for this reason, are already facing the lack of labour force and an issue of aging population. Employers are often forced to organise the transportation of labour force from other towns in order to ensure a sufficient number of workers. The lack of human resources is already visible in the public healthcare system as well because healthcare workers easily get jobs in some Western European countries.

However, the lack of human resources is not the only reason for the noticeable discontent with the healthcare system that the focus group participants clearly express. Namely, the citizens believe that the healthcare workers are often not interested in doing their job, and that the corruption is not a rare thing. The population outflow, however, also opens the issue of availability of healthcare specialists, particularly in Ada. In the near future, the work of the primary healthcare centre there might also be brought into question. The general conclusion is that a quality healthcare service is available only to those citizens with higher incomes, having in mind that an increasing number of examinations and services need to be done in private healthcare sector due to the lack of resources and long waiting lists in the public institutions.

The third most severe problem that was emphasised in Subotica was a decreased feeling of safety. Although people still live largely in an easy-going and 'homely' manner, a significant number of interceptions and thefts aimed mostly at elderly people have been registered lately. There are frequent bicycle thefts, as well. Such perceptions of a lower personal safety were not noted in Ada, but only in Subotica. On the other hand, in Ada, the respondents said that they missed cultural and social events, while the citizens of Subotica were quite content in this regard. And there is no difference between Subotica and Ada in the following: participants of all focus groups mostly show to be proud of their multi-ethnic environment and mutual respect for differences.

With regard to education, there is a difference that can be noticed between younger and older respondents. While the older ones think that the offer of educational

institutions is sufficient, the younger ones complain about limited choices, particularly at the level of higher education. The increasing number of private educational institutions was also emphasised, starting from the kindergarten to higher educational institutions, whose accreditation is not always undisputed. The opinions on the quality of education in general are divided and depend primarily on personal experience or experience of family members. However, unlike the healthcare system, in relation to which there are mostly negative impressions and experiences, the opinions on the education could be characterised as prevalingly positive.

"The life isn't easy, it is difficult to find a job. Especially at my age of 51. I worked for a company that went bankrupt, and we applied for those public works, and then it expired, then you wait for the public works again, and all over again in a circle..."

"There is a saying that more to the south you go, the sadder it gets. It used to be the case, but now, the more to the north you go, the sadder it gets. There are some young people here left who, as my colleague has said, have become more aggressive. Whoever could, literally escaped, the population age of the town has now drastically changed, we will remain a town of the old people. For the past several years, over 200 people have left the institution, and for the past several years there have been about over 300 workers at the institution. Then it's clear to you what's goin' on." (Subotica)

"Unorganised, there isn't a sufficient number of doctors, medical staff, they are usually leaving abroad, the doctor's office will remain without a doctor, so without one shift, without two shifts, doctors leave to work elsewhere as substitute staff, and patients are left without a doctor." (Subotica)

"You enter, say 'good day' and then, instead of asking you "Why are you here, what bothers you", he needs to fill in five forms, some papers... [...] and it takes him twice as much time than a person working for the administration, and it is questionable whether he can do his job well, and how much of that nonsense he has to do, imposed to him... [...] I think it's the same everywhere..." (Subotica)

"[...] Earlier, while there were more residents in the municipality, the specialists used to come once a week... Then there is a question about whether the Primary healthcare centre will be revoked, because we do not have a significant number of residents. [...]" (Ada)

Migrant crisis

With regard to current and recent migration flows, although Subotica and Ada are in totally different situations, it seems that the residents of both sides perceive the events related to migrant crises as far, disconnected with their lives, and they certainly do not consider them priority problems of their communities. The respondents in Ada said that they did not have a chance to run into migrants, and their opinions and attitudes were mostly shaped by the media reports. On the other hand, Subotica citizens typically base their views on the events from two or three years ago, when a river of migrants flew towards Hungary. However, the impressions from those times now fade away, while presently migrants can rarely be seen in the territory

of Subotica. The topic of migrant crises is something the citizens rarely talk about spontaneously, and the conversation about it during the focus group discussions were rather directly incited than the reflection of what could be heard in everyday conversations.

"[...] ordinary people with the same problems as some of us face, some are bigger, some smaller, and they simply found themselves here, on this territory, on their way... Now, what the politicians are doing, what they are not doing... [...] It is usually the case that ordinary people suffer most. And so is the case with them, poor people. Especially children." (Ada)

"What caused fear in me was that, you know, I live near the forest, and that's where they were hiding most, there are many vineyards in this part of the town, various fields, orchards... They were wandering there, hiding, and waiting to see whether anyone lives a house, and even if someone did live in a house, if they were out for a few days, they would break into their houses and make some damage, took everything they found, I don't know [...] so this was the reason for the fear, I have my own animals at home, chickens and all this, and now, for example, I wouldn't like to come home from work and see it all gone or choked or taken away. So, I had this fear, I didn't experience anything bad, but I wouldn't like it to happen to me. I'd like to avoid it somehow and sometimes I'd think – 'Oh just let me fall asleep, and when I wake up, it isn't there anymore, it's all gone, it's in the past, as if it was never happening'; so, this is what I would like..." (Subotica)

"What I noticed was that they were arriving partially, first the people who had money, you could see that on them, you know the whole families, clean, with a lot of money, and finally came, you know like when you clean, the last bits – the worst ones. Well, these ones caused fear. Not those families." (Subotica)

"I say, that, simply, a man does not leave home just like that, gladly. And doesn't leave his hearth. Trust me. It's very hard. I never got over it. [...] And I live in my own country. D' you know how people feel then? We should help them." (Subotica)

"I think this is the case in places closer to border, that had more contact with these people, who perhaps experienced some both unpleasant and positive situations, so... We saw it in the media and watched it on TV, when it is talked about, it is current, when it is not talked about in the media, then it is no longer current. These people are constantly present... Now, we who have not had any contact with them, then it is not current for us... you focus on your own problems in life that you are currently facing... and so..." (Ada)

At the same time, the migration issue has proved to be closer to people here, and also more important when talks about the emigration of local population to Western Europe are initiated. Earlier experience with refugees from the territories of former SFRY and with internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, provides a framework to some citizens for understanding the current situation with migrants. However, it is at the same time emphasised that life circumstances exhaust the citizens so much that they can offer nothing more to migrants than empathy. In addition, a feeling of being denied and of a kind of envy can be seen, because it is considered that migrants can choose their destination and that it would be easier for them than for the citizens of Serbia to live and work in the Western Europe. In this

context, here again we could hear the stories of migrants with incredibly large sums of money. At the same time, there is a prevailing opinion that differences between the local culture and cultures that migrants belong to can practically not be bridged. This position is rather based on some general issues (different religion, different customs) than on some concrete illustrations of the disputable differences.

"I am more concerned about the silent migration of our population who are leaving, because we will remain without young people and experts, without any potential for our children, and you will be able to see this in 10 years only." (Ada)

"You asked us about our perception of all this. I usually make a comparison with 1995 and with the expulsion of Serbs from Knin, who were returning to their motherland and were barely welcomed by their own people... And let alone those fleeing from their motherlands to a totally different culture, it causes the fear of unknown [...]." (Subotica)

"I saw them thousands of times in Ljutovo, the place where I live, they pass by, on foot, because the border with Hungary is there, until it all closed, while they were still able to cross, and I saw them elsewhere, at the bus stop where they were sleeping and eating... This was interesting for me, because they were all in new sneakers, with touch screen phones, and being refugees. I mean, I don't know. [...] We had a situation, they came one by one, thirsty, to our house, asking for water, and we gave them water, and this was it." (Subotica)

"This is what people are angry about. You see, people here don't have money, we all live more and more modestly, as compared to, let's say... and when somebody says they have so much..." (Subotica)

"I worked on a highway gas station and a bus with migrants came and they were full of foreign currencies." (Subotica)

"Or Greece, why don't they stay in Greece? Here, I'll give you an example. They came to Sweden, and this migration service of theirs sent them to the north of Sweden where they have these uninhabited areas. No, well no, they don't want this, they want Stockholm, Goteborg, so the major cities, big cities, real cities, they are not interested in the deserted areas with three persons per a square kilometre. Regardless of what they offer to them." (Subotica)

Consequences

The influx of migrants is not perceived as an event that has resulted in some significant changes in the lives of citizens. Neutral to negative perception of consequences prevails, and only few respondents provided examples of some positive consequences.

While the citizens of Ada municipality have not had any experience with migrants, the residents of the Town of Subotica have witnessed a large number of migrants passing through their town. Although it is considered that there have not been any major incidents, the very presence of a larger number of migrants has evoked fear in some citizens. As they claim, the fear of unknown. The **negative** consequences of these events are said to be disarray, rubbish, breakings into sheds and houses, demolition of holiday houses, and then they also mention the attack with a compact knife against a

local young man at the Novi Sad bus station. However, only few examples of any offences done by migrants are mentioned, and the impression is that it was all happening too far away to cause any serious concerns. The incidents related to private facilities were happening mostly in the areas adjacent to the border with Hungary and were not numerous. The following **positive** consequences are mentioned only from time to time: working for projects implemented by the Commissariat, building up a special healthcare office for migrants within a Primary Healthcare Centre, organisation of a joint dinner by Gymnasium students and their migrant peers. They also mentioned that the 'Kolevka' Home for Children with Disabilities had got a vehicle for food distribution, and a reception place for children was arranged within the Home. With regard to economic effects, those observations that are usually heard in the local communities intensely affected by recent migration inflows were largely repeated in Subotica as well: during the days of the most intensive migration movements, the income of taxi drivers greatly increased, while the turnover in shops enlarged noticeably as well, and there are numerous speculations about large profits made by local smugglers.

"Except for psychological consequences, they have no other impact. Except for the fact that people have instilled in their heads that they are such and such, as far as I heard, it was in the news, in Šid particularly, I have a friend from Šid, they entered houses, stole vegetables from gardens, and fruit, they can't find it in Subotica, but downtown you will see more migrants than our, local people, other than this, there are no consequences. At least not in Subotica, I don't know about other towns." (Subotica)

"As regards the impact on the community, you should bear in mind that as far back as in 1990s Subotica was a town, where, oh, many people earned living by smuggling, they transferred all kinds of goods across the border, mostly from Hungary, more rarely to Hungary and further, and you see, this kind of surviving has remained, so that much before the Hungarians closed the borders, a part of the population had done this for living, and a part of the population either let's say had got rich or at least got some assets, those prone to adventures or petty crimes, and you know, many of them smuggled people across the border, taking them on roads through the forests and alike. It all later closed, many people ended up in prison [...] we all know someone who managed to make some significant profits in this manner." (Subotica)

"I used to know people who worked for the Commissariat, got a job there, but mostly on projects, so as the crisis diffused, they lost their jobs, sooner or later. So, it was all temporary. As for some more permanent benefits, I am not aware of them, I don't know whether any of the children went to school with migrants. In some other communities in Serbia this was the case, however, when they reach Subotica, none of them stays for a longer period of time, these are all temporary reception centres, and they try to move on, towards Hungary." (Subotica)

Sources of information

Unless from personal experience, people learn about these migrant-related events from their friends and acquaintances. In the beginning, the media had a great influence, but today they almost do not report on migrants in Subotica at all. In general, citizens obtain information on migrants in mostly informal manner and by chance. They claim that there have never been any activities organised by the local

government aimed at informing the citizens on migrant crisis. However, it is also true that the participants of the focus group discussions did not show the need to learn more neither about the migrant crisis in general, nor about the presence of migrants in their local community. They think that the migrants are there only temporarily, feel burdened with their own problems, and believe that the migrants are the ones who should learn about the local culture rather than vice versa. It is assumed that only in the case of a permanent residence of migrants in the local community, would there be a greater interest in their stories.

"[...] If this happens, then we would probably try harder to be more informed and would want to express our opinion on some topics." (Ada)

Responsibility for the initiative

The citizens definitely do not consider themselves as people who should launch initiatives for tackling migrant influx issues, and some of the reactions of the focus group participants clearly indicate a weak potential for initiatives. Namely, some of the participants spoke convincingly about how they were expected to think about migrants' problems while, on the other hand, nobody was interested in their own problems, the suffering the citizens were facing. They were almost surprised by the question about whose role it would be to ask them about the problems they were facing, and further discussions on this topic indicate a high level of distrust in both local and central authorities. They spoke about a high level of corruption, general collapse of the value system, drastic impoverishment and segregation of the society. They do not believe in the possibility of any significant positive changes.

The citizens do not hide that this issue is not among their priorities. On the other hand, it is believed that Serbia has offered hospitality to migrants and that it treats them better than many other countries, but also that without a significant financial and material assistance of the developed countries, it would not be able to meet the requirements imposed by the migrant crisis. Therefore, convinced that the existing solutions yield results, the citizens believe that the responsibility for further initiative lies in the hands of 'big players' — and certainly not in their own courtyard. Tackling the migrant issue is deemed to be primarily a responsibility of the state, to a lesser extent of the local authorities, and only to a certain extent is the role of non-governmental organisations recognised. This does not exclude humane support for migrants, but a reactive approach towards migrant issue is deemed normal and no need for proactive action is recognised. Expecting the citizens to invest their energy in actively considering migrant issues and tackling those issues is perceived as a bit weird and inappropriate idea.

"People here are so tired, they no longer have a motivation for fight for anything." (Subotica)

"Many things happened. [...] Crisis is a fertile ground for some serious manipulations. It is, we are afraid, in the mentality that not much can be changed – the deeper the crisis is, the murkier the water gets." (Subotica)

"Based on what my colleague said, it is quite clear that the citizens don't count. We do not create anything. We are nobody's object of interest, we are a subject to promises and hints of a better life within a short period of time, and then we realise nothing has changed." (Subotica)

"Well you see, I can speak for myself, and we are now talking about people struck by a huge misfortune, but I simply do not have time to watch and think about it because I have so many personal problems and I fight for me and my family, my friends [...] But now we are discussing these people and how and why they fled from their country, this and that, in addition to all our troubles. Believe me, to think about them, having all my personal problems, I don't have a second for it because I am thinking about how to stay, to survive through a day, a month, a year." (Subotica)

"I feel sorry for those people, when you see those young people, those children, it is horrible / I would give them a last piece of bread. But you see, we have been in much deeper crisis than them for 20 years now and we are talking about them, and what about us? Who is talking about us? What we have been though for the past 20 years! We do not fall, but rather push off and keep fighting. What our people are going through down there in Kosovo!" (Subotica)

"You made a great question a few moments ago, 'What topic would be appealing to you?' Do you know what the topic is? Trust. If someone has trust in me, and in you, in anyone [...] and when you lose trust once – it's hard to restore it." (Subotica)

"[...] I have nothing against those people dogged by misfortune. But I'd like to talk about us, so that things get better for us, and of course, better for them as well." (Subotica)

Proposals for local policies in the context of the influx of migrants

The citizens of Subotica and Ada do not make any concrete proposals for tackling the issues related to influx and reception of migrants. This could be related to several previous findings indicating that: (a) the citizens do not show a particular interest in migration flows and presence of migrants in their local communities; (b) this topic is not among those recognised as a priority by the citizens; (c) there is a widespread belief that the related issues have been efficiently and appropriately tackled so far and that nothing new needs to be done; (d) the citizens show profound distrust in authorities (at any level).

However, some specific notions and comments about a possibly (hypothetically) more permanent presence of migrants in the territory of Serbia have been voiced:

- Permanent presence of some migrants would cause disbelief and doubt 'that there is something behind it', having in mind that the citizens of Serbia themselves wish to leave their own country.
- Migrants should be taught about local customs and their adjustment to the local environment should be ensured.
- It should be ensured that migrants are not more privileged than the local population, in any way.

In addition, no particular opportunities for the local community can be recognised in the hypothetical situation of a more permanent presence of migrants. A potential advantage was recognised only in the possibility of migrants doing some simple manual work for which there is a lack of the local labour force, assuming that migrants would previously learn the Serbian language. However, the participants in our focus groups rather saw certain risks than a chance in a more permanent presence of a larger number of migrants, although such risks were not elaborated and concretely described.

"A chance for what? For us it is not a great chance, except that, you now, I guess, it's hard to find a job generally, and maybe they would cause a bigger competition for finding a job. And I say, probably a risk, yeah there are all kinds of them just like us, but they would probably make more a negative environment I believe, because they are not a famous people. If a decision was made that they should stay for good, it would probably take a longer period of time for the people to get used to it, not just a year or five years, but I think a bit longer." (Subotica)

"I think that it is only natural in such a situation that they first face resistance, and only then acceptance." (Subotica)

"It'd be suspicious. I'd believe there's something behind it. What do these want now? So, it means someone gave them the money to come, why else would they come if people are leaving from here, why some other people would come here and work for the same money..." (Subotica)

"Of course, their culture is totally different from ours. They are rather aggressive. I don't know if this is out of fear. It seems to me like two rabbits ran into each other, and you can't tell which one is more scared. Which is essentially true to some extent, but their reactions are a bit strange to us." (Subotica)

"The question is whether they themselves want to change and get used to our environment. So, we are as we are, and maybe here there are some opinions and rules, we are here, why would we change, you came here, you should change." (Subotica)

"How would it affect you if someone new moved into your building, and next door there is no longer that old lady who used to live there and get up at 6 am, and now there is someone getting up at 12 pm, at noon, stays up until midnight, plays loud music, and alike... has a different rhythm of life... So, it means you lose your life rhythm because... you live next to each other... [...]...which means both sides need to adapt... they arrive to a foreign country, they are no longer in their own country where they had their rhythm of life, here we have a different life rhythm... Let's start from the fact that our skin colours are different, for instance, and that not all of us are open-minded..." (Ada)

"This thing about their moving in, if they came, the same rules should apply to all, right? For both the people who live here and those who arrive should adapt, so that there are no new rules, so that they are not privileged, this is perhaps what would irritate, or irritates people, these rules. They can do this, we can do that, there is this division between 'they and we', which is a bad thing." (Subotica)

"I think that finances are the biggest problem because, ok I don't want to say that local people are selfish, but everyone probably thinks that they would take our jobs, jobs of our children and so on, and let's say, it's probably that local people are offended by the fact that they would get a bigger social assistance, while some others, most of us, are not entitled to a childcare allowance. And we also have low incomes. And this offends people, and they would not accept this." (Subotica)

Further development of migrant crisis

Neither in Subotica is there a common opinion on further course of the migrant crisis. However, the prevailing opinion is that migrants themselves do not want to stay in Serbia, seeing it as an economically underdeveloped country which cannot provide them with a better life they are seeking. Furthermore, citizens believe that Serbia has no important impact on the further course of broader migration challenges and that all the decisions lie in the hands of great powers. It is also clear to everyone that without the assistance of Europe and international institutions, Serbia would not be able to deal with the migrant influx.

"Generally, we are only a country of transition from which people want to flee towards the Hungarian border, they are not interested in us, trust me, neither Serbia nor Subotica." (Subotica)

"I don't think the problem is the mess and garbage, well we are not such clean people, we leave trash too, just to be clear, I don't think that life here attracts them, and really [...] he hasn't gone this far to work for EUR 200-300." (Subotica)

"There have been wars since ever. Africa has been the largest centre of wars since forever and a day. And, I'm sorry, they didn't run for 1000 m, they ran from a country to a county. I think this has all been paid to happen. Someone designed this and gave them money for it. It happened that an asylum seeker was robbed, and they found three thousand euro. They set off from some Syria, Iran, those from there, wherever, with about 10-12 thousand euro, and they have nothing, it's been a non-stop war. So, someone paid them to go to Europe. To settle in Europe. And when they settle in Europe, when it starts here, then I don't know where they would escape then. Someone will flee again, but who, I don't know. This is my logics." (Subotica)

"That's right, there will certainly be some security issues in future. If a huge wave of this population arrives, because there is a huge difference in mentality. Between the European and Asian population there is a huge difference in mentality. We now, if they are on a certain area in large numbers, there will probably be conflicts." (Ada)

Research findings: MIGRANTS

Background – why and where?

The stories by migrant women in Subotica Transit centre about the reasons for leaving their motherland are very much like those we heard in other centres: war, violence, fear for their lives... Equally, all women we spoke to want the same – safety and future for themselves and their children. Years spent on migratory paths are a small investment as compared to what awaits for them if they reach the destination which is – with no exception – somewhere in the Western Europe. Although they have never had a chance to live in the country where they would like to settle, the respondents are convinced that their wishes will come true in their country of choice. The motive to reach the country of destination is so strong that not even the extremely difficult conditions of their journey can hamper them from achieving their goal.

“No... No. we have not [laughter] [...] Why would we, when we have endured it all, forests, pregnant women in forests, deliveries in forests, just to get there, and we are not coming back again?”

“In Afghanistan is war and every people want to leave Afghanistan. They are not safe; their children are not safe... more people want to leave Afghanistan. Now in Afghanistan everywhere is bombs... They kill 40, 60 persons. And in Afghanistan Taliban are... they kill the Afghan people... Afghan people are in very bad situation [...] And Afghan government is not... they don't support people... they just work for their benefits. They don't work for the people.”

“[...] I am from Quetta city, and in Quetta city has the problem with Hazara... Bomb blasts!!!! Bomb blasts across the city! [M: Hazara did that?] No, Pashtu did that... Pashtu people and Taliban don't like Hazara. And Hazara because of that, they leave... [M: You are Hazara?] Yes. Yes, she is Hazara... She was a child when she left Afghanistan. With her parents. In Afghanistan is also war, and in Pakistan is also war...”

Sources of information

It has proved again that on the long and arduous journey, the sources of information about 'where to now' are often the smugglers themselves. Although they are aware that smugglers cannot be trusted, migrants believe they do not have any other choice. In an unfamiliar territory, without knowing the language, migrants stick to smugglers even after they experience their cruelty. The approach of the Serbian police and the treatment they got at the reception centre evoked in our respondents a feeling of trust in the police service and the Commissariat. However, with regard to some concrete information about their legal status during their stay in Serbia, and about their rights based on this status, there is an impression that none of the stakeholders at the reception centre particularly tries to provide them with such information, and that the migrants themselves are not interested in that.

“Because of the smugglers. We give them money and they decide. Because we don’t know to what country we should go... because, we were in the forest, in the mountain, we walked one day – two days... we were two or three days in the forest. My mother got very sick. Three times the smugglers said we will leave you in the forest because you cannot go... Another time the smugglers said why you want to leave this place? We have problem... we had no shoes... [M: Why did they want to leave you in the forest?] Because my parents got sick, that was the problem... The smugglers said we don’t want to help you because you cannot go. You will be a problem for us. Because they were sick.”

“And we just trust to the police... yes, because when we arrived in every country, they take you... the police arrive and every time they take you, maybe to jail, maybe to a camp, or to a house... they help us... Just in Bulgaria they were not good because they send us to jail, and said you have to go. When we arrived in Serbia, the police catch us and gave us police paper. And they said, you are going to a camp, and we will help you, because in the camps, you are safe.”

“We are happy because Serbian police support us, and they help us... [...] all camp boss is good, in Serbia camp [...] they know about our problems... their behaviour is very good... Talked about Đurđa because I was two years in Krnjača camp, and she help Shekila... very much... Đurđa is very good.”

“We are always in some camps, there are many organisations circulating there, it’s usually about gathering information, we can’t tell you concretely who helped us in this regard. In this camp there are only UNHCR and several other organisations that are more in charge of providing medical services... [...]”

Stuck in Serbia

While waiting to cross over to Hungary, migrants feel safe and provided. People they meet are mostly perceived by them as benevolent, with only some exceptions. However, due to poor socialization, the feeling of boredom often occurs.

“[...] for the past two years we have not established any particular communication, but sometimes there were situations when local population would approach us – they want to talk to us.”

“The local population usually do not ask too many questions, there was a situation when in Belgrade I spoke to an older man and a woman; they asked me where I came from, what I was, whether I was a migrant, what camp I lived in, what it was like... it was one of the situations...”

“Maybe one day my children will go to school, and be like this people’s life, because their life is very good, and we are in this camp, and it is boring for us, because for one, maybe two years, we are in camp.”

“We generally do not communicate, only at the market for instance, when we go shopping, you have to communicate. Generally, I think there were some very good situations in which

people treated me really fine; like on a bus, train; while on the other hand, there are people who do not treat us adequately. And you see that they are checking you out, head to toes..."

"As compared to Afghanistan, we are extremely safe. But there is a technical issue now, because in some camps there are three-four families in one room. This is a bit problematic."

What in the meantime?

Despite the position that Serbia is just a stop on their way to Western Europe, migrants are open for getting better acquainted with local culture and establishing contact with the local population; they have a need for socialisation. However, they recognise that spontaneous communication with the local population is not frequent and believe that the language barrier is the main reason.

"I personally would like to speak to them, and I think that citizens of Serbia are hospitable. Then again, on the other hand, there are good and bad people, but I would like to sit with them and talk about their customs, some inter-cultural topics..."

"Serbia is a very nice country, people are very nice, cultural, I simply haven't had any problems in Serbia, I would like to speak to people, but there is the language barrier. We don't understand each other."

Research findings: ENTREPRENEURS

Background – doing business in Subotica

Focus group participants in Subotica believe that general business conditions do not equally affect all economic agents, that large systems are rather immune to the shortages of the general business climate, while smaller companies can hardly overcome the shortages of the business environment and need to be very flexible. The universal problem is the deficiency of qualified labour force – construction millwrights, electricians, construction workers, etc. For simpler jobs, it is hard to find workers that would be content with the salary on a long-term basis, which the respondents understand, believing that many salaries cannot cover the living expenses. The situation is further complicated by the fact that an increasing number of qualified workers are leaving to work abroad, and the existing unemployed human resources cannot be retrained to a sufficient extent. On the other hand, the educational system in vocational high schools is such that those who finish these schools need to have a few years of work experience in order to reach the satisfying level of efficiency and work quality. In addition, it is very difficult to find workers for seasonal jobs in the field of agriculture.

“[Here it is...] Well, quite the opposite Unlike with her [collocutor], who fight day after day, there is nothing I can do here... the system is well organised... In our company the top management makes decisions. Second: rules, standards, legal acts, they all need to be respected. And they are extremely precise. If you wanted to be a contractor for us, you need to abide by all the rules, precisely, just to be eligible to apply for the contractor.”

“You can't find masters in something, for instance a construction millwright. Masters in mechanics or electronics, this you can't find... electricians as well... craftsmen...”

“Now you can't [...] as it is the case in our industry, take someone who finished school yesterday and let him work in the production or do something, he needs at least 3-4 years of work experience. The education system is such that it doesn't provide practice, and then you need to train him for literally 4 more years.”

“Both here in Vojvodina and in Belgrade as far as I heard, to find workers at gas stations. And not just ours, it's the same for all other gas stations, including OMV and MOL, and others... They work for two or three months, even shorter, and they don't want to work anymore... The conditions are nothing special, the salary is about 35 thousand, but they don't want to work, they all ask for 55 thousand, 60. Essentially, they are realistic, just have a look at how big the costs of living are. [...]”

Migrant crisis

The respondents have an understanding for migrants and all the troubles that make them leave their homes. There is also a certain level of identification with them since many of our citizens are forced to emigrate by the hardship they face. They don't reject a possibility of having a number of migrants staying in Serbia for a longer period of time. Moreover, they mentioned the experiences with the citizens who came a long time ago to Subotica from the countries from which migrants come today, and now those people are reputable members of the community, which is believed to indicate that everyone deserves a chance. However, our respondents do not hide a certain feeling of injustice because Serbia, which has neither contributed to the causes of migration nor is the desired country of destination for the migrants, has to invest efforts in combating

migrant crisis, while other countries, that are EU Member States, feel to have the right to refuse the reception of migrants. The migrants are not perceived as problems, nor do they question whether help needs to be provided to them, but rather the small capacities of Serbia to tackle such a large-scale issue. On the other hand, they are distinctly aware of the fact that Serbia is losing labour force, which is a problem that currently has no solution.

“Yes, and they all [migrants] want to go to the Netherlands, Germany, France.”

“In my opinion, it wouldn't be a problem at all if they wanted to stay, well... there are many of them in Germany, and if there are many of us there, and many Turks there, what's wrong with having them here as well...”

“And we are always concerned about something, and we never give a chance to others to show their skills... well, this is our problem... Because when we see someone is a bit black... we immediately say – well here he is! Why? Let a man alone, let him do his job. Well we have our doctor, he came here, studied, now he works... the whole town respects him. He has his own polyclinic, an extraordinary man. And why now this man who came here, or a young man, why couldn't he do the same?”

“You see, my colleague has three daughters in three countries: Germany, Norway Sweden... they all have kids, nice... and d'you know when they will come back here? Never. Never! They will come for a visit for 10 or 5 days... When will they come back to Serbia? ... Never! And what shall we do... we will stay here without anyone...”

“Some of our providers of restaurant services have a problem. They don't have neither qualified labour force, not do they have enough of labour force to meet their needs... for instance, we know this facility opened at our flea market where there are many, many people passing by during the day and they all need to eat, but they had to close the facilities because they don't have workers.”

“[...] Or, among these migrants, who wish to stay – but they all want to leave. Or even, I would offer some of them, those with some diplomas, doctors, engineers and so... I would offer them to stay – but for at least 10 years. So, who adapts – adapts, and then let them go wherever they want. I mean no, something must be done – because one day this will happen: we will be out of labour force, the Romanians and the Bulgarians are already in the EU, they have all went up there, and who will work here? If our people continue leaving like this, our children, grandchildren, who will come to us? If even these from Pakistan don't want to stay here, even they are looking for something better, what will we do then? Then we will all be members of a gerontology club...”

Requirements for employing migrants

Although, in principle, they support the idea of employing migrants during their stay in Serbia, the respondents do not recognise the potentials within their companies for hiring migrants, or such opportunities are rather scarce and refer only to simple jobs. Therefore, opinions on hiring migrants are more general than related to some concrete examples and situations. They said that the first step should be to make a register of the qualifications the migrants had, which then would be compared to market demands. As jobs for which migrants could most probably be hired, they listed those jobs for which in Subotica (or generally in Serbia) there is not a sufficient number of qualified workers: construction millwrights, electricians, restaurant and food service workers, seasonal workers in the field of agriculture, construction workers, drivers. Moreover, they also believed that many migrants had arrived here with significant financial resources that

would be welcomed for investments in the local market. Generally, it is noticeable that the respondents have an impression that many things that could have been done so far, with regard to inclusion of migrants in the local economy, has not even been initiated. The respondents said that nobody had contacted them about the migrant crisis and they suggested that it would be most reasonable to address the Chamber of Commerce, as a mediator, because this institution is most familiar with the concrete companies that could meet the concrete proposals.

"They should be given a chance, whoever wishes... They know that it is difficult to go abroad, that they need to stay here for a year, two, five years, because it's hard to leave particularly since the borders were closed, and with the wires, dogs, and all sorts of things... Give it up... [...] 'Let's see who wants what, ask people, let's see what their professions are, I guess this data could be obtained from some of the countries, whichever... [...] The fact that we are always like, we, we and we... well you see, that's a different story..."

"[...] Of course, it would be a small number of them, but then again, we have taken care of someone, and on the other hand, we have helped someone do the business right. And there are probably among those people some who are qualified for something. We have seen in the media that there are children talented for something – so, it was noticed by someone, if they have been here for a few months, they haven't been just sitting in one place, without going anywhere, they've been communicating with someone. If the kids have shown their abilities, well the adults have probably had a chance to show theirs. These are not uneducated people who came from there. It's more likely that the educated ones left in greater numbers."

"So that people have something to do... because the more they wander around the town, the more bored they are... then various things might happen and some incidents might occur, and then this is raised to... well, if you like, it happens here every day as well... as it was the case in Koviljača: I don't want them to be lying in the parks, I don't want this, I don't want that..."

"[...] If a person is a doctor, why couldn't he work in a primary healthcare centre, we will send him to a village, there is nobody there... And, give him a flat, a small salary, and if you'd like to move on – go, no one will stop you, but here you are, on temporary basis – work... He might even like it. Who knows."

"Local government has some other interests or possibilities, and this is different... the Chamber of Commerce does not have its own funds, but it knows who has the funds."

"Here, you take care of the migrants. I haven't heard that anyone has made an analysis and said, here, we have people with this and that profession, there are this many students, children of kindergarten age, school age, people with high school, I haven't heard this – ever! What's the structure of these people... they just say – 'they've arrived, they've arrived'."

Further development of migrant crisis

Our respondents in this focus group share the opinion that the global developments are such that it is not much likely that the existing migration flow will cease.

"I think there will be more and more of it... It's the Middle East, this will spread further... this Syria will finish, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan started, and this will all spread to the others, you'll see... [...]"

"It can hardly end: so that everyone finds his place in his own community and that there is no need for such a massive emigration. There have always been some reasons for leaving somewhere – in larger and smaller numbers... [...]"

Research findings: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Background – situation in the Town of Subotica

Life in Subotica is described as peaceful and filled with the spirit of tolerance. The life style of the citizens of Subotica is considered to be similar with the European one. Subotica has good geographic position: proximity of the border with the European Union on one side, and of the high way, on the other side, make Subotica a suitable place for economic investments. A good example of investment is the industrial zone that employs several thousand people. The town is considered to be in much better situation than many other towns in Serbia, but the representatives of local government admit that many citizens are not satisfied with small income and low standards of living. This is, however, not deemed to be an issue of local nature. The discussion has confirmed the information that many citizens of Subotica opt for working abroad, primarily in Austria and Germany. It is stated that those people are mostly the members of certain national minorities in Subotica, and that is what enables them to get a citizenship of their motherland – in most cases, it is Hungary or Croatia. Consequently, there is a shortage of human resources – medical staff, caretakers, maintenance workers, lawyers, maths teachers, physics teachers, teachers in the field of sciences in general, and German language teachers.

“It’s more European... During the working days, it is quiet, at weekends people go out... [...] there are events for the youth; life is good in Subotica. [...]”

“As for what Steva started talking about, the coexistence, there are not many problems in this regard. Even last night we had a very nice public discussion, which we have had for years now, the Children of Abraham: from the aspects of four confessions in Subotica, an inter-religious dialogue. It is an ordinary event, we have had this several times this year. And when we are visited by a high official, we say a priest, high representative of a religious community, then we are all here.”

“Rarely anyone can manage without an extra job.”

“It is a specific situation here because we have people with Hungarian and Croatian passports and they leave based on this. It is easier for them to leave, and this is why it is a bit... But they come to us as well, for instance, I have employees, for example the teacher of German language is from the south, a maths teacher who now wants to come here to work is from Kragujevac; this is now an internal migration.”

Migrant crisis

Requirements related to migrant crisis that Subotica needs to meet are not the same today as they used to be two years ago. In the beginning, the blow of the migration wave was so strong that it required a high level of engagement. Despite this, the response of the town was, according to the respondents, fully appropriate. This was largely enabled by a long lasting and smooth cooperation between all relevant stakeholders at the local level, but also by the support provided through the cooperation with competent ministries and numerous non-governmental organisations. In addition, it

could be observed that the respondents have an impression that the importance of local efforts invested in tackling migration crisis is unfairly diminished. They believe that external stakeholders are not fully aware of what the local community in which migrants reside is actually facing. By observing a wider picture, the respondents concluded that the European Union gave itself the right to treat Serbia unfairly – expectation from Serbia are larger than the assistance provided to it. Anyway, today, when the number of migrants in Subotica is much lower, the Town can handle the migrant crisis without any major problems.

“And through the Migration Council and the Working Group, everyone participated – from the institutions and social welfare and healthcare institutions, public utility companies... So that in the first months we were managing it all very well. We really enjoyed the support of the Ministry as well, and they came here.”

“As a town, we had a very good cooperation during the migration crisis with the Divac Foundation, with the ‘Atina’ association, so that we are open for cooperation with the non-governmental sector.”

“[...] When migrants arrived here, the town’s policy was to support human rights, we opened a reception centre and the conditions in it were adapted to the life of migrants, and everything went fine Because it is important for a person who comes, leaving the life she had in her home country, to have a freedom of movement, to have a possibility to rest and not to be discriminated, not to be excluded from the whole system... [...] ...that there is an inter-ministerial cooperation that functions on the move. So, when we detect a problem, we can practically talk on the phone about the direction in which to act and which of the sectors should be involved in problem solving.”

“[...] ...There was a round table organised for the representatives of local governments, and then I said as a joke: And there you are, in the third panel there were representatives of local governments and the room was empty... [...]: and I said: Nobody’s here! Who would listen to us, and we are the most important.”

“You probably know that we have a reception centre, it is nearby the town, with the capacities for 50 migrants, and I get a report on weekly basis, but there are about 50-60 of them there now, and there used to be 500 of them. You understand what I’m talking about. And the capacities are for this number. [...] ...It was the biggest wave. This was when we struggled most... Now, the situation is much calmer.”

“And to be clear: here they want to introduce this story, integration of migrants at the highest possible level, because integration into schools is something absolutely difficult to accomplish, it requires 4, 5 to 10 years of preparations, good, systematic preparations... [...]”

Consequences

Mostly **positive** consequences of the influx of migrants were mentioned, primarily numerous donations that were beneficial not just for the migrants, but for the citizens of Subotica as well. During the whole migration crisis period, the feeling of safety remained undisturbed with both the citizens and the migrants.

“Donors really invested in the Social Work Centre and in the primary healthcare centre and in the ‘Kolevka’... either in the form of equipment, or even in the form of adaptation of facilities or construction of new facilities, so that... This means a lot to the institutions. And vehicles, and alike...”

"We can say that neither the safety of migrant nor of local population was jeopardised. There's no discussion on this, regardless of two or three incidents, we can't say that safety was jeopardised because of these two or three incidents."

About **negative** consequences, only sporadic incidents were mentioned, happening two or three years ago, during the intensive influx of migrants. As regards the recent period of time, they emphasised an unfavourable position of teachers included in the education of migrant children. Namely, they believe that there was no appropriate training for this kind of work, which is carried out mostly owing to the good will and previous experience in work with refugee and internally displaced children. Teachers do not receive any additional remuneration for this work.

"There were some individual incidents, but it wasn't a large number as compared to the number of inhabitants... In percentages, the number is small with regard to the number of inhabitants, with regard to Šid, or... Those municipalities and towns, they had more migrants in these places than inhabitants."

"They [teachers working with migrant children] don't know what's expected from them. They are still going to the camp, doing something, having no idea what to DO... They go there, amuse the kids, do some things that make sense or some that don't make sense, they are not trained for this. If he's a professional, he can easily refuse it and say: 'I don't want to do this there'."

"It's not easy for us to find teachers who would go there... [M: Who finances this?] Well this is how it goes: travelling to the camp and backwards, because our residents go there, this is included in their 40-hour working week, and it's more like volunteering. There's no remuneration for this, nothing."

Information about migrants' issues

Our respondents acknowledged that citizens were not sufficiently informed about the presence of migrants in their town, which might have contributed to some negative attitudes towards the migrant population. It is recognised that the citizens could draw conclusions on the migrant issues only based on what they had a chance to see and experience personally. In such a context, media coverage of the migrant crisis made a huge contribution to the creation of attitudes.

"But I think that it wasn't well represented to the citizens. If we went to the reception centre even now, I's sure we'd find migrants who have been there for as long as six months. Who literally live there. And the citizens are not aware of it! The citizens probably think that they are somewhere over there, passing by." But in those months, speaking about the year of 2016, both migrant women and men were passing by, they were well-off, they were downtown, sat in cafes, bought clothes and shoes at shops, I mean... There were no problems, no attacks..."

Proposals for local policies in the context of the influx of migrants

Considering the circumstances in which relevant local policies would be defined, the representatives of the institutions and local government emphasised the following:

- Migrants do not wish to stay in Serbia.
- There is a Local Action Plan for refugees and internally displaced persons and measures envisaged by this LAP are also relevant for working with migrants.

- It is important to ensure that there is no affirmative discrimination of migrants.
- Local stakeholders need a concrete support for the work with migrants.

The fact that migrants do not wish to stay in Serbia hampers any further considerations of any long-term local plans. Unlike in Germany, as mentioned, where migrants wish to settle and where the focus is on sustainable housing and employment of migrants, in Serbia the focus is on transit centres and partially on the education of migrant children. However, it is emphasised that satisfying results cannot be reached in the field of education neither, because migrant children cannot speak Serbian; they pick up some through everyday social interactions, but they are not interested in learning it formally and systematically (through lessons, etc.). In addition, it is reportedly impossible to establish a continuity in teaching because, while staying in Serbia, families are being moved from centre to centre.

“And so, what is solved are the issues that exist as problems. We don't have a problem, as far as I know, that 20 families wish to stay, and that we don't have a solution for them. So, we are creating solutions for the problems that have occurred. There's no interest, and we have mentioned this for several times: they don't want to stay here! And how can we make plans for their stay when they simply wish to pass by... They don't want to learn, for instance, Serbian, they don't want to learn about anything local, we can't fulfil the part related to education, we are working on the social part more, on the development of some of their skills. And now, what's going on here: learn English, learn German. This is the only thing they require when we go there.”

“There is rarely the same child attending, there's no continuity. The basic thing in the education is to do things in a systematic manner, continuously and have it all well planned. And we can't have these segments.”

“[...] ...I'm sure a part of them will stay, some remain here even now... after all, this is why we started with the education, in our reception centre... [...] ...but it's a bit harder here, because those people at this centre are all on the list for crossing over, today they are here, and tomorrow they might be over there, maybe in another centre... [...]”

At the same time, it is believed that all the measures envisaged by the Local Action Plan for refugees and internally displaced persons are sufficiently applicable on the migrant issues as well. Namely, the position of internally displaced Roma, just as that of the returnees under the readmission agreements, is believed to be significantly similar to the position of migrants, for whom the same or similar solutions could be applied.

“There is an LAP for refugees and IDPs, and persons under the readmission, we adopted it last year, in the end of the year actually, for the period 2017-2021. We had had an LAP before this one as well. So, we have this, such document...”

“Through a regional housing programme, we are now building 30 houses, wright, 91-95. [...]”

“We have just been talking about, for example, persons under the readmission. We are going to face the same or similar problems. Somewhere it will be the integration of Roma population, such as: we don't have any documents, we can't speak the language... we will face the same or similar problems: some pedagogical assistants, or... the state will need to initiate something, so that it gets rolling and functioning. At least at school.”

If efforts are invested in further integration of migrants, it should be ensured that migrants are not privileged in anything since it would probably cause a strong disapproval of local citizens. It is believed that this is more relevant for Serbia, which faces high unemployment and low standards of living, than for developed Germany. Furthermore, this indicates that some good practices may not be applicable everywhere – what proved to be a good solution in a developed country may not necessarily be a workable solution in a poor country in transition.

Nevertheless, in the existing circumstances, a greater support would be welcomed, particularly in the education of migrant children. It is not just a material support that is needed, but also consultations for teachers, their training, supply of books, and sharing examples of good practice.

“As for us, we always need a material support. [...] ...some extra training is necessary for people [teachers], some additional support, talks, seminars are necessary. We need perhaps some more books. We need to learn about a good practice in some other countries that... For now, we get this from the School Management and donors. We had some donors from Switzerland and they are trying to help in this way or another... various NGOs come, offer some kind of help. Now, we need assistance in obtaining teaching resources, supporting equipment most, because you can't go there and talk to children if you don't have some didactic, I mean...”

“I'm still under the impression of those trips – what they told us, what is important for German population is that, for instance, not a single German citizen was deprived of a job because of the arrival of migrant population, which is important to some extent... They need new people, new labour force. This could be a good example, where necessary, where there is work for everyone. Here, the situation is different...”

“[...] We had a situation when it was announced, there was only an announcement, that six little houses would be built for the accommodation of mothers with children, migrants – it caused a general chaos in the town... with the media, so in the media, on social networks, some protests were announced and alike... The idea was given up and it won't be implemented, not for these reasons, but due to some other circumstances: the investor withdrew, right? This was suitable for these people who objected it, a small group of people, if this had happened, they would've been very loud... regardless of the fact that some of us wouldn't mind.”

“But from the point of view of people like me, for instance, indigenous people, why should he have better conditions? He will get a flat, for example, these were the stories told in the open market: ‘Now what, he will get a job immediately and I am looking for a job, he will get a flat and I don't have a flat, and he just came here...’ We had this situation with refugees.”

Finally, there is a general consent among the respondents that, in the society in general, there is no awareness that the citizens should and can participate in the creation of local policies. They show apathy about this issue. And they are certainly more prone to criticism than to the constructive problem-solving approaches. Apathy is particularly present with the youth, as well as ignorance about the way the system is functioning. The explanation for this is found in the multi-decade one-party system during the socialism period, in large historical changes in the past decades, and in consequent lack of the tradition of civic activism. Aware of the abovementioned circumstances, representatives of the local government are willing to work towards

building up the necessary capacities within the local government itself. They believe that the activities (workshops, training courses) aimed at sharing the experiences of the others – that would facilitate active inclusion of citizens in the creation of policies – are more than welcome.

“[...] ...and when there is a public discussion on making some decisions, I think that few people have a wish to participate in the creation of a local policy. [...] ...how to say, is it about the mentality, do they let some things just pass by, happening... habits, mentality...”

“There is an apathy prevailing in the whole community, which means, we all mind our own business.”

“It’s in our nature just to criticize without offering a concrete solution to a certain problem.”

“[...] ...I don’t think we have all been appropriately educated. And we don’t know how the system functions, I think this is also partially the reason. Seven out of ten of my friends don’t know how the system works, local governments, NGOs.”

“[...] When we need to organise parents, we have a club of parents and teachers, and when we need to allure them to come... [...] But! ... They think they don’t have time for this, you should do your job, that’s the answer we often get: ‘You should do your job and I’ll do mine’. [...]”

“We had a one-party system for a long time, and in 1950s people learned that this was how it worked. [...] To make a change, I know, to make a change in a Roma community, it takes three generations, at least – so, my child and my grandchild. I’m talking about changes, structural changes. And you can’t expect some turbulent changes in this period of time, and then to start all over again.”

Further development of migrant crisis

Opinions on further development of migrant crisis range from a simple confession that it is out of the range of local actors to the belief that the number of migrants in Subotica will be reducing for as long as Hungary is surrounded by a razor-wire fence. The respondents agree that only large global powers can affect these processes.

“Now, it depends on many factors. On Turkey, where there is a large number of migrants – what’ll happen with these people... there are big global interests involved... Well now, what is going to happen... What remains for us to do, as a town, as individuals, is to wait, I don’t know, we can’t affect these things...”

“Let’s have a look at our town and this wire... [...] ...I think that in our town, concretely, the numbers will decrease and that we simply won’t be an interesting destination for them, not even for waiting, because as far as we know, families have an advantage with regard to crossing the border, so we’re not interesting for them... cos’ the number of them who cross over on daily basis is small, the process of crossing over lasts for a long time, and then again, there’s this wire on the border... I think that Subotica, concretely, won’t be their destination... and the way things will develop further, we’ll see, I don’t know...”

Concluding remarks

In the conclusions of our analysis we are going to consider seven particular topics that stood out during the talks and discussions on the issues of reception and stay of migrants in the territory of the Town of Subotica. In the beginning, it is very important to emphasise that the analysis we carried out did not include any verification of the information that the focus group participants provided, and the agreement among the focus group participants or provision of (approximately) the same information within different focus groups can be deemed as the only confirmation of the reliability and validity of some specific information. We should take into account the fact that human experiences and perceptions, opinions and attitudes, were the primary subject of our qualitative analysis, and not any quantitative data. Furthermore, the provided analysis indicates distinctive agreement among various categories of the respondents on some crucial issues. In this regard, it should be noted that some of the topics appear as equally important in interviews and discussions with different target groups, while others are pronounced only in focus group discussions with a particular target group of the survey (for example, representatives of local institutions).

Impact of migrant influx on the situation in local community

The influx of migrants in the territory of Subotica is not perceived as something that could bring major developmental changes, neither when looking back, nor with regard to current circumstances and possible developments. The same goes for both the citizens and the representatives of the local government and local business sector. The prevailing opinion is that the influx of migrants, but also local involvement in the activities related to reception and protection of migrants, have not brought any significant changes for the local population. The citizens only sporadically mention some of the positive consequences. With regard to economic effects, only those from the period of the most intensive influx of migrants and refugees are mentioned; just as in other places, significant revenues of taxi drivers and some retail shops and restaurants are particularly emphasised. It is interesting, however, that citizens also speak quite openly about a significant number of people who were involved in smuggling of migrants and that many of them have made significant profits in this manner. The representatives of the local government present much more positive effects related to activities with migrants whereas the citizens more often than the representatives of the authorities mention various negative consequences. Nevertheless, there is a wide consent that the number of incidents and serious negative consequences were negligibly small with regard to the intensity of the transit and the number of migrants that passed across the territory of Subotica.

Among the positive consequences, the most frequently mentioned are (1) the projects aimed at the construction, renovation and equipping of various public institutions and infrastructural facilities (most frequently related to 'Kolevka' and the primary healthcare centre), and also (2) short-term project employment related to reception and protection of migrants; and then also (3) increase of income in

some sectors of the local economy (in the period of intensive migration flows) and (4) rare examples of development of new cultural contents (for migrants and for the local population).

Migration challenges related to the departure of a significant number of local inhabitants, mostly for the purpose of working abroad, have been documented in Subotica as well, being the subject of a large number of spontaneous discussions among the participants in the focus groups. The reasons are well-known, and here the consequences are perceived to be related to the departure of many young people and the increasing lack of qualified workers and some highly educated experts (including medical specialists in smaller places).

Interaction of migrants with the local population

Even though a very large number of migrants and refugees passed through Subotica, it seems that personal contacts have been relatively rare, and those described in focus group discussions with the citizens have mostly been quite superficial. However, as a rule, our respondents did not show any negative attitudes and they mostly expressed empathy towards migrants (as people who have left their homes). When the possibilities of a permanent integration of migrants were discussed, the prevailing attitude was that such a process would bring more risks than gains. There are no particularly clear and specific reasons for such an assumption and rather general opinions were expressed on big cultural differences and the lack of 'their' will to adapt to the local culture and customs. Still, the different attitudes were also expressed, and some examples of reputable citizens whose origin was from the same territories as the migrants and refugees today were also mentioned. Anyway, the attitude that was strongly expressed was that a provision of any kind of privileges or positive discrimination of migrants would cause strong negative reactions of the local population and that all such measures should be avoided. This is a part of a wider narrative on a poor economic situation and a large number of local inhabitants who live in difficult circumstances and do not receive any kind of support.

Migrant women who we spoke to at the Subotica Transit Centre mostly spoke positively about people in Serbia (including about the police and the Centre management). Though they rarely spoke with the local population, and mostly in the circumstances that made such conversations unavoidable, they have shown a wish for a higher level of inclusion in the local community and establishment of ordinary contacts with the local people. Admittedly, as it was the case in other places, we noted that they consider Serbia a country in which they are staying temporarily and where they have no intention to stay.

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools

In Subotica, in the school year 2017/2018, no migrant children were included in local schools. Instead, a school programme for the school-age children from migrant families was organised at the Transit Centre, and the staff of four Subotica primary

schools participated in this. Our survey, however, included only one representative of the local schools (a principal of one of the primary schools). Taking this into account, and based on the provided information, it could be concluded that the education process at the Transit Centre was not appropriately supported and that the teachers trying to conduct the educational activities frequently find themselves in an unenviable situation, without a possibility to really achieve the educational goals. The inclusion of migrant children in local schools is considered to be a demanding process, requiring time and serious investments in the development of school resources and teaching capacities, while the current expectations and related plans were assessed as quite unrealistic.

Migrants staying outside official centres

One site in Subotica – an Old Brickyard (*Stara Ciglaná*) and the adjacent area – had been, even before 2015, well known as a place for gathering of migrants who tried to cross the border with Hungary irregularly and continue their journey towards the Western Europe. However, the issue of migrants staying outside the official centre is not brought up at all in the discussions with the citizens and representatives of local authorities. The Hungarian policy of physical protection of borders (and many other restrictive measures aimed at deterring irregular migrants and asylum seekers) are probably the main reason for which migrants nowadays, excluding those staying at the transit centre, quite rarely show up in Subotica and stay mostly unnoticed. Therefore, observations on negative consequences of migrants' influx and the proposals for the improvement of the migrant-related situation in the territory of Subotica do not relate to irregular migrants at all. This issue is simply not on the agenda. Even if there were some problems before – like those that are still present in Šid and Sombor – they seem to be totally forgotten.

Providing information on issues related to the arrival and presence of migrants

The citizens of Subotica say that local institutions have never taken any particular measures to provide the citizens with the information about migrants' reception and stay in the territory of the town. This is acknowledged also by the representatives of the local government and they believe that the citizens could learn about the local migration situation only through their own perceptions, and that such a situation might have contributed to some negative attitudes. In the period of an intensive influx of migrants, this was an attractive topic for the media, and a lot of information could be found in the media as well. On the contrary, media coverage on migrants in general today is less frequent, while it is difficult to find any information about the migrants staying in Subotica. Thus, currently, the information about migrants in Subotica can only be found through informal communication channels, but in discussions with the citizens it is noticed also that no need for any additional measures in that regard currently exists. The citizens of Subotica and Ada clearly indicate that this is not really an issue they would like to learn more about, and that

they would probably have a need to get more information — and to get to know migrants better — only if a larger number of migrants start staying in the territory of their local communities for longer periods of time.

Possibilities for employing migrants

Representatives of the local business sector do not recognise any current employment possibilities for migrants, neither in their own enterprises, nor in the local labour market in general. No activities aimed at migrant employment have been taken, and this topic was not given an importance neither in the discussions with representatives of the local government, nor with the migrant women staying at the Transit Centre. The key reason for this might be the fact that for the migrants at the Subotica Centre this place is just the last stop before entering the so-called transit zones on the other side of the Serbia-Hungary border. In this regard, the temporary nature of their stay in Subotica is additionally emphasised, and considerations of any integration activities are only general and hypothetical.

However, the lack of qualified labour force was clearly indicated in Subotica as well, in several different fields, and the representatives of the business sector that participated in the survey were open for considering a possibility of employing migrants in general. In this regard, they expressed an opinion that among migrants there must be people with various skills and qualifications, and that some kind of identification of their capacities and aspirations should be initiated (through a survey, for instance). Moreover, they proposed that the best way for establishing cooperation with the business sector would be through the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, which could be a good mediator and source of information about the needs of specific economic sectors and some concrete economic entities.

Further development of local policies and practices in working with migrants

Although in Subotica there is a prevailing opinion that it is difficult to envision further development of the situation with some certainty, there is, however, a strong belief that this area will not attract migrants too much for as long as the Hungarian policy deters migrants from the attempts to enter Hungary, particularly by ensuring a strong protection of the state border with Serbia. Furthermore, the very existence of a relatively small transit centre is not a heavy burden for the local government and relevant institutions, and the presence of migrants accommodated in this centre has almost no effects on the local community. On the other hand, the representatives of the local government are convinced that the Town of Subotica proved that even in the period of intensive migration flows it could give an efficient and effective response to such a (crisis) situation. When it happened, all involved local stakeholders proved competent and well-coordinated.

In the current situation of significantly smaller challenges, which could objectively be assessed as stable, the need for introducing any changes, or any new activities and

plans, is not recognised. In this regard, the representatives of the local government believe that the Local Action Plan adopted at the end of 2017 is fully sufficient and the measures and activities envisaged there (those aimed at refugees, displaced persons and returnees under the readmission agreements) easily can be adapted to the needs of migrants, if a certain number of migrants decide to stay in Subotica.

**Migration challenges, local policies
and civic participation**

**General conclusions
and framework
recommendations**

Impact of migrant influx on the situation in local community

Local communities are aware of the positive changes related to the influx and stay of migrants and refugees who arrive to Serbia via the Western Balkan route. This awareness and knowledge on various positive effects are regularly present among both the citizens and representatives of local authorities and relevant institutions, though in some communities, much more among the representatives of institutions. It is also the fact that in all communities some negative effects are regularly noticed, but they are, however, frequently associated only with the presence of migrants staying outside official centres for accommodation of migrants, and they are never prevailing. Positive effects of the presence of migrants and refugees can generally be divided in four categories, among which the donors' investments into the development of public services and various infrastructural facilities are always emphasised and perceived in very positive manner.

Neither the influx of migrants nor any issues related to migrants' stay are recognised as priority issues by a local community. Equally, despite the clear recognition of the existing positive effects, the influx of migrants and various activities instigated or fostered by it are not seen as a real opportunity for solving some of the essential local problems or initiating some significant developmental changes. Accordingly, it is noticeable that this migration phenomenon has not found its place in the local development strategies of the municipalities or towns that have revised or drawn up these umbrella strategic plans recently.

It is also very important to note that local stakeholders do not recognise the exposure to migration flows on the Western Balkan route as the most important local migration challenge. Quite the opposite, it is obvious that in all the communities, emigration of local population (which is usually deemed as growing and driven by economic reasons) is emphasised as the most important and a much more serious migration challenge. Namely, while some concrete activities are taken with regard to influx and stay of migrants, supported by various external stakeholders (including relevant state authorities, international donors and civil society organisations), the emigration is deemed as a long-lasting process that already now produces some negative effects, but there is no information about any concrete measures taken in this regard.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) The positive changes caused by the influx of migrants and protection activities organised in local communities should be further encouraged, and efforts should be invested in disseminating them and making them sustainable. Further support to local activities related to reception of migrants should be used as much as possible for the development of local resources and capacities and for achieving relevant goals envisaged in the local strategic and action plans.
- (B) It is necessary to support wider consideration of all most important migration challenges faced by concrete local communities and to encourage development of operational measures and activities that will contribute to overcoming these

migration challenges in a manner that brings greatest possible benefits to both various categories of migrants and local communities as well.

Interaction of migrants with the local population

In all the communities in which migrants are staying for a longer period of time there are some forms of their informal inclusion into the social life and there are various examples of positive interactions between migrants and the local population. The language barrier is one of the reasons for which some deeper and more permanent interactions (establishment of friendships or alike) are quite rare, but some more intensive relations between migrants and the local population do also occur. On the other hand, besides these spontaneous interactions, various organised activities (workshops, courses and alike) bring about positive interactions between the members of the two communities on regular basis, as well as other positive effects which are mutually beneficial (for example, creation of new cultural contents or opportunities for acquiring new knowledge).

Migrants welcome all the opportunities to interact with the local population, and this could be understood as a part of their desire to make the time spent in Serbia purposeful and to organise their life in the centres in the manner that it looks like a normal every-day life as much as possible, which includes their appropriate participation in the social life of the community where they are staying.

Migrants mostly do not express a desire to stay in Serbia, not even in cases when they are staying here for over a year. This attitude is widely recognised by the local citizens and representatives of local institutions and may be summarized by the words '*None of them wishes to stay here*'. In the discussions about a new hypothetical situation in which a certain number of migrants would opt for staying in Serbia, the citizens' opinions about a more permanent integration of migrants were usually coloured by a perception of big cultural differences between 'us' and migrants. In this sense, they also express concerns that migrants are not willing to adapt to local customs and that they might incline to impose their cultural patterns. However, the hypothetical future integration is usually not rejected as absolutely impossible (or undesirable) and they assess that a more permanent inclusion of migrants into local communities could be acceptable but only if it included just a limited number of migrants staying, their adaptation to local culture and that they do not impose different customs and values.

In general, it could be said that there are mixed feelings and attitudes among the local communities. On the one hand, there are concrete testimonies of positive social interactions with migrants and, on the other hand, there are concerns and doubts that there is a risk that a long-term inclusion of migrants into local communities could, in a way, jeopardise the local population.

Framework recommendation:

Investing continuous efforts in organising various activities and events offering opportunities for positive social interactions between migrants and the local population is necessary and brings multiple benefits. Such activities provide migrants

with opportunities to get to know the local culture and society better. In addition, it greatly eliminates the risks of negative effects of a longer stay in reception camps and significantly contribute to their general mental and social wellbeing. On the other hand, the mere content of these activities offers diverse benefits for the local population as well. Furthermore, interactions with migrants provide yet another very important thing: an opportunity to meet individual persons (that we call migrants) and acquaint with various aspects of cultures from which these people come, which then could have a significant impact on eliminating all kinds of prejudice, stereotypes and negative expectations, and thus create more favourable conditions for both interaction in the current situation and a perspective of a long-term co-existence.

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools

Inclusion of migrant children in local primary schools is mostly assessed as a positive process that brought significant benefits to the local children as well, particularly in the form of opportunities to make new acquaintances and friends with children from quite different cultures. It is noticed that positive outcomes of the inclusion, including the positive experiences and testimonies of local children, have frequently caused the parents of these local children to change their attitudes in cases where there was resistance to the inclusion at the beginning. In addition, this process was usually accompanied by projects that enabled local schools to renovate and improve the facilities of the schools concerned and provided them with various other material resources important for organising school activities, which consequently brought benefits primarily to the local communities in question.

Teachers at schools that migrant children attended typically assess that the process of the migrant schoolchildren's socialisation was successful. Further to that, it is usually claimed that no significant problems occurred in the school communities and that migrant children were fully accepted.

On the other hand, teachers are much more critical with regard to the inclusion of these children in the very process of education. The usual opinion is that the real methodical instructions for working with the migrant children are simply missing whereas various external actors (including the ministry in charge of education) significantly neglect the challenges in teaching children who cannot speak (or can barely speak) the Serbian language, and whose prior formal education was often significantly hampered. The fact that there is still a significant fluctuation of migrant children and that some of them leave school after a couple of weeks or months is also noted. However, with regard to children who regularly attend school during the whole school year, it is impossible, in current circumstances, to enable a full inclusion of these children into the education process and their achievement of the envisaged educational goals.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) Inclusion of new schools in the migrant children inclusion process should be based, among other things, on previously conducted authentic process of consultations with the school staff and families of local pupils. Namely, it is only reasonable to

expect that in local communities there might be a certain level of resistance to the migrant children inclusion into local schools — based on negative prejudices, lack of information and fear of the unknown — and the right way to overcome and eliminate these is a timely and carefully organised open and honest consultation process.

- (B) Inclusion of migrant children in the formal education in the manner that would truly enable these children to acquire new competences presents significant challenge to which the school system has not yet provided genuine responses. Further progress requires some essential improvements which, among other things, should include the development of detailed methodical guidelines for working with children who cannot speak the Serbian language, further training of teachers, and introducing effective lessons of Serbian as a foreign language.
- (C) Inclusion of migrant children in local schools is a process that needs to be further improved in order to overcome the obvious shortcomings and challenges to which there are currently no solutions. Therefore, it is important to ensure an independent and continuous monitoring and evaluation of this process and introduce all future improvements on the basis of an objective analysis of comprehensively collected data. The monitoring and evaluation activities should definitely include both social and educational aspects of the migrant children's inclusion in formal education in the Republic of Serbia.

Migrants staying outside official centres

The presence of migrants staying outside official centres and the related negative incidents frequently cause strong negative reactions and a major discontent of the citizens. This is only partially based on negative prejudices, stereotypes and rumours, but rather, the citizens' discontent is frequently based on legitimate reasons, e.g. the material damage inflicted to the citizens. It could be proved or reasonably doubted that these damages were inflicted by groups of migrants staying outside official centres, usually in border areas, and related to the attempts of irregular crossing of a particular state border. In any case, undoubtedly, a significant number of citizens in the concerned local communities perceive these incidents as an important and unsolved problem, and they regularly assess that competent institutions do not take all the measures necessary to solve this issue.

A particular issue raised is the issue of reimbursement of damages for the material damage incurred to the private property of citizens. Based on the collected data, it may be concluded that there is no effective mechanism in place for the reimbursement of damages, and that competent local governments can only register and assess the damage incurred, based on the previous police on-site investigation.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) The presence of migrant groups staying outside official centres, and usually in some kind of an informal and self-organised accommodation, is relatively often related to some forms of disturbing the public order and peace or damaging citizens'

property. In this regard, it is necessary to develop a set of measures that would ensure the prevention of the abovementioned negative incidents (offences and crimes), within the positive legal regulations and relevant human rights protection standards.

- (B) Access to effective mechanisms for claiming damages should be ensured for the citizens who suffered a significant material damage due to the offences by which their private property was harmed or destroyed. As there is no such mechanism in cases when perpetrators of the offences are irregular migrants, relevant decision-makers should, as soon as possible, try to reach an agreement on the establishment of a new specific mechanism that could, among other things, include establishment of a special fund for the payment of damages and/or an appropriate contract with insurance companies.

Providing information on issues related to the influx and presence of migrants

In the local communities in which the reception of migrants has been organised, there is a widely spread impression that citizens lack information on the events and activities related to migrants and their stay in the territory of a town or municipality. Citizens often assess that they are not informed enough, particularly on issues of practical importance, and that they do not know who to ask for the information they are interested in. It is believed that the institutions take some measures aimed at informing the citizens usually only after a problem occurs or in the last minute, and anyway – not in due time.

Mostly critical comments and assessments may be heard about the manner in which the media covered the issue of migration crisis. Moreover, there is a common opinion that the media today, when this issue is no longer central and attractive for the media, rarely cover migrants-related issues, or do not cover them at all, particularly not those related to particular local communities in Serbia.

Representatives of local governments and relevant local institutions, on the one hand, agree with the citizens' views, but they also speak about the events that local authorities organised for the purpose of informing the citizens in general, or some specific target groups (teachers and pupils of local schools, for instance). Perhaps due to their short-term nature and to a small number of them, these events obviously did not have a wider impact on the citizens. In addition, and related to this, representatives of local authorities and institutions assess that they themselves often lack information which they expect to get from competent state institutions.

In general, it may be concluded that provision of information to citizens is deemed important and that even when there are some positive examples, both institutions and the citizens themselves assess that the situation could be significantly improved in this regard.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) Through the cooperation of relevant institutional stakeholders at the local and national levels, it is necessary to establish local official sources of information that would be easily accessible for the citizens and ensure timely provision of complete and objective information on all the issues related to migrants' stay in the local communities concerned. It is vital that these official sources contain quality information on both positive and negative aspects of the local migration situation. In other words, citizens should be fully informed on all positive changes and types of support that local institutions get owing to the cooperation related to the reception of migrants, but also on the problems and negative effects and all the measures taken to overcome the problems.
- (B) Cooperation with the local media might prove very useful in this regard, and professional coverage of the migrant issues by the local media may have significant positive effects, including the reduction of various negative stereotypes and prejudices, and promotion of tolerance and solidarity.

Possibilities for employing migrants

In majority of cases, local business people show certain reservations with regard to the possibilities for employing migrants, although this topic is accepted as legitimate in the discussions. In all local communities in which the survey was conducted, it was emphasised that it was difficult to find workers at the local labour market, especially certain profiles of qualified workers and experts. However, employment of migrants is usually not seen as a solution to this problem for three particularly underlined reasons. First, it is considered that qualifications and professional experience of people from the migrant population are unknown, and it is often doubted that migrants could possess appropriate qualifications. The second reason is the language barrier: the fact that migrants usually cannot speak Serbian is assessed as an obstacle for the engagement of migrants for numerous jobs. Third but not less important reason, is the conviction that migrants do not want to stay in Serbia and that they are not motivated to seek employment or have a job here. It may further be noted that business people very rarely take into account the obstacles related to the legal status of migrants, or limitations related to employment of foreigners in general, particularly of those migrants not granted any legal status.

On the other hand, migrants staying in official centres usually react positively to possible employment proposals, and they recognise their potential employment primarily as an opportunity to purposefully use the time they spend in Serbia and to be more involved in daily life of the local communities concerned.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) With regard to the possibility of employing migrants, it is necessary to raise awareness of relevant representatives of the local economy and other local stakeholders and to expand their knowledge on the legal requirements for the employment of foreigners in general, particularly of persons granted some form of

international protection, asylum seekers and persons granted temporary residence for humanitarian reasons.

- (B) For the purpose of improving mental and social wellbeing of migrants staying in official centres, it is necessary to work towards development of legally possible modalities of inclusion of these people in purposeful work activities that do not need to include establishment of formal employment relations necessarily, but that would be organised in such a manner as to bring benefits to both migrants and the local communities concerned. It is essential to align these activities with relevant standards and good practices established in other European countries, and with relevant regulations of the Republic of Serbia.
- (C) For the purpose of planning the potential inclusion of migrants in some work activities, it might be necessary and extremely useful to establish procedures for a continuous collection of data on education, qualifications and professional experience of all the people staying in official (asylum and reception/transit) centres. To begin with, it should be determined which relevant activities have already been carried out or initiated and what is yet to be done to find a purposeful, sustainable and systemic solution.

Further development of local policies and practices in working with migrants

Local governments and relevant local institutions and organisations in all communities that have faced the challenges of migration flows along the Western Balkan route have taken various important activities aimed at tackling these challenges, from providing urgent humanitarian assistance to the inclusion of migrant children in local schools. These local stakeholders had a role of key partners to state institutions and relevant international organisations and civil society organisations, and they have obtained a practical experience of participating in various projects that usually were a part of a wider response to the migration challenges that greatly surpass the local level. From an insider's perspective and by looking back, implemented local activities aimed at tackling these migration challenges are now usually seen as an opportunity that enabled local stakeholders to reaffirm their abilities to ensure coordinated and efficient actions of a larger number of various local institutions and other stakeholders.

On the other hand, in general, the above-mentioned migration challenges have not found their place in strategic and action plans that have been made and implemented in these communities for the past three years (2015-2018). In other words, recent migration challenges are not recognised as a factor that has a significant impact on the situation in local communities and that needs to be taken into account when considering strategic development plans in some areas or when defining activities that could facilitate the achievement of certain strategic goals. The only local documents that reflect the existence of new migration challenges are the local action plans that were developed previously with the support of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration and its international partners. Earlier versions of these plans referred only to refugees from the area of former SFRY and internally displaced people from Kosovo

and Metohija, while later they included challenges related to reintegration of returnees under the readmission agreements, and now they include also the challenges related to the influx of migrants and refugees through the Western Balkan route. With regard to the latter, it is visible that challenges are primarily recognised in the fields of promoting tolerance and building up local public resources and institutional capacities.

Moreover, based on the conducted discussions with local stakeholders, one could conclude that in local institutions there is a prevailing opinion that there are no reasons for creating additional policies or operational measures referring to new migrant target groups, or for providing support to migrants and refugees that arrive to Serbia through the Western Balkan route. Namely, it is believed that no measures are necessary because these migrants will not stay in Serbia and/or the existing measures and activities may easily be adjusted to new target groups if necessary.

The measures and activities that have been implemented for the purpose of ensuring migrants' reception and their access to some public services are generally implemented without any previous consultations with citizens, and in some cases, this was the cause of organised protests through which the citizens tried to impose a dialogue with the authorities and affect decision-making process. Essentially, these protests – regardless of how justified they were or based only on rumours and prejudices – were always also the consequence of the lack of previous consultations with citizens.

That is no exception. On the contrary, it reflects the general state of affairs related to the participation of citizens in decision-making and creation of public policies. Although the apathy, lack of trust, and constantly present burden of existential difficulties are widely recognised as some of the reasons, the citizens and the representatives of local governments do not perceive civic participation in making of the public policies in the same way. Namely, while the representatives of local authorities and institutions mostly believe that citizens choose not to participate in various forums and bodies (due to deeply rooted habits or for other reasons), the citizens, on the other hand, mostly claim that there are actually no mechanisms that would enable 'ordinary people' to participate and have a real impact on decision-making.

Framework recommendations:

- (A) It is necessary to consider the synchronisation of relevant local policies with the new challenges brought by the reception of migrants and their inclusion in local communities. Discussions on this issue should be based on the data and rational arguments, while their outcomes should lead towards a thoughtful integration of current migration challenges into local strategic policies and plans. Anyhow, the decisions should be genuinely local and based on the acknowledgement of the activities related to migrants' reception and inclusion—as opportunities for the community development and improvement of general living standards.
- (B) Developing the culture of dialogue and consultations with the citizens requires a responsible commitment in order to put ideas into real practice and ensure the mechanisms easily accessible to citizens – understandable and simple – enabling constructive participation and a true possibility of influencing the process of making and implementing strategic decisions and key public policies.

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