

# Survey report on the needs of vulnerable foreigners in local **integration**

## SURVEY REPORT ON THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE FOREIGNERS IN LOCAL INTEGRATION



NSHC - Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre  
Arse Teodorovića 3  
21000 Novi Sad  
Serbia

[www.nshc.org.rs](http://www.nshc.org.rs)

For NSHC:  
Danijela Korać-Mandić

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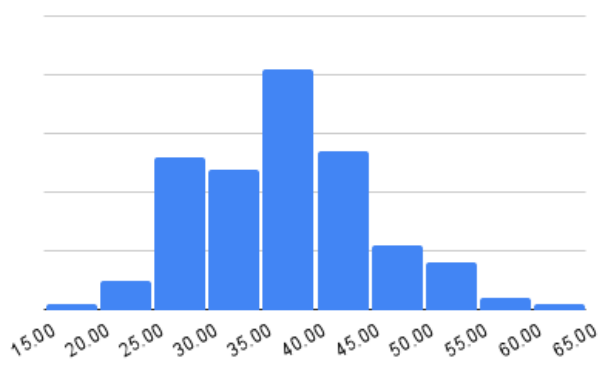
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## Introduction

Within the framework of the FOSTER<sup>1</sup> project, in April and May 2024 NSHC conducted an online survey among the Russian-speaking foreign nationals living in Novi Sad, Serbia since spring 2022. The aim of the survey was to find out more about foreigners' *experiences* in Serbia and their *integration* into the local community. The survey was anonymous and conducted in Russian language using the Google forms.

## I) Demographic data

The online survey was completed by 147 respondents of which 100 women, 46 men, and one participant did not answer. The average age of the participants was **36.8 years**; the youngest participant was 18, and the oldest 61.



1. Age of respondents

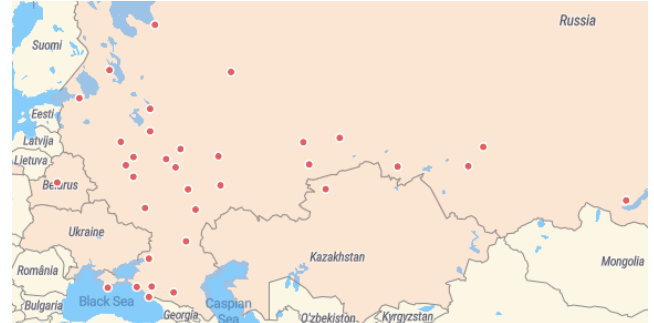
By nationality, 130 participants were Russian, two Belarusians, one Tatar, one German, while 13 did not answer. Before leaving their country, most of the respondents lived in Moscow (34%) and St. Petersburg (17%).

### Places of origin

Most of the respondents (52,4%) came to Serbia directly from Russia, while others lived in one (32,6%), two (12%), three or more other

<sup>1</sup> Inclusion of FOreigners in Western Balkans – accesS To social and Economic Rights

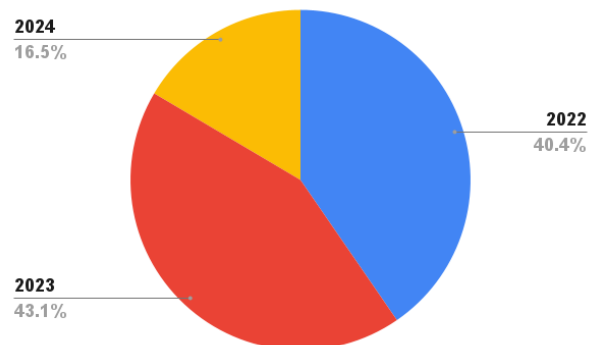
countries (3%) before deciding to come to Serbia. In most cases these countries were Turkey (25 lived there), Kazakhstan (14), Georgia (12), Armenia (8), and Montenegro (7).



2. Cities of origin

Most of the respondents were living in Novi Sad at the time of survey (90,5%), while the rest lived in Belgrade (4%) and in other places in Serbia (5,5%).

The survey participants moved to Serbia in the previous two years: 40.4% came in 2022, 43.1% came in 2023, while 16.5% of them moved to Serbia during 2024.



3. Year of arrival to Serbia

By education, **83% have university level education**, 11% secondary general education, and 6% secondary professional education. Among the respondents almost one third are IT professionals, while others are artists, photographers, researchers, medical doctors and other health workers, HR managers, teachers, translators, psychologists, financial

and marketing consultants, economists, public relations specialists, journalists, construction engineers, psychologists, entrepreneurs, managers, accountants, etc.

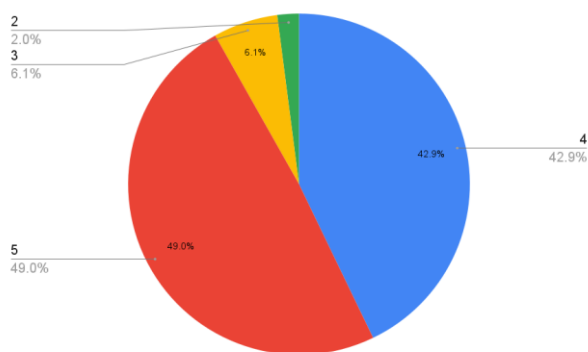
Regarding the current employment status, 36% are **employed abroad** (working for an entity registered in their home country or a country other than Serbia); 20,4% are employed in Serbia (working for an entity registered in Serbia); 18,4% are unemployed; 23,8% work as freelancers with occasional jobs; 6,2% are volunteering.

Most respondents live with their family members or friends (57%), with their spouses and underage children (27%), while 16% live alone.

## II) How is your life here?

When asked how would they rate the place where they currently live as a place to live in, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = "I don't like it here at all", 5 = "I'd like to live here for a long time"), the average given mark was **4,39**. The most frequent mark was 5 (49%).

4. How do you rate your current place of living (1-5)



Criticisms are mainly related to high prices and taxes, dirty streets and graffiti-stained buildings, polluted air, the fact that smoking is mostly allowed in restaurants, too warm climate, the lack of parks and playgrounds for

children, a lack of certain services and online shopping and delivery of products.

On a good side, they see Serbia as a beautiful country and Novi Sad as a beautiful city. They like the people and their friendliness and openness, the cycling culture, the fact that green areas are nearby, wide avenues, architecture, lots of greenery.

„I like the friendliness and relaxation of the people, the beautiful architecture in Novi Sad, the safety, the proximity to Europe, it's nice that people here speak English, the availability of legalization and the possibility of easy integration of children into school.“

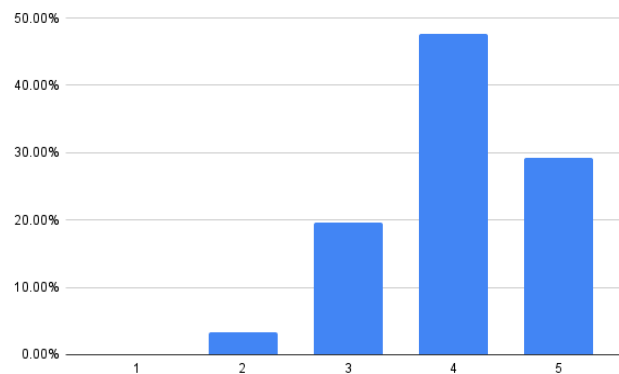
„Beautiful country, city, people, nature, weather, food. We really like everything.“

„Novi Sad is a surprisingly cozy and pleasant city. It has excellent transport infrastructure, European buildings and a good service sector.“

„I am very glad that I found this city and then moved here, so far I have never regretted the decision.“

Most respondents estimate **the quality of their life in Serbia** (housing, social life, culture etc.) as **very good (47,6%)**. The average mark on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent) was **4,39**.

4. The quality of respondents' lives in Serbia (1-5)



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The quality of life is impaired mostly by **unstable sources of income** and **high living costs** (rent, utilities, etc.), **language barrier** and the lack of opportunities to develop social contacts, lack of cultural events, marketplaces, underdeveloped banking and other services, widespread smoking, etc.

“Everything is very expensive, and the quality of things and services provided leaves much to be desired.”

“Social life dropped almost to zero after emigration.”

“My income now does not allow me to take out medical insurance, go on vacation, or fly to my relatives.”

“What makes the quality of life very good or excellent is the openness and accessibility of the local population, the favorable climate, numerous cultural events, the offer of services needed for a quality life, even with a limited income.”

“High accessibility of people. There is predominance of human attitudes over formal requirements.”

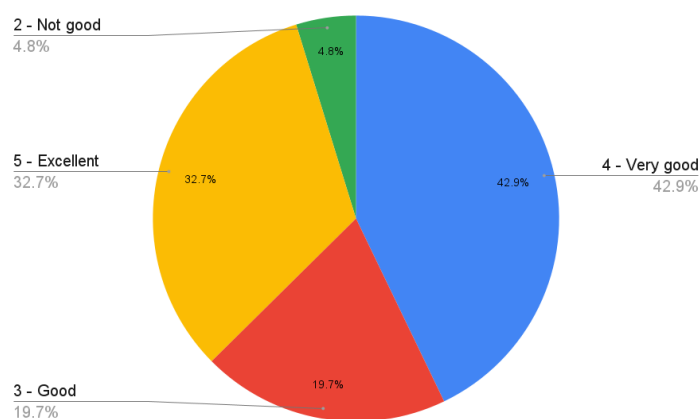
“There is everything for a normal life here. We live in the center of the city, 5 minutes from a swimming pool for children, my office and a shopping center. The training center is 10 minutes away, the park and school are nearby. There are many different cultural events. There is always something to attend: from a lecture on art history to a walk along Fruška Gora.”

“Here is almost everything I need and what could be in a city with a population of 350k.”

Most of the respondents estimate their **current economic status** as **relatively good** (42,2% claim that they „can buy new clothes, but in order to buy a fridge or a washing machine, they would have to save up”) or **quite good** (41,8% claim that they “can buy household appliances, but they would have to save money to buy a new car”). For 11% of respondents buying food is no problem, but they struggle to buy new clothes. Only 1,4% struggle to cover the food and other basic needs costs, while 4%

are well off and can buy a flat or a house with no difficulty.

**In general, the respondents feel quite good since they’ve moved to Serbia.** The average mark on a scale from 1 (I feel very bad most of the times) to 5 (I feel great most of the times) was 4,03.



5. How do you feel in general since you’ve moved to Serbia?

For those feeling bad, the reasons are related to unemployment and unstable income, issues with integration into the new environment, worries regarding the residence permits, lack of communication with the locals due to language barriers, etc. On the other hand, 32,6% stated that they feel great most of the times because they enjoy the freedom and safety, the climate, and the pace of life in Serbia.

“There are no job prospects for my profession. The current unstable income can be reduced significantly at any time.”

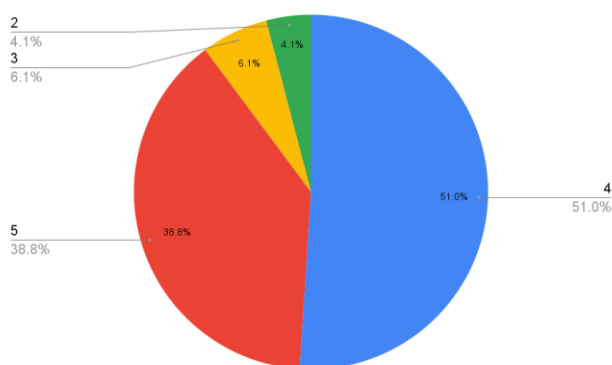
“Everything has changed: the daily routine, food, work, friends, language, and weather. What you like and what annoys you. Before I moved, there was one worry because of security. It’s better now, but sometimes the amount of new stuff is overwhelming.”

“Everything is still very unstable, but optimistic :)”

“Melancholy attacks.”

### Most respondents feel quite safe in Serbia.

On a scale from 1 (not at all safe) to 5 (completely safe) the average given mark was 4,24. The majority feel very safe (51%) or completely safe in Serbia (38,8%). Reasons for not feeling safe were the general insecurity and instability due to the new beginning and starting a new life, worries about if they will be allowed to stay in Serbia, specific issues faced by the vulnerable groups, financial situation, etc.



4. The quality of respondents' lives in Serbia (1-5)

"Because of general insecurity and instability due to starting my own business, the feeling of security is quite far from me."

"As a member of the LGBT community I don't feel safe."

"I don't quite understand the political situation in Serbia, it seems that it is not very stable. Plus, the influence of Russia is noticeable (although, in fact, thanks to this influence, we were able to move here so easily), which in the current situation potentially could violate our security."

"I don't feel completely safe when I think about renewing my residence permit - if for some reason they don't renew it, I'll have to look for a place to move. I absolutely don't want to return to Russia."

"I feel insecure due to my financial situation."

"The cancellation of residence permits for some Russians without explanation confirms fears that the situation could change dramatically."

"Compared to my homeland, life in Novi Sad is much safer in every sense. But the possibility of the authorities deporting any person back to Russia is frightening. Today you cannot feel 100% safe anywhere in the world. I think that a Serbian citizenship (in our case) would add a peace of mind."

"I see that it is much safer here than in Russia, but the anxiety does not go away."

"It seems to me that the crime rate is quite low, and the roads are safe, I calmly cross the road in different places."

"Children go to school and for walks by themselves, which was not the case in my home city."

### When asked about the good things of living in Serbia

and what they like the most here, the most frequently mentioned were a warm climate, friendly people, relaxed life style, the nature, opportunities to live here, safety, moderate prices of living, Slavic language.

"It's quite easy to learn the language. People in general, in my experience, are quite open to communication. Moderate prices and especially taxes."

"Positive attitude of the majority of the local population towards Russians, pleasant climate, small size of the country, no need to spend a lot of time on the road. A calm lifestyle, without haste and stress."

"Good people."

"Climate, climate and once again climate! Everything blooms beautifully, (I can wear) sneakers in winter, no icicles falling on our heads, no snowfalls... Peaceful life, nice people, thank you for hosting us."

"Possibility of obtaining permanent residence after three years of living with a residence permit, close culture, same faith, similarity of language, climate, food."

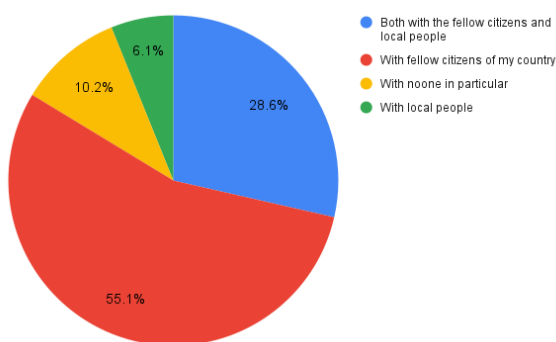
"Close to Europe, similar language, friendly locals, the most promising of visa-free countries (for work, study, long-term stay)"

"Lots of greenery in the city, safety on the streets, good attitude of local people towards Russians, good city infrastructure and the city size (Novi Sad),

opportunity to quickly find yourself in nature, many Russian-speaking people, simple local language."

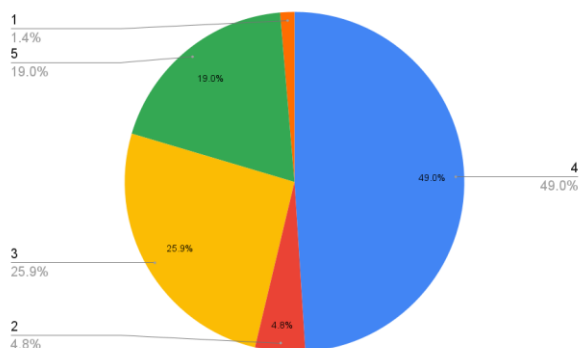
"Sociable, open people, kind animals, you can pet almost all dogs. A neighbor is any person who lives within 3-5 kilometers."

**More than half of the respondents socialize with their fellow citizens (55%) the most**, or both with the fellow citizens and local people (28,6%); 10,2% does not socialize with anyone in particular, and 6% socializes mostly with the locals.



7. With whom do you interact the most (socialize, spend time) outside your household?

**Interactions with the government structures in Serbia were marked as good.** On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (great) the average mark was 3,84.



8. How would you rate your interactions with the government institutions in Serbia (The Ministry of Interior, border police, etc.)? (1 - poor, 5 - excellent)

The issues mentioned were related to the lack of information and explanation, complex procedures, the lack of possibility to apply for residence visa online and long waiting times.

"It's unusual not to have a person who can clarify your understanding of state laws. When applying for a residence permit, any consultations are only from lawyers and for money. All consultations on obtaining a residence permit are to be sorted out by yourself, contact a lawyer, consultations with compatriots. Although they say that in Russia, obtaining a residence permit for foreigners is an even more unfriendly process. "

"Often difficult interaction due to lack of language knowledge, complex and multi-step procedures."

"Inconvenient working hours of government organizations. Once I needed to get a certificate from the MUP, but the department closed right in front of visitors 15 minutes before the official end of their working hours. (...) Once at the police station they almost lost my passport."

"We waited for an answer for enrolling a child in school for a long time. It takes a long time to open a bank account, sometimes the police officers are rude."

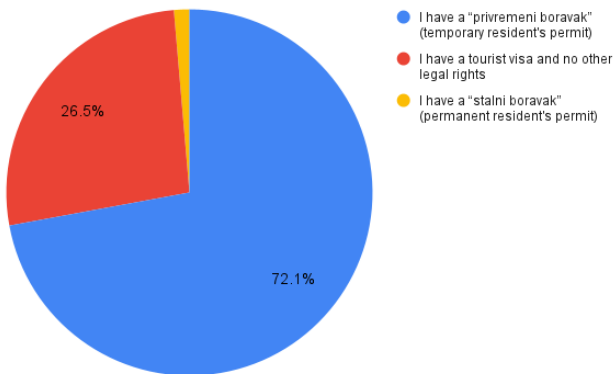
"You always need to communicate in person. Not much is available online. You need to spend time going to these institutions."

**The overall self-rating** of respondents' lives since they came to Serbia shows that most of them feel that the quality of their life has decreased, but they can deal with it (36%) or that their life is pretty much the same (30%). A total of 30,6% estimates that the quality of their life has increased, or is way higher than it used to be. Only 3,4% feels that their quality of life has fallen.

Regarding prospects for improvement, **49,7% feels that their life in Serbia improves day to day**; 39,5% that it stays the same, while 10,9% do not think that their life is improving.

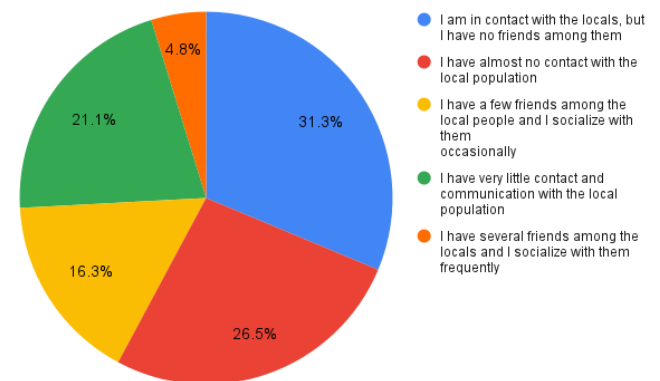
### III) Integration

The majority of respondents (72,1%) have a “**privremeni boravak**” (temporary resident's permit); 26,5% have a tourist visa and no other legal rights, while 1,4% have a “**stalni boravak**” (permanent resident's permit).



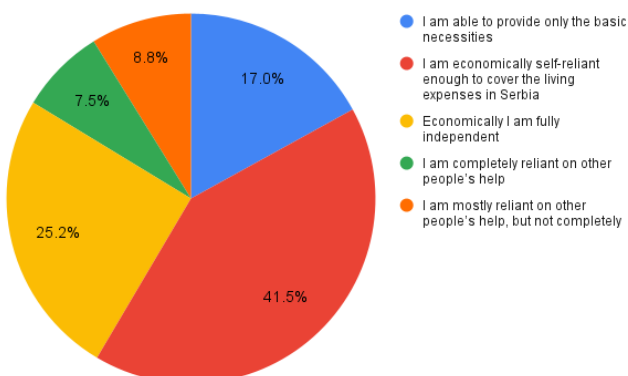
9. Residence status in Serbia

The majority of respondents have **contact with the locals**, but have no friends among them (31,3%) or have very little contact and communication with the local population (26,5%); 16,3% have a few friends among the local people and they socialize with them occasionally, while 4,8% socialize with their local friends frequently. 21,1% have almost no contact with the local population.



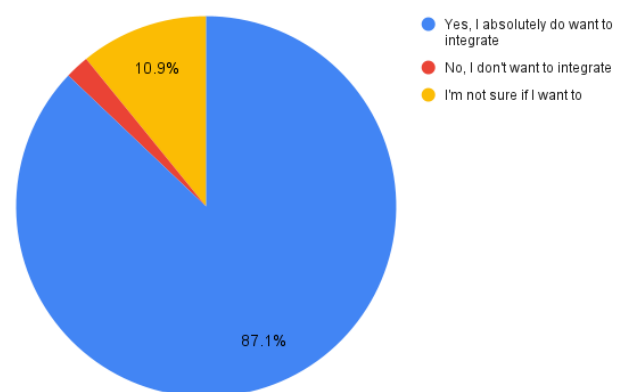
11. Social integration in Serbia

Regarding **economic opportunities for self-reliance** 41,5% are economically self-reliant enough to cover the living expenses in Serbia; 25,2% are economically fully independent. On the other hand, 17% are mostly reliant on other people's help, but not completely, while 7,5% are completely reliant on other people's help.



10. Economic self-reliance in Serbia

Regarding **integration in Serbia, vast majority (87,1%)** “absolutely wants” to integrate in Serbia; 10,1% is not sure, while 2% don't want to integrate.



12. Would you like to integrate in Serbia?

**In five years** 41,5% sees themselves living in Serbia; 8,8% living in another European country; 2% living outside Europe; 2,7% living back home, while 44,9% does not know.



"I would be happy to integrate into the Serbian community, especially the cultural one, and am now looking for ways for such integration and am open to cooperation with the Serbian cultural community."

"I'm not sure yet whether I want to live here all my life, for the next couple of years, it's good here. Time will show."

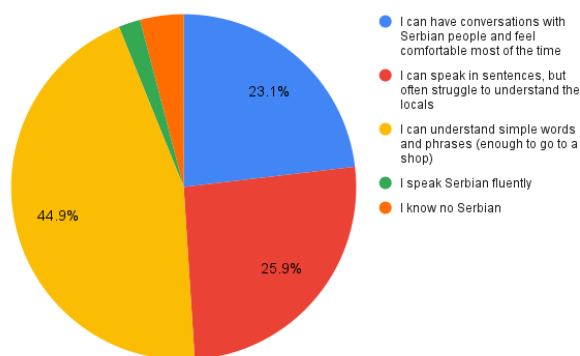
"I hope that the situation in the Russian Federation will normalize so that I can return."

"I want to, but now there is uncertainty. For me, it will only make sense to integrate if dual citizenship is introduced in Serbia. Until this happens, there is no point in putting a lot of effort into it."

"Now I am dealing with issues of ensuring my own life here. And integration requires effort and commitment."

"I'm not sure I'll stay here long. I don't have the energy to learn the language right now."

**Most of the respondents are learning Serbian language** in a language school or with a teacher (41,5%), or by themselves (38,1%). Only 5% speaks Serbian well, while 15% makes no attempts to learn the language.



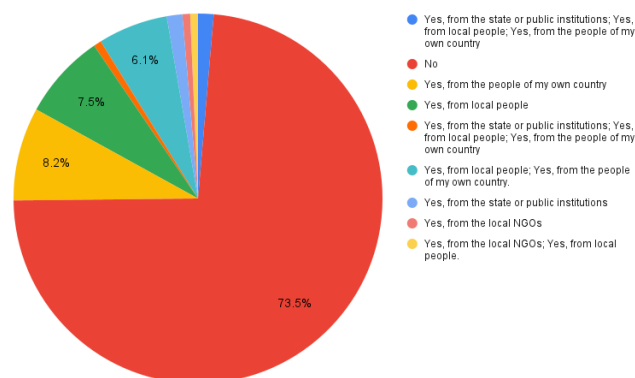
13. Serbian language proficiency estimate

**Regarding the level of Serbian language proficiency, 44,9%** can understand simple words and phrases (enough to go to a shop); 25,8% can speak in sentences, but often struggle to understand the locals; 23,1% can have conversations with Serbian people and

feel comfortable most of the time; 4,1% know no Serbian, and 2% speaks Serbian fluently.

## IV) Assistance in local integration

Since coming to Serbia, most of the respondents (73,5%) **did not get** any free-of-charge help (support, assistance) in settling in. 15,6% received help from their fellow citizens; 15% from the local people; 2% from the local NGOs and 2% from the state or public institutions. Assistance included information, help with paperwork and housing.



14. Since you came to Serbia, did you get any free-of-charge help (support, assistance) in settling in?

"(I received) Help with obtaining a residence permit, help with basic necessities, enormous moral support."

"My friends helped me find housing and answered my questions about legalization and life here."

"When I first arrived, I lived with my Serbian friend whom we met before I emigrated. When I had financial difficulties, both local residents and my compatriots helped me with basic necessities. In general, we have normal friendly relations and mutual support with both of them."

"NSHC (a local NGO) helped a lot and continues to help at different levels: they arranged me as a volunteer, which allowed me to get the temporary

residence, they are open to communication, which allows me to better understand the local situation. They organize events in which they offer participation, which allows me to integrate into the local community.”

“The company paid the moving costs, helped with finding and renting an apartment with money, issuing a residence permit and working documents, the landlord helped transport things from the office to the apartment.”

“The landlord left his car for us to use. The neighbor helped in every possible way with the children and provided us with a freezer for storing food.”

“Neighbors gave clothes to our child that were too small for their children.”

“Not financial assistance, but you can always find answers to all questions that arise in chats. And these are not toxic answers in the spirit of “Google it yourself,” people can really tell you which clinic to go to, which specialist to see.”

“Information and advice in Russian chats.”

Regarding **experiences with the local population, most were excellent.** On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent), the average mark was 4,3. Bad experiences included issues with the language and rude behaviour of some local people.

“A couple of times at the children's clinic, the nurse refused to talk to us because we did not understand Serbian. Two of my children go to the local Serbian school and, in my opinion, have adapted well to life in a new country. We have mastered the Serbian language very well and have Serbian friends.”

I managed to make friends with two colleagues. In general, communication in shops, cafes, pharmacies, services, on the street, while renting an apartment was a very unpleasant experience; disrespect and rudeness or indifference at best.”

“I've never encountered negativity.”

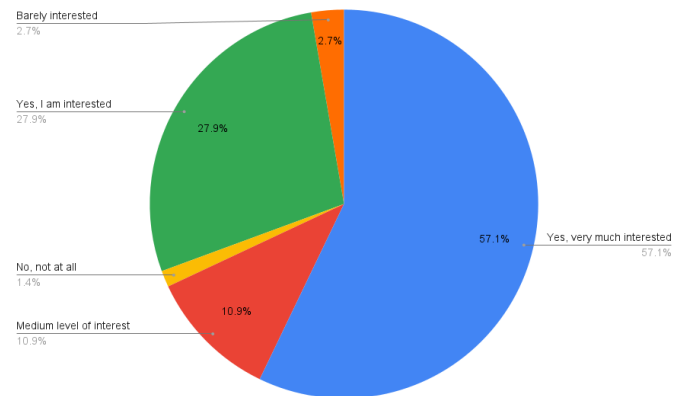
“Sometimes people start talking about politics and it gets awkward.”

“Sometimes they refused to talk to me without knowing the language, but this was extremely rare.”

“People are open and ready to help.”

“Everyone is friendly, but there is still a language barrier.”

**When asked if they are interested in getting to know more local people and creating closer connections** with them, the vast majority replied that they are either very much interested (57,1%) or that they are interested (27,9%), while 15% were indifferent or not interested.



15. Are you interested in getting to know more local people and creating closer connections with them?

“I'm an adult and I'm not specifically looking for new friends. My son studies at the local gymnasium and he has Serbian friends, and I am sure that there will be even more.”

“I don't make any special efforts to find new acquaintances either among immigrants or among the local population, but I communicate with pleasure whenever possible.”

“It seems to me that the locals themselves are not particularly interested in this.”

“It's very difficult. The more acquaintances I have, the more people I can turn to for help and support.”

“(I am) interested but don't know how to do it.”

"I love people, I love to communicate, I'm learning the language, but if I don't communicate with the locals, I won't speak."

"I would like to better understand the culture and ideas about the world of the Serbs, the language."

**As the greatest help for local integration received so far**, the respondents mentioned free language courses and other help with learning Serbian and communicating with the locals, information and assistance in obtaining a residence permit, opportunities to socialize with local people.

"Any assistance: a place where you can sit together and be silent; Interaction through games; Talk; Conversation club in Serbian; A joint trip/hike to school/APR/MUP/hospital/police with a story about how it works, meeting employees of organizations to see the human side of officials. Any experience of getting to know Serbia in a group will help me, because in a group it's not scary in a new place, and then this place becomes familiar and no longer scares, but rather becomes recognizable."

"Explanation by local residents of the features and aspects of their life, assistance in learning the language, as speaking partners."

"Manuals from compatriots for obtaining a residence permit."

"Free or at least not so expensive Serbian language course."

"Free conversation clubs with Serbs for meeting and making friends with them."

"Children's literature or cartoon courses in Serbian to help with the language."

"Communication, understanding how life works here, what is accepted and what is not. Inclusion in informal life."

"My Serbian friend showed me the city, introduced me to other locals and taught me the basics of the Serbian language (before I started taking classes)."

"Affordable Russian kindergarten"

"The fact that the child went to a Serbian school and we began to communicate closely with the parents."

"A community ready to talk to me in different languages on different topics. Since I have knowledge of English and Serbian, I would like to meet locals in some places and try to learn to speak with them. But for this we need locals who are ready to tolerate broken Serbian and English."

"Perhaps a place where you can meet and communicate and receive information on emerging issues."

"Some events for establishing connections and acquaintances with the local population, conversation clubs with Serbs, language courses in everyday Serbian from Serbs."

The **greatest obstacles** for local integration so far have been not knowing the language and not being able to communicate with the local community, lack of information, lack of time to learn the language, psychological difficulties.

"Psychological difficulties (such as social anxiety and features of autism spectrum disorder)."

"Lack of knowledge of the local language, personal psychological qualities (closeness to communication, introversion, gentleness of character) which directly contradicts the mentality of the majority of local residents (extroverts)."

"Language barrier, depression and lack of energy."

"Bureaucracy"

"I miss opportunities to make friends locally."

"I have difficulty learning languages. Ignorance of the Serbian language and poor level of English."

"It's not clear how to search and find out everything."

"There is little time to study Serbian, as you have to work a lot to meet your expenses."

As the **most needed services** to be able to integrate locally, the respondents listed language courses and conversation clubs where they could learn about the local life, and legal assistance when needed.

"I think help in finding a job would be most useful, as well as more accessible medicine (not so expensive and in Russian), since one of the main problems in integration for me is my psychological problems."

"What we need most is a free Serbian course. As soon as I have the strength to do something, I leave the house, and all around me is the Serbian language. We need a conversation club."

"Help from a lawyer, language learning, getting to know the local business community"

"Social clubs are a good idea, conversational or, for example, playing board games. Free language courses are also a good idea."

I dream of a consulting service where I could turn for advice when different life situations arise. Various questions arise, both about interaction with government organizations, city services, and about cultural traditions, how it is customary to solve some everyday issues, etc. Now most of this information can be found in Russian-language chats, but this is the subjective experience of visiting Russians just like us. I would like to have the opportunity to receive information from the Serbs."

"(The most needed is) Legal assistance. taxes (+cases with investments), practice of obtaining a tax and a foreigner, the nuances of banking services, real estate, sending children to kindergarten and school, pensions."

This survey was conducted within the project\* „Support for the integration of vulnerable foreigners into the local community“ implemented by NSHC from 1.4. to 30.9.2024.

The aim of the survey was to find out more about the position and current needs of vulnerable foreigners who, due to being forced to leave their country, came to Serbia in 2022-2024 and are now in need of support in social integration.

Based on the collected data, recommendations for cross-cultural and socially inclusive activities will be provided and implemented within the framework of this and other future projects.

*\*This project is supported in the framework of the project "Inclusion of foreigners in the WB - access to social and economic rights (FOSTER)" which was developed as a regional response of 7 civil society organizations connected to the Balkan Refugee and Migration Council (BRMC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) on common challenges related to migration in the Western Balkans region, with a focus on the basic human rights of various vulnerable groups of migrants and foreigners, especially their access to social and economic rights.*

*The project is financed by the European Union within the EU civil society and media program for the benefit of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023. (IPA III) within the lot "Human rights, anti-discrimination and intercultural dialogue".*