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HOW LOCAL PEOPLE LIVING AT THE EXTERNAL EU BORDER PERCEIVE MIGRANTS

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I. INTRODUCTION – II. METHODOLOGY – III. RESULTS – IV. CONCLUSION

ABSTRACT: Research showed different results in the perception and acceptance of migrants in Croatia. Earlier research show that respondents perceive migrants as socio-economic and a socio-cultural threat while newer ones show mostly positive attitudes towards migrants and belief that there should be equal living conditions for all persons in Croatia. Considering that the integration takes place at the level of local community, the opinions and attitudes of the local population are extremely important. There is a need for continuous examination of public opinions and attitudes.

The aim of this study was to research the perception of migrants in the adult population living at the external EU border, precisely, in the rural settlements of Split-Dalmatia County, near Bosnia and Herzegovina border. The research area is on the Southern Balkan migrant route. In recent years, irregular migrants have crossed Croatian territory on their way to Western countries. The local population who lives on migrant route is exposed to encounters and occasionally to incidents with migrants.

The survey method was used. For the purposes of research, a questionnaire was designed. The research focus was on two questions: how do local people perceive migrants and did the vicinity of the migrant route and migrants influence their everyday life and safety? In general, the results showed intolerance, strong social distance, and stereotypes towards migrants. Due to the closeness of migrant route, the part of respondents feels unsafe while some of them change daily habits.

KEYWORDS: migrants, sociological research, perception, acceptance, safety, Croatia.

CÓMO PERCIBE A LOS MIGRANTES LA POBLACIÓN LOCAL QUE VIVE EN LA FRONTERA EXTERIOR DE LA UE

RESUMEN: La investigación mostró diferentes resultados en la percepción y aceptación de los inmigrantes en Croacia. Investigaciones anteriores muestran que los encuestados perciben a los inmigrantes como una amenaza socioeconómica y sociocultural, mientras que los más nuevos

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muestran actitudes mayoritariamente positivas hacia los inmigrantes y creen que debería haber igualdad de condiciones de vida para todas las personas en Croacia. Teniendo en cuenta que la integración tiene lugar a nivel de la comunidad local, las opiniones y actitudes de la población local son extremadamente importantes. Existe la necesidad de un examen continuo de las opiniones y actitudes públicas.

El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar la percepción de los inmigrantes en la población adulta que vive en la frontera exterior de la UE, precisamente, en los asentamientos rurales del condado de Split-Dalmacia, cerca de la frontera con Bosnia y Herzegovina. El área de investigación se encuentra en la ruta migratoria de los Balcanes Meridionales. En los últimos años, los inmigrantes irregulares han cruzado el territorio croata en su camino hacia los países occidentales. La población local que vive en la ruta migratoria está expuesta a encuentros y ocasionalmente a incidentes con migrantes.

Se utilizó el método de la encuesta. Para efectos de la investigación se diseñó un cuestionario. El enfoque de la investigación se centró en dos preguntas: ¿cómo percibe la población local a los migrantes y la vecindad de la ruta migratoria y los migrantes influyeron en su vida cotidiana y seguridad? En general, los resultados mostraron intolerancia, fuerte distancia social y estereotipos hacia los migrantes. Debido a la cercanía de la ruta del migrante, parte de los encuestados se siente inseguro mientras que algunos de ellos cambian hábitos cotidianos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: inmigrantes, investigación sociológica, percepción, aceptación, seguridad, Croacia.

LA PERCEPTION DES MIGRANTS PAR LA POPULATION LOCALE VIVANT À LA FRONTIÈRE EXTÉRIEURE DE L'UE

RÉSUMÉ: La recherche a montré des résultats différents dans la perception et l'acceptation des migrants en Croatie. Des recherches antérieures montrent que les personnes interrogées perçoivent les migrants comme une menace socio-économique et socioculturelle, tandis que les plus récentes affichent des attitudes généralement positives à l'égard des migrants et pensent que les conditions de vie devraient être égales pour toutes les personnes en Croatie. Considérant que l'intégration a lieu au niveau de la communauté locale, les opinions et les attitudes de la population locale sont extrêmement importantes. Il est nécessaire d'examiner en permanence les opinions et les attitudes du public.

L'objectif de cette étude était de rechercher la perception des migrants dans la population adulte vivant à la frontière extérieure de l'UE, précisément dans les agglomérations rurales du comté de Split-Dalmatie, près de la frontière de la Bosnie-Herzégovine. La zone de recherche se situe sur la route migratoire des Balkans du Sud. Ces dernières années, des migrants irréguliers ont traversé le territoire croate en route vers les pays occidentaux. La population locale qui vit sur la route des migrants est exposée à des rencontres et occasionnellement à des incidents avec des migrants.

La méthode d'enquête a été utilisée. Aux fins de la recherche, un questionnaire a été conçu. La recherche s'est concentrée sur deux questions : comment les populations locales perçoivent-elles les migrants et la proximité de la route des migrants et des migrants a-t-elle influencé leur vie quotidienne et leur sécurité ? En général, les résultats ont montré une intolérance, une forte distance sociale et des stéréotypes envers les migrants. En raison de la proximité de la route des migrants, une partie des répondants ne se sent pas en sécurité tandis que certains d'entre eux changent leurs habitudes quotidiennes.

MOTS-CLES : migrants, recherche sociologique, perception, acceptation, sécurité, Croatie.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the migration crisis in 2015, large numbers of migrants moved from parts of western Asia, across the Mediterranean Sea or across Southeast Europe to European Union countries.² Most refugees were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Most of them left their countries due to the war conditions. There was a smaller number of those who were economic migrants. The destination of most migrants and refugees were the western European countries, primarily Germany.

According to official data from the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, 658,068 people entered Croatia from the beginning of the migrant crisis until 4 March 2016, of which 558,724 in 2015. Croatia was a transit area where a small number of people sought asylum.³ Croatia showed solidarity, providing migrants and refugees with care and humanitarian assistance as far as possible. A reception center was opened and organized transport by trains and buses to the border was provided. Humanitarian aid in the form of food, hygiene, clothing, and footwear was also provided by organizations and citizens. Authorities and citizens expressed empathy for refugees and migrants.⁴ Croatian media portrayed migrants humanely and compassionately

² In the literature different names can be found for the influx of people to Europe in 2015. Some authors write about European refugee crisis (GUILD, E., COSTELLO, C., GARLICK, M., MORENO-LAX, V., *The 2015 Refugee Crisis in the European Union, CEPS Policy Brief*, CEPS, Brussels, 2015; CARRERA, S., BLOCKMANS, S., GROS, D., GUILD, E., *The EU's Response to the Refugee Crisis: Taking Stock and Setting Policy Priorities*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2015; Greussing, E., Boomgaarden, H. G., "Shifting the refugeneer narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe's 2015 refugee crisis", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, no 11, 2017, pp. 1749-1774; CHOUILIARAKI, L., ZABOROWSKI, R., "Voice and community in the refugee crisis: A Content Analysis of News Coverage in Eight European Countries", *International Communication Gazette*, no 6-7, 2017, pp. 613-635), while others use the concept European migrant crisis (PODDAR, S., "European Migrant Crisis: Financial Burden or Economic Opportunity. Social Impact Research Experience", 2016, pp. 1-26; BARLAI, M., FÄHNRIK, B., GRIESSLER, C., RHOMBERG, M., "The Migrant Crisis: European Perspectives and National Discourses", Zurich, Berlag, 2017; BECKERS, K. VAN AELST, P., "Did the European Migrant Crisis Change News Coverage of Immigration? A Longitudinal Analysis of Immigration Television News and the Actors Speaking in It", *Mass Communication and Society*, no 6, 2019, pp. 733-755).

³ ŠELO-ŠABIĆ, S., BORIĆ, S., *At the Gate of Europe: A Report on Refugees on the Western Balkan Route*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Zagreb, 2016.

⁴ ESTERAJHER, J., "Iskustva zbrinjavanja prognanika i izbjeglica i suvremena izbjegličko-

Figure 1. Balkan routes



Source: “Migrant deaths in Croatia highlight alternative Balkan route”, *Deutsche Welle*, of 13.08.2018.

and played an important role in shaping public opinion. On almost a daily basis, newspaper and television reported detailed personal accounts of fleeing people, their misfortune, and their experiences along the route to Europe.⁵

Since 2016, mass migration movements to Europe have decreased. However, migration flow has continued in the following years, mostly as irregular⁶ border crossings of the Republic of Croatia, via the Western Balkan

migrantska kriza u Hrvatskoj”, *Političke analize: tromjesečnik za hrvatsku i međunarodnu politiku*, no 23, 2015, pp. 15-22, p. 15.

⁵ ŠELO-ŠABIĆ, S., BORIĆ, S., *At the Gate of Europe...cit.*

⁶ According to European Commission: “Movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries” EUROPEAN COMMISSION, MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS, 2022.

Route which is one of the main migratory routes into Europe. In 2018, the number of irregular migrants⁷ detected on this route halved from the previous year to 5, 869. Most of migrants detected on this route in 2018 came from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

Illegal migration is a social problem with a strong security component. “What is indisputable is the fact that member states whose borders are also the external borders of the European Union and which are on immigrant routes, must make increased efforts to control them to prevent illegal crossings. For them, and consequently for the European Union as a whole, this is certainly a permanent security problem”.⁸

Figures show an increase in irregular crossings along the Western Balkan route. In 2019 there were 15,152 illegal border crossings, while in 2020 there were 26,969. In the first three quarters of 2021, there were about 40,200 illegal border crossings on the Western Balkan route, or 117% more compared to the same period of last year. In September, there were 10,400 illegal crossings on that route which was a 112% increase compared to September 2020.⁹

In the territory of the Republic of Croatia, irregular migrants move day and night, in larger groups of up to 50 people. Depending on the case, the local population living on migrant routes helps migrants with clothing and food, while most avoid or are afraid of theft, burglary in their houses, cottages, and cars.¹⁰

Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/irregular-migration_en (last accessed February 24th 2021).

⁷ According to European Commission: “An irregular migrant is a person, a third-country national present on the territory of a Schengen State who does not fulfill, or no longer fulfills, the conditions of entry while irregular migration is a movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries”. EUROPEAN COMMISSION, MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS, 2022. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/irregular-migrant_en (last accessed February 24 2021).

⁸ FRČKO, M., SOLOMUN, D., MIRI, K., *Migration and crime: reality and perception, Zagreb Police Research days. Understanding new security challenges. Proceedings of 7th International Scientific and Professional Conference*, Centar za policijska istraživanja, Zagreb, 2020, pp. 283-302, p. 284.

⁹ FRONTEX, *Migratory Routes*. Available at: <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route/> (last accessed April 14, 2021).

¹⁰ “U Hrvatskoj sve više ilegalnih migranata, ima i provala: Došao je u šest ujutro jadan i moka, pa smo ga obukli i najeli”, *Dnevnik.hr*, of 14. 09.2020.

The population living in settlements in the border area of Croatia with Bosnia and Herzegovina has been repeatedly exposed to incidents with migrants who commit theft and do other material damage on their way to the West. The population of the settlements of the Imotski region in Split-Dalmatia County is particularly exposed. Due to irregular migrants in transit through the area, residents feel insecure. The Croatian Border Police have 6,500 police officers protecting the external border with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Slovenia. The police are engaged in two areas: border protection and prevention of human trafficking, criminal activity that is often associated with the transition of migrants.¹¹ To protect the inhabitants of this area, representative in the Croatian Parliament requested the formation of an army in this border area.¹²

In considering migrant policy, it is important to emphasize that the fundamental values of the EU are “values of respecting human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respecting human rights, including the rights of minorities. These values are common to all member states, in a society in which predominant are pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality of men and women”¹³. On the other hand, there are challenges of large migrations, as a result of which the majority of nations will find themselves in a situation of living with minorities, and the EU will demand more tolerance.¹⁴

EU migration policy is based on two documents, the 2016 *Integration Action Plan of Third-Country Nationals* and the 2020 *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)*. These documents set out a policy that is inclusive for all with a focus on anti-discrimination, to enhance migrants’ active participation in society.¹⁵ Member States are invited to improve the monitoring and evaluation

¹¹ “Hrvatska policija je spremna, opremljena i sposobna nadzirati i štiti vanjsku granicu Europske unije”, *Republic of Croatia, Ministry of the Interior*, of 05.11.2019.

¹² “Saborski zastupnik traži vojsku na granicama: Stanovnici Zagore u strahu od agresivnih migranata?”, *Dalmacija danas*, of 07.09.2020.

¹³ MALDINI, P., TAKAHASHI, M., “Refugee Crisis and the European Union: Do the Failed Migration and Asylum Policies Indicate a Political and Structural Crisis of European Integration?”, *Communication Management Review*, no 2, 2017, pp. 54-72, p. 57.

¹⁴ BERTOŠA, S., “O toleranciji kroz povijest”, *Tabula: časopis Filozofskog fakulteta, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrića u Puli*, no 12, 2014, pp. 41-50.

¹⁵ MIICT | *ICT Enabled Public Services for Migration*. Available at: <https://www.miict.eu/> (last

of the integration of third-country nationals.

When it comes to integration, it should be borne in mind that “integration depends not only on the policy towards migrants and the willingness of migrants to participate in the process of acceptance, but also on the openness of the local population, their attitudes and prejudices towards immigrants”¹⁶, in other words, integration does not take place at the national level but in the local community, settlement, municipality, city or county.¹⁷ Therefore, it is important to research the opinions and attitudes of local residents toward the implementation of migration policy. Given that public opinion is a dynamic category influenced by various predictors, there is a need for continuous research. This paper aims to investigate how the inhabitants of the Republic of Croatia living in the area of irregular migrant movements and at the external border of the EU perceive migrants.

Research on the perception and acceptability of immigrants in Croatia is more intensive than Croatia’s accession to the European Union and the related possible influx of foreign workers. The migrant crisis in 2015 and migration trends toward Europe gave additional impetus to research. Studies have investigated the attitudes of populations towards immigrants. Taken as a whole, with rare exceptions, the findings of research conducted in Croatia show consistent results of non-acceptance and social distance towards people from other countries.

The survey of citizens’ attitudes towards labor immigration in 2009 showed a high level of resistance to the entry of foreigners into Croatian society, which was perceived as a socio-economic and socio-cultural threat. For example, the closest relationship that respondents were willing to have was friendship (20%), while 9% of respondents were willing to have family ties, 6,8% neighborly relationships, and 13,3% business relationships with foreigners. “The exclusivist attitude” of the respondents was interpreted by

accessed May 21, 2021).

¹⁶ ČAČIĆ-KUMPES, J., GREGUROVIĆ, S., KUMPES, J., “Migration, Integration, and Attitudes towards Immigrants in Croatia”, *Croatian Sociological Review*, no 3, 2012, pp. 305-336, p. 310.

¹⁷ AJDUKOVIĆ, D., ČORKALO BIRUŠKI, D., GREGUROVIĆ, M., MATIĆ BOJIĆ, J., ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ, D., *Challenges of Integrating Refugees into Croatian Society: Attitudes of Citizens and the Readiness of Local Communities*, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb, 2019.

economic conditions, ie the processes of “strong national homogenization”¹⁸. A survey conducted after Croatia’s joining the EU showed similar results. Immigrant workers were perceived as a sociocultural threat, along with the expression of a considerable degree of social distance towards them. Asylum seekers were further perceived as a security and economic threat. Age and political orientation have the greatest influence on the formation of attitudes. Older respondents of right-wing political orientation show a greater propensity for negative attitudes toward asylum seekers and foreign workers.¹⁹ It was also found that the student population had similar attitudes towards immigrants. Asylum seekers are perceived as socio-cultural, economic and health threats.²⁰ Research often points to religiosity and political affiliation as predictors of attitudes toward immigrants. Religious people and people who are religious and nationally oriented show a greater social distance toward immigrants.²¹

The newer survey, conducted in last couple of years, showed different results. The respondents had mostly positive attitudes towards refugees despite. Most respondents did not feel threatened by the arrival of refugees and expressed a low degree of social distance. The prevailing opinion was that there should be equal living conditions for all people living in Croatia. The authors explained these findings by the recent end of the refugee crisis in Croatia and by the exposure of citizens to the influence of the media who showed photographs and videos of the passage of columns of migrants and children.²² Recent research on the integration of refugees into Croatian society shows some shift in attitudes from negative to neutral with slight support for asylum seekers. According to this research, the degree of closeness ranges from 60% in friendships to 86,5% in the number of respondents who are

¹⁸ ČAČIĆ-KUMPES, J., GREGUROVIĆ, S., KUMPES, J., “Migration, Integration...” cit, p. 318.

¹⁹ GREGUROVIĆ, M., KUTI, S., ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ, D., “Attitudes towards immigrant workers and asylum seekers in Eastern Croatia: dimensions, determinants and differences”, *Migration and Ethnic Themes*, no 1, 2016, pp. 91-122.

²⁰ ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ, D., GREGUROVIĆ, M., “Stavovi studenata prema tražiteljima azila u Republici Hrvatskoj”, *Društvena istraživanja: Journal for General Social Issues*, vol.22 no 1, 2013, pp. 41-62.

²¹ ČAČIĆ-KUMPES, J., GREGUROVIĆ, S., KUMPES, J., “Migration, Integration...” cit.; KUMPES, J., “Religiosity and Attitudes towards Immigrants in Croatia”, *Migration and Ethnic Themes*, no 3, 2018, pp. 275-320.

²² MEDLOBI, M., ČEPO, D., “Towards refugees and asylum-seekers: a post festum of the so called refugee crisis”, *Political Perspectives*, no 1-2, 2018, pp. 41-69.

willing to accept foreigners as residents of Croatia. The only exception to the high percentages of intimacy is the lower willingness to accept a migrant as a family member (27,5%). Respondents rarely had contact with asylum seekers and rated them as neither positive nor negative.²³

II. METHODOLOGY

1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aim was to research the opinions of the population living at the external border of the EU toward migrants.²⁴ Precisely, the research aims were to: (1) examine the level of tolerance towards migrants; (2) research how respondents perceived migrants; (3) determine whether the vicinity of the border and migrant route influenced everyday life and sense of safety; (4) research the opinion of respondents on immigration policy; (5) determine the influence of variable “gender”.

2. METHOD AND SAMPLE

The research was conducted by a survey method on a sample of 111 respondents. A survey questionnaire was designed for the needs of the research. The field part of the research was adapted to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Accordingly, the survey was conducted by telephone. Respondents were selected randomly, using a telephone directory.

Spatial context is important as a variable. It helps to understand how surroundings determine one’s opinion and behavior. Respondents live in small settlements, in the rural area, which is sparsely populated, at the border

²³ AJDUKOVIĆ, D., ČORKALO BIRUŠKI, D., GREGUROVIĆ, M., MATIĆ BOJIĆ, J., ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ, D., *Challenges of Integrating Refugees... cit.*

²⁴ The term “migrant/s”, which is common in everyday speech was used in the questionnaire. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) “migrant” is an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from the place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students International Organization for Migration, IOM Definition of “Migrant”, 2019, Available at: <https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0> (last accessed March 17, 2020).

of the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figure 2). These settlements are in the vicinity of the Balkan (Southern) migrant route. It is to assume that the researched population had encounters with irregular migrants. It is expected that the vicinity of the border and closeness of the migrant route will influence migrant perception.

Figure 2. Split-Dalmatia County – researched area



The research was conducted in the following settlements: Cista Provo (2,377 inhabitants), Aržano (478 inhabitants), Kamensko (107 inhabitants), Voštane (42 inhabitants) and Lovreč (2500 inhabitants). According to the place of residence, 26 persons from Cista Provo, 24 from Aržano, 19 from Lovreč, 11 from Kamensko, 16 from Voštane and 14 from Studenci were examined.

III. RESULTS

1. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

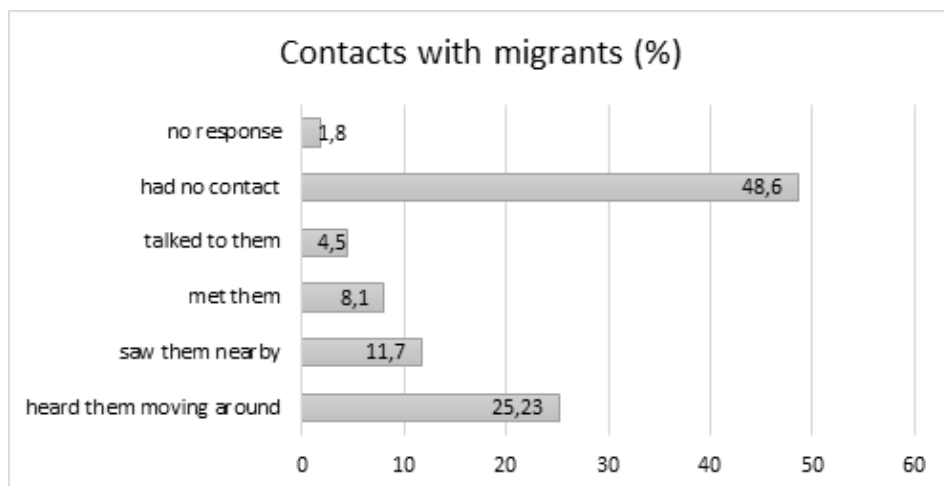
Women (51%) and men are almost equally represented in the sample. The age structure of the sample corresponds to the age structure of the population

of the investigated area. Respondents are mostly older; 58,5% are older than 60, of which 36,9% are 70 or older. Slightly more than a third of respondents (36%) have completed primary school, 45,9% have secondary education, while the percentage of those with completed college or university is lower (15,3%). Regarding the employment status, most respondents are retired (47,7%), slightly less than a third (29,7%) are employed, while 17,1% are unemployed. Respondents most often perceive their standard of living as mediocre (49,5%) and good (25,2%). As many as 54,1% of respondents did not answer the question about political orientation. Among those who answered this question, the majority (38,7%) are right-wing. Furthermore, 12,6% of respondents did not answer the question about religious affiliation, while 77,5% are religious, of which the majority (54%) believe and practice their religion regularly. Considering the structural characteristics of the respondents, the homogeneity of the sample can be stated. They mostly represent a group of the mature and older population, with less favorable educational status, mostly religious and of right-wing political orientation.

2. ENCOUNTERS WITH MIGRANTS

The contacts of respondents with migrants were considered as an important variable. As can be seen from Graph 1, most respondents did not have personal contact with migrants (73,8%), while a smaller part of them had personal interaction, either in the form of meetings (8,1%) or conversations (4,5%). A higher share of men (58,4%) than women (42,6%) had contacts with migrants. Men, in comparison with women, met and talked with migrants more often.

Graph 1. Respondents' contacts with migrants



3. THE ACCEPTANCE OF MIGRANTS

Taken as a whole, the data showed unacceptability and social distance (Table 1). Non-acceptance is particularly visible in terms of accepting a migrant into the family by marriage (64%), accepting a migrant as a resident of Croatia (60,4%), and as a resident of the settlement (53,2%). Also, a significant number of respondents do not want migrants as close neighbors (48,6%), friends (42,3%) and co-workers (34,2%). On the other hand, short-term stays of migrants in Croatia are more acceptable to respondents, with 50,5% of respondents approving temporary stays of migrants, while 65,8% would accept migrants as tourists. The findings are consistent with previous research on the acceptability of foreigners in Croatia.²⁵

By using the Chi-Square test, it was tested whether the variable “gender” influenced the tolerance towards migrants. Among all tested variables, statistically significant differences were shown in two variables: (1) *Obtain asylum in Croatia* (AS = 0,036). Women are more unsure (37%) than men (15,8%) whether migrants should obtain asylum in Croatia, while men are

²⁵ ČAČIĆ-KUMPES, J., GREGUROVIĆ, S., KUMPES, J., “Migration, Integration...”, *cit.* GREGUROVIĆ, M., KUTI, S., ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ, D., “Attitudes towards immigrant workers and asylum seekers in Eastern Croatia: dimensions, determinants and differences”, *Migration and Ethnic Themes*, n° 1, 2016, pp. 91-122.

more sure than women that migrants should not obtain asylum in Croatia (45,6% compared to 37%). (2) *Become a resident of Croatia* (AS = 0,002). Women are more unsure (37%) than men (9%) whether migrants should become residents of Croatia, while more men (71,9%) than women (48%) are sure and state that migrants should not become residents of Croatia.

Table 1. The acceptance of migrants

Would you accept migrant person?	NO		NOT SURE		YES		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
if a migrant marries someone from your family	71	64,0	21	18,9	19	17,1	111	100,0
if a migrant becomes your friend	47	42,3	38	34,2	26	23,4	111	100,0
if the migrant becomes your collaborator at work	38	34,2	43	38,7	30	27,0	111	100,0
if a migrant becomes your close neighbor	54	48,6	34	30,6	23	20,7	111	100,0
if a migrant settles in your place	59	53,2	27	24,3	25	22,5	111	100,0
if a migrant is temporarily staying in Croatia	24	21,6	31	27,9	56	50,5	111	100,0
if a migrant obtains asylum in Croatia	46	41,4	29	26,1	36	32,4	111	100,0
if a migrant becomes a resident of Croatia	67	60,4	25	22,5	19	17,1	111	100,0
if a migrant visits Croatia as a tourist	17	15,3	21	18,9	7	6,3	111	100,0

4. THE PERCEPTION OF MIGRANTS

In addition to the positive and moderate neutral perception of migrants, the data indicate a majority negative perception of migrants regarding respondents' opinions on migrants as a threat to the security and identity of the population (Table 2). For example, more than half of the respondents state that the security of Croatian citizens is reduced due to migrants (59,5%), and that migrants threaten the traditions, customs and values of the Croatian population (55,9%). In particular, more than half of the respondents state that migrants are inclined to violent behavior (58,6%), theft and crime (58,6%).

Statistical testing of the impact of the variable “gender” on the perception of migrants does not show the existence of statistically significant differences between men and women in the studied opinions and perceptions.

Table 2. Perception of migrants

What do you think about migrants?	NO		I'M NOT SURE		YES		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Migrants are inclined to violent behavior	22	19,8	24	21,6	65	58,6	111	100,0
Migrants are inclined to theft and crime	22	19,8	24	21,6	65	58,6	111	100,0
Migrants start conflicts with citizens	27	24,3	36	32,4	48	43,2	111	100,0
Migrants are threatening our traditions, customs, values	20	18,0	29	26,1	62	55,9	111	100,0
There is a danger of terrorism because of migrants	28	25,2	33	29,7	50	45,0	111	100,0
In a pandemic, migrants pose a health risk	25	22,5	34	30,6	52	46,8	111	100,0
Due to migrants, the security of citizens has been reduced	19	17,1	26	23,4	66	59,5	111	100,0

The results of this research are in line with previous research on the perception of migrants in Croatia. For example, the study of Franc et al. (2010) shows that migrant workers are perceived as a strong economic as well as cultural and security threat²⁶. Also, the research of Šram (2010) states the existence of ethnocentrism conditioned by the perception of minorities as a security and cultural threat.²⁷

6. CHANGES IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND A SENSE OF SECURITY

Since the respondents live near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and near the migrant route, it was investigated to what extent this spatial

²⁶ FRANC, R., ŠAKIĆ, V., KALITERNA LIPOVČAN, L., “Perceived Consequences of Immigrations and Attitude towards Immigrants”, *Društvena istraživanja: Journal for General Social Issues*, n° 3, 2010, pp. 421-440.

²⁷ ŠRAM, Z., “Ethnocentrism, Threat Perception, and Croatian National Identity”, *Migration and Ethnic Themes*, n° 2, 2010, pp. 113-142.

dimension influences the changes in their daily lives and whether it affects a sense of security. The data from Table 3 show that the closeness of the border and the migrant route does not affect the behaviors and practices of everyday life in most people and does not diminish a sense of security. However, it is important to point out that everyday practices and a sense of security are important aspects of life, and that changes felt by fewer people are indicative. Viewed from this point of view, between 20% and 40% of respondents claim that the closeness of the border and the migrant route affect changes in their everyday life and reduce their sense of security. Thus, some respondents spend more time at home, whether they do not go out when it gets dark (39,6%) or spend their free time at home (40,5%). It is important to point out that slightly more than a third of respondents feel insecure (35,1%), while between a third and a quarter of respondents fear for their family and loved ones, community, neighbors, property, health, and life.

Table 3. Living close to the border and migrant route

How do you feel regarding the closeness of the border and migrants?	NO		YES		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
I don't get too far away from the settlement	76	68,5	35	31,5	111	100,0
I don't go out when it gets dark if I don't have to	67	60,4	44	39,6	111	100,0
I spend more free time at home	66	59,5	45	40,5	111	100,0
It is difficult for me to perform daily tasks and obligations	108	97,3	3	2,7	111	100,0
I fear for my property	82	73,9	29	26,1	111	100,0
I fear for my health	84	75,7	27	24,3	111	100,0
I fear for my life	87	78,4	24	21,6	111	100,0
I fear for my family and loved ones	75	67,6	36	32,4	111	100,0
I fear for my neighbors	84	75,7	27	24,3	111	100,0
I fear for my community	81	73,0	30	27,0	111	100,0
Generally, I feel insecure	72	64,9	39	35,1	111	100,0

Variables related to changes in everyday life were tested regarding the variable "gender". Testing was performed using the Mann-Whitney U test. Among the tested variables, statistically significant differences were confirmed

in three variables: *Generally, I feel insecure, I don't go out when it gets dark if I don't have to; I spend more free time at home* (Table 4). The analysis showed that women, due to the closeness of migrants, changed certain behaviors in everyday life to a greater extent than men in a way that they felt more insecure and spent more time at home.

Table 4. Gender and changes in everyday habits

How do you feel about proximity of the border and migrants?	Gender	Mean Rank	MWU	p
Generally, I feel insecure	M	51,11	1260,000	0,047
	F	61,17		
I don't go out when it gets dark if I don't have to; I spend more free time at home	M	50,55	1228,500	0,031
	F	61,75		
I spend more free time at home	M	51,03	1255,500	0,049
	F	61,25		

The variables related to the sense of security were also tested regarding the variable “gender”. There were statistically significant differences in three variables: *I fear for my health; I fear for my life; I fear for my neighbors* (Table 5), with feelings of fear more presented among women than among men.

Table 5. Gender and a sense of safety

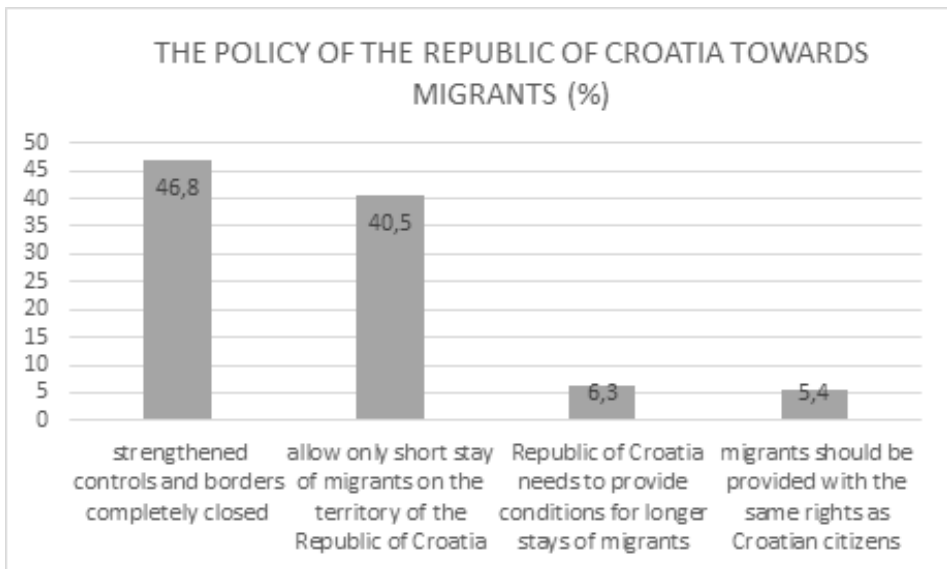
How do you feel about closeness of the border and migrants?	Gender	Mean rank	MWU	p
I fear for my health	M	50,29	1213,500	0,010
	F	62,03		
I fear for my life	M	50,82	1243,500	0,014
	F	61,47		
I fear for my neighbors	M	51,26	1269,000	0,032
	F	61,00		

7. RESPONDENTS' OPINION ON MIGRATION POLICY

The last question in the questionnaire referred to the opinion of the respondents on the migration policy of the Republic of Croatia. The data (Graph 2) indicate that there is most respondents (87,3%) who approve of the policy of “closing”. They point out that it is necessary to strengthen controls and to close borders completely (46,8%), or to allow migrants only a

short stay in the territory of Croatia (40,5%). On the other hand, the share of respondents who approve the longer stay of migrants in Croatia is significantly lower (6,3%), as well as the number of those who think that migrants should be granted the same rights as Croatian citizens (5,4%). A statistical application of the Chi-Square test showed that the variable “Opinion on migration policy” does not depend on the variable “gender”.

Graph 2. Respondents’ opinions on the migration policy of the Republic of Croatia



IV. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted in a rural, underdeveloped area that is close to the route often used by irregular migrants. The structural characteristics of the respondents suggest that they are a homogeneous sample, mostly of older and conservative respondents. The spatial dimension and structural characteristics of the respondents form the context in which we need to observe the achieved results. Generally speaking, the data indicate a mostly negative perception of migrants as a threat to personal and general security and to the identity of the local population.

Although this is an area exposed to illegal migration, most respondents did not have personal encounters with irregular migrants. Therefore, it is important

to emphasize that low acceptability and strong social distance are manifested in relation to persons and groups with whom the majority of respondents did not have close interactions. Considering that a small share of respondents had personal encounters with migrants, it can be concluded that prejudices and stereotypes shape the opinion on migrants.

The everyday life of most respondents is not disrupted due to the closeness of the migrant route and illegal movements of migrants. However, it is important to keep in mind the fact that although it is often underestimated as trivial, everyday life represents regularity and normalcy. Therefore, smaller percentages of respondents who experience disorders in this domain are significant. In this aspect, it is important to state that due to the space in which some of the respondents live, they spend more time in the house, feeling insecure and afraid. These disorders are more common among women than men.

Respondents' opinions on Croatia's migration policy are in line with their views on migrants. The data shows that the vast majority advocate control and closing of Croatian borders for migrants. Such attitudes are contrary to Croatia's migration policy, which is based on the EU migration policy.

This research is in line with the results of most previously conducted surveys of citizens' opinions about "others", which show the temporal and spatial continuity of non-acceptance and social distance, and the perception of "others" as a threat. For this reason, it is important to continue to monitor public opinion trends. The importance of monitoring the thinking of local communities, which are factors of acceptability and inclusion, should be especially emphasized.

Finally, it is important to point out that the research presented in this article has certain limitations that are the results of conducting the research in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the research is of limited spatial coverage and a limited number of respondents. Therefore, there is a need for further future research as well as the application of the same instrument in other environments and communities, which would allow longitudinal and comparative studies.

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