

CULTURAL AND COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract: *A large part of Southern and Eastern Europe, including Croatia and its neighbouring countries, encountered the first major migration crisis in the second half of 2015. Migrants, predominantly from the Middle East, most often travelled via the so-called Mediterranean migration routes through Italy, Spain, and Greece, as well as by land from Turkey, then across the Balkans towards the wealthier Western Europe.*

Various sources provided different information about the refugee routes, as well as the behaviour of refugees and their lives and survival in refugee camps. People's knowledge about refugees from the east is mostly based on their prejudices. It is precisely on such prejudices that attitudes and opinions about migrants arriving via perilous routes were formed. Migrants left and continue to leave their homes driven by wars or the inability to provide a living for themselves, which is often on the brink of poverty. Many have lost their lives in the waters of the Mediterranean in their quest to reach a promised land somewhere in Western or Northern Europe.

This paper aims to explore how cultural and communication differences affected their adaptation to the people and countries they arrived in and how significant the cultural and other differences are between, so to speak, them and us.

Keywords: *migration, migration crisis, cultural differences, communication*

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2015, countries in the South-Eastern Europe faced significant migrations and an influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East, Central Asia, and the African continent. Most migrants died on the central Mediterranean route, in the area between the coasts of Malta

and Italy and the African coast. Human losses were enormous. Thus, in just one day, in April 2015, 800 people lost their lives at sea on this route. Many volunteers were involved in their rescue, and the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies announced that around 150,000 refugees were saved in the Mediterranean through the *Mare Nostrum*¹ operation.

After the EU's external border protection agency, Frontex, took over the responsibility for continuing the operation in October 2014 (actions Poseidon and Triton), the actions continued but solely in the form of patrolling and control, and the return of boats to the shores of North Africa. By early November 2015, around 770,000 people who had left their homes arrived in Europe. The majority, around 620,000 people, arrived in Greece (Nađ & Mirenić, 2019).

According to Šterc, in the first major wave from September 2015, the majority of refugees were men – 58%, followed by 25% children and 17% women. Among them, the largest number were from Syria – 41%, followed by refugees from Afghanistan, who made up 21%.

Furthermore, in Libya, more than 20% of the total population experienced violent displacement, which created 1.2 million, exiled, refugee and displaced persons. The situation in Syria is even more difficult, where half of the population is forced to flee, amounting to 11 million refugees and displaced persons. Furthermore, according to the official UNHCR² data, there are about 3 million displaced persons from Iraq and Afghanistan (Šterc, 2016).

The migration of such a large number of people brought numerous risks and highlighted many cultural and, consequently, communication differences.

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND PERCEPTION OF MIGRATIONS

There is no widely accepted definition of the term "migrant." The term "migrant" typically describes an individual who emigrates from their own country and living environment for personal reasons and without coercion, moves to a new environment to achieve better life

¹ *Mare Nostrum* operation (Our Sea) is the name of a one-year rescue operation by the Italian Coast Guard and Navy, which lasted from October 13, 2013, to October 31, 2014. The operation was carried out with the aim of rescuing immigrants who attempted to reach Italy across the Mediterranean Sea during the migration crisis. Over 150,000 immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East were rescued in this operation. The rescues were conducted in the maritime area around the Italian island of Lampedusa.

² *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) – is the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, headquartered in Geneva. It was established in 1951 as the successor to the International Refugee Organization to protect refugees until they can return to their own country or settle in another country. It mainly operates in war-torn areas. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has received the Nobel Peace Prize twice..

prospects and improved economic and social conditions. The United Nations (UN) ³ describes a migrant as a person who spends more than one year in a foreign country, regardless of the reasons for leaving, whether the migration is voluntary or forced, legal or illegal. The term migrant also includes short-term migrations of people who go abroad for shorter periods in search of seasonal work. A refugee is described as a person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country." (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees - Article 1, Section A, as amended by the 1967 Protocol)⁴.

In addition to the definition of a refugee in Article 1, Section 2 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity ⁵ defines a refugee as any person who is compelled to leave their country "due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of their country of origin or nationality. The Cartagena Declaration (1984) ⁶ expands the category of refugees to include people fleeing their country "because their lives, safety, or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, and massive violations of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order" (International Organization for Migration, 2015) ⁷.

Population migrations from the Middle East, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, as well as other countries where living conditions forced people to migrate for various reasons, occurred via the so-called Mediterranean migrant routes through Italy, Spain, and Greece and

³ United Nations (UN) - an international organization established to maintain peace and security in the world and to address political, economic, and other problems while preserving human rights. The UN headquarters is in New York, with offices in Vienna, Geneva, and Nairobi.

⁴ The Geneva Convention refers to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, concluded in Geneva on July 28, 1951, as amended by the New York Protocol of January 31, 1967.

⁵ The Convention of the Organization of African Unity (African Union) was adopted in 1969 in Addis Ababa. This convention addresses specific aspects of the refugee problem in Africa.

⁶ The Cartagena Declaration was adopted at a meeting of experts in Colombia from November 19 to 22, 1984. The declaration sets standards for refugees in Central America, Mexico, and Panama..

⁷ *International Organization for Migration (IOM)* is the leading international organization dealing with understanding migration issues and monitoring the social, economic, and criminal aspects of migration..

by land most often from Turkey via neighboring Bulgaria and further across the Balkans towards Western Europe.

Three basic refugee routes emerged in the Mediterranean area. The first is the south-north route, which is mainly used by migrants from Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt looking for a way to Spain, France and on to Italy. The second south-east-north route is chosen by migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and from African countries (Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Senegal) on their way to Western Europe. The third route refers to migrants from Albania and Eastern European countries who come to Western European countries (Gregurović, 2011). In its 2018 report, FRONTEX (*European Border and Coast Guard Agency*)⁸ mentioned as many as six routes that migrants used to reach Europe. The most frequented is the Western Mediterranean route, leading from Morocco to Spain, while the Eastern Mediterranean route, which actually continues into the so-called Balkan route, is mainly used by Syrians and Iranians.

These routes included countries in Southeast Europe, from Macedonia, through Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and finally Slovenia. The arrival of migrants presented these countries with enormous challenges and new problems. Considering that crossing a national border without fulfilling legal requirements is illegal, all these countries dealt with illegal migrations. Vurnek, Bengaz, and Perkov (2018) note that illegal migrations can be organized, unorganized, or semi-organized, and they identify organized illegal migrations as the most dangerous.

The influx of migrants from the East was primarily caused by political unrest and wars starting in 2010 in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and then Syria. "To this wave, mostly Syrian refugees joined all those who sought to escape from politically and/or economically unsustainable conditions in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa" (Akrap and Kalinić, 2015).

Today, migration is a major contemporary issue which, in addition to the main protagonists, involves not only refugees themselves but also numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations, civilian populations, media, and various other actors who contribute in different ways to the better or worse treatment of the unknown. In recent history, we have witnessed

⁸ *European Border and Coast Guard Agency* (FRONTEX) - the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, established in 2004 to assist European Union member states and countries associated with the European Schengen Area in protecting their borders.

migration phenomena that are not new in human history. On the contrary, since the beginning of mankind, migrations or their variations such as relocation, refugee movements, and other forms of human mobility have been present throughout human civilization.

The broadest form of migrations, mass migrations, occurred historically from the 4th to the 7th centuries, widely known as the Migration Period or the Barbarian Invasions. Since then, human civilization has recorded several instances of large-scale migrations. Here, the focus will be on migrations significant for European populations.

Many studies to date highlight the largest movement of people known as the Great Atlantic Migration, lasting from 1820 to 1980, during which approximately 37 million people emigrated from Europe to America.

The reasons behind such large migrations, both in terms of the number of people involved and the extended time periods over which they occurred (more than a century and a half), were primarily existential. Widespread hunger in large parts of Europe compelled inhabitants, predominantly from Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands, to migrate to distant overseas lands. Following this, during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, poverty and conflicts led people from Eastern and Southeastern Europe to depart for America, viewed as a promised land. The Second World War also brought significant population movements, especially after its conclusion. In a new wave of migration, Germans who had to return to Germany from Eastern Bloc countries suffered the most, totaling around 16 million individuals. Here we will also mention the return of the Jews to Israel. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and until today, about 3.5 million people have returned to their country (Sučić, 2015).

It is clear, therefore, that today's migration movements cannot be considered epochal or large-scale in historical terms, given that only a few million people have entered Europe through migration so far. However, continued immigration into European territories will bring new concerns for Europeans. With nearly 740 million inhabitants, Europe faces increasing challenges of aging populations, labour shortages, depopulation, and natural ageing. The ongoing arrival of large numbers of non-European peoples poses numerous other issues that future generations will inevitably confront (Šterc, 2016).

Migration is a social process accompanied by dynamic and diverse changes. The magnitude of the socio-cultural impact of migrations and their negative consequences depends on the relationship between migrants and the older population in the receiving areas, as well as the strength of cultural differences (linguistic, national, religious) that either facilitate or hinder their integration (Croatian Encyclopedia, 2020). This aspect will be explored through the migration of people from the Middle East to European countries. How these migrations are perceived and understood in our surroundings will certainly depend on the methods, channels, and models through which information is made available to us and how it is interpreted.

3. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Migrants who have arrived in European countries have brought with them their cultural, religious, political, and general social characteristics. These characteristics constitute cultural differences that become even more pronounced when considering the significant communication challenges between the two sides.

Existing studies suggest that local populations often perceive migration from the East as a threat to their own cultures. There is fear that migrants will bring different cultures and lifestyles with them, thereby endangering or threatening their native cultures. There is a belief that new immigrants do not wish to integrate into the new community. Such attitudes are extended to all asylum seekers, with research showing an increasing strong aversion towards immigrants from Islamic countries, leading to a significant rise in Islamophobia (Crawley, 2005; Finney, 2005). Research on public perception in European countries also confirms that respondents who hold generally negative attitudes towards a group of immigrants with different religious or cultural characteristics also hold negative attitudes towards all migrants or immigrant minorities (see, e.g. Kinder & Kam, 2009; Sniderman et al., 2004; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Strabac, Aalberg & Valenta, 2014).

Furthermore, according to research conducted in the United Kingdom (Hellwig & Sinno, 2016), an increase in crime is often associated with immigrants from Eastern Europe, while cultural threats are frequently feared by respondents in the context of immigrants from Islamic countries. From our own research among respondents, there is also a prevailing belief that there are significant differences between the local population and migrants, starting from external

characteristics such as different modes of dress or dietary habits, to differences in religion and culture.

It is quite certain that the majority of people think about migrants because it is an unavoidable topic in today's world. It is also certain that individuals ask themselves a series of questions such as; why and where all these people come from, why are they doing it, do they have legitimate reasons, and what impact they have on the people and environments they come to, whether there are potential dangers from their arrival, whether it enriches or impoverishes us and what attitudes do people generally have towards those in need. The cultural differences and everything that influences our perception of people arriving in waves of migration have been addressed in survey research conducted for the purpose of this study.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Addressing the problem of illegal migration, an extremely important topic of our time, is dealt with in this paper through the analysis of survey research on the cultural differences between migrants and the population in the area of Southeast European countries.

The survey, which included more than 520 respondents, investigated the perception of people regarding cultural and sociological differences and the influence of the media on peoples who do not belong to the domiciled European population. The survey was conducted on the territory of Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia.

The survey for the purposes of writing this paper was created by using the "Google Forms" tool and was available from July 26 to September 5, 2020 on the following link <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1HKFyEl0HydWdTJrfVe9sbTfbCzEgWbYyxIUfZply4I4/edit?usp=sharing>

To measure the constructs, statements were used for which respondents rated their own level of agreement on a Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - mostly disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - mostly agree and 5 - strongly agree).

The methods used to process the results include analysis, comparison, and description of the data of the thematically structured survey.

The study aimed to determine the perception of the populations of the republics formed in Southeast Europe regarding cultural differences and the impact and role of the media when it comes to the perception of migrants. This was achieved in the following way:

- 1.) By determining whether the cultural differences of migrants are significantly expressed in relation to the population in Southeast Europe;
- 2.) By investigating the extent to which the media influence the population's perception.

The following hypotheses arise from the set objectives:

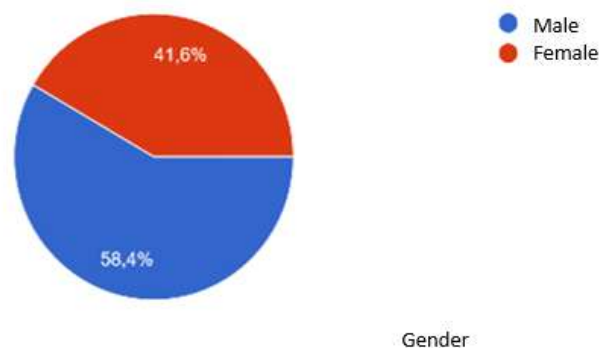
Hypothesis 1: Cultural differences with migrants are significantly pronounced in comparison to the population in Southeastern European countries

Hypothesis 2: The media play the biggest role in shaping the population's perception of migrants and the impact of illegal migrations

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

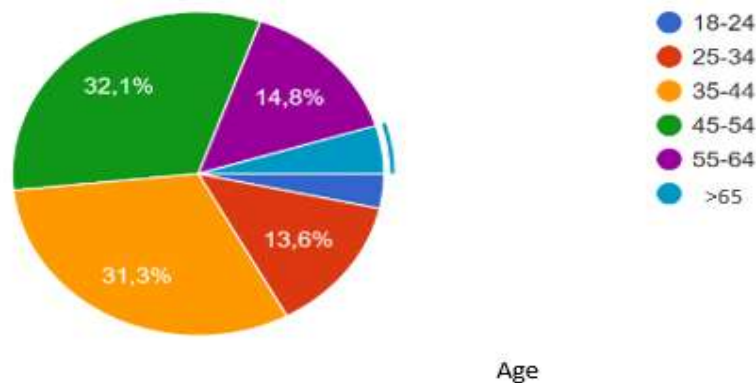
524 respondents from countries in South-Eastern Europe participated in the survey.

Regarding the gender of the respondents, 58 percent of women and 42 percent of men participated in the survey (Figure 1).



Picture 1. Gender of the respondent

The age structure was also very satisfactory, covering all age groups from 18 to 65+ years (Figure 2).



Picture 2. Age of the respondent

In terms of education, the majority of respondents had higher or secondary education, while only a negligible part of 0.3% had no education.

The next set of questions and answers provided data on the extent to which people notice and perceive differences between the local population and newcomers, comparing clothing, culture, religion, and education. Only 3 percent of respondents believed there were no differences. The answers were offered on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), and the results are shown in Figures 3 to 7.

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree

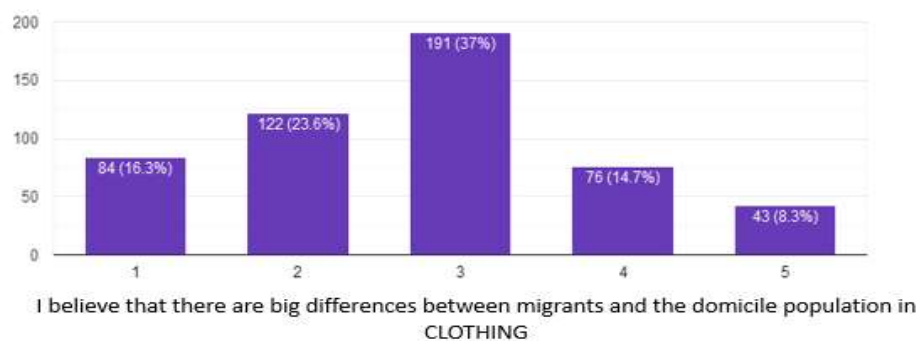


Figure 3. The most pronounced difference between migrants and the local population is in clothing

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree

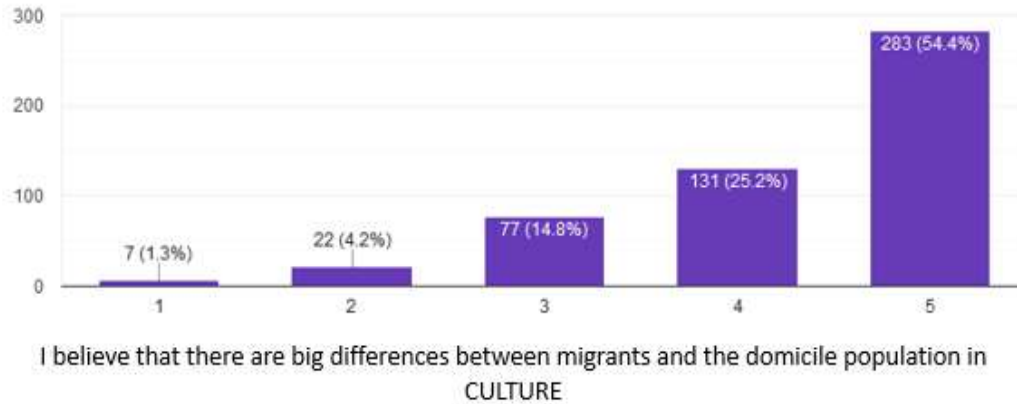


Figure 4. The most pronounced difference between migrants and the local population is in culture

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree

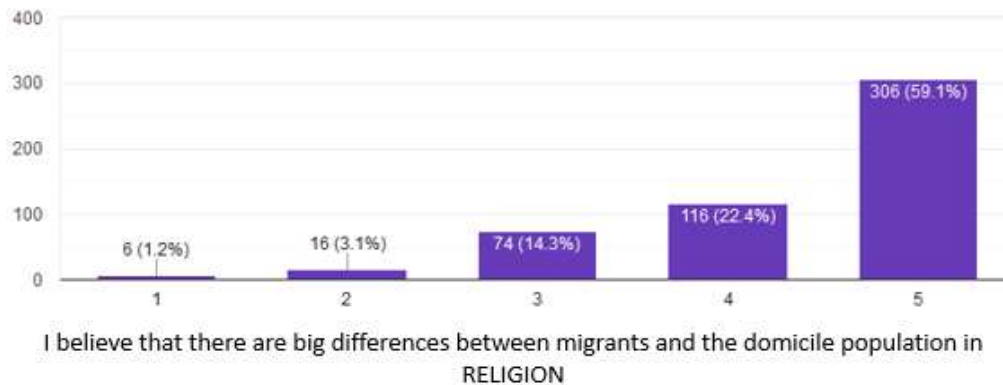


Figure 5. The most pronounced difference between migrants and the local population is in religion

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree

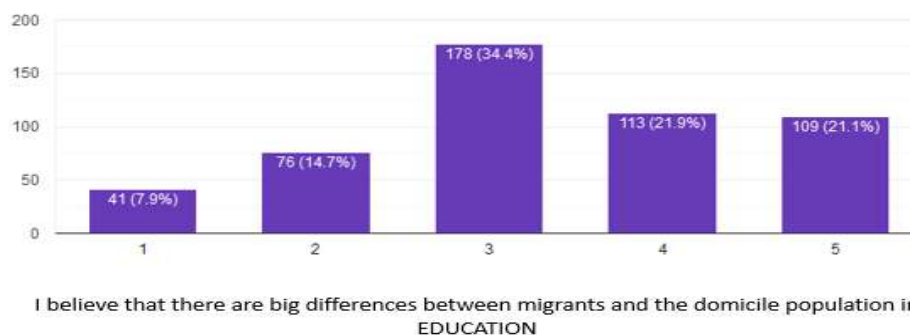
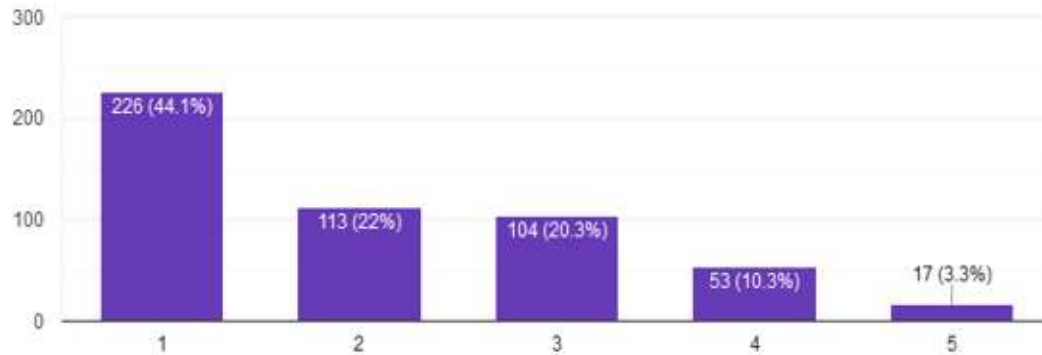


Figure 6. The most pronounced difference between migrants and the local population is in education

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree



I believe that there are no differences between migrants and the domicile population at all

Figure 7. There is no difference between migrants and the local population

The opinions of the respondents indicate that the greatest differences between the local population and migrants are in terms of religion and culture. Almost half of the respondents believe there are differences.

The next set of questions relates to perceptions of migrants and what shapes them.

It is evident that most respondents have preconceived notions about migrants. In fact, as many as 63 percent of respondents admit that prejudice is partially present, while 20 percent of respondents have a preconceived notion about migrants. Thus, approximately 80 percent of respondents have partial or complete prejudice against migrants (Figure 8).

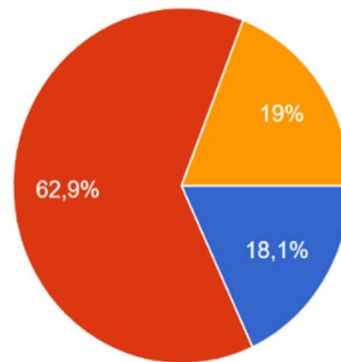


Figure 1 Do you have a preconceived notion about migrants passing through your country?

Regarding attempts to change perceptions, it is evident that respondents do not have firmly established views, with the majority being uncertain. Through the next set of questions, an attempt was made to obtain data on the emotions caused by migrants. Respondents rated their agreement with various statements from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), and the results are shown in Figures 9 to 13.

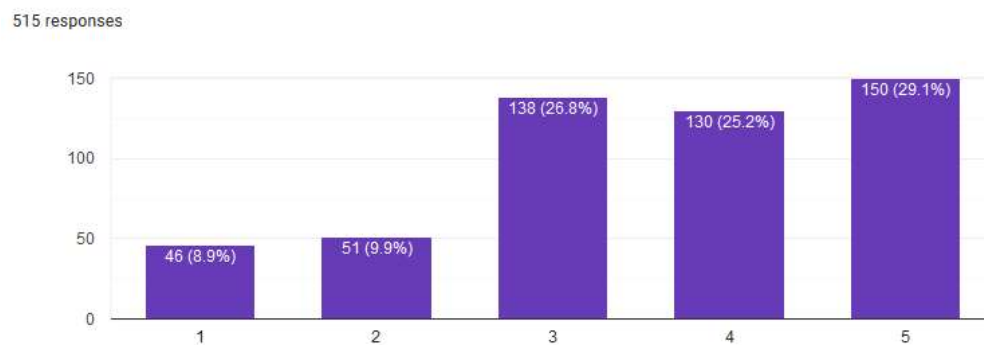
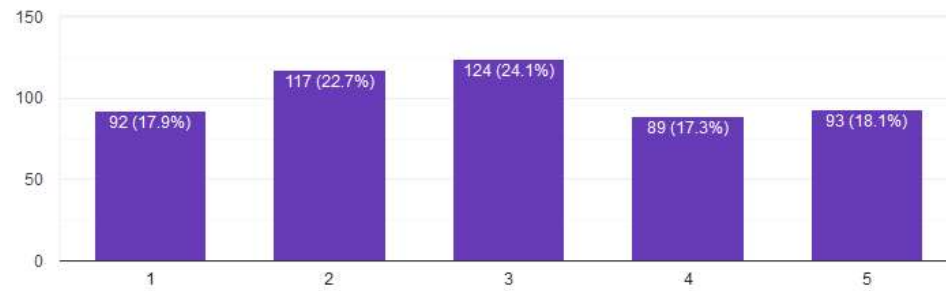
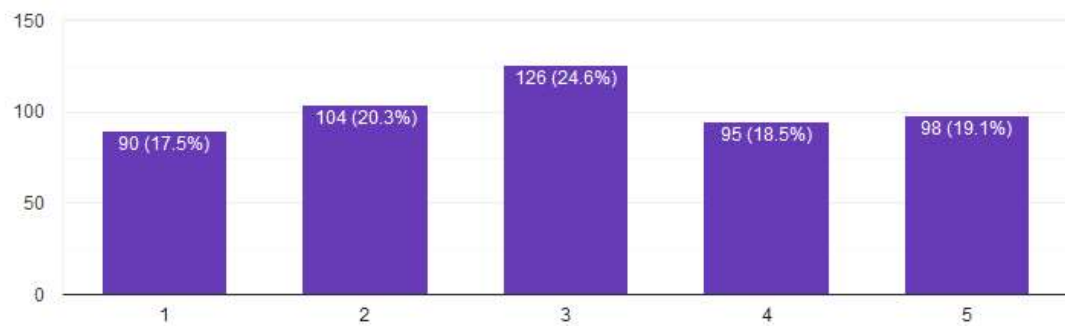


Figure 9. Migrants evoke emotions of sadness

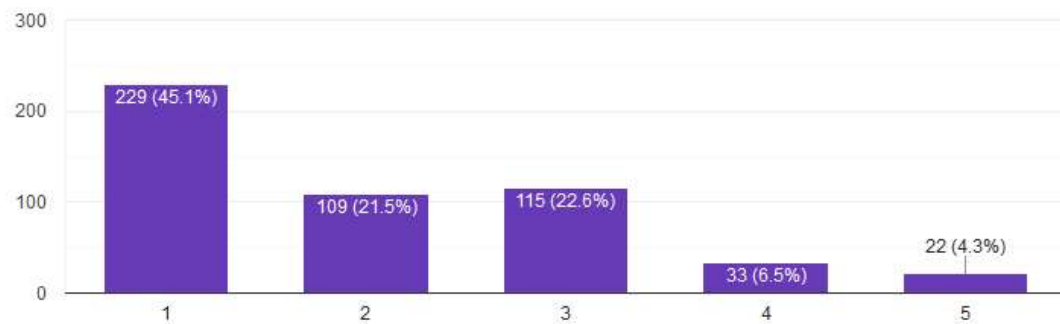
515 responses

**Figure 10. Migrants evoke feelings of anger**

513 responses

**Figure 11. Migrants evoke feelings of resentment**

508 responses

**Figure 12. Migrants evoke feelings of indifference**

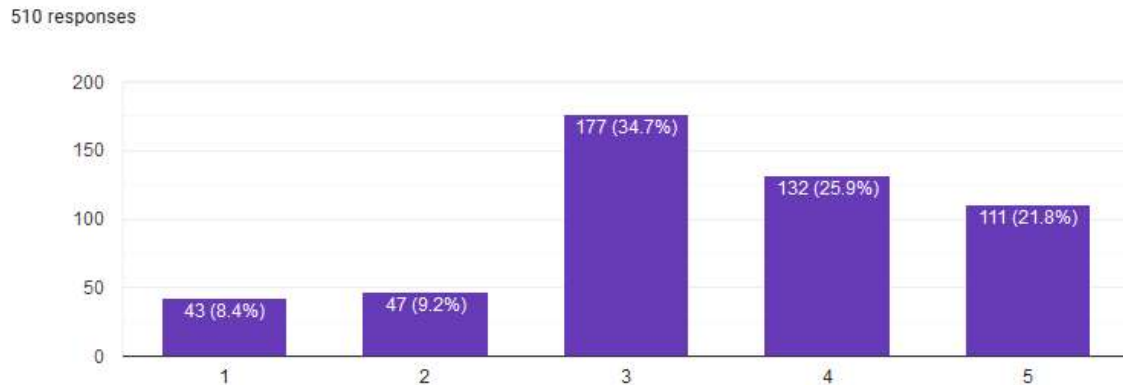


Figure 13. Migrants evoke feelings of empathy

In any case, it is confirmed that migrants strongly influence our emotions. For most people, they evoke sadness and grief, but not indifference. It is very interesting that respondents are evenly divided on questions of anger and resentment, with many feeling these emotions strongly and many not feeling them at all. Finally, when it comes to whether the arrival of migrants enriches or impoverishes the residents of the country they come to, the responses were predominantly negative (Figure 14).

Would you say that the arrival of migrants in general impoverishes or enriches the inhabitants and the country they arrive in?



Figure 14. Would you say that the arrival of migrants generally impoverishes or enriches the residents and the country they arrive in?

In the second part of the survey, questions were asked about the influence of the media on people's perceptions. Of the 10 categories, four related to the media, it is clear that the media are generally the main and largest source of information about migrants, with television and internet portals being the most prominent, followed by print media and finally radio stations, which were the least cited media channel. There was a very small sample of those who had

personal contact or received information from neighbours, friends, relatives, or colleagues. This highlights the fact that our perceptions, attitudes, and opinions are mainly formed based on news, reports, and documentaries. Despite this, respondents do not believe that the media provide objective news and stories, with the smallest number agreeing with this statement. A significant portion of respondents believe that the media do not send an objective picture to the world at all.

Although the media are the main source of information, they do not greatly influence respondents' attitudes and opinions. Respondents are divided on this, with some believing in significant media influence and others not, while the majority think that the media have a moderate impact on their opinions. Despite this, the majority, as many as two-thirds of respondents, believe that the media are the most responsible for creating perceptions about migrants. The research shows that people are less willing to admit the extent of the media's influence on their opinion formation while simultaneously believing that the media are the primary creators of this perception. The influence of the media on respondents' perceptions is illustrated in Figures 15 to 20.

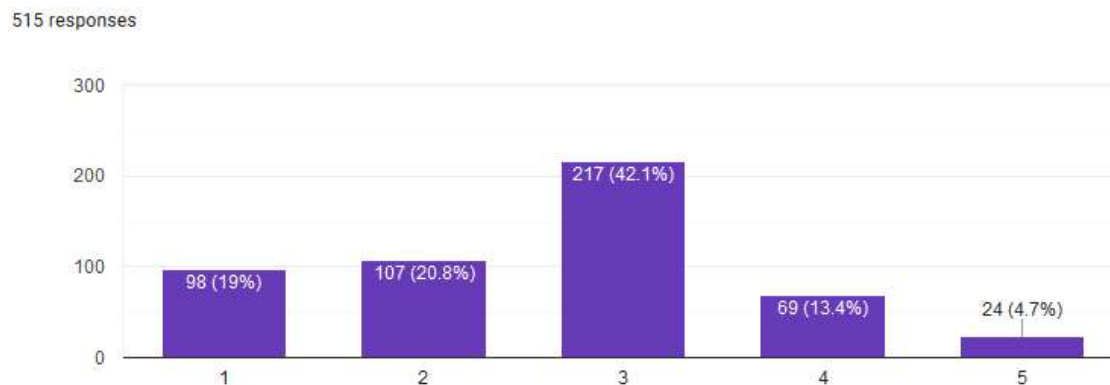


Figure 15. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media report objectively on migrants?

515 responses

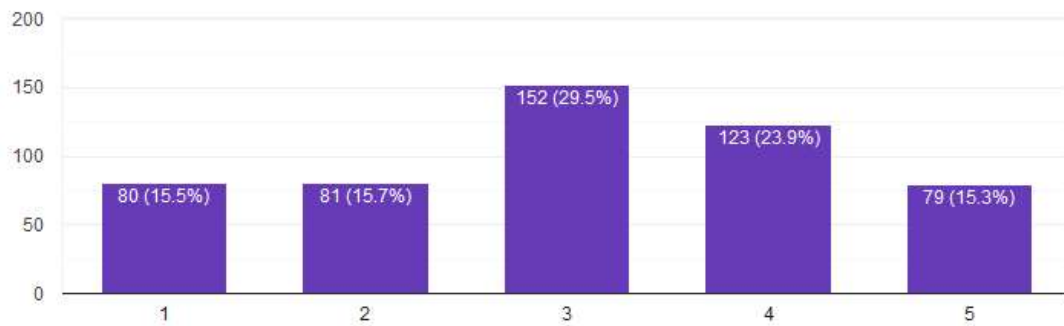
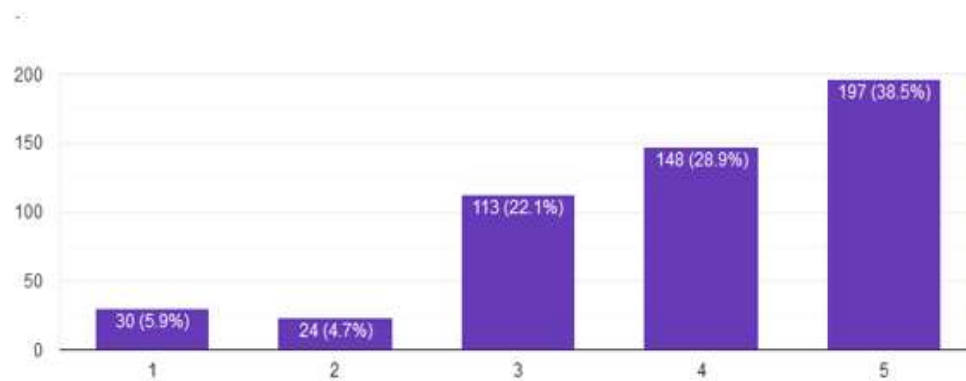


Figure 16. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media have a significant influence on your opinion about migrants?

1-I totally disagree; 2-I partially disagree; 3-I neither agree nor disagree; 4-I partially agree; 5-I totally agree



The media are the most responsible for the image of migrants that is created

Figure 17. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media are most responsible for the image of migrants that is created?

516 responses

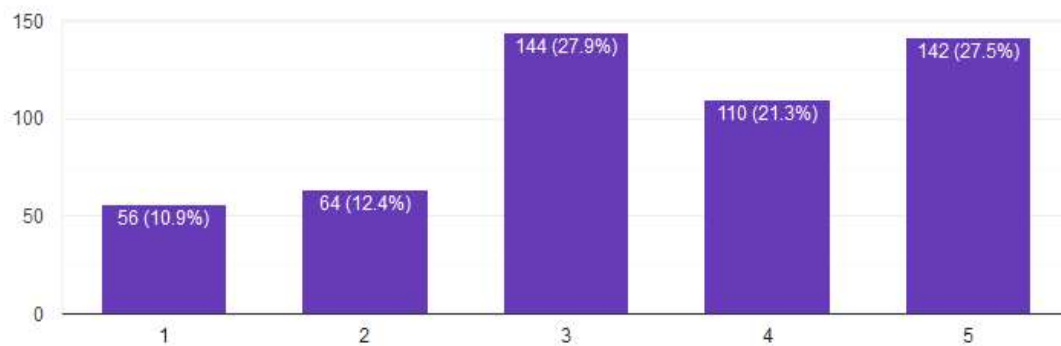
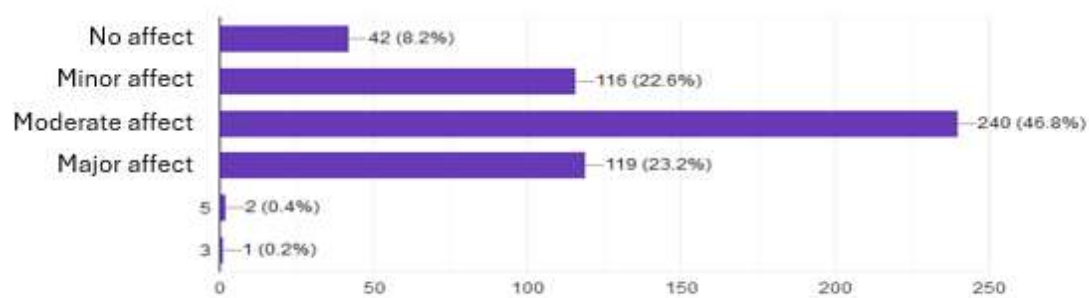


Figure 18. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media are responsible for the negative image of migrants?



The media has the greatest effect on creating an objective image of migrants in the public

Figure 19. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the media have the greatest influence on creating an objective image of migrants?

On what basis do you create an image of migrants?

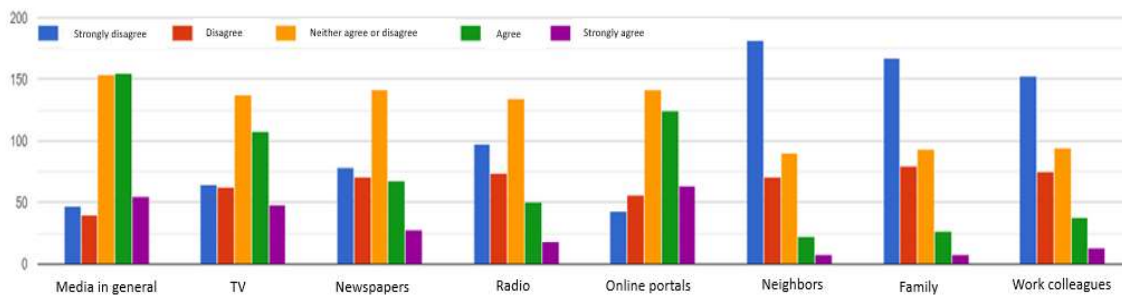
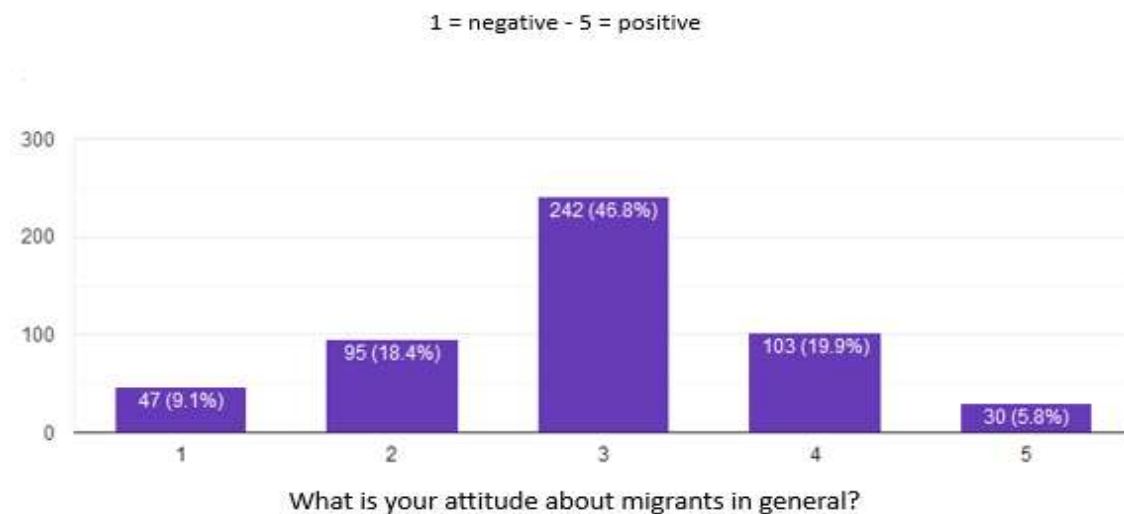


Figure 20. On what basis do you personally form your opinion about migrants?

The general attitude of respondents towards migrants is somewhat more negative than completely positive. The majority of respondents have a moderate opinion, therefore, neither too positive nor too negative (Figure 21).

**Figure 21. What is your overall opinion of migrants?**

This paper shows a deviation from the research conducted by Čačić-Kumpes, Gregurović, Kumpes (2012) on attitudes towards immigrants, where unequivocal responses indicated a high level of xenophobia, demonstrating a reluctance to accept the arrival of migrants. This reluctance is attributed not only to the fear of competition in the labor market but also to a closed attitude towards cultural diversity.

This research showed a much greater willingness of the local population to accept migrants.

However, it should be noted here that there are certain limitations in the number of respondents, and it is impossible to fully generalize the attitudes.

6. CONCLUSION

The study presented in this paper aimed to determine the perception of the population in Southeast Europe regarding illegal migration and cultural differences, with the language being an integral part of a nation, and the influence and role of the media on people's attitudes and opinions. This was achieved by determining whether the cultural differences and characteristics of migrants are significantly pronounced compared to the population in Southeastern Europe, and by investigating the extent to which the media influence the perception of the population.

The research confirmed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Cultural differences with migrants are significantly pronounced in comparison to the population in Southeastern European countries - confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: The media play the biggest role in shaping the population's perception of migrants and the impact of illegal migrations - confirmed.

Confirmation of Hypothesis 1 assumes that cultural differences, such as religion and language, are particularly pronounced in the comparison of migrants and the native population.

Confirmation of Hypothesis 2 assumes that the media largely shape people's perceptions of the migrant population.

In the last five years, about 1 to 2 percent of its total population has entered Europe, which should not be a significant tectonic disturbance in preserving its cultural and historical heritage and perhaps more efforts might be needed to assimilate those who have decided to make this continent their new home. This can also indicate that Europe is a more mature, higher-quality, safer, and better society to live in. Such a fact should not be a burden to those who inherit the old European continent.

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