



A Pathway to Integration:

Perception Study with
Migrants, Refugees, and
Host Communities in
Montenegro

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction:

Migration patterns have drastically changed over the last 20 years. New and long-standing crises, climate change, and economic instability caused by COVID-19, and other global economic factors have increased the number of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees throughout the world. As of May 2023, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are over 110 million refugees and forcibly people displaced in the world¹. The impact of this mass global migration makes it necessary to continually rethink how humanitarian and governmental systems respond and adapt to the ever-changing needs of migrants, as well as the interaction and eventual integration and inclusion into host communities.

The escalation of conflict in Ukraine which started in February 2022, saw an immediate migration of roughly 7,785,514 people displaced from Ukraine across Europe, and over 5,828,000 refugees from Ukraine had registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes across the continent by September 2023. More than 7 million internally displaced persons were estimated to remain within Ukraine at the same time². In addition to Ukraine, refugees and migrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa have significantly increased since 2015, especially with Syrians fleeing civil war, Afghans, Eritreans, Iraq, Pakistan and others leaving their countries because of conflict and economic reasons. In 2022, there was an increase in crossings of refugees and migrants on the Central Mediterranean (+56%, 105,600), the Eastern Mediterranean (+113%, 43,900) and the Western Balkan routes (+134%, 144,100) compared to 2021³. This crisis has

greatly impacted the neighbouring countries of the European Union (EU) and the Western Balkan countries (WB) which have absorbed these migrants and refugees.

Montenegro, one of the countries participating in the study, has been greatly impacted by changing migration patterns over the past four years.

Since **Montenegro** restored its independence in 2006, refugees from former Yugoslavia in Montenegro needed regular legal status and housing. Since 2006, out of 16,727 asylum applications, 105 people have been granted international protection, with most applications closed as asylum seekers left before a decision was made. The UNHCR identified 459 persons at risk of statelessness, and nine individuals had been officially granted stateless status in Montenegro⁴. Though not much current data is available about other migrants and asylum seekers in Montenegro, there is some recent statistics about Ukrainian refugees. Since 2022, more than 40 thousand people displaced have arrived from Ukraine, while the country has also received refugees from the neighbouring countries of Russia and Belarus⁵.

The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) along with other components of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (RCRC) have been supporting the European National Societies (NS) to support migrants across Europe for decades. The teams have strategic operations that assist people with shelter, basic aid items, cash assistance (CVA), medical supplies, psychosocial support, and medical treatment. In recent years and in response

¹ Statistics. UNHCR, 2023.

² [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation](#), UNHCR, 2024.

³ [Statistics on migration to Europe](#), European Commission, 2024.

⁴ Universal Periodic Review: Fourth Cycle, 43rd Session, UNHCR Montenegro, 2022.

⁵ [Montenegro Fact Sheet](#), UNHCR, 2023.

to the various migration changes, National Societies started with emergency response operations in line with their auxiliary role and have adapted their programs to the evolving needs, perceptions, and patterns of the migrant populations⁶. In addition, Montenegro is part of the IFRC Global Route Based Migration Programme – comprising 15 NS in Europe – focused on countries in transit, assisting and protecting people on the move, reinforcing the capacity of the NS and working on local and global humanitarian diplomacy.

As the needs of refugees and migrants move into a new phase of possible integration and inclusion of both people displaced from Ukraine and other migrants within host communities, the Regional IFRC Community, Engagement and Accountability (CEA) team commissioned this **Perceptions Study to explore the knowledge, perceptions, and practices of communities related to the migration and refugee situation in Bulgaria and Montenegro, with the intention of identifying community sentiments and experiences towards the reception, cultural practice, and power dynamics, conflict and tensions, and opportunities for integration, cohesion, and inclusion between host communities, migrants, and refugees.**

The findings and recommendations of this Study will be used by National Societies and IFRC to understand community dynamics, to adapt operational planning and identify appropriate, effective interventions, advocacy strategies, and messages.

Methodology:

At the initial phase of the study design, the IFRC CEA Europe teams engage National Societies within the region to participate in the study. Due to the workload and limited capacities of the contacted National Societies, only two of them – Bulgaria and Montenegro – agreed to participate in this study.

Data collection and sampling: The consulting team identified a sample size, and location

of the research, and developed tools for both Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant interviews (KII). Two virtual training of data collection tools were conducted for key NS team members and data collectors. Data collectors were then trained in the field, and provided the necessary data collection resources, including recording devices and the translated FGD and KII guides by NS team members. Interviewees were recruited by NS volunteers. Data collection in both countries was conducted between January and March 2024. All interviews were conducted in the relevant local languages and translated into English for analysis.

Data analysis: The qualitative data analysis was conducted by all three AFC team members for accuracy and to ensure cross-collaborative veracity. Results and recommendations were broken out by population and country, while conclusions were provided at both the country-level and extrapolated for generalised key learnings.

A total of 54 participants comprising of 32 data collection activities were conducted in Montenegro.

Study Findings:

Montenegro:

People displaced from Ukraine were generally grateful and content with their experience in Montenegro. Many noted the similarities between their cultures and noted the slower and more tranquil way of life in Montenegro. The respondents cited some frustration, like bureaucracy and their perception of corruption that led to lower economic opportunities, restrictions around banking and entrepreneurship and housing access. Generally, however, the respondents planned to stay in the country and felt affinity to the

⁶ Internal Operational Review (2022), IFRC's Response to Ukraine and Surrounding Countries.

host community. Language was cited as a large barrier to integration by both communities surveyed. The respondents also touched on difficulties in finding employment, particularly for older individuals, and mentioned limited opportunities in sectors like information technology (IT). Respondents proposed creating exchange programs for employment and providing more support to the IT sector to attract skilled workers. Additionally, the respondents reflected on the migration patterns of people displaced from Ukraine due to war-related factors. Respondents noted that some individuals stayed in Montenegro and integrated well, while other people displaced from Ukraine moved on to other countries if they didn't find sustainable work or a community. People displaced from Ukraine noted that the integration of their children into the education system went far to help them feel integrated into society. The population was also very grateful to the support from non-governmental

organisations, including the Red Cross, for the assistance they received upon arrival and throughout their experience in Montenegro.

The host community expressed deep belief in humanitarian principles and the community responsibility to help people displaced from Ukraine. The consensus was their country was doing the right thing in their assistance programs. There was some economic stress felt by this population, and people perceived "rich" Ukrainians to be causing difficulties in the housing market. Some respondents went so far as to say landlords would only rent to Ukrainians and regular Montenegrins were suffering from housing insecurity because of that. The host community also noted that misinformation and bias in the media was counterproductive to assisting the two communities to live healthily together. They noted work by the Red Cross and other NGOs were instrumental in assisting with integration and community development.

Key Takeaways:



Language identified by all parties as a barrier for integration.



Consensus of acceptance on principle by host communities.



Host community felt welcoming but noted tension with economic challenges across the country they attributed to migrant populations.



Host community perceived displaced people as driving up cost of living and treated with preference.



Difficulties in accessing housing, work and health care - bureaucracy blockages.



Education a great way to integrate the children.



Consensus of safety in the country and high quality of life living in Montenegro.



Misinformation and bias in the media noted as an issue by all hosts.



Humanitarian organisations services acknowledged and appreciated.

Conclusion:

The refugee and migrant situation in Bulgaria and Montenegro represent the complexities of migration around the world. While both people displaced from Ukraine, as well as from Syria,

Afghanistan, Iran and other countries mainly felt gratitude and safety in both countries, there was consistent evidence of financial hardship, high cost of living, and incidence of discrimination.

Host communities in Montenegro were most concerned by migrant populations potentially overtaxing the state resources

and reducing their ability to access housing and government services.

The primary pain point for all respondents across all populations was around **economic struggles**. While people displaced from Ukraine and other refugees consistently mentioned high housing prices and government restrictions on their ability to work, both host community participants were less supportive of refugees who came for economic reasons as opposed to conflict.

Key barriers to integration identified across countries and populations included:



Language barriers: all populations noted language barriers as one of the key deterrents to immigrants' ability to integrate into society fully.



Housing: The lack of support in terms of affordable housing and financial assistance further exacerbates economic difficulties, placing strain on immigrant families.



Employment: Respondents mentioned finding their new

environment difficult due to challenges in finding employment opportunities.

Recommendations:

The study findings underscore the significance of collective efforts by all stakeholders in facilitating the integration and inclusion of refugees and migrants into the host society and aiding their adaptation (including migrants and refugees themselves). While the government and media can significantly influence policies and shape positive messaging, NGOs and other relevant entities must collaborate closely to align these efforts with the actual needs of the community. These study findings recommend a comprehensive multi-pronged approach that can be utilised by National Societies and IFRC to address the relationship between community dynamics, perceptions, and trust on one side, and common collective behaviours and sentiments such as xenophobia and social stigma on the other.

The Top Key Recommendations included (please refer to the full report for detailed recommendations):

Top Recommendations:	
NGO/Int'l Organizations	<p>Language learning initiatives and engaging in educational programs: All groups noted the need of language courses as imperative to facilitating integration for migrants and refugees. The recommendation is to expand these services and ensure these initiatives aim to teach not just the local language but also important aspects of the local culture, history, geography, and societal norms, generating empathy, and trust.</p> <p>Policy advocacy and support for healthcare access: Advocacy for policies that improve healthcare access for immigrants and refugees, including language interpretation services, simplified enrolment processes, and culturally competent care standards.</p>

Top Recommendations:

Research

Research potential discriminatory housing practices: In Montenegro, host community members detailed discrimination in the housing market, with landlords only wanting to rent to people displaced from Ukraine as they perceive them able to pay more for rent. A housing market study is recommended in both countries, as migrants and refugees in Bulgaria also consistently complained of high rent and landlord exploitation. This research could act as an advocacy tool for the government and help the NS/IFRC identify further support needed.

Communication strategy and efforts

Media advocacy: Respondents recommended IFRC, NS, the government, and other humanitarian aid actors work closely with media outlets to shift the narrative around refugees and immigrants towards a more positive and accurate portrayal. This involved showcasing their successes, economic contributions, and cultural diversity while challenging stereotypes and promoting empathy. This initiative could potentially collaborate with media outlets to share uplifting stories and highlight the positive impact refugees have on society. This could help counterbalance negative narratives and stereotypes, providing a more balanced view to the public. Overall, the goal would be to create a more inclusive and empathetic society by working collaboratively with media outlets, promoting positive narratives, and empowering the public with media literacy skills.

Housing

Housing navigation: In all contexts, housing access was an issue raised by migrants and refugees and in Montenegro, even the host community. Consider building out housing navigation services that help all groups identify potential housing and navigate the legal nuances of each system (i.e. deposits, utilities payments, legal status requirements, etc).

RESULTS

People displaced from Ukraine were generally grateful and content with their experience in Montenegro. Many noted the similarities between their cultures and noted the slower and more tranquil way of life in Montenegro. The respondents cited some frustration, like bureaucracy and their perception of corruption that led to lower economic opportunities, restrictions around banking and entrepreneurship and housing access. Generally, however, the respondents planned to stay in the country and felt affinity to the host community. Language was cited as a large barrier to integration by both communities surveyed. The respondents also touched on difficulties in finding employment, particularly for older individuals, and mentioned limited opportunities in sectors like information technology (IT). Respondents proposed creating exchange programs for employment and providing more support to the IT sector to attract skilled workers. Additionally, the respondents reflected on the migration patterns of people displaced from Ukraine due to war-related factors. Respondents noted that some individuals stayed in Montenegro and integrated well, while other people displaced from Ukraine moved on to other countries if they

didn't find sustainable work or a community. People displaced from Ukraine noted that the integration of their children into the education system went far to help them feel integrated into society. The population was also very grateful to the support from non-governmental organisations, including the Red Cross, for the assistance they received upon arrival and throughout their experience in Montenegro.

The host community expressed deep belief in humanitarian principles and the community responsibility to help people displaced from Ukraine. The general consensus was their country was doing the right thing in their assistance programs. There was some economic stress felt by this population, and people perceived "rich" Ukrainians to be causing difficulties in the housing market. Some respondents went so far as to say landlords would only rent to Ukrainians and regular Montenegrins were suffering from housing insecurity because of that. The host community also noted that misinformation and bias in the media was counterproductive to assisting the two communities to live healthily together. They noted work by the Red Cross and other NGOs were instrumental in assisting with integration and community development.

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Theme One: Understanding Migration Dynamics

Ukrainians

The dynamics of being comfortable in Montenegro as migrants:

Based on interviews with people displaced from Ukrainians in Montenegro, the majority fled the recent conflict in Ukraine, while a few had arrived during the 2014 crisis. Respondents frequently recounted empathetic interactions with the Montenegrin community, such as initiating conversations on buses and expressing concern for Ukraine's situation. Respondents expressed a general positive sentiment towards life in Montenegro. Many appreciated the slower, more relaxed pace of life compared to the bustling urban environments they left behind in Ukraine. They likened their new experience to living in a big village, enjoying the peaceful atmosphere, lack of crowds, and opportunity for relaxation, such as sitting in a pub. Most respondents felt safe and trusted the local environment, noting that it was secure enough to leave belongings unattended or money in restaurants without concern.



“Overall, I am satisfied here. I still count on myself, so I can learn the language and work in the area of my vocation. I like the culture, the tranquillity of life, the lifestyle. It was hard to get used to it, but now I like it.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

The coexistence between displaced Ukrainians and Montenegrins was characterized by empathy, shared cultural similarities, and mutual respect. Despite some integration challenges, the people displaced from Ukraine appreciated the support and hospitality they received, fostering a sense of gratitude and belonging in their new environment. The

positive interactions and community support they experienced significantly contributed to their overall sense of safety and acceptance in Montenegro. They expressed overall contentment with their new lives, frequently citing the support they received from organizations like the Red Cross, which provided psychological support and financial aid.

They appreciated Montenegro's beauty and hospitality, even while facing challenges such as limited job opportunities, higher living costs, and difficulties in accessing services like SIM cards and bank accounts. Despite these obstacles, many respondents shared positive interactions with locals, including assistance from apartment proprietors and organizations like the Red Cross and Caritas. These interactions contributed to their sense of safety and trust. Although there were challenges in sourcing certain goods locally, respondents appreciated the community's support and enjoyed participating in local activities such as gym sessions and school sports. One university student particularly praised the pleasant atmosphere, warm weather, and the hospitality of the Montenegrin community.



“In my soul, I am satisfied because we have here a lot of friends, a job, a community of Ukrainians, good weather, sea, mountains, maybe five or seven years ago before, we thought about living here, but it was unbelievable for us.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Some respondents did mention that interactions with fellow Ukrainians in Montenegro were limited, despite the existence of online communities on platforms like Facebook and Telegram.

However, the majority of respondents highlighted the kindness and warmth of the Montenegrin population. They noted similarities between Ukrainian and Montenegrin cultures, which facilitated their adaptation.



“There are lot of carnivals here, not like in Ukraine. Prčanj, Kotor has a carnival, mimosa festival, olive festival. There is no such thing in Ukraine. But it’s better than at our place.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

The people displaced from Ukraine also noted they had been able to explore Montenegro’s diverse cultural and historical attractions, such as the Ostrog Monastery and the Bay of Kotor, expressing enthusiasm for the country’s rich heritage. They embraced cultural differences, such as the tradition of rest and family time on Sundays in Montenegro, viewing these differences as enriching experiences. Shared Orthodox Christian heritage and common values like hospitality helped foster a strong sense of connection between the two cultures.

Host Communities

General empathy, efforts to welcome and integrate the refugees:

Echoing the sentiments of the Ukrainian respondents, some of the host community respondents discussed conversations with migrants who expressed having nowhere to return to due to destruction in their home countries. Some respondents reported they felt migrants sought better conditions and opportunities, often influenced by the economic strength of different countries.



“And I’ve talked to them; now they tell me they have nowhere to go back to, even if they want to, because everything has been demolished to the ground. Now they are just looking for a situation where the state will offer them better conditions. All depending on the economic situation and how strong the country is, they get better or worse conditions. It is likely that Germany gives them much better conditions than we give them, so yes, they run away... that’s why they went away from here.” (host community member)

Positive experiences with migrants are noted, and these positive interactions contributed to reducing prejudices and fostering acceptance. The attitudes toward migrants from the former Soviet Union USSR, especially Ukrainians, were generally more positive due to traditional and historical values, leading to less prejudice compared to other populations. Some host community respondents also supported and were open to the arrival of other migrants in future, believing it would be inhumane to reject them when they were fleeing difficult situations.



“I will say that for sure no one will come to Montenegro just like that, without reason, but most people who run away have to run away, so I think that it would be absolutely inhumane that we don’t want (them) here, to tell anyone they are not welcome, again this is dystopian very inhumane. (host community member)

However, some of the same community members also expressed mixed feelings about accepting refugees and migrants. Some perceive migrants as privileged and cause frustration among locals who felt like migrants



and people displaced were receiving extra benefits and support. There was a significant contrast in attitudes towards migrants within the host community and these varying attitudes towards migrants among individuals may be attributed to personal biases and prejudices. There were specifically concerns about challenges like housing competition and perceptions of wealthy refugees impacting local resources.

Yet, there appeared to be an overall willingness and desire to help refugees integrate into society, grounded in compassion and an understanding of the trauma's refugees may have experienced while fleeing war. Host community respondents emphasized the need for integration efforts to combat prejudices and stereotypes. They suggested promoting workshops and discussions to raise awareness about migrants and stressed the importance of language learning and fostering a culture of understanding and acceptance regardless of religion or economic status. Humanitarian principles were highlighted, advocating for providing necessary assistance to refugees, such as food, shelter, and support systems. The respondents engaged in activities like language classes and workshops for displaced individuals and expressed a willingness to help, mainly through donations, despite not

volunteering directly with organizations like the Red Cross. *“And they need to learn the language, if not ours, at least English, to work hard on it.”* (host community member)



“Well, of course, the most important thing is to be there and listen to them. Because, mostly, they have big traumas and a lot of problems, and I think what they need most is someone who will listen to them and who will support them in difficult times.” (host community member)

Migration's effect on access to local services:

When asked about the hosts' perception of migrants' access to services, the respondents believed that people displaced from Ukraine, had access to essential services such as healthcare, vaccines, psycho-social support, education, and social welfare benefits. Although not well-informed about people displaced from Ukraine's healthcare choices, one respondent speculated on potential advantages they might have in accessing healthcare.



*“Everybody has everything. They have healthcare and they received help, and their needs have been met. Not only in the health centre but also pharmacies.”
(host community member)*

Respondents highlighted disparities in healthcare access between migrants and locals, noting that migrants often receive priority for general medical examinations, resulting in longer wait times for locals. While there were efforts to ensure equitable healthcare access for migrants, this led to frustrations among locals who perceived disparities. Respondents understood the need for equal healthcare for everyone and emphasized the ethical principle of providing medical assistance to all, regardless of nationality.



“I think yes, because we never know what somebody’s health condition is, and everybody has the right to the health care.” (host community member)

They also expressed frustrations with the healthcare infrastructure in Herceg Novi, citing issues such as doctors moving to private practices and longer wait times at public health centres. These problems, they noted, existed before the arrival of migrants and were due to pre-existing issues in Montenegro’s healthcare system. Concerns were raised about the increased demand on local services, particularly healthcare, causing potential overcrowding and management challenges.

Theme Two: Perceptions and Realities of Migration

Ukrainians

Living alongside host communities:

Respondents expressed mixed feelings about trusting the host community. While some individuals expressed trust in the Montenegrin community based on positive interactions and support received from local organisations like the Red Cross and the Civic Alliance, others highlight incidents of mistrust or lack of responsiveness from authorities

Overall, there appeared to be a mixed perception of trust and support from the host community by people displaced from Ukraine. Despite these challenges, many participants acknowledged the warmth and support shown by Montenegrins, especially in understanding and empathising with their background, including the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The persistence of language

barriers and occasional feelings of being treated as tourists during the summer months highlighted ongoing challenges in achieving full integration.

The complexities of mixed feelings about trust for the local community:

Trust issues were acknowledged as a common challenge in any community, with both positive and negative experiences mentioned. While most interactions were positive, some respondents faced negative experiences. There was an example of being defrauded of a significant amount of money upon arrival, though most of the funds were recovered through legal action. Another respondent mentioned that a jealous neighbour demanded money to allow them to conduct their business activities. Some respondents heard rumours about issues with landlords and rental services, such as not returning security deposits, but,

they personally had not encountered such problems. Instead, they emphasized their open and trusting relationships with their landlords, based on mutual understanding rather than formal agreements. Respondents recognized that such problems could happen anywhere, and these problems did not define the entire Montenegrin community.

The respondents largely believed the local population trusted them, as reflected in positive interactions and opportunities for communication. They noted that individual opinions varied, with some supporting Russia and others advocating for Ukraine and peace, but these differences did not overshadow their general sense of safety and acceptance.



“Well recently, I think you know it also that the news started arising that locals are afraid that Ukrainian and Russians are going to take their business, for example, and stuff like that. I’m not a businessperson, I don’t have so much money to take someone else’s business, so in terms of the fear that we might actually take some spot in the market, yeah, for sure, I understand that.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Despite these distinctions, participants viewed their experience as generally as enriching, appreciating the opportunity to immerse themselves in a different cultural context. Respondents highlighted the similarities between Ukrainian and Montenegrin traditions, particularly in their shared Orthodox Christian heritage. They emphasised the commonalities in values such as hospitality and a jovial spirit, suggesting a strong sense of connection between the two cultures.

Host Community

Efforts to build trust in both communities:

Despite admitting to initial weak trust towards migrants due to prevalent prejudices, some respondents highlighted positive experiences and mutual activities as key factors that fostered their trust, adaptation, and integration between migrants and host families. They praised the Red Cross branch in Budva for its exceptional care, while emphasising inclusivity regardless of religion, nationality, or politics.



“It’s just a matter of our culture, our approach. It all depends on how we are inclined, what the relationship is like, to eliminate certain prejudices, to remove the burden of whether someone is of the Catholic, Orthodox, or Islamic faith. Instead, always approach it from the perspective that a person is a person, people are people. If someone needs to be helped, they should be helped.” (host community member)

Respondents noted efforts such as, joint activities, socialisation, and language learning, with migrants showing keen interest in embracing the local language and culture. Respondents noted they also participated in activities like picnics, creating souvenirs or establishing dance classes.



“I heard that they started a dance class, bars. It is cute to me because they started something that is new here, something that didn’t exist before. They brought something new to the place.” (host community member)

Theme Three: Integration Challenges and Solutions

Ukrainians

While there was a general sense of positivity, respondents acknowledged challenges in fully integrating into Montenegrin society, particularly due to language barriers. Respondents also detailed their efforts to respect local traditions and holidays, such as attending church services and participating in cultural events.

However, they faced difficulties in accessing services, citing regulatory differences and varying practices among banks, which complicated their integration. Instances of potential dishonesty in transactions, such as double payments in parking lots, were also noted, though overall feelings of security prevailed. Overall, respondents noted that there were challenges related to transportation, job opportunities, language and housing. They noted frustration over the lack of clear pathways to access job offers, social housing, and mobile phone connectivity, which they felt were crucial for integration and a high quality of daily life.

Language and cultural differences:

Discussions on integration highlighted language barriers as a major challenge for people displaced from Ukraine. Proposed solutions included offering partially funded language courses to improve access and affordability. While interactions with Montenegrin children at school were mostly positive, language differences sometimes led to separate playgroups for Ukrainian and Montenegrin children.

However, many found integration in Montenegro easier because many Montenegrins speak English, facilitating communication. Some respondents actively participated in language courses across different locations to overcome this barrier, recognizing that limited proficiency in the local language hindered communication, access to services, and employment opportunities.





“Well, it seems to me that the main thing is the language. That’s how it seems to me: the language is the most important thing. When a person speaks the language, integration becomes easier and happens more quickly for him.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

“I’d say that a majority of Montenegrins can speak English. So, even if you can’t speak Montenegrin, you can always get things across fluently in English.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Respondents also noted difficulties in finding employment, with one mentioning the struggle to find a job similar to what they had in Ukraine due to language barriers and other factors like high housing costs and slow postal services. Despite feeling generally comfortable in Montenegro, language barriers and cultural differences sometimes created tensions between Ukrainian people displaced and the host community.



“Some people came from Ukraine because of the war there or before the war. I came before the war, but people came during the war. Some came and stayed here for half a year and went on to Italy, France, those that didn’t like it here. Those who like it must love Montenegro to live here, and those who don’t like it have moved on.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

“It’s actually our people [Ukrainians] who simply aren’t always open, and that could bother the Montenegrins.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Lack of Employment and overall economic hardships:

The respondents also touched on difficulties in finding employment, particularly for older individuals, and mentioned limited opportunities in sectors like information technology (IT). Respondents proposed creating exchange programs for employment and providing more support to the IT sector to attract skilled workers. Additionally, the respondents reflected on the migration patterns of people displaced from Ukraine due to war-related factors. Respondents noted that some individuals stayed in Montenegro and integrated well, while other people displaced from Ukraine moved on to other countries if they didn’t find sustainable work or a community.

Economic challenges:

Furthermore, respondents noted multiple economic challenges they faced, particularly regarding the high cost of living in Montenegro compared to Ukraine. Participants highlighted the difficulties in affording social housing and finding affordable accommodations, especially with limited financial resources. Additionally, respondent’s hinted that there was potential corruption or informal payments in certain processes, particularly around housing, which added to their economic hurdles. Financial strain was a recurring theme, with participants expressing concerns about the cost of various services like bank cards, education, and communication plans.

They noted differences in costs based on citizenship status and mentioned challenges during tourist seasons, when prices tended to escalate. Limited financial support further exacerbated their daily strain and adaptation efforts, underscoring the complexity of integration and adjustment. While participants appreciated the support

programs provided by organisations like the Red Cross, there were suggestions for more frequent financial assistance. Some respondents specifically mentioned that additional financial assistance from the government or local organisations would enhance migrants and refugees' integration experience, indicating the importance of continuous assistance in addressing immediate needs and promoting stability during their integration process.

Housing frustrations:

Some respondents mentioned difficulties in finding affordable housing, especially in areas with high living costs. Limited employment opportunities and financial resources further exacerbate these challenges, making it challenging to secure suitable accommodation. Additionally, participants discuss instances of unfair treatment, including being served last in stores, encountering issues from landlords with returning security deposits



“Like, for instance, trying to find social housing there. Yes, but the prices there are insane. And without money, I don't know how to find something more affordable.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Bureaucratic and logistical complaints:

Most respondents discussed bureaucratic hurdles encountered in obtaining essential documents such as bank cards and notarized certificates for accommodation. Respondents noted the challenges faced by the people displaced from Ukraine in Montenegro were related to legal and administrative barriers, particularly related to their temporary protection status. These barriers impacted various aspects of daily life, such as purchasing

SIM cards, opening bank accounts, and accessing essential services.



“So our protection status doesn't allow us to do everything that people who [don't need protection status] As foreigners, so for example, we cannot buy a car here. It is hard to open a bank account here. I know that some banks open accounts, but it's really hard. So, the view here like that their government just allowed us to live here, but we cannot fully integrate. Because at the moment, the situation in Ukraine looks like we won't come back soon, and lots of people now are thinking that maybe they will never come back.” (person displaced from Ukraine)

Respondents also touched upon uncertainties regarding legal status, residency permits, and citizenship, which significantly impact participants' long-term plans and stability within the host community. The complexities in legal status and bureaucracy, along with restrictions due to protection status, contributed to their perception of integration hurdles. One respondent noted his struggles in obtaining information regarding crucial services such as job opportunities, housing, and transportation schedules. He noted the absence of comprehensive online resources and structured information, particularly regarding public transport schedules. These challenges, he believed, hindered his ability to navigate daily life effectively.

Challenges with accessing health care:

While earlier sections (in theme 1) reported about what the host communities perceived as migration's impact on access to services, the people displaced from Ukrainian expressed

the opposite. They reported challenges related to accessing healthcare services and medical prescriptions, highlighting broader difficulties in accessing social services. However, similar to the host community respondents, the migrants also discussed longer wait times and difficulties accessing specialised medical care, as well as challenges in obtaining medications and managing healthcare costs. Overall, the conversation underscored the complexities of navigating healthcare systems and accessing essential services for migrants and refugees in Montenegro.



“The only problem is the healthcare. It is a huge problem for me and my mom for example, as we have some health issues. So, it’s difficult to sometimes find the medicine here that were usually readily available in Ukraine. Also, the clinics are remote dispersed across the country.”
(person displaced from Ukraine)

“So here, for example, we can’t have something urgent like surgery or I don’t know, whatever, trauma. So, it’s the main problem I would name. And in other stuff, like expensive, maybe accommodation. Because the purse is really stretched after the war started, so basically the two main issues that we have, it’s healthcare and accommodation. Other than that, nothing too big.”
(person displaced from Ukraine)

Challenges with education:

Some respondents expressed concerns about educational standards in Montenegro compared to Ukraine, where children may have longer school days and what respondents perceived as a more rigorous curriculum. Respondents discussed several challenges

related to education and childcare, particularly in the context of enrolling children in schools and kindergartens.



“Yes. It was barely impossible to register children in the school. [...] we have three children, and we could register our youngest child, but they said that we don’t have any places for your elder child. And it’s... can you imagine the parents should get a [lift] for one child at one school, another child to other school. It’s really hard.”
(person displaced from Ukraine)

Respondents noted difficulties in finding suitable educational institutions, which was compounded by financial constraints resulting from the high cost of living in Budva. These challenges influenced family decisions regarding education and childcare arrangements. On the other hand, some respondents highlighted positive experiences with a Montenegrin kindergarten. One participant noted a specific experience where, despite initial language barriers, she was able to successfully enrol her daughter in school with the help of a friend acting as a translator, leading to a smooth enrolment process without significant problems.



“One problem was when I came to school to my daughter to come there, and I didn’t know language at all, Montenegrin language when I came here. But the secretary of the school spoke only Montenegrin language, no English, no Russian, Ukrainian, so that was a little problem. But I had a friend here, and she helped me, she came with me like a translator. But no problems with school. I mean they took my daughter without any problems.”
(person displaced from Ukraine)



Respondents mentioned making several efforts to overcome these barriers included enrolling in language courses and seeking opportunities for joint activities with locals to improve language skills and foster social integration into the local community due to language limitations and differences in cultural expectations.

Host Communities

Perceptions from historical conflicts, and personal experiences:

Though Theme 1 data showed that the host community generally expressed empathy and a welcoming attitude toward Ukrainian refugees, further analysis revealed underlying negative attitudes rooted in past European conflicts. Media portrayals perpetuating stereotypes, along with language barriers, economic disparities, social differences, cultural diversity, and societal prejudices, influenced trust levels and interactions between migrants and the host community.

Respondents discussed the significant role of education in shaping attitudes toward minority groups, specifically people displaced

from Ukraine. There was a strong belief that education played a crucial role in fostering understanding and acceptance among communities. Some respondents also touched on the current political climate, noting a shift towards prioritising economic concerns over political leadership, which they view positively and an approach that would serve both host communities and migrant populations better.

Some community members believed in the potential for migrant integration, while others harboured reservations due to cultural or economic concerns. Public perception often focused on the perceived material advantages of Europeans, treating Ukrainians more like tourists than war refugees. Despite this, most respondents emphasized understanding the challenges newcomers face and advocated for addressing these issues humanely and peacefully to avoid escalating tensions. Personal experiences of displaced individuals in Montenegro highlighted both improvements in education and support for migrants today and the various challenges and negative experiences they encounter. Some respondents described migrants as “arrogant” and uncooperative, especially in traffic-related incidents: *“They simply behave arrogantly. They simply don’t care. When it comes to traffic, which interests me the*

most, they are a disaster. It's a disaster. So, they don't want to identify themselves, show ID cards. They don't want to show you the documents. They automatically burst into tears. Frustration sets in. They shut themselves in the car, lock themselves, they won't open to an official to talk to him.” (host community member)

However, other host respondents showed understanding and empathy, attributing such behaviour to trauma related to displacement: *“Then they start beating us...So I guess there must be some kind of trauma. There is probably some kind of trauma. And it's not easy for them that they had to leave their homes, probably, and that's why they behave like that.” (host community member)*

Most respondents recognized that some migrants might not trust them due to fear of a new place and uncertainty about acceptance and legality in Montenegro. Mixed sentiments were evident regarding the impact of immigrants on the community. While there was agreement on aiding refugees from war, concerns arose about certain behaviours and influences brought by immigrants, such as the visibility of religious sects, drug-related issues, and other abnormalities. These concerns were believed to contribute to tensions and challenges in security and social integration.

Segregation as a challenge against integration:

The host community discussed integration challenges due to segregation faced by migrants in Montenegro. A respondent expressed concerns about the segregation of Russians and people displaced from Ukraine, likening it to historical separation practices of Jewish people by other regimes, advocating for their integration among locals to promote social inclusion into the broader community. Some respondents believed building housing only for Ukrainians and Russians was problematic and urged for more inclusive integration efforts. They felt that this segregation created isolated neighbourhoods and hindered integration. Another respondent noted that many migrants

see Montenegro as a temporary refuge and tend to isolate themselves, affecting their integration prospects.



“But in general I would mix them among our people so that people integrate into our life. I simply wouldn't separate them to other places, like the Jews used to be separated, and then have people look at them, and they are there...hey, why do we have one building in Bečići where only Ukrainians and Russians live. It's a huge building, it looks roughly like a clinical centre, and there are probably one, two, three thousand people in that building. Only Ukrainians and Russians live in that building, and then it became like, it's like some kind of their neighbourhood, don't go there I think like that... I think...it's just so catastrophic to me.” (host community member)

“And they isolate themselves in a way, so it depends on both... it depends on them too, how much they think they can find their way here, to stay. I would say that majority of them do not plan to stay here, they feel like this a temporary refuge for them.” (host community member)

Resource Pressure of Migrants in Parts of the Country:

Respondents also discussed the complexities of migration in Montenegro, focusing on the distribution and impact of migrant populations in different regions. Most acknowledged both positive aspects, such as cultural diversity and contributions, as well as potential challenges like overpopulation and strain on resources. Concerns were raised about the burden on the south of Montenegro, noting that certain regions, particularly Budva, bear a heavier burden due to migrant concentration.

Economic impacts due to migration, such as increased rental and supermarket prices, were concerns mentioned by respondents. They cautioned against the government or NGOs showing favouritism towards migrants at the expense of local residents, expressing concerns about escalating real estate prices benefiting migrants while other refugees and locals face different circumstances. This finding, though contradictory to the reports from the Ukrainian respondents, who also reported about housing frustrations and high economic pressure, shows that, the overall economy was in pressure from rising prices and financial burdens.

Further, host community respondents also detailed their perception of refugees' impact on local services, particularly focusing on crowded government offices due to increased demand for services. Concerns were voiced about potential issues like limited access to healthcare for locals, citing differences in service access and wait times between migrants and locals.



“Overpopulation that especially prevailed in Budva, that is for sure, I would say that. To the greatest extent. Overpopulation is (maybe the only consequence) of their arrival.” (host community member)

“There are neighbourhood stories, that Ukrainian children go to schools, so now our kids won't be able to enrol. I think that it is not true at all, those are just local stories. There's space for everyone at the moment, but people are afraid. This city was not built for 60-70 thousand of people. When I came to this city, this city did not have 3 thousand people in the winter of 1998, now it has 54,000 health cards. Then you can imagine how many people there are.” (host community member)

“But this frustration also comes from the people who live here. We see a Ukrainian or Russian man driving a 150 thousand EUR worth car. And that one with 150 thousand EUR came (a Red Cross staff) to the Red Cross... and of course, they will help.” (host community member)

“And here you have people living in apartments for 1,000 euros, 1,200, 1,700 euros, 1,500 euros. And our people who lived in those apartments with two or more children, had to go out in the street. Because they were those tenants who had their rents increased.” (host community member)

“Rent has all been increased because of the Ukrainians, now everyone would (like to) rent to the Ukrainians.” (host community member)

“I would not like to be unfair, but generally, we should be helped first. They have jeeps, they play tennis.” (host community member)

Language and Cultural Barriers:

Respondents noted frustration over migrants' reluctance to learn the local language while expecting locals to speak Russian or Ukrainian. This mismatch in language expectations was seen as a negative aspect hindering integration efforts.

Along with linguistic challenges, some host respondents discussed difficulties related to assisting people displaced from Ukraine, citing cultural differences that may complicate support efforts. They stressed the necessity of providing aid while recognizing the complexities involved. Respondents

acknowledged stereotypes and prejudices as obstacles to integration, emphasizing the need for education and awareness for both populations to dispel these barriers. Some participants acknowledged the positive aspects of cultural enrichment and integration, suggesting that learning from other cultures could enrich their lives. Some respondents advocated for promoting cultural exchange and community engagement to facilitate successful integration of refugees and harmonious coexistence between refugees and hosts. They spoke about the importance of recognizing and respecting cultural differences and promoting mutual understanding through initiatives such as cultural exchange programs, language classes, and community events.



“There is a language barrier and then it is hard to establish communication because they don’t put effort to learn our language either.” (host community member)

“I think that the most important is to include them in the activities of the community. Because, if they are isolated, then they stick together as a group, and if they form a group, an integrated group, and if we are another, separated group, we won’t have many things in common. [..]” (host community member)

Other Integration Challenges:

Respondents also touched on topics like people displaced from Ukraine obtaining refugee status and potential concerns about rent payments, although concrete examples were not cited. Safety concerns in crowded areas with unfamiliar languages were also mentioned by some respondents, despite a generally welcoming attitude toward migrants. While some fears were shared, most respondents mentioned not observing migrants engaging in criminal activities but instead working together to organize and improve their living conditions. A respondent shared examples of migrants who had successfully integrated by attending school or finding employment, highlighting their resilience and willingness to adapt.

Theme Four: Integration Efforts

Ukrainians

Pivotal role played by the Red Cross for adaptation and integration:

People displaced from Ukraine expressed gratitude for the extensive support received from organizations like the Red Cross, which played a crucial role in their adjustment and integration. The Red Cross facilitated workshops, language courses, legal aid, assistance with temporary protection, medical issue resolution, and psychological support. Many respondents emphasized the importance of legal support and advocacy through organizations like the Red Cross and Civilian Alliance to address

issues related to rights, services, discrimination, and access to psychological support groups and childcare facilities. One female respondent specifically appreciated the psychosocial support she and her children received due to the trauma of fleeing their country and being caught in conflict.

The Red Cross and other NGOs also provided food and hygiene packages, financial assistance (ranging from 50 to 120 Euros at different times of the year), and a bank card from Caritas loaded with 100 Euros for use in shops and pharmacies. Although respondents did not detail direct support from the Montenegrin state, they noted that the Montenegrin community offered financial assistance, helped cover basic

expenses, and provided practical support, such as cards for purchasing children's clothing.



“There was the Red Cross organised a meeting with the local directors with I believe with the Minister of Education, and they made the Director of School Jugoslavija was there, and so they could register all three children at school. I know that lots of other people that couldn't register their children in school.”
(person displaced from Ukraine)

Host Communities

Efforts and engagements from the host communities:

Host community respondents highlighted positive interactions and integration efforts with migrants and refugees, including joint activities, socialization, and language learning. Host community members participated in activities such as picnics, creating souvenirs, and establishing dance classes. They supported refugees through language classes for children, workshops for older individuals and young displaced children from Ukraine, and by donating items, although they hadn't directly volunteered with organizations like the Red Cross.

One respondent quoted their indirect participation in humanitarian aid efforts: *“I did not directly participate in any such actions, but it can be said that directly by participating in collection actions, I distributed humanitarian aid, which was distributed to the migrants themselves, both from Ukraine and from Russia, so I consider that I have contributed so far.”* (host community member)

Respondents also observed that inclusive activities and interactions helped some migrants integrate well and become communicative, emphasizing that migrants are like anyone else

and could find themselves in similar situations.

Role of the media in integration and trust:

The host respondents highlighted negative comments often associated with migrants in the media, leading to a lack of understanding in the community. *“The media will mostly show only some of the ugliest things in the most dramatic way, because of which people have a certain distance from migrants and create a wrong image.”* (host community member)

Some of them criticised the media for sensationalising negative aspects, leading to a distorted image and creating distance between locals and migrants. On the other hand, some of the host respondents perceived the media's portrayal of migrants as positive, focusing on raising awareness and aiding them. However, they emphasised the importance of spreading accurate information and suggested journalists conduct fieldwork and engage with refugees before reporting.



“First of all, I think there is very little talk about it. We know a rough number of people that came here. I personally haven't read a lot about it, or heard, so I think that media absolutely don't contribute to integration. Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp, all that, And of course, mainstream media, such as “Vijesti” [News].” (host community member)

When addressing how to dispel negative attitudes, some respondents suggested involving more volunteers but expressed uncertainty about specific measures. Additionally, they noted a decrease in media attention over time. Despite acknowledging the media's role, host respondents felt there was minimal discussion in mainstream media about migrant integration.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 17 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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