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# In the Eyes of the People: Social Tolerance towards Migrants and Refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Analysis on attitudes towards migrants using data from the BiH SCORE Index 2020*



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Date: February 2021

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For more information about SeeD visit: [seedsofpeace.eu](https://seedsofpeace.eu)

For more information about SCORE BiH data visit: [scoreforpeace.org/en/bosnia](https://scoreforpeace.org/en/bosnia)

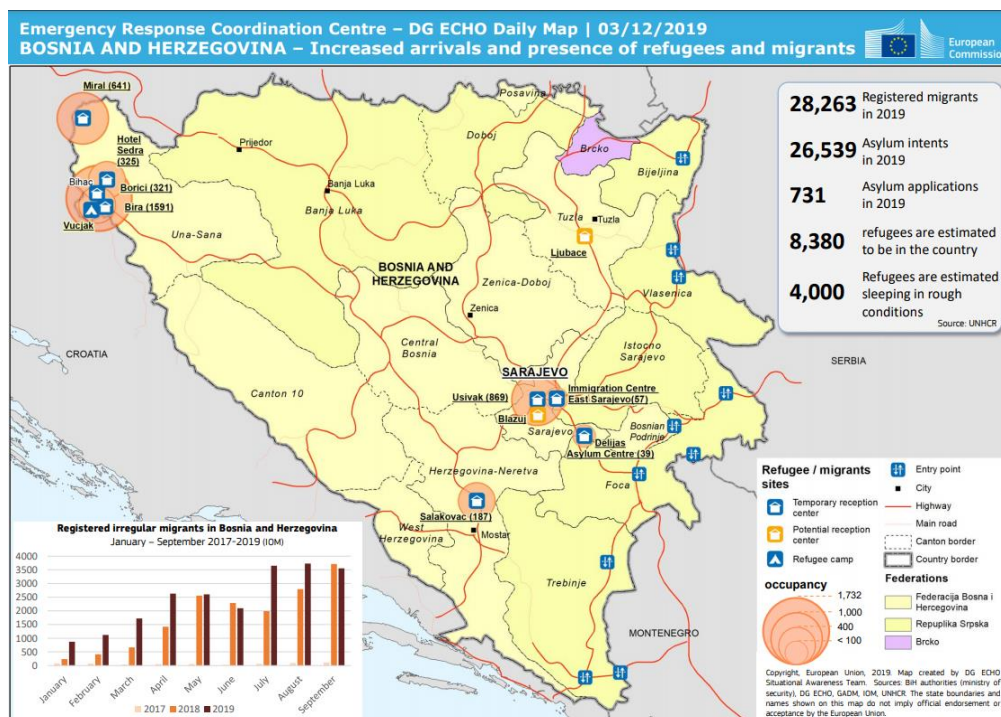
## Background

The analysis described in this report investigates attitudes towards migrants and refugees<sup>1</sup> as well as foreign workers based on data collected for the 2020 Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The data for SCORE BiH 2020 was collected by Prism Research between October 2019 and March 2020, with a total representative sample of 3637 respondents. The project was implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) in partnership with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Resilience Initiative (BHRI), funded by USAID/OTI and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Increasing migration under tense circumstances due to COVID-19, extremism, xenophobia, and a volatile political environment underlines the necessity for this study. However, findings should be interpreted with caution since attitudes towards migrants and refugees might have shifted over time since early 2020. Furthermore, the data captures perceptions of citizens of BiH regardless the actual presence of migrants in their locality.

Over the past years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced increasing numbers of incoming migrants. Data from the Ministry of Security of BiH (2020) around the time of data collection states that in 2019, 784 persons applied for asylum (1,568 in 2018), 3 were recognized with a refugee status, and 41 with subsidiary protection from BiH. The majority of asylum applications were filed by people from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, and Syria. The number of issued work permits increased by 12.8% to a total of 3,183 in 2019. Most work permits were issued to people from Serbia followed by Turkey, China, and Croatia (Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020).

The image below gives a clear overview of the migrant and refugee situation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2019 (European Union, 2019). Key sites and locations shown on the map can be used to interpret presented findings to understand if people's attitudes are influenced by the presence of migrants and refugees or by merely perceptions.

*Figure 1: Presence of Migrants and Refugees (European Union, 2019)*



<sup>1</sup> SCORE 2020 in Bosnia and Herzegovina asked people about their attitude towards “Refugees or Asylum Seekers from other Countries” referred to in this brief as “Migrants and Refugees” to remain consistent with USAID and IOM terminology.

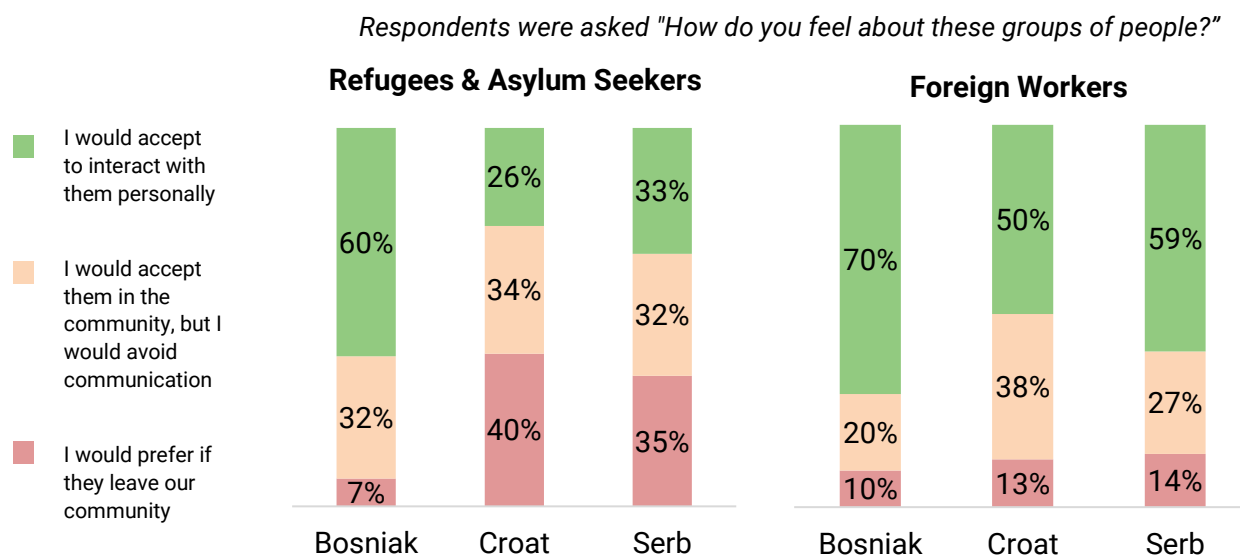
## Tolerance Towards Migrants and Refugees

In early 2020, the SCORE survey gauged the level of tolerance that citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina feel about various groups, by measuring if they were open to interacting with members of such groups, or if they would prefer for such groups to leave the community.

Figure 2 shows that people are significantly more tolerant of foreign workers than migrants and refugees. On average, 63% of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina would interact with foreign workers versus 46% with migrants. Across the three ethnic groups, Bosniaks are the most tolerant, with 60% willing to accept migrants in their community and interact with them. Around 40% of Croats and 35% of Serbs would prefer if migrants left their community, however, these Croats and Serbs are often living in regions hosting no to little migrants. This shows the need to counter fears and negative stereotypes towards migrants in areas where Croats or Serbs are the ethnic majority. Furthermore, 33% of Bosnian citizens (of all ethnic groups) feel hesitant to interact with migrants and refugees and would avoid doing so.

There are no significant differences in levels of tolerance when comparing across gender, age, or education level. However, people with a higher income tend to be slightly more tolerant towards foreign workers than people with a lower income (score of 6.9 vs. 8.1)<sup>2</sup>. People living in rural areas tend to be less tolerant of migrants and refugees than those living in urban areas (score of 5.9 vs. 6.6).

Figure 2: Tolerance towards Migrants/Refugees and Foreign Workers

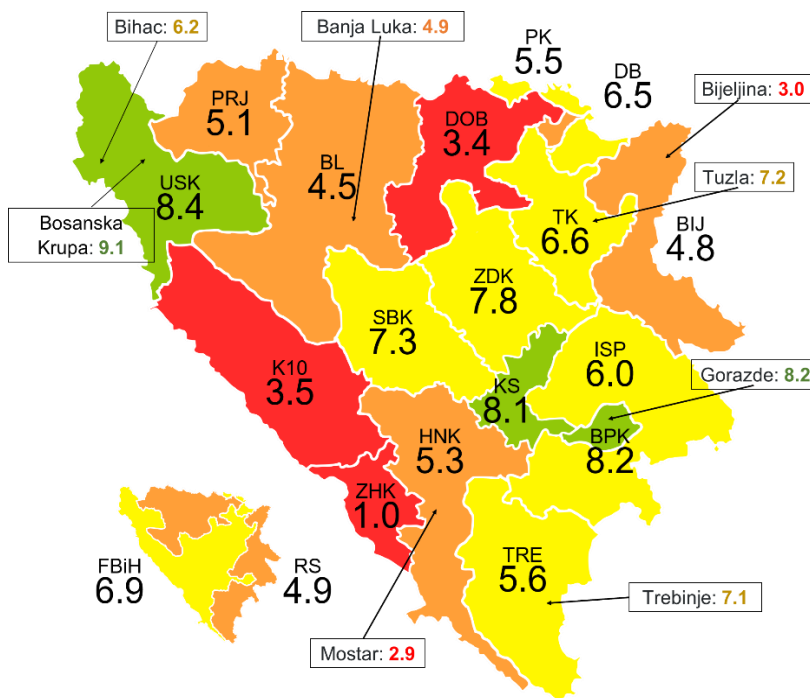


## Mapping Tolerance Across the Country

The following section focusses on migrants and refugees, as tolerance towards this group is significantly lower than towards foreign workers. Based on the average level of tolerance, we can map out which cantons and municipalities are more or less tolerant of migrants and refugees.

<sup>2</sup> Tolerance scores are calculated from 0 to 10, where 0 means everyone believes refugees should leave the community and 10 that everyone would accept and interact with them.

*Figure 3: Heatmap of Social tolerance towards Migrants/Refugees*



In figure 3, green areas are the most tolerant, as they achieved scores of 8 to 10. They also tend to host the highest number of migrants. As seen in figure 1, several refugee facilities are based in Una-Sana Canton. Figure 3 shows that the canton scores 8.4 on tolerance towards migrants and refugees, with 75% of people expressing they would accept to interact with them. In the migrant-dense municipality of Bosanska Krupa this figure rises to 88% and in Velika Kladusa to 97%. Sarajevo Canton also scores above average with 8.1, and 69% of respondents willing to interact with migrants. In Ilidza, 82% of respondents would be open to interact with migrants.

The yellow and orange zones are areas where there is a mix of intolerant groups, people who avoid interaction, and tolerant groups. As a key area in

migration management, Bihac municipality should be targeted to increase tolerance towards migrants and refugees. 34% of people in Bihac would avoid interaction and 21% would prefer migrants to leave.

The red zones are the least tolerant of migrants and refugees, with scores below 4. In West-Herzegovina, 84% of respondents want migrants to leave their community, while the equivalent figure in Canton X is 54%. In these areas, people's attitudes might not be influenced by encounters with migrants but by stereotypes. In Bijeljina, a transit area for migrants, engendering tolerance is needed, as 61% of people in the municipality would prefer migrants and refugees to stay out of their community. Mostar is also a risk area, with Salakovac reception centre a few kilometres away, and 52% of people in Mostar rejecting the presence of migrants.

## Identifying Drivers and Barriers to Building Tolerance of Migrants and Refugees

SCORE analysis can reveal factors and indicators which underpin higher or lower levels of individuals' social tolerance, shown in figure 4 below. The key factors that should be focused on when working on tolerance are: inclusive civic identity and coexistence; establishing trust between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs; combating Islamophobia and ethnonationalist ideology; cultivating growth mindset and critical media literacy.

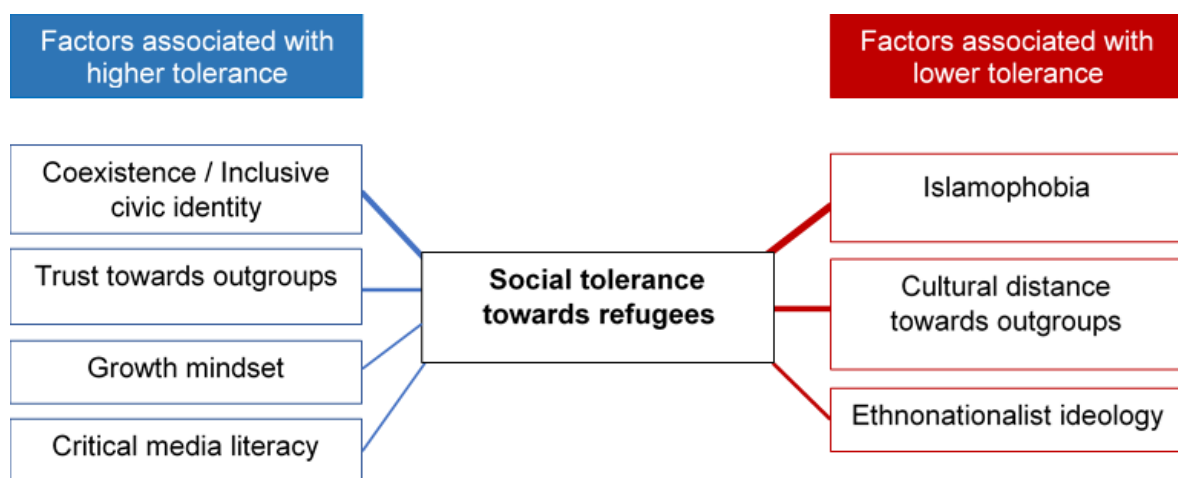
Barriers to building tolerance are rooted in fears of religious and ethnic outgroups. Many of the indicators which were found to be linked to social tolerance towards migrants and refugees were indicators measuring harmonious relationships and positive attitudes between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. This implies that peacebuilding work focusing on reconciling the three larger ethnic groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina will have a possible benefit of building acceptance of migrants and refugees. Becoming more open towards Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs can be a first step towards more tolerance to other, more distant outgroups. Such interventions build a muscle for tolerance



and trust by revealing commonalities and embracing differences, which can be generalized to other groups.

Islamophobia also reinforces negative attitudes towards migrants, who often come from Muslim-majority countries. Combating divisive narratives among non-Muslim ethnic group is crucial, and building the skills for that at the individual level should become a priority. Cultivating a growth mindset, which triggers questioning one's beliefs, curiosity about others and openness to change, as well as building critical thinking when being exposed to manipulative narratives will counter fears and negative perceptions. Interestingly, economic factors were not found to be associated with either positive or negative perceptions of migrants. This implies that more economically fragile groups (low income, unemployed), and more secure groups, are equally tolerant towards migrants and refugees.

*Figure 4: Factors associated with higher (blue) and low (red) levels of social tolerance towards migrants and refugees*



The previously discussed associations with tolerance are common across all ethnicities. However, by analyzing Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs independently, we can identify factors underpinning social tolerance of migrants and refugees which are specific to each ethnic group. Tolerance among Bosniaks tends to be more strongly linked to possessing life skills, having access to religious spaces and stronger community relationships. Negative attitudes seem to be politicized among Bosniaks as low tolerance is associated with higher trust in institutions, implying a link between support for those institutions and rejection of migrants. Among Croats, identifying as a Bosnian or a European is linked to higher tolerance, while a strong city or regional identity is linked to lower tolerance. Tolerant Croats have an active civic orientation and opportunities to engage but also feel more distant towards other Croats. Therefore, among Croats, focus should be placed on cultivating a sense of shared identity with others and extending feelings of solidarity beyond their ethnic ingroup. For Serbs, a tolerant mindset is mostly about intergroup harmony where people do not fear other religions or ethnicities, have access to leisure spaces, and are resilient against ethnonationalist ideology.

## Indicator Glossary

The table below gives an explanation of the indicators mentioned in the text. Scores and heatmaps for these indicators are available at: [scoreforpeace.org/en/bosnia](https://scoreforpeace.org/en/bosnia)

<b>Coexistence</b>	The extent to which respondents support the protection of all ethnic groups' heritage, teaching youth to live peacefully and how open respondents are to live in mixed communities.
<b>Critical Media Literacy</b>	The extent to which respondents are able to critically appraise information they are exposed to, both in the media and from other sources, reaching evidence-based decisions and being cautious of the techniques that media outlets may use to affect their attention and understanding of certain messages.
<b>Cultural Distance Towards Outgroups</b>	The average extent to which respondents feel that their values, culture (including food, music, customs, language), and history are distant from those of the other two ethnic groups.
<b>Ethnonationalist Ideology</b>	A composite measure of respondents' support for an ethnonationalist political ideology, their rejection of coexistence, and the extent to which they agree with nationalist narratives relevant to their ethnic group.
<b>Growth Mindset</b>	The extent to which respondents are driven to expand their own knowledge, implement feedback and criticism, and improve themselves.
<b>Inclusive Civic Identity</b>	The extent to which respondents acknowledge an overarching culture, identity and shared way of life across all residents of BiH, regardless of ethnicity.
<b>Islamophobia</b>	The extent to which respondents agree with prejudicial stereotypes about Muslims, including that Islam promotes violence, that Islam is incompatible with the values of BiH, that Muslim women in BiH should not be allowed to wear religious clothing.
<b>Social Tolerance Towards Foreign Workers</b>	The extent to which respondents are tolerant of foreign workers.
<b>Social Tolerance Towards Refugees or Asylum Seekers from other Countries</b>	The extent to which respondents are tolerant of refugees or asylum seekers from other countries.
<b>Trust Towards Outgroups</b>	The average extent of trust that respondents feel towards the other two ethnic groups.